

**The later work of Jean Ricardou**

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For my mother, Joan, my late father, Leslie  
and of course, Ann.

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, and that the work within it has been carried out by myself and has not been included in other theses.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the career of Jean Ricardou after 1982. The introduction indicates the obscurity in which he Ricardou's reputation languishes currently. Chapter 1 sketches Ricardou's career until 1982 and examines the denunciations of him by Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Claude Simon pronounced in that year, and how critics have subsequently portrayed him. Chapter 2 describes Ricardou's involvement in writing workshops in France and the role he played in developing them and exercises to be used in such workshops, in particular the *Bestiaire*. Chapter 3 introduces the new discipline of textique which aims to provide a theoretical description of all phenomena associated with writing starting from the simplest mark. Chapter 4 suggests that textique, because of its militant materialism, might be susceptible to ultra-left tendencies. Chapters 5 and 6 examine textique as literary criticism, the former with reference to *Une Maladie chronique*, the latter to sonnets by Heredia and Mallarmé. Chapter 7 examines Ricardou's later fiction, the concept of the "mixte" as developed in *Le théâtre des métamorphoses* and *Hommage à Jean Paulhan* and in these texts and *La cathédrale de Sens*, it explores the commonly held opinion that Ricardou's work is "anti-referential". The conclusion looks at factors that could influence the expansion of textique's influence, its difficulty or reluctance to find an audience and its relation to those that Ricardou considers to be the great thinkers of the modern era, Mallarmé, Freud and Marx.

## Introduction.

The title of this thesis, *The later work of Jean Ricardou*, was chosen because in the early eighties, for reasons that will quickly be revealed, the reputation of Jean Ricardou went into a rapid decline. Though he remains active, participating in colloquia and writing workshops, involved in publications and developing a new discipline that he calls “textique”, very little is known of him in France beyond the restricted circle that collaborate with him, and even less outside of France. The question that is posed is: is this relative obscurity merited?

*The Independent*, in its regular Friday arts and books review always carries a small column entitled: “Cult Classics”. In the edition of 21 April 2006, Alice Jones introduced the readership to “Jealousy”, by Alain Robbe-Grillet, in the following terms :

Alain Robbe-Grillet is widely acknowledged as the father of the “nouveau roman” the 1950s movement that rejected wholesale the traditional novel. Gone were chronology, plot, characters and motive; in their stead, Robbe-Grillet and his fellow anti-novelists, including Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor and Marguerite Duras, put “the adventure of writing”, where language and the creative process became the story.

It would be unfair to expect academic rigour in a short piece of journalism intended only to bring a novel to a wider audience, but it contains several startling assertions. Alain Robbe-Grillet is so successful a self publicist that he has, it seems, convinced Ms Jones that he is “widely acknowledged as the father of ‘the nouveau roman’”. Nathalie Sarraute, had she still been alive, would no doubt have challenged this contention most forcefully, as she always resented Robbe-Grillet's claims in this regard, and Jérôme Lindon was indisputably as instrumental as Robbe-Grillet in promoting this group.

Robbe-Grillet's long campaign to include Marguerite Duras in the "nouveau roman", despite her complete indifference,<sup>1</sup> seems here to have produced results and one can perhaps forgive the omission of Ollier, Pinget and Ricardou from the list. However, surely it is strange that as great a writer as Claude Simon is not mentioned. Possibly, the elevation of Robbe-Grillet to the Academy occludes the vision of cult worshipers in respect of winners of the Nobel Prize for literature. But if any of the writers formerly associated with the nouveau roman now have cult status, it is surely the trio listed previously: Ollier, Pinget and Ricardou, if, that is, declining sales and readership, in combination with small groups of enthusiasts and occasionally fervent supporters, qualifies one as a "cult" writer. But one thing is certain, of the writers, loosely associated in the mid-1950s, and who ultimately came together in the early 1970s, at the colloquia at Cerisy-la-salle Michel Butor, Robert Pinget, Jean Ricardou, Claude Ollier, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, and Claude Simon, none considered themselves "anti-novelists". This term dates from the late 1940s, when Sartre first used it in his preface to Sarraute's novel *Portrait d'un inconnu*: "Un des traits les plus singuliers de notre époque littéraire c'est l'apparition çà et là, d'œuvres vivaces et toutes négatives qu'on pourrait nommer des anti-romans."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this label predates the nouveau roman. Lindon did not join forces with Robbe-Grillet until the publication of his novel *Les Gommages* in 1953 and it was about this time that the term nouveau roman began to gain currency. Specifically after Emile Henriot's review of Sarraute's *Tropismes* and Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* entitled "Un nouveau roman" that appeared in *Le Monde*, 21 May, 1957.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Robbe-Grillet, *Le Voyageur*, Paris, Minuit 2001, pp. 495-7, 507-523, 528-532., for Duras' attitude see chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> Sartre's introduction to, Nathalie Sarraute, *Portrait d'un inconnu*, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, p. 9.



The most startling thing about Alice Jones's article, however, is that it quotes, or rather, half quotes one of the authors that it ignores: Jean Ricardou. For it was he of course, in his discussion of *La Jalousie* who suggested that the modern novel had progressed from "l'écriture d'une aventure" to "l'aventure d'une écriture":

C'est une autre solution que propose *La Jalousie*. Puisque la description est maintenant soumise à un sens, que ce soit au moins un sens contraire. Condamnée à ne plus être créatrice, la description se fait *déstructrice*. La jalousie décroît : c'est l'apaisement final. Ainsi un roman est-il pour nous moins *l'écriture d'une aventure que l'aventure d'une écriture*.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting that Ricardou puts this almost aphoristic statement in italics as if he had a premonition of the career that it would subsequently enjoy. For, whenever anyone wishes to initiate a discussion of the nouveau roman, this quotation inevitably appears, so much so that it has achieved the status of a commonplace.

It may be that in time Ricardou will be remembered only for one or two "famous sayings" that an occasional stray reader wandering through the byways of French literature, and stumbling across his work, might be mildly surprised to realise were of his invention. Formerly regarded as both the leading theorist of the nouveau roman and an important novelist in his own right, Ricardou's reputation has been in decline and under attack for many years. Even those who have heard of him are sometimes surprised to learn that he is still alive and active.

Much of the literary criticism produced by Jean Ricardou relating to the nouveau roman remains in print, but of all the novelists formerly associated with this movement, his are the only works of fiction that are currently out of print. In the case of his novel *Les Lieux-dits*, as we shall later see, this situation is of Ricardou's own

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Ricardou, "Description Créatrice", in *Problèmes du nouveau roman*, Paris Seuil, 1967, p. 111.

making. The simple explanation for the neglect of his fiction, that it is deemed unreadable, seems plausible, until one recalls that the novels of fellow nouveau romancier Robert Pinget are today little read, yet remain in print. Even if we accept the fairly widespread view that Ricardou is more significant as a critic than novelist, how do we explain the fact that, despite the regular appearance of articles in a variety of publications over the last twenty-five years (over eighty at the last count, not to mention a considerable number of conference papers) these remain uncollected, and he has had no extended theoretical work published since *Une Maladie chronique* in 1989.<sup>4</sup>

Even at the height of his influence, discussion of Ricardou's fiction up to and including the publication of *Le théâtre des métamorphoses* in 1982, was limited and often heavily determined by what Ricardou has said about it himself in various colloquia and articles. Some critics writing in French have occasionally selected elements of Ricardou's work to illustrate their particular theses. For example, Lucien Dällenbach concentrates on Ricardou's use of mise en abyme, while Genette discusses Ricardou's original use of the bands with which French publishers wrap their products.<sup>5</sup> Then there is a third group of writers who at some point collaborated with Ricardou, whether at the famous colloquia of the 1970s at Cerisy, or subsequently. Perhaps the best known of these are Jan Baetens, Mireille Calle-Gruber, and Jean-Claude Raillon who between them produced a number of articles which are influenced strongly by his ideas. These articles remain uncollected. The most prolific of Ricardou's followers has been Michel Sirvent, who has written on various aspects of Ricardou's work over many years. A French academic working in Texas, his

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<sup>4</sup> *Une Maladie chronique*, Paris, Les Impressions nouvelles, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Lucien Dällenbach, *Le récit spéculaire*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, pp. 175-208 and Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, Paris, Seuil, 1987, pp. 33-34.

recent monograph, *Jean Ricardou : De Tel Quel au nouveau roman textual*,<sup>6</sup> is primarily concerned with the eleven years 1960-1971, although he gives some details of Ricardou's activities thereafter. Much of the analysis centres on Ricardou's first two novels, *L'Observatoire de Cannes* (1961) and *La prise de Constantinople* (1965). At the end of this study, Sirvent gives several reasons for thinking that attitudes to Ricardou might be changing. The most important of these was the publication of a history of *Tel Quel*.<sup>7</sup> This seems, according to Sirvent, to have stimulated some interest in Ricardou's career:

Le nom de Ricardou a recommencé à vraiment circuler dans la presse en 1995 à la sortie du livre de Forest (...). Cette fois, dans le dossier "L'avant-garde ne se rend pas." qu'y consacre *Le Monde*, Ricardou se trouve au centre de la photo qui représente le comité de *Tel Quel* en 1965, aux côtés de D. Roche, Thibaudeau, Baudry, Boisrouvray et Faye.<sup>8</sup>

Sirvent expected a change in Ricardou's fortunes as a result of this event, but after more than ten years, it is evident that this has not been the case. Another development, the emergence of the review *Formules* might also have been expected to revive interest in the author, but again this has not occurred, and Ricardou, who was published in earlier numbers makes no appearance in the later editions.

In what the French know as the Anglo-Saxon world, there continues to exist some residual interest in Ricardou's work. Lynn A. Higgins in *Parables of theory: Jean Ricardou's metafiction*,<sup>9</sup> has produced the only book-length study of Ricardou's fiction in English, but it has been overtaken by events and it has only the briefest discussion of *Le théâtre des métamorphoses* which appeared in 1982. It is clear,

<sup>6</sup> Amsterdam, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Philippe Forest, *Histoire de Tel Quel 1960-1985*, Paris, Seuil, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Sirvent, op. cit. p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> Birmingham Alabama, Summa publications, 1984.

however, from references in her later work, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics*,<sup>10</sup> that she continues to find his ideas of value. One of the few critics to have discussed Ricardou's later fiction has been Tobin Jones, focusing on the formal elements of the writing, in a chapter on Jean Ricardou in the collection of essays edited by William Thompson that appeared in 1991.<sup>11</sup> Jones also wrote the entry for Ricardou in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* that appeared in Volume 83.<sup>12</sup> Writing in 1982, David Carroll is one of the few critics to have examined the ideological bases of Ricardou's theories, with interesting results. Generally hostile to Ricardou's positions he writes:

Ricardou and those who take his position are arguing that their theory bears no relation to traditional representational theories of the novel, that it is absolutely and essentially *new* and therefore, one has to conclude, a kind of "epistemological break", (in the Bachelardian sense), a new science.<sup>13</sup>

It was indeed about this time that Ricardou embarked upon the task of developing the new discipline he called *textique*.

Celia Britton, as will be seen in the following chapter, in her 1992 study of the *nouveau roman*,<sup>14</sup> reaches much the same conclusions as Ricardou's associates, Daniel Bilous and Michel Sirvent, on the political and theoretical consequences of Ricardou's enforced departure from the *nouveau roman*. David Platten has used what he describes as '(...) Jean Ricardou's less systematic, though recurrently illuminating writing on the all-pervasiveness of metaphor in both literary and non-literary

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<sup>10</sup> University of Nebraska, 1998, p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 7, *The Contemporary novel in France*, University Press of Florida, 1991, pp.145 - 162.

<sup>12</sup> *French Novelists since 1960*, New York, Gale, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> *The Nouveau Roman: Fiction, Theory and Politics*, St. Martins Press, 1992.

discourse,<sup>15</sup> basing his method on Ricardou's novel *Les Lieux-dits*. But apart from this isolated case, and those mainly North American critics who continue to take Ricardou seriously, it is true to say that any residual interest in Ricardou is confined to the historical question of his influence on fellow novelist Claude Simon which, the consensus seems to be, was on balance pernicious. This position will be examined in more detail in chapter one.

Thus far, we can say that attitudes to Ricardou can be summarised for the most part as indifference to his later work, hostility to his earlier views, often combined with a view of him that is frozen in time. An indication of the extent of the neglect of Ricardou can be gained by an examination of Celia Britton's article in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*:

**Ricardou**, Jean (b.1932). French novelist and theorist. Ricardou's first novels, *L'Observatoire de Cannes* (1961) and *La prise de Constantinople* (1965), aligned him with the Nouveau Roman, and for a while he was their leading theorist. He then invented the "nouveau nouveau roman" - an even more radically and systematically anti-representational writing. His fictional texts are like difficult crossword puzzles; but he is more important for his substantial body of theoretical work. For Ricardou the text subverts the ideological "dogmas" of representation and expression through its self-referential structure and by maximising the autonomous productivity of language through punning and wordplay. *Le théâtre des métamorphoses* (1982) combines fiction and theory in a deliberately "unclassifiable" text.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from the dubious assertion that Ricardou "invented" the nouveau nouveau roman and the fact that he classifies *Le théâtre des métamorphoses* as a "mixte", a term that will be explained further on, he had before 1990, the latest date given for entries to the *New Oxford Companion*,<sup>17</sup> abandoned the term "anti-representation":

<sup>15</sup> *Michel Tournier and the Metaphor of Fiction*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1999, p3.

<sup>16</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, Ed., Peter France, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> 'The cut-off date for most entries is 1990; events and publications between 1990 and 1994 are covered less systematically,' p. xvi.

“Des travaux plus récents, dans le domaine de *textique*, m’ont fait abandonner l’idée, trop courte en l’espèce, d’antireprésentation.”<sup>18</sup> He replaced it with the term “metarepresentation”, which will be examined in more detail in the chapter devoted to *textique*, as more accurately reflecting his views.

In the conclusion to his essay “Semiology: The Saussurian legacy”<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Culler quotes the philosopher Ernst Cassirer.

In the whole history of science there is perhaps no more fascinating chapter than the rise of linguistics. In its importance it may very well be compared to the new science of Galileo which in the seventeenth century changed our whole concept of the physical world.

Opinions might vary as to the validity of this statement, and they will certainly differ when it comes to Ricardou’s variation of structural Marxism. But it may be that once the froth of “post-modernism” blows away there will be a reassessment of this era. It is alleged that when he asked his opinion of the effects of the French Revolution, Zhou En-lai replied, “It is too soon to tell”.<sup>20</sup> A similar degree of circumspection may be warranted before structuralism and Ricardou with it, is completely written off, if only because Ricardou continues to be very active at both a theoretical and practical level. But in any event, it will be the conclusion of this thesis that Ricardou’s relationship to structural Marxism is not as straightforward as it might seem on first acquaintance. Ricardou considers himself to be a materialist, and he frequently refers to Marx as a great thinker, but he is not enough of a Marxist to apply the lessons of historical materialism to literary history, which interests him not in the slightest. This

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<sup>18</sup> Footnote to *Les raisons de l'ensemble*, reprinted in the second edition of *Le nouveau roman*, Jean Ricardou, Paris, Seuil, 1990 p. 247. This article dates from 1985 and originally appeared in the review *Conséquences*, Ricardou's italics.

<sup>19</sup> In *Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader*, Ed. Bennett, Martin, Mercer and Woollacott, London, Open University Press, 1981, p. 141.

<sup>20</sup> See the preface to *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, Simon Schama, London, Viking, 1989, p. xiii.

despite his deep seated hostility to Stalinism puts him at odds with Trotsky. Moreover, a feature of Marxism is that it is able to explain its own arrival on the historical stage, whereas Ricardou sees no need to explain the historical juncture that leads to the emergence of his new discipline: textique. I will suggest that Fredric Jameson<sup>21</sup> following the lead of Ernest Mandel<sup>22</sup> provides such an explanation in his discussion of the nouveau roman. When it comes to structuralism, however, Ricardou is much less rigid than many of his contemporaries were. As we shall see, he does not take the view, once common, that ideology is an inescapable all-pervading structure. Nor does he believe that language is an entirely self-contained structure the meaning of which can only be defined in terms of elements within the structure. For Ricardou, language and with it literature must ultimately have some relationship to the physical world. He is none the less a formalist and I would suggest that his position might best be described as “materio-formalist”.

It will emerge that as well as Marx, two thinkers revered by Ricardou are Freud and Mallarmé. This thesis will not pursue a biographical or psychological interpretation of Ricardou’s work. It will, however, indicate areas where this approach might be appropriate citing those occasions when Ricardou himself has revealed himself to be influenced by Freud in particular.

It should also be acknowledged that even though Ricardou has largely disappeared from public view there remains a considerable number of writers whom he might be said to have trained to write. Even if some no longer accept all his ideas many are still prepared to acknowledge his influence and recognize a debt to him. Space precludes it here but an assessment of what might in future become known as the “school of

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<sup>21</sup> *Postmodernism or, The cultural logic of Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1991.

<sup>22</sup> *Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1978.

Ricardou” will in my view be necessary at some point in the future.

At this point the reader might ask him or herself why it is that I have not used Bourdieu’s concept of “intellectual capital” in the writing of this thesis. It was at one point considered as an option, but then rejected. Ricardou’s career might indeed provide an elegant case study in which to try out or illustrate Bourdieu’s ideas, but on reflection I felt that this would have been a different thesis from the one I was writing. Moreover, in my view, the idea of intellectual capital is problematic. For me, capital is a concrete phenomenon materialised in the means of production:

(...) capital has one single life impulse, the tendency to create value and surplus-value, to make its constant factor the means of production, absorb the greatest amount of surplus-labour.

Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives the more, the more labour it sucks.<sup>23</sup>

This view of capital would at the least require to be reconciled with Bourdieu’s, and I am far from saying that this is impossible, given capital’s tendency to commodify everything, intellectual labour included. However, such an approach would have run the risk that of evolving into a debate with, or worse, a polemic against, Bourdieu that would have distracted us from the principal aim of this study, which to chart and evaluate the activities of Ricardou since 1982.

Instead, the chapters that follow will highlight Ricardou’s leading role in the promotion of writing workshops in France and his contribution to their theoretical justification. This will include a discussion of the results in the form of the *Bestiaire*, illustrated by examples taken from the late Maurice de Gandillac’s collection *Bestiaire lateral*.<sup>24</sup> Then we shall devote a chapter to Ricardou’s new discipline “textique”, which he claims is a unified materialist theory of all signs and symbols.

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<sup>23</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974, p. 224.

<sup>24</sup> St. Quentin-de-Caplong, *Atelier de l'agneau*, 2005.



There will be an exploration of his later literary criticism and his fiction from the 1980s relating it to his earlier fiction in a way that will challenge some of the statements often made about Ricardou. We begin, however, with a sketch of Ricardou's earlier career and an account of the events which led to his expulsion from the nouveau roman, as it has been represented by others and himself.

## Chapter 1. Jean Ricardou's career and its interpreters: 1932-1982.

In 1982 a colloquium on the nouveau roman was held in New York at which a number of writers who had formerly been considered as collaborating with him denounced Jean Ricardou in the strongest terms, publicly ending their association with him. The intention of this chapter will be to examine briefly Ricardou's career up to this event and how it has been presented, suggesting that this has largely determined how he has been viewed since.

As could be expected from someone who has repeatedly denounced what he calls the romantic notion of the expression of self in the "dominant ideology" that rules literature, Jean Ricardou has always proved reticent when it comes to his biographical details. This does not arise from any false modesty, but rather from the opinion that the revelation of the author's life is not of itself interesting for the reader.

*Je suis né à Cannes, le 17 juin 1932, au 6 de la rue Louis-Braille. L'amateur de minuties notera que ma maison natale porte aujourd'hui une plaque. En lettres vertes, luminescentes, sur un fond vert, presque noir, celle-ci propose un nom, Jean Ricardou, suivi de la mention 'Electricité générale' et d'un numéro de téléphone. Mon père exerçait ce métier, en effet, autrefois à titre d'artisan. Dans l'un des magasins de cet immeuble s'est établi pendant maintes années, un réparateur de machines à écrire. Braille est l'inventeur d'un alphabet en relief, auquel il a donné son nom et qui, pourcouru par les doigts, permet aux aveugles de lire. Alors, je vais vous faire un aveu.... Au cours de mon enfance, de loin en loin, vers le soir, il m'est arrivé d'entendre, à la radio, la Mer de Claude Debussy. Autant qu'il m'en souviennne, jamais l'idée, ah non alors! ne m'est venue que cette musique pût entretenir une quelconque référence, à la fin, avec l'immensité horizontale qui se proposait, variable, chaque jour à ma vue. Il faut le reconnaître : si exactes soient-elles, si conformes à celles dont les autobiographies se contentent, telles indications, prises en elles-mêmes, ne présentent, pour le lecteur, strictement aucun intérêt.<sup>1</sup>*

Pausing only to note the important qualification, "prises en elles-mêmes", the full significance of which will emerge later in chapter seven, we can add to these facts that

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<sup>1</sup> *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, Jean Ricardou, Paris, Seuil, 1982, p.186. The bold italics are in the original text.

Ricardou attended the lycée at Cannes and then went on to qualify as a primary teacher at the Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs at Auteuil, thereafter working as a primary school teacher in Saint Denis from 1952, a profession he left around 1987. Apart from teaching sessions at New York University and Laval University in Quebec, Ricardou has never been part of the French academic system, though he applied unsuccessfully for a post at Toulouse. According to Ricardou, he was invited to do so by Bernard Magné while the latter insists that he put forward Ricardou's name only at his insistence. Ricardou has a doctorate awarded by Toulouse on the basis of his published work and he relates that at dinner after the event, the assembled academics discussed the relative merits of their automobiles. Ricardou has been for many years a "conseiller scientifique" at the Centre Culturel at Cerisy-la-salle.

From 1956 until 1959, Ricardou was a member of the Union de la Nouvelle Gauche, but since then, while remaining sympathetic to the left in general, he has not been a card-carrying member of any political group. He was never a member of the French Communist Party and he remains deeply hostile to Stalinism. A long time collaborator with Jean Ricardou, Jean-Claude Raillon, states that he was active as both writer and teacher in various trades unions as an independent militant. To avoid conscription into the French army during the Algerian War of Independence, he feigned mental illness and was hospitalised in Tunis where he was forced to undergo electro-convulsive therapy. In an interview with Alastair Duncan conducted in 1987, he maintained, despite his sympathy for the youth that took to the streets that "les événements" of 1968 were "un désastre pour la littérature".<sup>2</sup>

The beginnings of Ricardou's literary career were modest. A notice appeared in *Le Monde*, 30 January 1998, advising the public that Fayard were about to embark on the project of republishing *L'Herne*, which, according to this notice:

(.....) fut d'abord, de 1956 à 1958, et le temps de huit numéros, une petite revue ronéotée à trois cents exemplaires. Parmi ses collaborateurs, Jean Ricardou et Jean Thibaudeau, qui rejoindront ensuite l'équipe de la revue *Tel Quel*.

In the event, Fayard have not republished these early numbers. This is disappointing

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<sup>2</sup> Unpublished interview with Alastair Duncan, Paris, 1987.

as it would have been very interesting to have seen these early efforts which Ricardou seems to have disowned since he does not list them in his bibliography.<sup>3</sup> Thibaudeau, in *Mes années Tel Quel*, describes Ricardou and himself at that point as being “furieusement surréalistes”.<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to the impression given by this notice of 1998 in *Le Monde*, Ricardou did not move directly to *Tel Quel*. Nevertheless, *L’Herne* seems to have acted as his passport to a wider literary milieu, for in 1959 his work started to appear in *La nouvelle revue française*, through which made the acquaintance of Jean Paulhan. His contributions consisted of fiction that was later to form part of his collection of nouvelles, *Révolutions minuscules* (1971), several book reviews and a couple of longer articles, one of which, on Robbe-Grillet, brought him to the latter’s attention and thus into contact with the nouveau roman. It was after this experience, that lasted about eighteen months that he moved to *Tel Quel*. But already, prior to this, Ricardou had collaborated on Jérôme Lindon’s aborted project of a *Dictionnaire du nouveau roman* along with Claude Ollier, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon and Jean Thibaudeau.<sup>5</sup>

Ricardou was eventually to break with *Tel Quel* in 1971 when he returned from one of his occasional trips to Laval University to find that Sollers and Pleynet had behind his back aligned it with Maoism. Renaud Camus, in *Buena Vista Park*, records the reaction of critic ‘X’, in fact, Sollers: “A quoi peut-on s’attendre, politiquement, d’un homme qui intitule un de ses livres *Révolutions minuscules*?”<sup>6</sup>

During this period, the event that did most to bring Ricardou into the public eye was the famous debate on the novel that took place in December of 1964. Gavin Bowd describes it from the political point of view:

Le débat organisé par *Clarté* à la Mutualité en décembre 1964, “*Que peut la littérature*”, n’est pas important seulement parce que c’est la dernière fois que l’UEC (i.e. the French communist party’s student organisation, D.F.) mobilise le Quartier latin. Il préfigure aussi

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished. Available to participants at the annual seminars of textique.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Thibaudeau, *Mes années Tel Quel*, Paris, Ecriture, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, footnote 5, on page XIII of A. Duncan’s introduction to the novels of Claude Simon in the 2006 Pléiade edition.

<sup>6</sup> Renaud Camus, *Buena Vista Park*, Paris, POL, 1980, p. 62.

l'éclipse relative de Jean-Paul Sartre. Participent aussi au débat Jean-Pierre Faye et Jean Ricardou, représentant *Tel Quel*. Ces jeunes intellectuels joueront un rôle important dans la vague structuraliste du milieu des années soixante.<sup>7</sup>

Ricardou's account<sup>8</sup> of this event differs slightly from Bowd's. The former saw himself as representing the nouveau roman, since he replaced Claude Simon who, perhaps wisely, had withdrawn from the event in view of the way it was being portrayed as a confrontation between him and Sartre.<sup>9</sup> There is also a suggestion in some quarters that Simon took stage fright, a suggestion that Ricardou generously discounts:

Et puisque, de la sorte, ce qui s'avéra, l'atmosphère promettait d'être partielle et chaude, le recul, au dernier moment, du futur prix Nobel de Littérature gagne en lumière quand on l'interprète, sinon, comme d'aucuns pourraient l'estimer, selon quelque flagrante dérobade, du moins, comme il me paraît plus adéquat d'y consentir, selon un stratégique repli prudent.<sup>10</sup>

It happened that Robbe-Grillet was out of the country and so Lindon, at that time widely regarded as a sponsor of the nouveau roman, asked Ricardou to step into the breach. But Bowd is surely correct in his assessment that this marked the beginning of a decline in Sartre's influence, and the growing influence of *Tel Quel*. The enhanced status of Ricardou was confirmed by the publication in 1967 of *Problèmes du nouveau roman*. Ricardou's prestige reached its height with the three colloquia organised by him at Cerisy-la-salle: the first, in collaboration with Raymond Jean and Françoise Rossum-Guyon, on the nouveau roman in general, took place in 1971,<sup>11</sup> the

<sup>7</sup> *L'interminable enterrement, le communisme et les intellectuels français depuis 1956*, Gavin Bowd, Paris, Diapraphe, 1999, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> "Un soir d'automne à la Mutualité", in *L'Infini*, no 49/50 Paris, 1995, pp. 213-231, why Ricardou considers December an autumnal month remains unexplained, perhaps the weather was very mild that year....

<sup>9</sup> Claude Simon, "Lettre ouverte à l'Union des Etudiants Communistes", *L'Express*, 7 December, 1963 p. 80-81. Robbe-Grillet alleges that Simon disliked Sartre intensely: "Je crois d'ailleurs qu'il y a chez Duras ou chez Simon, une haine de Sartre considérable..." *Le Voyageur*, Paris, 2001, p. 238. See also Simon's "Pour qui donc écrit Sartre?" *L'Express*, 25 July, 1963, p. 22-3.

<sup>10</sup> *L'Infini*, no 49/50, p. 220.

<sup>11</sup> Proceedings published under the title *Nouveau Roman: hier aujourd'hui*, Paris UGE, 1972, in two volumes.

second on Claude Simon in 1974,<sup>12</sup> under his sole direction and the third, in 1975, on Alain Robbe-Grillet,<sup>13</sup> again under his sole direction.

The seventies also saw the publication of two major collections of essays, *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman*<sup>14</sup> and *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*.<sup>15</sup> The year 1971 was very busy for Ricardou since during it he also published his critical study *Le nouveau roman*.<sup>16</sup> It is probably accurate to say that those who have heard of Jean Ricardou will be most familiar with his writing from this decade. But even at this high point in his career we should not exaggerate Ricardou's prominence. Michel Sirvent describes the limits of his success and media exposure.

A la différence de quelques-uns de ses anciens amis, que Ricardou n'ait occupé nulle position de pouvoir dans l'édition, la presse ou l'université, explique en partie le statut paradoxal dont son œuvre est aujourd'hui l'objet. (...) Un passage à *Apostrophes* (aux côtés de Daniel Boulanger) doublé d'un entretien à *France-Culture* pour la sortie de *Nouveaux problèmes du roman* en 1978 résume à peu près le retentissement médiatique de l'œuvre à la fin de la période néoromanesque.<sup>17</sup>

Ricardou, like Breton in a previous period, was sometimes seen in the public perception as the "Pope" of the nouveau roman. It is true that his impact on the nouveaux romanciers was considerable at this stage, and his reputation amongst the critics considerable and, in retrospect, some were even to claim that he was the dominant figure, but this situation was rapidly to change. When it did change, his lack of media savvy, or his refusal to play the media game, was surely a factor in the rapid decline in his public presence.

By the time of the 1975 colloquium on Robbe-Grillet, strains between the participants can be readily detected. In his history of *Tel Quel*, Forest describes the clash between Robbe-Grillet and Ricardou colourfully. He accurately attributes the

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<sup>12</sup> Proceedings published under the title *Claude Simon: analyse et théorie*, Paris UGE, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> Proceedings published under the title *Robbe-Grillet: analyse, théorie*, Paris UGE, 1976.

<sup>14</sup> Paris, Seuil, 1971.

<sup>15</sup> Paris, Seuil, 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Paris, Seuil, 1971.

<sup>17</sup> *Jean Ricardou: de Tel Quel au nouveau roman*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2001, footnotes to pp. 130 & 131.

initiative to Robbe-Grillet:

Avec l'astuce et le formidable sens tactique qui le caractérisent, Robbe-Grillet engagera avec Ricardou une passionnante partie où chacun de ces deux écrivains joue alternativement avec l'autre le rôle du chat et celui du souris : en témoignent notamment leurs échanges tenus à Cerisy.<sup>18</sup>

Sharp though the exchanges were between Robbe-Grillet and Ricardou, they remained relatively civilised. By 1982, however, relationships between Ricardou and several other members of the nouveau roman had effectively ceased. In that year, Tom Bishop organised a conference in New York, to which Ricardou was not invited and where he was roundly denounced in very personal terms.

Nathalie Sarraute for her part claimed to be concerned with the effect of Ricardou's theories on readers:

With regard to Ricardou, I have always considered his theories, or at least most of them, to be untenable. They were of no significance for writers. I do believe, however, that Ricardou's points of view were dangerous to readers - and we are all readers. If I, as a reader, had had to read books according to Ricardou's principles, I would have stopped reading. It would be impossible for me to read a book by Claude Simon, looking for the word "yellow" on page 67 and on page 126, even if this was one of the rules of the game and if Claude Simon had written his book for us to find the word, which, by the way, I do not believe to be the case. This was the danger of Ricardou's theories: They run the risk of turning people away from reading.<sup>19</sup>

This seems vastly to overestimate the power of a single critic to prescribe the ways a text should be read. Moreover, Sarraute's depiction of Ricardou's method is a caricature, giving the impression that in Simon's novel, *La bataille de Pharsale*, huge expanses of prose separate instances of the word "yellow" or the mention of things yellow, whereas they often occur on the same page, as Ricardou's article had pointed out:

Evidemment cette fréquence n'est pas toujours aussi régulière. Il arrive que les occurrences se groupent par crises. De la page 208 à la page 211, on rencontre seulement, à première lecture : "un talus jaune" et "ombrées et ocre". En revanche, à partir de la page 212, se

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<sup>18</sup> *Histoire de Tel Quel, 1960-1982*, Philippe Forest, Paris, Seuil, 1995, p239.

<sup>19</sup> *Three Decades of the French New novel*, Ed. L. Oppenheim, New York, University of Illinois Press, 1983, p.181. It is regrettable that the original French transcripts are unpublished and that the translation by Oppenheim seems a little stilted at times.

déclenche une manière de salve: “la brousaille des poils jaunâtres” (p.212), “les poils jaunes” (p.212), “un tricot blanc jaunâtre” (p.213), “un râteau rouge et jaune” (p.214), “une Indochinoise” (p. 214), “cheveux filasse” (p. 214), “au visage jaune et ridé” (p. 214).<sup>20</sup>

Given that previously, Simon both welcomed Ricardou’s ideas and attempted to write novels according to those very principles<sup>21</sup> that Sarraute mocks, it is strange that Simon does not challenge her travesty of Ricardou. On the contrary, the allegation that Ricardou is both mad and dangerous is one that Simon is happy to repeat, in an exchange that is worth quoting in full.

*Robert Pinget:* I very much appreciate François Jost’s intervention. I find it very honest. Everyone is ganging up on Ricardou. I think that at a given moment this intelligent critic shed a certain light on our works, and suddenly, though no one knows why, he is no longer spoken of. We ought to acknowledge that he is someone of value.

*Claude Simon:* Our friend Pinget is Christianly making himself the defender of the poor and the orphan. It is touching and very charitable, although I wonder whether true charity would not rather be to warn someone that he is treading on thin ice. No one has said here that Ricardou’s writings are worthless (of course, Nathalie Sarraute had just said precisely this, D.F.). The problem, if I must repeat myself, is that, like all theses pushed to an extreme, those that he developed have, in practice, led him to a dead end, and his followers along with him. In this regard, he is dangerous. Moreover, he seems to have been suffering, for some time now, from a pathological megalomania, which is of no help either. Just as I did not spare my public approbation when I found what he was doing interesting, I have told him very frankly (and in writing) what I think today.<sup>22</sup>

Simon’s sarcastic dismissal of Pinget’s rather mild objections is distasteful, particularly as in the same breath as he scorns Pinget’s “charity” he charitably warns Ricardou that he is “treading on thin ice”. As for the letter, Ricardou has denied its existence in conversation with me. It is obvious from this exchange that Pinget, who trained as a lawyer, is uncomfortable with the invective directed at Ricardou. There may have been personal reasons for this. Forest makes an interesting remark in his

<sup>20</sup> Jean Ricardou, *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1971, pp 129-130.

<sup>21</sup> “(Simon) spoke warmly (at Cerisy-la-salle in 1974, D.F.) of how much Ricardou had helped clarify what in his own writing he was doing or aimed to do.” Alastair Duncan, *Claude Simon, Adventures in words*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> Oppenheim, *op. cit.*, p. 188.



history of *Tel Quel* to which I have already referred: “Rapidement, Ricardou s’avère impuissant à agir sur la politique de la revue, à y imposer les textes et les auteurs qu’il entend défendre.”<sup>23</sup>

According to several of Ricardou’s long-term collaborators,<sup>24</sup> one of the authors that he was keen to co-opt on to the editorial board of *Tel Quel* was indeed Pinget, the other being Ollier.

Whether it was the intention of Claude Simon and Alain Robbe-Grillet or not, the consequence of this conference was that the authors that had previously gathered under the banner of the nouveau roman were never to do so again. If the nouveau roman was not in a serious state of decomposition before 1982, it certainly never recovered, as a movement after this date.

What were the reasons for this rupture? The difference between Alain Robbe-Grillet and Ricardou is the most profound possible for theorists: their view of ideology.

Alain Robbe-Grillet : Un mot encore. Lorsque vous dites idéologie, vous ajoutez toujours dominante : je ne vois pas trop pourquoi. Par ailleurs, dans mon propre travail, je ne me mets pas en dehors. Je me considère comme un fragment de cette masse idéologique de la société à laquelle j’appartiens, et c’est cela, peut-être, qui nous oppose sur la fonction de la théorie. Comme si vous pensiez travailler à l’extérieur de l’idéologie, alors que, personnellement, j’espère seulement être dans les marges.

(.....)

Jean Ricardou : Mais il y a les idéologies qui ne dominent pas, celles qui sont dominées, occultées par l’autre, et qu’il importe de ne pas écraser sous la notion d’une seule et unique Idéologie, avec une majuscule. Il faut se méfier des positions qui en reviennent, dans un domaine, à censurer les contradictions. Parler d’idéologie dominante, c’est refuser l’unité de l’homogène, c’est concevoir la contradiction de l’hétérogène et, en outre, le phénomène de domination selon laquelle l’idéologie de la classe au pouvoir tend à être imposée....

Alain Robbe-Grillet : “tend à” est faible....

Jean Ricardou : ....tend à être imposée à l’ensemble de la société par toutes sortes d’institutions comme l’école, l’université, et qui ont pour

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<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>24</sup> In conversation Cerisy-la-salle, 2002.

fonction non seulement de reproduire l'idéologie mais de l'imposer à l'ensemble des membres et notamment aux exploités de façon qu'il y ait unité idéologique : celle, bourgeoise, de l'Homme Eternel. Parler d'idéologie, sans parler d'idéologie dominante, c'est finalement prendre le risque de parler de l'Homme Eternel. Alors je crois que l'idéologie non spécifiée, c'est précisément la façon défensive selon laquelle l'idéologique prend en charge le problème idéologique.<sup>25</sup>

In this exchange, Ricardou is putting what might be called the classic Marxist position, and Robbe-Grillet's position is based on a confusion, the idea that all ideology is "bad" and delusional: "(.....) the use of "ideology" in Marx does not imply cognitive defect. It denotes only ideas whose content gives them a political significance and use, and is *epistemologically neutral*."<sup>26</sup>

Robbe-Grillet shares this confusion with the leading French Marxist of the day, Louis Althusser, whose ideas are in fact derived directly from Spinoza rather than Marx, as Perry Anderson has pointed out.

"Those who believe that a people, or men divided over public business, can be induced to live by reason alone, are dreaming of the poet's golden age or a fairy-tale." (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, I, 5.) Althusser was to adapt this final tenet too: even in a communist society, men would still be immersed in the phantasms of ideology as the necessary medium of their spontaneous experience. "All human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life".<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps we should thank Robbe-Grillet for taking Althusser's profoundly pessimistic view to its logical conclusion; that everybody lives in an ideological bubble, with escape being possible only into another bubble. This contrasts markedly with the Marxist point of view. In the article quoted above, Edgley continues:

(Marxism) recognizes that the consciousness of working-class participants tends to be dominated by conservative influences, on the

<sup>25</sup> Robbe-Grillet : *analyse et théorie*, Paris, UGE, 1976, pp. 44-46.

<sup>26</sup> Roy Edgeley, "Philosophy", in *Marx, The First Hundred Years*, ed. David McLellan, London, Fontana, 1983, p. 286.

<sup>27</sup> Perry Anderson, *Consideration on Western Marxism*, London, New Left Books, 1976, p. 65. As Anderson remarks in a footnote to this page, after the writing of this passage, Althusser wrote a self-criticism (1974) that admitted his debt to Spinoza, albeit in a very vague fashion.

one side by society's superficial appearances, on the other, in collusion with those appearances, by bourgeois ideologists and the ideological apparatuses of bourgeois society, church, education system, media etc. But it also recognizes that unlike the bourgeoisie in general workers are educable by Marxist science; for the interests and situation of the working class provide it with a point of view that has fundamental advantages over that of the bourgeoisie, and it is that point of view and those advantages that are incorporated in Marx's science and give its cognitive superiority over bourgeois theory. (...) It is not that Marx's science, being ideological, is none the worse for that. On the contrary, being proletarian ideology it is scientifically all the better for that.<sup>28</sup>

Failure to understand this prepared the way ideologically for the rejection of Ricardou's ideas. Thus David Carroll writes in 1982:

Ricardou has at times more modestly acknowledged that no one, not even himself, escapes completely from the "ruling ideology", and the real task is to attempt to undermine it from within; but for the most part he acts (.....) as if he were *outside* (Carroll's italics), as if the concepts and strategy he uses are radically other, untouched by ideology.<sup>29</sup>

But if we refer back to the exchange between Robbe-Grillet and Ricardou quoted above, we can see that Ricardou is discussing competing ideologies rather than "Ideology", and far from acting as if he were outside ideology, he advances an ideology in opposition to the dominant one. Robbe-Grillet accuses Ricardou of thinking "à l'extérieur de l'idéologie", which no one can do, as long as it is understood that it is impossible to think outside of *an* ideology of some kind (Marxist, fascist, racist, liberal, peasant and so on); but it does not follow that it is impossible to think outside of the dominant ideology or to challenge it. To undermine a dominant ideology from within already presupposes that the person doing the undermining has escaped its control. From the correct proposition that everyone has an ideology of some kind, Carroll and Robbe-Grillet take it as given that no one escapes entirely from the dominant ideology, though no evidence is given for this assertion. Furthermore, the conclusion to be drawn from this is not obvious. Just because your ideology shares some features with the dominant ideology does not make it the same. Robbe-Grillet has seven thousand genes in common with the sea-urchin, this does not

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<sup>28</sup> Op. cit., pp. 286-287.

<sup>29</sup> David Carroll, *The Subject in Question*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 16.

make him a sea-urchin.

The reaction of those close to Ricardou is mixed. For Daniel Bilous, in an unpublished contribution to a colloquium “Pontigny, Cerisy dans le S.I.E.C.L.E.”, (The acronym stands for: Sociabilités Intellectuelles Echanges Coopérations Lieux Extensions), “(...) l’histoire des ‘colloques nouveaux romans’ est celle déplorable, d’un rendez-vous manqué.”<sup>30</sup>

Michel Sirvent accuses Robbe-Grillet and Simon of opportunism:

Cette période se termine avec la rupture avec les nouveaux romanciers après le colloque “Robbe-Grillet” (1975), notamment ceux qui avaient participé à la phase précédente, Robbe-Grillet et Simon, au moment où ces deux auteurs jouissent d’une plus grande reconnaissance institutionnelle. Le leitmotiv étant celui du “retour du sujet”, l’expression est souvent synonyme d’un refus de la théorie.<sup>31</sup>

This assessment is similar to Celia Britton’s: “(...) the most obvious single theme running through the N.Y.U. conference is a very vehement *rejection* of theory.”<sup>32</sup>

As Britton points out, the attack on theory amounts to an attack on structuralism, which by 1982 had already fallen completely out of fashion. There is no attempt at this colloquium to elaborate theory, for as Britton points out theory is now seen as incompatible with the individual freedom of the writer. Of course, this assumption is itself a theoretical position open to challenge. More importantly, and in this she and Ricardou are alone, she recognises that the abandonment of the collective project led directly to the de-politicisation of the nouveau roman and its disintegration, “to the extent that a political project is almost by definition a collective one”.<sup>33</sup> She continues: “But if the failure of the “revolution” was one factor in the abandonment of the collective project, another, possibly more decisive one was the *success* of the individual members of the group.”<sup>34</sup>

Robbe-Grillet continues to this day with his assertions that the nouveau roman is

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<sup>30</sup> *Une certaine suite dans les idées : Du nouveau roman à la Textique*, Daniel Bilous, unpublished, 2002, p.6.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Sirvent, op. cit. p21.

<sup>32</sup> Celia Britton, *The Nouveau Roman*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1992, p. 186, her italics.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.193.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, loc. cit.

alive and well, based it would seem, solely on the measure of commercial success:

Des tas de gens ont appris l'existence du Nouveau Roman par un grand article de l'hebdomadaire *Arts* qui disait "Le Nouveau Roman est mort". C'était vers 1958. Depuis on a toujours contesté son existence, et il est toujours là. Il est même là de plus en plus. S'il n'est plus un objet de mode, il a maintenant un public. Le dernier livre de Nathalie Sarraute, celui de Claude Simon, le mien ont eu vraiment un public : plusieurs dizaines de milliers de lecteurs à leur sortie. Des quantités de romans dits publics (sic grands publics?) n'en ont pas autant. De plus, le Nouveau Roman subsiste aussi, est toujours vivant, sous la forme de livres plus anciens. On ne lit pas seulement le dernier Sarraute ou Robbe-Grillet comme on le fait pour les écrivains de grande consommation. On continue à lire massivement *Tropismes* ou *La Jalousie*, tant en France qu'à l'étranger.<sup>35</sup>

Robbe-Grillet's remarks lead one to the conclusion that besides marking the demise of the nouveau roman as a movement, it was also the end of its theoretical development.

The lead in this attack is taken by Robbe-Grillet, who adopts the position that Ricardou's theories were outrageous, but necessary and disposable:

Ricardou has an extremely interesting personality, a fascinating one. Roughly speaking, Ricardou, Claude Simon and I can be said to have been urged to say things which we ourselves did not want to say. By this I mean that in all that is of theoretical interest for literature, some things immediately appear to us wrong and at the same time interesting. *And I almost think that it is more important that they be interesting than they be true.* Ricardou was the one who accepted to theorise very explicitly about totally outrageous things having to do with the author disappearing from his work and the construction of the text. Yet Ricardou must not be reproached for that. These things had to be said. The only thing for which Ricardou can be criticised is that he believed that it was all true and that he had founded as a kind of established order this "Nouveau Roman", which did not want to be an established order, but rather an order unceasingly moving, searching, remaking, and contradicting itself.

If, after some time, Claude Simon and I rejected Ricardou, it was actually because he said that he had become our leader.<sup>36</sup>

Celia Britton suggests another very plausible motive for the attacks:

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid* p. 431.

<sup>36</sup> *Three decades of the French New Novel*, translated and edited, Oppenheim, New York, University of Illinois Press, 1984, p. 106. My emphasis.

Reading through the conference papers and discussions, one soon realises that this is more than a purely intellectual disagreement: there is a strong element of personal antagonism towards Ricardou. Indeed, Simon and Sarraute both apparently agreed to come to N.Y.U. only on condition that Ricardou was not invited; and the American conference is explicitly situated by Bishop, in his introductory remarks, as “above and beyond past battles” in other words, as a deliberate attempt to move away from the acrimony generated at Cerisy in 1971. In this context one realises that, throughout the conference, many apparent abstract statements criticising theory are better read as veiled personal attacks on Ricardou.<sup>37</sup>

Philippe Romon in his report of the event for *Libération* summed up the general feeling, “(...) s’il avait abouti, Ricardou aurait pris le pouvoir. C’était un stalinien, un fou.”<sup>38</sup>

The subsequent lack of cohesion, due to the evacuation of theory that followed the expulsion of Ricardou, is astonishingly admitted by none other than Robbe-Grillet himself.

*-Vous semblez nous menacer d’un retour aux actions terroristes des années cinquante -cinq- soixante. Dans Le miroir qui revient, vous dites , avec l’humour caractéristique de ce genre d’interventions dans vos textes : “Il faudrait donc à présent reprendre les actions terroristes des années cinquante-cinq-soixante ? Très certainement, il le faudrait.” Alors, le faut-il ?*

- Bien sûr! Il faut convenir que l’époque est molle. Il nous faut un Ricardou....<sup>39</sup>

Some might object at this point that it is terrorism, not theory that interests Robbe-Grillet. But it is important to remember that for Robbe-Grillet, they are the same thing: “Néanmoins la théorie continue, pour moi, à avoir ce rôle de faire peur aux gens. Et c’est cela que d’ailleurs j’aime chez vous .....(*Rires*)”<sup>40</sup> It was precisely this attitude that Ricardou attacked in his opening paper to this colloquium.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.189.

<sup>38</sup> “Révolution à New York : le nouveau roman,” *Libération*, 12th October, 1982.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Jacques Bersani, published under the title “Les étapes du nouveau roman,” in *Le Débat*, no 50, April. 1988, reprinted in *Le Voyageur*, p. 502.

<sup>40</sup> *Robbe-Grillet : analyse, théorie*, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Ricardou’s opening paper to the colloquium on Robbe-Grillet, is entitled “Terrorisme, théorie,” and has an epigraph quoting him, “Dans ce terrorisme, il y a

Meanwhile, the vacancy for a new Ricardou remains unfilled.

So, if the function of the nouveau roman was not as a group of like minded writers working together on aesthetic questions then what was it, apart from a terrorist stunt? Again Robbe-Grillet supplies an answer. Samuel Beckett's theatre is well-known and popular because it was associated with theatre of the absurd, whilst his novels sold poorly because they were not associated with the nouveau roman: "sans étiquette ils ont paru des objets aberrants".<sup>42</sup>

There appears to be no documentary evidence to support the allegation that Ricardou claimed the leadership of the nouveau roman, and we can be sure that if such evidence had existed, Robbe-Grillet would have produced it by now. In and of itself, leadership that is not authoritarian is not objectionable, but the charge is that Ricardou's style of leadership was Stalinist. Taken literally, this is nonsense, since Ricardou did not have the resources of a state machine at his disposal. But we must remember the context. Nowadays, an allegation of Stalinism or indeed fascist behaviour is a more or less routine political insult. But for those for whom the suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956 was a shocking betrayal, for whom the pusillanimous attitude of the French Communist Party in the Algerian War of Independence was a genuine disgrace, and who had waged war against the notion of socialist realism, use of this type of language is designed to be deliberately wounding. Realistically, the only resources that Ricardou disposed of throughout this period were the strength of his personality and the originality of his ideas, and if he was, as was suggested at the 1982 conference, a ranting megalomaniac, one has to ask why Robbe-Grillet and Simon allowed him to rave on so long unchallenged. Robbe-Grillet can only offer an explanation that insults the integrity of anyone who does not share his point of view:

Je n'ai pas raison de ne pas le (i.e. Ricardou, D.F.) citer. C'est un esprit intéressant, mais il a dit à Cerisy, lors du colloque *Robbe-Grillet: analyse et théorie* qu'il avait organisé en 1975, des stupidités que je

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une chose très particulière: c'est que je l'aime, mais que je ne le supporte pas." from *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui* vol. 1, p. 249.

<sup>42</sup> In the interview with Bersani referred to above.

préfèrais ne pas dire moi-même. Elles étaient pourtant passionnantes - il fallait les dire. Ce qui m'étonne, c'est que tant de gens s'y soient laissé prendre, la plupart du temps par mauvaise foi.<sup>43</sup>

So, Ricardou is a mad dangerous Stalinist who has led those who support him, or take him seriously, down a dead end, but they probably deserve it as they only followed him out of bad faith anyway.

Since 1982 a critical consensus has emerged which writes history in a way that minimises the contribution of Jean Ricardou. Associated with this there has been a regrettable resort to vituperation. Calling Ricardou a "terrorist" and his work "verbiage", as some have, is hardly an appropriate way to conduct a debate. Ralph Sarkonak, attempts to whip up sympathy for the referent:

Si, vingt ans après les attaques les plus virulentes contre le référent, plus personne ne semble prêt à continuer ou à reprendre ce qui était une véritable campagne de terrorisme intellectuel, (...)<sup>44</sup>

Everyone rushes to join in the general denigration of Ricardou. Mary Orr describes him in one of her essays as the "'big bad wolf' essential to the tale of any path through the woods of criticism for unsuspecting but eager critics of Simon". She concludes her critique with the words: "More than ever before, Simon's *Le Jardin des Plantes* laughs at theories of representation à la Ricardou because these ultimately fail to take into account so many forking paths."<sup>45</sup> J. A. E. Loubère, refers to what she calls Ricardou's rigidity.<sup>46</sup> David Ellison writes of:

(...) the tendency of theoretical discourses on art to impose (retroactively) on works of the imagination a rigid and codified armature - dare I say shades of Jean Ricardou?<sup>47</sup>

And shades of Robbe-Grillet as well, no doubt:

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<sup>43</sup> Robbe-Grillet, *Le Voyageur*, Paris, Christian Bourgeois, 2001 p. 541.

<sup>44</sup> Avant-propos to *Claude Simon 1 à la recherche du référent perdu*, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> "The Garden of Forking Paths" in *Claude Simon, a retrospective*, pp.130 & 134.

<sup>46</sup> "The dynamics of conflict in the novels of Claude Simon", *ibid*, p. 88.

<sup>47</sup> "A partir du *Jardin des Plantes*", *ibid*, p.148.



Jean Ricardou : Et, en même temps, vous brutalisez les gens en disant : “oui, mais on ne peut plus écrire autrement”.

Alain Robbe-Grillet : Ah ouais!<sup>48</sup>

Only Mária Minich Brewer cautiously sounds a warning that goes unheeded:

Speaking of the works of the *nouveau roman* and *nouvelle vague* film, Lynn Higgins writes: “in the early years it was their referential dimension that was most consistently overlooked or discounted. Now it is their mediated, textual dimension that is most easily overlooked.” Autobiography serves as a *mise en abyme* of historiography. For Jean-Pierre Vidal, the scale seems to have tipped too far “vers l’autre extrême, le vécu triomphant”, so much so that it is appropriate to “insister sur ‘l’indécidable’ de ce biographique désormais trop innocent”.<sup>49</sup>

Stranger still is the idea that Simon was in some fashion an outsider or interloper when it came to the *nouveau roman*:

Twenty-six years later, S. is once more the outsider, this time at a *nouveau roman* colloquium, held at Cerisy in 1971. It appears that the events of his novel *La Route des Flandres* may have some relationship to lived and remembered experience. This runs counter to the prevailing orthodoxy (...).<sup>50</sup>

It is difficult for us to unravel this. Who is the outsider? S. or Simon? Did he feel this way at the time or in retrospect? What exactly is this “prevailing orthodoxy”? It is one thing to note that Simon regarded or came to regard himself as an outsider at this event, quite another to agree with him. Duncan accepts without question, it seems, the idea that Simon was in some sense marginal to the *nouveau roman*, whereas a witness to all these events, Jean-Claude Raillon, maintains<sup>51</sup> that if Ricardou and Robbe-Grillet were sparring partners, there existed between Simon and Ricardou “une vraie amitié”. If anyone regarded Simon as an interloper, it certainly was not Ricardou. The fact that Simon cooperated with Ricardou and was present at the

<sup>48</sup> Robbe-Grillet : *analyse, théorie*, UGE, Paris, 1976, vol. 1, p. 39.

<sup>49</sup> “(In)Commensurabilities” in *Claude Simon a retrospective*, p. 41.

<sup>50</sup> Alastair Duncan, “Satire, Burlesque and Comedy in Claude Simon” in *ibid* p. 103.

<sup>51</sup> In conversation with me at the 2002 textique seminar, Cerisy-la-salle.

colloquium, *Claude Simon : analyse, théorie*, in 1974, fully three years after the one of 1971 which he quotes, tends to support this alternative view, and the surprising fact is that Duncan, who appears to accept that Simon was an outsider at the 1971 colloquium, was present at the later one of 1974. If Simon felt so hard done by, why did he agree to appear at the later event? Far from being marginal, Claude Simon was central to the nouveau roman and it is the work of Simon that has appeared in La Pléiade, and he who was awarded the Nobel prize for literature, even if, according to Robbe-Grillet: “Jamais Simon n’aurait eu le prix Nobel sans ce mythe du Nouveau Roman.”<sup>52</sup>

In between his mildly ridiculous posturing around the Academy, Robbe-Grillet never tires of claiming credit for the invention of this myth, but if myth it is, then Ricardou played a major role in propagating it, so according to this logic, Ricardou can, at least in part claim responsibility for the award of the Nobel Prize to Simon.

There is a tendency in recent appraisals of Claude Simon to portray him as heroically struggling with the supposedly impossible task of writing history. This attitude to history stems from Claude Simon himself, but he is highly inconsistent; on the one hand he mocks a journalist with his tape recorder, but on the other, he is quite happy to “reconstruct” the atmosphere around Cerisy in 1971, before quoting.....the transcript of a tape recording, as if it were entirely unproblematic. It seems then, that for Simon and some of his followers, history is only problematic on certain occasions. In 1940, in the heat of battle, events and emotions are only established with great difficulty, in 1971, in the heat of polemic, events and emotions can be described with no difficulty at all. Consider Simon’s quotation in *Le Jardin des Plantes* of these exchanges that took place at the colloquium *Nouveau Roman : hier, aujourd’hui*.

Par ailleurs, quelques années plus tôt, autour d’un colloque sur le roman, la divulgation de cette lettre par S. avait suscité un autre genre d’émotion (d’alarme?): S. n’avait-il pas enfreint les principes de base d’un certain mouvement littéraire? En rendant public un tel document, S. ne contrevenait-il pas aux théories dont se réclamaient les adeptes de ce mouvement? Ne s’excluait-il pas ainsi lui-même de la communauté de pensée qui présidait aux recherches du groupe? En montrant comment un texte doit être construit à partir des seules combinaisons

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Arnaud Viviant, republished in *Le Voyageur*, p. 509.

qu'offre la langue ne se référant qu'à elle-même, Raymond Roussel n'avait-il pas ouvert (prescrit) au roman une voie dont on ne pouvait s'écarter sans retomber dans les erreurs (l'ornière) d'un naturalisme vulgaire? Était-ce bien ici la place de S., attendu le lendemain, et l'invitation qui lui avait été faite n'avait-elle pas été lancée à la légère? Convenait-il de l'accueillir en tant que membre de la communauté ou plutôt de le considérer comme un occasionnel et douteux "compagnon de route"? Ne fallait-il pas en finir avec cette équivoque?

Comme en témoigne la bande enregistrée des débats dont la transcription fut publiée par la suite, ces questions donnèrent lieu à une intéressante discussion:

Une participante:.....si on lit "La bataille de Pharsale" ou "La route des Flandres", il y a des séquences qui suggèrent quelque chose de réel, même si ensuite, évidemment, elle ne prennent leur signification profonde et ne fonctionnent que par rapport à d'autres à l'intérieur du livre. Or, C.S. lui-même, qui sera bientôt parmi nous, m'a montré un jour une lettre qu'il a reçue d'un vieil officier de cavalerie ayant subi la défaite de 40 et disant à propos de "La route des Flandres": "Comment est-il possible? Comment avez-vous pu voir ça? C'est exactement ce que j'ai vécu!" Ainsi, non seulement, il y a illusion représentative mais même, dans certains cas, elle peut être carrément confirmée par une référence.

J.R. : Il me semble que le diable, dont vous faites l'avocat, était tout de même plus malin...(Rires). S'agissant de théorie, les lettres d'un officier de cavalerie, je dois avouer qu'elles m'importent peu (....)

A R-G : Nous savons tous que l'une des illusions majeures dont la lecture doit se défaire est l'illusion de la projection (....) Il n'est donc nullement curieux qu'un ancien officier de cavalerie se projette dans "La route de Flandres". (....) Il y a deux manières : éliminer la dimension littérale (ici par une projection qui remplace le texte par des souvenirs fantasmés) et se laisser fasciner par une prétendue "la vie même"; éliminer la dimension référentielle (illusion pratiquement plus rare car elle est à contre-courant de l'idéologie régnante) et se laisser fasciner par la pure matérialité d'un ensemble ordonné de lettres. La première serait l'illusion référentielle : la seconde l'illusion littérale.

La participante : Mais alors, je suis tout à fait d'accord avec vous.....

J.R. : Permettez-moi de ne pas l'être tout à fait, moi, en revanche : il y a entre nous, à moins d'une rapide volte-face de votre part, un certain officier de cavalerie au témoignage duquel nous n'attachons pas la même importance. Je n'ignore pas que ce problème est délicat et R.-G. a eu raison de le faire rebondir avec les photographies. Ce qui est donné par S., ce sont les référents de la fiction: cela ne veut nullement dire que la fiction obtenue par le texte est l'équivalent du référent donné à titre documentaire.

A. R.-G. : Nous sommes d'accord avec vous, en réalité, R.. A chaque fois qu'on vous tend des "pièges" comme celui-là, c'est pour vous faire préciser le problème : personnellement, je trouve en effet que, comme vous l'avez fait remarquer un peu plus tôt, chacun d'entre nous est soumis à des tentations vers un certain passé référentialiste et que C.S., parmi nous est, le seul qui a éprouvé le besoin de laisser afficher au mur un billet de banque référent. (...)

Un intervenant : Je voudrais préciser que le que le référent du texte de C.S. est en partie le billet de banque, mais en partie seulement. Il est en partie, également, le référent du signe qu'est le billet de banque. Il y a dans le texte une sorte de confusion qui s'établit entre le référent du billet de banque et le billet de banque en tant que référent. Le résultat, je crois ce n'est pas de valoriser le référent mais au contraire de le dévaloriser.

A. R.-G. : Il n'en reste pas moins que C. S. nous donne constamment ses référents. (...) Donc, il faut bien croire que S. accorde aux référents une importance supérieure à celle que font les autres romanciers de cette réunion.<sup>53</sup>

In commenting on this passage Jean Duffy states that "(Simon) ....repeats *verbatim* the contributions of Jean Ricardou, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Léon Roudiez to a discussion about the status of 'referents' that Simon had supplied for exhibition at Cerisy."<sup>54</sup> This extract from the record is not in fact quite as "verbatim" as Duffy would have us think.

Firstly, Simon uses initials for Ricardou, Robbe-Grillet, and his own name, and consigns to anonymity both van Rossum-Guyon and Roudiez. I doubt that this is done to protect their identities, since this debate is a matter of public record, and nobody involved said anything to be ashamed of. Moreover, Duffy herself identifies the participants in this article, even though further down the same page she refers to the "anonymous 'participante'". Perhaps this procedure is supposed to fictionalise these events and far from Claude Simon conducting a polemic against Jean Ricardou, S. is conducting one against a fictional J.R.. Certainly the picture of Jean Ricardou

<sup>53</sup> Claude Simon, *Le Jardin des Plantes*, Paris, Minuit, 1997, pp. 355-358.

<sup>54</sup> Jean H. Duffy, "Truth, Verbiage and *Ecriture* in *Le Jardin des Plantes*", in *Claude Simon a retrospective*, p.193.

that emerges from this collection of essays is fictional, but possibly not in the sense anticipated by these critics.

Secondly, Simon quotes selectively, adding words in brackets (*alarme, prescrit, ornière*) to underline his scorn while prompting us what to think, omitting what does not suit his purpose. In the passages that follow the words in italics are those excised by Simon.

Jean Ricardou : Il me semblait que le diable, dont vous vous faites l'avocat, était tout de même plus malin...(Rires). S'agissant de théorie, les lettres d'un officier de cavalerie, je dois avouer qu'elles m'importent peu. *Je pourrais mentionner de mon côté l'avis d'un lecteur m'assurant : "L'Observatoire de Cannes", mais c'est exactement mes vacances à Cannes !"* (Rires).<sup>55</sup>

The first part of the quotation only makes sense with the restoration of the second. At first sight Ricardou's remarks might seem to be a *reductio ad absurdum*, but the thrust of his argument emerges immediately in another passage suppressed by Simon,

Il n'est nullement curieux qu'un ancien officier de cavalerie se projette dans "La route des Flandres". *Je l'ai fait apparaître nettement, je crois, dans le second chapitre de "Pour une théorie du nouveau roman": tout événement fictif est un lieu paradoxal, résultante mobile de deux dimensions contradictoires: la dimension référentielle, et la dimension littérale. C'est cette impensable qu'il faut pourtant penser et qui se rencontre dans les livres de Simon, de Robbe-Grillet ou les miens par exemple et bien des autres, selon les spécificités qu'il faudrait étudier. Supprimer cette tension, c'est cesser de lire.*<sup>56</sup>

It is difficult to see how this position, "(...) show(s) the determination of the anti-referentialist camp to accommodate Simon's fiction to fit its own highly theorised critical framework."<sup>57</sup>

But this was not Ricardou's position at this time. Here he is speaking later at the same colloquium, using terminology that he was later to modify:

Il n'y a pas lieu de faire une opposition simpliste entre tous les textes de la représentation, et de tous les textes de l'anti-représentation. Il

<sup>55</sup> *Nouveau Roman : hier, aujourd'hui*, p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid* p.30.

<sup>57</sup> Duffy, loc cit., p. 193.

importe de noter que dans les textes de l'anti-représentation continuent de travailler certaines procédures représentatives et que dans les textes représentatifs, commençaient déjà, parce qu'il s'agissait d'écriture tout simplement, à œuvrer des procédures d'anti-représentation.<sup>58</sup>

True, the term antirepresentation is open to misrepresentation. Ricardou was later to abandon it in favour of metarepresentation precisely because of the misunderstanding that it occasioned. But the quotation makes clear that in Ricardou's view every work of fiction employs procedures which promote representation and others which combat it. Curiously, in talking of the struggle between the real and the fictional, David Ellison, appears to approach this position unaware that Ricardou got there before him:

The inclusion of the now famous letter signed "colonel C...., ex-colonel au 8e Dragons" in the context of the 1971 Cerisy colloquium, the real letter of congratulation, confirmation and verification that needed to be taken *à la lettre* but caused consternation among the apostles of literary self-referentiality adds to the suspicion we have as readers of *Le Jardin des Plantes*, that this new text is, in part, the narration of the difficult combat *between* the real and the fictional.<sup>59</sup>

One might go further and conjecture that this combat is a prolongation of the battle of the phrase, except that in using the terms "real" and "fictional" rather than "representational" and "anti-representational" the uncomfortable question of the truth is posed. Any suggestion that Ricardou is uncomfortable in displaying the referential material that acts as the stimulation for fiction, will be rapidly dispelled if the reader takes the trouble to refer to Ricardou's own study of the nouveau roman of 1971. There is reproduced on page 182 a family portrait with the caption, "*Le portrait de l'ancêtre utilisé pour une description de La route des Flandres*", and on page 184, a collection of postcards, with the caption, "*Cartes postales à partir desquelles s'est écrit Histoire.*" If Ricardou is content to include such material in his own book why

<sup>58</sup> *Nouveau Roman : hier, aujourd'hui*. Vol. 2, p.398.

<sup>59</sup> Ellison's italics. "A partir du *Jardin des Plantes*", in Duffy and Duncan, op. cit., p. 137. In a footnote to this passage, Ellison quotes approvingly Michelle Labbé who describes Simon's stance thus: "L'homme dans une relation constamment dialectique avec son univers, ne peut parvenir à la pause et à la lucidité."

would it worry him to see a reproduced banknote?

In all of this, one of the most bizarre experiences is reading “Claude Simon et la route de la référence”, an article by Anthony Cheal Pugh which painstakingly reproduces the famous letter of Colonel Cuny and a sketch map of the railway cutting that features in several of Claude Simon’s novels, fondly believing it would seem, that this queers Ricardou’s pitch for good. Hoping, however, to avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater, he “restores”, with one hand, what he threw out with the other: “(...) l’idée ricardolienne d’une “*tension*” nécessaire entre les deux “*dimensions*” du texte de fiction, la “*référentielle et la littérale*”.”<sup>60</sup>

Sarkonak performs exactly the same operation using terminology that Ricardou uses himself in *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*.<sup>61</sup>

(...) certaines scènes (...) nous frappent (...) moins aujourd’hui que le passage continu, progressif et presque inévitable d’une “thématisation” du hors-texte à une “textualisation” du thématique et même à une “intertextualisation” des deux premiers processus.<sup>62</sup>

In *Le Jardin des Plantes*, a journalist comes to interview Claude Simon at his apartment seeking “an orderly, objective and comprehensible account of his war experience”, in the words of Jean H. Duffy, who comments on these scenes:

It is, however, clear from an early stage in the interview that the journalist’s objectives are unachievable for a number of reasons. First, the sheer plethora of the data that the senses have to accommodate at any one moment, the fact that certain information is only available in retrospect and the gaps in S’s recollections make orderly reconstruction impossible. Second, it is, as S, points out, impossible to give an objective account of any event. Third, the journalist cannot hope to reconstruct or understand what S. himself still cannot explain or even recall with precision.<sup>63</sup>

The status of Simon’s book, *Le Jardin des Plantes*, for all the discussion of it that

<sup>60</sup> In *Revue des sciences humaines*, no. 220, 1990-4, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> “Un hors-texte textualisé”, p. 265.

<sup>62</sup> Sarkonak, op. cit. p.4.

<sup>63</sup> “Truth, verbiage and *Ecriture* in *Le Jardin des Plantes*”, Jean H. Duffy, in *Claude Simon, a retrospective*, ed. Jean H. Duffy and Alastair Duncan, Liverpool University Press, 2002, p. 196.

occurs in the volume from which this quotation comes, is never clarified, there is no discussion of whether it is a collection of memoirs, autobiography or fiction. In a previous study, Alastair Duncan talks of “autobiographical fiction”, which looks like a sophisticated way of avoiding a decision. Meanwhile, Duffy seems to be in the unenviable position, and in this she is by no means alone, of accepting as a true record of events, a text that loudly proclaims the impossibility of such a thing, “it is, impossible to give an objective account of any event”, she says. David Carroll verges on mysticism:

In all recall and rewriting of the past, whether of a collective or individual subject, and regardless of whether memory takes the form of a *formal history, a personal memoir or a fiction* (my italics, D.F.), there will always be something lacking in memory and something added to the memory to compensate for its inadequacies: an indication both of something not heard, seen, felt, remembered or narrated and of something that points to, fills in for and supplements what is lacking.<sup>64</sup>

Michel Butor’s novel *Degrés*<sup>65</sup> illustrates the impossibility of recording every sensation or thought experienced by anyone beyond the shortest period of time. But is this the task of a historian in the first place? Moreover, does failure to do so invalidate all historical writing? The state of Napoleon’s haemorrhoids may or may not have influenced the outcome of the battle of Waterloo. The fact that Joe Bloggs suffered from haemorrhoids as he landed in Normandy, however, probably did not influence the outcome of D day. Surely the task, or at least one of the tasks of a historian is precisely to decide what and what is not relevant in such situations. But this is not the sort of history that Simonians are concerned with:

There remains a gulf between *L’Acacia* and any work of history. Simon is not a historian in the sense in which the word has come to be used since the Enlightenment. He is not primarily concerned with the comprehensiveness of knowledge, vigour of argument, factual truth.<sup>66</sup>

It is hard, indeed very hard to see how someone “not primarily concerned...with

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<sup>64</sup> “Thinking History Otherwise”, Duffy and Duncan, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>65</sup> Paris, Gallimard, 1960.

<sup>66</sup> Alastair Duncan, *Claude Simon: Adventures in words*, p. 145.



factual truth” can be a historian in *any* sense of the word. Furthermore, it would be somewhat perverse to read Simon in order to determine the historical facts relating to the Battle of France or the Spanish Civil War<sup>67</sup> and in this respect, the judgment of Ricardou in relating to his own biographical details quoted earlier is surely relevant. In and of themselves, the experiences of trooper Claude Simon are of no interest. It is how he uses them artistically that is the question.

This view of history has served Ricardou ill. It seems that the accepted wisdom that because it is impossible to ever arrive at a complete catalogue of all the subjective feelings and sensations of a dazed and confused cavalry officer we could be lead to suspect that the Germans really lost in 1940. It absolves us from any attempt at establishing the facts as far as they can be so established. How do we *really* know what happened in 1940, or what happened at Cerisy-la-salle in 1971? One solution might be to read the transcripts of the debate that took place, but then again, who is to say that they are more reliable than Simon’s cut and paste version of them? The more I consider this the more I sympathise with the hapless journalist referred to above.

Ricardou has responded to these claims in an article, *Les raisons de l'ensemble*, first published in *Conséquences*,<sup>68</sup> and subsequently reprinted in the new edition of *Le nouveau roman*. It should be noted before discussing the contents of this article that this is the only time that Ricardou has written about the events of 1982, and he rarely mentions them in conversation. He is genuinely uninterested in either Claude Simon or Robbe-Grillet’s careers as they developed after 1982 and when his attention was drawn to *Le Voyageur* and *Le Jardin des Plantes*, he showed not the slightest interest in either. But before moving on we should allow Ricardou the opportunity to defend himself from the charge of Stalinism. He starts by quoting the journalist, Philippe Romon, who, echoing the *Communist Manifesto*, recorded the original indictment:

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<sup>67</sup> Nowhere are the contradictions of Claude Simon more evident than in his attitude to George Orwell and John Reid, who are taken to task by him for his account of events in Barcelona in 1936 and Russia in 1917. In fact Simon’s extreme relativist and subjectivist position invalidates all of his criticisms since there is nothing to which one can appeal to decide these issues. Writing history becomes in this situation a utopian daydream.

<sup>68</sup> No 5, Paris, 1985, pp. 62- 77, Impressions nouvelles reprinted this series in 2006.

"Une ombre hante Robbe-Grillet et à travers lui, l'ensemble du Congrès en a souffert: celle de Jean Ricardou, théoricien et maître à penser du colloque de Cerisy en 1971. Dix ans après, son spectre a plané sur les conférences de New York. "Le Nouveau Roman n'a pas abouti parce que la liberté ne peut pas s'institutionnaliser", dit Robbe-Grillet en précisant : "s'il avait abouti, Ricardou aurait pris le pouvoir. C'était un *stalinien, un fou.*" (.....) Soit. Mais qu'on y pense un instant : l'ostentatoire injure (les mémorables *vipères lubriques*), l'accusation de démence (les persistantes *incarcérations psychiatriques*), n'est-ce point sous les cieux soviétiques qu'elles ont le mieux fleuri ? Dès lors, au regard de certains, les moins inattentifs, il pourrait bien corrompre sa vertu persuasive, et peut-être, même se retourner, l'arrêt qui incrimine un *hypothétique* "stalinien" suivant maints procédés du stalinisme classique.<sup>69</sup>

Ricardou's defence begins by reminding us of something that appears to have become obscured over the decades, of the dual nature of the nouveau roman, political and aesthetic:

Dans la seconde moitié des années cinquante, l'on se souvient peut-être, les milieux intellectuels dits de gauche étaient notamment aux prises avec un double problème. L'un, général, était *politique* : le Parti communiste français et la Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière présentaient, chacun dans son genre, pour d'aucuns, d'insurmontables traits répulsifs. Le premier, par sa flagrante inaptitude à faire sienne la déstalinisation en divers lieux entamée. La seconde, par sa spectaculaire compromission dans une guerre douteuse en Algérie. L'autre difficulté, particulière, était *artistique* : dans ses principales tendances, la littérature n'offrait guère pour lors d'inscutables principes attractifs. D'un côté persistait ce qui avait offert son meilleur dans l'avant-guerre : le surréalisme, disons, ainsi que les écrivains proches de la *Nouvelle Revue Française*. D'un autre côté, sévissait ce qui avait montré ses limites dans l'après-guerre : la sartrienne littérature engagée, disons, ainsi que le réalisme socialiste.<sup>70</sup>

Having set the context, Ricardou argues that the nouveau roman can be divided into two phases, "soft" and "hard". The turning point was the colloquium of 1971:

Jusque-là, comme ensemble, le Nouveau Roman avait été le résultat d'une détermination extérieure et imprécise. *Extérieure* : parce qu'il était advenu selon les variables jugements de la critique davantage que

<sup>69</sup> Op. cit., pp. 232-233.

<sup>70</sup> Jean Ricardou, *Le nouveau roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1990, p. 226.

par le raisonnement approfondi de tel groupe de romanciers. *Imprécise* : puisque ainsi ses contours demeuraient discrètement insaisissables. Était-il donc possible d'invertir ces deux caractères majeurs pour obtenir, tout à la fois, et une détermination *interne* (qui procédât des écrivains eux-mêmes) et une composition *définie* (qui évitât les facilités du brouillard)?<sup>71</sup>

Ricardou evidently feels that this question was answered positively, but his analysis is that the authors concerned, apart from himself, refused one way or another to accept the consequences of their decision. They were faced with the question: “(...) comment se définir en tant qu'écrivain, dès lors qu'on accepte de faire partie d'un ensemble littéraire?”<sup>72</sup> There were, in his view, two possible courses of action:

Soit par le haut : en tirant aussi loin que possible les conséquences de la situation advenue. Soit par le bas : en éludant autant que se peut les questions ainsi construites. Tout porte à croire qu'Alain Robbe-Grillet a choisi la voie inférieure et, peut-être, avec moins d'humour que d'humeur.<sup>73</sup>

Ricardou concludes his article by announcing (or rather reconfirming ) in the final paragraph of this article, his future orientation :

(...) dans la mesure où telle stratégie et telles tactiques apparaissent, non point comme une marque originale (celle, unique, d'un auteur), mais bien comme un caractère partagé (présent chez plusieurs écrivains), elles cessent d'être l'apanage d'une seule personne pour devenir, en principe, une possibilité permise à quiconque. Dès lors, on est conduit à se rendre d'une *extension restreinte* (la détermination d'un certain ensemble élargi), à une *extension généralisée* (l'incitation à un usage répandu de ces procédures). Bref, on est enclin à passer d'un acte d'*intellection* (avec ses acquis propres) à une attitude d'*enseignement* (avec ses voies nouvelles). Ainsi, pour prolonger l'exemple utilisé jusqu'ici, à ce qui a été nommé *Le Nouveau Roman*, et, depuis un certain temps, *Les Ateliers d'écriture*.<sup>74</sup>

That Ricardou's reputation has suffered since 1982 cannot be in doubt. What this chapter has demonstrated, I hope, is that it may be time to look more objectively at the record. Ricardou has been portrayed above all by Robbe-Grillet as some sort of

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<sup>71</sup> Op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>72</sup> Op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>73</sup> Op. cit., p. 323.

<sup>74</sup> Op. cit., p.248.

Caliban whose ideas are outlandish and dangerous. His theories have been misrepresented as being anti-referential and he has been portrayed as a power hungry Stalinist imposing his opinions on a group of cowed writers and intellectuals, victimised and reduced to a formalist conformism until they could stand the humiliation no more and burst their bonds at New York, once more free to write about their childhood and the “real” world.

The reality is somewhat different. Most of the “orthodoxy” that Ricardou was supposedly trying to impose bears little or no relation to his real opinions and since 1982, he, not Simon has been the outsider. Nevertheless, in the years that followed, he attempted to carry out the programme announced at the colloquium on Claude Simon of deepening his theoretical understanding and developing “ateliers d’écriture” as the subsequent chapters will demonstrate.

## Chapter 2. Les Ateliers d'écriture.

...je ne sais plus ce que j'avais l'intention de dire, car, je ne me rappelle pas le commencement de la phrase.

Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Chant sixième.

The principal aims of this chapter will be to describe and evaluate the writing workshops which have been a major part of Ricardou's activities since the late seventies. His interest in collaborative and collective writing led Ricardou to initiate successfully, with the support of others, the movement for writing workshops in France. In the review *Texte en main* which was founded, and is still edited by, his collaborators, he published a series of his articles that give both a theoretical justification for this initiative, and practical hints on the problems that might be encountered. He has developed an exercise for use in the classroom, and with those he was working with in the early eighties he produced a series of what he called constraints (contraintes), to be used in the writing of a *Bestiaire*.

Even at the height of his activity in and around the nouveau roman, Ricardou had already started to collaborate with people who would continue to work with him after the breach with the more widely known writers of the nouveau roman. With these often younger writers he organised, from 1977 onwards, colloquia, the majority of which took place at Cerisy-la-salle. They can be divided into two categories, those concerned with theory, the first six of which were already designated as "ateliers":

1977 Le texte (à effets) de fiction, directed by Jean-Claude Raillon.

1978 Le texte (à effets) de théorie, directed by Claudette Oriol-Boyer.

1980 Pour une théorie matérialiste du texte I, directed by Marc Avelot.

1981 Pour une théorie matérialiste du texte II, directed by Marc Avelot.

1982 Pour une théorie matérialiste du texte III, directed by Marc Avelot.

1983 Le texte de fiction et sa théorie, directed by Marc Avelot and Benoît Peeters.

1984 Comment écrire la théorie? I, directed by Jean Ricardou.

1985 Comment écrire la théorie? II, directed by Jean Ricardou.

The second series concentrated on the development of ‘ateliers d’écriture’:

1979 Problèmes actuels de la lecture, directed by Lucien Dällenbach and Jean Ricardou.

1979 Pour un nouvel enseignement du français, directed by Jean-François Halté and André Petitjean.

1983 Les Ateliers d’écriture, directed by Claudette Oriol-Boyer.

1988 La Réécriture, directed by Claudette Oriol-Boyer.

Frequently, the participants in one series also participated in the other, and apart from the directors of these events, Jean-Claude Raillon, Claudette Oriol-Boyer, Marc Avelot, and Benoît Peeters, participants also included, Jan Baetens, Gilles Tronchet, Guy Lelong, Michel Gauthier, Philippe Guinet, Bernard Magné, Nicole and Daniel Bilous, Patrice Hamel and Mireille Calle-Gruber. These people, writers and academics for the most part, formed the nuclei for two projects, *Conséquences* and *Texte en main*, both reviews the editorial boards of which were in the main drawn from this group, but in which Ricardou did not involve himself, confining himself to the continued organisation of the seminars of what would become known as textique, and the writing of a series of articles for both of these reviews.

Literary criticism can be an impediment rather than a help in the appreciation of a text, and we can all feel sympathy for the type of remark reproduced here:

Si l’on essaie de synthétiser quelques grands points de fixation de la critique concernant Lautréamont/Ducasse, on voit se dessiner plusieurs bonnes raisons de ne pas le lire. Trop souvent le jugement porté sur son texte passe arbitrairement du dénigrement à l’exaltation et se borne à reconnaître les deux pôles stables exigés par la tranquillité de l’esprit : le génie ou la fumisterie.<sup>1</sup>

It is Ricardou’s opinion that the cause of this uneasiness with the results of certain

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Pierre Goldenstein, preface to *Les chants de Maldoror*, Paris, Pocket, 1999, p. 12.

types of criticism, is that it comes to literature either from a non-literary direction, or is formulated by academics who have little or no experience of writing fiction. In this quotation, Ricardou is talking of psychoanalytic criticism but the same may be said of other sociological approaches:

(...) si (la psychanalyse) est fascinée par l'œuvre littéraire, c'est sur un mode extrinsèque en quelque façon, puisqu'elle la considère, par principe - il suffit de lire Marie Bonaparte ou Laplanche et Pontalis -, sous l'angle de sa communauté (dans ce qu'elle partage avec le rêve), et non de sa spécificité (en ce que son élaboration excède celle du rêve). Bref, elle l'éclaire, sans doute, mais au prix d'un peu l'assombrir.<sup>2</sup>

As will become apparent, Ricardou's solution will be, not the abolition of criticism, but the proposed abolition of the critic as someone whose function stands separate and opposed to that of the author. Furthermore, he is not afraid to put himself forward as a model for this. Even if it might seem that his career is divided into periods when he wrote fiction and others when he concentrated on theory, on closer inspection, there has always been a dialectic present. As Ricardou would have it, an advance or discovery in one area would lead to changes in the other, as the following quotation indicates:

Mais il est une seconde raison à l'affluence du théorique dans mes travaux. On pourrait la prétendre *structurale* : c'est parce que, constitutivement, un lien étroit associe la fiction (prise comme une pratique résolue de l'écriture) et la réflexion (entendue comme une soigneuse théorie de cette pratique), que j'ai conduit ces deux activités de façon quasiment paritaire. Ce contact, plus précisément, prend la forme d'une relation réciproque.

L'*exercice de la théorie* ajoute à la pratique de la fiction : elle autorise, en effet, une certaine connaissance de ses actes. Or, cette connaissance tient une double fonction. D'une part, elle offre à la pratique fictionnelle un *premier programme* : réussir d'une manière plus systématique ou, du moins, plus ordonnée, certaines opérations accomplies jusque à là de façon épisodique, tâtonnante, hasardeuse. D'autre part, elle propose à la pratique fictionnelle un *second programme* : expérimenter diverses opérations inédites dont le mécanisme aura été établi, précisément, par voie de réflexion.

Mais la *pratique de la fiction* apporte à l'exercice de la théorie : elle l'outrepasse, en effet, dans son geste expérimental. Or, cette

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Ricardou, *Pour une théorie de la réécriture*, Paris, Poétique, no 77, 1989, p.11.

expérimentation joue un double rôle. D'une part, elle propose à l'exercice théorique un *premier objet* : l'ensemble des résultats, certains quelquefois imprévus, des opérations menées à terme. D'autre part, elle offre à l'exercice théorique un *second objet* : les nouvelles opérations hasardeuses, tâtonnantes, épisodiques, qu'elle est induite à effectuer, de façon corrélatrice, pour mener à bien son double programme.<sup>3</sup>

From Ricardou's point of view, then, there is something asymmetrical in the existence of critics who have little or no experience of writing fiction. It is equally the case that there are authors who have little interest in theoretical matters:

Sans doute les Nouveaux Romanciers ont réfléchi, de temps à autre, sur l'art qui les concerne. Mais, du moins, jusqu'à présent, cet effort s'est contenu dans deux lisibles limites. Des limites *quantitatives*, d'abord : le contraste est flagrant entre la profusion de leurs pages fictionnelles et la minceur de leurs feuillets théoriques. Des limites *qualitatives*, aussi : leurs réflexions, quelquefois d'un vif intérêt, n'ont guère débouché, dans la plupart des cas, sur un quelconque groupe cohérent de concepts.

Ricardou's solution to this problem, as he saw it, is twofold: firstly, the development of a materialist theory of writing, which goes under the name of *textique*, and the second, the inauguration of writing workshops (*ateliers d'écriture*). Ricardou sees these strands as being inseparable. Both began to come to the fore simultaneously at the beginning of the 1980s; the series of articles on *textique* appeared in the review *Conséquences* while *Texte en main* was carrying one on writing workshops. The fact that we are obliged to consider the two elements separately should not cause this point to be obscured.

It would be difficult, indeed some might say impossible, to overestimate Ricardou's conviction that writing can be a profoundly revolutionary activity. Ricardou has always held definite ideas on the challenge that it ought to present to what he invariably calls the dominant ideology. At the *Mutualité* in 1964, he replied

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<sup>3</sup> *Le tout-à-lire, réponses écrites de Jean Ricardou*. (These questions were posed by Mireille Calle-Gruber in February of 1982). The replies appeared in a special edition of *Micromégas*, devoted to the nouveau roman, Rome, 1982, pp. 17-33. This and the passage below are on page 18.



to Sartre's questioning of the value of literature confronted by a starving child, by claiming that the existence of literature stood as a condemnation of a world that allows children to starve. Evidently, he does not share Adorno's belief, that after the holocaust, art became impossible. But his ideas did not stop at this point. He poses the question, how can writing further revolutionary changes in society? There is, of course, no suggestion of writing becoming subordinated to the interests of a party, as was the case with socialist realism. It is rather a question of writing that challenges certain fundamental assumptions of society, rather than writing from a particular political position. It is the practice that is revolutionary, or potentially so, not the content. Hence, Ricardou sees writing as a social activity, and not an overtly political one.

Such ideas, which were already embryonically present in *Le nouveau roman*, are more forcefully stated in the discussion that followed the paper that Ricardou presented at the colloquium on Claude Simon held at Cerisy-la-Salle in July 1974. Although he rarely uses the term, it is the division of labour that he attacks here, and at two distinct levels. Firstly, he attacks the division of society into those who are able to write creatively and those who are not:

(....) si je dois travailler dix heures par jour pour me nourrir, je ne vois comment écrire. Or nous ne l'ignorons pas : si certains se trouvent astreints à travailler dix heures par jour pour se nourrir, c'est en raison d'une autre très curieuse parcellisation du travail : c'est parce que d'autres par la place qu'ils occupent ont, eux, la possibilité de ne pas travailler du tout. Montrer à chacun qu'il peut écrire finit par déboucher sur le refus de l'exploitation sociale. Et je ne doute pas qu'il s'agisse là d'une des raisons de la terrible réticence, au plan idéologique, que rencontrent, ici et ailleurs, certaines de mes propositions.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, he criticises the divide which he sees as fundamental to the French university system, which separates the critic or teacher from the writer:

En ce qui concerne l'enseignement de la littérature, je remarquerai ceci: il y a un phénomène tout à fait extraordinaire et dont il n'est pas

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<sup>4</sup> *Claude Simon : analyse, théorie*, Paris, U.G.E. 10/18, 1974, p. 30.

de bon ton idéologique de parler. Au niveau universitaire, lorsqu'on enseigne la mathématique, on fait des mathématiques; lorsqu'on enseigne la physique, on fait de la physique; lorsqu'on enseigne des sciences naturelles, on fait des sciences naturelles; *mais lorsqu'on enseigne la littérature, on ne fait pas de littérature : on enseigne un discours sur la littérature.* Sans doute, çà et là, y a-t-il des expériences. Mais que l'on regarde les sujets donnés à l'agrégation, aux certificats et au baccalauréat, il faut bien admettre que l'exercice de la littérature y est proscrit et l'exercice d'un discours triomphant (sic). Que se passerait-il si l'on enseignait, à la place des mathématiques elle-mêmes, un discours sur les mathématiques? Il faut bien marquer le clivage : jusqu'à l'âge de treize ou quatorze ans (celui de la puberté, comme par hasard), on fait faire dans nos écoles et lycées français des textes de fiction aux jeunes gens. Bien sûr, la mise en jeu des stéréotypes y est massive, mais l'on peut tout de même dire que l'activité littéraire est concernée. Puis dans les classes de quatrième et de troisième, c'est fini : voici les dissertations sur toutes sortes de sujets et de textes. On transforme les jeunes gens en petits professeurs. L'université est ainsi, plus largement qu'on ne croit, une machine à se reproduire elle-même....Enseigner la littérature sera un jour, peut-être, enseigner à fabriquer du texte dans ce qu'on pourrait appeler des *ateliers d'écriture*. On y écrira du texte, mais en se demandant toujours quels procédés sont employés : L'enseignement sera une production conjointe de pratique et de théorie. Nous en sommes loin.<sup>5</sup>

In 1975 Ricardou, at a colloquium at Cerisy-la-salle, repeated his charge, in words, according to Claudette Oriol-Boyer,<sup>6</sup> “désormais célèbres et cités partout”, that universities teach, not literature, but “un discours sur la littérature, qu'on l'appelle commentaire, dissertation ou ainsi qu'il plaira”,<sup>7</sup> to which he added these remarks.

Pour la question qui nous assemble ici, il s'agit, non plus du tout de se demander comment réussir, aussi bien que possible, à diffuser la culture littéraire dans le public, mais plutôt, *comment travailler à ce que la littérature devienne l'activité pratique et théorique de tous.* Mais, dans ces conditions, quel type de rapports sera-t-il entretenu avec les travaux du passé ou du présent? Ce ne sera plus le *rapport culturel*, qui institue la passivité d'une masse considérable séparée de la fabrique et qu'on appelle le public. Ce sera un rapport nouveau, que je propose d'appeler *le rapport expérientiel*, qui permettra l'activité

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp. 33-34.

<sup>6</sup> Claudette Oriol-Boyer, *Nouveau Roman et discours critique*, Grenoble, Ellug, 1990, p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Ricardou, 'Travailler autrement', in *L'enseignement de la littérature (crise et perspective)*, Paris, Nathan, 1977, p. 19.

d'une masse considérable, l'ensemble de ceux qui, conjointement, pratiqueront et théoriseront (...) La lecture ne sera plus de l'ordre d'une passive consommation culturelle, régentée par une caste d'intermédiaires ; la lecture sera de l'ordre d'une active attention élaboratrice, déterminé à partir des besoins du moment.<sup>8</sup>

It is doubtful that Ricardou could claim any originality for the basic ideas that underlie these pronouncements. For Roland Barthes, the abolition of boundaries between different forms of writing is the welcome result of the development of structuralism:

Le prolongement logique du structuralisme ne peut être que de rejoindre la littérature non plus comme “objet” d'analyse, mais comme activité d'écriture, d'abolir la distinction, issue de la logique, qui fait de l'œuvre un langage-objet et de la science un méta-langage, et de risquer ainsi le privilège illusoire attaché à la propriété d'un langage esclave.

Il reste donc au structuraliste à se transformer en “écrivain”, non point pour professer ou pratiquer le “beau style”, mais pour retrouver les problèmes brûlants de toute énonciation, dès lors qu'elle s'enveloppe plus dans le nuage bienfaisant des illusions proprement *réalistes*, qui font du langage le simple médium de la pensée.<sup>9</sup>

At this time, as Oriol-Boyer notes in the study previously quoted, there seems to have been a consensus of both writers and critics that there should be a fundamental unity between reading and writing. She quotes Jean-Louis Baudry from a collection to which Ricardou also contributed:

Lire apparaîtra donc comme un acte d'écriture et pareillement écrire se révélera être un acte de lecture - écrire et lire n'étant que les moments simultanés d'une même production.

Cette écriture, loin de protéger le lecteur du souci de s'écrire, le replacerait d'emblée en position d'exercer pour son propre compte lecture et écriture, l'amenant ainsi à se saisir non comme possesseur, non comme propriétaire mais comme effet de texte.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.22.

<sup>9</sup> Barthes, this article first appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, in 1967, reprinted in *Le bruissement de la langue (Essais critiques IV)*, Paris, Seuil, 1984, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Jean - Louis Baudry, 'Ecriture, fiction, idéologie', in *Théorie d'ensemble*, Paris, Seuil, 1968, pp. 131 & 147, quoted in Oriol - Boyer, op. cit. pp. 84-85.

Baudry, along with Ricardou himself, was associated with *Tel Quel*, and in the case of *Tel Quel* the idea of a collective effort in writing was certainly proposed, not merely as a project, but as a practice that was already being employed by those writing for this review. Thus, Sollers feels justified in writing that if articles are signed, it is not thereby to be understood that they are the result of one person's deliberations:

1. l'emploi du pronom "je" dans les énoncés qui vont suivre n'implique pas que celui qui parle dans cet exposé se considère comme "l'auteur" - au sens classique - de ce texte. "Je" renvoie à la situation concrète d'un locuteur qui parle après-coup d'un ensemble pratique et théorique dont il n'est pas question de maîtriser absolument les effets;
2. par *texte*, j'entends ici non seulement l'objet saisissable par l'impression de ce qu'on appelle un livre (un roman), mais la totalité concrète à la fois comme produit déchiffrable et comme travail d'élaboration transformateur.<sup>11</sup>

Ricardou has always expressed his debt to Mallarmé and his hope for the disappearance of the poet: "L'œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots (.....)".<sup>12</sup>

Despite these statements of principle, there is little or no evidence either in Forrest's exhaustive study,<sup>13</sup> or in other histories of this review,<sup>14</sup> that these theories were put into practice in any formal sense, even though it is probably the case that ideas and articles were discussed prior to their publication both within the group and with contributors. If, therefore, Sollers and his collaborators helped prepare the ground for the appearance of writing workshops, they did not participate in this movement when eventually it got off the ground.

That such ideas were in the air, part of the intellectual furniture of the era, whatever their provenance, is demonstrated by the first few pages of *S/Z*. Here Barthes sets out

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<sup>11</sup> Philippe Sollers, *Niveaux sémantiques d'un texte moderne*, reprinted in *Tel Quel*, *Théorie d'ensemble*, Paris, Seuil, 1965, p. 274.

<sup>12</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Pléiade, 1945, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> Philippe Forrest, *Histoire de Tel Quel, 1960-1982*, Paris, Seuil, in the collection *Fiction & Cie*, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> For example, see Leslie Hill, 'Philippe Sollers and *Tel Quel*', which comprises chapter 4 of *Beyond the Nouveau Roman : Essays in the Contemporary French Novel*, Oxford, Berg, 1990, pp. 100- 120.

the difference between a text that is *lisible* and one that is *scriptible*:

L'évaluation fondatrice de tous les textes ne peut venir ni de la science, car la science n'évalue pas, ni de l'idéologie, car la valeur idéologique d'un texte (morale, esthétique, politique, aléthique) est une valeur de représentation, non de production (l'idéologie "reflète", elle ne travaille pas). Notre évaluation ne peut être liée qu'à une pratique et cette pratique est celle de l'écriture. Il y a d'un côté ce qu'il est possible d'écrire : ce qui est dans la pratique de l'écrivain et ce qui en est sorti : quels textes accepterais-je d'écrire (de ré-écrire), de désirer, d'avancer comme une force dans ce monde qui est le mien ? Ce que l'évaluation trouve, c'est cette valeur-ci : ce qui peut être aujourd'hui écrit (ré-écrit) : le *scriptible*. Pourquoi le scriptible est-il notre valeur ? Parce que l'enjeu du travail littéraire (de la littérature comme travail), c'est de faire du lecteur, non plus un consommateur, mais un producteur du texte. Notre littérature est marquée par le divorce impitoyable que l'institution littéraire maintient entre le fabricant et l'usager du texte, son propriétaire et son client, son auteur et son lecteur. Ce lecteur est plongé dans une sorte d'oisiveté, intransivité, et, pour tout dire, de *sérieux* : au lieu de jouer lui-même, d'accéder pleinement à l'enchantement du signifiant, à la volupté de l'écriture, il ne lui reste plus en partage que la pauvre liberté de recevoir ou de rejeter le texte : la lecture n'est plus qu'un *referendum*. En face du texte scriptible s'établit donc sa contrevaleur, sa valeur négative, réactive : ce qui peut être lu, mais non écrit : le *lisible*. Nous appelons classique tout texte lisible.<sup>15</sup>

When we consider another possible stimulus to the development of writing workshops in France, Oulipo, the situation is a little more complicated. One of Queneau's better known sayings, contained in *Exercices de style*, "C'est en écrivant qu'on devient écrivain"<sup>16</sup> could readily serve as the motto for the movement that Ricardou did much to foster. Yet, even though the very name of the group, Ouvroir de littérature potentielle, suggests some affinity with the idea of workshops, the choice of the word "ouvroir" seems to imply, at least, something quaint or more genteel than Ricardou's more robust or, as he might see it, proletarian "atelier". Oulipo's practice of meeting to exchange and discuss the use or development of what are now called "contraintes", is a feature it shares with workshops of the type advocated by Ricardou and others. But it would seem that the emphasis has always been on the research of such constraints, combined with a taste for public performance, rather than their use

<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Seuil, Paris, 1970, pp. 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Queneau, *Exercices de style*, Paris, Gallimard, p.80.

for pedagogic purposes. Another, equally significant difference is that, in comparison with textique, which is open to all comers, Oulipo functions like a club, and membership is by invitation.<sup>17</sup> This means that to become a member of Oulipo you must already be to a certain extent a writer, and it helps if you have specialist knowledge of computer programming or mathematics as well, whereas, in theory at least, the type of workshop envisaged by Ricardou is intended to create writers from scratch, as it were. Nevertheless, despite these differences, Oulipo's insistence on procedures open to use by all, undercuts the notion of property rights attacked by Barthes in the quotation above, and more importantly, its emphasis on writing as a craft to be learned and perfected have helped prepare the ground for the emergence of writing workshops.

It is doubtful that Ricardou would want to claim any originality for the bases from which he helped initiate the workshop movement in France. Indeed, the first of his series of articles on the subject that he wrote for *Texte en main*, bears the title, *Pluriel de l'écriture*,<sup>18</sup> which, despite Ricardou's judgment that apart from writing about fashion, Barthes was too much influenced by literary fashion,<sup>19</sup> would seem to refer to a remark contained in *S/Z*: "Interpréter un texte, ce n'est pas lui donner un sens (plus ou moins fondé, plus ou moins libre), c'est au contraire apprécier de quel pluriel il est fait."<sup>20</sup>

Ricardou's claim to originality then is more accurately based on the use to which such theoretical ideas could be put in practice and how they could be taken to their logical conclusions. In this respect, one can legitimately say that in the quotation cited above from the colloquium on Claude Simon, he sets out a programme that he has successfully implemented, even if he has not gained much credit for it.

The key ideas on which this programme was based are contained in the series of

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<sup>17</sup> Conversation in February, 2002, with Bernardo Schiavetta, co-founder of *Formules*, which maintains close relations with both Oulipo and Textique.

<sup>18</sup> *Pluriel de l'écriture*, Grenoble, Texte en main, no 1, 1984. This article is also available in *Ateliers d'écriture, Colloque de Cerisy-la-salle, sous la direction de Claudette Oriol-Boyer*, ed. Claudette Oriol-Boyer, Grenoble, Ceditel, Librairie de l'Université, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Unpublished interview with A. Duncan, 22/10/87.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Paris, Seuil, 1970, p.11.

articles that Ricardou wrote for *Texte en main*, numbers 1-7, that appeared between 1984 and 1989. Daniel Bilous, one of those at the heart of the development of this tendency, and who remains active in *Textique*, writes of this period:

Il ne faut pas sous-estimer ici l'importance des revues, qui furent souvent une conséquence directe des rendez-vous de Cerisy, une manière de continuer, voire de pérenniser l'échange par d'autres moyens. Certaines déjà très florissantes, comme *Pratiques*, avaient presque le monopole de la vulgarisation non triviale des concepts théoriques auprès des collègues curieux de renouveler leur enseignement. Elle débarqua en force en la personne d'André Petitjean, Jean-Pierre Goldenstein,<sup>21</sup> Jean-François Halté, parmi beaucoup d'autres.

Une autre vit vraiment le jour à cette époque, dans ma voiture et sur la route de Cerisy à Coutances, où Claudette Oriol-Boyer, Bernard Magné projetèrent avec Jean Ricardou et moi de créer une revue capable d'articuler ensemble création, théorisation et information : elle s'appela *TEM* - Texte en main. Son slogan était "Ecrire, cela s'apprend" et l'on y parle d'une mouvance neuve dont elle se réclamait; "le scripturalisme", interprétable comme un mot valise (structuralisme en écriture). Jean Ricardou y publia une bonne demi-douzaine de chroniques baptisées "Textuelles", où entre autres il breveta des concepts comme la "recouverte", explora les méfaits de la lecture "diagonale". Le premier numéro (1984) accueillit un sien article "Pluriel d'écriture", fondamental en ce qu'il articulait pour la première fois la notion de groupe de co-scripteurs avec la nécessaire émergence, au cœur du text, d'un jeu multiplié.<sup>22</sup>

In "Pluriel d'écriture", Ricardou gives us two possible models for writing workshops, the first he calls "parcellisation", the second, "connexion". In the case of the former, the person leading the workshop allocates the tasks to be completed by each individual and behaves rather like a foreman. "Il tient l'emploi de *contre-maître* : il se ferme sur une relation d'*asservissement*. Ou, si l'on aime mieux, sur une procédure inégalitaire : l'exécutant est celui qui doit obéir au contre-maître."<sup>23</sup> Historically, such workshops have existed, though Ricardou does not refer to them. One has only

<sup>21</sup> Whose introduction to *Les chants de Maldoror* we have already quoted.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Bilous, *Une certaine suite dans les idées : Du nouveau roman à la Textique*, unpublished contribution to a colloquium "Pontigny, Cerisy dans le S.I.E.C.L.E." held in 2001, S.I.E.C.L.E. is an acronym to be read Sociabilités, Intellectuelles Echanges Coopérations Lieux Extensions.

<sup>23</sup> *Pluriel de l'écriture*, in *Texte en main*, no 1, Grenoble. 1984, p. 21.

to think of Dumas père, who employed large numbers of so-called “nègres” to write for him. He may also have in mind certain rigid teaching methods. With the second model of workshop, all of the participants should be allowed the opportunity to attempt all tasks and be encouraged to help each other:

L’aide que chacun peut offrir, de façon différée, est du registre d’une *éducation*: le plus expert contribue patiemment à l’essor de l’autre. Il peut lui servir, au moins de modèle, au mieux de moniteur. Il joue le rôle de *maître* : il s’ouvre à une relation d’*enseignement*. Ou, si l’on préfère, à un procès égalitaire : l’apprenti est celui qui doit, au moins, pouvoir égaler le maître.<sup>24</sup>

Fundamental to Ricardou’s project is his attack on the notion that the author is a special type of creature, endowed with something unique to write, and an innate ability or God-given talent for writing it. This is, of course, that part of the dominant ideology that Ricardou calls expression. For him, on the contrary, writers need to be much more modest in their claims:

Cette doctrine, nul doute qu’elle ne soit, à beaucoup, légèrement familière. Cette doctrine, nul doute qu’elle ne soit, néanmoins, lourdement erronée. Et à un point tel que, dût-on ainsi paraître un rien provocant, le plus expéditif, sans doute, est d’en contredire avec vigueur, méthodiquement, les deux prétensions sempiternelles. Premièrement : *pour écrire, l’écrivain n’a nul besoin d’avoir, au préalable, un quelque chose à dire*. Deuxièmement : *Pour écrire, l’écrivain doit d’abord comprendre qu’il ne le sait que peu*. (...) Pour commencer d’écrire, l’écrivain n’a pas besoin d’avoir, au préalable, un quelque chose à dire, *parce que c’est en écrivant qu’il trouve ce qui finit par être dit*. En ce sens, l’écriture est une machine à penser. L’écriture n’est pas le moyen d’expression d’une pensée déjà passée. L’écriture est le moyen de production d’une pensée à venir. (...) Pour réussir à écrire, l’écrivain doit donc comprendre qu’il ne le sait que peu, *parce que c’est en transformant ce qu’il a écrit qu’il écrit*. En ce sens, la page est un théâtre des métamorphoses. L’écriture ne vient pas du don de celui, ou de celle, qui saurait vivement exprimer telle quelle une sienne pensée. L’écriture est l’acte de celle, ou de celui, qui raturant son écrit, parvient à lentement penser ce qu’il ne pensait pas encore.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 21. ‘procès’ is Ricardou’s choice of terms.

<sup>25</sup> *Pluriel de l’écriture*, loc. cit., pp. 22-23.



Clearly no one would suggest that in setting out to write, the writer has no inkling at all of what he will write. But it seems plausible that as often as not the writer has only a vague idea of where his writing will lead him or her, and we are all familiar with facsimiles of the pages of famous authors with their deletions and revisions. On the other hand, even when a writer has a clear idea of his or her final objective, he or she may not have a precise idea of how he or she might get there. As Wittgenstein might well have suggested, the language game of writing is analogous to playing a game of chess. We learn the rules, just as we might learn the rules of the sonnet, and we set out to win or at least play for a draw, but we cannot predict completely the course of the game, and who knows, we might stumble across a new variation as we play. The model of writing suggested by the theory of expression would imply that the work had in some sense, already been written or composed before being set down on paper, which exceptionally, in the case of miniature forms like the haiku, may sometimes happen. But when we consider such works as *A la recherche du temps perdu*, this explanation of the writing process flies in the face of facts, and this is equally true of technical writing, consider the relationship of Marx's notebooks, known as the *Grundrisse*, to *Capital*. In his attitude to writing, Ricardou has in common with Wittgenstein a rejection of the Cartesian notion that we have thoughts which we somehow translate into language.

Now, no one would seriously suggest that we cannot think or write on our own, and this is not Ricardou's position. What he maintains, however, is that in order to write effectively a writer must at some point read his or her writing as though it were that of someone else, and effectively, internalise the reader so that he or she evolves as the writing proceeds:

En effet, pour écrire, c'est par deux fois, résolument qu'il doit admettre de se départir de soi.

Une première fois parce que, pour apercevoir les siennes bêtises, il doit parvenir à lire effectivement ce qu'il a écrit. Or, pour ce faire, il doit considérer son écrit avec des yeux sitôt différents : *comme les lettres d'un autre*. Car, si, tout confit de soi-même, il n'y parvient point, il ne lira nullement ce qu'il a écrit : il retrouvera, seulement ténébreux, ce qu'il voulait dire. Tel défaut de lecture, qui entrave l'exercice de l'écriture, il relève de ce que j'ai cru devoir nommer,

ailleurs, la *retrouvaille*.<sup>26</sup>

Une seconde fois parce que, pour amoindrir lesdites bévues, il doit savoir abandonner effectivement, ce qu'il a pensé. Or, pour ce faire, il doit consentir à se rendre plutôt différent : *comme un être autre*. Car, si, infatué de soi-même, il n'en convient point, il ne rectifiera aucunement ce qu'il a écrit : il conservera simplement, prétentieux, ce qui est le pire. Tel défaut de posture, qui empêche le travail de l'écriture, en ce qu'il clôt toute métamorphose, il ressortit à ce qu'on pourrait appeler, ici, le *fermail*.

Il n'est pas trop tard, peut-être, pour le comprendre. L'homme qui écrit n'est jamais seul : toujours, en lui, un autre travaille.<sup>27</sup>

Elsewhere, Ricardou suggests that this phenomenon was recognised by Rimbaud:

Que l'écrivain, également, dès lors qu'il est à l'œuvre, ne soit jamais seul, formulons-le ainsi la célèbre énigme d'Arthur Rimbaud : "Car, *sitôt qu'il écrit, JE est un autre*."<sup>28</sup>

It is clear from this that a convenient way to gain distance from one's writing, to see it through the eyes of another, is to seek a second (or third and fourth) opinion. To become someone else as soon as one sits down to write is so difficult to achieve, that even skilled and experienced writers, according to Ricardou, fail from time to time. Hence the ateliers. But as always with Ricardou, this is not the whole story.

In order that the reader can judge whether or not the writer has succeeded in the task that he has set himself, he must be aware of what the writer has attempted to do. There are two ways by which we can come by such knowledge. It can be deduced from the internal evidence of the text itself, especially when we have successive drafts of the work, or we can be informed of his intentions by the writer himself/herself. From this point of view, Valéry has not given us the full picture:

Si elles proviennent d'un autre écrit, l'on pourra les nommer des *instructions interscriptives*. J'en ai commenté ailleurs un exemple : jadis au terme d'une analyse un peu soigneuse, j'ai établi que dans *Le remplaçant*, de Robbe-Grillet, l'étudiant "revenu sous la branche la plus basse" ne va pas sans nourrir certaines idées de pendaison. Or, de

<sup>26</sup> In "Ecrire en classe", *Pratiques*, Metz, no 20, 1978, pp. 23-70.

<sup>27</sup> "Pluriel de l'écriture", loc.cit. p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> Jean Ricardou, "Pour une théorie de la réécriture", *Poétique*, no 77, Paris 1989, p. 4. The quotation from Rimbaud comes from a letter of 15 May 1871 to Paul Demeny in *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1963, p. 270.

cette lecture, l'écrivain m'assura qu'elle était impossible parce que jamais personne ne songerait à se pendre, en plein jour, à Paris, à l'un des marronniers du boulevard Pasteur. (...) C'est alors que, lumineusement averti de la sorte, le lecteur est sitôt en état de distinguer une classique recouverte : nul signe en effet, dans *Le remplaçant*, ni du parisien boulevard, ni même, apparemment, d'une quelconque effervescence urbaine. Tout cela est resté dans la tête de qui croyait l'avoir écrit.

Du coup, c'est sous un nouveau jour que se laisse entrevoir la célèbre assertion de Valéry :

Quand l'ouvrage a paru, son interprétation par l'auteur *n'a pas plus de valeur* que tout autre par qui que ce soit.

Perspicace, ô combien, en ce qu'elle empêche un vouloir de s'imposer au faire, la voilà curieusement contredite, comme au second degré, par sa propre logique. Quand l'ouvrage a paru, son interprétation par l'auteur *a plus de valeur* que tout autre, parce qu'elle permet de définir, le cas échéant, ce qui, devant être fait, ne l'a pas été.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to take account of Ricardou's remark that Valéry's assertion "empêche un vouloir de s'imposer au faire". He is talking here of an absence from the text of something that the writer thought he had included. Ricardou is equally aware of a phenomenon that we have all witnessed at some time or other, that is, the situation where a reader points out something in the text of which the writer was previously not conscious, and from time to time, the writer is prepared to admit that even though he or she had not intended to produce this effect, now that it has been pointed out, he or she recognises that it is indeed there in the text. A striking example of just how complex such unintentional effects may be is provided by Milan Kundera, discussing the relatively complicated structure of one of his novels:

C.S. : Cette structure mathématique est-elle préméditée?

M.K. : Non. Tout cela, je l'ai découvert, après la parution de *La Plaisanterie* à Prague, grâce à l'article d'un critique littéraire tchèque : *La géométrie de "La Plaisanterie"*. Un texte révélateur pour moi. Autrement dit, cet "ordre mathématique" s'impose tout naturellement comme une nécessité de la forme et n'a pas besoin de calculs.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "L'utilité d'une erreur", in *Texte en main*, no 2, 1984, p.119.

<sup>30</sup> Milan Kundera, interviewed by Christian Salmon, reprinted in Kundera, *L'art du roman*, Paris, Folio, 1986, p. 107. This collection does not give details of when or where this interview first appeared.

These two processes, as Ricardou has already noted earlier in this article are facilitated by writing workshops:

*La reconnaissance*, qui permet d'apercevoir si son écrit répond à son projet. Bref, si son faire est conforme à son vouloir. Ce qu'elle autorise, c'est une *vérification*. Ce contrôle est-il négatif ? Alors, pour obtenir la convenance, le scripteur est porté à récrire. Il s'agit en somme, d'une entreprise finaliste : celle qui soumet à un vouloir.

Et la *découverte*, par laquelle il détecte ce qu'il a éventuellement opéré, à son insu, dans son écrit. Bref, en quoi son faire excède son vouloir. Ce qu'elle favorise, c'est une *innovation*. Car le scripteur peut s'aviser d'épanouir cet événement que, d'abord, il n'avait pas ambitionné. Il s'agit, cette fois, d'un geste conséquentialiste : celui qui subordonne un vouloir à un faire.<sup>31</sup>

So far, Ricardou has looked at things from the point of view of the writer. But just as there is a danger that the writer will read a text in the fashion that he or she thinks that they have written it, so there is a danger, equally pernicious, that the reader will read what he or she expects to read: "(...) il aperçoit non le tracé, mais le connu (s'il est l'auteur) ou le prévu (s'il est le lecteur)."<sup>32</sup> Ricardou's position is that a certain speed in reading is inevitable for its success, but that there is a tendency for what we call "speed reading" to become a fetish, leading to what he calls, "la lecture galopante"<sup>33</sup>,

L'on saisit sans peine, par suite, ce qui, sous cet angle, distingue la lecture courante (celle du lecteur commun) de la lecture galopante (celle de la lecture dératé). Nullement, elles-mêmes, les diverse procédures (tantôt suppression, quelquefois adjonction, voire substitution) qui entraînent les furtives métamorphoses de la page : l'on ne peut s'y soustraire en ce qu'elles forment les modes majeurs de la métamorphose. Mais seulement le caractère de leur distribution : les vandalismes sont épars avec la lecture courante (car insue mais restreinte, la diagonale limite régulièrement les bévues qu'elle engendre), et assemblés avec la lecture galopante (car surveillée mais étendue, la diagonale, au moindre relâchement, concentre soudain les dégâts qu'elle suscite).

Lest we think that Ricardou is exaggerating this fetish, he quotes a well known journalist, Louis Pauwels, writing in the *Figaro Magazine*,

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Ricardou, "Le lecteur dératé", in *Texte en main*, no 7, Grenoble, 1989, p.115.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, loc. cit., p.115.

Hommage au lecteur pressé (....) Comment un homme intelligent aujourd'hui ne se sentirait-il pas pressé (....) Notre meilleur lecteur, le plus cher à nos yeux, en aura fini avec nous en deux ou trois heures (...) Au besoin, sautez les chapitres (....), lisez en diagonale (...).<sup>34</sup>

Moreover he gives us some startling examples of what can result from such hasty readings. Among them, Philippe Sollers, who misquotes Mallarmé, (heinous sin in Ricardou's book), so that "le vers : lui philosophiquement rémunère le défaut des langues, complément supérieur", becomes: "(...) lui, philosophiquement rémunère le défaut des langues, complètement supérieur."<sup>35</sup>

Ricardou's next example, takes issue with the editors of the Pléiade edition of Mallarmé's work:

(....) nul amateur de Mallarmé n'ignore, de l'éminente missive à Cazalis sur le premier sonnet en X, qu'elle comporte également ses deux versions plutôt distinctes : celle qu' Henri Mondor fournit avec la collaboration de Jean - Pierre Richard ; celle que propose, avec le concours de G Jean - Aubry, curieusement le même Henri Mondor. Parmi de remarquables différences, la moins étrange, assurément, ne semble guère celle-ci : alors que, dans une lettre, en accord avec le poème, l'obscur chambre est vide : "(....) une chambre avec personne dedans (....)", elle est occupé dans l'autre : "(....) une chambre avec une personne dedans (....)".

Ricardou, the reader will be glad to learn, is not above revealing his own errors in this respect. Immediately following this passage, which he explains as being caused by an ingrained tendency to normalise grammar, he describes how he was for a long time under the delusion that the final line of Rimbaud's poem *Le dormeur du val* : "Il a deux trous rouges au côté droit", mirrored the first, "C'est un trou de verdure", since the words "trou de" and "deux trous" were, as he thought, the third and fourth words of their respective lines. However, the final line reads, in fact, "Tranquille. Il a deux

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 116. Ricardou does not give a reference for this quotation, the omissions are his.

<sup>35</sup> Philippe Sollers, *Littérature et totalité*, in *Tel Quel*, no 26, 1966, p.85, reproduced in *Logiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1968, p.103. The quotation from Mallarmé comes from volume 1 of his correspondence, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 279. This and the next quotation are from *Texte en main* no. 6, p. 101.

trous rouges au côté droit”.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, reading this series of articles, one sometimes gets the impression that Ricardou is taking the opportunity to settle one or two scores, whether it be in reopening a dispute over the pièce montée in *Madame Bovary*, when a teacher called Duchet earned his displeasure, or the reply to an unfavourable review of his book, *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, written by Bertrand Poirot-Delpech. This, despite an intriguing suggestion that he does not develop in any depth here or anywhere else, that in some sense, a text collaborates in its own misreading, perhaps:

Alors, en secret, c’est d’une véritable incitation à l’erreur qu’il s’agit. Les justes lignes décrivent d’autant mieux, après coup, la bétise accomplie, que l’évoquant en creux, elles contribuent, dans l’ombre, à sa venue. Ou si l’on aime mieux, la lecture accomplie que l’écrit en secret lui suggère.<sup>37</sup>

Faced with this material, the reader might be inclined to suggest that these “ateliers d’écriture” would be better named, “ateliers de lecture”, and he or she would have a point. It is indeed the case, that in the workshops that he runs concurrently with the textique seminars, and even more so in the seminars themselves, much attention is paid to a careful reading of the text. But this is justified by the obvious fact that a close reading is a precondition for understanding and improving one’s writing, and this has the obvious benefit of improving one’s reading skills which we are inclined to take for granted. In effect, what happens in these workshops is not so much writing, since the participants are expected to submit a piece, written according to certain constraints, in advance of the seminar. This is then read over in the workshop, then rewritten, if necessary, to comply more rigorously with the constraints. In this instance, the original writing does not occur in the workshop, which might be more accurately be described as a “reading and rewriting” workshop, if this were not a trifle cumbersome. One assumes that there exist other forms of workshop where the original writing takes place, in the workshop itself, perhaps collectively, or a workshop might be devoted to the development of the constraints.

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<sup>36</sup> This error occurs in *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, p. 157.

<sup>37</sup> Jean Ricardou, “Méfais de la diagonale”, in *Texte en main*, no 6, 1986, p. 102.

The impression that Ricardou is more concerned with reading than with writing is reinforced by the fact that in these articles he says very little about the mechanics of writing with constraints, except to warn that the institution of such a programme of writing with constraints, designed to convert a group of individuals into what Ricardou calls a collective of “polyscripteurs”, can be negated by the advent of an authority figure:

Soumis par un coup d'autorité, bientôt le lecteur est porté à une singulière abdication: tout bonnement cesser de lire. Sa vertu critique (la confrontation d'une exécution et d'une intention), se renverse lors en un rôle servile (la confusion d'une intention et d'une exécution). Dès lors, le métaphorique bestiaire s'enrichit, symétrique, d'un nouveau spécimen: à l'opposé d'un singulier pluriel le scripteur, ce bicéphale individu qui réussit un tant soit peu à se faire l'autre de soi, se profile un pluriel singulier, le pseudopolyscripteur, ce multiple monocéphale en lequel plusieurs acceptent d'abolir l'altérité en faisant nombre sous l'impérieux joug d'un seul.<sup>38</sup>

But this impression is perhaps due more to the fact that this series of articles was never completed, for reasons that are not clear. It is noteworthy that another series, published in the magazine *Conséquences* with the title, *Éléments de Textique*, also ceased abruptly at this time without being completed. One can only speculate that Ricardou suffered some sort of crisis at this time. Certainly, his relationship with those editing *Conséquences* deteriorated sharply, but more of this later.

To find out what a programme of writing by constraints might look like we have to look elsewhere and fortunately, there exist two sources to which we can turn. The first is the *Bestiaire* that is being written each year in the writing workshops held annually at Cerisy-la-salle. The second is an exercise devised by Ricardou for classroom use by teachers. But before proceeding to this we shall consider what Ricardou means by constraints and why he thinks that they are useful in the context of writing workshops.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jean Ricardou, “Dédoubler la recouverte”, in *Texte en main*, no. 5, 1986, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> What follows is based on Ricardou's contribution, ‘Logique de la contrainte’, to the colloquium, *Le goût de la forme en littérature : écritures et lectures à contraintes*, held at Cerisy-la-salle in 2001, organised by the editors of the review *Formules*, Bernardo Schiavetta and Jan Baetens, proceedings published under that title by Noesis, Paris, 2004. Ricardou's article appears between pages 38 and 53.

It is important to understand that it is not only “artistic” writing or fiction that is subject to constraint. It is the view of Ricardou that all writing must conform to the norms of the language in which it is written. In the terminology of textique, it must be “ortho-representative”. The test of this is whether a phrase can be paraphrased in that language and retain its semantic value. Beyond this, there are constraints, many of which have been with us for a very long time, such as acrostics, lipograms and all varieties of versification, that are “metarepresentational”. For Ricardou, these constraints must not contradict the constraint of orthorepresentation, and here he differs with Oulipo. A further difference is that while Ricardou fully recognises the ludic possibilities of such constraints (indeed some, such as Oulipo’s procedure S+7, can be dismissed as little more than parlour games, and as we shall see are not taken very seriously by textique), unlike Oulipo, he appreciates the real pedagogic value that this type of exercise may have. In an early article entitled *L’ordre des choses ou une expérience de description méthodique*<sup>40</sup>, that appeared in *Pratiques* “une revue militante publiée par un collectif d’enseignants”, among whom Claudette Oriol-Boyer, we can see clearly that his interest in what might be called programmed writing is a result of his professional practice as a primary teacher. The exercise proposed by Ricardou is to encourage his pupils to list all the components and dimensions of the classroom on the blackboard and then rank them from the macro to the micro. From this Ricardou draws two conclusions. First that an exhaustive description of the classroom implies an infinite regression, and secondly, that the linear description in writing contradicts the perception, alleged by Ricardou to be simultaneous, of its parts. Thus the arrangement of the parts of the classroom can be represented as an inverted tree, which reveals “(...) la contradiction déchirante qui travaille la description : la disposition arborescente de son objet, au plan logique, confrontée à la disposition linéaire de sa matière, au plan scriptural.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> In *Pratiques*, special editon, no date, (1980?), *Pour un nouvel enseignement du français*, acts of a colloquium held at Cerisy-la-salle, 2-12 August 1979. Collection republished with the addition of interventions that followed the papers, under the same title, as a joint publication by A. de Boeck, of Brussels, and J. Duculot of Paris in 1982. References are to the latter.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 104.



This idea has preoccupied Ricardou for many years, and this article prefigures *Une maladie chronique* which we shall consider elsewhere. But here the main thrust of the argument is to suggest to the pupils in the sixième that, “(...) ce n’est pas tant le quelque chose à dire qui détermine l’écrit que l’écrit qui détermine le quelque chose à dire”.<sup>42</sup> With this Ricardou sees a means of attacking the dominant ideology. But surely, the real value of such an exercise is provided by him in the discussion that followed his presentation:

Je précise également un des avantages de la mise en jeu des règles pour tous ceux qui trouvent cela agaçant et contraignant. Lorsqu’une collectivité au travail (une classe) opère avec des règles communes, il est possible à chacun de lire ce qu’écrit l’autre en sachant exactement les problèmes qui sont en jeu et il peut intervenir, apporter des solutions. C’est à partir d’une certaine rigueur et du partage des mêmes opérations qu’un certain travail collectif peut se mettre en œuvre parce qu’il y a un objet commun.<sup>43</sup>

At the start of each summer session of textique, Ricardou introduces the workshop element with the same remarks, for the benefit of newcomers, in much the same terms as he used in the discussion above that dates, as we know from 1979. But he also adds another important consideration for those who might yet consider the use of rules “agaçant et contraignant”. When we sit down to write, before an empty page, the possibilities are so enormous that the vast majority of us do not know how to begin. However, having once begun, if ever we do, we can rapidly become carried away by the same possibilities, leading to a rambling incoherent end product. It is Ricardou’s opinion that the use of constraints has a paradoxically liberating effect on the writer, both in limiting the initial choices to be made, and in providing a structure for the text. This is particularly true for the novice, but this, he maintains, is true for writers at all levels of competence.

2006 saw textique come of age,<sup>44</sup> so the *Bestiaire* has been a long time in the writing, and has yet to be published, though this remains the intention, when it will stand as a monument to the considerable number of writers and academics who have submitted themselves, however fleetingly, to the rigours of this new discipline. These

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>44</sup> The first seminar was held in 1985.

workshops are held every evening of the “decade” and are open to all and an invitation is always extended to the participants of the colloquium that runs concurrently with *textique*, with varying response, since in the experience of this writer is that some intellectuals, so-called, can be surprisingly lacking in curiosity. On the other hand, Maurice de Gandillac, who may have been sympathetic to *textique* without subscribing to it, seems to have become an aficionado of this type of writing, and regularly wrote for this workshop. In his ninety-ninth year, he died in 2006, in his hundredth, he published a collection of eighty-one (9 x 9) imaginary beasts,<sup>45</sup> described according, more or less, to the rules set out below.

Before arriving at Cerisy, each participant is invited to submit an imaginary animal for consideration and the procedure is that one is displayed on an overhead projector, and improved according to the rules by which it was supposed to have been written.

These rules are:

Chaque écrit, destiné à un perfectionnement collectif, et pouvant ultérieurement faire partie d'un recueil intitulé *Bestiaire*, sera établi de façon individuelle sous les relatives apparences d'un article encyclopédique ayant pour thème un animal fantastique.

Il débutera par le nom de l'animal, précédé par l'article défini, et se terminera par une mise en rapport de cet être avec un autre dont le nom, formant le dernier mot de l'ultime ligne, et l'article qui le précède seront mentionnés par de points de suspension (en principe, dans le recueil cette zone recevra le titre de l'écrit suivant).

Il adoptera, en guise de titre, le nom de l'animal, exclusivement composé avec le plus grand nombre possible des lettres du mot *Bestiaire*.

Il choisira, pour ce nom, une combinaison des lettres capable de fournir par à peu près un certain sens.

Il déterminera, à partir du sens ainsi produit, certains caractères majeurs de l'animal.

Il se composera d'une série de neuf lignes, toutes faites de neuf mots. Il manifestera au moins une fois, en les comportant à des places

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<sup>45</sup> Maurice de Gandillac, *Bestiaire Latéral*, St-Quentin-de-Caplong, Atelier de l'agneau, 2005.

respectives notables, les lettres du mot du base, *Bestiaire*.

Il présentera, si possible, au moins une mention capable de correspondre à certains des aspects matériels du mot de base, *Bestiaire*.

Il offrira, si possible, au moins une mention capable d'évoquer certain de ses propres aspects matériels hors ceux qu'il partage avec le mot de base, *Bestiaire*.

The text is then amended, Ricardou adding the amendments with a variety of different coloured felt tip pens to the overhead transparency day by day. Throughout this process the writer is forbidden to speak about his or her writing, and only when the collective considers that it has finished with the piece is the scriptor invited to indicate two things: Is there anything in the writing that has not been detected by the collective? Did the collective see anything in the writing that the scriptor had not been aware of before the workshop? This of itself can be an interesting exercise, since some find the urge to explain, or indeed defend their work almost irresistible, and the answers to the two questions can often be surprising. The following are some examples of improvements:

#### l'ARBISTE

l'arbiste, céleste,	au bistre lustre,	rôdeur, lévite
bizarrement, dans des	îles aux arbres	sinistres. Une abraçadabrante
tiare, un buste	élaboré, des bras	en arbalètes composent
sa stupéfiante structure.	Terrestre, c'est	un fruit triennal
né d'un	œuf bis, basaltique,	urcéiforme aux solaires
facettes. Aérien, il	découvre le neuf	univers. Courant les
baies et les	estuaires, veuf et	solitaire, il baisse
tristement entre les	isthmes et les	airs son attirail
iridescent. Ses ailes	reptiliennes busculent aux	enfers l... ....

In this case, the improvement made was to the ninth line, where the word "ailes" was changed to "pattes", so that each of the groups of words at the "corners" ends with the

sound “te”, providing we posit an “intertextual metaprogramme” that would require an animal ending in “-ite” in the vacant spot at the end of the line and nothing is lost in the change.

However, where there are conflicts between gains and losses produced by changing the text it can often be very difficult to decide whether it should be altered or not. Thus, in *l'ESARE*, the final line reads: “Bicolores, comme nonnes en messe, ils évoquent l...” Here, the simile “nonnes en messe” represents the black and white of the text, and has a resemblance to the latin for nine, “none”, which is reinforced by its appearance in the ninth line. There is, however, the disadvantage that the image is derived from a semantic field that is completely alien to the idea of an encyclopaedia. But as Ricardou is wont to say in these situations, “L’écrit met en jeu, pour défendre le réel passif de son inconvénient, le solide de ses avantages.” Thus, in this case the line was left unchanged in the final form of the piece. In general, one soon learns that structured texts resist rewriting, for it is often the case that what at first seems a straightforward amendment, easily undertaken, turns out to be nothing of the kind, since improving one element in the structure frequently results in the deterioration or destruction of another.

As a tribute to Maurice de Gandillac, here are the original and final versions of his “Trébiaise”.

Le trébiaise est un baroque batracien aux ruses biscornues  
 Que l’on doit éviter et ne pas épargner  
 Il dévore notre très sérieux silence, le gauchit spécieusement  
 Muni de grosses pattes triples tordues, il avançait transversal,  
 Biaisant et sournois. Truquant, insolite, imprévu, insinuant, retors et  
 Divers, il débauche les autres animaux de même aspect  
 Et mieux vaudrait certes interdire indéfiniment son insolite insinuation  
 Que l’affronter à reculons, résolument sortant du rang  
 Surtout lorsqu’il sinue en escorte de l’.....

La trébiaise, variété de batracien batave, fréquente les bassins,  
 Les ruisseaux, davantage les étangs et surtout les eaux  
 Saumâtres et troubles où sévit sa trémulation. Avançant sur  
 Neuf bien étranges pattes triplement torsées, sans jamais trébucher,  
 S’insinuant de travers, insidieux, il dupe les nigauds,  
 Suggère à bien des animaux aquatiques de précieuses trouvailles,

Partout instille ses venins, imagine, inlassable, des biais astucieux,  
 Use souvent de trompeuses reculades, recourt à des ruses  
 Variées et par ses effronteries, étourdit même l'abisterie.<sup>46</sup>

This piece was reworked by anything between ten and twenty people, for three hours a day for ten days, and it would be almost impossible, if not tedious in the extreme, to plot every suggestion, substitution, reinstatement, and renewed substitution that occurred. The reader can readily see that in terms of vocabulary little remains of the original version. Strikingly, what does remain, are the two acrostics that are formed by the initial letters of the fifth and sixth words in each line.

What does this way of proceeding have to offer, beyond the advantages described earlier? According to Ricardou, there are at least four effects to be expected. Firstly, the fact that the programme does not use any technical concepts or specialised vocabulary makes it accessible to all and sundry. Secondly, the opportunity to evaluate the writing according to whether it conforms to the programme, deviates from it or attempts to accomplish it without success, conforms to only partially, or indeed implements another, different programme, allows for a critique of the writing. Thirdly, the confrontation of the critique and the writing will show to what extent the critique is justified to the extent that the writing conforms to a lesser degree than was at first thought, or that in an unsuspected fashion, it conforms more closely than seems likely at first sight. This implies a critique of the reading. Fourthly, the reading established after the critique of it leads to the possibility of suggesting modifications of the text to reduce or remove defects or complete structures that have been only partially implemented.<sup>47</sup>

It must be observed at this point that the general statement of principle, that there should be egalitarian relationships within the workshop, avoids the delicate issues of class, gender and race. But, then again, the French left has always struck a different

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<sup>46</sup> Maurice de Gandillac, *Bestiaire Latéral*, p. 67.

<sup>47</sup> All of these remarks, along with several imaginary beasts, with examples of how they have been rewritten, can be found in an unpublished booklet, *Bestiaire en vue : Programme d'écriture*, produced by Jean Ricardou for the 2000 seminar. This booklet also contains an analysis of the writings produced using the methods and the vocabulary developed by textique.

attitude on these issues compared with its British or American counterparts, and in any case, opinions might differ over whether such a workshop would inevitably reinforce sexist or racist behaviour, if conducted, with the best of intentions, by a white male, or the possibility that such a workshop might challenge such behaviour. One can imagine that for some extreme feminists, the very fact of Ricardou's masculinity precludes an egalitarian relationship with female writers. It may well be the case that he has never been forced to confront such issues. As far as racism is concerned, I am far from accusing Ricardou of this, but I have examined the extensive photographic files at Cerisy, and it would seem that no black person has ever attended *textique's* annual seminar. Similarly, the question of class does not arise in practice, for although Ricardou constantly bemoans the fact, the composition of *textique* is entirely homogenous, consisting as it does of students, teachers and university lecturers. Apart from the obvious fact that such people will come to these workshops already in possession of a certain level of proficiency with both the spoken and written word, which does not preclude the possibility that they will likewise have absorbed what are in Ricardou's view prejudices about writing that it will be necessary to unlearn, nonetheless, in my experience, even the rawest recruit often has enough self-confidence to question his ideas, whereas, for someone from a different background, something as simple as asking a question might be a daunting experience. Moreover, for a worker, perhaps already active in a political party or trade union, to give up two weeks of their annual leave each year, is difficult to imagine, especially if they are responsible for childcare. One can see children present at Cerisy, one or other of whose parents were attending a colloquium running concurrently with *Textique*, but there are no childcare facilities, and at present one would have to conclude that single parents need not apply. No doubt, Ricardou would leap at the chance to demonstrate that anyone can become a writer, given the opportunity, but when the difficulties set out above were put to him,<sup>48</sup> he joked that *texticiens* should not have children. Many a true word spoken in jest and it would appear that the experiment of introducing Ricardou's variety of workshop to the

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<sup>48</sup> Interview, Paris, February 2001.

working classes remains to be undertaken.

From the above, we can conclude that it is not the broader political framework of workshops that concern Ricardou in the articles that he has devoted to the topic. He is rather, more concerned to provide a theoretical justification for them, pointing out a number of features of writing that can be facilitated by working collectively and pitfalls that can be, if not completely avoided, then at least diminished.

In these workshop sessions, Ricardou is the master, and no one would really grudge him that, given his experience and one can only admire the man's energy in continuing this activity year after year. But, and this is a tribute to the accuracy of his observations, he does from time to time, slip into the role of foreman or authority figure and he always acts as the final arbiter as to whether a change will be incorporated into a text or not. For example, in 2002 Maurice de Gandillac, used the word "primat" in one of his writings, which to some indicated that the fantastic beast in question was mankind, but Ricardou could not see this, and refused to consider this as a possibility, and the participants deferred to his judgment. At the end of the session when de Gandillac was able to reveal his intentions it emerged that "primat" did indeed refer to humanity.

There are two things that can be said about this tendency to slip from one role to the other. First, Ricardou's training as a primary teacher, wary though we must be of stereotyping, might lead us to the conclusion that he brings to the workshop some of the habits of the classroom. The charge of dogmatism has frequently been levelled against him in respect of his behaviour at the colloquia on the nouveau roman. It would be difficult for someone who had not been present at these events to deny that Ricardou's manner was on occasion dogmatic, but we are the losers if we conclude from this fact that the ideas that he is proposing meantime, can be dismissed out of hand for this reason. The present writer can attest that in three seminars that he has attended, Ricardou would often react very dismissively to a suggestion, only to return to it the next day having reflected on it, to admit that he had changed his opinion. This would suggest that he has had to struggle with a certain hastiness of judgment all his life.

The second thing to note is that this phenomenon is indeed a tendency and not an

inevitable consequence of the dynamics of a workshop. But it is a tendency that could emerge in any workshop at any time and it would be illogical to conclude, even if from time to time Ricardou falls short of the standards he sets himself, that his workshops are particularly prone to this effect. All we can expect is that the participants are aware of this possibility, and Ricardou has done what he can to make them aware of this, and when this tendency emerges, to deal honestly with it, which, from the evidence of his behaviour in the seminars, we can say he attempts to do. For those who lived to tell the tale of the nouveau roman colloquia, this might be a significant difference from the Ricardou of that era.

How then do we appraise the success of the French movement for writing workshops, in which Ricardou has played an important, if largely unrecognised part? Here is one assessment, from another prominent figure in this movement, Claudette Oriol-Boyer:

Il y a dix ans, en 1983,<sup>49</sup> se déroulait à Cerisy-la-salle le premier colloque consacré aux ateliers d'écriture. Il réunissait plus de cent participants.

Aujourd'hui, alors que très nombreuses manifestations s'organisent autour de l'écriture, ce colloque n'a rien perdu de son actualité. Au contraire, c'est maintenant qu'il peut jouer pleinement son rôle de référence.

Sur le chemin parcouru depuis dix ans, figurent pour moi et quelques autres la création de la revue TEM, *Texte en main*, des stages de formation des maîtres dans le cadre des MAFPEN et du Plan National de Formation et des Universités d'été où écrivains, chercheurs, enseignants ont travaillé ensemble à comprendre un peu mieux, un peu plus, comment ils pouvaient coopérer pour écrire-relire-réécrire ensemble.

Dans le même temps, des centaines d'ateliers se sont mis en place, sur des critères très divers.

Et le Ministre de la Culture a permis l'ouverture d'ateliers d'écriture artistique dans les lycées et collèges, pour des élèves volontaires, à raison de trois heures par semaine et en présence d'un écrivain.<sup>50</sup>

From this point of view, the movement that Ricardou helped to initiate has been a success, and for this alone deserves to be acknowledged as an important innovator in

<sup>49</sup> See above for Ricardou's pivotal role in this and similar events.

<sup>50</sup> Claudette Oriol-Boyer, preface to *Ateliers d'écriture*, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy-la-salle, 23 juillet au 2 août 1983, Grenoble, CEDITEL, 1992, p.5.



both education and in the field of literary workshops. The question of the revolutionary impact of workshops is, however, much harder to evaluate. It may be that in the context of May 1968 and the pervasive influence of Louis Althusser, Ricardou was led to overestimate the potential for weakening the dominant ideology by attacking part of what Althusser calls the ideological superstructure in the form of the education system. But it is hard to imagine that Ricardou was then or is now naive enough to think that this tactic alone would bring about a revolutionary change of society, and as we have already noted, he certainly would not subordinate literary activity in general and workshops in particular, to this end. Perhaps, more modestly, he can claim to have helped to train people in a revolutionary way of thinking, and certainly it is true to say that the majority of those who have been his closest collaborators would express some allegiance to Marxist ideas, but often they are already under the influence of such ideas when they become attracted to Ricardou's theories. That said, as we have already noted for the reasons given above, these practices have never been implemented on a mass scale, possibly, they never will be. The fact that a Minister, as noted above by Oriol-Boyer, has given permission for voluntary workshops to be set up in schools represents a step forward, but there seem to be no figures available as to how many schools are taking this step, certainly the only recent study gives none.<sup>51</sup> In the final section of her book, "Les effets sociaux de l'atelier",<sup>52</sup> Rossignol discovered that workshops, apart from their expected use in educational settings, were also used in prisons, hospitals and workplaces and she briefly assesses their effect in all these circumstances. Despite her apparent familiarity with Ricardou's ideas, she does not notice anything obviously revolutionary happening, in any of the workshops she studies, Ricardolian or not. She does, however, quote an interesting observation from a report written by Jacqueline Dupret: "La tolérance a progressé. (...) l'entraide spontanée a eu lieu par petits groupes d'affinités. (...) Une solidarité s'est développée."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Isabelle Rossignol, *L'invention des ateliers d'écriture en France*, Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, 1996.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp. 255-279.

<sup>53</sup> Jacqueline Dupret, 'L'écriture, moteur de la classe de français en quatrième', Rossignol calls this a 'rapport' dated 1994-1995, quoted in her book on p. 260, without page numbers or place of publication.

For many teachers the awakening of a social consciousness would be a more than welcome result and it is surely a precondition for any truly revolutionary consciousness.

### Chapter 3: Textique.

It is not difficult to advance reasons for the obscurity which surrounds the theory of textique. The most important of these is the rupture formalised in 1982 that led to Ricardou's relative isolation, but there are features of textique itself that anyone approaching it for the first time will without doubt find more or less intimidating. There is, above all, the colossal size of the basic text that textique has been working on for nearly two decades, the "Intelligibilité structurale de l'écrit". This shows no sign of nearing completion, indeed the aim is to add new sections each year, and it now runs to close on a thousand A4 pages. As a result, accessibility is a problem. No publisher, mainstream or otherwise, is going to entertain the idea of printing this material because of its bulk, the open-ended nature of the work, and frankly speaking the market is at present non-existent, for even when there exists a concise, manageable introduction to textique such as that produced by Gilles Tronchet, circumstances have restricted its distribution to those attending the seminars.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, Tronchet's text has not been considered for publishing because the publisher Noesis, some time ago agreed to publish an introductory volume to the ideas of textique, but this has stalled because of Ricardou's refusal to reduce the length of his contribution. The sheer volume of the work so far completed might be daunting enough to deter the casual reader from dipping into it from time to time, but there is the added deterrent that as textique has evolved, it has developed a whole new vocabulary of technical terms that are frequently difficult both to understand and employ. Often, these describe phenomena that have long been recognised and known by old and familiar names, and clearly people will need to be persuaded of the benefits of the neologisms before they adopt them. These neologisms, which can reach extraordinary length and complexity, as we shall see, arise from textique's desire for scientific rigour and its demand that all texts should be examined "sous la loupe de textique". Since, textique is not a neatly rounded finished theory, and is still

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<sup>1</sup> Thus Tronchet's article, "Une nouvelle discipline: la textique", has appeared only in Spain, in *Langage : théorie et applications en FLE*, 2, ADEF, Madrid, pp.97-132, as long ago as 1995.

being elaborated, and moreover, considers itself to be a new discipline independent of other theories, there is no easy intellectual route into it, particularly for those from a liberal arts background for whom its approach might seem both alien and inappropriate. Such people, Ricardou would say, are still in thrall to the dominant ideology. Specialists in other disciplines will no doubt be inclined to see textique as a literary school that ventures illegitimately into areas where it has no place. These, in Ricardou's opinion, are the border guards of bourgeois science. This is his view of the present situation:

La vigueur d'un domaine intellectuel peut se mesurer, sans doute, au nombre des controverses dont il est le site. En effet ce qui s'y marque, de cette façon, c'est, non seulement une exubérance et une variété des idées nouvelles, mais encore cette chose un peu différente : la soif de les confronter. Or, sous tels critères, il n'est pas sûr que ce qu'il est loisible, pour aller vite, de nommer **théorie de l'écrit** forme, en France, au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, un domaine très vigoureux.

En effet, à supposer, dans les meilleurs des cas, ne serait-ce pour être aimable, qu'il existe une exubérance des idées nouvelles, il semble un peu que les diverses écoles préfèrent se cantonner, institutionnels ou non, dans leurs respectifs espaces, et, quitte, pour lors, à y fustiger, en profitant de leur avantageuse absence, les tenants des perspectives différentes, avoir grand soin de préserver leurs convictions en les garantissant de tout débat.<sup>2</sup>

The cumulative effect of this is that textique often seems to feel itself, if not under siege, then at least unduly neglected and the beginner who embarks upon a closer acquaintance, would be well advised to go dressed, if not in protective laboratory clothing, then perhaps as she or he would enter a site under construction wearing a hard hat and steel capped boots. As a group, textique may be small but it is perfectly belligerent.

It has already been indicated that an interested newcomer would have difficulty in finding a general introduction to textique. This is not to say that Ricardou has been entirely unsuccessful in getting his ideas into print. However, when he has been successful it has been in journals restricted in their availability, such as *Conséquences*,

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Ricardou, "Outre la 'Sémiotique'", unpublished article, presented to the textique seminar, 2003.

which carried a series of articles in the eighties called *Eléments de textique*, before ceasing publication at the end of that decade. An essay, *Une maladie chronique*, published by its associated imprint, Les impressions nouvelles, in 1989, is out of print.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, neither of these is really intended as an introduction to textique. Rather they are intended to demonstrate to a literary audience the type of literary criticism that can be achieved by employing its methods. They are therefore restricted in the insight that they give into the nature of textique. Even *Discernement matérialiste*, also difficult to obtain, but which appeared in the Belgian review *Cahiers marxistes*, is the nearest thing to an introduction to textique produced by Ricardou himself. But it moves rapidly from the theoretical foundations of the theory straight to its employment as a literary critical tool.<sup>4</sup>

When it began to look to Ricardou more and more likely that the colloquium of 1975 on Robbe-Grillet could only result in an irreconcilable rupture between him and other members of the nouveau roman, he embarked on a series of “ateliers” that was held at Cerisy-la-salle, with the project of developing a materialist theory of writing:

1977 Le texte (à effets) de fiction. Jean-Claude Raillon.<sup>5</sup>

1978 Le texte (à effets) de théorie. Claudette Oriol-Boyer.

1980 Pour une théorie matérialiste du texte I. Marc Avelot.

1981 Pour une théorie matérialiste du texte II. Marc Avelot.

1982 Pour une théorie matérialiste du texte III. Marc Avelot.

1983 Le texte de fiction et sa théorie. Marc Avelot and Benoît Peeters.

1984 Comment écrire la théorie? I. Jean Ricardou.

1985 Comment écrire la théorie? II. Jean Ricardou.

1986 Initiation à la textologie. Jean Ricardou.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2006, Impression nouvelles reprinted the entire run of *Conséquences*. The directors may yet persuade Ricardou to allow the reprint of *Une maladie chronique*, but this must be considered unlikely as he has refused permission for them to reprint *Les Lieux-dits*.

<sup>4</sup> For full details of the publications mentioned in this paragraph see the bibliography.

<sup>5</sup> The names that follow the title of the workshop or seminar are those of the organisers.

Until 1989, Ricardou and his collaborators proposed to proceed along two lines of research, which would result in two separate but related disciplines. The one, known at that time as “scribologie”, would concentrate on the study of the physical elements that allow writing to occur, the other as “textologie”, would concern itself with the problem posed by Roman Jakobson: what is it about a message that turns it into a work of art? Between 1984 and 1986, Ricardou led a seminar at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris that started to elaborate the theory of textology. But at this point, Ricardou seems to have come to the conclusion that such a division was not justified. It was on this new basis that a further uninterrupted series of seminars was initiated in 1989, which continues to the present day:

- 1989 La textique (I): objet, méthodes, concepts.<sup>6</sup>
- 1990 La textique (II): recyclage, éclairage.
- 1991 La textique (III): principes, problèmes.
- 1992 La textique (IV): textures élémentaires.
- 1993 La textique (V): principes d’analyse.
- 1994 La textique (VI): circonscription, palinodie.
- 1995 La textique (VII): la consistance texturale.
- 1996 La textique (VIII): schèmes, grammes, icônes.
- 1997 La textique (IX): l’économie des “moyens”.
- 1998 La textique (X): l’écrit à la loupe.
- 1999 La textique (XI): logique de l’“expressivité”.
- 2000 La textique (XII): logique de la contrainte.
- 2001 La textique (XIII): récrire suivant la textique.
- 2002 La textique (XIV): l’interscrit (premiers problèmes)
- 2003 La textique (XV): l’interscrit.
- 2004 La textique (XVI): l’interscrit.
- 2005 La textique (XVII): l’interscrit (affinement de l’exhaustion).
- 2006 La textique (XVIII): vers une paramétrisation de l’écrit.

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<sup>6</sup> From this point, all the seminars were led by Jean Ricardou.

Later he was to write: “La littérature est sans doute une fort aimable chose; hélas, elle n’existe point.”<sup>7</sup> This is not to be understood in the sense that literary artefacts do not exist, rather that “Literature” as an independent discipline is not viable. In the first volume of “Intelligibilité de l’écrit”, textique is defined in the following fashion:

L’on appellera **textique** certaine discipline animée d’un double souci: celui de concourir, d’abord, à une **théorie unifiée des structures de l’écrit**: celui d’investir ensuite, et selon de nouvelles hypothèses à partir de ses éventuels acquis, les **phénomènes d’autre sorte**.<sup>8</sup>

According to the *Petit Robert* “discipline” can be defined as a “Branche de la connaissance, des études, ⇒ **domaine, matière, science.**” The scientific pretensions of textique are reinforced by its choice of name which suggests an affinity with mathematics, physics and, perhaps logic, even though this name was not adopted definitively until 1989. Hence the definition of textique as “une théorie unifiée des structures de l’écrit”. This amalgamation can therefore be seen as a move on Ricardou’s part away from literary criticism pure and simple, even if the choice of the name “textique” would suggest, wrongly, a prioritisation of literary questions. We shall return to the question of “les **phénomènes d’autre sorte**” in the conclusion, at this point noting that textique has made some very tentative steps to extend its activity into the plastic arts and architecture.

At the heart of textique’s view of writing lies a type of distinction that will probably already be known to those who are familiar with formalist theory. According to this approach, there are two great categories of structures that allow textique to distinguish between “scriptures”,<sup>9</sup> which are limited to representation pure and simple, and “textures”, that go beyond this limit, and it is this insight that

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<sup>7</sup> Jean Ricardou, *Belvédère*, in “Quai Voltaire, Revue Littéraire”, no. 9, Paris, 1993, p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> Unification fondamentale, p. 3 of the first volume of “Intelligibilité de l’écrit”, Paris, unpublished, 2003. The emphases are in the original. Although, without doubt Ricardou is the principal author of these texts, nevertheless they are collective works and it would be unjust to attribute them to him alone.

<sup>9</sup> It goes without saying that nothing religious is implied by the use of this term in this context.

provided the initial impetus for textique. In effect, textique sets out to answer rigorously the question posed by Jakobson:

L'objet de la poétique, c'est avant tout, de répondre à la question : *Qu'est-ce qui fait d'un message verbal une œuvre d'art ?* Comme cet objet concerne la différence spécifique qui sépare l'art du langage des autres arts et des autres sortes de conduites verbales, la poétique a droit à la première place parmi les études littéraires.

La poétique a affaire à des problèmes de structure linguistique, exactement comme l'analyse de la peinture s'occupe des structures picturales. Comme la linguistique est la science globale des structures linguistiques, la poétique peut être considérée comme faisant partie intégrante de la linguistique.<sup>10</sup>

In answering this question, however, textique differs considerably from Jakobson. So much so, that textique inverts the thesis proposed by Jakobson, as far as textique is concerned, it is the material bases of language that secondarily provide opportunities for artistic invention. Therefore, this question is not the only one that textique tries to answer, as we shall see when we consider textique's analysis of the German war-time symbol "SS".

Textique's seminars are conducted in the following context:

Il s'agit d'une entreprise collective, qui s'élabore selon deux rythmes:

- en août à Cerisy, dans la Salle Haute des Granges, un Séminaire annuel de textique (le *Semtex*), requis chaque année par un nouveau thème de recherche (...) lequel est plutôt une dominante qu'un thème exclusif. Le *Semtex* est naturellement assorti, tous les soirs de la décade, d'un atelier d'écriture journalier, autour du désormais fameux "Bestiaire" (...).
- durant l'année, un système épistolaire diverses contributions, sous forme de fiches (analyse, théorie, documents) échangées en réseau par les membres du Cercle Ouvert de Recherche En textique (le *Cortex*) : celle ou celui qui fait une fiche peut recevoir ainsi, de tels autres, un écho, une question, une remarque ou une relance.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Roman Jakobson, "Linguistique et poétique" in *Essais de linguistique générale*, Paris, Minuit, 1963, p. 210.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Bilous, unpublished contribution, "Une certaine suite dans les idées: Du *Nouveau Roman* à la *textique*", to the colloquium "Pontigny, Cerisy dans le siècle", 2002.



It is important to emphasise here that all contributions for discussion at the seminars are circulated beforehand. The reasons for this are straightforward and it is surprising that this procedure is not more widely adopted. It is assumed that having received these contributions the participants will have read and studied them. This frees the time that would have been taken up presenting them at the seminars which is then more profitably, in theory at least, devoted to discussion or clarification of them. It also means that the participants are not obliged to react immediately to new material before it has been assimilated. This represents a considerable advantage for those who have not yet acquired the facility acquired by the more experienced members of *textique*.

We now come to what might be called the protocols of *textique*. Inevitably, given the difficulties in vocabulary posed by *textique*, the reader will find the next few paragraphs hard going. However, rather than postponing the difficulties, it is to be hoped that by confronting them immediately, the reader will find it easier, further on, to grasp the ideas being proposed by *textique*.

As befits a discipline with scientific pretensions, its principal text, already mentioned, the “*Intelligibilité structurale de l’écrit*”, is presented like a mathematical treatise. Each proposition advanced by *textique* in these texts is numbered. Thus the two items quoted immediately above are **2.22** and **2.23**. As a rule, in *textique* such propositions stand alone, followed by a section of “argumentation” and examples. Here is an example, which also serves to illustrate the neologisms which proliferate in *textique*. I quote the proposition in full, but I refrain from giving the argumentation and the discussion in full since these combined run to two pages of text, and I shall be quoting more fully other sections of “*Intelligibilité structurale de l’écrit*” when we come to discuss some of what *textique* considers its more original ideas.

**18. 9. Proposition :** Quand un **ortho(captro)textème-"moyen"** occupe seul, sur le paramètre concerné, la ligne **orthoscriptuelle**, l’**orthoreprésentation** est entièrement capturée par l’**orthoreprésentation**, laquelle, pour assurer son intégration, l’oblige, suivant une **ortho(plasto)texture**, à se mouler sur elle de façon à l’accueillir.

**18. 10. Argumentation :** (...)

**18.10.1. Exemple:** *Observons, dans un article de grande popularisation scientifique (...), le circonscrit suivant:*

(...) un micromoteur de silicium à peine plus gros qu'une tête d'épingle. Tellement léger qu'il s'envole au moindre souffle, si petit qu'il tiendrait dans **le point placé à la fin de cette phrase.**

**18.10.2** (gives further examples)

All examples are in italic and enclosed within a box as are all quotations, which textique calls “circonscrips”. The latter term requires a word or two of explanation. In its desire for precision and exhaustivity, textique has abandoned the older term “citation” in favour of “circonscription”. If the renaming might raise eyebrows, the activity itself is unobjectionable, as it consists merely of isolating those elements of a text that are presently under consideration. When it is necessary to alter the perspective in which this examination is taking place, then textique uses the term “reconscription”: the original circonscrit now becomes the “circonscrit-basal”, and the new one a “reconscription majorante” or “reconscription minorante”, according to whether we are broadening or narrowing our perspective.

For the most part, the neologisms invented by textique are derived from Greek, with occasional borrowings from Latin. Thus, in **18.9.** reproduced above, **ortho(captopro)textème -"moyen"** is composed from the elements, ortho-, from the Greek, orthos, meaning, “correct”, captopro-, from the Greek, katoptron, meaning “mirror, image”, and textème which, in the parlance of textique, is an element of a “texture”, which in turn is derived from the word “texte”, which is itself derived from the medieval Latin word, textum: textile or weave. So in this instance we might translate textique’s term as “an element of a text(-ure) that successfully mirrors another material element of the text(-ure)”. In this case the element, “le point placé à la fin de la phrase”, is an **ortho(captopro)textème-"moyen"** because it mobilises the **ortho(captopro)textème-"base"**, i.e., the full-stop.

Another refinement needs to be mentioned before we proceed. In texts written by members of textique that are intended more immediately for the public, one will often

find what are called “zones techniques”. These are demarcated by being indented to the right, and also by having a line down the left margin.<sup>12</sup> The idea is that the reader can, if he or she wishes, leave these sections unread, or read them at a later date, without losing track of the main argument of the article. This has been the source of controversy within *textique*. Gilles Tronchet, for one, refuses to avail himself of this device on the basis that it, on the one hand, could encourage a certain laziness in the reader by giving the impression that parts of the argument are redundant, and on the other, that *texticiens* or *texticiennes*, as they call themselves, should strive to present the technical elements of their texts in such a manner that they present as few impediments as possible, and where real difficulties exist, the reader should be encouraged to persevere rather than invited to skip them. This can lead to some curiosities, such as sections of an article that contain little else but “zone techniques” interspersed with the occasional sentence by way of introduction or summary, and indeed one hapless *texticienne* opened one of her contributions with a technical zone : this was plainly too much even for *textique* to accept. I should add that when a newcomer first subscribes to the seminars of *textique*, and Ricardou presents them with the mass of work that has to date been completed, he indicates those sections that will repay immediate study, and this is only realistic, since it would be a deterrent to expect every beginner to absorb immediately the results of some twenty years of sustained effort.

So much for the way in which the texts are presented. We must now attempt to describe some of the basic concepts themselves. The reader will appreciate, given the proliferation of new ideas and terminology, the profusion of examples and analyses presented by this ever increasing corpus, that what follows can only be a brief introduction to what might be called the main planks of *textique*'s position. We will therefore confine ourselves to a description of the basics upon which this massive edifice is elevated and to some of the more obvious innovations that *textique* itself considers noteworthy. It is to be hoped that in the course of this description the reader will perhaps be stimulated to undertake their own investigation of *textique* resisting

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<sup>12</sup> The reader will find an example of this, along with a specimen page from “*Intelligibilité de l'écrit*” at the end of this chapter.

the temptation to dismiss it all as flappedoodle, which might be the initial reaction.

Each group of related phenomena is defined and analysed in what are called “matrices d’exhaustion”. That is to say, all the possibilities have been described and accounted for, always with the recognition that if omissions or counter-examples can be produced, these matrices will have to be revised. Thus, textique puts forward as a working hypothesis, the following:

**Hypothèse de l’exhaustion des modes:** La textique présupera qu’un écrit ne comporte jamais d’autres modes que le **schémocrit**, le **grammoscrit**, l’**iconocrit**, le **symbolocrit** (sous ses trois variétés), et leurs éventuelles combinaisons diverses.

These terms will be explained shortly. The text continues:

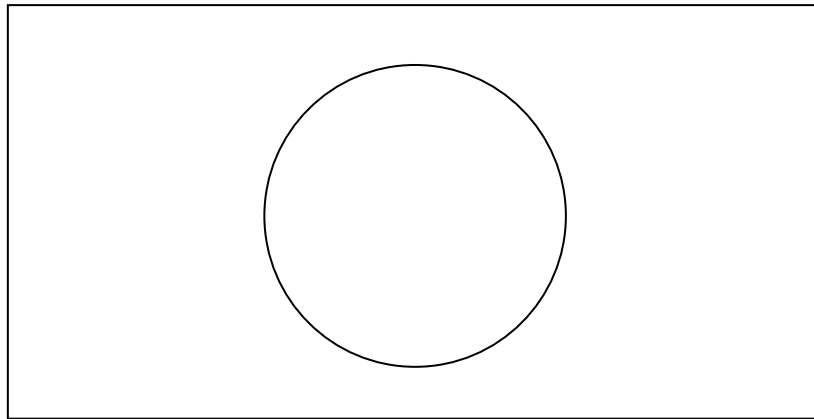
**Matrice fondamentale d’exhaustion textique:** L’on appellera **matrice fondamentale d’exhaustion textique**, dès lors, l’ensemble de concepts liés offerts par ce chapitre (...), dans la mesure où, avec les concepts qu’ils subordonnent, ils paraissent, sous réserve de tout éventuel contre-exemple analysé comme tel et qui fasse effective opposition, capables de produire l’objet de pensée permettant, sans manifeste reliquat, une certaine **déméconnaissance** du phénomène ici retenu: l’écrit tel que défini.

This is the matrix as it appears in the text:

DOMAINE	ECRIT		
MODES	SCHEMOSCRIT	GRAMMOSCRIT	SYMBOLO(SCHEMO)SCRIT
		ICONOSCRIT	SYMBOLO(GRAMMO)SCRIT
			SYMBOLO(ICONO)SCRIT
EFFETS	COMPARUTION	REPRESENTATION	

In what follows, it will help the reader to refer back to this diagram as it encapsulates the features that the proponents of textique believe make writing possible whilst also distinguishing it from similar phenomena such as symbols and icons.

All writing assumes a restricted ground or field for its operation which receives a “trace”, which must create a contrast of some kind. The result of this contrast is called a “scheme”, from the Greek *skhema*, “form” or “figure”, and it is important to grasp immediately that for textique, there must always be a minimum of two schèmes. Perhaps the most helpful way of grasping this is to think of a simple map of an island:

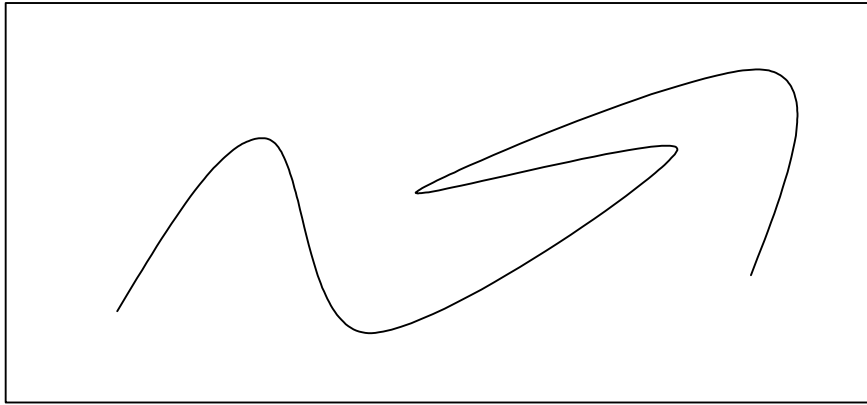


The area within the circle represents land and the area without, sea. Clearly, though, in normal circumstances we would be inclined to “see” this arrangement as a geometric figure or a letter of the alphabet. When we learn the rudiments of reading and writing, or of geometry, we learn to disregard one of these schèmes, but the fact that they persist is demonstrated by the well-known figures of the vase, that can also be seen as the profiles of two faces, or the old woman who transforms into a young girl with a feather boa, that Gestalt psychology uses to demonstrate the fact that our expectations often impose upon our perceptions. This tendency to see one schème to the exclusion of another is called “comparution”<sup>13</sup> and as can be gathered from the preceding remarks, it implies a certain automatism, which usually passes unnoticed.

In and of itself, a schème cannot represent anything whatsoever, even if we are already predisposed to regard a random mark;

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<sup>13</sup> See the matrix reproduced above.



as a “line”. Thus, in many of what we habitually call “writings” where characters of the alphabet predominate, we can find elements which are devoid of any representative meaning, ranging from the errors of the schoolchild, to decorative elements. It is only when these schèmes are linked to a “dimension idéale” that representation becomes possible. It is, of course, important to realise that this by no means implies any form of philosophical idealism. This ideal dimension refers only to mental processes that are socially determined. Equally, it would be wrong to assimilate the categories described by *textique* to what are customarily known as letters, images and symbols. For *textique*, schèmes capable of representation fall into three classes; *grammes*, from the Greek, *gramma*, “letter of the alphabet”, icons, from the Greek, *eikon*, “image” or “portrait” and symbols, from the Greek, *symbolon*, meaning a conventional sign.

No matter how distantly, and in the case of some languages, such as English and French as opposed to Spanish, this may be historical rather than actual, *grammes* are related to the sounds of the spoken language as they are assembled into words and sentences. Obviously, the phonetic alphabet has a direct relationship to sound. Combined into words and sentences, *grammes* have the ability to evoke ideas. All letters of the alphabet are, therefore, *grammes*, but they do not account for all the *grammes* used, for example, in the French language, of which there are, in fact, forty-one:

a, à, â, b, c, d, e, é, è, ê, ë, æ, f, g, h, i, î, ï, j, k, l, m, n, o, ô, œ, p, q, r, s, t, u, ù, ü, v, w, x, y, z.

We are all, naturally, familiar with the use of stylised figures such as ☎ to indicate a public telephone, or the use in arithmetic or electronics of signs like + and -, but we are equally aware that in certain circumstances a stylised image of an arrow →, can in one place indicate a direction to take, whilst in some systems of logic it indicates a conditional proposition:

$$A \rightarrow B \text{ (i. e. if A then B).}$$

Similarly, grammes can function as symbols, as is the case with **J** and **W**, which in physics stand for “joules” and “watts”.

For these reasons, textique proposes the classification of these phenomena into the following groups:

1. grammoscrit, which is composed of grammes.
2. iconoscrit, some elements of Chinese and hieroglyphic scripts fall into this group.
- 3a. symbolo(schémo)scrit, where the symbol is an arbitrary one derived neither from an image nor from a gramme.
- 3b. symbolo(grammo)scrit, the symbol is derived from a gramme.
- 3c. symbolo(icono)scrit, the symbol is derived from an image.

It should be obvious from this that all punctuation marks are symbolo(schémo)scrits, even if they occur, as is the case for the most part, in the context of writing that is predominantly grammoscrit. In this situation textique would say that the “mode” is grammoscrit even if other non-grammique devices are employed within it.

Before we move on to the area named in the basic matrix as representation, it should be pointed out that textique has invested a considerable amount of time and effort in the description of the constitution of schèmes, as the necessary groundwork for what is after all, a discipline that is inclined to see itself as materialist.

Nevertheless, we will be obliged to pass over this material for the following reasons.

The sheer quantity would require a separate study. Its nature is such that though it would be of great interest to those working in the field of communication theory, or, indeed typography, it is not necessary to go into this region of textique in great detail as long as one has grasped the basic distinctions laid out in the matrix reproduced above. Within textique, there is work being undertaken by Miriam Labadie, who is analysing Escher’s drawings of interlocking animals, and Jean-Claude Raillon has

been studying strip cartoons and has written an article making use of the concept of “schemes” for the proposed introduction to textique already mentioned. Sandra K. Simmons has devised a game that she calls “Les Margelles” that is inspired by the ideas of textique.<sup>14</sup> Finally, we have Ricardou’s permission to proceed directly to the question of representation:

Le lecteur novice pourra aller directement à la partie **ORG (Orthoreprésentation grammique)**, dont l’objet est à prime vue plus familier, et revenir à celle-ci dans les seules éventualités de références explicites.<sup>15</sup>

The definition of representation provided by textique is that what is written elicits an idea other than that of the material means by which it is produced, to such an extent that these material means become invisible to the reader in a process that it calls “occultation”. It is important to appreciate that this occultation is never irreversible. Almost anything, from a printing error to a change in font, can negate it at any time, whether fortuitously, by the writer drawing attention to the text, or the reader deciding for whatever reason, to pay special attention to the writing. But in general, this phenomenon which everyone will recognise, and is indeed actively sought in the process of learning to read, corresponds to Sartre’s definition, that Ricardou always refers to with approval, of the distinction between prose and poetry. Ricardou’s only criticism is that Sartre did not take his insight to its conclusion:

L’art de la prose s’exerce sur le discours, sa matière est naturellement signifiante : c’est-à-dire que les mots ne sont pas d’abord des objets, mais des désignations d’objets. Il ne s’agit pas d’abord de savoir s’ils plaisent ou déplaisent en eux-mêmes, mais s’ils indiquent une notion ou non. Ainsi arrive-t-il souvent que nous nous trouvons en possession d’une certaine idée qu’on nous a apprise par des paroles, sans pouvoir nous rappeler un seul des mots qui nous l’ont transmise.<sup>16</sup>

When, on the other hand, these material bases are highlighted by the structures of the

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<sup>14</sup> She states this in her article describing the game: ‘Au tour de la page : *Les Margelles*’, *Formules*, No. 9, Paris, Noesis, 2005, pp. 365-367.

<sup>15</sup> “Intelligibilité de l’écrit”, Section 2, “Schèmes”, footnote to page 1.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 70.



text, not as something that replaces representation, but emerges from it, in a process that textique calls "transparation", something that includes but goes beyond representation, then we are in the presence of a phenomenon that Ricardou formerly called "antirepresentation", that textique now calls "metarepresentation". So, a phrase such as the following: "Earth has not anything to show more fair(.)" presents us with an idea that could as easily be represented by the phrase: "There is nothing more beautiful on this planet". Indeed, this interchanging of one group of words for another, which textique calls an exchange-value is used as an argument to support its version of materialism. One might, if presented with this line in isolation, be struck by its rhythm and diction, but in and of itself, there is nothing that conclusively shows that it is intended to do anything other than impart information. It is only if we read on that we realise that the line quoted above is the opening of a sonnet, in this case, by William Wordsworth, *Upon Westminster Bridge Sept. 3, 1802*.

Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
A sight so touching in its majesty;  
This city now doth, like a garment wear  
The beauty of the morning: silent, bare, etc.

If, moreover, we were to substitute the paraphrase for the opening line in the sonnet, it would quickly become apparent that we had vitiated its status as a sonnet:

\*There is nothing more beautiful on this planet:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
(.....)

However, we could continue this process, in such a way that the sonnet would no longer exist, without, in the meantime, destroying the representation contained within it. In fact, it is sometimes the case that when someone asks for the "meaning" of a poem, this is precisely the operation that they are asking to be carried out.

Making use of the prefixes ortho-, which we have already met with above, and caco-, from the Greek *kakos*, "bad", textique proposes a further matrix, composed of four groups. All writing must fall into one of the following categories:

**orthoscriptures**, or structures that produce an idea distinct from that produced by the schèmes from which they are constructed, **orthotextures**, or structures which by their

particular mechanism promote certain material aspects of the “grammes” from which they are constituted, **cacoscriptures** where the production of the idea is impeded by a defect, and **cacotextures** where the structure intended to promote the material bases is defective. Thus, “All writing must fall into one of the following categories” is an orthoscripture as it conveys an idea without drawing attention to the material elements from which it is constructed.

Vienne la nuit sonne l’heure  
Les jours s’en vont je demeure.

Is an orthotexture, because beyond the idea that it imparts, it draws the reader’s attention to features, **Vienne**, **vont**, **heure**, **demeure**, of the writing. This act of going beyond the idea represented by the scripture is called **metarepresentation**.

If, to continue with Wordsworth’s sonnet, the reader were to encounter something like the following:

\*Earth as not anything to show more fair

he or she will probably be able to reconstruct the correct form that corresponds to the norms of the language in which it is written. Nevertheless, the spelling mistake impedes the understanding of the line, which loses its transparency, since it calls attention to itself, without forming part of a structure that is **metarepresentative**, and it is therefore classed as a **cacoscripture**. The sonnet is an **orthotexture** because, by placing the words “fair”, “by”, “majesty”, “wear”, and “bare” in prominent places in the writing, in this case after so many syllables, Wordsworth brings to the fore, not the meaning that they convey, but the fact that they sound alike, which is one of their material features. The rewritten first line is an **orthoscripture**, but because it disrupts the rhyme scheme it forms part of a **cacotexture**.

So, logically enough, all orthoscriptures result in **orthorepresentation**, orthotextures in **orthometarepresentation**, and conversely, all cacoscriptures and cacotextures result in **cacorepresentation** and **cacometarepresentation**, respectively.

An idea that appears to be original to textique is that of the **couple accréditif** which is a tool that allows us to distinguish representation from metarepresentation. The suggestion is that for metarepresentation to be present there must exist a structure that is both independent of orthorepresentation, and integrated within it. What is

meant by this can be demonstrated by the example of Wordsworth's sonnet, referred to above. The ideas that are present in it can readily be reformulated without destroying them and therefore its structure is indeed independent of what it represents. On the other hand, as a sonnet it must conform to various conventions: in the English tradition, at least, it should be composed of fourteen lines of iambic pentameters, rhymed and divided according to whether it is a Petrarchan, Spenserian or Shakespearean sonnet. This is, of course, a matter of choice, but once the choice is made, then in the view of *textique*, it must be consistently applied, unless there are pressing structural reasons that indicate otherwise, that is to say, that further analysis reveals a less immediately obvious structure that is in operation. Of course, some might regard this as being prescriptive, which in a sense it is, but one can hardly call an article on cheddar cheese that repeatedly uses these words, a lipogramme of "e". Supposing two people agree to a game of chess, and one then "castles" with a rook and the queen, then there are three possibilities. The player has not understood the rules. This is a new form of chess in which it is possible to castle the queen. The player is cheating, not playing the game, literally. What the player cannot maintain logically is that he or she is playing chess as it is currently recognised. We can, of course, agree changes in the rules, and formerly, pawns could only move one square on their first move and castling took two moves, and similarly, it is perfectly open to a poet to decide that he or she is going to invent a new form of the sonnet, i.e. rewrite the rules. But having done this, the poet can hardly then go on to disregard the very rules that he or she has just announced. To summarise the **couple accreditif** enables us to identify metarepresentation, and consists of the semantic dependence, or integration of the metarepresentation that contrasts with its structural independence of the representation.

In the case of a sonnet, this presence of the **couple accreditif** is relatively easy to detect, and this is true of all other rhyming or metrical forms, but according to *textique* such structures are equally detectable in prose. There is need of a further refinement, because we now need a means of determining the structural independence of the texture. This is supplied by the **couple transparatif**, which consists of **diaphérorisme** and **diaphéromorphisme**. This pair of phenomena describes the

mechanism by which the orthotextures emerge from orthoscriptures.

Diaphéromorphism, derived from the Greek, *diaphero* “to distinguish”, and *morphè*, “form”, and diaphérochorism, derived from the Greek, *diaphero* and *chora*, meaning “place”, combine so that identical or similar forms appear in significant places or regular intervals. It is clear that in the sonnet already quoted, the rhymes of the sestet:

Never did sun more beautifully steep  
 In his first splendour, valley, rock or hill;  
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
 The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
 Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
 And all that mighty heart is lying still!

the words “steep” and “deep”, “hill” and “will”, are notable for their similarity of form and for the fact that they occur at the ends of lines as rhymes, and that the structure so begun, programmes the appearance of the words “asleep” and “still” as they occur in the two concluding lines. To summarise: the presence of metarepresentation is demonstrated when the conditions demanded by the couple *accréditif*, semantic integration and structural independence are present. Structural independence is demonstrated by the couple *transparatif*, that is to say, the existence of similar forms in significant places. This combination of the couple *accréditif* and the couple *transparatif* is itself called the **couple orthotextural**.

Textique now goes on to postulate four varieties of chorism, the exhaustive matrix of chorisms; **diaphéro(iso)chorisme**, “iso”, from the Greek, *isos*, “the same” where similar elements are found in the same place in similar sequences as is the case with the sestet above, **diaphéro(anti)chorisme**, “anti”, from the Greek, *anti*, “opposed to”, where the similar elements are found in opposite positions in a similar sequence, **diaphéro(para)chorisme**, “para”, from the Greek *para*, “near to”, where similar elements are in close proximity to each other, and, somewhat less obviously, **diaphéro(hyper)chorisme**, “hyper”, from the Greek *hyper*, “above”, where the same forms occupy the same place.

Gilles Tronchet, in his unpublished introduction to textique, *Un aperçu de la textique*, gives examples of these phenomena<sup>17</sup>; the verse is of his own devising:

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<sup>17</sup> P.30.

Ce lent **sifflet** vibrait comme une plainte aiguë,  
 Assaillant nos tympanes avec une **stridence**  
 Qui envahissait toute la pièce exigüe  
 Rageur et obstiné, déchirant le **silence**.

This is an example of diaphéro(iso)chorisme, of similar forms appearing in the same place in a line of a poem. The second is an example of diaphéro(anti)chorism:

Ce **lent sifflet** vibrait comme une plainte aiguë,  
 Assaillant nos tympanes avec une stridence  
 Qui envahissait toute la pièce exigüe  
 Rageur et obstiné, déchirant le **silence**.

Similar forms occur in opposed positions.

The third, a diaphéro(para)chorism, according to Tronchet, is found in Claude Simon's novel *Leçon des choses*<sup>18</sup>:

A gauche du bois, le terrain se relève en pente sur le versant d'un coteau planté d'arbres fruitiers **clairsemés**, comme un verger à l'abandon ou mal entretenu au sol couvert de longues herbes et constellé de pastilles (**ombelles**, coquelicots ?) blanches ou rouges. Trois femmes au teint sans doute fragile qu'elles protègent du soleil par des **ombrelles** descendent la pente du verger. Elles portent des robes **claires** d'un style démodé, très serrées à la taille, aux manches à gigot.

The detection of this and other such structures allows us to conclude that a text that at first sight appears to be dominated by representation, just as much as any verse, displays features that are "orthometarepresentative". The third example is of a diaphéro(hyper)chorism that comes from a work by Maurice Roche: "Que je l'achève ou non, ce sera le plus beau livre *jamais écrit*!"<sup>19</sup> For Tronchet, what we are accustomed to call a pun and which is indicated by the author's own italics can be explained in this manner. The word "jamais" can give rise to two contradictory ideas: "the most beautiful book ever written" and "the most beautiful book never written".

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<sup>18</sup> Claude Simon, *Leçon des choses*, Paris, Minuit, 1975, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Roche, *Qui n'a pas vu Dieu n'a rien vu*, Paris, Seuil, Points Virgule, p.118, the italics are in the original.

Thus, these “grammes” are the site of two divergent “orthoscriptures” in the same place. It is questionable, however, whether we can conclude from this that we are dealing with two identical instances of the form “jamais” which in turn puts in doubt the existence of the “couple transparitif” for this class of phenomena. This may account partly for Ricardou’s vigorous attack on the concept of polysemy contained in his unpublished article “Eléments de textique V”.

But further refinements to this system have been suggested by textique. Since many, though by no means all, rhymes are to be found at the end of a line, and most acrostics, but not exclusively so, are located at the beginning of them, textique proposes the following refinements:

(....) les **rimes classiques**, lesquelles, précisent les **texticiens**, quand ils limitent la technicité, sont des **acro(télo)stiches isomorphiques** (du grec *akros*, “extreme”, *télos*, “fin”, *stichos*, “vers”, *isos*, “égal”, *morphè*, forme), en distribuant leurs éléments similaires en fin de vers, soit comme avec les **classiques acrostiches**, lesquels stipulent les **texticiens**, dans leurs jours plutôt aimables, sont des **acro(proto)stiches arthromorphiques** (du grec *prótos*, “premier”, *arthron*, “articulation”), en distribuant leurs éléments articulaire en début de vers, (....).<sup>20</sup>

As Ricardou states, he is limiting the technicality of the language, for the two phenomena should be described strictly as **diaphéro((acro(télo)sticho)choro)isomorpho-textures** and **diaphéro((acro(proto)sticho)choro)arthro-morpho-textures**. Elsewhere, it often happens that Ricardou will spare the reader as much pain as possible by placing the expanded formulations of textique to the footnotes, sometimes with an explanation, sometimes without:

(.....) ce qu’on nomme, à l’ordinaire, une *allitération expressive* et, en textique, pour des raisons de cohérence théorique et terminologique, une allitération *hyprreprésentative*, comme dans le racinien *Pour qui sont ces serpents qui sifflent sur vos têtes ?* où les *transparitives* sonorités sifflantes correspondent, l’illustrant, au sifflement des ophidiens (ce que l’on nomme, plus techniquement, une *ortho(hyper)scripture* en s).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Jean Ricardou, preface to Maurice de Gandillac, *Bestiaire latéral*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> “Une leçon d’écriture de Stéphane Mallarmé”, in *Mallarmé ou l’obscurité lumineuse*, p. 204.

To this Ricardou adds the footnote “Et, mieux, une *ortho(hyper-paraméthro-para(poly)choro)scripture en s.*” without comment but which, I suggest, can be interpreted as *paraméthro*, from the Greek, “para” beside, “metron” measure, used by textique to indicate a group of features according to which grammes appear:

**1.2 Paramètres grammiques:** L’on appellera **paramètres grammiques** les divers aspects selon lesquels un **gramme** se manifeste, spécifiquement ou non, comme tel.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the initial letters **c** and **s** because of their sound emerge as grammes from the words of which they constitute a part. *Para*, in this instance, because these grammes occur in close proximity, *poly*, Greek “many”, *choro* Greek “place”.

We now come to an idea that if it were more widely known, would be sure to arouse considerable controversy. This is the RAPT, or “Récriture avisé par la textique”. This operates in two opposite directions which are based on Ricardou’s ideas of reading as discussed in the previous chapter. When it is applied in the field of representation, rewriting should aim to remove any impediments to the ideal exchange and any structures that might lead one to suspect incorrectly that they are independent of and not integrated into the text should be removed. Again we can refer to an example given by Tronchet:

Très précoce, le jeune enfant détenait un exceptionnel **savoir** et ses proches avaient dû s’en aperce**voir**. En effet, il exerçait une influence étonnante sur tous les membres de son entourage et beaucoup prenaient conseil auprès de lui.<sup>23</sup>

His view is that the rhyme highlighted by him obstructs our reading of the text by arousing expectations that remain unfulfilled and it should be rewritten accordingly:

Très précoce, le jeune enfant détenait des connaissances exceptionnelles et ses proches avaient dû s’en apercevoir. En effet, il exerçait une influence étonnante sur tous les membres de son

<sup>22</sup> “Intelligibilité de l’écrit”, 3/9, **Paramètres grammiques**, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> Gilles Tronchet, *Un aperçu de la textique*, unpublished, 2002, p.33. It is not clear whether this example is of Tronchet’s devising.

entourage et beaucoup prenaient conseil auprès de lui.

A more subtle case is provided by Ricardou in “L’intelligibilité de l’écrit”, in which he quotes *Un conte à votre façon*, by Raymond Queneau: “Si vous préférez qu’ils rêvent, passez à 6 sinon, passez à 7”. This, he maintains, is an orthoscripture, but,

(...), sitôt que, dans le reste du conte, toutes les autres occurrences (il y en a **sept**), sont inscrites "**si non**", comme pour :

Si vous désirez connaître la suite, passez à cinq **si non**, passez à 21.<sup>24</sup>

cette orthoscripture devient une **caco(idio(proto))scripture**

On the previous page, he has defined **ortho(idio(proto))scripture**.

(...) le code général, en matière de graphie, permet que l’on écrive ou bien “**clé**”, ou bien “**clef**”. Cependant sitôt que l’écrit régulièrement adopte, quelle soit-elle, l’une de ces deux solutions, celle-ci passe du statut général au statut spécifique et devient une **ortho(idio(proto))scripture**.

This infraction of the rule might have been justified, if it had directed the reader to a structure in the text independent of its representative value. In a note to the remarks on Queneau, Ricardou makes a further comment: “(...) le fait que (...) la série des “**si non**” comportent **sept** occurrences, la mention “passez à 7” semble indiquer une piste de lecture qui pourrait bien, de surcroît, conduire à une ... impasse”. In this situation, the use of the form “sinon” draws additional attention to what turns out to be a non-existent structure and this provides an extra reason for consistency.

In section 7/9 of “L’intelligibilité structurale” de l’écrit among the many RAPT’s that Ricardou proposes is one of a sonnet, *César*, by Paul Valéry, which opens and closes with the following lines:

**César**, calme **César**, le pied sur toute chose,

(.....)

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<sup>24</sup> Raymond Queneau, op. cit. in *Oulipo, la littérature potentielle*, Gallimard, Paris, 1973, p. 278, quoted in Ricardou, op. cit. Section 4/9, "Cacoreprésentation grammique", p. 45.



Quelle foudre s’amasse au centre de **César**.

This, says Ricardou, is an **caco(choro(antichoro))texture** ( choro = place) where either there is a “César” too many or a “César” lacking. Therefore there are two possible RAPT’s, one additive:

**César, calme César**, le pied sur toute chose  
 (...)  
 Cette foudre en ton sein, **César, calme César**.

The other is subtractive:

**César**, calme, certain, le pied sur toute chose  
 (...)  
 Quelle foudre s’amasse, au centre de **César**.

If it is hard to imagine a situation where all writers would consent to being rewritten in this manner, in a sense, Valéry at least, seems to invite it:

(....) Valéry (.....) (places) a special emphasis on the objectivity of a poem: its independence of its author.

Il n’y a pas de vrai sens d’un texte. Pas d’autorité de l’auteur. Quoi qu’il ait voulu dire, il a écrit ce qu’il a écrit. Une fois publié, un texte est comme un appareil dont chacun se peut servir à sa guise et selon ses moyens: il n’est pas sûr que le constructeur en use mieux qu’un autre. Du reste, s’il sait bien ce qu’il voulut faire, cette connaissance trouble toujours en lui la perception de ce qu’il a fait.

*Au Sujet de Cimetière Marin.*

The phrase on which everything here turns is *une fois publié*. From the point of view of the “philosopher” such a moment is quite arbitrary (*un ouvrage n’est jamais achevé - mot qui pour eux n’a aucun sens - mais abandonné*): whereas for the reader, who wants to respond, who wants a *poem*, the moment has a clear significance: it is the moment when the machine is finished, and can be used by everyone *à sa guise et selon ses moyens*. (.....) And the reason the poet has, according to Valéry, no status as an authority on the meaning of his poem is because of his inability to admit this moment, to regard his poem

as *achevé*, as a *fin*: because of his temptation not to regard literature as affective.<sup>25</sup>

If one accepts that a poem or novel is never really complete, then that may give another writer licence to attempt its completion, but that raises the question of who will decide what part of the work is defective and requires remedial work. Agreement in principle that a work is never finished does not guarantee agreement as to what would finish it. In the passage from Ricardou's essay of 1999, "Une leçon d'écriture de Stéphane Mallarmé", he continues:

(.....) un relâchement stylistique, soit, et même chez les meilleurs, par inadvertance, comme dans le flaubertien *carré de carton bleu*, puisque, on le sait, le styliste pourchassait les mauvaises répétitions, soit par fatuité, "ce que j'ai à dire est assez important pour souffrir certaines imperfections sonores", soit par méconnaissance, comme chez la plupart des tire-lignes qui n'en sont guère à même se poser la question, soit par rigueur de pensée, "il n'est guère possible, en l'espèce, de formuler les concepts autrement" (ce que l'on nomme, plus techniquement, pour toutes ces éventualités, et sur des modes variés, une *cacotexture*.)<sup>26</sup>

To the word "cacotexture", Ricardou adds one of his elucidatory footnotes:

Et, mieux, par exemple, s'agissant de Flaubert, une *caco(hypotaxo-parachoro)texture en car*. Il est loisible d'observer, à ce propos, que la formule *cacotexture en "car"* est elle-même, une *cacotexture en ca* selon la rigueur, dans la mesure où, en l'espèce, il n'est guère possible, dans ce vocabulaire technique, de formuler le concept autrement.

There have no doubt been many readers of Flaubert, and perhaps there will be many more in the future, who have not noticed anything particularly objectionable in a phrase like "carré de carton bleu". Often one can see some justice in the RAPT. On other occasions, one suspects that the sensitivity developed by an acquaintance with textique becomes a hyper-sensitivity, especially when it comes to technical texts. In

<sup>25</sup> Laurence Lerner, *The Truest Poetry, An Essay on the Question What is Literature?* London, Hamish Hamilton, 1960, pp, 90-91.

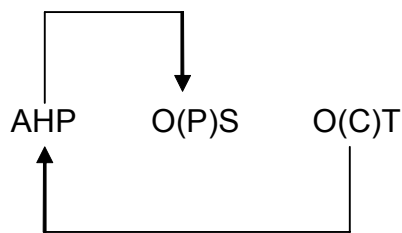
<sup>26</sup> "Une leçon d'écriture de Stéphane Mallarmé", in *Mallarmé ou l'obscurité lumineuse*, p. 204.

the instance of the second cacotexture, Ricardou seems to be apologising for something that only someone steeped in the rigours of textique would firstly, notice, and secondly, criticise. Paradoxically, of course, it is unlikely that anyone apart from stylists like Flaubert would accept the necessity for a RAPT.

The limitation that textique imposes on itself when undertaking a RAPT, is that we must always be alert to the possibility that an apparently defective structure, and indeed many satisfactory ones too, might form part of other structures. The term that textique has selected for these circumstances is **palinodie**. This word derives from the Greek tradition of writing a poem supporting one point of view that is contradicted by another that holds a diametrically opposed position:

**Palinode.** (Gk. “again-song”) A recantation; a poem written to contradict some earlier work by the poet. Chaucer’s *The Legend of Good Women* (c. 1380-6) was supposed to rectify the condemnatory portrait of womanhood in *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1380-5).<sup>27</sup>

In essence, textique’s employment of the term depends upon a phenomenon that it calls “basculement” of an element of a text. This arises because that element is fulfilling more than one function within it. To take the example of the simple “onion” reproduced below:



This relatively simple example refers to a description of a microchip “si petit qu’il tiendrait dans le point placé à la fin de cette phrase.” The starting point is O(C)T which is an **ortho(captro)texture**, that is, a correctly formed texture (i.e it is metarepresentational) that mirrors its material composition. Through the mechanism described as an **autohétéropalinodie** AHP, there is a “basculement” (“mutates into”

<sup>27</sup> Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Singapore, Longman, York Press, 1992, p. 207.

might be a reasonable translation) into an **ortho(phanéro)scripture** O(H)P, a correctly formed writing where a constraint (phanero) in this instance, the writing mirroring its material elements, in itself causes a transposition to occur, because in the normal course of events, the material elements mobilised in a “scripture” undergo a process of occultation. The argument can be summarised in the following manner. Here we are presented with an apparent texture that draws attention to a material element from which it is constructed, in this case a symbolo(schémo)scrit, a full-stop as it happens. It would therefore seem to indicate that the text is metarepresentative. But the features required by the “couple orthotextural” to confirm are not present. The texture therefore undergoes a “basculement” that produces a “palinodie” which is “auto-”, because it remains a texture, “hetero-” because it returns to the regime of representation.

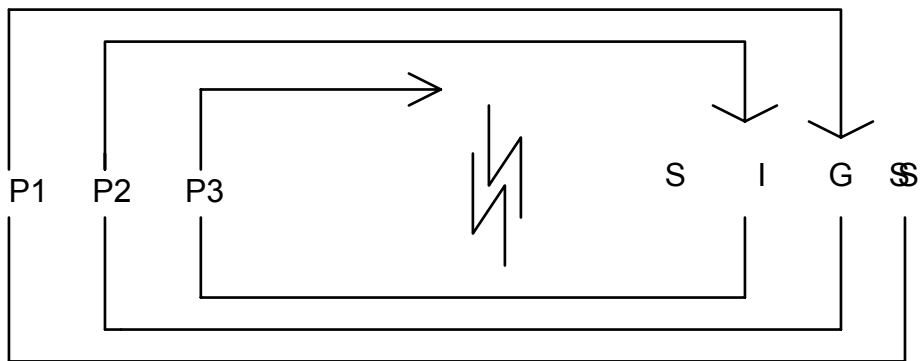
Ricardou adds a further comment:

A savoir: **O(C)T** une structure **orthométareprésentative** selon l’**ortho(hyper)autoreprésentation** (i.e. represents itself at the same place as the element that it is mirroring -D.F.), **AHP**, qui, conservant le même type d’accomplissement (correct pour l’heure), mais passant dans un autre régime (**orthoreprésentatif** en l’espèce), bascule en une structure à effet d’**ortho(intra)représentation**.<sup>28</sup>

He also notes that if the writer had chosen to write “à peine plus gros qu’une tête d’épingle” the analysis of the sentence would proceed along entirely different lines. Conscious of the fact that Ricardou considers the analysis of literature as only part of what textique is capable of, and that so far most of the preceding has been concerned with literature, I reproduce below a series of three palinodies, discussed at Cerisy-la-salle in 2003. They are stripped of their “accomplissements”, (though I seem to recall that all of them are “hetero-hetero-palinodies” (HHP)), for the easier comprehension of the reader. We start with two “schemes” that undergo a first “palinodie” and become “grammes”, two letters “S” from the runic alphabet. The second “palinodie” sees the mutation of the grammes into an icon, that is to say, two lightning bolts, which finally become the symbol of a military formation.

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<sup>28</sup> Orthometareprésentation grammique, **18.10.1**



Anyone inclined to dismiss textique at this point would have to acknowledge that it attempts to describe and classify real elements of a text, but some maintain that it also projects into a text features that are not really there. One such critic, who nevertheless remains on very cordial terms with Ricardou and others involved in the elaboration of textique, is Bernardo Schiavetta, who in 2003 and again in 2004, engaged in a debate with Ricardou at the annual seminar at Cerisy-la-salle around a document that he wrote entitled “Objections à la textique”.<sup>29</sup> Schiavetta claims to base his arguments on communication theory. The problem here is that communication theory contains such a wide variety of tendencies, some of which are so close to textique that it is hard to criticise the latter simply from this angle.

Nevertheless, he uses Peirce’s theory of signs and icons to attack what he alleges the position of textique to be:

Une étendue de sable comportant des guirlandes d’algues déposées ci et là et des empreintes diverses d’humains et d’animaux. Cette étendue de sable est un écrit selon la textique.

Textique in the person of Ricardou, has little problem in dealing with this objection since this is not the view held by it, as it regards these phenomena as “traces”.

Schiavetta’s main objection, however, is that, along with several other strands within critical theory, represented by Wimsatt and Beardsley, Barthes and Derrida, textique not only fails to take account of the intentions of the writer, but also positively deplores the attempt to do so whilst simultaneously underestimating the

<sup>29</sup> Written and circulated in 2002, it remains unpublished, as do Ricardou’s documents in reply. My comments on the debate are based on, Emory A Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 3rd Edition, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1997.

ability of the reader to anticipate or respond to these intentions. Textique, in short, ignores the “coopération entre le destinataire et le destinataire”. We have already seen the attitude of Ricardou to such ideas in his arguments for writing workshops, the problem being, in his view, that both “destinateur” and “destinaire” can be seriously wrong about what they are writing or reading.

It has been impossible to do more than provide the briefest of sketches of textique in the space available here. The volume of work that has already been completed and its often exhaustive nature mean that textique could already provide the material for several book length studies and there is no evidence that Ricardou or his collaborators are ready to slacken the pace. But from what has been described here it should be clear that textique unites two traditions, one, very French, the close analysis or "explication" of a text, the other, Russian formalism.

Dès lors, il est loisible de stipuler, si nécessaire, que la région blanche est une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(grammo))icône, puisque c'est avec un gramme qu'elle contraste. Et, en regard, que la région noire est un énantio(ortho(icono))gramme puisque c'est avec une ortho-icône qu'elle contraste.

L'avantage vient de ce qu'il est rendu compte, par tel biais, de l'hybridité foncière de la structure. En effet, pour la région blanche, la formule ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(grammo))icône spécifie qu'il s'agit d'une ortho-icône qui contraste avec un gramme, et, en regard, certes, pour la région noire, la formule énantio(ortho(icono))gramme spécifie qu'il s'agit d'un gramme qui contraste avec une simple ortho-icône.

(NB: Prenons le soin de le noter, et dans la mesure où elle contraste, par un bord, avec une zone noire, et, par l'autre bord, avec une zone grise, la zone blanche est, vis-à-vis de la zone noire, comme on vient de le noter, une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(grammo))icône, et, vis-à-vis de la zone grise, comme il est facile de l'observer, une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(ortho(icono))icône.)

**10.3. Enantio(exo)ortho-icône:** La zone assurant le contraste englobant un schème ayant été nommée énantio(exo)-schème (S-2.7), et, englobant un gramme, énantio(exo)gramme (PG-10.3), on l'appellera énantio(exo)ortho-icône quand elle englobe une ortho-icône.

**10.3.1. Exemple:** Ainsi, dans l'initial exemple précédent (Pic-10.2.1), reproduit ci-après, la région blanche est requise, on l'a vu, par une ortho(équimétre(morpho(opistho(schémo)))icône qui, en ce qu'elle fait contraste avec une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato)))icône, celle d'une "pomme" disons, est une ortho(équimétre(morpho(opistho(schémo)))énantio(ortho(icono))icône. Cependant, comme elle englobe cette ortho-icône, elle peut être dite, moins vaguement, une ortho(équimétre(morpho(opistho(schémo)))énantio(exo(ortho))icône.



**10.3.2. Exemple:** Ainsi, dans le deuxième exemple précédent (Pic-10.2.2), reproduit ci-dessous, la zone noire est également requise, on l'a vu, par une ortho(équimétre(morpho(opistho(schémo)))icône qui, en ce qu'elle fait contraste avec un schème, est une ortho(équimétre(morpho(opistho(schémo)))énantio(schémo))icône. Cependant, comme elle englobe ce schème, elle peut être dite, moins vaguement, une ortho(équimétre(morpho(opistho(schémo)))énantio(exo(schémo))icône.



**10.3.3. Exemple:** Ainsi, dans le troisième exemple précédent (Pic-10.2.2), reproduit ci-dessous, la zone blanche est également requise, on l'a vu, par une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato)))icône qui, en ce qu'elle fait contraste avec un gramme, est une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(grammo))icône. Cependant, comme elle englobe ce gramme, elle peut être dite, moins vaguement, une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(exo(grammo))icône.



**10.4. Enantio(endo(ortho))icône:** La zone assurant le contraste englobé par un schème ayant été nommée énantio(endo)schème (S-2.8), et, englobée par un gramme, énantio(endo)gramme (PG-10.4), on l'appellera énantio(endo(ortho))icône quand elle est englobée par une ortho-icône.

**10.4.1. Exemple:** Ainsi, dans l'initial exemple précédent (Pic-10.2.1), reproduit ci-dessous, la zone noire est requise, on l'a vu, par une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato)))icône qui, en ce qu'elle fait contraste avec une ortho-icône, celle du fond disons, est une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(ortho(icono))icône. Cependant, comme elle est englobée par cette ortho-icône, elle peut être dite, moins vaguement, une ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(endo(ortho))icône.



**10.4.2. Exemple:** Ainsi, dans le second exemple précédent (PIc-10.2.2), reproduit ci-dessous, la zone **blanche** offre un pur schème qui, en ce qu'il fait contraste avec une **ortho-icône**, celle du fond disons, est, moins vaguement, un **énantio(ortho(icono))schème**. Cependant, comme elle est englobée par cette **ortho-icône**, elle peut être dite, moins vaguement, un **énantio(endo(ortho(icono)))schème**.



**10.4.3. Exemple:** Ainsi, dans le troisième exemple précédent (PIc-10.3.3), reproduit ci-dessous, la zone **blanche** est requise par une **ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato)))icône** qui, en ce qu'elle fait contraste avec une **ortho-icône**, ou plus précisément une **ortho(équitro(morpho(opistho(schémo)))icône**, est une **ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(ortho(icono)))icône**. Cependant, comme elle est englobée par cette **ortho-icône**, elle peut être dite, moins vaguement, une **ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(endo(ortho(icono)))icône**.



(NB: Dès lors il est facile de spécifier le double statut énantiotique de la zone **blanche** vis-à-vis, respectivement, de la zone **noire** et de la zone **grise**, en inscrivant qu'il s'agit d'une **ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(exo(grammo))énantio(endo(ortho(icono)))icône**. Et, moins vaguement encore, qu'il s'agit d'une **ortho(inframétre(noémo(orato))énantio(exo(grammo))énantio(endo(ortho(équitro(morpho(opistho(schémo))))))icône**.)

**10.5. Hypoénantiotismes ortho-icôniques:** Les divers aspects par l'office desquels peut advenir un contraste lié à un schème ayant été nommés **hypoénantiotismes schémiques** (PS-7.2) et lié à un **gramme** pouvant être nommés **hypoénantiotismes grammiques**, l'on appellera **hypoénantiotismes ortho-icôniques** ces aspects quand le contraste est lié à une **ortho-icône**.

(NB: Pour alléger la syntaxe en amenuisant le nombre des adjectifs, ces **hypoénantiotismes schémiques**, **grammiques**, **ortho-icôniques**, seront dits, respectivement, des **schémo(hypo)énantiotismes**, des **grammo(hypo)énantiotismes**, des **ortho(icono(hypo)énantiotismes**.)

**10.6. Proposition:** Les **ortho(icono(hypo))énantiotismes** contribuent, principalement, à l'identification des objets iconisés.

**10.7. Argumentation:** Les **ortho-icônes**, on l'a précisé (O-Ic-2.1), sont, rappelons-le, des **schèmes** à vertu **ortho-représentative** en ce que, non directement liables aux sons d'une langue, ils comportent, pour le spectateur, au moins un caractère **déterminant** de tel objet vu sous quelque angle, et dont l'idée, ainsi, s'ajoute à celles que l'on peut se faire d'eux-mêmes. Toutefois, dans la mesure où, on l'a vu non moins (UF-2.4), les **schèmes** sont des espaces contrastifs, ils possèdent, fondamentalement, au moins un **schémo(hypo)énantiotisme**, c'est-à-dire au moins un des divers aspects, par exemple la teinte (la couleur) ou le ton (la valeur), sur lequel peut jouer le contraste. Du coup, il est nécessaire de se demander, quand certains **schèmes** sont requis par des **ortho-icônes**, en quoi tels aspects contrastifs sont mobilisés, bref en quoi tels **schémo(hypo)énantiotismes** deviennent des **ortho(icono(hypo))énantiotismes**.

Or, dans cette optique, nulle peine à y consentir: le **même état**, sur tel aspect contrastif, la teinte ou le ton par exemple, peut fort bien appartenir, et à un **schème**, et à un éventuel **objet iconisé**. Par suite, le **schème** possède bien, ainsi, un certain caractère de l'objet vu sous quelque angle. Et ce caractère, à défaut d'être **déterminant** (car la même teinte ou le même ton, dans la mesure où ils ressortissent à une foule d'objets divers, ne peuvent aisément être décisifs), joue pour le moins un rôle d'**adjuvant** (car sa possession commune ne saurait que concourir à l'identification de l'**objet iconisé**).

Cependant, observer, de la sorte, que la possession commune d'un **même état** sur tel aspect contrastif tient un rôle d'**adjuvant** quant à l'identification de l'**objet iconisé**, ce n'est aucunement avoir montré que le **contraste**, comme tel, en joue un. Toutefois, nul effort pour le saisir: à supposer que deux **schèmes** contigus partagent, respectivement, le **même état** sur tel aspect contrastif avec leurs éventuels **objets iconisés**, alors, nul doute que leur **contraste**, ainsi spécifié, ne joue un rôle d'**adjuvant** dans la **mutuelle** identification de l'un par l'autre.

**10.7.1. Exemple:** Ainsi, dans tel exemple précédent (O-Ic-4.14.1), reproduit ci-dessous, et puisque l'occurrence, on l'a vu, présente une **ortho(inframétre(scoténo(orato)))icône**, le contraste du blanc et du gris a lieu, pour reprendre une stipulation précédente (PS-7.2.1), sous les espèces d'un **ortho(icono(hypo))énantiotisme photique** (c'est-à-dire jouant sur les tons).



## **Chapter 4. Textique's materialism: a form of literary ultraleftism?**

Textique claims to be a form of materialism. It defines writing as “traces”- marks might be an adequate translation- that produce in the reader an idea other than those of the marks themselves. Textique does not therefore minimise the mental effects of reading. But it does challenge the idea or prejudice that ideas evolve independently of the means by which they are expressed. When a writer starts to write, according to textique he or she has no exact idea of what they intend to write and, moreover, the process of writing transforms the writer. Most materialists would probably follow Ricardou thus far, and they might in addition accept his thesis that writing workshops that challenge certain elitist or semi-mystical views of what it means to write might have a revolutionary democratic potential.

It is close to a hundred years since the term ultra-left was first used in the aftermath of the First World War. Lenin used it to characterise those groups who had broken with Social Democracy because of its refusal to oppose the war and were now keen to set up Communist parties in the wake of the Russian revolution. Their understandable disgust with the betrayal, as they saw it, of principled politics by the leaders of the Second International led these groups to adopt what they saw as uncompromising, “pure Marxist”, positions that effectively isolated them from the audience that they were seeking to address. At their most extreme, these groups refused to join “reactionary” trades unions or to stand for election to parliament, Reichstag and so on, and I am far from suggesting that textique is ultra-left to this extent. But there are occasions where the impartial observer might think that its uncompromising methods might lead it to unacceptable and extreme conclusions. The “purity” of textique might preclude it from revising or adapting its theory, thus protecting it from the well known sin of “revisionism”, but the corollary is that this often forestalls necessary adaptations of theory to the real world.

It should be recalled, moreover, that when Lenin coined the term “ultra-left” he pointed out that it was an “infantile disorder” and in mitigation, we should recall that textique is a relatively new discipline. As it attains maturity it is to be hoped that it will grow out of any such disorders, and indeed we shall see that it manages to avoid

this pitfall in areas where it might have been expected to flourish.

Ultra-leftism is not the sort of accusation often levelled at a literary tendency but there are areas where the militant materialism propounded by *textique* could be susceptible to it. Given that at various times literature can be influenced, some might think illegitimately, by political ideologies, and given that we have little difficulty in accepting the idea that literary currents can express reactionary or progressive notions, and taking into account the avowed political ambitions of *textique*, then there seems to be no logical impediment to adopting the language of politics in this instance. On the contrary, there might be areas where *textique*'s version of materialism might lead us to expect it to adopt positions that might in all fairness be labelled as truly ultra-left. After all, Paulhan felt entitled to discuss literary history in terms of "terrorism", a term that Ricardou felt justified in applying to Robbe-Grillet.<sup>1</sup>

At this point we can identify four possible points at which *textique*'s extreme materialism could result in ultra-left conclusions. Three have of these have been at least partially explored by *textique*. They are: whether *textique* is a form of Cratylism, the question of the author's intentions, and the existence or otherwise of what is called "polysemy". The fourth, the existence of nonsense verse, has not been the object of any attention from *textique*, but may pose problems for it.

In his book on Cratylism, Genette summarises what he sees as the various positions adopted by philosophers and linguists over the years;

On convient de réduire la "doctrine" mimologiste à ces trois propositions déjà énoncées : A, *la langue doit être mimétique* ; B, *la langue peut être mimétique*; C, *la langue est mimétique*. On observe alors, comme il se doit, que seuls Cratyle et ses vrais disciples admettent ces trois propositions. Socrate, et à sa suite le mimologisme secondaire, n'admet que les deux premières. Hermogène n'admet ni la seconde ni (par conséquent) la troisième, et ne se prononce pas sur la première, mais le conventionnaliste, dont Saussure pourrait fournir, provisoirement, le paradigme, n'en admet aucune. Leibniz, seul représentant à ma connaissance du conventionalisme secondaire et anti-thèse parfaite de Socrate, n'admet que les deux dernières. On pourrait encore envisager quelques autres combinaisons (...). L'une

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<sup>1</sup> See Ricardou's discussion of Paulhan in "La métaphore aujourd'hui", in *Problèmes du nouveau roman*, p. 127 onwards, and of course, his opening paper to the 1975 "Colloque Robbe-Grillet".

d'elles mériterait une particulière attention, mais j'ai quelques raisons pour ne pas la mentionner tout de suite, laissant au lecteur impatient le soin de la déduire.

Voici donc l'inévitable tableau (...), où + signifie l'adhésion, - le refus, le silence, et peut-être l'indifférence. J'y laisse exprès un rang vide; j'y reviendrai peut-être.<sup>2</sup>

From these remarks Genette constructs this table:

A	B	C	
+	+	+	Mimologisme absolu (Cratyle)
+	+	-	Mimologisme secondaire (Socrate)
?	-	-	Hermogène
-	-	-	Conventionalisme absolu (Saussure?)
-	+	+	Conventionalisme secondaire (Leibniz)

Evidently, the position that Genette is so coy about is this : one can deny that language ought to be mimetic, and also that it is mimetic, while at the same time maintaining that it can be, or perhaps more precisely, can become mimetic, or in Saussure's terms, motivated:

Le mécanisme de la langue peut être présenté sous un autre angle particulièrement important. Le principe fondamental de l'arbitraire du signe n'empêche pas de distinguer dans chaque langue ce qui est radicalement arbitraire, c'est-à-dire immotivé, de ce qui ne l'est que relativement. Une partie seulement des signes est absolument arbitraire; chez des autres intervient un phénomène qui permet de reconnaître des degrés dans l'arbitraire sans le supprimer : *Le signe peut être relativement motivé.*

(...)

<sup>2</sup> Gérard Genette, *Mimologiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1976, pp. 74-75, the table appears on p. 76.

En effet, s'il y a des éléments formatifs transparents, comme *-ier* dans *poir-ier* vis-à-vis de *ceris-ier*, *pomm-ier*, etc.. il en est d'autres dont la signification est trouble ou tout à fait nulle ; ainsi jusqu'à quel point le suffixe *-ot* correspond-il à un élément de sens dans *cachot* ? En rapprochant des mots tels que *coutelas*, *fatras*, *platras*, *canevas*, on a le vague sentiment que *-as* est un élément formatif propre aux substantifs, sans qu'on puisse le définir plus exactement. D'ailleurs, même dans les cas les plus favorables, la motivation n'est jamais absolue. Non seulement les éléments d'un signe motivé sont eux-mêmes arbitraires (cf. *dix* et *neuf* de *dix-neuf*), mais la valeur du terme total n'est jamais égale à la somme des valeurs des parties ; *poir x ier* n'est pas égal à *poir + ier*.<sup>3</sup>

We can deduce that the element of the table that Genette temporarily withholds looks like this<sup>4</sup>:

A	B	C
-	+/-	-

I must admit that when I first came to this conclusion, I had only a plus sign in the box marked "B". Ricardou frequently makes reference to Genette, usually in favourable terms, but I can find only two occasions when such references are related to a discussion of Cratylism. Taking them chronologically, they confirm that textique seems indeed to fall into the "empty" category postulated by Genette in *Mimologiques* :

Faute d'ouvrir ici, le "formidable dossier" évoqué par Paul Claudel, et largement compulsé, bien sûr hors l'exhaustif, depuis par Gérard Genette ( in the work cited above DF), l'on peut accepter pour le rapport entre stratèmes matériels et stratèmes idéels, les minimales thèses que voici. D'une part, cette relation est, non point arbitraire, comme le dit, à l'intérieur de son propre cadre conceptuel, Ferdinand de Saussure, mais bien nécessaire, comme l'a établi Emile Benveniste<sup>5</sup> dans sa classique démonstration. D'autre part, elle est, non point totalement immotivée, puisqu'il existe des concordances accidentelles

<sup>3</sup> Ferdinand Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. Tullio de Mauro, Paris, Payot et Rivages, 1995, pp. 180- 182.

<sup>4</sup> Genette, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

<sup>5</sup> Emile Benveniste, "Nature du signe linguistique", *Problèmes de linguistique I*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, pp. 49-55. (Ricardou's footnote).

(“bref” est un mot bref) ou relatives (notamment avec le jeu des suffixes (here Ricardou, in a footnote, quotes from the passage from Saussure quoted by me above DF)), mais bien exempte de tout motivation régulière (puisque ces concordances, précisément, ne sont qu’accidentelles ou relatives).<sup>6</sup>

It is hard to see what the reference to Benveniste adds to Ricardou’s argument here, since it would seem that Saussure’s concessions, which he cites, offer enough space for Ricardou’s position.<sup>7</sup> There is also the unfortunate choice of word that suggests a contradiction between accident and motivation. But this, as it happens is not Ricardou’s real position, which is that such accidental concordances can become motivated by the work of a poet or novelist. Ricardou chooses an example of this from Claudel:

Locomotive Un véritable dessin pour les enfants. La longueur du mot d’abord est l’image de celle de l’animal. L est la fumée, o les roues et la chaudière, m les pistons, t le témoin de la vitesse, comme dans *auto* à la manière d’un poteau télégraphique, ou encore la bielle, v est le levier, i le sifflet, e la boucle d’accrochage, et le souligné est le rail.<sup>8</sup>

Of such phenomena Claudel writes: “Qu’on m’accuse tant qu’on voudra de fantaisie, mais j’affirme que le mot écrit a une AME, un certain dynamisme inclus qui se traduit sous notre plume en une figure, en un certain tracé expressif.”<sup>9</sup> To this, Ricardou replies:

Malheureusement, tout porte à craindre, à côté de la plaisante saveur, certes, ô la locomotive, de ses véanies puériles, que ce léger délire n’entraîne, et par deux fois, un fâcheux dédain opératoire. En effet, la méticuleuse mise en place de l’hyperreprésentance, elle la mésestime dans son genre, parce qu’en faire quasiment un fruit naturel, c’est ne point percevoir qu’elle est, pour l’essentiel, quand elle a lieu, l’effet d’un art. Dans sa raison, parce que déclarer motivés les vocables, c’est soustraire beaucoup de son prix à l’expressiviste labeur, puisque, dès lors, pour obtenir de l’hyperreprésentance, il doit suffire en somme, si

<sup>6</sup> “Eléments de textique II”, *loc. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of Benveniste’s views on Saussure, see Tullio de Mauro’s huge footnote (138) to his edition of Saussure, *op. cit.*, pp. 443-445.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Claudel, “Idéogrammes occident”, *Œuvres en prose*, Paris, Pléiade, Gallimard, 1973, p. 83, quoted by Ricardou, in “Eléments de textique II”, *loc. cit.*, p. 13, where his comments on this passage may also be found.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Claudel, “Les mots ont une âme”, *loc. cit.*, p. 92.

l'on comprend bien, de laisser la plume poursuivre aimablement son traintrain sur le rail.

Ricardou's position is even more clearly spelt out in the essay on Heredia: "(...) cette sorte de stratégie (...) les texticiens appellent **métacratylisme**, c'est-à-dire une convenance, non point de "nature" (offerte au cœur du lexique), mais bien "d'artifice" (obtenue par spécial arrangement de l'écrit), (...)"<sup>10</sup>

Genette's amendment to his original table occurs in the section of his book entitled "mimophonie restreinte" but clearly this label is not appropriate for textique; "mimologie restreinte" might be more suitable or more accurate perhaps, "mimologie secondaire restreinte".

There might be a temptation to see this secondary mimetism as a simple division between representation, non-mimetic, and metarepresentation, mimetic, but this would be a mistake. As we have already seen, for textique the vast majority of the incidents of Cratylism fall into the category of "hyperreprésentence" which remains within the sphere of representation. Ricardou even goes so far as to suggest that there exists a category of writing called "hyper(anti)représentence", where a physical property is represented by its opposite. The example he gives that is La Fontaine's description of a heron, a tall gangly bird described by means of short (dare we say "squat") words:

Un jour sur les longs pieds allait je ne sais où  
Le héron au long bec emmanché d'un long cou.<sup>11</sup>

A text may be entirely metarepresentative, without displaying any mimetic feature, as long as it is structured so as to reveal some material feature of the writing, independently of the meaning of the words used, as is the case with "Ses purs ongles" and "septuor". Equally, we must resist the further temptation to identify the project of textique with that of Mallarmé, for whom famously, poetry fulfils a sort of remedial function by restoring or rationalising the mimetic features of language.<sup>12</sup> There is on

<sup>10</sup> "Une immersion du récit dans le texte", *loc. cit.*, p. 258.

<sup>11</sup> "Eléments de textique II", *loc. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> But this is only a starting point for Mallarmé, according to Genette, as he explains in the section of *Mimologiques*, "Au défaut des langues".

the other hand, a clear link with the Russian formalists' theories of "poetic language" even if Ricardou often disagrees in detail with them.

Textique is cautious when it approaches to the question of intentionality. This is surprising, for it would seem that the structuring of a text, once a constraint has been adopted, must render the text independent of the intentions of the writer. Furthermore, as the series of articles in *Texte en Main*, discussed earlier, show, even where the intentions of a writer can be determined, which is often not the case, the writer is often an unreliable witness. He or she, may fail partially or completely to structure the text or may structure it in ways of which he or she is not fully conscious, because of the tendency that we all share, of reading the text according to what we think it says, rather than what it says in fact. In other words, the intentions of the author may mislead him or her. This view is hardly new: an essay by Wimsatt and Beardsley, written in the 1940s initiated a long debate on this question.<sup>13</sup> Their conclusion is that the intentions of the writer, when not misleading, are virtually useless in evaluating a work of literature. Wimsatt and Beardsley might be described as holding the "hard" anti-intentionalist position.

Ricardou, on the other hand, seems to hold on some occasions a similarly hard position, but on others something closer to a common sense view. In the case of the RAPT, (*Récrit avisé par la textique*) he appears to refuse absolutely the right of any writer to leave a work intentionally unfinished or imperfect. The logic of a work's structure must be followed implacably. In this instance, the charge of ultra-leftism might stick and it would seem at first glance that Ricardou is aligning himself with Wimsatt and Beardsley, except that Ricardou requires a more common sense notion of intentionality to underpin some of his other views. This is most obviously the case with his description of literary innovation. According to Ricardou, on re-reading a text, the writer may become aware that it contains unintended features, that he or she then goes on to employ intentionally. Ricardou could therefore be said to hold a more subtle position similar to that held by the philosopher, John Searle,<sup>14</sup> that we can

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<sup>13</sup> "The intentional fallacy", reprinted in *The Critical Tradition*, ed. D.H.Richter, Boston, Bedford, 1998, pp. 748-756.

<sup>14</sup> In John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Boston, MIT Press, 1992.

distinguish primary and secondary intentionality. So, if I have understood the argument correctly, a book or computer displays secondary intentionality because it presupposes a human brain having an intention in constructing it but that once programmed, and it is interesting that Searle includes books in his reasoning, it becomes capable of functioning in ways that were not predicted by the programmer. Therefore, the only intention that we can safely infer from a book or computer, is that the writer or programmer set out to write a book or programme, not that it emerged in a form that was intended. Indeed, Ricardou, as we have already seen, goes a step beyond this argument and argues that the writer does not know precisely what he or she is going to write when he or she sets out to write.

It looks as though a materialist explanation can be provided for this type of phenomenon. Ricardou's observations are contained in the first of his articles for *Texte en Main* which is entitled "Aveugle à son aveuglement"<sup>15</sup> where he notes that a writer will often be convinced that he or she has written something different from what is on the paper. He seems, however, to be unaware that there exists a pathological phenomenon of some importance, called "blind sight".<sup>16</sup> It was discovered that some victims of stroke in a specific part of the cortex seemed to be totally blind, but that if a clinician sits in front of one of these people so affected while waving a pencil in front of them and then asks them the question "Supposing for a moment that you were still able to see, what would you be looking at right now?", they invariably answer that they would be looking at a pencil. This discovery demonstrated that sight did not take place in a single area of the cortex but in separate areas, V1, V2, etc.. Given that writing, usually implies reading what one is in the process of writing,<sup>17</sup> one can already see room for disparities to arise, without taking into account the complex psycho-motor skills also required for the act of writing. Suffice it to say that we often find writers, such as Milan Kundera, quoted elsewhere,

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<sup>15</sup> *Loc. cit.*, no 1, pp.71-74.

<sup>16</sup> First identified by David Marr, the renowned neuroscientist, and described in his posthumous book, *Vision*, San Francisco, Freeman & co., 1982.

<sup>17</sup> "Usually" because historically, some writers e.g. Milton have dictated their compositions, and had them read back to them, but often this will only mean that the complexity of the operation is moved from the visual to the aural.



admitting that that they became aware of a feature of their work only once it had been pointed out to them.<sup>18</sup> That Ricardou is prepared to allow a place for intentionality is surely connected to his theories of rewriting which make the basic assumption that in setting out to write a sonnet, for example, the writer intends to produce something that conforms as closely as possible to the constraints of the sonnet and any other structures implied in the writing of it. Ricardou's militant materialism might have led him to a crude rejection of intentionality but his concern with the structural coherence of a text, leads him, independently of Searle, to a recognition of secondary intentionality.

The reader familiar with such concepts might at this point conclude that for Ricardou all texts are "polysemic" because we cannot deduce a meaning from the intention of the author, and therefore, each reader will supply his or her own. But this is far from being the case.

It is regrettable that the fifth section of "Eléments de Textique" was never published because, as far as I am aware, it contains the only available written exposition of Ricardou's criticism of the concept of polysemy. *Conséquences* refused to publish it as it was too long in their view and Ricardou was reluctant to edit it and this periodical ceased publication before the dispute could be resolved.

It might be supposed, given that Ricardou clearly and emphatically rejects the idea that the intention of a writer is the final arbiter of the meaning of a text, that he would be inclined to support the idea that the reader, so to speak, supplies his or her own meaning to it, determined by his or her cultural, historical or social background. Given also that Ricardou claims to have strong sympathies for Marxism, it might equally be expected that he would emphasise the social or class element in the reading of a text. Such ideas would seem to be allowed by the theory of polysemy, a typical definition of which is provided by Martin Gray:

**Polysemy.** (Gk. "many meanings") The capacity of words to have several separable meanings. Most words are "polysemous": "bank", for example, has at least four quite different meanings. A literary text that is capable of being interpreted in many different ways is also

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<sup>18</sup> Milan Kundera, "Entretien sur l'art de composition", *L'art du roman*, Paris, Folio, 1986.

“polysemous”. *See also* DIALOGIC, POLYPHONIC.<sup>19</sup>

This concept has enjoyed a considerable vogue, to such an extent that one suspects that on occasion it is taken as licence to read into a text pretty much what the reader wants, a fact that one might deplore without necessarily rejecting the idea out of hand. Ricardou, however, attacks this concept at a much more fundamental level rejecting the statement that “most words are ‘polysemous’”.

His argument runs as follows. If we take a word such as “poêle”, and ask what it is, the naive will respond, “mais c’est un mot, voyons”.<sup>20</sup> But, what exactly, Ricardou asks, is a word? To find out he consults three eminent lexicographers, with these results:

son monosyllabique ou polysyllabique qui a **un** sens<sup>21</sup>

son ou réunion de sons correspondant à **une** idée<sup>22</sup>

**un** son ou groupe de sons correspondant à **un** sens<sup>23</sup>

In the light of this if we look up the word “poêle” in the last of these dictionaries we find several definitions:

voile tenu au dessus de la tête des mariés dans la liturgie catholique<sup>24</sup>

appareil de chauffage clos, où brûle un combustible<sup>25</sup>

ustensile de cuisine en métal, plat, généralement rond, à bords bas, et muni

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<sup>19</sup> *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Harlow, Longman, 1992, p. 226.

<sup>20</sup> “Eléments de Textique V”, unpublished, p2.

<sup>21</sup> Paris, Littré, Hachette, 1877, p. 729.

<sup>22</sup> Paris, Larousse, Librairie Larousse, 1923, p. 306.

<sup>23</sup> Paris, Petit Robert, Société du nouveau Littré, 1967. p. 1116, I assume that these are Ricardou’s emphases.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1332.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1332.

d'une longue queue.<sup>26</sup>

Confronted with this phenomenon, Ricardou makes the not unreasonable point that, if we at this stage ask ourselves which meaning is represented by the word “poêle” we may have to admit that we have here, in fact: three words represented by the same form.

Si rien ne permet de choisir, alors c'est non point “l'un des trois”, mais bien “les trois” qu'il convient de répondre. Bref, ce qui se trouve inscrit sur le feuillet, outre la vue, il suffit qu'on y songe, est non pas un mais plusieurs mots.<sup>27</sup>

If we accept the well known theory first formulated by Saussure,<sup>28</sup> that a word is a sign that combines inextricably signifier and signified in a way analogous to the recto and verso of a sheet of paper, then the existence of three significations must logically imply the presence of three separate words, unless we are to divorce the word from the sign. There is a further problem for the naive view. Ricardou cites Victor Hugo's pun, “saints et poêles” which can be “read” as “seins et poils”. In their written form these “words” or signs, perhaps more accurately, are not the same, but when spoken, they are in the terminology of textique, “isophonismes”, in the plural, be it noted.

The concept of “polysemy” therefore, according to Ricardou is based on a mistake. How does he account for this? His explanation is that the convenient arrangement of our dictionaries misleads us into thinking that multiple significations coexist in the same word:

Que l'idée de polysémie se trouve liée, plus ou moins, à une précise sorte d'artefact, sans doute suffit-il, pour y songer, d'examiner l'effet comique engendré par un total redéploiement monosémique du dictionnaire. Si l'initiative suggérant d'inscrire, devant chaque définition, la lexicale occurrence qu'elle spécifie, peut induire certains à une hilarité, c'est, hors le monstrueux remue-ménage entrevu, qu'elle semble méconnaître, sur un mode provocatoire, l'heureuse économie offerte, dans l'ensemble des dictionnaires, avec la présentation

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 1332.

<sup>27</sup> “Eléments de Textique V”, p. 2, from which the quotations also come.

<sup>28</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris, Grande Bibliothèque de Payot, p. 97 onwards.

traditionnelle Ainsi, multiplier les entrées lexicales ne reviendrait-il pas dans l'algébrique équation  $ab + ac + ad = a(b + c + d)$ , à choisir, non point le transfert du premier membre au second, bref l'élégante mise en facteur commun, mais le passage du second au premier, bref la lourde explication d'une harmonieuse formule intelligible? Soit. Cependant, l'adage ici est pertinent, comparaison n'est pas raison. Alors que dans la formule  $a(b + c + d)$ , nul algébriste n'ignore que le "a" ostensiblement unique, est fait d'une superposition de trois occurrences, formant respectivement produit avec b, c et d, en revanche le séculaire agencement des lexiques et le tardif néologisme de polysémie accréditent l'idée, naïvement conforme à la vue, qu'il s'agit à chaque entrée d'un mot unique.<sup>29</sup>

The undoubted convenience of the manner in which our dictionaries treat words is procured by a process that Ricardou calls lexicolysis whereby an element of a grammatical paradigm, in the case of the verb, the infinitive, or in French adjectives, the masculine singular, becomes in some sense "the name of the word". The details of this argument need not concern us, suffice it to say that in Ricardou's opinion,<sup>30</sup> the lexicographer can do his work only by doing violence to grammar, so that "intègre", "intègres", "intégrons", "intégrez", "intègrent", "intégrais", cease to exist as independent words.

Ricardou takes great delight in exposing the confusions that result from, if he is correct, really quite an elementary error. For example, the entry in most French dictionaries for the French word "fort" will have three entries, according to whether it functions as a noun, an adverb or an adjective. Here, if you like, grammar comes to the rescue of the lexicographer, and one word becomes three. That this is a matter of choice, rather than in indisputable fact of language is underlined by a revealing quotation:

L'association d'une définition ou ensemble de définitions à une forme **oblige le lexicographe** à pratiquer un certain choix, justiciable d'attitudes diverses. **Dira-t-on qu'un même mot a plusieurs sens ou bien que chacun de ces sens correspond à des mots différents qui se trouvent avoir la même forme?**<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "Eléments de Textique V", p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Arrivé, Gadet, Galmiche, *La grammaire d'aujourd'hui, guide alphabétique de linguistique française*, Paris, Flammarion, 1986, p. 229 quoted by Ricardou, *op. cit.* p. 4. Ricardou's emphases.

Ricardou is particularly incensed by the recourse to etymology to find a way through these problems. As he correctly says, etymology is at worst guess-work but more importantly he finds undignified the spectacle of those he repeatedly and sarcastically calls “les linguistes causeries” ignoring Saussure’s clear demarcation between synchronic and diachronic linguistics. In retrospect, we find this theme present very early on in the thinking of Ricardou in the short piece “Naissance d’une déesse”, where he cites three versions of the origin of the name Aphrodite and comments:

Ces trois auteurs obéissent donc au démon de l’étymologie qui prétend définir à tout prix l’origine des mots. Pour eux le nom d’Aphrodite a été obtenu comme ceux plus récents, de l’ustensile *faitout*, l’enseigne *Lavblanc*, la marque *Kiravi*.<sup>32</sup>

For Ricardou, and therefore, textique, polysemy simply does not exist; it is the illegitimate result of a tool that has been elevated to the status of a phenomenon: “(....) la naturalisation d’un résultat issu de son propre décret (...) la naturalisation linguistique de certain résultat issu d’un décret lexicographique.”<sup>33</sup>

For those that share his aversion to the term, what has previously been regarded as the existence of several meanings in the same text, should now be seen as the coexistence of one or more “textures” in the same place. This, textique has given the name “autochorotextures”:

**2.24.1 Définition:** L’on nommera *autochorotextures* les textures isochoroendotopiques, c’est-à-dire les textures dont les éléments, dans la mesure où ils occupent la même place à l’intérieur d’un site donné, se trouvent en quelque espèce l’un sur l’autre.<sup>34</sup>

In practice, the existence of one word with several meanings compared with the presence of several words each with one meaning appears to make little difference to Ricardou’s analysis of a text, except, I think, that he is keen to exclude the possibility of a choice of mutually exclusive readings. A white supremacist will read *Heart of*

<sup>32</sup> *Problèmes du nouveau roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1967, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> “Eléments de Textique V”, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

*Darkness* one way and the descendant of slaves in another, but can a text be both racist and non-racist simultaneously?

Due to the extremely limited circulation of this article, “*Eléments de Textique V*”, it is unlikely that Ricardou’s attack is likely to be widely discussed in the near future. Moreover, like many ideas in this field, polysemy may fall rapidly into desuetude before Ricardou’s thoughts on the matter become known to a wider public, if ever that should happen. Considering that feminists, gays and “post-colonialists” read texts from their particular experience, it is likely that an underlying assumption of such criticism will continue to be that polysemic readings of a text are valid. As we have already recognised a primary and secondary form of intentionality, we might also posit a restricted lexical and a wider cultural version of polysemy. The former presents the difficulties revealed by Ricardou, but there must be allowance made in any post Marxist version of materialism, for class gender and race, in short, the experience and culture of the reader in the reading of the text. A small but revealing incident in the discussion at Cerisy-la-salle of the “SS” symbol described in the chapter on textique came when the discussion turned to the runic alphabet. Some felt that the analysis would change according to whether or not the reader was familiar with runes. If the answer was negative, then could the “palinodie” to a grammoscrit occur? This discussion was not resolved to everybody’s satisfaction.

So far then we can say that textique does indeed show signs of that infantile disorder, “ultra-leftism” but does not entirely succumb to it. In the case of textique’s attitude to Cratylism, there is little or no sign of it, there are ultra-left features when intentionality is under discussion and it takes over completely in the discussion of polysemy.

There is a further point mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, where the extreme materialism of textique might get itself into difficulties and that is the existence of nonsense poetry. Let us take two examples, one probably better known than the other both from Lewis Carroll:

He thought he saw an Albatross  
That fluttered round a lamp:  
He looked again, and found it was  
A Penny-Postage-Stamp.

“You’d best be getting home,” he said :  
 “The nights are very damp !”<sup>35</sup>

With this example the argument of textique would be that reading the first line: “He thought he saw an Albatross” we would believe ourselves to be in the realms of representation, but that reading further we would notice the rhymes (or isochorisms) that would alert us that this writing is in fact metarepresentational because it draws attention to certain material elements of the text, for example, lamp/stamp, independent of the meaning of the words. As we know, Ricardou rejects what he calls the dominant ideology that he claims rests on two false ideas, representation and expression. The artist in this view invents or changes as he or she creates rather than expressing a preconceived idea, and art announces itself when it goes beyond mere representation. But surely this is to confuse two types of representation. There is the type that Ricardou is clearly targeting where fiction, as with the historical novel, closely mimics the real world and incorporates real events and personalities into it. But at the other extreme there is fiction, often humorous, that makes no attempt to represent the real world. No one in their right mind imagines that in the universe that we inhabit a postage stamp can hover round a lamp in such a manner that it could be mistaken for an albatross, but we can imagine one where it is possible. In other words, certain types of fiction proclaim their artificiality so loudly that they do not require what textique calls metarepresentation to reveal themselves as art. However, there is another sense in which we could employ the term metarepresentation, that is the combination of phenomena that really exist in the real world, thus the tail of a fish combined with the upper body of a woman results in a mermaid. At one extreme there is fiction that does its best to be as close to real life as possible, and at the other there exists fiction that makes no attempt at all to be convincing, but Ricardou’s theories would seem to place the Gormenghast trilogy in the same category as “Illusions perdues” which might be justified if we acknowledge that imagination of virtual worlds, no matter how closely or how little they resemble ours can be a legitimate feature of art.

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<sup>35</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno*, New York, Dover Publications, 1988, p. 164.

The second quotation from Carroll will be much more familiar, although a deal stranger than the first:

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

It is, of course, the first stanza of “The Jabberwocky”. It is immediately apparent that there is a considerable difference between this and the preceding quotation. Both are metrically regular with an uncomplicated rhyme scheme. But if the preceding quotation could be said to represent something, albeit absurd, which then comes under the sway of metarepresentation, this verse from “The Jabberwocky” represents absolutely nothing which therefore seems to disqualify it as metarepresentation as the theories of textique currently stand. An ironic situation, given the frequent accusation of formalism levelled at Ricardou.

We can conclude that textique displays ultra-left tendencies in its attitude towards polysemy and partially in relation to the question of the author’s intentions but avoids them when it is dealing with the phenomenon of Cratylism, and that these tendencies might lead it into difficulties if and when it attempts to account for the existence of nonsense verse. These ultra-left traits are present as a result of textique’s determination to divorce the text, not from reference to an external world as many of his critics maintain, but in the case of polysemy from its social and political context.



## Chapter 5. Une Maladie chronique.

In this chapter and the next we shall consider textique as literary criticism, concentrating, in the first instance, on an essay, *Une maladie chronique*, that appeared in 1989. This essay is a convenient place to start as it is the only instance of Ricardou's work that is comparatively easy to find. But it presents a further advantage in that it brings together and recapitulates ideas that have preoccupied him for many years to do with the apparent contradiction inherent in trying to describe phenomena that are presented to us simultaneously in the linear medium that is writing. Apart from the notable and perhaps revelatory fact that he tends to see all things literary in terms of "problems", *Une maladie chronique*, which carries the subtitle, *Problèmes de la représentation écrite du simultané*, deals more fully with this idea than had been the case in earlier articles. Thus: "Temps de la narration, temps de la fiction",<sup>1</sup> "DE NATURA ficTIONis",<sup>2</sup> in two sections of *Le nouveau roman*;<sup>3</sup> "L'enlissement descriptif" and "L'extension scripturale du temps", and a further two sections of *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*; "Le stationnaire" and "L'innérrable".

From the fact that Ricardou had already broached this area in previous work we might be tempted to come to anticipate that *Une maladie chronique* merely recapitulates his earlier ideas, and Ricardou takes pains to justify the return to a familiar problem:

Ce problème, je l'ai travaillé à mon modeste tour maintes fois. Si je propose de l'examiner derechef, c'est avec un double souci: fournir un approfondissement (ce qui pourrait conduire à une théorisation moins sommaire); offrir une récapitulation (ce qui devrait permettre d'inscrire à commune enseigne fonctionnelle une bigarrure de mécanismes assez variés pour qu'il ressorte, sous cet angle, à quel point le récit romanesque ne traite jamais, à sa manière, diversement, qu'un phénomène général).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *Problèmes du nouveau roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> In *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Paris, Seuil, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> *Une Maladie chronique*, p. 9.

Thus the fact that, for example, he deals with the wedding cake described by Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* in much the same way as he had on previous occasions, should not blind us to the fact that *Une maladie chronique* reveals a change in method that is fundamental to textique a change signalled by Ricardou in the quotation above. As we have already noted, there is a clear tendency in Ricardou's writings on other authors to move from a given text as a starting point for his theoretical views, which tend to evolve out of an examination of a particular text, to a position where he approaches such texts from another direction. That is to say, he now starts from the basis of some feature that is in his view common to many texts and then examines the various ways in which this feature is expressed in them. In the present case, we have a problem that is solved by writers in a number of different ways. In other words, he starts with what we saw in the previous chapter is called a 'matrice d'exhaustion', which is illustrated by references or quotations from a number of authors. Although nowhere in *Une maladie chronique* do we find a matrix such as we would expect to find in the *Intelligibilité de l'écrit*, it is nevertheless the case that it is implied by the structure of the former and it would be possible to construct such a matrix with relative ease. Furthermore, he introduces terms that are not just a change in vocabulary, but represent new concepts. The most salient of these is the idea of "palinodie", employed by Ricardou in his discussion of various authors examined below. It is also evident that Ricardou's quest for the definitive enumeration of all the possible solutions to this perceived problem leads him to consider writers, Apollinaire, Marot, Roche, in whom he has previously shown little interest. On the other hand, there seems to be an unacknowledged intention on the part of Ricardou to keep references to the nouveau roman to a minimum. None of the authors, Butor, Robbte-Grillet, Ollier, Ricardou himself, Sarraute, and Simon, mentioned in the sections of *Le nouveau roman* cited above that deal with this problem, appears in *La maladie chronique*, apart from Claude Simon and his own works. In contrast, we find that Saint-Exupéry, mentioned in passing, and Sartre, one fairly substantial quotation, both in "Temps de la narration", are treated much more fully in *La maladie chronique*. As far as his discussion of Homer is concerned, he progresses from quoting what Lessing says about Homer, which is all he does in "Temps de la narration temps de la

narration”<sup>5</sup>, to a fuller examination of the other means adopted by Homer when describing his protagonists: “Certes, pour autant que je sache, et tout occupé à défendre sa thèse judicieuse, l’écrivain allemand a omis un des cas, au moins, où le poète grec déroge ouvertement à sa méthode.”<sup>6</sup> Flaubert is a special case that we shall examine more fully later.

It would not take a great psychologist to deduce a reason for this change of approach, given the circumstances in which this book was written, but as well as distancing himself from the *nouveau roman* he is simultaneously broadening the area from which he selects his examples, both making more of writers that he has already analysed and drawing from others that he has not previously considered.

This change of emphasis, perhaps latent in *Le nouveau roman*, now becomes Ricardou’s main *modus operandi* and when he applies himself to more intensive dissections of a text, be it by Mallarmé or by Heredia, it is as often to illustrate the analytical innovations proposed by *textique* as it is to evaluate the text itself. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility, suggested by Ricardou, that innovations in the text require new concepts with which to analyse them. Tactically, it was perhaps wise of Ricardou to introduce the new discipline of *textique* by making the reader’s introduction to the subject easier by going over an area that his readers could reasonably be expected to be familiar with already, making the use of the new terminology a little easier to cope with, whilst also introducing fresh material and ideas into the mix. Nevertheless, it would probably be fair to say that Ricardou’s perspective has changed from an attitude that starts from the question, “What can analysis based on the dichotomy between description and narration, find in this text?”, to a slightly different one, “What can this revolutionary new discipline, *textique*, find in this text, and others that attempt to cope with the same problem, that other methods cannot account for?” A result of this Ricardou broadens his view: “C’est un problème fondamental de description. Il y a deux solutions : la solution Homère, la solution Flaubert.”<sup>7</sup> At the colloquium in 1971 he saw two solutions to this fundamental

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<sup>5</sup> In *Problèmes du nouveau roman*, p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> *Une maladie chronique*, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Nouveau Roman : hier, aujourd’hui*, p. 32.

problem of description: “la solution Homère, la solution Flaubert”, now he sees fifteen.

At this point, the average reader might object that the problem to be discussed, the representation of simultaneous phenomena in the linear medium that is writing, is only a problem for Ricardou. It may indeed be the case that it is only a problem for authors, but since the days of Lessing, writers seem to have shared Ricardou’s preoccupation and as the epigraph to this work, Ricardou quotes Leonardo Da Vinci, a quotation that we will reproduce later. Milan Kundera, who is probably as representative of the modern author as any, made the following remarks in an interview with Christian Salmon.

Christian Salmon : Le terme polyphonique appliqué de façon métaphorique à la littérature ne conduit-il à des exigences que le roman ne peut satisfaire ?

Milan Kundera : La polyphonie musicale, c’est le développement *simultané* de deux ou plus voix (lignes mélodiques) qui, bien que parfaitement liées, gardent leur relative indépendance. La polyphonie romanesque ? Disons d’abord ce qui en est l’opposé : la composition *unilinéaire*. Or, dès le commencement de son histoire, le roman tente d’échapper à l’unilinéarité et d’ouvrir des brèches dans la narration continue d’une histoire. Cervantes raconte le voyage de don Quichotte. Mais pendant qu’il voyage, don Quichotte rencontre d’autres personnages qui racontent leurs histoires à eux. Dans le premier volume il y en a quatre. Quatre brèches qui permettent de sortir de la trame linéaire du roman.

C. S. : Mais ce n’est pas de la polyphonie !

M. K. : Parce qu’il n’y a pas ici de simultanéité. Pour emprunter la terminologie de Chklovski, il s’agit de nouvelles “emboîtées” dans la “boîte” du roman. Vous pouvez trouver cette méthode de l’“emboîtement” chez beaucoup de romanciers du XVIIe et du XVIIIe siècle. Le XIXe siècle a développé une autre façon de dépasser la linéarité, la façon que, faute de mieux, on peut appeler polyphonique. *Les Démons*. Si vous analysez ce roman du point de vue purement technique vous constatez qu’il est composé de trois lignes qui évoluent simultanément et, à la rigueur, auraient pu former trois romans indépendants (...). Etant donné que tous les personnages se connaissent entre eux, une fine technique d’affabulation a pu facilement lier ces trois lignes en un seul ensemble indivisible. A cette polyphonie dostoïvskienne comparons maintenant celle de Broch. Elle va beaucoup plus loin. Tandis que les trois lignes des *Démons*, quoique d’un caractère différent, sont du même *genre* (trois histoires *romanesques*), chez Broch les genres des cinq lignes diffèrent radicalement : roman ; nouvelle ; reportage ; poème ; essai. Cette

intégration des genres non-romanesques dans la polyphonie du roman constitue l'innovation révolutionnaire de Broch.<sup>8</sup>

According to Ricardou, this chronic illness, the contradiction between the linear medium and the simultaneous events, is congenital and was present at the birth of western literature. Furthermore, since all writing that we are familiar with<sup>9</sup> operates under the same unavoidable constraint, we are in the presence of a pandemic:

Il s'agit, déjà connu d'Homère dans son *Iliade*, et commenté ensuite, outre Vinci, notamment par Lessing dans son *Laocoon*, de l'embarras technique auquel se heurte, sitôt qu'elle devient soigneuse, la représentation écrite du synchrone.<sup>10</sup>

*Une maladie chronique* is, then, an examination of the means by which various writers have attempted to overcome this contradiction, but before examining these techniques, Ricardou acknowledges that there exists what he calls the syntactic solution to the problem, so-called:

Cependant, tout effrayante ainsi qu'elle se déclare, cette crise n'est pas sans remède. Quiconque a réfléchi un brin sait que chacun dispose, même si peut-être à son insu, et fort heureuse en l'occurrence, d'une machine à convertir le successif en simultané. Son principe? Il est très simple: que les éléments consécutifs deviennent les constitutives parties d'un tout. Son usage? Il advient quasiment sans trêve. Par exemple, quand on trouve midi à douze heures, et non point, malgré l'énumération, une heure, douze fois. Ou encore, sitôt qu'on perçoit un "instant", c'est-à-dire, d'après tel dictionnaire, "une durée très courte que la conscience saisit comme un tout". Ou, bien sûr, avec le permanent effort syntagmatique dont l'office autorise que certaine suite de segments, selon divers paliers intégratifs, deviennent, jusqu'à souvent la phrase, l'unité d'un seul bloc fonctionnel, et permet ce faisant que la synchronie du phénomène à représenter, au lieu d'être en butte à la contradictoire diachronie de la série lexicale, trouve un appui (...) dans la concordante synchronie de la prise syntaxique.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Entretien sur l'art de composition", reproduced in *L'art du roman*, Milan Kundera, Paris, Folio, 1986, p. 92-93. Unfortunately there is no indication of when this interview took place nor where it was first published. This passage is all the more interesting in that Ricardou himself has produced a "texte mixte": *Le théâtre des métamorphose*, that would seem to owe nothing to Broch.

<sup>9</sup> Without venturing too far into the realms of science fiction or philosophical speculation, one can postulate a form of consciousness, non-human admittedly, that is able to perceive a written text in one instant in its entirety.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

It would have been helpful if Ricardou had supplied an example or two of what he means, though clearly he recognises that we use syntax to integrate simultaneous events into speech or writing without any difficulty. To take a banal example, nobody would have much of a problem with a statement like “I was eating fish and chips.” because the pair “fish and chips” is so much of a “bloc” that a sentence like “I was eating chips and fish.” would sound distinctly strange. Similarly, Ricardou seems to regard as unproblematic a sentence of the type, “As I was eating fish and chips, I read the newspaper it was wrapped in.” What he seems to be suggesting, however, is that at a certain level, beyond the sentence, and here Ricardou’s text is slightly vague: “jusqu’à souvent la phrase”, syntax alone is not able to overcome this perceived contradiction between the simultaneous and the consecutive.

At this point we might also take a moment to consider what Ricardou excludes from his examination of the “simultaneous”. He does not, for example, attempt to analyse the portrayal of a mind that has no sense of chronology such as Benjy’s in Faulkner’s “The Sound and the Fury”. Perhaps more surprisingly, he neglects those features of the nouveau roman that might lend themselves to inclusion in this study. One thinks of the simultaneous presence of events in the memory which is a feature of Simon’s novel *La Route des Flandres* and the effort that many of those associated with the nouveau roman made to convey a sense of writing of the text as a continuous process/present rather than a chronological narrative. According to Ricardou, one of the simplest ways of dealing with this restricted version of the problem is to avoid it altogether:

Car le problème, évidemment, il y a une radicale manière de le résoudre: prendre grand soin de ne le point poser. Et, cette tactique du refus, il suffit d’un peu réfléchir pour la voir gouverner deux conduites distinctes: en occurrence haute, plusieurs artificieuses façons d’écrire dont le moins qu’on puisse dire est qu’elles remontent à Homère; en profil bas, certaine étrange manière de lire, tristement revendiquée, nul ne l’ignore, par le poète André Breton.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid p.24.

It is with descriptions, then, that the problem becomes particularly acute and therefore they are to be avoided by those who do not feel inclined to search out a solution to the problem:

S'il est un cas où les tourments du synchronisme surgissent en force, c'est bien sûr, chaque fois que l'écrivain se prend à décrire un objet fixe. En effet, tout solide est à l'évidence un pur ensemble simultané de parties. Du coup, quiconque souhaite traiter le problème selon sa censure se doit notamment d'éconduire par tous moyens cette catégorie de description.<sup>13</sup>

When the censorship is applied by the author himself, Ricardou calls this effect "scripto-censure"<sup>14</sup> which operates in two ways:

L'un est la *spécification emblématique*. Si, afin, semble-t-il, d'éviter l'aride simple nom, Homère se prend à offrir un corps significatif à certains parmi les protagonistes, souvent il les pourvoit chacun, ainsi qu'on sait, d'une formule exclusive, laquelle, dans une espèce de héraldique par synecdoque, joue le rôle d'un écusson armorial. En effet leur ensemble en vient, non seulement à former un système (dans la mesure où maints personnages majeurs en sont régulièrement pourvus: "Héra aux bras blancs", "Achille aux pieds rapides", "Briséis aux belles joues", "Athéné aux yeux de chouette", pour s'en tenir au seul début), mais encore à s'établir sur un commun trope (celui qui veut qu'une partie représente le tout).<sup>15</sup>

To be frank, other than to avoid a "périlleuse description",<sup>16</sup> Ricardou has nothing further to say about this procedure and it would appear to be there for the sake of completeness.

Ricardou calls the second procedure "diégétisation descriptive":

Si, en vue, dirait-on, de fournir un rien plus d'épaisseur, Homère accroît quelque peu les détails, alors, méthodiquement, par l'insert d'une suite d'actions, il ne laisse point de convertir le dangereux synchronisme en le commode échelonnement d'une diachronie. Lessing, dans son *Laocoon*, en a prodigué des exemples fameux. Nul doute à cet égard, et c'est pourquoi il me semble opportun, ici, de le reprendre,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

que le travail sur Agamemnon ne soit un des plus probants:

Il se *dressa* sur son séant, *revêtit* une tunique souple, belle, neuve, et *s'enveloppa* d'un grand manteau; sous ses pieds brillants, il *attacha* de belles sandales. et *jeta* sur ses épaules son épée à cloues d'argent. Il *prit* le sceptre de ses pères (...).<sup>17</sup>

Here the thesis advanced by Ricardou, following Lessing, is clear enough: Homer substitutes a series of actions for a description of Agamemnon's apparel. But even when an example exists that appears to contradict this thesis, it emerges that it in fact confirms the rule by its breach. Homer describes Thersites in less than flattering terms: "Il était le plus laid des hommes venus devant Ilion: louche, boiteux d'une jambe, la poitrine creuse entre des épaules voutées; là-dessus une tête pointue où végétait un rare duvet."<sup>18</sup> Ricardou suggests that the reader can immediately see the difference between the positive description of Agamemnon and the negative one of Thersites:

Du coup, l'on ne saurait être surpris qu'avec le premier la description s'établisse en heureux ordre de marche, et qu'avec le deuxième elle subisse une dysfonction. Car dans la mesure où la "forme" problématique, disons, se calque sur le contenu dénigré, l'exception descriptive tient ici le rôle expressif de ce qu'on a plus haut nommé une hyperreprésentance. Ou, si l'on aime mieux, Homère, eût pu ajouter, s'agissant de Thersite: "et, de plus, privée d'actions intermédiaires, sa description n'était même pas capable d'éviter le synchrone..."<sup>19</sup>

Such a remark might have been surprising in the work of Homer, but in Ricardou's view, the alert reader can detect just such a remark in the words that precede the description of Thersites:

**Tous** s'asseyaient et **se rangèrent** sur les bancs. *Seul* Thersite, *parleur sans mesure, piaillait* encore. Son esprit abondait *en paroles de désordre*, pour chercher, vainement, mais contre le *bon ordre, querelle aux rois*, avec tout ce qu'il jugeait *propre à faire rire les Argiens*. Il était le plus laid des hommes (...).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Ricardou, op. cit. pp. 26-27

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Ricardou, op. cit. pp.27-28, Ricardou's emphases.



This is because the words, “paroles en désordre”, serve to announce the infraction of the rule that follows in the text. It would appear that Ricardou’s thinking at this point is that either Homer or perhaps more accurately the oral tradition from which he emerged, operated with constraints such that the failure to observe them puts Thersites beyond the pale.

There are two observations to be made concerning Ricardou’s treatment of Homer and both relate to the historical context in which the *Iliad* evolved. And this is perhaps an occasion when historical materialism would part company with Ricardou’s more restricted version of materialism that is hostile to historical interpretations. One can freely admit that in the *Iliad* description is avoided in favour of action, but this may be because the society from which it arose was so inclined to value action over words, that all its rhetoric, of which there exists plenty, was slanted in this direction. Indeed, Cicero’s exposition of rhetoric is devoted almost entirely to this end, how to use words to induce action in the audience. Thersites is the only low-born character among the Greeks at Troy and when he argues that after Agamemnon has stolen the girl Briseis from Achilles, the Greeks should raise the siege, he is soundly beaten by Odysseus for his insolence. From an aristocratic point of view, Thersites is congenitally disqualified from heroic deeds and his speech is incontinent and I would suggest that this is the ideological reason for his negative portrayal, rather than a problem of description in a linear medium of speech or writing.

Assuming that “Homer” was one person, something that has been disputed for some centuries, and remains a subject of debate, without doubt, he compiled the *Iliad* from oral sources. Part of the evidence for this is precisely the existence of those repeated formulae like “Hera of the white arms” which make it easier to commit the poem to memory, and also provide a moment’s respite which the performer can use to recall the next episode of the poem. This feature is common to all poems that derive from an oral tradition, as an acquaintance with *Beowulf* will confirm. In the case of Homer, these conventional phrases have become so ossified that the latter feels no discomfort in immediately cancelling them by attributing to the objects described a quality that nullifies the conventional phrase, which leads to some curious effects for the modern reader, though they would have in all probability passed unnoticed at the

time:

(...) there are a number of curious cases in which, unless we credit him with self-conscious art, Homer must be regarded either as having used a stereotyped expression in a meaningless way, or as having “nodded” - which would amount to the same thing for such a stylist. I take as an axiom that Homer never nods, and I suggest that where (in XXIV.57) he gives the Achaeans their usual epithet “great-hearted”, though they are behaving like cowards, he does so in order to produce an exactly opposite effect - and succeeds. Again, Phemius’ lyre is called “tuneful” on an occasion when it is not only silent (which would not matter) but likely to remain silent forever as far as Phemius is concerned (XXII.332). Or if this is pushing the idea too far, consider the one occasion when “early” Dawn is late yet Homer persists in calling her “early”. The artifice, if such it is, is untranslatable. But there is a kind of halfway usage where we can almost follow the Greek. Dogs are styled “noisy”, and rightly so in XIV. 29, where they bark at a stranger, but somewhat surprisingly also in XVI. 4 where they are greeting a friend and are expressly stated not to have barked. (...) Just as “noisy” dogs do not always bark, and all “fast” ships are not clippers, so “prudent” Penelope, the “wise” Telemachus, and the “stalwart” or “resourceful” Odysseus are often found, as their characters evolve in the hands of their maker, to behave in a manner far removed from exemplary wisdom, patience, and sagacity.<sup>21</sup>

All this tends to show that Homer’s use of epithets has historically little to do with the avoidance of description, and it is unlikely that he avoids them for the reason suggested by Ricardou. This does not, however, preclude the use of Homer as a model for those who do feel embarrassed by the contradiction between the simultaneous and the linear.

When he comes to the case of André Breton, Ricardou is on much firmer ground since the latter is quite unequivocal in his rejection of descriptions, famously alleging that they are like postcards sent to him by the author.<sup>22</sup> This attitude, Ricardou calls *Lecto-censure* and he dismisses it out of hand:

Voici la prétentieuse échappatoire:

Cette description de chambre, permettez-moi de la PASSER, avec

<sup>21</sup> E. V. Rieu, Introduction to his translation of the *Odyssey*, London, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1969, pp. 19-20.

<sup>22</sup> André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, Paris, Editions Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1962, p. 19.

beaucoup d'autres.

Ainsi l'on distingue sans effort en quoi l'artifice homérique a pu être dit une "occurrence haute", et en quoi les manières du poète surréaliste, ici, dessinent un "profil bas". En effet, avec Homère, il s'agit de la féconde censure d'un auteur inventif, lequel, ayant fort bien compris le problème, lui fait tenir, en heureux technicien, le rôle d'une façon de muse, et, avec André Breton, des stériles ciseaux d'un lecteur paresseux, lequel, sans trop saisir l'industrie en cause, intuitivement se détourne.<sup>23</sup>

This condemnation of Breton is one of the strongest that Ricardou makes of any author or critic, but it fits into the pattern already noted in his ideas on reading discussed earlier in relation to his conception of writing workshops. For Ricardou, who himself works like a Trojan, the accusation of laziness is a far more serious charge than being simply mistaken, an accusation that is quite revealing of his attitude to reading. Of course, Ricardou's attitude is by no means accepted universally. There are many authors who cater solely for lazy readers, but there are also those who maintain that in this situation the rights are all on the side of the reader. A good example of such a writer is Daniel Pennac who sets out the "droits imprescriptibles du lecteur":

1. Le droit de ne pas lire.
2. Le droit de sauter des pages.
3. Le droit de pas finir un livre.
4. Le droit de relire.
5. Le droit de lire n'importe quoi.
6. Le droit au bovarysme (maladie textuellement transmissible).
7. Le droit de n'importe où.
8. Le droit de grappiller.
9. Le droit de lire à haute voix.
10. Le droit de nous taire.<sup>24</sup>

As Pennac points out, we often deny these rights to others, particularly children, while

<sup>23</sup> *Une maladie chronique*, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Pennac, *Comme un roman*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, p. 162.

indulging ourselves but even this is not, as it appears to be with Ricardou, a matter of duty:

Et puis, même devenus “grands”, et même si nous répugnons à l’avouer, il nous arrive de “sauter des pages”, pour des raisons qui ne regardent que nous et le livre que nous lisons. Il nous arrive aussi de nous l’interdire absolument, de tout lire jusqu’au dernier mot, jugeant qu’ici l’auteur fait dans la longueur, qu’il se joue là un petit air de flûte passablement gratuit, qu’à tel endroit il donne dans la répétition et à tel autre dans l’idiotie. Quoi que nous en disons, cet ennui têtue que nous nous imposons alors n’est pas de l’ordre du *devoir*, il est une catégorie de notre plaisir de lecteur.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the accusation of being lazy is perhaps wide of the mark, for Breton is not saying that he does not read description just because he cannot be bothered, but that he cannot be bothered because it does not appeal to his sensitivity, which is a slightly different matter. The idea, that Ricardou seems to suggest, that if Breton had thought about and understood the problem being addressed in such descriptions he would then have come to appreciate them seems to lack credibility. Apart from which, Breton was notorious for his deliberately provocative statements, the most famous of which is his advocacy of going into the street and firing at random.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Breton never carried out this plan, and his condemnation of description may have been a case of posturing, unless we are convinced that the description of the room taken from Dostoyevsky was the last he read.

However, let us accept for the moment that Ricardou is correct in assuming that both Homer and Breton are avoiding a real problem here, let us now consider some of the methods by which in Ricardou’s opinion various writers have dealt with it. A

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

<sup>26</sup> Trotsky records that when Breton visited him in Mexico in 1939, they went to look at several rural churches, where Breton helped himself, despite Trotsky’s displeasure, to some of the votive statuettes left in them by the peasants.

second group of strategies for dealing with the problem are classed as “solutions extrinsèques”:

Pour Homère, l’on vient de l’apercevoir, il s’agit en somme d’obtenir une *censure intrinsèque*: la difficulté est soustraite, il est vrai, par son évitement, mais tel refus survient à l’intérieur même du matériau responsable. Avec la nouvelle conception, à l’inverse, l’on vise à réussir une *procédure extrinsèque*: le problème, certes, est cette fois retenu, mais les moyens choisis pour le résoudre mobilisent la spécificité d’un matériau d’autre sorte.<sup>27</sup>

There are four of these: “solution iconique”, “solution iconogrammatique”, “solution schématique”, and “solution schématogrammatique”, and although Ricardou does not specifically state this, they presumably form a matrix such as we have previously encountered.

When an image, which Ricardou designates as an icon, appears in a text it can do so in two ways, as an illustration of, or as a substitute for the description. We are all familiar with the first, an icon, which accompanies the text. But the second, which is not so common, is physically incorporated into the text as a substitute for description:

L’image est *constitutivement* incorporée, en revanche, si elle fournit sur son propre mode la représentation dont se dispense l’écrit auquel d’une certaine manière elle s’intègre. En effet, consentir, s’agissant de montrer un objet, à l’idée que l’image est supérieure au successif cumul des mots éventuels, porte en bonne logique à inclure l’icône en vue, non plus d’une assistance, mais plutôt d’un remplacement. Telle est, nul n’ignore, la solution préconisée par Paul Valéry, dans *Notre destin et les lettres*:

Toute la partie descriptive des œuvres pourra être remplacée par une REPRESENTATION visuelle: paysages, portraits ne seraient plus du ressort des lettres, ils échapperaient aux moyens du langage.

et réalisée par André Breton, dans *Nadja*:

de même que l’abondante illustration photographique a pour objet d’éliminer toute description - celle-ci frappée d’inanité

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<sup>27</sup> *Une maladie chronique*, p. 31.

dans le *Manifeste du surréalisme* -,

notamment avec la photographie de la Porte Saint-Denis complétant cette simple mention: “la très belle et très inutile Porte Saint-Denis”.

Immediately following this, Ricardou scores a palpable hit against Breton:

Toutefois, il est piquant de le noter, nul doute, avec telle spectaculaire mise d’une image à la place de l’éventuelle description, que le poète surréaliste n’approche au plus près, *mais hélas à reculons*, du problème qu’il n’aura donc jamais cessé de ne point comprendre. En effet, si après avoir reproché à l’auteur de *Crime et châtiment* d’en venir avec les descriptions à “glisser ses cartes postales”, il se prend à remplacer lui-même par des cartes postales les descriptions qu’il n’écrit point, alors il se trouve pris, bien sûr, dans les douloureuses rigueurs d’un dilemme. Ou bien le voici devenu lui-même un Dostoïewsky outrancier, puisque, sous prétexte d’impératifs “anti-littéraires”, c’est, avec la photographie de la Porte Saint-Denis, encore plus clairement, ses clichés, qu’il nous les place. Ou bien trouvant soudain licite de les inclure, il eût dû saisir que le reproche fait à l’écrivain russe concernait, non point la fadeur supposée des cartes postales, ou des éventuels médiocres moments de l’existence, mais bien plutôt, comme on l’a tout à l’heure entendu, la dangereuse représentation du synchrone selon la diachronie.<sup>28</sup>

The second group of extrinsic solutions are relatively rare but interesting for all that . Examples of iconogrammes offered by Ricardou are taken from Claude Simon and Guillaume Apollinaire. In *La bataille de Pharsale*, we find this passage: “(...) l’autre bras levé montrant d’une ☞ à l’index tendu là-haut la Gloire et les Nuées (...)”<sup>29</sup>

This he proposes to classify as:

(...) une icône à double rôle, puisqu’elle est, dans son ensemble, *constitutive* (c’est une idéoscripture hétérohylétique), en tant que dessin remplaçant la suite des lettres du mot “main”, et pour une de ses parties, *illustrative* (c’est une idéosaphénoscripture hétérohylétique), en tant que son index tendu redouble la suite scripturale “à l’index

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp. 34-36.

<sup>29</sup> Claude Simon, *La bataille de Pharsale*, Paris, Minuit, 1969, p. 15, quoted by Ricardou p. 37 of *Une maladie chronique*.

tendu”.<sup>30</sup>

It is interesting that textique appears to have abandoned the term “hétérohylétique”, (which might be translated as “foreign matter”) which derives from the Greek *hyla*, “matter”, I assume on the grounds that all icons, grammes and symbols are composed of “schemes”. If such a use of icons is relatively rare in what we call literature, it is of course, increasingly common in advertising, where constructs such as “J’ ♥ Paris” abound. The increasing use of icons in text messages and e-mails is also an area where the analyses commenced by textique will perhaps one day come into their own.

Ricardou objects to Apollinaire’s choice of terminology maintaining that the latter’s “calligramme’s” have in fact very little if anything at all in common with the art of calligraphy. He proposes an alternative; *iconostichogrammes*, derived from the Greek, *stikhos*, meaning a line of verse. The calligramme chosen by Ricardou ; “un cigare allumé qui fume”, reproduced below, illustrates the points made by him quite effectively. The eye takes in the calligramme as a whole before reading the text and therefore grasps the idea of the object before any words are required to describe it. This, from the point of view of the difficulty of representing the simultaneous by way of the linear, is its undoubted advantage. However, this is achieved at the cost of severe disruption of the text, thus, one of the elements, because of its orientation to the left leads us to read “iuq”, and another can be classed as a cacotexture (i.e. a structure in the text that looks significant but in fact is not, so producing a gratuitous and undesirable effect):

(...) ainsi les semblables syllabes finales de “allumé” et de “fume” troublent la représentation en ce qu’elles sont accidentellement promues, non seulement par leur même place à l’extrémité des deux segments obliques, mais encore par leur quasi alignement en colonne.<sup>31</sup>

I suspect that I am not alone in finding that some of Apollinaire’s calligrammes require a little unravelling. For example, on the same page, in “Voici la maison...”, one is inclined in the first instance, to read the text as “Voici où les toi et..” and so on., and what is the function of the question mark ? Often, it seems to me that it is not

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p. 40.

immediately apparent, despite what Ricardou says and the intentions of Apollinaire, what the calligramme is supposed to represent before we read the poem.

What textique has classified as the “solution schématique” need not detain us long since it relates to those elements of a text that we would recognise as architectural or geometrical drawings, which are either figurative or representative, according to whether they stand for plane or three dimensional objects. Ricardou gives examples but they are not of great interest, being the representation of a box in two dimensions.<sup>32</sup>

The final component of this group, the “schematogrammatic solution”, remains linear, as all writing as we know it must, but offers, simultaneously, more than one way in which it can be read:

(...) un dispositif à plusieurs chemins peut se voir obtenu avec le recours majeur à des caractères inscrivant des suites significatives (selon ce qu’il faut lors appeler un schématogramme). Ainsi le schéma (...) où un groupe de traits parallèles se voit coupé, en le début, par certain segment perpendiculaire, existe sous la forme littérale d’un schématogramme connu: l’écrit acrostiché.<sup>33</sup>

No doubt, these phenomena exist simultaneously within the text, but in the case of the acrostic at least, it is more usual to regard this as a constraint rather than a means of combating the illness diagnosed by Ricardou. In French literature, one of the best known acrostics occurs in a poem by Villon:

Vous portâtes, digne Vierge, princesse,  
 Iesus regnant qui n’a fin ne cesse.  
 Le Tout Puissant, prennant notre foiblesse,  
 Laissa les cieux et nous vint secourir,  
 Offrit a mort se tres chere jeunesse;  
 Notre Seigneur tel est, tel le confesse  
 En cette foi je veuil vivre et mourir.

Like the overwhelming majority of such poems the acrostic reveals the name either of the poet or of the dedicatee of the poem. If there are cases where this procedure is

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid p. 42, figure 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid p.43.



used to describe simultaneous events, and in principle it should be possible to do this, then I remain unaware of them. Nevertheless, Ricardou states that he has employed what he calls a *schematogramme* to construct a short story, “Gravitation”, the title of which was changed to “L’Enlèvement”, for the later edition of *Révolutions minuscules*, which takes its structural basis from crosswords.

These then are the extrinsic means by which according to Ricardou a text might seek to overcome the contradiction between the simultaneous and the diachronic. Although strictly speaking foreign to the medium of writing, these solutions are relevant to literary criticism because writers have in the past availed themselves of such devices with no sense of inhibition.

The next sections of *Une maladie chronique* treat those resources of writing that are intrinsic to it, and consequently, they will be the more relevant to the practice of literary criticism, if only because they are much more frequently employed. Ricardou bases his discussion of the matter on a distinction between the visual and the intellectual:

Le contemporain, en effet, se déploie sur deux modes. L’un est *visuel*, disons: ce que l’œil embrasse d’un seul coup, soit qu’il se porte sur un spectacle fait de choses et actions distinctes, soit qu’il se focalise sur un objet en sa composition. L’autre est *intellectuel*, si l’on veut: ce que l’esprit envisage comme synchrone, par une manière de regard mental extrapolé dans l’instant.

One might be charitable and say that the word “disons” represents a sort of shorthand here, but it seems that Ricardou is illustrating the fact that as humans we privilege unconsciously vision over other senses. This is a characteristic that according to psychologists is a function of our visual cortex that is highly developed when compared with our other senses and relative to other species. Unlike dogs, we do indeed interpret our world for the most part visually, rather than by taste, smell, hearing or touch, but nonetheless, we still possess these senses even if they are less developed than they might be, and there is no absurdity in saying that we can smell our fish and chips as well as see them. Sometimes we can smell fish and chips without seeing them at all. Similarly, there is a whole area of what is called proprioception neglected by Ricardou in which simultaneous events may take place,

unfortunately for the sufferers of such conditions, an attack of gout will not preclude a toothache. Moreover there are what might be called states of mind, one might anticipate a meal of fish and chips with relish whilst fearing that it might result in heartburn. There are more cases and combinations of simultaneous perception and proprioception than Ricardou takes account of. In this connection it is interesting to remember that the *nouveau roman* was at one time called “chosiste” by critics more or less hostile to it, when in fact it would have been more correct to call it “visualist”. Certainly in the discussion of description given by Ricardou, one gets the impression that it is only the “sense-datum” of the physical world, as proposed by the logical positivist school of philosophy, that concern him. Moreover, of these sense data, the visual ones seem to be privileged to some degree. As has been mentioned previously, Ricardou quotes Leonardo da Vinci as the epigraph to this study:

Le poésie, elle, se réfère au même objet par un moyen moins digne que l’œil, apportant plus confusément à la sensibilité, dans un délai plus long, la représentation des choses nommées: ce que ne fait pas l’œil, véritable chemin de l’objet à la rétine, qui transmet sur le champ, avec plus de vérité, les vraies superficies et figure de ce qui se présente devant lui.

Both Leonardo and Ricardou seem to be seduced by the immediacy of visual stimuli into thinking that this is a guarantee of “truth” and therefore of the superiority of vision compared with description.

Before moving on to Ricardou’s treatment of what he calls the intrinsic techniques for dealing with the problem, there is a characteristic feature of *textique* displayed here that it may share with other literary theories that are influenced by structuralism. There are no empty spaces in the matrices. Where one existed previously, in the case of the “schematogramme”, Ricardou has filled it himself. One can have two attitudes, not necessarily contradictory, to this fact. One the one hand, the urge, almost pathological some might say, to produce a complete classification of literary devices is so strong that an empty space cannot be contemplated, even though in principal it would not be illogical to say that there exist theoretical possibilities that remain unexploited. On the other, we can take the more positive line, one often expounded by Ricardou himself, that there exists a dialectic between theory and practice so that an advance in one area leads to changes in the other. This may be an illustration of

theory acting as a stimulus for experimentation.

As Ricardou correctly observes, there are events that occur simultaneously but are so separated spatially that they present an entirely different problem for the writer:

(...) la base du problème, bref la résistance spatiale, demeurée forte en le premeir cas (chaque objet sous le regard étant astreint à une place définie), devient plus faible dans l'autre (chaque objet flottant, en quelque espèce, dans un volume colossal hors-la-vue). Et, du coup, ainsi libérés de leur visuelle assignation à résidence, les événements et choses intellectuellement synchrones, plus mobiles, s'opposent moins à leur miraculeuse évocation simultanée: celle que permet un pharamineux cumul grammatical, le pluriel. (...) Ainsi, en la circonstance, une fois de plus, l'on ne saurait y voir très juste sans culbuter résolument certaine idée reçue : ce qui finalement se trouve dit (par exemple une identité dans les comportements ou la conjoncture), loin d'être un préalable quelque-chose-à-dire (par exemple une thèse unanimiste) sincèrement déposé sur la page, est en réalité, tout à l'inverse, la chose qu'il fallait faire (une astucieuse représentation scripturale du synchrone).<sup>34</sup>

To illustrate his point, Ricardou quotes the opening of a novel, rigorously constructed on a chronological framework, ("vendredi 23 septembre", "samedi 24 septembre"):

Seize heures trente à Berlin, quinze heures trente à Londres. L'hôtel s'ennuyait sur la colline, désert et solennel, avec un vieillard dedans. A Angoulême à Marseille, à Gand, à Douvres, *ils pensaient: "Que fait-il? Il est plus de trois heures, pourquoi ne descend-il pas ?"* Il était assis dans le salon aux persiennes demi-closes, les yeux fixes ses épais sourcils, la bouche légèrement ouverte, comme s'il se rappelait un souvenir très ancien. Il ne lisait plus, sa vieille main tavelée, qui tenait encore les feuillets, pendait le long de ses genoux. Il se tourna vers Horace Wilson et demanda : "Quelle heure est-il ?" et Horace Wilson dit "Quatre heures et demie, à peu près". Le vieillard leva ses gros yeux, eut un petit rire aimable et dit : "Il fait chaud." *Une chaleur rousse, crépitante, pailletée s'était affalée sur l'Europe: les gens avaient de la chaleur sur les mains, au fond des yeux, dans les bronches: ils attendaient écoeurés de chaleur, de poussière et d'angiosse.* Dans le hall de l'hôtel, les journalistes *attendaient*. Dans la cour, trois chauffeurs *attendaient*, immobiles au volant de leurs autos; de l'autre côté du Rhin, immobiles dans le hall de l'hôtel Dreesen, de longs Prussiens vêtus de noir *attendaient*. Milan Hlinka *n'attendait plus*.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid p.50.

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Le sursis*, Paris, Gallimard, 1945, p. 7, quoted by Ricardou on page 51 of *Une maladie chronique*. The italics are Ricardou's.

Ricardou's choice of author to illustrate his point is interesting. The reader will recall that Ricardou was involved in a well-known polemic with Sartre over the nature of fiction. Apart from the famous question that asks what use literature can be faced with a dying child, Sartre was of the opinion that prose is an unproblematic phenomenon that is different by its nature from poetry in being entirely representative and unproblematic. What Ricardou is clearly suggesting here is that Sartre's practice diverges from his theory and that his fictional writings are more sophisticated than his theory would imply, though Ricardou nowhere explicitly says this, probably feeling that the facts speak for themselves.

Certainly, Ricardou is correct to see in this passage an element of simultaneity, but it seems to me that there is more going on here. It is a fact well known to students of linguistics that in certain types of discourse we should treat the use of pronouns cautiously, in particular when it comes to politics and history. They can, whether it be through the use of the first, second or third person plural, or indeed with the French impersonal "on", a kind of shorthand, frequently meaning those that really matter or count in this matter. Thus when a politician says "we", he may be implying that there are of course dissidents who disagree with him, but in general he is claiming to speak for the majority of his party class or nation as the case may be. Similarly, when a historian writes that in 1938 the Germans wanted the Sudeten Land, there is an unwritten assumption that there were nevertheless some Germans who had no interest whatsoever in the Sudeten Germans. In other words we have an example of a shorthand way of describing phenomena of mass psychology by way of synecdoche. The key word in this passage, I would suggest is "Europe", and if by definition the mood of huge masses of Europeans must be felt simultaneously in a period of crisis, this is not the main concern of the text, which is concerned to express a political reality in an artistic fashion without overwhelming the reader with statistics and caveats.

This solution to the problem, Ricardou calls the "solution plurielle". The next that he discusses goes under the title of the "solution virtuelle" which he sees at work in the famous description of the wedding cake in *Madame Bovary*:

A la base, d'abord, c'était un carré de carton bleu figurant un temple avec portiques, colonnades et statuettes de stuc tout autour dans des niches constellées d'étoiles en papier doré; puis se tenait au second étage un donjon en gâteau de Savoie, entouré de menues fortifications en angélique, amandes, raisins secs, quartiers d'oranges; et enfin, sur la plate-forme supérieure, qui était verte où il y avait des rochers avec des lacs de confiture et des bateaux en écales de noisettes, on voyait un petit Amour, se balançant à une escarpolette de chocolat, dont les poteaux étaient terminés par deux boutons de rose naturelle, en guise de boules, au sommet.<sup>36</sup>

Here, if the danger is not entirely avoided, in Ricardou's opinion it is reduced by a Flaubert's mention of the object to be described: "Comme il débutait dans le pays, il avait soigné les choses; et il apporta lui-même une *pièce montée* qui fit pousser des cris. A la base (...)"<sup>37</sup> Similarly, what Ricardou calls "intertitres antéposées", namely, "A la base", "au second étage", "sur la plate-forme", serve partially to disguise the underlying diachronic character of the description. But this has as much to do with the logic of descriptions as it has with the problem of synchronicity. It is usually the case that they move from the general to the specific. Thus, a police officer would say that a suspect wanted for questioning is, for example, a white male, around twenty years old, wearing a distinctive jacket, and having a five inch scar on his left cheek. If the order were reversed, which would make no difference as far as the synchronicity is concerned, a potential witness would in all likelihood ask why he had not been told immediately that the suspect was a male. Similarly with cakes.

But there is a further curiosity in Ricardou's discussion of Flaubert. As we shall see further on, he gives us an example of what he calls a scriptural striptease, but fails to "recapitulate" a feature that he has dealt with elsewhere. In *Nouveaux problèmes du roman* Ricardou turns his attention to the description of the schoolboy Bovary's outlandish headgear:

Ovoïde et renflée de baleines, elle commençait par trois boudins circulaires; puis s'alternaient, séparés par une bande rouge, des losanges de velours et de poils de lapins; venait ensuite une façon de sac qui se terminait par un polygone cartonné, couvert d'une broderie

<sup>36</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, Paris, Club du meilleur livre, 1957, p. 33, quoted by Ricardou, *ibid* p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> Ricardou's italics.

en soutache compliquée, et d'où pendait, au bout d'un long cordon trop mince, un petit croisillon de fils d'or, en manière de gland. Elle était neuve; la visère brillait.<sup>38</sup>

This description Ricardou says can be reduced to the “tree of description”, reproduced below. In fact, his position is that all descriptions are susceptible to this operation, which represents, contrary to what Ricardou states, an achronic, rather than synchronic, primitive state of the sense-data, prior to their arrangement in the linear form that is writing. The selection of the elements that appear in this list is in itself interesting. The exclusion of all the verbs except “brillait” and the dubious change of the verb “terminait” to a past participle might rest on a tacit assumption that the remaining verbs perform a similar function of those used by Homer to link the elements in the description, but in this case the verbs in fact mark a relationship of the part to the whole. Curiously, this observation could have strengthened Ricardou’s argument. Bearing in mind that Flaubert’s description starts with the sentence “Le nouveau tenait encore sa casquette sur ses deux genoux”, and that Ricardou therefore considers that the cap is described in relation to a “hyper-object”, the new pupil, and a “para-object”, his knees, he gives us the following instructions for interpreting his diagram:

La situation ( \_ .\_. ) marque le rapport de l’objet décrit, soit à un ensemble plus vaste dont il fait partie ou *hyper-objet*, soit à un objet proche ou *para-objet*. La *qualification* ( \_ \_ \_ \_ ) marque le rapport de l’objet avec l’une de ses *qualités*. La *composition* ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) marque le rapport de l’objet avec l’une de ses parties ou *hypo-objet*; il va de soit que ce rapport peut s’accomplir par l’intermédiaire d’une qualification.<sup>39</sup>

It is those relationships of the whole to its parts that are marked by the presence of a verb.

The construction of these “trees” is precisely the exercise that Ricardou recommends for class room use as we have seen in the chapter on workshops, and it is

<sup>38</sup> Flaubert, Paris, *Pléiade*, I, p. 294, quoted by Ricardou, op. cit., p.25 (it is not clear why Ricardou quotes a different edition of Flaubert at this point).

<sup>39</sup> *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*, p. 25.

strange that Ricardou does not also introduce them to the argument in *La maladie chronique*. This is surely a missed opportunity for Ricardou to demonstrate the link between textique and workshops, even if strictly speaking, this lies beyond the task that he set himself in *La maladie chronique*.

To return to the subject in hand, the two preceding techniques, the plural and the virtual solutions to the problem of the simultaneous represented by the linear, can be combined in what Ricardou christens the “pluralo-virtuel”, which, he maintains is employed by Saint-Exupéry at the beginning of *Vol de nuit* :

Saint-Exupéry développe le cas d’un unique pilote, puis l’intègre soudain, tirant profit d’une convergence anecdotique (leur commun point d’atterrissage), à un pluriel qui autorise une synchronie virtuelle en ce qu’il permet la rétrospective affectation aux deux autres des divers détails fournis sur le premier.

Voici, extrait du chapitre initial, un group parmi les précisions concernant Fabien:

Il enfouit sa tête dans la carlingue. Le radium des aiguilles commençait à luire. L’un après l’autre. L’un après l’autre le pilote vérifia des chiffres et fut content. Il se découvrait solidement dans le ciel. Il effleura du doigt un longeron d’acier, et sentait dans le métal ruisseler la vie : le métal ne vibrerait pas, mais vivait.

Voici, au début du second chapitre, la brusque assimilation à plusieurs, que renforce la confluence des itinéraires et leur transmutation, pourrait-on dire, en un seul appareil :

*Ainsi les trois avions postaux de la Patagonie, du Chili et du Paraguay revenaient du Sud, de l’Ouest et du Nord vers Buenos-Aires. On y attendait leur chargement pour donner le départ, vers minuit, à l’avion d’Europe.*

Trois pilotes, chacun à l’arrière d’un capot lourd comme un chaland, perdus dans la nuit, méditaient leur vol, et, vers la ville immense, descendraient lentement de leur ciel d’orage ou de paix, comme descendent les paysans de leurs montagnes.<sup>40</sup>

For some reason, Ricardou seems to be dissatisfied with this solution as it is used by this author:

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<sup>40</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Vol de nuit*, Paris, Gallimard, 1981, pp. 26, 31, 24, 34, quoted by Ricardou, *ibid* p. 57. Ricardou’s italics.

C'est parce que le pluriel synchronique est *postérieur*, chez Saint-Exupéry, qu'il ne peut prétendre à la solution d'un problème qui, avec l'éventuelle énumération antécédante, se serait trop ancré, déjà, au fil des pages (d'où l'évocation du seul Fabien). Bref, dans *Vol de nuit*, (...) le pluriel synchrone ne produit son rétrospectif couvert virtuel pour masquer la diachronie énumérative qu'afin de donner l'illusion qu'elle s'est... accomplie, et en vue d'induire le lecteur à croire qu'il était en possession d'un savoir, déjà, sur deux des pilotes dont on ne lui a cependant encore point parlé. Ou, si l'on aime mieux : l'astuce suprême vient, en l'espèce, de ce que la solution virtuelle est requise afin de résoudre un problème qu'on a su se dispenser...de mettre en place.<sup>41</sup>

On the same page, Ricardou states that this procedure obliges the reader to transfer the more personal reflections of Fabien to the other two pilots. Be this as it may, the suggestion that an author tries to deal with a problem by avoiding it seems strange when we are dealing with a work of fiction.

The device that Ricardou designates as “méro-virtuel” appears to offer problems, particularly since in the section of *Une maladie chronique* (3.4, pp.61-63), he offers no clear example of its use. The meaning of the term is clear enough once one is aware that the Greek “mero” means partial. We have already encountered what Ricardou classifies here, and it is odd that he does not do this earlier, as “holovirtualisation”: the idea that the mention of the whole, the wedding cake, conceals the simultaneous existence of the ingredients. As far as I can determine from the rather slim discussion, which again relies on *Le sursis* and *Vol de nuit*, “merovirtualisation” corresponds closely to what we have seen previously described by Kundera as polyphony, or more accurately, in my opinion, “brèches”:

(...) au lieu (...) d'actualiser mot à mot l'une des possibilités ouvertes, l'on suspend tel cours narratif, et, tirant bénéfice de ce que la suite interrompue reste présente, dès lors, suivant disons le mode du désir, en pointillé dans l'esprit du déchiffreur, l'on dispose sur la ligne *une autre série contemporaine à sa place*.<sup>42</sup>

The final two sections of this essay are those that show most clearly the new

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 62, Ricardou's italics.



directions that Ricardou was starting to open up through the development of textique. Both, as the titles *Secours texturopalinodique* and *Tracas scriptoropalinodique* indicate, make use of the concept of the “palinode” that is not to be found in his earlier work. The first paragraph of section 3.5,<sup>43</sup> introduces the distinction already familiar to us, between “scriptures” that are designed to produce an “*effet de représentation*” and “textures” that by revealing features of writing that are ordinarily obscured by “representation”, lead to an “*effet de métareprésentation*”. The second describes the mechanism of “texturopalinodie”:

L'on montre aisément, en outre, qu'une texture peut subir un renversement de fonction, une *texturopalinodie*, quand elle concourt à produire, elle-même, une structure à vertu représentative. Ainsi, avec un écrit acrostiché, le transversal dispositif en surcroît est une texture (puisqu'il attire l'intérêt sur l'initiale de chaque vers) et, à supposer, comme il advient le plus souvent en l'espèce, que la supplémentaire consécution des lettres possède vertu significative, il suscite une scripture (puisqu'avec lui s'obtient un nouvel effet de représentation).<sup>44</sup>

Ricardou gives two interesting instances where he sees this technique operating. The first, perhaps surprisingly, comes from Clément Marot (1496-1544):

Playsir n'ay plus, mais vy en desconfort  
Fortune m'a remis en grand'douleur (....)<sup>45</sup>

This is according to textique's terminology of the time, “isologique”, now called an isochorism because it employs the same element, “fort”. The second makes use of an articulation of the text and is therefore described as “arthrologique” since it combines a question with its answer:

qu'eSt-ce QUE LETTrE.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, loc. cit..

<sup>45</sup> Quoted by Ricardou, ibid p. 66, from Henri Morier, *Dictionnaire de rhétorique et poétique*, Paris, P.U.F., 1981, p. 961.

<sup>46</sup> Maurice Roche, Paris, *Circus*, Seuil, 1972, p.32, quoted by Ricardou, op. cit. p. 66.

There is a more detailed discussion of this quotation contained in *Eléments de textique II* where it is pointed out that there is a curious form of virtuality at work, “l’intérieur est à l’extérieur et l’extérieur n’existe pas.”<sup>47</sup>

As the examples quoted above suggest, a texturopalinody does not necessarily imply simultaneous events, but it can be used to this end. So, according to Ricardou, the merovirtual solution detected by him in *Le sursis*;

(....) reçoit, à la frontière des deux séquences, l’apport d’une structure telle que la première cellule rompue par la suivante, au lieu de passer sur le champ en phase virtuelle, perdure quelque peu, selon une rémanence trompeuse, comme si de rien n’était. (....) cette procédure repose bien sur le principe de texturopalinodie : elle fait intervenir une texture (obtenue par l’ajout, ici, entre les deux cellules consécutives, d’un couple de liaisons en surcroît), et cette texture obtient, d’une certaine manière, un surplus de représentation, puisque le quiproquo qu’elle fomenté permet à la première cellule de passer pour encore effective alors qu’elle est en réalité déjà devenue virtuelle.<sup>48</sup>

The examples provided by Ricardou are straight-forward enough:

(....) le dialogue des Britanniques à Munich, bien qu’abruptement rompu (au lieu où mes soins ajoutent une barre), semble se poursuivre dans la scène simultanée concernant Milan Hlinka en Tchécoslavquie:

Le vieillard se leva, il traversa la pièce, les genoux raides, d’un pas noble et sautillant. Il dit “Messieurs!” et il sourit affablement; il posa le document sur la *table* et en *lissa les feuillets* de son poing fermé; / Milan s’était planté devant la *table*; le *journal déplié* couvrait toute la largeur de la toile cirée (....).

Ainsi, à la page suivante, selon la même procédure, ce sont les propos de Chamberlain qu’a l’air de commenter, synchrone, la pensée, cette fois, du Tchèque:

Neville Henderson et Horace Wilson s’étaient approchés de la table, le vieillard se tourna vers eux, il avait l’air inoffensif et périmé, il dit “Messieurs, voici ce qui nous reste à *faire*” /

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<sup>47</sup> Jean Ricardou, "Eléments de textique II" in *Conséquences*, no 11, Paris, 1988, p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

Milan pensait : “Il n’y avait rien d’autre à faire.”<sup>49</sup>

Initially, one might be inclined to think that the identical nature of the actions or thoughts described by Sartre accounts for the identical vocabulary. However, their banality, which is incidental to the drama being played out, suggests that Ricardou is correct in his suggestion that, on the contrary, the desire to establish their synchronicity leads to what he calls the “écholalique reprise de certains vocables”.<sup>50</sup>

The closing section (3.6) of *Une maladie chronique*, introduces the concept of the “scripturo-palinodie” which is the inverse of the “texturo-palinodie”. If the latter uses what textique calls metarepresentation for representative ends, the former appears to be representational when in fact it is metarepresentational. It is here that Ricardou formulates most clearly the idea that informs this essay:

(...)avec telle antiexpressivité statuaire surgit, un rien paradoxal, certain phénomène longtemps méconnu : le temps qui se passe (celui qui foment la séquence des mots), tandis qu’on reste dans l’instant (celui de la simultanéité des éléments représentés) devient, non seulement un *temps en trop*, mais encore un *temps qui fait que certaine chose se passe alors qu’il ne se passe rien*.<sup>51</sup>

Again quoting from Flaubert, Ricardou offers us what he calls a “strip-tease scriptural”<sup>52</sup>:

Une jeune fille venait d’entrer.  
Sous un voile bleuâtre lui cachant la poitrine et la tête, on distinguait les arcs de ses *yeux*, les calcidoines de ses *oreilles*, la blancheur de sa *peau*. Un carré des soie gorge-de-pigeon, en couvrant les *épaules*, tenait aux *reins* par une ceinture d’orfèvrerie. Ses *caleçons* noirs étaient semés de mandragores, et d’une manière indolente elle faisait claquer de petites *pantoufles* en duvet de colibri.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Le sursis*, op. cit. pp.7-8, 21-22 quoted by Ricardou. op. cit. pp.66-67, Ricardou’s italics.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 69. Ricardou’s italics.

<sup>52</sup> A procedure that he himself employs in *L’observatoire de Cannes*, and as we shall see further on, in *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*.

<sup>53</sup> Gustave Flaubert, “Hérodias”, Paris, *Œuvres II*, Pléiade, 1968, p. 675, quoted by Ricardou, op. cit. p. 70. Ricardou’s italics.

This offers us the whole event at once, “une jeune fille venait d’entrer”, and then again little by little with the head to toe description. That such descriptions are metarepresentational is most clearly illustrated by the introduction of adverbs in that of the wedding cake:

Ce à quoi les adverbes “d’abord” et “enfin” se rapportent, c’est, respectivement, non point à “la base” et à “la plate-forme supérieure” qui seraient advenues l’une après l’autre sur la table, mais bien au début et à la fin ... de l’exercice descriptif. Bref, selon une canonique scripturopalinodie, la structure à visée représentative (ou si l’on préfère, la scripture) se métamorphose, sous l’angle fonctionnel, en une structure à effet métareprésentatif (ou si l’on aime mieux, une texture), puisqu’elle permet que transparaisse ce que l’accomplissement représentatif voue à l’estompe (ici la série lexicale sous l’hallucination représentative de l’objet synchrone).

At this point it would have been logical for Ricardou to conclude his investigation of the problem of the simultaneous and the linear but as we have already seen in his series of articles in *Texte en main*, he cannot resist, it seems, reopening old debates. In this instance he returns to the dispute that erupted at Cerisy-la-salle during the colloquium of 1971 between Ricardou on one side and Claude Duchet and Nathalie Sarraute on the other. Both Duchet and Sarraute can be shown to have a faulty recollection of what Flaubert wrote when he described Madame Bovary’s bride cake. However, this seems to have little to do with the question in hand and more to do with questions addressed elsewhere by Ricardou, when he deals with the various possible ways of reading a text. Moreover, Ricardou has already gone over this material in *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*,<sup>54</sup> where he discusses it in the context of a distinction between: “(...) *restriction du texte* : il consiste à ne pas lire ce qui est écrit. (...), *dilatation du texte* : il consiste à lire ce qui n’est pas écrit.”<sup>55</sup> Placing what are in effect polemical asides at the end of this text which is intended in part to introduce a new discipline is probably a tactical error, since it leaves the reader with the unfortunate impression that textique is more concerned with settling old scores than opening new vistas, which indeed the final part of the book attempts to do.

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<sup>54</sup> On pages 61-68.

<sup>55</sup> *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, p. 62.

We cannot conclude this chapter without making a few remarks concerning what we might call Ricardou's theory of perception which when compared with his linguistic insights seem to be a little naive. When we perceive an object there is often no reason to believe that we are immediately aware of all its constituents even though they undoubtedly exist simultaneously. Unless we have a particular interest in cakes we are more than likely to register the fact that there was one at the wedding we recently attended, but asked to describe it we may struggle. As psychologists have repeatedly demonstrated, the human brain has a great capacity for ignoring events or features that do not seem at the time of any importance. Moreover, there are elements of which we may be justified in assuming the presence of from previous experience, such as the root system of a tree, or the marzipan under the icing of an uncut cake, that we do not immediately perceive. When we examine an object, we often do so in an order, which is, of course often arbitrary, whether it be from salient to not so obvious features, from top to bottom or vice versa is often of little import, it being more a question of convenience or mental habits. In other words, the physical world presents us with amorphous experiences which we order, frequently through the medium of language, and different languages divide up this amorphous world in different ways, a fact long known to linguists. Plainly, Ricardou recognises that it is impossible for us to recognise as simultaneous events that take place beyond our immediate field of perception except by means of language, (Sartre might show us films of the chauffeurs and diplomats on a split screen, but he would still be obliged to inform us by some means or other that these were simultaneous events, and it is difficult to see how he could avoid using language to convey this notion unambiguously) But Ricardou does not appear to consider the possibility that in our perception of an object like a cake, language also intervenes. The recognition of a donjon or a small figure representing an "Amour" already presupposes a large element of historical, social and cultural facts embedded in language that determine how we perceive this apparently simple object. This is all the more surprising given that elsewhere Ricardou justly remarks: "C'est donc une candeur touchante, ou terrible peut-être, de croire qu'un écrit met en mots ce qui a été pensé, sans songer que

l'on y pense, surtout, ce qui pouvait être mis en mots."<sup>56</sup> What Ricardou fails to take account of is that prior to the rise of feudalism the word "donjon" did not exist.

The depiction of the synchronous in a diachronic medium is not just something that occurs in literature and in every day life it does not seem to be a problem. Just as in the normal course of events few would criticise a photograph for being unable to include a narrative, so few would criticise a narrative for not being a snapshot. Nonetheless, the example of Lessing demonstrates that some have felt that it was an artistic problem to be solved, even though this does seem little like criticising a novel for not being a painting. Perhaps "problem" was the wrong word for this phenomenon, for it is not a catastrophe for language if the problem cannot be solved, as is the case. It is rather a question of technique in which the author tries to find the means of creating the illusion that the contradiction between the synchronic and the diachronic can be overcome by linguistic means. *Une maladie chronique* attempts to be the definitive exposition of the ways that this can be attempted. Due to the events of 1982 this attempt passed unnoticed.

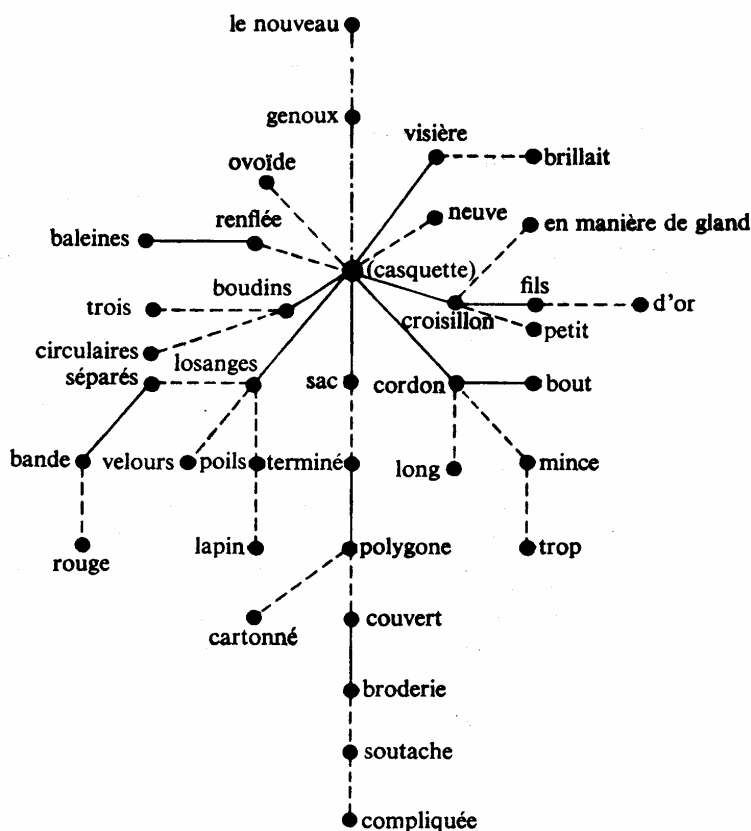
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<sup>56</sup> "Eléments de textique II", loc. cit., p.10.

## LE TEXTE EN CONFLIT

objet extérieur ou *méta-objet*; il va de soi que ce rapport peut s'accomplir par l'intermédiaire d'une qualification.

Si l'on se souvient que cette description proprement dite est ouverte par une mise en situation, « le NOUVEAU tenait encore sa casquette sur ses deux genoux », disposant l'objet décrit par rapport à un para-objet (genoux) et à un hyper-objet (le nouveau), il est possible d'établir l'arbre descriptif dans son ensemble (figure 1).



(Figure 1)

B. *Le récit interrompu*

On le voit, cet arbre descriptif est non seulement unitaire, mais encore synchronique : tous les éléments qu'il associe appartiennent

*Paysage*

V  
OI ?  
LA  
CI MAISON  
Où NAISSENT  
LES É  
TOI LES  
ET LES DIVINITÉS

CET  
ARBRISSEAU  
QUI SE PRÉPARE  
A FRUCTIFIER  
TE  
RES  
SEM  
BLE

C O U C H É S  
a  
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## Chapter 6: Textique as Literary criticism

Anyone coming to textique for the first time by way of *Une maladie chronique* might be left with the impression that textique is merely a question of applying a new terminology to ideas that Ricardou formulated long ago in his career. Two questions therefore arise, separate but related. Firstly, to what extent does textique confine itself to a re-examination of authors, for the most part novelists, that Ricardou has previously discussed in his earlier work, or does he, in addition, treat other authors and extend his range to other genres namely poetry and the theatre? Secondly, what are the merits of textique as a mode of textual analysis (particularly in the study of poetry) and what are its limitations?

A good example of what appears to be the increasing range of Ricardou as textique develops can be seen in the series of articles, *Eléments de textique*, four of which appeared in the final issues of the defunct review *Conséquences*. The writers that Ricardou mentions here, in the order in which they appear, are the following: in *Eléments de textique I*, Flaubert, and the inevitable “pièce montée”, Pagnol, Simon, Valéry, Racine, Hugo, Chateaubriand, Lescure, Mallarmé; in *Eléments de textique II*, Claudel, Racine, Boileau, Roche, La Fontaine, Constant, Vielé-Griffin, France, Gautier, Ricardou himself, a verse that he attributes to de Banville in fact written by Cros (Ricardou corrects this error in the next article), Mallarmé; in *Eléments de textique III*, Marot, Simon, Ricardou, Pinget, Robbe-Grillet, Proust, Sartre, Perec, Valéry, Baudelaire, Cros, Ollier, Calle, or Calle-Gruber, as she is now known, Hugo, La Fontaine; in *Eléments de textique IV*, Proust, Ricardou, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, Roussel, Valéry, Mallarmé, Lelong, Rimbaud, Perec, Fleury, Joyce, Calle-Gruber, Roubaud, Fénéon, Vigny, Avelot, Lemaire, Borges, Lahougue. *Eléments de textique V*<sup>1</sup> continues this apparent trend, but it was rejected by the editorial board of *Conséquences* on account of its length which Ricardou refused to reduce. After this, the review ceased publication. Even though this fifth article has therefore only circulated among those who have attended at one time or another the textique

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Jean-Claude Raillon for supplying me with a copy of this article.

seminars, it is worth discussing as it contains a strong attack on the idea of polysemy. It is more than likely that some of the names listed above will be unfamiliar to anyone who has not previously happened upon *Conséquences*, so it should be pointed out that Mireille Calle-Gruber, Guy Lelong, Daniel Fleury, and Marc Avelot, at that time formed part of a group of writers younger than Ricardou who were closely associated with *Conséquences*. Jean Lahougue is more widely known and has received more critical attention than this group, and although he never participated in this review, he has always acknowledged a debt to Ricardou.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the examples of his own work that Ricardou discusses come from his collection *La cathédrale de Sens*.<sup>3</sup>

We need to make a further qualification when we consider Ricardou's apparently increased interest in poetry, which we can attribute to the fact noted by him above that it is often in what he himself calls traditional poetry that the features that he describes are most evident. Of course, Ricardou has turned his attention to poetry prior to his development of *textique*. His appreciation of Mallarmé is long-standing, and in the past he has also written, albeit sometimes in passing, on other poets, in particular La Fontaine,<sup>4</sup> the poet (poetaster?) Raymond Roussel who merits an essay of his own, "L'activité roussellienne",<sup>5</sup> and Rimbaud.<sup>6</sup> However, it quickly becomes apparent that much of the poetic material quoted by Ricardou in the series *Eléments de textique*, derives from one source: Henri Morier's reference work, *Dictionnaire de Poétique et de Rhétorique*.<sup>7</sup> Ten of his examples are drawn from this work, by far the largest group

when poetry is considered as a separate class. The danger of relying upon secondary sources, without checking them is only too obvious. We have already noted the error of ascription contained in *Eléments de textique II*:

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<sup>2</sup> Particularly in *Ecriverons et Liserons*, Seyssel, Champ Vallon, 1998, p.210-211. Although Lahougue did not participate in the review, he did change publishers from Gallimard to Impressions nouvelles, the publishing house associated with *Conséquences*, to the short term detriment of his literary career.

<sup>3</sup> Paris, Impressions nouvelles, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, L'or du scarabée, in *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1971, p. 57, where he quotes *le Laboureur et ses Enfants* in full.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> See *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, p. 157.

<sup>7</sup> Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1981.

Dans ces meubles laqués, rideaux et dais moroses,  
Danse, aime, bleu laquais, ris d'oser des mots roses.

This, following Morier, Ricardou attributes to Théodore de Banville.<sup>8</sup> In *Eléments de textique III* he quotes these lines again in their true position:

Dans ces meubles laqués, rideaux et dais moroses,  
Où, dure, Eve d'efforts sa langue irrite (erreur!)  
Ou du rêve des forts alanguis rit (terreur!)  
Danse, aime, bleu laquais, ris d'oser des mots roses.

To which Ricardou adds the following footnote:

Charles Cros, "A un page de la reine Isabeau", *Le coffret de santal*, cité par A. Duchesnes et Th. Legay, *Petite fabrique de littérature*, éditions Magnard, collection "Textes et contexts", Paris, 1985, p. 56. Avec ce quatrain et sa référence bibliographique, dus aux aimables soins de Marc Perayre, je rectifie le citation incomplète (le premier et dernier vers en distique) et l'attribution douteuse (à Théodore de Banville) commises (en 2.18.9) sur le foi d'un propos d'Henri Morier.<sup>9</sup>

No doubt, if these articles were more widely circulated, this mistake would provide ammunition for sceptical critics with which to mock the ambitions of textique. It illustrates, however, Ricardou's procedure which is to propose a hypothesis and then seek evidence to support, or invalidate it, rather than trawl through a large number of authors and then draw theoretical conclusions. The statement of a hypothesis, to be validated or disproved by the evidence, is how scientists proceed, or at least how they like to imagine that they proceed. Whether or not such a procedure is entirely appropriate when it comes to artistic matters is open to question. Perhaps we can allow it as legitimate if we draw a distinction between the methods legitimate for the literary critic and those of the literary theorist.

Ricardou's choice of examples from the theatre are more often than not, considered from the point of view of the written word rather than their effect in performance. Take, for example, one of the many occasions when Ricardou discusses the famous

<sup>8</sup> *Conséquences*, no. 11, Paris, 1988, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Conséquences*, no. 12, Paris, 1989, p. 26.

passage from Racine's play, *Andromaque*:

Hé bien! filles d'enfer, vos mains sont-elles prêtes ?  
 Pour qui sont ces serpents qui sifflent sur vos têtes ?  
 A qui destinez -vous l'appareil qui vous suit ?  
 Venez-vous m'enlever dans l'éternelle nuit ? <sup>10</sup>

Of this Ricardou writes:

Or, l'essentiel, en l'espèce, plus que la capacité des mots "serpents" et "sifflent" à redoubler par leurs stratèmes matériels l'idée de sifflement lui-même, plus que la présence, sur un mode claudélien, disons, hors le théâtre certes, à l'initiale du terme "serpents", dans la typographie commune, d'irrécusables courbes serpentine, vient de la soigneuse constitution des lignes selon une foule de formules sensiblement porteuses du son et de la lettre. Bref, c'est avec un cumul de vocables (par exemple, "destinez") et la répétitive marque du pluriel ("têtes", par exemple), nullement motivés en eux-mêmes, que s'accomplit ici, et cependant au mieux, soit au niveau des sons, soit à hauteur des lettres, l'exercice de l'hyperreprésentance. Ou, encore, quitte, polémiquement, à enfoncer un rien le trait, l'on pourrait presque dire que le "s" le plus réussi de "serpents", sous l'angle du labeur stylistique, est non point, comme depuis longtemps on l'assure, celui du début (puisque en l'affaire il est un strict accidentel don de langue), mais bien (puisque avec lui, entre autres, l'éparse marque du pluriel est vouée par effet d'art au mimétisme) celui de la fin.<sup>11</sup>

Having conceded that in performance some of the features that he regards as noteworthy will be inaudible, it seems he continues by suggesting, in so many words, that one of the inaudible features constitutes the highpoint of this quotation.

Further on, in his presentation of what he calls "dynamotextures",<sup>12</sup> where a part of a word or sentence induces us to complete it, for example, "etc.", is always read as "etcetera", Ricardou offers us an extract from *Topaze*:

Topaze : Non, Monsieur Durant -Victor, ça ne peut pas s'arranger, parce que, quoi qu'il fasse, où qu'il aille, il lui manquera toujours l'approbation de sa cons... de sa cons...

<sup>10</sup> Act V, scene V, lines 1637-1640, Paris, Hachette, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> *Éléments de textique II, loc. cit.*, p. 15. Note that this form of alliteration falls into the category of "hyperreprésentance", and not metarepresentation, because it draws attention to the material elements of the thing represented not to those of the text itself. Of course, this text is metarepresentative by virtue of the rhymes and so on.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

Pitard -Vergniolles : De sa concierge.

Again, Ricardou acknowledges, but almost in the passing it must be said, the theatrical context:

Comme la prétention d’augurer, à partir d’un écrit, tel fragment de son propre reste, construit par pincipe, une machine à quiproquos, l’on ne s’étonnera point qu’elle aie pu se voir mise en scène, au théâtre, en l’espoir d’un facile effet de comique.<sup>13</sup>

It is difficult to explain Ricardou’s apparent superciliousness: “l’espoir d’un facile effet de comique.” Surely, it is only in the theatre that such a device can be fully comic, in this example, in its contrast between the abstract thought of the schoolmaster, and the (maliciously ?) concrete thought of the pupil, for, as Ricardou himself explains in the articles related to workshops discussed in a previous chapter, in its written form, we can see the joke coming. Given insistence on the materiality of the written word, moreover, his analysis of this quotation seems incomplete:

Qu’il s’agisse ici de la mise en spectacle, avec ses particularités, d’une dynamoscriture, tout concourt à le laisser entendre. D’un côté, l’usage du classique biais des points de suspension, lesquels s’interprètent, certes, au niveau de ton, comme une montée de la voix sans retombée. D’un autre côté, le recours à un clair polyscriptème (1.11.2), au moins composé, pour rester simple, par les stratoscriptèmes sémantique (le sens incomplet du propos “il lui manquera l’approbation de sa cons...”), syntaxique (l’agencement suspendu qui suppose un probable substantif apte à finir le complément du nom “approbation”), et syllabique (l’audible fragment, “cons...”, de l’ultime unité sonore. (...)) Cependant, bien sûr, on saisit non moins un autre phénomène. Puisqu’il s’agit de théâtre, l’aspect graphique, en sa stricte spécificité n’a guère ici d’importance. Dans la version écrite, au contraire, l’on perçoit clairement que l’actif du stratoscriptème grammatique, en convoquant le “s”, opère, semble-t-il, une focalisation des complémentaires virtuels suffisante pour exclure le quiproquo survenu.<sup>14</sup>

But how are we to interpret the “points de suspension”? Clearly, the first set also indicates a pause while the schoolmaster awaits the appropriate response, which might

<sup>13</sup> *Éléments de texture I*, p. 19. in which the quotation from Pagnol appears.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, loc. cit.

be less ambiguously indicated by a stage direction: (...) de sa cons.... (pause), de sa cons... In which case, does the director instruct the actor playing the part of Pitard - Vergniolles to leave a slight pause between his line and the second “de sa cons...”? If so, then Pagnol ought perhaps, to have written: “....De sa concierge.” or is this phrase meant to follow directly without a pause. Then again, it is possible that Pagnol foresaw both possibilities and left the choice deliberately to the director.

In his comments Ricardou seems to assume that the “s” of “cons” is silent. In this situation, it would appear that both he and Pagnol have been betrayed by the vagaries of French orthography. On the one hand, Ricardou is lead by the clear similarity between an existing word “cons”, plural of the word “con”, which is nevertheless masculine, to read the end of Topaze’s speech thus: (...) de sa con.... de sa con...

This, for all I know, may be how the piece is generally performed. But the “s” is deniably there and the joke still works if it is pronounced. It seems to me plausible that Pagnol could not bring himself to write, for example, what we might propose as a RAPT of our own: (...) de sa conce... de sa conce... the reason being that this looks less “natural” to him than “cons”, even though “sa cons” is impossible in French since “sa” is feminine singular and “cons”, masculine plural. In order to meet Ricardou’s objection that this “s” precludes the mistake committed by Pitard -Vergniolles, we can offer a further RAPT: “Pitard -Vergniolles : De sa conseillère scolaire/professionnelle”.

We can deduce from the list of authors above that there is in some areas a gradual shift in interest, sometimes, however, the shifts can be abrupt. As far as the nouveau roman is concerned, his preferred author continues to be, without doubt, Claude Simon, but it is true to say that in 1982 he turns away from comment on the novelists with whom he was formerly associated. In November of that year, Ricardou was invited to give a speech at Palermo on the occasion of the award of the “Premio Internazionale Mondello” to Alain Robbe-Grillet, who refused the opportunity to reply, on the grounds that Ricardou’s speech was “polemic”. The speech was later to be printed in *Conséquences*, no. 4, in 1984 under the title “Un habitant de la couronne”:

En géométrie, une couronne est la surface incluse entre deux circonférences concentriques. Faisons une hypothèse: que chaque circonférence soit une barrière, et le centre du dispositif l'origine des mobilités. Alors, par principe, tout habitant de la couronne est celui qui a déjà franchi une clôture (la circonférence du petit cercle), et qui reste pris dans une autre (la circonférence du grand).<sup>15</sup>

Although ostensibly about Robbe-Grillet, the theoretical implications of the essay are clearly meant to apply to the nouveau roman as a group. Just as previously we have seen Ricardou criticise Sartre for failing to take his distinction between prose and poetry to its logical conclusion, so he believes that the nouveau roman refused to follow its own logic:

S'agissant du Nouveau Roman en général et, donc, par exemple, d'Alain Robbe-Grillet, il semble qu'une telle analyse déjà fait ses débuts: diverses bizarreries insistantes, il a été possible de les saisir selon la cohérence d'une perspective intelligible. Ou, si l'on préfère: de certains interdits surmontés, il a été permis de déduire une logique de l'œuvre. C'est ce que, voulue ou insue, j'ai proposé de nommer une *stratégie de l'antireprésentation*.

L'antireprésentation, ce n'est guère, selon on ne sait trop quelle caricature, un refus intégral du principe de représentation. L'antireprésentation, c'est plutôt, selon un dessillement d'envergure, une lutte contre son insistante suprématie.<sup>16</sup>

More than twenty years later, all that would be required to update this assessment would be to replace the term "antirepresentation" with "metarepresentation". But what would in Ricardou's opinion, have constituted a breach of the second circumference? The proliferation of variants of the same descriptions or incidents at a material level, which Ricardou calls a "matéριο-transit" of the fiction producing a "matéριο-essaimage", could suggest an analogous "idéο-transit" of theory resulting in an "idéο-essaimage". Ricardou does not call them so, but such texts could be described as "mixte",<sup>17</sup> preferring at this stage the terms "fictio-théorique" or "théorico-fictionnel". Ricardou's argument is that Robbe-Grillet's work is not entirely devoid of

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<sup>15</sup> Op. cit. p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> It was at this time that Ricardou was experimenting with "mixte" in *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*.

these things but that they are present only “au timide état de trace”:

Signalons (...) ce double idéo-transit analogique à deux régimes. Le premier, d'ordre fictio-théorique, permet que, sans prévenir, l'on passe de la fiction à la théorie, car tel protagoniste est nommé par sa fonction récitative, “le narrateur”. Le second, d'ordre théorico-fictionnel, fait que, sans crier gare, l'on repasse sitôt de la théorie à la fiction, car l'immédiate conséquence pratique, l'usage donc du “je”, en autorise dans la même phrase le retour. Voici: “Agacé par leur manège/, le narrateur-disons “je” ça sera plus simple/cherche longuement, un peu à l'écart, s'il ne reste plus rien derrière le massif d'aucubas”.<sup>18</sup>

At this distance, it is apparent that neither the nouveau roman in general nor Robbe-Grillet in particular chose to continue in this direction. It is consequently not surprising that Ricardou was never again to write the sort of analytical essays devoted to a single novel or novelist that characterised collections like *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*, which proved to be his last such collection. What is more, where Ricardou does continue to refer to these novelists, he never refers to work that they published after than 1982 for the very good reason that about this time he ceased reading these authors on the basis that he was no longer interested in what they were writing.<sup>19</sup> In his opinion, having gone beyond one barrier, they refused to go beyond the next.

The reader who cares to acquaint him or herself with Ricardou's criticism after 1982 will find that he continues to refer to writers such as Flaubert, Proust and Roussel that he has preferred from the beginning of his career as a critic. However, as with the nouveau roman, he no longer treats these writers extensively in essays, but as examples to be used in his discussions of particular points. For a decade, from 1982, when Ricardou published an article on Claude Simon and intertext,<sup>20</sup> until his article on Roussel of 1993,<sup>21</sup> his essays were devoted to theoretical questions rather than to specific authors. The exception was an essay from 1987 devoted to Valéry that takes

<sup>18</sup> . *Conséquences*, no. 3, p. 46-47., Ricardou is quoting, *Projet pour une révolution à New York*, Paris, Minuit, 1970, p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> The reader will recall Ricardou's indifference to his portrayal in Simon's *Le Jardin des Plantes*.

<sup>20</sup> “L'escalade de l'autoreprésentation”, Toronto, *Texte* no. 1, 1982.

<sup>21</sup> “Raymond Roussel? un académisme démesuré”, *Raymond Roussel : perversion classique ou invention moderne?* Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1993.



him to task, rather irascibly, for his excessive use of the abbreviation “etc.”.<sup>22</sup>

We must also exercise some caution before we deduce that a wider range of authors has been introduced. We might be inclined to see, for example, that the inclusion of Benjamin Constant in the list of authors represents a new departure, until we recall that Ricardou has already referred to him in *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman*. So, in the final essay of the latter collection we find the following:

Je venais de finir à vingt-deux ans mes études à l’université de Gottingue. -- L’intention de mon père, ministre de l’électeur de \*\*\*, était que je parcourusse les pays les plus remarquables de l’Europe. Il voulait ensuite m’appeler auprès de lui, me faire entrer dans le département dont la direction lui était confiée (.....).<sup>23</sup>

Ricardou comments: “Alors le *je* vide se remplira d’une identité sans cesse plus précise. Peu à peu ce narrateur jouira des traditionnels caractères du personnage”.<sup>24</sup>

In *Eléments de textique II*, Ricardou selects three sentences from *Adolphe*:

L’intention de mon père, ministre de l’électeur de \*\*\*, était que je parcourusse les pays les plus remarquables de l’Europe (...). Je me rendis, en quittant Gottingue, dans la petite ville de D\*\*\* (...). Je m’agitais intérieurement lorsque je fis connaissance avec le comte de P\*\*\*, homme de quarante ans, dont la famille était liée à la mienne.<sup>25</sup>

Concerning this Ricardou remarks that as one of the “diverses procédures de la discretion”,

(...) les indications concernées, le plus souvent parce que pour des motifs divers elles sont présumées importantes, reçoivent, à l’opposite de l’hyperbole typographique, le concours de signes restreints. Ainsi des étoiles ou des astérisques qui remplacent, de temps à autre, certains noms propres, comme le fait Benjamin Constant, tantôt entièrement, tantôt partiellement, dans *Adolphe*.

Given what we saw of Ricardou’s methods in *Une maladie chronique*, that is to say, the constant recycling of certain privileged passages from certain authors, we can

<sup>22</sup> “L’etcetericite”, in *Valéry, pour quoi?* Paris, Les Impressions nouvelles, 1987.

<sup>23</sup> *Nouveau Roman*, Tel Quel, *op. cit.* p. 246.

<sup>24</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> *Conséquences*, no. 11, Paris, 1988, p. 23.

hardly be surprised to find him adopting the same procedure in these articles. The curiosity of Ricardou's treatment of the quotations from *Adolphe* is not that they are used to prove different points, but that what he says in the first instance seems to contradict what he says in the second. According to his first reading, the "je" of Adolphe "se remplira d'une identité sans cesse plus précise", making identification of the character more and more likely (note that Ricardou uses the word "identité" rather than "personnalité"), whereas according to the second the "diverses procédures de la discretion" intervene.

A further example is a line of Mallarmé's, quoted for one purpose in *Nouveaux problèmes du roman* and for an entirely different reason in *Eléments de textique III*. In the earlier work, Ricardou is defending the following thesis: "L'excellente remarque de Gérard Genette selon laquelle il n'y a pas de récit sans description doit à présent se compléter d'un apparent symétrique : *il n'y a pas de description sans récit.*"

At a later point he writes:

Pour s'en tenir au plus simple, disons que l'indication fournie par le premier mot forme un réservoir de possibilités dans lequel puise le second, et ainsi de suite (...). Soit le vers de Mallarmé, "le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui", écrire ou lire "le", c'est faire un premier choix dans les possibilités de la langue et déterminer l'ensemble de ce qui est masculin et singulier.<sup>26</sup>

Compare this with the use to which it is put in the later text:

**2.21.5** (...) C'est dans la poésie traditionnelle, bien entendu, que se déploient les plus manifestes des isochorotextures.<sup>27</sup> En effet, sa découpe en vers souvent réguliers et de moindre longueur que la ligne commune offre un flamboyant statut, sur la page, à des isotopies, ou des homotopies, au sein desquelles certaines occurrences liées de façon notoire (les rimes et leur isophonogrammatisme, si l'on veut), se disposent, la fin, en général, à de remarquables places identiques.

Dans un sonnet, disons, on l'a vu (...), l'arrangement des rimes forme texture, le périodique insert des sons semblables, défini sur son mode propre, oblige les idées sans ravager leur exercice, et transparait du coup, de façon organique, en sa notable structure, outre l'effet

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, pp. 32 and 33.

<sup>27</sup> That is to say, equivalent elements of a text appearing in significant places.

représentatif.

Or, cet agencement est d'ordre isochoroïstotopique, à l'évidence, comme il est de le souligner dans ce quatrain :

Le vierge, le vivace, et le bel aujourd'hui  
Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre  
Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre  
Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui!

We have already noted above Ricardou's irritation with Valéry. In "L'impossible Monsieur Texte" we find the following:

Songeons aux quatre sonnets : *Blanc, Fée, Féerie, Même féerie*. Sans doute le dernier titre proclame curieusement le maintien d'une identité. Mais il suffit de relire chacun des premiers quatrains et des derniers tercets de deux d'entre eux pour admettre qu'il est toujours possible, à partir d'un poème, d'en composer bien d'autres, ni tout à fait les mêmes, ni tout entier différents, et qui forment plutôt avec leur irréductibilité et leur similitude, le groupe d'une parenté.<sup>28</sup>

One can almost imagine Ricardou berating Valéry, "One more push and you will have a RAPT". But the least one can say is that through Valéry Ricardou approaches the position that both an intratext and an intertext<sup>29</sup> are the logical corollary of a constraint.

This possibility, if never made explicit, seems to lie behind his analyses of Mallarmé's sonnets. In their heyday, of course, sonnets were often written in series, sometimes one poet writing in imitation of, or in reply to, another. The sonnet, for reasons that lie beyond the scope of this study, but which perhaps textique will come to dissect later, seems readily to lend itself to this practice. But whether or not the sonnet is a form that is peculiarly liable to this sort of treatment, on those increasingly rare occasions that Ricardou turns his attention to a single writer, it is invariably on a single sonnet that he focuses, and the analysis always takes the form of an analysis using the terminology of textique, followed by one or more RAPTs. This attitude raises all sorts of interesting questions, not least, how many alterations can one make

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<sup>28</sup> *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman*, pp.86-87.

<sup>29</sup> Some of Ricardou's opinions on intra- and intertext can be found in "L'escalade de la représentation", in *Texte*, no. 1, Toronto, 1982, pp. 15-25.

to a sonnet and it remain the “same” sonnet, especially when it is not the original “scripteur” making the changes, and to whom it should then be ascribed. This question is partially answered in Ricardou’s introductory remarks to his paper “Tel qu’en lui-même enfin Mallarmé s’améliore”:

Ainsi, du moins à en croire ce titre, Mallarmé, tel qu’en lui-même, pourrait s’améliorer ? (.....)

Bien sûr que non. Bien sûr que oui.

**Bien sûr que non ?** En effet si, à suivre une habitude, l’on baptise “Mallarmé” certaine personne singulière, faite, jadis, de chair comme de sang, et qui, par les offices d’un ensemble d’écrits, s’est manifestée à son heure, alors, il faut l’admettre: nul ne saurait exciper, ni maintenant, ni sans doute plus tard, d’une possession de son idiosyncrasie telle qu’elle lui permettait, à sa place carrément, de transformer, à l’une parmi ses lignes, le moindre parmi ses mots.

**Bien sûr que oui ?** En effet si, au prix d’une réflexion, l’on appelle “Mallarmé” certain opérateur d’écriture, et, précisément, celui que détermine, moins souvent pensé que cité, l’un de ses propres célèbres avis:

L’œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s’allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries (.....)

alors, certes, il suffirait de connaître les règles qui gouvernent l’étrange initiative pour en accroître s’il y a lieu l’exercice, et concourir, ce faisant, en l’obstiné souci de “l’œuvre pure”, à cette perfectionniste “disparition élocutoire” par laquelle, fût-ce curieusement au regard de plusieurs, le poète est déclaré s’accomplir comme tel.<sup>30</sup>

Ricardou has had a long-standing interest, some would say obsession, with Mallarmé, in particular he has devoted much time and energy to an analysis of the two versions of the “Sonnet en X”. The published results, for Ricardou frequently refers to these sonnets in the unpublished “L’intelligibilité de l’écrit”, can be found in an article to which we have already had occasion to refer in which he makes the following point:

Or pour s’en tenir au plus lisible, il paraît clair que le travail qui a conduit de l’une à l’autre comporte, et un raisonnement sur les

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<sup>30</sup> In *Mallarmé et après*, Ed. Daniel Bilous, Paris, Noesis, Collection Formules, 2006, pp. 247-248.

opérations (c'est, pour dire ainsi, *le sonnet réfléchi*), et une amélioration du programme opératoire (c'est, pour ainsi dire, *le sonnet réflexif*).

La réflexion, au sens conceptuel, on la trouve en place dans la lettre à Cazalis de juillet 1868. Notamment ;

J'extrais ce sonnet, auquel j'avais une fois songé, d'une étude projetée sur la parole : il est inverse, je veux dire que le sens, s'il en a un (mais je me consolerais du contraire, grâce à la dose de poésie qu'il renferme, ce me semble) est évoqué un mirage interne des mots eux-mêmes.

La réflexion, au sens textuel, on en trouve trace, entre mainte autre, avec les modifications touchant aux ongles et au septuor. Dans le premier sonnet, sauf erreur, tels deux mots ne sont guère dans un rapport lisible. Dans le second sonnet, au contraire, ils sont réunis par un double lien : d'une part, se déplaçant, ils sont inscrits aux antipodes, l'un à l'alpha et l'autre à l'oméga : d'autre part, l'un satellisant une proche épithète, ils sont astreints à consonance : ses purs ongles, septuor. Par suite, il s'agit bien d'une amélioration du programme initial : le traitement consonantique concerne, non plus seulement l'isotopie ( au sens de la textologie : qui occupe un même lieu dans des unités matérielles définies) comme le fait la rime classique, mais encore, très exactement, une antitopie ( au sens de la textologie : qui occupe des lieux symétriques dans une unité matérielle définie). Ce faisant, elle perfectionne et au moins deux fois, "le mirage interne des mots eux-mêmes" : une première fois, par la symétrie et la consonance ; une seconde fois, par raisonnement sur cette résonance.<sup>31</sup>

To assist the reader, here are the two versions of the sonnet:

La nuit approbatrice allume les onyx  
De ses ongles au pur Crime lampadaphore,  
Du Soir aboli par le vésperal Phœnix  
De qui la cendre n'a de cinéraire amphore

Sur des consoles, en le noir salon: nul ptyx,  
Insolite vaisseau d'inanité sonore,  
Car le Maître est allé puiser l'eau du Styx  
Avec tous ses objets dont le rêve s'honore.

Et selon la croisée au nord vacante, un or  
Néfastes incite pour son beau cadre une rixe

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<sup>31</sup> "Pluriels de l'écriture", in *Texte en main*, no. 1, Grenoble, 1984, p. 28. Reprinted in *Ateliers de l'écriture*, Grenoble, L'Atelier du Texte, 1993.

Faite d'un dieu que croit emporter une nixe

En l'obscurcissement de la glace, Décor  
De l'absence, sinon que sur la glace encor  
De scintillation le septuor se fixe.

1868

Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx,  
L'Angoisse, ce minuit, soutient, lampadophore,  
Maint rêve vespéral brûlé par le Phénix  
Que ne recueille pas de cinéraire amphore

Sur les crédences, au salon vide: nul ptyx,  
Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore,  
(Car le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx  
Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s'honore),

Mais proche la croisée au nord vacante, un or  
Agonise selon peut-être le décor  
Des licornes ruant du feu contre une nixe,

Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor  
Que, dans l'oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe  
De scintillations sitôt le septuor .

1887

A comparison of the lines of the two versions that are relevant would seem to confirm what Ricardou's suggestion that the second version brings the words "septuor" and "ses purs ongles" into a tighter relationship:

La nuit approbatrice allume les onyx  
De ses ongles au pur Crime lampadaphore,

(...)

De scintillation le septuor se fixe.

(The first two lines and the last of the first version.)

Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx,

(....)

De scintillations sitôt le septuor.

(The first and last line of the second version.)

In the earlier analysis of this sonnet quoted above, when *textique* was still divided into “*textologie*” and “*scribologie*”, terminology was in a state of flux. What was then described as an “*isotopie*” has now become an “*isochorisme*”, and an “*antitopie*”, an “*antichorisme*”. With this change of terminology, this point is taken up again in a paper, “*Une leçon d’écriture de Stéphane Mallarmé*”,<sup>32</sup> that was presented to a colloquium at Cerisy-la-salle in August of 1997. In this paper, the culmination of Ricardou’s thoughts on the subject, an additional claim is made:

Si l’on considère, à présent, les *isomorphismes antichoriques*, c’est-à-dire, rappelons-le, les identités de forme en des places opposées, l’on rencontre, dans leur groupe profus, une occurrence, non seulement moins aperçue que les autres (à en croire un scrupuleux recensement (that is an unpublished article by Bernardo Schiavetta, *Le “Sonnet en ix” de Mallarmé, comme mise en œuvre raisonnée de son “étude sur le parole”*, see Ricardou’s footnote to this article - DF), elle semble, avant la *textique*, être demeurée invisible à la critique mallarméiste), mais encore capitale pour l’intelligibilité du poème (elle formera le point nodal de la présente *structurodromie*).<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the word “*septuor*” is: “(....) d’une *expressivité naturelle*, ou comme le disent les *texticiens*, (...) un “*ready-made*” *hyperreprésentatif*.”<sup>34</sup> This links it, not to the constellation Orion as is usually said of this poem, but, according to Ricardou, because of its structure “*sept*” + “*-uor*” i.e. 4+3, to Ursa Major. For the sake of brevity, in this instance Ricardou leaves to one side the phenomenon of *arthromorphisme*, by which a text is “*jointed*”, and which would involve what is commonly called “*enjambement*”. Thus, proceeding methodically, Ricardou notes

<sup>32</sup> In *Mallarmé ou l’obscurité lumineuse*, Paris, Hermann, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 207-208.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 211.

under the heading

- *Isomorphismes parachoriques* (i.e. the same element in close proximity) the following “voisinages” “juxtapositions”. To assist the reader, the elements deemed to be similar have been underlined.

L’Angoisse, ce minuit...

Maint rêve vespéral ‘un micropalindromique voisinage en rê/ér’ ( a micropalindromic juxtaposition of rê/ér)

Avec ce seul objet

agonise selon (here one might legitimately ask whether Ricardou is neglecting the phonetic side of the question, the first “s” being pronounced as a “z”, but perhaps he is adopting the attitude of Derrida, that the writing has higher status than the sound)

le décor des licornes

se fixe De scintillations sitôt le septuor

et bien entendu...le célèbre “aboli bibelot”

- *Isomorphismes isochoriques* (the same forms in identical places in their respective lines)

Apart from rhymes the most obvious instances of this phenomenon, Ricardou suggests that the displacement of the word “par”, brings it into relationship with the syllable “pa” of “lampadophore”.

- that the replacement of “l’eau du Styx” by “pleurs au Styx” brings the syllable “eau” into correspondence with the “o” of “onyx” and of “pleurs” with “leur” (but the “o” sound of French differs from that of “eau”)
- “agonise” is a “sub-anagram” of “angoisse” appearing at the beginnings of their respective lines.
- the insertion of the word “feu” allied to “nixé” gives a “rhyme” with Phénix.

Perhaps here Ricardou is stretching the sense of identical a little.

- *Isomorphismes antichoriques* (the same form appearing at opposite positions in the poem)

This is a phenomenon, which, Ricardou claims, has remained invisible to critics of



Mallarmé, though essential to the structural intelligibility of the poem “.....elle semble, avant la textique, être demeurée invisible à la critique mallarméiste, *mais encore capitale pour l’intelligibilité structurale du poème* (elle formera le point nodal de la présente *structurodromie*)”.<sup>35</sup> He draws attention to the opposition of “Ses purs ongles” and “septuor” created by the relocation of these words at the two extremes of the poem. Particularly striking is the movement of “pur” which previously qualified “crime” and now qualifies “ongles”, and the fact that the movement of “septuor” disrupts the rhyme scheme. (The first sonnet having seven rhymes with “ix” and seven with “or”. The second, six in “ix”, eight in “or”.) Ricardou believes that this apparent deterioration of the poem is compensated for by the structural benefits that result. Having completed this stage in his examination, Ricardou comes to what he would see as the justification of his activity.

Or, sous cet angle, ce sont deux vocables, pour le moins, au premier vers, qui méritent la procédure: *dédiant* et *ongles*.  
Le mot *dédiant*? Oui. En effet il semble fort que son remplacement par le vocable *allumant*, bref le vers:

*Ses purs ongles très haut allumant leur onyx*

éclairerait mieux la valeur astrale de *Ses purs ongles*, établie, dans le second poème autrement qu’en le premier, on l’a vu, et par une corrélation (celle, phonique et grammique, qui lie cette formule à *septuor*), et par une cohésion (celle qui survient avec *L’Angoisse* en tant qu’elle s’assimile à *la Grande Ourse*). Or comme ce participe présent se rencontre, déjà, dans le sonnet initial, la tentation n’est pas mince d’assurer sitôt que *dédiant* ressortit, en sa venue dans le second poème, non plus à un perfectionnement (bref à une opération d’écriture), mais plutôt à une détérioration (bref à un geste de *désécriture*).<sup>36</sup>

For similar reasons, he proposes the replacement of “ongles” with “orbes”, since “orbes” has a planetary reference, so that the rewritten line reads:

*Ses purs orbes très haut allumant leur onyx*

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 208, Ricardou’s emphases.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 237.

It is difficult to believe that Ricardou is seriously proposing that Gallimard's next impression of the *Pléiade* should include this version of the sonnet. Rather his purpose would appear to be didactic, to demonstrate that no one, no matter how illustrious, is above the process or rewriting.

The question that might be asked at this point is whether or not the interpretation of Mallarmé's sonnet offered by *textique* diverges from what we might call 'mainstream' criticism or not. This sonnet has over the years attracted a great deal of comment. Bertrand Marchal somewhat despairingly remarks:

Du nouveau sur le sonnet en -ix? Sûrement pas, si l'on entend par là la mise en jour d'une nouvelle version ou la découverte d'un référent jusqu'ici inaperçu du poème. Rien de nouveau, donc, sur ce sonnet pour lequel ne manquent ni les interprétations préoccupées d'un sens à découvrir, ni les descriptions structurelles qui relèguent au cimetière des artifices périmées les tentations herméneutiques.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps to the surprise of some, we can see that Ricardou combines the two, suggesting a new interpretation from which he draws structural implications, but this interpretation is supplied by the poet himself, as we can see if we quote more fully the letter of July 1868, from Mallarmé to Cazalis cited by Ricardou:

J'extrais ce sonnet, auquel j'avais songé cet été, d'une étude projetée sur *la Parole* : il est inverse, je veux dire que le sens s'il en a un (mais je me consolerais du contraire grâce à la dose de poésie qu'il renferme, ce me semble) est évoqué par un mirage interne des mots mêmes. En se laissant aller à la murmurer plusieurs fois, on éprouve une sensation assez cabalistique. C'est confesser qu'il est peu 'plastique' comme tu me le demandes, mais au moins est-il aussi 'blanc et noir' que possible ; et il me semble se prêter à une eau-forte pleine de Rêve et de Vide. Par exemple, une fenêtre ouverte, les deux volets attachés ; une chambre avec personne dedans, malgré l'air stable que présentent les meubles, sinon l'ébauche plausible de vagues consoles, un cadre, belliqueux et agonisant, de miroir appendu au fond, avec sa réflexion, stellaire et incompréhensible, de la grande Ourse, qui relie au ciel ce logis abandonné du monde. J'ai pris ce sujet d'un sonnet nul et se réfléchissant de toutes les façons, parce que mon œuvre est si bien préparée et hiérarchisé, représentant comme il le peut, l'Univers, que je n'aurais su, sans endommager quelque une de mes impressions étagées, rien en enlever - et aucun sonnet ne s'y rencontre.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Lecture de Mallarmé*, Paris, Corti, 1985, p.145.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 212. I have quoted the complete passage from *Mallarmé, Correspondance: Lettres sur la poésie*, ed. B. Marchal, Paris, Gallimard, 1995, p. 392.

Ricardou accepts that the poem is “about” the reflection of the Plough (Ursa Major) in a mirror, and uses this as justification for his RAPT since his proposed rewriting of the poem strengthens the structure of the poem, while simultaneously bringing it into a closer relationship to the meaning as understood by Ricardou. We must take seriously the warnings given by Robert Greer Cohen:

A cautionary remark: Mallarmé’s sense of humour and personal irony, his extreme modesty, must always be kept in mind. Everything about him indicates that he was a relentless seeker after Meaning - ‘il y des lois’, he solemnly said to the Rosny brothers - and therefore incapable of surreal, automatic, or ‘nonsense’ verse (other than the most frivolous). Also, nothing indicates a serious interest in the specifics of ‘facile occultism’. His fraternal sympathy and sense of common goal were tempered by pity: ‘pauvres kabbalistes...par inattention et malentendu (ils détachent) d’un Art des opérations qui lui sont intégrales et fondamentales pour les accomplir à tort, isolément, c’est encore une vénération, maladroite’; at another point (‘Magie’) he sees alchemy as leading to finance rather than art.<sup>39</sup>

There is a widely shared opinion that Mallarmé’s poetry lends itself to such analyses: “(...) comme on voit, les sonnets de Mallarmé sont un matériel de choix, comme la drosophilie en génétique”.<sup>40</sup> In fact, Queneau’s simile is misleading. *Drosophila*, or the fruit-fly, is favoured by the geneticist for its simplicity: it has only four genes and therefore its chromosomes are easy to identify and manipulate, whereas it is surely the complexity of Mallarmé’s work that has attracted the attention of so many critics. But there is always the possibility that this complexity makes it almost inevitable that a persistent critic will find something new to say about him. There will no doubt be many who on the evidence of Ricardou’s analysis will regard him as a “pauvre Kabbaliste”, but his approach is certainly not unique. Indeed, it is possible to find critics who, though they do not adopt the vocabulary of *textique*, submit the text to exactly the same rigorous scrutiny as Ricardou:

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<sup>39</sup> *Toward the poems of Mallarmé*, p.145.

<sup>40</sup> "Littérature potentielle", in Raymond Queneau, *Bâtons, Chiffres et Lettres*, Paris Gallimard, 1965, p. 340.

Phonetically and graphemically these tercets show a similarity to and a difference from the first two quatrains. The transformations discussed in terms of the first quatrain occur here also. Related anagrammatically to ‘Angoisse,’ ‘Agonise’ is also the death menacing the forms. ‘PHENIX’ is repeated in ‘FEU comme une NIXe’ and in ‘FIXe,’ ‘aBOLI’ might be linked to ‘OuBLI.’ But in the first quatrain there was a tendency toward a ‘purifying’ transformation, with a consequent contracting movement - from ‘lAMPadoPHORE’ to ‘AMPHORE,’ for example. Here, as is shown by the resemblance between ‘Phénix’ and ‘feu contre une nixe,’ the movement may also be expansive. At the same time, it may contract - ‘feu contre une nixe’ becomes ‘fixe.’ The reflections noted in the second quatrain occur here : ‘AU NORd.’ ‘vACAnte.’ But whereas the ‘reflecting’ letters of the second quatrain turned round a pivotal letter, here they also occur separately, as terms whose parallel structure shows a crossing over : ‘pROche’ la cROisée au nORd vacante un OR’ is perfectly symmetrical and it is reflected. Similarly, the two *ti* of ‘scinTillaTIons’ are reversed in ‘sITôt.’ The parallels, the reversals, the transformations and the identities that could be pointed out within these tercets or between the tercets and the quatrains are innumerable. But more important, both kinds of phonetic and graphemic repetition are present, and both work on one another. ‘Oubli’ is at the same time a repetition of ‘aboli bibelot. a transformation of it, and a transposition of some of its letters. In the same way ‘pROChe,’ ‘CROisée,’ ‘déCOR,’ ‘liCORnes,’ ‘COntRe.’ and ‘enCOR’ show a number of different relationships. These phonetic and graphemic phenomena explain nothing, of course; at most they would indicate a direction to be take.<sup>41</sup>

This quotation demonstrates that Ricardou is perhaps moderate in selecting the phenomena that he chooses to focus on. If there is any originality in his analysis of this sonnet, it lies in the terminology that he employs to describe them and indeed the only claim to novelty that he makes in this respect is the “isomorphisme antichorique” that he notes in respect of the opening and closing of the poem, that is to say the opposition of “Ses purs ongles” and “septuor“, and indeed, Burt fails to comment on this correspondence.

With the concept “antichorisme”, we have at least one discovery claimed by textique that is not confined to the works of this poet. Gilles Tronchet draws our attention to the example of James Joyce:

C’est encore un livre entier qu’embrasse (...) le bouclage de

<sup>41</sup> E.S. Burt, “Mallarmés ‘Sonnet en -yx’”, in *Stéphane Mallarmé: Modern Critical Views*, Ed Bloom, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1985, pp116-7.

*Finnegan's Wake*, dont on se souvient que l'ultime phrase, apparemment incomplète, s'achève... Par celle du début, à laquelle semblait manquer une partie ; il s'agit donc, en ce cas, d'un diaphéro(anti)chorisme arthromorhique (inversé par rapport à l'ordre courant de la lecture, puisque c'est le commencement qui sert de suite à la fin).<sup>42</sup>

Those readers that manage to reach the end of the aforementioned novel will easily recognise this fact. Not so obvious is that to be found in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, separated as the two elements are by several thousand pages and more artfully concealed :

**Longtemps**, je me suis couché de bonne heure (....)

(....) une place au contraire prolongé sans mesure \_ puisqu'ils touchent simultanément, comme des géants plongés dans les années, à des époques si distantes, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer - dans **le Temps**.<sup>43</sup>

A further paper was presented to a conference organised by Daniel Bilous that was held between the 24 and 27 October 1998. However, the proceedings were not published until 2006,<sup>44</sup> and it is clear from internal evidence of the article that Ricardou has updated it for the appearance of this collection, and it can therefore be said to represent his latest thinking on Mallarmé's poetry. This article submits the sonnet *Hommage (à Richard Wagner)* to analysis. As Mallarmé published it, it reads as follows:

Le silence déjà funèbre d'une moire  
 Dispose plus qu'un pli seul sur le mobilier  
 Que doit un tassement du principal pilier  
 Précipiter avec le manque de mémoire.

Notre si vieil ébat triomphal du grimoire,  
 Hiéroglyphes dont s'exalte le millier  
 A propager de l'aile un frisson familier !

<sup>42</sup> Gilles Tronchet, *A Propos de la textique : Un aperçu théorique*, unpublished, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> *Intelligibilité de l'écrit*, unpublished, 7/9, Caco(hyper)métareprésentation grammique, 4.2.3., p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> In *Mallarmé et après*, Ed. Daniel Bilous, Paris, Noesis, Collection Formules, 2006

Enfouillez-le-moi plutôt dans une armoire.

Du souriant fracas originel haï  
 Entre elles de clartés maîtresses a jailli  
 Jusque vers un parvis né pour le simulacre,

Trompettes tout haut d'or pâmé sur les vélins,  
 Le dieu Richard Wagner irradiant un sacre  
 Mal tu par l'encre même en sanglots sibyllins.

There is much in this article that is very interesting, not least the suggestion that the poem, ostensibly in honour of Wagner is built around the components of Mallarmé's name, most notably in Ricardou's opinion, in the final line: "**Mal tu par l'encre meme.**" This according to Ricardou invites a comparison between Mallarmé and Wagner. But Ricardou abandons this line, for reasons that we will return to in our conclusion, to concentrate on the structure of the sonnet which he believes to be defective in several respects. Thus because there is no equivalent internal rhyme in the fourth line of the first quatrain "(...) l'occurrence "**moi**", vis-à-vis du jeu des rimes classiques, se confirme, sous cet angle, comme une **caco(isochoro(choro))texture en "moiré".....**".<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the line: "Du souriant fracas originel haï" would, in the eyes of textique lead the reader to anticipate a similar structure in the line

Trompettes tout haut d'or pâmé sur les vélins

But this is in fact absent:

(...) avec la syllabe "**d'or**", privée de l'occurrence "**in**", annonciatrice de la rime, "**vélins**", qui, à son vers, la concerne, et dont la série des "**a**", dans cette hypothèse, avait nourri l'espoir. Ou, si l'on préfère, quand on prolonge l'examen, l'occurrence "**d'or**", parce qu'elle fait surgir, à la place adéquate, **une forme inadéquate**, empêche à sa façon, sur les syllabes **six** des premiers vers de chaque strophe, le correct accomplissement de la **sous(sur)structure** présumée, et provoque, à son égard, ce qu'il sied de nommer une **caco(hypo(isochoro(morpho)))texture en "précursion de la rime"**.<sup>46</sup>

And it should therefore be replaced by the word "larynx". In addition, Ricardou feels that the clash of "tassement" and "manqué" in lines four and five is irksome and

<sup>45</sup> Ibid p. 259.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 263 from "hupo", "below", "isochoro", "same place", "morpho", "form".

should be replaced. To this end Ricardou proposes a number of RAPT, and the final version of the sonnet appears like this:

Le silence déjà funèbre d'une moire  
 Dispose plus qu'un pli sur le mobilier  
 Que doit l'incurvation du principal pilier  
 Précipiter avec l'oublieuse mémoire.  
 Notre si vieil ébat triomphal du grimoire,  
 Hiéroglyphes dont s'exalte le millier  
 A propager de l'aile un frisson familier !  
 Enfouissez-le-nous plutôt dans une armoire.  
 Du souriant fracas originel haï  
 Entre elles de clartés maîtresses a jailli  
 Jusque vers un parvis né pour leur simulacre,  
 Trompettes et larynx pâmés sur les vélins,  
 Le dieu Richard Wagner irradiant un sacre  
 Mal tu par l'encre même en sanglots sibyllins.<sup>47</sup>

At the end of this article, Ricardou returns to the question of the ascription of such a poem in its rewritten form:

(...) l'**écrit** devenant ainsi, non plus seulement, comme on l'a prétendu (.....), un chantier ouvert, mais plutôt, moins vaguement, un **chantier ouvert à tous**, l'on peut envisager une **auto-multiplication des allo-rescripteurs dans le procès**.

Par suite, ce dont il s'agirait, c'est, en quelque espèce, chacun cédant l'initiative aux mots, non plus de la "disparition élocutoire du poète", mais plutôt, de l'expropriation élocutoire d'une kyrielle de poètes successifs. Ou, si l'on aime davantage, d'un possible accomplissement, peut-être imprévu, offert au ducassien principe, plus souvent énoncé que suivi : "La poésie doit être faite par tous. Non par un."<sup>48</sup>

To many readers this concept will no doubt be mildly shocking, while to others, it might seem faintly ultra-left.

In his analysis of a poem by José-Maria de Hérédia, "Némée", Ricardou demonstrates that it is not just in the poetry of Mallarmé that he is able to find complexity and opportunities to suggest a RAPT. This is the sonnet in question:

Depuis que le Dompteur entra dans la forêt

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 293.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 294.

En suivant sur le sol la formidable empreinte,  
Seul, un rugissement a trahi leur étreinte.  
Tout s'est tu. Le soleil s'abîme et disparaît.

A travers le hallier, la ronce et le guéret,  
Le pâtre épouvanté qui s'enfuit vers Tirynthe  
Se tourne, et voit d'un œil élargi par la crainte  
Surgir au bord des bois le grand fauve en arrêt.

Il s'écrie. Il a vu la terreur de Némée  
Qui sur le ciel sanglant ouvre sa gueule armée,  
Et la crinière éparses et les sinistres crocs;

Car l'ombre grandissante avec le crépuscule  
Fait, sous l'horrible peau qui flotte autour d'Hercule,  
Mêlant l'homme à la bête, un monstrueux héros.

At the representative level, as Ricardou puts it, he takes issue with Jean Fournier and Maurice Bastide,<sup>49</sup> questioning their identification of “le Dompteur” with Hercules. The title “Dompteur” is never applied in classical mythology to Hercules, because it always indicates Poseidon: “Damaïos : *Le Dompteur (Poseidon)*”<sup>50</sup> in which case, Heredia is guilty of inconsistency, for the Greek hero is Heracles, and not Hercules. If the Latin “Hercules” is to be preserved, then, as Ricardou would have it, Heredia should have written: “Depuis que **Neptune** entra dans la forêt....”

As it stands, the poem presents us with, “(...) une métamorphose mythologique inédite : Poseidon ayant pénétré dans les bois, c'est Héraklès qui en sort....”<sup>51</sup>

Immediately prior to this, Ricardou quotes the same dictionary:

damazô: “au propre, *soumettre au joug, domestiquer, en parlant d'animaux*”, “p. anal. *soumettre (une jeune fille) au joug de mariage*”, “*soumettre, vaincre: avec un sujet de divinité ou de personne*”, “par ext., *tuer, faire périr*”, “*tuer un sanglier, en parlant d'un lion; avec un sujet de choses*” ....<sup>52</sup>

Had he continued this line of enquiry, Ricardou would have noticed a further difficulty with this poem: Poseidon Hippios was the tamer of horses and not lions, in

<sup>49</sup> *Français en classe de 6e*, Paris, collection Lagarde et Maichard, Bordas, 1965, p. 138, quoted by Ricardou in “Une immersion du récit dans le texte”, in *Cahier de narratologie*, no. 5, Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis, 1991, p. 233.

<sup>50</sup> Anatole Bailly, *Dictionnaire grec-français*, Librairie Hachette, Paris, 1976, p. 429.

<sup>51</sup> “Une immersion du récit dans le texte”, *Loc. cit.*, p. 238.

<sup>52</sup> It is not clear from Ricardou's quotation whether the emphases are his or Bailly's.



at least two of the senses given by this dictionary, as he was the father of Pegasus and Arion was also known as Mare-tamer. Nonetheless, in order to resolve the first difficulty he suggests that we might, in a procedure that at that time was called by textique an OPA (Offre Publique d'Amélioration, this was dropped as it would be hard to offer anything to the deceased):

Depuis le **Chasseur** entre dans la forêt....<sup>53</sup>

However, this is immediately rejected as “une claire **OPA naïve**”<sup>54</sup> because it would resolve this difficulty at the representational level by reducing the metarepresentational structure of the poem, for within it Ricardou detects another antichorism similar to the one he has already found in the “sonnet en ix” :

Depuis le **Dompteur** dans la forêt

(....)

Mêlant l'homme à la bête, un **monstrueux** héros.<sup>55</sup>

This has the undeniable effect of removing the awkward repetition of the “D” in “**D**epuis le **D**ompteur...” which Ricardou considers contradicts the antichorism “fâcheusement”.<sup>56</sup> For this reason: “(....) la textique n'hésite pas à dire, du vocable “Dompteur”, qu'il est une **palinodo(textème)cacoscripture**, c'est-à-dire une cacoscripture qu'une palinodie transforme en élément textural”.<sup>57</sup>

This palinode illustrates another feature of textique that critics might find surprising: that there are occasions when a RAPT is possible but undesirable, and the imperfect poem has to be left in its flawed condition. According to Ricardou, and this is something that he has yet to commit to print, the more constrained and structured a piece of writing, the more it resists rewriting. This leads, however, to the principle set out in an article to which we have already referred:

(....) (le) **principe de circonspection**, dont voici l'énoncé : **quand un Récrit Avisé Par la Textique semble avoir résolu, de façon plus**

<sup>53</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 244.

<sup>54</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>55</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>56</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>57</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 256.

**ou moins satisfaisante, un problème d'écriture entrevu, il convient de se demander si, ce faisant, il ne détériore point, à son insu, certaine autre sur-structure au prime regard moins lisible.**<sup>58</sup>

For the most part, Ricardou has restricted his activities to the criticism of poetry. However, in 1999 he ventured a RAPT of the first paragraph of Perec's post-scriptum to his novel, *La Disparition* which originally read as follows:

L'ambition du "Scriptor", son propos, disons son souci, son souci constant, fut d'abord d'aboutir à un produit aussi original qu'instructif, à un produit qui aurait, qui pourrait avoir un pouvoir stimulant sur la construction, la narration, l'affabulation, l'action, disons, d'un mot, sur la façon du roman d'aujourd'hui.<sup>59</sup>

Ricardou's argument is that the constraint, in this case a lipogram, imposes the Latinism and vexatious repetitions on the text and in order to remove them he proposes a RAPT:

L'ambition du plumitif, son primordial souci, commandât-il maints calculs ingrats, fut, sans faillir jamais quant au but, d'offrir un produit aussi original qu'instructif, issu d'un postulat influant si fort sur la construction, la narration, l'affabulation, l'action qu'il gauchirait partout, au prix d'un oubli nul selon un soin assidu, l'optimum du roman sous nos climats.<sup>60</sup>

Noting only in passing that with this RAPT, Perec seems to metamorphose into Ricardou, we can see that the latter has slipped up seriously in including the word "selon", inadmissible in a "lipogram in e". This provides an opportunity for disaffected ex-texticien Bernard Magné to launch an attack on textique, which at times raises some valid objections. For example, Magné objects that "scriptor", fits in with the debates of the era which centred on the role of the "scripteur", whereas "plumitif" is pejorative. He rejects the suggestion that repetition must necessarily be a fault to be removed:

<sup>58</sup> "Tel qu'en lui-même enfin Mallarmé s'améliore", in op. cit., p. 273. Ricardou's emphases.

<sup>59</sup> Op. cit., p. 309.

<sup>60</sup> *Formules*, no. 3, 1999-2000, Paris, p. 194.

Réduire les répétitions du texte signé Perec à une simple facilité, c'est n'en point percevoir la fonction structurelle dans *La Disparition*, pourtant immédiatement lisible dans le cinquième des paragraphes du *Post-scriptum* (...). Le "Scripteur" y revendique en effet "son goût, son amour, sa passion pour l'accumulation, pour la saturation".<sup>61</sup>

He cannot, however, resist the opportunity to indulge in sarcasm:

**RAPT : Récrit Avisé Par la Textique ?**

Après ce que j'espère avoir réussi à montrer, je suggérerai plutôt :

**RAPT : Récrit Au Péril du Texte.**

Voire :

**RAPT : Récrit Avarié Par la Textique.**

Ou alors, travaillant un autre champ de connotations, j'assimilerai assez bien l'émondage imposé au texte de Georges Perec à une tentative de détextualisation: un **Début de Détextualisation par la Textique**. Quelque chose comme une variété de **DDT**, bref un **texticide**.<sup>62</sup>

Ricardou cannot restrain himself from replying in kind:

Certificat: "Je, soussigné Jean Ricardou, atteste que le professeur Bernard Magné, de l'Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, a suivi assidûment, de 1985 à 1990, les divers séminaires de textique, et qu'il ne lui a donc fallu que cinq ans pour comprendre qu'il ne comprenait pas. Jean Ricardou."<sup>63</sup>

Often textique is not so much concerned to find new phenomena as to categorise and provide new terms for phenomena that have been recognised for some time, though there might be a dialectic involved whereby this process of classification might lead to the discovery of new phenomena. The proposal of "matrices d'exhaustion" would lead one to look for examples to fill "empty" compartments, just as the existence of literary phenomena leads to the creation, in textique, of such matrices. Certainly, as the case of "antichorism" shows, the "discovery" of such literary effects, is welcome when it occurs, but this, one feels, is not the major motivation for the activity of textique. Moreover, it seems to me that terms like "dynamascripture" or

<sup>61</sup> *Formules*, no. 5, 2001-2002, Paris, p. 207.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 214.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 231.

“isochorisme” are not so cumbersome that they can be discounted on that basis alone, and these terms which are designed to be applied to literary devices that have existed long before the advent of textique may yet prove, in the future, to be a convenient way of referring to them.

What most will find difficult to accept will be the RAPT because, says Ricardou, many “confondent un rien trop écrits et Saintes Ecritures”. At times it does seem as though he is assuming too much because he fails to stress forcefully enough the didactic role that the procedure is intended to fulfil. Frequently taken as read, the clearest statement of this is to be found in his earlier essay on Mallarmé:

Recourir à ces récritures, toutefois, ne va point sans profit. En effet ce que, par tel biais, il est possible d’obtenir, c’est une poursuite, enfin, outre ses obstacles ordinaires, de l’analyse jusqu’ aux extrêmes de sa rigueur, puisque, sous les espèces d’*examens de praticabilité alternative*, (...) les récritures permettent éventuellement, soit, au sein d’une analyse, d’asseoir ou réfuter un diagnostic en cours, soit, à son terme, de tester quelque stratégie d’écriture aperçue. Or, avec cet enchaînement de la théorie et de la pratique par le maillon de l’analyse, si contraire à l’actuelle cartelisation du travail (à l’écrivain d’écrire, au lecteur de lire, au professeur de gloser, au mondain de causer)...<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “Une leçon d’écriture de Stéphane Mallarmé”, in *Mallarmé ou l’obscurité lumineuse*, Paris, Hermann, 1999, p. 199, the reference to Holy Scripture comes from the same page.

## Chapter 7. The fiction of Jean Ricardou: New Novel or New Novelist?

The principal aim of this chapter is to examine the fiction of Jean Ricardou of the 1980s, and along the way it will challenge the generally accepted view of Jean Ricardou's fiction prior to this which can be summarised as the belief that it is extremely and unremittingly formalist. This view accepts almost without question the thesis that Ricardou, as a result of his well known proposition that the novel was until the emergence of the nouveau roman under the sway of the dominant ideology and subject to the combined vices of representation of reality and the expression of the self, avoids anything in his own novels and short stories that could be considered as either reflecting the real world or autobiographical. There is indeed plenty of material in his fiction to encourage this view, but it is not too difficult to find elements in it that would allow alternative interpretations. That this has never happened requires explanation, for there are also elements in the earlier fiction of Jean Ricardou that cannot be reduced to this framework, elements that become more prominent in his later work.

The analysts of Ricardou's fiction up to and including *La Prise de Constantinople* have for the most part viewed it as formalist. Moreover, it is not surprising that a certain consensus has developed among those commentators on Ricardou's work, for example, Daniel Bilous,<sup>1</sup> Mireille Calle-Gruber<sup>2</sup> or Jean Claude Raillon,<sup>3</sup> who have collaborated with him over some time. But it is also the case that a number of sympathetic North American academics, have taken the statements made by Ricardou to mean that there is nothing in his fiction that can be related to the world beyond his fiction. Some of these, like Bruce Morrisette,<sup>4</sup> and Leon Roudiez,<sup>5</sup> who must have been acquainted with and possibly influenced by him, but even others who have

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<sup>1</sup> In his unpublished doctoral thesis "Mallarméides" of 1991.

<sup>2</sup> "Effets d'un texte non-saturé: *La prise de Constantinople*", *Poétique*, no 35, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> "Une Etude périlleusement excessive du texte cité", *Sud*, no. 8, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> "Generative techniques in Robbe-Grillet and Ricardou", in *Generative Literature and Generative Art: New Essays*, Fredricton, York Press, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> "Jean Ricardou and French Writing Today" in his book, *French Fiction Today: A New Direction*, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1972.

maintained a certain distance, such as Lynn Higgins<sup>6</sup> and Tobin Jones,<sup>7</sup> nevertheless, agree in interpreting Ricardou in this manner. As far as British critics<sup>8</sup> are concerned, when they mention Ricardou at all, it is usually in connection with other authors and in a generally hostile way, but one that also for the most part accepts this view of his fiction.

What Ricardou has said about his own fiction should be treated with caution. It is open to misinterpretation, and has indeed often been misinterpreted. Moreover, two other factors are at work: critics have always for whatever reason found it difficult to deal with his fiction and Ricardou has always provided many opportunities to interpret his work in a purely formalist manner. To take up the latter point, in his earliest writing the emphasis is on description and in *Révolutions minuscules* and *l'Observatoire de Cannes* there is virtually no dialogue. All the figures- one hesitates to call them characters- are anonymous. In later short stories, there is increased use of dialogue but it is so devoid of any emotion or content, so repetitive and stylised, that by no means could it be called naturalistic. Characters are now named, but so curiously, for example "Ed Word" in *La Prise de Constantinople*, can be no more than a cipher or allegorical figure. In *Les Lieux-dits* there appear characters called Crucis, Epsilon, and Attis (a species of red ant). This novel is constructed around an eight letter grid that is reminiscent of the chess board in *Alice through the Looking Glass* :

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<sup>6</sup> *Parables of Theory: Jean Ricardou's Metafiction*, Birmingham Alabama, Summa, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> "In Quest of a Newer Novel: Jean Ricardou's *La prise de Constantinople*", *Contemporary Literature*, no. 14, 1973.

<sup>8</sup> See for example those critics referred to in chapter 1.

BANNIERE  
 BEAUFORT  
 BELARBRE  
 BELCROIX  
 CENDRIER  
 CHAUMONT  
 HAUTBOIS  
 MONTEAUX

Eight is Ricardou's number of choice, and much of *La Prise de Constantinople* is structured around it.<sup>9</sup> Ricardou frequently uses his own work to illustrate his arguments. Examples abound in the series "Éléments de textique" that appeared in *Conséquences* and in many previous essays, but his fullest treatment of his own writings occurs in his contribution to the 1971 colloquium at Cerisy-la-salle, "Naissance d'une fiction"<sup>10</sup> which was rewritten and expanded to form the final section, "La fiction à mesure", of *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*.<sup>11</sup>

To a certain degree, it could be argued that Ricardou's criticism of his own works has conditioned subsequent readings of his texts. Reading Ricardou on Ricardou<sup>12</sup> one finds a constant emphasis on the mechanisms by which the work is written and little or no discussion of the content. And if anything, this emphasis becomes more pronounced. "Naissance d'une fiction" begins with these remarks:

Rien, un jour, ne m'a paru plus impératif que le projet de composer un livre qui édifiât sa fiction non comme la représentation d'une entité antécédente, réelle ou imaginaire, mais à partir de précis mécanismes de génération et de sélection. Le principe de choix peut se nommer *surdétermination*. Il exige que tout élément de texte y figure au moins

<sup>9</sup> For an exhaustive discussion of this see, Hélène Prigogine, "L'Aventure ricardolienne du nombre", in *Nouveau Roman : hier, aujourd'hui*, vol. 2, pp 353-378.

<sup>10</sup> *Nouveau Roman : hier, aujourd'hui*, vol. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Paris, Seuil, 1978, pp. 244-238.

<sup>12</sup> The principal article is "Naissance d'une fiction", which Ricardou presented to the colloquium of 1971 on the Nouveau Roman. This essay was rewritten and considerably expanded for the fifth section of *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*, an analysis of *La prise de Constantinople* that runs to one hundred and sixty one pages. There are also numerous references to his own fiction in *Le nouveau roman*.

pour deux raisons.<sup>13</sup>

Compare this with the equivalent passage from section five of *Problèmes du nouveau roman*:

Rien, si l'effort théorique s'efforce rétrospectivement d'en rendre compte, ne nous a paru un jour plus impérieux que l'objectif de construire un livre qui édifiât sa fiction d'une manière communément peu admise : non point selon le mécanisme d'une *reproduction* (celle, représentative, de telle entité antécédente appelée monde : celle expressive, de telle entité antécédente appelée Moi), mais bien selon le mécanisme d'une *production* (celle élaboratrice, qui d'une part, mettrait en œuvre certaines opérations exactes et, d'autre part, s'appliquerait à ne guère se dissimuler en son exercice). (.....) Par hypothèse, la question se pose de façon pressante : si nul choix préalable au travail du texte ne se trouve admis, quel critère saurait-on dès lors prendre en compte ? L'une des réponses les plus rigoureuses consiste évidemment à ne concevoir de critère qui ne vienne du texte lui-même.<sup>14</sup>

Those North American critics that have turned their attention to Ricardou's fiction can be divided between those, like Tobin Jones and Leon Roudiez who have confined themselves to situating Ricardou in his context and those who examine the fiction in a manner which entirely divorces it from the everyday world:

Even such a summary account (of *L'Observatoire de Cannes* -D.F.) should demonstrate that from the start Ricardou was ahead of almost everyone else in textual matters. In *La Prise de Constantinople* he goes even further in establishing the text's independence from signified and referent. The book has no other source than the book itself and its situation in a continuum of language and literature (...).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Naissance d'une fiction", *Nouveau Roman: hier, aujourd'hui*, Paris, UGE collection "10/18", 1972, Vol. 2, p. 379.

<sup>14</sup> "La fiction à mesure. (Problèmes de l'élaboration textuelle sur l'exemple de *La Prise de Constantinople*)", in *Nouveaux problèmes du nouveau roman*, p. 244.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Roudiez, *Jean Ricardou and French Writing Today*, being Chapter 15, of his book *French Fiction Today: A New Direction*, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1972, p. 372. The opinions of Tobin Jones can be found in his contribution, Chapter 7, to *The Contemporary Novel in France*, ed. William Thompson, University of Florida Press, (1984). Jones has the merit of extending his analysis to the later fiction dating from the 1980s.



Bruce Morrissette's article, 'Generative Techniques in Robbe-Grillet and Ricardou,'<sup>16</sup> despite the title, has little to say about Ricardou, apart from a long paragraph on generators employed by him in *La Prise de Constantinople*. Morrissette does, however, raise an interesting point regarding the parallels between serial music and the nouveau roman:

Not too long ago, Andrew Porter wrote an essay in the *New Yorker* on Pierre Boulez. In it he describes how Boulez composed his work in which Mallarmé is the central topic. He makes a little side issue in which he says that Schoenberg never would explain his structures and that only other composers, or extremely gifted musical critics, were able to reconstruct them, and that Schoenberg simply did not even want them referred to.<sup>17</sup>

At about the same time, Dina Sherzer published an essay that looked at *L'Observatoire de Cannes*, from the point of view of serial structures, inviting a comparison that she does not make explicitly, with modern music. She does, however, make the link with modernist painting:

Indeed in the *Observatoire de Cannes* everything is invented, constructed, and deployed artificially. And because the narrator constantly imposes a geometrical filter in the representation that he inscribes, the text is a formal construction which recalls the works of Cézanne, Picasso, and Braque, which are studies in shapes and volumes of objects, people and landscapes of the same region.<sup>18</sup>

Yet there are reasons for questioning the view that Ricardou is entirely formalist and on occasion even critics who seem to accept it either hint at other possibilities or are uneasy with this interpretation. One might expect thematic considerations to be heretical, but writing in 1989, Tobin Jones edges closer to them than he had dared previously:

It thus seems more reasonable to assume that in the consistent use of the figure and homological counterparts of eight, there is indeed a kind of signature of a personally thematic kind which reflects the meld of

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<sup>16</sup> This can be found in *Generative literature and generative art: New essays*, ed. David Leach, New York, York Press, 1983.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Serial constructs in the nouveau roman*, *Poetics Today*, vol. 1, part 3, 1980, p. 94.

theory, criticism, and fiction, that has become the benchmark of Ricardou's writings.<sup>19</sup>

Jean-Claude Raillon perhaps in an attempt to forestall the charge that Ricardou is purely formalist suggests that there is something almost organic about *La prise de Constantinople*. He employs the term "vivacité" as if the reading of it were somehow capable of constantly extending its bounds:

Une telle lecture fige en toute conscience formaliste le mouvement producteur du texte pour ne lui reconnaître plus, dans la lettre qui l'informe, d'autre mouvance. Le livre serait par là même inerte et clos; lettre morte.

C'est précisément la vivacité de cette lettre qu'il s'agit de mettre en évidence en prenant la précaution de pousser au plus loin la lecture de tels rapports producteurs.<sup>20</sup>

Mireille Calle-Gruber, who was also at the time close to Ricardou, attempts to use some of his ideas, derived it would seem from Goux, on the exchange value and use value of words, to analyse the same novel. The problem here is whether these terms which derive from Marx can be legitimately applied to literary criticism.

L'analyse que l'on se propose ne saurait être convaincante sans une reprise de l'évaluation marxiste du problème de valeur d'usage et de la valeur d'échange des marchandises telle qu'elle apparaît dans le chapitre du *Capital* et telle qu'elle est appliqué au travail de l'écriture par J-J. Goux dans *Economie et Symbolique*.<sup>21</sup>

But her main line of approach is similar to Raillon's: a non-saturated text offers multiple possible readings as opposed to a saturated text which is open only to one, leading to readings that are "périlleusement excessive".

Also appearing around this time, Lynn A. Higgins' book *Parables of Theory, Jean Ricardou's Metafiction*,<sup>22</sup> is the only extended study of Ricardou's fiction to date. As

<sup>19</sup> *Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 83, French Novelists since 1960*, Gale, 1989, p 196.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> *Effets d'un texte non-saturé*, Poétique, vol. 35, p. 326.

<sup>22</sup> *Parables of Theory, Jean Ricardou's Metafiction*, Birmingham Alabama, Summa Publications, Inc., 1984.

the title would suggest, like many others before her and since, she sees Ricardou primarily as being concerned with theoretical concepts, with a strong didactic streak, as the use of the word “parables” would suggest:

(...) Ricardou’s most significant contribution to contemporary thinking about fiction in general and the New Novel in particular lies less in the individual instances of influence than in his exploration of the relationships between fiction and theory, in what can be called his metafictional vision.<sup>23</sup>

But as a feminist, she is not slow to comment on a feature of Ricardou’s writing that is often only mentioned in passing by other critics, and that is its sexuality which sometimes takes on a sado-masochistic tone similar to passages in the novels of Robbe-Grillet or Simon. Towards the end of her book, almost as a hesitant afterthought, she writes;

The desire to produce oneself and thus be one’s own author - what Kellman calls “the Modernist ideal of autogeny” - is an existential project when viewed philosophically. Ricardou’s goal of reeducating himself and his reading public constitutes a sincere ideological commitment in and outside his fiction. The fantasmatic dimension of that desire emerges as an ambivalent myth of eroticism and meaning. When a mythical female image is at the same time the desired goal and the feared consequence of writing, and when her birth from the waves represents the ideal birth from words while simultaneously reconfirming the impossibility of purely self-begotten texts or authors, the only way she can be erased is to stop writing.<sup>24</sup>

I suggest that what Higgins has here at the back of her mind, is the transition, noted below, from the masculine “i” of *La Prise* and the feminine “o” of *La Prose de Constantinople*. Though Ricardou never makes it explicit, there is a suggestion that in the act of writing the libido is diminished or discharged, or worse, emasculated. A text that entirely generated itself, would be in these terms, parthenogenic, genetically an exact replica or clone of its progenitor and sterile in the artistic sense. Of course, one solution is to erase the female by giving up writing. The other might be to recognise the “impossibility of purely self-begotten texts” and accept the consequences.

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<sup>23</sup> p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> p.173.

Shortly after these words were written, Ricardou published *Le théâtre de métamorphoses*, a work that she sees as confirming her hypothesis, since in her view it recycles older writing in an attempt to create a new genre that Ricardou calls a “mixte”.

If Ricardou has turned away from fiction, it is not difficult to see why. The fundamental contradiction in his work has brought him to an impasse: while his essays persist in extolling the opacity and productive potential of poetic language, these theories are qualified if not falsified by a means of didactic parables. Ricardou’s attempts over two decades to weave fiction together in a seamless web have produced on the contrary a more and more frenzied critical schizophrenia.<sup>25</sup>

Events have not entirely confirmed Higgins’ conjecture as Ricardou later published a further collection of nouvelles under the title *La cathédrale de Sens*, demonstrating that he was still capable of producing fiction, but it is certainly the case that he has written no more novels, and perhaps this is because he has a problem with the genre. Nevertheless, Higgins through her feminism and her recognition of the erotic element in Ricardou’s fiction comes closest to realising that despite all the formalist elements and interpretations offered above, there are other possible ways to approach his work. Furthermore, Higgins’ reference to schizophrenia, in all probability not used in the clinical sense, is perhaps nearer to the mark than she anticipated. Thus in *Problèmes du nouveau roman* Ricardou provides clear hints as to how to interpret his works, some of which have been taken and, curiously, others ignored. *L’Observatoire de Cannes* is constructed according to certain principles, around triangles and V shapes:

La jeune baigneuse se trouve à l’apogée de cette obsession triangulaire: triangles du soutien-gorge et du slip du bain, cils blonds coagulés en une frise de triangles, mèche angulaire sur la joue, angle des jambes disjointes etc. *Le triangle se trouve ainsi crédité d’une valeur érotique.*<sup>26</sup>

Colours, topography and movements combine to create an erotic effect: “Les

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<sup>25</sup> p. 175.

<sup>26</sup> “Plume et caméra”, op. cit. p. 73, my emphases.

*mouvements* (le lent dévoilement du paysage lors de la montée du funiculaire provoque toute une série de dévoilements dont le strip-tease....)<sup>27</sup>

As we shall see, not only are these indications of an erotic element in scattered throughout his critical work but sexual anxieties and fantasies and autobiographical material are present in Ricardou's fiction to such an extent that one starts to wonder why no one has commented on them previously.

Ricardou has never shied away from describing, not just his own work, but that of others in terms of "strip-tease":

(.....) Salomé, (.....) en les descriptives lignes qui l'obtiennent, se livre tout à la fois d'un seul coup (puisqu'il est dit qu'elle vient d'entrer) et, aussi, peu à peu (puisque, selon une manière de "strip-tease scriptural", elle révèle successivement, de haut en bas, quelques-uns de ses charmes).<sup>28</sup>

Further on we shall see the use to which he puts this idea in *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, but it is already extensively employed in *L'Observatoire de Cannes* as Ricardou himself informs us:

Dans *L'Observatoire de Cannes*, le méthodique strip-tease minutieux prolongé sur deux chapitres répercute la kyrielle des déshabillages et dévoilements de toutes sortes que le livre à plaisir multiplie, qu'il s'agisse de jeunes femmes ou de paysages touristiques. Ainsi enseigne-t-il, à sa façon, sur le fonctionnement de la description qui forme, selon l'heureuse remarque de Vinci, une *découverte par degrés*.<sup>29</sup>

That Ricardou chose to adopt the term "strip-tease" rather than Da Vinci's neutral "discovery by degrees" even when the process is applied to tourist landscapes rather than to young women suggests that there is something more taking place here than the simple selection of literary terminology. This passage from *Le nouveau roman* alludes to the fact that *La prise de Constantinople* is constructed partly around the figure of a young woman whose feet are in Rome, head in Jerusalem and pubis in

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> *Une maladie chronique*, p. 70

<sup>29</sup> *Le nouveau roman*, pp. 78-9.

Constantinople:

Dans *La prise de Constantinople*, le multiple mimodrame qui occupe les huit chapitres de la partie centrale miniaturise bon nombre des dispositifs du roman tout entier. Par exemple : la répétition avec une constante d'irregularité, l'alternance réglée du masculin et du féminin, les microcycles du récit, le livre dans le livre, l'assimilation des mouvements guerriers et des gestes érotiques travaillent à l'une parmi les "déterminations pubiennes" de l'emplacement constantinopolitain.<sup>30</sup>

If this sexualisation of the text is not apparent enough, Ricardou, in the same book, reproduces on page 116, a sketch drawn by him in preparation for the writing of *La prise de Constantinople*, the title of which changes to *La prose de Constantinople* on the back cover, that makes it clear that in the course of the novel the phallic "i" becomes a vaginal "o". Moreover, the novel is dedicated to Isis: "*A Isis, donc*". In Egyptian mythology Osiris is murdered by his jealous rivals, cut into pieces and the body parts are cast into the Nile. His faithful wife, Isis, searches for and finds all his remains and puts her husband back together again. Unfortunately she is unable to find the last missing part and that happens to be his penis.

There is a further striking feature of *La prise de Constantinople*, that nobody so far has commented on: its repeated descriptions of ECT (Electro-convulsive therapy). "Ramifié selon des raffinements byzantins, immense, un éclair se déploie d'une tempe à l'autre, dans l'espace obscuri."<sup>31</sup> Often, the description of this procedure, in itself displays features of a psychiatric disorder called "perseveration", that is to say, the stereotypical repetition of an action or phrase beyond the point where the context demands it:

De nouveau, il faut donc, de nouveau, il faut donc s'allonger sur le lit élémentaire de nouveau, il faut donc s'allonger sur le lit élémentaire, la tête proche de nouveau, il faut donc s'allonger sur le lit élémentaire, la tête proche de la boîte vernie de nouveau, il faut donc s'allonger sur le lit élémentaire, la tête proche de la boîte vernie d'où émanent des circuits électriques qui conduisent, de nouveau, au léger casque temporal.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> This novel has no pagination.

These repeated accurate<sup>32</sup> descriptions of ECT are based on the personal experience of Ricardou who has confirmed<sup>33</sup> that he underwent such treatment at the time of the Algerian War of Independence, having feigned a psychiatric disorder to avoid conscription. Quite why other commentators have remained silent on this topic is not clear. It is possible that some of them were not aware of what they were reading, perhaps others were too tactful or embarrassed to broach the issue. Yet others may have recognised the descriptions for what they are but refrained from commenting on the basis that there is nothing of the self in Ricardou's writing. Nevertheless, the fact remains that these descriptions are central to the novel and thematically linked by the word "casque" to the medieval troops plundering and raping their way through Constantinople, so that the interrogations of Dr. Baseille that precede the administration of ECT become associated with the torture scenes set in Constantinople. This autobiographical facet of the novel, hard to miss one might have thought, give it, not just the "vivacité" noted by Raillon, but also a certain anxiety, general and all pervading at one level, specifically sexual at another.

So what of Ricardou's fictional output since 1982? In what follows, I hope to demonstrate that there is plenty of material to satisfy those content with interpreting Ricardou's writing as being markedly formalist, but that the anxieties, sexual and otherwise, if anything are more prominent in the writing published since 1982 than they were before. Ricardou has never been a prolific writer of fiction, which contrasts with the large amount of material, albeit most of it unpublished, that he has produced in the course of his work with textique. Since 1982 he has published only three volumes, and one must immediately add that much of the material in two of them dates from an earlier period in his career. *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, described

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<sup>32</sup> I can vouch for their accuracy. As a Registered Mental Nurse I helped administer ECT in the late seventies at Woodilee Hospital, Glasgow, where it was still occasionally employed as a treatment of last resort.

<sup>33</sup> In conversation with me, Paris 2003.

by the author as a “mixte”, appeared in 1982,<sup>34</sup> followed in 1988 by the republication of *Révolutions minuscules*,<sup>35</sup> and an entirely new collection of short stories, *La cathédrale de Sens*.<sup>36</sup> In the latter we find an announcement of a novel to come, that is allegedly “préparé”: *Le centre de gravité*, and in the reprint of *Révolutions minuscules*, a collection of short stories: *Le polygone de suspension*. However, Ricardou informed me, when asked about these works that only one short story was in fact written and remains unpublished. It would therefore seem that after the publication of *La cathédrale de Sens*, he more or less gave up writing fiction. Even prior to this, as a section of *Le théâtre des métamorphoses* entitled *L’empressement* demonstrates, Ricardou was scornful of those who write to order:

*Pressez-vous*, nous dit-on : hâtez-vous dans votre écriture. Cette fois, encore, c’est de prestesse qu’il s’agit. Seulement, ce n’est pas au lecteur qu’on la souhaite : c’est de l’écrivain qu’on la sollicite. Convenons-en d’abord : en sa roideur, ce commandement se rapporte à un quatrain d’exigences inéluctables. D’une part, *l’abondance féconde* : qui, à l’opposé du petit maître, aspire à passer pour un grand écrivain doit prendre une précaution majeure : s’appliquer à écrire grand. Bref, élargissant jusqu’à pléthore la litanie de ses ouvrages, il doit permettre que se disposent une fois de plus, en leur efficace incantatoire, la syllabique consonance de l’entendement et de l’engendrement, l’étymologique alliance du génie et du géniteur. D’autre part, *la restreinte période* : qui prétend à réduire quelque peu l’inattention des lecteurs, mais non moins des lectrices, doit avoir cure de souvent paraître. Bref, adoptant comme on sait un saisonnier régime de publication, il voit, en sa redite persistante, la physionomie de son nom devenir familière et conduire ainsi vers l’annuel ouvrage, irrésistiblement, la curiosité de plusieurs. En outre, *l’observance de mode* : qui entend bien séduire s’il se peut, l’opinion des lectrices, mais non moins des lecteurs, doit avoir souci d’être en phase avec le goût du jour. Bref, adaptant comme il sied son rythme d’écriture, il doit suivre au plus proche, avec le temps qui court, les métamorphoses, les parodies, les métempsycozes, les palinodies, de ce qui plaît. Enfin, *la franchise profonde* : qui, à l’antipode du petit traître, vise à toucher le cœur par l’innocence nue d’un discours très sincère doit tendre vers une précoce ardeur : s’impliquer au plus près. Bref, accourcissant jusqu’au moindre la distance de l’auteur de l’écrit, il doit prévenir tout travail trop précieux, avide de durée cosmique, et qui jamais ne fournit

<sup>34</sup> Paris, Seuil, in the collection "Fiction & Cie", 1982, p. 300.

<sup>35</sup> Paris, Les impressions nouvelles, 1988, p. 200.

<sup>36</sup> Paris, Les impressions nouvelles, 1988, p. 208.



mieux, à vide, que divers cosmétiques.<sup>37</sup>

These comments, which contain more than a hint of bitterness, might explain a certain slow rhythm of writing, but not a complete cessation. That Ricardou appears to have ceased writing fiction all together is the more surprising given that Ricardou has always claimed that advances in his theory are intimately combined with those in his fiction. Even where there at first sight appears to be new material, appearances can be deceptive. The first of the works mentioned above, *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, recycles a radio play, *Communications*, broadcast by France Culture in 1973, and in an abridged version that same year, by ORTF for the Prix Italia. It also incorporates certain sections of *L'Observatoire de Cannes* which he now calls "Improbables stripteases". Much of the new writing in this volume is of a theoretical nature accompanied by a number of line drawings and diagrams. The new version of *Révolutions minuscules* contains rewritten short stories from the original collection with the addition of a long novella, "Révélations minuscules", that doubles the size of this volume (it takes up 108 pages of 204 pages). Only *La cathédrale de Sens* is entirely new writing.

Having noted this recycling of material in Ricardou's fiction, we need to recall an element of his theoretical position that in part explains it, namely that all writing of any value must to some degree involve rewriting. Moreover, Ricardou frequently claims that advances in theory and practice go hand in hand, changing the "scripteur" along the way:

Le scripteur est le produit de son produit : il est une mobilité intra-scripturale. L'œuvre est un assemblage unitaire de textes. L'intertextualité restreinte est une chaîne de transformations. En négligeant, pour simplifier, le caractère incessant du procès, on peut écrire : produit du scripteur A le texte A le change en scripteur B, producteur d'un texte B, et ainsi de suite.<sup>38</sup>

What Ricardou calls in relation to the work of Claude Simon, the restricted intertext,

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<sup>37</sup> *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, pp. 31-32.

<sup>38</sup> "Claude Simon", textuellement", in *Claude Simon : analyse, théorie*, Paris, U.G.E., 1975, p. 12.

as opposed to what he here calls dismissively, the œuvre, is something almost organic that changes and grows. This is so because, if text A changes the writer, who then produces text B, the latter must logically result from text A. Rewriting is only the most obvious example of this process that is well documented in the biographies of many writers. A more general term for it might be what Claude Simon calls, borrowing the idea from Lévi-Strauss, “bricolage”: “Et pour qualifier ce travail de l'écrivain, (.....) il existe un mot lui convenant admirablement. Il a été employé par Lévi-Strauss mais je crois, avant lui déjà, par le cercle de Prague ; c'est celui de *bricolage*”.<sup>39</sup> The term “bricolage” may have a slightly different meaning for Simon, but Ricardou refers approvingly to Simon's statement at the end of “Claude Simon' textuellement”. A newer term, derived from computer technology, is “cut and paste”, for this is certainly, along with rewriting, one of the procedures that he adopts in *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*. The title of the work first appeared in the series of articles for *Texte en main* that we have already examined in relation to Ricardou's theories of writing workshops, where the theatre of metamorphoses is the page, in which not only the text but the scriptor is transformed. The clearest indication given by Ricardou of what he is attempting in these writings is contained in an interview from 1983.. In the first he is discussing *Le théâtre de métamorphoses* with Bernard Magné:

Ces deux activités disjointes (fiction et théorie), elles se réunissent certes dans mon œuvre, mais à demi, en quelque sorte, puisqu'en des livres séparés : romans d'un côté, essais de l'autre. Avec *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, voilà qu'elles se combinent dans un même livre. Je dis bien “combine” et non pas “assemblé”, car ce livre, ce n'est pas un “mélange” ( un fourre-tout désinvolte ), c'est un “mixte” (une diversité calculée). Bref, c'est un livre divisé, une *fiction*, qui s'efforce de déployer ses sortilèges (avec ses suspenses, avec ses stripteases), une *réflexion*, qui tente de comprendre des procédés (avec ses analyses, avec ses concepts). (...) Evidemment, il y a toutes sortes de façons pour permettre au lecteur de garder les pieds sur terre, ou, si l'on préfère, les yeux sur les lettres. Parmi celles que requiert *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, j'aimerai en souligner deux. L'une, (...) c'est de *rendre inclassable le texte offert à la lecture*. En effet, ne pouvant s'installer (s'endormir...) dans tel ou tel type de lecture, il est conduit à

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<sup>39</sup> Claude Simon "La fiction mot à mot", *Nouveau roman : hier, aujourd'hui*, vol. 2, Paris, U.G.E., 1972, p.96.

perpétuelle vigilance. (...) L'autre manière, c'est, *en les élargissant, de recourir aux procédés de la poésie traditionnelle*. Car, on ne le redira jamais assez, tel poème à forme réglée, s'il lui advient de susciter tel sentiment ou telle idée, c'est toujours, par le jeu de ses rythmes et se rimes, en rappelant le lecteur à l'ordre des... mots. *Le théâtre des métamorphoses* superpose au moins ces deux dispositifs : un travail très approfondi, non seulement sur les parallélismes de toute espèce (du rythme à la rime), mais aussi l'instabilité du genre (le fictionnel et le théorique).<sup>40</sup>

The cut and paste element of this work is evident in the juxtaposition of theoretical element, dialogue derived from the radio play, and the "improbable striptease", but there is a considerable element of "bricolage" involved also in the rewriting of the latter. The striptease occupies most of chapter 18 and all of chapter 19 of *L'Observatoire de Cannes*<sup>41</sup> and pages 200- 214 of *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*.

In *L'Observatoire de Cannes*, we find the following description:

Une silhouette - un mouvement d'étoffe - se devine, à gauche, dans l'embrasure de la porte.

Noir.

La jeune fille est entrée. Elle a fait trois pas. Elle est éblouie. Elle s'immobilise, presque de profil.

La corolle rose de la robe - dont le léger tissu, à partir de la taille, cesse d'être ajusté - ondoie un peu, encore, à hauteur des genoux, presque insensiblement.<sup>42</sup>

As it happens, this entire section of *L'Observatoire de Cannes*, has already reappeared in *La prise de Constantinople*, but also in a rewritten form:

Une silhouette - un mouvement d'étoffe - se devinera, à gauche, dans l'embrasure de la porte.

Noir.

La jeune fille sera entrée. Elle aura fait trois pas. Elle sera éblouie. Elle

<sup>40</sup> "Lire ce qui change", interview with Bernard Magné, in *Affaires de style*, no. 3, June, 1983, pp. 22-24.

<sup>41</sup> Paris, Minuit, 1961, pp. 162-180.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

si'immobilisera, presque de profil

La corolle rose de la robe - dont le léger tissu, à partir de la taille, cessera d'être ajusté - ondoiera un peu, encore, à hauteur des genoux, presque insensiblement

This in *Le théâtre des métamorphoses* becomes:

une silhouette - un mouvement d'étoffe - se devine, à Gauche, dans l'embrasure de la porte.

blanc.

la jeune fille sera entrÉe, elle fera quatre pas. elle aVait été éblOuie. elle s'immobilisa, presque de profil.

la corolle oraNge de la robe donT le léger tIssu, à partir de La taille, ceSsait D'être ajusté - a ONdoyé un peu, enCore, à hauteur Des genoux. presque insensiblement.<sup>43</sup>

Before we discuss it we need to account for two changes that do not seem at first sight to improve the text significantly. One is the removal of the word "noir" which is replaced by its antonym "blanc". It should be pointed out at this stage that this part of *L'Observatoire de Cannes* forms an intratext, in Ricardou's terminology, with the opening of *La prise de Constantiople*:

Rien

Sinon, peut-être, affleurant, le décalage qu'instaure telle certitude.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 201.

<sup>44</sup> Paris, Minuit, 1965. The reader should recall that there is no pagination to this book. These two lines constitute the first page.

Over the page the text continues, after another large blank space:

Le noir

Pour obscure qu'elle soit, il semble qu'on puisse revenir du plus loin sans accrédi-ter cette figuration du vide.

C'est la nuit, donc.

Et déjà, peu à peu, une clarté diffuse l'élucide.

The passage from the first novel involves the conflation of two scenes, a girl in the carriage of a funicular railway, and a stripper. The repetition of the word "noir" in this case, is representational as it represents both the lighting in the strip joint and the passage of the train through a number of short tunnels. The "noir" of both novels, emerges from "rien", and this is Ricardou's attempt to carry out Flaubert's project of writing a book out of (if not about) nothing.<sup>45</sup> In the rewriting that takes place for *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, "noir" becomes "blanc". This is in order to lessen the degree of representation while maintaining the texts "scripturality", because, here as so often with Ricardou, the word "blanc" refers to the blank page; the theatre of

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<sup>45</sup> See Ricardou's discussion of *La prise de Constantinople*, which takes up the last chapter of *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*.

metamorphoses.

Another curious feature of this process or rewriting is the successive change of the tenses of the verbs. Since it occurs in both the subsequent versions, it cannot be there to supply the correct capital letters for the next operation that we will examine. It is rather, as though the text marks each moment of its rewriting by a step back in time from the original, fictional, event described, becoming more “literary” at each stage, culminating in the use of the historic.

The most salient feature of the rewritten text is the abolition of upper case letters at the beginning of the sentence and their seemingly random distribution throughout the text. Ricardou is not averse to using such tactics to jolt the reader from his or her reading habits, which can become, in his opinion, too automatic. In this instance, the upper case letters reveal another text now embedded within the original writing: “Sachant que les lettres, en général, s’avoisinent selon des ensembles de mots, le lecteur tend à rapprocher telles capitales erratiques.”<sup>46</sup> In case the reader fails to carry out this task spontaneously, Ricardou repeats the instructions in *Le théâtre des m étamorphoses* :

S’il est astreint, de la sorte, alignant patiemment les lettres détectées, à ce quelque peu de d’écriture, le lecteur s’est mis en posture de bien saisir le critère des choix : ce qui, dans les lignes d’“Improbables strip-teases”, permet d’élire les lettres dignes d’une promotion majuscule, ce sont diverses phrases venues d’ailleurs. Ou, si l’on préfère, ce qui bat en brèche, ici, le représentatif, n’est rien de moins que l’actif d’un acrostiche ostentatoire : l’inscription éclatante, en archipel, dans le texte, d’un texte différent.<sup>47</sup>

The reader who carries these instructions out will discover the sonnet below:

Cette improbable vierge et son ptyx orangé  
Vont-ils donc déchiffrer avec un coup de livre  
Ce passage oublié que chante entre les lignes  
Le symbolique oiseau au plumage étranger

Un signe d’autrefois se souvient que c’est lui  
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre

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<sup>46</sup> Jean Ricardou, *Le tout-à-lire*, written replies to questions posed by Mireille Calle-Gruber in "Micromegas" no. 20, Rome, Bulzoni, 1982, p. 30.

<sup>47</sup> P. 258.

D'avoir inauguré tout le chapitre où lire  
Quand du stérile hymen a resplendi l'écrit.

Ses lettres secourent cette blanche agonie  
Par les pages infligée aux plumes qui les nient,  
Même l'horreur du mot où le secret est pris.

Hypogramme en ce lieu, si son pur éclat l'ose,  
Il s'immobilise au songe blanc de l'inscrit  
Du précis souvenir de la prise enfin prose.

This is presented again in a more conventional form on page 262 of the same book. No doubt, many readers will recognise it as a rewriting of a well known sonnet already quoted by Ricardou on page 258:

Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui  
Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre  
Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre  
Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui !

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui  
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre  
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre  
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie  
Par l'espace infligée à l'oiseau qui ne le nie,  
Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris.

Fantôme qu'à ce lieu son pur éclat assigne,  
Il s'immobilise au songe froid de mépris  
Que vêt parmi l'exil inutile le Cygne.

It is apparent from this, that the original "strip tease" has now become a far more complex process. It is now part of the intratextual chain described by Ricardou previously, but it has also become, due to Ricardou's reworking of it, an intertext that refers to the sonnet by Mallarmé. Furthermore, to borrow once again from the terminology of information technology, it has become an interactive site, since the reader is expected to reconstruct the sonnet from the text as presented. At this point one cannot help but think of Gérard Genette's study of what he calls "La littérature au second degré",<sup>48</sup> which he calls figuratively "palimpsests", or more scientifically,

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<sup>48</sup> *Palimpsestes*, Paris, Seuil, 1982.

hypertexts derived as they are from an earlier text. Often this relationship will be made clear by the author, perhaps, as in the case of Joyce's *Ulysses*, by the title; but it must be very rare indeed for one of the hypotexts, for in this case there are two, Mallarmé's sonnet, and the rewritten section of *L'Observatoire de Cannes*, to incorporate physically the hypertext.

This is in fact only the culmination of a feature of a text that proceeds by incorporating other writings, more often than not, those of Mallarmé. Take for example this passage from the first pages of section 2, "Le Texte":

Telles disparitions élocutoires, nul doute que plusieurs, certes chacun à sa manière, aient parfois entrevu qu'il était difficile d'y survivre.

JACQUELINE : AVEC PLAISIR, DANS SON LIT, ELLE SE LIVRE.

cathERINE : L'un, par, exemple, dénommé Pierre-Henri Simon, quand, dans une prose de journal, Littérature de laboratoire, il se prit à remarquer :

Oui, M(X) écrit bien : il se tue à bien écrire : il nous tue quelquefois aussi.

L'autre aux vers amples, renommés, Edgar Poe, quand, dans un poème numéral, *Tombeau de Stéphane Mallarmé*, il se rit à démarquer :

Tel qu'en autre enfin le texte entier le change,  
Le poète suicide avec son saugrenu  
Son siècle épouvanté de n'avoir pas connu  
Que les mots triomphaient dans cette croix étrange.

SUZEL : Somme toute, ainsi, le texte est cet appareil qui s'en prend à l'identitaire. A l'expression et à la représentation, en leur évidence. A l'auteur et au lecteur, en leur permanence. Sans doute, aussi, le texte, si l'on n'y veille, est ce qui se prend à s'y complaire : à faire chaque chose largement autre, il risque de s'affermir longuement lui-même. D'où un problème : le texte tend à subvertir toutes identités fors la sienne ; le texte tend à tout contester, fors lui-même. D'où un théorème : proprement machine à métamorphoses, le texte exige les métamorphoses de sa machine propre.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, p. 59.



It may come as something of a surprise to those familiar only with Ricardou the serious theoretician, to find him producing such playful material, to such an extent that the whole text becomes saturated with them, for example, on page 57 we find, “MICHEL ; Sans verve, le vorace et le double aujourd’hui va-t-il donc déchirer en un seul coup le livre?” This clearly echoes the sonnet mimicked later in the text. Elsewhere we read:

Monsieur BERT : On s’en souvient en effet. Dans les années quatre-vingts, le siècle mal armé de n’avoir pas connu son potentiel reposait sur la soif de l’essence, fut sollicité, jusques aux profondeurs par l’inévitable quatrième choc pétrolier (...) On y revient. Dans les allées des souterrains, le peuple épouvanté d’y être contenu, perdait bien trop pluriel, sa foi en l’existence.<sup>50</sup>

And further on a passage that plainly mimics the lines from Mallarmé’s homage to Poe:

Son siècle épouvanté de n’avoir pas connu  
Que la mort triomphait dans cette voix étrange.

A further subversion of the “serious” theoretical text is the games that Ricardou plays with the conventions of academic writing.

Petit A : *l’artifice mimétique*  
Grand B : *l’extension de la défiance.*  
Petit c : *La volte-face tactique.*  
Grand d : *La simulation de défaillance.*<sup>51</sup>

This playful attitude extends to the ephemera of publishing that Ricardou now seeks to incorporate into the more permanent “peritext” as Genette calls it:

Pour d’autres exemples récents, on consultera Jan Baetens, “Bande à part” (*Conséquences* no 1 1983), qui parle à juste titre, en particulier à propos de certaines initiatives de Jean Ricardou, d’une “textualisation”

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp. 78-79.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid pp. 41-42.

de la bande : prise en charge d'un élément éditorial par l'auteur qui le fait entrer dans le jeu du texte. Ainsi, pour *la Prise de Constantinople*, à la mutation terminale du titre en *Prose de Constantinople*, répondait une mutation de la bande, de (*recto*) "La machine à détraquer le temps" en (*verso*) "Le temps a détraqué la machine". Ou pour *les Lieux-dits, un petit guide d'un voyage dans le livre*, cette invite ambiguë, et rigoureusement adaptée au texte : "Devenez un voyageur à la page". Les Editions du Seuil ayant depuis plus ou moins renoncé à la pratique onéreuse de la bande, le même Ricardou imprime en 1982 sur la couverture du *Théâtre des métamorphoses* cette fausse bande en trompe l'œil : "Une nouvelle éducation textuelle." C'est peut-être la solution de l'avenir - je ne parle pas du slogan, mais du procédé technique, somme toute parallèle au passage du prière d'insérer d'une feuille naguère coûteusement encartée, à la quatrième de couverture.<sup>52</sup>

It is Genette, in another of his studies, *Palimpsestes*, who makes the observation that parody is not necessarily always satiric or mocking in intent. For Proust it seems to have formed part of his apprenticeship. The inclusion of parody and the other elements in the theoretical sections of this work would seem to indicate a similar serious intention in their use, perhaps to seduce the reader or to educate him or her in the "tricks of the trade" so to speak, or both simultaneously, is difficult to decide. But when set alongside the radio play "Communications" they make the latter seem decidedly dull and pedestrian which leads to a curious imbalance in the volume, in my view, since all the playful elements are contained in the theoretical sections, whilst the fictional elements are much more staid and conservative.

This accentuates another problem. Ricardou describes *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, as we have already noted, as a "mixte". If at this point in his career, Ricardou felt the need to depart from the novel, even in its "nouveau nouveau" form, perhaps he felt that the invention of a new genre would answer the question: how does one write as a "texticien"? If this is so, then one would have to say that the results of this initiative have been disappointing. The only previous example of which I am aware did not augur well. Herman Broch created a comparably mixed form in the final novel, "The Realist", of his trilogy, "The Sleepwalkers". Published in 1918, it alternates a prose story of an officer on leave from the western front, a poem about a Salvation Army girl, and a philosophical essay on the future of Western civilization.

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<sup>52</sup> Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, Paris, Seuil, 1987, pp. 33- 34.

The aim was no doubt to create a synthesis from this innovation, but the fact of the matter is that the separate parts of these books remain just that. Ricardou attempts a little more strenuously to make the elements more intermingled than does Bloch. He presents a large part of the theoretical passages as a parallel text on opposite pages to the script of the radio play, presenting the reader with the problem of how to proceed. Should we read them exactly as presented? In practice, it is clear that if anything is to be made of either, they must be read all the way through, one at a time. The only question that really is posed after this reading is whether one of the texts has a prior status or did they evolve simultaneously? But, in the final analysis, the four sections that go to make up *Le Le théâtre des métamorphoses*, that is - Le Mixte, Communications, Improbables stripteases, and Principes pour quelques transformations, could be extracted and reconstituted so that they could happily exist independently. They are as is the case with Broch's attempt at the same sort of thing, autonomous pieces of writing that have been cut and pasted. This is perhaps, closer to "bricolage" than Ricardou would care to admit. By its very nature, "bricoler" means to make use of material originally intended for another purpose or left over from another job. This is radically different from the activity of a craftsman who uses tools and materials selected for the job in hand. Which is not to say that in this instance Ricardou's writing is entirely devoid of hybrid or synthetic results, for as we have already seen, the writing devoted to theoretical issues includes large amounts of parody. It would nevertheless, be difficult to argue that the "mixte" in this form is in any way representative of a new genre arising out of theoretical advances such as Ricardou clearly hoped for at one stage.

It would seem therefore, that if this attempt at a departure from the novel form was not a total failure it remains something of a dead end, unless we can make a case for saying that it is an experiment ahead of its time, which may yet prove to be the case. The fact is, however, that after this, Ricardou returned to the short story. If *Le théâtre de métamorphoses* is a "mixte" by virtue of its bricolage, then *Révélation minuscules, en guise de préface, à la gloire de Jean Paulhan*, is so by reason of its defiance or contravention of the reader's expectations of what a preface should be. For whatever this piece of writing is, a preface, in the conventional sense, it certainly

is not. Appearing in 1988 as the preface to the revised edition of *Révolutions minuscules*, and in the process almost doubling the length of that volume, it consists of a mixture of autobiographical reminiscence, mingled with fantasy, literary theory, and parody. As such, it contrasts markedly with the cooler impersonal tone of his earliest stories, which were rewritten for the new edition, but in such miniscule ways that pass almost without notice. Along the way, this *Hommage* does indeed perform some of the functions of a conventional preface and explains features of the work it precedes, for example, when the first lines of the first story are linked to its ending:

*(...) à l'intérieur d'un lieu de minime ampleur, et à des places opposées, selon un jeu de lettres semblables, de réunir certains sons identiques, il avait souhaité, méticuleusement, que sa première histoire s'inaugurât par la sentence :*

*JE ne conterai guère, en l'extrême détail de ses péripéties, toutes les phrases qui m'ont ouvert l'accès de cette page où, à presque l'atteindre, me voici, parmi les coquilles, proche de l'objectif.*

*et se cloturât par la période :*

*Alors, sombre et la chevelure éparse, elle s'enfuit en tout sens sur la plage, parmi les coquilles, au risque de se perdre, à la poursuite de quelque nouveau JEU.<sup>53</sup>*

This is in turn linked to the final paragraph of the collection:

*(...) que la première histoire, Jeu, pourrait avoir aussi commencé de cette manière :*

*JE ne compterai guère, en l'extrême détail de leurs péripéties, toutes les phases qui m'ont ouvert l'accès de cette plage où, à presque l'atteindre, me voici, parmi les coquilles proche de l'objectif.*

*pour l'ultime, certes, Autopsy, c'est moi, toujours, qui souligne, se cloturât de la sorte :*

*Ce sera au prix, sur le sable, d'insignifiantes courbes que*

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<sup>53</sup> *Révolutions minuscules*, Paris, Impressions nouvelles, 1988, pp. 36-37, the whole of the preface is in italic.

*viendront compliquer peu à peu, en tous sens, infiniment, DES EMPREINTES DES OISEAUX.*<sup>54</sup>

At this point, then, the preface functions like a “normal” preface in that it indicates how the work that follows should be read. But two things are immediately apparent. Firstly, that the texts quoted by Ricardou are unstable and subject to rewriting, no more so than when it comes to their titles, which are in a constant state of flux (for example on page 81, where *La cathédrale de Sens* becomes “La cathédrale de censure” and “La cathédrale de sang”). But equally Ricardou rewrites when citing his own works, the original sentences of the short stories read as follows:

Je ne conterai guère, en l’extrême détail de leurs péripéties, toutes les phases qui m’ont ouvert l’accès de cette plage où, à presque l’atteindre, me voici, parmi les coquilles, proche de l’objectif.<sup>55</sup>

Alors, sombre et la chevelure éparse, elle s’enfuit en tous sens sur la page, parmi les coquilles, au risque de se perdre, à la poursuite de quelque nouveau jeu.<sup>56</sup>

Ce sera au prix, sur le sol, d’insignifiantes courbes que viendront compliquer peu à peu, en tous sens, infiniment, des empreintes d’oiseaux.<sup>57</sup>

The third of these comes from the short story called *Autobiographie* but which is referred to as “Autopsy” in the preface.

As is obvious from these quotations, Ricardou has reversed the positions of the words “plage” and “page”, changed “phases” for “phrases” and “sable” for “sol”. The effect of this rewriting of his own work by Ricardou is to implicate the reader in it, for particularly with the first pair, page/plage, which occurs frequently in this collection, the reader is induced, willy-nilly, to substitute one for the other whenever they appear in the text. Thus the opening of “Plage blanche” the penultimate story of the collection, invites the same substitution not least because it is clearly echoed by the ending of the final story, already quoted:

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid p. 113.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid p. 204.

Chaque fois, semble-t-il, des paysages : les oiseaux fragiles, dès le jour.

Plage blanche, courbe. Accumulation friable où, déplaçant chaque fois, semble-t-il, des paysages minuscules, se sont inscrites, floues, des empreintes de pas. Sans doute les oiseaux du large ont laissé sur les ondulations fragiles, dès le jour, le fin graphisme de leurs traces. Mais, gagnant près des reliefs sur l'ombre, la lumière simplifie.<sup>58</sup>

Unlike the traditional preface, however, which confines itself to an indication of how the author or critic hopes or believes the work under discussion should be read, this preface also indicates how the preface itself should be read, so that if we take the first and last sentences of it, there is an obvious play on the word “monumentalement”: “*Monumentalement prodigue de feuillets excessifs ou, (.....) divers vagues demi-mots, nus, mentalement*”.<sup>59</sup> Such play runs throughout the text, for example: “(....) *moi dont l'intime douceur nue espérait de ses soins, mentalement (...)*”<sup>60</sup> The reader is early on in the text alerted to this play on words by the text itself, so a sentence that appears on page 16 in this form, “(....) *il me semble même qu'apprenant d'aventure que j'en étais victime la plupart, m'infligeait sur le champ, sans un mot, un menu zéro mental, en eussent beaucoup ri.*” reappears as a quotation on page 22 with the capitals added to reinforce the point:

(....) *il me semble même qu'apprenant d'aventure que j'en étais victime la plupart, m'infligeant sur le champ, sans un MOT, un meNU zéro MENTAL, en eussent beaucoup ri.*

The self referential character of this piece reaches a climax with the word-counting that increasingly fills the final pages by means of which Ricardou demonstrates the construction of his sentences. For the convenience of the reader, I quote the shortest example:

(1) Du (2) coup, (3) l' (4) envoi (6) cet (7) objet (8) à (9) partir (10) de (11) tel (12) centre (13) exige (14) du (14) tireur (13), qui (12) hélas (11) quelquefois (10) n' (9) en (8) a (7) cure (6), un (5) luxe (4) de (3)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid p. 189.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid pp. 11 & 108.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid p. 58, my underlining.

*soins (2) assidus (1).*<sup>61</sup>

Thus the syllable “du” occupies the first, last and central positions in the sentence. This contrasts strangely with *La prise de Constantinople* which has, as previously noted, no pagination. With the latter Ricardou seemed to go out of his way to obstruct the reader’s attempts to unravel his intentions whereas in the case of *Révélations minuscules*, he appears ready to undertake the task on his or her behalf.

So far we have established that in Ricardou’s later fiction he continues to explore aspects of form, and in particular the practice of rewriting. We shall see Ricardou continuing his research in *La Cathédrale de Sens*. However, the later work has in addition a strong autobiographical element combined with powerful fantasies and anxieties. We have already seen him use his own experience of ECT (electro-convulsive therapy) in *La prise de Constantinople*. In the case of *Révélations minuscules* the stimulus for the work is Ricardou’s recollection of the weekly games of boule in which he played. The regular players, or so Ricardou at one time thought, included the following: “(cette) *abracadabrante kyrielle*: Jacques Audiberti, André Bay, Pierre Béarn, Jacques Bens, Yves Berger, Jérôme Lindon, Jean Paulhan, Bernard Pivot, Jean Ricardou, Claude Simon, Maurice Toesca.”<sup>62</sup>

These games were played on a Sunday at the Arènes de Lutèce, off the rue Monge in Paris. This must have been in the early and mid sixties at the latest since Paulhan died in 1968.

One cause of Ricardou’s anxiety was his mistaken recollection of the participants, for it emerges that Jean-Pierre Richard never played in these games. Ricardou quotes Richard himself to this effect:

*Combien je regrette de n’avoir jamais pu participer à l’une des messes boulistiques que présidait, si j’en crois la légende, Jean Paulhan, le dimanche matin, dans le rond des Arènes de Lutèce!*<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid p. 87.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid p.16.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid p. 18.

Of course, it may be that Richard is the one who is mistaken and that he did, even if on only one two occasions, in fact attend these social gatherings, and in a sense, the facts of the case do not really matter, for it is Ricardou's Freudian explanation of the lapsus that is more interesting than the reality, for, as is often the case with Freudian analyses, the analysis is not invalidated by a change in the facts. Thus the reasons that Ricardou gives for the lapsus, that is to say his insecurities surrounding his social background, the traces of his regional accent, his status as an autodidact, and the fantasies surrounding his parentage would remain whether Ricardou's error consisted in thinking, as he maintains, that Richard was there, when he was not, or in believing that he was not there when he was. The explanation would be equally convincing for both possibilities.<sup>64</sup>

The explanation given by Ricardou for this "false memory", has as much to do with his social insecurities as it does with any infantile trauma, but, as so often in such cases, difficulties with authority are complicated by those experienced earlier with the father. Ricardou thinks that others, better educated formally than he, regard him as marked by what he calls "sa crasse inculture d'autodidacte".<sup>65</sup> We must bear in mind that Ricardou is not a product of the French university system, indeed he never fails to avail himself of the opportunity to decry "les universitaires". In Ricardou's self-analysis, he detects an affinity between himself and Jean-Pierre Richard as they share an interest in Mallarmé's poetry; therefore, they might be rivals, or alternatively, they might be academic collaborators. More bizarrely, they might be related. Ricardou suggests that he thought incorrectly that Richard played in the Sunday games of boules because his subconscious saw a parental connection in their names. Thus "ricard" is the occitane version of the word "Richard", with the addition of a diminutive suffix "-ou", which means, rock and roll fans will be delighted to learn, that "ricardou" translates as "little Richard":

*(...) l'éminent critique de la Sorbonne dans la liste des arénuleux dominicaux sphérophiles, tout bonnement parce qu'ainsi, sans le savoir, il permettait, à peine émis le conjectural nom Ricardou, que fût*

<sup>64</sup> For a discussion of this peculiarity of Freudianism, see Sebastiano Timpanero, "The Freudian Slip", London, New Left Review, no 91, London 1975, pp 43-56.

<sup>65</sup> *Révolutions minuscules*, p. 104.



*soudain retour le pseudopatronyme Richard, lequel, victime d'un ajout et d'un retrait totalement fantasmatiques, en formait, semble-t-il, l'embryon angoissant.*<sup>66</sup>

This musing initiates another set of word games. Since Richard taught at the Sorbonne and both it and the Arènes de Lutèce are situated off the rue Monge, Ricardou comes up with a fine Spoonerism, in “le songe de la mort bonne”.<sup>67</sup>

If the fantasy dependent upon the name of Jean -Pierre Richard seems mildly odd, an incident described involving Jean Paulhan, or at least Ricardou’s reaction to it, seems very strange. According to the latter, in many of the grounds devoted to the playing of boules there can be found a small naked statuette in a small grotto. A team that fails to record a score in a game is obliged to kiss its buttocks in observation of “l’occulte culte de Fanny”, a name that Ricardou conjectures, derives from “far niente”:

*Nul boulodrome du Midi, sauf à se mépriser, qui ne porte en quelque angle, à précise hauteur, une discrète armoire dont la pénombre offre de dos, argentine, intégrale, certaine demoiselle nue.*<sup>68</sup>

In the absence of such a statuette, it seems that the circle marked out by the players from which the boules are launched will serve equally well, this being known as the “rond de Fanny”. It is this action of bending down a kissing the sand that Ricardou remembers Paulhan performing. This seemingly innocent act apparently had a strange effect on the author:

*Tremblant, je l'avoue, sous un étrange effet d'émotion, j'ai découvert ainsi, comme premier indice de l'appui sur le sol, une aire arénuleuse dessinant une ellipse, à chacun de ses genoux, sur l'antique pantalon bistre. Mais, surtout, décisifs cette fois, oui vraiment, bien qu'infimes, ce que j'ai aperçu (trois sur l'une, un seul sur l'autre en bas), ce sont divers calculs de sable aux deux lèvres fermées.*<sup>69</sup>

Ricardou suggests that the reader influenced by Freudianism might postulate two

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid p. 88.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid p.28.

psychological disturbances in operation here: homosexuality and gerontophilia, only to withdraw them and propose another:

*Si les grains de silice s'étaient empreints d'une manière indélébile dans l'esprit de l'écrivain débutant, c'était, non point, comme la trompeuse introspection l'en avait trop longtemps convaincu, parce qu'en l'attente submergée d'une terreur imprévue, il avait fixé avec démesure la bouche close du considérables homme de lettres, mais, à l'inverse, parce qu'ayant réuni sans le savoir, d'emblée, les grains de sable selon l'inaugurale fourche de sa propre signature, il avait, sur le mode subliminal, comme en tirets ou pointillés, continué d'inscrire, avec une virtuosité toute phantasmatique, sur les deux lèvres de l'augure, les douze signes du prénom puis de son propre nom.<sup>70</sup>*

This waking dream could be interpreted as a wish fulfilment of the desire for fame and recognition, the name of Jean Ricardou will be on everybody's lips, "sur toutes les lèvres", not least on those of this grand old man of letters, who is revealingly called the augury. There is even the suggestion that Paulhan deliberately contrived this scene, perhaps to indicate his heir or successor:

*En effet, si l'on accepte, pourquoi non, de l'initiale fourche triple, qu'elle est la juste empreinte du porte-plume, nul doute alors, ayant dès le début saisi sans détour à quel point la sphérophilie était un pur prétexte dans l'affaire, que Paulhan (il faut espérer, et le mieux, d'un écrivain voué aux minuties) avait anticipé une experte réponse en sachant disposer lui-même, avec une millimétrique rigueur, les quatre scrupules sur ses propres lèvres, sous couvert de baiser, au sol, le substitutif rond de Fanny, l'on s'en souvient, selon le clandestin rite occitan.<sup>71</sup>*

How seriously one is supposed to take all this is, in my view, indicated by the humorous inflation of the language, for example, "le substitutif rond de Fanny", which, I would suggest is triggered by Richard's initial "messes boulistiques". Perhaps this paragraph gives the game away:

*Et d'autant plus que le pire advenait, ce me semble, non point il murmurait, ainsi, contre, munie je crois d'une psyché hebdomadaire paroi improbable, mais plutôt quand, ayant pris la minuscule résolution, je suppose, de se mettre enfin à portée de quiconque, et*

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p 45.

*adoptant du coup sans le savoir, l'aimable ton des docteurs en Sorbonne, il se risquait à vous susurrer, en guise de préface, "attends, je vais tout t'expliquer".*<sup>72</sup>

The bathos of this final remark gives reason to think that the piece is in part a parody of a certain academic style. But quite how this all reflects to the glory of Jean Paulhan is not so clear. Perhaps this title is ironic, but an answer is suggested below.

If there is any doubt concerning Ricardou's humorous intent, it should surely be dispelled by his choice of Mallarmé's poem "M' introduire dans ton histoire" for his peculiar form of commentary, as it is surely meant to reflect the erroneous introduction of Richard into the history of the Sunday boules games. The title undergoes some amusing mutations, "M' introduire dans ton hystère", culminating in the fine porte-manteau word "mysthoire",<sup>73</sup> before nodding off: "M' endormir dans cette histoire".<sup>74</sup>

Mallarmé's original poem in full reads as follows:

M' introduire dans ton histoire  
C'est un héros effarouché  
S'il a du talon nu touché  
Quelque gazon territoire

A des glaciers attentatoire  
Je ne sais le naïf péché  
Que tu n'auras pas empêché  
De rire très haut sa victoire

Dis si je ne suis pas joyeux  
Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux  
De voir en l'air que ce feu troue

Avec des royaumes épars  
Comme mourir pourpre la roue  
Du seul vespéral de mes chars

It is the last two lines that he chooses to play with, making them refer to, now himself, now to Raymond Roussel or Jean -Pierre Richard:

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid p. 83.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid p. 98.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 107.

Comme mourir pourpre la roue  
Du Seuil vespéral de Richard <sup>75</sup>

One could go on almost indefinitely unravelling the references and word games in this work, but one must call a halt at some point to ask what its purpose is. It may be that the shuttling to and fro that structures the work is meant to represent the trajectory of the bowls and the players as they amble from one end of the Arènes de Lutèce to the other. Thus *Révélation minuscules* could be considered a homage to Paulhan the player of pétanque, as much as the scourge of literary terrorism.

Ricardou describes his intentions in writing *La cathédrale de Sens* in the following terms:

Ce que j'ai opéré, dans *La Cathédrale de Sens*, c'est (...) l'inhibition de l'écrivain face au commentaire. Borges, dans *Le jardin au sentiers qui bifurquent*, commente un livre qu'il n'écrit pas. Dans *La Cathédrale de Sens*, ce sont les fictions qui, de temps à autre, en viennent à se commenter elles-mêmes. Ce que je fais paraître, en passant à cet acte, c'est ce qui est en général prohibé chez l'écrivain, son désir de se commenter sur place (...). Il s'agit, non pas de remplacer par moment la fiction par de l'analyse, mais d'enrichir, en les inquiétant et les relançant, la densité et le rythme de la fiction.<sup>76</sup>

*La cathédrale de Sens*, consists of seven stories all of which are independent of each other, apart from "Résipiscence" which immediately follows "Supercherie". The latter is constructed around the breasts of stone sirens in a fountain leading to the mention of a "lupanar" (p. 143.) which is also referred to as a Cathédrale de Seins, this becomes the location for the following story. All the stories continue with both the formal concerns that characterise earlier work and the autobiographical fantasy elements and some show thematic links with earlier writing. Delacroix, who appears in *Les Lieux-dits* disguised as a painter called "Crucis" is the subject of "Conte dans le goût d'autrefois". "Enterrement d'une île" is set in Cannes, and concerns the sexual stirrings of an infant being carried by an adolescent girl to an islet that has since been buried under la Croisette. "Une promenade contrariée" is about a couple planting a

<sup>75</sup> Ibid p. 93.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Marc Avelot, in *Le mensuel littéraire et poétique*, no. 6, April, Paris, 1988, p. 8.

terrorist bomb. With its reference to the fascist organisation Occident it is clearly to be read with Ricardou's earlier story "Incident" from *Révolutions minuscules* in mind, with its whirling pigeon: "-Cela veut dire: 'L rêve est révolu au profit de la révolution'. Ou bien 'Au bénéfice de la révolution est révolu le vol'." <sup>77</sup> "L'art du X" reveals Ricardou's obsession Mallarmé at its most pronounced as it contains eight rewritings of his "Sonnet en X".

Often there are direct self-referential links with *Révolutions minuscules*, and its key word "monumentalement":

Hélas, d'échos en échecs, ce qui de proche en proche en est venu à m'apparaître, c'est, impitoyablement, l'absurde inanité d'un tel labeur: "Délai, c'est délice, corps, Nemo nul, mentholé..... Délice, c'est décès, corps nu momentanément..... Délice, c'est cornemuse....". Si bien qu'avec un piètre sourire j'en suis venu à murmurer : "il ment, le monument allemand, monumentalement". <sup>78</sup>

Throughout this collection Ricardou takes word play to extremes: "Incapable, évidemment, du fait de sa déformation professionnelle, de résister au moindre parmi les écrits (...)" <sup>79</sup> What he cannot resist in these texts is the compulsion to metamorphose them through all their possible permutations. There are frequent incidents when as Ricardou himself states in the interview quoted above, the rhythm of the story is interrupted while he is driven to push a phrase as far as he can, after which his equilibrium is re-established. This, with the increasing use of perfect and pluperfect subjunctives, is a typical example of something that pervades the whole collection:

Ainsi avait-il suffi, une fois, que j'eusse entendu un quelconque marin scandinave en bordée prétendre, un peu trop bas, dans la pièce voisine, "I want to see", "je veux voir", pour que sitôt je conçusse "Je veux Tootsie". Et même, vite, par le bizarre biais d'un bégaiement bilingue lui-même bientôt scindé en deux : tantôt "Je veux voir Tootsie", tantôt "Je veux Tootsie, pour voir". Or, évidemment, quand, selon tel mécanisme déraisonnable, le navigateur en était venu à scander, dans ma tête, "I want two seas", "Je veux deux mers", alors, dessous, le vase avait débordé et, enfin, j'avais pu reprendre mon sang-

<sup>77</sup> *La Cathédrale de Sens*, p. 117.

<sup>78</sup> "Le lapsus circulaire" in *ibid*, p. 65.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*. p. 76.

froid.<sup>80</sup>

For those that enjoy the formalist side of Ricardou “L’art du X” will provide endless pleasure. This remarkable story, some twenty pages long, is composed entirely of sentences of twelve words: “-Par une remarque : chaque phrase, toujours est écrite juste avec douze mots.”<sup>81</sup> Twelve is one of Ricardou’s favoured numbers, apart, of course, being the number of syllables required for an alexandrine line, it is the total of his name, Jean (4) plus Ricardou (8), the latter also determining the eight variations on Mallarmé’s sonnet that he produces. The subject matter sends the reader back to the final sections of *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*.

*La cathédrale de Sens*, can therefore be said to show all the formalist features of Ricardou’s writing that are evident in his previous work. But the autobiographical elements continue to emerge, and, if anything, the sexual fantasies are more pronounced. “Le lapsus circulaire”, the first, and by far the longest story of *La cathédrale de Sens*, is a fantasy revolving around the idea that Jean Ricardou is a changeling, a fantasy that becomes increasingly elaborate as the story unfolds. Noël (or is he Jean?) is undergoing hypnosis by a doctor. Lying on the couch he reveals that his “spiritual father” is “Ryvéla” (It later emerges that his first name is Paul). His mother, la Marquise, - it is noticeable that this is the only point at which a mother figure appears in Ricardou’s tales<sup>82</sup> -, is promiscuous, so it is not clear who the father is. It may be the electrician M. Ricardou, who carries out maintenance work at the château more frequently than might be thought necessary. When Jean was born, it was suspected that he had a weak heart, so Ricardou père might have swapped the children at birth to ensure that he receives the best medical treatment, but in fact he might have been merely reclaiming his own child and Mme Ricardou might have been unfaithful. And so the story descends into a nightmare of neurotic speculations that repeat and amplify those of *Révélation minuscules*.

A similar amplification takes place with the “strip-teases”. Prior to *La cathédrale de Sens* the women described in these scenes kept their fictional clothes on. Now, they

<sup>80</sup> "Supercherie", in *ibid*, p. 134.

<sup>81</sup> *La Cathédrale de Sens*, pp.186-187.

<sup>82</sup> She is not mentioned in the autobiographical notes in *Le théâtre des métamorphoses*.

go the whole way, and more, in a scene from the story *Résipiscence*, set in a brothel where the clients play a game based on their names and the rolling of dice which causes the prostitute to remove items of her clothing one by one:

Mourant d’impatience, tandis qu’au fond de moi l’humeur accrue se fait insupportable, j’envisage le cas où, avec ce client par exemple, et à la suite d’une des mémorables procédures antécédentes, mon déshabillage s’étant ouvert par l’élégant retrait de la chaussure gauche, et s’étant vite achevé, ainsi, avec, l’éviction du gant sénestre, c’est en respectant avec précaution, sur ma jeune stature, et les lunettes de myopie, et le porte-jarretelles, et la robe enchanteuse, et (si profuses que d’éventuelles melliflueuses eussent pu soudre (peu à peu) en secret dessous) l’inévitable slip aux carreaux verts et noirs, et l’enivrant soutien-gorge, et chaque bas jusqu’au plus haut de chaque jambe, et chaque boucle d’or au strict début de chaque oreille, et la chaussure droite, enfin, un rien moins escarpée afin de garantir au mieux à ma démarche les perceptibles répétitives aspérités d’une boiterie nécessaire, c’est conservant avec dévotion sur ma jeune statue, disais-je, et sans la moindre élastique tolérance, et sans le plus ténu des compromis, les divers ornements dont on semble avoir lu la liste, qu’il nous serait seulement permis ensuite, à mon client et à moi-même (et quelquefois (on le comprend), par suite d’incontournables inconvénients, selon un labyrinthe de péripties impératives), de nous livrer (et dût un progressif désordre perturber (mot à mot) le vaste autel d’abord impeccable) millimètre par millimètre à l’énigmatique commerce d’amour.<sup>83</sup>

Further on in the story, (p. 165), the strip-tease becomes a “peep show”, which, I assume Ricardou was aware, is somewhat seedier than a strip-tease. In a “peep show” the “client” watches from behind a screen or through a peep-hole, so that he can masturbate at leisure, whereas with a striptease the audience sits together and some sense of decorum is maintained.

In a further departure from his previous practice, Ricardou introduces dates to his descriptions of Cannes, where he was born in 1932. In “Enterrement d’une île”, set in 1936, he describes an incident in which a child is carried by a pubescent girl to a small island:

Les mains de l’enfant se croisent sous le menton de la porteuse. Mais son visage se baisse. Mais son regard entre en rapport, tout proches, avec les cheveux lisses nettement partagés. Alors, peut-être

<sup>83</sup> *La Cathédrale de Sens*, pp.157-158.

parce que, de façon étonnante, cette raie presque blanche dans la chevelure très sombre propose comme une réplique, en plus petit, de l'île vers laquelle eux-mêmes ils se dirigent, peut-être parce que de façon surprenante, cette ligne claire, très différente du cuivre de la peau ailleurs bien visible, lui ouvre il ne sait quelle intimité inconcevable, il se sent transporté, de manière subite, par une sorte de ravissement. Soudain, se font effervescents, dessous, divers détails de la baigneuse : la douceur de ses joues entre les avant-bras, la rondeur des épaules au contact des deux cuisses, le relief de ses seins sous les jambes tendues. Et, un temps après, quand elle l'a laissé descendre, avec lenteur, avec précaution, sur le sol ouvragé de l'île, elle remarque son air rêveur (.....)<sup>84</sup>

The discovery of infantile sexuality is usually attributed to Sigmund Freud and Ricardou has always insisted that the great thinkers of the modern era are Marx, Mallarmé and Freud : “Supercherie”, carries the dedication “A la mémoire de Sigmund Phreud, nécessairement”.<sup>85</sup> It is in his fiction that Ricardou’s debt to Freud emerges most obviously in the nature of the subject matter that it portrays. The title of the first section of “Le caractère singulier de cette eau” : “Les hors-textes”, which examines the Freudian interpretations of Poe’s writing offered by Marie Bonaparte and Gaston Bachelard, might encourage the superficial reader to imagine that Ricardou is rejecting them out of hand as being external or alien to the text under consideration, *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Closer attention to what Ricardou writes confirms that this is not the case. Poe describes a land where the water has four qualities:

(...) (pas de liquidité sauf en cascades, dissolution de gomme arabique sur les déclivités peu sensibles, couleur variable, veines et leur étrange cohésion), Marie Bonaparte n'utilise qu'un seul, l'idée des veines. Sans doute un objet peut-il symboliser par un seul de ses caractères : C'est précisément le définir comme centre possible d'un symbolisme pluriel. Mais au lieu d'admettre qu'elle néglige les autres attributs, Marie Bonaparte les escamote en laissant entendre que leur déchiffrement, trop facile pour être noté, apporterait de nouvelles concordances. C'est ainsi qu'une exégèse partielle, dont il ne nous appartient pas ici de discuter le bien fondé, prétend indûment à l'exhaustivité par un coup de force herméneutique.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, pp. 105-106.

<sup>85</sup> *La cathédrale de Sens*, p. 127.

<sup>86</sup> *Problèmes du nouveau roman*, p 195.



The only legitimate inference that we can make from these remarks is that it is not Bonaparte's Freudianism that is at issue but her method, and Ricardou abstains on her conclusions. He takes a similar line with Bachelard, who appears to complete Bonaparte's exegesis. Ricardou quotes from his study *l'Eau et les Rêves*:

Mais le conteur qui commence par une narration descriptive éprouve le besoin de donner une impression d'étrangeté. Il faut donc qu'il invente; il faut donc qu'il puise en son inconscient.

Nous y distinguons un sophisme par tautologie. Dire d'un texte qu'il devient étrange parce que l'auteur en a éprouvé le besoin, c'est répéter l'idée en termes différents.<sup>87</sup>

Again we have Ricardou objecting to the method of the writer rather than his theory, and this is true of his strongest censure:

L'accord de Marie Bonaparte et de Gaston Bachelard repose sur une commune option : la littérature aurait pour charge *d'exprimer un antécédent*, "l'inconscient des hommes qui puise dans sa préhistoire les thèmes éternels sur lesquels il brode mille variations différentes", ou les "rêves qui préfacent les œuvres". Toujours une force centrifuge projette telle lecture du texte vers le hors-texte essentiel qui serait exprimé.<sup>88</sup>

It is not the existence of the unconscious nor its manifestation in literature that is in question here, but the idea that literature exists solely to give it a voice. The refusal of the author to express the pre-existing by no means precludes him logically from using the pre-existing in any shape or form to create something that never existed before and this is precisely what Ricardou does in the fiction that we have examined.

Ricardou uses autobiographical events and real locations in his fiction along with his sexual fantasies and Œdipal anxieties. The fact that this has been unrecognised or denied for so long bears testament to the fact that he himself analysed in *Texte en*

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, loc.cit.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 198.

*Main*, namely that readers of his earlier fiction often read in a text what they expect to find. Of his later fiction, it might be argued that the parallels between Ricardou and other nouveaux romanciers indicate that he was moving away from the concepts that informed the nouveau roman. There is, however, a significant difference. Yes, he shares with them a more overtly autobiographical content, and like Robbe-Grillet in particular he plays with sexual and other fantasies, but unlike them in his continued formalism and Mallarméan style, he makes no concession to the reader's reading habits. Celia Britton makes a crucial point:

(.....) over a long period of time the Nouveau Roman *did* conceive of itself as a collective project; Robbe-Grillet's own *Pour un nouveau roman* provides ample evidence of this - and even now he still speaks in retrospect of the "revolution" which the Nouveau Roman started in the 1950s. The title of François Jost's paper, 'From the "New Novel" to the "New Novelist"' (presented to the colloquium in New York in 1982, D.F.), is significantly ambiguous in this respect: is it recording a real historical change, or offering a revised and truer definition of an unchanged phenomenon?<sup>89</sup>

We must leave to others the task of deciding what Jost had in mind here, but in the case of Ricardou, he remained loyal to his conception of the nouveau roman and to this extent, he refused to become a "new novelist".

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<sup>89</sup> *The Nouveau Roman, Fiction, Theory and Politics*, New York, 1992, pp. 191-192.

## **Conclusion: Mallarmé, Freud, Marx.**

We will conclude this study by examining two questions that could be crucial to the success of textique in both the short and long term. In the immediate future the influence of textique will depend on the ability to take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves to broaden its appeal, to publicise and propagate itself. To take the longer view, the future of textique depends to a certain extent on how it relates to the three dominant thinkers identified by Ricardou as having shaped intellectual life over the last century: Freud, Mallarmé and Marx.

In April 2000, what became known as “L’affaire Camus” made the headlines in France. In the 1995 offering of his yearly journals, Renaud Camus apparently complained that France-Culture had a disproportionate number of Jews commenting on French cultural matters. His usual publisher, P.O.L., refused to publish this volume. Fayard subsequently published it but then recalled it. Yale withdrew its support from a colloquium, scheduled for April 2000, devoted to Camus, which nevertheless went ahead with the author in attendance.<sup>1</sup> In the forefront of his defenders were Jan Baetens and Benoît Peeters who insisted that Camus was not in any sense anti-semitic. Both of these writers were formerly associates of Ricardou, and it might have been expected that Ricardou and his present associates would have spoken out in defence of Camus, but the only one to do so was Michel Sirvent, and it is notable that he did not claim to speak in the name of textique. It seems that textique missed an opportunity not only to defend a fellow writer, but also to publicise its views on what it means to be a political author, its attitude to censorship, with the secondary benefit of promoting textique as a serious literary tendency. In isolation, this failure to exploit such an obvious opportunity would not be so serious, but in conjunction with other facts, it starts to look like a deliberate, if tacit policy.

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<sup>1</sup> For further details and commentary see Camus’ website, <<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/renaud.camus>> and the conference proceedings published as *Renaud Camus, Ecrivain*, Jan Baetens, Charles Porter, Eds, Peeters, Leuven, 2001, in particular the essay "Renaud Camus Politique", by A. Albert-Galtier, p. 75 onwards.

We have already encountered Ricardou's intransigence in connection with his attitude to *Conséquences* when he refused to reduce the length of his article "Éléments de textique V", which consequently was never printed. A similar situation has arisen with the proposed introduction to textique. Noesis, publisher of *Formules*, considers that Ricardou's contribution is disproportionately long in comparison with the other contributions. Again, Ricardou refuses to compromise and this project remains stalled. As if this was not suggestive enough of Ricardou's reluctance, conscious or otherwise, to see textique expand its influence, in 2003 in conversation with me he revealed that he had been approached by the revived publishing house Impressions nouvelles with a view to reprinting his novel *Les lieux-dits*. He stated that he had refused permission for this on the grounds that he was no longer interested in the course that the directors of Impressions nouvelles were pursuing, most of whom were of course former collaborators. Ricardou asserted that this demonstrated his indifference to his standing in the literary world and his dedication to textique. However, his explanation of his refusal fails to acknowledge the opportunity which the republishing of his novel would offer Ricardou for the publicising of textique in reviews, interviews and a general revival, however limited that might have proved to have been, in interest in his activities. In an article by Jan Baetens that records his experiences with textique, we can detect a possible reason for Ricardou's apparent reluctance to expand the influence of textique:

(.....) sa coupure avec le monde était totale, comme l'était aussi sa solitude institutionnelle, exception faite de sa position de *conseiller scientifique* à Cerisy. La protection dont il bénéficiait au Château m'a empêché d'apercevoir le vide qui se faisait autour de lui.

(.....)

Il faut porter à son crédit l'obstination avec laquelle, mauvais stratège, il a brisé sa propre carrière. Même avec ses amis, à force de les brimer ou de casser toute velléité d'indépendance, il était toujours sur le point de se brouiller.

Then comes an interesting remark:

(.....) après 1983 (note the date, D.F.), les ateliers, pour des raisons de chauffage et de finances, n'étaient plus organisés à Pâques, quand tout le Château était à nous, mais en appoint d'un colloque estival

mineur dont les responsables pensaient qu'il ne ferait jamais le plein des capacités hôtelières de Cerisy.<sup>2</sup>

If increased numbers were suddenly to become interested in *textique* it would entail some awkward decisions for Ricardou. Would he be able to revert to a position where the whole Château is devoted to *textique*, from the present situation where it is a very small affair run in parallel with a much larger colloquium, “ceux qui (ont) droit à la bibliothèque” as Baetens puts it?<sup>3</sup> If large numbers were overnight to decide to investigate *textique*, would Ricardou move the venue to accommodate them or would he restrict the numbers allowed to attend? These scenarios are perhaps a little implausible, but it seems that Ricardou is not too anxious to bring them about, being more or less happy in his long standing relationship with the management of the cultural centre at Cerisy-la-salle (as I understand it, he is resident there all summer). The essence of a sect is not as many imagine its size, but its willingness to put its own interests before those of the beliefs that it claims to represent. In this respect, I suggest that Ricardou's behaviour could be seen as mildly sectarian in nature, he claims that *textique* is his foremost concern, but his actions suggest that he fears any disruption of his relationship with the managers of the Cultural Centre of Cerisy-la-salle.

If this is not the explanation of Ricardou's apparent reluctance to see *textique* expand rapidly, then we might be forced to the conclusion that his motive is a question of keeping control of a nucleus of like-minded followers. Control that could be threatened if *textique* were to proliferate beyond the restricted circle it currently influences. Certainly, *textique* is not sectarian in the sense that it would actively turn anyone away. It is rather that Ricardou and those close to him seem content with the situation as it presently is. There is, I must admit, something attractively heroic about the embattled, tight-knit group, who see themselves, and address each other as “camarade”, engaged in esoteric research over many years,

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<sup>2</sup> *Mot à Mot*, Jan Baetens, <http://engdep1.philo.ulg.ac.be/textes/baetens1.html>

<sup>3</sup> The library at Cerisy functions as the main lecture room. The seminars of *textique* take place in the "Grange".

with absolutely no possibility of financial gain, indeed quite the reverse, they finance these activities themselves. The opaque language, the pretension of rigour and exhaustiveness, the classification of participants into “chevronnés” and “apprentis”, its heretics, its excommunications and its occasional reconciliations, its sometimes difficult relations with what it calls the “compagnons de route”, all serve to repel immediately some of those who come into contact with it. There are, however, some for whom these same features are highly attractive, who stay faithful to *textique*, not just for years but for decades. Anyone who has experience of political or campaigning activity will immediately recognise this picture, particularly if they have ever been involved on the left of politics. It is a remarkable feature of *textique* that not only in its social composition, its often centrifugal tendencies, the ferocity of its disputes, (only dimly remembered a year later), but also its struggle to find an audience and be taken seriously reminds one of nothing so much as the “groupuscles” that sprang up in the wake of 1968, not just in France but throughout Western Europe and North and Latin America, whether of Maoist or Trotskyite persuasion. There are several reasons why this should not be too surprising. At least two of Ricardou’s principal collaborators have a political history, Gilles Tronchet was for many years a member of a Franco-Albanian friendship society and has pronounced Maoist sympathies, and Jean-Claude Raillon was a dissident member of the Belgian Communist Party. Daniel Bilous talks, half jokingly, of “entry work” in the university system. Then there is *textique*’s declared intention of revolutionising society, in part at least, through the activities of writing workshops. Moreover, having made the acquaintance of and corresponded with this group over a number of years, I am often left with the impression that they would like nothing more than to become a section of the cultural wing of a mass revolutionary party, raising consciousness and creating revolutionaries by revolutionising reading and writing practices. In the absence of such a party, *textique* seems on occasion to act as a surrogate and to function as if it was the nucleus or embryo of one.

By now nobody could be in any doubt that Ricardou regards Mallarmé as the most important figure in modern literature, whose ideas are the starting point for all

future literary production. In the case of Ricardou, Mallarmé also serves as a stylistic model. Of course, both were teachers, and there is often something of the schoolmaster in their prose. Where Mallarmé uses capital letters, Ricardou prefers to use bold letters:

Tandis qu'il y avait, le langage régnant, d'abord à l'accorder selon son origine, pour qu'un sens auguste se produisît : en le Vers, dispensateur, ordinateur du jeu des pages, maître du livre. Visiblement soit qu'apparaisse son intégralité, parmi les marges et du blanc; ou qu'il se dissimule, nommez-le Prose, néamnions c'est lui si demeure quelque secrète poursuite de musique, dans la réserve du Discours.<sup>4</sup>

Est-il tout à fait sûr que les **mêmes lecteurs**, loiblement nombreux, et même si sans pouvoir exciper mieux qu'un aimable "**je ne sais quoi**", n'en soient pas venus, malgré tout, plus que miette, à préférer l'...**apocryphe version originale**?<sup>5</sup>

Compare these two sentences, one taken from Ricardou's paper in the collection *Mallarmé et après?* with one from Mallarmé:

Cet ensemble, pour l'essentiel, comporte deux situations cousines, dont l'une, bien perçue, qui relève de la forme, permet d'éclairer l'autre, moins voyante, qui ressortit à la place.<sup>6</sup>

Tu remarques, on n'écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur, l'alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s'indique, ébauché ou interrompu; l'homme poursuit noir sur blanc.<sup>7</sup>

It would be quite difficult for the non expert to distinguish one from the other. Décaudin and Leuwers describe Mallarmé's style as working on syntax rather than vocabulary: "Ce sur quoi Mallarmé agit prioritairement, c'est la syntaxe. Il la disloque en n'hésitant pas à séparer le verbe du sujet ou l'infinitif de l'auxiliaire, en affectionnant les appositions, les ellipses et les périphrases."<sup>8</sup> These features except

<sup>4</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Quant au livre*, Tours, Editions Farrago/Editions Léo Scheer, 2003, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> "Tel qu'en lui-même enfin Mallarmé s'améliore," in *Mallarmé, et après*, p. 272.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p, 253.

<sup>7</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, op. cit, p.29.

<sup>8</sup> *Littérature française*, Vol. 8, "De Zola à Apollinaire", Paris, Arthaud, 1989, p. 212.

for apposition and the separation of the infinitive and auxiliary, can be found without much difficulty in Ricardou's later critical writings. He frequently separates verb and subject: "Ainsi, du moins à en croire ce titre, Mallarmé, tel qu'en lui-même enfin, pourrait s'améliorer?"<sup>9</sup> There are ellipses in abundance:

Les rimes sont-elles de nature à permettre la singulière entreprise par laquelle le poète est déclaré subir une "disparition élocutoire"?  
Assurément et ostentatoirement.  
**Assurément** ? Oui. (.....)  
**Ostentatoirement** ? Oui. (.....)<sup>10</sup>

Periphrases also abound, sometimes with an unfortunately prolix affect which is perhaps intended to have a humorous effect:

(...)En effet si, à suivre une habitude, l'on baptise "Mallarmé" certaine personne singulière, faite, jadis, de chair comme de sang, et qui par les offices d'un ensemble d'écrits, s'est manifestée à son heure, alors, il faut l'admettre : nul ne saurait exciper, ni main tenant, ni sans doute plus tard, d'une possession de son idiosyncrasie telle qu'elle lui permettrait, à sa place carrément, de transformer, à l'un parmi ses lignes, le moindre parmi ses mots.<sup>11</sup>

If earlier we hinted that Ricardou with his RAPT was turning Perec into Ricardou, here we can see Ricardou, in the theatre of metamorphoses, turning into Mallarmé and over the years, the choppy syntax in which the comma rules, present only occasionally in his earlier work, has increasingly become the trademark of Ricardou's writing, as if he identifies himself more and more with his model. One could of course, do worse than model one's style on Mallarmé's. But the identification may go deeper than this. Flaubert expressed the desire to write a novel out of nothing and Ricardou in *La prise de Constantinople*, attempted to do just that. Mallarmé, rather than create a book from nothing, proposed the writing of "Le Livre", the all encompassing book, which he himself never succeeded in writing. *La prise de Constantinople* ends thus: "Certaine lecture consciencieuse suffit maintenant pour que l'irradiation de toute la figure élabore qui JE SUIS, et par un

<sup>9</sup> "Tel qu'en lui-même enfin Mallarmé s'améliore.", in *Mallarmé, et après*, p. 247.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 252.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 247.



phénomène réflexif point trop imprévu, en un éclair, me LE LIVRE.”<sup>12</sup>

Ricardou must be assumed to be referring to this project rather than attempting to carry it out, though we have seen that he comes very close in his ideas on the sonnet to suggesting that all sonnets merge into “The Sonnet”, as functions of the constraints of the form. Instead of writing the Book, a utopian task unless one sees the intertext as the form that this “book” might take, Ricardou might be seen as attempting to write “The Theory”, not in the sense employed by physicists, looking for the unified theory that will account for quantum physics and relativity, but more described as creative:

(....) puisque les concepts de scripture et de texture, il est aisé de saisir (....) ne s’inféodent en rien au seul domaine de l’écrit, rien n’empêche de concevoir, ni une analyse universelle des structures de script et de texte, la *panscriptique* et la *pantextique*, ni, bien sûr, des études sectorielles, concernant diverses régions particulières: entre autres, la *scriptoscriptique* et la *scriptotextique* pour l’écrit, et la *pictoscriptique* et la *pictotextique* pour la peinture. Dès lors, déterminer les textures selon le paramètre des emplacements, c’est préparer, sous cet angle, la confrontation de l’écrit avec, disons, tous les arts de l’espace.<sup>13</sup>

This ambition is even made explicit in the document that sets out the structural framework on which textique is constructed:

**2.1. Textique:** l’on appellera **textique** certaine discipline animée d’un double souci: celui de concourir, d’abord, à une **théorie unifiée de l’écrit**; celui d’investir ensuite, et selon de nouvelles hypothèses à partir de ses éventuels acquis, les **phénomènes d’autre sorte**.<sup>14</sup>

Saussure held the view that linguistics could be divided into two fields of study, diachronic and synchronic, though from reading his works it is never made clear how they relate to each other. In practice, it was the synchronic feature that attracted

<sup>12</sup> *La Prise de Constantinople*, final page, (no pagination).

<sup>13</sup> “Eléments de Textique II”, *Conséquences*, no. 11, Paris, 1988, p. 8

<sup>14</sup> *Unification fondamentale*, unpublished, no date, p.3.

theorists like Barthes, who tended to see all things in terms of systems that have meaning only by virtue of their relations to one another. It is, of course, possible to examine a structure while still maintaining that its components have a significance irrespective of their position in the structure, but as Eagleton remarks:

(...) you become a card-carrying structuralist only when you claim that the meaning of each image is wholly a matter of its relation to the other. The images do not have “substantial” meaning, only a relational one. You do not have to go outside the poem, to what you know of suns and moons, to explain them; they explain and define each other.<sup>15</sup>

Ricardou’s position is different in that what he calls representation describes the real world from which it draws its meaning, whereas metarepresentation conforms to the structuralism described by Eagleton in the sense that the real world is the “hors-texte” that is “textualisé”.<sup>16</sup> There is nevertheless, a strong influence of structuralism in *Discernement matérialiste* as we shall see. The other feature that Ricardou inherits from structuralism in general and Althusser’s structural version of Marxism in particular, is its general anti-humanism: “La littérature n’est donc pas un humanisme.”<sup>17</sup>

If structuralism determines Ricardou’s attitude to what he has always called the dominant ideology in literature it is the systematic element that informs his attack on representation of the real world and its anti-humanism that on expression of the self.

Apart from the remarks in *Discernement matérialiste*, discussed below, Ricardou, for all that he considers Freud to be one of the great original thinkers of the previous century, has little to say about Freud as a literary critic, which is strange given that there are schools of thought that maintain that Freud was primarily - a literary critic. In truth, as we have seen, Ricardou has little time for Freudianism as a tendency in

<sup>15</sup> *Literary Theory* Oxford, Blackwell, 1983, p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> See pp. 265-269 of *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*.

<sup>17</sup> *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman*, p. 64. Althusser’s position is based on an unjustified distinction between Marx’s early and later work, and a misreading of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, but was widely accepted for a time.

literary criticism, because, as he sees it, this diverts attention away from the text. But an open minded reader will have no difficulty in recognising that sexual fantasies and anxieties provide much of the raw material from which Ricardou's fiction is constructed. Such a reader might also be tempted to see the obsessive-compulsive tone of Ricardou's formalism as the sign of a defence mechanism against the overwhelming emergence of such material. In other words, a Freudian interpretation of Ricardou's fiction could plausibly conclude that far from the autobiographical standing in opposition to the formalist elements, they are, on the contrary intimately connected, and just as it is permissible to talk of the unconscious performing "dreamwork", the process of writing may allow it to produce "fiction work". The mistake of many Freudians, as Ricardou would see it, is to regard the latter as dreamwork, revealing that, for example, Ricardou has an Œdipal complex, a banality since all little boys, according to Freud go through this stage, whereas, the real interest is what the fiction makes of this material. It is as if, for argument's sake, analysis existed to create dreams from unconscious urges, rather than existing to deduce the contents of the unconscious from the dreams. Thus, although Ricardou from time to time borrows Freudian terminology in his criticism it is primarily in his fiction that Freudian themes comes to the fore, not as revelation of the self, but as raw material from which the fiction is constructed, as I hope has been demonstrated earlier. Even Freud himself, as "hors-texte", is textualised as Phreud.

Much more problematic is Ricardou's attitude to Marxism, one of the strengths of which is that it can explain its own emergence on to the historical stage. Another is its ability to explain change, its dialectic nature. We have already seen Ricardou setting out the reasons why the nouveau roman emerged in the mid to late fifties.<sup>18</sup> So much for the timing, but what of the content? Textique often portrays itself as a corrective to Marxism and in some sense superior to it, yet it is the Marxist Fredric Jameson, who offers an explanation for the tendency of the work of Simon, and

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<sup>18</sup> "Les raisons de l'ensemble", appendix to the reprint of *Le nouveau roman*, Paris, Seuil, 1990.

others<sup>19</sup> to focus on the act of reading, which he closely links to a period that he calls, following Mandel, late capitalism:

(f)or Simon (.....) and the *nouveau roman* generally, (...) there opens up a provisional space in which this breakdown is experienced over and over again as a process, a temporary runoff between the habitual onset of linguistic belief and the inevitable degradation of the signified into its material signifier or the sign itself into a mere image.

This provisional and repetitive process is what used to be called reading: what I want to argue here is that in the *nouveau roman*, reading undergoes a remarkable specialization and, very much like older handicraft activity at the onset of the industrial revolution, is dissociated into a variety of distinct processes according to the general law of the division of labour. This internal differentiation, the becoming autonomous of older combined branches of the productive process, then knows a second qualitative leap with Taylorization; that is to say, the planned analytic separation of the various productive moments into independent units.

(.....)

Beginning with Ricardou, a great number of fine-grained analyses of local procedures and patterns in Simon have been produced, which mainly end up affirming a kind of “textualist” aesthetic ideology (.....). I myself would suggest that two general processes are at work in Simon’s *nouveau romans* (.....) the reproduction of an external environment within the system (or text) and the replication of distinct internal environments for each subsystem. These last correspond to what I have called, above, the degradation of the signified into its material signifier or, if you prefer, the eclipse of the illusion of transparency, the unexpected transformation of a meaning into an object, or, better still, its deconcealment (sic) as something already reified, something opaque in advance, whether that opacity be revealed as the sound and complexion of words or as their printed reproduction and the meaningless spatiality of individual letters.<sup>20</sup>

For Jameson, the re-emergence of the materiality of a text gives it an internal environment that he likens to the (electro-) chemical processes in the brain. What follows is not entirely clear, but it would appear that, for Jameson, within this

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<sup>19</sup>Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1991. What Jameson says about Simon applies equally to other writers associated with the *nouveau roman*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 140-141.

environment the differentiation leads to two “general forms” in Simon’s writing:

The first may be described as the reading of “reading”, a moment in which something in the words (.....) alerts us to the possibility that they may be themselves a quotation, and that we are reading someone else’s reading; in the second, the words themselves become mere typography, as with inserted foreign languages or the reproduction of letters printed in other type faces.<sup>21</sup>

We have already seen that Claude Simon and others formerly associated with the *nouveau roman* broke with Ricardou and that this breach was formally announced in 1982. It is possible that deeper than the personal reasons for this breach, was the refusal to confront the process described by Jameson (i.e. the Taylorisation of reading) which of course he was free to do. With *textique*, Ricardou, on the other hand, has the merit whether consciously or not, of pursuing to its conclusion the logic of the cultural conjuncture outlined by Jameson, in attempting to produce what we might call a layer of “super-readers”, or “texticien(ne)s” who abolish the demarcation between reader and writer. Jameson’s description of the reading of Simon’s novels could almost stand for the training that *textique* offers:

(.....) it is the linguistic focus of Simon’s “new novels” that uniquely - and for one long moment, the one in which we read these texts - renders reception (or consumption) indistinguishable from production. We have to read these sentences word by word, and that is something already fairly unusual (and painfully unfamiliar) in an information society in which a premium is placed on briefing and instant recognition, so that sentences are either skimmed or prepared for rapid assimilation as so many signs. The discipline of the word by word (Simon’s own expression, by the way) is enforced by the practice of cross-cutting, the possibility that the subject may change at any minute. There is, in any case, no point whatsoever to speed-reading books of this kind; they have no supplemental content or information to offer us, nothing to store up and carry away, not even anything to find out (.....) unless it is the one simple tragic discovery that there is nothing to find out in the first place.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.141.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

Thus far, Jameson and Ricardou might be in broad agreement, and the questions they pose as a result of their view of the nouveau roman are surprisingly similar:

The economists tell us that automation goes hand in hand with deskilling, so here too that prodigious differential specialization of what used to be called the reading process, and of which we have spoken above, goes hand in hand with new and more rudimentary, plebeian, forms of labor that anyone can do: for under certain conditions - social conditions or indeed, conditions of socialism! - deskilling also goes hand in hand with democratization (or plebeianization, as I prefer to call it). Is it possible then, that the reading of so specialized and highly technical an elite literary artefact as *Les corps conducteurs* might offer a figure or *analagon* for nonalienated labour and for the Utopian experience of a radically different, alternate society?<sup>23</sup>

To which Ricardou would reply, in so far as the reading (and the possible rewriting) of Simon implies a social activity, that the answer is decidedly yes. But, despite the fact that Jameson bases his argument, and indeed takes the term “Late Capitalism”, from the work of the late Ernest Mandel,<sup>24</sup> who was for many decades a leading Trotskyist, his positions seem slightly at odds with those held by Trotsky, whereas, Ricardou, who frankly shows little interest in his ideas, appears, ironically, to have arrived independently at similar conclusions to Trotsky’s. Jameson suggests that the nouveau roman makes explicit a tendency in late capitalism to deskilling reading which becomes a factor in democratisation, something that he seems to regard positively. Quite why he refers to the plebeian rather than the proletarian in all of this, is not at all clear. In the context of reading, the deskilling of reading surely leads to a process of popularisation and trivialisation, rather than democratisation. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that late capitalism makes reading a problematic activity as opposed to requiring less skill. Ricardou’s entire career has been dedicated to an entirely opposed thesis that reading is a skill that we too often take for granted and on occasion, need to relearn. It has become, not Taylorised, as Jameson would have it at one point, but as he also says, automated, “diagonal”, as

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.p. 146.

<sup>24</sup> Ernest Mandel, *Der Spätkapitalismus*, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972, translation *Late Capitalism*, London, New Left Books, 1975.

Ricardou describes it in his series of articles for *Texte en main*. Far from being something that the proletariat can passively acquire as a hand-me-down from the bourgeoisie, once it has been, so to speak devalued, it is a skill that needs to be reactivated and relearned. Moreover, this process might lead to the proletariat challenging the current order, as Ricardou proposed at the colloquium on Claude Simon, discussed in a previous chapter.

Jameson appears to be ambivalent concerning this “plebeian culture” whereas for Trotsky the perspective is clear:

(.....) the proletariat will be more and more dissolved into a Socialist community and will free itself from its class characteristics and thus cease to be a proletariat. In other words, there can be no question of the creation of a new culture, that is, of construction on a large historical scale during the period of dictatorship. The cultural reconstruction which will begin when the need of the iron clutch of a dictatorship unparalleled in history will have disappeared, will not have a class character. This seems to lead to the conclusion that there is no proletarian culture and that there is never will be any and in fact there is no reason to regret this. The proletarian acquires power for the purpose of doing away forever with class culture and to make way for human culture.<sup>25</sup>

Although it shares this objective, textique displays here its ultra-left face. It wants the working class to go beyond Balzac, the representation of the real world and the expression of the self when in fact it has for the most part yet to make Balzac’s acquaintance:

But the meaninglessness of this call becomes evident as soon as it is addressed to the proletariat. The working class does not have to, and cannot break with literary tradition, because the working class is not in the grip of such tradition. The working class does not know the old literature, it still has to commune with it, it still has to master Pushkin, to absorb him, *and so to overcome him*.<sup>26</sup>

It may be that textique is mistaken in that it seeks to propel the bulk of humanity

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<sup>25</sup> Leon Trotsky *Literature and Revolution*, London, Redwords, 1991, pp. 214-215.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161, my italics.

beyond the cultural achievements of the bourgeoisie, without having first absorbed them, but there can be no doubt that the underlying motive is that described by Trotsky.

Though the proletariat is spiritually, and therefore, artistically, very sensitive, it is uneducated aesthetically. It is hardly reasonable to think that it can simply begin at the point where the bourgeois intelligentsia left off on the eve of the catastrophe. Just as an individual passes biologically and psychologically through the history of the race and, to some extent, of the entire animal world in his development from the embryo, so, to a certain extent, must the overwhelming majority of a new class which has only recently come out of prehistoric life, pass through the entire history of artistic culture. This class cannot begin the construction of a new culture without absorbing and assimilating the elements of the old cultures. This does not mean in the least that it is necessary to go through step by step, slowly and systematically, the entire past history of art. Insofar as it concerns a social class and not a biological individual, the process of absorption and transformation has a freer and more conscious character. But a new class cannot move forward without regard to the most important landmarks or the past.<sup>27</sup>

Irrespective, then, of the difficulty of its vocabulary, and the controversial ideas it advocates, not least the RAPT, textique must surely be seen as a progressive tendency. It openly recognises its difficulty, but it would reject any suggestion that this is an example of mystification. Ricardou often reminds his listeners that a term such as deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is a complicated concept, which nevertheless corresponds to a real thing in the real world. No one finds it at all extraordinary that the theory of relativity is hard for a great many to understand. What many seem to find difficult to accept, on the other hand, is that certain activities that we carry out almost unconsciously, such as reading and writing, (even if it has to be admitted that these are often the principal ways in which we “think”), might present serious theoretical problems, not necessarily on the same scale as biochemistry or astrophysics it must be said, but which from time to time might shake our prejudices and rattle our preconceptions. Not least of these is the realisation that difficulty is

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. pp. 253-254.



relative. Two hundred years ago, the idea that nations of many millions might attain the heights of semi-literacy would have seemed risible. Right now, it may seem utopian to postulate a society in which the majority have no difficulty at all in discussing DNA in one breath and relativity in the next, but those committed to textique see themselves as working to hasten that day.

If textique sees itself as a type of materialism, the question arises: what is the nature of and how does it relate to other forms of materialism? In his essay *Discernement matérialiste*,<sup>28</sup> Ricardou seeks to establish textique as a materialist practice on the basis, it would seem, of some sort of affinity with market forces, and therefore, one assumes, with Marxist economics. He starts from the barter (troc) of objects such as curtain rods, pen-knives and egg-timers and the discussion of their relative “exchange-values”, the basis of which is their physical difference. Obviously, no one would exchange one curtain rod for another exactly the same, but for an exchange to take place, there must be an equivalence, which Ricardou calls “utility value”. This he also calls the “market value”:

Mesurer la **valeur marchande** d'un certain objet (par exemple un couteau), c'est, ainsi que l'atteste le caractère disparate des divers objets passables d'un même troc marchand, mettre hors course, car insignifiants sous l'angle du paramètre porteur de l'équivalence (la marchandise, a-t-on dit), tous les autres aspects qui ne sont pas concernés, non seulement les siens, mais encore ceux de tous les objets équivalents requis pour la mesure. Ce qui compte, en tel cas, c'est, et seulement (ici **marchande**), l'unique commune valeur que tels objets possèdent à l'identique.<sup>29</sup>

This common value, Marx discovered, was not some intrinsic “exchange” or “market” value but the amount of labour required to produce each object of exchange, but Ricardou does not go this far with his argument because he does not wish to argue that words are commodities. Instead, what Ricardou argues is that reading and rewriting depend on the “exchange value” of words. In the case of reading, only a partial exchange is necessary:

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<sup>28</sup> In *Cahiers marxistes*, June-July 1994, no. 194, Brussels.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.36.

(.....) dans la **lecture proprement dite**, il s’agit, implicitement quand elle fonctionne, explicitement, quand elle défaille, d’obtenir, (.....) non moins un **demi’échange**, puisque l’on se doit d’établir, sur le paramètre considéré (la valeur idéale), une équivalence entre le’objet à lire et l’instrument de la lecture (par exemple, le synonyme ou la définition), tout en se gardant bien, en général, une fois cette possibilité acquise, de substituer effectivement l’instrument de lecture à l’objet qu’il fallait lire.<sup>30</sup>

In the case of rewriting the exchange is complete:

*La température était agréable, mais, comme il était frileux, il enfila un pardessus, par-dessus lequel il jeta un cape.*

If we consider the close proximity of the two words “pardessus” and “par-dessus” vexatious we can replace one of them with no great inconvenience:

*La température était agréable, mais, comme il était frileux, il enfila un manteau, par-dessus lequel il jeta un cape.*<sup>31</sup>

In describing these procedures, Ricardou refers here and elsewhere to the idea produced by a text, other than the material means employed by it, whilst scrupulously avoiding any reference to the meaning (sens) of a word. He is surely correct to note that the structural nature of language is such that it is always possible to define a word using other words. In this he is true to his structural origins. Any word can be exchanged for another, and it is not necessary to refer outside of the system. Nevertheless, at some point a materialist view of language must surely attempt to explain its link with the physical world, a link that Jameson has shown, becomes problematic with the nouveau roman. From this point of view, and following Jameson, we might say that textique is the materialism of the word as object, that avoids the relationship of the word with objects, and that it is therefore a

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.40.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

second order materialism. or as we suggested in the introduction a “materio-formalism”.

*Discernement matérialiste* is one of the few occasions when Ricardou refers directly to Marxism, or indeed, Freudianism, which he criticises for the same inadequacy:

En effet, et commençons par le dire ainsi, ce qui, pour la textique, caractérise sous cet angle le freudisme et le marxisme, c’est qu’ils opèrent, vis-à-vis de la **représentation**, non point en liaison avec une **théorie effective**, mais, ce qui est un peu autre chose, l’on s’efforcera de le montrer graduellement, et pour mobiliser tels de leurs propres concepts, sous l’emprise....d’un **fantasme** et d’une **idéologie**.<sup>32</sup>

At this point the argument becomes difficult to follow. In the case of Marxism, Ricardou states that:

L’idéologie est une disposition collective dont la part insue tient à ce que, **associée à une classe**, la classe dominante en dernier ressort, elle se trouve spécifiquement refulante, bref **censurante**. (...) (elle) persiste par l’exercice de la censure qu’elle impose, en renforçant la représentation dominante (avec s’agissant du “dit”, le naturel encouragement prodigué aux pensées conformes, les récompenses, voire les carrières; avec, s’agissant du “dire”, les divers avatars de l’académisme). (...) la **représentation**, en ce qu’elle constitue, (...) l’**horizon du système**, n’est point vraiment interrogé quant à l’opérativité qui la produit.<sup>33</sup>

It may be that these quite remarkable statements refer to the bureaucratized (and therefore bastardized) form of Marxism peddled by the Stalinists which gave rise to the “theory” of socialist realism. Ricardou has long held the view that there is no difference between capitalist ideology and the ideology behind socialist realism, but this is a position that many Marxists could subscribe to with little difficulty. The idea that Marxism is in favour of censorship and encourages careerism is a travesty quickly dispelled by the manifesto that Trotsky wrote in collaboration with André

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

Breton:

The conception of the writer's function which the young Marx worked out is worth recalling. "The writer," he declared, "naturally must make money in order to live and write, but he should not under any circumstance live and write to make money....The writer by no means looks on his work as a *means*. It is an *end in itself* and so little a means in the eyes of himself and of others that if necessary he sacrifices his existence to the existence of his work....*The first condition of the freedom of the press is that it is not a business activity.*" It is more than ever fitting to use this statement against those who would regiment intellectual activity in the direction of ends foreign to itself, and prescribe, in the guise of so-called reasons of state, the themes of art. The free choice of these themes and the absence of all restrictions on the range of his exploitations - these are possessions which the artist has a right to claim as inalienable. Every progressive tendency in art is destroyed by fascism as "degenerate". Every free creation is called "fascist" by the Stalinists.<sup>34</sup>

At this point, the least one can say is that there is some misunderstanding of Marxism on the part of textique.

What, though, does Marxism have to say of tendencies like textique? Turning to Trotsky once more, the answer is that what they propose is very interesting and often useful but by no means the whole story:

What is the formalist school?

As it is represented at present by Shklovsky, Zhirmunsky, Jacobson and others, it is extremely arrogant and immature. Having decided form to be the essence of poetry, this school reduces its task to an analysis (.....) of the etymology and syntax of poems, to the counting of repetitive vowels and consonants, of syllables and epithets. This analysis which Formalists regard as the essence of poetry, or poetics, is undoubtedly necessary and useful, but one must understand its scrappy, subsidiary and preparatory character.<sup>35</sup>

The wider questions of historical or cultural materialism cannot be dealt with by this tendency, and it is important to understand that because of its neglect of the diachronic this is not a question of choice:

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<sup>34</sup>A.Breton and L. Trotsky "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art" in *Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art*, New York, Pathfinder Press, 1970, pp. 119 & 120.

<sup>35</sup> Leon Trotsky *Literature and Revolution*, p. 192.

The methods of formal analysis are necessary but insufficient. You may count up the alliterations in popular proverbs, classify metaphors, count up the numbers of vowels and consonants in a wedding song. It will undoubtedly enrich our knowledge of folk art, in one way or another: but if you don't know the peasant system of sowing, and the life that is based on it, if you don't know the part the scythe plays, and if you have not mastered the meaning of the church calendar to the peasant, of the time when the peasant marries, or when the peasant women give birth, you will only have understood the outer shell of folk art, but the kernel will not have been reached.<sup>36</sup>

Historical materialism does not reject these methods, as Trotsky makes quite clear, but its materialism goes beyond anything the formalists could envisage:

It is unquestionably true that the need for art is not created by economic conditions. But neither is the need for food created by economics. On the contrary, the need for food and warmth creates economics. It is very true that one cannot always go by the principles of Marxism in deciding whether to reject or accept a work of art. A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history; in other words who it was who made a demand for such an artistic form and not for another, and why.<sup>37</sup>

Textique has grasped the thesis formulated by V.N. Voloshinov: "Communication and the forms of communication may not be divorced from the material basis."<sup>38</sup>

But in an unjustifiable corollary, it reduces communication and the forms of communication into the material basis on which it is founded.

A serious weakness of this approach is illustrated by Ricardou's comment on a passage from *Les corps conducteurs*:

Aucun mot n'est lisible en entier. Il n'en subsiste que quelques fragments énigmatiques, parfois impossibles à compléter, permettant d'autres fois ou plusieurs interprétations (ou reconstitutions) comme, par exemple, ABOR (LABOR, ABORto, ou ABORrecer?), SOCIA (SOCIALismo, aSOCIAcion?) et CAN ( CANdidato, CANibal,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 207.

<sup>38</sup> V.N. Voroshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Rivkin and Ryan, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, p. 279.

CANcer ?)<sup>39</sup>

As we have seen earlier, Ricardou analyses such structures as “dynamoscitures”, which, it will be recalled, requires the reader to complete a word from a fragment. In this case, it does not take much imagination to appreciate that Simon’s choice of words to complete the structures are determined by the political situation in Latin America, which produces one set of readings, “labor”, “socialismo”, and his attitude to the unfolding events, “aborto”, “canibal”, “cancer”, which is no doubt coloured by his earlier experiences in Republican Spain. It is not the case that Ricardou denies the existence of these external elements, rather he sees the task of the writer to textualise them, but a materialist must at least pose the question: what determines the “hors-texte”? Textique regards the question as illegitimate, but even if it were in its eyes legitimate, could not answer it, a serious deficiency in a discipline that is contemplating a meta-discipline in the form of pan-textique.

Jameson, in his analysis of Claude Simon’s novels, claims to have, “(...) followed Adorno here in defending the proposition that the work of art registers the logic of social development, production, and contradiction in ways usefully more precise than are available elsewhere (...).”<sup>40</sup> This, textique would denounce as illegitimate, even though it is powerless to prevent it. The irony is that if Jameson’s reading of the situation produced by late capitalism is correct, textique itself “registers” this logic, despite its refusal to engage with all the larger questions that historical materialism is more than equal to. Textique is a form of materialism, a micro-materialism that deliberately restricts itself, to a secondary materialism of the word as object.

If I have dwelt on the relation of textique to Marxism at some length it is because I believe that in the long term the future prospects for textique will to a great extent depend on its ability to connect with this current. Nevertheless, the career of Jean Ricardou remains a considerable achievement regardless of any difficulties in this direction. After 1982 he produced fiction that is challenging for the reader but repays the effort. He continues work on the longstanding project that is textique

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted by Ricardou in “Eléments de Textique II”, *Conséquences*, no. 11, Paris, 1988.

<sup>40</sup> Jameson, op. cit. p.152.

publishing theoretical articles and presenting papers to colloquia whenever the opportunities arise. His influence, and it is regrettable that lack of space precludes a fuller analysis of this, will continue through the medium of *Texte-en-main* and *Formules*, and a considerable number of creative writers and theorists who acknowledge the formative influence that Ricardou has had on them. Whatever one's opinion of him one can only admire his single minded application to a project that he has sustained over many years, which may yet come into its own.

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