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THE BEGINNING: TEL QUEL IN THE 1960s

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

Matthew Landry

December 2016

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ABSTRACT

The Beginning: Tel Quel in the 1960s

Matthew Landry

The Beginning: Tel Quel in the 1960s presents an overview of this literary journal in the first half of its history. Its book publications are taken as the primary source materials, and each chapter deals with one publication in particular in order to describe each author's respective writing style, being the primary trope in the theory of literary production underlying its approach to literary journalism. Demonstrating how this theory is an inherent contingency of its own mode of production, combining works of literature with literary theory, this serves as a practical inquiry into Julia Kristeva's semiotic theory of paragrammatic writing, a key insight into the Tel Quel's collective theories of the "text" and "poetic language." As a reaction to this semiotic approach, my argument proceeds by means of a self-conscious application of linguistics to works of literature that anticipate a reader's familiarity with their related theoretical works. As such, it elaborates the texts' own appropriation of linguistics in order to locate the basis of the various modes of interpretation they entail.

The journal itself is included throughout as the object of its contributors' investigation into literary production, or "textual production" as they preferred to call it in distinction to the literary market. By combining these two approaches, the linguistic and the economic, each individual chapter gradually unravels Tel Quel's "group theory." I argue that this merging of linguistics and economics forms the basis

of a theory of the ways in which a work of literature plays a role in the formation of its own reading practices. Drawing out the elaboration of this specifically Telquelian form of theorization primarily based on "poetic language," each chapter works through various modes of reading as defined in relation to generic conventions as an investigation into the question of style. Kristeva's concepts are shown at work in the poets Denis Roche and Marcelin Pleynet, the novelist Jean Thibaudeau, and finally in Kristeva's own interpretation of Philippe Sollers's *Nombres*, in which she expands significantly on her theory of the paragram, moving from the human sciences to science considered more generally as a discourse, as a "semanalysis."

INTRODUCTION

In the Language of the Review

The question "what is Tel Quel?" may seem unnecessary, but there is no denying the particularity of this phenomenon: in its simultaneous strangeness and clarity, and both its unfathomable influence and its contradictory lack of recognition by contemporary literature. Without a doubt, Tel Quel is a singular aesthetic enterprise without precedent. Therefore, to ask if it is a group, or an aesthetic, a magazine, an elaborate hoax, a way of life, or even a revolutionary movement is to somewhat miss the point, and to only fall into the trap set by the various misunderstandings and confusions that the group actually sought to shed light on, albeit mostly in equally contradictory ways. The irony of course, is that this is no different than the business-as-usual of literature, which characterizes the group's primary aesthetic strategy: affect.

In many ways, it is this market savvy that sets them apart from most other literary movements or aesthetics. To call Tel Quel a financial form of literature would not be too far from the truth either. After all, the magazine began in 1960 as a gathering of a former finance student, Philippe Sollers, and some of his college friends, and so to imagine them as the "financiers of literature," just as the "new novelist" Alain Robbe-Grillet was imagined to be its "engineer," certainly seems likely, but again this is only in the figurative sense. Alternatively, one might say "in the allegorical sense" insofar as, as with all the images Tel Quel attempts to shroud itself in, the idea of economics remains an operative valance in its work, whether in

the form of class struggle or as in the economic principles of narratology. This is what Tel Quel really was: the long, dark journey into the economic heart of literature, or in Jean Thibaudeau's words, "approcher sans cesse *la réalité interdite de la production littéraire*" (Foucault et al. 220), although in truth more properly a semiotic rather than a financial undertaking. It is most important to note that, stylistically speaking, this was done through the verbal properties of language, as in the above quote where Thibaudeau plays with the ambiguities of the transitivity of the verb *approcher*, creating a sentence with many possible meanings: the most likely being "to get closer and closer to the forbidden reality of literary production," but also, "to bring the forbidden reality of literature closer to literary production," etc.

Still, the best description of Tel Quel is that there is no way to describe it: it was very deliberately indescribable. The unreasonably difficult works of its members ran the gamut of not only the genres, but also of the various forms of discourse that make up both expository and literary prose. Yet therein lies the paradox. The goal of the following pages is to provide more or less a description of the literary production of Tel Quel, a task made all the more complex given that there never really was such an entity that could be grossly referred to as "Tel Quel," at least not beyond a literary journal bearing the same name, despite the fact they often emphasized their existence as a cohesive group.

It gives one pause to think that there is in fact no rational way of defining this literary phenomenon precisely because it never actually existed, and so it is the premise of the argument of the following pages that it is only by irrational means that

it can be explained. This is not so surprising given the subject matter, fiction, which by most definitions falls outside the realm of logic. It is in this very presumption, however, that what can be recognized as an entity corresponding to a "Tel Quel" can be discerned in any definable way.

Parody is the most fitting term for its diverse transgressions of discourse, although they would often refer to it, in a political mode, as ideology: its means of going about a revolution in the conception of literature by reconceiving it, rather than as a collection of artifacts, as an idea. In any case, in spite of their most straightforward political rhetoric, it is a significant step in the elaboration of a criticism of Tel Quel to take full consideration of its essential playfulness. None of its work cannot ever be taken with complete sincerity. More often than not, its theories, even those written in the contrasting, self-ordained "scientific" tones, require a much less serious approach than its poems and novels.

Even the harshest of their political statements, shrouded in parody, can only fully be appreciated in light of these theories. More importantly, what also must be taken under consideration is how two, or any number, of texts are specifically related to each other. In fact, although it is never overtly developed, the relationship of play to theory is one of their more astute political observations: that this play-function experienced when confronted with the irrationality of theory conceals a form of rationality constitutive of its ideology, existing beyond any form of expository narrative, rational or not.

For example, this is more or less the premise of the first proposition in their political declaration, "La Révolution ici et maintenant," published in the 34th issue of *Tel Quel* in the midst of the events of May 1968: "Nous ne sommes pas des 'philosophes', des 'savants', des 'écrivains' selon la définition représentative admise par une société dont nous attaquons le fonctionnement matériel et la théorie du langage qui en découle" (3). To paraphrase this statement, within each of these definitions is a self-contained, and self-justifying, theory of language constitutive of it. Practically speaking, within the hypothetical discourses of each of these ideologically defined personages is a discursive form of rationality constitutive of their ideas, statements, and conclusions. There is no need to go so far as to hypothesize, within this declaration, the various contradictions surrounding the concept of a "theory of language" in this particular case. More important to note, in fact, is that they in no way defined literature as having, as in constituting or even being, a theory of language: closer to the truth is that they are playing with this cliché here, specifically preempting their potential critique, given that such a "theory of language" can in this case be used to its own ends as a "literary theory" of such a statement.

In fact, given this article's particularly counter-discursive rhetoric, specifically written as a rebuttal to the events of May '68, the reactions to the polemical statements made in it by previous Tel Quel commentators are particularly telling in this regard, even to the point of being symptomatic of their overall approach of the Tel Quel phenomenon. All of the four books published in French and English on the

subject have interpreted the article as solely pertaining to May ’68, merely scratching the surface of this declaration that openly presents itself precisely as a reaction to such a surface interpretation of these events. Characteristically ignoring its subtle formulations, these accounts fail to contextualize the article within Tel Quel’s own shifting politics, which could be easily be accounted for in relation to its similar political manifestos made throughout the journal’s history, and which oddly these books otherwise tend to focus on as their primary means of approaching Telquelian politics.

Philippe Forest’s *Histoire de Tel Quel* is an encyclopedic work that essentially attempts to synthesize Tel Quel as a literary entity with the historical events surrounding it. In it, Forest presents the literary output of Tel Quel as a seemingly direct corollary to the dynamics of the group of writers of which it is comprised. While his approach has the advantage of circumnavigating the particularly difficult task of the application of Telquelian theory to its literature, it is the least observant in this regard. Thus, beyond taking the aforementioned article at face value, his presentation of it is in fact entirely in contradiction to the theories it puts forward. Forest’s misstep is clear, stating that, according to Tel Quel, “la vraie révolution ne peut passer que par une rigoureuse mise en question du langage” (334), while in fact the article is in fact simply, and unmistakably, a refutation of this very notion of a “theory of language.”

While perhaps it does not entirely bend the article to its own purposes, the alternate interpretation, shared by Danielle Marx-Scouras in *The Cultural Politics of*

Tel Quel and Patrick Ffrench in *The Time of Theory*, is no less misleading, however. Both of these authors approach the article from the point of view of Tel Quel's theorization of "class struggle." There is no indication, however, that the "lutte sociale" mentioned in the opening paragraph in anyway corresponds to such a concept. In fact, this assertion stands in contradiction to their own formulation of the article's tenants, which according to these commentators seeks to parody the participants in the events of May '68, and in which case the expression should of course be read as a parody, in the sense of accusing the latter of perverting the true class struggle. In any case, Ffrench falls shortest here, presenting a literal misreading of the article's opening statement, which very clearly claims itself to be in favor of the "primacy" of this "social struggle." Ffrench claims the complete opposite, interpreting it as Tel Quel's insistence on "the primacy of theory" (117). For her part, while certainly not guilty of such misleading misinterpretations, Marx-Scouras evinces her own faulty understanding of the Marxist concept of "class struggle," and thus reading the article as a Tel Quel manifesto regarding its own direct role to play therein through the "relationship between textual action and class struggle" (163). If any such role could be determined, however, is could only be interpreted in the article as an entirely indirect one. Truly, however, and in typical Tel Quel fashion, the article is precisely much more given to play with such misinterpretations as the one made by these commentators, rather than make any definitive statements as to their thoughts regarding the future of the proletariat.

As if to maintain a sociological approach, Niilo Kauppi's *The Making of an Avant-Garde: Tel Quel*, characteristically attempts to keep his distance with regards to this important article, citing it merely as an example of how Tel Quel conceived itself as the "bearer" a literary theory to the French Communist Party (166). The outcome, however, is the same as in Ffrench and Marx-Scouras, and remains just as unclear as to the meaning of the article's content as Forest.

In keeping with both the typically Telquelian tendencies to define their work in relation to each other and their equal attention to the valences of discursive modes, in "La Révolution ici et maintenant" a political mode of discourse in relation to the mode of discourse proper to Tel Quel as an object (the journalistic mode), the statements put forward in this article can in fact be better understood in comparison to a similar statement of values made in *Tel Quel* concerning the state of the literary review. Confronted with the demise of the *Mercure de France*, Marcelin Pleynet was inspired to give a statement concerning the present and future of the genre, in which *Tel Quel* claimed, or at least aspired, to play a pivotal role.

In many other ways, the article, entitled "A propos des revues," which appears at the end of their 22nd issue, makes for a convenient introduction to Tel Quel, almost self-consciously setting the scene for a critical review of the journal itself, alongside its various practical arguments relating to its subject. This may seem like a facetious remark, especially if one were to ignore this very typical mode of presentation, referred to above as parody. In fact, not only did they very consciously seek to preempt their critical reception, but this is an essential element of going about reading

and interpreting their work. In short, this preemption was conceived as part and parcel with their mode of literary production, the central concept in 1968 Tel Quel "Group Theory" (*Théorie d'ensemble*), which hypothesizes the combination of the literary review format and its concurrent publication apparatus as a crucial dynamic in the reception of its work. Therefore, in order to take full account of this proposed dynamic, this dissertation considers its book publications as the primary source materials, especially considering the journal's editorial staff was composed of primarily writers of fiction. In some sense, this means an integral account of not only how they wrote, but the meaning of their writing style and also how and why they wrote that way. Still, the journal itself is included throughout as the object of the Tel Quel writers' investigation into literary production, or "textual production" as they preferred to call it in distinction to the "literary market." Moreover, this is also done precisely because it was elaborated by theoretical means along with the more practical engagement of the literary review. As if to complement this dynamic, not only did they also anticipate their future commentators on a general level, such as in the Pleynet article in question, but this preemption was in fact methodically geared towards the more particular levels of language and discourse, even to the level of sentence structure.

For example, the syntax of the previous sentence, because it relies on rationalizing what is essentially an irrational idea beyond the bounds of expository prose, not to mention in its own terms, can be found mirrored in Pleynet's article:

> *Ce qui nous désigne, aussi précisément que possible, le point d'impact où doit, par rapport à la littérature contemporaine, se situer une revue, et par la même occasion éclaire, dans la stricte logique du capital, les intérêts qui commande la nouvelle distribution de l'édition française. Au moment où justement elle prend conscience de la place essentielle qui lui revient et du pouvoir qui pourrait être le sien dans le champ culturel qu'elle seule peut reconnaître et justifier, la littérature va sous le fallacieux prétexte de culture de masse, être récupérée sous une forme comportant un minimum de danger (livre de poche, livre d'images).* (79)

Given the specific context of this quote, whose argument is cut short here, the reader might expect the long-winded opening clause of the second sentence to be related, not to the question of literature, as it is, but rather to the question of the review, which is the express object both of the article and of the immediately preceding sentences. It comes as a surprise, then, that Pleynet's statement, and its subject ("*elle*"), should be related to literature, rather than a review, and as such, in its rear-loaded subject clause mirrors the syntax which is meant to describe it, also notably in the overly rational logical format of "not only…but…." On a similar note, an elaboration of Tel Quel's own theory of literary production, itself usually only ever implied as it is here, must therefore proceed by means of a self-conscious application of linguistic and semiotic theories to these literary works, and specifically in relation to Tel Quel's more explicit theories, because of such a deliberate confusion of linguistic and economic categories. Furthermore, given the circumstance of the Telquelian mode of

production, it must also demonstrate how these works anticipate a reader's familiarity with their related theoretical works, both as a practical means of evaluating this appropriation of linguistics and of locating the scientific bases of the various modes of interpretation these works entail, as well as Tel Quel's potential direct influence on such modes of interpretation. As such, I will argue that this merging of linguistics and economics essentially amounts to a theory of the ways in which a work of literature plays a role in the formation, and ultimately in the institutionalization, of its own reading practices. This is one reason, for example, that most Tel Quel novels tend to paint themselves as meta-novels, or "theoretical" novels, specifically lacking any self-awareness even despite being explicitly presented as such.

Pleynet's syntactical pun above is related to his statement toward the end of the article concerning the "review as an artistic form," where he states that a review should not be considered as an art form, which is indicative of both the mood of this article and of its essential parody. It is not that *Tel Quel* as a journal should be read as an art form, that each individual periodical should be read as its own kind of novel, which they in many ways could be. It is more likely, rather, that this is meant to stand for this very particular way of reading their work, just as here it works as the manifest confusion of literature and the language of the review. For example, modeled after similar reviews of the time, the first few issues of *Tel Quel* could in fact very well be read as works of art, each one having its own particular theme attached to it, and Pleynet's statement here could therefore be read as typical of the journal's penchant for self-historicizing.

Similarly, the article in general could be read as indicative of the parody of the discourse of the periodical, specifically in the mode of the literary review. Although inscribed within the higher registers of theory, the "surprise" ending to the sentence seems to represent the article's extreme readability, overall setting the tone for something resembling a "throw-away" appreciation of it. Of course, it nevertheless conceals a complex theory governing such a mode of discourse instilled within an economic theory of the periodical as it relates to its own discursive status. Thus, this "parody" too can only be understood relative to a statement such as that found in the above political statement, as an instance of a self-justifying "theory of language" resulting from the author's identity as a composer of journal articles.

It is precisely this article's self-consciousness that is meant to make up for such a flaw, that through the preempted futurity of its own critique it is able to transcend the gratuitous, self-congratulatory building-up of its own importance as a meta-discourse. The hypothetically inevitable recognition of its own discursive status as being problematic in order to establish itself as an object of reading, thereby undermines its own proposed ideology by recognizing that similarly it is the act of seeing itself as a problem that is also a potential problem.

To return to the opening question regarding this article, the much more particularized, deliberate preemption of its own commentary in the form of syntax, made manifest by means of its own melding of syntax and sense, can be understood as being contained within the same gesture. It is neither by any deliberate formal design, nor is it because of a mimetic impulse on the part of the commentator that this

results in a preempted syntactical imitation. It is rather between the two, conceived within a theory of its own discourse: that is, between its form and its theory is concealed another theory, inevitably relating to its own commentary.

For the same reason, the theory behind this phenomenon, similarly stands out in mirror formation opposite its commentary, which as such also stands as a symbol of that theory: the relationship between literary production and linguistics:

> *L'œuvre ne peut pas, et aujourd'hui moins que jamais, ne pas considérer, et comprendre le réseau culturel (qui est aussi un réseau social) où elle tente de prendre place… D'une façon ou d'une autre l'écrivain (l'artiste) aujourd'hui se trouve révélé (et révélateur), engagé dans une totalité dont il ne peut pas faire semblant de ne considérer qu'un des aspects. Les rapports qu'entretiennent aujourd'hui des sciences comme la psychanalyse, la linguistique, l'ethnologie, ne peuvent pas ne pas se retrouver (à tous les niveaux) et s'établir entre chacun des aspects de la culture. L'écrivain étant, quant à lui, tout d'abord et plus particulièrement aux prises avec l'inconscient (individuel et collectif), ne peut pas ne pas voir son matériel, dans une coupe verticale, engagé à tous les niveaux dans ce qui paraîtra demain comme ce que la linguistique nomme* le référent. (79)

Still, the theory of the relation of linguistics and economics only stands as a cover here, symptomatic of the over-rationalization required to decipher it, for the relative lack of historical perspective that this theory serves to supplant. For *Tel Quel* then, the question of the literary review hangs directly on the question of discourse, and in a

form of discourse that can only begin to explain its problematic nature as the relationship of literary production and linguistics as a formal process undergoing a historical shift that in fact only serves to obscure it. This is further complicated by the fact that, on the one hand, literary production is played out on three different levels (literature, its review, and its potential account by future literary commentators) and, on the other, with linguistics being specifically employed to provide its theory with a referential status, while simultaneously providing a theory of itself as such.

Theory is thus underwritten in order to supplement this process, of which this theory also is part and parcel, as well as constitutive of its own discourse, which is the reason Pleynet opens this article with a loaded statement, implying that all language in fact requires a theory as a prerequisite to its own articulation: "La parution et la disparition d'une revue d'art et de littérature, ne peut pas ne pas poser de question quant à sa fonction au sein du contexte culturel et social où elle est appelée à vivre" (77). In some sense, then, this undermines itself while also setting up his logical transition, where he requires his reader to navigate the unjustified connection between a writer's political consciousness and his grasp of the economic factors governing literary production, such as the one implied in the passage leading up to his first reference to the economics of literary production:

> *Il est bien évident que ni pour Hubert Damisch, ni pour les écrivains qui avec lui ont dénoncé l'imposture culturelle de cette entreprise à bon marché, il n'était question d'envisager la suppression culturelle d'un des secteurs les*

> *plus prospères de l'édition, mais bien plutôt d'éclairer et de restituer à l'entreprise sa réalité économique (sa dérision culturelle).* (78)

Thus, Pleynet works to make manifest the rationalization essential to this theoretical mode, presumably a symptom of the system of which it is a part, and in which its theorization plays a significant role, also essentially mirroring the rationalization required to understand such an ambiguous statement.

For these reasons, the goal of the pages that follow is to unravel these very convoluted modes of discourse employed by Tel Quel by means of an investigation into its various subtexts, a procedure that will also inevitably result in an articulation of the theory of subtext at work within it, in relation to their concepts, and conceptualization, of discourse, literary production, and linguistics. The hope of such a methodology, besides providing insight into each individual work of literature in question while painting a broader picture of Tel Quel as a whole, is that it clarifies the more patent arguments, which rely on the contradictions they entail, as in Pleynet, by means of uncovering its more latent materials.

However, also for similar reasons, the connections between the two are not always cut-and-dried, and therefore some introduction to the history of Tel Quel and its own relationship to literary production will prove decisive in this matter, as well as provide some necessary context for Pleynet's remarks about it. The history of the journal, and in particular its pre-history, need not be belabored given this has been the primary subject of its previous commentators. On a related note, it is also best to avoid a thorough critique of these works, most of which tend to take the journal and

its members at face value. In this context, they more or less begin where Pleynet left off in "A propos des revues," which therefore could only lead to more confusion regarding the delicate subject at hand.

Of course, this is not to deny that the history and production of French literary journalism around the time of the 1960s was not without its own particularities, but it is simply no different than the particularities of the French literary scene in general, and certainly not without its counterparts in the Anglophone world. That it is somehow significantly historically different than any other period of French literary production is another matter altogether. Naturally, Pleynet himself was fully aware of the historical contradictions he was putting forward in the above article.

Previous commentators' pre-histories of the journal discern two important precursors in the literary review format from the decades preceding the foundation of *Tel Quel* in 1960 under the auspices of the developing Éditions du Seuil publishing house. Also published by Seuil, the review *Écrire*, edited by the author Jean Cayrol and established in order to promote young authors at the beginning of their literary careers, was where many future Telquelians, most importantly its editor-in-chief, Philippe Sollers, found a place for their first publications. There, they were welcomed with open arms and hailed as the new generation of authors, publishing outside of one Seuil's contemporaries, Éditions de Minuit, which had gained notoriety as the home of the groundbreaking Nouveau Roman and so represented their primary competition in this burgeoning market.

Niilo Kauppi's *The Making of an Avant-Garde* is the most enlightening in this regard. As his title suggests, Kauppi proceeds by means of a sociological approach in order to take account of Tel Quel's impact of the publishing world at the time. Thus understanding Telquelian literary theory as inextricably linked to market strategy, his Bourdieu inspired literary market approach to Tel Quel somewhat unfortunately tends in turn to reduce its literary personages to mere affects of cultural capital. In this sense too, he takes on the typical thesis of the four book-length publications on Tel Quel, all published in the 1990s, all of which similarly assume a common lineage through Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*, reading *Tel Quel* as presenting a historical alternative to a "politically engaged" literature, especially for Kauppi via a non-academic readership. Although it is not far from the truth, this is unfortunately only to the detriment of reading the various specific dynamics of its politicized rhetoric, carefully couched in its theory of literary production. Most important, however, is that Kauppi fails to bring his own insights to conclusion, which imply a connection between contemporary youth market strategies of French publications with the concurrent dynamics of the literature of political engagement as symbolized by the Sartre of the post-war years, and hence underrepresenting this specific interest of Tel Quel during the early 1960s.

Still, Kauppi's analysis of the market strategies employed by Seuil when conceiving of the *Écrire* production model do work to establish the most central problematic relating to Telquelian aesthetics, style, with an eye to contextualizing it within Tel Quel's theory of literary production, astutely conceived in relation to the

contemporary publishing world. Here describing the central market strategy carried out by Seuil in order to promote young writers while still profitably navigating the high risks associated with the burgeoning youth market, he states:

> For an editor, the success of the first work of an unknown writer depended largely on luck; and using this new formula or little collection as some called it, minimized the risk, uncertainty and chance involved in publishing a new author … . From this collection young writers could move on to the house's regular collection. Given the difficulty of controlling this economy of launching new authors … , the practice of commissioning works was directly favored in the editors' investment strategies and in literary production models. A few unknown newcomers could be grouped around a young but promising and well-known (that is, already consecrated) author – such as Philippe Sollers in 1958. This leader figure could be used to create an image by presenting a team of authors, or literary group, to the public. If debutants succeeded in making a name for themselves, which in the best of circumstances would contribute to the creation of a myth, the editor could require that the team produce a succession of works written in a similar style or dealing with similar themes. (7-8)

Thus centered around the question of style, Kauppi continues to formulate the various economic pressures set up by this post-Fordist production model based on market affect, primarily here pertaining to its more or less direct influences in the various sectors of literary production. Beginning with its possible negative implications,

relating to the writer's "public image" he marks the inherent risks assumed by publishers as an essential component of such a model to inadvertently ruin one of their authors by means of stylistic "ghettoization." Then, moving to its more potentially positive implications, he notes the inevitable influence of such a production model on an author's critical reception:

> With their glorious history of heralding the new within the literary field, literary critics would cringe at the thought that they might be missing something essential. When faced with the audacity of aspirants and new arrivals, the initial irritation of the press quickly turned into praise. Anticipating trends and thereby identifying challenges to established authors meant avoiding scorn. (8-9)

Hence, *Écrire* serves as an important reference point for *Tel Quel*, branding it not only as the launching pad for many of their members, but also as both the continuation of Seuil's efforts to stake its claim on the burgeoning youth market, the supposed next step in this model of literary production. The reference is also a key insight into the *Tel Quel* editorial staff's own attempts to manage this market affect on their own terms, presumably in attempt to counteract it, though still caught within its market dynamics as critics themselves. As such, *Écrire* represents a pivotal insight into the mode of literary production in relation to the literary journalism of the time, while to some extent explaining the various, often tumultuous, shifts and changes that occurred in the early history of the journal.

As Forest notes in *Histoire de Tel Quel*, far from a revolution in style, however, aesthetically speaking *Écrire* was in fact a fairly conservative publication: "Une jeune littérature se donne à lire dont on note d'abord avec surprise qu'elle n'est en rien une littérature nouvelle. Les auteurs d'*Écrire* sont en général à mille lieues de tout avant-gardisme" (16). In contrast to Kauppi, Forest points out *Écrire*'s relative market dominance, as opposed to the former who paints it as existing within an explosion of youth oriented literary reviews. In fact, such an influence continues even today, having been the one of the first publishers of authors such as Roland Barthes, Marguerite Duras, Régis Debray, and Pierre Guyotat. He also notes another important market dynamic with its own potential reverberations in the aesthetic realm of style: specifically, that the review's own editor was not immune from the inherent stylistic ghettoization of this mode of literary production. Bombarded by the popularity of his review, Forest's account implies that Cayrol must have also been driven to cut corners in his practice as editor. Being simply constituting "groups around a leader," as in Kauppi, the review's most successful authors thus played an integral role in both assigning a stylistic mold, as well as serving an editorial function of their own by the more common means of a social interaction with other authors. In this sense, not only was *Écrire* the launching pad, but also the breeding ground for the early Telquelians: Pleynet, Sollers, Jean Pierre Faye, Fernand de Jacquelot du Boisrouvray, Jacques Coudol, Michel Maxence, and Denis Roche all found homes there during their early careers.

Thus, beyond the market affect of the mode of literary production literally speaking, the market strategy employed by Seuil and other publishing houses at the time extended, at least according to the aforementioned commentators, to its own readership as well, presumably via the formation of stylistic taste. Even Cayrol himself, Forest notes, was given to speaking of such a readership, as he did rather ironically in the very first issue of *Écrire* in his essay "Le coin de la table":

> Pre-littérature, littérature en formation, littérature verte, encore désordonnée, avec des scories, ce timide gravier qui grince entre les phrases, entre les pensées, composée parfois avec des miettes, des reliefs de lecture, d'effusion, dans laquelle l'écrivain-né fait son or, son magot, sa magie près d'un feu qui n'attend pas … . Un lecteur qui n'engage pas les hostilités avec un auteur désarmé, mais qui accepte de s'appuyer sur lui pour retrouver aide et confiance dans ses propres rêves et dans ses propres aspirations. (in Forest 14-5)

Thus, *Tel Quel* would have been conceived of as the continuation of such a readership "produced" by this mode of literary production, as noted by Kaupii: "Various strategies for conquering new readers and increasing revenues especially in the subfield of publishing targeted mostly at an intellectual public, also resulted in the metamorphosis of purely literary reviews such as *Tel Quel* into polyvalent reviews" (14). Kauppi's wording here too is typical of the Tel Quel commentators of the 1990s, which manifestly misrepresents both this strategy, which he otherwise implies to be a much more conscious effort on the part of the publishing houses, as well as *Tel*

Quel's own approach, or reasons for, such a particular shift in their format. Practically speaking, this argument ignores what this new "polyvalent" readership had specifically to do with this question of literary style.

Naturally, beyond the "production" of a readership, this market affect extended to the authors themselves as well. Here providing a much clearer vision of this particular outcome of Seuil's market strategy, especially with regards to the question of literary style, Kauppi works what he calls the author's "self-image" into his previous theory of the "public image," transformed suddenly in his book into a "public self-image," produced by this particular market dynamic:

> Furthermore, through the dialectical formation of self-image and public self-image, aspiring authors could make themselves believe, true to the "conformity of non-conformism" which reigned in the intellectual milieu, that incomprehension by one's contemporaries was a necessary condition for immortality. The incomprehension, if not real, could be invented (as if it existed) or even provoked. The success of such provocations depended on social demand for geniuses and on the structural tendencies of certain producers, distributors, and consumers to rally around authors usually presented as discredited or marginal in order to oppose to the field's dominant values. (9)

Beside the relatively gratuitous, and accordingly ill-defined, notion of the "conformity of non-conformism," this concept is in fact important for understanding *Tel Quel* in its early years in other ways. In fact, this dynamic of conformity was at

work within the ranks of the *Tel Quel* editorial staff of the first few years of the 1960s in its two distinct "camps," as previous commentators have tended to conceive of the early years of the journal fraught with conflict: with Sollers on one side, represented by *Écrire*, and with Jean-Edern Hallier and Jean-René Huguenin, represented by their own early proponents in the publishing world, the reviews *La Table Ronde* and *Arts*, on the other. As such, *Tel Quel* itself was indeed its own bubbling cauldron, mixing conformity and non-conformity within its own mode of literary production.

Founded in January 1960 though Sollers's connections with Seuil, although literally conceived of by Hallier as early as 1958, *Tel Quel*'s earliest issues were indeed geared towards such a youth market very much along the same lines as *Écrire*, although most of the literary works represented in them were written by either members of its committee or authors who were soon to be members, and much of which were excerpts from longer works soon to be published by Seuil. A few years into its history, they were endowed with their own collection, given some editorial power over book-length publications, as a complement to this format. Other divergences from *Écrire* were works by well-established authors, like Francis Ponge. The creative work was also supplemented by literary criticism, both by members of the committee and other authors, which ran the range of literary commentary, such as Renaud Matignon on Flaubert, to literary theory, such as the work of Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette. In keeping with its early format, the former critical model made its appearance much sooner. Alongside this more formal, academic-style literary criticism, these early issues contained book reviews, mostly of novels, and some even

included more light-hearted fare, such as questions posed to living authors about what it means to be a writer. Of course, even this was done in the more serious tones of this self-aware group of interested young authors.

This contrast was made clearer by the blunter statements made by the journal concerning its particular commitment to literature. The clearest example of which, the "Declaration" that opens their first issue, has been taken by many commentators as indicative of their stance vis-à-vis the second most important reference point for the literary review, Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*. This is especially the argument presented by Marx-Scouras in *The Cultural Politics of* Tel Quel, who uses the reference in order to contextualize *Tel Quel*'s historical reception. In contrast to Sartre's agenda of promoting an "engaged" literature, *Tel Quel* was often interpreted as a right-wing entity with the contrasting attitude of "art for art's sake," supposedly calling for literature "as is" (more or less a translation of the journal's name). While Marx-Scouras does correctly argue that the move should be understood as a strategic one, essentially a marketing scheme calling for a much desired alternative to "Sartre's hegemony," she accordingly fails to also recognize another important aspect: that it was simply a provocation in its own right. For the same reasons, her argument tends to misrepresent the journal's philosophy of "*tel quel*," an important indication of its early aspirations as a scientific observer of literary production, serving as an objective account of the contemporary phenomenon of the literary review, and which was one of the primary intentions of establishing themselves in relation to *Les Temps Modernes*. To some extent, this also hints at the impossibility, if not the total

uselessness, of determining their political motivations during these nascent years. In fact, as Forest in particular notes, *Les Temps Modernes*, despite its relative success, had simply already been reduced to the object of public ridicule, serving as both straw man and punching bag, as a "moralistic" review in the guise of a politically engaged practice, and so devoid of any real status as a journalistic precursor.

The post-war years in France were undoubtedly a time of literary revival, and in which the literary review played a pivotal role in shaping both the nature of its productions and its readership alike. However, none of these phenomena were particularly new to the scene of literary production. In fact, most histories and pre-histories of Tel Quel are more effective at pointing out the inadequacy of their own theories when it comes to appreciating the world of publication at the time, mostly due to the extent to which Tel Quel was deliberately involved in the reassessment of the theory of literary production. While Pierre Macherey, and his *For a Theory of Literary Production* is the usual point of reference, the Telquelians are too often overlooked in this matter, being both directly engaged in the practice while working towards a theory in its more subtle dynamics appropriate to such an undertaking. Macherey's work, of course, brought the literary production model closer to a dialectical materialism by highlighting the economic role literary criticism had to play in its processes. However, he was only truly able to demonstrate that such an undertaking had to be both conceived as a process existing within another process, as well as by means of an active relationship between literature and its theory.

This is one of the reasons Tel Quel, after 1967, decided to shift the theory of "literary production," which they also hypothesized as being essential to it, towards a theory of "textual production." In any case, Macherey's concept falls short of a description extending to Tel Quel, whose work constituted intersections, or rather modes of intersection, with this process while reacting to it. For example, in his history of the journal, *The Time of Theory*, Ffrench remarked an essential element of the burgeoning literary review scene of the period, which he referred to as "the ferment." Thus, in Ffrench, this world is presented as a didactic one in which interdisciplinary progress was developed, and registered under the heading of the transcendental signifier of "science." To borrow Jacques Derrida's term, this reading of Tel Quel is very markedly a "logocentric" one, and only manages to apply to the journal, in which many of the philosopher's early works were in fact published, parallel to the ways in which its members diverged from his ideas.

Ffrench's primary examples are the influences of journals relating to the fields of psychoanalysis, sociology, logic, and mathematics. In reference to the latter, he notes the influence of the mathematical theories of Georg Cantor, whose papers were published at the time in *Les Cahiers pour l'analyse*, in particular his notion of the "transfinite," on the work of Julia Kristeva, citing it as the inspiration for her theories of poetic language and intertextuality. The implications are compelling, but likewise misrepresent the ways in which Tel Quel as a group was more deliberately involved within a process of theorization, within another parallel process of literary production, and the specific dynamics thereby established between their theoretical and literary

works. This is not to imply that their theories are only applicable to their own work, however, but that they were conceived of as a form of process involved within another process: practically speaking, their theory can only be represented, and therefore also understood, with reference to their literary output. Because these are the particularly complex questions at the heart of Tel Quel, not simply a question of appropriation nor relating directly to the theory of discourse, specifically relating to the much more complicated relationship maintained by Kristeva with her borrowings from the field of mathematics. For the time being, these central questions could be preliminarily understood as representative of the problems of the study of discourse in relation to the theory of literary production.

Ffrench was aware of the essential parody at work within her theory, Kristeva being the most serious of the theorists directly attached to the journal, noting her latter-day critique of such "concept-gadgets" passed off as literary theory. Still, *The Time of Theory* is more invested in capturing the forces of literary production at work at that time, and unfortunately to the detriment of these essential questions of discourse. In fact, it would be more fitting to say that Tel Quel developed a parody of the theory of literary production because its central concept, "poetic language," was a notion developed as a mode of theorization precisely out of its contingency to the relations of historical literary production, being defined by the accordingly misrepresented generic distinction between prose and poetry.

The relationship of poetic language to the question of genre understood from a historical perspective is most thoroughly put forward, again, by Pleynet, in his essay

on Denis Roche, "La Poésie doit avoir pour but…," which accordingly serves as the primary theoretical reference in the first chapter. This essay begins by noting the recent progress made in the theory of the novel, while lamenting the relative lack of theorization when it comes to poetry. In this quote, Pleynet also puts forward his related theory of censorship, appropriately standing here for the problem of theory and its theorization of literary production:

> Si au cours de ces dernières années une certaine activité théorique semble avoir réussi à sortir le roman de l'impasse "naturaliste" où il se trouvait enfermé, et suggéré la possibilité d'un espace propre, d'une nouvelle articulation *réaliste*, propre à la lecture romanesque, rien de tel ne s'est produit pour la "poésie" qui reste, qu'elle le veuille ou non, complice d'une lecture esthétisante, décorative : lecture qui dans le meilleur des cas masque l'activité du texte (ou démasque sa gratuité), remplissant de toute façon sa fonction de censure. (Foucault et al. 94-5)

In the literary world, the primary reference here is the aforementioned "New Novel," notable for its concurrent self-theorization not unlike Tel Quel, which serves as the supposed starting off point for many accounts of the journal, mostly as a reference in order to apply their own theory of "textual writing" to their novelistic output. For the same reasons expressed above, the direct application of their theories and concepts can only be problematic, which is why this study seeks to avoid this influence entirely. Particularly, it demonstrates how the "New Novel" is more aptly conceived

as a point of reference, rather than an actual direct influence, owing to its shared interest in the question of the poetic language of the novel.

This is the point that Pleynet is looking to make in "La Poésie doit avoir pour but…," quoting Kristeva in a footnote:

> Une sémiologie littéraire est à faire à partir d'une logique poétique, dans laquelle le concept de *puissance du continu* engloberait l'intervalle de 0 à 2, un continu où le 0 dénote et le 1 est implicitement transgressé.
>
> Dans cette "puissance" du continu du zéro au double spécifiquement poétique, on s'aperçoit que "l'interdit" (linguistique, psychologique, social), c'est le 1 (Dieu, la loi, la définition) et que la seule pratique linguistique qui échappe à cet interdit, c'est le discours poétique. (95)

In a self-reflexive mode echoing his article on the question of the literary review, similarly engaging directly in the complexity of the articulation of such a problematic, Pleynet accordingly offers a more prosaic version of Tel Quel's interaction with the theory of literary production as a complement to Kristeva's more scientific rendering:

> Que devient (dans ses manifestations les plus fortes) dans la théorie du texte romanesque à partir du mouvement où elle se trouve amputée de la fonction théorique du discours poétique ? Si ces deux questions — abandon de la poésie à un esthétisme décoratif, choix du texte romanesque "polyphonique" (J. Kristeva), si cette double question fait scandale (?) c'est que déjà, à travers ce qui la censure, dans une production littéraire (théorie qui détourne ces

> questions) s'est inscrite ; c'est que, dans cet ordre, une autre question doit répondre : Qu'en est-il aujourd'hui des "genres" littéraires ? (95)

As in "A propos des revues," it is as if their theoretical density also required the supplemental rationalization of a commentary such as this. Still, such a density is not rendered here in order to circumvent the potential critique of this argument, that it merely reproduces what they intended to imply about their own work, but rather that this is merely a contingency of their own discursive modes in order to capture, while inevitably reproducing, their dynamic forms of "textual production."

Demonstrating how this theory is an inherent contingency of its own mode of production, combining works of literature with literary theory, the following chapters serve as a practical inquiry into Kristeva's semiotic theory of paragrammatic writing, a key insight into the Tel Quel group's collective theories of the "text" and "poetic language." Working through various modes of reading as defined in relation to generic conventions, each chapter revolves around the problematic status of "poetic language" as a means of approaching the question of style: chapters one and two deal with poetry, and chapters three and four the novel. The two parts are linked by means of an elaboration of Tel Quel's central theory of the artificial ideological distinction between literature and literary criticism, being constitutive of its particular mode of literary production. This in particular forms the basis of its literary theory and practice specifically mediated by linguistics and economics. Along with the relationship of literary production to poetic language, the chapters consider Tel Quel's concurrent theory of the "text" under its various transformative forms by means of analysis of its

shifting modes of intertextuality and its concurrent development of a semiotic literary theory. Broadly defined by Kristeva in *Séméiôtiké* as the reader's interaction with a text's "network of connections" (175), paragrammatism is thus progressively unfolded within the layers of potential multiple readings within each work.

The first chapter introduces the paragram as the textual basis of poetic language, or the elements of paragrammatic writing, distinguishing it from the latter in relation to linguistics by first defining the paragram in the poetry of Denis Roche. A stylistic device employing meta-poetic transgression, the paragram systematically undermines both poetic and linguistic conventions with the paradoxical goal of evoking the "text," summarily described as an experience of poetic language. As such, this chapter provides an introductory definition of Tel Quel's pivotal theory of "textual production" as a palimpsest, serving as a preliminary image transgressing the generic distinction between literature and its commentary. Kristeva's theory thus provides an in-depth analysis of paragrammatic reading as well, as also demonstrated by Pleynet's essay on the poet. By reading Pleynet's own poetic language in the essay, I describe Roche's poetry as a matrix in which paragrams erupt, making writing an act of aggression, "disfiguring" his own poetic authority by means of his misappropriation of linguistics. Thus, considering Kristeva's statement, "l'écriture paragrammatique serait l'aspiration vers une agressivité et une participation total" (181). Roche's poems enact a "lyric I" establishing itself to accomplish a negation of the structures of textual influence, essentially defined by Roche as the "theory of poetry." As Roche's poetry elaborates a poetic corpus in order to transgress it, I

consider it here in relation to Telquelian Marxist discourse and in the corresponding social terms of taste. Contextualizing the Tel Quel apparatus as a necessary reference point for Roche's work, this chapter serves as an outline of the various valences of paragrammatic writing, as well as an introduction to the question of style considered in light of the theory of literary production.

The second chapter continues along these lines to demonstrate how a theory can be disengaged from the multiple layers of readings at work in a text. It further considers paragrammatic writing as a re-working of the role of linguistics in literature and literary theory, examining both Jean-Louis Baudry's "Linguistique et production textuelle" and Marcelin Pleynet's 1967 book on the prose poet Lautréamont. The latter represents Tel Quel's most significant influence whose work represents its primary reference point for a "theoretical literature" specifically engaged with the question of literary production. Pleynet's book asks the important question of genre, somewhat beyond the confusion of literary and critical genres, by making his commentary into a personal struggle of the poet's relationship to prose, especially in relation to the generic topos of the "end of poetry" exemplified by Roche. As such, this also serves as an introduction to Jean Thibaudeau's idea of the "novel as autobiography" by reading Pleynet's criticism and poetry through Kristeva as a theory of language and trauma, the dynamics of literary influence and personal style, and the relevance of such a theory to literary criticism. In this sense, while reading the dialogue between Lautréamont and Pleynet, particularly how the dialogistic use of an intertext is its own aesthetic technique with its own particular challenges, Pleynet's

book simultaneously represents a theory and a paradigm of paragrammatic writing. In general, this chapter also explores Tel Quel's relationship to theory by means of the concept of a "theoretical literature." Specifically, Pleynet develops a "narrative theory" by illicitly re-appropriating Lautréamont for his own purposes of self-theorization with concepts such as *renversement* and distanciation, also incorporating Derrida's influence with concepts such as logocentrism. This chapter more thoroughly introduces the group's derisive attitude towards the institutions of education and academic literary criticism. Pleynet's work therefore serves to conceptualize a theory of anti-theory concurrent with their hypothesized dynamic relationship of theory to literary production, specifically as a critique of the practice of close reading. Along with Philippe Sollers's economic theory of literature, this chapter demonstrates that more than a simple critique of the institution of literary criticism, Tel Quel set its sights on contemporary Marxist discursive analysis as well. By reading Baudry's essay as an essential intertextual element of Pleynet's work, it also shows how particularly Pleynet's use of intertextuality was in fact designed as an alternative to the two ideologies of academic and Marxist criticism. Baudry introduces the Telquelian theory of the "inscription du travail," and in general provides the theory to Pleynet's practice of interpretation by outlining the theory of Tel Quel's decisive shift from literary to "textual production." Practically speaking, this translates to uncovering significant alternative readings at work in Pleynet's literary commentary, particularly in relation to the book's photographic imagery.

Turning to an applied investigation of the relationship between linguistics and textual production, the third chapter provides a comprehensive description of Tel Quel's novelistic practice towards the latter half of the decade. In order to distinguish it from previous Tel Quel commentators' conceptions of its novels, this chapter constitutes a reappraisal of Telquelian literary theory, particularly with reference to its novels being constructed in counter-distinction to an idea of "Literature." As such, it reconsiders literary production as defined by Thibaudeau in "Le Roman comme autobiographie." Specifically, the chapter focuses on the latter's novel *Ouverture* and its various intertextual elements, especially reading it as an interpretation of Lautréamont, and as a means of delineating its multiple layers of reading, couched in its inevitable misreading. In addition, it looks at other Tel Quel novels considering them to be in meaningful dialogue with one another in Thibaudeau, notably Jean-Edern Hallier's *Les aventures d'une jeune fille* and Baudry's *Le Pressentiment*. The question I ask is: if a novel is the composition of the book the author feels he needs to write, then how has Tel Quel as an entity enabled him to write it and around which paragrams is the novel built? In short, this intertextual dynamic could be understood as existing within the spaces between literature and its criticism, the marginalia within the contradictions of literary production, therefore simply existing as an essential structural element of its style, discourse, and theory. While this chapter provides a systematic account of the "text" in light of the concept of the paragram, of a Telquelian deconstruction of authority, and how style can reveal language as meta-poetic, I argue that these works are primarily concerned with the relationship between

life and text, specifically in a direct relation to its criticism. Returning to the question of style, I demonstrate that the idea of a novel as "autobiography" is no different than that of a self-constructing "text," a paragrammatic "inachèvement du texte bouclé provisoirement" (278), or writing as a process playing off the idea of literature as a representation of speech as the life of the text. In general, this chapter pinpoints the group's relationship to literary theory, particularly in their conceptual elaboration of a "group theory" in relation to literary production, a decisive feature of their poetic project.

Turning to the journal's figurehead, Philippe Sollers, his 1968 novel, *Nombres*, and its deliberate coherence with Kristeva's article on the novel "L'Engendrement de la formule," the fourth chapter provides a final definition of the "text" created by this significant shift to a calculated theoretical intertext. This intertext being representative of a shift in Tel Quel's mode of literary production, this chapter confronts the question of style in relation to paragrammatism as redefined in chapter three. It begins by refuting Barthes's and Derrida's readings of Sollers, by identifying the latter's explicit definition of writing, especially literary commentary, as a form of interpretation in and of itself. Hence, it elaborates the negative logic assumed from the beginning of the systematic erasure of the spheres of influence of textuality and literariness as an attempt to capture the various disseminations at work within the text, and how, in its differential multiplicity, language can be made to "speak itself." I argue that Kristeva's appeal for an experimental literature, one that calls for transgression of norms due to its very structure in order to reveal the text's

verbal qualities, "la logique relationnelle est verbale" (202), is critical to this discussion and assists in providing a more comprehensive theory of Tel Quel's theory of literature. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates how this can only be fully accounted for in this particular intertextual mode. Considered in direct relation to Sollers's novel, an intertext further mediated by Nicolas Bourbaki's universal mathematics, *Théorie des emsembles*, Kristeva's essay marks the apogee of the group's philosophy of literature by bringing theory to its logical endpoint as a representation of language. This she does by integrating a scientific, axiomatic conception of literary theory with a critique of mathematical and scientific positivism through the addition of the subjectivity of language, by uncovering the grammatical subject within scientific discourse. In other words, Kristeva constructs her own veritable "grammatology" through a critique of positivism and within the spaces of these generic confusions as a basis for a "semiology of paragrams," as well as a "semanalysis," or an argument for a linguistics of writing. In conclusion, I return to the theory of textual production by means of such and elaboration of scientific discourse, with reference to the representation of speech especially considered via Telquelian film theory, demonstrating the centrality of Tel Quel's literary production to its political theory.

CHAPTER ONE

Denis Roche's Introductions

The poetry of Denis Roche plays an essential role in defining both Telquelian prose as well as "Tel Quel" as an unidentifiable entity paradoxically in need of definition, drawing it closer to its more sociological and ideological implications. Practically speaking, Roche's work provides a preliminary definition of "textual production" as a distinction between what can be observed in Tel Quel publications from its contemporaries, such as Pierre Macherey's "literary production," as a common concern for the text that a given work is either meant to, or otherwise inevitably will, produce. Thus for Roche, textual production, rather than being conceived as an abstract literary market, stands more literally for an imaginary text implicitly constituted by interpretation. Representative of this important preliminary shift in the concept carried out by Tel Quel under this specifically poetic form, Roche's poetry is symptomatic of its fundamental reappraisal of the theory of literary genre and central to its general mode of literary production.

For example, existing under the surface of the work of the poet as a "textual" palimpsest, and more specifically as part of the reading or the meaning itself, such a textual product can be considered one of the simplest instances of a stylistic form of textual production. One such example can be found, not in Roche's poetry, but rather in his only contribution to the theoretical output of Tel Quel published in the 1960s beyond the bounds of his own poetry: his essay "La Poésie est inadmissible," which appeared in 1968's *Théorie d'ensemble*. Even by Tel Quel standards, "theory," is a

generous term for the work, which tends rather to ironically paint itself as an advertisement for his poetry, and even entirely disintegrates into some of his most abstract poems, by which point the easy irony of this gesture itself seems an empty one. His particular approach to the theory of poetry here, what could be termed the genre of poetry as literary criticism is exemplary of Tel Quel's more general approach to the application of the concept of "poetic language" to the theory and criticism as well its development of a "theoretical literature." Of primary interest, then, are the poet's theoretical prefaces, particularly in relation to Roche's contemporary collection of poetry, *Éros énergumène*, a work that constitutes the culmination of the poet's obsessive motifs, themes, and poetics, which specifically, while most patently incorporating poetic theory into poetry itself, compensates for its lack of coherence through an appropriately "eroticized" relationship to Tel Quel as a group.

"La Poésie est inadmissible," Roche's essay in which the phrase producing a palimpsestual "textual product," constitutes an explicit transgression of the generic distinction between an essay and a poem in order to form this textual palimpsest by poetically motivating syntax as part of the normal process of meaning-making of the sentence. Specifically, this is done by obliquely associating Louis Althusser's concept of "interpellation" with a reference to Rimbaud, and by "dissecting" the syntax of the sentence with commas, thus simultaneously in reference to the iconic Lautréamont quote "le rencontre fortuit d'une parapluie et une machine à coudre sur une table de dissection" (327): "je contemple l'idée précisément dramatique que je suis, … une conviction qui n'est ni 'idéologique' ni 'philosophique'" (222). That is, by

syntactically making the sentence sound more like an enlightened, in other words "poetic," "I contemplate the idea that I am," he is making an explicit reference to what is considered Rimbaud's own *ars poetica*, the iconic line of the "Lettre du voyant": "Je est un autre."

The overt reference to Althusser a few lines later, foreshadowing the ironic descent into poetry just mentioned, thus confirms this piecing together of a "textual product," a hyper-palimpsest image: "the chance meeting of Althusser and Rimbaud on a dissection table." The confirmation also instills this technique with particular power by, again through a similarly poetic means, getting directly to the heart of his critique of contemporary poetry, which is only ever implied here and elsewhere. Although in this case it is brought to the heightened level of a symbol, Roche's critique by means of a theory of poetry is otherwise made immediately explicit, as in the preface to *Éros énergumène*. In "La Poésie est inadmissible," it represents a common critique, but also common hypocrisy, shared by Roche, Baudry, and Kristeva in her "Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes": the abuse of linguistics as a means of theorizing (and in Roche's case, writing) poetry, namely the misappropriation of grammar and syntax. This is employed by Roche, both in order to justify his equally abusive, hyper-extended use of the "poetic language" of the essay. Thus, he presents the reader with a correspondingly false definition of syntax. As above, he likewise turns what is hereby identified as grammar into a poetry-like experience of an essentially allegorical theory: a "reading" identified as such by its own reading. For example, simply by stating that any "toute révolution ne peut être

grammaticale or syntactique" (226), as Roche does at the end of this essay, is the "syntactical production," so to speak, of *this* text: the critical interpretation, rather than the face value, of his theory of poetry, simply because it is deliberately inexact, and ultimately incorrect.

Accordingly, this theory at work in his poetry can only be the object of an interpretation itself. Opposite textual production, this relative abusive misappropriation of linguistics was employed generally to mediate various manifestations of the "critical poem" genre in Tel Quel precisely because Roche's critical work in particular takes on this question most explicitly as an essential part of a theory of genre, not to mention by the most typical means of Telquelian theoretical methodology. What also makes Roche's approach such a central question for the group as a whole, especially relating to its particular concern for the relation of literary practice to its theory and criticism, is an overly self-conscious relation to its own criticism. This is further complicated by his surprisingly open recognition of the nonsense produced by his erroneous and misleading use of linguistic terminology, particularly brought to the fore by his habitual practice of the theoretical introduction. Roche therefore exemplifies one trend of the literary production of Tel Quel in his efforts to produce deliberately defective literature, along with an accordingly defective theory, which he often combines in an effort to produce new, but equally unimpressive, rhetorical tropes, such as is the case above with this "textual product."

In other words, Tel Quel's work can be misleading. For example, this question of the ideology of taste implied by Roche's work is in fact nothing but the intrusion of

the author conscious that he writes such poor poetry. That this overlaps with the reader's distaste in reading his unsavory and scandalous poems, contemplating the social implications of aesthetic judgment, is far from a theory, however. It may be presented as such, as it is in his critical work, but it is still an unsatisfactory theory, even if it may prove successful, in turn, at producing a critical commentary that is equally poor. As such, the above text, by more closely conforming to the model of "syntactical production," or an interpretation-based reading of the "poetic language" of the critical poem, rather than simply producing another text, sets itself up as a mirror of its own commentary, not unlike an allegory. For instance, the *explicit* reference to its own criticism stands a symbol for the *explicitness* of his form, or register. Naturally, the majority of his poems simply mark themselves in various ways as "bad," although there are certainly some poems that are, however ironically benign they may cast themselves, morally offensive.

Éros énergumène's preface contains an explicit reference to Roche's own future criticism, whose theory of poetry as "conventions" suggests that the notion of the "poetic language" of criticism is nothing more than the degree of the author's awareness of the conventions of his discourse. After having set out his sophisticated theory of poetry in the final three paragraphs of the introductory essay, he begins to put forward his new revolutionary conception of poetry with the ironically pedantic idea of a "new scansion." Given the context of the genre of the critical poem, it is hard not to read this section of the preface, entitled "Pour une nouvelle scansion," as a rhetorical staking of claim on his own approach to poetry and poetic theory, close to

the stereotypical rhetoric of the "poet's poet" who sees the need to incorporate the irrational into the rationality of theory, at least when it comes to poetry. This is especially clear in contrast to his earlier prefaces, which prefer to cast themselves in the very different light of a relatively unrecognizable avant-garde, and using much less specific terms such as "rhythm." So he begins his new poetics, also differentiating himself from other paragrammatic avant-gardes such as Surrealism: "Récupérer l'idée de la scansion" (16), as if poetry's claim on theory was enough of a freeing gesture.

The complex poetic theory that follows, mixing the discourses of psychoanalysis, namely "drive" (*pulsion*), and poetics, essentially suggesting this as a way of reading the book, is intercut with the explicit reference to his own critical readership in question, simply by his use of the word "study" rather than "read": "Certains pages d'*Éros* seraient à étudier à ce seul niveau de *bousculade pulsionnelle*" (16). Again, the phrasing is essential not just for reading this work, but also for understanding what he meant, as part of the need to interpret Roche's theory of poetry by working through it, rather than taking it literally. This is just as much a practical question of reading these works as it is a theoretical one, as this preface, as much as other "critical poems," does not ever give itself over easily to a straightforward interpretation, and often makes as little sense as it is theoretically cogent.

There is no connection established with his critic, and in fact he comes off far too overconfident to inspire trust of any kind. Practically, the reference works instead

to establish an affective way of reading in conjunction with his literal suggestion of a new scansion, to lend the reader a "critical eye," so to speak, presumably required to digest his radically new poetry. The sentiment echoes Kristeva's conception of the purpose, or perhaps even of a new form, of literary criticism, similarly made abundantly clear in her essay on Lautréamont, "Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes," in which she also puts forward her deliberately ambiguous, but central, concept of "poetic language."

Kristeva's own reference to a new kind of reading is made immediately after giving what is the closest definition of "poetic language," and which most specifically implies the use that Roche is making of it here: "Dans le fonctionnement des modes de jonction du langage poétique nous observons, en outre, le processus dynamique par lequel les signes se chargent ou changent de signification" (178). Significantly, Kristeva mirrors Roche by progressively associating the literary critic with a linguist, notably imagined as a form of reading itself, which therefore, in contrast to the poet, defines a new kind of reading by means of an outside reference to a discourse, rather than to an actual form of poetry:

> Dans cette perspective, la pratique littéraire se révèle comme observation et découverte des possibilités du langage; comme activité qui affranchit le sujet de certain réseaux linguistiques (psychiques, sociaux); comme dynamisme que brise l'inertie des habitudes du langage et offre au linguiste l'unique possibilité d'étudier le *devenir* des significations des signes. (178-9)

The passage is typical of the style of both Roche and Kristeva, who, while stating their theory, explore the very dynamics of the polyvalent possibilities of the language in question, here conflating the uncertainty of who is a literary critic and who is a linguist with the ambiguity of her statement: it remains uncertain whether or not she is simply describing a form of reading, or a new kind of structuralist theoretical and/or critical discourse. Here, too, is simply the point at which these discursive levels of ambiguity are most noticeably made deliberate, a rare occurrence in Kristeva who tended to opt for the much more serious tones of a "scientific" theory, although often to the point of over-affectation, however discreetly, as in the above quote. As such, it serves as a form of "poetic language" of its own, complementing Lautréamont as a "theoretical poet" with a similar vision of the critic as a scientist.

"Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes" can be read as a way to read Roche, inventing similarly useful concepts for the interpretation of his poetry such as the "poetic language" and "paragrammatic writing." In short, the latter represents the text's "network of connections," as defined in the introduction, and is complemented by the Saussurian concept of the "paragram," which more or less constitute the various elements of such a network. Most important is this essay similarly provides much needed interpretations of the more inexplicable aspects of his work, such as aggression, describing both his aggressive theorization of poetry, as well as his abusive appropriation of linguistics: "l'écriture paragrammatique serait l'aspiration vers une agressivité et une participation total" (181). Still, the essay could also be taken as an explanation of Kristeva's own poetic language in the guise of a theory,

such as "la science paragrammatique doit donc tenir compte d'une ambivalence" (181), and therefore could only truly be related to Roche as a reading of his theory of poetry, and not of his poems. For example, Kristeva's consideration of the meaning of the verb "to read" in this passage, used in lieu of a more scientific equivalent, could be seen as an interpretation, or at least the counterpart, of Roche's insistence on the need to "study" his poems.

In his essays on Roche, Marcelin Pleynet attempts to define a concept similar to both Roche's poetry and Kristeva's theory of poetry particularly relevant to the above example: the "bourgeois matrix." Describing Roche's mode of composition, as a progressive amassing of images and tropes, the example also speaks to the degree to which Roche both identifies and works through new and different ways of reading, as in the example above. Similarly, the concept of the "matrix" also offers an image of the particular relationship between Roche's poetry and Kristeva's essay. The two are both equally invested in a conception of poetic language breaking down the immediate registers of signification to the extent that there is no, technical or moral, deliberate distinction between these two texts. This Roche states in the preface to *Éros énergumène*, here reading "poetic language" instead of "poetry," accordingly: "la poésie serait débarrassée des exposants moraux, affectifs, sentimentaux et philosophiques" (12). This would also explain their common interest in Lautréamont, whose influence runs throughout Roche's work, as much as it does for Tel Quel in general, as a common text reduced to its minimal conventions. Not only does Lautréamont's work seem to particularly give itself to a paragrammatic analysis, but

also provides the outlines for such an undertaking, summed up in his iconic phrases, often quoted by these authors: "le plagiat est nécessaire" (381), and, "la poésie doit être faite par tous. Non pas un" (386).

The Pleynet essay in which he gives his concept of the "matrix," in contrast to the hypothetical relation between Kristeva's and Roche's texts, also constitutes the single reference to a deliberately, though oblique, intertextual relationship between two texts written by two different authors of Tel Quel. This relationship is also literally bound together as its own "matrix," between Pleynet's two-part essay on Roche, the first half of which has already been published in *la Nouvelle Critique* and the second in *Tel Quel*. Roche's essay "La Poésie est inadmissible," is only published later in *Théorie d'ensemble*, the book in which all of these essays appear together, and in which Pleynet's two pieces are presented as a single whole. The reference is found in the first part of Pleynet's essay, entitled "La Poésie doit avoir pour but…," cites Roche's iconic statement, "poetry is inadmissible" (103), in this essay which would have been published before Roche's. It appears at least to be the case in *Théorie d'ensemble*, and should therefore be read as an explicit intertextual reference. This indication of a partially deliberate intertextuality, however, is also remarkably feeble in comparison to other Tel Quel intertexts, all of which give specific discursive valences to each distinct form.

Here, the common thread between the two poets in these texts is simply the relationship of theory and poetry. In the preface to *Éros énergumène*, Roche paints a long and complex history of the question, locating the origins of this relationship at

the origin of poetry itself, working his way up to the present while establishing the logic of his poetic solution to this problem, under the form of a "theory" of the theory of poetry. This solution he terms, as its poetic equivalent, "disfiguration." His evolution is summarily provided in the opening section of the preface, ending with a curt observation regarding the lack of understanding of the origins of poetry, from which he deduces the following:

> Mais qu'en déduire, sinon sans doute qu'étant donné cette absence de racines connues de la chose poétique il ne saurait être pour nous question d'approuver ni même de commenter toute entreprise de théorisation poétique qui perdrait un instant de vue qu'elle se doit avant tout à sa propre réflexion ou, si l'on veut, à son autocritique. C'est peut-être une sorte de justification par la méfiance mais convenons bien que la poésie ne se connaît pas comme naissance, qu'elle ne se connaît pas comme emploi, qu'elle *ne* se connaît *plus* comme science et qu'elle ne se connaît jamais comme société. (10)

Pleynet proceeds very much parallel to Roche in this respect, acting as the theory behind this theory, similarly grounding his argument generally in terms both of the question of genre and of the history of language itself. Pleynet's commentary thus provides an alternative theory required in order to uncover the latent levels of meaning in *Éros énergumène*, in which the problem of the theory of poetry makes this problem more patently inexpressible. In due form, Pleynet shifts his attention from poetry proper to what he refers to as "textual writing," which should not be understood here as Roche's or of any other Tel Quel author, but rather the modern

form of writing self-aware of these theoretical problems: “L’inscription des textes, leur activité, doit donc traverser les barrages réducteurs de la langue, barrages qui se manifestent au niveau littéraire (de culture) sous la forme de structure littéraire ou genre, mais qui en fait ne sont que la représentation métaphorique (en abîme) des lois de cette généticité de la parole où s’origine la langue" (99). Similarly, representative of the commentary of Roche’s theory, Pleynet shifts his attention to the more practical question of the relationship between theory and poetry in the literal sense of the historical use of theory to read poetry. This he states as the transition from the essay’s theoretical opening to its poetic commentary, critiquing his contemporaries:

> Passer la colère qui fait poète (contre les chantres de l’harmonie qui se confondent aujourd’hui avec l’avant-garde anarcho-révolutionnaire et le jeu mystifiant des formalistes — formes et combinatoire scientistes, garantie vide d’idéologie… ce qui n’est pas peu dire), revenir sur cette histoire cultivée (“Nous revenons arpenter le jardin cultivé”, R.C., p. 86) dont la non-lecture peut justement donner lieu à ce n’importe quoi “transgressif” ou sans transgression, exige une pratique dont la complexité opératoire n’offre pas forcément en une seule fois l’articulation de ces lectures. (100)

As such, he sets out to develop his own more scientific means, based on Althusser’s theory of “generalities” from “On Dialectical Materialism,” of unraveling the problem of theory’s relationship to poetry.

The above critique of theory is more than innocent, however. Given the context, especially regarding the question of poetic “disfigurement,” a reference to

the Russian formalist, Victor Chklovski, and his essay "Art as Process," which puts forward a similar theory of poetic language and its use regarding a "distanciation" effect, seems most appropriate. The essay had in fact been recently published in *Tel Quel*, a precursor to their book collection's publication in 1965 under the heading *Théorie de la littérature*, a collection of works by Russian formalists translated by Tzvetan Todorov. Indeed, Roche's works do echo this essay in many ways, both being particularly concerned with the semantic functions of language and with the questions of convention, alienation, and effects of "distanciation." While in some ways, Roche's signature overuse of nominative forms could be likened to Chklovski's theory, representing in some sense the surface effects of the incursion of the prosaic in poetry, it is more that Roche, by shifting the focus from "distanciation" to "disfigurement," is rather working against this conception of figuration, especially in its subsequent poetic forms. Hence, the dialectic of prose and poetry in Chklovski's essay is transferred to the dialectic of poetry and theory, giving rise to the modifications in the signifying functions of "semantics" as found in Roche, which work precisely to nullify such a restrictive use of linguistic formalisms.

From this particular theoretical reference, the Pleynet intertext is further mediated by the texts' "poetic language," which in this case might be more suitably defined as different forms of discourse, and does not take on the true shades of the critical poem genre until the second part of Pleynet's essay. In other words, by means of the contrast between the two parts, it is particularly the way Pleynet goes about putting forward his interpretation of Roche's work that determines what he concludes

about it. The first part of the essay, presented more or less as a serious piece of literary criticism, speckled with casual undertones, appropriates Roche's aforementioned erotic metaphor of "explicitness," especially in reference to the explicitness of this intertextuality. Concurrently, he mediates Roche's juxtaposition of theory and poetry and the questions of genre presented by it through his own short foray into a theory of genre as well as his remarkably sexualized concept, "geneticity."

Practically speaking, like Roche's prefaces, this essay can be read twice, once before and then after reading *Éros énergumène*. The collection's introduction sustains a level of ambiguity able to account for both of these readings, and, also like Roche, precisely only in direct reference to the poetry. The first of these tends to favor an interpretation of him as a poet of theory, who, by means of a reduction to a legal language, plays out its deliberate relationship to criticism as a way of challenging its normativity. In short, what Pleynet calls the "poetic code" in his heavily theoretical opening cannot in fact be fully understood in relation to Roche's poetry without a specific common reference to his "theory" of the theory of poetry as put forward in the preface to *Éros énergumène*: "C'est parce que la loi de la langue est immuable dans sa fonction légale qu'elle peut déplacer, transformer ses statuts et les adapter au besoin à un progrès (et à une modernité) qu'elle comprend 'positivement'. Ainsi la connotation du code poétique n'est pas la même pour Lamartine et pour Mallarmé …" (97). Without direct reference to Roche, which Pleynet makes no effort to provide, the idea even appears as Pleynet's own theory of poetic language as it relates

to the institution of legal written language, when in fact he is doing nothing other than simply describing the historical distinction between prose and poetry. It is at the end of this same paragraph however in which he draws out the more immediate implications of this otherwise monumental legal theory of literature:

> Qu'on songe à la fonction de lecture du texte poétique pour un contemporain de Dante et à celle d'un contemporain de Mallarmé ; puis pour renverser ce mode de valeur (de valorisation), à la fonction de lecture du roman de Mme de Lafayette par ses contemporains et à celle du roman de Proust par les siens, et l'on verra se dessiner ce déplacement d'activité du code littéraire d'un ordre de signifié métaphysique avoué à celui d'une "science" positive. (97)

Here he constructs an essential complement to Roche's theory of poetry, playing the role of both its theoretical equivalent and its implications, which relies on its own poetic language in order to make similar suggestions, here specifically in relation to the theorization of literature: that, as a complement to this phenomenon of the legal record of language, is the implication that a work of literature contains both its own ideology as well as its own readership, as part of its "syntax" according to its false definition used here, or in the act of its reading, which are historical.

After putting forward this complex, yet incomplete, theoretical introduction, the second section of the first part of the essay, which in fact represents a formal manifestation of a second possible reading of itself, could be understood as a theory that is not a theory, but rather the poem that is the theory. As such, it tends instead to provide a reading of Roche's poems as an evolution of eroticism, rather than simply

state it to be the case, as in the first part. In typical Pleynet fashion, it is presented as a meta-interpretation, a reading of itself as an erotic text, and as the inevitable outcome of its own reading of "geneticity." The interpretation in question is in fact a very particular one, also the very same deliberately anticipated by Roche in his preface to *Éros énergumène*: the shift from the poem as an erotic object, exemplified by the portrait poems of his previous collection *Les Idées centésimales de Miss Élanize*, to the more explicitly erotic poems in the former. The reading may be modest, and this certainly seems to be the case given the essay's otherwise high theoretical register. In fact, a closer look at his only in-depth rhetorical analysis of a poem reveals that it, like his other direct quotations, is simply deliberately left unclear. Notably, the close reading of the first block quote of Roche's poems, which attempts to define a Rochian technique of "rupture," makes no direct reference to any one of the many possible ruptures in the text, and even confuses the matter by adding meaningless slashes, as if to mark out these so-called "ruptures." Naturally, they do no such thing.

The "rupture" technique in Roche would in fact be more aptly described as the aforementioned "textual products," or relating to his use of what he calls "*assises*." In fact, it is more appropriate to read Pleynet's interpretations in this part of the essay as simply those that are most applicable to the poetic language of Roche's theoretical work, rather than his poetry proper. In any case, this certainly closes the circle, so to speak, of the revolving connection that the essay sets up between poetry in its relation to theory. This temptation is made stronger by Pleynet's out of character and seemingly reductive, and undeniably uncritical, reading of the series of erotic poems

as an integral erotic diary, of a single female character constituting a story in a body of work that in reality systematically tends towards its own de-serialization. As will be demonstrated below in *Éros énergumène*, for example, any such "erotic diary" is in fact worked through multiple strategies in order, in turn, to represent a more problematic singular personality within a more generalized social context. Of course, it is impossible to prove that Pleynet simply did not understand Roche's poetry, still it is likely, given the context, that he is deliberately playing with an uninformed, surface reading his work that the poet himself has a tendency to put forward only to transgress. "Serialization," for example, is a concept Roche branded himself with from his very first collection of poetry, and while it is perhaps useful for approaching his strings of nonsense organized into lines and single stanzas, these kinds of concepts provided in his prefaces are almost always misleading. Likewise, Pleynet also contradicts himself in this regard: "Le poème érotique se trouve en quelque sorte chez Denis Roche perverti" (109), defining Roche's erotic poems as counter-conventional after having already explicitly established that he effectively eludes convention entirely.

The second part of Pleynet's essay on Roche as printed in *Théorie d'ensemble*, making no explicit reference to his work, takes the genre of the critical poem to new heights, even going so far as to give itself the title of "La poésie comme explication," likely in reference to Gertrude Stein's "Composition as Explanation." The piece, written entirely in italics, essentially casts itself as the work of a "poet's poet" by developing its own self-congratulatory theory that a true theory of poetry

cannot be undertaken by theoretical means alone, but must also be considered from the point of view of a poetic composition. The article's ironically smug tone representing an essential part of its own mode of figuration, this gesture also mirrors the ideological implications of his explicitly Marxist concept of the "bourgeois matrix." Similarly working off his theory of poetry contained within the poetic form developed in reference to Roche, the text takes on the form of a more explicit self-reference, mixing theory and poetic imagery, but lacking contextualization, in order to catapult them to the level of a theory. One such example is the following passage, which notably marks Pleynet's development of an economic conception of poetry:

> *Le récit, vous le lisez, n'a d'autre fonction que ce texte dans les textes, le rêve de ce texte. Et pourtant dans le récit, le texte de la graine, le texte de la terre, le texte de la saison, le texte de la récolte, le texte de la réserve en blé, qui est aussi le texte de la faim, qui est aussi le texte de l'économie, qui est aussi le texte de la dépense… ne sont jamais lus, jamais écrits (à écrire — cette gueule pleine de livres).* (120)

While his use of "*récit*" has theoretical implications, here it is simply brought over the top through the article's pre-established self-referentiality, here highlighted both literally and in contrast to the text, and reduced to a symbol of the discourse being used to theorize it. In other words, like Kristeva's imaginary scientific "reader," Pleynet has done nothing more than open up the possibility of a "reading" taking place by means of his theory of language as related to his implicit appropriation of Roche's theory of poetic language. In continuation of the motif of the "récit du récit,"

instead of quoting or even openly referencing Roche's work, Pleynet simply appropriates his imagery in order to construct his own self-reflexive theory by means of a parallel re-contextualization in which the female erotic object of desire stands in for the indefinable theory-as-poem being undertaken in lieu of analytical close reading. For example, in the following passage, in which "*terre*" (earth), used as a relatively ambiguous image until now, takes on the role of the "poetic" in contrast to "science": "*En me voyant celle dont les cuisses sont pareilles aux eaux du fleuve, cache ses seins et son ventre comme si dans sa crainte elle voulait se rendre invisible… C'est pour répondre à ce qui est dans leurs corps que le récit commence et s'achève. Elle se lève et le récit commence. Elle est celle qui convient à la terre et à la science*" (121). Carrying out on a poetic level what he has previously done on a discursive one, here paradoxically conflating his own poetic literary theory with science, this "poetry as explanation" tends to rely on similar conceptual aesthetics, which culminates in a similarly confused elaboration of his concept of the "matrix." Pleynet thus accordingly opts for a summary, ever so slightly derisive, account of the history of poetic theory. In the end, the potentially ideological distinction of theory and poetry is somewhat convincing, but this is unfortunately outweighed by the equal likelihood that the piece of writing just read makes little to no sense at all, on account of its overly affected self-consciousness.

The effect is similar to Roche's theory of poetry in many ways, especially insofar as it works to level out the distinction between a critical and non-critical readership, precisely by ironically asking this question of the purpose of having read,

or reading, a work that claims itself to be simultaneously both theory and poetry. Pleynet's style in this second part of his essay is also close to a Roche's, such as the *mise en abyme* of the melding of poetic form and a theory of why such theory necessarily has to be mixed with poetics as in "La Poésie est inadmissible," but much closer to the "critical poem" found in the prefaces to his first two collections of poetry. The most extreme of these forms is found in his final collection of poems, *Le Mécrit*, in which Philippe Sollers interjects his own take on the genre: that the latter text, which has its own role to play in the intertextual matrix of the Rochian theory-poetry apparatus being drawn out here, may or may not have actually been written by Sollers, but rather simply signed Sollers by Roche. At best a Sollersian pastiche of Roche's prefaces, this particular piece adds to the confusion of personalities based on generic conventions that can be observed in Pleynet's contribution, for example.

It is more important, however, to note the contrast in styles between Roche's earlier prefaces and the two theoretical works surrounding *Éros énergumène*, not only because they provide insight into these works in retrospect, but also because it sheds some light on Pleynet's suggestion that there is an evolution or maturation observable in Roche's work. For example, the preface to his first collection of poetry, *Forestière Amazonide*, which was published by Seuil before he joined the ranks of Tel Quel, appears to take on the typical undertones of the poetic preface, somewhat already mixing theory and poetry as in Pleynet. In some sense, his quote taken from a historian of religion could be seen to stand for this necessary mediation, a symbol of the state of mind required to understand a theory of poetry:

> « Tout langage poétique, dit Mircea Eliade, commence par être un langage secret, c'est-à-dire création d'un univers personnel, d'un monde parfaitement clos… L'euphorie du chaman avant sa transe, comme l'inspiration du prophète ou du poète primitif, s'exprime par le truchement d'un langage secret qu'on appelle communément langage des esprits et qui comporte aussi bien une imitation des cris d'animaux qu'une invention verbale d'une étonnante richesse. » (9)

While his comparison of the poet to the shaman, and his otherwise simple conceptualization of poetry, may seem like an attempt to reach a non-intellectual audience, it comes off more as a romance, especially by the end, at which point clearly his opening words simply serve as an excuse to provide a way of reading his poetry.

His two major poetic concepts in this preface, serialization and rhythm, are not only misleading, but also similarly seem to stand for nothing but the simplest way of going about reading through his poems by creating a narrative through the establishment of its own imaginary universe. Ironically, characteristic of Roche's theoretical mode of exposition, the two concepts can only be understood, without reference to the poetry, as essentially standing for the same technique: that is, rhythm having no practical bearing on his poems, the concept could only be understood as a means of marking out their "serial" design. Thus, already in this first preface Roche is playing with the problematic applicability of poetic theory, simply appropriating a traditional concept of a "series" with a prototypical poetic trope, rhythm, that he

simply marks as "new." Thus, in sharp contrast to his cliché conception of poetry as an "opening of the imagination" taking place between the equal feeling of mysteriousness felt by both the poet and the reader, self-reflexivity is taken to an extreme here, as it is in Pleynet, in which the genre of the poetic preface is brought to reflect upon its own discursive status as "poetic language."

Given this is the case, it would appear that this preface is in fact the first reference to the concept of poetic language, rather than Kristeva's "Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes," in its very first line: "Le langage poétique n'a d'autre but que d'exprimer une certaine intériorité qui lui est propre, c'est-à-dire qu'il se suffit à lui-même" (9). Therefore in contrast to Pleynet, in this preface Roche eschews the rhetorical heights of a poetic preface in order to establish footing in the larger theoretical question of the relationship between theory and poetry that he will eventually put forward in *Éros énergumène*. This transgression is mirrored by the irony of the self-commentary given at the end of the preface, which nonchalantly offers a summary overview of the conceptualization of his work in the same romantic vein: "Un tableau récapitulatif de la culture des plantes médicinales en France, suivant la nature du terrain, et suivant les mois de l'année, a été le point de départ de ma recherche" (9). This first indication of Roche's approach to poetry as a personal diary, particularly inspired by Rousseau's passages on natural science in his *Confessions*, in fact serves more as a cliché at work in his writing, its most stereotypically "bad" element, than it does an actual inspiration.

The ironic poetic language of the critical poem is pushed to the point of parody in this preface, which may explain beyond the simple desire to mislead his reader Roche's seemingly innocent, but gratuitous self-theorization regarding rhythm and serialization. This is accomplished by his discursive mode of exposition, which mimics what could be defined in context as the "poetic language" of the essay proper, manifesting something like a parody of the logic of the essay genre. That is, the concepts of rhythm and serialization are not simply thrown in the reader's face, but are given due and proper introduction, first as the relatively innocent ideas in a concept of poetry, the quote below immediately following his "medicinal plant" concept: "Ainsi se sont réalisés des états d'opposition permanant entre des *séries* d'images ou des phrases de construction asymétrique. Il restait alors à animer les « collages » ainsi obtenus par un *rythme* nouveau, adapté à de nouvelles exigences, et capable de soutenir efficacement cette technique de cloisonnements." (10 emphasis mine). Second, in essayistic fashion, and with the same self-assured ease, each of these concepts are then systematically given their own explanatory paragraph, which allot to each its own theoretical weight, presumably to provide a clearer picture of the concept at work in the poetry, but which practically do little other than simply give a summary description of this collection of poems.

The preface, then, is more of a consideration of the relationship between the common trope of a misleading cliché and the contract made by a reader of a necessarily unclear theory of poetry, here symbolized by the illicitness of reading implied by a culture of censorship. In terms of its rhetoric, the preface tends to

privilege a compositional theory of poetry, asking how to write poetry, but only to pose the more general question of a theory of poetry, or what it *means* to write poetry. This is an essential element in Roche's early work, which, instead of offering an actual theory of poetry as in *Éros énergumène*, systematically works through a process of depersonalization. Here this is done by interjecting the idea of a "poet" as a character, as he theorizes in "La Poésie est inadmissible," in the following quote referring to how this character has been defined historically and ideologically: "Mon propos dans ce texte trop court … est ici non pas de démontrer mais de mettre les lecteurs à même de saisir l'arête par laquelle *on fait intrusion fonctionnement dans l'état écrit* d'un homme défini 'poète'" (222). This relatively classical imaging of the differentiation between the writer and the subject or speaker of the poem, is also made manifest on the level of poetic technique, such as the conspicuous display of various styles, or, as in the above example of the diary, by transgressing various poetic clichés.

The preface to his following collection, *Récits complets*, continues his elaboration of the poetic essay genre. Opting for its more habitual form of a series of random observations about poetry, only ever implying reference to the poems it precedes by relying on an all-encompassing idea of "theory of poetry," he loosely translates his thoughts into a cohesive mode of reading. The first lines of this preface, which unhurriedly explains why he just cited his opening quote for no reason in particular, is given below in full as contrast to Pleynet's citing of the line "On vit de quelques mots," who only makes the very limited, overly romanticized use of it one

might expect of such as phrase. This is not to show that Pleynet did not fully understand Roche's ironic use of flowery poetic language, but because it indicates the extent to which he was deliberately misrepresenting his rhetoric, which is in fact working expressly against this kind of easy packaging of the critical poem genre, in order to paint his own skewed portrait of Roche, in this case inevitably suggesting this as a way of reading Roche's prose in relation to his poems. Moreover, this deliberately misleading gesture revealed as such on page 106 in Pleynet, where he cites a line in *Éros énergumène* that is in fact a quotation itself. The passage in question, Roche's opening to *Récits complets*, begins like one of his poems, with a graphic symbol instead of a letter, and a lowercase "d" instead of the conventional capital:

> « d'une douceur, d'une raison, d'un désintéressement adorables. » Quelques mots en travers de la poussé du temps, mais pas au hasard, … . On vit de quelque mots, non pas parce qu'il sont ceux-là mêmes que j'ai choisi (« mon choix est hors de moi ») « …d'une douceur, d'une raison, d'un désintéressement adorables », non pas à cause de ce mot « adorables » qui pourtant remplit si bien son rôle de flotteur de beauté, du grâce, de féminité, et des autres nuances d'intérêt auxquelles il dispose — j'aurais pu choisir les mots d'une ligne suivante — non pas parce qu'ils sont extraits d'une page agréable du *Journal intime* de Benjamin Constant — datée de 1806, où il est question d'une faiblisse qui le fait retrouver chez Madame de Staël et s'entretenir avec un Monsieur Dutertre — mais parce qu'il se trouve, sans

> aucune raison, que mes yeux se sont épris de ceux-là sans être même tombé sur les mots voisins, ni sur une autre page. (11-12)

Making direct reference to a diary, he remains ambiguous about it actually being the source of the, seemingly unrelated, quote. The essay itself becomes a kind of poetic journal, echoing the sentiment found in Pleynet's "poetry as explanation" essay, which itself often seems more like a helpful exercise for him to work through his interpretation of Roche, rather than an expository piece of prose meant for an audience beyond the author alone.

Published in 1968, *Éros énergumène* as a collection takes this idea to its extreme in this regard by literally inserting other poems, specifically presented as historical works, as if his poems should actually be considered as literary criticism. As if working, like "poetic language," to reduce the difference between theory and poetry to its absolute minimum, it turns the collection into a theory of poetry itself. As an attempt to materialize the various paragrammatic matrices at work in Roche, this collection is in many ways, at least on the surface, a culmination of the poet's obsessive motifs, intertexts, and poetics that run throughout his earlier work, especially in his first book: among the many standards of the Rochian lexicon, even the word "*forestière*" (191), from the title of his first collection makes an appearance towards the end. The final poem, too, is dated as if it had been written during that time period: "Poème du 19 Avril 62." Thematically, besides the erotic poems indicated by this collection's title, and which are in fact no more or less erotic than his other poetry, these poems work to build up a collection of modern imagery on a

massive scale, an ironic rendering of a post-modern poetry in contradistinction to his earlier work which tends rather to use these kinds of massive images, such as the geo-economics of deforestation, in juxtaposition to his minimalist poetics.

These themes are echoed in his essay, "La Poésie est inadmissible," in the form of a "textual production" such as the one described in the beginning of this chapter. In reference to André Breton and the poetics of the Surrealists in relation to their approach to literary theory, he states, "si la théorie de Breton marque avec précision la portée idéologique de ce 'poétique bourgeois', la poésie des surréalistes a fait long feu, amplifiant inutilement, comme en un jeu diabolique de miroirs brisés, l'exotisme des métaphores" (Foucault et al. 226). Here, Roche implies a theory of poetry, as well as a common science in Marx and Lautréamont, the latter through the Surrealist connection and in reference to the opening to the former's *Capital*, in which the world "appears as an 'immense collection of commodities'" (125), which translates in Roche to: poetry is an immense collection of bourgeois poetics. The possible reference to Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, which similarly employs direct quotations from *Capital* suggests that the "other poets and artists" Roche criticizes in his theoretical works are none other than the Situationists, a possibility made more likely given the re-working of the concept of *détournement* being implicitly undertaken in these texts as "disfigurement."

His poetics here, however, also display a tendency towards overload, quite unlike his minimalist efforts, such as the depersonalization of the poet figure, of his first three collections. For example, his style is given the grandeur of the French

alexandrine simply by virtue of quoting historical works of poetry as part of his work, which lends weight to his other experimentations in style, and therefore in no way could be said to contribute to a "depersonalization" of any kind.

In a similar gesture, rather than the encyclopedic archive of the poetics of free verse such as in his earlier work, the poetics of *Éros énergumène* makes poetry itself, rather than poetics, into what was formerly known as poetic technique or rhetoric, not to mention turning poetry into a theoretical practice. In other words, "the poet" has become whoever decides to call himself one. An example can be found in the poem on page 97, the first in a series of poems entitled "Mémoires méconaissables," referencing the personal diary motif mentioned above:

après déjeuner, deux années après, alors qu'il avaiT
appris à l'arrière au front en selle à dé-
plier la bâche, à rêver : " est-il celui qu'iL
aurait voulu être un jour ? Nulle parT
et pendant un bon moment après un déjeuner pareiL
ne sont-elles pas déjà assises à nos places, leS
réservoirs silos poudriers emballeuses assises,
les regardent, les remplissent et les conduisE
nt à la chapelle rurale. Si possible je les ferA
i descendre à la plage, juste devant l'entrée dE
Qui fait tressaillir l'esprit d'indicibles onduL
ations ? Ah… ——————————— QuI

Ah… L'amante s'écroulanT

SeS bras nus roulent comme une torche qui sE

transformerait brusquement en une machine partiellE

d'oscillateur cathodique = un pied d'lampe spiralé O

Si elle ne se contentait pas de se découraG

d'se découvrir les seins à chaque occasion dE

m'embrasser quand je l'éveille en plein somme quand j'ar

ticule avec soin un arrangement de jambes une posturE

après ses excuses

quelle pourrait être ma mine sinon de filoN

jaunissant, d'ordure ou d'héritage en carrosse mal calé

?

At first glance, the poem reads like a microcosm of the entire collection, containing many of the recurrent motifs and images found throughout, notably colloquialisms, "d'se" and "mal calé," along with some repeated images: "déjeuner" [lunch], "bâche" [canvas], and "descendre," the "descent" motif functioning in his books as an image for the surface effect of his poems, describing the act of reading, given the lack of grammar as well as the "oscillations" between sense and nonsense in general confronted by the reader of this kind of poetry. In short, it describes the Western convention of reading from top to bottom in terms of semantic resistance. Alternatively, the verb embodies the "fast reading" (*lecture hative*) that Plenyet deems an essential element of Roche's work (100). In this sense, he organizes the

collection into a whole, whose first poem also contains the image, "je descends," marking a narrative-like motif at work in the first few poems, which echo the gesture: "retombe" in the second, and "élan" [momentum] in the fourth. Likewise, "oscillateur," like "indicibles ondulations," could be read as the gratuitous eruption of a self-description, the manifest necessity of this poetry to describe the inexplicable experience of reading it. More significantly, in the same vein, the poem is an example of the "visual poems" mentioned in the introduction, making its poetic language a function of its theory by describing its own visual nature, such as by "dé- / plier" [un-fold], folded itself, depicting its unusual enjambment and right-justified format.

It is the final "O" on the same line that gives this poem a more deliberately "post-modern" quality, however. The single letter stands remarkably inconspicuously as the rightful occupant of a right-justified typeset poem, whose final letters are made capital instead of the opposite standard page format of verse. As such, it paradoxically stands out as a signifier of classical poetry's use of the interjection, "O," as well as an image of the above described "oscillation of reading" highlighted by the appearance of the motif of the "descent." The "O" also stands as the literal image of the bottom of the lamp described. Moreover, as a possible interpretation of the potential symbolism of this classical trope, Roche is literally transforming his poetry into a kind of theory as well. The poem itself is also a reinvention of the ballad form, as the entire poem is transposed exactly twenty pages later now left-justified, with a modified ending, appearing in an overall more "correct" format. Hence, its post-modern poetics too are ironic, through its theoretical context reevaluating the

concept to a reference to early modern poetry, likewise locating it as the essentially unmodified source of modern free verse.

As such, these "post-modern" poetics, rather than corresponding to an actual "post-modernity," correspond instead to a reading of his actual theory put forward in the preface to this collection, entitled "Leçons sur la vacance poétique," which appears, at least on the surface, to outline an extensive critical project of the categorization and theorization of poetics:

> Quel rêve donc que l'écart absolu qui nous ferait rejaillir hors d'*eux tous*, hors d'*elles toutes*, ces *contorsions relatives*, le flux-reflux des mondanités, le soliloque-de-l'homme-réfléchi, la métaphysique-du-chant-dignité-conquise, et l'incantation donc, toutes chamanisations d'objets sans fonctions, tous avatars cruels de ce *fonctionnement poétique* (FONCTIONNEMENT POÉTIQUE) depuis longtemps disqualifié. (11-2)

His hopeful "dream," so it seems, is that the systematization of these "avatars," namely poetic topoi, will be able to revolutionize poetry, presumably in the same way as in the above poem, bringing poetry one step closer to the Lautréamontian dream of a "poetry made by all and not by one," by making poetry into whatever notion of poetry that any one person might have of it. In a mirror gesture, apostrophizing the hypothetical commentator of this work, he also makes this passage simply worth quoting as evidence of his gratuitous use of the poetic language of the essay, specifically by repeating "poetic function" in all caps. He then delves into the details of this dream in the following section entitled "Tableau des Avatars," and exploiting

the necessarily technical quality of such an enterprise as an excuse in order to directly address his critics:

> Un tableau de ces avatars reste à dresser. Qu'on établisse donc quelques étanches et qu'on compte, qu'on récapitule et qu'on ordonne l'entrée en diagramme des combinaisons foireuses dont on nous vêt si élégamment (il faudra dire aussi un jour à quel point nous le recherchons ce vêtement, et à quel point on recherche que nous le recherchions !) Se résoudre à ça et s'en satisfaire !
>
> La fixation d'un tel matériel d'investigation critique aurait deux conséquences :
>
> — la poésie serait débarrassée des exposant moraux, affectifs, sentimentaux et philosophiques qui l'accablent aujourd'hui, les poèmes étant généralement rapportés à un *Bien*, à un *Bon* ou à un *Beau*. …
>
> — la possibilité d'expliquer, d'indiquer des certitudes. (12-3)

The language of the preface constitutes an obvious shift in tone from his earlier introductions, but, far from being an actual theoretical register, or even a strictly "poetic theory" discussed above, in fact "Leçons sur la vacance poétique" tends rather to take on the dark undertones of an authoritative figure, merely giving the impression of the grand project of great poetic importance he only appears to describe within a much larger theoretical framework. This, along with the levels of theoretical ambiguity of the kind maintained in Kristeva's work, practically extends the range of

this preface in such a way that it can only actually be understood after multiple readings, and as in Pleynet both before and after reading the poetry itself.

As a complement to the multiplicity of its readings, the poetic language of the preface correspondingly mimics the polyvalence implied by this kind of reading, in a style that is typical of Telquelian expository prose and Roche's poetry alike, whose syntax appears to constantly defer its meaning as much as possible. This can be observed at multiple levels in the preface's first paragraphs, outlining Roche's historical theory of language, whose opening sentence begins with a gerund, and then breaks the following subject ("*l'homme*") from the main verb:

> N'ayant jamais perdu de vue qu'il ne doit son progrès qu'à son énorme entrain à cultiver la convention — à la régler selon l'incessant besoin qu'il a de s'étayer devant toute chose — l'homme, mais à cette condition seulement d'être en alerte *de ce fait*, reste au centre de l'affranchissement de la pensée si, comme le dit Novalis, *l'état de critique est l'élément de liberté*.
>
> Le hasard a peut-être voulu que la nécessité de la convention portât d'abord sur la parole avant de venir brouiller, *d'entrée de jeu*, l'écriture (mais de quelle chronologie sommes-nous assurés ?). Un jeu, ou une pratique, ou bien l'impératif de quelque *tracé* (dont les modalités nous sont inconnues à jamais) ont fait que naquit un jour sur quelque îlot égéen (pour notre part d'hommes d'Occident bien sûr) une convention *visible selon un ordre donné de dispositions de caractères inscrits*. (9)

The jump from one paragraph to the next, defining writing as the convention in question, is as equally jarring as the remarkably similar, rear-loaded syntax, not to mention the reader's possible expectation of a typical Roche preface, hoping perhaps to read "traced" as a poetic image rather than as the literal, quotidian meaning employed here. The use of italics is also remarkable, here being used according to an earlier convention instead of scare quotes and hence making an implicit reference, via formal means, to the subject of the conventional.

Roche continues this narrative of the history of writing, in the literal sense, in the next paragraph with a pseudo-scientific theory of the "dispositions of inscribed characters" as a "retinal technique." Again, the subject then suddenly shifts, marked by the gratuitous use of "however" (*cependant*), which does not acceptably make its usual logical connection between sentences, to the first historical claim in his theory of poetry:

> On sait cependant que les plus anciens textes mathématiques étaient rédigés en vers mais on on ne sait pas de quoi parlaient les plus anciens textes de poésie. Bien. Mais qu'en déduire, sinon sans doute qu'étant donné cette absence de racines connues de la chose poétique il ne saurait être pour nous question d'approuver ni même de commenter toute entreprise de théorisation poétique qui perdrait un instant de vue qu'elle se doit avant tout à sa propre réflexion ou, si l'on veut, à son autocritique.[1] (9-10)

[1] The typo, the repetition of "on" in the first sentence, appears only in the original edition, where it straddles the two bottom lines of the page.

Roche, in this passage, maintains an honest, or innocent, mode of address: a sufficiently ironic self-distancing, but only to disguise the fact that his theory, that a coincidence concerning the origins of poetry has to do with the relationship between theory and poetry, does not make any sense. This claim is paired with the similarly gratuitous conviction, resembling the discourse of the "critical poem," that there is no way of explaining poetry without having to lie about it, as in Pleynet. Relying, therefore, on the force and weight of its discourse alone, the poet drives towards a theory of the socialization of poetry as it relates to the historical confusion between criticism and poetry. In other words, it is remarkable that, rather than presenting this much more logical theory of the relationship between criticism and poetry that he forms later in the essay, he begins instead with an outrageous claim concerning the archeology of writing, in order to make his point.

The same ambivalence persists in his elaboration of the history the "codification and super-codification" of French poetry, from the Middle Ages, to Molinet, and later to Lautréamont and Mallarmé, summarily dispensed with in the second section of the essay, here in connection to his own theory of the "dis-figuration" that contemporary poetry should take as its objective:

> Dé-figurer la convention écrite c'est, en écrivant, témoigner de façon continue que la poésie est une convention (*de genre*) à l'intérieur d'une convention (*de communication*). Un établissement plus fondé de cet état de fait pourrait nous venir d'études pourtant aujourd'hui — c'est une des solutions possibles, une seule bien sûr — sur les premières manifestations, à la

> fin du Moyen Age, de cette intention de codifier les convention écrites. … Toute masque (spectacle soi-disant innocent) retombé, toute invite au lecteur rendue impossible, il ne reste qu'un code nu codant et surcodant l'unité de principe, l'unité de convention, le poème. (11)

Here, by disfiguring poetic conventions by means of his own rhetoric down to the only possibly discernable poetic trope, the poem itself, Roche's previous ironic use of the term "convention," along with this distance he takes from his text by means of poetic language, adds a level of obscurity to the statement made in the first sentence. One cannot therefore be sure if he means that communication is a convention, or if it is rather the act of conceiving of literature as a convention called "communication" that is the convention, this confusion being drawn out in relation to his thesis that the theory of poetry is itself a history of conventions.

Roche takes the theory up again in "La Poésie est inadmissible," but with the relative clarity of a more explicitly Marxist discourse. After opening with a calligraphic poem in the shape of a keyhole, dated 1582, this essay opens in a way that "Leçons sur la vacance poétique" could have more appropriately begun, with an ideological theory of poetry:

> Je prétends également que cette intelligence historique peut se manifester à l'encontre de n'importe quelle sorte de fiction poétique qui est l'avatar certainement le mieux fixé, quant à l'aliénation individuelle qui en est comme le principe sous-tendeur, de la *fabulatio* sociale.

> Mon propos dans ce texte trop court, récapitulation en somme d'un exposé qui serait livre et définition dernière de cette activité, est ici non pas de démontrer mais de mettre les lecteurs à même de saisir l'arête par laquelle *on fait intrusion fonctionnement dans l'état écrit* d'un homme défini "poète".
>
> Le propos est de dévoiler par une suite de rapports antinomiques entre des discours idéologiquement différenciés (3 ou 4 ici nettement distincts) qu'il y a une mesure à prendre, en fin de lecture, d'une INADMISSIBILITÉ immédiate d'une sorte d'intelligence de la poésie telle qu'elle fonctionne depuis 1868 (Publication du Chant I de Maldoror.) D'une intelligence SYMBOLARDE de la poésie dont l'écriture n'a jamais été vue que comme personnelle esthétisante (nous parlons ici d'une esthétique sociale / morale). (Foucault et al. 222-23)

As with many of Pleynet's concepts, Roche's "historical intelligence," referring to the historical false theorization, or "super-codification," of poetry, also doubles as the opposite image of the understanding needed to decode this overly complicated theory. In closing, after citing poems from the French classical period, he specifies his class-based theory of poetry in the terms of the history of poetry, "Symbolism" in particular. By this point, however, it is unclear whether or not this confusion of theory and poetry is the cause of the lack of clarity progressively reached by the end of the essay, or whether it is rather the network that Roche has set up to get here that makes his theory unclear:

> *C'est à partir du symbolisme, en gros, que la poésie est devenue la concrétisation écrite de l'idéalisme bourgeois : écrire alors de la poésie c'était étaler et vivre du même coup ces aspirations multiples à un ailleurs que l'on a eu vite fait d'appeler, justement,* "*poétique*". …
>
> Peu à peu, très lentement, en fait, cette production "poétique" est devenue le symbole, i. e. la définition, de la poésie. Puis le *poème* est devenu l'unité de mesure de ce poétique (226)

Given the play-on-words, from the derogative *symbolarde* to the academic standard "Symbolism," it is difficult not to take this move as a critique of the official history of literature, established by the same period: "la grande critique imbécile du siècle qui nous a précédé" (223).

The difference in tone between the two essays is striking. Mirroring the shift between the two parts of Pleynet's essay, "La Poésie est inadmissible," is more explicit by means of a Marxist discourse, offering more concrete concepts and theories, while "Leçons sur la vacance poétique" tends rather to maintain a level of ambivalence, fostering a polyvalent text, owing to its place in *Éros énergumène* as a preface, following the convention, meant to provide some sense of the poems that follow it. Significantly, however, this polyvalence is maintained only in reference to a formal theory, even if the theory that it ends up providing effectively pertains only to a method of composition, rather than to a theory of poetry as a genre. The clearest example of such an effort, evincing Roche's ironic distancing of his own poetic authority, only able to produce an overly ambiguous theoretical discourse, is his

outrageous claim regarding these poems: that they are neither visual or oral poems, a reading that only seems to make sense in light of his previous commentary on the calligraphic poem, an overdetermination of the visual form, so as to ignore that all poems are, in fact, visual and oral.

In the same section, another such example, delineating a preliminary reading in the essay's multiplicity, is the gradual building of an implicit reference to Antonin Artaud, from the off-hand mention of his theory of cruelty, on page 11, to the idea of "bringing about an end to" certain forms of poetry at the end of the preface, echoing Artaud's call for "an end to masterpieces," by page 14. Another such example can be found in the first of the two sections entitled "An End to…" in which Roche states the calligrammatic poems "exploit the semantic function of writing," which could be understood, especially given the lack of explanation on Roche's part, either as the form of address taken on in this preface in general, or Roche's own signature overuse of the "semantic function," the proliferation of nouns and nominative forms in his poems:

> les possibilités de la fonction sémantique de l'écriture y ont été allègrement matraquées au profit d'une prolifération insensée d'objets immédiatement consommables. Et c'est tout. *Quelques-uns de ces objets étaient beaux*.
>
> Le calligramme est l'une des formes possibles de la destruction du fonctionnement poétique. A preuve l'absence des rythmes dont j'ai parlé (un seul peut demeurer intact, le rythme métrique, ce qui tendrait à prouver qu'il n'a jamais été intégré à la fonction poétique) et l'absence d'intérêt quant au

> texte de la plupart des calligrammes (étant entendu que j'appelle calligramme tout texte qui tend à devenir figuré). (14-15)

Yet another possibility presents itself in this paragraph following his "semantic theory" as well, which, in the context of classic French versification, reads as stereotypical French syntax: "A preuve l'absence des rythmes," a potentially self-referential clause, referring to its own conventional absence of a verb, following the convention of the expression "à prevue," also paired with a pleonastic negation. As such, it stands as an image of one possible reading among many in relation to his poetry, many of which also play with similar norms.

Although the preface is able to make much clearer and more socially acceptable statements, the outcome of both texts, however, is the same: they do both effectively describe, while describing themselves also as such, poetry as "a collection of bourgeois ideologies." In other words, poetics is grossly described as a categorization of social behavior: "autant d'*empreintes* (au sens biologique), toujours *fonctions d'un acte social qui est celui d'écrire et d'un autre acte social qui est celui de lire*" (13-4). This is the kind of definitive theoretical statement whose implications Pleynet, for example, would prefer to cast aside, or even possibly dismiss as falling outside the realm of poetry. He makes this gesture from the very start by quoting Engels' *Anti-Dühring* as an epigraph on the connection between poetry and "social anomaly" without paying much attention to it, opting instead for an ideological theory of reading.

Whether or not poetry has anything to do with sociality, and whether or not there is a way of identifying one poetic practice as a certain social practice, is most likely irrelevant both for a theory of poetry and for Roche himself. By all appearances, he seems to merely identify a process of the historical socialization that has worked to obscure such a connection because this is simply precisely what poetry is, according to Roche. In any case, all it can do is what it is meant to: establish poetry as a convention.

This is also why this preface presents itself as a list of possible strategies, rather than solutions, and necessarily in such as way as to require multiple readings in order to grasp its full implications. This is an important distinction to be made concerning this preface, whose poetic language only takes on its various poetic registers as a way of introducing the kind of stylistic tropes found in the poetry, but which is actually done solely in the interest of maintaining the level of ambiguity and ambivalence required to support multiple readings.

The social perversion theory is rather a part of the poetry itself, building its social allegory of poetic deviance out of its own poetics of eroticism: in more literal terms, it paints the picture of a sexual deviant, in many ways a stereotypical sinner whose perversions lead him to commit perverse social acts, which accordingly are not described, rather only signified to the reader as poetics. Of course, this narrative only reaches its climax towards the end, especially considering the social situation is not represented in any narrative form, but out of the culmination of the poetry's imaginary constructed social spaces, such as the café scene on page 179:

A G. d'où parent les collines et manquent d'

A G. d'où parent les collines et manquent d'
Argent pour y développer un jeu ou deux de colonnes
Elle et moi nous groupons pour la démarche parallèle
Qui doit nous mener vers un amour durable. Avec diffi-
Culté, je ne pense pas l'avoir jamais entendue donner
Une indication sur les robes ou la multitude d'agrafes
Qui ornaient les étagères de sa chambre.
Sa délicatesse (de magazine) lui interdit de voir
Un patron à découper et ma présence de barman (faux)
Cohabiter sur une même terre de chambre, ou bien
Encore l'apanage d'une bouche d'invitée au sofa
(comme : " la bergère aux instruments de musique ")
G. la longue et l'inusuelle dans mon Bains-Douches.

The subject described here is not a single character, but rather an amalgam of social images, at once the lover, the boss, and the bartender, with undertones of castration, "découper," standing for the socio-sexual transgression taking place. Moreover, two possible readings emerge: the more complex "socialized person," along with the more literal reading of a couple simply sitting at a table, the former being specifically marked as indecent by the parenthetical "false" cropping in at the end of the line in question. The scene is marked also by the poetic transgression of grammar, the

uncertain use of the verb "voir" and of the "et," giving the poem a general sense of a grammatical uncertainty also anticipated by the syntax of its opening lines. This "cutting" of sight, presumably an illicit glance of some sort, is furthermore associated as a poetic act with reference to the practice, shared by all the poems in this sequence entitled "7 Poèmes de bon sens, sans conclusion," of putting the first line of each poem as the title in italics. This is a common practice in Roche's work, what Pleynet refers to as "spacialization," but it is by no means a convention. So for a reader to verify the pattern by the third poem in the sequence, whether by glancing up while working through the poem itself or by flipping through the pages, seems a likely kinetic symbol for this mysterious social act of "cutting." Viewed particularly within the collection as a whole, a similar technique could be discerned in the earlier series "Lectrice, tu frémis d'étonnement !...," in which the first few poems are headed with a title "*mauvais couleur*," then breaking with this motif and only producing the first line as the title from then on, habituating the reader to such an anomaly. Similarly, the "cutting" image reemerges a few pages after the above cited poems as "knife to the throat," referring to the possibility to read only the first few words of the title without finishing the line, having assimilated the gesture of the title as the repetition of the first line as the convention of this section.

Of course, the real sinner, the dark shadow of the "puritan" who emerges only at the end of the collection, is none other than the poet himself, and if there is a real theory in Roche's work as a whole, it is that there is no such thing as a theory of a sinner's poetry. Still, this does not make it unreadable. In the end, his theory of poetry

is successful at accomplishing one task, in both his theoretical essays and his poetry as well: making a convincing argument that poetry is unsatisfactory because it convinces the reader that it is. In many ways, this also explains the direct address to his future critic implied in this preface, considering that any interpretation of such poor poetry, from the critical to the everyday, also is simply guaranteed to be a disappointing, desperate cliché. From the point of view of a theory of poetry, there is nothing really recoverable from Roche's poems, and not even the trace of a desire to accomplish such a degree-zero.

There is certainly a kernel of truth in his work: the social paranoia of taste, and the frightening thought that there is no way to be certain that it is, in fact, bad or not. Likewise, his theory of poetry does everything but prove that it is so, or even, as one might expect, that it is good poetry because it is bad. It is only particularly important to the poetry because it too is an unsatisfactory theory, whether it makes sense or not, a deliberately incomplete account of his poems, and delivered in the least convenient way possible.

In the end, his argument for a "revolutionary" poetics too comes off as an excuse for this poor delivery of what is an outrageous, and completely unjustified theory of poetry. Roche's work could be reduced to its essence as a social theory of a resistance to poetry confirmed by the experience of reading the poems as a "work of resistance." For example, he creates a social form of resistance by working against the impulse of theory to demonstrate that the "quality" of poetry is not the affect of an abstraction, but rather the mundane feeling of superiority felt by a "reader of poetry."

In this respect, his poetry is successful as a work of theory because of its heavy investment in the question of reading, especially from the point of view of the literary critic, equally invested in accounting for such a reading. Indeed, the hope clung to in his preface, opposite the "fearful idea" with which it ends, is simply that his poems will make a better theory and criticism possible.

From his harshest politicized critique of literary criticism, of theory as nothing but the critic's ideological gaze, to his more theoretical implications, claiming the full intersection of theory and poetry, nullifying the difference between the two and therefore suggesting the critic's reading to be an illusion of this socialized state of the discourse, Roche is able to pose a problem for criticism: that it is a discourse that inevitably ignores its own discursive status. As Pleynet puts it, it ignores it "genetically." That is, by producing a theory that, primarily in relation to a work of poetry, works to enhance its contradictions rather than resolve them, such as "good" and "bad," makes itself manifest as a discourse as unsure as the reading itself. Still, what makes it an unsatisfactory theory is that its true implications are left unresolved as well, not to mention the implication that, because it is an inaccurate theory, its implications are equally false.

CHAPTER TWO

1967: Tel Quel Goes Mainstream

Marcelin Pleynet's 1967 *Lautréamont par lui-même*, would probably best be described as an object of literary curiosity, even something along the lines of a failed attempt at literary commentary, were it not for its exemplarity as the most complete and extensive practical criticism of an influential literary journal. This can be said even despite the fact that it was not published in the Tel Quel collection, but rather as part of a mass-market paperback series, mostly geared toward students and literary hobbyists: it was, in fact, a best-seller. Still, it is no coincidence that in this it also resembles its proposed subject, the prose poetry of the late nineteenth century author, Lautréamont (pseudonym of Isidore Ducasse), *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Poésies I* and *II*, both by the strangeness confronted by any reader of these works, that is meant to disappoint, and even offend, all expectations, and also by the awkward place they both occupy in the history of literature.

From its most frequently quoted line, the famous "chance meeting on a dissection table," to its contemporary reception by literary historians, which has tended through an essentially structuralist drive to reduce it to its easily digestible parts, since its publication the interpretation of the œuvre of "count Lautréamont" has been cast as if the work had itself been conceived as a pre-consumed, and regurgitated, literary object. In other words, the story of "Lautréamont" today is the story of its repression, often stereotyping it as a "pre-avant-garde work." In some ways, at least insofar as the aesthetic judgment of this piece of literature is concerned,

this is the correct story, and this is also what Pleynet was actually able to get right in his work: that what makes Lautréamont so intriguing is that his work is particularly susceptible to this kind of regurgitation, and does by all means appear to be a simple, compact whole. Instead of its commentary, then, the object of this chapter is rather Pleynet's theory of Ducasse's work. Specifically, by means of its own object, it deals directly with the paradox of literary criticism, which relies simultaneously on the randomness of an interpretation and the randomness underlying the inability to verify whether or not its interpretation is correct. Pleynet demonstrates that this is carried out in Lautréamont's work essentially by anticipating such a critical appreciation, while simultaneously validating any interpretation. It is for these same reasons, and because of Pleynet's own matching mode of exposition, itself a normative criticism fulfilling what he called its "function of censorship" in his essay on Roche (Foucault et al. 95), that this is precisely the reading of Pleynet's work that must be avoided.

What Pleynet discerns as the poet's radical or revolutionary quality, however, is not that he demonstrates that this type of criticism is precisely not "normative," in the sense of reproducing and reaffirming a normative dominant discourse, but rather that it is an incorrect interpretation and also, simply, the norm. Moreover, he demonstrates how and why all literature in a sense can accommodate this mode of criticism, specifically through a common misappropriation of linguistics. The prose poems of this enigmatic nineteenth century author have not surprisingly become the stuff of literary legend, and one that in particular calls into question some of the premises of literary theory, namely the canon, and even down to what is considered to

be literature. The lack of the Surrealist origin story may be one of Pleynet's strangest omissions from this book, one which indicates the extent to which it was not conceived as a layman introduction to the work of the "cursed poet" (*poète maudit*), Lautréamont, but rather as a distinct challenge to his habitual reception.

The legend generally goes that it was Philippe Soupault who unearthed *Les Chants de Maldoror*, nearly fifty years after its original self-publication, and gave it to André Breton. The two were likely inspired to write *Les champs magnétiques* together, a landmark in the history of collectively produced literature, and of course would go on to start one of the most important avant-garde movements, Surrealism. Allegedly, they probably found it all the more inspiring because it was their own "found object," as well as a searing insult to the institutions of literature and literary criticism alike, while of course the reality is that Lautréamont's prose poetry does precisely tend to disappoint these expectations set up by the surrealists. Nonsense, for example, does not run wild as it would in a Breton poem, but, in the *Chants*, as Pleynet argues in his deliberately sensational work, is often paired with other rhetorical devices, contrasted for example with a gratuitous narrative, which more often than not result in validating, rather than transgressing, normative ideas of signification and figuration.

Pleynet's interpretation of Lautréamont is of an author of a "theoretical literature" directly invested in the question of literary production. In keeping with its inadmissible status as proper literary criticism, however, he leaves this clouded in ambiguity, only to be implied by the reader by strategically distancing himself from

it, be it by a casual, anecdotal manner, or by means of the much higher registers of psychology and linguistics. This will be mostly encompassed by Ducasse's later work, published under his real name, entitled *Poésies I* and *II*, which is largely a parody of the adage-type writing of seventeenth century *moralistes*, quite literally plagiarizing Pascal and his contemporaries, and thus also, in the interest of the "sense-making" of moral commonsense, its investment in its own readability. This specifically in meant to address a common thread in Tel Quel's theoretical output, which was also a common criticism of their work in general: their infamous "unreadability." As such, any interpretation of Lautréamont, which here could mean nothing other than Pleynet's interpretation, is ultimately irrelevant because this book in fact represents a critique of literary criticism shrouded in an "interpretation" of a work that Pleynet himself explicitly claims defies all interpretation, rather than, as it may appear, a piece of criticism that simply defines its interpretation in the mode of critique. That the question of unreadability makes his *Lautréamont* particularly relevant to this critique, indeed an important question for literature in general, is due mostly to the coincidental, but very real, influence that the prose poet had on both the affiliates of Tel Quel and on literature in general, rather than it being a matter of strategy, marketing or otherwise, on the part of the journal's editorial committee.

More alarming is that Tel Quel's deliberate effort to produce essentially unreadable texts, especially in the field of literary criticism or theory, works to undermine any claim to the truth that its theories may have had to begin with. This is usually done by various hermeneutic means carried out in the interest of aggressively

deconstructing what its members often referred to as "discourse," which could approximately be understood as any institutional form of language. Although the need to make sense of a literary concept may appear as a normal situation to those accustomed to dealing with literature, as it has been argued that any literary commentary is fated to be a kind of approximation, and so what could it possibly matter if an admittedly foggy concept such as "intertextuality" that even in its most specific definitions still essentially encapsulates the entire notion of literature is simply made up? Or even, is part of it being a "theory" is precisely that it is made up?

These questions are best approached by means of a political interpretation, which is somewhat of an unfortunate situation given this means the very dubious practice of using Tel Quel's own theory in order to interpret its own literature, even under the guise of the softer political form of "ideological criticism." According to this theory, ideology would be held responsible for any influence that Tel Quel may have had on literary criticism, whether it be through its concepts such as "intertextuality," or otherwise, just as it is ideology that is to blame for their inevitable deconstruction of its own discourse. Necessarily, this involves some of the most difficult, and often problematic, hermeneutic claims, such as determining the author's intentions and politics. Therefore it appears to calls for its own commentary, doomed to deal with these logical gaps and questionable discursive forms.

Like most literary theory produced by authors of fiction, what made much of Tel Quel's theoretical output most interesting and unique is that it is worthy of literary criticism itself. Naturally this is contingent on their own arguments as well,

which were employed specifically in reaction to the contradictions presented by the ideological norms of the bourgeois institution of criticism. Of course, the true extent of this critique can be appreciated only from this point of view, and in this sense it is particular to this work that it did in fact actively call for its own interpretation, among its many other distinguishing traits.

The reasons for such a particularity are demonstrated throughout this chapter: such as that the "theoretical" work in question could, and should in fact, be considered as its own unique form of self-conscious rhetoric, even a unique genre of a kind of poetic language, one meant to deconstruct the ideologically determined generic rift between theory and its object, literature. Considering the context, "anti-theory" is indeed more convincing a term given another of its primary characteristics includes, especially regarding Pleynet's overt tirade against academic criticism in *Lautréamont*, that it was conceived as a counter-discourse to a normative one, part of the aforementioned institutions of literary criticism; that is, laying a self-justifying claim to its own authority by denouncing its opposite as false. Thus, by interpellating a discourse that is in turn deconstructed, they are setting an example, specifically here in the form of *contra-exemplum*, of the kind of undertaking they deem necessary in the face of these types of contradictions set by ideology, while simultaneously providing a practical example of how ideology is at work in discursive processes.

Perhaps the common ground of literary theory and literature is that they both do thrive at these theoretical levels of abstraction, but even this is a theory-centric interpretation that is far from the truth. This, of course, requires the elucidation of

commentary as much as Kristeva did in her dissertation on Lautréamont and Mallarmé, *La révolution du langage poétique*, and of which Pleynet's *Lautréamont* provides the clearest example. In fact, this book actually does work to make its points so clearly, though obliquely, and seemingly by means of over-intensification, that it can effectively be understood even at a level of abstract description. For example, regarding the notion of the author and the question of interpretation: the topic can be easily manipulated in the discourse of literary criticism, but, in an act of interpretation by conceiving of any supposed "manipulation" to begin with, one falls prey to the very problem in question, ultimately giving rise to a potential bias, or at least the kind of double bind described above as ideology.

Neither was it a coincidence that, in a 1967 interview published in *les Lettres françaises* and republished in *Théorie d'ensemble*, Sollers cites Pleynet's *Lautréamont* as an example of a practical analysis of the question of authorship. This was far from the case, as the book is in fact more specifically concerned with the question of literary production. It was also not a coincidence, however, that this remark also coincided with a reflection on the question of what Tel Quel meant as a whole, giving a rare inkling into the coveted secret of the group's behind the scenes inner-workings. An analogy of how their respective influences were integrated into their books and writing styles, that is, the interaction between authors, along with that between author and reader, this fascinating interview question provides essential insight into how they themselves may have conceived of these dynamics, explained here by Sollers as a "market effect" (*effet de marché*) not unlike the concept of

ideology proposed above. As such, it also demonstrates, somewhat awkwardly *en abyme*, the point to which they were conscious of their media image, and to which they were willing to manipulate language, ideas, and situations to their own ends. Sollers's response opens with the good intentions of providing an analogy, albeit in a somewhat convoluted manner, and a frank explanation to a difficult question, but one that ultimately disappoints those expectations by shrouding itself in a theory:

> [Question:] Comment concevez-vous cet appareil de production, cet organisme triadique (groupe / revue / livre) qu'est *Tel Quel*, et quelle place assignez-vous au nom propre de cet organisme ?
>
> [Response:] Ce rôle du *nom* a en effet une grande importance, et il demande à être pensé précisément dans une pratique et une théorie du texte. Une analyse particulièrement précise de ce rôle dialectique a été faite par Pleynet dans son livre sur Lautréamont. Si vous voulez, nous pensons — et c'est là une réactivation en même temps qu'un dépassement d'une problématique déjà ancienne marquée par les groupes formalistes ou surréalistes — que, par définition, l'écriture doit s'inscrire dans les intervalles entre les individus qui se livrent à son expérience et comme de l'un à l'autre, en retrait de chaque personnalisation qui n'est jamais, au fond, qu'un effet de marché. Le texte appartient à tous, à personne, il ne saurait être un produit fini mais doit au contraire constituer l'indice d'une productivité qui comporte aussi son effacement, son annulation. Bien entendu, nous agissons à l'intérieur d'un système social qui, dans sa détermination accumulative, est la négation, la

> lettre morte, de ce type de fonctionnement. Cela suppose un ensemble réglé de compromis sans lesquels notre activité serait simplement utopique. Le groupe, la revue, les livres sont en cela la forme d'un processus dialectique en cours. C'est d'ailleurs cet "en cours" qui provoque les dénégations les plus fortes. Dans la pratique, cela signifie que toute signature n'est, à *Tel Quel*, que l'apparence d'un travail plus général susceptible de provoquer de nouvelles signatures en restant fondamentalement anonyme. De même, le système de lecture indiqué est celui d'un rapport entre les textes produits sans différents champs et la forme implicite de leurs jonctions calculées, muettes. (69)

This quotation is less meant to show that they had a clear conception of a notion of affective, "poetic" theory, than it is to demonstrate that they did have an idea of a collective literary project, here Sollers referring to a "group." It requires interpretation, even if that interpretation is the dead-end of an author's over-romanticized self-justification, and an appeal to being an exploited member of the proletariat. Here, on a basic level, the strengths and weaknesses of a theoretical discourse are all played out. Still, it is likely that Sollers was also aware of these various implications, and especially the pitfalls of interpretation, as speculation quickly becomes the name of the game: how possibly could this market-based theory correspond to any reality, literary or otherwise, in which influence would be traded like on the stock market floor? In terms of literary theory, did they think of themselves as sailing off into the uncharted waters of theory, in which truly original thinking could only be articulated within a larger theoretical system? Or, because of

the extreme limitations of ideology, are they simply forced to come up with theories, nonsense or otherwise, which therefore require verification and further theorization by quasi-deliberate intertextual means? These questions are certainly worth asking, but, again, are best approached precisely by means of analysis and exegesis regarding their mode of literary production.

Most important is that they did in fact have a common conception of a singular approach to literary theory beyond the material publications, a systematization of which can be determined through a comparison of their work, essentially by means of their theory of the ideological "social system." In some sense, then, it is simply a matter of simplicity to rest on the aforementioned conception of ideology, as well as their otherwise theoretical abstractions like "signature" used by Sollers above, limiting any particular intentional connection made between texts, only to show that these connections do in fact exist.

In some sense too, these "personalities" mentioned by Sollers also exist and can be easily discerned. Although it certainly would be difficult to make a case for anything resembling a systematization of these so-called personalities, it is rather reasonable to conceive, as Sollers seems to imply, of an awareness of each other's respective character, as well as a willingness to work along with them, at least in practice. Marcelin Pleynet's "personality," in this respect, even from the beginning of his career with Tel Quel in the early '60s, seems to crystalize in his role as Sollers's right-hand-man as the unlikely scholar, replacing the rearguard, pseudo-academic literary criticism more prominently featured in their first years of publication, but

already on the outs by 1962. How exactly this deliberate assumption of a particular genre or discourse plays out in his work is best demonstrated by the work itself, but his "scholar" character also forms a distinct contrast to the personality of Jean-Louis Baudry, and particularly in his "Linguistique et production textuelle," reprinted in *Théorie d'ensemble*. This essay also works in relation to Pleynet's *Lautréamont* in that it provides the theoretical tools needed to decipher what essentially claims to be an indecipherable work, and precisely through this question of authorial personality. The advantage of the Baudry comparison is that, in his role as the more mature and most scientifically-minded, but still most unapologetic Marxist, he comes to personify the ideal "anti-theorist," while still, especially in the context of the Pleynet book, providing a real-life application of a theory, even though that theory ultimately works to nullify itself in his own work.

It is debatable whether or not Baudry's speech offered to his audience at the 1968 *Colloque de Cluny* any actual solutions along these lines, who represented for Tel Quel a much closer tie to the French Communist Party and the Left in general. This is ultimately rendered irrelevant, however, tending towards the more practical solutions provided by its own exemplarity rather than providing any theories, and this precisely because his argument regarding literary creation in "Linguistique et production textuelle" does in fact hinge on the personality of the author, thus making it immediately relevant to the practice of literary criticism as well:

> On peut, pour simplifier, isoler dans l'idéologie de la "création littéraire" deux caractéristiques :

1. Elle établit une hiérarchie et une opposition non dialectique entre deux termes l'auteur et le lecteur, sur le modèle théologique Créateur / créature. Elle reconnaît à un certain nombre d'individus, en vertu de dons particuliers propres à leur nature, le statut de "créateur". Ce sont aussi les possesseurs, les propriétaires et en quelque sorte les capitalistes du sens. Les lecteurs comme la créature ont d'abord pour fonction de renvoyer au créateur sa propre image. Ils permettent au créateur de se connaître en tant que tel, de s'accomplir selon son essence.

2. L'idéologie de la création littéraire aboutit à une fétichisation d'un produit, l'œuvre, qui présente le caractère contradictoire de n'être qu'un signe renvoyant à un signifié, l'auteur, qui seul compte et qu'elle représente; mais d'obtenir une valeur dans la mesure où elle contient l'auteur sous une forme monnayable, où elle est la forme même que le sens peut prendre dans la circulation. Elle possède un rôle intermédiaire, celui de mettre en communication deux sujets, l'auteur et le lecteur, par un message porteur et représentant d'une vérité générale, dans la mesure où l'auteur est lui-même le représentant de tous. Mais elle est aussi un pur produit de circulation s'épuisant dans une consommation qui ne change rien aux termes en présence. (353)

What this reproduction of Baudry's curt summary of the state of the theory of "literary creation" omits is that the ideology of the author's personality stated so clearly here represents more of an over-simplification, rather than anything like the

cutting-edge of Marxist literary criticism. As such, it stands out as an image for the more general questions of readability carried out on a much larger scale, if only because of his shockingly contrasting call for a complete reconceptualization of linguistics and literary theory in general. Effectively speaking, this section highlights the question of readability, separating out two distinct potential audiences, or two almost separate but complementary discursive modes, the introductory and the exploratory. It also concurrently acts as an analog to the pairing of Marxist and literary critic, and, as if through a feat of personal style, as an image of the transgression of the ideological rift between theoretical and literary discourses.

Beginning with Saussure's concepts of the signified and the signifier, the rest of his speech is a sustained reading of the pitfalls of Saussurian linguistics by means of a close reading of the *Cours de linguistique général*, which he argues has been distorted, down to these foundational concepts, by capitalist overdetermination of exchange-value: "C'est … dans Saussure lui-même qu'il nous paraît préférable d'isoler les symptômes du refoulement de la production dans la théorie de l'échange" (359). In fact, as if a wink to the in-crowd of literary critics, this close reading is brought even to the point of parody. By the second of the Saussure block quotes, Baudry already seems to abandon any notion of Saussure's theories corresponding to any truth, reading him instead more as fiction, commenting on his choice and manipulation of analogies, even to the point of suggesting reading the *Cours* on a deliberately figurative level, and that by the same means of assigning the kind of authorial personality just denounced. After Saussure's long quote comparing

linguistics and economics, regarding his notion that linguistics is separated into the two sub-fields of diachronic and synchronic linguistics, he writes:

> Il est d'abord intéressant de remarquer qu'en suivant l'ordre des termes de l'analogie [de Saussure], le travail est du côté du signifié et le salaire du signifiant. Pourtant c'est bien le travail, et le travail sur le signifiant qui permet la circulation des signes et la transmission du signifié. Et Saussure lui-même dans ce qui nous connaissons de ses cahiers, délaissant la conception du langage comme instrument du communication et d'expression, se montrera attentif au travail anagrammatique auquel le signifiant donne lieu et à la production paragrammatique du texte dont les opérations ont été analysées par Julia Kristeva. (359)

Noteworthy too here is his pseudo-scholarly claim to Saussure's notebooks (*cahiers*), but which still comes off, in the context of this destructive reading, more as Baudry's habitual self-conscious posing as the scientific Marxist than as the fruit of any actual painstaking research.

By the end of the speech, the entire argument has been reduced to rubble. This is even despite the fact that he attempts to both reclaim the relevancy, however random or dubious he has shown it to be, of Saussurian notions like the signifier and the signified to his theory of "literary creation," and even to suggest a similar potential existing in generative grammar. Of course, none of this is done very convincingly, and is in general significantly obscured by these various contradictory rhetorical postures that he is forced to maintain throughout, particularly relating to the

central unresolved hermeneutic problem of authorial personality. Beyond an "anti-theory," then, what makes this into a poetic theory, or a theory that treats the question on the level of style, is that its core argument is also played out on the level of interpretation.

Thus, he moves from a process of disengagement of the "symptoms" at work within Saussure's text and locates the "inscription" of the bias of exchange-value at work within his theory of exchange. Thus, what Baudry is implying by the end of his speech, by quoting Saussure and more directly engaging with his analogy of economics and linguistics, and literally comparing meaning-making with monetary exchange-value, is that constitutive of the science of linguistics is the inscription of its own interpretation. That is, contained within its own logic is its own conceptualization of a kind of textual production, namely the "scriptural" practice constituted by its own interpretation: that is it *always already* interpreting itself, and as its own interpretation.

The notion is directly related to his theory of the "inscription of work," a concept more directly addressed by Jean-Joseph Goux in his essay on the subject also printed in *Théorie d'ensemble*, as it relates to the particular, more ideological argument Baudry is making towards the end of the speech. In the quote below, it is brought up only in the context of Saussure's logocentrism, here in the limited sense of the priority of speech over writing, although the concept is in fact used more dynamically throughout the essay as a means of argumentation. For Saussure, then, the science and discourse of linguistics is constituted by a foundational rejection of

the "work of inscription" that it, in fact, implies: "Le rapport de l'écriture à la parole se détermine au début même de la linguistique scientifique dans un contexte à la fois moral, médical … et politique, dans lequel le travail est annexé et dissimulé, l'inscription du travail est rejetée par l'affirmation d'un ordre légitime et naturel que le travail menacerait" (358). In this context, this notion of "inscription of work" is particularly relevant, for example, to Roche's poetry and its abuse of linguistics as well, that, because of the dynamic established by the ideological bias of exchange-value, the same "inscription of work" can be said to be repressed in writing as it is in linguistics. Here shifting the valence of "logocentrism," he states: "L'opposition entre intériorité et extériorité, le danger pour l'intériorité et l'extériorité, propositions qui appartiennent au champ de la pensée logocentrique, peuvent être reportées à un autre niveau, au conflit opposant l'institution légitime à ce qui apparaît comme la possibilité même d'institution, à ce qui par son action institutionnalise" (358). Practically speaking, this means that it is only a matter of the "form of appearance," in Marx's terms, that linguistics seems to be relevant to literary interpretation, only present in literature therefore as an affect of reading.

Baudry's speech closes in the state of indeterminacy typical of other Tel Quel publications of the kind, in which the Marxist ideological discourse itself has been cast in doubt, derisively parodied as possibly nothing but an excuse to lay out the more serious plans of literary theory. This is made all the more plausible due to the fact that what Baudry has effectively done is to have provided a practical literary theory, albeit by this somewhat vulgar hybridization of Saussure and Marx: namely,

the text-as-commodity, as he made clear in the above citation on authorial ideology, which, compared to the dwarfed, "symptomatic" conceptions of classical linguistics and generative grammar alike, shines through as a true application of the linguistic sciences to literary studies, especially having been demonstrated by Baudry to his audience as being an important factor in any interpretation.

Of course, it is more difficult to prove that an argument does not make any sense than it is to claim that one is unable to make an argument because of repressions inherent to discourse. Here, already, Sollers's theory of "personality" seems to work in Baudry's favor, as he contents himself without any explanation of the subject he sought out to treat, barring any insight into his personal views on the topic, for example. Also therefore implicit in Baudry's speech is the representation of a "literary person," for whom the speech could be considered as a kind of allegory of the difficultly of applying Marxist terms like "ideology" to literature: that is, a person for whom a word like "ideology" would sound something like Baudry's claim that he cannot express himself because of an ideological limit to language itself. Certainly, he does make one wonder if "making one wonder" is not the very ideological norm that hinders the communication in question.

On a practical level, Baudry's indeterminacy is in fact also made manifest in the text itself, couched in the terms of his hesitancy to apply the notion of "production" to literature in the first place, which by the end is totally relinquished, presenting to his audience this Telquelian consensus of avoiding a theory of literary production altogether for reasons of "strategy." Presumably, it is also for these same

reasons that so much in this text, as in Tel Quel in general, is left only to implication, open to interpretation, so to speak:

> Il semble d'ailleurs nécessaire en ce qui concerne la pratique scripturale d'employer le terme de production avec prudence pour autant qu'il peut être capté par la métaphysique et renvoyer à la notion d'origine. C'est pourquoi nous ne voulons pas pour l'instant isoler la production des raisons et des conditions de son occultation en rapport avec la circulation et lui conférons avant tout une fonction stratégique. (364)

It is in his opening statements, however, that the implied affect of reading, wrought by the relation of linguistics to textual production, is more literally made manifest by means of his rhetorical hesitancy, first by questioning the relevancy of the concept of production and then by confirming it as an aspect of "ideological production" by quoting Marx and Engels from *The German Ideology*. What Baudry implies is that not only does this relationship have discursive effects, but in fact actually requires being worked through by means of discourse, or a "meta-discourse." This necessary self-reflection in particular is especially relevant to Pleynet's text, not only because he employs similar rhetorical strategies, similarly blurring the lines between the intentionality and the lack thereof in scriptural practice, but also because it forms the basis of a notion of a narrative theory, requiring the marriage of literary theory and commentary such as in his *Lautréamont*.

In some sense, it is their common goal of a practical investigation of the ideology of signification that interconnect Baudry and Pleynet's texts, but this

misrepresents the specificity of the concept of "textual production" outlined here, which would be a more fitting description of Pleynet's work alone, as the practical investigation of the relationship between literature and its criticism. It would be more correct to say that the two are related because they are unrelated, in that one cannot make any sense of either of them without the other, which is precisely how they are interrelated. Practically speaking, Baudry provides the theory connecting linguistics and textual production, while Pleynet puts it into practice, with each of them being mutually reliant on each other due to this dynamic's preconceived, hypothetical "absence of origin," to quote Baudry. This also demonstrates the extent to which these two works were conceived in a somewhat direct relation to each other as the very nonsense of the "meaning" of these two texts represented in the previous sentence, and thus also serving as effective proof that signification is wrapped up in the question of ideology. In this light, too, the relationship between these two texts could also be summed up in relation to their relative methodologies, with, on the one hand, Baudry approaching with an ideological argument, "creation" in the sense of capitalistic production, and Pleynet, on the other, with a more markedly literary form of linguistic production. Thus, they meet in the middle, so to speak, around the question of *Logos*, described in Baudry citing Derrida, forming an intertextual dynamic determined both by and as the "repression" (*refoulement*) of the "inscription of work" they both describe in their own terms, but which *de facto* both overlap within each.

How exactly a text can be geared towards its own commentary, such as here producing these almost nonsensical formulations, is a central element of Pleynet's work, but it is more the case that this relationship is simply called into question, since the true connection between these two texts works both for and against the subjects in question: specifically, as an introduction to the influence of Lautréamont on most, if not all, of Tel Quel, but simultaneously against the particular intertextual dynamics in question, which in this case takes on an entirely different color of complete and total randomization. In summary, Baudry exploits the normal conditions of interpretation inherent to any reading, blowing them up beyond proportion, thereby implicitly reducing linguistics to a symptom of misinterpretation, and claiming some sort of revolutionary occupation of modes of discourse. Pleynet, for his part, takes up the other extreme manifestations of the exploitation of interpretation, and its interpreters. The result is a "by any means necessary" solution in the face of similar repressive conditions of normativity wrought by the ideologies of interpretation, equally abusive and dismissive of both the science of linguistics and normal expectations of sense-making alike.

Thus, Baudry is the theory and Pleynet is the practice specifically conceived within this intertextual dynamic. The former provides an overly simplified theory of the relation of ideology and literature, openly straying from his proposed topic of linguistics and literature, identifying ideology as what is called "literature," but still not limiting it to this definition. Put more literally, Pleynet is the practice of the interpretation of the unreadable. The latter is able to provide a practical proof of

Baudry's theory through the circumstantial context provided by the genre of literary criticism, and in particular one done by a poet. By engaging in a self-reflexive interpretation of interpretation, Pleynet demonstrates the difficultly in applying the concept of ideology to literary studies, namely that "ideology" requires distinction from the, albeit surely ideological, processes of interpretation that identify the literary commodity as a piece of literature, as described above by Baudry. As such, they each embody the two sides of what together they prove to be nothing other than an artificial dynamic relationship, between linguistics and literary production. This results in their most searing critique of both theories, one deliberately only left implied by both and only made clear by the two in tandem: that they were, in fact, simply ideas produced by a common time, the late nineteenth century, and therefore both requiring the further theorization that Baudry was only able to begin to apply to linguistics. It goes without saying, then, that it is the practice interpretation itself that requires further investigation, a reinterpretation of literary criticism drawn in this light.

This is why, such as the aforementioned relationship to its own commentary, Pleynet turns the tables on his own hypothetical commentary by effectively undoing a normative notion of literary theory, making an accusation not unlike Baudry's against linguistics, reducing it to a similarly "symptomatic" misrepresentation. Hence, only considered together do they fully demonstrate literary criticism's misappropriation of linguistics. Exploiting the upshot of the indeterminate relation of linguistics and textual production by setting his sights on the institution of literary criticism instead,

Pleynet traces the theory of "literary production" deliberately at work within Lautréamont. The interconnection between Pleynet and Baudry can therefore be described as a mutual dynamic of making each other interpretable because they are both equally concerned with the processes of "making interpretable." With this move towards mutual dependency, however, they are also equivalently determined to not being interpretable in some respect. In Baudry, the case is much more cut-and-dried, as it simply does not make enough sense, relying too heavily on its own sense of itself, to imply anything other than that interpretation is somehow ideological. In Pleynet, this translates fairly squarely into not being explicitly concerned with the question of ideology at all, except as a critique of the methodologies of criticism, and in fact expressly skirting the issue entirely by means of clever prevarication.

Whether this was the result of the pressures of publication, the expressed desire of his editors or not, is of course also a possibility, but which is essentially irrelevant because, though he never uses the word, ideology is almost always certainly on the table. One example is Pleynet's interpretation of the opening to *Les Chants de Maldoror*, which uses "pleonastic" as a euphemism for "ideological," while also giving a general outline of the main issues at hand, such as these questions of "personality," linguistics and reading, but whose use is overly ironic and self-undermining because it entirely denounces the very act of interpretation he is in the midst of undertaking. After quoting the opening lines to *Maldoror*, he states suddenly, and without further commentary:

> Toute interprétation ne pourrait qu'être pléonastique. Et puisqu'en tant que lecteur nous nous trouvons mis en cause, puisque nous ne nous trouvons mis en cause qu'en tant que lecteur, nous devons, si nous voulons prendre toutes les précautions capables de soutenir notre *défiance*, revenir sur « ce » qui nous écrit et que nous lisons.
>
> Ceci tout d'abord : « dès la première ligne », nous nous lisons, nous, *lecteur*, « je me lis », moi, *lecteur* à la troisième personne du singulier … . Si nous en croyons une règle linguistique éclairée par Émile Benveniste : « en toute langue et à tout moment, celui qui parle s'approprie *je*, ce *je* qui, dans l'inventaire des formes de la langue, n'est qu'une donnée lexicale pareille à une autre, mais qui, mis en action dans le discours, y introduit la présence de la personne sans laquelle il n'est pas de discours possible… » ; et si nous l'appliquons à ce lieu discursif qu'est notre lecture de ce début du chant I, nous nous trouvons, en ce commencement, présence du discours, nous lisant nous-même comme un autre (il). Autant dire que, devenu « il » dans la lecture (qui n'est possible que si « je » s'y introduit comme lecture) que dans la mesure où la lecture et le sujet de la lecture ne feront plus qu'un, dans la mesure où « je » sera devenu *comme ce qu'il lit* ; lui-même écrit : écriture. (111-2)

Provided the book's opening context of the ideology of literary criticism paired with his therefore "symptomatic" self-denial as such, "pleonastic" here should be read, ironically, as "ideological" or, more specifically, "normative." This is also the case

given his introductory remarks to this passage, concerning both the interpretation of Lautréamont in general and this particular opening scene, in which he states that Lautréamont's work must be considered in relation to its reading and interpretation, its "matérialité même première-dernière" (109), implying that his work is designed to preempt its own critique, and thereby by nature anti-normative. The term "normative," however, Pleynet only uses much later on page 137, employing a technique of semantic re-appropriation and relocation, here transferring aesthetic norms to critical norms by the same logic through the confusion caused by the bias of the theory of literary production. More than any other, this quotation also shows the extent to which Pleynet's interpretation is nothing more than a theory of ideology in sheep's clothing, and, as is often the case in this essay, a paltry, half-baked theory at that, particularly given this first, and remarkably logocentric, use of linguistics.

Still, beyond the processes of intertextual interpretation, taking place somewhat on the level of a formal relationship, in which one text does what the other cannot, or refuses to do, the logic of the interconnection between Baudry and Pleynet extends much further into the form of the work as well, down to the level of what could be called, especially in Pleynet's case, its poetics. With this in mind, Baudry's cavalier treatment of the "close reading" works as a reference, especially given his out-of-the-blue use of it, to the manner in which Pleynet's work on Lautréamont also seems to demand a somewhat different approach to the traditional techniques of close reading, and that beyond simply accusing its reader of being "normative." Sometimes he even deliberately confuses the two as if to trick his reader, as a further endeavor to

convince him that how he is reading is "ideological" and therefore incorrect; or how he otherwise deliberately avoids any rational account, such as by means of his "anti-bourgeois," "non-linear" narratives, as noted by Frans de Haes in his article, "'Inflation verbale': Surréalisme, Tel Quel, Lautréamont."

The interpreter of this implied ideological reading, already sufficiently cued into Pleynet's ultra-ironic, here euphemistic, distanciation-effect can thus easily read "ideology" in the place of "pleonastic." What makes this a "writerly" text, in the terms of Pleynet's own self-definition carried out in reference to Lautréamont, for which he uses the term "scriptor," is that this hypothetical reader is consciously and consistently narrated throughout this self-reflexive work, in the place of, and often simultaneous with, the aforementioned interpreter of interpretation, and particularly as an "I," as in the above quotation, but also as a potential commentator, who is therefore left to his own devices to navigate the precarious stepping stones left in the wake of this troubling identification.

Most often, this identification is specifically played out between the particular dynamic in this book between the author and the literary critic. Indeed, the essay does work, if only as a counter-example, as a consideration of literary criticism and theory, but also according to its own terms, expressed by Pleynet as what, at the very least, his predecessors have failed to address: quite literally their readers, and specifically the lack of explicitness of their own implied interpretations of Lautréamont. As Pleynet expresses, here particularly in reference to their misinterpretation of Lautréamont's connection to the gothic novel (*roman noir*):

> Type de récit qui se construit sur plusieurs niveaux, et notamment la démystification du roman noir, du roman populaire (et, par extension, la démystification des *Chants* dans leur rapport au roman noir), mais que le lecteur perçoit tout d'abord comme insensé, comme un acte gratuit, et que les commentateurs, quand bien même ils n'ont pas osé l'avouer, n'ont pas pu ne pas percevoir, dans leur perspective, comme délirant. (145)

Besides demonstrating Pleynet's attitude towards criticism, it is also a typical example of the poetics of this essay, whose prose style takes on the characteristics of its meta-narrative, in particular creating the jumbled syntax at the end of the sentence here. In addition, and even more clearly than in the previous citation, it accuses its reader (the "I") of the "insanity" of not being able to properly read the quotation torn from it context: that is, as if the text itself takes on a personality of its own, resisting, as a citation, to more generally come to stand for Pleynet's overall treatment of the question of the critical reception of Lautréamont. Namely, this quotation stands in general as a symbol for Pleynet's exploitation of one of the particular circumstances of the book, and which is most essential to the ideological reading in question, its exemplarity as a work of criticism. In other words, it demonstrates most clearly and succinctly how Pleynet's interpretation of Lautréamont works by means of an implication that is specifically motivated in negative relation to criticism, of what

previous commentators of Lautréamont have "left out" of their interpretations, but also in direct reference to its own commentary.[2]

Similarly, this quotation also demonstrates the direction in which implication is taken in terms of the book's own self-narrative, as a symbol for his deeper critique of criticism, namely the normative mode of interpretation based on contextualization. In Sollers's terms, and those of the previous paragraph, this means the notion that a text has its own "personality," and which can be interpreted by means of its formal context. The case is certainly complicated by its own generic circumstances, it being an essay and not a poem, but not nearly as much as it is simply by being implied to be normative, especially considering that, in some sense, there is no other possible interpretation of this work, which otherwise is a disorganized, gratuitous, convoluted mess, and which is also particularly given to pointing it out. In fact, this silence of criticism is an example of one of the many symbols at work in the essay that come to stand for various forms of silences in question, down to Pleynet's own admitted reservations as to the extent of his own commentary, which he makes abundantly clear: "l'édition critique des *Chants* reste à faire, et que ce petit livre n'a finalement d'autre ambition que de lui faire place nette" (146), here this "making place for" taking on a similar kind of polyvalence as well.

[2] Early on, this critical norm is also explicitly identified as academic: "Que lisons-nous en lisant Gaston Bachelard et Julien Gracq ? Nous lisons que ces deux auteurs sont ou furent membres de l'enseignement" (24). Of particular interest is the reference to Gracq, who could also be understood as representing the old-guard of Tel Quel literary criticism as well, being the former teacher of some of the early members of the group, namely Hallier, Huguenin, and Matignon. Ironically, Pleynet himself had just been teaching courses of Lautréamont in the United States.

The silence of criticism serves most prominently, in relation to the narrative form implied by normative interpretation, as a symbol of the rift between literature and its criticism, here indeed figured as persons, the author and the critic: the imaginary difference between the knowledge of a literary science, namely rhetoric, and the ability to manipulate it in the terms of what is generically categorized as literature, fiction and poetry. In some sense, then, this is precisely what is theorized by Baudry of what is considered to be literature. In Pleynet there are the darker tones of the real potential limitations implied by such a claim, that the critic is somehow either limited by his own interest or, worse, limited by his own institutional context: particularly that the addressee, the above "I," is actually carrying out what is deemed the normative, narcissistic, and ultimately useless task of criticism.

The presence of a censor is maintained throughout the essay, constituting the second half of what makes this book a particularly interesting literary artifact, but most importantly it serves as an essential component in the much larger question pertaining to why Pleynet kept his distance from Lautréamont's work. His awkward posturing, as if in avoidance of speaking the truth about Lautréamont, sometimes even as if he were a secret worth keeping, but more often as if fully aware of the fact he is potentially being exploited as a critic, of what he calls a "dangerous" work, shines glaringly through as an inner conflict from the very first lines of the first chapter at the level of his poetic composition, performing this hesitance.

Although it is never made entirely explicit, perhaps because he meant to imply that Lautréamont was consciously working against this critical assumption, Pleynet's

interpretation of the poet's appropriation of the notion of "literary production" is similarly presented as a danger. From this motif's first appearance on page 14, in a passage intended to introduce the various problems associated with a biographical interpretation of the poet, he implicitly warns the reader against the pitfalls of anachronism in taking the words of one of Lautréamont's editors as a hype, an implication that, it should be noted, contrasts rather sharply with his more explicit surface argument. This is how the poet-critic Pleynet inaugurates the feeling of danger associated with the concept of "literary production," which he continues to elaborate throughout the book. This is first done through the example of one of Duscasse's letters, reading the poet as deliberately hyping his own work, although strangely to the editor and not to his readership, and then later as a constitutive element of his arguments of both the intertextuality of *Les Chants*, as well as the defining characteristic of what could be called the anti-autobiographical design that Pleynet sees at work in the essential connection between the latter work and *Poésies*.

Significantly, this "danger" is also played out on the level of writing. His opening passage, in fact the third paragraph, showcases Pleynet's own personal identification with the text, even to the point of a personal conflict with an influential poet, representing a brilliant spectacle of the authorial *tour de force* Pleynet plans to carry out in the pages that follow, here in the opening equating the "I" more with himself than the reader.

> Paradoxes, contradictions plus ou moins évidents qu'on doit, lorsqu'il s'agit de Lautréamont, se garder d'écarter ou de passer sous silence : il faut les

> voir s'inscrire contre la lecture puérile qu'ils ont pour charge de ridiculiser. C'est pourquoi sans aller plus avant nous refermons ce petit livre pour consulter sa couverture. Il ne peut être en effet question de choisir entre un « Lautréamont par lui-même » et un « Isidore Ducasse par lui-même ». Si Ducasse écrit le premier chant de *Maldoror*, il n'en signe pas la publication (le premier chant sera publié en revue et en plaquette sans nom d'auteur). Cette première version de ce premier chant étant la seule où Ducasse apparaisse comme personnage biographique (personnage qui disparaîtra tout à fait dans la seconde version), il prendra à ce moment même la précaution de souligner : *J'écris ceci sur mon lit de mort*. Et l'on pense bien que l'utilisation du pseudonyme Lautréamont n'a pas pout seul but écarter d'éventuelles poursuites judiciaires, mais sert, dès la rédaction du deuxième chant, à s'inscrire en faux contre une identité possible de l'auteur des *Chants*. Il faut bien lire *les Chants de Maldoror (Un monstre, dont je suis heureux que vous puissiez pas apercevoir la figure) par* le comte de Lautréamont, pour entendre Lautréamont comme scripteur, scribe de Maldoror, et comprendre que Ducasse joue là avec deux pseudonymes et une absence d'identité. (6-7)

This passage also demonstrates why Pleynet's prose seems to call for a different kind of close reading because the quotations contain within them more or less the story or implied narrative of the entire essay, and in a much more extended form than in the previous passages. Namely, this narrative can be identified as the poetics of signification employed throughout the book, by associating poetic technique with the

narrative itself: here, in the movement from the identification of author and subject towards the total identification brought out by the quotation, "I write this on my death bed," as if virtually rendering the precise moment of Pleynet's own composition, in a ventriloquized voice, thereby fully assuming the role of the poet-critic from the very start. In addition to containing a larger narrative necessitating a slightly modified mode of close reading, they require long citations such as these and consequently produce a more documentary style of commentary, which corresponds to Pleynet's own documentary, mostly biographical, style of literary history in the opening chapter.

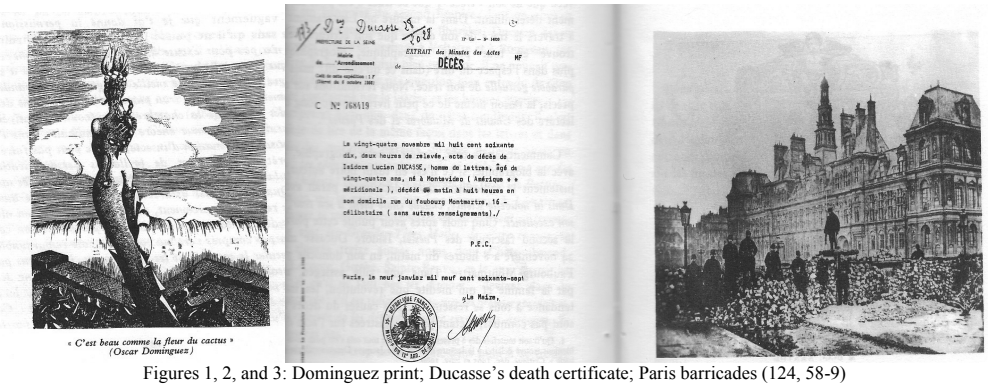
Already in the text, the limits of "personality" are therefore being tested, rather than focusing in on any one particular identifiable person, as Sollers would seem to have suggested. The reader is also contained here between these two movements, and in the general confusion caused by both the overlapping of authors and the overuse of the first person plural (*nous*) in the phrase: "C'est pourquoi sans aller plus avant nous refermons ce petit livre pour consulter sa couverture," which acts as a simulacrum of the enclosure represented by this book. Whether by its intertextual constellation of reference to Tel Quel or by its otherwise sheer force of self-containment that it will undergo in the pages that follow, or both, it acts as a mirror image. One is just as likely tempted to read "nous nous renfermons," repeating his overuse of the first person plural and virtually filling in a simple "n," thereby carrying out a complete shift in its meaning.

Other alternative narratives existing on different levels of the text can in fact be found throughout the entire work. The palimpsest quality of the book is in fact one of its primary characteristics, the most apparent being the multiple registers it engages, or that it least seems to, at times, in the midst of its otherwise unreadable meanderings. At times, it uses unexplained terminologies, like *scripteur*, and at others it appeals to a more casual reader, and this often by the very means it deems normative, such as by his long-winded first chapter that reads more like a cult homage rather than a true biography: "La biographie, l'interprétation, l'auteur, l'œuvre font évidemment partie de l'application indécente du théorème – nous sommes conscient de n'y avoir qu'en partie échappé" (172). In both cases, it appears as a commodified object, made for casual consumption, a pre-packaging of literary theory and the avant-garde alike, mostly by exploiting its more directly consumable paratextual elements, thereby fulfilling Baudry's theory that a work of literature should be conceived of deliberately as a commodity form, a work of "literary production."

One example of these alternative, paratextual elements is the one provided by quickly flipping through the pages and re-reading the titles of the sub-sections of each chapter, many of which provide either key insights or serving as symbols of the various other levels of narrative at work. The "Retour aux Sources" is the most interesting of the titles in this regard, because it begins with a critical cliché, a detail like many others that Pleynet chooses to leave unexplained, relying on the reader's previous knowledge not only of Lautréamont, but also of the history of his reception

as well. The "sources" can also be read as the various influences that Lautréamont may have had, in addition to the influences that other writers had on him more explicitly treated in the book. Such impressions and allusions come and go throughout, especially within the first few chapters, and are typically left without any explicit reference, such as the Oscar Dominguez print [Figure 1]. This image appears on page 124 without any reference, besides the quote found below it ("C'est beau comme la fleur du cactus"), being nothing other than an inside joke at the expense of the critics whom he has already lambasted, who all speak of a somehow infamous "beau comme" scene, while "beau comme" is in fact a common phrase found in many places in *Les Chants*, and has since only been erroneously defined by critics as a single scene. It is essentially the same light critique that he tends to level against critics, of having not been specific enough about this work that, as he argues in the above quotation, deliberately avoids categorization.

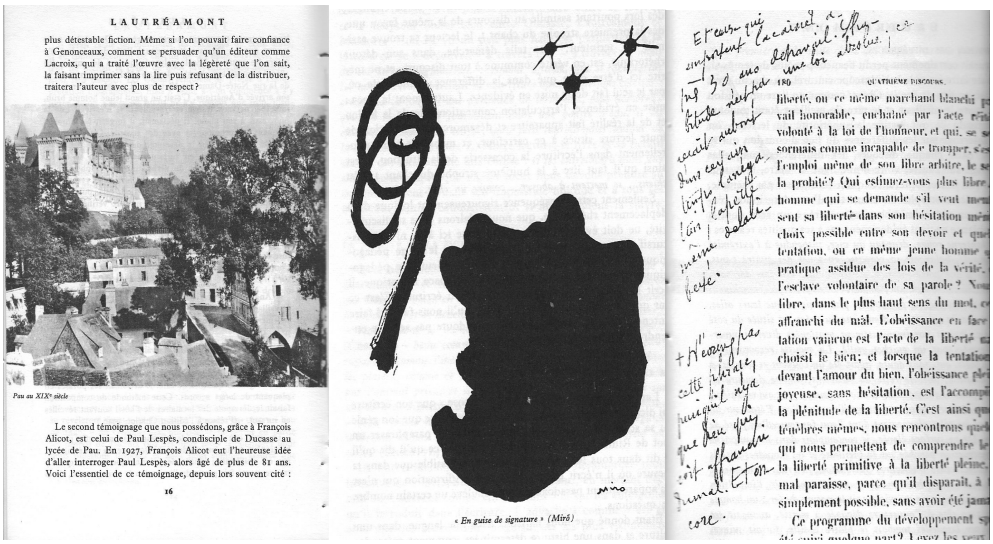
Other "sources" can also be seen at work in another important alternative narrative constituted solely by these images that are included, dispersed throughout the essay, a non-linear narrative inscribed within the "ordre fini de la langue" (Foucault et al. 97), and as a complement to its story of literary production. Many of the images do serve a strictly documentary function, from death certificates to reproductions of frontispieces, and even the first pages of the journal in which the first chapter of *Les Chants de Maldoror* was first published. The latter seem to call for a full historical reconstruction of the conditions of publication, which has been left lamentably untraced by Pleynet's predecessors.



Figures 1, 2, and 3: Dominguez print; Ducasse's death certificate; Paris barricades (124, 58-9)

One of these documents in particular stands out as a kind of spectral manifestation of the "market effect" described by Sollers, where Baudry's name appears printed on Isidore Ducasse's baptismal certificate, as the last name of Ducasse's godparents.

In general, from the very beginning, it seems like Pleynet is asking the question of how to represent such a hugely important work of literature, and as simply as possible, considering its particularly troubled history of reception. That is, to a reasonably competent reader, in contrast to what Pleynet clearly in some sense views as an incompetent criticism, his conceptualization, the first notion of Pleynet's "personality" coming into play as his self-reflexive mode begins to develop, seems to be geared towards gradually unraveling Lautréamont's overall aesthetic in this respect. Moreover, this is done with a less knowledgeable reader in mind, apparently modeled on Pleynet's own assessment of the state of Lautréamont studies. As in the above image, he seems to be asking how to tell what is essentially a modern-day ghost story, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, in an imaginative and compelling way.



LAUTRÉAMONT

plus détestable fiction. Même si l'on pouvait faire confiance à Genonceaux, comment se persuader qu'un éditeur comme Lacroix, qui a traité l'œuvre avec la légèreté que l'on sait, la faisant imprimer sans la lire puis refusant de la distribuer, traitera l'auteur avec plus de respect?

Pau au XIXe siècle

Le second témoignage que nous possédons, grâce à François Alicot, est celui de Paul Lespès, condisciple de Ducasse au lycée de Pau. En 1927, François Alicot eut l'heureuse idée d'aller interroger Paul Lespès, alors âgé de plus de 81 ans. Voici l'essentiel de ce témoignage, depuis lors souvent cité :

16

« En guise de signature » (Miró)

180 QUATRIÈME DISCOURS.

liberté, ou ce même marchand blanchi p
vail honorable, enchaîné par l'acte réf
volonté à la loi de l'honneur, et qui, se s
sormais comme incapable de tromper, s'e
l'emploi même de son libre arbitre, le s
la probité? Qui estimez-vous plus libre,
homme qui se demande s'il veut mem
sent sa liberté dans son hésitation m
choix possible entre son devoir et que
tentation, ou ce même jeune homme
pratique assidue des lois de la vérité,
l'esclave volontaire de sa parole? Nou
libre, dans le plus haut sens du mot, ce
affranchi du mal. L'obéissance en face
tation vaincue est l'acte de la liberté m
choisit le bien; et lorsque la tentation
devant l'amour du bien, l'obéissance pl
joyeuse, sans hésitation, est l'accompli
la plénitude de la liberté. C'est ainsi qu
ténèbres mêmes, nous rencontrons quel
qui nous permettent de comprendre le
la liberté primitive à la liberté pleine,
mal paraisse, parce qu'il disparaît, à
simplement possible, sans avoir été jam
Ce programme du développement s
été suivi quelque part? Lorez les

Figures 4, 5, and 6: "Pau in the 19th century;" Miró painting; Ducasse's margin notes (16, 116, 139)

While Pleynet does not necessarily take the coincidence of Baudry's name to the same limits he tends to take most of his imagery used throughout the work, it is no coincidence that Baudry's name appears here in the same ghostly manner, and as part of his more general motif of Lautréamont's influence as existing, ghost-like, within the ether of intertextuality, itself an image of how Tel Quel conceived its own common influence, in particular on its members respective styles. More importantly, the extreme coincidence of Baudry's name is a shockingly extreme spectral manifestation of this common influence, also literally made more prominent the, ironically coincidental and slightly out-of-character for the otherwise nonchalant Pleynet, need to type out the illegible document underneath its photographic reproduction. Ultimately, it also stands out in stark contrast to the ways in which Pleynet's *Lautréamont* is actually a kind of Tel Quel manifesto, practically employing their concepts and theories in experimental ways. As with the spectral appearance of

Baudry's name, the images are also entirely haunted by Tel Quel. In fact, among the first pieces of extra-textual of information encountered in the book is the post-printing insert listing previous issues of the *Tel Quel* journal. The group in general could otherwise be said to make a significant appearance in the book in the form of an anthropomorphized "heard" (*troupeau*) on page 120, whose intertextual dynamics would in fact be best described as the "scriptural process" of the repression (*refoulement*) of normative criticism, as the manifestation of the detritus left in the wake of its "phantasmagoria," to use Baudry's terms.

These simultaneous narratives are also associated as existing as a repression on a kinetic level, as if within the force of the physical image, like the barricade bricks resembling the skulls of the Paris catacombs in the poor resolution of the above print, or like Lautréamont's underground influence in general. The images even take on a narrative of their own, although not without at least some reference to the text: in many ways, the story told by the images is precisely something like the story of their reference to the text, for example as a secondary image of the critical relationship between Pleynet and Lautréamont. Still, these are only ever subordinate to the plotline of the series of images scattered throughout the essay: the story of its own commentary as a story, which very much resembles the text as well. For example, the first image that appears printed in the middle of a page, rather than as a whole page or at the extreme top or bottom, seems to be self-aware of its own character both as a potential example of a description of how images tend to work in this book in general, as well as its first truly haunting picture, as if the nineteenth century picture itself

were proof enough of the period's gothic (*noir*) aesthetic [Figure 4]. In other words, it is as if the image were trying to take control of its own narrative, as if the text emanating from both below and above were a like a mirror, or *mise en abyme*, working as a defense against its being quoted, torn out of context. Doing so, it begs the more pressing question concerning the apparent difficulties in adequately describing Lautréamont's work, particularly concerning the ideology of citation.

In the photograph following, taken of Ducasse's class at the *lycée* in Pau he attended, the author himself disappears as if himself a ghost. The strangest piece of documentary evidence Pleynet includes in the book is found ten pages later, in which Ducasse's name appears on a list of class grades from the same school. At this point especially a second kind of ghost story begins to emerge, looming even more ominously than the first behind Pleynet's seemingly obsessive reconstruction of Lautréamont's life, a level of paranoia running concurrently with Pleynet's apparent refusal to serve the institution of literary criticism for reasons of censorship: that perhaps there never even was an "Isidore Ducasse" who ever self-published his own work under the name of "count Lautréamont." Although not unrelated to the question of authorial personality, what this complete distrust in what is depicted as the culture industry of the nineteenth century publishing world has to do with the trust issues surely encountered by Pleynet's reader, like Pleynet's aforementioned anticipation of his own exploitation, could only ever remain the object of pure speculation. In this light, the paratextual narrative continues as if in distinction to what Pleynet's has

roundly deemed the relatively pointless intertextual research done by his predecessors, and self-assured in its own "usefulness."

This is often parodied in the book by reducing previous commentators' work down to lists in in the form of tables. Another kind of table appears on page 101, following a reproduction of the frontispiece of the first publication of the first *chant* of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, here giving a list of the first lines of each strophe, reducing this monumental work down visually to its relatively few pages. The "tableau" motif will eventually also be brought to the point of parody when, at the beginning of his chapter on *Poésies*, he provides a similar table, but cut down to a ridiculously short version of this much more modest work. The move in fact mirror's Pleynet's polemical, overly simplified, interpretation of *Poésies* in his final chapters as a mere continuation of *Maldoror*:

> Les *Poésies* se donnent donc comme correctif des *Chants*, eux-mêmes correctifs des *Poésies*. Il ne faut en effet pas se laisser prendre à la chronologie des œuvres, pièges biographique où sont tombés tous les commentateurs : les deux livres sont chronologiquement inséparables. Il ne faut pas non lus ignorer cette chronologie puisqu'ici encore, paradoxalement, ce n'est que dans la mesure où nous la poserons que nous nous apercevons qu'il fait défaut. (157)

Although central to Pleynet's argument regarding Lautréamont and literary production, this assertion is in fact the most gratuitous and under-analyzed of this

generally gratuitous book, and falls flat, as at most a self-description of his own attempt to write in the tradition of *Maldoror*.

Woven within this de-synchronization of the paratext in Pleynet is another non-linear force at work in the paratextual narrative, and more particularly in reference to the linearity of its hypothetical commentary, when an image breaks through the strictly image-based narrative in more explicit connection with the text. The Miró ink-stain painting reproduced on page 116, as if a more far-fetched example of a work inspired by Lautréamont, and bears the ironic inscription "in lieu of a signature" (*en guise de signature*), like Pleynet signing his own voice into the text, ventriloquizing himself as a self-depredating gesture of the gratuity of his own claims and interpretations concerning Lautréamont. It is also a parody of the common elocutionary expression used in French expository prose, "in lieu of a conclusion…" (*en guise de conclusion*), in direct reference to his own conclusion concerning *Les Chants* comes to bear down on him, but only at the level of what could only be considered his implied interpretation of Lautréamont. While certainly a climax point in Pleynet's practical investigation into the dynamics of interpretation, more than the intertext, however, the more general question of a common aesthetics of implied interpretation of Lautréamont comes to the fore, as if the one thing that all artists and commentators can agree about concerning this work is it is somehow structurally interconnected, suggesting a higher logic at work in *Les Chants*. Literally, however, the chapter on *Les Chants* is far from its actual conclusion on page 145. Transported to an imaginary museum, Pleynet's serves as Virgil to the reader's Dante, pictured

only a few pages later in a Masson drawing, pointing out the spiral as if an image of the impossibility of representing this complex work.

Pleynet's interpretation of the text also works itself out on two distinct levels of implication, the first of which is a more literal implication, handled in the more ambiguous terms of a theory, rather than an explicit commentary, and the second the more situational contextualized implications found at the level of the image, only now specifically applied to Lautréamont's text. This first, stated in terms of a theory, relates to what Pleynet ambiguously terms Lautréamont's "rhetoric," and mostly seems to get by on this very borderline level of implication by means of analogy with the Chklovskian or Brechtian distanciation effect. This implicitness he expresses ironically with an emphatic "obviously" (*évidement*):

> Ils ont évidement pour fonction de désamorcer toute tentative de « métaphorisation » des *Chants*, en mettant l'accent sur l'adverbe comparatif « comme » et sur les ambiguïtés qu'il introduit dans l'écriture. L'adverbe « comme » est en effet une des articulations linguistiques les plus visiblement employées dans *les Chants* parce qu'il met en relief l'arbitraire de la fiction. Par l'adverbe « comme », la fiction entend faire appel à une « réalité » ou fiction commune (au scripteur et au lecteur) introduisant dans le discours un corps étranger, dès lors pourtant assimilé au discours de la même façon que, dès la première strophe du chant I, le lecteur se trouve assimilé au scripteur. (114-5)

Pleynet pushes the limits of the inarticulateness of implication most clearly here to the point of beating around the bush with his interpretation, which is simply that tropes like the over-repetition of the aforementioned "beau comme" scene work to break down Lautréamont's reader's preconceptions.

He names this technique of Lautréamont's some pages later specifically as "distanciation," in the following quote, reproduced here to show how his own style also tends to mirror what is happening in the paratext, the list format motif, which also more materially represents the affected movement towards a conclusion just described. This also demonstrates how Pleynet also exploits the imaginary space created in the wake of his implied interpretations, oscillating between this implicit and the more explicit interpretations at work in his text, such as the aforementioned notion of the so-called "realism" of *Les Chants*. The passage also shows the extent to which these deliberate ambiguities and evasions are couched in the terms of a self-narrative, and within a theory of a "writerly text" (*sous-scription*), meant in some ways to provide a self-reflexive theory of interpretation, simultaneously figured and made particularly patent here by his over-determined use of the first-person plural:

> … il faut peut-être, dans cette même perspective technique de ce qu'on pourrait appeler la distanciation « lautréamontienne », relever l'ambiguïté du mot « chant », et du titre, « *les Chants de Maldoror* ». Nous ne nous avançons pas en prétendant que Lautréamont joue constamment sur cette ambiguïté, que ce que est chanté (le chant), l'originalité du chant, la valeur du chant, ne résident pas forcément dans l'originalité, la valeur des paroles : *Celui que*

chante ne prétend pas que ses cavatines soient une chose inconnue. (Chant I, strophe 4.)

Nous voyons une fois de plus comment, dès le début du *Maldoror*, toutes les théories « lautréamontiennes » se trouvent inscrites. De cette façon, avant même que le livre soit ouvert, alors que nous n'avons lu que le titre, nous savons déjà (sans le savoir, mais c'est tout l'essentiel de cette thérapeutique) que, lisant ce que nous lisons, nous lirons :

1. une interprétation de ce que nous lirons (notre interprétation, notre projection dans la lecture) ;

2. le chant (c'est-à-dire l'expression que Lautréamont donne de ses *cavatines*) étant écrit, ce que l'auteur entend c'est son chant dans l'écriture, sa « scription », sous-scription des *cavatines*, et non pas les malheur de la fable. Et de cela il nous prévient par milles détours : contradictions, invraisemblances, caricatures (les *petits romans de trente pages* du chant VI, *les ficelles du roman*) ;

3. à travers notre lecture, notre interprétation qui est l'interprétation même (écrite dans l'écriture, écrite dans notre lecture de Lautréamont). Autrement dit, le « travail » auquel se trouve soumise la rhétorique (et nous-même en tant que corps, à travers elle).

Nous avons là chaque fois trois corps en un : mythe – rhétorique – inconscient, ou si l'on préfère : mythe – histoire – inconscient, qui seront chacun mis en évidence par Lautréamont, mais toujours à partir de la

> charnière qui commande le déploiement (et le repliement) : l'histoire, la rhétorique. (127-8)

The passage is surely more itself a parody of a "conclusion," too heavily reliant on these under-contextualized catchalls, "history, myth, and unconscious," and indeed the second implied interpretation is found further on, in a closer consideration of the subject of rhetoric in relation to its classical conception. In fact, Pleynet is undertaking his own "distanciation effect" of rhetoric, by means of this self-reflexive deconstruction, as it appears in a paragraph that appears just before the above paragraph, more like the very concept that he has deemed normative, effectively barring the deciphering of such a "radical" work as *Les Chants*:

> C'est que la forme rhétorique, étant une des plus prégnantes de notre culture, hante toutes les questions que cette culture peut être amenée à se poser sur elle-même ; et c'est que notre intelligence même de ces questions (comme ces questions) pour n'être plus prise dans la forme rhétorique, doit d'abord et peut-être même avant tout « jouer » cette discipline. (127)

The implication, or rather the "theory," is clear enough: Pleynet is playing with the idea of rhetoric as an affective means of carrying out this impossible interpretation.

Of course, he persists in his own classical approach to the subject, but by embedding a more particular reference, again only to be implied to a more initiated reader of Lautréamont, namely, his signature use of the, almost stereotypically avant-garde, the meta-poetics of self-reference, such as Lautréamont's: "Ce serait bien peu connaître sa profession d'écrivain à sensation, que de ne pas, au moins, mettre en

avant, les restrictives interrogations après lesquelles arrive immédiatement la phrase *que je suis sur le point de terminer*;" or, clearer: "J'établirai dans quelques lignes comment Maldoror fut bon pendant ses premières années, où il vécut heureux; *c'est fait*" (emphasis mine). The passage in question opens with Pleynet's own typical off-hand reference to the clichés of Lautréamont studies, as if specifically for the initiated, critical reader, his plagiaristic use of other texts, followed a list of rhetorical tropes, in particular "le jeu est terminé," which is about as explicit as Pleynet gets, referring to "sur le point de terminer":

> Ce n'est pas dans la fabuleuse bibliothèque de la culture occidentale qu'il faut chercher les sources de Lautréamont, on n'en finirait pas (on l'a bien vu) d'en trouver, mais dans le vieux catalogue des tropes. …
>
> Exemples qui pourrait être multipliés, étant entendu que l'entreprise de démystification, pour être efficace, n'implique pas systématiquement l'utilisation du renversement rhétorique, mais aussi bien, même si ce n'est pas sans quelque humour, l'utilisation du code rhétorique classique pris tel quel. (135)

The expression "tel quel" [as such] is by no means an automatic reference to the journal. What follows, however, is precisely the question of the application of linguistics to literature, one of, if not *the*, central common thread between the various theories put forward by the journal, Baudry, Kristeva, and Sollers in particular. Additionally, Pleynet adopts, or perhaps even inaugurates, their common dismissive attitude towards linguistics, using a linguistic theory pertaining to the grammatical

category of negation in an inappropriate and similarly abusive manner; that is, what below in Benveniste is a simple statement, Pleynet over-interprets as an existential or psychological quality by means of literary analogy. The implication is of course not that there is no connection between linguistic and psychological phenomena, as is often the interest in Benveniste, but rather that it can be, as it is here, misappropriated as a form of literary criticism:

> Émile Benveniste dit très bien que « la caractéristique de la négation linguistique est qu'elle ne peut annuler que ce qui est énoncé, qu'elle doit poser explicitement pour supprimer, qu'un jugement de non-existence a nécessairement aussi le statut formel d'un jugement d'existence », Lautréamont l'avait admirablement compris, aussi bien dans *Maldoror*, où joue le renversement rhétorique, que dans les *Poésies*. Le reversement, dans la mesure où il est « constitutif du contenu lié », est constitutif de « l'émergence de ce contenu dans la conscience et de la suppression du refoulement » : nous avons là la clef didactique et la réalité thérapeutique des *Chants*.
>
> L'exemple le plus probant de cette émergence du contenu dans la conscience, nous l'avons vu mis en lumière au début des *Chants* dans le rapport écrivain-lecteur ; la mise en garde *à moins qu'il n'apporte dans sa lecture une logique rigoureuse et une tension d'esprit au moins égale à sa défiance, les émanations mortelles de ce livre imbiberont son âme comme l'eau le sucre* indique bien le niveau de refoulement symbolique où une

> lecture qui ne sera pas celle de la négation comme renversement, va immanquablement sombrer. (135-6)

The passage ends in the most impressive, and certainly central, of the poetic interpretations of Lautréamont done in such a superficially implied manner. Namely, of the famous opening lines of *Les Chants* quoted here, the awkward combination of two substantive nouns, "like water sugar," stands out, the larger implication being that these grammatical turns of phrases are a central component to Lautréamont's style, and which is employed poetically in the same manner as Pleynet has done here: that through the deviations and divagations of implication, language, in this case grammar, is instilled with a poetic power that, as in the text, "imbibe his soul like water sugar." Behind this particular interpretation lies of course the presumption that Lautréamont is somehow "like" Pleynet, which is expressed poetically by the text as well, "like Lautréamont Pleynet," as the governing structure of the entire book.

That these interpretations can also exist somehow simultaneously, as how linguistics can somehow be interpreted to apply to the psyche, is the premise of what is presented as Pleynet's most trying theory of Lautréamont's rhetorical transgressions and "*reversements*," a concept that remains deliberately vague, again couched in the authoritativeness of the classical literary trope of "reversal," and returning to Benveniste in a much more openly abusive manner:

> Cette clarté, toutefois, nous permet de comprendre, dans ce qui rend inefficace sa trop grande lisibilité, l'envergure de l'entreprise lautréamontienne, qui

porte le renversement non plus des simples phénomènes *(le phénomène passe. Je cherche les lois (Poésies)*, mais à celui des structures linguistiques.

Pris dans cette perspective du topos du monde renversé, les *beau comme* ne s'en prennent pas seulement à « l'association des choses incompatibles, » il déplacent le renversement sur l'un des trois concepts normatifs fondamentaux (le beau) et sur toutes ses possibles liaisons « matérielles » (il faut bien entendu, dans un ouvrage qui se donne comme littéraire, y vois aussi la suspicion portée sur l'émotion esthétique) ; il s'en prennent finalement à ce seul topos (celui du renversement) que, semble-t-il, Lautréamont devrait épargner, et, en le radicalisant, soulèvent à son propos toutes les ambiguïtés que « la négation comme constitutive du contenu nié » est appelée à recouvrir.

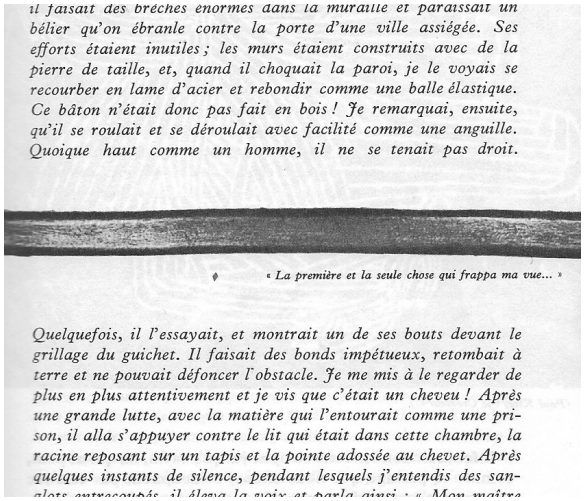
Ce travail exercé par Lautréamont sur le topos du monde renversé, est la preuve même de la conscience qu'il avait, pour reprendre la formulation d'Émile Benveniste, que la négation « constitutive du contenu nie, donc de l'émergence de ce contenu dans la conscience et de la suppression du refoulement », laisse « subsister une répugnance à s'identifier avec ce contenu », répugnance ici visée.[3] (137)

After this, the text's self-ordained "conclusion," the aforementioned Dominguez lithograph is found another few pages on, which consequently marks a more literal

[3] The typo in the first paragraph of this passage, the lack of a closing parenthesis, is part of the original publication. Also see the occurrence of a similar omission, more likely a deliberate one, in Thibaudeau's *Ouverture*.

backward turn in Pleynet's paratext, or, following the same pattern as the opening sequence, as if the narrative were being reset and starting over again.

Lautréamont's handwritten notes in the margins of a contemporary essay on the concept of evil, in double reference to the photograph of Pau, surrounded by text [Figure 4], as well as the handwriting samples found there, which by the end of this series of samples are reduced to his signature, also seem to reduce Ducasse too to the girlish, snot-nosed teenager he has previously depicted him as. The strangest of all the images appears on page 141, a representation of a strand of hair through a microscope, presumably an image serving only for the reader's imagination of what it would be like for a piece of hair to speak as in *Les Chants* [Figure 7]:


il faisait des brèches énormes dans la muraille et paraissait un bélier qu'on ébranle contre la porte d'une ville assiégée. Ses efforts étaient inutiles ; les murs étaient construits avec de la pierre de taille, et, quand il choquait la paroi, je le voyais se recourber en lame d'acier et rebondir comme une balle élastique. Ce bâton n'était donc pas fait en bois ! Je remarquai, ensuite, qu'il se roulait et se déroulait avec facilité comme une anguille. Quoique haut comme un homme, il ne se tenait pas droit.

« La première et la seule chose qui frappa ma vue... »

Quelquefois, il l'essayait, et montrait un de ses bouts devant le grillage du guichet. Il faisait des bonds impétueux, retombait à terre et ne pouvait défoncer l'obstacle. Je me mis à le regarder de plus en plus attentivement et je vis que c'était un cheveu ! Après une grande lutte, avec la matière qui l'entourait comme une prison, il alla s'appuyer contre le lit qui était dans cette chambre, la racine reposant sur un tapis et la pointe adossée au chevet. Après quelques instants de silence, pendant lesquels j'entendis des sanglots entrecoupés, il éleva la voix et parla ainsi : « Mon maître

Figure 7: Strand of hair (141)

Truly, the image is more a parody, a desperate attempt at a compelling image necessitated because of his otherwise obtuse interpretation of the passage: simply, that it is an exemplary scene demonstrating Lautréamont's conception of "realism."

Alternatively, it might also be an image of Pleynet's "realistic depiction" of *Les Chants*, which, taking an affected measure of distance from the work, seeks simply to organize it into a more manageable whole. This would be more reasonable, of course, were not for the fact that Pleynet ends up making it into an unreadable piece of literature, or at least rhetorically speaking, as a deliberately reserved or resistant form of literary theory. In terms of the paratextual narrative, it also stands out as a striking example of the physical force of an image, able to cut through a text in a grotesque manner, demystifying the book down to its very core as an object, or commodity: the standard, left-to-right European codex.

The book's commodity quality is reinforced by its final images, the unexplained portraits of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, being preceded by a short description of Lautréamont and his work done by an unknown author, presented in a style, though certainly in a prosaic, popular register, thought still somewhat reminiscent of the format *Tel Quel* used in the journal. Thus, it brings the paratext back, full circle, to the post-publication *Tel Quel* insert at the very beginning. Similarly, the final image of the Pantheon, which is where in the final strophes of *Les Chants* one of the characters flings a body, is another, perhaps overly ironic, self-reference to the monument to Tel Quel that Pleynet's *Lautréamont* in many ways actually does represent.

Ultimately, however, this triumphant feeling ending the paratextual narrative runs contrary to the true emotion of the text itself. While certainly the last chapters are marked by a certain emotional investment, especially vis-à-vis theory, as in the

romanticized passage below lauding Lautréamont's radicalism and originality, Pleynet's overly polemical conclusion concerning *Poésies* is in fact a rousing disappointment, if that were even possible considering his otherwise lack of explicit insight into his subject:

> De cette œuvre qui s'en prend si radicalement à l'originalité et aux tics des auteurs, c'est bien les « Théories » que leur auteur espère un jour ou l'autre voir acceptées. C'est vers ces Théories (les *Poésies* le signifient sans ambiguïté) qui assignent à l'œuvre la formulation abstraite du théorème … c'est vers ces « Théories » que nous avons tenté d'orienter notre lecture de Ducasse. La biographie, l'interprétation, l'auteur, l'œuvre font évidemment partie de l'application indécente du théorème – nous sommes conscient de n'y avoir qu'en partie échappé. Aurions-nous été encore plus prudents que leur négation même nous aurait encore compromis dans notre *lutte contre la matière, contre les ravages de l'esprit*. (172)

From the beginning of his chapter on *Poésies*, Pleynet appears to rest on his laurels even more so than in the section on *Maldoror*, returning to the source work undertaken in the opening chapters, which by now seem more impressive than ever, and relying heavily on documentary evidence, mostly letters, in order to support his preposterous and misleading theory of *Poésies* being a "correction" of *Les Chants de Maldoror*.

A mirror or repeated image of the implied interpretation of Lautréamont's grammatical poetic style is in fact just about the full extent of any commentary

concerning *Poésies*, which is summarily disposed within a few meager pages in contrast to both the distended, and consequently reneged, biographical reading and the, albeit unstructured and unclear, interpretation of *Les Chants*. This interpretation of *Poésies* is likewise carried out on two distinct levels, the first being a similarly general interpretation, bordering on a mere description by implication, of *Poésies* as a collection of axioms, which of course it is:

> *Poésies* pour donner un nom aux pulsions proches et lointaines de ce que instruit en se faisant *(La poésie n'est pas la tempête, pas plus que le cyclone. C'est un fleuve majestueux et fertile)*, à travers l'histoire toujours présente de celui qui, en se faisant, pense son histoire sans la laisser échapper, qui l'écrit, et qui se trouve alors semblable à ceux qui « entrent et n'entrent pas deux fois dans les même fleuves », puisque « vers ceux qui entrent dans les même fleuves affluent d'autre et d'autres eaux ; et les âmes aussi s'exhalent de l'humide » ; et les âmes aussi se font (s'exhalent) dans l'ordre où elle écrivent leur pensées. (169)

Here quoting the axioms of Heraclitus, the suggestion is therefore more of *Poésies* as a work of anti-axiom, an anti-ideological machine such as the one described in *Les Chants* only working more at the level of the sentence, or, in French, at the level of the "word," *bon mot* being the equivalent of an axiomatic phrase, for example. It is a far cry, to say the least, from the much more relevant question of readability, the major underlying question of Pleynet's previous close readings.

The second phase of this implication comes, as in the first interpretation of *Les Chants*, a few pages from the end of the book. As Pleynet implicitly hones in gradually on Lautréamont's personal style, and characteristically in reference to his own, another quote stands out as particularly exemplary of his elocution, which Pleynet describes as his "writing" (*écriture*), as if fulfilling the meaning of this word to which he has ascribed particular significance throughout the entire book, and as if it were already identified as a deliberately theoretical concept:

> L'auteur espère que le lecteur sait ce qu'il fait dans sa peau du lecteur, et à quoi il souscrit lorsqu'il dit : *j'exprimerai le vœu ardent que vous fussiez emprisonné dans les glandes sudoripares de ma peau pour vérifier la loyauté de ce que j'affirme en connaissance de cause*. (Chant VI.) Phrase sans ambiguïté quant aux objectifs ducassiens vis-à-vis du lecteur qui connaîtra ce que est affirmé s'il est dans la peau de Ducasse (dans son écriture) … . (175)

Naturally, the only thing "unambiguous" here is that Pleynet is being ironic, especially considering the complete lack of context, so it is no wonder that the quotation stands out mostly for its formal qualities. Lautréamont's similarly conspicuous use of the subjunctive additionally acts here as a kind of historical marker at work in his œuvre, which has been the subject Pleynet's primary explicit interpretation, namely in relation to the gothic novel. The topic was not new to Pleynet, and in fact bears significant similarity to his contemporary essay on Marx's reading of Eugène Sue, which also centers on a historically based theory of the novel genre in relation to literary production. More important in this context, however, is

the similarity it bears more directly with the situation faced by the novelists and poets associated with Tel Quel. This, along with the question of a work's particular "writerly" relationship with its own commentary, provides particular insight into the "market effect" spoken of by Sollers, which, in light of Pleynet's self-reflexive approach to the question of interpretation, can now be more correctly described as a process: that is, not only does Lautréamont's relation to the *Roman Noir* resemble Tel Quel's complicated relationship with their own predecessors, namely the public's expectation of Tel Quel works to be in the experimental and theoretical tradition of the *Nouveau Roman*, but that the "market effect," the "spectral" or haunting in Pleynet's work, is more specifically the dynamic at work between the two.

Also in light of this analysis of the text, Sollers's implication concerning "personality" equally does not hold much water, and could only truly considered to be a rough approximation of a more dynamic set of images ranging from the personal, to the self-reflexive, along with the more delicate distinction: the emotional. As such, Sollers's response can be seen as ironically self-reflexive, standing as an image for how, if one can speak of an extra- or inter-textual relationship between Tel Quel texts, then it is through their own particular approaches to writing, which in fact has little to nothing to do with personal style, as much as it is through a common set of theories and concepts. In this case, the latter, a common theory of ideology, stands out as the most prominent, while the literary output tends to favor the former. This in many ways is at the heart of Pleynet's work, as if it were itself part of the historicity and "market effect" concerning the public's perception of the relationship of theory and

literature to bend itself backwards to the generic force of theory, to reveal a theory at work within the theory.

It therefore represents Sollers's abilities as a reader, rather than as a discerning critic, to have identified the central theme of the book on Lautréamont as having to do with personality, since it is certainly one of the means by which Pleynet introduces his reader to the pressing, yet underlying, issues relating to the reception and interpretation of Lautréamont. Indeed, if there is a "self" to speak of in the text, it is much more clearly identified as a hypothetical critic and potential commentator. Although a movement is traced along these lines from the personality of the "critic-poet" towards an identification of this self with the text's own self-reference, the essential movement of the text takes place directly in relation to its own analysis. Firstly, this is carried out by marking a shift from a resentment registered as an empathetic rejection of the incompetence of Pleynet's predecessors, to a rejection of Pleynet's own inadequate interpretation identified as a "normative anti-normative" discourse, and secondly by deliberately confusing the text's two primary implied close readings of Lautréamont, conflating them as "style," and thus registering the temporality of analysis and commentary within his own text. This confusion is traced essentially by means of a categorical reduction of the two to stylistic elements within the simultaneous shift in the critical narrative, representing the memorial process of the text's own commentary, by first establishing a normative limit and then by transgressing it.

This deliberately convoluted structure, typical of the *contra-exemplum* model adopted by Pleynet, constitutes what would become the practical application of the theory of ideology and literature as put forward by Baudry, which, taken together, identify by means of the ideological rift between literary theory and literature an essential difference between these two genres, and which, in context, serve as a symbol of the ideology of reading, or ideology at work in reading, therefore imagined here as whatever normative confusion stands in the way of interpreting a piece of literature. In other words, theory comes to stand in for ideology as what blocks it from being interpreted, and it does so practically by a process both defined by and defining of normative interpretation. Essentially, what redeems Pleynet's feeble attempt at literary criticism is simply that he ends up doing what he has accused others of not doing, which is not taking their readers under careful consideration, although only by means of a strange meta-poetic temporality in which history has likewise been swapped for ideology. In other terms, Pleynet, working within the tradition of the avant-garde he traces throughout his book, appeals to the futurity of his work, and to the futurity of Tel Quel in general as being ahead of their time, although less resigned to an ironic distance to their reception, but equally concerned with the underlying questions of this aesthetic standard, indeed down to their market dynamics as expressed by Sollers.

Regarding the notion that this has been interpreted by critics, although for the most part of the kind prone to also referring to them as "unreadable" and just as likely to criticize them simply for being Marxists, as being the product of an experimental,

avant-garde form of literature conceived in a counter-discursive relation to the idea of an ideological institution called "Literature," and thereby suggesting that they are merely a band of trouble-making reactionaries. It is rather that this assumption is anticipated, and in fact patently at work in Pleynet's essay, although it appears more along the lines as a distraction from the larger narrative outlined here. After all, most of the difficulties associated with the interpretation of this influential group of writers stem more from these types of sticky situations that they tend to get themselves into, rather than from any true, especially any "normative," ideological or otherwise, problem of their reception as radical authors. The abstract question of readability is simply one of the many details lost in the mass of information represented by this small book, both literally and figuratively, and, although worthy of note, such as the "memoir" motif that recurs throughout it symbolizing the memorial process of a critical interpretation, are simply the analogies most pertinent to his particular mode of interpretation by implication, present precisely to be distinguished from ideology, rather than being supplied to the reader as such. Simply put, they are ultimately added exclusively as extraneous details precisely due to of their lack of relevance to the text. Following the linguistics motif, the clearest example of this often imply that such unreadability has to do with the problems of language, and most often relating to the question of syntax. In other words, they are images of the inevitable confusion caused by a convoluted work and the foreseen hermeneutic impulse to make up for such a lack of sense. Hence the image of style, in Pleynet reduced to the level of linguistic impulse, comes to stand for the inevitable blind spot of a normative criticism, falling

outside the reach of its totalizing grasp, constituting its own interpretation, which in turn also requires an interpretation. Like *Lautréamont par lui-même*, Sollers's interpretation of it also should ultimately be considered parody, as a specific example of an ideological, normative hermeneutic model, and which is exploited to the extent of suggesting it to be the fundamental ideological misunderstanding wrought by linguistics, "symptomatic" in Baudry's terminology, whose "market effect" theory carries no real weight, but rather serves as a subtle, ironic rebuff to the bad question of an incompetent interviewer.

CHAPTER THREE

The Opening of Jean Thibaudeau's *Ouverture*

One would imagine the opening to a book literally translated as *Opening* would have a good first line. That *Ouverture*'s opening passage is something like a parody of the beginning of Proust without being too jarring, by acting as a symbol of a major subject of the book, literary history, rather simply immediately associates it with a more personal judgment: whether or not one actually finds it a good opening. More impressive is that it does so in a way that marks the only structure that could possibly be described as its narrative, or its "history" in the sense of its diagesis, the movement from sense to non-sense, corresponding to the degeneration of interpretation, specifically problems of literary criticism, particularly the question of foreshadowing in a novel without a plot: "Plus tard, je suis surpris, j'ouvre les yeux tout de suite, vraiment, et je ne sais pourquoi, ce qui m'a réveillé, ici, je regarde, et brusquement heureux, où je suis ému, mon cœur bat, et je suis assuré de vivre, au fond, contre toute raison maintenant, un jour à venir encore, d'entre tous celui-ci, total élu, jour libre et n'importe lequel, et je ferai n'importe quoi" (11). Thus, the novel opens with a "Later" that does not make sense: in context most likely meaning "this is the later moment in relation to another past one," while still, through ambiguity, retaining some of the opposite valence, "at some later time," already breaking the barriers between story and narrative. Already it is unclear if it is the author who is "doing whatever" (*ferai n'importe quoi*), playing with the idea of an alienated personality, or if it is a true portrait of a dismissive *désinvolte*. Also, on the

level of language, it describes the context of a crisis of meaning, while retaining some notion of the physicality of poetic language, such as syntactically making ambiguous its deictic "où," which could mean either "where" or "or" depending on the accent. Similarly, the passage walks the fine line between the oral and written forms of the French language with the word "plus," meaning either more or less, temporally speaking.

The word, or in this case the sound [plu], is another important intertextual reference for the novel, mimicking the iconic opening lines from Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*, the Bible of the avant-garde: "Plût au ciel que le lecteur, enhardi et devenu momentanément féroce comme ce qu'il lit, trouve, sans se désorienter, son chemin abrupt et sauvage, à travers les marécages désolés de ces pages sombres et pleines de poison" (123). The simultaneous reference to the reader while begging the question of reading, because the referent of the transitive verb "find" can only be determined by the syntax of the entire clause, whose full meaning can therefore can only be understood at the end. This highlights a technique used throughout *Ouverture*, along with its similar tendency toward narrative self-description, emulating its relative lack of plot. This is somewhat in contrast to both Lautréamont and many other Tel Quel novels of the period, which often take on a direct reader address, even directly speculating on what it means to read.

The *Maldoror* intertext, spattered throughout the novel, might be one explanation of the book's dedication, "Pour M. L.": *for my Lautréamont*. As if to mirror this, *Ouverture* is written as if a part of the subconscious dream of everyday

reality, or the super-ego, if only through its sheer overload of intertextual imagery. Moreover, this is in direct contrast to this particular, and ultimately personal, allusion to the poet Lautréamont, who works here, and elsewhere in Tel Quel, despite the various theorizations and speculations as to this author's relevance to the theory of literature, as an image of a literary influence, common among Telquelians: that is, as an influence beyond the definable confines of a canon of theory.

Personal connection is an essential element of the novel precisely because there is practically no interpretation to be spoken of here: the only possible "story" that one may be able to discern is a love story between a person (presumably the male narrator, whose gender is only established by the gender agreement in the French language) and a woman. That the "only" interpretation be in relation to the establishment of a person, of a distinguishable self from which the narration emanates, speaks both to the novel's particular self-reflexive form, as well as how it transcends the usual registers of self-narration, participating in a scriptural practice that would be better described as "literary theory" or "literary" literary theory: conjecture as to the underlying premises of literature, here the specific relation between character and story. Whether or not this makes *Ouverture* a "theoretical novel," or for that matter any sort of "textual novel" or otherwise as has been previously suggested, is doubtful. More of interest, especially vis-à-vis the question of a group project, if ever one existed, is a short time after the publication of *Ouverture*, Marcelin Pleynet published his book on Lautréamont, *Lautréamont par*

lui-même, which also deliberately blurs the line between author and subject, while blurring those between literature and literary criticism.

These represent most of the essential themes of the novel, and lead to the dark conclusion, at the limits of interpretation, of its actual story, which could only be reached by the book's emotional rather than its narrative drive: the final day of someone who is about to commit suicide, specifically the imagined life of Lautréamont, expressing the victim's inexpressible desire to take one's fate in one's own hands by exterminating the self to those who survive, the abject painful image of the title, "opening" one's own flesh, along with the overwhelming feeling of inexplicability left over in those grief-stricken by the loss of a loved one by suicide.[4] Previous commentators of this novel, particularly Philippe Forest, have attempted to explain what Thibaudeau's novel refers to as the "eternal day," or the "day of all days," with the quotidian, and inevitably only partial, interpretation of this book's attempt to describe a "day-in-the-life," or a "day that contains all days" (243).

On a symbolic level, the sympathy over the shared experience of grief stands for the relationship between the reader and the author, and the emotional connection one makes with a book, as in Pleynet's *Lautréamont*. It also takes on a more specific valence in the novel as the particular relationship between the author and the literary

[4] Suicide is not listed as the official reason for Lautréamont's untimely death, and is more the stuff of literary legend than fact, an interesting cultural artifact in itself that exists and without reference in official literary culture. Similarly, *Ouverture* contains scenes that most likely take place in the 20th century, which does not necessarily preclude this interpretation, and the mentality of the dreamer of a future world may be seen as a image of paradoxical state of mind of the denial of the future of someone considering suicide, as well as Lautréamont's vision of the future of poetry. The latter therefore might also be understood as an image of Thibaudeau's anticipation of future critic's over-theorization of his work.

critic: symbolized by the particular emotional charge of mourning a suicide being too far beyond the reasonable limit of human sympathy. This requires the demonstration of commentary, especially considering the delicate symbolic structure this novel is built upon in lieu of narrative, and it is in fact particularly worth noting that the assumption that there is no difference between a book written for the purpose of literary theory and one written for a non-academic audience is actually a "theory" in itself, based on the idea that all readers share this limit of emotional connection undermining any stable notion of interpretation constitutive of literary commentary. There seems to be a contradiction inherent in the interpretation of a novel that is specifically structured to have none besides an emotional one: that one has experienced the emotion required to interpret the work that also makes one a subjective, conditional commentator.

As shown above, through its ambiguous employment of syntax, among other poetic techniques, *Ouverture* like Lautréamont's *Maldoror*, calls for an account not only of reading, but of *a* reading, which in the end is all any literature is: a reading of it. So, perhaps it is indeed a mistake to go about an interpretation of a novel designed primarily by blurring the lines between reality, fiction, and dream world while retaining some sense of reference indicating a stable, single narrator, although precisely to not support any one single possible reading. It is also a mistake that has to be made, however, in order to fully demonstrate the two fundamental elements that make the novel such a fascinating work of literature: first, that it accounts not only for different possible readings of the story, but actually weaves multiple levels of reading

into its method of composition, along with an account of their theoretical structure; and secondly, how *Ouverture* represents an important keystone, a particularly telling example of Tel Quel's novelistic experiment of the Tel Quel-specific intertext. Especially how the Tel Quel apparatus was conceived to produce works literally in dialogue with each other, which has already been noted by previous commentators such as Patrick Ffrench, somewhat regrettably requires the exposition of close reading, and one far beyond what is suggested here:

> They can be written 'about'; a writing can be generated from them that analyses itself. So in writing about these texts it is the experience of their reading that is being unthreaded. It is also possible to set out the details of their structure and of their intertextuality—that is, how they relate to each other and to earlier and later texts—and to trace general movements of the theory of fiction and fictionalizing of theory they produce. (145)

The predicament is similar to the question of the specificity of the author's relationship with the literary critic insofar as it is again simply another matter of theory, and in the end an assumption that one particular "reading" may just be part of a more expansive symbolic structure. Again, it is most important to note that Tel Quel in this sense consciously conceived of an intertextual system designed to overlap, at least in practice, with what might otherwise be perceived as part of the narrative or poetic form, just as *Ouverture* sinks deeper and deeper into its intertextuality in order to construct its own: Jean-Louis Baudry's *Le Pressentiment* (1962), for example, could be weaved in seamlessly with the theme of foreshadowing, and Jean-Edern

Hallier's *Les Aventures d'une jeune fille* (1963), a meta-novel about the theater, with the dynamics of intertextual dialogism itself. These two particular intertexts are carved into *Ouverture*'s intertextual network on two distinct levels: one could be considered "theoretical," such as the one just described, and the other beyond the typical bounds of critical inquiry, more along the lines of the details composing the personal connection with the novel, representing the author's concept of it and any reader's ability to sympathize with powerful imagery, and maintaining an essential emotional level of ambiguity as to the particular valence of this original literary device.

Like the construction worker's pickax outside the window of the narrator hesitant to rise from bed, this strikes at the heart of the various problems associated with providing an integral account of the phenomenon of the Tel Quel novel: that, for one, it was carried out in counter-reference to an entity called "Literature," presumably the norm, and characteristically realist; and that this constituted what is referred to by them as a "text," with its own special language and form. Indeed, it is only that the text somehow overlaps, like the aforementioned intertexts, with an object called "Literature," that makes this dynamic possible. As such, Tel Quel constructed its own language and this language's distinct tautological quality is a remarkable effect of the kind of self-styling evinced by their intertextual project. Their theory too, represented primarily by *Théorie d'ensemble*, was also conceived in direct relation to their literary output. There is no taking them at face value, and therefore only headaches result when it comes to directly applying any one theory to a

novel, which after all is only ever a conceptual object, indeed an interpretation in itself.

First published in the *Tel Quel* journal, and then again as part of the above collection, Thibaudeau's essay, "Le Roman comme autobiographie," is typical of the Telquelian approach to literary theory laid out in *Théorie d'ensemble*, both in its presentation of a simple "writerly" literary concept, in the limited sense of a writer's theory of writing, but also in its seemingly deliberate refusal to provide a clear, coherent presentation, opting rather for the headiness of the theoretical, requiring the reader to fill in the gaps by means of re-reading, much like in his novels. This procedure of self-definition, which works on the discursive level to make up for the theory's relative lack of clarity, making for a self-justified, necessarily "narrative theory" as in Pleynet, is also typical of the literary theory produced by the journal at the time. The "narrative" of the theory likewise takes shape within the essay, and, not surprisingly, between its theoretical and emotional registers, here between the theoretical rigor of an ideological theory and the despair felt by an avant-garde author attempting, in vain, to move beyond the simple reproduction of bourgeois normative values. These conflicts are made most manifest in the twelfth section of the essay, such as: "Et de toute façon, écrire met à contribution l'inévitable mémoire … ;" and, quoting Sollers: "Cependant que 'le travail apparemment inutile … '" (219). Both passages, while spanning these emotional registers by means of their adverbial openings, deal also with the bittersweet realities of a repressive culture of censorship.

The more straightforward valence of the "novel as autobiography" can be quite literally read in his novels that read something like a personal journal, although composed in the most abstract of forms. Still, this aspect stands more in the background of his essay, which proceeds by means of numerated sections in order to work through an ideological theory of literary production. In this sense, too, it is a central work in the Tel Quel theoretical corpus because it provides both a theory and a practical account of its emphatic shift from the notion of "literary production" to their own concept of "textual production." In short, the purpose of the essay is to hypothesize a universal theory applicable to all forms of literary products, as reproductions of bourgeois ideology, to which any writer must adhere in order to produce a literary work in the mode of production of the ruling class. The novel, therefore, is said to be autobiographical in that it works to reproduce what he calls a "textual I" by means of a working through of "fragments" and "scenes," fashioning them into "sequences" in relation to the gaps produced therein, and by the process of their being edited into a final piece, published, and brought into the public sphere:

> Le romancier y joue en tout cas sa vie — sa langue, sa culture son idéologie, etc. — et le "jeu" sans doute fonctionnera d'autant mieux, sera d'autant plus et mieux "formalisé", que les mises seront de la part de l'auteur, plis fraîches.
>
> Certes, les "valeurs" (réactionnaires par définition, ou si l'on préfère fondamentalement avares de leur dépense) sont absolument à refouler en tant que structurantes. Mais du moment que le "je textuel" s'emploie tout entier à

> concevoir activement ce "jeu textuel", dont il n'est jamais que la conscience en effet, c'est-à-dire du moment que l'économie textuelle ne produit (reproduit) pas un modèle de structure (cette production ou reproduction étant un idéalisme), il est en somme nécessaire que ces *valeurs*, qui en tout étant de cause sont *cotées* dans la société où s'écrit et se publiera le texte, soient conservées / consumées, dans le texte.
>
> Cela est sans doute préférable à un procédé de refoulement pur et simple, qu'évidemment le texte ne saurait maîtriser par lui-même, dès lors laissant ce soin à d'autres textes. (217)

Thus, this procedure generates the reproduction of ideology, which in the above passage is inherently linked to intertextual dynamics, the central question of *Ouverture*, and those which inscribe a work into a literary public. A novel could therefore be said to be autobiographical in the same sense that it is literature, and also in the sense that it is about literature as such, and thus about itself as literature.

Still, although perhaps only in relation to Thibaudeau's necessarily fragmentary theory, it is Baudry's notion that best describes anything that might resemble a true Tel Quel "unified theory of literature" (*théorie d'ensemble*) that literary theory, like "theoretical" literature, is a form of ideology. Thus one may conclude that to demand a literary commentary necessary to demonstrate it, itself rooted in the notion of "Literature" or the "Literary" and its rhetoric and ideologies that equally demands admitting both the limits of literary theory and the practice of reading alike, is to enact an ideological transgression, an argument Baudry pairs with

analogous notions of the uselessness of the text and the ideological bias of "sense," or the perception of meaning. His essay, "Écriture, Fiction, Idéologie," significantly also the essay where he also establishes Lautréamont as a primary literary precursor along the same lines as Pleynet, opens with the lines:

> L'écriture est de la part de la société l'objet d'un interdit qui se dédouble selon qu'elle met en jeu des œuvres de fiction qui renouvellent et contestent le système formel jusque-là admis, ou qu'elle relève d'une activité théorique qui a pour fonction de penser à la fois le système de langage, le relai d'informations par lequel cette société se parle et se vit et les nouveaux systèmes formels qui viennent à apparaître. (127)

This transgression symbolizes a breach in the necessary personal experience of having to interpret and learn the "language of the text" on one's own, and by extension "Literature" as well. So rather than, in complementary (pseudo-) Marxist terms, our alienated consumer culture, in practice, comes in the (pseudo-) psychological terms of the "everyday" to stand for one's desire to reclaim one's lost youth, particularly in a work like *Ouverture*, one of whose primary themes is pedophilia. This tautological concept is at work in the text like a dynamo, a fantasy built somewhere between reading, recollection and thought, only shakily buttressed here by its creative group-specific intertextuality. This notion requires further demonstration as to how style and poetic language work as an integral part in this dynamic structure. Essentially, this gap represents the process of reading, in particular the personal and emotional connection a reader maintains in contradistinction to the

author, in order to keep reading a book (or a sentence) that has yet to be understood as a whole, which in turn represents one's personal, and by definition stylistic, relation to the impersonality of language, *langue* in Saussure's terminology, one's "tongue." In other words, the question here is that of originality, and its relationship to narrative temporality.

It is food for thought that this only happens in literature, but it is most likely that such ideas are simply meant to engage the counterintuitive question of the ideological boundaries that actually do affect discourse. In a sense, and the reason *Ouverture* stands out as a prime example of the Tel Quel enterprise, this is also simply an image of how the group tends to affectively skirt these boundaries in order to construct a theory and a literature that play off of each other in interesting ways, creating a subliminal, or implied, theory of the poetic language of the text, a deliberately ambiguous concept. Of course, despite the intricacies of narrative and the dilemmas of the very notion of literary theory, all literature is in fact simply "its own language," even if that language is only rhetoric, and so literary theory is as such a kind of retrieval of lost youth regardless. It is only that the "text" is conceived as a deviation from an idea of "Literature," not to mention their general lack of sense, that these novelists are able to carry out their elaboration of a novelistic practice of poetic language, for example, in between its metaphorical and meta-poetic registers as in the above passage.

Whether or not literary theory is good for the soul, it is a central affect of many of these publications that they represent a certain threat to society, and that it is

an essential, however paradoxical, element of the connective interpretations that make up their narrative, as Baudry explains at the end of the same essay:

> Sans commencement ni fin, sans histoire, sans personnages, décevant toute lecture à la recherche d'un sens fini, la fiction devrait suspendre le réseau compact des informations qui ont toujours pour but de voiler le lieu où prennent naissance les informations. Ce lieu, qui est lieu d'échanges et de permutations, qui est économique à tous ses niveaux, a toujours été dérobée et sans doute ne peut que le rester, du moins partiellement. Que l'on comprenne bien cependant que c'est la même opération de censure qui fait que l'on peut admettre les énoncés sans se poser la question de leur énonciation et consommer des produits sans se poser la question de leur production. Ce serait, du moins, le mérite de l'écriture envisagée dans la perspective de sa production de donner accès aux mécanismes de production du texte (de "l'histoire"). 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. (147)

Expressed differently, this is constitutive of the mental structure required to think through its conceptual form, and in that sense also plays an important role in the intertextuality of a work. This is especially true for *Ouverture*, whose Proustian opening bed sequence could be seen as symbolic in this respect, a dreamlike fantasy state, a real luxury, helpful for thinking about literature and art more generally. In this

case, this limit is represented by the conceptual structure of the novel, which is designed in theory to provoke literary speculation, and which in turn represents the limits of the text itself. To speculate as to whether it really does keep this promise is just as good as wondering if "text" is more a way of reading than a way of writing, and, in a word, conforming to the bourgeois concept of intellectual property.

Again, neither is there anything inherently new to this practice: it is a staple of prose to stray into the realms of the metaphorical, as it is common practice for many novels to want a plot. Of course, the opening passage of *Ouverture* is a kind of self-conscious laundry list ("vêtements par terre") of the very concepts described above needed to interpret the work. Indeed, the mind boggles ("mon cœur bat"), formed in an extemporaneous speech-like style, more emotional in register due to the lack of connection between ideas: from the awakening, to the light coming into the room, it is like the reader is confronted with literature for the first time, making the "promise" of reading, feeling, learning, and discerning. So much so that it is like experiencing the breakdown of interpretation altogether, as well as the breakdown of the boundaries between criticism and its literary object: *Ouverture* is as much an introduction to its own commentary as it is an opening, and this is the limit to which this novel can be considered a "writerly" text, a concept in fact shared by Roland Barthes and Tel Quel. Naturally, there are limits to the value of such sweeping interpretations, whose valence is only just beginning to take shape, and whose limits are not unlike those described above, but, again, it essential that this basic figuration exist if only to establish the "text" in contradistinction to the literary norm, just as it will be

necessary take some account of the various "misreadings" that perform a fundamental function in this, and all the novels of Tel Quel.

The clause, "je prends possession" (11), is exemplary in this respect, as both an image of the text subsuming all metaphorical language, and in theory all of literature too, while acting in contradistinction to it. In other words, what seems to be literary poetic language taking control is actually being taken control of by the text by itself being a performative image of that act. This is preceded by a similarly functioning image of the heat in the room, suggesting the time and perhaps providing some insight into the mentality of the protagonist, which is then specified as owing to the summer months, an image in distinction from the western classical notion of the "opening" of the year being springtime. In true form, the entire "poetic" quality of this first paragraph disintegrates into a parody of itself in which metaphor appears as an evasion, rather than insight, so much so that there is no telling the "meaning" of the first paragraph's overly sentimental final image of the earth on which the city is founded. Both ambiguity and foreshadowing equally appear to be potential candidates, besides it having a purely formal significance: a circular conclusion to a circular logic, and claiming originality but falling back on the most unoriginal of intertexts, the Bible. Still, what stands out more as an image, the underdog to the biblical reference, is the "flannel belt" (12), an almost clichéd "textual" metaphor (in the etymological sense of "text," meaning fabric) representing the way in which, for example, the notion of the literary is woven into, both confused and in harmony with, the usual valence of poetic language. In fact, throughout the book, as in many novels,

it is these sorts of dreamy, insignificant details that tend to win out over the monumental, "literary" ones. This particular fabric with its own particular quality also has associations with an upcoming reference to a similar fabric, that being felt, the latter a seemingly more suitable image for the random mashing together of images, symbols and references used in the opening paragraph.

Much along the same lines, the divagations of thought are the subject of the first major experimentations with the ambiguous style that will be maintained throughout the novel. The narrator, still in bed, seems to experience having a memory for the first time, like the reader "reading for the first time," a completely foreign idea that he only appears capable of describing as a "headache," apparently caused by the confusion between the mind and what is happening around him, the provenance of this suggestion also being for the reader impossible to discern. All of this is slowly rationalized and accounted for by the movement of the text: the narrator claims to have an actual headache, which ends with a confused image in complicated language that may or may not be a memory, let alone an image of this strange reading experience, so much so that one wonders whether the narrator is actually writing the book, and deliberately teasing a hypothetical "reader," rather than the habitual first-person narrator form:

> Étendu, et les yeux bien ouverts, je m'habitue. Je ne reconnais rien, si je veux. Étendu là, la tête soudain remplie de ce qui se passe autour, situation ancienne, revenue. Et je suis, trace des derniers jours vécus, à cause d'un mal de tête depuis la veille tenace, ou l'avant-veille, et pas tout à fait dissipé,

> quelque chose qui flotte, détaché des os, et qui ne s'en va pas, ballon tenu par un fil au-dessus des dunes, vent, baudruche biscornue accrochée au front et aux tempes, craquement de l'os, à l'occiput, et qui se balance. (12-3)

The child's experience with the floating balloon represents the reader first presented with the "text" form, or the reader "reading for the first time" now, experiencing a more hazy idea of its imagery that tends to be localized, as it is here, in its formal and blatant lexical qualities, something akin to skimming. The play-on-words of the copula, cut off from its object in the sentence, and thus signifying either "am" or "follow" in context, reducing the narrator to the status of a spectator as if a dream, will in fact become icon for the book's unmistakable and characteristic ambiguity and confusion. Although it certainly plays an important role in the poetic language of the text, it is too early in the narrative to come to any conclusions, just as it is for the following image of the memory. Thus the narrative "oscillates," to use a term in the text itself, between the waking reality and the dream, and reading and writing by means of the confusion of the word "suis," which appears first at the beginning, "Et je suis … quelque chose" (12), and then closed at the end of the paragraph, "Non, je ne suis pas cet homme" (13) whose return to the copula form indicates the narrator's shifting consciousness, as defined in relation to the act of reading.

The image is paired with a key theoretical term, the psychological "trace," Freud's *Spur*, in creative syntax, mirroring the imaging of the narrator's psyche through words. It also marks a remarkable kind of "signature," the "bau" from the uncommon "*baudruche*" [rubber], representing the difference in writing and

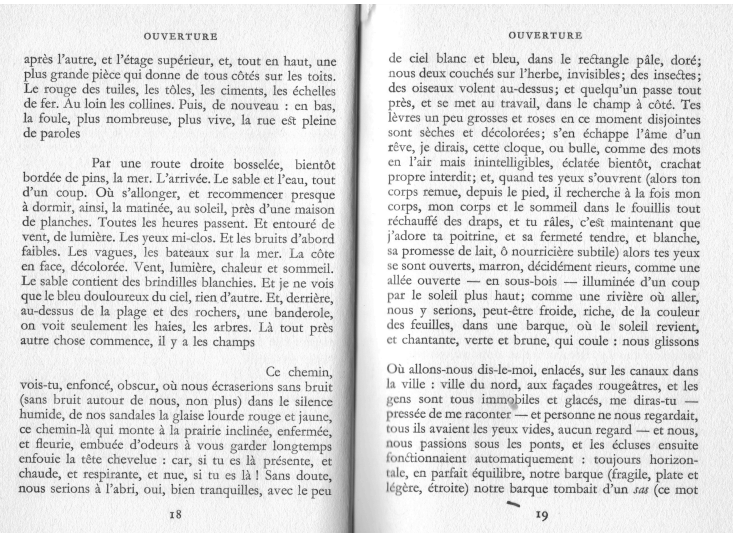
speaking, between the diphthong and the triphthong in Thib*au*d*eau*'s name, ending finally with the disappointingly traditional image of "bones." The memory, thus, slowly comes into focus in on an injured man, who is the object of the child's morbid curiosity, presumably the narrator's former self. This marks the emergence of a minor motif especially towards the beginning of the novel, and like the balloon in the memory/dream, eventually only comes to float in the background, a strange reminder of a gruesome and inexplicable event: "A cause de cela j'aperçois, je suis un homme gros en habit rouge vif couché sur une route, et il tente de se relever, et il ne peut pas, il fait une ombre, elle remue. Je me suis mis à ras de terre pour le voir. Les dunes derrière, le ballon dans le ciel. Non, je ne suis pas cet homme, il suffoque" (13). In the end, the scene most likely represents an image of the technique of using a motif in lieu of a well-defined plot for the purposes of narrative, whose intricacies require further development, but also, in good form, of the degeneration of such fictional supplements that are meant to stand in for their utter lack of sense. In the terms of the aforementioned "theory of the text," this represents a semi-literary device, at once both a transgression of "Literature" (realistic plot) and a transgression of that transgression, characteristic of the contemporary novel. For the purposes of this interpretation, which seeks to take into account the various levels of intertextuality in particular, it is also necessary to affirm that these observations are not yet a part of the "reading" hypothetically taking place, and that whether or not a reader has this in the back of his mind, it is an essential part of reading that any image, symbol, or meaningful stylistic device have the chance to take on significance beyond its

apparent or habitual one. This novel is in fact particularly concerned with producing repeat images of any such form of "transgression," which provide additional attention for a reader outside the bounds of traditional narrative, and it would therefore be an over-interpretation here, for example, and to not take them into account as an integral part of book's essential structure. Still, for a book already so manifestly concerned with the idea of misreading and the emotions, one cannot help but wonder if this is an image of the kind of transgressions that are to come, where other, more horrifying and inexplicable images like the "suffocating man" that will simply be glossed over.

In the following paragraph, marking the narrator's own confusion, the interjection "où je dormais ?," more literally references the reader's inevitable confusion in reading this convoluted narration, and, by referencing the opening passage's syntactical confusion between *ou* and *où* ("or" or "when"), acts as a nod to the similarly inevitable non-linear reading that has to be undertaken throughout the novel simply in order to follow it, but also here in the particularly swift, and deliberately perplexing, shift between waking and dreaming on the bottom of page 12. Thus, it specifically implies the reader's participation in the weaving together of the fragments and sequences, such as those outlined in Thibaudeau's "Le Roman comme autobiographie."

On the page, the narrative continues on, back and forth between dream and waking state, delving into ambiguous depths of the blurry imagery of the alienated existence of modern culture, amassing the imagery of reading the opening two paragraphs: such as "répétées," "spectacles," and "interpellais de loin" (14), that also

both foreshadow and describe the form and syntax of the prose. As it does, the non-traditional paragraph format of the book, characteristic of the experimental formatting of the Tel Quel publications, also comes to the fore: in the first three paragraphs here the opening lines have been indented progressively farther away from the left margin, with two spaces between each paragraph [Figure 8].



OUVERTURE

après l'autre, et l'étage supérieur, et, tout en haut, une plus grande pièce qui donne de tous côtés sur les toits. Le rouge des tuiles, les tôles, les ciments, les échelles de fer. Au loin les collines. Puis, de nouveau : en bas, la foule, plus nombreuse, plus vive, la rue est pleine de paroles

Par une route droite bosselée, bientôt bordée de pins, la mer. L'arrivée. Le sable et l'eau, tout d'un coup. Où s'allonger, et recommencer presque à dormir, ainsi, la matinée, au soleil, près d'une maison de planches. Toutes les heures passent. Et entouré de vent, de lumière. Les yeux mi-clos. Et les bruits d'abord faibles. Les vagues, les bateaux sur la mer. La côte en face, décolorée. Vent, lumière, chaleur et sommeil. Le sable contient des brindilles blanchies. Et je ne vois que le bleu douloureux du ciel, rien d'autre. Et, derrière, au-dessus de la plage et des rochers, une banderole, on voit seulement les haies, les arbres. Là tout près autre chose commence, il y a les champs

Ce chemin, vois-tu, enfoncé, obscur, où nous écraserions sans bruit (sans bruit autour de nous, non plus) dans le silence humide, de nos sandales la glaise lourde rouge et jaune, ce chemin-là qui monte à la prairie inclinée, enfermée, et fleurie, embuée d'odeurs à vous garder longtemps enfouie la tête chevelue : car, si tu es là présente, et chaude, et respirante, et nue, si tu es là ! Sans doute, nous serions à l'abri, oui, bien tranquilles, avec le peu

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OUVERTURE

de ciel blanc et bleu, dans le rectangle pâle, doré; nous deux couchés sur l'herbe, invisibles; des insectes; des oiseaux volent au-dessus; et quelqu'un passe tout près, et se met au travail, dans le champ à côté. Tes lèvres un peu grosses et roses en ce moment disjointes sont sèches et décolorées; s'en échappe l'âme d'un rêve, je dirais, cette cloque, ou bulle, comme des mots en l'air mais inintelligibles, éclatée bientôt, crachat propre interdit; et, quand tes yeux s'ouvrent (alors ton corps remue, depuis le pied, il recherche à la fois mon corps, mon corps et le sommeil dans le fouillis tout réchauffé des draps, et tu râles, c'est maintenant que j'adore ta poitrine, et sa fermeté tendre, et blanche, sa promesse de lait, ô nourricière subtile) alors tes yeux se sont ouverts, marron, décidément rieurs, comme une allée ouverte — en sous-bois — illuminée d'un coup par le soleil plus haut; comme une rivière où aller, nous y serions, peut-être froide, riche, de la couleur des feuilles, dans une barque, où le soleil revient, et chantante, verte et brune, qui coule : nous glissons

Où allons-nous dis-le-moi, enlacés, sur les canaux dans la ville : ville du nord, aux façades rougeâtres, et les gens sont tous immobiles et glacés, me diras-tu — pressée de me raconter — et personne ne nous regardait, tous ils avaient les yeux vides, aucun regard — et nous, nous passions sous les ponts, et les écluses ensuite fonctionnaient automatiquement : toujours horizontale, en parfait équilibre, notre barque (fragile, plate et légère, étroite) notre barque tombait d'un *sas* (ce mot

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Figure 8: *Ouverture*'s indentations (18-19)

It is a sort of added bonus to the fantasy of these novels in speculating as to the specific degree of the editors' control over the formatting of these books, especially those published in the "Tel Quel collection," but the kinetic effect, flipping through pages to get a sense of its unusual format, is remarkable, an experience akin to the narrator's seemingly cinematic perception, embodied by the sharp cuts between the list-format of the above described passage, from the opening of the novel entitled *Opening*. While it does also seem to be an image of the very metaphor provided by

the cinema, a particular man appears, almost as if out of the hustle and bustle of collective film production, whose identity, paired with the word "grotesques," is unmistakable.

Thus here, figuratively speaking, the Romantic dinosaur emerges: Victor Hugo, who penned the Romantic manifesto of French literature, the preface to his play *Cromwell,* which used the dichotomy of the sublime and the grotesque to illustrate his aesthetic argument. Hugo represents a threat, while embodying the "author" at the same time. His corpus expands beyond the narrow confines of the work of the avant-gardist, and distinctly smacks of pedantic academism and the literary canon. Who exactly this man is remains a mystery, however: it could stand for anyone, even the injured man mentioned on the previous page, despite being in a totally different context, and although the Hugo reference instills the author with literary authority, it is equally an image of the reader, as the "I" of the narrator is as well. The tone is tinged with a certain irony or sarcasm, that may potentially give any reader the feeling of being in on the secret of the novel's poetic language, but its markedly evasive quality, mirroring the prose of the first paragraph, indicates the critical gaze of the literary theorist or commentator, represented by the, ironically "interpellated," preceding crowd, who would have perhaps preferred a more appropriately iconic opening sequence for the reference (13):

> — celui-là déjà vu il n'y a pas longtemps et j'ignorais qu'il fût et il tenait dans sa bouche des clous dorés et courts à tête plate une douzaine et ses lèvres remuaient continuellement et il ne parlait pas — cet autre jamais vu, je le jure,

> jamais rencontré — celui-là déguisé, et je le reconnais, quand même, j'ai deviné juste, je soulève la voile qui recouvrait sa face, et soudain son regard — et moi ? (14)

The colloquialism "quand même," a common oral expression usually meaning "anyway," though here it acts more as an emphasis, as in "yeah, I recognized him," as if the man were "indeed recognizable," marks the first explicit indication as to the oral nature of the narrator's language, also being "revealed" here.

The above allusion can be seen to quickly shift, via an easy reference to a romantic "country," naturally while maintaining a level of ambiguity tinged with clever images of the modern world ("arcades of green"), most likely suggesting Charles Baudelaire's "Invitation au voyage." On the same note, the reference is to the opening to *Les fleurs du mal*, which contains the one of the most famous direct reader addresses, referring to him with the possessive "mon semblable, mon frère." By this point the allusion comes off as a bit hackneyed. The prose too becomes heavy with Baudelairian poetic imagery, and interest fades to the background, the mystery man along with it.

The following paragraph, however, starts afresh with the exciting image of throwing off the covers, containing the first explicit Lautréamont reference in the novel: "Je rejette les draps," a kind of mirror image of the ironically dismissive third line from *Poésies I*, itself essentially a collection of plagiarism and re-writings: "J'accepte Euripide et Sophocle ; mais je n'accepte pas Eschyle" (361), a sentiment echoing Thibaudeau's earlier "je prends possession." The allusion is then verified by

a pun, "malodorant," a word-jumble of *Maldoror* in the fashion of the pseudonym of Isidore Ducasse, "Lautréamont," his penname having been redesigned from the title of Eugène Sue's novel, *Latréaumont*. The paragraph trails on like an ironically half-hearted psychological interpretation of the name ("l'autre à mont": the other on high), "sur un fil, d'une montagne à une autre, à une très haute altitude et au début du jour, et je serais le premier à voir le soleil. Moi," gradually interweaving imagery of Arthur Rimbaud, "Alchemy of the Verb" in particular, especially towards the end, "je cours, saluant. Et quelque mal qu'on me fasse, ensuite, oui : tombé, rejoint, battu, insulté, emprisonné, séparé de mes proches, emmené, défiguré, perdu, seul : prêt à me voir et m'aimer, ici, dans le moindre reflet" (15), which paints him, in the distinct voice of the literary historian, as a ragamuffin "beat" poet icon. "Séparé de mes proches" (cut off from my loved ones), marks Thibaudeau's first foray into the poetic, paragrammatic, letter play, that will become an important technique: echoing the opening to Rimbaud's "Ma Bohème," the "poches crevées," dropping the "r," so particular to spoken French, in "proches," and reconfiguring the image of the "tear" in to a "separation" in turn. This is also likely an homage to his fellow Tel Quel committee member, the poet Denis Roche, as if in the preceding voice of Baudelaire: "Denis Roche: mon proche, mon frère." His style also makes for a remarkably moving intertextual passage, a literati's delight, especially due to the return of the Hugo reference, and an explosion of intertextual suggestions for potential Hugo opening passage intertexts, as if he were searching through the shelves for the next book to read: *Les Misérables*'s iconic wretched street urchin, along with *L'Homme*

qui rit's disfigured Gwymplaine, the latter returning at the end of the chapter, and an equally important reference for Lautréamont's *Maldoror*.

Like the looming "shadow in a field," if the mature Hugo were not enough of a clue to the theme of lost youth, what follows is the narrator's first lame attempt at personal, sentimental style, in a more convention form of "poetic language": "La paille, l'odeur de la paille" (16). The narrative slips into a childlike state, and is transported into the fantasy of fiction. He begins to do, or at least imagine doing, what only a child would, jumping around furniture like imagined obstacles, even breaking them with an ax, "jostling my chains," so he says: "Parmi les objets provisoires, trois chaises et une table, les fleurs, une armoire, obstacles, je peux courir, sauter. Cabrioler sur le lit, et de là, en bas. Casser les meubles, à la hache. Et je secoue mes chaînes" (16). The style, however, is notably no different in voice than the earlier narrator, whose emotional self-consciousness more closely resembles that of an adult's, which is underlined by the echo of the actual childlike voice that was clearer in the above passage: "I'll be the first one to see the sun": "où je serai … ." The question of the child's voice thus poses an interesting possibility to a second-time reader, who may have only caught on to the shifting of voices when a child is more clearly dramatized much later in the narrative as the protagonist/narrator: namely, the possibility of writing multiple layers of readings in the text by structuring them around localized points like these. Whether or not this is the case, this fantasy, akin to "writerliness," is at work here as an especially important component of the theme of

lost youth, represented by one's past readings, and associated here with traditional notions of narrative, especially the assumed connection between form and content.

It is no coincidence, then, that this first important shift in the novel by means of the potentiality of multiple, unknown narrators and readers towards its potential uninterpretability, be paired with a literal descent into the literary realm of fantasy, where dream world, reality, and fiction meld, and, particularly owing to the intertextual context, causing tension between the habitual binary distinctions of inside and out, while apostrophizing this voice of the literary theorist reader throughout as a delusional pervert: "Mais je peux sortir encore. Par la porte et l'escalier rapide. Ou bien héro du roman intrépide, enjamber la fenêtre, écouter là quelque temps, assis sur le rebord, répertoriant parmi les bruits qui m'assaillent ceux qui ont affaire avec moi. J'analyse la situation avant tout" (17). Dramatized, then, as the agoraphobic dilemma of leaving the house, the narrative too tends to ironically highlight its own fictional status, by foreshadowing imagery in a tone that seems to depict the act of reading as an "evasion," rather than the narrator's own evasive self-conscious ironies: "sur le sable qui brûle, où je serai environné de milles broussailles, infestées de serpents toutes sortes d'ennemis, aux aguets, qui m'attendaient patiemment, dehors, et les branches remuent, je suis immobile, attentif, je prépare l'évasion, tandis qu'ils tardent à se démasquer, à bondir et hurler, m'entourer, et je vais courir" (17). At the break, the "dehors" [outside] then makes the connection to the following paragraph, which is also ironically depicted as a sentimental experience, and again doubling over, the word also literally repeated in the sentence as if spoken, the various overlapping

techniques dominating the opening scenes down to the author-reader-narrator doppelgänger scene on the previous page, making for somewhat of a language-based imaginative mold for these abnormal images and reading experiences. In the Saussurian terms used above, linguistics acting as the referent of "outside" in relation to the "inside" experience of reading literature, the technique could interpreted to symbolize the reader's own "passage" into a more kinetic act of reading via the impersonality of *langue*:

> Dehors (et lui, sur la route plus loin, il en est à son dernier soupir, maintenant, enfin ?) dehors le soleil brille, jusqu'à midi voisin, et la brume s'en va, de toute choses qu'il éclaire : dans les rue, la foule des visages et des corps, les mouvement, et aussi les maisons, les portes, ouvertes sur le vestibule sombre, le carrelage blanc et noir, l'escalier, une porte, le couloir d'un vaste appartement … . (17)

This scene as a whole marks an essential shift, and so it is also an important feature of this technique that it also serve as well, especially the drama of location, not only as an image of the local transference of narrative from the injured man scene to the next, but also as a landmark throughout the novel, working as a narratological mechanism, or "mouvement" (17).

What this effect is meant to produce, or if it is an effect at all, are both worthwhile questions, but the fact that it constructs itself by means of form as potentially having different effects on different readers is actually constitutive of what makes this book a work of fiction, and that, as if by the same gesture, it hypothesizes

a potential reader for that fiction, and in the exact place it undermines that same stable position. Off *terra firma*, it is certain, but still grounded in the secret shared language of the text's poetic language, therefore any possible "effect" is nothing other than the act of interpretation. In other words, the author has overstepped his bounds here, asking far too much of any reader to realistically appreciate the enormity of an opening that begins to stack, rather than alleviate, its bizarre complexity. Like the intensity of metaphorical language, it is simply overwhelming, and one must ask, what is the point of intertextuality and what does this have to do with literary theory?

It is of course not an uncommon novelistic technique to pair the emotions with theory, and the reader in being both interrogated and teased more than anything here, demanded to assign classical literary tropes to an object that claims to be separate from them. Themes, subjects, motifs, plot thus all fall by the wayside, and the "subject" of this novel still seems lost in the modern state of alienation, particularly the loss of the ability to emote, culture in this respect being reduced to a set of ironic references, and rhetoric and imagery to psychology. *Topos* is a better term, at least in the context of the book, meaning both location and theme, which here is also the author's, or narrator's (and by the same logic the reader's as well), apparent inability to compose original literature. Thus, the structure of the fiction of the text, its mode of figuration, progresses by means of an associative network of what are essentially strings of clichés. In terms of the book, this "movement" also plays a central role, where motion stands in as a supplement for emotion, as well as the lack of plot that emotion is made to represent. Still, it is more a question of style, the primary

technique used throughout the novel to interrogate and embody emotion in literature, of which the earlier "La paille, l'odeur de la paille" is a symbol, not to mention a simple, glaringly obvious, example of how Thibaudeau will presumably attempt to revitalize its tired forms. Also, because literary criticism requires the rational recreation of an irrational emotional experience, the book's apparent demand of its own commentary is already a convincing indication of some of the stylistic experimentations, and its relation to intertextuality, to come.

At this point, intertextuality appears to be designed to provide analogous concepts and extra images for the reader equally lost in the partial non-sense of the text. Doing so posits a relation between the emotional and the aesthetic, implying an emotion is nothing other than a form of thought via analogy, symbolized by the relation between poetic language and its opposite, which is an enactment of its *topos*, emotional alienation, and by the same gesture anointing itself as a new kind of poetic fiction. In this case, that the particular dynamics of intertextuality require further demonstration by means of the Tel Quel-specific intertext is nothing other than the very "movement" of the text that makes this second-tier intertextuality possible, precisely what obliges literary theory to describe it, which is also to establish a "narrative economy" of supply and demand, whose analogical processes are coupled with analogous images. In parallel terms, the text works off the assumption that there is a connection between form and content at a grammatical level, which has already been demonstrated in the novel, and that therefore for a text to outline a self-reflexive narrative structure via analogy within the reading process would produce the

abnormal thought process required for the aesthetic experience of reading the text, which could appropriately be called a "fantasy": where writing and reading are made to be, or at least become, coincident processes. Here, the reading process is imagined as the contextual confusion of the form-content dynamic of language, and played out on different scales of poetic language, with the relation to the emotions to form. Naturally, it should not be taken for granted that understanding language affects our ability to emote, an idea suggested in the above passage by the lack of any discernable "voice." It is rather that language does contain emotion in a way similar to the fictional representation of emotion in question here because of the affective relationship, a social dilemma of originality in the process of sense-making, with which the linguistic subject engages in relation to the *langue*, to reuse Saussure's terminology.

While it may seem require a certain predilection to grasp this at work in the text, namely a basic knowledge and necessarily gross approximation of Tel Quel's theoretical output and sources, and one not unlike both the very reading relationship being described here and the "ideological" experience of literary theory above, it cannot be surprising to find a linguistic work of art based on poetic language singing the praises of an emotional connection in language. Whether this constitutes a valid linguistic theory is a question for linguists, and not scholars of literature, since it is only strictly speaking an image for reading, or of the "literary" experience. In short, *Ouverture*, like many Tel Quel novels, seeks to conflate reading and writing, the latter being depicted as the unearthing of the text within the intertext, by becoming the

composition of its own commentary through a dynamic process analogous to a speaker's relation to the impersonal code of his "tongue." Translation provides a compelling metaphor for this distinct form of "writerliness," which does not actually correspond to any real reading conditions, as Thibaudeau was himself a translator of Italian novels. Along with the functions of intertextuality, then, is how these kinds of interpretations can take place through different analogical processes and at different points in the novel, beyond the simple repetitions of the similar structures: that *Ouverture* is in fact a polyvalent narrative with a particular conceptual form. Still, by this point, the overall dynamic movement of the text has been essentially defined as the gradual shift towards the form of literary commentary, the apostrophe of the literary theorist, together with a scaled movement of poetic language, from phrase to narrative, and in relation to its intertextual processes.

The novel, itself moved on to a more relatable outside world, continues in its fantastical tone, as if presenting itself to the reader in its true form, a modern picaresque story barely more a string of non-sense. "*Sas*," a word the narrator claims his interlocutor thought he or she did not know, meaning "airlock" and most likely referring to the doors separating the chambers of the sinking boat found later, stands out an odd lexical image, especially considering it describes a future scene in a language that is incomprehensible to a first time reader. "Nous glissons," says the narrator as if describing the reading experience, something between skimming and a retrieval of the imagery of the opening scenes. Again, the narrator appears to "break the fourth wall," as if self-consciously building up to the following intertextual

reference: “cette salle ronde un temple où les chevaux tournait” (22). The reference is in many ways a strange one, if only because it breaks the bounds of French literature that have been the norm until this point, but while also grounding it firmly within the French literary canon as a reference to Francion’s dream in one of the first French novels even written, the picaresque *L’Histoire comique de Francion* by Charles Sorel.

Some lines later, in a passage mirroring the first chapter of Anna Sewell’s seminal young adult novel, *Black Beauty*, a group of boys throw pebbles at the injured man, who makes a sudden reappearance: “ils lancent doucement sur son corps des minuscules cailloux, qui ne peuvent pas lui faire de mal, des cailloux légers, il y en a tout un tas gris blanc où ils vont reprendre” (22). The youth theme is the clearest reason for the *Black Beauty* connection, which, as if anticipating the reader’s hesitant desire to flip back through the opening pages to look for verification of such a doubtful allusion, seems to posteriorly engrave the title into poetic language by means of an alliteration, “brindilles blanchies,” on page 18: as if announced in the above quote, the negative image bearing the initials B.B., a motif in the novel, while tying into the English language reference, “brindille” meaning twigs but resembling “bridle,” which has specific valence in Sewell’s novel as an image of everyday animal torture, with “blanchies” being the opposite color in opposite adjective order. “The sand has bleached twigs in it”: the image smacks of the poetic laments of the lost opportunities of love. It is also like the “bones” in the first memory of the injured man, perhaps an image of the (historical) linguistic connection between English and French, and also indicative of the animal and race motifs that will play an important

role in *Ouverture*. *Black Beauty* can also been seen as a stylistic precursor to the Tel Quel novel because it too experiments with plot, in which the human drama of history takes place in the background in the random life of a workhorse, and is also written in an unmistakable signature style reminiscent of Thibaudeau's own.

Sewell's 1877 novel is also notable for its concern with the historical changes of its time, and so it is suiting that here should also be found the first of what are to become "plot points" as essential to reading as its story, historical markers. A "car" passes by the boys on the road, but the word, while having the same modern valence as in English, *voiture* is still ever-so-slightly too ambiguous for any definite historical location. The paragraph continues on in the novel's characteristic barely readable state of oscillating ambiguity, as if enacting the reader's incomprehension, or the narrator's inability to deal with guilt, in the face of such as morbid scene of social alienation, in a voice distinctly marked as speech by the "s'il n'est," which also identifies it as a fantasy within a fantasy, which begins with an echo of the opening words, while simultaneously appearing to both describe and verify the above "brindilles blanchies" interpretation:

> Et, plus tard, une voiture passe, et elle le frôle, et il a vu à l'intérieur les visages étaient collés contre les vitres, ils étaient blancs, rapprochés, et les bouches grandes ouvertes dans un seul cris; s'il n'est pris dessous, par malheur; trop surpris pour penser; s'il n'est soudain coincé dans la tôle brûlante, déchirée et coupantes; entre les tuyaux qui éclatent; et l'huile chaude; (23)

It is almost as if, through the unemotional state of the spectators, the reader too is rendered dumb. The "story" is clear: the narrator imagines the man being hit and mangled by the car; but the context is not clear, nor are the emotions appropriate, making reading a chore. "Pneu," specifically indicating a pneumatic wheel, not to mention "tubes" and "oil," are perhaps indications of a modern car and the ensuing accident. More important is that the extra level of reading taking place here, the determination of temporality by the reader, acts as a complementary, and exemplary, structure to the experiments in poetic language and intertextuality in the novel to this point, while also acting as an image of the commentator's necessarily approximate reconstruction of the narrative's temporality. On the whole, it stands as a more practical and clearer example of polyvalent reading, making for the possibility for other readings, and beginning a more systematic interrogation of the question of misreading central to the narrative of ambiguity, especially the role played by emotion, within the traditional narrative dynamics of "reading for the plot."

The paragraph ends at the first of the triple-line space breaks used throughout, although with no apparent logic to them. "Here," the next begins with its locational, deictic motif, and ending with its first foray into non-sense, the monologue-like interruption of the first coherent story in the novel again takes on his self-conscious, semi-direct reader address, as if taunting the reader, anticipating interpretation with the letter-play between "pneu" and, here, "peau" [skin]: "L'identité perpétuelle. Avec ces yeux, leur couleur, est-ce les voir que les regarder ? Je" (23). With this "Je," the paragraph ends without a period, as if excusing his taunts.

Descending into the darker, equally unreadable, world of the animal integral to the first half of the novel, in a recurring bathroom scene containing another randomly recurring image: first, into the mouth of the narrator, brushing his teeth in front of the mirror, and then, with a technique of moving between scenes seamlessly, though incomprehensibly and with confusing and ambiguous imagery, seems to deliberately complicate the separation between the unreadable confusion of narratives and simple, and by contrast, clarifying, imagery, such as the image of the proto-typical "opening" motif here: the mouth. Continuing the untraditional experiments with style, especially concerning the visual component of reading, the paragraph begins with the first of two open parentheses, and which are never closed, and also with a "Hop," an overdetermination of the already abundantly clear abrupt switches between scenes:

> (Hop, dans le lavabo, ce creux aux formes pleines qui se nettoie si bien, où, malade, la nuit; … il arriva que, seul, isolé, seul éveillé de tout l'immeuble, dans ce quartier, je dégorge les tripes et les boyaux; me tenant d'une main la bouche, l'ouvrant avec mes doigts, tirant les lèvres, les dents, mouillées, agrandir forcer l'orifice (24)

The "tripe and guts" scene remarkably returns randomly in the second chapter, acting as the secondary image to the returning injured man that works to constitute the imaginary, "non-literary" plot formation for a reader not yet familiar with the genre, as if reoccurring scenes could somehow be reconstituted by the end of the book to make a coherent storyline, not to mention as an image of his mistreatment of his

reader as well. The disgusting image is notably stuck into the bathroom scene, which further along in the book serves to confuse the reader more, but here does actually begin to form an image of the story: a man (or boy), hell-bent on providing the reader with the minor details of his wandering mind, wakes up, day dreams and maybe reads, before brushing his teeth, just like anyone, presented in a pastiche of a stream-of-consciousness style. Still, the tension of genres is outweighed by the tension between these experiments with imagery, admittedly impressive, and the text's readability.

This notion of multiple readership, that there can be multiple levels of the same reading stemming from the author's use of repeated analogical structures, finds its own analog on the following page. The narrative takes is usual lexically ambiguous step away from itself with the word, repeated, "histoire," meaning both story and history, and with dates, as if marking the history of the new genre of novels, which could also be called "texts," or "textual novels": "Et à vrai dire, ou pense, l'histoire : années 30, 40, 50 et 60 : c'est-à-dire l'histoire : à la *Déclaration de Guerre*" (25). By creating its own genealogy, as if its own manifesto as in reference to the infamous "Declaration" published in the first issue of *Tel Quel*, the novel hypothesizes a competent reader of such novelistic experiments, familiar with an obtuse narration style, along with perhaps providing a specific example in the preceding paragraph, "bavardage" [chatting]: Jean-René des Forêts' *Le Bavard*, which provides an appropriate example of the style and experimentations with prose undertaken in *Ouverture*. The reference is oddly not to the "Nouveau Roman," and

the likes of Alain Robbe-Grillet, which served as the primary point of reference for the early Tel Quel, an interesting detail in the anti-Oedipal structure that permeates the novel, which noticeably drops Philippe Sollers as a reference as well. By the same gesture, this passage also hypothesizes another reader, one completely unfamiliar with the mechanics of the text and markedly "ahistorical," along with, of course, the Tel Quel-specific reader, especially privy to its particular style and mythos. The latter appears to be the specific addressee of the next page, the first of a series of single, short paragraphs taking up entire pages, which tend toward the poetic and generally appear as an *ars poetica*. While any reader may indeed feel "in" on the secret poetic language ("beyond words") of the lovers ("nous") apostrophized in the text, the tone is the particular "writerly" address to the literary commentator, with whom the author claims to be writing, as if a spiritual experience, "in the dimensions": "jamais comme à ce moment les corps ne sont étrangers — réels :" (26). More along the lines of a "prose poem," this single page passage is in fact an announcement of the upcoming Tel Quel-specific intertext passage on the next page, with the previous "Declaration" scene also referencing backward to the previous car crash scene, where precisely "l'histoire n'a rien à voir," describing a fantasy realm beyond history (25).

The following end of the chapter sequence contains one of the novel's first powerful sensory images, namely drinking, in many ways already established by the recent eating scene as an image for "opening," and made salient by its particular relevancy in a linguistic work of art: "bonne à boire et je suis le conseil, goulu, à long traits puis je m'essuie les mains au torchon blanc et rouge sec et propre" (27). Being

described is the physical image of "chugging" a beverage, here used an image for what it feels like to regard his lover, and of the "opening" of flavor through aeration, an insightful detail of the physiology of taste, a personal remark bridged only by common experience. The effect produced by the text here is precisely that of the title of Baudry's *Le Pressentiment*, an earlier novel not actually published in the "Tel Quel collection," ironically the last novel associated with Tel Quel that could be referred to as anything truly classifiable as a "textual novel," but which shares remarkable similarities to this one. That is, this technique could be considered a "presentiment" in the sense that, beyond a mere anticipation of the reader's thoughts in context, it has been given particular structural weight to it by the entire thematics and poetics of the opening pages thus far, combined with the contextual disconnect between the emotionally charged idealized lover and the mundane, vulgar "chug." The concept is notably also given its theoretical equivalent in Baudry's "Linguistique et production textuelle" of *presentification*. This "presentiment," however, must also be distinguished from what could grossly be termed the elements of foreshadowing scattered throughout this opening chapter, used to demarcate the singularity of this particular reading in which these intertextual elements occur. Thus, what follows this image is a description of the effects of chugging on the body as well as, simultaneously, the act of making love, drawn out in poetic language determined only by the context: "au fond, vers une boue ultime, noire et liquide, essentielle, substantielle, molle, commune, par les conduits obscurs" (27). In habitual doubled-over form, it is also the Tel Quel savvy reader that makes this a "presentiment" of the

emergence of a new figure, as if replacing Hugo as the new representative of the injured man: Baudry himself, while the following narration overlaps with images of common themes of the two novels, as if a hidden "book review," describing the latter's novel in allegorical form, presented as a commentary: "(tu sais, cet homme qui, tandis que au mépris de toute prudence et pudeur, vive ce bonheur là, nous nous aimons; que le village, non loin de cette route où les enfants se sauvent, après leur crime, en contre-bas vivait, rues et boutiques, pavés, enclumes, le s cheminées tranquilles, rouge et rose, joliment bruyant;" (27). Exactly how these images overlap with Baudry requires further exposition, however, and must be postponed in the interest of recreating this complex reading, simultaneously a distinct linear and non-linear narrative, which at the turn of the page quickly takes on a sinister tone, depicting the man as a victim more reminiscent of the incompetent reader previously hypothesized: "le pauvre."

The narrative shifts back to the love story, recently associated with the secret readership of the "competent," and particularly of the Tel Quel-specific, reader, echoing the Baudelairian "Invitation au voyage" allusion: "ce voyage avec toi, aux îles, au loin, quelle croisière, azurée, nous deux légers, au bastingage, accoudés, enlacés, et en bas l'eau très verte est dans l'ombre, filante, toi, petite, les paupières plissées, et bronzé, en robe blanche et large d'été" (28). The story ends in ironically "censored" lovemaking, echoing the *Madame Bovary* carriage scene, in which pieces of paper being thrown out of the window symbolize ejaculation, and with the remarkably compelling image of "waves," which have already appeared more

literally in the form of the open-ended parentheses and significantly reappear here as well, as if literally and physically tracing the missing connection of the Baudry reference between the sensory image of "chugging," the "presentment," and the reference to the aforementioned "incompetent," ahistorical reader. The image also serves to foreshadow the narrator's cutting of his cheeks at the end of the chapter, echoing Hugo's *L'Homme qui rit*. It fills in the gap, so to speak, for the initiated one, as if the text were itself taking a picture: "nous courons justement dans notre cabine et nous y enfermer et déshabiller dans cette pièce vaste et basse le sol lisse et quand on veut, quand on veux voir sinon le ciel les mouettes suspendues un nuage blanc derrière" (28). Appropriately, the text also names itself a "Kodak," and this intertextual image is likewise reinforced with reference to itself as an image to a previous passage on pages 18 and 19, whose proliferation of colors is conceptualized rather as a painting, also similarly historicizing the narrative up to this point. This earlier passage is also relevant to the intertextual reference at hand since it is where the theme of the text-as-life is brought to its climax, wrought more literally by the contrasting of a hot summer seaside promenade scene with the use of the mundane image of "nous serions à l'abri." Literally translated, this colloquial expression means "we'll be sheltered," notably less romantic, not to mention less realistic than "in the shade," shade also having been used as a major image in these opening pages, such as page 15's more literary rendering of it as a "pénombre": "car, si tu es là présente, et chaude, et respirante, et nue, si tu es là ! Sans doute, nous serions à l'abri, oui, bien tranquille" (18). Here again, it is by means of the reader's expectations that his

reading comes to play a role in defining the world-as-text, specifically following the novel's speech representation motif, a quixotic rendering of everyday life.

The above scene also sets up the central theme of pedophilia: in the context of the injured man, the narrator is still a boy, and his lover is conspicuously described as "petite," and so the looming Hugo is replaced by a looming Hallier, both the dark horse and scapegoat of Tel Quel, having been the first to be expelled from the editorial staff. His first novel, *Les Aventures d'une jeune fille*, acts somewhat differently than Baudry's in the intertextuality of *Ouverture* primarily on the level of theory, although it does seem to adopt some if its imagery, especially, a common image throughout the Tel Quel œuvre, and, haunting in any context, the corridor (*couloir*), which functions as a metaphor for the theater, "coulisses" being the French word for off-stage. Hallier's book maintains a primarily theoretical relationship to the intertext because, by its form, it accomplishes what *Ouverture* cannot: utterly lack a story. *Les Aventures* has no plot, and its narrative revolves around the reader's realization that there is simply no telling between fantasy and reality: the novel appears to shift back and forth between scenes from a play, or many plays, but, deftly drawing on the measure of an ambiguous narrative, slowly disintegrates into an state of complete indetermination in which any story recuperated by a reader is itself a fiction. In the terms of Hallier's novel, this in turn represents the ultimate doubt any reader has as to whether or not a reader can be gendered, which towards the end of the novel is symbolized, in the appropriate juvenile fashion, as a "tampon." For *Ouverture*, which in many ways also deals with this theme, *Les Aventures* represents,

more blatantly than it can, the true full lack of understanding a reader can have of what is taking place in a novel before it ends. *Ouverture*, too, ends with a reference to the stereotypical image of "curtains," first imaged as those of a theater on page 164, then shifting abruptly with the scene to a household curtain on page 168, as if relegating itself it to the mundane, likewise returning to the motifs in the beginning of the novel described here.

The opening chapter to *Ouverture* then closes, back in the bathroom, but this time with darker tones, and the primary image of the suicide theme, suggesting the decomposition of what until now has served as the main plotline, with the "blade" (*lame*) also symbolizing the image traced on the previous page. The reference to suicide also marks a return to Baudry's *Le Pressentiment*, which deals more directly with the topic. Besides using techniques similar to the "presentment" described above, and also concerning the question of multiple readership, particularly in relation to "Literature," the novel is remarkable for three reasons. First, it combines speech and poetic language in ways the *Ouverture* does not; that is, beyond the mere use of colloquial expressions, which, to return to the aforementioned fake "book review" in poetic language, following the "chugging" scene, is succinctly summed up in editorial fashion: "joliment bruyant" (27). Second, Baudry's book similarly employs poetic language in description form in a simpler and more obvious manner, as if it were a handbook for poetic description, as if the landscape were nothing but a mirror used to in turn describe the function of poetic language, for such devices as in the previous example. This is noted in the aforementioned "book review" as the "road

where the children hid," being its own kind of self-descriptive image of poetic language, also symbolizing the gullet. Thirdly, on a thematic level, the novel includes a touching scene in which the narrator deals with the suicide of a lover, recounting various scenes ridden with the guilt of possibly not having paid close enough attention to signs of suicidal behavior: which, in terms of the "book review," is the "crime." While the motif functions in Baudry's novel mostly as a metaphor for misreading, it maintains an interesting connection to *Ouverture* in that it also provides extra insight into the mind of its narrator, such as the line "the sand has bleached twigs in it," as being the expression of an apprehension of love past by.

In the end, like a child who must always win, it is back to Hugo: the ominous suicide being replaced by the less fatal, but more gruesome slitting of the cheeks, the disfigurement of *L'Homme qui rit*, and which also makes an appearance in *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Still, the message rings clear through the poetic language of the text. *Ouverture* stands out as a testament to one of Tel Quel's most significant contributions to literary discourse and culture, which is simply a pointed critique, a lesser detail in their greater influential opus, no more than a compelling observation: Thibaudeau, through the unlikely underdog of fiction, was able to show the full extent to which literary interpretation, including the ideological and historiographical, is based entirely on literary commentary and close reading by requiring an account of the basic mechanisms of figuration at work in the text, such as those demonstrated here. This he accomplished precisely by means of historicizing a Telquelian corpus through the original use of intertextuality as well as constructing their own language

on the basis of poetic language. In fact, it is on this basic assumption that the reading of such a work, and according to Baudry all literature, is carried out, on the ideological, or "economic" in Thibaudeau's terms, relations that also provide the basis for these experiments in intertextuality:

> C'est la mobilité des surfaces textuelles fragmentaires, le fait que chacune est en relation par glissement, recoupement répétition, permutation, avec toutes les autres, qui rend une lecture linéaire à proprement parler impossible, mais c'est aussi cette même mobilité, c'est-à-dire l'impossibilité de les orienter selon un centre défini, unique, qui donne à lire dans ce texte sa relation aux autres textes ou comme dirait Julia Kristeva, sa dimension paragrammatique. Dans le rapport des fragments les uns aux autres se trouve impliqué le rapport "intertextuel". Rapport analogique où espace et texte coïncident, la grille faisant fonction de partie, d'espace clôturé, mais mettant en jeu, par le recoupement des fragments, la non-clôture du texte général. (Foucault et al. 143)

They make it sound easy, but the impact of their groundbreaking work has yet to be fully appreciated, and this chapter has only scratched the surface of the extent to which Tel Quel-specific intertextuality was used in their literary practice, even in *Ouverture,* and which extends throughout their entire œuvre. However, its goal could be essentially understood as a means of transcend the normalizing, ideological "signature-effect" of the intertext described by Thibaudeau in "Le Roman comme autobiographie," to work by means of a "theoretical literature" towards a better

understanding of a simpler, common influence such as that of the poet Lautréamont; this, for example, rather than the establishment of a literary corpus or canon.

This critique also relies on another mechanism, and one that can only be revealed by close reading, which are the limits to literary commentary itself. Not only are there limits to interpretation, as there are to the depth and scope of each specific commentary, but there are limits to the extent to which even the particular design of a single passage can be fully appreciated, and which can only be suggested, such as the relationship between stylistic demonstration and imagery. They represent the limit between the author and the text constitutive of their respective existences, as well as the limit to the reader's interest in it: the trace of an interpretation manifest in the "insignificant" details in the constellation of the text, like *Ouverture*'s echo of the bleached twigs in the sand, so characteristic of literature and yet so elusive.

CHAPTER FOUR

Issues, *Numbers*, and Articles

It is not surprising that many critics, when confronted with the task of providing a commentary of the work of Philippe Sollers, whose œuvre constitutes one of the most compelling and enigmatic of the twentieth century, are quite literally struck dumb, so much so that they themselves might be those derisively referred to as the very "dumb machines" (*machines muettes*) mentioned throughout his 1968 novel, *Nombres*. More surprising, perhaps, is the common reaction, one of almost complete avoidance, and that by some of the most venerable literary commentators of their time, namely Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida.

Barthes, for his part, is quite explicit in his stance, stating he dare not venture to hazard even an educated guess at Sollers's books, preferring to hide behind the thin veil of an alleged lack of expertise, quite shocking given Barthes's well established forays into the fields of both semiotics and literary theory by the time. Thus, in an essay on Sollers, he hesitantly muses, "If I were a theorist of literature…": "Si j'étais théoricien de la littérature, je ne m'occuperais plus guère de la structure des œuvres, qui ne peut exister, au fond, que dans l'œil de cet animal particulier, le métalinguiste, dont elle est, en quelque sorte, une propriété physiologique …" (74). Perhaps it was a lack of perspective, or rather out of some decisive irony on Barthes's part, who sought, instead of a literary commentary concerning *Nombres*, a political explanation to Sollers's aesthetics. In fact, what he does say about the novel would have been a much more relevant observation of the aesthetic shift constituted by *Nombres* both in

relation to Sollers's previous novels and to Tel Quel publications in general, rather than the historicizing over-generalization he gives below in relation to Leftist political rhetoric. As he states in his essay specifically on *Nombres*, "Le refus d'héritier":

> Par exemple : il paraît nécessaire à Sollers de marquer une certain rupture à l'égard du langage politique des pères; les pères, en l'occurrence, ce sont les intellectuels et les écrivains de gauche, accaparés pendant les vingt dernières années par le combat anti-stalinien : leur mode d'inscription politique dans le monde doit être maintenant *désécrit*, écrit d'une manière contradictoire, « scandaleuse ».
>
> Un communiste à « Tel Quel »? Pourquoi pas, si cela est désécrire l'anti-communisme dont s'est nourrie (et surnourrie) l'intelligentsia traditionnel des intellectuels communistes ? (48)

Some irony is manifestly clear, in any case, in that the statement marks Barthes himself as an old-guard, a spectator on the periphery of the avant-garde aesthetics of Tel Quel able to provide an objective observation of the current state of political discourse, but one supported only by the gratuitous invention of this presumably "Sollersian" concept: "dis-writing."

It might be seen as fitting, then, that what aesthetic commentary Barthes did see fit to include concerning *Nombres* could in no way be seen as an apt description of the book in any way, but rather of only Sollers's previous novels, such as *Le Parc* and *Drame*, or, more likely, of the work of his Tel Quel colleagues, in particular Baudry, who characteristically relies on the use of the highfalutin grammatical

complexities of the "belle langue" of "proper French," in direct contradistinction to *Nombres*, which prefers the grotesque lows, for example, of the pornographic and everyday colloquialisms:

> *Nombres*, où l'on trouvera, disséminées comme des germes à travers l'une des plus belles langues qui soient en français (car le « bonheur d'expression » est cela même qui était déjà moderne dans les anciens textes) beaucoup d'écritures qui viennent de ces *autres langues* (la mathématique ou la chinoise, par exemple), dont l'ensemble forme nécessairement pour nous la *langue de l'autre*. (52)

In keeping with his aforementioned motif of his presumed lack of expertise, which for Barthes would be referring to the lack of connection between semiotics and literary criticism, notable in this passage is Barthes's glaring misuse of the Saussurian distinction between *langue* and *langage*: mathematics being an example of the latter, and Chinese the former. This is perhaps to imply the common notion that mathematics, like politics too perhaps, constitutes a truth-value beyond the relative subjectivity of a "literary language," or others, a notion which in fact should be understood as one of the primary subjects of the novel itself, rather than its premise.

In his essay on *Nombres* entitled "La dissémination," Derrida's stance with regards to the novel, on the other hand, may be less surprising, and could be chalked up to an expected gesture of providing a "deconstruction" of the work of literature, rather than an explicit, direct commentary. The notion is in fact quite compelling especially for a work such as *Nombres*, which, as this chapter will demonstrate, does

in typical Tel Quel fashion trouble the very foundations of its own literary commentary, both by means of providing its own self-commentary, as well as by approaching its impossibility by means of an extreme, paragrammatic in Kristeva's terms, structural reduction. In fact, the positions these two critics took with regards to *Nombres* can in some ways be summarized by the stances they took up vis-à-vis the work's, hypothetical, potential commentary. Thus, for Barthes, his staunch avoidance of the very idea of literary commentary matches his statement regarding what could be understood as something like the novel's "phenomenology," specifically the relation between it and its critique, in the following quote concerning a later Sollers novel, *H*, symbolized by the latter's notes:

> Comment fait-on un article de critique? On lit le livre de bout en bout, on prend des notes, on fait un plan, on écrit. Ici, ce chemin n'est pas le bon. *H* vous porte à la limite du commentaire : il ne permet pas « l'idée générale. » D'où ces fragments : eux seuls, on peut l'espérer, empêchent de produire dans le commentaire ce « fantasme d'unité » que *H*, précisément, s'emploie à dissoudre. (68)

Derrida, for his part, takes up the position of a would-be literary critic, in contradistinction to his habitual role as a philosopher, in order to provide the keys for an "eventual reading" that presumably will take place for the reader of his work. To be precise, like Barthes, he shirks any direct commentary, and maintains his position as a "philosopher of literature," so to speak, by providing a speculative map, existing in a deconstructive mode as a text within the text, by means of his own personal

hesitance to provide any directly relevant literary commentary. Fittingly, one might say that he provides the keys to the reading of *Nombres* that is the very "key" buried within it: for example, by means of the facile technique of simply using the word "claie," a homonym for the French word for "key" (*clef*), which is a rare term for the binding of a book, although in context employed in its usual sense of "grill" (409). For Derrida, it is therefore as if this word existed somehow already within the subtext of the novel. This then affords him not only various speculations as to Sollers's possible musings on the concept of the codex in relation to the contemporary novel, but also, as in Barthes, serves as a manifestation of the book's relation to its own commentary via the practice of note-taking; that is, given the image, as if one existed as a mirror to the other.

It is of the essence to note that this observation of Sollers's attention to his own critique comes not from any literary convention, nor even from the kind of critical relationships outlined in the previous chapters, but in fact from a statement made by the author himself concerning the stakes of contemporary literature. This he made clearest in the opening lines of his "Programme" laid out first in *Tel Quel* and again in the opening chapter of his 1968 collection of essays entitled *Logiques*, where he states that any modern work of literature must be interpreted by means of writing, here reproduced in full to provide Sollers's context, particularly the relation of this phenomenon to the "practice of writing":

> I. UNE THÉORIE D'ENSEMBLE PENSÉE À PARTIR DE LA PRATIQUE DE L'ÉCRITURE DEMANDE À ÊTRE ÉLABORÉE.

> I.1. Cette pratique n'est pas assimilable au concept, historiquement déterminé, de 'littérature'. Elle implique le renversement et le remaniement de la place et des effets de ce concept.
>
> I.2. *A partir de la pratique*, signifie qu'il est devenu impossible, à partir d'une rupture, précisément situable dans l'histoire, de faire de l'écriture un objet pouvant être étudié par une autre voie que l'écriture même (son exercice, dans certaines conditions). Autrement dit, la problématique spécifique de l'écriture se dégage massivement du mythe dans sa littéralité et son espace. Sa pratique est à définir au niveau du "texte" dans la mesure où ce mot renvoie désormais à une fonction que cependant l'écriture "n'exprime" pas mais dont elle *dispose*. Économie dramatique dont le "lieu géométrique" n'est pas représentable (il se joue). (9)

One might say, therefore, that Derrida has here fallen victim to the common pitfalls of "intentional fallacy," but these are also what Derrida appears to have deemed to have been common enough as to constitute a need for them to be addressed somewhat directly, even if they are only done so in the most implicit of ways as in "La dissémination."

So, it is just before providing the key "claie" image to which he will cling throughout the rest of his essay, which more or less works through a random series of images culled from the novel, that he provides what he apparently takes to be a

common thread throughout Sollers's work: the image of notes, here in the form of "notebook" along with "blue-black ink," the standard shade of blue used in pens, presumably used to take notes, tracing this image back to one of his first books, *Le Parc*: "« Le cahier est ouvert sur la table de bois brun faiblement éclairée par la lampe. La couverture est déjà un peu déchirée tandis que les pages couvertes une à une par l'écriture fine, serrée, tracée à l'encre bleu-noire, s'ajoutent lentement les unes aux autres, progressant sur le papier blanc quadrillé … »" (408). In this case, Derrida is purporting to act in his limited capacity as an archivist, a provider of "keys" and sources, by means of this fairly artificial contrast to a typical literary critic. However, not only is the observation dubious, however implied it may be, as it could just as likely be referring to the Sollers's sometime practice of writing his novels out longhand. It also misses this point not only of the above quotation taken from "Programme," but also of *Nombres*'s important reflection on the practice of writing, which, in particular in this novel, primarily sets its sights rather on the use of typing as a means of novelistic composition.

In any case, even though the force of Derrida's argument relies precisely on the kind of implied ambiguity described above, essentially claiming that the relation of a piece of literature to its commentary is, by nature, not subject to commentary and therefore must be dealt with by other means. However, this is only done in lieu, and to the detriment, of what is of the most importance to Sollers's work in particular, namely his poetic language. What will be shown to be Sollers's typical employment of ambiguous syntax, and this precisely in order to interrogate the status of literary

language, also typically in this case the direct object of his interrogation. This is the case in the above "Programme" quote, where the clause is broken into two separate pieces, significantly by means of an unexplained "historical rupture," making for the confusions of the type encountered in Tel Quel's literary language. Also loaded with a double negative, it makes the confusion more directly aimed at the question of the significance of the relation of a work of literature to its criticism: "*A partir de la pratique*, signifie qu'il est devenu impossible, à partir d'une rupture, précisément situable dans l'histoire, de faire de l'écriture un objet pouvant être étudié par une autre voie que l'écriture même." It is therefore most surprising, in the essays on *Nombres*, that these very simple turns of phrase are cast aside in favor of their own fancy rhetorical sidestepping, when they are the central question in the novel itself, not only due to its own ambiguous rhetorical status, but also quite literally as in the following quotation, appearing at the end of the novel, and which plays in this way on the emotional registers of political language:

> Je pouvais maintenant de détacher de la surface dure, brûlant qui avait dirigé mes nuits, laisser tourner maintenait la roue distribuant les places, les mots, les outils; je pouvais mieux prendre part, maintenant, à la guerre en train de s'étendre dans chaque pays, sous le masque des arrestations et des prix… Appelant à l'action direct, indirecte et n'ayant plus à répéter le même avis : savoir se révolter encore et encore, ne jamais renoncer, ne jamais accepter le geste de se courber et de censurer, apprendre à contre-attaquer, à changer et à connecter (115-6)

The sort of mantra found at the end of the passage, where emotional rhetoric clashes with the avowed refusal preceding the colon, is in fact more of a statement regarding the reading of the novel, in typical Sollersian fashion swapping the political or the ideological for the act of reading, and particularly of the various subtleties that must be navigated in order to sift through the rhetorical chaos of registers contained in the novel. Still, and appropriately so given the context, it represents the problem of political rhetoric that *Nombres* in many ways sets out to address, rather than, as for Barthes, it is supposed to represent.

It is therefore in direct contrast to the respective rhetorical stances represented by Barthes's and Derrida's imaginary relationship of the novel to its commentary that this chapter sets out to describe a distinct shift in the literary practice of Tel Quel with regards to its own theoretical apparatus. This chapter follows their parallel problematization of the historical shift relating to "literary production" as described in the opening chapters by the addition of a concurrent historical factor referred to in the following texts as positivism, specifically mathematical positivism, a shift also embodied in the above quote from "Programme" and its poetic deployment of syntax. In addition, this chapter will argue that, rather than existing in relation to a hypothetical, future literary commentary as in the opening chapters, this novel exists in direct relation to a particular essay, namely Krisetva's "L'Engendrement de la formule," which not only positions itself rhetorically with such a deliberate relation in mind, such as can be found in earlier Telquelian essayistic practice, but was in fact a thoroughly, even openly, planned one. *Nombres* could therefore only be partially

understood without being read in conjunction with it, and as such represents a distinct innovation in the journal's publication methods. In other words, the novel's dedication, "to Julia" in the Cyrillic alphabet, should in fact be taken quite literally as being written for her, in the sense that it is written for her to write about.

For example, because this essay on the novel stands, at the end of her first book, 1969's *Séméiotiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse*, as the materialization of her notion of the potential for literary commentary to provide a linguistic theory hypothesized in its opening essays, "la pratique littéraire … offre au linguiste l'unique possibilité d'étudier le *devenir* des significations des signes" (178-9), Sollers's above technique of deliberately confusing syntax therefore symbolizes the form of mediation represented by her essay, which, appropriately, addresses Indo-European syntax in its most basic form, according to contemporary linguistics: the relation of subject and predicate. Hence, while Sollers's gesture of confusing syntax may have some meaning in its own right in relation to linguistic theory, it only actually makes sense in, a similar, "syntactical" relation to Kristeva's. In fact, this is what also makes it such an exemplary case of what has been referred to more generally in Tel Quel as a "text."

In a similar gesture, the shift at work here can be seen as typical of the symbolic restructuring at the heart of the aesthetic project of Tel Quel: for example, if the intertextual structures at work within *Ouverture* take place in relation to the concept of linguistics and with reference to the larger theoretical construct represented by *Théorie d'ensemble*, then in this case, these texts take on these

subjects on a more literal level, by Kristeva directly addressing the question of linguistics as it pertains to literary theory, and by simultaneously constituting a shift in its relation to the theoretical apparatus. Practically speaking, the substitution, on the one hand, is of its primary theoretical intertext to the very source of Tel Quel's concept of the *théorie d'ensemble*, which takes its name from the encyclopedic work by a group of mathematicians some years earlier who published their *Set Theory* (*Théorie des ensembles*) under the collective name of Nicolas Bourbaki. On the other, another substitution is making more direct reference to the journal *Tel Quel* itself, "special issue" #35 of the Fall of 1968, *Le semiology aujourd'hui en URSS*, subtitled "Number in Culture," which reproduces in translation speeches given at a contemporary literature colloquium on the subject by Russian semiologians.

Hence, the textual network in question, *Nombres*, and its essay "L'Engendrement," can in fact be seen in some sense as the crowning achievement of Tel Quel's publication history of the 1960s, both completing and in many ways explaining their work to date. Still, it should also be noted that this is also firmly set within this already established structure, as the context of Russian semiology can only be fully understood with reference to their previous book-length publication of the literary theory of the earlier Russian formalists. This shift in theory, essentially represented by the shift from an ideological literary theory to Kristeva's "semanalysis," sought to emulate these methods. The alteration in their theoretical apparatus was therefore also intended to make manifest this particular shift. This formalist position can be most appropriately summarized by the following remarks

given by Eikhenbaum, quoting Jackobson, in his account of the formalist method, placed at the head of the aforementioned publication, *Théorie de la littérature: textes des formalistes russes*:

> En s'opposant à ces autres méthodes, les formalistes niaient en nient encore, non les méthodes, mais la confusion irresponsable des différentes sciences et des différents problèmes scientifiques. Nous posions et nous posons encore comme affirmation fondamentale que l'objet de la science littéraire doit être l'étude des particularités spécifiques des objet littéraire les distinguant de toute autre matière, et ceci indépendamment du fait que, par ses traits secondaires, cette matière peut donner prétexte et droit de l'utiliser dans les autres sciences comme objet auxiliaire. R. Jakobson (*la Poésie moderne russe*, esquisse 1, Prague, 1921, p. 11) donna à cette idée sa formule définitive : « L'objet de la science littéraire n'est pas la littérature, mais la « littérarité » (*literaturnost'*), c'est-à-dire ce qui fait d'une œuvre donnée une œuvre littéraire. Pourtant, jusqu'à maintenant, on pourrait comparer les historiens de la littérature plutôt à cette police qui, se proposant d'arrêter quelqu'un, aurait saisi à tout hasard tout ce qu'elle aurait trouvé dans la chambre, et même les gens qui passeraient dans la rue à côté. Ainsi les historiens de la littérature se servaient de tout : de la vie personnelle, de la psychologie, de la politique, de la philosophie. On composait un conglomérat de disciples frustes au lieu d'une science littéraire, comme si on avait oublié que chacun de ces objet appartient respectivement à une science : l'histoire de la philosophie, l'histoire

> de la culture, la psychologie, etc., et que ces dernières peuvent naturellement se servir de faits littéraires comme de document défectifs, de deuxième ordre. » (37-8)

This decisive structural shift, one perhaps meant to mimic Sollers's aforementioned "historical rupture," or the epistemological break described in Kristeva's essay, should also be tied to Sollers's technique of syntactical ambiguity. It is also therefore linked to the theoretical passages in *Nombres*, represented by the present tense sections, in contrast to those in the imperfect, distinguished by the number 4, of the novel representing the narrator's emergence into the "real world" of things, places, and people. That is, rather than representing a true "theory" or even a "commentary" of the novel, it represents the shift at work, presumably made manifest by Kristeva in "L'Engendrement," into this "real world of theory;" in other words, precisely constituting this innovation regarding the relation of literature and criticism, the latter transferring its focus to "literarity."

While this focus on the dynamics of the "shift," which has little to nothing to do with the Jakobsonian concept of the "shifter," marks a distinct change in the Tel Quel corpus, it is also conceived by Kristeva has having particular significance as a form of cultural record of the social transformations happening at the time, and one most likely beyond the most obvious one represented by May '68, as she concludes at the end of "L'Engendrement":

> A force d'être cet espace brisé de l'infini au point, de l'engendrement à la formule, ce *site* de la différentielle, l'espace textuel est celui qu'aucun

> rationalisme ne peut occuper. Il est *ce* que le discours scientifique peut se représenter, peut représenter, tandis que le texte en fait l'anamnèse. Non vu par le discours scientifique pris dans la représentation, savamment censuré, mis de côté ou réduit à une simple structure — ce qu'il n'est pas —, ce lieu que notre culture élabore aujourd'hui pour se penser est difficile, sinon impossible maintenant, à accepter. Mais comme tel, justement, il est un des symptômes les plus marquants de la transformation radicale que cette culture est en train de vivre. (370)

However, precisely what makes this commentary of *Nombres* relevant beyond the particular relation that it maintains with Kristeva's essay is what this shift also has to do with the act of reading the novel. Failure to take into consideration the self-reflective aspect of the book, on its own discursive status as a work of fiction, as has been shown with Barthes and Derrida, will inevitably lead to misunderstandings, especially considering the extent to which this dynamic plays a role in the overall structuration of its non-linear narrative.

Philippe Forest, for example, in his treatment of the novel in his monograph on Sollers, simply skims the surface by naively reproducing not only Kristeva's terminology of "geno-text", "pheno-text," "*nombrant*," "engenderment," and "formula," which also must be understood as maintaining a shifting-type function within the novel as is in fact specifically stipulated by Kristeva, but also by taking the aforementioned #4 sequence of the novel at face value, ascribing it the limited use of

a “commentary,” presumably in relation to its “story,” which also is far from the truth:

> Tout d’abord – première lecture – les trois murs représentent les séquences à l’imparfait (1, 2, 3) – qui sont celles du « récit » –, la paroi absente est celle de la séquence quatrième – celle qui offre entre parenthèses et au présent le commentaire du texte, et cela à l’intention du lecteur lui-même. Le fonctionnement semble tout d’abord simple : au terme de chaque cycle, le récit se projette dans le commentaire; il se présente au lecteur, c’est-à-dire que, abandonnant la distance que lui conférait l’imparfait, il se dit, au présent, comme s’avançant sur le devant de la scène du texte. Le commentaire, si l’on veut, explique le récit. Ainsi alterneraient de manière simple narration et commentaire, fils romanesques tressés tour à tour. Cependant, continue le texte, il s’agit là d’une pure illusion : la séquence quatrième ne reflète pas les précédentes mais les transforme. Elle ne livre aucune clé pour l’ensemble car elle est prise au même titre que les autres faces du carré dans la mécanique romanesque. Si bien qu’au total tout se joue sur une seule surface, celle de la page. (133)

Like Barthes and Derrida, while this kind of commentary provides some insight into to novel, it does more to misrepresent it, nullifying what makes the book an innovation in its own right, essentially making for what, above, Barthes refers to as the personal “physiological property”: the narcissistic delusion of a “reading” in which its theory is distinct from the story, existing somewhere between abstraction

and materialism, intended to rationalize a presumably irrational novel. This critical methodology, moreover, is entirely different from Kristeva's paragrammatic analysis of the semiologian, and therefore Forest's appropriation of her terminology, for example, could only lead to more confusion.

The unfortunate result of Forest's limited treatment is that it leaves his reader to clean up the mess, operating under the same delusion that only an "interactive" type of reading could possibly render a realistic description of the book, which in many ways should in fact be considered the spiritual father of the "choose-your-own-adventure" novel, whose numbered sequences could be read separately as novels existing within the novel:

> Pour mettre en évidence le mouvement perpétuel de rotation et de répétition que le roman s'inflige à lui-même, les cent séquences sont numérotées sur le principe suivant : un premier chiffre indique la place que la séquence occupe dans le cycle qui est le sien (1, 2, 3 ou 4) ; un second chiffre (compris entre 5 et 100) indique la place que la séquence occupe dans la totalité du roman. La succession des séquences se donne donc à lire ainsi : 1, 2, 3, 4, 1. 5, 2. 6, 3. 7, 4. 8, 1. 9… 4. 100. (128)

In short, while attempting to explain the dynamic brought about by the text's separation of its numbered sequences, instead of providing a paragrammatic explanation of the matrix of signification it sets up, he opts instead for the numerological relation of 1 to 4 to the number 5, presumably in order to explain the non-existent mathematical relation of the "commentary" to the text portrayed in the

above quote, as if the simple presence of an abstract level of signification were enough to explain the novel's design as having a sort of logico-mathematical "plot."

The novel would be much more succinctly explained as setting up such an analogical structure and then pursuing various means of working through it, rather than a hypothetical dichotomy of text and "commentary." Each of the four sequences can in fact be read as having their own distinct plots: the first, an erotic tale; the second, a violent display, generally exhibited in a crowd setting; the third, a stroll taking place sometime with two people, and sometimes the narrator alone; and the fourth, as the aforementioned emergence into the world, indeed paired with a meta-textual commentary. While the novel does tend to move abstractly between the action of the plot and the more "poetic language" of its so-called theoretical commentary, in general the sequences are more simply woven together by various means, usually of the "paragrammatic" type described elsewhere by Kristeva.

One such example can be found in the following passage, spanning sequences #3 and #4, associating the former's "stroll" theme with an image that has previously been used to connect the themes of the first and second sequences, the "tête coupée," and whose final word, "voice," (*voix*) then associates the paragraph to the following #4 sequence, including the image of the connection itself with the word "line" (*fil*). The imagery is picked up again in the second part of the passage below, which lists some of the classical Chinese "elements," although not including the non-Western standard of "wood," which has already made its appearance in the first part (*bois*):

> j'étais entré là où il ne fallait pas entrer, je marchais sur le sol fragile, de même que dans une rue étroite, en pensant à rien, avalant mon souffle, respiration dont le glissement comme une tête coupée au fil d'une rivière coulant dans le bois perce un moment votre voix — … Tout se répète et revient, se répète et revient encore, et tous êtes entraînés dans cette chaîne de terre et d'air, de feu, de sang et de pierre, vous êtes pris ou prises dans ces permutations déréglées… (26-7)

Of course, this is also accomplished by various innovative plot devices: such as, the erotic love story often itself turns violent, and is associated with the gore of the second sequence, making for a kind of imaginary plot for the reader of this otherwise dense novel, of a spectral public execution, which is sometimes reinforced paragrammatically by the slightly ambiguous use of the word "execute," although always only in the most neutral sense of "accomplish."

In fact, the most patent of the novel's own extra-textual references is not the relation to its "commentary," but rather the image of the narrator dozing in and out of consciousness while watching a movie:

> Cette quatrième surface est en quelque sorte pratiquée dans l'air, elle permet aux paroles de se faire entendre, aux corps de se laisser regarder, on l'oublie par conséquent aisément, et là est sans doute l'illusion ou l'erreur. En effet, ce qu'on prend ainsi trop facilement pour l'ouverture d'une scène n'en est pas moins un panneau déformant, un invisible et impalpable voile opaque qui joue vers les trois autres côtés la fonction d'un miroir ou d'un réflecteur et vers

> l'extérieur (c'est-à-dire vers le spectateur possible mais par conséquent toujours repoussé, multiple) le rôle d'un révélateur négatif où les inscriptions produites simultanément sur les autres plans apparaissent la inversées, redressées, fixes. Comme si les acteurs éventuels venaient tracer et prononcer à l'envers, devant vous, leur texte, sans que vous en ayez conscience — ni eux non plus — en raison du dispositif en question. D'où l'impression d'assister à une projection là où, finalement, c'est l'apparition même du produit de la surface — de la chambre noire transformée en surface — qu'il s'agit. D'où l'imagination qu'il se passe quelque chose dans un espace à trois dimensions, là où, initialement et pour finir, il n'y en a que deux : ni salle, ni scène, une seule nappe capable de donner à la fois la sensation de profondeur, de représentation et de réflexion : la page est, pour l'instant, l'indice de cette nappe, son enveloppe la plus évidente, là où, pour ce qui apparaît et pour celui à qui cela apparaît, joue le passage même du temps sur le corps. (22-3)

This passage, in particular, is important because it consciously marks a direct reference to Kristeva's essay on the novel, referring to it indirectly as the "apparatus" (*dispositif*), particularly with reference to her, here deliberately pre-conceived, partial misinterpretation of the novel, which she says is meant to represent the "theater" rather than the cinema, as it obviously does despite its methodical ambiguities.

While in many ways Forest's approach to this confusing and complex novel could be considered ingenious, were it not for the fact that this is precisely this type of linear logic that the novel is specifically designed to challenge, and while it may be

considered an equally gratuitous gesture to equate mathematics with literature, it is made much more plausible when accompanied by a theory that it is able to logically make the link between the two, as Kristeva does in "L'Engendrement": "En fait, jusqu'à la coupure épistémologique de la fin du XIXe siècle, ces opérations formulaires dans le tissu de la langue ont été bloquées, sans être totalement empêchées, par l'idéologie de la littérature comme représentation d'un dehors, la rhétorique ne proposant pas de formules autres que celle résumées dans la géométrie primaire" (287). The point, however, it not whether or not this equation is true or not, but rather how it is able to work to create a "textual" correlation able to trouble and interrogate the discursive statuses of both mathematical and literary language, and in particular, according to Kristeva here, of literary criticism, which likewise relies on similar "textual" relations in order to achieve its purpose, namely by the convention of a heavy use of citations.

The metaphorical use of "non-Euclidian" geometry, most likely inspired by Bertolt Brecht's notion of a non-Aristotelian aesthetics in order to describe Tel Quel, can be traced back to Michel Foucault, who was the first to use the term "isomorphism" to account for Telquelian aesthetic practice, most likely used as relating to the type of intertextuality in question in the first three chapters:

> Je n'ignore pas ce qu'il y a d'injuste à parler de façon si générale, et qu'on est pris aussitôt dans le dilemme : l'auteur ou l'école. Il me semble pourtant que les possibilités du langage à une époque donnée ne sont pas si nombreuses qu'on ne puisse trouver des isomorphismes (donc des possibilités de lire

> plusieurs textes en abîme) et qu'on ne doive en laisser le tableau ouvert pour d'autres qui n'ont pas encore écrit ou d'autres qu'on n'a pas encore lus. Car de tels isomorphismes, ce ne sont pas des "visions du monde", ce sont des plis intérieurs au langage; les mots prononcés, les phrases écrites passent par eux, même s'ils ajoutent des rides singulières. (12)

This quotation is taken from his essay "Distance, Aspect, Origine," a seminal work of Tel Quel literary criticism, which was reproduced at the head of *Théorie d'ensemble*, but first published in 1963, dealing with the early novels by Sollers, Thibaudeau, and Baudry:

> On ne déchiffre pas de signes à travers un système de différences; on suit des isomorphismes, à travers une épaisseur d'analogies. Non pas de lecture, mais plutôt recueillement de l'identique, avancée immobile vers ce qui n'a pas de différence. Là, les partages entre le réel et le virtuel, perception et songe, passé et fantasme (qu'ils demeurent ou qu'on les traverse) n'ont plus d'autre valeur que d'être des moments du passage, relais plus que signes, traces de pas, plages vides où ne s'attarde pas mais par où s'annonce de loin, et s'insinue déjà ce qui d'entrée de jeu était le même (renversant à l'horizon, mais ici-même également en chaque instant, le temps, le regard, le partage des choses et ne cessant d'en faire paraître l'autre côté). (16)

Foucault's employment of the concept of isomorphism is remarkable, not only because it allows him to avoid the awkward constructions presented by the novelty of

Tel Quel, such as its theoretical apparatus, but also because it enables him to account for a "reading" without falling into the pitfalls such as those encountered by Forest.

As for Kristeva, her appropriation of a mathematical terminology, while in many ways very similar to Foucault's, envisions it as able to bring about the shift that she hypothesizes is necessary to account for the aesthetic transformation that she understood to be happening at the time, rather than a quick discursive fix as in Foucault's case:

> La sémiotique se construira alors à partie du cadavre de la linguistique … et à laquelle la linguistique se résignerait après avoir préparé le terrain à la sémiotique.
>
> Le rôle du sémioticien est, par conséquent, plus qu'un rôle de descripteur. Son statut changera le statut de la science elle-même : la société prendra de plus en plus conscience du fait que le discours scientifique n'est pas une symbolisation, qu'il est une pratique qui ne *reflète* pas, mais qui *fait*. Parce que le sémioticien n'est pas seulement linguiste et mathématicien, il est écrivain. Il n'est pas seulement celui qui décrit en antiquaire de vieux langages, faisant de sa science un cimetière de discours déjà mort ou se mourant. Il est aussi celui qui découvre, en même temps que l'écrivain, les schémas et les combinaisons des discours qui se font.[5] (57-8)

It is precisely within this transformation in which she locates the significance of what she refers to as "texts" in the beginning of "L'Engendrement":

[5] There is likely a typo in the first sentence, "à partie de" rather than "à partir de," which is in the original edition of *Séméiotiké*.

> Passant au-delà de l'"œuvre" et du "livre", c'est-à-dire d'un message produit et clos, le travail dit "littéraire" présente aujourd'hui des *textes* : productions signifiantes dont la complexité épistémologique relève, après un long détour, de celles des antiques hymnes sacrés. Productions qui demandent — pour être comprises et reprises par le *discours* manœuvrant le social en cours — une théorie, celle-ci devant s'élaborer comme une réflexion analytico-linguistique sur le *signifiant-se-produisant* en texte. (278)

Also important to note in this quotation, simply in passing, is her reference here to the relation of classical texts, such as the *Vedas*, to contemporary "texts," and in comparison to her aforementioned theory of the "epistemological break," which plays an important role for her argument. They can be summarily dispensed with here, however, because they are essentially used to provide the framework to navigate through her own discursive background, in this case in relation to Saussure's foray into the semiology of classical literature, the so-called *Anagrammes*, as a means of developing her own distinct theory. Thus, in this respect, her use of it here could be viewed as exemplary of the shift being undertaken by her and Sollers, making for further ambiguity in the concept between the Hegelian "historical consciousness" and the Marxian and Lautréamontian scientific break as relating to literary production.

It is in her earlier work, however, found in the opening chapters of *Séméiotiké*, in which she lays out the plans for this transformation in literary criticism by means of mathematical language, which can more or less be described as an "axiomatic" method: that is, one which proceeds by means of hypotheses and proofs, in its most

basic form amounting to something akin to the Wittgensteinian numeration found above in Sollers's "Programme":

> … la nécessité d'introduire les mathématiques dans la sémiotique, de trouver un système de *sigles* (= de *nombres*) dont l'articulation décrirait le fonctionnement des pratiques sémiotiques et constituerait le langage d'une sémiotique générale.
>
> Plus qu'un linguiste, le sémioticien serait donc un mathématicien qui calculerait les articulations signifiantes à l'aide de signes vides. S'il en est ainsi, son langage ne sera pas le langage discursif : il sera de l'ordre des nombres, il sera *axiomatique*. (56)

In other words, for Kristeva, the axiomatic method contains within it the same logical principles that underlie language as well, and as such are able to form and connect new relations with poetic language: "Le langage poétique … contient le code de la logique linéaire. En plus, nous pourrons trouver en lui toutes les figures combinatoires que l'algèbre a formalisée dans un système de signes artificiels et qui ne sont pas extériorisées au niveau de la manifestation du langage usuel" (178). Hence, the axiomatic method is not only useful, and even revolutionary, in the case of literary criticism, but is in fact an absolute necessity in order to historically determine what she defines as "texts": "Le texte sera donc un certain type de production signifiante qui occupe une place précise dans l'histoire et relève d'une science spécifique qu'il faudra définir." (279)

At this point, not only would some reference to an actual example of these "combinatory figures formalized by algebra" provide some further explanation of the types of phenomena referred to here by Kristeva, but in fact a direct reference to the axiomatic work by Bourbaki makes up an essential intertext in this case, which also entirely relies on, while it sets out to formally theorize, the axiomatic method in relation to mathematics, and specifically set theory. In fact, it could be understood that the "text" composed by the Sollers-Kristeva-Bourbaki complex is built on the negative correlation established by the latter's conceptualization of the axiomatic in relation to syntax:

> La *méthode axiomatique* n'est à proprement parler pas autre chose que cet art de rédiger des textes dont la formalisation est facile à concevoir. Ce n'est pas là une invention nouvelle ; mais son emploi systématique comme instrument de découverte est l'un des traits originaux de la mathématique contemporaine. Peu importe en effet, s'il s'agit d'écrire ou de lire un texte formalisé, qu'on attache aux mots ou signes de ce texte telle ou telle signification, ou même qu'on leur en attache aucune ; seul importe l'observation correcte des règles de syntaxe. (2)

In other words, syntax for Bourbaki, instead of being conceived, as it is in Kristeva, as being directly related to the axiomatic process, it is rather simply a condition of it.

This particular conceptualization also has its effects on the Bourbaki text in general: for example, the text's attempt to define "syntax" in its own, overly mathematical terms as in the above quote. The idea is in fact worked through again

and again throughout this theoretical introduction to its various volumes, and which need not be belabored here as well, generally conceived as falling somewhere between the two extremes of the ultra-formalization of mathematical notation and, curiously, what is overtly considered the *problem* of figural language: "On s'est efforcé, sans sacrifier la simplicité de l'exposé, de se servir toujours d'un langage rigoureusement correct. Autant qu'il a été possible, les *abus du langage*, sans lesquels tout texte mathématique risque de devenir pédantesque et même illisible, ont été signalés au passage ; s'il y a lieu, ils sont mentionnés à l'index ou au dictionnaire" (3). Or again:

> Souvent même on se servira du langage courant d'une manière bien plus libre encore, par des abus de langage volontaires, par l'omission pure et simple des passages qu'on présume pouvoir être restituées aisément par un lecteur tant soit peu exercé, par des indications intraduisibles en langage formalisé et destinées à faciliter cette restitution. D'autres passages également intraduisibles contiendront des commentaires destinés à rendre plus claire la marche des idées, au besoin par un appel à l'intuition du lecteur ; l'emploi des ressources de la rhétorique devient dès lors légitime, pourvu que demeure inchangée la possibilité de formaliser le texte. (7)

Despite these various divagations into the problem of figural language, mostly revealing only the authors' confusions in the field of linguistics, the issue is ultimately disposed of by the naïve notion of a "basic mathematical competence" with which the introductory chapter began, "Sa lecture ne suppose donc, en principe,

aucune connaissance mathématique particulière, mais seulement une certaine habitude du raisonnement mathématique et un certain pouvoir d'abstraction" (3): "Nous ne discuterons pas de la possibilité d'enseigner les principes du langage formalisé à des êtres dont le développement intellectuel n'irait pas jusqu'à savoir lire, écrire et compter." (4-5).

This passage in particular is parodied in *Nombres*, found as a motif recurring throughout the novel, which significantly and ironically adds "decipher" and "remember" to Bourbaki's stereotypical tripartite ending, and begins with the aforementioned image of the incompetent critic, "dumb machine": "là où les machines muettes savent désormais lire, déchiffrer, compter, écrire et se souvenir" (122-3). This apparently productive inability to sufficiently define the relationship between mathematics and the axiomatic method also has its discursive equivalent in Bourbaki, and which is also similarly mirrored in Kristeva's essay, in which she develops her critique of positivism, specifically in relation to Chomsky, Saussure, and Lacan, although also with direct reference to the history of mathematics much in the same style as in the prosaic companion to Bourbaki's axiomatic presentation, the "Notes historiques." In the latter's text, this positivist outlook is in fact consciously also brought to the fore in the separate introduction: "Mais voilà vingt-cinq siècles que les mathématiciens ont l'habitude de corriger leurs erreurs et d'en voir leur science enrichie, non appauvrie ; cela leur donne le droit d'envisager l'avenir avec sérénité." (9). There, as well as in the quotations below, it is conceived as the productive process of correction undergone within the evolution of mathematics,

specifically relating to the relative clarity of the methodological changes carried out by means of the axiomatic method since Euclid's *Elements*.

Thus, Kristeva's implicit critique of Bourbaki's positivism could be summed up as the work's over-reliance on the historical process as a means of conceptualizing the history of mathematics, something akin to the sociological phenomenon of the intervention of the observer's gaze as affecting their attempted scientific account, which in this case is brought to the extreme of being meant to provide an account of the very science itself. Such a rhetorical employment of a confusion of terms, between a rhetorical and a mathematical "isomorphism," for example, can be found in the following passage taken from the "Note historiques" in the *Set Theory* volume:

> Précisant l'« accord » dont parlait Descartes, [Leibniz] entrevoit en effet, pour la première fois, la notion générale d'isomorphie (qu'il appelle « similitude »), et la possibilité d'« identifier » des relations ou opérations isomorphes ; il en donne comme exemple l'addition et la multiplication. Mais ces vues audacieuses restèrent sans écho chez les contemporains, et il faut attendre l'élargissement de l'Algèbre qui s'effectue vers le milieu du XIXe siècle pour voir s'amorcer la réalisation des rêves leibniziens. Nous avons déjà souligné que c'est à ce moment que les « modèles » se multiplient et qu'on s'habitue à passer d'une théorie à une autre par simple changement de langage ; l'exemple le plus frappant en est peut-être la dualité en géométrie projective, où la pratique, fréquente à l'époque, d'imprimer face à face, sur deux colonnes, les théorèmes « duaux » l'un de l'autre, est sans doute pour

> beaucoup dans la prise de conscience de la notion d'isomorphie. D'un point de vue plus technique, il est certain que la notion de groupes isomorphes est connue de Gauss pour les groupes abéliens, de Galois pour les groupes de permutations ; elle est acquise de façon générale pour des groupes quelconques vers le milieu du XIXe siècle. Par la suite, avec chaque nouvelle théorie axiomatique, on se trouva naturellement amené à définir une notion d'isomorphisme ; mais c'est seulement avec la notion moderne de structure que l'on a finalement reconnu que toute structure porte en elle une notion d'isomorphisme, et qu'il n'est pas besoin d'en donner une définition particulière pour chaque espèce de structure.[6] (93)

Kristeva's critique, however, which could only be considered that of an outside layman observer of the science of mathematics, and therefore it is precisely her

[6] As in the introduction, these confusions are then later just as awkwardly resolved like rhetorical, and sometimes philosophical, careful sidestepping: "Il est en tout autrement dès qu'à la notion d'ensemble viennent se mêler celles de nombre ou de grandeur. La question de la divisibilité indéfini de l'étendue (sans doute posée dès les premières Pythagoriciens) devait, comme on sait, conduire à des difficultés philosophiques considérables : des Eléates à Bolzano et Cantor, mathématiciens et philosophes se heurteront sans succès au paradoxe de la grandeur fini composé d'une infinité de points dépourvus de grandeur. Il serait sans intérêt pour nous de retracer, même sommairement, les polémiques interminables et passionnées que suscite ce problème, qui constituait un terrain particulièrement favorable aux divagations métaphysiques ou théologiques ; notons seulement le point de vue auquel, dès l'Antiquité, s'arrêtent la plupart des mathématiciens. Il consiste essentiellement à refuser le débat, faute du chez les formalistes modernes : de même que ces derniers s'arrangent pour éliminer toute intervention d'ensembles « paradoxaux », les mathématiciens classiques évitent soigneusement d'introduire dans leur raisonnements l'« infini actuel » … " (97); and later, providing a rhetorical solution to this problem: "La valeur de « certitude » que l'on peut attribuer à un tel raisonnement st sans doute moins probante que pour ceux qui satisfont aux exigences initiales de Hilbert, et est essentiellement affaire de psychologie personnelle pour chaque mathématicien ; il n'en reste pas moins vrai que de semblables « démonstrations » utilisant l'induction transfinie « intuitive » jusqu'à un ordinal donné, seraient considérées comme un important progrès si elles s'appliquaient, par exemple, à la théorie des nombres réels ou à une partie substantielle de la théorie des ensembles.

D'autre part à l'intérieur de la théorie des ensembles, se posent de nombreux problèmes de non-contradiction « relative », en liaison avec les multiples « hypothèses » qui subsistent dans cette théorie." (116-7)

addition of the concept of the "subject" and the history of subjectivity that, rather than providing a direct critique of Bourbaki, or the contemporary state of mathematical discourse in general, is specifically what makes manifest this "textual" apparatus in relation to *Nombres*. In addition, according to her theory, this particular "text" makes for a more appropriate litmus test for the state of contemporary discourse:

> C'est le calcul différentiel de Leibniz qui restitue l'infinité au signifiant forclos. Son infinitésimal redonne au nombre sa fonction d'*infini-point* qui constitue la spécificité de cet actant symbolique, et en fait la marque qui actualise dans la notation scientifique tout l'espace où se meut le signifiant. L'infinité transparaît dans l'écriture du "sujet" connaissant et bouleverse ses fondements en allant même jusqu'à le méconnaître. (297)

Practically speaking, beyond putting forward a discursive critique of mathematical subjectivity, what Kristeva is effectively doing is leveling out the discursive playing field, so to speak, in some sense locating her own "mathematical" terminology for the purposes of literary semiotics within the preexisting contradictions of metamathematics, and by constructing an "inter-text," in the sense of an intertextual complex, by means of a common structural relation to Bourbaki with *Nombres*, and thereby hypothetically making her theory applicable to all "texts." A more developed critique of this form of positivism can be found, however, in her introduction to the *Tel Quel* issue on "Number in Culture," in which she downplays Chomsky's concept of generative grammar in favor of its Russian appropriation.

In terms of her essay on Sollers, the purpose of her own construction of such a complex textual apparatus is precisely to accomplish what she theorized as the goal of literary semiotics, which is to develop and put forward a linguistic, in this case grammatical, theory of syntax. Much of the essay is devoted to providing various keys, although manifestly different than Derrida, necessary to a basic interpretation of the novel: such as Sollers's emulation of *Finnegans Wake* by the use of Sanskrit, which make it an essential component of the novel itself. Still, most of the essay focuses rather on providing a conceptual framework that, instead of producing a workable means of deciphering it, as Forest would have it, it is in fact meant to tap into the linguistic resources she hypothesizes because of the novel's remarkable "syntactical" design, in this respect:

> Le texte n'est pas un *phénomène* linguistique, autrement dit il n'est pas la signification structurée qui se présente dans un corpus linguistique vu comme une structure plate. Il est son *engendrement* : un engendrement inscrit dans ce "phénomène" linguistique, ce *phéno-texte* qu'est le texte imprimé, mais qui n'est lisible que lorsqu'on remonte *verticalement* à travers la genèse : 1) de ses catégories linguistiques, et 2) de la topologie de l'acte signifiant. La signifiance sera donc cet engendrement qu'on peut saisir doublement : 1) engendrement du tissu de la langue; 2) engendrement de ce "je" qui se met en position de présenter la signifiance. Ce qui s'ouvre dans cette verticale est l'opération (linguistique) de génération du phéno-texte. Nous appellerons cette opération un *géno-texte* en dédoublant ainsi la notion de texte en phéno-

> texte et géno-texte (surface et fond, structure signifié et productivité signifiante). (280)

While in some ways this auto-deconstruction of her own terminology at the end of this citation simplifies the task of future commentaries of *Nombres*, such as this one, it is of the utmost importance to call attention to the extent to which this also focused her own attention on the novel and its imagery in "L'Engendrement;" that is, both how she reads the novel and how she addresses its images. The secondary outcome of such a focalized reading is that the essay goes about its commentary semi-conscious of the fact that the novel is not about "her" in the traditional sense of a character within the novel, but actually about her own explanation of it and that it is also, at least partially, about itself too, thus fulfilling the dynamic that this theorization sets itself as the geno-text of its own generation of the pheno-text by the geno-text interior to the novel. In other words, her attempt is simply to reproduce the very linguistic utterance that she makes her subject.

One such instance of a false appropriation, and therefore misinterpretation, of Sollers's imagery relates to the novel's aesthetic inheritance, in which she provides an over-simplified, cursory account of Surrealist techniques, which is in fact only particularly relevant to the surrealist image. Here contrasting this so-called "surrealist" method with Sollers's technique of a "signifying differential," she explains:

> Le signe peut se libérer de plusieurs contraintes (le concept, la grammaire) dans son aspiration vers cet infini-dehors initialement et pour jamais dissocié

> de lui. C'est ainsi qu'il opère dans l'expérience surréalistes : invention de mots nouveaux, écriture automatique etc. Les mots-signes peuvent se succéder et se tordre de façon indéfinie pour marquer que la langue nage sur un fond idéal illimité, duquel émergent ces signes. Mais quelque variable qu'il soit, le signe est fixé doublement : dans son rapport Sa-Se, et dans sa prévisibilité par la langue. … De telles "transgressions", de type "surréaliste", visant une infinité sur-matérielle parce que au-dessus du signifiant réel de la langue, deviennent la mesure interne d'un système linguistique codifiée; en les rejetant, la langue close et signifiante indique ses propres censures, ou autrement dit, permet certain énoncés "transgressifs" (c'est-à-dire non-signifiants) pour qu'on puisse lire leur non-transgressivité.
>
> Il est en tout autrement de la différentielle signifiante. Elle est la marque de l'infini des signifiants actuels (et non pas hors-signifiant) pour laquelle il manque une place dans l'ordre des signes *supportés* par l'infini. (299)

Moreover, the remark is also not directly related to *Nombres* in the context of her own account, in which the concept in fact not only plays a decisive role, but one that is entirely different than the one accounted for here. This is not surprising given the level of depth she has deemed appropriate for her own reading, whose irony can be evinced by her use of quotation marks around "surrealist," which most likely are meant to parody similar, but much more abusive, cursory accounts of the aesthetic

school and its heritage, such as can be found elsewhere in Forest's essay on *Nombres*, for example.

What is apparently important are the stakes of such a remark, rather than the precision of her interpretation of the novel, due perhaps to her aforementioned perceived need to break with the habitual conventions of literary commentary in order to achieve her goal of a linguistic one. Still, as can be glimpsed in the following passage from *Nombres*, Sollers's employment of the surrealist image can only be correctly conceived as working in direct relation to such grammatical techniques. Moreover, this is done in fact only in the most straightforward of ways, as an image itself, and not, as both Kristeva and Forest would seem to suggest, by any use of the more subtle means of any inherited aesthetic influence, such as in the following passage:

> Plus rien ne répond de vous ni pour vous dans cette séquence, cet englobement, ce sursaut terreux de fermer, de disséminer, de fonder en disparaissant…. … Si j'écris parmi vous les traces de cette histoire, la second où je jouis de ma recomposition et du fait d'être brièvement écrit parmi vous … Le problème étant le suivant : comment transformer point par point un espace en un autre espace, l'imparfait en présent, et comment s'inclure soi-même dans cette mort, c'est-à-dire non pas conserver son corps mais incessamment au-delà des muscles retrouver l'air sans conscience ou encore toucher comme une couleur l'énergie granulée, lisse, la surface d'engendrement et d'effacement… Cela fait comme des gouttes ou des taches

> jetées sur le plan du temps, et cette pluie est simultanément la fuite du fleuve depuis la nuque jusqu'au jaillissement des temps, et il faut aller chercher la main dans son tremblement, la maintenir au niveau des lignes qui grondent, des flèches qui traverse le jeu silencieusement… Et, c'est pourquoi je viens sous sa main de ce fond de peau plus complet que les os, de cette décharge noire explosant depuis les vertèbres jusqu'à l'idée d'os, c'est pourquoi, après le retrait il y a ce, il y a ce jet tassé sur lui-même au moment où elle enfonce ses ongles, ses dents… Et je peux dire qu'alors la peau devient transparente, c'est que je suis en effet sur la peau, mais il faut encore lui donner comme un lait pour sa bouche dure, la mâchoire la définissant des pieds à la tête, résumée ainsi au-dehors… Ici, vous commencez à comprendre ce que ce roman poursuit dans la science de son détour, vous savez maintenant ce qu'est le refus de toute naissance, le calcul qui vous fait tomber les yeux bien ouverts dans d'autres rapports) — (63-5)

This passage, taken from the #4 sequence, muses on the nature of its own relation of the imperfect tense of the rest of the novel to its own use of the present. In this case, the verbal tense imagery might also be interpreted as similarly musing both on the relation of his own work to Surrealism, as well as the nature of the surrealist image's relation to his own linguistic and grammatical images.

The surrealist image, which is more along the lines of a parody, comes at the end of the passage, "la mâchoire la définissant des pieds à la tête," as a grotesque, rhetorical reconfiguration of the female body, and within the full intensity of the

pornographic image of the "money shot," the typical image of the male ejaculating on the female's mouth, the "facial" in pornography: "il faut encore lui donner comme un lait pour sa bouche dure." Thus, there is no shift here from the surrealist aesthetic, but rather a simple reuse of their aesthetic technique. Still, this of course also takes place in this central passage, which not only works through Sollers's technique of temporization, through grammatical tense, but is also marked with a particular intensity of grammatical imagery. "Lisse," found towards the middle of the passage, is in fact a motif found throughout the book, here forming the core of its paragrammatic lexical matrix. Here, the word is reworked into a sememe, and reappears within the word, a few lines later, "jaillissement," notably also used the a pseudo-surrealist image: "jaillissement des temps." Hence, "lisse" is also transformed, into its adverbial form by applying the suffix "-ment," into "(jail-)lissement," which are in fact essentially interchangeable forms in French in many cases. The adverbial suffix, "-ment," motif can be located throughout the passage as well, serving precisely as an image of the shifting of tenses that the sequence takes as its subject, but also of the paragrammatic reworking of the central sememe that could be seen as moving the images that follow it from one sentence to the next, mirrored in the hesitant repetition mimicking speech: "il y a ce, il y a ce jet … ." For example, the sememe could be seen as occurring, between "ligne" to "silencieusement," as a sort of disfiguration of itself: that is, from the "-lencieusement," then with the "-ment" breaking off on its own, shifting from "mo-ment," and back to a common word, "d-ent" [tooth].

The use of these kinds of poetic devices, especially those based on grammatical forms, certainly did not go unnoticed by Kristeva, who pays particularly close attention to the verb tenses at work in Sollers's novel: "Cette orientation du verbe vers le nom pour marquer une modalité de la signification qui manque actuellement aux langues européennes, est encore mieux marquée dans *Nombres* par la prépondérance des formes verbales nominales ou adjectivales. *Nombres* abonde en *infinitifs*, *participes passés et participes présents*" (325). Although she does not go into the same poetic detail that she does, in her work on the paragrammatic structures found in Lautréamont for example, she was as equally aware, at least, of the implication Sollers's "phonetic" innovations as well: "La signification naît de la combinatoire phonétique, elle est produite par le réseau tabulaire des correspondances phoniques" (309). Thus, what she does not fully account for, just as she fails to accurately depict Sollers's appropriation of the surrealist image, is the precise nature of the combination and interaction of the two.

It is perhaps, then, simply a matter of critique that Kristeva eschews a direct commentary and explanation of Sollers's *Nombres* in order to relate her own "linguistic theory," simultaneously with her theory of the power of a "text" to achieve such a theory, in this case this particular form of intertextuality. In fact, she does imply that the "text" alone is capable of taking such a critical view of itself, which figures here as a "reminiscence" of itself:

> L'originalité du *texte* — et son importance pour notre culture — est qu'il organise comme le seul continent capable de réunir dans un ensemble brisé la

> combinatoire infinie et le corps extrinsèque : cette combinatoire qui n'a pas besoin du corps sinon comme point (et le met entre parenthèses), ce corps qui a besoin de la combinatoire pour en assurer la représentation. Impossible sans le lieu qui le représente, l'infini textuel reprend ce lieu ("vous") pour en faire l'anamnèse; donc pour lui démontrer sa genèse biologique, logique, métaphysique, politique, qu'il se représente comme une réminiscence. (369)

That is to say, much along the same line as Pleynet's implicit critique of criticism outlined in the second chapter, this is to demonstrate that partial commentaries, such as those presented by Barthes, Derrida, or Forest operate only under the subconscious lack of achieving the same linguistic theory that underlies the text itself. Alternatively, this underlying critique is merely the extra push that she hypothesizes is necessary here in order to break through the veil of prejudice, much like the underlying assumption seen in Bourbaki of the inherent truth-value of mathematics, as a means of accessing the unseen levels of meta-grammar that may otherwise go unnoticed. Such aspects of grammar theoretically underlie not only literary criticism, but the use of language in general. Hence, it is in "L'Engendrement," that she is able to extract the most basic principles of modern grammar, of the noun and the verb:

> Cette distinction entre d'une part le *nominal* comme désignant une fonction *virtuelle*, *possible* et *impérative*, et d'autre part le *verbal* comme marquant l'acte présent dans le temps, semble avoir constitué une particularité propre au sanscrit de même qu'à l'arabe. Si aujourd'hui nous distinguons deux modes de la signifiance : engendrement infini et actualisation phénoménale, en

> attribuant le premier au *nom* et le second au *verbe* ("nom" et "verbe" en dépit de l'interpénétration de leur fonctions étant pris, ici, comme des paradigmes de leurs significations respectives les plus constantes dans les langues indo-européennes *aujourd'hui*), le sanscrit connaissait les deux modes sans leur attribuer de siège fixe dans le nom et dans le verbe : ceux-ci passaient aisément de l'un dans l'autre, sans que la distinction de deux types de signifiance soit pour autant effacée. (329-30)

Still, this potential critique is secondary to the fact that she is able to construct a metalinguistic theory, precisely out of the contradictions of linguistics she has highlighted, as well as in lieu of close readings that might be able to uncover it at work within the text, by means of her own, albeit sometimes over-complicated, set of concepts and historical analyses.

In any case, her most cutting piece of criticism comes after the fact: just as it is not because of the pre-existence of such inadequate forms of literary commentary that enable a metalinguistic semiotics such as Kristeva's to take shape, a meta-science is similarly not a sufficient means of taking a full account of any specific discourse. For her, the pitfalls of positivism are all too common, as in the case of Bourbaki, whose so-called "metamathematics" works solely as a convenient rhetorical cover, and not a productive force as they would have it, far from a true science in its own right.

CONCLUSION

The Politics of Science, Speech, and Cinema

Confronting the contradictions set out by Tel Quel itself, about the nature of its own literary production, this study constitutes the basis of a synthetic Telquelian literary theory. The means of generating such a synthesis are orchestrated by uncovering the non-contradictions within these contradictions, especially those existing within such dynamics as pointed out more explicitly by Tel Quel: by demonstrating the influence of Telquelian literature on literary theory, hidden at work within Tel Quel's theories as a mode of its own literary production. Of primary importance is the relation of this theory to political discourse. Precisely because Tel Quel theory was motivated by politics, specifically by the demonstration of the political dimension of theory, this synthesis essentially encapsulates the relevance of literary criticism to politics. Thus, Tel Quel was able to establish a scientific basis by both literary and theoretical means for the study of literary theory as a subject in its own right, extending beyond the notion that a theory is a product of its time, while simultaneously establishing the central significance of such a project in relation to Telquelian political theory, and vice versa. Of central importance is the role of the journal in such an elaboration, which enabled the Telquelians to clearly, though often ultimately unjustifiably, articulate such contradictory and counterintuitive theories through the logic contained within its own shifting modes of literary production, especially this very unlikely marriage of literary theory and politics.

In more ways than one, Sollers's *Nombres* and its multivalent intertextual universe, essentially represented in the last chapter in its tripartite dialogue with Kristeva's "Engendrement de la formule" and Bourbaki's *Théorie des ensembles*, constitutes the capstone of Tel Quel in the 1960s and symbolizes its shift to a more overtly politicized discourse. Although Barthes's shirks the essential role the novel's poetic language in this regard, making his observations into the mere surface reproduction of what the novel sets out to imply itself, Barthes commentary as to its language is most relevant in this light as expressing the shift in Tel Quel's conception of its political rhetoric. Beyond the novel's literal avoidance of any surface connections by which any discernable plot or any other determining factors amounting to a cohesive narrative could be determined, if it is difficult to say what *Nombres* is about it is because, if the novel is about anything, it is about itself as the material constitution of a Telquelian capstone. Hence Barthes's remarks concerning its politics have more in fact to do with the "rupture with the political language of his fathers" carried out by the journal in general rather than the novel specifically. That this key to the culmination of the Tel Quel's project of the 1960s comes in the form of a novel is perhaps not surprising, given its interest in producing a "theoretical literature," but this is also part of the calculated shift undergone by the journal and the reconstruction of its politicized discourse. The move is in fact significant in itself: from the disappointed expectation of a theory, made possible by the Tel Quel apparatus and its subsequent incorporation of the theoretical discourse by which such a theory could be clearly articulated, to the relatively disappointing novelistic format

favoring a more overtly political theorization of literature. Significantly, this strategic discursive formation is representative of the strategy itself, between literature and politics, as put forward in Sollers's "Thèses générales," addressed at the second *Colloque de Cluny* and published later in issue #44 of *Tel Quel* in 1971. In the end, however, this is simply the culmination of what *Tel Quel* set out to do in the first place, which was to both elaborate and carry out a political theory of literature. This shift can be summarily understood, in the terms set out in this dissertation, as the elaboration of a theory that is not only directly applicable to Telquelian literature, as opposed to the more oblique theories represented by *Théorie d'ensemble*, but also in fact as its necessary reference point. Thus, what emerged in the Tel Quel of the 1970s was a true "theoretical literature," made only possible by the preliminary stages relating theory to literature described in the previous chapters: a literature fully reliant on the articulation of a theory, and freed from its habitual bounds of making sense of its own experimental form. As such, an essential representation of the capstone to Tel Quel in the 1960s, *Nombres* can be more or less reduced to three primary elements: the representation of speech, cinema, and science.

The scientific context is the most enigmatic. While the notion still confronts objections from all sides, whether from politically motivated sectors or directly from the institutions of science itself, the consideration of science as a form of discourse was commonplace at the time, dating at least from Gaston Bachelard's theories of the "scientific spirit." This was also precisely one of Tel Quel's primary concerns, particularly Kristeva's, and in fact one of the topics that they were able to shed the

most light upon during this period, an original point of view specifically provided by Tel Quel's mode of literary production. In true form, however, it was also what they were most successful at debunking and, in turn, problematizing by means of integrating it into their more politically motivated theories, in order to reveal what it considered to be the political bases of scientific thought. In conclusion to "Thèses générales," Sollers states:

> Mais cette tâche politique, marquée par une incessant prise de partie dans l'histoire et la lutte des classes, sera remplie à son niveau spécifique si l'écriture se connaît dans sa fonction de "connexion universelle", dans sa pratique matérialiste des contradictions et de la lutte des contraires; si elle se fonde à la fois sur les sciences de la nature, du langage, sur la science de l'histoire et celle de l'inconscient; si elle sait, comme l'écrit Lénine, que "seul le socialisme affranchira la science de ses chaînes bourgeoises". (98)

Science, in this sense, represents the keystone to this shift undertaken by Tel Quel from the 1960s to the '70s, providing the basis of a theory that is no longer directly reliant on a text, and vice versa, as well as an analytical framework in which, given its inherent limitations, simply asking the question is a sufficient form of discourse. This is how Sollers introduces the role of science in "Thèses générales," existing as a central question for contemporary literature and, simultaneously, as having nothing to do with it whatsoever:

> "Jusqu'ici, écrivait Engels dans *Dialectique de la Nature*, la science de la nature, et de même la philosophie, ont absolument négligé l'influence de

> l'activité de l'homme sur sa pensée. Elles ne connaissent d'un côte que la nature, de l'autre que la pensée." Nous pensons que l'époque est venue d'une écriture des sciences de la nature et de la pensée, de ce "théâtre de l'ère scientifique" — théâtre de la connaissance dans la langue et dans l'écriture de la langue — appelé par Brecht. "L'écrivain a de plus en plus besoin de l'enseignement des sciences. Et, lentement son art même se met à développer une science, à tout le moins une technique qui, par rapport à celle des générations antérieures, se comporte à peu près comme la chimie par rapport à l'alchimie". (97)

Characteristically left at the level of implication, symptomatic of the contemporary condition of the problematic relationship of science to literature described here, this theory is also played out on the level of Sollers's own exposition, itself markedly narrative. Beginning with the implication that "the influence of man's activity" has to do with the relevance of linguistics to science, he quickly switches modes, implying the contradictory connection between the relationship of knowledge and language to literary theory, as in the Brecht quote whose writer is doomed to the scientific inquiry of theory.

So, if Kristeva was able to extract a theory of grammar from scientific models as she does in "L'Engendrement de la formule," it is not because these grammatical elements exist, *en abyme* or otherwise, at work within scientific discourse. In fact, this discursive presumption would more appropriately be understood to be the case as the motivation behind Bourbaki's claim as put forward in the general introduction to

Théorie d'ensembles relating to the so-called "problem" of figurative language. Thus, Bourbaki's rhetorical call for a competent reader assumes not only a one sufficiently versed in mathematical concepts required to decode the work's axiomatic mode of presentation, but also implies a "theory of language" constitutive of a mathematician, to use the terminology put forward by Tel Quel in "La Révolution ici et maintenant." More properly understood, this is the reason Kristeva's grammatical theory can only be fully grasped by means of the intertextual analysis as demonstrated in chapter four. Thus, the shift described there, represented in the intertextual network established by *Nombres*, is in fact constitutive of the shift to the explicitness of its politically motivated literary theory developed in the early 1970s:

> Une nouvelle pratique de l'écriture, dissolvant les effets de "littérature" et critiquant leurs formations transitoires, peut en revanche consolider cette nouvelle pratique de la philosophie qu'*est* le marxisme, lui donner, sans subordination (comme c'était le cas dans le couple philosophie/littérature qui, toujours sous la domination de l'idéalisme, s'opposait lui-même aux sciences et à la politique), non pas sa *dérivation* mais son *redoublement producteur*. (98)

Hence, according to Sollers, Bourbaki's misappropriation of linguistics, representative of a "dominant idealism," only serves to misrepresent this type of dynamic politicization, as a science underwritten by politics.

Itself considered mostly as the practical equivalent of the linguistic elements at work in Tel Quel's literary production, the theme of the representation of speech

has appeared as a significant subtext in all of the previous chapters. In Sollers's *Nombres*, speech too is brought more overtly to its political dimensions, being worked through from the stylistic level towards various representations of political rhetoric. The move itself was carried out on two distinct levels in the novel. First on a surface level, speech is employed as a poetic device, as demonstrated in the previous chapter in the context of the "surrealist image," and as such forms the basis of a type of "distanciation effect" providing for the deconstruction of political rhetoric, which is inserted by means of a cut-up method within the text.

The second method extends towards the text on a paragrammatic level, employing the representation of speech as a metaphor in and of itself as a means of contextualizing a complementary political allegory, the allegory of political rhetoric, which in turn makes up an essential element of the book's narrative. Thus, for example, in the quote below following a common paragrammatic technique in the novel, "aiguille" is paragrammatically linked to a previously mentioned "aiguillon," as such forming a narrative device, serving as a verbal inscription and effectively contextualizing the passage's political allegory:

> Interrogeant, retrouvant sur le plan du temps les termes vivants comme autant de germes, il y avait donc une enveloppe battante et j'étais à sa limite un mort parmi d'autres morts désignant leur mort à tous les corps détachés sur la surface vivante où s'inscrit la mort… Cette indication pouvait se présenter simplement : « pour le futur, détour par l'imparfait » — mais il s'agissait surtout d'une aiguille, d'un rayon mat traversant directement chaque organe,

> là où il est nécessairement collé sa propre explosion, elle-même en prise directe sur le dehors… Pour chaque figure, il y avait un « cri » poussé dans la chute raide des traces et des plis, comme si leur effondrement correspondait à un meurtre précis, comme si j'allais enfin avoir sous les yeux la totalité du circuit… Comme si les signaux qui continuaient à vivre au cœur des objets et des villes donnaient de temps en temps la formule de ce que je suis, de la main qui répond ici de ce que je dis — (62)

This *non*-narrative device is essential not because it constitutes the basis of a narrative mode of theorization of narrative itself, which is in fact one of the implied political theories of the shift in literary narrative as put forward in "Thèses générales." Rather, in keeping with the novel's abstract form, it provides the intertextual basis for such a mode of political theorization, not to mention the particular mode of intertextuality, the "text" as described in the previous chapter. Hence, in this quote, the political allegory is brought to the level of the novel's own meta-narrative, represented by the "totalité du circuit," significantly cordoned off by an ellipsis.

In this respect, the novel's preempted critique of its own commentary extends towards the idealistic underpinnings of the more generalizing tendencies of the primarily politically motivated commentaries that make up the core of Tel Quel criticism today. Hence, the "dumb machines" are not only the critics themselves, but their methodologies as well. As such, their attempts to read Tel Quel's early political statements as allegories, they suggest that their political theories had poetic motivations. One such example, quoted in Niilo Kauppi's *The Making of an Avant-*

Garde, is Sollers's facile formula, "transformer l'écriture en même temps que la société et le monde" (190), suggesting both a naïve Telquelian political romanticism, along with a parodic tendency to anticipate such a judgment by means of a syntactical rearrangement, here in a more passive form rather than its active equivalent of "change the world *by* writing." While in essence this is simply an astute appropriation of Telquelian discourse, it runs the risk of reducing Tel Quel itself to a "dumb machine." Such appropriations are symptomatic of the various misinterpretations of Tel Quel, flattening not only these political statements, but also the subtleties of its political theories whose "poetics" are rather motivated by political discourse with the expressed interest of locating such discursive dynamics, as stated in the "Thèses":

> La recherche que nous poursuivons n'est ni un "formalisme" ni un "sociologisme". Ni analyse mécaniste de l'expressivité directe des déterminations sociales ou économiques, ni déchiffrement limité du matériau linguistique. Intérieurs aux modes de production matériels, et eux-mêmes produit à travers leur transformation qu'ils transforment par rétroaction dialectique, l'écriture, le texte ne sont ni simplement idéologiques ni simplement formels. Ils ne sont pas réductibles à telle "émanation" subjective ("psychologie de la création" etc.). Leur fonction est de faire apparaître la matérialité des enjeux symboliques d'une phase historique donnée et, notamment, la scène des conflits philosophiques et politiques, selon un mode spécifique, relativement autonome, indirect. (96)

The dynamic problematic of political discourse described above is in fact an essential part of this central question of the relation of speech to politics, which in many ways is also deliberately reliant on these early forms of Telquelian political rhetoric.

It could be said that this is one reason *Nombres* presents itself as "an endless recording of voices," but it is more the case that Tel Quel consciously conceived this interpretation of political discourse as simply the same as the role they ascribe to the political dimension of speech in literature:

> Ce n'est que pour nous, cependant, que la nuit tourne et se fait au-dessus des villes — là où les machines muettes savent désormais lire, déchiffrer, compter, écrire et se souvenir — et l'on voit une conversation s'interrompre, les gestes rester sur place, ici, parmi les étoffes, les objets assemblés, « quelque chose n'a pas été dit ». Ils parlent, maintenant, mais quelque chose subsiste de leur silence, ils sont représentés ici par une buée, un reflet, « mais non, c'est exactement le contraire », « je pense en effet qu'on peut affirmer cela » : j'écris véritablement ce qui passe, et bien sûr il est impossible d'être là en totalité, cela se fait de biais, sans arrêt — mais enfin nous sommes ensemble, aucune raison d'attendre ou de s'arrêter —
>
> il est difficile d'accepter cet intervalle, ce blanc intact ; il est cependant très difficile de confirmer sans cet oubli qui revient et force la main — quand le texte s'interrompt, se replie, laisse revenir les voix comme un enregistrement sans fin — (16)

More than an allegory, this text can be read quite literally, describing both Tel Quel's envisaged shift into the 1970s, as well as their future commentary, anticipating such a shift being simply the same as anticipating the political idealism of its commentators's methodologies by incorporating their voices into Sollers's own, acting as the author in his role as an objective observer of the "totality." Thus, by the same logic, it is simply Sollers's recording of his own self-conscious writing of this literal statement: "j'écris véritablement."

What is in fact most remarkable is that this was carried out most consciously in a novelistic form, and one that overtly highlights its narrative functions as part of its own narrative. *Nombres*'s use of images of the representation of speech is concurrently twofold, corresponding to its dual function as a form of representation mentioned above. The first, corresponding to Tel Quel's early political statements and demonstrated by Kristeva's reading of Mallarmé with which she opens her interpretation of *Nombres* in "L'Engendrement de la formule," is simply to provide an alternative to the "bourgeois conception of literature" as expressed by Sollers in his "Thèses": "Le divorce entre la conception bourgeoise de la littérature et une pratique du langage en rupture avec le code rhétorique (exemple : Lautréamont, Mallarmé)" (96). The second function stands as an image of the shift in Tel Quel being undertaken by the novel and serves as the material basis for the construction of a narrative of "signifying practices," as theorized by Sollers as a transitional form of socialist literature:

> Nous définissons l'effet idéologique appelé "littérature" comme dérivation philosophique investie dans et par la représentation verbale, soumise à cette représentation; comme mise en scène de la philosophie pour la captation et la liaison des sujets sociaux; comme "laboration" philosophique en état de transformation à l'intérieur du matérialisme historique. Dans le mode de production féodal, on peut dire que la "littérature" assure une fonction de cohérence mythique fondée sur le symbole et, dans le mode de production capitaliste, une fonction d'appropriation narrative réglée par le signe. Nous avons à penser maintenant la crise et la transition vers un autre mode de production (socialiste). Cette crise et cette transition sont saisissables, sous la pression de la découverte freudienne, dans trois types d'interventions conceptuelles : la problématique du *signifiant* chez Lacan … ; celle de l'*écriture* chez Derrida … ; enfin la fondation sur fond de transformation de l'apport formaliste et linguistique, d'une théorie dialectique des *pratiques signifiantes* comme *sémanalyse* (Kristeva). (97)

To specify exactly how *Nombres* creates the intertextual basis for this type of political theorization, here it provides an interpretation of the above quote as a mode of transitional discourse. Beyond being a meta-narrative in its own right, and in the same gesture characteristically nullifying the ideological generic distinction between literature and its theory, the novel too spans the shift hypothesized by Tel Quel in the above passage, most notably by means of the ambiguity of the phrase "verbal representation," potentially meaning verbal speech specifically, but here only

referring to language in general. This ambiguous slip likewise lends the statement its own meta-history, standing in as the "feudal" symbolic mode of representation in Sollers's own discourse. As such, this theory of political literature can be more easily interpreted as a "theoretical literature," in some sense alone capable of carrying out a theory of narrative as a transitional form concurrent with a narrative of its own signifying practices, represented by linguistics of the kind encountered in the previous chapters:

> La "littérature" fonctionnerait donc comme le refoulé d'un refoulé, comme une dénégation au second degré qui, doublement subvertie par une théorie de l'inconscient et de l'écriture articulée à la politique donnerait lieu à un enjeu stratégique clé : précisément celui qui met en cause le procès où le langage se produit et se transforme matériellement dans l'histoire. (97)

Speech for Tel Quel, therefore, is merely a convenient image covering both these narratives modes as well as the political confusions encountered when confronting them, and thus likewise represents a "rupture with the rhetorical code." In other words, the image of speech is the means by which the bourgeois conception of "literature" can be motivated to "question the process by which language is materially produced and transformed in history." In the above quotation this is also appropriately imaged in the article's self-reflexive, ambiguous mode as "l'écriture articulé."

Cinema, besides providing the clearest analog of an aesthetic representation of speech, is an essential insight into Tel Quel's transitioning from the 1960s to the '70s

for three reasons: first, owing to Baudry's theory of the cinema as the representation of the "speaking subject;" second, as an apparatus producing "ideological effects," thus described by Baudry along the same lines as Tel Quel's mode of literary production; and third, as an image of the means by which a politicized aesthetic theory is often made the object of an ideologically motivated reduction. This third point is put forward in *Tel Quel* in the article directly following Sollers's "Thèses," a significantly telling gesture, in which he describes the means by which, due to its marginal status as an emergent discourse, a politically motivated theory of art is usually attacked, primarily by means of a "parasitic" reconceptualization to its own political ends:

> à exploiter les retard et les difficultés de la théorie marxiste-léniniste dans le champ des pratiques signifiantes, et plus généralement dans le champ idéologique, par le recours à l'opportunisme politique (quelqu'en soit la contenu) pour justifier toutes activités de brouillage dans ce champ. (99)

The article, "Cinéma, Littérature, Politique," represents an important shift in the journal, being not only co-signed by members of other reviews (*les Cahiers du cinéma* and *Cinéthique*), but also a more overt attack on the journalistic practice of its contemporaries.

Like Sollers's theory of political literature, Baudry's theory of the cinema is its own kind of transitional theory that is similarly made more relevant by its hypothetical quality. The article, "Effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de base," published in 1970 in *Cinéthique*, is similarly written in typical Tel Quel

fashion in which this transitional quality is played out concurrently on a discursive level. Specifically, his twofold theory of cinema as a representation of a "speaking subject" and as an apparatus producing "ideological effects" appears to reach the limits of its ability to adequately describe these two essential aspects of the film genre. In particular, the cinema as apparatus is represented as a perfect coherence of otherwise unrelated elements: "L'idéologie de la représentation comme axe principale orientant la conception de la « création » esthétique et la spécularisation qui organise la mise en scène indispensable à la constitution de la fonction transcendantale y forment un système singulièrement cohérent" (26). Moreover, it is precisely this discursive condition, that it can only be explained or described by means of a narrative, that seems to make up for Baudry the very definition of what most makes the cinema the representation of the "speaking subject." In the following passage, taken from the introduction to *L'effet cinéma* in which his article, "Effets idéologiques," was published in book format, he attempts to introduce this theory by a discursive analogy, between philosophy and literature:

> Tous ces éléments ne sont pas présentés comme dans le texte du philosophe d'une manière discursive et articulée, cohérente ; ils sont simplement rassemblés et rapprochés de telle sorte que le lecteur y puise avec des associations personnelles les raisons de sa propre nostalgie.
>
> Le cinéma est bien, une fois que les conditions techniques furent réunies, l'invention d'une machine destinée à simuler l'accomplissement d'un désir constitutif de l'être parlant. (12)

Here, after citing the opening to Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*, his juxtaposition to Plato's relatively clear mode of exposition in his allegory of the cave is in fact the closest Baudry ever gets to providing his reader with a clear theory of why exactly the cinema represents a "speaking subject."

At least, while the majority of "Effets idéologiques" is dedicated to elaborating a theory of the cinema's signifying practices, and more or less to a theory of the genre's constitution of a "speaking subject" by means of such practices, the essay never quite makes these associations in a fully satisfying theoretical manner. In fact, the article only manages to be clear about the fact that this theory is simply a kind of allegory, merely the preliminary efforts towards a more developed cinematic theory. First, he puts forward Plato's allegory of the cave as one possible image of the cinema, while identifying it as a source of his theory of the "speaking subject," but only to reject it. He then does the exact same with Lacan's "mirror stage," even though this theory does seem to provide much of the symbolic framework needed to make sense of Baudry's concept, such as in the quote he provides in a footnote: "Qu'il se soutient en tant que « sujet » veut dire que le langage lui permet de se considérer comme le machiniste voire le metteur en scène de toute la capture imaginaire dont il ne serait autrement que la marionnette vivante" (25). Still, the metaphors provided here only seem to fall back on themselves as the images conjured up by psychology in order to relate the intricacies of the psyche, such as with Freud's optical metaphor for the dream with which Baudry opens his essay.

If “Effets idéologiques” could be said to provide a theory of the cinema as the representation of the “speaking subject” at all, it is only in typical Tel Quel fashion: understandable both as a theory of its own discourse and relating to the Tel Quel apparatus as a whole. In this case, it is directly related to Sollers’s above political theory of a transitional socialist literature. Here too, it is posed as a problem of narrative, especially, owing to the ideological limits of the cinematic apparatus, of a narrative that can only be conceived of, precisely, as a narrative:

> Ainsi, le rapport entre continuité nécessaire à la constitution du sens et le « sujet » constitutif de ce sens se trouve-t-il articulé : la continuité est un attribut du sujet. … La recherche d’une telle continuité narrative, si difficile à obtenir de la base matérielle, ne peut s’expliquer que par un enjeu idéologique essentiel projeté en ce point : il s’agit de sauvegarder à tout prix l’unité synthétique du lieu originaire du sens, la fonction transcendantale constitutive à laquelle renvoie comme sa secrétion naturelle la continuité narrative. (20-2)

Two narratives must also be distinguished here, one being problematic and one not. The latter, significantly, is represented by the material reality of the apparatus: the continuity set up between the dual continuity, particular to film, of both montage along with the continuity between each frame. As such, it is representative not only of Tel Quel as an apparatus, but also of the emerging power of its politicized theory, able to shed new light on the theory of the cinema, itself still under development, but already under significant threat.

While in this sense too, it may seem that such a critique is nothing more than self-criticism of Baudry's own inability to sufficiently articulate his own theory. The goal of this dissertation, however, is essentially to demonstrate the central significance of the types of discursive shifts, often just as unjustified and gratuitous, to Telquelian discourse in general, as well as demonstrate the relevance of such discursive modes to the Tel Quel mode of literary production under its shifting valences. In short, speech too occupies the same nodal position in their writings as a kind of modular supplement, but more important in this regard is what this form of discursive exposition has to do with the articulation of Tel Quel's politics, both in its changing forms and throughout the years.

Tel Quel's so-called "science" of literary theory, while admittedly delving into the more scientific realms of linguistics and semiology, should similarly be understood in relation to literary production considered here as a form of appropriation of such discourses. Especially in the late 1960s, being theorized concurrently with the mode of textual production, science in this sense was primarily considered by the Telquelians as a form of discourse in and of itself; that is, as its own discursive mode. This is the reason they set out to produce forms of discourse that mark themselves in their own "shifting" modes, which most often resulted in the self-reflexive mode of a deconstruction. One such example is Pleynet's *Lautréamont par lui-même* and its tirade against "normative criticism." The clearest example, however, is Kristeva's in "L'Engendrement de la formule," whose "science," while still essentially applicable to scientific discourse as a mode of critique, is mostly

played out as an image of its own “science” of literary theory as a form of discourse, considered specifically in this light of a shifting mode of literary production.

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