SHORT ABSTRACT

'Problems of Perception and Representation in the Novels of Claude Simon', thesis submitted in Michaelmas term 1981 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Jean Henderson Duffy, St. Anne's College, Oxford.

My main argument is that Simon's association with the Nouveau Roman springs not simply from a reaction against tradition, but more importantly from a positive, personal interest in the relationship between perception and representation. Simon's theory of defamiliarization and his interest in the cultural code and its influence on perception provide a possible solution to the apparent inconsistency between his notations of sensory impression and his subversion of traditional 'realistic' definitions of representation. Indeed, Simon's development can be viewed partly in terms of a shift in interest from the defamiliarization of our perception of the world to a defamiliarization of hitherto 'invisible' literary techniques and of the relationship between language and reality.

The introduction of the thesis correlates Simon's various scattered literary statements and tries to establish the coherence of his theoretical principles. Chapter one charts the shift in Simon's fiction from behavioural and moral questions to questions relating to the psychology and philosophy of perception, including the relationship between perception and the code. Chapter two illustrates Simon's rejection of the primacy of the Realist code and his exploitation, in the generation of a text, of the multiple associations

of the gamut of linguistic and cultural codes into which the writer is born. The final chapter tries to effect a synthesis and considers both the perceptual and representational aspects of time and history.

While the thesis situates Simon in the context of recent psychological and linguistic theory, it does not posit conclusive links with any one school. Contemporary theory simply offers a set of co-ordinates by which to gauge Simon's evolution and openness to prevalent ideas. In the end, however, my principal concern remains the specificity and intrinsic coherence of his development.

FULLER ABSTRACT

'Problems of Perception and Representation in the Novels of Claude Simon', thesis submitted in Michaelmas term 1981 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Jean Henderson Duffy, St. Anne's College, Oxford.

The topic of my thesis is 'Problems of perception and representation in the novels of Claude Simon'. This approach seemed particularly relevant in the light of Merleau-Ponty's explicit interest in Simon's work, Simon's own reflections on the relationship between literature and the visual arts, and prominent features of his work such as perspectival experimentation and an evident interest in the nature and perceptual influence of cultural codes.

Although he is less well-known perhaps than the most notorious nouveaux romanciers, there is nevertheless a considerable body of highly respectable criticism on Simon's work, a fuller account of which is given in my introduction. However, the rather general nature of most of the books on Simon has precluded a thorough exploration of the theoretical links between the problems of perception and representation, or of the effect which this particular interest has on the novel form. As far as other theses and articles are concerned, there has been a tendency either to try to 'retrieve' Simon's work by isolating its 'realistic' elements or, on the contrary, to emphasize his innovatory intention and to exaggerate somewhat his similarities with other exponents of the Nouveau Roman. In my opinion, a thorough consideration of Simon's conception of the relationship between the perceptual and

representational processes is the approach most likely to accommodate both the 'realistic' and 'anti-Realist' aspects of his work. I should like to argue that there is a theoretical coherence to Simon's work which challenges the rather facile Realism versus Nouveau Roman polarity.

While my thesis intends to situate Simon in the context of recent psychological and linguistic enquiries into these problems, it does not posit conclusive links with any one school of thought. Rather, I see Simon's exploration of these problems in and through the novel as prevailing over and perhaps precluding the elaboration of a definitive solution. What contemporary theory has offered is a set of co-ordinates by which to gauge Simon's evolution and his openness, conscious or otherwise, to current thought.

Consistent with my more openly intertextual approach and with Simon's emphasis on the negative, anti-traditional nature of the common ground shared by the various nouveaux romanciers, the Nouveau Roman as such is not to be especially privileged as a point of reference. The fact that the first part of each chapter is concerned with the extent to which Simon's work represents a continuation of or a reaction against tradition ensures that due consideration is given both to the general negative agreement on which the Nouveau Roman is founded and to Simon's own idiosyncratic definition of tradition/s. The subsequent sections in each chapter attempt to define the characteristics and preoccupations which make Simon's work more positively individual.

In an attempt to respect the subtlety of Simon's evolution and to avoid excessive recapitulation, I have given not a chronological, text-based structure to my

inquiry, but rather a synchronic structure organizing it round certain key problems. The individual sections or chapters do, however, seek to sketch out both the major stages of evolution and minor shifts in emphasis.

Thus in the first chapter, I have followed the shift in interest in Simon's work from behavioural and moral problems to more fundamental questions related to the psychology and philosophy of perception. The principal section of this chapter tries to give a phenomenological perspective on Simon's work. Here, the examination of the points of convergence between passages from Simon's work and Merleau-Ponty's Phénoménologie de la perception, while telling us nothing conclusive about specific influence, provides a means of assessing the coherence of Simon's perspectival and sensory notations. The consideration, in the final part of this section, of the very important area of perception and the cultural code, central to the definition of the work of art as a means of defamiliarization, provides the crucial, if problematical, link in Simon's theory between perception and representation and the explanation for the shift from sensory to linguistic issues, from issues pertaining to the relationship between man and the world to questions intrinsic to language such as the debate between expression and self-referentiality.

These latter questions are taken up in the second chapter, which looks at Simon's relationship to both traditional 'Realist' and 'anti-realistic' concepts of meaning-production and the role of the novel. In particular, I consider his relativization ad absurdum of the concept of representation and his exploration of that tentative but

apparently endless activity by which the writer generates new texts by a process of recombination and the establishment of linguistic correspondances. Here the principal external points of reference are Structuralist and post-Structuralist theorists such as Barthes and Lacan, who have given more detailed consideration than Merleau-Ponty to the questions of code and linguistic association.

The third chapter tries to effect a synthesis in the examination of both the perceptual and representational aspects of time in Simon - the tension between the synthetic nature of academic historiography and the myriad impressions experienced by an individual consciousness in a particular empirical situation, the relativization of conventions of temporal measurement, and the relationship between fictional and textual time. In brief, it charts Simon's evolution from a moral to an epistemological to a textual conception of time. In order to assess both the strengths and limitations of the novelist's subversion of a number of traditional historiographical tool-concepts, I have attempted to set it in relation to both the heterogeneous 'scissors and paste' approach to history and more recent relativistic apologies such as that proposed by Raymond Aron. In my consideration of Simon's own more positive reflections on the relationship between time and representation, his promotion of a synchronic, as opposed to diachronic, reading of his texts and his interest in the codal, as opposed to the historiographical, status of the document have, I think, been related with profit to current Structuralist thought.

Despite the apparent eclecticism of my approach, I should, however, like to stress the importance I attach

to the internal coherence and specificity of Simon's work. My introduction establishes from the outset the principal stages to be detected in the evolution of Simon's scattered theoretical statements, and my comparative analysis of the relations which bind him both to tradition and contemporary theory has been accompanied throughout by corroborative evidence drawn from Simon's own explicit commentaries. The correlation of these theoretical statements will, I hope, invalidate Simon's reputation as a 'powerful' but theoretically suspect 'enfant terrible'. His association with the Nouveau Roman is neither arbitrary nor derivative; it is determined by specific preoccupations which transcend the 'school''s negative foundation.

Problems of Perception and Representation in the Novels of Claude Simon

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Michaelmas Term 1981 [i.e. 1982] ††

by

JEAN HENDERSON DUFFY

Saint Anne's College, Oxford.



Foreword

The completion of the final draft of this thesis before the publication of Les Géorgiques (September 1981) has made it impossible for me to take this work and the most recent criticism on Simon into account.

Acknowledgements

I wish particularly to thank Mrs. Rhiannon Goldthorpe who supervised this thesis and offered a rare combination of methodological latitude and active guidance. Her patient scrutiny of the thesis drafts and her invaluable advice are greatly appreciated. I should like to thank Claude Simon himself for the hospitality and information which he readily supplied on the occasion of my interview with him. Grateful acknowledgement is also made to the following: Dr. Stanley Jones who first cultivated my interest in Claude Simon, Dr. Angus Kennedy for encouragement at important stages of my undergraduate course, Dr. Stuart Sykes who very kindly provided me with a copy of Le Tricheur and thus spared me considerable practical difficulties, the Principal and Fellows of Saint Anne's College, Oxford whose offer of a Kathleen Bourne Research Fellowship facilitated the completion of this thesis, and the staff of the Taylor Institution Library and the library of the Maison Française in Oxford. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my parents for their unfailing support in all things and to David Small who provided considerable moral support and helped keep things in perspective on many occasions.

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Introduction

CLAUDE SIMON'S CRITICAL RECEPTION

It is an ironic truism that the existence of a literary avant-garde depends almost equally on the _succès de scandale_ springing from critical mistreatment and on an elitist partisanship which overcompensates for gratuitous hostility by stressing the ingenuity of the writer concerned. While Claude Simon[1] himself would never claim to belong to any form of literary movement, his work has been widely categorized as an example of the _Nouveau Roman_ and, as such, its discussion has included its fair share of hyperbole both critical and favourable. Simon's explicit commentaries on his intentions and achievements have presented a refreshingly modest contrast, while his steady literary output has gradually given rise to a body of earnest academic reflection which shuns the excesses of polemic, while making more reasoned claims about the value of his work.

For various reasons, relating to the specific aims of the critics or to the date of publication of their work, Simonian criticism has been marked by one or both of two tendencies. In several cases, Simon's evolution[2] has been left out of count. The comparative nature of John Fletcher's work, _Claude Simon and Fiction Now_ (1975), results in a series of one-to-one comparisons between individual works by Simon and representative works by several other writers. Fletcher establishes a set of analogical and contrasting relationships across the spectrum of contemporary fiction; he is not concerned with developmental relationships intrinsic to Simon's fiction considered as a body.

John Sturrock's general introduction to the _Nouveau Roman_, _The French New Novel_ (1969) broke much new ground and remains stimulating. The appearance of the book before the radical shift in emphasis which takes place between _Histoire_ (1967)

and La Bataille de Pharsale (1969) means, however, that he could not readily assess the evolutionary impetus of Simon's work.

Roubichou's monograph Lecture de 'L'Herbe'(1976) stands at the opposite end of the critical scale. Breadth of approach is replaced by detailed analysis on the level of sentence and phrase. Roubichou is a master in the detection of macro- and micro-structure within Simon's labyrinthine sentences, but it remains doubtful whether this method would yield as much in an application to the more ascetic language of Triptyque (1973) and Leçon de choses (1975). Furthermore, the concentration on a single work entails its removal from its context in Simon's evolution and a slight tendency to exaggerate the specific work's innovatory aspect, since the commentator's knowledge of subsequent developments inevitably makes itself felt in implicit anticipations.

Jean Ricardou is probably the most intellectually original of Simon's critics, but he has a very specific theoretical axe to grind. Simon's work happens to be one of his favourite springboards for the development of his idiosyncratic Structuralist theory and he uses the former's fiction, much as Gérard Genette uses A la recherche du temps perdu in Figures III, as both a pretext and a source of examples by which to illustrate his critical taxonomy.[3] Ricardou's work evolves but he tends to factorize Simon's work into numerous discrete instances of novelistic features which he, Ricardou, wishes to examine.

The other tendency of most criticism on Simon is to stress either his interest in perceptual problems or his view of representation. Understandably, in view of the publicity given to linguistic play in the Nouveau Roman, representational issues have preoccupied most critics. S. Jiménez-Fajardo's study, Claude Simon (1975), stands half-way between conventional

thematic and Ricardou-inspired linguistic study. His first chapters concentrate on the fictional content of the novels, while in the later chapters he carries this step-by-step procedure over to his analysis of Simon's combinatory method, noting with remarkable patience almost every pun or associative change in direction. Individual chapters try to synthesize this detailed study in the application of a personally devised grid which would seek to label the overriding structural characteristics of each novel. Unfortunately, discrete and ill-defined notions such as 'penetration' (chapter 6), 'crossing-over' (chapter 7), and 'triangulation' (chapter 8), do not resolve themselves into a coherent theory.

The relative lack of attention Stuart Sykes pays to perceptual questions in Simon is consistent with the aims of his book, Les Romans de Claude Simon (1979) - it is a topical consideration of structure and creative process in the context of the spatial metaphor employed by Simon. Like Jiménez-Fajardo, Sykes establishes the 'notion centrale et centralisante' (p.63) of each novel. However, here these central issues and their ramifications are defined with considerably greater precision, and their discussion is coherently related to the synthesizing overview of structural pattern. The evolution of Simon's fiction is charted by reference to the degree of integration achieved in each work between overall structure and the various suggestions thrown up by certain words.

J.A.E. Loubère's The Novels of Claude Simon (1976) is probably the other most important single work on Simon. Like Sykes, she profitably takes her cue from the novelist's own statements, in particular those concerning the ordering capacity of language. Perception figures occasionally as the disorder out of which language creates order through the

fabrication of new metaphorical links. Generally, however, she concentrates on the encroachment of linguistic concerns on traditional thematic preoccupations.

Of those who look at the question of perception in Simon's work, Fletcher is primarily concerned to pinpoint the psychological constants in the man, Simon, which motivate temporally distant books. Sturrock responds to Merleau-Ponty's remarks on Simon[4] and initiates the phenomenological criticism of Simon's work. Ultimately however, Sturrock is less interested in the phenomenologically reductive potential of the novel than in the element of thematic continuity between Simon's 'world view' and the more specifically Existentialist themes of authenticity and absurdity.

Heath's chapter in The Nouveau Roman (1972) is perhaps the only one to give sufficient emphasis to both the phenomenological aspect and the element of linguistic play in Simon's work. However, as a result of restricted space and his desire to set one of Simon's books in the context of an eclectic theoretical framework, he cannot fully treat the issue of the dynamic, evolving relationship between Simon's perceptual and representational interests, and the variations in their relative prominence in different works.

This summary survey of critical work on Simon has established the priorities of this thesis. My method has several quite specific aims - to give due respect to Simon's own theoretical statements without falling into the trap of attempting to psychoanalyse the author as a person;[5] to avoid diffuseness by concentrating on a specific central topic - the relationship between perception and representation - in the context of which Simon's development can be measured, and by a restricted appeal

to external theoretical concepts. Finally, it hopes to reply to the challenge implicit in Stephen Coon's review when he suggests that the theoretical problem relating to Loubère's subscription to both the notions of 'truth' and 'play''might well have been resolved by arguing that the incremental changes from novel to novel have finally effected a reversal of the sign under which Simon's work may be placed: a shift from an existential/phenomenological subject-centered fiction to a structural-analogic arrangement in which the subject as centre of consciousness has been effaced.'[6]

Having considered the body of criticism written on Simon, I shall devote the second section of this chapter to Simon's own critical commentaries on literary tradition and to his theoretical statements about his own general aims.

SIMON AS CRITIC AND THEORIST

Both the narratorial digressions which are fairly frequent in Simon's work up until La Bataille de Pharsale and his explicit statements of aesthetic standpoint reiterate two closely related concepts. One is the question of the extent to which our notion of 'realism' and indeed of 'reality' is determined by earlier and now culturally assimilated representations of reality. The second is a concern with the novel's capacity to renew our perception of the world through the subversion of sclerosed preconceptions about it.

The Representational Basis of 'Realism'

As far as the first of these issues is concerned, Simon argues that that impressive but amorphous body of fiction which is generally filed under the heading 'Realism' and which forms a notable part of novelistic tradition provides an implicit grid through which we view the world and a gauge by which to measure

the verisimilitude of other representations. Simon underscores the aprioristic and selective nature of the criteria by which we assess the 'realism' of a work:

> Nous voyons le monde tel qu'il a été dit par les peintres, par les écrivains.[7]
>
> Je ne crois pourtant pas que l'on puisse ignorer l'importance que joue dans notre appréhension du monde, l'ensemble des textes (littéraires, picturaux, philosophiques, mathématiques) qui l'ont déjà dit. Chklovski a remarqué que 'l'objet se trouve devant nous, nous le savons, mais nous ne le voyons plus',et par ailleurs Jakobson a fort bien montré, par exemple, comment le roman dit réaliste du XIXe constitue le lieu de référence d'après lequel par la suite on a jugé du plus ou moins grand degré de 'réalisme' d'une oeuvre. (Colloque, pp.422-3)

In La Bataille de Pharsale, we find an example of this very type of norm-establishing representation. Here, Simon draws our attention to the way in which a standard, formulaic shorthand, demanding only effortless recognition on the part of the reader, underlies all realistic fiction and serves as an easily assimilable framework for the apparently most heterogeneous situations. The unpalatable, amorphous 'reality' of war can be naturalized by a qualified comparison with a comédie bourgeoise:

> Espace clos... décor fermé. Boîte dont l'un des côtés a simplement été enlevé. Comme pour les comédies bourgeoises le mari la femme et l'amant... le type en caleçon remplacé par un soldat à pantalon genre caleçon aussi mais dont le bas est serré non par les classiques fixe-chaussettes mais par des guêtres... et le groupe des autres soldats, côté jardin, blessés ou tiraillant encore dans des poses réalistes c'est-à-dire *comme les gens imaginent la réalite ou peut-être à force de l'imaginer finissent par la voir.* (pp.166-7)[8]

The attractiveness of this ordered representational grid is such that it frequently competes with direct experiential response to the point of irresoluble ambiguity. On those occasions when undigested, unordered 'world' makes itself felt, it is experienced as a surreal contrast with the norm and can only be accommodated in a comparison with a malfunctioning form of representation:

> ses propres paroles et elle-même semblaient (comme dans un film dont la partie sonore serait mal synchronisée avec le déroulement des images...)... participer de cette même irréalité, sans doute parce que le propre de la réalité est de nous paraître irréelle, incohérente, du fait qu'elle se présente comme un perpétuel défi à la logique, au bon sens, du moins tels que nous avons pris l'habitude de les

> voir régner dans les livres - à cause de la façon dont sont ordonnés les mots, symboles graphiques ou sonores de choses, de sentiments, de passions désordonnées - si bien que naturellement il nous arrive parfois de nous demander laquelle de ces deux réalités est la vraie. (H, pp.99-100)

On other occasions, 'reality' can take on a paradoxical impression of insubstantiality when it corresponds too closely to our representations of it, i.e.when it does not let us impose a priori constructs on it:

> deux files de soldats (c'est-à-dire des vrais - pas des types faméliques et efflanqués avec leurs cheveux cosmétiqués, leurs pantalons élimés et leurs espadrilles, et bardés, ou plutôt hérissés d'armes - ou peut-être après tout des faux, c'est-à-dire qui avaient plutôt l'air, à force d'être propres et astiqués, de sortir des coulisses d'une opérette, avec leur drôle de bicorne verni, leur uniforme ajusté, leur modeste carabine, leurs pas d'automates mécaniques, exactement comme des figurants de music-hall. (P, p.118)

Man views the world through a montage of humanly engendered representational structures. It is a vicious circle in which man's perception is informed from a very early age by omnipresent instances of representation produced by previous generations, which he perpetuates by his own re-presentations. 'Reality' has no concrete quiddity; it is a relatively valid, formal viewing structure. As Stephen Heath - with the approval of Claude Simon[9] - remarks:

> 'Reality' ... needs to be understood not as an absolute and immutable given but as a production within which representation will depend on (and, dialectically contribute to)... a complex formation of montages of notions, representations, images and modes of action, gestures, attitudes, the whole ensemble functioning as practical norms which govern the concrete stance of men in relation to the objects and problems of their social and individual existence; in short, the lived relation of men to their world. In this sense, the 'realistic' is not substantial but formal (a process of significant 'fictions') and, in connection with the novel, it may be described in the notion of the *vraisemblable* of a particular society, the generally received picture of what may be regarded as 'realistic'.[10]

Eventually, if one follows its implications to their logical conclusion, the 'realism' principle ousts reality and renders the external world a virtually redundant support for its own ideology and literature. This effect is exemplified by the narrator's

friend in La Bataille de Pharsale. Irritated by the former's attempt to verify his classical reading, he remarks cynically:

> les choses ne se sont jamais passées comme on l'imagine ou si tu préfères on n'imagine jamais les choses comme elles se passent en réalité... Alors fais comme tout le monde et décide qu'elles sont ce que tu crois voir ou imagine-les et décide que c'est comme ça que ça s'est passé et alors ça sera réellement passé ici. (p.88)

Thus throughout Simon's fiction we find a quite astonishing number of references to the multifarious forms of representation which structure our perception of reality. A selective survey of these references reads like a fairly comprehensive catalogue of representational genres, ranging from the aggressively persuasive to the gratuitously decorative, from the seriously informative to the arbitrary and symbolic, from the highest art forms to the basic tokens of exchange. There are references to advertising, propaganda, newspapers, flags, coins, Latin texts and translations, geography texts, travel brochures, paintings, tapestries, photographs, the covers of pulp novels, rick-shaw price-lists, toys, armour, bus-tickets, train time-tables, amusement machines and gravestones.

One early instance of that most widespread and compelling form of representation - advertising - is to be found in Le Sacre du printemps (1954), and constitutes a telling commentary on the way in which our aspirations - one of the strongest perceptual bonds between us and the external world - tend to be formulated in terms of images instilled in us by the cultural codes into which we are born:

> Dans la vitrine du garage son propre reflet vint à sa rencontre en surimpression au-devant ou plus exactement à travers les modèles d'occasion exposés, les accessoires de toute sorte, les affiches vantant des marques de lubrifiants ou d'essences avec des filles échevelées emportées sur les tan-sad.(pp.216)

Bernard's reflection is inextricable from the window and advertisements which form the reflecting surface; he is made to see himself through the images of his past, representationally

engendered aspirations.

The extent to which these ubiquitous representations contribute to the formation of an a priori perceptual infrastructure by which experiential data are channelled, is highlighted by those occasions when a character's impression or his attempt to reconstruct it are evoked in a comparison with a representation. The compelling impression of insubstantiality which Corinne leaves on Georges in La Route des Flandres (1960) takes the form of a cardboard playing card (p.235). Understandably, the impact of representational codes makes itself particularly felt in the domain of the imagination. The narrator's attempts to reconstruct past 'reality' almost inevitably culminate in a comparison with a form of representation, as in the description of Marie's arrival in L'Herbe (1958) in terms of an Impressionist painting (p.30) or Georges'repopulation of the countryside in La Route des Flandres (p.78) which is inspired by a typical Vanitas painting of Death skulking behind young lovers.

Even in those moments when we would expect physical sensation to be at its most direct, the perceptions of Simon's narrators are filtered through representational models. Surprise, normally associated with the direct impingement of the world on a human sensibility, is expressed in terms of an imaginary penetration into an old photograph (CC, p.86). The narrator of Histoire projects the painterly grid of classical perspective on to what he sees even on opening his eyes in the morning (pp.40-1). Finally, it is with pointed irony that the intermittent nature of perception itself is described in a comparison with an old patched-up film or collage (Hist,p.41).

The correlation of such remarks and examples sheds some light on the emphatic use made by Simon of framing devices and on the emboîtement of motifs in his late texts where one narrative thread becomes a fiction or painting within another. Thus in

Triptyque the description of the boy looking at the countryside through a film clip (p.28) is a mise en abyme indicating the way in which we perceive even our immediate external surroundings in terms of a representation. The same point is made in Histoire where a whole scene is viewed through an artist's easel, every item described according to its position relative to the artist's tool (p.279).

The sheer number of these references and, in particular, this last reference to the type of art which he values most highly - painting - suggests that Simon's interest in representational grids is not simply subversive. As we shall see in chapter 1, Simon is aware that it is a necessary condition of the civilised human being's perception that it be informed by the representation-saturated context in which it takes place. The myriad representational forms which surround us are crucial factors in our competent articulation of the mass of data which presents itself to our senses.

Furthermore, Simon freely acknowledges his own debt to past masters such as Cézanne, Faulkner, Conrad, and Proust. As his great admirer Maurice Merleau-Ponty recognized, the cultured man cannot exist in a vacuum; he constantly perceives reality against the backcloth of his previously acquired cultural baggage. The 'having-seen' of the work of a particular artist is irrevocable, and whatever his explicit attitude to his cultural heritage it is one of implicit acknowledgement:

> La peinture de Van Gogh est installée en moi pour toujours, un pas est fait sur lequel je ne peux pas revenir, et, même si je ne garde aucun souvenir précis des tableaux que j'ai vus, toute mon expérience désormais sera celle de quelqu'un qui a connu la peinture de Van Gogh.[11]

What Simon does subvert is the static and predicative criteria of verisimilitude which have been derived from one particular tradition - 19th-century French Realism. This retention of fossilized forms and principles is in sharp contrast

with the process of interaction that is dynamic tradition, a process wherein the new is produced through a reaction against, and therefore an implicit reliance on, past culture:

> Selon qu'il est employé au pluriel ou au singulier, le mot tradition recouvre des réalités très différentes, sinon, même, opposées, et cette ambivalence est la source de bien des confusions.
>
> Les traditions sont principalement des répétitions de formes mortes...
>
> La tradition est, au contraire, dynamique. Nous existons et nous créons en fonction de la tradition qui nous a formés et dont nos actions découlent, même - et peut-être surtout - lorsqu'elles prétendent le nier. Comme on l'a très bien dit: pour qu'il soit possible de dessiner des moustaches sacrilèges à la Joconde, il fallait qu'auparavant elle ait été peinte.[12]

This reaction against earlier traditions is not simply iconoclastic. On the contrary, it obeys a logic based on the relationship between representation, readerly reception and the general conditions of perception. For although any aesthetic approach will eventually be assimilated by the process of tradition and will create its own audience, it can only do so by altering the gestalt through which that audience views the world:

> Le réel...non, je ne crois pas qu'un texte, que mes romans, puissent contribuer à le transformer. Mais, par contre, à transformer la connaissance qu'on en a, alors, oui. Pensez aux impressionnistes: leurs contemporains ne voyaient dans leurs tableaux que barbouillages informes. Pourquoi? Parce qu'ils ne connaissaient la 'réalité' (les arbres, les nuages, les collines, les cheveux des femmes, etc.) qu'à travers le langage qui les avait déjà produits, celui qu'ils étaient habitués à déchiffrer dans les musées, qu'ils savaient lire. Aujourd'hui que les peintres impressionnistes ont, avec le temps (comme la sonate de Vinteuil) façonné peu à peu leur public, tout le monde trouve que ces arbres aux troncs roses ou mauves... ces femmes aux chevelures violettes qui choquaient tellement le professeur Cottard et sa femme, eh bien, cela 'reproduit' fidèlement la 'réalité' que chacun, de Tokyo à New York et du Cap Nord au cap de Bonne Espérance y 'reconnaît'... La boutade d'Oscar Wilde est beaucoup plus profonde qu'elle n'en a l'air 'La nature imite l'art'.[13]

The continuation of, and the avoidance of repetition within, the aesthetic tradition depends on a constant and unflagging effort on the part of the individual writer to revitalize, through a renewal of forms, the way in which we perceive reality.

Art as Defamiliarization

This brings us to the other prominent motif running through Simon's aesthetic statements - the concept of art, derived in most part from Russian Formalism as a means of defamiliarization. Simon's interviews are peppered with references to Victor Chklovski's definition of art:

> A text produces an image, an object, a spectacle, which derives, of course, from the initial stimulus but which is at the same time separate from it and related to another context. Chklovski defines the 'literary item' ('fait littéraire') as the movement of an object from its usual zone of perception to the realm of a different perception.[14]

In La Corde raide (1947), in similar though immaturely romantic terms Simon had offered his own definition of the particular art of Cézanne, stressing the way in which the latter defamiliarizes the world through the suspension of the conventionalized network of representational signs:

> un univers pour la première fois démuni de poteaux indicateurs. Si totalement dépouillé de tout, excepté de vérité et de cohésion, que pour la première fois s'offrait dans sa totale magnificence, sans commentaires ni restrictions, le monde visible, et à travers lui, le monde tout court. (CR,p.17)

And it is in this very early seminal autobiographical work, La Corde raide, that Simon voices most enthusiastically his desire to 'see' the world - in terms which are very close to the often fervid statements of intention of Merleau-Ponty. Compare, for example, the following passage from La Corde raide and the reference in Phénoménologie de la perception to Fink's definition of the notion of phenomenological réduction as a kind of astonishment in the face of teeming reality, a suspension of the intentional bonds which automatize our perception of the world:

> Mais, pour l'instant, je veux voir. Je ne ferme jamais les rideaux de mes fenêtres, même la nuit, et si je me réveille dans la nuit, j'ai besoin de voir les étoiles dans le ciel, ou...le reflet jaunâtre et diffus du réverbère sur le plafond, et si je me réveille plus tard, la couleur de l'aube, cette couleur comme les margelles savonneuses des lavoirs, entrant, le jour qui se lève, se déploie, vertical,

> colosse, ses mains pleines d'angoisse et de temps. Les matins, les soirs, les heures stagnant les aiguilles sur la figure impassible de la montre, le plafond, les murs, la pluie, les nuages dispersés, la cloche du couvent. (CR,pp.104-5)

> C'est parce que nous sommes de part en part rapport au monde que la seule manière pour nous en apercevoir est de suspendre ce mouvement, de lui refuser notre complicité (de le regarder ohne mitzumachen, dit souvent Husserl), ou encore de le mettre hors jeu... La meilleure formule de la réduction est sans doute celle qu'en donnait Eugen Fink, l'assistant de Husserl, quand il parlait d'un'étonnement' devant le monde. La réflexion ne se retire pas du monde vers l'unité de la conscience comme fondement du monde, elle prend recul pour voir jaillir les transcendances, elle distend les fils intentionnels qui nous relient au monde pour les faire paraître, elle seule est conscience du monde parce qu'elle le révèle comme étrange et paradoxal. (PP, p.viii)

The notion of phenomenological reduction originally promulgated by Husserl, but taken up by Merleau-Ponty among others, consisted in the suspension of the intentional thematization of the world, the neutralization of the common-sensical code which automatizes our attitude to the world and implicitly invests it with an 'interested' humanizing teleology.

Significantly, both Merleau-Ponty and a writer normally filed along with Simon under the label Nouveau Roman - Michel Butor - have designated the novel as a propitious experimental field in which to effect the mise entre parenthèses of those blunting self-evident truths which preclude pristine perception:

> La vraie philosophie est de rapprendre à voir le monde, et en ce sens une histoire racontée peut signifier le monde avec autant de 'profondeur' qu'un traité de philosophie. (PP, p.xvi)

> Alors que le récit véridique a toujours l'appui, la ressource d'une évidence extérieure, le roman doit suffire à susciter ce dont il nous entretient. C'est pourquoi il est le domaine phénoménologique par excellence où étudier de quelle façon la réalité nous apparaît ou peut nous apparaître; c'est pourquoi le roman est le laboratoire du récit.[15]

This is, however, not to say as Annette Tamuly does in her phenomenologically-oriented study of Julien Green that 'le principe de la neutralisation exige avant tout que l'univers romanesque se donne comme univers contemplé et simplement décrit '.[16]

Such a definition of the phenomenological role of the novel only posits an alternative version of that intrinsically ideological, and therefore relatively defined, literary panacea 'realism', the invention of which has been claimed by so many literary movements as to render it meaningless. Virtually all the so-called nouveaux romanciers have declared the impossibility of 'describing reality' and the essentially unrealistic nature of description. The notion of 'meticulous description' taken beyond a relatively limited amount of detail results in a dissolution of our mental image of the object, scene, or person 'referred to ' by the narrator.[17]

Simon himself corrected an interlocutor at the Cerisy colloquium devoted to him in 1974 who had endeavoured to 'see' the hen-house door 'described' in La Route des Flandres (pp.246-9), even commissioning a draughtsman friend to draw one according to this description. Simon drew attention once again to the interaction of ideation and assimilated, structuring, representational codes governing our 'visualization' of a described object:

> vous ne pouvez pas 'voir', de quelque façon que ce soit, la porte dont vous parlez. Jean Ricardou a très justement fait observer que, contrairement au cliché répandu, on ne 'voit' rien quand on lit (sauf des caractères imprimés ou calligraphiés). Comme il a dit, il n'y a pas vision, mais intellection, ce qui est tout autre chose. Et c'est aussi vrai d'un dessin comme celui exécuté par votre 'gars du bâtiment'. Ce dessin, c'est-à-dire ce que vous voyez en le regardant, ce sont seulement des lignes tracées au crayon ou à l'encre sur une feuille de papier. Il n'est devenu idéogramme que par suite d'une accumulation de traditions, et si vous y '*voyez*' une porte, c'est encore par une opération de votre esprit conditionné au préalable.(p.408)

Simon has not, as Alain Robbe-Grillet often seems to have done[18], fallen for the ultimately realist illusion of materialist accuracy. Simon is much closer to the true spirit of phenomenology in that he does not purport to represent reality 'objectively', but rather to suspend those verisimilitude-conferring codes which naturalize 'reality' and blunt our perceptual responses.

In his warm appraisal of Monique Wittig's L'Opoponax Simon sums up her achievement in terms which suggest the production of the conditions of an étonnement in the face of the world. Monique Wittig does not describe the world in relation to a child. She says the virgin, value-free perception of a child:

> L'enfant... pose sur la bizarre féerie du monde qui l'entoure un regard neuf, grave, passionné, égal, et que n'a pas encore déformé ou plutôt perverti la connaissance d'une échelle de 'valeurs'. N'étant pas troublé (ou aveuglé) par les idées préfabriquées que l'adulte a faites des choses, il voit celles-ci non pas évidemment telles qu'elles sont (?) mais telles que ses sens ou son émotivité encore vierges les lui représentent...
>
> Après tant de récits où tant d'adultes ont vainement essayé d''exprimer' leurs souvenirs d'enfance, comment Monique Wittig a-t-elle réussi, elle, à dire l'enfance?
>
> ...Lisant ces pages, je ne lis pas la chronique ou le récit plus ou moins fidèles... de ce qui a pu arriver à une petite fille: je vois, je respire, je mâche, je sens par ses yeux, sa bouche, ses mains, sa peau. Je ne suis plus moi, je ne suis non plus une certaine petite fille: je deviens l'enfance.[19]

And what does that highly idiosyncratic use of the word 'dire'[20] mean if not that capacity ascribed by Merleau-Ponty to the 'parole authentique' to make us see the world anew and render possible the transcendance of our own particular coded perspective?

> la parole fait lever un sens nouveau, si elle est parole authentique... D'ailleurs, il faut bien que les significations maintenant acquises aient été des significations nouvelles. Il faut donc reconnaître comme un fait dernier cette puissance ouverte et indéfinie de signifier, - c'est-à-dire à la fois de saisir et de communiquer un sens, - par laquelle l'homme se transcende vers un comportement nouveau ou vers autrui ou vers sa propre pensée à travers son corps et sa parole. (PP, p.226)

Simon is not trying to establish a one-to-one relationship between brute reality and some hypothetical mot juste. Dire puts the emphasis on the specifically linguistic relationships established between objects through'description'. In his middle fiction, in particular, Simon sees the establishment of these relationships as a means of renewing our perception of the world, of the objects which surround us yet remain unnoticed by us. The writer effects this renewal by installing the reader at the point of intersection of a web of linguistic

relationships specific to the fictional situation established. Thus in this same early article on Wittig, he explains her achievement, not in terms of the use of an accurate childlike vocabulary as we might expect, but in terms of the grammatical structures, the use of 'shifters' and the rhythm established by her sentence units:

> il serait passionnant de voir le rôle que jouent certains pronoms personnels ou impersonnels, certaines constructions grammaticales, l'emploi de certains rhythmes [dans] ce livre... qui nous restitue l'enfance.

The same principle underpins his answers to the usually aggressive question about the role of art in revolutionary politics - he consistently stresses the need to query static institutionalized structures. In a world the principle of which is change, there can be no definitive code:

> Tout ce que je sais, c'est que la vie est une sorte de perpétuel mouvement, de perpétuelle révolution, de perpétuelle destruction et reconstruction, que ce qui était vrai hier n'est plus vrai aujourd'hui, que peut-être même rien n'est vrai et que la seule chose valable dans ces conditions, me semble-t-il, c'est la perpétuelle contestation, la perpétuelle mise en question des structures et des formes admises et établies qu'elles soient sociales ou artistiques.[21]

The emphasis is on the renewal of articulatory structures rather than on any quest for veracity and verisimilitude. This principle is applied to every level of articulation, right down to the most elementary declinable grammatical constructions:

> L'affirmation de Maïakovsky qu''il n'y pas d'art révolutionnaire sans formes révolutionnaires' est et sera toujours valable. Et Butor vient utilement de rappeler ce que disait Proust de Flaubert, à savoir que ce dernier 'par l'usage entièrement nouveau et personnel qu'il a fait du passé défini, du passé indéfini, du participe présent, de certains pronoms et de certaines prépositions a renouvelé presque autant notre vision des choses que Kant avec ses catégories, les théories de la Connaissance et de la Réalite du monde extérieur. (Colloque, p.413)

By the time of the colloquium from which this last quotation is taken, the enthusiasm and ambitions of the Wittig article are qualified by a greater awareness of the problematical

status of the referent in the enterprise to renew our vision of things. Already in the interviews on his fiction after Les Corps conducteurs (1971), Simon is obviously treading more warily, restricting the role of object to that of a pre-text which sets in motion the verbal play and declining to define the relationship mot/chose other than in terms of ambiguity:

> les mots ne sont pas les choses et... les choses ne sont pas les mots. Il y a toujours entre le mot et la chose une sorte de jeu ambigu. Je voudrais rappeler la judicieuse formule de Jean Ricardou: 'Une circulation comme magique s'accomplit ainsi entre les choses et les mots, les mots et les choses.'[22]

His remarks in the Colloque de Cerisy evidence a more radical understanding of the implications of his concept of tradition and an insight into the future ossification of his own fiction into a tradition. This insight is, however, far from defeatist; in fact, it is largely instrumental in the more precise formulation of the mechanism at work in literary renewal.

Literary renewal depends not on the ever more competent adequation of the referential and scriptural dimensions but rather on the tension between two historically separated but tradition-linked scriptural codes:

> dans la composition de la 'dimension référentielle' entre déjà, pour une bonne part, une 'dimension scripturale' de sorte que le conflit dialectique serait... entre deux 'dimensions scripturales', l'ancienne et une nouvelle...(p.423)

Art cannot pin down or obliquely reflect the external world. But in Simon's terms that is not a limitation but rather an emancipation. It is freed from a static and subordinating parallelism to explore its own resources, to produce out of old forms new and revealing combinations and to engender a defamiliarizing jouissance in the reader:

> je ne pense pas que la littérature soit quelque chose qui se situe *à côté* de la Réalité... elle ne la redouble pas, ne la conjure pas, ne la récupère pas. Proust n'a jamais *retrouvé* le 'temps perdu': il a *produit* quelque chose, un texte (qui a sa propre temporalité), des sens, des lieux, des personnages *qui n'existent pas avant qu'il les écrive*. (Colloque, p.422)

> 'Le public semble avoir perdu la notion de ce qu'est l'art, c'est-à-dire une jouissance, celle de la connaissance. On a pris l'habitude de lire un livre comme on lit son journal: pour être informé... Et l'information, c'est peut-être le contraire de la culture.[23]

This introduction has necessarily been involved and quotation-ridden, principally because of Simon's apparent reluctance to set down explicitly in a single, fully developed theoretical text the principles according to which he works. I have tried here by a somewhat painstaking method of correlation to show the underlying rigour and coherence of Simon's scattered critical commentaries and the common ground they share with certain currents in contemporary philosophy and twentieth-century literary theory.

In the following three chapters, I shall consider the way in which Simon tries to induce readerly defamiliarization. In the first chapter, I shall consider the way in which he decodes our perceptual grid, partly by a critique of traditional interpretative representations of human behaviour, partly by an attempt to effect something like a phenomenological reduction, to realize imaginatively the conditions in which the relation perception-world might be <u>seen</u> at its most fundamental and myth-purged.

The first part of the second chapter will look at the way in which Simon neutralizes the assumptions of and undermines the techniques used by the still prevalent realistic ideology. The second part will examine the alternative aesthetic definition offered by Simon, which depends largely on a process of linguistic recombination, the <u>rapprochement</u> of the unlike and the reactivation of metaphor.

Together, these chapters will trace the natural progression in Simon from a still referentially-oriented interest in the conditions of perception to a more rigorous exploitation of the

linguistic codes within which he must work. The final chapter will try to effect a synthesis of what has preceded in an examination of both the perceptual and representational aspects of time and history.

Chapter I

Perception

Before we proceed to the principal subject of this chapter - the ways in which we are made aware of the complexity of the process of perception - we shall have to attempt to answer one important question begged by the introduction i.e. Simon's own relationship with literary tradition, the elements of debt and rebellion in it. Thus the first section of this chapter will be concerned to assess the remnants of a traditional psychological interest to be found in Simon's novels, while the second will look at his subversion of traditional novelistic techniques of behavioural[1] description. In the third and fourth sections, I shall consider respectively Simon's own implicit conception of perceptual psychology, and the technical means by which he tries to renew our vision of the world.

I ELEMENTS OF CONTINUITY

Surprising though it may seem when we consider the starkness of Simon's most recent novels, his early fiction offers a remarkably varied spectrum of psychological study. His early approach tends to be eclectic and intuitive, and the subtlety of his portrayal of psychological states can at best be described as uneven. These novels are overloaded with a welter of ramifying moral and motivational problems, which range from some of the longest-established themes of literature - such as the mind/body schism and the conflict between the generations - to very schematic illustrations of currently fashionable pseudo-Freudian theories on dream symbolism and the Oedipus complex.

The Mind/Body Dichotomy

The age-old theme of the gulf between mind and body figures prominently in a work such as Gulliver (1952), the characters of which could almost be said to constitute points of reference on a graded scale, ranging at the same time from the intellectual to the animal and from the victim to the survivor/predator. Simon gives a personal twist to the theme by associating the dialectic of suffering and survival to that of the demands of the intellect and of the animal instinct. All his characters are defined in relation to their ability or lack of it to survive with a minimum of suffering, and to suppress their intellectual consciousness of their situation. (The epigraph 'Non cogitant, ergo sunt' sums up the condition of survival.) At one end of this scale, there is the hyper-intellectual Herzog, the archetypal Jewish sufferer, at the other the equally caricatural Chavannes twins who incarnate unadulterated animality. While Herzog paces back and forth relentlessly in his book-filled room discoursing on the nature of history and ratiocinating ad infinitum, Jo de Chavannes seizes with delight any chance to abdicate mental control in favour of an orgy of physical violence (p.199).

Unlike Jo, Herzog is left at the end of the novel to carry his burden of suffering and paradoxical guilt until his body eventually gives out and lets him die. Early in the novel, Herzog explicitly formulates this capacity of the body to continue, indifferent to the torment undergone by mind and emotions (p.60). Another passage which makes the same point is the brief reference to Tom's experience as a prisoner-of-war, the account of his confinement to his cell where, like an injured animal or a 'cheval qui tique', he cured his abscess

by knocking out his own tooth and waiting with the resignation of an animal until he recovered (p.313). This analogy with animal resignation is very pointedly juxtaposed with the notation of the subsidence in him of conscious revolt.

It is, however, Max who most forcefully incarnates the dualist tension, caught between his inability to deny his physical desires and his inability to suppress his awareness of the suffering they eventually bring. The vividly rendered account of Max's nocturnal walk away from and eventual return to the inn at which Bobby is killed constitutes the thematic centre of the novel (pp.168-70). The vision of a mineral world glimpsed in the distance represents the arid, soul-destroying direction which conscienceless physical survivors should take. Here, light - conventionally the image of divine truth - becomes a material, mechanically generated object, to be reached by an extraordinary physical rather than a spiritual effort. Initially, Max is carried along mechanically by the hypnotic effect of his footfalls, but as soon as the regular sound stops he is disoriented and turns back to the dark imbroglio of his past. Unlike the horse,[2] whose instinct for survival predominates:

> Les chevaux qui passent le long des murs des entreprises d'équarrisage, même poussifs, même exténuées, se cabrent, se hérissent et cherchent à s'éloigner (p.170),

conscious man cannot escape the consequences of his past.

Another example of this dualist theme can be seen in Le Sacre du printemps. The main theme here is the arch-rationalist Bernard's realization of the animal basis of his idealized attraction to Edith, and of the relativity and subjectivity of his 'rationalist' perspective. The demonstration of this realization is effected through Simon's

adoption and modification of the Dostoievskian theme of the double.[3] The resolution of the conflict of the demands of the intellect and the repressed desires of the flesh, and the demonstration of the arrogance of the moral judgements Bernard pronounces on his mother and stepfather are brought about through his final verbal confrontation with his stepfather, who turns out to be an older double of himself. In Le Sacre du printemps the 'splitting' of the personality occasioned by Bernard's rationalizing and solipsistic morality is, it is implied, resolved when he is made to recognize the stifled part of himself in another whom he had condemned. Typically, the positive, love-based, transcendental aspect of Dostoievski's morality is absent from Simon's relative world. As Bernard's stepfather cynically remarks, a greater understanding of oneself precludes love of one's fellow-man (pp.57-8).

Ideal versus Reality and the Responsibility of Self-delusion

Another psycho-moral theme, common to Simon and to the novelistic tradition against which he was to react, is that of the tension between ideal and reality, between illusion and disillusionment:

> l'homme est un dieu quand il s'abandonne à ses rêves mais un bougre de pauvre diable dès qu'il se livre à la méditation. (LT, pp.120)

The theme of disillusionment was probably the principal mainstay of the 19th-century Realist plot. However, in Le Tricheur (1945) the motif receives a more modernist, morally ambivalent treatment. Here, the emphasis is on the exploration of the complex psychological factors behind a personal obsession, rather than on the inexorable destruction of illusions. Louis' obsession is self-determination in the form of an

acte gratuit which will attest the exercise of free will and defiance of the law of chance (p.41). This ideal masks a profound inconsistency - it, in fact, springs from an inability to assume responsibility for his acts and an attempt to repress his own indecisiveness. His (almost immediately reversed) decision to abandon Belle points to an unconscious desire to yield himself to the direction of fate. He can only decide to do something by convincing himself that he has no choice. Thus, he posits a controlling framework such as the banal 'fatality' of a railway timetable in which he is equated with the number of his ticket (p.54). Likewise, the description of his bus-ride before the eventual murder stresses his temporary delegation of the furtherance of his plan to the bus containing him and its pursuit of its chartered route (pp.216-7).
In the final pages, there is a tension set up between Louis' mental tirades about free will and his capitulation to overwhelming sensory impression. Ultimately, the murder is an involuntary, undiscriminating gut-reaction. The physiological and concrete terms in which he describes his will - the blood rushing in his veins, the beating of his heart, the image of a door closing behind him - indicate the very lack of will involved. The excuse he invents for bending to pick up the murder weapon - urination - is a basic animal need, while the immediate peace he attains is the calm produced by a near-uniform perceptual field:

> sans autre chose que ce rectangle dans mes yeux et ses cheveux sous la paume de ma main.(p.246)

In retrospect, we can understand better the function of the apparently gratuitous little anecdote about the day out with his mother as a child. When asked whether or not he would like a boat-ride or an ice-cream, he chooses the

boat-ride, does not enjoy it and demands the ice-cream as well (p.55), i.e. throughout his life he has evaded the consequences of his choices. This anecdote is doubly significant in that it is his relationship with his mother which provides the key to his obsession and its concomitant inconsistency. The account of his walk before the murder of the priest alternates with memories of Louis' visit to Lourdes with his dying mother, who is herself obsessed with religion. Significantly, he has already said that her God has taken the place of his dead father. The most obvious conclusion to draw from this would be that Louis' story is a classical case of an Oedipus complex. The negative comparison with family relations which he uses to define his gratuitous act (pp.243-4), and the stress he puts on its desired autonomy (its fatherless self-generation) only highlights the extent to which it has been determined by his relationship with his mother and his unconscious desire to destroy her adoration of his father/God.

An implicit analogy with Le Rouge et le Noir (signalled awkwardly by Ephraïm's reading of it (p.176)) is used to corroborate this psychological study. Le Tricheur could be seen as a reworking of the theme of Stendhal's novel. Julien, like Louis, denies his natural father and ends up by renouncing the 'inauthentic' uniforms of red and black and performing the superficially inexplicable act of shooting at Mme. de Rênal. Similarly, Louis fails in his self-imposed duty and resorts to an irrational murderous gesture. But Simon does not accept Stendhal's conclusion. Julien's spontaneous acte gratuit and his remorse endow him with a nobility which Louis does not share. Louis' acte gratuit is not as gratuitous as he would like to believe, and it is highly

fitting and psychologically determined that he kill this priest who has a photograph of his soldier brother on his desk. That he should become a soldier like his father, or a spiritual 'father' were after all the alternative ideals of his mother. This is surely an Oedipal killing of the father. It is an action which can be completely naturalized in post-Freudian terms as a classic psychological type.

However, it is in Gulliver that this multi-dimensional moral and epistemological question relating to motivation, determinism, self-delusion and consciousness of responsibility is most fully treated by Simon. This novel examines the mechanism of circumstances which takes over after an initial thoughtless gesture or act:

> Après coup, quand il eut le temps de réfléchir de nouveau, lui qui avait mis en marche ce mécanisme effrayant, Faure devait se demander si la façon dont les choses tournèrent par la suite ne devait pas uniquement être imputée au temps qu'ils avaient ainsi passé, indifférents en apparence, plaisantant... une heure plus tôt seulement et ils seraient rentrés chez eux... mais alors c'était trop tard, et à ce moment-là il leur fallait qu'ils... (p.33)

It is only a retrospective survey which shows alternative possibilities previously open to one. This question remains central to Simon's work, though it shifts from the ethical to the aesthetic and epistemological plane. The necessarily retrospective nature of cognition becomes an increasingly prominent obsession in the middle works of Simon, where the characters realize the impossibility of grasping intellectually what is happening to them in the present and try to reclaim through rememoration as much as they can of their past.
On the aesthetic level, this grasp of the contingency of one's experience ultimately results in a narrative structure which draws attention to its own relativity, by positing alternative

versions of the same incident or interchangeable outcomes. But for the moment it serves essentially to problematize apparently stable moral universals. Without exonerating the characters involved, it lays the final stress on the complex interplay of heterogeneous factors.

In Gulliver, the techniques and structure of the detective novel or mystery story[4] provide a favourable framework for the attempted elucidation of the factors leading up to three rather spectacular deaths. Other nouveaux romanciers such as Butor and Robbe-Grillet are attracted to the detective novel largely because its suspense techniques and delayed release of information exemplify in its purest form the hermeneutic code identified by Barthes in S/Z (p.26). Simon is, at least in his early and middle fiction, much more interested in its epistemological status as an investigatory structure.

The technique of Gulliver resembles that of a detective novel in that, in the allusion to the three deaths, we are given from the outset the raw material or outcome (depending on whether one looks at it from a Structuralist or realist position) of the story. But it is a detective story without a detective. Simon is not interested in the specific question as to who killed Bobby. In the detective novel one normally comes to some point of 'truth', an enlightenment with a quasi-cathartic effect. In Gulliver the pieces of the jig-saw do fit together but several will fit into the one place, and full responsibility for anything can never be exclusively attributed to one person. There is no clear chain of events - the story is extremely fragmented and its progression is constantly interrupted by digressive flashbacks which would

purport to help explain the characters' behaviour, but which ultimately imply an infinite regress of possible factors. Conversely, each factor would seem to have an almost infinite number of possible consequences. Gulliver is a challenging, uncomfortable text - it does not give us any intellectual control over the narrative, and far from corroborating conventional morality, as most detective novels do, it exploits the essentially retrospective, investigatory structure of the detective genre with a view to questioning basic moral and epistemological concepts such as responsibility and truth. By the end, the three discrete events signalled at the outset have been dissolved by the text into an inextricable mass of intentions, mistakes, conscious and repressed desires and circumstance.

To take an extreme cas limite, out and out condemnation of the Chavannes twins has to be suspended. As they wait for the train on which Loulou will escape, the narrator offers a relativistic interpretation of their indifference which defies conventional morality (p.205). Depending on one's perspective, it may be a lacking which renders them sub-human, or a hard-earned strength and virtue which has allowed them to survive the peripeteia of their youth. Similarly, Tom's apparently unreasonable antipathy for the superficially affable Jo is left unexplained until very late, when we are told about his suspected betrayal of his fellow prisoners-of-war. The retention of such a conventionally damning piece of information bears witness to the narrator's reluctance to pre-judge even in the apparently most clear-cut cases.

Similarly, the account of the numerous scandalous episodes in the past of the central enigmatic figure Max

is an approximative collage of fragments of information culled from a variety of sources which are never completely corroborative. Information is released grudgingly and prismatically; Simon's characterisation is accretive and forever revisable rather than frankly descriptive. 'Events' are the result of an unfactorizable combination of minor incidents, thoughtless remarks, non-events and temperaments. The reader's understanding both of the structure of the novel and of one of the central themes depends on his ability to correlate textually distant passages.

Simon's moral relativism extends to his appraisal of the contemporary historical period and to his study of group psychology. Gulliver could be seen as a conscious reply to post-Liberation self-righteousness and wilful self-delusion. On the formal and ideological level, Gulliver corresponds very closely to what Sartre called in Qu'est-ce que la littérature? the relativistic, post-war 'roman de situation', with its fragmented plot, its informational thrift, and its moral indeterminacy (pp.252-3). Max is probably acting as Simon's a-moral spokesman, when he draws attention, in scathing fashion, to the moral ambivalence and psychological inconsistency of post-bellum French society:

> c'est une excellente époque pour jouer au moraliste justicier. Les gens n'ont jamais tant eu besoin qu'on leur parle de vertu et de guillotine. Ce qu'ils demandent, au fond, c'est de s'empiffrer au marché noir et se repaître de pensées élevées. (p.124)

In Simon's own semi-autobiographical work he declares his relativistic view of the war and the 'enemy', suggesting that the German atrocities should not be viewed as an isolated phenomenon, but as a ubiquitous possibility latent in every nation and springing from factors common to us all (CR, p.58).

Thus the football match which opens Gulliver sets the general psychological atmosphere which ultimately helps to explain the three deaths likewise announced at the outset. This whole second chapter serves as a framework for the examination of the human need to persecute a victim whether in the form of a Jew or simply a football referee (p.12).

Simon's interest in the psychological factors which contributed to the Second World War and permitted something like the Nazi extermination campaign is best expressed in his penetrating analysis of Eliane's grandmother's attitude to Herzog. Simon undoubtedly inherited something of his interest in the psychology of prejudice from Faulkner. In neither is there any facile condemnation, but rather an earnest attempt to understand the concerted ostracism of a scape-goat, on whom is heaped the blame for man's suffering. Simon suggests with great skill the insidiousness of this moral blindness - the chief representative of prejudice is a frail, kindly old woman whose ineradicable intolerance co-exists with a blind liberalism (p.100). Simon demonstrates particular sensitivity to the doublethink intrinsic to ingrained anti-Semitism, which is related to and disguised by the innocence/guilt paradox running throughout Christianity:

> Comme si en quelque sorte il se condamnait lui-même et, ce faisant, sinon absolvait, du moins excusait l'injustice et l'iniquité, seulement coupables à tout prendre d'erreur sur les apparences. Tout cela naturellement elle ne le pensa pas, du moins en mots. Pas plus qu'elle ne pensa d'une façon coordonnée à lui exprimer sa gratitude et sa satisfaction pour le conformisme qu'il montrait aux usages. Notamment à celui qui veut que les disgrâces du sort s'accompagnent de disgrâces extérieures propres à fournir généreusement de ces sortes de raisons pour le soulagement des coeurs sensibles. (pp.108-9)

It is anodyne little old ladies like this who implicitly

ratify and render possible the conditions conducive to atrocities which will be, in retrospect, universally condemned.

The Emotional State

Our analysis has so far revealed a considerable debt to the traditional repertoire of die-hard psychological and moral themes. Simon's study of both individual and group psychology could be described in the terms of humanist criticism as rich, complex and full. Notwithstanding, his formal and thematic relativization constituted an early pointer to later subversive developments, and we have intentionally left until last the discussion of his treatment of that mainstay of the Freud-fuelled psychological novel - the revealing affective or emotional state. It is a development of this aspect which is to provide the springboard for much of Simon's subsequent evolution. To conclude this section, therefore, I should like to consider rather different passages from his first novel which by their contrast highlight both the derivative and the auspiciously idiosyncratic.

The first of these passages is the odd set-piece on pages 134-7 of Le Tricheur describing Belle's dream. This dream lends itself to a rather rudimentary psycho-analytic naturalization, corroborating and corroborated by her characterisation elsewhere in the novel. Her tendency to place her hope in someone else (e.g. Louis) or in some magic solution (such as winning at the races) takes the form, in her dream, of a man from whom she must get some vital addresses, while the moral ambiguity of this reliance on others emerges in the dubious hotel scene with the mystery man - in fact her elopement with Louis is a form of prostitution.

There is an unconscious attempt to justify her own promiscuity in 'J'avais froid, et alors je me suis aperçue que j'étais en chemise', while the curious description of the heavy rain and the man scything in the garden who runs at her suggests a 'loss of virginity' complex. This complex is perhaps explained by her father's possessiveness. In the dream, when the light is switched on, Belle's friend Else is having sexual intercourse with the stranger and, on page 159, we find that Belle greatly resented the fact that Else's father let her do what she wanted while her own created a scene. Finally, the description of François' sister's fine lingerie sums up Belle's covetousness and desire for fine things.

On pages 147-8, there is a second dream sequence, which is even more readily interpretable. The overwhelming impression of claustration can be explained in terms of the tension between Belle's aspirations and the grey monotony of her present life. The repeated allusions to her thirst refer to the damaging childhood experience when she was forced to drink from the cup into which her idiot cousin had dribbled (p.151). This episode is given emphatic treatment (both Gauthier and Belle refer to it), and Gauthier's face-saving weakness here marks the beginning of Belle's loss of faith in him and of her resentment. These two initially disconcerting dream-sequences are, then, related very closely to other episodes and personality traits illustrated elsewhere in the novel. Notwithstanding, and in spite of Simon's evident skill in evoking incongruities which upset our naturalizing vision of the world, they remain awkwardly integrated anomalies which betray an enthusiast's fragmentary assimilation of Freudian

psycho-analysis and a naive belief in a one-to-one, causal and hermeneutically soluble relationship between characteristic and oneiric metaphor.

The other passage to be considered is the description of Catherine's worries about Belle's safety on the way to school (chapter 2.). Apart from illustrating Catherine's exaggerated motherly anxiety and protectiveness, the function of this protracted episode is obscure. Catherine herself is not a strongly delineated character and arouses little serious psychological interest. She is defined almost totally in terms of the vulnerable position of pig-in-the-middle. Her loyalties are constantly torn between her family and Gauthier, and between Gauthier and Belle, and she lives in a permanent state of anxiety. But more interesting than her self-effacing concern for others, is the way in which that concern is evoked. The exercise here in the arousal of anticipatory tension in the reader which is then shown to be baseless (there is a build-up of suspense about Belle's safety, but then the dog which accompanies her to the end of the woods turns up as usual) bears witness both to Simon's interest in very specific emotional states which distort momentarily our impressions of the world and to an acute awareness of the manipulative power of certain narrative techniques which he is willing to activate gratuitously and regardless of their relevance to the progression of the narrative. Here Simon draws upon and undermines a technique-suspense-which is generally used to invigorate the reader's response to the linear thrust of a fiction dominated by the hermeneutic and proairetic codes.[5] Our expectations fizzle out, but not without these literary codes and techniques

having been highlighted. Attention is drawn to a very specific psychological state, the way in which it is represented, and the way in which the reader's own perception is governed by specific and arbitrary narrative devices.

'II THE SUBVERSION OF TRADITIONAL NOVELISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

The development of Simon's interest in 'very specific psychological states' has two important consequences for his fiction as a whole. It problematizes and subverts traditional behavioural categories and it results in remarkable circumstantiality in the description of impressions and emotions which cannot be readily subsumed under a psychological label.

Not surprisingly - in view of his stress on the informative nature of representation - it is frequently impossible to distinguish between his subversion of the layman's interpretation of the behaviour of his fellows, and his subversion of Realist behavioural grids. His onslaught on techniques of characterisation is inextricable from his attack on the working assumption of everyday human intercourse that the Other is a discrete personality about whom we have a contextual knowledge, based on our own knowledge of ourselves. A concomitant interest in the way in which the individual both acquires and is constituted by language complicates the issue further, and challenges the notion of self-knowledge on which commonsensical interpretations are based.

What is more important than the identification of social or novelistic targets is the fact that there is, explicitly or implicitly, at stake throughout Simon's fiction the more fundamental question of the justifiability of the confusion of

commonsensical psychology and the critical consideration of characters, which are ultimately simply the nexus of so many reconcilable semes tethered to a proper name.[6] Simon's realization of the essentially linguistic nature of characterisation is prepared for and accompanied by an increasing scepticism regarding the denotative capacity of language and the validity of the hermetic categories of traditional novelistic typology.

Attack on the Psychological Label

The fiasco of Montès' story in Le Vent (1957) could be viewed as a thorough invalidation of the behavioural criteria propounded at the outset of the novel by the notary, that personification of categorial confidence. This latter is forced to recognize the arbitrariness and relativity of any system of psychological interpretation when it is confronted with a 'character' such as Montès whose behaviour corresponds to no regular pattern, and least of all to the notary's cynical summary of humanity in mercenary terms (pp.12-14).

Professional knowledge, world-wearily acquired experienee and intuitive shrewdness prove ineffectual in any attempt to summarize Montès. Behavioural competence is an irrelevant notion here, and the notary's linguistic frustration and disorientation appear in the extravagance of his analogies. Not only do his facile labels prove inadequate, but any attempt to describe Montès sends him off on a frustrating chase along the paradigmatic axis of language in search of an ever more precise near-synonym (e.g. p.13). The analogy is no longer an easy stop-gap for a missing mot juste. The attempt at a more nuanced circumscription must go on within the

analogy, and so on potentially ad infinitum. The notary's paradigmatic expansion stands in direct counterpoint to his customary attempt to outdo literature's synthesis and stylization of human behaviour into 'trente-six situations'. Until he met Montès he had believed in the possibility of definitive formulation, and the authority of the syntagmatic statement.

Interestingly, Montès' lack of conformity to what is expected of him is explicitly related to a sense of remoteness vis à vis psychological labels, and the values to which people attach so much importance. He cannot respond to Maurice's tacit plea for respect because he does not think in terms of such abstractions (p.138). Equally remote and senseless to Montès are those labels - such as 'peur', 'désespoir' 'horreur' (p.182) - by which man assimilates what is unassimilable in its brute form. The significance of Montès' experience - he can be considered as an epitome of saintliness[7] - springs largely from the way in which he defies analysis, and transgresses the clear-cut linguistic categories in which we clothe our feelings. Simon has Montès reject the word 'souffrir', only to revitalize our appreciation of the experience of suffering.

The unproblematical smooth-running of society depends on a degree of concordance about such abstractions; hence the disruptive, catalytic effect of Montès in the small Midi town, and the virulence of the inhabitants' reactions. If his behaviour does not directly affect their lives, it does challenge their preconceptions about human predictability and the value-judgements according to which they themselves behave.

In <u>La Route des Flandres</u>, the amorphousness of the <u>débâcle</u>

renders conventional values and motivational criteria - such as 'vengeance' and 'devoir' - not only inadequate but redundant. Such dockets simply cannot be usefully attached, for example, to de Reixach's attitude to Iglésia (p.16). Furthermore, Simon invalidates by implication the type of psychological novel which would seek to render the thoughts on life of a character in a position such as Georges during the war. In such a situation one's concerns are very short-sighted, compelling, physical, rather than philosophical, ones:

> Mais il n'était pas dans ses intentions de philosopher ni de se fatiguer à essayer de penser à ce que la pensée était incapable d'atteindre ou d'apprendre, car le problème consistait plus simplement à essayer de dégager sa jambe. (p.74)

But it is, undoubtedly, in Histoire that this awareness of the décalage between psychological bracket and actual sensation is most explicitly and eloquently expressed. In the evocation of the narrator's Spanish Civil War experiences, Simon explores at length the situation where things and reactions are divorced from their arbitrarily endowed names. The narrator discovers that the emotion he has been conditioned to expect and the aprioristically selected label which he reserved for such an occasion do not match his sensation. On pages 177-8, the narrator develops his doubts about the applicability of a word such as 'fear' to the very concrete sensations experienced by him in Spain. There, it seemed that a gulf had suddenly opened up between his experience of the world and the 'symboles verbaux' by which we assert human dominance and possession of the objects in the world. The abstract notion 'fear' does not capture the disorientation experienced in the face of the radical metamorphosis of apparently stable co-ordinates. Furthermore, a consideration

of what the word 'fear' itself means for him involves the narrator in a particularizing definition which appeals to sensory example and vivid metaphoric approximation:

> Non: la peur, je l'ai connue ailleurs, dans une chambre d'hôtel, à écouter des bruits ou plutôt à guetter le silence: c'est autre chose; visqueux, répugnant, c'est comme le corps noir d'un reptile se déroulant lentement, avec des reflets métalliques froids et bleuâtres. (p.178)

Hereafter, the psychological interest as such more or less disappears from Simon's novels as he focuses his attention more and more exclusively on the suggestive properties of the linguistic medium itself. Throughout La Bataille de Pharsale certainly, attention is drawn to the discrepancy between the narrator's experience of suffering, whether in war or in love, and the literary depiction of such feelings in his readings, which sets up a horizon of expectations and behavioural conventions and contributes greatly to the classification of human emotion into precedent-based psychological categories. However, at this stage, this tension in itself no longer greatly interests Simon.

In La Bataille de Pharsale, he is at one and the same time stating the vanity of any attempt to represent emotion, and turning his attention to more specifically novelistic and linguistic concerns. La Bataille de Pharsale is not an exploration of the suffering of jealousy - it is a linguistic construct which builds up, through the combination of motifs and intertextual references to À la recherche du temps perdu, the themes of suffering and jealousy. The distribution of related semes and pointed allusions triggers off certain readerly expectations, which, however, are never rewarded with an explicit psychological analysis or instances of integrated personalized characterisation. The reader learns

nothing about human nature *per se*; he does learn something about convention-based conditioning and the role of paradigm in readerly response.

Approximative Description

This rather radical conclusion is, however, counter-balanced throughout Simon's early and middle fiction by a retouching and qualification of description which, while invalidating the unqualified docket, does suggest the capacity of an approximative method of description to do more justice to the complexities of the psyche and the senses. There is a precarious and shifting counterpoint between the representational effort implied by approximative description, and the tendency of extended description to monopolize our attention and to foreground its metaphorical processes at the expense of the referent. A frequent technique employed by Simon is the application of evasive, *passe- partout* adjectives combined with a long particularizing qualification. He will frequently advertise in a word such as *indéfinissable* the absence of a nuance-rendering *mot juste*, adding an approximative and accumulative specification which seeks to cover as many of the constituent elements of the sensation as possible, and which also gives an unusual prominence to the figurative formulation itself. This descriptive method discards the criteria of syntactical tidiness and verbal pithiness in favour of a more flexible sentence structure with frequent recourse to hyperbole, negative definition, circumlocution etc.

One such syntactical labyrinth can be found in the description of the peculiar conglomeration of sensations experienced by Montès when he tries awkwardly to help

Rose (V, p.76). To dismiss Montès' reaction here as sexual attraction would be to greatly oversimplify the paradoxicalness of the emotions experienced. Simon is reducing the poetically overworked theme of the sensory égarement of the lover to the most fundamental terms of a categorially disruptive paradox relating to the way in which a response to the corporal attributes of another can take the form of a sensation of diffusion and incorporeality. The attraction to the apparently integral Other can result in a dissolution of one's own sense of identity and a sensory identification with the varied and non-human elements of one's surroundings.

Furthermore, the play on the words 'choir', 'décharné', 'désincarné' testifies to an early interest in the self-generating, suggestive properties of language and in phonetic differentiation and association. This passage exemplifies in miniature the process, which takes place in the course of Simon's work, by which the concept emotion is detached from the novelistic repertoire of psycho-physiological indices with which it is conventionally associated, and is transformed into an associative catalyst for a certain linguistic play. At this stage, the interest in abstract linguistic patterns is subordinated and subsumed in the exploration of an interesting psychological case.

In L'Herbe, Simon puts the approximative method of description to suggestive use in his evocation of the obscure relationship between Louise and her aunt-in-law, Marie. Louise's decision not to depart with her lover cannot be attributed to any obvious, logically or psychologically valid reason. It refuses to be explained away in terms of deterministic family ties (Marie is not a blood relative),

or in simple moral terms of duty or gratitude. Ultimately, the peculiar pressure exerted by Marie can only be described in self-qualifying refinements of vocabulary and analogies such as that with an imaginary pushing hand on pages 114-5. The paradoxical nature of this unreasoned decision to stay in this claustrophobic, yet magnetic household is vividly rendered in the complementary descriptions of Louise's sensation of suffocation (p.178) and her peculiar remoteness from her own immediate surroundings after her imaginary evocation of Marie's past (pp.235-9). This imaginary excursion into another's life paralyses her will to act in her own interest.

The attempt to render specific sensations in a more nuanced fashion than traditional novelistic behaviourism allowed can have important reverberations even in the description of actions and behaviour so banal that we take them and the words that denote them for granted. Note, for example, the annotation of that very simple word 'mangeait' in the description of Louise's rather tense meal with her husband's family (p.135). Louise's 'behaviour' as such is of minimal interest, and a straight behavioural description could not suggest the oppressive sensations experienced . Simon's circumlocutory description gives a much more vivid account of the texture of the experience:

> et maintenant elle mangeait, c'est-à-dire que sa gorge déglutissait docilement l'une après l'autre les cuillerées du liquide tiède et opaque, pourvu moins d'une saveur, d'un goût, que d'une qualité de matière particulière - légèrement grenue - que son palais et sa langue se contentaient d'enregistrer sans plus....

The redefinition of the word and the factorization of the experience into its constituent parts to a degree beyond the

normal threshold of meaningful behavioural analysis in a novel reverses and undermines the co-ordinative procedure demanded of the reader of a realistic novel whereby cognate semes are polarized and synthesized into personalities. Simon makes us analyse the banal, where we would normally accommodate it in some thematic overview.

The Non-reaction

Simon takes this emphatic analysis of the conventionally a-meaningful a step further in his descriptions of non-reactions. In traditional novelistic descriptions, negative reactions tended to be neglected. Psychological depiction has depended principally on the attribution of distinctive, positively drawn characteristics to memorable personalities. The advent of the modern anti-hero and Faulkner's enigmatic figures have shaken somewhat this fine balance between idiosyncracy and readily comprehensible coherence. However, Simon is unusual in the amount of space which he devotes to conspicuous absences of reaction.

Many of Simon's descriptions of non-reactions expose our reliance on the establishment of relations of verisimilitude in our interpretation of any one aspect of behaviour. One such example is the description of Louise, Georges and the man-servant's car-ride to Pierre and Sabine's holiday hotel (pp.88-9). There is an elaborate account of an absence of visible reaction - a silence - in which the most 'significant' explanations concerning the characters' hypothetical relationships are proposed and rejected in one breath, and which concludes with the suggestion which the reader of the 'psychological novel' would be most reluctant to accept -

i.e. the simplest explanation, so obvious as to be invisible to our hermeneutic approach to novelistic behaviour, that they have nothing to say to one another.

Elsewhere, the expectations aroused by the vulgar conception of a 'normal' reaction to a certain stimulus serve as a gauge against which Simon's characters' non-reactions are defined. Thus, Montès non-reacts throughout Le Vent, and these non-reactions are defined negatively in relation to the what-might-have-been-expected of behavioural conventions (pp. 44, 158-9, 196-7). The extent to which behavioural interpretations depend on the retrospective imposition by an observer of an external, causally oriented frame of reference can be seen in the narrator's elaborate attempt to supplement Montès' scanty account of his relationship with Rose. The narrator's knowledge of the outcome of this 'relationship' prompts an attempt to establish a comprehensible behaviour pattern conforming to the 'normal course of events'. Montès' reaction/non-reaction is described negatively both in relation to conventional norms and in relation to the outcome of the story (p.51). Similarly, the element of what might be called pride in Montès' attitude to Rose is such that it can only be defined negatively in relation to a conventional epitome of it (p.57).

The choice of a representative literary character - Don Juan - as the vehicle of this inverted analogy bears witness, of course, to the extent to which our conception of the emotions is informed by fictional archetypes.

Alternative Hypotheses

Another way in which Simon invalidates conventional approaches, while delineating the vast amount of data which would have to be taken into consideration in the evaluation of any psychological observation, is the attribution, to often very tenuous aspects of behaviour, of a quite astonishing number of alternative and hypothetical explanations. The evocation of Montès' mien when he is talking about himself dissolves into myriad explanations, which interact, modify and refine on one another without resolving themselves into one labellable complex factor (V, p.74). Paradoxically, it is often the most static, most fixed aspects of a character which present the greatest problems of interpretation. Montès' unchanging apparel generates a host of alternative hypotheses which, without cancelling one another out, are sufficiently different to suggest radically varying implications in any developmental assessment (p. 74). It is of crucial importance for us to know whether it is his own decision to retain the same vestimentary style, or whether it is under the influence of a domineering mother that he does so; yet the narrator cannot or will not come down on one side or the other.

The characters themselves, in their analysis of their own behaviour, do not aid understanding. Cécile's erratic, teasing commentary on her unexpected visit to Montès' hotel promotes mystification rather than elucidates (p. 67). She herself is incapable of, or reluctant to formulate fully and clearly the nature and implications of her relationship with Montès. Thus, she describes her visit in terms of a riddle with several possible solutions.[8]

In Le Vent, the attribution of motive is related to the central themes of the 'guilty innocence' of the saintly and catalytic Montès, and the transgression of moral codes. In Simon's work after Le Vent, the behavioural interest that remains is more generally epistemological than moral. The enigmas posed by Marie and de Reixach show an interest in the epistemology of motivation divorced from any evaluative effort, the commentaries drawing as much attention to the conditions of perception of behaviour as to the behaviour observed. Any one expression may be the result of a response to a certain stimulus on the part of the person observed, or again it may simply be inherent in the lighting conditions in which the observer finds himself (H, p.28).

In La Route des Flandres, the temporal dimension makes itself increasingly felt in the determination of psychological cause. Indeed, the novel begins with a behavioural omission - de Reixach's failure to explicitly recognize his relative - which opens up a problematical perspective into the former's past (pp.11-12). An appreciation of the complexity of the psychological reasons behind any aspect of behaviour entails a consideration of the interaction of a potentially infinite number of temporally distinct and often distant factors. Here, a variety of periods and events are painstakingly correlated in an attempt to explain what may simply be an unintentional behavioural omission.

In Histoire, with Simon's progressive decrease in interest in psychological study per se, two tendencies are to be noted which contribute to the relativization ad absurdum of the concept of motive. The less common is an accentuation of the previous complications which pulls tighter still that

Gordian knot of the elucidation of determining forces. In Histoire, the 'analysis' of the old family friend complicates the sequence of hypotheses by multiple complications and analogies which make us lose sight of the subject of the analysis (p.50). The other more common, and eventually prevalent, tendency is to banalize the explanations in the extreme, by the sly insertion of a pithy parenthesis which reverses the perspective on any one reaction (Hist, p.12), by the incongruous juxtaposition of the most individualized explanations alongside the most commonplace (Hist, p.12), or by the proposal in ascending order of frivolity of several trivializing hypotheses for a potentially sociologically interesting instance of behaviour:

> Insensiblement ils se rapprochèrent formant à la fin un seul attroupement... l'entourant attentifs soit qu'il fût le seul à porter un vêtement qui en dépit des manches effilochées et de son aspect fripé ressemblait à un costume civil soit qu'il fût le seul aussi à ne pas avoir d'arme du moins apparente soit encore que ses lunettes lui conférassent aux yeux des autres une autorité vaguement professorale. (Hist, p.195)

By the time of Triptyque, the ascription of alternative and contradictory explanations remains, but in a token, banal form which, without adding anything to the study of the human psyche, reminds us of the relativity of any interpretation - even of the most commonplace gesture:

> Au bout d'un moment, soit indécision, soit que la porte se trouve fermée à clé de l'autre côté, la main lâche la poignée et retombe le long du corps. (p.23)

In both Triptyque and Leçon de choses, it is with a certain facetious insouciance that Simon offers us a few isolated and elementary interpretations of reactions so common as to remain unnoticed. The off-hand insertion of terse parentheses qualifies and relativizes the most rudimentary behavioural

commentaries, and betrays a sceptical interpretative evasiveness on Simon's part.

Hyperbole and Over-interpretation

Another complementary aspect of Simon's critique of traditional novelistic behaviourism is the marked tendency on the part of his narrators to stylize and exaggerate the scanty indications of behaviour or appearance they have. It is principally in the works of Simon's 'middle period' that this extravagance appears.

The physical and behavioural description of the Italian in Le Palace (1962) gives no indication as to the workings of his mind or to his part in the presumed disposal of the American. The analogy with a stuffed, dressed monkey in a concierge's lodge puts whimsical hyperbole and graphic vigour before psychological demands (p.101). Where we might expect a more nuanced psycho-sociological analysis in Le Palace of the reasons for the failure of the revolution, we find that Simon is more interested in the spectacular and graphic effects of an anarchic transgression of social codes than in their political implications. Instead of a commentary on mass reaction and lack of leadership, he chooses to concentrate on the pictorial value of the ineffectual soldier, which he renders in an improbable comparison with a Christ-like figure rising above a throng of headless people (pp.193-4).

The descriptions of physical reactions and tics are equally insouciant of establishing a credible equivalence between tenor and vehicle. The inquisitive eye-movements of the furniture dealer in Histoire give rise to a surrealistic analogy with a pair of savage beasts which virtually reverses

the behavioural relationship whereby the reaction of parts of the body is taken as an index to the activity of the mind. Here the woman's eyes have been rendered independent and are controlling her (Hist, p.245). But perhaps the over-interpretation which is most outrageous, in terms of digressive extravagance and preposterous precision of detail, is the description of the narrator's fat but agile cousin's movements in Histoire. The narrator can only convey these movements by a comparison with a magician's stunt, and the attribution to him of a hyperspecialized instinct which the finest of behavioural grids could not accommodate (p.235).

The span and detail of the commentary highlights the inadequacy of a schematic polarity such as intelligence and instinct, and would suggest that specificity and precision can only be achieved through a transgression of probability-bound descriptive codes. The disproportion between the referent and what would purport to be its metaphorical expression monopolizes our attention and inhibits readerly naturalization and thematization.[9]

Gesture

This fastidiousness in the rendering of the extraordinary impression made by a particular movement on the narrator brings us finally in this section to another aspect of Simon's unorthodoxy. He is fascinated with gesture for its own sake. In the bulk of character-based fiction, the delineation of gesture is subordinated to its contribution of a meaningful element to the psychological study. The fact that a gesture is noted at all intimates its significance in the work as a whole. In Simon's fiction, on the contrary,

the informational value tends towards zero, while Simon's painterly interest in the graphic effect of gesture, movement and expression prevails.[10]

The link between Simon's gestural predilection and his painterly training under André Lhote is crucial. His commentary on Cézanne's Baigneuses anticipates an aesthetic, rather than humanist, appreciation of gesture in his subsequent work:

> De ces corps presque assexués en mouvement dans une éternité suspendue sans terme et sans autre raison que l'irradiant frémissement de leurs gestes sans commencement ni fin. (CR, pp.115-6) [11]

Similarly, his restriction of the artist's role to the observation of behaviour in a variety of contexts explains the many, apparently gratuitous references to very specific gestures.

This artist's interest in form and contour over and above anecdote is, of course, very evident in the many descriptions triggered off by analogies with famous paintings. As early as Le Tricheur, Simon contrives to introduce a long description of a Poussin wash, the animation of which illustrates Gauthier's Empedoclean aspirations (p.124). In the much later Histoire, in the description of the heated and gesticulatory quarrel between the Spanish Revolutionaries, the fictional pretext is reduced to a minimum. There, the interest is not psychological, sociological or dramatic, but in the recombinations of movement and gesture - as becomes evident in the immediately following comparison, again with Poussin (pp.208-9).

Another revealing commentary by Simon on genres other than his own can be seen in a brief reference to drama in Le Tricheur (p.108) which puts a rather unorthodox slant on Shakespeare. The narrator comments admiringly on the

evocativeness of the stage directions and embarks upon a brief summary of what they conjure up for him. What impresses him most in drama is not the interaction of personalities or more far-reaching, philosophical issues, but simply the dramatic spectacle, the interplay of motion, gesture and expression.

Certainly, this graphic interest does not preclude nor oust all personality indices from the notation of gestures. In Simon's early novels, gestures remain a reliable psychological pointer. Attention is explicitly drawn in Le Tricheur to the 'expressiveness' of Louis' gestures - apparently signs of will at the outset, they finish up as expressions of overwhelming animal instinct (p.173). In Gulliver, Herzog's mass of incoherent, jerky movements, twitches and tics are explicitly related to his representative status as an eternal victim, the archetypal Jew, and to the history of his people (p.99).

By the time of Le Vent, the gestural description is becoming increasingly stylized and divorced from the construction of a convincing three-dimensional character. The description of the episodic character Jep's manipulation of his cigar, while signifying in a very traditional way arrogance and insolence, in fact exists in a psychological vacuum as a kind of rarefied absolute instance of an insolent gesture, the stages of which are devolved before us as in slow motion (p.48).

This last gestural notation figures in the description of an intense scene which is, nevertheless, evoked in terms approximating the stylized form of the mime rather than the climactic dramatic scene of traditional fiction.

Undoubtedly, one of the main contributing factors in the sharpening of Simon's sensitivity to the visual eloquence of the mute scene is the rise of the cinema. Simon is of the generation which witnessed probably the most spectacular technical innovations in the area of moving pictures, and although in his interview on the theme of 'Film et roman: problèmes du récit', he is very concerned to point out the gulf between the two genres, he is neverthless ready to recognize the innovatory influence of the cinema on his own perception of the world:

> pour moi comme pour tous le cinéma a enrichi la vision que nous avons des choses (angles et distances de prises de vues, panoramiques, plans fixes, travellings, gros plans). Et naturellement cette nouvelle façon de voir se trouve dans ce que j'écris. (p.103)

This explains the multitude of analogies throughout his work[12] drawn from the silent film where action is presented without its familiar sonorous accompaniment in reality, and the acceleration and stylization of that action create an impression of <u>insolite</u> which makes us look anew at human gesture and movement in an emotional void.

The role of the cinema in the de-automatization of our perception is therefore crucial. However, in general, in his mute scenes, Simon prefers the deceleration of the mime proper to the acceleration of the silent film. In this he comes closer to the Formalist conception of description used as a defamiliarizing hindrance to the development of the action and to the naturalization of it into a summarizable plot. Description, by its very nature, is a deceleratory device, and in his work Simon often accentuates this aspect by applying it to an action which would receive but scant attention in the novel dominated by the proairetic or hermeneutic code.

Occasionally, the introduction of a mime-sequence is speciously justified in 'realistic' terms by the presence of a token screen separating observer and observed. However, frequently these mime-sequences are simply posited as they are, void of any 'realistic' vindication, and unjustifiable in terms of any hermeneutic or proairetic code. Note, for example, the exquisite, but rather arbitrarily introduced, description of the silent play of Rose's little girls, which is equally silently interrupted by Montès (V, pp.118-9). This scene contributes little to our understanding of the characters, fulfils no function in the plot, yet remains one of the most vivid and memorable visual images in the novel.

But undoubtedly, the description of the silent gesture which best illustrates the growing disproportion in Simon's work between the volume of writing and the relative 'busyness' and velocity of the plot can be seen in the single gesture replayed again and again in Georges' mind which acts as the catalyst for the deliberation of La Route des Flandres. Here, the whole of Georges' ratiocinative interrogation of his relative's past is triggered off by the latter's spectacular, but enigmatic, final sabre-thrust. The novel is largely a circumlocutory exercise in gestural interpretation with no definitive solution. Ultimately, the only abiding certainty is that of the graphic vividness of the gesture, which remains fixed in our imagination as in Georges'.

Simon's fiction from Histoire on sees a concentration on two specific aspects of gestural notation - one is an increase in the precision of descriptions of the angles and outlines of certain limbs in certain positions; the other is an interest in the semiological status of

gesture. In the former case, Simon often comes close to the stark, mathematically detailed descriptions of Robbe-Grillet. However, in general, his descriptions seem more like an attempt to rival the painter's capacity to render positions and gestures for which no single word exists. In Histoire, the near skeletal frame of his uncle's body means that an attempt on the part of the narrator to describe her posture entails a redefinition, in terms of multiple analogies, of the simplest, most banal, words, such as 'assis' (pp.152-3). In contrast with a simplistic equivalence of gesture and meaning, the attempt to conjure up a gesture in Simon frequently triggers off a potentially infinite regression of analogies which contribute to the accumulated detail but which do not constitute a totalized representation.

The description of the slumped posture of the man in the suit in Triptyque (p.127) is equally fastidious about the position of individual limbs, and their respective positions in relation to each other. The essentially pictorial interest of this description becomes explicit in the passage which immediately follows it, where it becomes the description of a painting. Simon neatly and wittily diverts psychological interpretations by suggesting that the only type of investigation possible here would be one related specifically to pictorial art and the process of delineation, which investigation is likewise dogged by uncertainty.

On many occasions, Simon marries this gestural precision with an equally precise notation of the shadows projected on the body in certain positions, and by it in certain gestures. Frequently, the shadowgraphical appeal of a scene is developed at the expense of its obvious psychological

or dramatic potential. In Histoire, there is, for instance, no elaborate exploration into the possible reasons for the 'tension' or 'incompatibility' between the narrator's parents or between the narrator and his wife (even here there is no certainty, since the 'characters' and their 'emotions' have been levelled out and relativized to the point of interchangeability). Instead, we get a scrupulous description of the play of light (moonlight and streetlamps) on their naked bodies as they lie in the dark (pp.359-60). Their relationship becomes a question of the relations between light and shade.

Even more meticulous than this is the extended treatment of the play of shadows on the frosted glass of the bank office, a description which is dispersed throughout the third 'section' of the novel. This passage is strongly reminiscent of that in Le Vent (pp.163-6) where Hélène arrives at her father's house to find Maurice trying to blackmail her father, a scene which is viewed, minus its dialogue, through a glass door. In Le Vent, however, the action was simply presented at one defamiliarizing remove and behavioural deductions remained possible. In Histoire, the mime dissolves into a flat play of shadows and the only deductions that can be made are those concerning the physical distance between the object reflected, the door and the source of light (Hist, p.73). At one point the shadows of the two men are schematized to the point where they are no more than a geometric pattern of bands of light and shade on the flat surface (p.95). Neither the characters involved nor the narrator's fascination with them hold any psychological interest for the reader, and the undeniable vividness of the description springs

entirely from the emphasis which the purified form of the silhouette throws on scarcely perceptible perspectival and light variations in the shadows thrown by different gestures.

At the same time as this increase in positional precision, and in conjunction with a new concentration on the way in which meaning is produced in his late fiction, Simon also devotes an increasing amount of attention to the semiological status of gesture and the codes and assumptions which underlie any interpretation of a gesture or attempt to express meaning through a gesture.

In the following passage from La Bataille de Pharsale, Simon disrupts the confident relationship between gesture and recognized meaning in the innocent-eye description which he offers of the normally obscene gesture of the soldier:

> L'un des soldats... se penche et fait... un geste en frappant de sa main gauche le creux de son coude droit tandis que l'avant-bras droit, le poing fermé, remonte vivement. (p.263)

This non-interpretative description focuses on the parts of the body involved in the gesture instead of the meaningful impression created by it, and suggests the lack of any real correspondence between a particular muscular movement and the significance attached to it.

Elsewhere, Simon further relativizes the validity of gestural indications by relating the issue explicitly to that of perception and narrative point of view. The following passage from Les Corps conducteurs describes the sick man's progress along the busy street:

> Quoiqu'il s'efforce toujours de garder un visage calme et de suivre une ligne droite il ne peut sans doute s'empêcher de tituber légèrement car dans les yeux des passants qu'il croise il peut lire comme un bref étonnement, parfois réprobateur, avant qu'ils se détournent avec indifférence. L'abondance des bars dont les enseignes se multiplient dans cette portion de la rue explique peut-être pour eux ce que son allure et son visage peuvent avoir d'étrange. (p.205)

Here the rigorous restriction of point of view to that of one particular character precludes a description of that character from the outside; that character then has to read his own appearance in the eyes and reactions of those he meets. The whole process of psychological interaction thereby becomes more and more hypothetical in its ramifications. An understanding of the passers-by, for example, presumes a correlation of their interpreted reaction with a hypothesis as to what his own appearance might be and a consideration of the context of both appearance and reaction. This throws into relief the multiple assumptions underlying all behavioural interpretations - taken to their logical conclusion they would entail an infinite regress of interacting hypotheses.

In Triptyque, Simon launches an attack from a different side again on the meaningful, purposeful gesture. Frequently, the gestures of his characters prove to be pointless; they achieve nothing or have to be undone. In this, he flaunts defiance at the principles of economy, unity and meaningfulness which governed the aesthetically effective novel, as defined by Percy Lubbock[13] and practised according to him by James, Flaubert, etc. Thus, in Triptyque, Simon notes the gratuitous, unproductive gesture of the anonymous, episodic stage-hand. After thoughtlessly tidying the set, he has to restore its previous disorder so as to maintain the scenic continuity of the film (p.131). Similarly, there are long descriptions of the incongruous antics of the clown, which constitute self-defeating, purposeless gestures in their most extreme and stylized form (e.g. p.78).

This same novel provides complementary ironic comment-aries on the way in which the gestural code is acquired.

One of these commentaries indicates the role of mime in the acquisition of meaningful codes. On pages 143-5, Simon describes the capers of children peeking illicitly into the cinema and squabbling among themselves. By page 145, the attention has been focused on the conflict between two of the children, and on the contrast between the one child's incoherent, spontaneous gesture of defiance and his eventual recourse to the more stylized gestures which have been instituted as part of a code, and which he sees in an advertisement for a boxing-match. The child is renouncing his own more vivid gesticulations in favour of the more rigid, schematic one of the code. At a different point in the same novel (p.146), in the drunken café scene, there is a breakdown of this rudimentary semiological code constituted by the limited gamut of recognized gestural clichés. Gradually, universally recognized and rigidly fixed signs:

> Accompagnant son geste du même tourniquet significatif de la main qui englobe toutes les personnes présentes dans l'estaminet,

give way to the wild incoherent gesticulation of people vainly trying to communicate:

> Accouchés ou plutôt accrochés au comptoir, deux des jeunes gens poursuivent en gesticulant une conversation incohérente,

and finally to the pointless and gratuitous, if ritualized, twitches and shivers of the almost narcissistic pop-dance of the ring-leader of the group of teddy-boys. The association of the acquisition of code with power and aggression is counterbalanced by the suggestion, in a pendant passage, of the facility with which the same code is rendered inoperative under certain physiological conditions.

Imaginary Gestures

Finally in this section, I should like to look at the complementary way in which Simon dissolves the confident behavioural one-to-one relationship between gesture and meaning through a neat reversal of this relationship i.e. he posits an emotion and describes it in an analogy with an imaginary gesture. Thus in Le Vent, Montès conjures up the impulsive, foot-stamping reaction which would correspond most closely to the impression of irritation conveyed by Cécile (pp.64-5). In traditional behavioural description the reader was always required to see past the gesture to the workings of the character's psyche; here the emotion is established and dismissed at one and the same time, while our attention is monopolized by the delineation of a vivid gesture. On page 100 of the same novel, Montès' own sensation of panic as he feels himself being drawn into situations and emotions which he cannot handle is likewise given a graphic 'unrealistic' representation in the form of an analogy with a whole gamut of gesticulations.

In L'Herbe Simon effects a refinement and complication of this procedure. On page 182, Sabine's sly expectation is not hypothetically deduced from her behaviour: her reaction is confidently asserted and then incarnated in an imaginary expression which is in turn compared to an imaginary gesture. In each of these examples, the apparent attempt to give a more nuanced description of the emotion through circumlocution and the evocation of an imaginary gestural correlative leads, paradoxically, to a depreciation of the emotion in favour of a vivid rendering of the imaginary vehicular gesture. Gesture is released from its traditional role as a metonymic index, is abstracted from its meaning-conferring context and

becomes a near-autonomous image. Its figurative description and the pre-emptive statement of emotion preclude any further interpretation. It remains recalcitrant to traditional assimilation, and we have no option but to consider it as a vivid linguistic - rather than psychological - event.

This second section has tried to trace Simon's long-running attack on traditional novelistic psychology. This attack was varied and thought-provoking, ranging from the explicit rejection of certain labels to much more indirect, ironic jibes, in the form of hyperbolic stylization and negative definitions. Two principal tendencies were noted, each concurrently developing and crossfertilizing the other in the course of his work - namely, the prominence of certain linguistic and stylistic devices, the implications of which will be considered in section four, and Simon's emphasis on the unlabellable specificity of certain reactions. We shall now look at the perspectives opened up by this latter concern and the more radical alternative offered by Simon's work to facile categorization - a concentration on the conditions of perception which precede the synthesis involved in such categorization.

III PERCEPTION - A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Our discussion of Simon's onslaught on traditional novelistic behaviourism and of his preoccupation with the specificity of mental and emotional states has shown him to be a writer of considerable self-consciousness. However, this in itself does not distinguish him from those self-

appointed heralds of ever more precise realism, whom he is so ready to condemn in his interviews. Furthermore, his relativization of interpretation has as its technical correlative a relativization of point of view which, if taken to its logical conclusion, would conflict with the tenet of fidelity of description likewise taken to its logical conclusion.

One possible exit from this apparent conceptual impasse is, however, suggested by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's keen interest in and use of Simon's work in his lectures.[14] A consideration of Simon's psychological relativity and his descriptive fastidiousness in the context of a larger, phenomenologically reductive project, may permit us to accommodate both in a coherent appreciation and to understand more precisely the way in which he dissociates himself from the realistic traditions.

The stress which Simon himself lays on the importance of the relationship subjectivity-world provides one of the most important clues to his attitude to the relationship between reality and representation. A comparison and correlation of two passages from temporally distant interviews will prove instructive in this connection:

> S'il semblerait, à première vue, logique pour un écrivain, de fixer ses pensées ou ses idées dans des essais, des maximes, des aphorismes et ses émotions ou ses sentiments dans des poèmes, des notations... un souci plus poussé d'exactitude amène à se demander ce qu'est sinon néant, la 'pensée pure' dissociée d'avec le support matériel qui l'a suscitée... il semble alors que seul le roman (c'est-à-dire la description de personnes dans certaines situations - étant entendu que celles-ci ne sont pas seulement psychologiques ou sociales mais aussi physiques: assis, debout, dans une pièce...) soit capable de permettre cet incessant va-et-vient, ce perpétuel échange entre la matière et la pensée, sans lequel, l'écrivain court le danger de voir son esprit fonctionner dans le vide.[15]

> Le stimulus de tout écrivain c'est la connaissance qu'il peut avoir du monde... Par exemple, le fameux tapis des Mille et une nuits: il a bien fallu que le conteur ait vu un jour d'une part un tapis, d'autre part des objets volants (des feuilles emportées par le vent ou des oiseaux...) ...Tout ce qu'on peut écrire, c'est non pas le monde extérieur mais sa projection en nous... Je disais autrefois: il est possible de reconstituer à partir de choses vécues, senties. Aujourd'hui, après avoir réfléchi je ne pense plus qu'on puisse 'reconstituer' quoi que ce soit. Ce que l'on *constitue*, c'est un texte et ce texte ne correspond qu'à une seule chose: à ce qui se passe dans l'écrivain au moment où il écrit.[16]

Quite apart from the shift in interest from referential to linguistic issues, taken together, these two passages provide an admirably succinct summary of Simon's coherent, if evolving, conception of the relationship between perception and representation. For Simon there cannot be a definitive, exact depiction of the world, which would have a validity independent of the writer's subjective perception; the notion of representation cannot exist in a perceptual vacuum. Conversely, the human mind is not an absolute conceptual function. It is indissociable from the material supports which set its thoughts in motion, and therefore, it is the more concrete and modernistically relativized novel form which can best accommodate its situational state. In short, in so far as Simon's novels retain an intrinsic referential dimension, they are concerned not with the thankless striving towards greater realism but with the rendering of a particular phenomenological Lebenswelt.[17] Considered in this light as something like a phenomenological study of the conditions of perception and the relationship between the subject and the world, the marriage of subjective point of view and the meticulousness of description in Simon's work becomes not only possible but inevitable.

Simon's relativization of the traditional concept of

behaviour and character in novels can be assimilated to Merleau-Ponty's own initial attack on classical psychology in Phénoménologie de la perception. It is part of the suspension of prejudices which inhibit a pristine view of the world. Paradoxically, it is in the course of a polemical attack on Sartre that Simon, defining what he admires in Robbe-Grillet, does so in terms which echo strongly the phenomenologically reductive position:

> Cet acharnement austère... à découvrir enfin (dans le sens littéral du mot) un univers tangible, mesurable lavé nettoyé des vieux mythes qui chloroforment l'humanité traduit autrement que bien des déballages indécents, déclamatoires et larmoyants d''états d'âmes' torturés, l'angoisse de l'homme moderne dans son monde incohérent.[18]

Elsewhere, he describes his own project as a 'constante et perpétuelle contestation'.[19] In short, Simon's onslaught on traditional novelistic behaviourism is a kind of epistemological purge which necessarily accompanies any attempt to see the world anew.

For all this, Simon's interest does not spring from any firm, systematic philosophical convictions. As he is quick to point out when his interviewers try to draw him into a philosophical discussion, he is, if anything, a painter by training and not a philosopher.[20] On several occasions, he has attributed his heightened awareness of the minutiae of his experience to a grave attack of tuberculosis which rendered him bed-ridden for five months and to a near encounter with death during the débâcle.[21] The situations described in these interviews constitute crucial experiences in which the paradoxical nature of human existence appears at its most clear and untrammelled by spurious deterministic factors - i.e. Simon was made acutely aware of himself as a 'body-

subject'. His immediate physical vulnerability heightened his awareness of sensory impressions and the play of external forces upon his body, and drew attention to both the precariousness and the preciousness of his personal existence and sense of identity. Furthermore, the enforced passiveness of his sick confinement loosened the practical intentional bonds which had blinded him to the experience of living, through the imposition of more ambitious purposes and functions.

The coincidence, in a situation of danger, of a heightened sense of experience with a sensitivity to its tenuousness is the paradox on which much of Simon's work is based. In his middle fiction, in particular, Simon explores the factors which in certain extreme conditions undermine our sense of identity; however, at the same time he also illustrates the inevitable subjectivity of perception and the ways in which we articulate perceptual data into a coherent entity which might be called experience. Although the effectiveness of this paradox depends on a simultaneous treatment of its terms in Simon's novels, for reasons of clarity, I shall look at its ramifications separately and in turn - namely, (i) those factors which entail a dissolution of the ego in Simon's work, (ii) his stress on the subjective nature of all experience, (iii) his study of the ways in which we organize our perceptual data into an integrated experience, and (iv) the way in which the individual is constituted in language.

(i) The Dissolution of the Ego

The Traumatic Situation

It is in those passages which have their starting-point in Simon's war-experiences, that the question of the dissolution of the identity comes most conspicuously to the fore. In this situation, the intentional arc[22] which unifies and gives purpose to the multitude of sensory data impinging on us at every moment relaxes, and the gravitational point which we take to be our identity is dislocated.[23] Thus in La Route des Flandres the apparently arbitrary shifts in narrative point of view from the third to the first person and vice versa can be explained by the sensation of personal dispersal which is occasioned by a change in the balance of the relationship body-world, and by the concomitant violence with which external reality impinges on our senses. Georges, shell-shocked and drunk, cannot recognize his own reflection in the mirror and contemplates the movements of his own limbs with a stunned detachment (p.207). Ultimately for Simon, the war is not so much the sociologically interesting combination of forces and circumstances into an historical event, but rather the sudden disappearance of the most fundamental co-ordinates on the basis of which we structure our lives and act in the world. The resulting heightening of sensory impression at the expense of conscious bodily control, and the suspension of one's sense of identity alert us to the fundamentally a-personal or transpersonal nature of being-present-within-the-world.

Simon's formulation of his awareness of a primary perceptual stratum which precedes the constitution of the

ego is typically idiosyncratic and intuitive. However, a comparison between a passage from La Corde raide, evoking his sense of dislocation, and another from Merleau-Ponty's Phénoménologie de la perception, describing the primary sensory structure which the latter has labelled transcendental subjectivity, is illuminating:

> Réveillé, je regarde dans la glace une figure végétale, végétale comme un tronc d'arbre, un idiot, un train. Est végétal tout ce qui pousse au hasard dans les plaines ou les villes de pierre tout ce qui vient et puis s'en va. Je pense à toutes les choses qui arrivent et qui disparaissent, qui ont un commencement et une fin à une heure bien déterminée et qui ne pensent pas par elles-mêmes. Il y a le commencement et la fin d'un homme, d'une guerre, d'une machine à écrire, d'une fourmi. Une ville, un tableau, un caillou, le ciel, l'eau, vous n'en finirez jamais ça n'a ni queue ni tête, ni droite ni gauche et ça pense. (CR, p.170)

> Toute perception a lieu dans une atmosphère de généralité et se donne à nous comme anonyme. Je ne peux pas dire que je vois le bleu du ciel au sens où je dis que je comprends un livre ou encore que je décide de consacrer ma vie aux mathématiques. Ma perception, même vue de l'intérieur, exprime une situation donnée: je vois du bleu parce que je suis sensible aux couleurs... De sorte que, si je voulais traduire exactement l'expérience perceptive, je devrais dire qu'on perçoit en moi et non pas que je perçois. Toute sensation comporte un germe de rêve ou de dépersonnalisation comme nous l'éprouvons par cette sorte de stupeur où elle nous met quand nous vivons vraiment à son niveau. (PP, p.249)

In La Corde raide, Simon is disrupting the classical distinction between man and the universe, and suggesting a new polarity which cuts across the old. He identifies the eternal, or at least lasting aspects of the world with a kind of a-personal, but concretized and localized consciousness which is to be distinguished from what he calls the vegetable, i.e. the ephemeral, finite and individual instances of life. Simon's 'philosophy' is naive and unsystematic. However, in its recourse to the notion of some a-personal subjective gestalt underlying and pre-existing the thematization of the world in terms of man's finite state, it warrants a comparison

with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the transcendental subjectivity which Spiegelberg defines economically in the following terms:

> there is a 'true cogito' (cogito véritable) which can be expressed in impersonal formulations like: 'there is consciousness, something shows itself, there is a phenomenon' (PP 342)... The new cogito is my being-present-within-the-world... consciousness is already involved by previous commitment and ultimately by its birth and 'incarnation' in a certain body in space, and... in history.[24]

Considered in this light, the sensation of dispersal experienced by Simon's characters can be seen as part of an attempt to create the conditions of a primary, prereflective perceptual stratum which precedes the constitution of the ego.

In Le Tricheur, Gauthier tries to bring about a kind of reduction by ceding conscious control to sensory impression and allowing himself to fall off his bicycle. This attempt is, however, governed by a double-edged desire - an ambition to transcend the limits of his ego in a heroic Empedoclean diffusion, and a desire to escape the responsibilities of the individual. At this stage Simon is still concerned with moral issues of responsibility, and Gauthier is condemned to failure. Nevertheless, his bathetic experiment does draw attention to the precarious nature of our sense of personal identity, and anticipates much of Simon's development. The proximity to death dissolves the clear-cut contours of individuality, while leaving intact a more elementary level of existence where perception remains subjective but trans-personal.

> Il peinait un peu pour hisser sa géante masse de chair et d'os.... son corps. Sans ombre maintenant, reflet de son être inscrit sur le corps de la terre.
> Mais non, elle était toujours là; seulement elle avait cessé d'avoir des limites. Tout en continuant d'être. Et peut-être la mort était-ce seulement cela. Si tout simplement on se répandait...
> Il pouvait sentir leur sueur et aussi deviner la fatigue de leurs membres...
> -Je.
> Il sentait ses reins fatigués, leurs reins fourbus (p.93)

The first person pronoun proves to have no intrinsic substantive meaning but to be an indefinite shifter, an arbitrary linguistic tool normally naturalized and invested with a substantive personality.

The opening of Simon's next work, La Corde raide, sets the general tone of semi-autobiographical stock-taking and posits from the outset an acute openness to sensation which both anticipates the opening of Histoire, and looks back to that of A la recherche du temps perdu:

> Autrefois je restais tard au lit, et j'étais bien.
> Je fumais des cigarettes, jouissant de mon corps étendu
> et je regardais par la fenêtre les branches d'arbres...(p.9)

Also reminiscent of Proust is his differentiation between the various sensations of waking up in foreign hotel rooms. The relaxation, in the traveller, of the sense of urgency associated with human intentions and activities promotes sensory openness and allows Simon to transcend the immediate situation. By the time of La Corde raide, i.e. after his traumatic war experiences, any notion of moral irresponsibility associated with the leisurely deployment of the senses has disappeared, and Simon feels free to savour the impressions which are penetrating him (p.187). If anything, there is, in the contrast between his recumbent attention to sensation and the bustle of the life around him, a slightly self-righteous note which elevates this relaxation into an ideal (p.105). This passage is strongly echoed in Gulliver in the description of the world-weary Max, lying motionless for hours listening to the daily drudgery of all the other people in the building in which he is lodging (pp.248-51). In both passages there is a certain sense of superiority implicit in the disassociated recognition of the vanitas

of the activities of those around one, ultimately overshadowed as everyone is by death. One recalls the novels of the Absurdist and Existentialist schools and, in particular, the passage in La Nausée describing Roquentin sitting on a hill looking down with disgust at the bustling town. In fact, at this stage there is still an affirmative intellectualizing pretention implicit in Simon's work which he will himself undermine in later interviews.[25]

It is undoubtedly in La Route des Flandres and Histoire that the evocation of egoistic dissolution in conditions of trauma is most vividly and unpretentiously described. Thus on page 244 of La Route des Flandres, Georges' preoccupations, as he and Iglésia lie in the ditch watching the Germans go by, are reduced to physical longing for dissolution and identification with the 'matrice originelle' of the earth. In the same novel, the reverse side of the primal force of conflict is likewise responsible for a sensation of personal dispersal. Thus on page 269, Georges tries to maintain the infinite sensation of oblivion after the sexual act, while in the act itself (p.292), his sense of identity is dislocated by an awareness of the relativity of his own experience of the promiscuous Corinne, and by an identification with primeval animal forces.

Le Palace focuses specifically on the problem of altérité and self, and the rememorative attempt to totalize one's experience of the world and of other people. This leads to a recognition that the individual is no more than a particular combination of non-unique experiences of contingent reality:

> pouvant les entendre (c'est-à-dire, si, comme on l'affirme un homme est constitué par la somme de ses

> expériences, pouvant entendre cette partie de lui-même qui avait la forme d'un Américain déguingandé... en train de dialoguer avec cette autre partie de lui-même qui avait la forme d'un type chauve... tous les deux se tenant dans cette partie de lui-même qui avait la forme d'une petite place...(p.256)

One's fragile sense of uniqueness is challenged when one's ruminations about the mental workings of the Other become obsessive and militate against one's concern for personal survival. Thus in Le Palace, the narrator experiences a diminution to the point of insignificance of his own sense of identity and a centrifugal identification with his surroundings, both animate and inanimate (p.221). What starts as an attempt to assimilate external reality results in personal dispersal, though ironically the student does not realize this, continues to try to appropriate the world linguistically and believes to the end in an ultimate access to the past, a situation (death) where the Other will behave consistently and according to his memory of Him (p.227).

Histoire reaffirms the double-edged nature of these forces of dissolution - they at once offer reassuring oblivion and constitute a threat to one's autonomy. The novel is, at one and the same time, a desperate attempt to allay the narrator's sense of personal dislocation through recapitulation:

> Pensant: ne pas dissoudre, s'en aller en morceaux
> Où, comment? Récapitulation (p.89),

and a rememorative and imaginary return to the foetal-like oblivion of the womb, before the setting in motion of his individual, finite life in which a limited number of experiences are accumulated and hardened into an ego (p.402).

Simon further accentuates the experience of dislocation by having the narrator evoke his uncle's sensation of dissolution and openness to impression in the artist's studio (p.301),

and the uncle recount to the student what his (the student's) experience in Spain must have been like - again in terms of an identification with his surroundings (pp.165, 168). The relaxation of the intentional arc in moments of crisis, illness (e.g. Les Corps conducteurs) or erotic excitement entails a distension of one's experiential horizons to the point of identification of subjective consciousness and sensory support in the world.

Synaesthesia

The synaesthetic experience is another important factor in the dissolution of the sense of identity in certain circumstances. Synaesthesia, by its very nature, constitutes an increase in openness to sensation which tends towards a-personality. This is made explicit in a lengthy passage in La Corde raide evoking complex synaesthetic sensations, and concluding with a paradox which sums up their solvent effect on the ego:

> Les bruits et les couleurs se mélangent. Celui du camion qui dure, obstiné, sur toute la longueur de l'avenue et celles des maisons d'en face, lilas, orange, gris, et celle des arbres comme des plumeaux noirs...
> Tout s'embrouille et s'interpénètre... et ils jouent leurs musiques en arc de ciel acide sur ma table et des avions passent en grondant à travers ma tête...
> A cause de tout cela, je ne suis pas moi. (pp.169-70)

Here, a loosening of the intentional perceptual grid through which Simon is habituated to see the world, and a concomitant passive disponibilité to sensation give him access to a synaesthetic level of experience which in structural terms antecedes both the constitution of the ego and the articulation of simultaneous perceptual data into sensory categories, and which Merleau-Ponty associates with the notion of transcen-

dental subjectivity:

> Dans cette attitude [that of a phenomenological reduction] en même temps que le monde se pulvérise en qualités sensibles, l'unité naturelle du sujet percevant est brisée et j'en viens à m'ignorer comme sujet d'un champs visuel. Or de même que, à l'intérieur de chaque sens, il faut retrouver l'unité naturelle, nous ferons apparaître une 'couche originaire' du sentir qui est antérieure à la division des sens. (PP, p.262)

Throughout Simon's fiction we encounter a wide variety of synaesthetic references ranging from the cursory, momentarily suggestive 'peau qui sait, qui voit le scintillement' of Le Sacre du printemps (p.36) to La Bataille de Pharsale where the narrator's jealousy is produced very largely on the basis of the synaesthetic paradox of the seeing ear, which unites present sensation and time-spanning imagination in the production of a hypothesis/fiction:

> pierre pouvant voir je pouvais entendre leur sueur pellicule peu à peu plus froide oreille voyant l'enchevêtrement confus de membres avec des parties nettes d'autres bougées comme s'ils avaient été un de ces couples de créatures mythiques... (p.25)

In Leçon de choses[5] (p.171) the same motif is used to evoke the sensation of natural rhythm which is the primal basis for the temporal articulation of our experiences.

The indeterminacy of some of our sensory impressions ought to alert us to the crude and selective nature of the apparently watertight categories through which we filter our experiences. In L'Herbe, the apparent subordination of everything to hearing in the activity of eavesdropping actually suggests, at certain moments of particularly acute attentiveness, an instinctual level of sensory experience which precedes and anticipates the perception of sound:

> l'espèce d'ahanement silencieux (et pourtant perceptible à travers la cloison: pas audible, perçu peut-être par autre chose que l'ouïe, un autre sens). (pp.175-6)

Conversely, the rendering of a complex impression often entails the transgression of conventional linguistic classifications and the positing of paradoxes where, for example, sounds are rendered in vividly graphic terms:

> Les bruits du soir couleur de cendre entraient par la porte ouverte: la trompette s'était tue et tout s'apaisait, en vagues de plus en plus molles, leur écume morte encore bercée sur leurs dos, s'étirant en longues bavures marbrées. (LT, p.105)

Nor is the classical division between the senses and the intellectual faculties left intact. The vivid visual images suggested by sounds (e.g. Le Tricheur, p.99) indicate the tenuousness of the distinction between sensory impression and imagination, while the vision of Uccello's Battle of San Remo conjured up by the imaginary piétinement of the dead suggests the interaction of imagination, sensory impression and the cultural memory of acquired knowledge (p.93).
The relations between our various perceptual and intellectual faculties are far from stable, and the synaesthetic experience offers an insight into the way in which our impressions organize themselves into a precarious hierarchy in certain situations. Thus, the description of Bernard's impressions as he listens in on his stepfather's 'phone-call to Edith, on page 224 of Le Sacre du printemps, suggests the primacy of the visual in the exercise of the imagination. The visual image prevails here even when the perception of this one-sided conversation is of course aural. This curious phenomenon can only be conveyed by a comparison with the subtitled cinema which likewise translates the aural into the visual. Elsewhere, in a specifically erotic context, it is the sense of touch which prevails over the play of graphic shapes:

> Ses seins ovales remuaient sous l'étoffe légère du corsage, appelant la main à les palper, déjà pleine de leur dure lourdeur (LT, p.99)

while, on other occasions, the very acuteness and extremity of the visual impression results in a kind of spontaneous, chain-reaction overflow from one sensory category to the other:

> la lumière le frappant, soudain, brutalement (presque bruyamment, comme le contenu liquide et blafard d'un récipient lancé à la volée et qu'il aurait reçu de plein fouet. (P, p.173)

Such categorial transgression, combined with the mobile priorities of the hierarchization of experience and the revelation of a prereflective, unfactorizable level of experience, constitutes a radical challenge to the positivist and realist belief in the definitive classifiability of experience.

The Tyranny of Irrelevant Sensory Impression

The suspension of our categorizing hierarchization of impressions is often accompanied by a relaxation of the functional perspective on the individual objects of our world, and by an increase in the prominence of random detail in our perception of our surroundings. Such a suspension is to be most acutely observed in moments of crisis, when the loss of conscious control over our body and environment results in a hypersensitivity to impressions which we would normally suppress as trivial and irrelevant. Merleau-Ponty draws attention to the irrepressible, prereflective functioning of senses, independent of the personal trauma of the individual:

> on peut dire que mon organisme, comme adhésion prépersonnelle à la forme générale du monde, comme existence anonyme et générale, joue, au-dessus de ma vie personnelle, le rôle d'un complexe inné... Pendant que je suis accablé

> par un deuil et tout à ma peine, déjà mes regards errent devant moi, ils s'intéressent sournoisement à quelque objet brillant, ils recommencent leur existence autonome. (PP, pp.99-100)

This tendency is well illustrated in Simon's work. His characters are constantly plagued by the readiness with which their minds and eyes stray even during the most serious of considerations.

In Le Palace, at the height of his panic after the American's disappearance, the student's attempt to formulate hypotheses and to explain away his own excitement is constantly being foiled by the force with which the most banal elements of his immediate external surroundings - such as the pattern of the linoleum (p.181) - impinge on his senses. Similarly, in Histoire, during one of the most critical moments in the narrator's personal life - his separation from his wife in the railway station - his attention is distracted by random and incongruous details - the froth in the bottles of the drunk soldiers, the large buttocks of a passenger stretching to capacity her Chinese silk trousers (pp.365-6). Here, as elsewhere, visual and graphic vividness has prevailed over potential analysis and the labelling of emotion, and has hindered the thematization of the situation in terms of human drama.

The pursuit of the implications of this disruptive graphic force inevitably raises the question of the opacity of the object, and the challenge that it can pose to our sense of environmental control. In certain conditions, individual objects begin to take on a disconcerting appearance of autonomy which challenges the classical assumption of the superiority of man over his environment, and therefore the very basis of the distinction between man and his world.

Here, Simon is toying with the paradoxical status of the object as an en-soi-pour-nous, i.e. something which can only be conceived of as the object of human perception, but at the same time enjoying a certain independence and opacity because it can be conceived of as existing in a context where there are no human beings present to perceive it directly. In our day-to-day, anthropocentric and functional perspective on these objects, we tend to forget those elements intrinsic to it which we have not attributed to it and which cannot be explained in terms of human usefulness.

> On ne peut... concevoir de chose perçue sans quelqu'un qui la perçoive. Mais encore est-il que la chose se présente à celui-là même qui la perçoit comme chose en soi et qu'elle pose le problème d'un véritable en-soi-pour-nous. Nous ne nous en avisons pas d'ordinaire parce que notre perception, dans le contexte de nos occupations, se pose sur les choses juste assez pour retrouver leur présence familière et pas assez pour redécouvrir ce qui s'y cache d'inhumain. Mais la chose nous ignore, elle repose en soi. Nous le verrons si nous mettons en suspens nos occupations et portons sur elle une attention métaphysique et désintéressée. Elle est alors hostile et étrangère, elle n'est plus pour nous un interlocuteur, mais un Autre résolument silencieux, un Soi qui nous échappe autant que l'intimité d'une conscience étrangère. (PP, p.372)

On several occasions in Simon's work we find references to the thought-provoking fact of the continuing existence of ignored objects. He draws attention to their curious nature as objects in relation to an understood human subject-ivity by describing them negatively in relation to a human consciousness whose attention is focused elsewhere. For example, the rifle and the growing oil-stain it is leaving on the chair are both ignored by the four revolution-aries watching the funeral procession in Le Palace (pp.102-3). In the same novel, there is a reference to the gilt letters on gravestones dropping off and rusting away to nothing without anyone seeing them do so (p.105).

In Triptyque, the current-tossed fishing-line is forgotten by the two boys who are more interested in a little girl undressing in the bushes (p.182). Objects and their various displacements, or lack of displacement, are described in relation to human action upon them, but this does not preclude a certain 'thingness' which allows them to continue to exist when individual subjectivities are no longer concerned with them:

> La carte postale...est maintenant appuyée contre l'un des montants qui soutiennent la partie supérieure du buffet. Personne, par contre, ne semble s'être soucié du lapin dépouillé...non plus que du panier tel qu'il a été posé là. (pp.200-1)

This element of opacity and independence can take on disconcerting and alarming proportions where one's own sense of autonomy and one's confidence in one's ability to control the situation are shaken. Hence the meticulous description in Le Palace of the obstinacy of the newspaper, which continues to unfold by itself regardless of the different ways in which the student refolds it (pp.146,183). Similarly, in Histoire, an old broken-down car-engine and a temperamental tap are described in subjective terms of hostility, mockery, fury and gaiety (pp.291-2,43-4).

The epigraph to the third section of La Bataille de Pharsale (p.187), drawn from Heidegger, sheds important light here on Simon's view of the relationship between man and object. The malfunctioning or break-down of a tool, i.e. of an object considered essentially as subordinated to the purposes of man, exposes the fallacy of the anthropocentric assumption of superiority, and makes us aware of the resistance of partially opaque objects to exhaustion by the human mind. The defamiliarizing disruption of the

privileged anthropocentric perspective on the world results in the revelation of a challenging aspect insolite of the previously subordinated object.

It is perhaps the clown of Triptyque who best epitomizes man's ultimate inability to control, in any absolute sense, what he superficially assumes to be inanimate reality (pp.107-9). At one point, the clown's shoe is imaginatively metamorphosed into an uncontrollable substitute dog. Through the transformation of the banal, the clown recreates in a heightened form those conditions where our assumptions are 'parenthesized' and our control of the situation is questioned by aspects of our Lebenswelt which we had taken for granted.

One rather more spectacular form of the insolite is the large-scale construction fabricated by man but apparently deserted by him. The description of the Great Wall of China stresses the silence and the absence of any visible human beings (Hist, pp.131-2). A similar example can be found in Les Corps conducteurs, in the imaginary description of the abandoned city offices (p.81). Simon has exploited for its graphic vividness the very common phenomenon of the modern nocturnal ghost-town - not with any sociological purpose in mind but as an instance of the unfamiliar, and for the bewildering philosophical implications its existence poses in relation to perception.

The isolated and deserted landscape poses a similar challenge to man. In a brief but suggestive passage in Les Corps conducteurs, Simon shows a fine sensitivity to the dramatic effect on our perception that travel and the discovery of some uninhabited or unknown place can have. Thus, on page 88, he recreates imaginatively the pristine

perspective of the first explorers of the New World. In the same novel, Simon uses the panoramic views of the seashore from an aeroplane to convey the spectacle insolite of the sprawling uninhabited stretches of the globe, with their unexpected variations and awesome nakedness (p.182), while an even more profound impression is made by the sudden looming appearance of the spectral, virgin summit of a mountain viewed from the same(?) aeroplane (p.40).

The natural world thus seen under unusual viewing conditions makes us register its presence outside us. Similarly, at the end of Triptyque, the artificial illumination of the shrubbery in the nocturnal search for the presumably drowned child, allows us to stumble upon a whole gamut of non-human activities which normally pass unnoticed (pp.207-8). This passage is not an animistic description designed to show the eternal principle of renewal in Nature in spite of individual human deaths: it is primarily concerned with the unfamiliar perspective cast on reality here, and suggests the teeming multitude of things going on around us which we do not notice.

The Non-substantiality of the Past, the Revisability of Memory

The integrity of the perceiving subject is not challenged solely by factors disrupting the balance of the relationship between the intentionally oriented subjectivity and the surrounding world. Even those areas of human reality which seem invulnerable to doubt - past experiences and personal memory - prove to be but tenuously circumscribed entities which are equally relative to context, and which dissolve into uncertainty under pressure.

Simon reaches this conclusion through an examination of two specific and related aspects of perception - the décalage between perception and intellection, and the partial and intermittent nature of perception.

One instance of the delay in assimilation of sensory data can be seen on page 107 of La Route des Flandres. There, we encounter a long, self-qualifying description of the peculiar décalage between visual perception and the intellectual processing of auditory data, as Georges registers the antics of the soldier in civilian clothes who accosts and warns him and Iglésia. The eye has time to take in the vivid graphic effects of the movements, but his mind cannot immediately string together the sounds perceived into a coherent, meaningful statement. Similarly, in Le Palace the student's panic translates itself in a voluble reflex functioning of his vocal cords which precedes and prevents understanding of what is going on (p.203). However, it is not only in situations of extreme fatigue and alarm that our perception plays such tricks on us. Montès, for instance, naturally perceives and conceives at varying intervals (V, p.48, 105, 196).

The décalage has fairly important consequences for novelistic technique too. The majority of Simon's novels of the middle period are retrospective interrogations of the past on the part of the narrators. The evocation of the view from the back of the car as it hurtles through the revolutionary city in Le Palace (pp.80-1) constitutes a fine mise en abyme for the narrative technique of the fiction of this period. (The fact that Sartre uses an analogy based on such a view in his essay on time in The Sound and

the Fury is a happy coincidence if not necessarily a source of inspiration for Simon.)[26]

The only novel of the period which is not purely retrospective is L'Herbe where a decision has to be made in the present concerning the future (albeit on the basis of curious factors in the past). Here, it is through the insertion of naturalistically anomalous temporal prolepses[27] that Simon draws attention to our inadequate understanding of what is happening to us in the present (pp.114, 124, 126-7, 140, 153-4, 155-6, 166). This inadequate understanding has significant implications for those notions so crucial to our sense of identity - free will and self-determination. If we are constantly beset by our sense of accumulated time and unable to comprehend what is happening to us in the immediate present, the exercise of will is hampered and the course of our life is determined by factors extraneous to us. Furthermore, on page 126, Simon defines the passing of time and the understanding it brings with it not as a gain, a filling out of the personality and a stabilizing of the identity, but as a loss of innocence. The passing of time does not necessarily enrich us and give our personality substance: retrospective knowledge can schematize our aspirations to the point of caricature.

In fact, Simon has set up in L'Herbe a highly ambivalent temporal structure, the ambiguities of which contribute to the depersonalization of the character labelled Louise. Whereas the classical novel contrived to orchestrate as many cognate but distinctive characteristics as possible in such a way as to naturalize an initial given name, in L'Herbe the one feature which characterises Louise - her

desire to leave - is gradually eliminated and her sole action consists of the reversal of a previous decision. The anomalous time sequence contributes greatly to this depersonalization. Both Stuart Sykes and Gérard Roubichou have examined the way in which 'les dix jours d'une agonie deviennent un espace romanesque à la fois concentré et éclaté dans et par la conscience du narrateur et du personnage central'.[28] In order to be able to take the decisive step to leave with her lover, Louise would have to maintain a sharp awareness of time passing and of the urgency of action. In fact, the imaginary incursions into Marie's past seem to become more and more real, as Louise becomes more and more remote from her 'present' situation, and as the precise sequence of the ten days, which at first seems to form the temporal framework of the novel, becomes increasingly indeterminate and confused. Ultimately, it could be said that Louise's decision to stay is produced on the level of the narration (as opposed to that of the character's psyche) by the confusion (combination) of two heterogeneous temporal frames. The observation of certain perceptual effects is already having important consequences for Simon's technical awareness.

The partial and intermittent nature of their attention to the world is the other factor which foils the attempts of the characters to achieve an integrated view of their personality. In La Corde raide, Simon stresses the heterogeneity and meaninglessness of his own albeit vivid memories:

> il n'en reste plus, comme au fond d'un tiroir qu'on rouvre après des années... qu'une suite confuse d'images et de figures, pleines de violence et de lumière, véhémentes, muettes... un film gesticulant, sans sous-titres, sans même l'accompagnement d'un frêle et fantomatique piano. (p.47)[29]

In Le Vent, the gaps in Montès' story are as prominent as the fragmentary information he has retained and his awareness of the passing of time is irregular in the extreme (p.146). The different moi of different periods remain recalcitrant to an absolute and definitive reconciliation (p.173).
In Simon, the individual is not a closed entity: he is a fluid, never totalized accumulation of temporally separated sensations, plus elements from the past of others. With the dissolution of the past into myriad perceptions, the barriers between personal pasts are lifted and the narrator can recollect his uncle's experiences and vice versa (Hist, passim). Ultimately in Simon, the consciousness is an anonymous structure in which different experiences are assimilated; the variations in perception of the world are not those between two idiosyncratically defined personalities, or those which emerge in the evolution of a person's character: they are simply variations in constitution between different combinations of the same elements of the Lebenswelt:

> jouant, faisant son office... ce formidable appareil à assimiler toute situation nouvelle que sont, non seulement l'homme, sa conscience, mais le tout (gens, objets, arbres, ciel) contenu dans cette conscience, reflété par elle, c'est-à-dire à la fois la constituant et l'enfermant; la modification - ou la disparition - d'un des éléments étant aussitôt compensée par une série d'infimes modifications (contractions ou dilations) en chaîne des autres parties composantes, de sorte que se reforme, dans l'instant même, un autre tout, différant par sa composition, mais dont le poids, le volume total sont exactement les mêmes. (H, p.104)

Once again the analogy with Merleau-Ponty's non-substantive view of the subject is eloquent:

> Nous avons l'expérience d'un monde, non pas au sens d'un système de relations qui déterminent entièrement chaque événement, mais au sens d'une totalité ouverte dont la synthèse ne peut être achevée. Nous avons l'expérience d'un Je, non pas au sens d'une subjectivité absolue, mais indivisiblement défait et refait par le cours du temps. (PP, p.254)

With Simon, as with Merleau-Ponty, the classical a priori assumption of the facticity of a clearly defined personality is neutralized in favour of a serious exploration of both the disconcerting gaps in our memory and of the common ground of transpersonal experience.

In contrast with the informational and integrative role of background and recollective flashbacks in the traditional novel,[30] memory and recollective flashbacks in Simon dislocate the character, and references to ancestors (e.g. in La Route des Flandres) lead not to the establishment of a convincingly determined character, but to confusion, the superposition of subjectivities, and an infinite regression of hypotheses and factors to be taken into consideration. Le Palace is less a rememoration than a constant contestation of the past, and the investigation of the student only leads to his personal annihilation. Simon stresses the arbitrariness of the correlation of different episodes into a meaningful whole. Thus on several occasions, after a long description or piece of narrative, he inserts a tiny phrase such as 'mais peut-être était-ce des années plus tard' (p.120) which throws an aura of doubt over everything. Elsewhere, memories are superimposed to the point where one can never be sure that one is attaching the right context to the right dialogue or incident.

(ii) Subjectivity

The preceding section has been concerned with Simon's attack on one of the most obdurate assumptions of traditional novelistic psychology - the belief in the substantiality of

identity, of the clearly delineated personality with recognizable and enduring characteristics and an inalienable past. In Simon, the sensation prevails over the characteristic; memory dissolves into associated but heterogeneous impressions which owe something of their vividness to their very discreteness. However, the subversion of the notion of identity does not automatically discredit that of subjectivity, and we have tried to show the way in which this very subversion grants us access to a level of perception which precedes reflection. There remain to be discussed a few points concerning Simon's subscription to the idea of the ubiquitousness of subjectivity.

Undoubtedly one of Simon's most categorical statements on this subject was made in relation to a discussion of the status of the writer and the notion of realism, in an interview given on June 7, 1970 to the Tribune de Lausanne.[31]
Here, he rejects outright the twin notions of realism and objectivity, adducing the subjective nature of all perception, and the lack of any absolute criteria by which to judge accuracy of statement or the convergence of viewpoints. The influence of his painterly interests is evident here in his choice of the perception of colour as an ideal test-case - there is no way of determining whether or not we are all perceiving the same thing when we label a colour.

A rather poignant passage in La Corde raide (p.21) illustrates another such test-case. It was the sight of terminal illness on the part of Simon's uncle that seems to have brought home the different significance that identical things must have for individuals in different situations. The awareness of our mortal condition relativizes human

perspective according to our proximity or distance vis à vis death. Conversely, the emergence of a self-awareness is also the thing which renders man most vulnerable. This is the point made by Bernard's stepfather's parable on the bull-whale in Le Sacre du printemps (p.55). It introduces the possibility of an alternative perspective on him (i.e. makes him a potential en soi for another and therefore his enemy's target) and questions his sense of absolute power.

In the work of his middle period, Simon is less interested in the relativizing identity-crisis than in the ubiquitous presence of consciousness in its most transsubjective form. The little old hunch-back looking after Marie in L'Herbe is an ever-vigilant symbolic embodiment of this timeless consciousness which also figures in the bewildering myths of the ancients as the reference, on page 112, to Panopres and Io testifies:

> comme celui... qui possédait ce corps couvert d'yeux de telle sorte que plusieurs d'entre eux étaient toujours ouverts et qu'il pouvait s'assoupir sans cesser de surveiller la blanche génisse.

But it is perhaps in the passages dealing with the cat which Louise meets in the garden that the relationship between perception and the existence of the contingent world is most thought-provokingly suggested (pp.18-9). The description of the cat in terms of an intrusion of a consciousness in the world could be seen as a statement of theme. The cat represents surely that impersonal conscious presence without which the unconscious wild vegetation could not exist in any meaningful sense. It is a co-ordinate which projects a certain perspective on reality, installs a particular Lebenswelt and articulates it spatially. In a pendant

passage on the cat (p.126), attention is drawn to that most important paradox of the continuing existence of a specific perceptual support in the absence of the initial, concretely embodied perceiver. The 'solution' to this problem, as we have seen, lies in the positing of an a-personal, ever-present awareness which breaks the deadlock between the materialist assumption of an objective world and the idealist constitution of the world. This accounts for lowest common denominators of perception such as gestalt (PP, p.275), the ability to conceive of and the attempt to understand autrui (PP, p.406) and the persistence of universal atavistic traits and interests (PP, p.513), all of which are motifs in Simon. Such a theory also explains the very curious passage on pp.109-113, describing a vigil of several hours during which the façade of the house is observed from an a-personal, though localized position at the bottom of the garden. The description of the comings and goings of the characters tells us nothing new, and the function of the passage - other than to advertise the artificiality of the activity of narration - is not evident.
The fact that the scene is viewed roughly from the position occupied by the cat in its various appearances would seem to confirm, however, this latter's role as an index of prereflective intersubjective commitment in the world. Simon has gradated his revelation of this anonymous presence in the variations in the narrator's points of reference within the fictional world, shifting as he does from a temporary identification with Louise's point of view, to a notation of external perspectives on her (her own on herself and her lover, that of the cat on her), and now to the elimination

of the concrete narratorial point of reference, and the emphatic treatment of an unnaturalized perspective on a fictionally uninformative scene.

The section O of La Bataille de Pharsale constitutes, however, the most rigorous study of the paradoxical co-existence of anonymity and subjectivity in perception. This whole section can to some extent be regarded as a virtuoso schematic study of perspectival relativity. At first, this would seem to be an attempt to recreate some kind of hypothetical pure state of perception. In fact, it is designed to show that any attempt to "reprendre tout à zéro" (BP, p.181) is vain - there can be no such thing as an absolute, objectively valid viewpoint which can see all aspects of anything at once. Perspectival deformation is an intrinsic part of the most neutral of reflecting sufaces,

> si l'on tient également compte des multitudes des points d'observation, des reflets, des images virtuelles et des déformations, des altérations que celles-ci peuvent subir selon la surface réfléchissante (vitres de mauvaise qualité, carrosseries d'autos, glaces de magasins où l'observateur peut voir sa silhouette transparente, sans consistance, se superposer aux substancielles marchandises de l'étalage). (p.186)

Furthermore, the thing regarded is yet another potential viewpoint which relativizes the validity of the first.[32] Thus on page 211, the O which previously signified the jealous narrator banging on the door becomes the point of view of the woman having sexual intercourse behind the door, and we are afforded a different perspective on information that we have already been given. The inter-changeability of points of view here and of narrators in Histoire is explained if one looks at the world in terms of a perceptual structure, i.e. if one identifies the

world with the infinite number of potential points of view by which it can exist for conscious beings (p.185).

Any one perspective is not only relative in terms of space but also in terms of time (p.18b). Combined with the necessarily attitudinal nature of every statement, the spatial and temporal relativization of point of view makes of the text a mobile of equally valid and relative view-points, with a depersonalized narrator who/which is no more than an intersection in time, space and language (p.18b).

(iii) Factors which Permit the Integration of Impressions into Experience.

Simon's subversion of the notions of identity and objectivity does not preclude a meaningful and functional co-ordination of our experience of the world. Simon's bracketing of these traditional criteria was a necessary adjunct to his defamiliarization of the way in which external reality appears to us, and constitutes a coherent Lebenswelt in which we can act.

Space

Undoubtedly, the principal factor which permits a meaningful relationship with the external world is the status of our body as a localized, though mobile point of reference situated within the world. The localization inherent in incarnation condemns us, from the outset, to a relative and fragmentary view of the world. Hence the importance of the screen motif which, Loubère points out[33] is ubiquitously and variously exemplified in Simon's novels. Ultimately,

we should understand the screen as a token for every object which prevents us from simultaneously seeing all the other objects in three-dimensional space. However, the screen also contributes to the meaningful factorization of, and investment of direction in what would otherwise be an amorphous continuum. The screen exemplifies both the irrevocable element of opacity in an implicitly phenomenological understanding of the relationship between subject and world, and the meaningful relativity of the incarnated perceptual apparatus.

In L'Herbe, the screen motif is brought into play - in the form of a partition wall - to suspend Louise's visual perception of the movements of Pierre and Sabine in the next room. In his intermittent treatment of this scene over about a hundred pages, Simon offers a very sensitive description of a wide range of finely differentiated sounds (as well as pre-audible silent breathing), which vary according to the specific movement and its distance from the partition. By parenthesizing the sense which constitutes our most immediate access to space, Simon makes us aware of the complex, synaesthetic nature of our sense of spatiality, involving the simultaneous concordance of a host of sensory data coming from different sources.

Space is far from a schematic, simplified and transparent field in which objects are situated; it is by its very nature cluttered. Thus in La Bataille de Pharsale, Simon draws attention to the perspectival superposition of intervening screens, of varying degrees of transparency and opacity, between the viewer and the object, and to the different impressions created by the perceptual support according to the type of écran through which it is viewed:

> Le reflet dans le vantail de la fenêtre à demi fermé toujours rempli aux deux tiers par l'angle de l'immeuble et à un tiers par du ciel, les larges mailles du rideau de filet derrière la vitre plus visibles dans la partie gris sombre que dans la bande remplie par le bleu clair. (BP, pp.10-11)

The conglomeration of modern, built-up cityscapes results not only in the obliteration of certain things in certain conditions, but also in a more variegated, composite spatiality where contextual factors, such as light conditions and obstructions, assume increasing importance:

> Quand on est dans les rues les réverbères empêchent de voir les étoiles c'est seulement dans la campagne ou comme ici au-dessus des toits des cheminées le ciel en était plein l'y et i de myriades scintillant et au bout d'un moment j'ai pu distinguer mes mains la cigarette les lignes dessinées par les rangées de briques en perspective fuyante sur le mur à droite plus sombres que les joints de mortier à droite comme on peut voir la nuit c'est-à-dire sans les couleurs simplement clair et sombre. (Hist, p.354-5)

The relative density and diversity of proximate and contiguous objects alter the visual and aural tonality of our perceptions. For example, the movement from a relatively open space to a relatively dense space, results in the differentiation of apparently absolutely perceived things such as darkness and silence.

> Elle sort du bois. L'obscurité est différente, non qu'elle diminue sensiblement, mais comme si elle changeait de nature. Ou d'odeur. Elle peut maintenant sentir de nouveau le parfum tiède des foins. (LC, p.50)

> Entre les troncs minces serrés et roses stagne un demi-jour d'église ou de sanctuaire et le silence semble plus profond. (T, p.20)

These last two examples also bear witness to the importance of a kind of reflexive, physical memory in the articulation of space and the perception of atmospheric variations. The appreciation of changes in one element of a perceived situation produced by variations in the constitution of

its immediate context depends on the capacity to make a reflex contrast between differently composed contexts.

The prominence of the screen and of contextual variations in Simon's work is an indication of a more fundamental conception of space in terms of a nexus of intersecting relationships between lifeworlds with a human body at the centre of each acting as a sens-giving point of reference.[34] Significantly, both Simon and Merleau-Ponty take up and scrutinize the status of those linguistic tools - prepositions - by which we express these relations. A naive view of language and the passe-partout colourlessness of prepositions tend to make us view them as absolute indices of habitually perceived relationships. In fact, like all shifters, they are among the most relative elements of language, and epitomize the relative and anthropocentric basis of our conception of space, which can only be defined with reference to our body:

> quel sens pourrait bien avoir le mot 'sur' pour un sujet qui ne serait pas situé par son corps en face du monde? Il implique la distinction d'un haut et d'un bas, c'est-à-dire un espace orienté. Quand je dis qu'un objet est sur une table, je me place toujours en pensée dans la table, ou dans l'objet et je leur applique une catégorie qui convient en principe au rapport de mon corps et des objets extérieurs. Dépouillé de cette importance anthropologique, le mot sur ne se distingue plus du mot 'sous' ou du terme 'à côté de'... finalement, loin que mon corps ne soit pour moi qu'un fragment d'espace, il n'y aurait pas pour moi d'espace si je n'avais pas de corps. (PP, pp.117-9)

Likewise, in the very opening pages of La Bataille de Pharsale Simon takes up those apparently innocent and objective tool-words and redefines them in a way which suggests that the accurate description of position would entail a qualification of every prepositional word or phrase and would result in inexhaustible qualifications where the concept of absolute position would dissolve:

> Disparu au-dessus des toits. Façon de parler: pas vu disparaître et pas vu réellement les toits. Simplement haut par opposition à bas. C'est-à-dire en bas un néant originel (pas la place, l'asphalte où deux autres piètent toujours, gris à pattes roses), en haut un autre néant, entre lesquels il s'est soudain materialisé, ailes deployées, comme l'immobile figuration du concept même d'ascension, un instant puis plus rien.(p.10)

Simon's interest in the pictorial value of the shifting planes of a structure or complex viewed from a moving locus was already apparent in Le Vent, in the narrator's imaginary evocation of Montès' home-town viewed from a train (p.73). In Histoire, the evocation of the day in the life of the anonymous narrator and his various displacements allow Simon to explore the perception of space in terms of time and of the different associations which different places have for a mobile perceiver. Indeed, this novel exemplifies the principle of voyage which, according to Michel Butor,[35] underpins and structures all novels and descriptions therein. The physical progression of the protagonist acts also as a kind of springboard for a metaphorical voyage into the realm of local reminiscence and linguistic association.

Although by the time of Les Corps conducteurs, the narrator is an implicit, depersonalized, mobile subjectivity, it suits Simon to have it take as temporary points of reference the positions of the various travelling characters - the sick man, the old woman painstakingly crossing the hotel foyer, the explorers in the jungle, the passenger in the aeroplane, Orion aveugle. The title of Les Corps conducteurs is double-edged. Gradually, its technical, scientific application, suggesting objectivity and the control of energies in space, is relativized by the description of the trips of the characters. Implicit here is a critique of a purely

geometrical concept of space which does not do justice to the complex sensations experienced by the individual in his automotion. Again Simon comes close to Butor's view of space in the novel as a phenomenological field:

> Mais l'espace dans lequel nous vivons n'est plus celui de la géométrie classique que notre temps celui de la mécanique qui lui correspond, c'est ... un espace encombré d'objets qui déforment tous nos parcours, et où le mouvement en ligne droite est en général impossible d'un point à un autre, avec des régions ouvertes ou fermées, l'intérieur des objets par exemple, et surtout comportant toute une organisation de liaisons entre ses différents points: moyens de transport, références, qui font que les proximités vécues ne sont nullement réductibles à celles de la cartographie.[36]

The various voyages in Les Corps conducteurs let Simon explore a whole gamut of spatial relations, and in particular the constant recombination into different spatial patterns of a multitude of potential spatial co-ordinates. These recombinations take place in our every movement, as we pass through space and circulate among objects:

> Le sujet kantien pose un monde, mais, pour pouvoir affirmer une vérité, le sujet effectif doit d'abord avoir un monde ou être au monde, c'est-à-dire porter autour de soi un système de significations dont les correspondances, les relations, les participations n'aient besoin d'être explicitées pour être utilisées. Quand je me déplace dans ma maison, je sais d'emblée et sans aucun discours que marcher vers la salle de bains signifie passer près de la chambre, que regarder la fenêtre signifie avoir la cheminée à ma gauche et dans ce petit monde chaque geste, chaque perception se situe immédiatement par rapport à mille co-ordonnées virtuelles. (PP, pp.150-1)

On occasion, the point of view is temporarily halted, and variation gives way to a more sustained study of dimensional and depth differentiation. One such example is the description of the podium, mural and speaker in a conference-hall viewed from the position of the sick academic (p.54). In this example, the normal distinction between representation and reality and between human figures and inanimate back-

ground is momentarily suspended in favour of the establishment of precise spatial relationships between shapes and contours on what would seem, at a certain distance, to be a single horizontal plane. In contrast with the flat, horizontal emphasis of this view, there is, on page 153, the description of the plunging perspective of a domestic interior, where the emphasis is on the differentiation of spatial planes and on the relations of distance from and proximity to the perceiving point of reference. The perspectival description of the tiled floor and the depth-evoking views through doors and windows testifies to the influence of Simon's painterly acquaintance with the Dutch interior genre. In the first example the sick conférencier, under the influence of a fever, is at one remove from everything around him, and his slightly hallucinatory view dissolves the normal dimensional distinctions between things. The second passage comes at a crisis in a character's life - the end of a relationship with a woman. An impression of urgency and of the desire to attain something across space is produced through the description of a plunging perspective, depth being, according to Merleau-Ponty, the dimension which makes us feel most strongly our existential involvement in the world:

> [la profondeur est] de toutes les dimensions la plus 'existentielle' parce que... elle ne se marque pas sur l'objet lui-même, elle appartient de toute évidence à la perspective et non aux choses... elle annonce un certain lien indissoluble entre les choses et moi par lequel je suis situé devant elles, tandis que la largeur peut, à première vue, passer pour une relation entre les choses elle-mêmes où le sujet percevant n'est pas impliqué. (PP, p.296)

Reflections

Merleau-Ponty also pointed out in Phénoménologie de la perception that our conception of a coherent geometric space is based

partly on the postulation of alternative, potential points of view, modelled on our actual one and situated in the other objects on all its other sides. We cannot perceive things in isolation: space is the interplay of different forms on one another, and is inextricably bound up with the web of interacting reflections:

> Ainsi chaque objet est le miroir de tous les autres. Quand je regarde la lampe posée sur ma table, je lui attribue non seulement les qualités visibles de ma place, mais encore celles que la cheminée, que les murs, que la table peuvent 'voir', le dos de ma lampe n'est rien d'autre que la face qu'elle 'montre' à la cheminée. Je peux donc voir un objet en tant que les objets forment un système ou un monde et que chacun d'eux dispose des autres autour de lui comme spectateurs de ses aspects cachés et garantie de leur permanence. Toute vision d'un objet par moi se réitère instantanément entre tous les objets du monde qui sont saisis comme coexistants parce que chacun d'eux est tout ce que les autres 'voient' de lui. (PP, pp.82-3)

Once again, Simon seems implicitly aware of this bewildering concept of the infinite interplay between objects, which is rendered visual in the interaction of reflecting surfaces. In his late novels, Les Corps conducteurs, Triptyque, and Leçon de choses,[37] he seems very concerned to note the reflections of one object upon another and the projection of shadows, varying as much as possible the type of reflecting surfaces noted for a maximum range of distortive and perspectival effects. Simon is defamiliarizing an element in perception which is necessary to our implicit belief in the supports of our perception but which in general passes unnoticed:

> Le reflet n'est pas vu pour lui-même, puisqu'il a pu si longtemps passer inaperçu, et cependant il a sa fonction dans la perception, puisque la seule absence du reflet ôte la vie et l'expression aux objets comme aux visages. (PP, p.357)[38]

Simon does not restrict himself to the simple notation of the one-to-one relationship of object and reflection/shadow.

In both Les Corps conducteurs and Le Palace, the description of that fixed but kinetic object, the revolving door, allows him to note the continuous and unceasing way in which the different elements of the world are interacting for a potential viewpoint, even when they are not being observed by an individual subject (CC, p.79; P, p.68). The fixed, but movable, mirrored wardrobe door in Triptyque performs a similar function (p.37). The very precise location of the point from which the initial reflection is seen and the meticulous notation of the limits of this single reflection, followed by the notation of the reflections projected on to the moving surface, draw attention to the arbitrary limitation inherent in the notion of a one-to-one reflective relationship which generally springs from our habitation of a stable, semi-permanently furnished world.

Furthermore, if the one object can serve as the surface of reflection for a whole host of other objects, conversely the one object is reflected by all the other reflecting and reflected surfaces around it. Each reflecting and reflected object implicitly projects a web of spatial vectors about it - what is to be considered as reflected and what is to be considered as reflecting are determined by the virtual point of view from which they are imagined or seen:

> les petites lampes dont l'éclat assourdi se reflète sur les flancs des bouteilles, les hampes en métal chromé des robinets de bière, le bois ciré des meubles et les têtes dorées des clous qui bordent les sièges des tabourets. (CC, p.86)

The highly polished museum-floor described on page 64 of Les Corps conducteurs provides the ideal pretext for the study of the reflection of/within a reflection within a shadow:

> Les cadres dorés des tableaux se reflètent dans le plancher ciré, miroitant, de la salle du musée. Ils entourent des rectangles sombres où, la tête en bas, les fantômes de héros, d'évêques et de femmes sortant du bain se distinguent vaguement, mêlés aux silhouettes verticales des visiteurs debout sur leurs doubles renversés. (p.64)

The problematization and levelling out of the distinction between representation and reality should alert us to the difference between retinal reflection and reflections on the surface of inanimate objects; these latter do not have the mental and physical reflexes to deal with this differentiation.

But undoubtedly, the most far-reaching and stimulating of the descriptions of reflections in Simon's novels is that of those projected on to the workman's shelled, hard-boiled egg in Leçon de choses:

> La surface lisse de l'oeuf brille d'un éclat bleuté et reflète le rectangle de la fenêtre étirée en longueur et arrondie sur son flanc bombé. En fait, à un degré moindre de lecture, invisible mais cependant présente sur la courbure polie, l'image virtuelle de la pièce (plafonds, murs, sol) vient se rassembler, englobant les gravats, les outils, les échafaudages et les deux occupants dans une sorte de microcosme dont le centre condenserait l'univers tout entier. (p.136)

Here he comes very close to Merleau-Ponty's notion that every object potentially reflects all the others in the world. According to this hypothesis, each object becomes a point of intersection for all the other reflexive vectors in the world. The choice here of such a banal object not only defamiliarizes and detrivializes the object itself, but carries the implications of Merleau-Ponty's concept as near as one can get to its logical conclusion in terms of empirically visible examples.

The Functioning of the Eye.

Turning away from the all-embracing implications of the interaction of reflections, I should now like to look at some of the other more particular aspects of perception which Simon touches on.

In reflex psychology in general, and in Simon's graphically oriented description in particular, vision enjoys an undeniable prominence in the sensory hierarchy. Not surprisingly then, references to the eyes of characters and analogies with eye-shapes constitute a recurrent motif in Simon's work.[39]

However, Simon's interest in the eye is not restricted to its potential role as a slightly perplexing motif conferring a specious unity upon the body of his fiction. The inclusion in Les Corps conducteurs of a lengthy, text-book description of the constitution and fuctioning of the eye shows at least a passing acquaintance with its physiology (p.154). But as with the other scientific extracts, this one is included principally as a presumptuous, 'objective' explanation which stands in counterpoint to the evocations of the way in which individual eyes work in specific contexts. Thus in Leçon de choses, Simon notes the effect of tiredness and stress conditions on the constituent parts of this tool (p.39). In Les Corps conducteurs, he records with great care the various changes which take place in the colour and shape of the rarely recorded multi-coloured floaters which appear when we rub our eyes (pp.162-3).

One particularly important aspect of visual perception, to which a bare account of the physiological mechanisms of the eye does not do justice, is the alternating relegation of different items of reality to background and foreground as

the eye focuses and re-focuses. Human vision, by its very nature, contravenes the criterion of objectivity - it is naturally and necessarily selective. As early as Gulliver, Simon's implicit interest in impressions and their effects, independent of any 'significance', was to be seen in the meticulous notation of the changes in focus involved in the very banal action of lighting a pipe:

> La flamme de l'allumette repoussa singe et violoncelle dans un arrière-plan brouillé au-delà du fourneau où le tabac se gonflait en grésillant. Puis la grotesque poupée reprit forme, ressurgit, et derrière elle, reflétée dans la glace qui surmontait la cheminée, toujours debout à la même place... le vieil homme au milieu de ce qui sans doute était une chambre. (G, pp.64-5)

Here, the incongruous conglomeration of objects, which forms one of the alternative perceptual supports, contrasts with the commonplace, domestic object - the pipe - which constitutes the other, and contributes to the defamiliarization of the whole perceptual process involved.

The tools produced by man to sharpen his perception of distant objects, which are normally subsumed into the background, accentuate the effects of the change of focus. This point is made in Leçon de choses, in the soldier's alternating surveys of the surrounding countryside through the telescopic lens of his gun and of his immediate surroundings in the ruined house (p.17). It receives emphatic treatment in Triptyque, in the description of the relative blurring and clarification of contour involved when the implicit human narrative point of view/reference focuses and re-focuses the lens of the camera, which he is supposedly using,[40] on the umbel of a weed and a distant church tower, viewed from a recumbent position among the grass.

Simon's interest in the process of perception, over and

above the thing perceived, is perhaps most manifest in his preoccupation with that blurred fringe area in our retinal impression, circumscribing the objects on which our eyes are focused. Simon is equally interested in what is being neglected and in what is being selected. An extended study of this marginal area is to be found in the account of the narrator's/narrator's uncle's visit to the artist's studio (Hist, pp.272-3). The lengthy description of what the narrator is perceiving only marginally and unclearly is schematically justified as a psychologically interesting fact - the narrator may have chosen his seat in order to avoid the embarrassment of a direct view of the artist's naked model with whom he may or may not have some personal relationship. Despite this token explanation, however, Simon is more interested in the complex patterns perceived out of the corner of the narrator's eye. Thus, that object of perception on which the erotic novel would have lavished its attention - the naked model - is described totally in terms of the blurred play of intersecting lines and patches of colour which project themselves on to the retina of the narrator.

Accommodation

A closely related mechanism is that process by which the eye, ear, etc. get used to and cope with a new context i.e. the process of accommodation.

In the early novels, the accounts of this are largely related to some momentous upheaval in the character's life. The account of Max's confrontation with Bobby in the hotel-room allowed Simon to explore the more dramatic effects of this process. Thus he gives us a highly impressionistic

description of Max bursting into the room and being suddenly assailed by a whole host of simultaneous sensory impressions which take on hallucinatory force, until his eye finally settles on and distinguishes Bobby sitting in a chair (p.171).

In the later fiction this spectacular element gives way to a more nuanced concentration on the sensitivity to often minimal indices of a certain order in an apparently amorphous whole. Thus in the description of the folds of a net curtain in Les Corps conducteurs (p.26), Simon shows the way in which, on the basis of a few schematic visual symbols, the eye can, with great versatility, reconstruct a meaningful pattern - here the image of a peacock - even while naturalizing any distortions deforming the order of the symbols. As a counterpoint to this detection of form in a plethora of detail, the panoramic shots over the beach and sea demonstrate the process by which the eye comes to terms with apparent uniformity and distinguishes individual moving elements in an undiversified field of vision (p.78).

The capacity, or lack of it, of our eyes to adapt to changing light conditions receives a varied treatment. At one point in Leçon de choses (p.164), Simon couples a description of the accommodation of the eye to the darkness, with an evocation of the subsiding of an orgasm, while in Les Corps conducteurs the capacity of the eye to cope with the abrupt shift from the strong artificial lighting of the toilets to the dim light of the basement bar is impaired by the sick man's feverish state (p.118). In both cases, the particular psychological value of the notation is minimal; the main interest is in the way in which our eye differentiates between degrees of light and shadow concentration, and

organizes them into a meaningful relationship.

Forme/Fond

The establishment of a pattern in a mass of sensory data is also governed by the ratio between the clarity of contour of the forme and the uniformity or amorphousness of the fond. Here again, it would seem that Simon's artistic training and his appreciation of the graphics of silhouette have made him aware of some of the crucial issues at the heart of gestalt psychology and of phenomenology. Thus he draws attention, in his description of the Impressionist painting which acts as the inspirational springboard for the cliff-top motif in Leçon de choses, to the importance of the play of contrast and counterpoint in the making of a coherent and recognizable combination of graphic signs:

> Toutefois, autour des jambes graciles, l'artiste a avivé le fond de mer pour mieux faire ressortir la couleur violente des bas. (p.93)

His artistic instruction likewise impinges upon his writing in the explanation, in La Bataille de Pharsale, of the way in which an impression of depth in painting and the theatre is created by a gradated differentiation between the foregrounded figures and the toile de fond, and by the inclusion of secondary figures and objects which are intended to mediate between them, and create the impression of a credible space between the conspicuous forme and the enhancing fond. (p.108-9).

Trompe l'oeil effects such as this latter are simply triggers which set in motion a desired perceptual reaction and are based on an understanding of the way in which that reaction normally operates. The activity of differentiation

and the detection of contrast are a constitutive feature in the accommodating process of the eye. In fact, perception involves primarily the ability to grasp the differential relationships between objects, rather than the ability to see the individual objects themselves in any absolute sense:

> Disparu au-dessus des toits. Façon de parler: pas vu disparaître et pas vu réellement les toits. Simplement haut par opposition à bas. (BP, p.10)

The perceptual process, however, is unlike the simultaneous, immediate differentiation of the silhouette, in that it involves a temporal dimension which consists of the capacity to compare previous and present sense-data:

> ténèbres puis lumière ou plutôt remémoration (avertissement?) rappel des ténèbres. (pp.9-10)

The inextricable and necessary nature of the relationship between forme and fond appears at its clearest when the object focused on can only be perceived against a certain background. Simon illustrates in a variety of ways his fascination for those very tenuous, transparent phenomena which are rendered visible by the presence of a contrasting background. Such phenomena are rain (T, pp.32, 35), cigar-smoke (P, p.150), human breath (RF, p.126, T, p.48), steam (T, p.58), tiny insects (T, p.74), particles of dust visible only in the contrast between the light of a cinema projector and the surrounding gloom (T, p.33). The perception of certain things requires a very precise combination of conditions and contributing factors. For example, the river-bed in Triptyque can only be viewed at the intersection of a complex interplay of reflections and shadows (p.13). Simon chooses to describe nocturnal or foggy scenes, or slightly unusual viewing conditions in order to suggest the eye's capacity

to differentiate between things which are nearly identical in colour,[41] usually black on black, grey on grey, or white on white. Nuances of this sort are generally neglected in novels principally concerned with varied effect and vividness.

Movement

Finally in this connection, I should like to look at the role of the relationship forme/fond as a spatial gauge in the perception of movement. In Phénoménologie de la perception, Merleau-Ponty stressed the importance of background in the assessment of movement and speed.

> Le fond du mouvement n'est pas une représentation associée ou liée extérieurement au mouvement lui-même, il est immanent au mouvement, il l'anime et le porte à chaque moment, l'initiation cinétique est pour le sujet une manière originale de se référer à un objet au même titre que la perception. (PP, p.128)

Similarly, in Les Corps conducteurs Simon suggests that the ascent or descent of a lift is imperceptible to someone inside the lift because there is no distinctive background which would act as a point of comparison (p.221). Conversely, the presence of a uniform monolithic background (such as the façade of the palace) punctuated by a number of diacritical points (balconies) as a backcloth for the perception of the fall of a small, heavy object (a vase), accentuates its speed in a spectacular way (P, p.129). The perception of direction and movement in an apparently immobile mass like a slow-moving river consists of focusing on a single small item such as a leaf which constitutes a point of reference of a visually accommodable size, and acts as a gauge of the speed of the larger mass in which it is situated (Hist, p.262).

Simon is also aware of the process of ancrage (PP, pp.323-4)

whereby certain apparently stable elements of reality provide liminally perceived co-ordinates against which an apparently discretely observed mobile can be seen. He illustrates the relativity of our normal 'points d'ancrage' in two similar passages in Le Palace and La Bataille de Pharsale, where the earth and its monumental edifices are viewed against the ever-changing cloudscape. The extent to which we rely on the token marginal presence of stable objects and on the establishment of a visual hierarchy, in which the elements of reality are reflexively distributed into a general fond and a particular forme, becomes clear when one focuses on what is normally considered the fond, at the expense of the forme. Our most solid spatial co-ordinates become shifting variables and take on an almost surrealistic mobility (P, p.190; BP, p.15).

This relativity is accentuated when it is the body of the perceiver which is in motion. In Les Corps conducteurs, Simon uses the perspectives opened up by the sick man's voyage to illustrate the variability of speed assessment, according to whether one measures it against the nearer, more diversified lateral background of the shop-fronts which one is passing, or against the telescopic perspective of the distance still to be travelled (pp.76-7). The perception of speed is inextricable from the distance between perceiver and background, and from the diversification in the individual objects composing the background.

Sensory Differentiation

In these last pages, we stressed the element of contrast in the relationship forme/fond. In fact, Simon's sensitivity

to the gradation between different sensory impressions is much greater than this polarity would suggest. He is particularly concerned to establish the relative prominence of different sensations perceived in certain conditions and from a certain standpoint.

Occasionally, the prominence of sounds and their relative perceptibility would seem to be due to a constant difference in the intrinsic volume or force:

> Le chant des grenouilles est plus fort que celui des criquets. (LC, p.53)

However, in general, the differentiation of sensations depends on the establishment of a scale of gradation related to the position one is occupying, or on the suppression of the more prominent sensation in favour of a previously imperceptible one, which formed part of the fond. The elimination of one impression accentuates another aspect of the experience. Conversely, the sudden, forcefully experienced impression displaces other sensations from the centre of our attention, and relegates them to a less distinct, more uniformly perceived background. Every moment in the subjective experiencing of the world is an intersection of synchronously perceived impressions which must be described in relation to each other. There is no such thing as a pure, isolated impression. Each one is part of a web of relations with other perceptions.

> S'élevant au-dessus de la voix du commentateur et de la musique sirupeuse, le grincement strident des roues d'un tramway... déchire le tympan comme un cri plaintif, interminable, s'affaiblissant peu à peu, laissant de nouveau place à la voix tonitruante qui dans le grésillement de l'appareil de projection continue à débiter, avec ses sonorités caverneuses, ses inflexions emphatiques et autoritaires de camelot, le commentaire dont parfois on saisit quelques mots... absorbés, comme étouffés, par l'invisible et silencieux crépitement de la pluie.

> Dans un fracas de ferraille brinqueballante, la motrice et la remorque du tramway défilent au bout de l'impasse. (T, p.48)

In view of the simultaneity and multitude of impressions demanding our attention, variations in relative distance and the presence of adulterating obstacles between the perceiver and different perceptual supports are of crucial importance in the establishment of a hierarchy of sensory prominence. Thus, the notation of a single sensation almost automatically entails a widening of the perspective, and the contextualization of that one impression in relation to ever more faintly perceived impressions:

> elle élève jusqu'à sa bouche une cuiller d'étain dont elle aspire le contenu avec un bruit de succion... Un bruit de pleurs parvient aussi par moments de la pièce voisine. Au dehors on entend parfois grincer en s'ouvrant l'un des battants du portail de fer. (T, p.202)

Elsewhere, Simon reverses the order of the narration, starting with the context and gradually focusing on the most prominent impression (LC, p.18). Simon's descriptions of the relationships between several sensory impressions read like extended exercises in the differentiation of simultaneous sensations, meticulously distributed along a scale ranging from the scarcely perceptible and distant, to the proximate and vividly registered. In these cases, the individual psyche of the perceiver and the specific impressions involved are principally pretexts for an exposition of the stratificatory distribution, in a perspectivally and subjectively perceived Lebenswelt, of the constituent elements of the external world.

Perception is first and foremost a differential process which seeks to establish ever finer distinctions in the apparently amorphous mass loosely called sensation.

In Simon's novels, sensory impressions are not mere situational indices which the reader naturalizes into a coherent background for the human drama. The human drama becomes increasingly insubstantial and hypothetical, while he carries out an emphatically orderly refinement of differential sensory notation. In Triptyque, the sound of running water undergoes a detailed analysis which seeks to establish the tonal differences between volumes, speeds and contexts. On page 20, of the same novel, he meticulously differentiates between the sounds of footsteps on different surfaces.

> Le gravier crisse sous les pas de personnes qui entrent et sortent dans une succession d'allées et venues désordonnées... les crissements du gravier cessant lorsqu'elles pénètrent dans la cuisine, les semelles de corde des espadrilles silencieuses sur le dallage de pierre où, au contraire, résonnent les brodequins.

The attention which Simon pays to a whole gamut of types of silence bears still more eloquent witness to his differential approach to perception and representation. Here, as in his treatment of non-reactions, he grapples with the problem of suggesting an absence, and of differentiating between different types of absence. Thus, the evocation of the impression of alienation from one's immediate context is in large part constituted by, and furnishes a pretext for, a description of the peculiar sensation of being enclosed in the silent, transparent void of a belljar, which can occur even amidst a considerable hubbub. The imaginary interposition of a cloche de verre, in a moment of crisis, between a character and the rest of the nonchalantly revolving world is a motif in Simon's fiction.[42] Elsewhere, the contrast between the physical, visually perceived volume of something and the relatively subdued nature of the other impressions it makes creates a queer impression of absence:.

> Attachés par des chaînes, les deux ours allaient et venaient inlassablement. Ils avaient une façon feutrée de poser leurs pattes et de mouvoir leurs volumes souples, en silence. (LT, p.98)[43]

In contrast, sometimes the force of a noise is such that it blunts our sensitivity and becomes imperceptible. The multitude of different sounds assailing our senses neutralize each other and create a kind of sonorous void (RF, p.158). After the abatement of such a tumult, our senses have to accommodate gradually a very different type of silence, which is, in fact, composed of a multitude of blended, continuous, scarcely perceptible sounds. This silence is perceptible only under such freak conditions, through a contrast with a previous, abnormally acute cacophony. Note, for example, the sensitivity of Georges to the silence of the vernal scene after the monumental noise of the ambush, which he was incapable of registering with any exactitude (RF, p.161).

Simon's awareness of the role of contrast in the perceptual relationship between forme and fond renders him particularly sensitive to the sound which seems to increase the impression of hush and acts as a contrasting gauge of the previously unnoticed peace. It need not be an isolated sound perceived in the context of a uniform silence. Paradoxically, the sound may come to the fore, be perceived against the background of a uniform, continuous noise:

> Sa voix aux accents faubouriens poursuit une espèce de monologue ininterrompu... Dans le silence de la pièce qui s'assombrit peu à peu, elle semble, avec les répétitions monotones des mêmes jurons, sa rage impuissante, ses brefs éclats, comme quelque chose de crépusculaire, d'irréel, comme si avec le chant sporadique de l'oiseau au-dehors, elle rendait plus sensible encore le silence, la pénombre. (LC, pp.54-5)

In fact this particular paradox is only an effect of a much more significant one - i.e. that silence is by its very nature composed of a mass of scarcely perceptible sounds which are too subtle to be perceived when we are preoccupied by other interests and more far-reaching projects, and which coalesce in our summary, undiscriminating assimilation of sensory data. Thus, the impression which seemed to be the most homogeneous is, according to Simon, multiple and subject to proliferation. Silence is not a single absolute state, it is composite and has the capacity to decrease or augment in quality and in quantity:

> tandis que le frémissement des milliers de feuilles semblait multiplier le silence, papillotant, pointillant la masse des arbres...(H, p.21)

In this subsection, we have tried to illustrate the ways in which Simon conceives of the integration of our multiple sensory data into a coherent experience, despite his subversion of traditional psychological assumptions. We showed the way in which he underlines the function of the body in our meaningful interpretation of things not aprioristically thematized by anthropomorphizing intention. For Simon, perception is above all the establishment of relationships between different elements of reality, the notation of the perspectivally viewed play of one form upon another. Sensory accommodation is essentially a gradual adjustment to a new perspective on the relations between familiar objects.

But the establishment of meaningful relationships between objectively discrete elements of the external world implies a converse and simultaneously complementary process of differentiation which distinguishes between foreground

and background and between the stationary and mobile. Simon's defamiliarization of the nature of perception has consisted in indicating the common ground between the establishment of more fluid relationships between apparently unconnected things, and the differential process which allows our perceptual faculties to articulate both heterogeneous and homogeneous sensory data. Ultimately, we find that correlation and differentiation are simply complementary aspects of the same activity.

(iv) Perception and the Code

This paradoxical combination of a prereflective, inter-subjective commitment to the world and the constitution and localization of an individual consciousness, through the co-ordination of perceptual data into a differential perspective on the world, finds a parallel on the level of our accommodation of the world in terms of cultural paradigms and of our linguistic articulation of experience.

The Cultural Context

We have already considered Simon's argument that any one age's criteria of realism are based on the preceding representational traditions which it has inherited. Thus, in Histoire, Corinne's visit to Capri or Sorrente will reveal to her no more than what she has seen on railway posters and tourist brochures, i.e. she will see what she expects (p.188). As Barthes has so bitingly remarked in S/Z (pp.210-12), bourgeois-dominated society has tended to reverse the relationship between life and art, and has invested its representation of itself with the status of reality. In his attack on the

ideology of 19th-century Realism, Barthes has defined these cultural codes in a comparison with the school manual, the most common medium for the transmission of previous generations' knowledge, skills and common sense. In the 19th-century Realist novel, these codes formed the moral and social background against which a character's behaviour was to be viewed, and the narrators had frequent recourse to axioms and clichés in the drawing of conclusions and the investment of the plot with significance.

Simon's attack on this moral complacency and its underlying aprioristic philosophy of life takes the form, in his later work, of a hyperbolic and parodic use of these codes.[44] This explains the ironically conspicuous comparisons drawn from banal cultural codes, and incorporating a demonstrative which establishes a knowing link between narrator and reader. Hence, the prominence of cultural codes in the Lexique section of La Bataille de Pharsale - here every attempt to define an impression is accompanied by an appeal to a common code or experience. Simon thus highlights the store of common knowledge already formulated into syntagms behind every statement, and suggests the way in which the traditional novelist invested his tale with meaning.

If Simon criticizes this reactionary aspect of popular fiction, he nevertheless recognizes the indispensable dependence of 'meaningful'perception upon a body of cultural codes. As inhabitants of a civilised society with a history, we are inevitably situated temporally and culturally, and we evolve our consciousness and interpretation of experience in relation to the body of acquired knowledge, skills, beliefs and superstitions of our ancestors.

One of the principal elements in any culture is that monumental corpus of narratives, composed of myth, fiction and history, which serves as a fund of paradigms on the basis of which new data can be interpreted. As Butor recognizes, this body of narratives constitutes our most concrete access to the Other, our most concrete index of that area of experience which we have called prereflective, intersubjective consciousness:

> Le roman est une forme particulière du récit.
> Celui-ci est un phénomène qui dépasse considérablement le domaine de la littérature; il est un des constituants essentiels de notre appréhension de la réalité. Jusqu'à notre mort, et depuis que nous comprenons des paroles, nous sommes perpétuellement entourés de récits, dans notre famille tout d'abord, puis à l'école, puis à travers les rencontres et les lectures.
> Les autres, pour nous, ce n'est pas seulement ce que nous en avons vu de nos yeux, mais ce qu'ils nous ont raconté d'eux-mêmes, ou ce que d'autres nous en ont raconté.[45]

In La Route des Flandres, Sabine's endless repetition of her family history during Georges' childhood is partly reponsible for his tireless curiosity about de Reixach's death. Stories and legends, heard or read in the formative years of our childhood, often become the most memorable cultural points of reference, and impinge without prompting on our perception of objectively quite unrelated incidents, these latter having nevertheless set in motion a chain of associations. This is very evident in the description of the priest giving the last rites to the narrator's mother in Histoire. The narrator was a child at the time and interpreted the gestures made in terms of the stories with which he had become acquainted in the course of his short life and not in terms of the deeper significance of the ritual:

> il avait brusquement baissé la tête comme décapité absorbé à présent dans une mystérieuse occupation que je ne pouvais pas voir (peut-être en train de la tenir sanglante entre ses mains comme cet évêque ce martyr qui la portant parcourut...(p.17)

The most immediate reflexes of the mind, according to Simon, would seem to be analogical and associative rather than logical and deductive. The example chosen above is likewise revealing, in that it is generally true in Western countries that the Bible and religious stories are one of the first mythical monuments with which children come into contact. Not surprisingly, throughout Simon's fiction, biblical reminiscences recurrently colour his characters' vision of the world. The Christian myth is essentially an accumulative one, and has been the source of inspiration for a multitude of representations, which have in turn enriched the myth itself. Here the force of the code is such that it is liable to generate a series of associations on the paradigmatic level, which prevail at the expense of the formulation on the syntagmatic level of what is actually seen. Thus, the description in Histoire of the water-skier seen in the distance dissolves into a host of biblical allusions, etymological hypotheses and a reference to a painting by Puvis de Chavannes (pp.310-11).

Of our other reading, it tends to be the most violent or erotic incidents which persist in the childish mind - for example, in Le Tricheur, the memory of the beating of the crippled idiot which has outraged Louis recalls an earlier memory of gruesome pictures of torture seen in a travel-book about China (p.49). In Histoire, the account of Hector's body being dragged round Troy behind Achilles' chariot rises to the surface of the narrator's memory at the sight of the

children dragging the octupus around behind them, and the two images fuse in their formulation (p.313). Even at the height of sexual intercourse, the narrator's excitement cannot be divorced from the memory of erotic Latin texts read in his youth and the image of human fossils read about or seen in museums (pp.125-6). Here, sensation ('agitant de doux mouvements ma pine enfoncée en elle'), literature ('super me sinsim residens ac crebre subsiliens lubricisque gestibus mobilem spinam quatiens pendulae Veneris fructu me satiavit'), general knowledge ('mes os parallèles qu'on retrouverait des siècles plus tard dessinés sur les parois des cavernes ou poussière dans la poussière') and hearsay ('bandant comme on dit que les pendus tendent dérisoirement cette sorte de seconde potence') are indistinguishable.

Simon was aware of the accumulative processing of banal knowledge and cultural codes and its assimilative role in our accommodation of reality as early as Le Tricheur. Indeed, it is a reflection on the part of Louis in this novel which provides the most explicit and succinct commentary on this process in the whole of Simon's fiction:

> On aurait dit qu'elle cherchait dans son souvenir quelque chose de semblable. Parce que nous ne pouvons pas imaginer une chose du premier coup si elle n'est pas immédiatement rapprochable d'une autre qui soit dans le souvenir. Comme si elle essayait de se rappeler, comme si elle passait en revue à l'intérieur d'elle-même, ses yeux regardant à l'intérieur de sa mémoire et cherchant à raccorder ou à assortir par superposition ce qu'ils voyaient sur un schéma déjà vu. Ça n'a d'ailleurs pas duré longtemps. Probablement que le registre de ses images est aussi riche que son vocabulaire, c'est-à-dire une cinquantaine de mots au maximum venant du cinéma ou de la radio. (p.231)

The limitations of the woman described are manifest, and her cultural experience paltry, but she does exemplify a fundamental feature of the perceptual process of accommodation.

Given her lack of imagination, the code has hardened into a rigid, a priori, schematic grid. In contrast with this, the sound of a train whistle activates, in the mind of the intelligent student of Le Palace, an association which has the same trivial source as that of the woman in Le Tricheur - i.e. the cinema - but which calls up with graphic vividness the image of a train ploughing its way through a herd of buffalo in a Western film, and projects it on to the present scene of the deserted station and the imagined one of the genteel old ladies of the spa. Cultural code, presently perceived scene and imagination interact and enrich one another. (pp.63-4)

We have already seen the way in which the apparently most irrelevant scraps of information impinge upon our consciousness in the most critical situations. In fact, this is partly due to the formation of our consciousness within the context of a general, anonymous body of culture which cannot but affect our most personal considerations. In La Bataille de Pharsale, the narrator's attempt to formulate the chaotic experience as the regiment hurtles down the railway embankment draws on spectacularly different analogies based on his own cultural repertoire, i.e. his attendance at a bullfight, and a scrap of information culled from his scientific reading concerning gravitation and relative body weight on different planets (pp.72-3). In the same novel, the child can only come to terms with the grotesque spectacle which greeted him on his trip to Lourdes through a comparison with the most grotesque images of his previous experience - fairground freak-shows and representations of the Crucifixion (BP, p.126).

When the pain of one's immediate personal experience is

too great to bear, this tendency to view reality through the grid of our acquired cultural codes can take on the force of an obsessive need. This explains the desperate concern on the part of O in La Bataille de Pharsale to find the passage from Proust which would match his own situation. In La Route des Flandres, the destabilized ego of Georges had derived some cynical satisfaction, amidst amorphousness and categorial anarchy, from the relativizing thought that experiences such as his had already been recorded in Latin (p.100). However, in La Bataille de Pharsale, there is an intrinsic contradiction in the narrator's attempt to relativize that most egocentric emotion, jealousy. He is, of course, making excessive demands on the process of perceptual and emotional accommodation, and he will realize eventually the décalage between representation and experience.

Language

Simon is, of course, especially interested in the relationship between perception and that most fundamental and highly developed code - language. Speaking in an interview about his own use of language, he expressed his view of the coincidence of language and consciousness. The progress of his work is dictated as much by the suggestions of language as by his conscious manipulation of linguistic expressiveness:

> A-t-il voulu capter la conscience à sa source?
> - Je ne vois pas de conscience en dehors du language. Dans la mesure ou j'écris, j'accède à la conscience... Au lieu de repousser les ouvertures insoupçonnées que recèle le langage, les mots, la phrase, je les accepte... Écrire c'est se découvrir.[46]

In an interview given to me by Simon on 24th November 1979, he recounted an anecdote from his days as an art-student

in the studio of Andre Lhote which illustrates very neatly this same indissociability of language and perception. A customary brimade for the nouveaux was to blindfold two of them, telling them that they were to be firebranded. The pranksters 'poussaient des hurlements' adding 'un peu de courage quand même'. A piece of ice was then applied to the victims' arms who yelled as if they had been burned. The moral of the anecdote, according to Simon, is that the word, plus a token trigger, was sufficient to produce in them the associated sensation, and that this was a clear illustration of the concomitance of the linguistic code and the other aspects of the perceptual process. In the conscious, civilised man, linguistic formulation is as fundamental a structuring process as the co-ordination of sensory data. This may in part explain the description of the medical plate in Les Corps conducteurs where the body is described in relation to letters of the alphabet (p.183) - it is a mise en abyme for the coincidence of body and language in perception. This also accounts for the innumerable notations where something is seen/described in relation to a particular letter of the alphabet, usually U,S,T and most prominently V (pp.59-60, 71), and for the scene represented on the shield in La Bataille de Pharsale which is described entirely in terms of the shapes of letters (p.194).

The extent to which one's linguistic code becomes second nature generally only becomes evident when, like the machine described in the epigraph from Heidegger in La Bataille de Pharsale (p.187), it breaks down, when someone puts it to a different use from that for which it is conventionally intended and makes of it a private code:

> employant sans doute une sorte de langage secret, un code pour initiés, la voix (on ne pouvait pas distinguer les paroles qu'elle prononçait - peut-être aucune, du moins relevant du langage articulé: quelque chose,

> plutôt, comme celui qu'emploient deux amants, ou ces gens qui connaissent le langage des bêtes) unie, posée, empreinte de cette espèce de connivence, de solidarité. (BP, p.143)

Ultimately, the much stressed but rather enigmatic gulf between man and woman in Simon's novels cannot be explained away in terms of conventional psychology or physiology. The difference between man and woman is fundamentally of a linguistic nature - they are situated within two different linguistic codes. Even though the one may understand the individual words spoken by the other (i.e. the paradigm forms), he cannot understand the general meaning when they are combined into a syntagm. Men and women perceive the world in a different way because the same words have different associations for each, cannot be understood abstracted from the code to which they belong (Hist, p.309).

For Simon, the individual is as much an 'homme parlé' as an 'homme parlant'. As early as La Corde raide he was aware of, and drawing our attention to, our prereflective commitment to the aprioristically instituted and anonymous linguistic code:

> comme on entend sa propre bouche dire quelque chose, hors, ou en dépit, de toute volonté ou de tout dessein préconçu, votre propre bouche parlant, articulant des paroles de douceur ou de colère et se servant pour cela d'inflexions et de ce répertoire secret de sons et de formes contenus à votre insu au fond de votre être et plus inconnu de vous-même que l'image de votre visage, même sans apprêt, dans la glace interrogée. (p.98)

Without involving himself in the philosophical and theoretical niceties of post-Saussurian linguistics and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Simon tries to suggest in rather old-fashioned, empirical examples the way in which the individual consciousness emerges in the context, and partly as a result, of the linguistic code in which he is situated. The following passage

from La Route des Flandres (p.162) is highly revealing in this connection:

> il y avait des coucous dans la forêt d'autres oiseaux dont je ne savais pas le nom mais surtout des coucous ou peut-être c'était parce que je savais le nom que je les remarquai.

The contrast between Georges' recourse to the passe-partout generic term to refer to the 'other birds' he hears and his recognition of the call of the cuckoo illustrates the crucial link between perception and the act of naming. Without the possession of a sensitively differentiated linguistic grid, our perception remains blurred and unfocused. Conversely, the knowledge of the label of something creates a kind of perceptual disponibilité which alerts us to something when it is present and allows us to distinguish it from all the other things impinging on our senses at the same time.

In Histoire, one of the narrator's earliest childhood memories illustrates the simultaneity of sensory perception and the need or desire to articulate one's impressions linguistically:

> et de nouveau je ne pus voir que les roses. Mais ce n'était pas elles qui sentaient tellement. Je cherchai: il y avait aussi de ces fleurs arums ou quoi qui poussent dans l'eau, ces grands cornets enroulés sur eux-mêmes évasés blancs. (p.14)

The importance of the childish acquisition of the names of things in the successful interpretation of sensory data is evident here. However, as we have already suggested, Simon is equally aware of the lack of a clear-cut one-to-one relationship between perceived object and label. The individual is situated both perspectivally and codally - there is no objective guarantee for what he sees and the words he uses have associations springing from the context in which he

first heard them. Thus the smell here remains unidentified, 'mais ce n'était pas d'elles non plus que venait l'odeur', while that which lingers on in the house years later can only be formulated approximatively, through an exploration of the associations which the sensation sparks off, and an activation of the analogical, paradigmatic resources of language:

> cette violente odeur de moisi de cave ou plutôt de caveau comme si quelque cadavre de quelque bête morte quelque rat coincé sous une lame de parquet ou derrière une plinthe n'en finissait plus de pourrir exhalant ces âcres relents de plâtre effrité de tristesse et de chair momifiée. (Hist, p.10)

In Histoire, despite the forcefully expressed memories of the narrator, Simon is less interested in the traumatic and marking effects his childhood may have had on him, than on the build-up of personal myths which constantly impinge upon his consciousness in the present and make of him the unique point of convergence of a certain combination of codes. The description of the narrator's first visit to the races shows us the way in which the child's consciousness is caught up in and dependent on the system of language into which he is born as an individual. It also shows the way in which he finds his own expression, personal myth and identity through an exploration and combination of the phonetic associations of a word and those attached to personal experience and the context in which the word was initially pronounced:

> cette tante de Reixach, cette baronne Cerise qui avait autrefois brillé dans les concours hippiques... dont le nom était pour moi la source de multiples associations... les vieilles lèvres crevassées peintes d'un rouge évoquant de façon bouffonne la fraîcheur du mot cerise qu'on retrouvait aussi dans les couleurs pimpantes agrestes (casaque verte, manches et toque cerise) portées par les jockeys que grand-mère et maman m'avaient montrés à Pau la première fois où j'avais assisté à

> une course de chevaux, le mot toque lui-même amenant à mon esprit (s'accordant au maquillage, à la légende d'amazone, au registre aigu et précieux de sa voix et aux coiffures emplumées qu'elle arborait) le qualificatif de toquée qui paradoxalement la nimbait pour moi d'un prestige particulier, le fait de se conduire... d'une façon un peu folle constituant en quelque sorte par soi-même un privilège non seulement inhérent à sa situation de fortune mais encore à son âge, parce que si dire toquée d'une femme encore jeune, comme je l'avais parfois entendu faire par oncle Charles, impliquait mépris ou apitoiement, son accouplement avec le mot vieille lui conférait au contraire dans mon esprit une sorte de majesté et de mystère, l'englobant dans cette aura d'obscure puissance qui les entourait toutes. (Hist, pp.12-13)

The first visit to the circus was another important incident in the formation of a personal mythology. Here too the psychological experience of the revelation of an area of activity previously unknown to him is simultaneously accompanied by the accumulation of a set of personal associations around certain words which will later reactivate the memory of the experience. The psychological explanation and the reference to the cultural codes in which he takes his own place are indistinguishable:

> l'odalisque... dont...la vision (c'était aussi la première fois que je voyais une femme aussi nue) m'emplit alors d'un trouble qu'exprime assez bien le mot libidineux avec sa consonance un peu rose, un peu molle, plissée pour ainsi dire par la répétition des mêmes syllabes et de sons évocateurs (lit, bite, noeud) émotion rose et caoutchouteuse que je devais retrouver plus tard à la vue de ces poupées vendues pendant l'entracte dans le promenoir d'un music-hall, faites d'une gomme élastique... (BP, pp.138-9)[47]

As a result of the accumulation of connotations which attach themselves in the mind over the years to certain quasi-fetishistic words, the individual's personal memory becomes indissociable from his linguistic code, and his biographical experience could in very large part be read in the play of associations between and around those words which have caught his imagination:

> Frascati... mot pour ainsi dire feuillu... bruissant
> frondaisons cascades fontaines comme dans ces tableaux
> ces gravures de jardins de ruines aux environs de Rome
> et en même temps indissociable de retours dans la
> chambrée des permissionnaires de minuit ivres vomissants
> l'odeur vineuse égoeurante d'un gris rouge frasques
> dans Frascati pas tellement différent de fiasque
> Chianti un soṅ...
> ...Fiaschanti
> tenant ce nom du lieu-dit la colline..(pp.335-6)

It is, then, not surprising that, at the Colloque de Cerisy, Simon drew attention to the internal necessity of his own formulations of experience through a reference to the way in which the individual is constituted within language and in the context of a certain play of associations:

> je ne crois absolument pas, dans mon travail, au hasard.
> Tout d'abord parce qu'il s'effectue au sein de la
> langue, qui nous constitue tous en tant qu'êtres
> parlants, et que celle-ci ne s'est pas forgée...
> au hasard: que ce soient ses 'figures', que ce soit
> l'historique de chacun des mots qui la composent, elle
> est le produit du long travail de la pensée et de son
> évolution. (p.418)[48]

That Simon's development and conception of the text, as the ground for the activation of the metaphorical associations of language and their combination in ever-new patterns, has the same basic foundation as his conception of the relationship between language and perception is made clear in a passage such as the following where Simon at one and the same time implicitly reactivates a cliché and vividly describes a very specific sensation - i.e. that of 'avoir des fourmis dans les jambes':

> me dévorant courant sur moi charogne déjà rongée noires
> myriades grouillant, puis peu à peu je les sentis
> abandonner mon bras refluer en mordillant, mille piqûres,
> réussissant enfin à le remuer. (Hist,pp.40-1)

It is impossible to separate the sensation from the implicit metaphorical elaboration, to say whether the linguistic expression precedes the sensation or vice versa. Common

sense argues, of course, that at that inconceivable mythical moment of the birth of language, experience preceded expression; but for the civilised, modern man who is born into a language-dominated culture where he learns to conceive of himself as a subject through language, it could be (and has been) argued that the reverse is true.[49] More often than not - and this is probably more true of metaphorical clichés than any other part of language - he acquires the expression before he undergoes the experience. The experience of many of Simon's heroes and narrators consists of the revelation of the circumstances which gave rise to a metaphor since fossilized into a cliché:

> *parfois plus haut que les flammes jaillissait brusquement une torche d'étincelles se tordant puis elles s'éparpillaient retombaient en une pluie de petits points jaunes d'abord puis rouges puis s'éteignant je ne savais pas encore que des expressions comme marcher au feu le baptême du feu voir le feu n'étaient pas des métaphores armes à feu et que les traces que laisse la guerre derrière elle sont simplement noires et sales exactement comme la suie d'un conduit de cheminée.. (BP, p.111)*

In his work up until Histoire, Simon appears to come down explicitly on neither side of the debate between 19th-century evolutionary-based linguistics and code-centred post-Saussurian linguistics. For him language and sensation are inextricable, and he would be unwilling (he would argue, unable) to say whether language preceded perception or vice versa. The nearest he comes to a formulation of his views on this subject - in a little parenthesis in Histoire - maintains the ambiguity and opts for an unnamed faculty mid-way between conscious mental formulation and perception:

> l'esprit (ou plutôt: encore l'oeil, mais plus seulement l'oeil, et pas encore l'esprit: cette partie de notre cerveau où passe l'espèce de couture, le hâtif et grossier faufilage qui relie l'innommable au nommé). (p.274)

In his fiction after Histoire, though his explicit commentary on the matter remains sparing, the emphasis shifts quite markedly from sensory association to the kind of verbal associative possibilities offered by a post-Saussurian differential conception of language. In these works the evocation of sensations frequently turns out to be the recombination of a number of earlier unassociated motifs. The description, in La Bataille de Pharsale of the narrator making love with his mistress:

> toujours à quatre pattes lourd comme si la terre m'aspirait ma tête tirée vers le bas le sol l'odeur d'humus de mousse je pesais mille kilos tonnes de pierre de marbre de bronze je m'écrasai... je sentis ses bras minces m'entourer les reins m'agripper le bracelet s'enfonçant dans ma peau... sa langue d'abord la léchant à petits coups comme timide (p.75)

can also be seen as a combination of a number of earlier motifs:

> et l'autre au-dessus de lui en l'air figure volante (p.61)
>
> puis disparaissant comme aspirés soudain.. (p.71)
>
> Amour et Psyché je crois dans cette matière savonneuse blanche marbre de Carrare.. (p.46)
>
> Un haletèment, le froissement soyeux des coussins ou le tintement des bracelets.(pp.70-1)

In short, as Simon's interest in the technical problems of the novel form and his concern to elaborate a text from the metaphorical resources of the language itself become more and more manifest, the study of perception which contributed largely to his reformulation of the domain proper to the novel tends to be subordinated to the examination and development of linguistic associations. The interest shifts from the referential domain of the problems of perception to the relationship between the referential and the representational,

i.e. from the relationship between the token character and his Lebenswelt to the interaction between the writer and his medium. But before we move on to the progressively more important writerly dimension, we must look at the effect that his interest in perception has on his conception of the relationship between the work of art and the reader, i.e. the way in which he uses the novel to make us see the world anew.

IV DEFAMILIARIZATION

The second part of our first chapter on the theoretical implications to be drawn from Simon's disparate interviews was concerned largely to establish his view of the capacity of the work of art to make us see the world anew. In the course of his career, he gradually restricted the novel's field of competence more and more to the defamiliarization of traditional technique and of language itself. Notwithstanding, there remained even in his most recent work many individual instances of defamiliarizing perspectives on the world. I should like, therefore, to give a general overview of the ways in which Simon's operative subscription to the Formalist concept of defamiliarization relates to his own perceptual interests and of some of the specific techniques by which he effects the defamiliarization of the perceptual process which we have just looked at.

The interdependence of the conception of art as a means by which to 'rendre sensible une vérité' and the notion of intersubjectivity is fundamental in Simon, and can be traced back to the fine distinction which he makes in

La Corde raide between the sycophantic confirmation of the popular view of the world and the striking of latent but previously unheeded chords in the reader:

> la pire malhonnetêté et le pire mépris à l'égard des autres pour celui qui écrit, qui peint ou qui parle, consiste à peindre, à ecrire ou à parler en fonction d'un public et non en fonction de ce qu'il a à dire... On peut rendre sensible une vérité, on ne peut ni la faire comprendre ni l'imposer et nul profitera jamais d'un message s'il n'était pas prêt à le recevoir c'est-à-dire si cette vérité n'était pas déjà latente en lui, lui seulement incapable de lui donner une forme. (pp.70-2)

Such a distinction might appear specious and unverifiable, had we not seen Simon's adherence to the notion of a transpersonal area of experience which is both subjective and anonymous. It is only in the context of such a hypothesis that we can understand his appeal to this vague, latent truth. This truth must surely form part of an intersubjective, prereflective matrix of human experience. Furthermore, this also explains to a large extent his teasing, enigmatic definition of his results in terms of an 'inattendu attendu' which in some way fulfils a need in him. (CR, p.182). His personal situation within language - that most important intersubjective code - allows him, in the pursuit of the suggestions of certain words, to produce combinations which surprise himself and which 'ring true' despite their unconscious source.

Techniques of Defamiliarization: the Prominence of Description

The technical means by which Simon appeals to these latent expectations and effects a renewal of our view of things are varied. The remarkable prominence of description in Simon's work is at once a distinguishing mark of the *école du regard* and a symptom of Simon's interest in universals of perception. The sheer frequency with which, even in

his early fiction, he introduces thematically gratuitous but pictorially vivid detail bears witness to a desire to strike those same intersubjective and prereflective chords in our sensibility which Proust, Stendhal and Flaubert struck in their thematically irrelevant sensory notations:

> retrouver, comme le disait Proust 'la matière éternelle et commune' de la réalité. Rendre non pas le sens des événements mais leur poids, leur chair, leur parfum. Et de citer un passage de 'La Chartreuse' où il est uniquement question de mouvements de cavaliers et de chevaux hors la signification, hors l'anecdote. Voilà l'écriture!... Autre citation, de Flaubert, la raie blanche dans les cheveux de la Bovary, l'angle de son menton par rapport à son cou, sa tête indéfiniment reflétée dans un miroir (détails malheureusement supprimés dans les éditions suivantes, quand l'auteur a voulu écrire plus 'élégamment').[50]

Simon exposes the poverty of the literary principle of economy and of the functional perception of the world, by according an uncommon amount of space to the vivid but informationless detail, such as the 'buée trouble' on a damp tiled floor (LT, p.61), or the remnants of towel-fluff inside a newly dried glass (G, p.320).

In the later novels, Simon fulfils the Formalist prescription of the aesthetic prolongation of perception by according the most tenuous narrative referents digressive or approximative descriptions which far exceed the bounds of narrative economy. According to Victor Chklovski[51] one of the mainsprings of defamiliarization in art is the delay of a meaning-conferring synthesis on the part of the reader through the problematization of the momentum of the action and a meticulous description which obliges us to follow the contours of the object described rather than ~~to~~ simply to identify name and referent. What better example of the prolongation of the 'becoming' of an object could we have than the lengthy

description in La Route des Flandres (pp.33-6) of the repeated emergence and disappearance of the farmer on his tractor as Georges sits in his father's kiosk at dusk? There is a meticulous notation of the noise of the tractor approaching and moving away, and of the gradual appearance/increase in size, decrease in size/disappearance of the farmer. A reference to the episodic figure of the farmer could at a limit be naturalized in terms of an implicit reference to Georges' decision to farm the estate rather than to pursue his studies. However, the lengthy detail and repetition of the description indicates that Simon is more interested in making us feel the way in which, under certain conditions, objects seem to loom at us, than in the thematic relevance of the reference.

Frequently, Simon effects the intended defamiliarization through the hyperprecise description of the most banal objects. This corresponds roughly to the Chklovskian notion of the représentation insolite,[52] whereby the immediately recognizable aspects of a familiar object are obscured (i.e. not mentioned) and hitherto neglected aspects are foregrounded. Our daily use of things in the world subordinates their intrinsic opacity and thingness to their function as perceptual supports. In Gulliver, an interesting analogy testified, at an early stage, to Simon's awareness of the automatization involved in the utilitarian perspective:

> la partie consciente de lui ne tient pas à retrouver cette vision et si par hasard l'image se présente il se contente de poursuivre son chemin sans la voir, non pas au prix d'un effort volontaire et difficile, mais comme lorsqu'on passe devant les boutiques cent fois vues, où l'on ne désire rien acheter, d'une rue cent fois parcourue. (p.250)

It is our awareness of this area of fringe perception that the Formalists and Simon are concerned to reactivate. Description is an emphatic and isolating operation. Applied to something generally taken for granted, it defamiliarizes both the object concerned and the traditional novelistic reliance on economical labelling and recognition. The object concerned is linguistically removed from its context in the hierarchy of notable/meaningful things, and valorized to an unusual degree.

In Les Corps conducteurs, Simon capitalizes on the disoriented view of the sick man and his painstaking struggle along a city street normally traversed in minutes, in order to describe in surrealistic detail a number of function-designed objects or consumption-oriented trappings, which we are so used to seeing that they cease to exist for us in any real sense, e.g. a fire-hydrant (p.11), neon lights (p.189), and a tobacconist's display (p.141). Note, in particular, the long description of the shape and composition of the telephone on pages 79-80. As early as Le Sacre du printemps (p.226), Simon was using the sharply focused telephone in order to convey the hallucinatory daze of a character (Bernard) after he had just heard some shocking news. However, in the later novel the psychological pretext is reduced to a minimum in favour of the defamiliarization of something the reader had rarely seen described.

Simon also defamiliarizes the human activities which subsume these objects in a utilitarian system where their meaning would seem to be fixed once and for all. In Lecon

de choses (pp.137-8), one of the banal activities which he describes in detail is the rolling of a cigarette. He describes the various stages of the preparation and the contour and colour variations of the finished object. This is not the smooth, uniform, mass-produced and consumption-designed object we are used to. Nor is it the behavioural sign we are conditioned to interpret in much modern fiction whose 'thingness' is subordinated to the evocation of situational nervousness, neurosis, swaggering affectation, youthful desire to impersonate maturity, self-destructive cynicism. It is an artefact and the painstaking description of its laborious production turns it into a true object of perception rather than an element in a codal system which is perceived only incidentally as a support for a transcendent meaning.

The disruption of the hierarchization and synthesis involved in anthropocentric perception is even more far-reaching when the activity described constitutes an instituted sign with a generally recognized significance. In Les Corps conducteurs, Simon makes us aware of the arbitrariness and 'real' meaninglessness of applause, by factorizing the activity into its various gradational stages and drawing our attention to variations in a noise which we tend to conceive of as uniform (p.81).

Undoubtedly, one of the most complex instances of this defamiliarization of a banal activity is to be found at the beginning of La Bataille de Pharsale in the description of the people emerging from the underground on an escalator. Here he concentrates on the incongruous graphic effect of contrast between the immobility of the people on the escalator

and their slow ascent out of the métro, at the expense of the function of the escalator and the intentions of the people (i.e. to get out of the métro and to go about their business). The choice of the object described is particularly fortunate in that, paradoxically, a mechanism designed to improve the speedy and effective advancement of human affairs, when viewed from the outside, actually facilitates the transformation of its users into quasi-reified perceptual supports for a potential viewer. As much as they are using it to leave the métro, it is sorting them out into a neat line and allows the potential observer/narrator/writer to focus on and describe them one by one. Here the defamiliarization of the object is due partly to the switch in function operated between the referential and narratorial levels. To the people in the fictional world, it is a machine to facilitate the ascension of steep exits; for the narrator, it facilitates the process of narrative selection.

In these last examples where Simon is defamiliarizing certain activities, abstracting them from their functional perspective and breaking them down into their constituent elements he is also problematizing what Barthes[53] has recognized to be a very important and basic activity of the reader of the conventional plot-oriented narrative, i.e. the organization of 'informations' and 'comportements' into proairetic sequences of behaviour which he can then name. It is on the basis of such naming that he can make meaningful interpretations about such things as the characters' behaviour as a whole or the role of determinism and responsibility in the outcome of an action. In Simon, not only do the inconsistencies on the level of his schematic plots preclude such an integration,

but he himself actively reverses this process by factorizing readily namable activities into stages and by describing them in ever more meticulous detail. Simon has provided his own succinct commentary on the function of this procedure:

> À partir du moment où l'on n'entreprend plus de communiquer des idées qui pré-existeraient à l'écriture, les choses se présentent tout autrement. Si j'écris "Il timbra la lettre", c'est abstrait. Si, au contraire, je parle d'un timbre vert, du goût de la colle sur la langue qui la lèche etc., aussitôt l'écriture devient 'sensorielle' et en quelque sorte 'concrète'.[54]

Omission of Names, Delay in Identification

If Simon's factorization of the banal in detailed descriptions militates against the reader's synthesis of the plot into nameable sequences, the delaying or complete elimination of the names of objects and actions takes this opposition to naturalization even further. This technique is, of course, not new and figures prominently in the repertoire of the writer of suspense and erotic literature. Understandably, Simon makes a frequent and conventional use of it in the description of the shadowy, criminal world of Gulliver, and in the evocation of the 'love that dare not speak its name' between Max and Bobby. Furthermore, in this novel the process of defamiliarization is subordinated to Simon's desire to shake up the moral complacency of post-war France. He gives a dead-pan description of Faure's involvement with the Communist/Resistance groups without naming them as such, an 'innocent eye' description which constitutes an ironic reductio ad absurdum of such activities:

> entourés de quelques garçons et filles qu'il connaissait maintenant assez bien pour les avoir rencontrés souvent aux coins des rues où ils avaient furtivement échangés des paquets de feuilles imprimées ou de petites valises. (p. 21)

The comic element in the above example is counterbalanced by the tone of moral condemnation in the following approximative description of the gun wielded by the young Resistance workers in the barn:

> la chose noire luisante de graisse dont les mains faisaient machinalement jouer le mécanisme. (p.31)

The entire episode of the shooting of the de Chavannes' servant with its initial mistaken premises and ultimate mindless violence is a reductive demystification of Resistance folklore. The pointed, circumlocutory description of the gun in the passage above is an early index of the callousness of these youths and the squalor of their activities.

By the time of Le Vent, the use of approximative description is more closely related to Simon's distrust of psychological categorization. On pages 190-1, there is an impressionistic description of the world as viewed through the blurring perspective of Montès' tears, though we are never told that he is crying. By rejecting the economic but simplificatory vocabulary of the category 'emotional reaction' and focusing rather on the way in which a certain emotional reaction alters our view of the world - in this case it transforms identifiable people into an unlabellable play of shapes - Simon conveys Montès' étonnement at the unfamiliar things which are happening to him and his unfamiliar reactions to them.

One of the most important examples of this process of defamiliarization through omission or delay of nomination occurs at the beginning of La Bataille de Pharsale. Simon exploits to the full the graphic possibilities of the flurry of feathers and the dramatic light effects involved in the closely observed take-off of a pigeon. He particularly

concentrates on the synaesthetic experience of the observer, who cannot synthesize the simultaneous impressions and who cannot identify with any clarity the particular sense perceiving a particular sensation (p.9). The naming of the perceptual support is delayed to the end of the description (oiseau) and figures only as one of alternative hypotheses (the other being that is a flèche).We also encounter in these first pages a telling counterpoint between this impressionistic rendering and the interpretative description of an intensely symbolic representation of a dove (i.e. the stained glass window). This latter propagandistic and formalized representation stresses the relationship between the image and the implied name ('Vase d'ivoire', 'Tour de silence'), and takes for granted the identification of symbolic object with a very rigidly defined meaning.

On several occasions in Histoire, Simon gives a neat twist to this delay/omission of name. There he exploits the motif of the postcards, with their mottos in a foreign language, in order to effect his defamiliarization. Thus on page 259, there is a very long description of an artillery range in terms of sexual organs, followed by the German word for the thing described. Such an emphatically metaphorical description of something which is generally defined by its function, rather than by its connotations or graphic effect, shows an awareness of the arbitrary identification in everyday usage of a certain register with a certain type of referent, and of the defamiliarizing effect that a disruption of that equivalence will have. This elimination of 'les visions toutes faites'[55] is carried out with great virtuosity, panache and

humour in the playful and figurative description of the tramp sitting on the park bench in Les Corps conducteurs. His general appearance is compared with portraits by Titian and his attire with Renaissance fashion, but never is the denotative tag of 'tramp' applied to him (p.180).

Metaphor

These last two examples also illustrate very well the process of defamiliarization through metaphorical parallelism which Chklovski discussed at some length.[56] The customary linguistic, categorial context of an object is suspended and that object is described in terms of something not normally associated with it. A rather more complex instance is to be found in the description of the métro escalator in Les Corps conducteurs already considered in another connection. There the defamiliarization of the everyday object is rendered more acute by the association of an object belonging to one meaning-system - that of utilitarian mechanization - with that of a very different one - that of graphic religious symbolism, in the form of an incongruous analogy with an illustration from a child's catechism depicting a procession of people on the steps of heaven (p.15). Simon's comparison is fulfilling that transfer of an object from its habitual frame of reference to a different one - a procedure which is central to the Formalist notion of defamiliarization and which Simon himself referred to in an interview with Claude Duverlie.[57]

In many of his novels, the motif of war constitutes a token realistic pretext for long, figurative descriptions of everyday objects. Already in La Corde raide, Simon had

stressed the way in which the extravagant anarchy of his war experiences had alerted him to the extraordinary in the banal. The comparisons with the lightning-struck landscape (p.35), the ancient custom by which slaves became kings overnight and the negative of a photograph (p.56) anticipate already the way in which he is going to metaphorically decontextualize the banal in a view from an unfamiliar perspective. In the descriptions of wasted landscapes in the novels, the impression of the bizarre springs from the absence of human activity and the disruption of the old utilitarian categories by which we normally organize and subjugate the inanimate.[58] Here everything is smashed or torn and cannot be recognized and labelled. These descriptions are marked by a whole range of singularizing comparisons with monumental natural catastrophes, which convey something of the perceiver's inability to interpret what he sees in terms of likely cause and effect. Generally, it is only after several minutes of uncomprehending étonnement that he can focus on individual items and realize that they are in fact identifiable and commonplace (LC, p.17). Their removal from the context in which they are normally utilized, and their juxtaposition with items not normally associated with them confer on them an impression of insolite which precludes ready assimilation. The number and variety of comparisons used to describe any one thing act as a gauge of the decontextualization. In Leçon de choses the war-waste is described in terms of the drift left behind after a flood, of the overspill of bins carried by careless dustmen and of the wake of litter left by a crowd after a sporting event or a fair (p.17). In his evocation of the anarchic atmosphere of Spain, the narrator of Histoire resorts

to comparisons with wild animals in an attempt to convey the odd impression of a perfectly banal object such as a car 'parked' in an unfamiliar, code-defying position diagonally across the road (pp.176-7).

Furthermore, the apparently most literal description of anything immediately establishes a whole range of associations and contrasts on the level of the individual words employed and in the web of novelistic motifs, and these open up perspectives on the object which one would otherwise never have considered. In an interview recorded in La Nouvelle Critique, Simon draws attention to the defamiliarization of the fish in the description of the restaurant at Balbec in À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs:

> en une phrase de dix lignes, ce poisson est littéralement arraché de son contexte dans le monde quotidien... pour se trouver 'contemporain'... des époques primitives, des commencements de la vie, habitant des profondeurs marines et au centre, non d'une table de restaurant, mais d'un faisceau de concepts: nature, plan, architecture, cathédrale etc.[59]

In the preface to Orion aveugle and at the Colloque de Cerisy, Simon illustrated this point by showing the multivalence of a very common word such as 'tête' or 'rideau' (an example he borrows from Lacan), according to its different contexts and the way in which its use can set up unexpected links between apparently heterogeneous things. Thus in Les Corps conducteurs, he sets up a network of associations between a métro map, an anatomical plate, a tobacconist's window display, a brick wall, the ground-plan of city-blocks, and the advertising columns of a newspaper - all on the basis of the damier motif. Similar chains of associations are established in the same novel on the basis of the words croix and serpent. The transformation of a word into a motif suspends its

functional categorial context and suggests potential, alternative semantic and phonetic groups which defamiliarize our perception of the word and the object with which we simplistically associate it.

Incongruity

An ability to see the points of convergence between heterogeneous things has a correlative in Simon's acute sensitivity to the incongruous and the absurd. His awareness of the insolite springing from incongruity between juxtaposed objects or between focused forme and accompanying frame/fond is related to his understanding of the importance of context in perception and of the influence of peripherally viewed data in our perception of the thing focused.

A spectacular early example of this insolite of the incongruous is, of course, the description of Herzog's house in Gulliver (p.60) where Simon revels in the evocation of material anarchy, capitalizing on the divorce of objects from their utilitarian value and their heterogeneous conglomeration. However, despite Simon's obvious pleasure in the description of the graphically incongruous, the passage contributes considerably more to the treatment of the thematic issues of the novel. In particular, the comparison with the catastrophe of the Flood, minus the salvation offered by the ark, sums up the theme of suffering without hope in a godless world, and epitomizes the kind of arbitrary retribution meted out to the referee, and to the Chavannes' servant. Furthermore, a later passage (p.65) links the description to the theme of materialism versus spirituality so central to the novel, and suggests that the only God

possible in this world is an absurd, materialist one. The acquisitiveness of the Jew is no longer justified theologically and testifies to the absurdity and incoherence of his religion.

An example drawn from the same novel which is less explicable in simple thematic terms is the vivid image of Max's discovery of the girl who had committed suicide in his house. Typically, the narrator passes no moral judgement but concentrates on the impression of insolite produced by the gruesome naked vestiges of human emotion in the glaring light of this clean, impersonal, modern bathroom (G, p.261). This example could be compared with profit to the passage in Histoire describing the odd effect produced by the naked model in the domestic setting of the artist's studio/living-room and surrounded by fully clothed men drinking tea (p.282). Here, Simon has eliminated the rather spectacular melodrama in order to concentrate on the graphic vividness and the incongruity springing from a transgression of social codes of respectability. Once again his debt to painting is manifest and it seems likely that the description is in part inspired by the same exploitation of codal transgression as Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe.[60]

It is, however, the enigmatic Marie of L'Herbe who exemplifies best Simon's taste for the outlandish and incongruous. On several occasions, he draws attention to the queer effect made by the presence of the strait-laced Marie and her sister on their brother's wedding photographs among the other young, fashionable guests (p.76). Elsewhere, he describes the bizarre effect of a huge razor among her old-maidish toilet things (pp.48-9). But the most perplexing thing about Marie is the impossibility of analysing

or describing her in words. Her categorial elusiveness is such that the application of the most banal epithet or adjective - for example, 'contente' - jars immediately and confers on the word itself an incongruous and bizarre quality (p.111).

Finally, a more discreet and rather more subtle instance is the description in Leçon de choses of the fire-back found in the old house being demolished by the work-men:

> Indifférente et futile dans le parc obscur et ratissé, la jeune femme noircie par les flammes semble suspendue immobile, sans toucher terre, effleurant le sol de son ample jupe aérienne, estompée par des couches de suie, comme l'habitante ignifiée et paradoxale d'un monde souterrain, charbonneux et fleuri. (p.110)

Here Simon illustrates the insolite of the incongruous in a fine play on the relationship between reality and representation, the functional purpose of the object and the effect of its usage jarring with the imaginary world conjured up in the engraving. The strangeness of the contrast is accentuated by the discrepancy in the temporal contexts implied by the conflicting aspects of the object. The old-fashioned but static and imaginary world of the representation is at odds with the everyday routine and repeated use of the object of which it is a part. The minimal functionality of the old-world decoration and the maximal functionality of the domestic implement coincide, and in the shock of coincidence make us aware of the coexistence of several alternative semantic contexts for any one object and of the extent to which the significance of objects is overdetermined by a variety of factors such as utility, decorativeness, rarity value, nostalgia etc. By describing an object where these various codes vie to the point of incongruity, Simon defamiliar-

izes both the object and the codes of which it is a point of intersection.

The Unusual Perspective

Finally in this section, I should like to look at his predilection for the hyperproximate and unusual angle on a particular thing. In many cases, the disruption of the characters' 'normal' control over their surroundings is brought about by the fact that the normal distance between perceiver and object is disrupted. Usually the perceiver is brought much closer to the object than usual and is made to notice things and aspects of things whose existence he had not previously suspected. Thus we find a great many descriptions of different types of textures and different light effects seen from close quarters or simply focused on at the expense of the naturalizing context.

Simon's own admission in La Corde raide of an early openness to the textures and surface effects of his immediate surroundings isolated from their integrating total context:

> Je me rappelais les deux dômes lourds de cette place de Berlin où je logeais... Et celui d'une église d'Avignon, tout contre ma fenêtre, si près que je pouvais vivre de sa vie et sentir la matière de ses pierres (p.9)

exemplifies what Merleau-Ponty has described as our capacity to suspend our total view of the world and let it dissolve into so many hyper-clear sensory impressions which make us aware of our prereflective participation in the world:

> Je ne vis jamais entièrement dans les espaces anthropologiques, je suis toujours attaché par mes racines à un espace naturel et inhumain. Pendant que je traverse la place de la Concorde et que je me crois pris tout entier par Paris, je puis arrêter mes yeux sur une pierre du mur des Tuileries, la Concorde disparaît, et il n'y a plus que cette pierre sans histoire; je peux

> encore perdre mon regard dans cette surface grenue et jaunâtre, et il n'y a plus même de pierre, il ne reste qu'un jeu de lumière sur une matière indéfinie. Ma perception totale n'est pas faite de ces perceptions analytiques, mais elle peut toujours se dissoudre en elles, et mon corps, qui assure par mes habitus mon insertion dans le monde humain, ne le fait justement qu'en me projetant d'abord dans un naturel qui transparaît toujours sous l'autre, comme la toile sous le tableau, et lui donne un air de fragilité. (PP, p.339)

Over and above this remarkable common ground between philosopher and novelist, the debt of the latter to his artistic training is once again at least equally important. In the Colloque de Cerisy (pp.410-11), Simon expressed his profound debt to Van Gogh - the first, according to Simon, to turn his eyes away from the picturesque motif and pay attention to what he found at his feet - and his recognition of a kindred spirit in Dubuffet whose series 'Routes et chemins' astonished him by its affinities with his own attention to the texture of the ground in the passage describing Georges crawling along on his knees after the ambush.

Simon's interest in the odd viewing angle and in perspective in general is likewise to be attributed to his technical training as an art student. Indeed some passages in his novels read like text-book descriptions of the laws of perspective - e.g. the description of the infinitely converging lines of mortar in the perspectivally viewed brick wall (Hist, pp.41, 388-9), the painstaking description of the perspectival artifice in the engraving of Barcelona (Hist, p.162), the description of the dramatic plunging perspective in the Brera version of Mantegna's Dead Christ (Hist, pp.397-8).

More important, however, than these technical virtuoso displays is his awareness of the relativity of any perspective.

This is demonstrated both in his description of the most intently focused, minute objects, and in his descriptions of vast sweeping shots over the countryside. Hence his interest in <u>trompe l'oeil</u> and perspectival puzzles:

> Ses pieds reposent sur un carrelage composé de losanges noirs, gris et blancs qui dessinent des cubes vus en perspective et accolés. Selon la façon dont on les regarde, les cubes semblent basculer dans un sens ou dans l'autre. (<u>BP</u>, p.220)

Here he is playing with the ambiguous perspectival relationship between form and background, and presents us with a puzzling pattern which is only further confused by the attempts of the eye to accommodate it. Contrasting with the compact dimensions of this example, but basically making the same point is the curious passage in <u>La Route des Flandres</u> (p166, at the races), where the sky and clouds are first viewed from the ground, then the earth is described from the point of view of the clouds. Simon exploits the licence of third person narrative in a way which does not attempt to conceal its inconsistencies, but rather draws attention to them in a thought-provoking way. The juxtaposition of the view of the characters on the ground with that of a hypothetical viewpoint in the clouds, in a commentary which trails off and opens out the perspective to potentially take in the whole world, draws attention in spectacular fashion to the limitations of the human view.

In some cases this relativization takes the form of an almost surrealistic threat to the character's point of view. <u>La Route des Flandres</u> revolves round the repeated description of a dead horse in various stages of decomposition, whose dull, glazed eye fascinates Georges. This eye seems to constitute a challenge to his perspective of things, his notion

of identity and to refer to an area of experience outwith his ken - death. Similarly, in La Bataille de Pharsale the account of the ambush is less interesting for its status as an event than for the relativization of perspective which it entails:

> la tête du cheval reposant sur sa joue de sorte que d'où j'étais je la voyais par en dessous avec ce creux qu'ils ont entre leurs quoi (maxillaires?) son oeil marron luisant couvert comme d'une taie aux reflets bleuâtres me regardant en coin semblait-il avec fixité puis je compris qu'il ne me voyait pas une ou deux fois encore ses jambes s'agitèrent se détendant faiblement comme s'il essayait de ruer après quoi il resta définitivement immobile *je.* (p.74)

This new physical perspective which throws into relief the horse's eye also draws attention to the way in which our sense of self derives in large part from our awareness of another observing us, the principal index of which is the eye of the Other. The illness of the man in Les Corps conducteurs likewise causes a disconcerting alteration in the man's relationship with his own body, and puts him in positions and contexts which oblige him to recognize the 'thing' in which his subjectivity is located. As he lies on his back in the doctor's surgery, his 'normal' view is now the ceiling, and when he tries to regain the 'normal' view of a vertically standing person, he gets an unfamiliar, foreshortened view of his own body (p.48 - this is perhaps a parodic reversal of the view of Christ in Mantegna's famous painting described at the end of Histoire). Man's 'naturally' upright position is the result of a long process of evolution and was determined by the paramount importance of good vision in the protection of the self from danger. A crucial element of self-preservation involves an active attention to and control of one's Lebenswelt and,

according to Simon, a capacity to efface one's consciousness of self (G, SP). In Les Corps conducteurs, the shock of the foreshortened view of his body, which is thereby transformed into an en-soi for himself, translates in perspectival terms the narrator's physical vulnerability. Although perhaps not a very successful work[61] in terms of the language-based aesthetic evolved after La Bataille de Pharsale, Les Corps conducteurs remains a curiously disturbing novel which satisfies the early expressed ambition of perceptual defamiliarization through a problematization of spatial perception and a particularly close scrutiny of the relationship between the perceiving subject and individual perceptual supports, including that of the narrator's malfunctioning body.

In this first chapter, I have tried to show the gradual shift in Simon's work from a quasi-Faulknerian analysis of a mass of motivational and deterministic issues to something like a phenomenologically reductive study of the conditions of perception (centred in the work of his middle period but extending its ramifications into his most recent work). Viewed in this light, the gradual increase in interest in gesture for its own sake at the expense of the behaviourally interpretable context, the impressionistic fascination with texture and perspective and the study of the constitution of the individual in language have all been seen as different aspects of a central concern with man as the point of intersection of body-world-language.

This complex threefold relationship was studied in some detail in our most extensive section III. There the quite remarkable points of coincidence between Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception and the main tenor of some of Simon's passages served as a useful gauge of the profundity and coherence of Simon's intuitive grasp of the principles of perceptual theory.

For much of his novelistic career, Simon retained a frequently voiced faith in the capacity of art to defamiliarize the world around us. Gradually, however, his exploration of the notion of language as a process of differentiation, association and combination adulterated and modified that naive faith in the renewability of our vision through description. Thus, we saw that on the level of psychological study, both the problems of moral ambiguity of the early novels and the epistemologically crucial issues of identity and the perception of autrui in Le Palace and La Route des Flandres give way gradually in the novels from Histoire on to text-generated 'emotions' where the description of a psychological state consists simply of the combination of motifs used earlier in the text. Gradually, the more rigorous defamiliarization of novelistic and linguistic processes themselves will come more and more to the fore and displace sensory association as the principal articulation of the text.

Despite our rough schematization of his work into periods, it is impossible to determine with any authority the point of rejection of one particular aesthetic position in favour of another. There does not seem to have been any single aesthetic crisis and the most we can hope to do is to ascertain

relative priorities within the individual works, which may permit at least a composite view of his evolution.
Our next chapter will, therefore, take up the other strand of our subject - representation - and try to trace the various modulations and refinements which take place in Simon's conception of it.

Chapter 2.

Representation

This chapter will seek to show the way in which Simon's reformulation of the general function of the novel affects his attitude to traditional technical priorities and is reflected in the changes which take place in the compositional method of his novels in the middle and more recent periods of his fiction.

Our first section will demonstrate Simon's critique of the compositional methods and techniques of the Realist tradition, and his devaluation of the whole enterprise of representation. Section two will show the way in which his distrust of verbal classification and his recourse to tentative and approximative, rather than confident, denotative description will have much wider repercussions on his attitude to language as a whole, bringing him into line, in general terms, with post-Saussurian linguistics. Particular attention will be paid to the way in which, in his later fiction, the notion of defamiliarization is applied more specifically to the reactivation of our appreciation of language itself and to the way in which it relates to his conception of writing as a combinatoire.

I CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT OF REPRESENTATION

Simon's relativization of the concept of representation to the point where it is defined in terms of a conceptual problem, rather than of a positive and possible activity, is not a facile iconclastic gesture at tradition. It is

based on a constructive awareness of the limitations inherent in any attempt to portray reality and on a thorough, demythologizing understanding of the technical mechanisms by which an illusion of vraisemblance was created in the Realist novel. Before looking at some of the more far-reaching theoretical implications and premises of his critique, I should like to consider (i) his suggestion of the limitations and inadequacy of traditional attempts at realistic representation. (ii) the foregrounding and subversion of the traditionally camouflaged mechanisms by which meaning is produced in a novel, and his facetious use of traditional 'meaning-producing' techniques.

(i) The Limitations and Inadequacy of Traditional 'Representation'

Inevitable Selectivity

Our second chapter drew attention to Simon's sensitivity to the multitude of sensations which impinge on us at any one moment; such an awareness made his dissatisfaction with traditional Realist claims inevitable. The tension between the mass of simultaneous sensations that is human experience and the intrinsically linear nature of language made nonsense of the attempt to reconcile them in a coherent, meaningful (i.e. where polysemy has been limited) fiction. The pursuit of the Realist ideal of the definitive transcribability of reality would result, ultimately, in an amorphous glut of data which, under no circumstances, could be described as a work of art:

> comme.... dans cette histoire de Balzac où un peintre ne réussit plus à faire, dans son désir d'extrême exactitude qu'un barbouillage dépourvu de toute signification. (V, p.177)

Throughout his middle fiction, even though the primacy of the dominant fictional motif is never really challenged, we are constantly confronted with disconcerting digressions - such as that on the history of the railway line in Le Palace (pp.57-8) - which threaten the order of the narrative, open up new perspectives on the level of the narration and sketch out alternative 'stories'. In La Route des Flandres, Blum's angry outburst and account of his own life act as a counterpoint which highlights how relative the narrative which has preoccupied us throughout this novel is, and suggests that the formulation of experience into narratives is the privilege of a certain class. His lengthy pseudo-Balzacian description of the street where he was brought up, in fact, serves a very different function from Balzacian description itself. It does not provide the explanatory social background against which the narrative proceeds and can be understood. On the contrary, it raises a question mark over its validity, the detailed humdrum description of every shop conveying the non-eventful, narratively uninteresting nature of life (RF, p.284).

In this middle period, the account of a single incident often begs more questions than it supplies information. By his elaboration of ever-ramifying digressions, Simon suggests the sheer multitude of material which would have to be taken into account in an exhaustive description of anything. On page 57 of Le Vent, the narrator announces the account of two events and then, without telling us any more, embarks on a description of a similar, earlier incident - the uncle's visit to Montès' hotel - going on to open up an historical perspective on to the family ancestry. Here,

the hiatus should draw attention to the difficulty of marshalling material into a narrative, every statement conjuring up parallel incidents which are necessary to explain subsequent ones, and highlighting the infinite weight of data from the past which would pretend to be valid. In La Route des Flandres, the account of the death of de Reixach is followed by an attempt to label the types of shrubs in the surrounding countryside. An adequate and accurate representation would require one to bring to bear the information from an infinite number of fields of study (RF, p.78).

The universal predilection of humanity for stories is dictated largely by an attempt to accommodate intellectually the multitude of sensations it has experienced. But assimilation is by its very nature selective and reductive. The American in Le Palace can cope with the anarchy of the Spanish Civil War and sum it up in cynical figures of speech, only after he has mastered the technique of selection - i.e. he chooses 'les deux ou trois phrases comestibles' (p.28) he wants to stress from an already-made selection of facts in the newspapers. The metaphoric motif of the comestibility of reality is a theme which runs through Le Vent, L'Herbe and Le Palace. Montès' refusal to read his experience in terms of the codes of the town takes on a physical force in his inability to swallow his lunch. Furthermore, narrative assimilation involves, by its nature, a retrospective gap between the initial experience and its account, and the very process of its formulation results in an oversimplification in the interests of order or in the introduction of a number of elements extraneous to the experience. The frustrating attempt to reproduce in schematic form, on the part of the

'homme-fusil' in Le Palace, the assassination he committed in Paris demonstrates the irreducibility of sensory impression to a retrospective synthesis (pp.47-99). In the thick of a critical experience, labels and categories are irrelevant and not immediately retrievable from the memory; he is eventually obliged to give a description in stereo, as it were, whereby he evokes his impressions in the main syntagm outside the brackets, and retrospectively attributes labels and categories to impressionistic shapes inside the brackets (pp.70-1). Moreover, the retrospective view automatically reads previous incidents in terms of the viewer's subsequent knowledge and confers upon them a fatalistic teleological perspective which invests them with a meaning they did not originally have:

> (et la photographie des morts saisie par les inspecteurs ou donnée par les parents aux journalistes, en dépit du fait qu'elle date d'un mois, d'un an, de deux ans avant le drame, présente ce même visage accablé de stupeur, empreint d'une expression d'interrogation, d'étonnement, comme une muette, pathétique et impuissante protestation contre l'injuste sort, l'implacable hasard). (SP, pp.158-9)

Time constitutes a point of intensity[1], an emphatic connotation which, according to Barthes, disrupts the general interest value of the apparently most objective document - the photograph - and confers an anachronistic meaning on it which owes more to the discrepancy between the photographer's and the subsequent viewer's temporal situation than to the content of the photograph, and which derives from the viewer's awareness of the dual perspective in which the intervening time can be seen:

> le Temps [est] l'emphase déchirante du noème ('ça-a-été'), sa représentation pure... Je lis en même temps; cela sera et cela a été; j'observe avec horreur un futur antérieur dont la mort est l'enjeu. En me donnant le passé absolu

> de la pose (aoriste), la photographie me dit la mort au futur. Ce qui me point c'est la découverte de cette équivalence.[2]

In Simon's most recent works, the notion of a central, coherent narrative thread has become irrelevant with the elaboration of a structure whereby each of the three motifs figures as a representation within the 'world' of the other two, and the shifts from one to the other are effected through linguistic association rather than by any specious logic of verisimilitude. In these novels, Simon's critique of traditional realisitic representation tends to take the form of mises en abyme suggesting its selectivity. In Triptyque, the account of the two boys trying to piece together a film-clip stresses the wide range of temporal periods and activities which must be left out in the artificial imposition of a certain order on life and the establishment of a sequence:

> Après avoir éliminé un certain nombre des fragments de films dont ils ont fait l'inventaire (parmi lesquels une course d'automobiles, une scène de western, une autre en costumes d'époque), les deux garçons... ont finalement retenu cinq qui leur semblent présenter une certaine unité et qu'ils entreprennent de classer dans un ordre sur lequel ils restent toutefois incertains. (T, pp.170-1)

Undoubtedly, one of the most interesting and self-conscious passages in this connection is to be found at the beginning of Leçon de choses:

> La description (la composition) peut se continuer (ou être complétée) à peu près indéfiniment, selon la minutie apportée à son éxécution, l'entraînement des métaphores proposées, l'addition d'autres objets visibles dans leur entier ou fragmentés par l'usure, le temps, un choc (soit encore qu'ils n'apparaissent qu'en partie dans le cadre du tableau), sans compter les divers hypothèses que peut susciter le spectacle. Ainsi il n'a pas été dit si... une seconde ampoule plus forte n'éclaire pas la scène, ce qui expliquerait la présence d'ombres portées très opaques... (pp.10-11)

This passage sums up, with considerable irony, the arbitrary nature of description practised by Realist fiction. It shows that the apparently exhaustive Balzacian description is far from exhaustive and could be carried on indefinitely. Representation as conceived of in traditional terms is equivalent to the circumscription of limitations within a potential infinity. Furthermore, the passage draws attention to the priority of writing, and makes the point that in a text it is the only reality; it is the writing which causes to exist for the reader the objects which it apparently describes.

Emphatic Selectivity

As a pre-condition of representation, selectivity inevitably gives a certain extraneous emphasis to the object described. This effect springs partly from the inherently limited nature of the work of art (because it cannot mention everything, what it does mention assumes an importance not intrinsic to it in the real world), and partly from the linear nature of language (nothing can be reproduced with the immediacy with which we perceive it and the description of an object is essentially enumerative, according an undue stress to its individual aspects as it treats them in turn).[3]

In the description of the group of teddy-boys in Triptyque, Simon draws attention to the way in which the notation of a minimal mark of differentiation signals the person or thing as being of future significance in the narrative. The blond, woolly-haired boy of the alley-scene is distinguished from his group of friends on the basis of his hair type. In the categorization of their hair-types - surely a parodic

allusion to Balzacian categorization - his is given a slightly more extended treatment (p.133).[4]

Ultimately, the classical principles of economy and unity are, in fact, the distortive elevation of necessity into an ideal. (Most serious 'realist' fiction would seek at one and the same time to represent reality, and to construct a unified work of art, without recognizing the inherent contradiction of such an enterprise). Thus in La Bataille de Pharsale (p.242) Simon both emphasizes the arbitrary nature of fictional chronology and subverts the implicit teleology which underpins the ideal of the unified work where every detail counts. In order to demonstrate the mechanism by which fictional events are articulated in view of a future outcome, he suddenly introduces a fictionally anomalous, but diegetically logical, future tense and defines the moment described in relation to a future one (i.e. one described later in the text). This throws into relief the governing consciousness manipulating fictional events and demonstrates the way in which traditional chronology conceals a false teleology. The banality of the outcome in relation to which the description is elaborated - the nose-bleed of a soldier - increases the irony.

Equally blatant, and therefore subversive, is the description, from a vantage point, of the spectacular sweeping view of the valley in Triptyque (pp.66-7), where the narrator gradually focuses on the one house. This house is distinguished verbally from the others because it is its gateway that one of the boys is going to enter. In fact, it is not the 'crépi mieux entretenu' which distinguishes it, but the fact that the narrator has mentioned it in view of a future

incident. Here, however, Simon deliberately leaves the notation hanging - he does not follow through the implications of the emphatic notation as one would normally expect and the passage is not meaningfully integrated into a unified fiction.[5]

Panorama, Ellipsis, Scene, Description.

The processes of selection and emphasis also govern the relative speeds at which a set of events or circumstances are related (i.e. they determine the temporal relationships between their variable durée on the level of the diegesis and on the level of the reality described),[6] and the frequency with which any one event is narrated. As Genette points out, the only real temporality that a text has is that which it metonymically borrows from its reading; therefore, the way in which it capitalizes on the duration of the reader's interest is of prime importance. More significant, however, than this vague, empirical and not particularly instructive conclusion, the validity of which is subject to individual reading habits, is the fact that the difference between the speeds of narration confers a relative prominence on narrative detail which it does not enjoy outside the context of being narrated, and institutes an effect of meaning which may or may not be intentional. Furthermore, the distribution of narrative data according to the four principal narratorial speeds available - the ellipsis, the descriptive pause, the scene, the summary - is fundamental to the communication (intentional or otherwise) of the author's ideological attitude to the world. The importance of an event in relation to the overall 'meaning' of the text is in direct relation to the length and focus of its narration and the time hypothetically

accorded to it by the reader (in comparison with that which he accords to other events).

Simon has explicitly indicated the artificiality and arbitrariness underlying this method of composition:

> Hormis cette 'continuité' à prétention réaliste (prétention parfaitement abusive d'ailleurs: chacun sait qu'il n'est pas de roman, pour si traditionnel et si 'réaliste' qu'il se présente, où le temps ne subisse des accélerations, des ralentissements, des coupures des compressions ou encore ce qu'on appelle de 'foudroyants raccourcis', c'est-à-dire qu'il est parfaitement *discontinu*)... hormis donc cette 'continuité' dans laquelle nous sont présentés des événements *fictifs* et *fortuits*, rien dans le texte lui-même (c'est-à-dire dans la matière même du récit), absolument rien (aucune 'figure'... aucune assonance, aucune parenté d'images ou de structures, autrement dit aucun lien qualificatif) ne permet de passer d'un élément à l'autre, ne renvoie d'une description ou d'une narration à une autre. (NR II, p.76)

Furthermore, in his article on Monique Wittig's L'Opoponax, he takes to task what he calls the 'optique Michelin' which is in direct conflict with his own defamiliarizing attention to details and his concomitant levelling-out of the hierarchy of worthy subjects of description:

> On voit donc, dans ce que l'on pourrait appeler 'l'optique Michelin', ce qui est jugé digne d'intérêt ou pas. Intéressant, 'extraordinaire', l'inhabituel, les vues panoramiques, les profonds abîmes. Stendhal, par exemple, trouvait qu'une bataille (chose pourtant courante et, hélas! des plus banales) valait la peine d'être décrite en détail... mais que, en revanche, un simple voyage sans incidents spectaculaires qui s'ensuivait (que de complexes problèmes sur l'espace et le temps, entre autres, nous pose pourtant le moindre déplacement!) n'avait rien que d'ordinaire' et ne méritait par conséquent tout au plus qu'une ligne. (p.69)

Simon's own work shifts from a meaningful (i.e. meaning-producing), emphatic and traditional orchestration of the 'content' in terms of scene, panorama, ellipsis and description to a perverse, willful and reactive deployment of these narrative speeds, in which description ultimately prevails over a more varied gamut of narrative modes.

Since the earlier fiction distributes its information

in a very traditional way according to the demands of theme and suspense, a detailed analysis of it here would reveal little more than the subjugation of form to the illumination of subject in the representational novel. In the later work, on the contrary, the disruption of the chronology has rendered irrelevant the notion of meaningful ellipsis (except in a Machereyan analysis), while the panorama and the dramatic scene figure only as parodic reductio ad absurdum of the principles of narrative distribution. Thus the summary can take the form of a list of post-cards (Hist, pp.83-4, 229-31), the hyper-compressed isolation and enumeration of key-words in information-processing systems (T, pp.57-9),[7] a super-abundance of iterative phrases[8] or the incoherent, and emotively telescoped war-reminiscences of the mason in 'DivertissementII' of Leçon de choses. In an apparently redundant notation in Leçon de choses Simon pushes to its logical conclusion the function of the panoramic summary in the traditional novel, which allowed the author to 'skip' 'dead' periods in which nothing of fictional interest happened:

> A part le cri de l'oiseau et le chant des grenouilles, aucun bruit n'est venu troubler le silence depuis la chute de l'unique obus et le tapage des deux rafales. (LC, p.74)

Simon's use of the dramatic dialogue scene in his middle and late work is less parodic than simply dismissive. On several occasions, he declares the ephemerality and absurdity of the attempt to subordinate language to 'meaningful' communication:

> (si tant est qu'une femme cesse jamais de parler du même sujet, de la seule et unique chose qui l'intéresse, et si tant est encore - car ce serait sans doute être trop injuste de s'en tenir aux femmes - si tant

> est que les tonnes de discours, de volumes, de ratiocinations, de fictions, de spéculations accumulés par l'homme aient jamais eu pour sujet autre chose que la même préoccupation, cette insoluble interrogation: lui-même). (H, pp.185-6)

Those conversations which are occasionally noted in the course of his fiction constitute the sporadic indices of an ultimately rather marginal interest in what Nathalie Sarraute calls the sous-conversation, that 'tropistic' layer of seething tensions, exacerbated frustration and profound emotion which underlies the most banal and apparently neutral conversations.[9] Simon merely flirts with this psychological approach, where the emphasis is on the polyvalence of superficial behavioural indices and on the welter of obscure, unformulated feeling underlying all explicit human 'communication'. In Le Vent, the intuitive suspicion of Cécile and the odd, delicate relationship of Montès, Cécile and Rose is evoked in an exemplary instance of sous-conversation (p.152). The scene concludes with a hyperbolic, fantastic analogy with the disastrous opening of Pandora's box, which would not look out of place in Portrait d'un inconnu. In L'Herbe, the explicit conversation between Georges and his father about money is only the superficial indication of a much more deeply rooted confrontation about differing values and Pierre's disappointment in his son (p.149). In the same novel, the religious tension between Sabine and Marie is so strong that it becomes impossible to distinguish between the 'real' conversation and the sous-conversation. Sabine is so preoccupied by her own obsessive ruminations about what is implicitly at stake that she cannot be sure whether or not she has articulated her worries. This particular

example ought to alert us, however, to an important distinction between Simon's sous-conversation and that of Sarraute. On page 59 of L'Herbe, the repeated qualification 'sans doute', juxtaposed with verbs of certainty, is used to highlight ironically the extravagance of Sabine's suspicions about Pierre. In Sarraute, there is not the same concern on the part of the narrator to distinguish himself/herself from the character described. For her, such suspicions and tropisms are the very stuff of all human communication, and in her explicit theoretical statements, she universalizes the implications of her psychological studies. For Simon, characters such as Sabine are implicitly judged to be neurotic in the most critical sense of the word, and are far from being typical. On the contrary, they are often set against taciturn, impassive, enigmatic characters whose treatment resembles rather Faulkner's most perplexing and non-committal characterisation.

By Histoire, recombinatory description of the collection of post-cards has largely ousted dramatic scenes. The sous-conversation is either banalized in the extreme (for example the suspicious little scene between the narrator and the furniture dealer (pp.224-247)) or is rendered so abstract and allusive that one can only conclude that Simon is using it to 'generate' by suggestion a fictional event, rather than supplying any crucial background information about the relationships between the characters. The confrontation between Corinne and Uncle Charles (p.296), about the tranquillizers she has been taking for her exams, does not so much hint at a closeted family skeleton as generate a possible past for the characters.

By La Bataille de Pharsale, the critical, Lubbockian dramatic scene is relegated to a single section labelled 'Conversation' in the central part of the novel. It has no explicit link with the rest of the novel and the speakers remain anonymous voices. Empirical psychological interest has been refined out of existence and Simon seems to be interested only in the way in which tension can be suggested, generated through linguistic manipulation, even in the absence of psychological analysis.

In the final fiction, the dramatic dialogue more or less disappears so that the evocation, in Les Corps conducteurs (pp.166-7) of what would seem to be the end of a relationship takes the form not of a critical dramatic exchange, but of a description of the placing of a woman's feet on the tiled floor, of those of the narrator on the carpet and of the pattern of that carpet. Those dialogues which do occur here and in the late middle fiction are either incoherent 'dialogues de sourds' or a play on linguistic ambiguity without any specific psychological interest in the participants:

> bon Dieu tu ne peux pas coucher avec elle comme tout le monde sans faire tant d'histoires bon Dieu Et moi... Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire Comme tout le monde? Et lui Oh bon Dieu j'ai dit comme tout le monde fait c'est tout de même pas la première fille que tu sautes une Et moi Coucher avec elle comme tout le monde. (BP, p.48)

Le Vent is, however, the work which forms the most instructive transitional point between his assumption and rejection of the principle of emphatic distribution which governs most 19th-century fiction. This important novel of 1957 marks the dawning of Simon's awareness of the arbitrariness and ultimate unjustifiability of the traditional marked and 'meaningful' variations in the speed

of the narration.

In contrast with the traditional Realist novel where the narrator capitalized on the 'salient relief' of the scene 'to clinch a matter already pending, to demonstrate a result, to crown an effect half-made by other means'[10] and where the use of the panoramic method allowed the narrator to maintain a forward impetus in his narration, in Le Vent the panoramic and the scenic passages tend to duplicate one another. The relationship - in terms of the temporality of reality - between the two methods is no longer consecutive, the panoramic survey giving way momentarily to a crystallizing scene, but parallel, the narrator on a number of occasions giving two versions of the one period or event, one scenic, one panoramic. This new treatment of the scenic/panoramic distributional method is sometimes to be recognized by sharp dislocations in the narrative, as in the opening paragraphs of chapter eight where the initial panoramic description of the changes in weather, which leads us to expect that a period of several weeks or at least days will have passed since Montès' nocturnal walk out to the gipsy camp, suddenly without warning cedes to the evocation of the events of the day immediately following. This abrupt, disconcerting disjunction in the linear continuity of the narrative arises from the fact that the narrator is here trying to marry his own memory of the period and that of Montès. The narrator at the time of these events did not know that all this was going on; therefore his impression of the period remains general and meteorological, while for Montès it is a particular day which sticks out in his mind. A similar example can be seen in the last chapter - it opens

with a panoramic evocation, in terms of the weather, of the period following Rose's death, the account of Montès' visit to the orphanage meanwhile being delayed for several pages. In both cases, the temporal pseudo-continuity of the Realist novel is being undermined to suggest the multi-dimensional nature of Time experienced by different people.[11]

Apart from its accelerative function, the panorama also allows the narrator to take advantage of the temporal distance between himself and the incident, to annotate and evaluate that incident. The speciousness of such retrospective interpretations is brought out in the contrast between Montès' naive, ratiocinative description of the things which have happened to him since his arrival and the narrator's exaggeratedly interpretative, panoramic survey of them on page 82 which would make Montès the victim of a social conspiracy. This 'meaningful' correlation of events also illustrates the way in which the panorama is used in the traditional novel to weld disparate 'episodes' together, the simple act of telescoping an extended period of time conferring on the incidents of that period a spurious homogeneity of significance and a consequential rapport.

Finally in this connection, I should like to note the marked tendency in this novel for the dramatic scene to give way to something between the scene and the description - the tableau vivant.[12] The superabundance of these rather unorthodox scenes both militates against the advancement of the story and flies in the face of the traditional narrative practice, which requires the skilled writer to reserve the scene to stress the more effectively the dramatic moments of the narrative.[13] Simon's uncustomary priority can be

justified, in part, in terms of the fragmentary, episodic nature of the narrator's information, but this does not explain the relish the narrator frequently takes in the elaboration of a scene which is not essential. The account of the joy-rides to which Montès treats Rose's children (p.53) is a case in point - this almost certainly would have been rendered panoramically in the traditional novel, evoking as it does a prolonged uneventful period and repeated action. The narrator starts off panoramically but gradually what he 'knows' generates in his imagination a tableau. Now this scene by its very status as an imaginary elaboration cannot perform any crucial function in the development of the story. Its main interest lies in the vividness of its general effect, so that a whole period suddenly takes on the a-chronological, immediate quality of an image.[14] Simon's expression, at the Colloque de Cerisy on the Nouveau Roman, of his desire to achieve in the novel something of the immediacy and synchrony of Western pictorial art (an immediacy which he opposes to the diachronic art of the East), constitutes an admirable commentary of this early prominence of the tableau. Furthermore, one of the conclusions he reaches here suggests something of the way in which Simon's work is going to develop:

> Comme le peintre, et en dépit du fait qu'il n'a à sa disposition, au lieu d'une surface, qu'une durée, l'écrivain peut cependant parvenir à abstraire de différentes séries des éléments qu'il assemble en une sorte de mécanique ou de système non pas, bien sûr optique mais scripturale. (NR II, p.86)

As we shall see in section 2, the construction of a fiction around a few vivid tableaux with a pretence to a certain hypothetical validity is going to give way to description

alone which establishes and is elaborated through, associations on the level of the language.

A-hierarchy, A-morality

This refusal to exploit the emphatic potential of selectivity is more than a gesture of technical defiance - it has an important moral dimension and is closely related to Simon's hostility to didactic literature in any form, whether it be basely propagandist or altruistically committed. His study of the Old Masters during his art training alerted him to the determining element of truquage in traditional representational art:

> En employant ce mot [truquage], je veux dire que tous les grands peintres que je pouvais voir dans les musées, n'avaient pu exprimer qu'une vision idéale du monde, volontairement limitée et arbitraire, chacune de ces visions du monde étant basée sur une conception, ou plutôt une morale de l'univers visible, ou même, ce qui est plus grave pour des peintres, une morale tout court. Par morale, j'entends une définition sélective et pratique du bien et du mal, permettant de se cacher une partie plus ou moins importante de la vie, souvent très importante, pour n'en voir (et n'en montrer) qu'un seul aspect... Toutes les oeuvres de ces peintres sont un refus. (CR, pp.66-8)

Much later, in La Bataille de Pharsale, Simon again has recourse to painting to highlight the selective 'morality' of representation:

> Dans la position (vu de dos et les jambes très écartées) où se trouve le guerrier... on devrait voir les bourses de ses testicules pendant entre ses cuisses. Dans un souci de pudeur, sans doute, le peintre ne les a pas représentées. (p.195)

Furthermore, throughout his work, Simon has condemned the attempt to turn literature into a medium for conveying a certain philosophy of life. Any criterion can serve as a basis of judgement and all moralizing is simply the arbitrary adoption of one point of view among many:

> On peut baser une philosophie et une conception de la vie sur à peu près n'importe quoi, sur n'importe quelle obsession, sur les crampes de l'estomac, l'homosexualité, la volonté de puissance, le calcul différentiel, la folie de la persécution, le spiritisme ou l'épilepsie et en faire découler tout un système logique ou onirique. (CR, p.95)

In the same work, he makes clear his postition vis à vis the Absurdist school with whom the école du regard was most often compared in journalistic reviews. Here, he points out the incoherence of the Absurdist position which is ultimately only an equally aprioristic negative substitute for the belief in a universal reason (p.64). His most extended attack on the use of the work of art as an ideological tool is to be found in his intermittent treatment of the conference on the revolutionary role of literature in Les Corps conducteurs. The dissolution of the meeting in general squabbling disqualifies automatically the social role of the writer as a communicator of ideas,[15] while the summary outline of the meeting's general policy with its stress on the writer's duty to convey his own view of the world and to manipulate his language and technique in such a way as to account for the 'hiérarchie qui existe... entre les éléments de la création' stands in direct counterpoint to the procedures used in the novel which includes it (pp.52-3).

It would be very easy to read the statements above and to relativize them in terms of Simon's own categories of traditions - seen in this light his dissatisfaction with the realist pretentions of committed literature could be seen simply as the unfilial reaction of a later writer to the previous generation. This is not to say that Simon's opus will not become part of a particular, relatively valid

tradition; it undoubtedly will, but the problem it poses here is not simply a polemical issue. It relates to the fundamental method of production of a novel and its definition in relation to society. Indeed, one could say that it is the attempt to withdraw the work of art from the whims of fashionable polemics and to give it a definition based on the selective and combinatory properties of language which forms the mainspring of the writing conducted under the label Nouveau Roman. The position of art vis à vis morality and ideology, is summed up in a passage from Elie Faure cited by Simon in 'Je ne peux parler que de moi':

> L'art est le seul à ne rien attendre de la vie même et à ne chercher sa récompense que dans son propre exercice. Il est antisocial au point de vue optimiste où la société... se place ... je veux dire la poursuite du perfectionnement indéfini d'un bonheur unanime que ses constructions imaginaires troublent, et d'un repos unanime que bouleverse sa perpétuelle évolution. Il est immoral... par son exaltation inexorable de l'amour. Il est amoral toujours puisqu'il cherche à tirer des événements et des objets des harmonies indifféréntes à la qualité sentimentale que les moralistes prêtent à ces objets et à ces événements.

Ultimately, Simon's neutralization of the anthropocentric value-judgements which govern the choice of subject and the distribution of emphasis in the narrative is the technical result of a fundamental reluctance to align himself with any ideological position on the world.

(ii) The Relativization of the Concept of Representation

Verisimilitude and the Author-Reader Pact

The notion of verisimilitude constitutes one of the main targets in Simon's critique of the concept of representation. Taken as a positive criterion of judgement in the assessment of new 'realisms', it presupposes that there are

some types of representation which are more faithful to reality than others and demands a preference on the part of the reader, who is then almost immediately required to suspend those discriminating faculties in favour of an unquestioning subscription to the probability of the fiction offered to him by the most recent 'realistic' tradition. In Simon, this hierarchy is relativized through the veritable pullulation of references to different types of representation, from Poussin's Orion Aveugle down to the sigle on the uniform of a delivery-man from a stocking-manufacturer in Les Corps conducteurs (p.15). The sheer frequency and variety of these references relativizes, to the point of absurdity, the assumption of the possibility of the definitive reproduction of reality.

The belief in an ideal reproducibility rests on an inconsistency at the heart of the notion of 'realism'. Most literary schools with any pretention to representational realism have tried to reconcile two fundamentally irreconcilable notions - that of a goal in the form of an ideal reproduction which would be identical to the referent and that of a representational process carried out on a level parallel to, but quite distinct from, the referential world and concerned with the problem of relative accuracy. Paradoxically, the concept of representation - if it is not going to collapse into sheer identification - includes the maintenance of a clear-cut differentiation between referent and representation which allows the intervention of a human representing agent.[16] Simon disrupts this precarious balance through a problematization of the distinctions between the referential and representational levels,[17] and thus draws our attention to the tacit demands made by Realist writers on the reader

to neutralize his awareness of narrative conventions in favour of an absorption in the fiction. The disruption of the functioning of these conventions in Simon, like the faulty Heideggerian tool, prevents the eclipse of technique in favour of content and makes us aware of the frame which, according to Boris Uspensky, is indistinguishable from the notion 'representation':

> In order to perceive the world of the work of art as a sign system, it is necessary (though not always sufficient) to designate its borders; it is precisely these borders which create the representation. In many languages the meaning of the word 'representation' is etymologically related to the meaning of the word limits.[18]

Simon frequently draws attention to this familiar distinction in nature between the representational and referential levels through the descriptive animation of an explicitly circumscribed representational object, such as a painting or photograph.[19] The imaginary injection of movement into the scenes represented without a corresponding imaginary extension of the boundaries of the representation highlights those very boundaries and the inevitably limited nature of representation. Whatever the dimensions of a representation, it is defined as a representation as much, if not more, by what it omits as by what it includes:[20]

> À l'approche du chef de la colonne le papillon prend de nouveau son essor, volette un moment, indécis, comme ivre puis disparaît sur la droite hors du rectangle de la photographie. (CC, p.109)[21]

Furthermore, the widely accepted notion of an implicit pact between author and reader, by which the reader's awareness of the framing conventions is submerged to an unconscious level, remains so ill-defined that, taken to its logical conclusion, its assumption of the reader's uncritical credence would confuse the crucially distinct notions of the true

and the arbitrary.[22] It presupposes a hypothetical common ground between reader and author where the work of art can take place, while at the same time denying the reader any participation other than his faith, and relegating the author to the position of donor of the text, which will remain a gratuitous, opaque object if the reader refuses to repress temporarily his consciousness of the activity of reading a book.[23] In reality, this concept of the pact is only validated by its customary conjunction with the laws of verisimilitude and precedent, closely observed by the Realist tradition and flouted at considerable risk.

Simon foregrounds and renders inoperative this notion of pact by setting up a number of red herrings which progressively reduce the reader's faith in the narrator. The question of the arbitrariness of the fictional world is one which much preoccupied Simon in his early and middle fiction. Critical articles on the imaginary elaborations on the part of the narrator of Le Vent, as he tries to supplement the scanty information supplied by Montès, are numerous, and all stress the problematization of the relationship between truth and narration, and the concomitant foregrounding of the narration. However, most of these critics have failed to exploit fully the evidence yielded by their stylistic studies; such a ramificatory pursuit would have alerted them to Simon's awareness of the fundamental arbitrariness of the world instituted by a fiction and the gratuitous nature of the activity of writing. An examination of the following passage from Le Vent will illustrate my point:

> Et plus tard, lorsqu'ils furent de retour, après les quatre heures pendant lesquelles il avait buté dans les labours sur les pas du regisseur...

> (tournée ou plutôt inspection ou plutôt épreuve qui promenait dans la plaine, l'une suivant l'autre, deux minuscules silhouettes semblables aux autres microscopiques silhouettes qui... semblaient plantées là, charrue, cheval et homme ancrés dans cette terre désséchée... et par moments le premier des deux hommes s'arrêtant, se retournant, contemplant, muet, interloqué, outragé, son oeil aigu et vide de rapace empli d'une incrédule stupeur, d'un incrédule triomphe, son compagnon attardé trébuchant dans les sillons, se hâtant, s'épuisant) plus tard donc, toujours conduit par le régisseur (et quelqu'un d'étranger qui se fût trouvé là n'eût pu se retenir de rire à ce spectacle caricatural, bouffon: lui avec sa dégaine de noyé, son minable imperméable, son appareil de touriste Cook. (p.29)

Here several layers of imaginative elaboration are superimposed one on top of the other to the point where the catalytic piece of information is lost from sight. There is an imaginary narrator positing an imaginary point of reference from which to observe an imaginary scene suggested in the narrator's mind by Montès' own account of the incident. The whole evocation is intended to fill in a blank in the narrator's tentative de restitution. Montès' account, fragmentary as usual, has probably left a vide of four hours unaccounted for between the moment of his arrival at the estate and that of their return from the fields. Having juxtaposed these two moments by means of the telescoping phrase - 'Et plus tard, lorsqu'ils furent de retour' - as they would have been juxtaposed in Montès' narration, the narrator then moves back into the time space which must have intervened in 'reality' to supplement Montès' account. However, having no information about the interchange or lack of it between these two men during this time, he maintains the position imaginatively occupied at the farmhouse, so that the view we get of the two men in the fields is that which one would get from the position previously occupied by Montès on his arrival in the farmyard. In short, the narrative point of view here does not accompany

the characters but remains fixed, thereby declaring its independence and arbitrariness - an arbitrariness, of course, made explicit by the hypothetical, implausible introduction of an imaginary stranger to the scene which, far from justifying the description, only highlights its anomalous status.

Furthermore, the passage has absolutely no justification in terms of the advancement of the 'fiction' - the great distance placed between the two figures and the imaginary narrative point of reference precludes any supplement to the information we already have. On the contrary, it would seem to be a redundant confirmation of the impression we already have of these two grotesque figures, repeating much of what has been said before even at the expense of verisimilitude. Considering the fact that all this imaginary stranger can see is the two silhouettes of the men, it is highly unlikely that he could see the 'oeil aigu et vide de rapace' of the farm-manager. The narrator, regardless of inconsistency, is superimposing his own knowledge on this imaginary, alien point of view, and in doing so exposes the liberty afforded to the author's whim and elaborative enthusiasm. In short, the arbitrary and gratuitous elements of description can never be completely dissociated from the Realist's claim on truth and meticulous accuracy.

One of Simon's fundamental objections to the notion of realistic representation is the discontinuity of our perception of the world and the continuity of the writing which seeks to record it. Not only, as we have seen, is our perception of the world limited by a multitude of factors, but the extensibility of writing is potentially infinite. In one particularly interesting passage in L'Herbe (pp.129-31),

Simon exploits this disparity in nature, and emphasizes the linear axis of language by merging, in a lengthy digression on the level of the representation, the main fictional thread with the description of a well-known painting which exists in the reader's referential world. The narrator's attempt to formulate the kind of primitive sensuality he wants Pierre and Sabine to convey gives way to a description of Poussin's Et in Arcadia Ego, which in turn, by the associative power of a gesture generates the semi-animated image of a whole line of little school-boys doing their homework. Here the descriptive crystallization of a scene from a fictional world into an object from the reader's world complicates the relationship between the real and the representational, to the point where the reader who approaches the text with expectations derived from the Realist novel is faced with an unfamiliar quandary - his principal concern is not as to whether the relationship between Pierre and Sabine is convincingly portrayed but as to the validity of the notion of referents and representation in the midst of such an imbroglio. For Simon, the notion of referentiality would seem to be a necessary evil,[24] the importance of which is minimized in favour of an exploitation, on the syntagmatic axis of language, of associations and metaphors generated, on the paradigmatic level of language, by a stimulating pré-texte or excitant.[25] The attractions of linguistic association on the level of the narration are beginning to militate against the election of a coherent, illusionistic fictional thread.

In his later fiction, the suppression of the distinction

between the fictional 'real' and the fictional 'imaginary', and that between the world within the work of art and the representation within the world within the work of art is taken further still. In most fiction with a representational intention, the inclusion of a description of a work of art, real or imaginary, serves a fairly obvious thematic function, often acting as a catalyst for, and a mark of a new stage in the principal character's development and awareness (this is the case of the description of Elstir's landscapes in Proust), or as a symbol of the character's state or qualities (compare the Holbein in The Idiot and the Grünewald described at the end of Le Vent).[26] In no way do they challenge the imaginary 'reality' or coherence of the fictional world, break out of the tacitly established frame. In Simon's later fiction, however, frequently what would seem to be remnants of the illusionistic narrative are suddenly incorporated into a description of some form of graphic or plastic representation. In Orion aveugle (p.113), the description of the couple lying on the bed becomes the description of a medical demonstration dummy. In Triptyque and Leçon de choses, the process is radicalized with an organization of the motifs through a process of emboîtement, whereby one motif contains and is contained by one of the other motifs (i.e. one motif becomes the content of a representation in another, which constitutes a representation in another, which is a representation contained within the first motif). J.A.E. Loubère has admirably commented on this compositional method in her book on Simon. I should merely like to add that this Escher-like use of perspective and laying of abruptly exposed fausses pistes serve essentially to jolt the passive

reader out of a subscription to an imaginary pact with the author, the full implications of which he does not appreciate, and to foreground the language in its essential linearity, at the expense of an illusion in the form of a narrative, the linear progression of which on the fictional level would be arbitrary.

The 'Objective' Explanation

Another assumption shared by the Realist and Naturalist schools and by that body of technical treatise writers who furnished them with much of their material is the belief in the ultimate verbal explicability of the world. This belief is the basis on which Balzac's notorious, informative digressions are founded. It is also the mainspring of Zola's Rougon-Macquart cycle. Simon has often voiced his disagreement with this pretention to omniscience, which even on the most obvious empirical level is absurd in view of the increasing specialization of research and fragmentation of knowledge. Elsewhere, he would seem to challenge the relevance of any scientific explanation with a claim to objectivity. In this he is once again in implicit agreement with Merleau-Ponty - both are concerned to expose the inadequacy and poverty of purely rational, scientific explanation in comparison with the immediacy and complexity of lived experience. The critique of the principle of simplicity and economy of thought central to positivist views of knowledge is one of the mainsprings of both Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's varieties of phenomenology:

> Phenomenology stands for a kind of rebellion against the trend in modern science which begins with simplifying abstractions and ends with a minimal vocabulary of scientific abstracts.[27]

We have already seen Simon's subversion of the abstracts and labels of empirical, common-sense psychology, and his lack of faith in positivist explanations based on notions such as determinism and causation.

In La Route des Flandres and Les Corps conducteurs, Simon extends this implicit critique of scientific explanation and the institution of General Knowledge to military science, ornithology and entomology. Already in La Corde raide (pp.60-1) he had indicated that his war-experience had made him aware of the discrepancy between the implications of a bombed town for military strategy or medicine, and the impression left by the carnage on a subjectivity. The contrast between the pseudo-strategic and text-book-modelled account, at the end of the novel, of the moments preceding de Reixach's death (pp.296-302) and the highly impressionistic evocation, at the very centre of the novel, of the first ambush and Wack's death implicitly makes the same point as in La Corde raide:

> i.e. Vous essayez tant bien que mal de continuer sur cette sacrée corde raide, manquant de vous casser la gueule à chaque pas et ces types vous expliquent qu'il n'y a en réalité aucun danger, ni aucune difficulté, si vous connaissez les lois de l'équilibre. On les trouve dans tous les manuels. (CR, p.61)

In Les Corps conducteurs, there is a constantly maintained counterpoint between the scientific explanation of the sick man's condition (e.g. p.17) and the highly metaphorical and totally 'unrealistic' evocation of his delirium in terms of an overwhelming tide of a snow-like substance encroaching on him (e.g. p.99). Similarly, the account of the visit to the doctor's surgery is presented in terms of both the vivid physical sensations aroused and their scientific

explanation in terms of virus and chemical reaction (p.47). The motif of the tropical voyage of discovery in the same novel lets Simon extend this relativization of the encyclopaedic approach to the more elementary and epistemologically less ambitious area of classification and categorization. There is a striking contrast between the encyclopaedic extracts on birds and butterfly life and those extremely impressionistic passages describing the disease-ridden explorer's glimpses of these strange, exotic species (p.212).[28]

But it is undoubtedly in Leçon de choses that the simplistic dogmatism of this belief in the explicability of the world appears. Through a malicious counterpoint between the quotations from the manual on the exploitability of the world about us and the descriptions of the way in which man uses his technology to destroy that world and himself in war, Simon exposes the incongruity of such works (without however, implying any moral view on the subject of war). The extracts from this school manual would seek to articulate reality by subordinating it to human use and needs, the vast and varied forestlands of the world being broken down into broad and secondary categories according to tectonic usefulness (p.104). The resumé on page 114 is totally concerned with the serviceability of nature and implies a teleological view by which nature and its elements would exist to serve man's ends. Furthermore, the obviously rigged, disingenuous nature of the patronizing questions the manual asks its young readers (p.28) illustrates the way in which young minds are encouraged to approach reality through simplistic representations, rather than through direct perception. Finally, the unquestioning confidence

of the manual in labels and definitions and in the possibility of establishing a one-to-one relationship between word and referent[29] is undermined by Simon's own compositional method here. By this stage, Simon has relinquished even the attempt to recreate, through circumlocution and approximation, the way in which the world impinges on us. Since La Bataille de Pharsale, he has been concentrating on the suggestions of the linguistic medium itself, and Leçon de choses is produced through a process which is in direct opposition to the conception of the referential relationship between language and the world implicit in the school manual. The novel is generated from the pursuit, on the level of the narration, of the ramificatory suggestions of given words, the associations of which are normally subordinated to a primary definition.

The Multiplication of Narrative Registers

Finally and briefly in this section on Simon's subversive relativization of the meaning of the word 'representation', I should like to draw attention to his accounts of a single incident or set of incidents in a variety of registers which each casts a different light on the original fictional données. The end of La Route des Flandres constitutes a radical dislocation of that implicit body of convenances and bienséances governing the fonctions émotives et idéologiques of the narrator.[30] Already much earlier in the text, the interpretation of the 'events' of La Route des Flandres in terms of a 'love-story' was discounted, through a negative definition which exposed the irrelevance - in the face of the amorphousness of actual experience - of the notion of narrative genre and its concomitant interpretation

of data in terms of certain abstracts :

> pas une idylle, une intrigue se déroulant, verbeuse, convenue, ordonnée, s'engageant, se fortifiant, se développant suivant un harmonieux et raisonnable crescendo coupé par les indispensables arrêts et fausses manoeuvres, et un point culminant, et après cela peut-être un palier, et après cela encore l'obligatoire descrescendo... et donc pas beaucoup question d'amour, à moins que justement, l'amour - ou plutôt la passion - ce soit cela: cette chose muette, ces élans, ces répulsions, ces haines, tout informulé - et même informé -, et donc cette simple suite de gestes, de paroles, de scènes insignifiantes... (pp.50-1)

while the arbitrary nature of all reconstructive narrative is suggested in Blum's proposal of alternative versions to Georges' account of certain scenes (p.197). The last third of the book steps up this attack on the watertight frames of traditional genre categories and the devaluation of the notions of tonal consistency and suitability. In the course of the last hundred pages, the various 'incidents' which form the narrative data of La Route des Flandres are summarized in a variety of registers and under a host of narrative genres which include the operatic burlesque, the comic silent film (p.209), the fairy-tale (p.267), the ordnance survey map (p.296), the topographical list (p.297), the army-manual (p.300), the geometric drawing (p.302), and the sociological study of class relations (p.305).

In contrast with the schematic simplification of each of these summaries considered in isolation, Simon's own method of combinatoire in the rest of the text takes in a whole host of conventionally irreconcilable registers and narrative structures, which he can bring together in new and startling syntheses. The interest is thereby shifted from the fictional 'events' as such to the process by which a narrative is produced out of a certain set of data and the suggestions

generated on the level of the narration by the conjunction of a variety of narrative codes:

> à moins qu'elle ne l'ait lu aussi dans un journal dans la rubrique des faits divers des accidents des crimes la rubrique mondaine des naissances les passions déchaînées engendrées par la chair délicate de la belle au bois dormant emmurée cachée, derrière, la queue du paon oscillait encore faiblement mais pas de Léda visible de qui donc le paon de quelle divinité est-il l'oiseau vaniteux fat stupide promenant solennel ses plumes multicolores sur les pelouses des châteaux et les coussins de concierges? (p.289)

This specific conjuncture of narrative codes in La Route des Flandres is a good example of what Susan Stewart would call nonsense in her book of the same name (1978). Nonsense is the level of linguistic play between metafiction and pure metaphor in the scheme metonymy - realism - myth - irony - metafiction - nonsense - metaphor. In the context of the particular novel in which it figures, it represents the exaggeration or concentration of the metafictional process which governs this text and Simon's work as a whole. The metafiction, according to Stewart, takes the form of a metaphoric violation of the conventions which appeal to the reader's situation in the context of commonsensical assumptions, and a valorization of its own process of construction.[31] The metafiction, then, is in part a reduction of the spurious relationship established by the Realist pact-makers between the work of art and the contingent context of the lifeworld in which both the reader and the writer find themselves. Like the attack on the notion of the adequate expressiveness of language, and on the pact between reader and author which made the fictional world a contiguous extension of the real one, the metafictional (con)fusion of registers is part of Simon's critique of the extraneous

contingent criteria on which traditional critical appraisals of fiction were based.

II SIMON'S DIFFERENTIAL VIEW OF LANGUAGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR HIS EVOLUTION

(i) Simon in the Context of Post-Saussurian Linguistics

Our account of Simon's relativization of the notions of representation and meaning has centred on his critique of illusionistic technique and on considerations relating specifically to the so-called genre with which he is working. Ultimately, however, the relativizing procedures which we have just looked at are simply the effects of a more fundamental questioning of the nature of language.

The final example of our previous section illustrated the way in which the meaning of a story is produced, in part, by the selection of a certain code in view of the information, or the ideological or aesthetic effect the writer wants to convey, and the temporary suspension of all other codes in which it might have been narrated. Meaning, in what Barthes calls the texte lisible,[32] consists of the isolation of one or two of the many possible interpretations of a set of data or the isolation of certain aspects of reality and their combination in such a way as to produce a definable sense which would defy the charge of inconsistency. According to Barthes, the authority of the classical writer depended on the pragmatic assumption that language is a relatively unproblematic tool by which the author could

convey his predigested meaning. In order to express this meaning he has recourse to language which is assumed to be a malleable and more or less transparent medium, whose limited ambiguities can be eliminated in the immediate use of a word in a certain context, or exploited in view of a subsequent or at least potential elimination (resolution) in the dénouement or final revelation by the all-knowing author.[33] In short, the meaning is determined by the subordination - through a barrage of emphatic and valorizing devices and the careful manipulation of language - of all possible meanings to a single one, and the illusion of the single, coherent, fictional world is authentified through the saturation of the text by

> liaisons pseudo-logiques, de relais, de termes doublement orientés: c'est en somme le *calcul* qui fait le plein de cette littérature: la dissémination n'y est pas l'éparpillement perdu des sens vers l'infini du langage, mais une simple suspension - provisoire - d'éléments affinitaires, deja aimantés avant qu'ils ne soient convoqués et n'accourent pour se ranger économiquement dans le meme *paquet*.[34]

In reaction to the common-sense assumption of the fundamental clarity of language and the ultimate delimitability of meaning at the anomalous points of potential ambiguity, post-Saussurian linguistics have shown that a single word has a manageable number of meanings for the communication of information and ideas and a valid semantic currency only because it is overdetermined[35] in relation to the other elements in the linguistic system (because it is defined negatively in relation to what it does not mean).

There is no necessary, natural or real relationship between a word and its meaning (or its apparently limited number of primary and secondary meanings). Meaning is by its very nature an excess; its relationship to the individual

words which combine to produce it, and which we naively assume to be self-evident and 'natural', is, on the contrary, arbitrary and superfluous; meaning does not reside in the words we use, it springs rather from a combination of the positive interaction of the different elements of the linguistic system selected and used in specific syntagms, and the negative relations between the individual words used and the other elements of the linguistic system not used.

Furthermore, the concept of clarity central to the common-sense view of language is further challenged by the cultural and psycho-linguistic associations latent in the collective intersubjective unconscious and the individual unconscious. Like phonetically overdetermined differences and associations, these operate paradigmatically and their associative mechanism cannot be naturalized in terms of any objectively valid, logical relationship. However, these subjective and intersubjective associations can rarely be reduced to homophony and homonymy, and have to be distinguished from the purely phonetic overdetermination of the national language. Indeed, intersubjective and subjective association may cut across the phonetic relations of the national language, and set up rival ethnic or fetishistic sets of relationships between words often neither phonetically nor semantically related. Subjective and intersubjective associations are overdetermined respectively by a combination of idiosyncratic psycho-linguistic factors and by a combination of intersubjective cultural (i.e. historical, social, ethnic, religious, etc.) factors, neither of which combinations is reducible to common-sense criteria of motivation, and whose initial contingent source-factors - of interest only

to the psychoanalyst or to the sociolinguistic anthropologist - are subsumed in the synchronic play of associations.

Finally, there is textual overdetermination whereby, in the course of a text, the combination of the associations of a number of arbitrarily chosen word-motifs results in a kind of semantic cross-fertilization within the text and the generation of text-specific associations which tend to eclipse the initial, determined, arbitrary choice of the motifs. This type of overdetermination is to be distinguished from the symbolic determination of the semantically overloaded leitmotif whose arbitrary choice is usually matched by an arbitrary, ideological investment of aprioristic meaning or at least an aprioristic set of limited meanings.

In practice, it is frequently impossible to distinguish absolutely between these four associative principles. Nevertheless, the distinction remains an important one in any assessment of Simon's theoretical position, in view of the interest we already noted in the situation of the individual within the context of cultural codes and, as we shall see, in relation to the emphasis he places on the role of the writer as a nexus of particular associations and as an element of control in the potentially infinite play of phonetic association. Furthermore, although in the body of the texts from La Route des Flandres on, all four types of overdetermination are exploited, the question of textual overdetermination becomes an increasingly important gauge of Simon's evolution as he shifts from a predominantly combinatory method to a process of production based more evenly on combination and generation. In the former case, the associations are contingent on the initial determined

choice of several motifs which interact and fuse through situational analogies. In the latter case, the initial determined _données_ are single words with no referential content as such - from their overdetermined associations and the interaction of their associations, the author generates the fictional motifs. These latter are now textual products; they no longer have the illusionistic guarantee of determination.

The commonsensical/Realist myth of the clarity of the linguistic medium[36] ignores these fundamental principles of overdetermination, while emphasizing the author's ability to determine his meaning to the point of equating truth with the signified. It is this emphasis on determination at the expense of the implications of overdetermination in the Realist attempt to identify truth with one particular ideological view of the world, and the lack of any real, necessary relationship, such as that posited by a naive view of language, between form and content, word and meaning which Simon wants to highlight in his _mise en abyme_ description of the cheap, highly coloured post-card at the beginning of _Triptyque_:

> La carte postale représente une esplanade plantée de palmiers qui s'alignent sous un ciel trop bleu au bord d'une mer trop bleue... Les fleurs des cannas sont coloriées d'un rouge et d'un orangé criards... L'encrage des différentes couleurs ne coïncide pas exactement avec les contours de chacun des objets, de sorte que le vert cru des palmiers déborde sur le bleu du ciel, le mauve d'une écharpe ou d'une ombrelle mordent sur l'ocre du sol ou le cobalt de la mer. (p.7)

Reality or rather a representation of reality (the initial photograph) has been touched up to convey a certain meaning ('exotic warmth'), and that meaning is produced by a

heightening exaggeration on the level of particular elements of the representation. The resulting overstated and vulgar impression arises from the 'artist's' concentration on local effects of meaning, as opposed to the potential, more nuanced colour-associations between different elements in the photograph. The self-defeating attempt to fortify the encrage is a metaphor for the traditional misguided faith in the possibility of identifying, effecting an absolute and permanent ancrage of word and meaning.

In this example, the determination of meaning through an emphasis on particular elements of an a priori composition resulted in an excess of banal meaning and the establishment of arbitrary, ideological (it proposes 'the good life' as an ideal), and aesthetically uninteresting relationships between discrete, but fortuitously contiguous elements in the referential world. The exploitation of the principles of overdetermination on the paradigmatic axis of language results, however, in the establishment of varied and surprising relationships between different elements of the linguistic system, and permits the écrivain[37] to reconceive the notion of meaning in terms of interaction and combination, as opposed to the implication in classical literature that it is a static entity. The substitution of a relational for a substantive view of language accords much more importance to things such as alliteration and metaphor, which are no longer viewed as simple figures of speech but fundamental principles of association. These overdetermining/ed sets of associations along the paradigmatic axis of a language are the ground for Barthes' writerly play of plural senses in a text.

Meaning, for the écrivain is never definitive. Phonetic overdetermination means that any one word, while being defined negatively in relation to all other words in its linguistic system, also enjoys a wealth of homophonic associations with them which make language a dynamic structure; it permits the associative dispersal of meaning and a subversion of the authority of purely syntagmatic logic. Cultural and psycho-linguistic overdetermination results in the provisional ancrage of certain connotations to certain words and the accumulation of certain associations between words, so that every word becomes a potential mot carrefour demanding the selection of an associative direction on the part of the writer and permitting the combination of individual words of multiple associations into a parole of plurivalent and textually overdetermined significance.

While the pursuit of the implications of these post-Saussurian lines of thought could lead us into the region of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean linguistic philosophy, and while it is fair to say that Simon is aware of the work of Lacan and Derrida, he himself remains more attached to a Structuralist belief in the Utopian plurivalent texte and to the practicable destabilization of instituted meaning, than he subscribes to the indefinable tool-notions of différance and trace in Derridean philosophy or to the Lacanian displacement of desire:

> A l'idée d'un sens qui se dégagerait d'un roman, c'est-à-dire d'un méssage délivré par le moyen d'une fiction, donc pré-existant à l'ecriture, j'opposerais les notions de polysémie, d'équivoque ou d'ambiguité - ce que Barthes a appelé le sens 'tremblé' par opposition au sens 'fermé'...
>
> ... le travail de l'écrivain tel que je le conçois, c'est-à-dire essentiellement basé sur une combinatoire, aboutit à la production (et non à l''expression') de sens pluriels dont aucun n'est explicité. L'écrivain

> <u>dit</u> le monde et les choses (ou plutôt <u>un</u> monde et <u>des</u> choses): il ne les explique pas. L'aboutissement de son travail est essentiellement une mise en question.[38]

That the general spirit of post-Saussurian differential linguistics has made its mark on Simon's work is, as I hope to show, undeniable. His insistence on his lack of philosophical training and unfamiliarity with philosophical language[39] suggests that his awareness of these linguistic problems is intuitive rather than intellectual and rigorous. The rest of this section will seek to establish the extent to which Simon's work displays this awareness and to which its governing principles conform (or do not) to the principal trends of thought outlined above.

Simon's subscription to the argument of the absence of any real and necessary relationship between word and meaning becomes increasingly evident in course of his work, although he does not radically subordinate the demands of intentional and contextual determination to the principle of overdetermination until fairly late.

As we suggested above, Simon's awareness of this linguistic issue seems to be intuitive rather than intellectual. Already in <u>La Corde raide</u>, there is a substantial amount of evidence regarding its empirical source in his experience. The very opening pages show the defamiliarizing effect his various trips abroad had on his understanding of the way in which language functions. The passage on the very different connotations of the words 'limpos botas ' and 'cireur' shows a dawning awareness of the importance of code - both linguistic and psycho-linguistic - in the comprehension of any one element of language, the word being overdetermined on the paradigmatic axis of language by a

combination of nationally established, cultural connotations and of personal, remembered associations:

> Parce qu'en français, l'appelation cireur a quelque chose de honteux et de triste. Les Français sont... beaucoup plus soucieux d'égalité que de liberté. Aussi la liberté que peut procurer à un individu l'exercice de tel ou tel métier leur importe peu en comparaison du symbole d'inégalité que celui-ci peut représenter... En plus de cela, le mot 'cireur' fait instinctivement penser à 'cirage'. Le cirage est une chose noire et qui salit. Il y a pourtant aussi des cirages jaunes ou d'une belle couleur rouge, cependant quand on pense à du cirage on pense noir. Je me rappelle une chanson qui parlait de six sauvages débarqués à Paris et qui les décrivait ainsi: ils étaient noirs comme du cirage. J'avais environ dix ans quand on chantait ce refrain, mais je crois que c'était déjà une vieille chanson. C'étaient les élèves de la classe au-dessus de la mienne qui l'avaient adoptée, ce qui lui conférait un mystérieux prestige à mes yeux. Je lui ai toujours cherché un sens caché que je n'ai jamais pu parvenir à deviner. (pp.10-12)

The comprehension of the difference between two languages as consisting in the fundamental difference between two sign systems is, of course, central to the argument on which differential linguistics is based. Language, according to Saussure, is not a substantive-based nomenclature: it is a system of relations, and this can best be seen at those points of untranslatability between different languages. Jonathan Culler, in his monograph on Saussure, has illustrated this through a description of the differences in the differentiation between fleuve and rivière in French and river and stream in English, and concludes:

> The fact that these two languages operate perfectly well with different conceptual articulations or distinctions indicates that these divisions are not natural, inevitable, or necessary, but, in an important sense, arbitrary... the fact that these concepts or signifieds are arbitrary divisions of a continuum means that they are not autonomous entities, each of which is defined by some kind of essence. They are members of a system and are defined by their relations to the other members of that system. (p.24)

An excellent example of such a point of untranslatability can be found in La Bataille de Pharsale in the narrator's remarks on the impossibility of translating into French the tool-word into in the definition of the Baroque as movement into space (p.160). Prepositions are notoriously difficult words to translate into a foreign language because of their status as shifters, but this is a particularly good instance of the way in which space is articulated into concepts or categories in a different and therefore arbitrary way in different linguistic systems.

It is this lack of a one-to-one relationship of equivalence or commensurability between different language-systems which foils the attempts of the young narrators of Histoire and La Bataille de Pharsale to translate their Latin texts. They have a naive approach to language whereby they translate through word-for-word substitution, instead of trying to enter into the spirit and nuances of the particular linguistic system with which they are working. Moreover, as the following example illustrates, their implicit faith in the hierarchization within the dictionary and its separation of the sens propre from the figuré produces a rigid, blinkered attitude to definition which can only result in an impasse:

> et moi assis dans ma chambre devant ma table alignant une suite incohérente de mots cherchés dans le dictionnaire jusqu'au moment où mon cahier de brouillon à la main j'irais frapper à la porte de son bureau...
> dextrum cornu ejus rivus quidam impeditis ripis muniebat Je m'arrêtais
> alors?
> rivus : une rivière
> impeditis ripis : aux bords obstacles
> des bords obstacles qu'est-ce que ça veut dire explique-moi
> je me taisais
> tu pourrais peut-être te donner la peine de chercher plus loin que le premier mot que tu trouves dans le dictionnaire...
> bon très bien impeditis ripis : aux rives escarpées ça ne te semble pas mieux. (BP, pp.51-2)

Similarly, in the initial passage we quoted from La Corde raide the young Simon's attempt to understand the song about the little negro boys was governed by a misplaced faith in the possibility of reducing the multiple associations of the texte to the intention-determined meaning of the oeuvre. It is only with the passing of time and the accumulation of both idiosyncratic and more general, cultural associations in the mature Simon's linguistic memory that he becomes aware of the semantic richness of the most banal words.

A little later on in La Corde raide, Simon tells how he tried to overcome the problem of his own active communication in a foreign country through the drawing of pictogrammes to convey his meaning:

> nous... essayâmes de parler. C'est-à-dire que je lui fis des dessins sur des feuilles de mon carnet. Je dessinai longtemps et un tas de choses. Des cartes d'Europe, des trains, des bateaux, des avions, des horloges pour dire l'heure, un cheval parce qu'elle voulait savoir si j'avais été soldat et dans quelle arme, et enfin, à peu pres tous les personnages de la Mythologie grecque... pour lui dire qu'elle était belle et que je l'aimais.(CR, pp.15-16)

The substitution of the pictogramme for the word is obviously more immediate and less arbitrary. However, it is a very limited means of expression. It can only give a very schematic, stylized pictorial version of reality and although, like language it works on principles of metonymy and metaphor, unlike language with its vast system of differences, it does not belong to a systematic code which is capable of a high degree of nuanced differentiation. In the end, the 'meaningful' articulation of subjective experience is inextricable from our position inside a complex differential linguistic code:

> J'avais été aussi en Espagne et j'avais vu un peu de la Révolution. J'avais rencontré des types épatants et vu aussi d'assez sales choses. Mais tout cela aurait été trop compliqué à lui raconter à l'aide de dessins.(CR, p16)

The expressiveness of a mundane use of language in communication and representation is, however, limited by its very status as a system. Simon has the narrator's uncle in Histoire sum up the impasse that the attempt to nuance one's expression leads to. The search for the mot juste means that words only refer you to other words on the chain of signifiers;[40] the alternatives are to resort to wild gesticulation which looks ridiculous and which can at best express only the minimum of basic needs, or to restrict oneself to a stringent and cynical compromise with the unthinking, commonsensical identification of word and meaning, to use only those labels absolutely necessary for one's physical survival and to refrain from any attempt at emotional nuancing. By this commentary, Simon relegates 'expression' to the status of a necessary evil. It also explains, in part, his eventual rejection of the dialogue, and the contrast established in the earlier works between the verbosity of a character like Sabine and the taciturnity of Georges who, we discover in La Route des Flandres, is more interested in what language suggests to him.

Furthermore, the definition of language as a differential system with no positive components renders the definitive categorization of the infinite varieties of nature impossible. In the linguistic system 'Identity is wholly a function of differences within a system';[41] in the 'real' world no two natural phenomena of the same species are ever identical in form: there are differences within the species which

the limited vocabulary of everyday communication cannot accommodate. Simon draws attention to this fact and undermines the logocentric belief in the stability of identity and in the presence of the signified, common to the Christian myth of the act of naming and the classical categorial enterprise, in a digression in Histoire where he stresses the arbitrary relationship between word and referent and suggests a vivid image of the whole of varied reality being telescopically and ironically compressed into the limited vocabulary of a parodic version of all nomenclature:

> Puis regardant sans parvenir à en pénétrer le sens... les noms d'aliments tracés d'une encre amarante ou délayée, ou plutôt sans parvenir à ce que les rangées de jambages de boucles et de hampes carminées coïncident, s'identifient avec comment est-ce déjà. Je vous ai donné toutes les herbes qui portent leurs graines sur la terre et tous les arbres qui renferment en eux-mêmes leur semence chacun selon son espèce afin qu'ils vous servent de nourriture et à tous les animaux de la terre, et à tous les oiseaux du ciel, à tout ce qui remue sur la terre qui est vivant et animé afin qu'ils aient de quoi se nourrir et qu'ils vous servent de nourriture ainsi soit-il, herbe, racines, oiseaux, tout ce qui remue sur terre et tout ce qui nage dans la mer apparemment réduit (apres avoir été coupé, cueilli, déterré, pêché, tué, vendu et transporté et ensuite vendu une seconde fois, et ensuite épluché, pelé, écaillé, désossé, découpé, et cuit) à la même et unique denrée calligraphiée sous des noms différents... (pp.138-9)

This lack of confidence in the classical logocentric nomenclature explains in part his predilection for the disaster motif[42] and the frequent descriptions of things, fragments of things to which a satisfactory name cannot be given. Hence Montès' astonishment that one could put a single name to anything as amorphous and heterogeneous as the gipsy-camp where Jep lives (V, p.120). Here the attempt to establish a one-to-one relationship between language and reality smacks of the ridiculous. Similarly, the deconstruction-site motif of Leçon de choses allows Simon to raise a

question mark over the 'identity' of the 'objects' described. Note, for example, the way in which he conspicuously brackets the specific names of things, opting outside the brackets for the vaguer, passe-partout generic term:

> rougeâtres (vermillon passé) où se répète le même motif (frise?) (p.9)
>
> constellé de pastilles (ombelles, coquelicots?) (p.16)
>
> un papier peint aux grandes fleurs (pavots?). (p.17)

The lack of a necessary link between word and referent appears at its most acute and disturbing, when the proper names which have figured as apparently absolute points of reference in our education suddenly reveal themselves to be meaningless to ethnic groups other than our own. La Bataille de Pharsale and the whole search for the site of the battle is a metaphor for an illusion-ridden attempt to identify word and referent. The confusion and language difficulties constantly encountered by Nikos and the narrator suggest the relativity of their own linguistic system and of sancrosanct proper names:

> il dit qu'il n'y a pas de montagne ici qui s'appelle le Karadja Ahmet il dit qu'il connaît seulement une montagne Krindir... Ils parlent encore d'une autre bataille celle de Kynos Képhalai Le mont Krindir. (pp.27, 35)

At the other extreme on the scale of linguistic specificity, the use of 'shifters' in Simon betrays a concern to forever defer the establishment of a single, unambiguous meaning in any one syntagm. 'Shifters' are the most context-sensitive elements of the language' and '[indicate] the limited access to so-called "General Meaning" that any communication can have.'[43] A disruption of the normal contextual procedures by which the intended meaning is indicated and ambiguity suspended (such as the repetition of the noun referred to)

exposes the very tenuous and relative basis of the pragmatic reliance on the logic of the context and on the hierarchy of instituted meanings in the elimination of any 'noise' which might affect the clarity of the message. The following example from Leçon de choses is irreducible to one single meaning. The context problematizes rather than limits the significance of the word 'elle', and conflicting but not mutually exclusive interpretations result according to whether one attaches the central syntagm to the one which precedes it or to the one which follows it:

> Il est obligé de s'arc-bouter un court instant pour faire franchir à la roue le pas de pierre qui marque le seuil de la porte. Elle sursaute soudain et se dégage. Elle dit rapidement dans un souffle il y a quelqu'un. (p.102)

One of the best examples of this eternally deferred identification of the personal pronoun and of the way in which Simon undermines the notion of meaning in general, through punning and a contextualization which constantly shifts the emphasis from one of the word's meanings to another, is to be found in Blum's description of the de Reixach, Corinne and Iglésia ménage à trois where 'elle' and 'la' refer indifferently to Corinne and the horse ridden by Iglésia (RF, p.185). This stands in opposition to the process which normally (but not, for that, necessarily) takes place in language used for everyday direct communicative and informational purposes. There, the context eliminates associations which are 'irrelevant' to the situation. Doubtful words, whose plurality of meanings threaten to introduce an element of opacity, are naturalized by the following statement which usually tilts the balance in favour of a particular sense:

> des mots... restant là suspendus dans l'air lui aussi immobile continuant à vibrer silencieusement redoutables énigmatiques chargés de sens multiples jusqu'à ce que la phrase la réplique suivante les repousse s'installe à leur place. (BP, p.68)

This destabilizing overdetermination also affects those apparently most stable and fixed fossils of the metaphoric process - the cliché or set expression. This is well illustrated by the older mason's concern in Leçon de choses lest his 'expression' of his war-experiences offend his colleague. This attempt to find the mot juste is ever frustrated - the language used by his officers is weak and euphemistic and fails to render the turmoil of the occasion, while his own more colourful cliché ('un cirque') is liable to offend the young mason who had worked in a circus. The cliché is double-edged - it is either too rigid and weak to express anything, or its status as a metaphor means that its original meaning can, in certain circumstances, be revived, with unforeseen implications in the context:

> un tantinet soucieux quand même comme on dit aussi Chaude affaire que j'ai entendu mince pasque tout ce cirque... sans offense hein? Y a pas d'offense dit l'autre maçon moi j'étais dans la musique. Sans offense je dis cirque c'est une expression alors tout ce cirque ils appelaient ça une affaire mince chaude affaire chaude-pisse oui. (pp.122-3)

The hazards encountered in everyday communication as a result of the polysemy inherent to a system, the principles of which are differentiation and overdetermination, are, however, counterbalanced by the rich store of associations on which the writer can draw at every moment in the fabrication of his text. And indeed in our last example we can sense Simon's relish in the elaboration of the highly figurative slang of the older mason, which contrasts sharply with the literal-mindedness and triteness of his young companion.

Thus on page 124 of Leçon de choses, the bewildering punning[44] on the word coupure highlights the constantly shifting relationship of word and meaning, and the deferral of definitive meaning in the 'authentic parole':

> Une coupure que je dis I se retourne l'air de quoi il est encore là çui-la? L'infirmier vous fera un pansement ... Coupure dans le cul que je me suis retenu de lui dire l'a pris une valda dans les miches votre Sainte-Euverte du coup c'était Sainte-Ouverte ah ah je peu vous le raconter moi rapport à ce que j'étais juste derrière lui quand i se cavalait comme nous bille en tête direction la coupure je veux dire la tranchée de chemin de fer.

The encyclopaedic entry on page 23 of Les Corps conducteurs makes a similar point. Although the dogmatism and authority of the textbook is frequently if implicitly criticized in Simon, this particular passage illustrates both the restrictive and the suggestive aspects of differential overdetermination:

> L'article Serpent commence à la page précédente au-dessous de Serpens (nom latin de la constellation du Serpent) et en remontant encore: Serpe, Serpa Pinto (Alexandre Alberto da Rocha) : Explorateur portugais. Les têtes d'articles sont en caractères gras. Serratula: herbe vivace, rustique à fleurs purpurines, pouvant atteindre I,20m. de hauteur. Serrano y Dominguez (Francisco), duc de la Torre, maréchal et homme politique espagnol (Isla de Léon, auj. San Fernando). (p.23)

As Michel Butor[45] has noted, the alphabetical enumeration in the dictionary and encyclopaedia draws attention to the conventionality of language - alphabetical order represents language at its most conventional - and levels out the anthropocentric hierarchy established between the referents of these words in the real world. The relationships between the words are dictated not by extraneous humanist concerns; they are phonetic and differential, and the passage illustrates very well the way in which meaning is overdetermined by a host of very slight but crucial phonetic differences on the

level of the syllable. Although, as Claudine Normand has argued in her book Métaphore et concept (1976) a hierarchization is maintained within the entry, the relationship between the different entries is conventional and arbitrary, and the anthropocentric distribution of 'significance' according to criteria of historical importance, identity, etc. is relegated to a secondary position, and language is seen as an unemphatic chain of signifiers.[46] For all that, however, the great diversity of these time- and space-spanning definitions indicates something of the potential suggestiveness of words considered as mots carrefours rather than as labels. Language, as it is handled by the écrivain, becomes the access to history, culture, space, etc. rather than a secondary reflection of it.

This cultural and phonetic overdetermination is often supplemented by a personal mythology centred round certain word-fetishes. The combination of these factors allows the écrivain to produce a parole of his own, independent of the novelty value of the referential material with which he is working. This element of idiosyncratic overdetermination explains, in part, the apparent paradox of Simon's condemnation of autobiographical criticism and his statements regarding the impossibility of separating his work and his life. These latter statements surely refer to the web of associations which the course of his life and the other codes he has acquired have projected on to certain words, already overdetermined by their status as elements of a phonetic and cultural code. Overdetermination precludes a one-to-one definitive representation of anything, but it opens up possibilities within the language itself for the

generation of a *texte*.

In Simon, the exploitation of this generative potential has a double effect - (i) It disperses meaning and militates against the establishment of a single 'significance' and the total naturalization of the text. Here the demands of paradigmatic association prevail over the syntagmatic translation of an a priori meaning. (ii) It permits the establishment of a unity other than the spurious articulation of a plot or the selection of things which cohere in a certain ideological perspective. The semantic dispersal noted above has a positive corollary in that the associations engendered by any word, combined with the very limitations of a language's vocabulary, permit the establishment of striking metaphoric relations between things which in the real world are disparate.[47] Paradoxically, Simon's early desire to rival the immediacy of pictorial art has prompted a reappraisal of the properties of language itself, which, in turn, has revealed to him both the digressive and associative potential of the linear medium and the centripetal, unificatory force of a system with a hypothetical but necessarily finite number of components.

The preface to *Orion aveugle* constitutes one of the best summaries of this double-edged implication of differential overdetermination. The 'justification' of the novel no longer depends on the authority of the novelist, the width of his experience and general knowledge. The production of a novel no longer depends on extraneous referential stimuli. It obeys the same principles of selection and combination by which language in general functions.[48] However, in contrast with the usage of ordinary speech, the selection of a particular association of a *mot carrefour*

does not preclude the pursuit of an alternative association at a later stage in the novel. The linearity of language requires selection but it does not preclude reprise and recombination, and whereas in ordinary usage the pun is generally avoided for the sake of clarity, in Simon's work it is cultivated for the sake of polyvalence. However, as we have already suggested, for Simon this polyvalence is limited. Simon does not go beyond the distinction between the sens institué of the Realist work and the sens produit of the novel based on association and recombination. The eternal deferral of meaning central to Derridean linguistics remains alien to him simply because the activity of selection on the level of the parole is by its nature indicative and significant, a necessary element of authorial determination amidst overdetermination:

> Soyons sérieux: tout toujours, a un sens: dessiner avec des droites plutôt qu'avec des courbes, choisir un bleu plutôt qu'un rouge, opter pour telle ou telle cadence de phrases, pour le passé simple ou le présent de l'indicatif... Ce qu'il est important de bien distinguer c'est entre sens institué et sens produit.[49]

In this scheme of things - in contrast again with the more extreme decentered developments of post-Saussurian conceptions of language - the writer retains a crucial function as a central, conscious perspective on language which prevents total dissolution, and as a nexus of specific associations. This is not the real Claude Simon who has been to Spain, served in the Second World War etc., but an a-personal, subjective intersection of language and consciousness; it is a linguistic memory. In Simon's novels, the authority and specificity of the narrator is progressively undermined to the point where we cannot view it but as a linguistic shifter defined in relation to its narrative,

or as a linguistic combination with no existence prior to the narrative and without even the hypothetical synthetic identity of the Boothian implied author.[50] Nevertheless, as far as Simon is concerned, the concept of intersubjectivity does not completely dissolve into that of intertextuality. The implied author becomes a locus of selective 'consideration', and the contingent ideological determination of the Realist novel gives way to a purely aesthetic and linguistic determination, which consists of the selection of a particular association from the gamut of those available relating a particular overdetermined word to its system (phonetic, psycho-linguistic or cultural):

> Ce que j'entends par considération, c'est ... en cours d'écriture... chaque fois qu'à chacun des mots carrefours, plusieurs perspectives, plusieurs 'figures' se présentent, avoir toujours à l'esprit par le choix que l'on va faire, la figure initiale avec ses quatre ou cinq propriétés derivées et ne jamais perdre celles-ci de vue, faute de quoi (faute de ce 'point fixe de la perspective occidentale qui, comme le dit Gaëtan Picon, exprime la volonté de maîtriser le plus grand nombre d'éléments rassemblés, d'en faire une ponctualité intemporelle') il n'y aurait pas <u>livre</u>, c'est à dire unité, et tout s'éparpillerait en une simple suite, comme les productions de l'"écriture automatique'... qui, pour si ingénieuse ou chatoyante que puisse être la succession de leurs éléments, restent purement linéaire, à la façon de ces chaînes composées de bouts de laines de différentes couleurs mis bout à bout que fabriquent certain tribus indiennes d'Amérique.(<u>NR II</u>, p.88)

The intention of the author may be reduced to a state of associative <u>ferment</u>[51] but Simon would still seem to subscribe to an authenticity of authorial <u>parole</u> which owes nothing to the originality of the material or the ideological perspective, but consists in the specificity of the psycho-linguistic associations and permutations:

> s'interrogeant ensuite sur la structure de ce 'fait littéraire' Claude Simon constate que l'écrivain est

> constamment amené à instaurer entre les mots des rapports tout différents de ceux qui les unissent dans le discours quotidien. C'est ainsi, par exemple, que Saint-Pol-Roux désignera une carafe par les mots 'mamelle de cristal'... grâce à cet assemblage de mots, qui a la carafe pour prétexte, le poète suscitera dans l'esprit du lecteur une série de représentations très variées, d'ordre tactile, visuel, auditif, affectif où se combineront les connotations, les consonances, toutes les 'harmoniques' propres à chacun de ces deux termes 'mamelle' et 'cristal'... Ainsi le pouvoir créateur du langage, par la vertu de la métaphore, a fait surgir un objet absolument neuf, purement verbal... qui n'a son lieu que dans l'univers mental.[52]

But perhaps the most important distinction between Simon's concept of the text and that proposed by more radical semantic analysis is his continuing subscription to the substantive and phenomenological notion of Unity now much devalued by theorists such as Julia Kristeva.[53] Indeed, it could be argued that the evolution of his writing is in large part inspired by a desire to give the novel a necessity it did not have when governed by contingent, representational concerns:

> ne pourrait-on pas chercher, dans la fiction à non plus aligner une succession d'éléments, mais à réunir des ensembles où les éléments se combinent en fonction de leurs qualités?...
>
> Faute de ces liens, ou articulations, ou encore passages qualificatifs, il n'y a pas tableau et il n'y a pas de véritable discours littéraire, c'est à dire un système structuré, mais seulement, alors, en effet, simple succession, sinon même cacophonie. (NR II, pp.80-1)

Simon is not seeking a reversal of the classical position and a replacement of the tyranny of the ideologically determined quest for the transparent syntagmatic vehicle by that of the paradigmatic anarchy of automatic writing. His writing aims to reconcile the demands of syntagmatic logic and paradigmatic suggestiveness, to acknowledge both the element of determination which attends every inevitably limited and selective parole, and the various

principles of overdetermination which preclude representation as such but permit the paradoxical combination of dispersal and unification necessary to an authentic parole. It is this evolution, the shift from the digressive centrifugal impulse of Le Vent and L'Herbe to the more coherent, economic and rigorous exploration of the potential of an initial semantic seedbed in the late fiction which I propose to trace now.

(ii) Simon's Evolution

This evolutionary assessment shall consist principally of an analysis of the relative proportion at different points in his work of devices which involve semantic dispersal and those which favour the relating of the diverse. Since the bulk of his early work is governed by determinants related to an a priori theme and contingent verisimilitude, I shall concentrate here on the work of the middle and late period.

Simon's notorious digressions undoubtedly constitute one of the most recurrent themes of the critical discourse on his work which appeared in the nineteen-sixties, and indeed the fiction of Simon's middle period is marked by a strong tension between the primacy of a principal fictional motif and its relativization in the form of narratorial digressions which suspend the progress of the narrative proper, temporarily monopolizing our attention for several pages at a time, puncturing the fictional illusion and opening out new perspectives on potential alternative narratives.

Le Vent

Le Vent is a very important transitional novel. Accordingly, the desire to subvert the old techniques which conferred a meaningful unity on the set of events recounted tends to prevail over a truly productive exploitation of language.

Occasionally, the digressions serve a more positive end, when Simon capitalizes on the graphic suggestions of a particular comparison and elaborates it to the point where the old hierarchical concept of the figure of speech as an expressive, subordinate adjunct to the principal narrative thread no longer applies. Such digressions include the approximative, comparative description of Cécile's abrupt movements (p.64), the comparative description of Montès with a 'garçon livreur de tartelettes' caught in the middle of traffic (p.107), and Montès' own comparison of his situation with that of a heavily mortgaged building site (p.82). Furthermore, there is the occasional example of a device which is to loom large in the course of Simon's work as it becomes increasingly a-significant and self-reflexive, i.e. that of the renvoi where a comparison takes another part of the same text as the point of reference for the vehicle. Compare, for example, the following simile:

> pas une couche : une poudrée, comme dans une de ces anciennes maisons non pas à l'abandon mais où, faute de domesticité, on fait le ménage seulement tous les quinze jours, pas très à fond, et peut-être même seulement toutes les trois semaines (pp.194-5)

and Montès' description of his uncle's house on page 59. This renvoi has no profound thematic importance - at most

it indicates the way in which the narrator is juggling his material about and interpreting new data in terms of old points of reference.

However, in general the digressions in Le Vent serve to undermine the principal narrative rather than to set up alternative foci of interest. They remain ancillary disruptions in a general, thorough-going subversion of the validity of témoignage and factual reconstruction. The dislocation of the concept of a central and univocal meaning, which can be expressed in the syntagmatic combination of a certain number of mots justes, takes the form of the elaboration of vast, syntactically labyrinthine sentences carried along over several pages by approximative enumerations and multiple comparisons, redefinitions and parentheses within parentheses. Thus the narrator's attempt to circumscribe linguistically the indefinable phenomenon that is Montès resorts to a sequence of parenthetic comparisons each of which moves further and further away from the referent:

> à la façon de ces réacteurs chimiques, de ces excitateurs, ou plutôt encore de ces objets chargés d'une vertu bénéfique ou maléfique et qui n'ont besoin pour manifester leur puissance de faire autre chose que se contenter d'exister, d'être là - [les événements qu'il déclencha] semblaient avoir passé sur lui... sans laisser de traces, ni plus ni moins que n'importe quelle tempête venue du fond des âges sur n'importe quel galet roulé lui aussi depuis le fond des âges... débarrassé de ses dernières aspérités pour présenter à la fin... l'impénétrable visage de cette insoluble, oiseuse énigme du bien et du mal. (p.11)

Of particular interest is the way in which the increasing distance between expression and referent actually results in a production of meaning which cannot be reduced to the simple facts out of which the narrator fabricates his tale.

Simon is here alerting us to the disingenuous nature of all narration. The attempt to 'express' automatically invests the referent with a meaning which is extrinsic to it - the expressive effort is in itself a determining factor. Elsewhere, the narrator's approximations result in a definition which turns out to be the opposite of what he started saying:

> se contentant donc de regarder sans rien dire autour de lui avec cette curiosité placide, si innocemment indiscrète qu'elle était comme le contraire de l'indiscrétion, de la curiosité. (p.206)

Such approximations illustrate the extent to which linguistic 'expression', because of the nature of language as a limited system, inevitably involves a normalization of the referent. They draw attention to the arbitrary way in which cultural models and archetypes affect our interpretation of data. This application of extraneous standards of judgement and points of comparison by the narrator is most evident in those passages where he tries to label something by explicitly eliminating opposites and alternatives:

> sans y avoir prêté plus d'attention - c'est-à-dire méfiance éveillée, et même pas méfiance : étonnement, et même pas étonnement, même pas simple curiosité. (p.68)

Here the expression is totally permeated with an implicit set of assumptions and norms - the character is described in relation to his conformability to an assumed set of expectations and to the set of abstracts available to express them.

In Le Vent the prominence of the digression is still realistically justified (i.e. contingently determined) by the fragmentary nature of the narrator's material, his need to supplement it with imaginary elaboration and the impossibility of correlating information from a variety of sources

without recourse to a highly parenthetic style. However, if these digressions are naturalized in terms of strict verisimilitude, their tenuousness and disruptive effect draw attention to the arbitrary, aprioristic nature of this correlative and deductive method, and call into question the validity of the narrator's attempt to impose on Montès' a-significant account a fairly rigid symbolic interpretation - i.e. that Montès is a personification of saintly suffering. The arbitrariness of this attempt to impose a given meaning on a set of facts is brought out forcefully on page 82 in the digressive, panoramic description of the town, which culminates in the juxtaposition of a reference to the religious statues of the town churches and a description of Montès. The implicit rapprochement is contrived and previously determined. Language is being used to impose a meaning not produce it.

Thus the digressions in Le Vent can be seen to fall into two principal categories. They are hyperbolic versions of fairly traditional meaning-conferring commentaries which, by their outrageousness, draw attention to the arbitrary determination of meaning in the traditional novel, normally camouflaged by equally arbitrary naturalizing devices. Or they are conspicuous anomalies, which retain a graphic vividness of their own and defy assimilation but remain extraneous elements superimposed upon a fairly coherent fiction. The dogmatic meaning of the narrator is challenged, but that challenge takes the form of the subversion of determination, and not the foregrounding of overdetermination and polyvalence.

Turning now to the structure and overall unity of

Le Vent, I would suggest that the sub-title of the novel draws attention at one and the same time to the narrator's organization of his material in relation to the theme of saintliness, and the ultimate failure - it remains a tentative - of his attempt to subordinate all his data to the salvaging of meaning in Montès' account. If one distances oneself sufficiently from the detail of the digressions and surveys the overall pattern of the novel, it becomes clear that the narrator has organized - i.e. determined the reading of - his material in such a way that it conforms as far as is possible to the triptychal retable structure.

The novel falls into three main parts, which hinge on two catalytic meetings between Maurice and Montès: the first on page 72 where Maurice's insinuations about Rose's troubles provoke Montès to follow Jep, the second (pp.126-145) - occurring immediately after Montès' 'confrontation' with the latter - when Montès' anger provokes the resentment of Maurice - a factor which is largely to determine the whole outcome of the affair. Secondly, there is the inverse-symmetrical pattern of motifs on the two 'lateral panels' of the retable, which emerges when one follows through the development of renvois. Motifs which only receive a mention in one part are expanded enormously in the other. The child motif, first referred to by the lawyer very briefly in the opening scene on page 14, receives its fullest and most poignant treatment just before the end of the novel in the account of Montès' visit to the convent-orphanage (p.231), while the brief allusion to the scandal aroused by Cécile's behaviour (p.14) is only fully explained on

THE TRIPTYCHAL STRUCTURE OF *LE VENT*

pp.9-15 Narrator's visit to lawyer

p.14 'il n'y a qu'aux gosses qu'il ne réussisse pas à faire peur à en juger par les trois ou quatre qui sont toujours à courir dèrrière lui'

p.14 'mais qu'une jeune fille aille se compromettre comme...'

pp.27-9 Montès' visit to the régisseur

p.43 'noir, nu, et juif. Et lui (Montès) assis là'

pp.46-52 Arrival of Montès at the hotel where Rose works.

p.60 Description of Hélène.

pp.62-5 First visit of Cécile.

pp.68-72 Maurice strikes up a conversation with Montès.

pp.84-90 Montès follows Jep out to the gipsy camp in the dark.

pp.90-102 Montès' and Rose's conversation in the dark square.

pp.118-25 Montès goes out to the gipsy camp in the daylight.

pp.130-45 Maurice pushes his way into Montès' room.

pp.149-55 Second visit of Cécile.

pp.162-70 Hélène tricks Maurice.

pp.180-7 Montès' visit to Rose's room after her death.

pp.192-5 Montès sitting in lateral chapel.

p.217 'sans doute en pensant à ce jour où il avait été invité chez son père par le régisseur.'

pp.216-7 The deflowering of Cécile.

p.231 Montès visits Rose's children in the orphanage.

p.263-7 Narrator's visit to lawyer.

pages 216-27, i.e. in the retable scheme, diagonally opposite the first reference. Inversely, the lengthy account of Montès' visit to his father's house on pages 27-39 is summarily referred to again much later in the text ('sans doute en pensant à ce jour où il avait été invité chez son père par le régisseur' (p.217)). The juggling with motifs and their alternating dilation and concentration closely resembles the balance of colour on a retable, a broad expanse of a particular colour on one panel picking up and highlighting just a touch of the same colour on the other panels. Finally, as in the altar-piece which takes as its subject the life of a saint, the most intense episode of Montès' experience - his untypical involvement in Rose and Jep's domestic problems - occupies the central panel, with at the very centre of the retable, Montès' bizarre, intense conversation with Rose. The narrator has arranged his material in such a way as to imply that this scene is the 'heart of the matter', and that it is it which radiates meaning to the rest of the 'story'. Despite the often rather diffuse appearance of the overall development of the narrative, peppered as it is with digressions and not particularly relevant interventions by the narrator, it can be seen that that same narrator is composing his narrative according to a very complex scheme, designed to confer upon the disparate circumstances of Montès' experience an expressive and meaningful pattern and to throw into relief the important points of his narrative.

On the simple narrative level of the anecdote, regardless of its allegorical potential, the narrator also plays an unusually active part in the organization of his material,

the very nature of that material calling for a particularly energetic participation on the part of the narrator if he is to construct a 'story'. He gives Montès' diffuse experiences a hard outline and a coherence that presupposes a rationally tight liaison of cause and effect between incidents. The concern of the narrator to give firm delineations to his narrative is seen from the outset in the definitive 'et maintenant que tout est fini' (p.10). To make a story out of this welter of circumstances, the narrator has to circumscribe a limited amount of material on which it will be possible to impose an 'end', and of course, the most obvious bounds of his narrative are the arrival of Montès in town and the information conveyed by Montès to him on the occasion of their last meeting before the narrator's departure. The obviousness of these bounds, however, does not prevent them from being arbitrary and determined by circumstances of the narrator's life independent of his friendship with Montès. After his final conversation with Montès, the narrator is absent from the town, and more than ever he can only surmise what Montès is doing - he can only guess that Montès is sitting every day in the little square, he cannot know; and if he cannot know, he cannot surely demarcate as absolutely as he does the 'end' of the story. Besides, the essence of the story, if there is one, would surely lie in the present ruminations and feelings of Montès, to which the narrator has no access at all. We should remain unconvinced by the philosophizing final paragraph, which would purport to clinch the narrative on a metaphysical note - it remains a vivid but artificial and summary adjunct which throws into relief the arbitrariness

of the much used fausse fin identified by Chklovski in Sur la Théorie de la prose (p.87). This particular fausse fin combines meteorology and metaphysics into a pathetically fallacious conclusion and is ultimately spurious, aphoristic and determined. Simon has successfully exposed the way in which narrative convention works, and has made the reader question the legitimacy of the traditional use of the first person narrator to disguise the arbitrary nature of any narrative and to justify the traditional arbitrarily circumscribed tranche de vie.

The division of the narrative into chapters likewise bears witness to the control and manipulation of a narrator striving for certain 'effects'. The chapter endings, in particular, testify to a profound concern to highlight meaningfully the narrative. The parallel endings of chapters one and two with their 'knowing' references to the loose morals of the farm-manager's daughter are cases in point. The accentuation of a sordid detail about which Montès himself has not spoken to the narrator is obviously, in retrospect, careful preparation for the outcome of Montès' court-case given two hundred pages later (p.236). Other chapters close enigmatically - as in chapter three which terminates with Jep closing the door to prevent Montès hearing Rose's complaints about his stealing, or ominously as in chapter 5 which concludes with one of the narrator's portentous allusions to what is going to happen (p.80).

The order in which the incidents are narrated is also determined by the effect rather than fact. This is clear in the account of Montès' uncle's visit to his nephew's hotel. Although the visit took place a few days after

Montès' arrival, the narrator made no reference to it in his account of Montès' first weeks in town, and it is only on the occasion of Cécile's visit that we hear about it. He has obviously reserved this account until now in order to corroborate his exaggerated interpretation of these incidents as violent intrusions into Montès' privacy (p.58). Furthermore, the terms in which the narrator describes Cécile's visit:

> Quoique à vrai dire, ce ne fût que la répétition (ou la suite, ou le corollaire) d'une autre (visite, intrusion) datant d'un mois auparavant

betrays the narrator's concern to give unity to his narrative by explicitly creating links between different episodes, which will then reflect on one another. Another instance of the narrator's dislocation of chronology for specific effect can be seen in chapter 7 in the intercalation of the account of Hélène's nocturnal discovery of the gipsy intruder. He thus introduces at the exact mid-point of the narrative the incident which is going to trigger off the dénouement - it is Hélène's establishment of the connection between the gipsy referred to by Maurice, the one she found in her house and the theft of the jewels which is to precipitate the tragic outcome. The juxtaposition of this account, with the false connection established by Jep between Montès' visit to the camp and his association with Rose, shows the way in which the narrator is prepared to subordinate the smooth flow of chronological narration to the meaningful association of the two factors which are to combine to 'produce' Rose's death.

Finally, further evidence of the narrator's 'pointed' marshalling of his material can be seen in a number of apparently

'innocent' comments which turn out, in retrospect, to be slyly knowing references to later incidents or rather incidents which are later to be revealed. The best example of this is to be seen in the evocation, on pages 172-3, of the sound of the wind during the night after Maurice's blackmail bid:

> Et le silence. Et seulement, au dehors, de nouveau, le vent oublié, ténace, les sporadiques et soyeux bruissements frôlant les murs comme la course d'un voleur chaussé d'espadrilles, s'enfuyant le long des murs comme le temps même fuyant, filant irrémédiablement le sang s'écoulant d'une blessure par où le corps se vide, la vie, dans un lent désespoir, et quelque part les battements d'un volet mal attaché ou encore quelque chose dégringolant, une tuile rebondissant sur une corniche, un balcon, les pavés puis plus rien.

A comparison of this passage with the imaginative evocation, by the narrator, of the attempted escape of Jep marks the earlier passage with its tell-tale simile ('comme un voleur') and the conjecture about a loose shutter (which is taken up again in 'les deux coups de feu ne firent pas plus de bruit qu'une porte claquée' (p.181)), as a prescient allusion to the report made by the shooting. Here, the narrator asserts his cognisant control over audience and material and imposes on that material a synthetic unity.

In comparison with his later work and the general claims of the Nouveau Roman, Le Vent is markedly conservative in its exploration of language. Its massive sentences and parentheses ultimately make little advance on Faulkner's circumlocutory camouflage of a central preconceived enigma. However, the work remains a crucial development in Simon's personal attack on the presuppositions of the traditional Realist novel. The tension he sets up between the tenuousness of the narrator's information and the elaborateness of the

structure he imposes on it illustrates in exaggerated form the arbitrary, determining control wielded by the traditional novelist over readerly interpretation and response.

L'Herbe

In L'Herbe, Simon elects a very traditional fictional quandary - the need to make a decision which would change the situation and transgress certain codes (here moral, matrimonial ones). In fact, however, that decision - Louise's decision to leave Georges - is reversed before it is put into effect, and although the initial project seems more than sufficiently determined (i.e. by an intolerable familial situation), its reversal seems completely arbitrary in terms of psychological criteria of verisimilitude. Gérard Roubichou's definitive analysis of what he calls the mécanismes de fonctionnement de l'écriture[54] in this novel renders lengthy commentary redundant. Suffice it to say, however, that despite the diffraction of the coherent psychological motivation of the traditional novel, the tangents remain intellectual and imaginative rather than associative and linguistically overdetermined. The three-fold return to what Roubichou calls the reprises textuelles[55] of the lovers' rendez-vous are ultimately the signs of an authorially imposed structure which disciplines the divagations of the parentheses.[56] Even so, the actual generation of these macro-textes and parentheses is principally governed by the fact that the implied author or narrator is bringing to bear upon the basic données of the narrative a variety of cultural references, which are imaginatively extended but are not subordinated to the associative potential of

overdetermination.

Only occasionally are these cultural codes subordinated to verbal associations and there results a striking but isolated reactivation of a metaphor; even here, however, it tends to be included in a sequence of comparisons which have an approximative, expressive rather than productive function:

> puisque aussi bien d'ailleurs il semble que dans ce moment se produise une confusion, l'éjaculation étant ressentie à la fois par la chair et l'esprit comme une sorte d'éblouissement sombre, éclatement chamarré de plumes de coq s'éparpillant dans le cerveau de l'homme en même temps que dans l'obscure et rouge nuit de la matrice, d'où peut-être (fusée, explosion) l'expression 's'envoyer en l'air', qui semble remonter à ces mythes originels de la Gigantomachie où des créatures aux noms (Ouranos, Saturne) et aux dimensions de mondes s'accouplent, luttent farouchement sur le fond bleu nuit du ciel encore sans astres, et ce mâle frustré de son desir, sa géante conquête assaillie (saillie) se dérobant d'un coup de reins, la semence se répandant, voie lactée, pollen polluant notre mère la terre d'où lève aussitôt sous nos yeux horrifiés une descendance maudite.(p.145)

The puns and alliterative play which characterize his later work are more or less absent, and the narratorial commentaries on language restrict themselves to the relativization of the 'meaning' of a particular word in the light of the idiosyncratic overdetermination of personal experience of the world and language (e.g. the differentiation between the nuances of the word 'argent', according to the way in which the individual earns and spends it, (p.191)). The incursi into the web of cultural and metaphorical suggestion remain interruptions in the evocation of a particular fictional situation, and the text is a conjunction of several cultural codes, rather than the pursuit and combination of the various associations of a polyvalent element of the linguistic system.

Another occasional feature of L'Herbe which anticipates later developments, but which remains a superficial appendage here, is that of the rather obvious renvoi from one part of the text to another, whereby a comparison seems to be taking another part of the text as a point of reference. The lengthy comparison with an imaginary sleeping railway passenger on pages 110-112 and the contrasting one on page 224 with the ever-wakeful, old country-woman sometimes encountered on night-trains can be seen to be variations based on Pierre's tirade (p.36) on the endurance of old women such as Marie on the dreadful train-journeys of the débâcle. A rather different instance of the self-referring text can be found in the description of the photograph discovered in the carnets (p.229), which is described negatively both in relation to the picture on the tin-box and to the earlier description of the photograph of Pierre and Sabine's wedding (pp.69-76). In L'Herbe, the reprise of the rendez-vous motif and renvois such as these give a hint of the type of self-intersecting, self-referring structure which Simon was to describe in his interview in Substance 8. However, at this stage the majority of the renvois remain thematically relevant (in the last case relating to the theme of a life of self-abnegation) and therefore ideologically determined. Ultimately, the much cited spiral structure of the book is closer to the organization of a set of aprioristic données described by Simon's interviewer, than the combinatory method and interplay of form and content posited as an ideal by Simon:

> -At Cerisy, in 'La Fiction mot à mot' you specified... that writing implies an adventure that unfolds on two levels, from page to page and according to a general

> plan or direction. You distinguished two operations: (i) the invention of elements, (ii) the organization of the elements into a balanced set. In what order do you proceed?
> - In completely empirical terms. I offered that distinction at Cerisy somewhat as one offers a grammatical analysis dividing a sentence into subject, verb, predicate , etc. The meaning of each of these elements lies in its combination and interplay with the other elements... The important thing, as I said, is for the chain to close back in upon itself, continuously.

La Route des Flandres

In La Route des Flandres, we encounter a similar profusion and disparity of informational sources as in Le Vent and the text would likewise more aptly be called a collage than the generation of a tale from an initial semantic seedbed. To be more accurate, there is one principal, witnessed donnée - de Reixach's final sword-thrust - and the subsequent attempt to penetrate that enigma takes the form of a crossfertilizing combination and eventual metaphoric synthesis of three potentially analogous situations, hypothesizing jealousy and adultery. In contrast with Le Vent, the narrator/s here is/are not simply filling in the motivational gaps in the account of a rather eccentric individual - the arbitrarily determined and illusory continuity of the traditional novel so vehemently condemned in 'La Fiction mot à mot' has given way to novelistic determination whereby the development of one narrative thread is largely dictated by the analogical influence of one of the other two. The rumoured suicide of the 18th-century Reixach contaminates the account of the 20th-century de Reixach's death during the débâcle, while the adultery of both Corinne and the peasant woman is transferred to the ancestor's wife, Virginie. Imaginative reconstruction - and therefore an element of

intellectual control - remains an important source - i.e. a contingent determinant - for the elaboration of Blum's narrative hypotheses.

Notwithstanding this ultimate determinacy, verbal play enjoys a new prominence and freedom in this novel. Corinne's skimpy attire defies definition in terms of decency or indecency, but the attempt to define it highlights the differential procedures of meaning-production:

> et plus indécente qu'une chemise de nuit (ou plutôt qui sur toute autre femme eût été indécente mais qui, sur elle, était quelque chose d'au-delà de l'indécence, c'est-à-dire supprimant, privant de sens toute idée de décence ou d'indécence). (p.147)

On occasion, one of the narrators/interlocutors draws attention to the happy coincidence of metaphoric expression and meaning:

> il n'aurait pas donné un coup d'éperon pas donné sa place pour un boulet de canon c'est le cas de le dire il y a comme ça des expressions qui tombent à pic (p.15)

> en proie à cette panique cette espèce de diarrhée morale (as-tu remarqué qu'on appelle cela aussi la courante?) (p.193)

> je posai la main sur elle juste au milieu c'était comme du duvet de légères plumes d'oiseau un oiseau dans la main mais aussi un buisson proverbe anglais.(p.275)

However, more frequently their account takes the form of the pursuit of the suggestions of a particular expression or the reanimation of a dead metaphor. The opening of the novel provides an excellent example of this, Georges' unfamiliarity with what is no doubt a regional cliché - 'les chiens ont mangé la boue' - reinvesting the image with a pristine vividness of association:

> Les chiens ont mangé la boue, je n'avais jamais entendu l'expression,il me semblait voir les chiens, des sortes de créatures infernales mythiques leurs gueules bordées de rose leur dents froides et blanches de loups mâchant la boue noire dans les ténèbres de la nuit, peut-être

> un souvenir, les chiens dévorants nettoyant faisant place nette.(p.9)

On page 32, the activation of a hackneyed comparison acts as a catalyst for a narratorial incursus into Georges' family life - the metaphoric inky blackness of the night gives way to a description of the real ink of Pierre's research notes.

Taken to its logical conclusion, this associative and combinatory process elucidates nothing - on the contrary, it obfuscates the facts in favour of startling new linguistic combinations. Myth is no longer a vivid but anomalous linguistic composition - it is subsumed in the linguistic play to the point where fact, mythical code and pun are indistinguishable:[57]

> Il (je veux dire l'adjoint...) couchait avec sa propre soeur qui était la femme de ce boiteux ...leurs soeurs et les chèvres hein? Paraît qu'à défaut de soeur ils font ça avec la chèvre ...alors il a transformé sa chèvre en fille ou sa soeur en chèvre et Vulcain je veux dire ce boiteux épousa la chèvre-pied et ce bouc de frère venait la sailler dans sa maison...
> c'est ce qu'il a dit
> alors c'était du lait de chèvre
> qui?
> celle qui était dans l'écurie ce matin celle qui se cache derrière ce paon mythologique...
> Merde Quel frère? merde à la fin Qu'est-ce que cette histoire Alors ils sont tous frères et soeurs Je veux dire frères et chèvres Je veux dire boucs et chèvres Alors un bouc et sa chèvre et ce boiteux de diable qui a épousé la chèvre qui s'accouplait avec son bouc de frère qui.(pp.128-9)

This verbal exchange could be seen to demonstrate the way in which a word becomes an element in the cultural code of a specific community. The rather special narratorial framework, based on alternation puts a new emphasis on discourse and verbal interaction. The collaborative and argumentative narration of La Route des Flandres foregrounds

the rich potential of language seen as culturally (i.e. intersubjectively) overdetermined and metaphoric.

Furthermore, although at this stage sensory association remains the principal articulatory device, phonetic associations, in the form of alliteration, pun and homophony, figure prominently as catalysts for digressions (e.g. the play on the words 'Corinne' and 'corail' pp.234-5) and in the shifts from one narrative motif to another and within a single narrative thread from one incident to another (e.g. the play on 'moule poulpe pulpe vulve' pp.41-2). Here, contingent and authorial determination have ceded primacy to an exploitation of the suggestive potential of overdetermined association on the paradigmatic axis of language. The crucial importance of slight phonetic differentiation and the lack of an exclusive relationship between signifier and instituted meaning are token restrictions when one realizes the associative possibility of a relational rather than substantive view of language.[58] Furthermore, the initial phonetic overdetermination of a word can be enriched through the adumbration of additional subjective associations and intersubjective myth in the course of the work - to the point where Blum can, on page 199, sum up the whole 'story' of the ancestor in a number of fugal variations on the one word 'pigeon', which is a personal vulgarization of Georges' references to the colombes of the de Reixach coat of arms.

In La Route des Flandres, the balance between determination and overdetermination is fairly even. The problems of linguistic expression, the étonnement at the linguistic trouvaille and the alternative perspectives opened up into the monothematic narrative by a play on the overdetermined

associations of a word are all made explicit in Georges' and Blum's dialogue. However, the novel remains a psychological and epistemological investigation and the linguistic play is underpinned by the common-sense, empirical psychology and criteria of verisimilitude which Georges and Blum bring to bear on their desire to understand, and by Simon's desire to show the inadequacy of those tools. Furthermore, Simon's frequent references to his method of composition in this novel suggest that the linguistic associations are being activated and disciplined according to the demands of a preconceived harmony, modelled on that of the triptych or the Poussinesque painting rather than on the harmonies inherent to the overdetermined linguistic system.

Le Palace

The main impulse of Le Palace, like that of La Route des Flandres, is an epistemological quest, and our conclusion about the earlier work can be applied in large part to the later novel. The relativization of psychological frames of reference and other naturalizing devices is advanced here in the restriction of the narration to the interplay between the student of the Spanish Civil War and the older self fifteen years later. The structure of this novel is seen by most critics as an anticipation of Simon's later technique whereby he posits an initial générique out of the combination of whose elements he generates the subsequent narrative. In fact, I would argue that, despite the surface confusion and digressions within the chapters, the overall structure is as rigidly aprioristic and determined as the articulation of the micro-texts of L'Herbe around four

monumental macro-texts. In 'La Fiction mot à mot', Simon himself draws attention to the determining considerations of symmetry:

> Autre exemple de composition symétrique, *Le Palace* qui s'ouvre par un chapitre intitulé *Inventaire*, se ferme sur un autre intitulé *Le bureau des objets trouvés*, le chapitre central, sur les cinq que comporte l'ouvrage, intitulé *Les funérailles de Patrocle* (décrivant l'enterrement d'un chef révolutionnare assassiné), lui-même encadré par les chapitres deux et quatre qui relatent chacun un meurtre, le premier raconté par son auteur, le deuxième soupçonné par le narrateur qui en est le témoin incertain. (NR II, p.93)

This preconceived structure disciplines internal developments and subordinates them to an illustration of the factors involved in the process of disintegration of the ex-student's sense of identity. The shift from the inventory of the movable objects which constitute History to the 'bureau des objets trouvés' mirrors the transformation and disintegration of an initial concrete experience in the memory - the ex-student is ultimately left with only a few sensory co-ordinates around which he vainly tries to reconstruct his past and impose an order.

As in La Route des Flandres, the interest lies not in the generation of a text out of a limited number of suggestive données, but in the combination and mutual interaction of several threads to the point of indistinguishableness. In Le Palace, the three narrative threads are the subjects of the three central chapters, all variations on the theme of murder recounted at second hand - the anecdote of the 'homme-fusil', the confused rumours concerning the death of the revolutionary leader and the hypothetical murder of the American. None of these murders is guaranteed as fact; none of the mysteries surrounding them is elucidated: but they do combine to effect that operation necessary to all

novels according to A.J. Greimas[59] - change in the initial situation. They combine to produce the hypothetical death of the student, or of the 'homme-fusil', at the end. At a limit, the failure of the student's epistemological quest could be seen as sufficient motivation for his suicide. But the reasons for that failure are not evident and, after all, it may be the 'homme-fusil' who accidentally shoots himself. The question as to who, if anyone kills himself/dies is irrelevant - the conclusion cannot be naturalized completely in terms of determining, psychologically realistic factors. The last few pages are defiantly non-naturalistic, the narration continuing after the supposed death of the ex-student narrator. In fact, the 'story' is carrying on from its previously gathered linguistic momentum and the conclusion is overdetermined by the weight of data which precedes it. On closer examination, the last section proves to be woven out of fragments and details distributed throughout the novel which now combine to the point of combinatory exhaustion to produce a new, fictionally problematic, textual event.

Histoire

The new emphasis given to linguistic combination at the end of Le Palace anticipates the process by which the whole of Histoire is to be produced. Histoire is the first of Simon's novels where one could speak of an initial germinal set of data out of which the text is to be generated. The opening evocation of the 'real' situation of the narrator seated before an open window is simultaneously an initially posited token point of departure - i.e. it is determined - and a mise en abyme for the process of writing.

The evocation of the view of the tree illuminated by the electric light makes oblique reference to the inevitable artificiality and limitations of narrative point of view. The tree itself can be seen as a metaphor for the multiple bifurcations (i.e. narratorial choices, verbal selections) involved in the process of writing, while the phrase 's'entrecroisant se succédant se superposant' suggests the attempted reconciliation by Simon of the linear impulse of the language with the spatial demands of a novel form seeking to rival the immediacy of pictorial art. In Simon, the writing remains linear but the individual words constitute so many potential overdetermined carrefours where several meanings meet. Subject as it is to the associations of the words, the narrative is fragmented, and scenes and events belonging to distant time sequences converge within the text.

The resemblance here to the opening of A la recherche... is obvious, and probably intentional. But the intellectual reference is important for its status as a repoussoir. Histoire is not so much an essay on the recuperability of the past through art as a study of the relationship between memory and psycho-linguistic association. In Histoire, the memories and sensations are generated through the language. They have no explicit or implied guarantee in terms of real referents or the vraisemblable of psychology. The opening paragraph is not a description of a tree with birds in it - the tree is, to use Simon's word, said, arbitrarily posited as a token stimulus, and the birds are gradually produced through linguistic combination. Initially, they are synecdochically referred to in the comparisons used to describe the

foliage -

> avec leurs feuilles semblables à des plumes palpitant faiblement (p.9)
>
> les folioles... remuant... comme des aigrettes.(p.9)

Then, there is a parenthesis which simply suggests some living form in the branches:

> (et derrière on pouvait percevoir se communiquant de proche en proche une mystérieuse et délicate rumeur invisible se propageant dans l'obscur fouillis des branches). (p.9)

Finally, the ornithological references emerge from the brackets to become the empirically perceived sounds of birds:

> quoiqu'on pût les sentir nombreux... dans les épaisseurs d'obscurité d'où parvenaient de faibles froissements de faibles cris d'oiseaux endormis tressaillant s'agitant.(pp.9-10)

The birds described have no referential status outside the text - they are the overdetermined product of so many associative linguistic entrecroisements. A similar procedure can be seen in operation in the evocation of the old women who figure so prominently throughout the text. They first appear as anonymous 'elles' (p.10), conjured up no doubt by homophony via 'ailée' which is implicit in the 'frémissants' and 's'agitant' applied to the birds. At this stage, they are a mere shifter - the pronoun seems somewhat adrift and unattached, and leaves the reader puzzled at first. Then, gradually, Simon weaves around it a web of associations drawn from the evocation of the birds, and the features attributed to the birds are recombined to produce the old women.[60] The ornithológical references suggest other zoological images so that eventually the description of the old women consists of a conglomeration of imagery drawn

from the animal world (pp.11-14). Throughout the novel, extraneous criteria of judgement, relating to 'good characterisation' or empirical lay-psychology, remain inapplicable and irrelevant to the evocation of les vieilles, and even their status as overdetermined personal myths in the subjective mind and memory of the narrator remains a subsequent fictional naturalization of their initial metaphoric production in the text.[61]

The general narrative framework of the account of the day in the life of a single man likewise has no absolute guarantee. The 'narrator' himself becomes a seminal element, is exposed as 'fictional'. The one physical indication concerning him -i.e. his wide-open eyes staring out into the dark - is applied to the phantoms of the old women which he conjures up - 'se tenant là les yeux grands ouverts dans le noir' (p.10). He, like the old women, is no more than a shifter - je - around which a mass of associations - naturalized in fictional terms as memories - are built up in the course of the novel.[62] This lack of a solid, extra-textual identity on the part of the narrator is highlighted by the subsequent shifts in point of view - the je has no reality outside of the discourse of which it is a part. The uncle can be seen as a textual generation on the model of the nephew or vice versa, and the conflict of the generations which figured so prominently as a theme in Le Sacre du printemps becomes a pun. In the earlier text, the younger generation was in part determined by the older; in Histoire they generate one another linguistically, and the chronological relationship which normally defines them is variable, indeed reversible. Furthermore, the principal

'incidents' of the narrator's day are not determined by the loose chronological continuity of the realist novel; they are overdetermined in relation to the textual system to which they belong. The description of the narrator washing his face on pages 43-4 has been generated by the description of the stained-glass window on page 42 (which is in turn a combination of words used earlier):

> et dans la rosace à côté... Du Guesclin agonisant sous son arbre Moïse enveloppé dans un péplum violet faisant jaillir du rocher frappé de son bâton l'eau d'argent (p.42)
>
> Donc je suppose quelque chose comme Introïbo in lavabo rocher de Moïse maintenant en porcelaine émaillée et le bâton miraculeux remplacé par une couronne de baronet en cuivre jaunâtre et terni.(p.43)

Similarly on pages 370-1, the narrator's orgasm takes the form of a list of all the post-cards described elsewhere in the novel. The list is prompted by a description of the birds represented on the woman's kimono, which calls to mind a Biblical phrase and leads on to a sweeping survey of all that God created, as represented by the time- and space-spanning post-cards. The orgasm is a textual, rather than psychological or physical, event and contrasts sharply with the attempt to express the sensation of ejaculation through comparison in L'Herbe.

In Histoire, the element of control exerted by the author, which Simon regards as indispensable to the work, does not consist in the rather arbitrary organization of the micro-texts around the four principal macro-texts. Here the author's control, after the initial description of the tree, consists in a reprise of a number of motifs - which can be mythological images or simply single words - and a responsive elaboration of their associations and

combinatory potential. An exhaustive list of these motifs would be tedious - I shall simply mention some of the most common ones. There are motifs based on the themes of birds, insects, lizards, trees, sphinx/pyramids, decapitation/amputation, bones, drops of blood/tears/candle-grease, tongue/flame, twins and a monochromatic object viewed against a slightly different monochromatic background (usually grey). The heterogeneity of these motifs indicates the lack of any coherent underlying thematic determinant governing their choice. Their permutations and variations are based solely on their initial phonetic, cultural or psycho-linguistic overdetermination and the associations which are acquired in the course of the elaboration of the textual system in which they figure as motifs and renvois. Simon's syntagmatic parole does not suspend the ancillary associations of a selected word in order to convey a certain meaning; it increases overdetermination by the creation of a textual system within the larger linguistic one.

Of the generative devices which relay the occurrence of these motifs, the reactivation of set expressions and old metaphors, and the pursuit of the phonetic associations of certain words remain two of the most important. In an interview given to the Tribune de Lausanne on the 9th April 1967 where he insisted on the lack of any pre-existent referential story, Simon explained his method of composition in Histoire in terms which accentuated the predominance of overdetermined/ing association. The progress of the fiction is dictated by an initial verbal selection on the part of the author combined with a pursuit of the unpredictable associations of the generator, which lasts until the author sees fit to

intervene or until another association sends it off in a different direction:

> J'avais envie d'écrire et je n'avais pas de sujet... Si vous voulez j'ai procédé un peu comme les joueurs qui lancent la balle contre un fronton. Comme ce fronton n'est jamais exactement plan, s'ils savent à quel endroit ils vont le frapper, ils ne peuvent pas prévoir comment la balle rebondira. Mon livre est ainsi un jeu avec le mur du langage, jeu vital, car, pour moi toujours imprévisible.[63]

The polyvalent and associative opacity of an apparently transparent or expressive figure of speech can suddenly be exposed in a deliberation on its bizarreness:

> Quand j'étais enfant je me rappelle que dans les journaux ce mot m'avait paru drôle marron médecin marron marron banquier marron homme d'affaires marron dans l'argot d'écolier marron voulait dire qu'on s'était fait rouler on disait aussi être chocolat (Hist, p.308)

or in a reactivation of an implicit but naturalized metaphor:

> et cet assourdissant et funèbre vacarme, les cinq instruments galopant toujours, cette tumultueuse poursuite d'animaux sauvages d'étalons continuant à se ruer entre les murs illuminés, leur éclatants pelages acajou, bruns, noirs, pourpre, bronze, feu, se poursuivant, (p.87)

To the now common phonetic association:

> léger tissu couleur de fruits de feuilles taché sous ses aisselles... essaim d'ailes nid comme si le mot lui-même était plein de battements de froissements feuillu soyeux bruissant des plumes s'envolant de sous ses... (p.115),

Simon adds that of the shape of certain letters:

> escaladant le lit elle aCCourt aile de ses cheveux défaits figure volante les deux boucles jumelles de l'*l* double alanguies inclinées par la course les deux C semblables à deux dos ou plutôt au même dos répeté deux fois comme les contours d'un personnage sur une photo bougée forme fuligineuse d'un corps ou plutôt d'un mouvement une jambe levée (p.124)

plus a combination of phonetic and graphic association:

> nom (Memel) qui faisait penser à Mamelle avec dans son aspect je ne sais quoi (les deux e blancs peut-être) de glacé ville noire couronnée de neige auprès d'une mer gelée livide habitée par les femmes slavonnes

> aux cheveux de lin aux seins lourds (les deux l de mamelle suggérant la vision de formes jumeLLes se balançant). (p.213)[64]

The vividness of these associative elaborations contrasts sharply with Lambert's perverse and reductive reworking of the religious responses, and the difference between the narrator's use of language and his former school-friend's distortions epitomizes the difference between an unproductive reworking of old clichés and the authentic parole which produces ever-new combinations and meanings. Lambert's deformations certainly show an awareness of the importance of phonetic association in our daily use of language: meaningful communication is not a question of connecting the 'right' word to the 'right' thing; a combination of sounds close to what is expected is often sufficient. But Lambert's deformation is not a liberation; it is not a truly productive use of language - he is enclosed within his own set of formulae modelled on the one he is trying to escape. Like the graffiti writers described in La Bataille de Pharsale (p.21), he is content to deepen the engravings or ruts of those who have preceded him. This becomes manifest when we discover that he has become a politician, a cliché-monger for whom linguistic deformation and a utilitarian exchange[65] view of language are indistinguishable.

In Histoire, then, primary referentiality is relegated to the status of an initial catalytic donnée which operates the entry from the 'referential' world into the mesmerizing play of differentiation and association on the overdetermined paradigmatic axis of language. The establishment of a set of internal points of reference in the form of motifs which have no external symbolic significance, but around which

a whole mythology of text-specific associations is elaborated, shows the way in which Simon is turning to positive effect the tricky theoretical problems inherent in the aesthetic need for a structural organization of material. These motifs are arbitrarily determined by their initial selection by the narrator - the associations gradually attached to them in the course of the work eclipses, if not eliminates, this arbitrary determination; and by the end of the novel they are inextricably involved in the textual system of renvois and associations which has been generated.

La Bataille de Pharsale

La Bataille de Pharsale functions in terms of a quite elaborate paradox which juggles facetiously with Simon's own method of combinatory and generative composition. As in Histoire, the linear text progresses through a combination of a few initial motifs and their ramifications, while, on the level of the fiction, the 'story' as such would seem to unwrite itself back to the author at the end seated in front of his window and the referents in the real world which apparently triggered off his imagination. The crux of the paradox lies in the irreducible ambiguity relating to this writer's status - he is as much a production of the text as he is its fictional producer; neither he nor the stimuli in front of him have any absolute referential guarantee; they are simply variations on earlier motifs.

In this novel, Simon relies to a remarkable extent on the reader's early grasp of his combinatory procedures. The short, disconnected sentences of page 20 are very disconcerting and offer no initial 'hold' for the reader,

until he realizes that they are snatches from specific texts in the vast code of other texts which form the intertext. This recourse to the intertext for his generators defers, even if it cannot solve, the problem of ultimate referentiality. A closer examination of these catalysts reveals them to be passages from a history manual ('avant que l'Allemagne ait été réduite au même morcellement qu'au Moyen Age...'), Proust (ARTP III, p.730) ('une certaine migraine certains asthmes nerveux qui perdent leur force quand on vieillit. Et l'effroi de s'ennuyer sans doute'), the description of a religious painting ('sur d'impalpables...'), a hearsay account of a certain experience of life (his uncle's) ('modèle petite garce...'), plus the intertextual reference to the romantic tribulations of the narrator of Histoire (p.109) which establishes a mental area for the play of associations and constitutes a point of reference around which a coherent and unique whole can form, i.e. the narratorial consciousness ('arrêter les yeux un instant ses yeux devant les vitrines je souffrais comme...').

As far as the actual combination is concerned, the text seems to function largely as in earlier works, the Greek episode generated initially by the following comparison used to describe, significantly enough, some rather primitive graffiti:

> avait gagné de proche en proche finissant par l'élargir au point qu'elle ressemblait maintenant à une île de forme allongée, la Crête par exemple.(p.25)[66]

It becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between catalyst and digression - the description of the boxer cartoon (pp.65-71) may have called to mind the pun on 'téléphonés', or more

likely, the narrative motif has been generated from the associations of the word (p.163). On several occasions, one of the principal 'narrative threads' becomes the point of comparison for another. On page 93, the sling described in the Roman war motif becomes a comparison for the expression of the flight of a bird, and on page 63, what we have taken to be a jealous memory on the part of the narrator is subsumed and subordinated in a comparison:

> comme dans ces escaliers aux murs peints en marron ou en gris fer souillés et éraflés avec des messages punaisés ou griffonnés au fusain sur les portes je suis descendu boire un pot ou je t'attends chez Mimile ou reviendrai à.

As in Histoire, La Bataille de Pharsale is composed largely around the variations on and combinations of key words and motifs such as that of the bone/'arête de poisson', bird, bubble of liquid, V, the colour 'brun orangé', 'poulie', triangle, fairground, the word 'pointillé', phallus, splinters of glass, swelling, giant, nail, death, decapitation/amputation, the gradation of colours, 'onduler', pointed finger. Probably, the most interesting of these word-motifs is the play on the word 'mort'. There is humour and considerable défi in the stress on the fact that the word for death is such a living part of the language. Its metaphoric application, early in the text, to the word langue draws attention to this paradox:

> Versions latines dont j'ânonnais le mot à mot comme une écoeurante bouillie jusqu'à ce que de guerre lasse il finisse... par traduire lui-même
> César la Guerre des Gaules la Guerre Civile →
> s'enfonçant dans la bouche ouverte clouant la langue de ce. Latin langue morte. (p.18)

In fact, as we have seen, Latin is only 'dead' for the child because he does not make the effort to enter its

linguistic system. He assumes a one-to-one relationship between language and referent which is belied by the metaphorical exploitation of the associations of the word by the older narrator:

> Eaux mortes. Mort vivant... mortellement triste...
> bois mort feuille morte... la mort dans l'âme
> la peine de mort.(p.18)

Significantly , the 'primary' meaning of death is illustrated here as an attack on the tongue/language. Death and the loss of language which is the prerogative of the human being are equated.

Conversely, Simon implies, language has the power to create fictional life in a text. Thus the letter O or figure zero, the conventional sign of absence, establishes a scriptural presence on the page. In La Bataille de Pharsale the variable narrative point of view/point of reference, O,[67] is textually generated (i.e. the paradoxical presence of the cipher denoting absence is overdetermined) by the motif of the gap/the circle/the eye[68] running throughout the text. The section 'O' and the final part of the book have their source in the compendium of cultural references to the eye on page 10. Here, Simon juxtaposes references to the eye at the centre of a triangle on a stained-glass window, an eye painted at the bottom of a chamber-pot, an obscene linguistic riddle ('qu'est-ce qui est fendu, ovale, humide et entouré de poils?') and a biblical cliché ('Alors oeil pour oeil..'), plus the statement of a mathematical rule concerning equilateral triangles and a reference to the immaculate conception. Section 'O' resolves these disparate references, drawn from a fairly general cultural baggage, into the description of a mobile system of viewing

angles on an act of copulation which - like the Biblical metaphors also mentioned on page 10 ('Vase d'ivoire, Tour de silence, Rose de Canaan, Machin de Salomon') has a purely linguistic reality. O is at once a cipher for the eye and the female sex, a geometrical point of intersection and a simple letter of the alphabet; and what might have seemed, on page 10, to be an instance of the much over-worked technique of the stream-of-consciousness proves to be a fund of generators.

Twelve pages later, the textual overdetermination of section 'O' and part 3 is reinforced by an oblique reference to Proust. Here attention is drawn to the absent/present status of the 'spare', unattached 'o'[69] which results from the discrepancy between the mistaken pronunciation of a word and the subsequent scriptural notation of that mistake:

> *édicules Rambuteau s'appelaient des pistières sans doute dans son enfance n'avait-il pas entendu l'o et cela lui était resté il prononçait donc ce mot incorrectement...* (p.22)

The paradoxical play on scriptural absence/presence is duplicated by the fact that Simon is himself scripturally and intertextually quoting from Proust's absent novel.

The last reference I have chosen occurs on page 80, where there is a description of a mosaic, and in particular of a wheel or shield (in any case a circular object) depicted there, with, at its centre amidst a mass of cloth or hair, a bodyless head, which may be 'real' (i.e. in terms of the verisimilitude of the mosaic) or a painted effigy (i.e. a representation within a representation). In the same way, in La Bataille de Pharsale there is considerable ambiguity about the relationship between the mobile narrative point

of view and its surroundings; it has no corporal existence. It polarizes 'semes' which connote the subjective emotion 'jealousy', but both it and its 'emotions' have only a scriptural reality. Here one of the passages which contributes to the generation of the narrative point of view 0 is also a fine mise en abyme for the non-substantive, ambivalent status of the narrator, ultimately a present combination of fragments drawn from the absent intertext.

This combinatory method is, of course, by this time part of Simon's stock-in-trade. More interesting in terms of his technical evolution perhaps is the process by which he disrupts the traditional parallelism between the progress of the text and the progress of the fiction in time. In this novel, the progress of the text brings about the negation of the fiction, accomplishes its factorization into its basic component parts. The end of the first section (pp.94-8) takes the form of a negative version of everything that has preceded:

> les ouvriers de la carrière étaient partis... (p.95)
>
> maintenant il n'y a plus de pigeons... (p.95)
>
> la façade de l'immeuble n'étant plus éclairée... (p.95)
>
> la terrasse du café est déserte. (p.95)
>
> la chatte blanche n'était plus perchée sur le poteau (p.96)
>
> Il n'y avait pas de marchand de journaux (p.97),

and the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of the preceding narrative are explicitly thrown into question:

> est-ce qu'il y avait vraiment un terrain de football comment aurait-il pu y en avoir au milieu de toute cette caillasse il faudrait vérifier mais vérifier quoi peut-être était-ce la veille dans un endroit moins sec en Macédoine peut-être batailles là aussi... (p.97)

By the time of the section 'Lexique', the narrative seems to have dissolved into an exploration of the associations and codal contexts of the individual words which form the germinal triggers for the novel. Of course, this is not true - we have already shown the way in which Simon, anxious to distance the question of referentiality, drew his generators from the intertext. La Bataille de Pharsale, starting from fragments of an intertext has itself become part of that intertext and has now produced a set of potential mots générateurs. This explains the curious freezing and disintegration of the objects produced by the text at the end of the novel. This, I would suggest, indicates that this particular novel has reached its own saturation point. Its possible permutations and combinations are exhausted. It can only be reread and is, therefore, subject to the fossilization of every work of art. However, its status as part of an intertextual tradition means that it can serve as a catalyst for another work of art. Thus in this last section are sown the seeds of the next novel, Les Corps conducteurs, in the descriptions of the negro at the bus-stop, the modern cityscape -

> La vivacité des couleurs fraîches éclatent dans le paysage légèrement brumeux, d'un gris bleuté, où, à l'horizon, un coup de soleil passager, éclaire un alignement de parallélipèdes allongés, de différentes hauteurs se dressant dans le ciel. (p.266)

the amputated limbs:

> De temps à autre une pellicule de marbre, une joue, une saillie, parfois une épaule, un coude, plus rarement un membre tout entier, s'effrite et tombe en poussière. (p.266)

the glimpse of entrails:

> Une plaque de peau détachée de la poitrine laisse

> voir à nu sa texture interne, compliquée, creusée de concavités, de sinuosités, de miniscules excavations, de sinus. (p.267).

The last few pages of the novel bring us back full circle as it were to the main theme of the epigraph. On pages 260-4, there are a number of variations of the theme of immobile movement, which epitomize the tension between the demands of the associations on the level of the writing and those of the fiction. In Simon, the former will always prevail since the articulation of the individual linguistic elements into syntactically correct syntagms can proceed irrespectively of a plot, whereas a plot cannot advance without a linear writerly frame. It is this independence in relation to contingent verisimilitude which Simon wants to stress here.

The section entitled 'Chronologie des événements' is a facetious puzzle which makes us think more profoundly about the nature of fictional and scriptural time. Pages 206-7 and pages 231-2 give an account of the events before and after that recounted on pages 36-7, i.e. the narrator's arrival at the old farmhouse and his contemplation of the graffiti and the broken-down combine harvester. Thus on pages 206-7 there is a description of a boy scratching MOUNA on to the wall, and on pages 231-2 a description of some men dismantling and carrying off parts of the machinery. However, on page 237 we encounter an account of the scratching in of the letters ε Δ and Π and the date 1966. In terms of the order of the writing, then, this occurs after the dismantling of the machine (therefore after the visit of O to the farmhouse), whereas in terms of 'real' time and verisimilitude it must have happened before O's arrival at the farm since he was

able to read it. In short, it becomes impossible to naturalize the 'fiction' in determinative terms of verisimilitude. Chronology is conceived of as the modifications of graphic traces, not as the passing of human time. Textual chronology is shown to have no absolute, necessary relationship with real time. It is indistinguishable from the linear succession of the syntagm, and the associations generated by these syntagms often result in a complete disruption of the articulation of experiential time. In Histoire, the pursuit of the psycho-linguistic associations of particular words inevitably led the narrator back through the memories attached to and articulated by these words to the hypothesis of the potential consciousness that he was in the womb and before he was constituted as an individual in the linguistic code. In La Bataille de Pharsale, Simon concentrates on the paradoxical status of the individual in language - the writer at the end produced by the language but apparently producing his own parole.

By this stage, the question of determination and referentiality has been suppressed (in Simon's conception of limited polyvalence it is insoluble). This text consists of the elaborate production of a complex, puzzling paradox where it becomes impossible to distinguish product from generator and to attribute definitive relations of antecedence. Simon disclaims responsibility for the initial determining establishment of generators by drawing these generators from the intertext, and he prepares the reader for his next text by the production of its generators in the final section of this one. If they are determined by an object outside the text to which they belong, this

determination is camouflaged by the fact that Les Corps conducteurs is overdetermined in relation to the larger intertextual system to which it belongs.[70]

Les Corps conducteurs

If Les Corps conducteurs marks a development in Simon, in the reprise and reworking of motifs from the end of La Bataille de Pharsale and in the use of photographs of various forms of representation as triggers for the elaboration of his text, the substance of the text itself presents little that is very new. It is an expansion of an earlier work, Orion aveugle, commissioned by Skira for its series Les Sentiers de la Création, and although Simon stresses that his mode of composition here was no different from that in his other works, the extended, novel-length version seems rather mechanically devised and colourless. In this novel, there are rather too many passages which could be read as contrived mises en abyme [71] and seem to be determined by a desire on Simon's part to highlight his own novelistic technique - a feature no doubt due to the general spirit of the series to which Orion aveugle belonged, which was conceived of as a set of essays, by contemporary writers, on the subject of art.

Simon himself has expressed his dissatisfaction over the reception of this novel[72] and its naturalization as the hallucinations of a sick man. In contrast with the section '0' of his preceding work, Les Corps conducteurs is in the end recuperable according to the demands of psycho-physiological vraisemblance. Simon has also voiced his regret that he did not retain his original title

'Propriétés de quelques figures, géométriques ou non',[73] which would have stressed his working analogy with mathematics as a system of relationships and his conception of his work in terms of the exploration of the common properties of apparently disparate objects. In his paper 'La Fiction mot à mot' he follows his explanation of the way in which he intended Les Corps conducteurs to be read, with a didactic analogy between his work and elementary set geometry, stressing, however, the subjective source of the aesthetic rapports in the writer's response to his stimuli:

> mon dernier livre est né de la considération... des propriétés du grand tableau de Robert Rauschenberg intitulé Charlène... Il va naturellement de soi qu'à la différence d'une figure géométrique dont les propriétés sont les mêmes pour tous, ces propriétés de Charlène sont pour chacun, différentes, chacun, bien sûr, étant à même de lui en découvrir d'autres, tout aussi valables. (NR II, p.87)

The use of a selection of well-known and less well-known representations, all of which are potentially accessible to the public, as the principal stimuli for the novel constitutes a radicalization of his incorporation into many of his works of oblique references to and playful descriptions of well-known paintings, and his idiosyncratic use in Histoire of a collection of postcards received by members of his own family. Now, as before, Simon is anxious to stress the lack of any representational relationship between the real stimuli and the text produced:

> Orion aveugle est le résultat d'une commande de Skira. J'ai placé ces stimulants pour montrer comment le texte avait fonctionné, puisque le titre de la collection est Les Sentiers de la Création. Mais ils ne doivent pas être tenus en compte dans un livre final. Si Les Corps conducteurs devait être accompagné de l'image des stimulants extratextuels, alors ce serait un échec pour moi. (NR II, p.108)

Certainly, the main linguistic features which we noted in relation to the other texts are present here. There is an intricate system of motifs and mots carrefours.[74] One of the most notable of the motifs is the play on the variations of 'or', 'orient', 'horizon', etc. This may be an inter-textual reference to the play on the same syllable in Mallarmé's Or.[75] In addition, while Mallarmé's poem closes with the effacement of the 'or' of the sunset, at the end of Les Corps conductuers, Orion fades into the 'ciel d'aurore' (p.222).

The exploitation of syllabic and phonetic association is more demanding and unobtrusive than before:

> Lorsqu'il s'immobilise les bras s'immobilisent aussi et le léger tintement du timbre sous les baguettes cesse. L'intestin comprend deux parties principales l'intestin grêle et le gros intestin (p.17)

and the shifts from one motif to another are often effected through figurative links which are more implicit and more carefully camouflaged than before. In the following example, the link is metonymic, depending on our grasp of the fact that the three objects referred to are made of the same material:

> la main jaunâtre qui s'appuie sur la canne sortant du combiné en ébonite noir...(p.46),

while the shift between the description of a caterpillar on a leaf and the noise of an aeroplane depends on an implicit comparison between the elongated shape of the caterpillar and the shape of the train to which the noise of the plane is compared to!

> S'arquant sur elle-même, la chenille progresse par contractions et élongations successives à la surface d'une large feuille... Plus puissant que le bruit des réacteurs, celui du frottement de l'air sur les parois

> extérieurs de l'avion ressemble au grondement d'un train express lancé à la vitesse. (p.163)

The rapports between the 'referents' are becoming increasingly embedded in the text in Simon's attempt to suppress the word 'comme'[76] and to concretize the metaphor which, he says - mythifying the non-substantial, relational nature of meaning - is the symbol of man's Fall,[77] alienation from semantic plenitude. The lengthy digressive comparisons of the earlier texts have given way to a much more sober exploitation of the suggestions of motifs. Metaphoric association is no longer the privilege of a few 'semantically rich' expressions - all of language is understood as potentially metaphorical.

However, despite this, I would suggest that Les Corps conducteurs depends for its full effect rather heavily on the reader's familiarity with the stimuli in Orion aveugle.[78] The very fact that he has to spell out the analogies intended in 'La Fiction mot à mot' is an index of the relative failure of this novel:

> Sur le plan de la ville les trajets des lignes de métro sont représentés par des rubans rouges ou bleus aux courbes entrelacées *comme* sur une planche anatomique les veines et les artères à l'intérieur du corps. L'étalage d'un marchand de tabac se présente *comme* un damier irrégulier de couvercles de boîtes de cigares séparées par des joints *comme* les pierres d'un mur, ou encore *comme* les blocs separés par les rues et les avenues d'une ville. Plus loin les annonces publicitaires des cinémas sur la page d'un journal sont aussi disposées en damier *comme* les maisons et les cours d'un faubourg misérable d'une ville sud-américaine vue d'avion. (NR II, p.90)

Furthermore, although there are numerous examples of one motif taking another as a point of reference in a comparison and although Simon makes an attempt to radicalize this procedure in an illusion-shattering emboîtement of one motif by another - 'le passager de l'avion lisait dans un illustré l'histoire de la colonne perdue dans la jungle'

(Colloque, p.425) - the text remains a web of relations determined by graphic analogies between things which have a referential value and substance as works of art in the real world.

Triptyque

Simon's interviews have indicated that he conceives of his own evolution in terms of the attempt in each novel to come to terms with problems left unsolved by , or inadequacies in, preceding novels.[79] And, indeed, Triptyque does tackle the problem of the referentiality of the stimulus drawn from the world of real art. Simon acknowledged in my interview with him that the three principal motifs of Triptyque are inspired by paintings by Bacon (the 'station balnéaire' motif), Paul Delvaux (the scenes situated in the 'banlieue industrielle') and Dubuffet[80] (the pastoral sequence). In each case, however, the discovery of the 'real' stimuli remains of ancillary, peripheral interest. One can see the extent to which Loreau's enumeration of the things to be seen in Dubuffet's painting and his emphasis on the 'enchevêtrement scriptural' of Dubuffet's art could be compared to Simon's meticulous definition of the elements of the landscape each in relation to the other, his verbal creation of a space where all the elements interlock very tightly. Dubuffet's painting is, therefore, also the obvious inspiration for the incorporation of this pastoral landscape in a jigsaw towards the end of the novel. The combination of scantily clad figures with an industrial cityscape full of railway buildings and factories is common to Delvaux's painting and to Simon's evocation of the couple

making love in the alleyway. Finally, according to Simon, the description of the naked woman sprawling on the bed in the bare, anonymous hotel-room and that of the man in black standing with his hand on a door-knob or sitting hunched in a chair were inspired by particular paintings shown in the Paris exhibition of Bacon's work (October 71-January 72) - Lying Figures (Nos. 46 and 89) and the Three Studies for a Crucifixion.

However, despite these very interesting connections with 'real' works of art, this novel constitutes a more tightly integrated, near-autonomous system. The intricate structural and verbal play between the three main motifs within the text ensures the displacement of the relationship between extra-text and text as the focus of interest. This play springs largely from a radicalization of the familiar technique whereby one motif is taken as a point of comparison in the description of another. Each motif has now become an object/representation contained within the imaginary world of the other two, which have been generated by elements in the motif which they are containing. The seaside motif is a film being shown in the cinema next to the alley where the drunken couple are making love, who in turn figure in a film being shown in the makeshift cinema/barn in the pastoral motif, which as we have seen figures as a jigsaw in the resort motif! This jigsaw has itself been partly generated out of a comparison used in a description of the branches of a tree in the pastoral sequence, which description could also be seen as a minor mise en abyme for the technique of emboîtement:

> Leurs contours sinueux le découpent en parcelles
> qui viennent s'emboîter comme les éléments d'un puzzle. (p.118)

The variations on this emboîtement procedure are too many to enumerate. They serve principally to problematize the relationships among the representation, the frame and the referential and including world. They also render impossible the establishment of a stable point of reference from which any of the motifs could be viewed and which would be crucial to the creation of a fictional illusion.

On the level of the subsidiary motifs, Simon retains the method whereby the text is produced out of variations on and combinations of a limited set of recurring words and images.[81] However, the limitation of his pictorial method to a very few paintings means that he is liberated from the need to multiply token connections between a large variety of extratextual representations. The referential stimuli have been linguistically assimilated into the system of motifs to a much greater extent than in Les Corps conducteurs. Whereas Les Corps conducteurs seemed rather like a grid of analogies superimposed upon a fairly large number of disparate representations, in Triptyque the very limited number of referential props means that Simon can elaborate fairly extensive variations on the one basic topos and pursue more freely associations generated by and between the principal motifs. Thus the uncanny, blood-stained figures adrift in the scarcely articulated space of Bacon's paintings combine with the description of the skinned rabbit at the beginning of the novel to produce the following fugal variations - the excessively made-up woman lying naked in the hotel room (pp.150-1), the prominently veined penis of the man in the barn-scene (pp.161-3), the sanguinary face of the clown (p.190), the ruddy face of the man in

the dark suit in the holiday resort sequence (pp.131, 223) who turns out to be a figure in a half-finished painting, where the ochre undercoating is left shining through (p.127).[82] The description of the lay-out of the church grounds (pp91-2) is a reprise, in concrete, picturesque terms, of the boy's geometry problem (p.26). The sex-scene in the barn (p.187) is described in terms very similar to those used in the descriptions of the clown/monkey act in the circus (pp.192,197-8), the reflex shudders of the dead rabbit (p.28), the tressautements of the lights of the search party (pp.214-5), the two young boys' encounter with the snake (pp.152-3), and the motor-bike which 's'engage en tressautant dans le chemin creux... et disparaît derrière les buissons du talus' (p.78). The descriptions produced by the text have a graphic vigour of their own independent of the pictorial stimuli which generated them - so much so that a German T.V. company has made a film of the novel on which Simon himself has collaborated. At my interview with him, he produced a set of stills taken from the film, two of which exploited the graphic potential of the linguistic echo between the description of the shadows projected by the light swinging above the dead rabbit and those projected by the stage light swinging above the naked woman in the film set. In both the film and the novel, the oblique reference to Bacon is completely subsumed in the graphic and verbal play within the total structure of the work of art.

Another analogy set up between the film-set scene and the other motifs takes the form of the reactivation of a slang metaphor, a technique fairly frequent in late Simon.

The waitress's incoherent and repetitive remonstrance with her drunken lover, as he tries to open his car door, in the 'banlieue' motif:

> T'es pas marteau non T'es pas complètement marteau beurré comme tu l'est Mais t'es pas marteau? (p.106)

generates both the noise of real hammers in the film Studio (p.131), and the antics in the clown sequence concerning the massive prop hammer, this whole act based on the primitive humour of the pun:

> Le clown crie Je vous ai demandé un marteau mais maintenant je vous demande si vous êtes pas marteau!.. Un marteau pas un joujou espèce de marteau! (pp.108-9)

The hypothetical drowning of the child in the pastoral sequence is produced (1) by the reactivation of the metaphoric uses of the word 'mort' to describe a battery (p.79) and a piece of stagnant water (p.208), and of 's'enterrer' in the teddy-boys' toast 'Ça s'enterre' (p.135); (2) by the promotion and exploration of the suggestions of the vehicle in the comparisons between the fountain and a sarcophagus (p.16) and between the train and a procession of coffins and (3) by a combination of implicit punning on the words 'lac'/'laque' (pp.222-3),[83] polyphonic play on the word 'noyer'[84] and the fictional suggestions of the description of the graveyard on pages 68-9. The description of the graveyard, like the notation of the cries of the frogs jumping into the water of the 'bras mort' (p.208), is not determined teleologically by its function in relation to the outcome of the plot; on the contrary, the 'outcome' of the 'plot' is overdetermined in relation to the rest of the text, and the 'main event' of the novel is, in fact, a linguistic non-event - it is never stated as such, is only one of the

suggestions of one of the many linguistic combinations and variations which do 'occur'.

Even more far-reaching in implication is the fact that the supposed donor of the text - the narrator - is a product of that text, is defined totally in relation to the specific syntagms which compose the body of the text. The stylistic indications of the narrative point of view of Triptyque define it as subjective and relative but a-personal; sensory perceptions relating to very specific points in space and time are noted with precision. However, the 'narrator' as such never identifies himself, nor even has recourse to a pronominal indication which would imply a human entity behind the text. In fact, it is this tacit assumption, on our part, of the existence/presence of a donor behind the text, independent of it and responsible for it, that Simon wishes to disturb. He is throwing another defamiliarizing spanner into the narrative works of the 'mimetic' novel in order to make us aware of the assumptions on which the realist illusion rests. While stressing the subjectivity and active participation of the narrative point of view, he at the same time obtrusively omits to attribute the narratorial voice to a specific je. Simon is once again elaborating a rather sophisticated paradox, the penetration of which requires of the reader an initiate's readiness to look out for illusionistic pitfalls. As both Butor and Émile Benveniste have pointed out, the implied narrator of a text can have no physical reality, can only be defined in relation to the parole of the texte, composed of a number of words selected from all the paradigms possible. He is defined in relation to

the act of linguistic selection.[85] In Triptyque, Simon builds up the narrative point of view through the notation of sensory impressions and spatial vectors in order to set in motion a set of conventional expectations and assumptions in the reader, to which he is going to refuse his authorial ratification by omitting to localize these sensations and spatial relations in a particular body or in a grammatical sign. The narrator of the text cannot be separated from the process of its production; it is the implied speaker intrinsic to the formation of every syntagm and is overdetermined by the procedures of selection which project particular elements from the paradigmatic axis of language on to the syntagmatic axis:

> Quelle est donc la 'réalité' à laquelle se réfère *je* ou *tu*? Uniquement une 'réalité de discours', qui est une chose très singulière. *Je* ne peut être défini qu'en termes de 'locution' non en terms d'objets, comme l'est un signe nominal. *Je* signifie 'la personne qui énonce la présente instance de discours contenant *je*.'[86]

Leçon de choses

In Leçon de choses, Simon takes this attenuation of the role of determination in favour of a promotion of overdetermination one step further. The narrative point of view is 'produced' and the text is generated negatively in relation to the objects described (i.e. initially posited) in the opening Générique section.[87] Whereas in Triptyque, the narrative point of view had been 'built up' through a description of sensory impressions, here it is a textual void which, by its linguistic presence, is negatively defined in relation to sensory impressions which have not been described (i.e. which are not linguistically present):

> Il n'a pas été dit si... une seconde ampoule plus forte n'éclaire pas la scène... Il n'a pas non plus été fait mention des bruits et du silence, ni des odeurs (poudre, sang, rat crevé, ou simplement cette senteur subtile, moribonde et rance de la poussière) qui règnent ou sont perceptibles dans le local, etc., etc. (p.11)

Here Simon gives a new twist to his demonstration of the fact that every individual speech act, every syntagm implies a speaker by its isolation and selection of certain words from the language as a whole, by its transformation of the possible into the actual and empirical. A standard procedure of the traditional novel was to posit as point of view a shifter or an a-meaningful proper name to which would be attached a number of psychological traits, physical features, a past background and a reason for telling the story, all of which would confer upon the narrator an illusion of finite individuality and of a life which preceded and outlasted the text. In Leçon de choses[5], Simon contrives no such naturalization of the existence of the text - on the contrary he draws attention to its arbitrariness, and its irreducibility to deterministic explanation. These fragments of information initially given are not subsequently bolstered by explanatory commentaries; they are immediately relativized by reference to their omissions. The specific combination of words and sentences of Leçon de choses[5] is there because the author wrote it, not because some narrator, with a psychologically valid urge to exorcize a particular experience, is impelled to recount it. In short, Leçon de choses[5] belongs to that 'partie de la littérature contemporaine' in which according to Barthes the constative function of the narration is transformed into a performative one. The 'referential content' of this opening is minimal, the

stress being on the gaps in the information relayed (i.e. stated) and on the stimulating conclusions to be drawn from those stressed gaps, i.e. that the very statement of an absence of information takes the form of a syntagmatic combination, and therefore implies a syntagm-maker -

> Cette rigueur [in point of view] recherchée par certains écrivains contemporains - n'est pas forcément un impératif esthétique; ce qu'on appelle le roman psychologique est ordinairement marqué par un mélange des deux systèmes, mobilisant successivement les signes de la non-personne et ceux de la personne; la 'psychologie' ne peut en effet - paradoxalement - s'accommoder d'un pur système de la personne, car en ramenant tout le récit à l'instance seule du discours, ou si l'on préfère à l'acte de locution, c'est le contenu même de la personne qui est menacé: la personne psychologique (d'ordre référentiel) n'a aucun rapport avec la personne linguistique, qui n'est jamais définie par des dispositions, des intentions ou des traits, mais seulement par sa place (codée) dans le discours. C'est cette personne formelle que l'on s'efforce aujourd'hui de parler; il s'agit d'une subversion importante... car elle vise à faire passer le récit de l'ordre purement constatif à l'ordre performatif, selon lequel le sens d'une parole est l'acte même qui la profère: aujourd'hui écrire n'est pas 'raconter' c'est dire que l'on raconte, et rapporter tout le référent ('ce qu'on dit') à cet acte de locution; c'est pourquoi une partie de la littérature contemporaine n'est plus descriptive mais transitive, s'efforçant d'accomplir dans la parole un présent si pur que tout le discours s'identifie à l'acte qui le délivre, tout le <u>logos</u> étant ramené - ou étendu - à une <u>lexis</u>.[88]

The opening of <u>Leçon de choses</u> emphasizes the fact that it and its implied narrator are to be defined, simultaneously and negatively, against the linguistic system from which the elements of which they are composed are drawn. Every statement is shown to be a compromise with completeness, every point of view a compromise with omniscience. Having established once and for all the irreducible arbitrariness[89] of the narratorial 'voice' and the lack of substance of the information it offers, Simon is then free to counteract, as opposed to camouflage, it by setting up a textual system

which hangs together by force of its own combinations and variations, and not through some spurious appeal to realistic determination.

The rest of this text is generated from the description of the shadows in this opening Générique. Simon is less interested in the specific light and perspectival effects, than in the paradox that the shadows pre-exist textually the objects which supposedly project them.[90] They are the arbitrary données from which these latter are generated, the textual cause rather than the natural effect of certain light conditions. Thus in Générique, the presence of another light and a person is deduced/produced from the shadows -

> Ainsi il n'a pas été dit si (peut-être par une porte ouverte sur un corridor ou une autre pièce) une seconde ampoule plus forte n'éclaire pas la scène, ce qui expliquerait la présence d'ombres portées très opaques (presque noires) qui s'allongent sur le carrelage à partir des objets visibles (décrits) ou invisibles - et peut-être aussi celle, échassière et distendue, d'un personnage qui se tient debout dans l'encadrement de la porte.

In the closing pendant section 'Courts circuits', the narrator proceeds from that second light, which is now taken for granted, to describe the shadows projected - i.e. from realistic cause to effect:

> Pénétrant par une porte ouverte sur un corridor ou une autre pièce, la lumière d'une seconde ampoule, plus forte, éclaire la scène, ce qui explique la présence d'ombres portées tres opaques (presque noires) qui s'allongent sur le carrelage à partir des objets visibles.(p.178)

In the course of the production of the text, the hypothetical light and open door have become textual fact, and indeed the whole novel can be seen to have consisted in the establishment of the existence (i.e. the textual fabrication) of the hypothetical light bulb at the beginning. It comes

to an end (as may the character) when one of the promeneuses destroys this whole process by switching on the light in the unfinished building and short-circuiting it!

The fact that the generative shadows at the beginning are described in relation to a building which is being demolished (i.e. the textual future of the description is at odds with the lack of a 'real' future of the house), while the 'real' light bulb mentioned in the last pages of the novel puts an end to the construction of the house (i.e. the end of the text comes at a potential new beginning), is a typical Simonesque paradox. He is asserting the independence of the text in relation to probability in the real world and in relation to the criteria of fictional potential in the traditional 'story'-based novel.

Within the body of the text, most of the combinatory devices which we have already noted figure with varying frequency and importance. To avoid repetition, I shall restrict myself to a footnote reference here,[91] confining the rest of my discussion to the rather more thought-provoking use of emboîtement in this novel. On page 145, we witness a fairly standard process in Simon - here the 'conclusion' of the work-site motif becomes the probable subject of a fragmented newspaper article in the war episode:

> ... IERS (ouvriers?) IVRE... (ivres?)... ENT (périssent?) ECRA... (écrasés?)... EUX (deux?)... OMB... (tombés?)... EMENT (effrondrement?) EN...(entraînés?)... COR... (encorbellement?).

However, twenty-two pages later these headlines are completed in a rather different way to 'complete' the cliff-top motif:

> IERS (vacanciers?)... IVRE (suivre?) ECRAS... (écrasés?) ... EUX (affreux?) AC... (accident?)... EMENT (effondrement?) EN... (ensevelis?)... UT... (chute?) ROCH... (rochers?) COR... (corniche?) (p.167),

while on page 182 it is the conclusion of the soldier motif which is at issue in a newspaper in the cliff-top motif:

> IERS (cavaliers?)... IVRE (livrent?)... ENT (courageusement?) ECRA... (écrasants?)... RIEUX (furieux?)... OMB... (combats?)... EMENT (de retardement?) EN... (ennemi?)... ROCH... (accroché?)... COR... (corps à corps?).

What these variations on the reconstructibility of the fragmented newspaper headlines indicate is the way in which a variety of narratives can be produced from a very limited set of generators, and the extent to which, in a linguistic system where there is no one-to-one relationship between words and meaning, the écrivain is free to exploit phonetic and syllabic differentiation and association, in a whole gamut of possible combinations which are completely independent of external determinants. These passages also illustrate the arbitrary nature of the dénouement in the traditional novel - here the conclusions for three very different motifs have been generated out of the same fragment of langue.[92] In Simon's novel, no attempt is made to relate the end of the story to some principle of logical necessity, to naturalize it by the imposition of a disingenuously camouflaged teleology; the conclusions are simply the recombination to the point of exhaustion of certain linguistic elements. Similarly, the conclusion to the novel as a whole takes the form of the coalescence of the three motifs in one - the women inspect the worksite where the masons are working, and the war motif is an article in the entrepreneur's newspaper. All three motifs are peremptorily dispatched in a short-circuit which, in terms of the motivation of the fiction and vraisemblance, is gratuitous and a result of chance. In the course of the fiction, the arbitrariness of the discourse has, by a

neat sleight of hand, been transferred to the 'world' of the fiction.

This second chapter has been principally concerned to show the way in which Simon turned to his own advantage the limitations imposed on the notion of art and representation by the insights which his interest in perception brought him. We commenced this chapter with an account of his negative reaction against the older realistic and naturalistic novel paradigm through a relativization ad absurdum of the notion of representation. Here our development of the theoretical implications of some of Simon's own statements showed his sensitivity to the conditions of human perception and his reaction against the premises of the realistic novel to be simply two sides of the same coin. Gradually, however, we saw the way in which the theme of language began to assume more and more importance in the course of Simon's work.

In the early works, the relationship between the individual and language is simply one aspect of the experience of being-in-the-world. In the course of his career, and in particular from La Route des Flandres on, however, we saw the way in which in both his explicit interview comments and in the textual body of his work itself, he became progressively more aware of both the positive and negative implications, for the écrivain, of the situation of the individual within the differential linguistic system. Until then, the author had been exempted from at least some of the limitations to which the characters he described were subject - their communication was incoherent and banal but the writer

continued to try to express this incoherence to the reader through narratorial approximations, circumlocutions, correlatory parentheses. The interviews after La Route des Flandres evidence an increasing concern for theoretical rigour, and for a radicalization of the implications of and subscription to the view of language as an integral, differential system. Thus Simon begins to modify the Chklovskian conception of the work of art as a means of defamiliarization; he directs that defamiliarization firstly on to the techniques and devices involved in the work of art itself, and then increasingly on to the mechanisms by which language itself functions, in particular metaphor and phonetic differentiation and association.

Here, our schematic, polarized model derived from a modification and combination of the Barthian notion of determination and the Lacanian notion of overdetermination provided a simple but useful gauge of Simon's evolution from a subversion of the meaningful distribution of content in traditional fiction and the promotion of the pictorially vivid, digressively described tableau, to a more rigorous exploration of the suggestions of an implicit network of motifs. In this connection, we noted the way in which his negative and approximative definitions gave way to an associative, albeit limited glissement along the paradigmatic axis of language. Furthermore, the fact that the comparisons and the negative definitions which do remain tend more and more to take previous passages in the same text as their point of reference bears witness to a more rigorous internalization of the generative process - i.e. apart from a few arbitrarily chosen generators at the outset, the text becomes

its own point of reference, and more general cultural codes diminish in importance. The instituted meanings of everyday utilitarian discourse give way for the duration of the text at least to the recombinations of the authentic parole.

Chapter 3.

Time and History

The last two sections of this thesis, although particularly concerned to show the fundamental common ground of Simon's perceptual and representational concerns and priorities, have treated those issues as discrete but related topics. In this shorter section, I shall consider the crucial question of the perception and representation of time. Here, the principal issues at stake - the perception of time passing, *témoignage*, memory, historiographical valorization, the representation of duration and the manipulation of a hypothetical reader's time - compose a complex set of relationships which are constantly merging, fluctuating and evading definition. It is hoped that the chapter will do justice to a philosophical issue which greatly preoccupies Simon in his middle period, while providing a consistent synthesis of the development sketched out in our two earlier sections.

The argument will follow a now familiar pattern. My first section will discuss (i) Simon's relativization of traditional approaches to time, and (ii) his subversion of a number of specific historiographical conventions. Since I have already discussed Simon's treatment of the question of the perception of time passing,[1] it will figure here only in so far as it explains and dictates Simon's *critique* of classical approaches.

The second section will then try to define Simon's own conception of time and history, and to describe the evolution of that conception in the course of the principal stages of

his work. It will consist of three subsections dealing with (i) time in relation to responsibility, (ii) personal memory and cultural memory, (iii) the textual dimension of the speeds and order of narration.

I THE REACTION AGAINST TRADITION

(i) The Relativization of Traditional Approaches to Time

Simon questions the validity of traditional representations of time partly by multiplying his references to their variables, to the point where the very concept of temporal measurement dissolves into a multitude of discrete activities with no necessary common factors. This is a facile but effective device, the crudity of whose mechanisms is perhaps a gauge of the complacency and persistence of the assumptions upon which some of our most basic co-ordinates are founded. Nevertheless, overstated though his attack may be, its premises are soundly established in relation to his study of the perception of time passing, and its challenge is based on the observation of three distinct types of temporal measurement: time in terms of rhythm; time as a process of change; time in terms of human activities.

Time as Rhythm

Throughout his work, Simon evidences an awareness of the crucial role of rhythm in the perception of time. All common systems of temporal measurement are, like our linguistic system, based on a combination of continuity and discontinuity;

they are both systems of relations with no absolute meanings but transected by token signs which endow both the intervals and the interruptions with meaning. Simon is constantly pointing to the lack of any absolute scale of temporal measurement; the co-ordinates are variable, and can take the form of drops of water (BP, p.22), lighthouse-flashes (LC, p.171), the regulated illumination of the various segments of a neon light (P, pp.67-8). More subversive still is the suggestion that the intervals between these interruptions are variable, not only in relation to other systems, but within a particular 'system'. Our everyday perception and measurement of time is highly approximative and can, for example, take the form of the not necessarily regular and probably irregular snores of a drunk (G, p.180). The greater the intervals and the more uniform the context in which they are perceived, the less rigorously regular they need to be. Thus in Histoire, the amorphous and desultory life of the narrator's mother is articulated by the post-cards intermittently and more or less regularly received from his father:

> ces messages insistants et en quelque sorte brutaux par leur tranquillité même leur régularité leur patient laconisme, jalons dans ce qui n'était pour elle qu'immuable immobilité un temps toujours identique toujours recommencé heures jours semaines non pas se succédant mais simplement se remplaçant dans la sérénité de son immuable univers.(p.33)

Simon's inquiry into the relationship between forme and fond has alerted him to the inverse relationship between uniformity of context and sufficient distinctiveness of form. In a life that is defined in terms of waiting, the most minor and most roughly regular incident serves as a sign.

Most frequently perhaps, Simon draws attention to the suspect accuracy of, and our unquestioning reliance on, contingently affected 'systems' of measurement, by the description of a malfunctioning tool, noting the anomalous two-minute jump of a clock:

> l'horloge pneumatique du carrefour indiquant neuf heures du soir, puis la grande aiguille sautant brusquement à neuf heures deux ce qui le fit, dit-il, comme se réveiller, prenant conscience du temps qui s'était écoulé depuis qu'il était là, c'est-à-dire de cette progression bizarre et saccadée, discontinue, du temps fait apparemment d'une succession de... fragments solidifiés. (P, pp.52-3)

As in the subversion of linguistic clichés of common-sense discourse, the disruption of a standardized method of selection of signs on the paradigmatic scale of possible indicators (i.e. hours, minutes, seconds) results in a foregrounding of the system and a more immediate sensory appreciation of time passing and its relationship to one's personal preoccupations or lack of them.

It is a recognition of the relativity of conventional systems of temporal measurement which partly triggers off Louis' quest for the authentic act. Le Tricheur starts with Louis' exasperated rejection of his watch, as a sign of his awareness of the way in which man's attempt to control time has backfired on him and enslaved him. The opening of the final section of the novel constitutes a pendant commentary on the first scene. This is an account of a civil servant's grudging purchase of a watch from Ephraïm. The buyer's complaints about the cost of repairs and his angry recognition of defeat before the necessity of possessing a watch (i.e. one's possession by a watch) looks back to Louis' complaints about the inaccuracy and cost of repairs

to his watch, and sums up the attitude which Louis himself is trying to throw off. However, ironically, this recognition of defeat on the part of the civil servant also anticipates the defeat registered by Louis when he hears the church-clock chiming immediately after the murder. These clock-chimes mark the failure of this and the earlier gesture which were, theoretically, to release him from the domination of routine, and from contingency and the determinism of the past. For his watch is a metaphor for his Oedipus complex, in that it is something which he inherited from his father/creator via his mother and would like to discard, just as he would have liked to obliterate the memory of his father from his mother's mind. Viewed in this light, his initial gesture is not simply childish but ironically self-defeating - his rejection of time illustrates the extent to which his gesture and the future killing of the priest/father-figure are, in fact, determined by psychological factors from his childhood, illustrates the weight of personal past which all the characters of Le Tricheur trail along behind them in one form or another:

> C'était ainsi que les choses vous suivaient... Avec cette immobile et persévérante ténacité d'ombre fluide, comme si l'air qui se souvient gardait intactes les paroles, encore vivantes du son des voix qui les ont portées. Les voix éteintes continuent à traîner, lourdes de l'obscure pesanteur du passé. (pp.82-3)

The shift in interest from questions of determinism and responsibility to more general phenomenological issues, discussed in chapter one, is matched by a reconception of temporal perception which puts a rather different slant on its relativity. Time begins to lose its substantive status,

is no longer the definable entity of a burden of personal past; more frequently, it is viewed simply as an aspect of man's prereflective involvement in the world. This is probably the sense of those many passages in Simon's work where time is identified with the processes of bodily functions. Normally,we remain unconscious of those functions, but a crisis in our relationship with our Lebenswelt, an interruption in the regularity of our routine alerts us to sensory rhythms at work below the threshold of consciousness and independent of psychological factors which, we naively assume, define us as individuals. In crises, one is made aware of the direct relationship between the sensory perception of time and a prereflective, intersubjectively inherited life-force at work in us. On page 266 of Le Sacre du printemps, Simon gives this notion a particular twist, in order to mark an important thematic and psychological development in his novel. Here, the crisis takes the form of Bernard's realization of the similarities between himself and his step-father, and Bernard's perception of time is suddenly identified with his awareness of the rhythm of his step-father's breathing. The recognition of his own relativity comes with an increased sensitivity to the living presence of the Other (whether that Other takes the form of the step-father, Edith or his mother) whom he had solipsistically schematized into a caricature, and the discovery of an intersubjective commitment to the world which makes a mockery both of his attempt to suppress his own physicality and his melodramatic horror at his mother's sexuality. It is fitting that his realization of a fundamental level of experience in which the Other also participates should take the form of a new experience

of time (something else he had tried to control/suppress through schematization) which takes into account the incorporation of the life-force by the Other.

In Le Vent, Simon uses the description of the boxing-match to illustrate the more complex but fundamental, connections between perception of time, the sensation of bodily rhythm, and the primal instinct for survival through the control of external forces in one's environment:

> c'était encore comme si on pouvait percevoir le temps en train de sourdre de s'écouler avec la sueur, le bourdonnement du temps confondu avec celui du sang se précipitant sous la peau brune du gitan et trop blanche de l'autre, se ruant en mugissant dans les ramifications astucieuses et compliquées des artères. (pp.87-8)

The close attention to incidents which epitomize the essential relationship between the notion of time passing and a prereflective commitment to life does not question the concept of time, but it does advance the sceptical examination of temporal meaning systems, by showing that the relative systems of temporal measurement are themselves dependent upon a more fundamental subjective relationship between man and his Lebenswelt.

Time as a Process, Change

Simon's study of time as change and process takes up a paradoxical reconciliation central to everyday temporal measurement. The belief in the infinite extensibility of time co-exists along with pragmatic historicizing serialization and the fragmentation of human civilisation into discrete units. The temporally situated individual believes in the existence of beginnings, endings and events, and yet makes panchronic hypotheses about time as an infinity with no verifiable origin

or foreseeable end. The best summary of this paradox in Simon's work is to be found in a passage in La Corde raide (p.170), already discussed in another connection, where he elaborates his own distinction between what is permanent and intersubjectively inherited in the world and what is ephemeral and idiosyncratically perceived by finite individuals. Of his characters, Georges is perhaps most sensitive to its bewildering implications, caught as he is as a contingent human being in an activity which is age-old, i.e. war:

> comment peut-on dire depuis combien de temps un homme est mort puisque pour lui hier tout à l'heure et demain ont définitivement cessé d'exister c'est-à-dire de le préoccuper. (RF, pp.105-6)[2]

Once again Simon is not invalidating a specific conception of time; he is merely dismantling the paradoxical mechanism on which it is based, and which is generally ignored in our everyday, intention-governed view of things. Thus, there is running through his novels an implicit tension between the infinitely revolving, regenerative cycle of Nature as perceived by humanity in general and at all stages of 'history' - perceived in the changes of the season,[3] the variations in natural light conditions,[4] or in the passing of clouds[5] - and time viewed in terms of the process of dying which begins at birth, and which manifests itself in the degradation of human values, such as currency devaluation (H, pp.141-4, 223; Hist, pp.101-2) and the passing of fashion (H, pp.70-1; RF, pp.242-3). The theme is an old one, but Simon is much less interested in the traditional exploitation of the tragic awareness of the finite, than in the defamiliarizing perspective which it can cast on certain things. His reconciliation of the usually opposed

concepts of decay and fat-accumulation, in the description of Pierre and Sabine in L'Herbe, is an obvious example of his delight in thought-provoking paradoxes. Elsewhere, he seems to be particularly attracted by the neat symmetry of discrepant views of the same thing according to whether one considers it in relation to natural processes:

> le secret remue-ménage d'atomes en train de permuter pour s'organiser selon une structure différente, minérale ou cristalline (RF, pp.242-3)

or human cultural history:

> les ossements des défunts Rossinantes et des défunts Bucéphales (et des défunts chevaliers, des défunts cochers de fiacre et des défunts Alexandres) retournés à l'état de chaux friable. (RF, p.242)

Undoubtedly, the most explicitly, if rather clumsily indicated, symbol of the 'doublethink' in this reconciliation of discrepant views of time is to be found in Gulliver, in the contrapuntal juxtaposition of the clock and the vinegar bottle on Tom's mantel-piece (G, p.321). Such a contiguity epitomizes the co-existence in the human mind of desires to control time through measurement, and to deny it by a pre-emptive acceleration of its natural corrosive processes. The paradox is further complicated by the symmetrical counterpoint between the fact that the corrosive chemical is a preservative and the fact that the man-made measurer of time - the clock - is constantly being eaten away inside by rust.

Time in Terms of Human Activities

Against this general framework of the tension between humanity's attempts to control time and its tacit awareness of its finite status in a universe of whose temporal and

spatial dimensions it can scarcely conceive, Simon's specifically phenomenological interests result in a localized focus on the variables in the perception of duration, and in particular, on the discrepant effects of diverse human activities on that perception. The examples of this stress on the relative value of time for different people according to their occupations and preoccupations are many and varied. In general however, they fall into two main categories - that where the character's intentional relationship with the world is imbalanced and transformed into a specific obsession, and for whom time is a crucial factor in the fulfilment of their fears or desires; that where the character's normal intentional relationship with the world is dislocated and relaxed to the point where the intervals between temporal indicators take on unbearable and monumental proportions. In the first category, I would include Louis' self-contradictory desire to defeat time in an <u>acte gratuit</u> which fails to take into account the fact that any project or aspiration is a form of compromise with time. Both his sense of urgency and his hesitations are unwitting admissions of time as an ineradicable component in human action. Likewise in this first category, I would include Belle's wish-fulfilment, which works nostalgically by obsessively projecting past alternatives into the future, Gauthier's desperate appeal to the bitter-sweet pleasure of his last night with Catherine before he went to the front (<u>LT</u>, pp.85, 95), the telescoping of remembered and mythic moments resulting from a soldier's belief in this impending death (<u>BP</u>, pp.84, 108), the contrast between the durational value of a moment for a man getting out of a taxi and paying his fare and for another man entering

a restaurant and shooting someone (P, pp.94-9), the acceleration of time when one's mind is being dominated by panic at the sensation of being drawn into a compromising situation (V, p.72), the view of a man dominated by an obsessional professional logic and who sees time in terms of inheritance, succession and legal contracts (V, pp.109-11). Under the second category, I would list Simon's evocation of time in relation to a feeling of monumental boredom under stifling conditions (LT, pp.168, 180), a variation on the old Christian eschatalogic equation of time and suffering (SP, p.236; V, passim), the relationship between sense of duration and motivation and a general interest in the psychology of waiting (G, p.33; Hist, passim), the surrealistically heightened perception, under certain stress conditions such as illness (CC, p.137) of the various stages of things normally taken for granted. In each of these examples, Simon has focused on specific combinations of conditions where the mechanism of habit falters and the character suddenly realizes his own contingency and the anguishing insolite of time perceived in a context other than that of the daily tasks to be fulfilled (such as the time necessary for the demolishing of a wall in Leçon de choses, p.144).

Jean Baudrillard[6] has illustrated the way in which an illusory dominance of time is effected through the synchronization of watches and the perception of the world through a network of serialized, consumer-oriented objects. According to Baudrillard, the watch epitomizes this articulation of the world according to a system of sign-objects; this transformation of the homely clock into a ubiquitous portable talisman indicates the apparently complete domestication of time (pp.133-4).

Simon does not attack the self-evident practical value of synchronized temporal measurement. What he does undermine is the unthinking faith in a convention which has no objective substance. The assumption of the objective validity of temporal conventions involves a naive investment of authority in what are no more than token differential indices. Taken to its 'logical' limits, this results in a near-superstitious obsession and a fetishistic attempt to substantify a relational (and relative) meaning-system. In Le Sacre du printemps, this misplaced belief of Bernard has been nurtured by the selective and stultifying structure of routine which has governed his life. A single unforeseen demand on his time involving a radical modification of the day's activities results in mensural anarchy and the figures on his watch dissolve before his eyes (p.128).[7] His disorientation after his confused and amorphous experience of the sordid world of petty crime, pathetic machination and vain ambitions. conveys well the Angst which reasserts its dominance when the temporal framework of routine is suspended and revealed as relative:

> Au présent, avec la sensation de quelqu'un mal réveillé (au sortir des rues écartées et mortes, c'était comme si le bruit, le tintamarre gigantesque de la ville, bien qu'il n'eût cessé, même au fond de la chambre close, d'en percevoir l'existence, l'agressait, lui sautait au visage avec une violence d'autant plus grande qu'il éprouvait comme un honteux malaise, l'obscène conscience d'une désertion, d'une trahison ... à l'égard de sa condition de créature diurne habitué à considérer le temps comme une durée découpée en tranches alternativement consacrées...les unes à la veille, à l'action, les autres...au repos, au sommeil, c'est-à-dire, à leur symbole: le lit). (pp.120-1)

Sometimes, the suspension of habitual frames of reference results in a widening of the perspective to suggest something of the infinity of potential variations in the use, perception

and evaluation of a particular moment for particular people. Here the defamiliarization is intended to bewilder rather than to alarm. In Histoire, the variety of the messages inscribed in the bundle of correspondence received by the narrator's mother underlines the double relativity of the variations in temporal perception and in the linguistic representation of a period of time. Thus Charles' meticulous notation, in a letter (pp.132-4), of his sensory impressions contrasts sharply with a message such as 'Aujourd'hui langoustes vivantes' (p.137). Similarly, in terms of the experience of those affected by it, as opposed to historiographical representation, the Spanish Civil War can be viewed as an extension of the summer holidays of the rich or the endless transportation of office equipment and furniture (P, pp.34-5).[8]

Undoubtedly, one of the most explicit commentaries on this theme is to be found in Le Tricheur, where Louis' meditations - triggered off by his observation that the two local church clocks are not synchronized - on what all the other people he ever knew are doing at that moment, are given a whole page's treatment:

> Ah! attention... Deux coups: la demie. Pas entendu sonner le quart... Qu'est-ce qui sonne encore? Un, deux. La demie toujours. Il doit y avoir une autre église. Ne marchant pas en même temps et la gare non plus probablement... Heures. Vingt-quatre enserrant la ronde terre. Quelle heure maintenant à Saïgon... deux, trois? Trois ou quatre heures de l'après-midi à peu près. Je me rappelle Irina, la petite putain russe du 'Paradise'. Doit dormir aussi maintenant. Sieste, serviette éponge... (pp.34-5)

Simon highlights the irony of the fact that the man who wants to act, and thus suppress time, is the same one who is wandering about wondering what everyone else is doing.

In La Route des Flandres, Simon uses another such panoramic rumination, on the part of the principal character, to render more immediate the shocking discrepancy between the contemporaneous experience of the soldier in the thick of the débâcle on the one hand, and the domestic routine of civilian life and the unheeding rhythm of nature on the other:

> Environ donc deux heures de l'après-midi, le moment où les oiseaux s'arrêtent de chanter où les fleurs se recroquevillent et pendent à demi flétries sous le soleil, où les gens finissent d'habitude de boire leur café où les vendeurs de journaux du soir proposent leur première ration de gros titres mais pas encore Sport Complet ou La Veine. (RF, pp.306-7)

More important, however, in the long term is the crucial relationship implied in these examples between the relativization of time and the perception of the Other or the not-I. This vital connection includes a capacity to empathize with certain among one's contemporaries and one's ancestors alike which, taken to extremes in La Route des Flandres, results in a dissolution of the narrator's sense of identity. The conjectural accommodation of the time-scale of another alerts one to the arbitrariness and solipsism of one's own rhythm.

The lengthy description of the broken-down Baroque clock in L'Herbe (p.203), with its hands pointing at any one time to a multitude of superimposed dials and different frames of reference epitomizes and is a monument to the ambitious vanity of this attempt to subordinate the infinity of the world to the necessarily limited - however varied - scales of measurement of a finite human construct.

Taken further, this relativization of the quality/value of time for different people implies a relativization of the quality of different moments for a single person and an atomization of time. The pulverization of duration, in certain conditions, into a mass of discrete sensations is well-illustrated in Simon's fiction, and is expressed in a number of pseudo-scientific metaphors. On several occasions, his narrators sum up the passing of time not as a continuum, but as a molecular recombination (RF, p242; P, pp.12, 206), or a series of diminishing units which suggest the infinite divisibility of time. The epigraph to Histoire stresses the tendency of man-made historical reconstructions constantly to dissolve and revert to a state of fragmentation:

> Cela nous submerge. Nous l'organisons. Cela tombe en morceaux.
>
> Nous l'organisons de nouveau et tombons nous-mêmes en morceaux.

while that of L'Herbe states our inability to perceive the continuous processes of time:

> Personne ne fait l'histoire, on ne la voit pas, pas plus qu'on ne voit l'herbe pousser.

One of the principal causes of this fragmentation of time is our intermittent perception of it. We have already looked at the counteractive salvaging of vivid moments of the past by associative memory. Now, we shall consider the perception of the instant as a discrete unit in the immediate.

The various accounts in La Route des Flandres and La Bataille de Pharsale of the ambush during the débâcle provide some of the best examples of this atomistic perception of time. The slow-motion accounts of Wack's death and the

narrator's flight along a railway track isolate and magnify what is at most a few seconds or minutes, to the point where all notion of conventional, regular measurement becomes irrelevant. These moments constitute intensely vivid, discrete units; their subjective valorization and impressionistic distension defy all 'objective' measurement. In flight, the narrator's awareness of the vital importance of the particular instant, combined with a desire to beat time through the maximum speed of movement, locks instant and gesture in an indissoluble relationship such that the notions of temporal flow and effective movement are rendered irrelevant. Time has temporarily ceased to exist as a continuum and - turning the tables on or misinterpreting Zeno's subversive reductio ad absurdum of the notion of dense temporal order and his attempt to refute the view that space and time have an atomic structure - Simon seems to take Zeno's paradoxes of motion literally and to suggest that they are experientially verifiable:

> je ne marchais même plus à la vitesse d'un homme au pas il me fallait même faire un effort pour ouvrir assez mes jambes à l'écartement des traverses... *Achille immobile à grands pas*. (BP, p.84)[9]

The account of Georges'/the narrator's recovery of conscious control, supposedly a few minutes later, offers a rather more variegated example of this atomized perception of time. What we might expect to be an organic, gradual process is perceived rather as a multitude of discrete sensations. This is particularly evident in the version in La Route des Flandres (pp.163-4) where the succession of finite verbs in the past historic and their conjunction with temporal phrases conveying change and suddenness[10]

give the impression of time as a multitude of vivid, isolated perceptions. Throughout this passage, there is an interesting and suggestive play on imperfect and past historic tenses whereby the imperfect verbs constitute a uniform background of peripherally perceived processes in the natural world relaying the valorized moments forcefully perceived by the narrator and evoked in the past historic.

However, despite these instances of the impressionistic atomization of time, nowhere in Simon is the notion of time passing completely dissolved as such. It may be temporarily suspended as in the first example, but the very isolation of a moment and the impression of <u>insolite</u> it creates imply a contrasting preceding and following continuum; it may be atomized into a mass of vivid valorized sensations but it nevertheless remains dense i.e. between any two vivid and distinct instants constituting the perceptual form, there are others which are only marginally or intermittently perceived. Despite his literal interpretation of Zeno's paradox and the prominence in his work of the psychological experience of time as a series of distinct presents, there is no evidence of an active attempt to discredit the notion of time as a continuum. Indeed, the example we have just looked at suggests rather that he has structured his depiction of the play between <u>forme</u> and <u>fond</u> in order to accommodate both vivid psychological time and continuity. As we have already remarked, Simon's attack on traditional objective views of time may be simplistic but it is much less aggressive and radical than his relativization of traditional fictional representation. The physical and philosophical implications of relativity

are left to the specialist. The limits of non-algebraic expression are not passed; his relativization remains on this side of the threshhold of ready comprehensibility and potential, if unusual, human experience.

(ii) The Subversion of Historical Representation

Turning now to Simon's more specific critique of historical representation as such, I would argue that this critique is not aimed at any one school of thought in the philosophy of history, or at any other methodology in the practice of historiographical research or report. His attack is rather directed upon a number of basic tool-concepts shared by both common-sensical approaches to history and more far-reaching philosophical justifications of the activity. This section will look at the three main areas of contention involved - his subversion of the historical name and of the synthetic concept of the event, his implicit challenge to the synthesis of such historic events into a causally or logically related sequence, and his reformulation of the status of the témoignage and the document upon which a great many historical deductions are based.

The Name, the Event

Just as the metafictional subversion of the classical realist novel takes issue with the assumed substantiality of the name and with the synthesis of trivial notations into an implicitly named proairetic sequence,[11] so Simon's subversion of the assumptions of the commonsensical approach to history challenges the integrity of the historical name,

and the synthesis of a number of discrete things and disparate experiences into a single nameable unit.

The demonstration of the purely relative currency of a particular historical label - which, for people of a certain nationality or age, is so well known that an arbitrary, purely economic exchange token is regarded as having an absolute, full and substantive significance - is a theme which runs throughout Simon's work.[12] In History, the name may seem to have a greater justification because of its connection with a particular place or person; however, this is simply a specious camouflage of an arbitrary act of geographical nomination at a more fundamental level or an earlier stage. Simon is constantly indicating the relativity and frequent irrelevance of the notion of geographical boundaries and national nomination. In Le Tricheur, Gauthier exposes in cynical terms the real rationale behind questions of territory in war such as those which preoccupy the barman of the café in which he stops to drink. The territorial name on which hangs so much nationalistic pride and outraged honour is, in fact, a metonymic and fetishistic displacement of the desire to impose meaning where there is none (in this case, on the war experience) and to appropriate something of substance from an essentially destructive enterprise:

> Probablement qu'il était sûr que les Allemands viendraient lui reprendre l'Alsace-Lorraine, aussi sûr qu'elle lui appartenait maintenant. Parce qu'il fallait bien qu'il eût gagné quelque chose pendant ces quatre ans de sa vie passés là où on avait peur. (LT, p.104)

The name is a talisman or magic barrier between the soldier and the existential panic aroused by an inkling of the

absurdity of the enterprise in which he is involved. Similarly in Leçon de choses (p.87), the astonishment of the soldiers, when they discover that the house in which they are hiding - i.e. the position which they are defending - was previously owned by Germans, undermines completely the belief in clear-cut categories which make the conduct of warfare possible. In the same book, the mason qualifies his equation of the labels chleus and espinglos with that of fascistes, lest he offend his Catalan colleague; this qualification highlights the element of necessary double-think involved in the nominalism which is called nationalism. It requires a dissociation of the self, and those like oneself, from the general objectification of the rest of the world through the act of naming. In this passage, the solidity of identity implicit in the demarcation of territory begins to dissolve- the customary identification of name and place on which nationalism is founded is simply an arbitrary system of differential relations, which serves to articulate an otherwise conceptually amorphous world. The conflict between nations proves to be a distortion and polarization of one of many differential linguistic relationships:

> un nom de chez toi Reixach? Après tout si tu le dis tu dois le savoir c'est bien possible vu que chleus ou espinglos c'est du pareil au même tous fascistes de mes sans offense hein? Le jeune maçon dit je suis de l'Ampurdan c'est pas l'Espagne. Le vieux maçon dit pas l'Espagne quelle langue tu causes? Le jeune maçon dit le catalan mais je parle aussi castillan jé. Le vieux maçon dit sans offense c'est pas des gars comme toi ou comme moi que je cause.(p.123).

As far as his relativization of the personal proper name is concerned, Simon's most thorough-going attack on the mythification of the unique historical hero or scoundrel

occurs in La Corde raide. By taking up the scandal-mongering demand for verification as to whether or not the bogey-man of the century - Hitler - was dead, and by pursuing the implications of such a questioning of assumed fact, he shows the arbitrariness and selectiveness of the criteria regarding 'proper historical questions' and suggests the open interpretability of a phenomenon which has since been defined in terms so rigid as to become a myth or symbol of evil -

> bientôt je passe à côté d'une petite affiche déjà déchirée:
>
> Salle Wagram
>
> HITLER EST-IL MORT?
>
> Qu'en pensez-vous? Hitler est-il mort? Chaque fois que je passe, le petit carré de papier blanc sali est là avec son interrogation. Chaque fois il est un peu plus terne, un peu plus délavé, mais je vois toujours les six lettres noires et le point d'interrogation... Savez-vous? Que faut-il en croire? Et puis d'abord qui est-ce, Hitler? Des lettres qui forment un nom et des photographies de journaux? Du noir et du rouge? Un type qui gueule? Un type qui rage? Un type méchant? Un fou? Une religion? Des tas de morts? Un Allemand? L'idée de violence? Quelque chose où il y a du fer? Un sale type? Des sales types? Des Allemands? Des Français? Des sales types de tous les pays? Des sales idées? (p.172)

Simon reverses the economic synthesis and hierarchization of multiple meanings in a single tag, and explores the potential and thought-provoking associations generated by this name when it is released from its one-to-one relationship with a primary moralizing meaning. The stress on the now purely linguistic and printed paper existence of the presumably defunct Hitler shows an awareness of the way in which what is superficially taken to be a unique historical phenomenon is imperceptibly assimilated into the linguistic system, where meaning is not the exclusive substantive attribute of specific words but springs from relations

between specific words and the whole of the rest of the system. The attempt to define Hitler in relation to a list of varied adjectives, nouns and verbs, all of which are equally valid, suggests an infinite regress of possible epithets.

Simon's attack on the tool-concept of 'event' is based on a combination of this linguistic relativism and his own empirical experience of warfare. Thus, he attacks it on two levels - the name given to an incident and the process of synthesis which allowed it to be named in the first place.

The name of the historical event is ultimately only the tip of the synthesizing iceberg and Simon does not spend too much ink on its relatively easy subversion. I shall concentrate on a few brief but suggestive examples. One such example is the commentary in La Bataille de Pharsale on the discrepancy in the names of a battle viewed in pre-Christian and post-Christian perspectives:

> bataille de comment déjà mot qui veut dire les Têtes de Chien bataille de Pharsale bataille contre les Turcs quel nom avant après Jésus-Christ pendant comment savoir le sort du monde. (p.56)

Here, Simon complicates the synchronic spatial relativization we have already noted in his treatment of the notion of territory, by a brief reference to the diachronic perspective of historical change. However, he is less interested in historical change as such, than he is in its effect on the synchronic semantic relationship between a particular sign and the system to which it belongs. Really what he is indicating here is the clash of two temporally distinct sign systems, a pagan one which turns nature into symbols

and a teleological Christian logocentrism where everything and everything's name are but representations of the Full Word, to which we shall have access only at the end of the world. Simon does not pursue the philosophical or philological implications of this clash, but the discrepancy highlighted is enough to split wide-open the camouflaged consolidation of apparently integral event with apparently irrevocable name.

Similarly, his assault on the notion of the labellable, historical event frequently takes the now familiar form of an unlabelled or retrospectively labelled, meticulous description of something which, by its emotive capacity, has passed into folk-history.[13] The best example of this levelling out of 'unique' history can be seen in Les Corps conducteurs (p.26) where he tries to defamiliarize a universally known, emotionally charged event - the John Kennedy assassination. Simon takes an event which, in its unique historicity and scandal, would seem to defy any but a political/historical treatment, and then describes it in the most neutral language available, putting the emphasis on the spatial dimension of its photographically represented stages. Simon shows the simplificatory and selective synthesis which underpins the notion of 'event '. The discrepancies between the various photographic frames, which would serve as the basis for the historical researcher's reconstruction of the order of the elements in view of an eventual synthesis, are the very things which draw attention to the incompleteness of any representation of an event and to the active role of the initial document-maker in its fabrication. Unlike Simon who highlights the frame of the representation and

the tell-tale background discrepancies, the photographer has concentrated on what he considers to be the main event. The background variations give us just an inkling of the emphatic subordination of what was to be seen to what was considered important and eventful. The event, like time, has no substantive reality; it is a man-made correlation of material in view of a certain synthesis and governed by certain criteria of priority. In fact, what Simon has done here is to concentrate on the discrepancy between authorial intention and spectator's reception, between the general interest or studium, which the newspaper photograph or historical document seeks to activate, and the fortuitous disruptive punctum. Here, the flower-bed remains recalcitrant to synthesis in the umbrella meaning 'assassination'. Paradoxically perhaps, our perception (or rather Simon's account) of the variations in the random detail in the background of each photograph militates against the synthesis, into a namable sequence, of the 'progress' which takes place in the positions of the people whom the camera is following and focusing on.

Simon's technical versatility becomes evident when one compares this passage with pages 66-7 of Histoire, where he suggests the conventionality of the name by a procedure which is the inverse of that just described. There, he announces from the outset - as if it were part of the average man's general knowledge - the name of a not very well-known incident of French history ('LES TROUBLES DE LIMOGES... la manifestation 17 avril 1905'), going on to describe the litter of everyday objects left after the confrontation of soldiers and strikers. The provocation

of the reader's surprise by the abrupt introduction of the 'name' of an event, of which he has probably never heard, breaks the vicious circle in name-and-date oriented school-histories, whereby the attribution of a readily memorable name and the renown of an incident are interdependent and mutually fortifying - the label both depends on and promotes general recognition. This standardized, metonymic shorthand results in a neglect of local detail such as these Limousin strikes, with their disruptions of banal routine, and the documentary survival of such local history depends largely on fragile records such as this postcard with its unfamiliar motto.

The premises of these challenges to historiographical representation have already been established in chapters one and two - the fragmentary and simultaneous nature of perception renders suspect any attempt to demonstrate a clear-cut relationship of cause and effect and to transform a mass of contemporaneous experiential detail into a linear account. The contrast set up between two vivid images in Le Vent makes clear Simon's position on this at an early stage in his career (p.163). The contrast between the brutal image of the spade thrust into a mass of soil and worms writhing in all directions and the domestic but tenuous image of the Indian handicraft-cum-message epitomizes the tension between the glut of sensory impressions impinging upon our consciousness at any time and man's attempt to synthesize experience in a set of neat knots (events) distributed meaningfully and univocally along a single axis.

The situation which exemplifies this tension at its most acute is that phenomenon which our school-histories

have taught us to call a battle, but which, in fact, consists of a plethora of minute sensory impressions confused, self-contradictory thoughts and never completely harmonious subjective perspectives. The contrast between the intellectually fumigated, schematic historical abstract and the composite, unassimilable impressions left by empirical involvement in a battle is a prominent motif in Simon.

In a very important passage in L'Herbe, a plunging perspective is opened up into the bewildering abyss of the infinitesimal, forever factorizable unit of experience which exposes the simplistic nature of the synthetic overview:

> les menus événements (et même pas événements: faits, incidents - et même pas incidents: le quotidien, le tout-venant - et même pas menu: miniscule, insignifiant)... (p.122)

Both the distillation of time in Marie's carnets into a series of line-long a-significant entries of equal importance and the fluidity and vagueness of time as experienced by Louise during Marie's ten-day agony (p.125) challenge the constructive and hierarchizing synthesis of the detail of existence into anything as well-defined as an event. By the same token, Simon's account of the Spanish Civil War takes the form of the notation of minute detail such as the progress of an oil-stain on a piece of cloth (P, pp.101-3) or the rise and fall of the particles of dust raised by bullet ricochets:

> les seuls indices d'action - de l'Histoire en train de se faire - se réduisant à ces quelques éphémères champignons de poussière jaune qui de temps à autre éclosaient en grappes sur la façade à banderole, et peut-être la chute d'un plâtras, et peut-être d'un rameau sectionné s'affalant avec ses feuilles sur la chaussée, rebondissant et s'immobilisant, ce qui ne faisait jamais qu'un détritus de plus s'ajoutant aux papiers sales et aux ordures déjà accumulées. (Hist, p.181)

Ultimately, on the question as to what constitutes a historical event, Simon stands in direct conflict with even such a moderate and sociologically relativistic justification of the practice of historiography as that proposed by Raymond Aron in his Dimensions de la conscience historique. This latter, while conceding the 'contraste entre l'incohérence de l'histoire vécue et l'ordre de l'histoire racontée', the 'innombrables pensées et mouvements' of 'des milliers et des milliers d'hommes', concludes nevertheless that the constructed historiographical representation may ultimately be as valid as the novelistic account of the experience of 'un simple hussard' (pp.75-6). In my interview with Simon in November 1979, on my quotation of the preceding passages from Aron, he remarked that 'les théories de l'histoire sont coupées de l'expérience sensorielle des faits', and that consequently they seemed more like fiction to him. He went on to say that the book on which he was working at that time was partly concerned with the discrepancy between the strategical theorist's overview of a battle and the immediate sensory experience of the soldier:

> Est-ce qu'un général a une connaissance d'une bataille. La bataille est un fait; la réalité est à plusieurs faces. Dans le roman, le général n'a pas de nouvelle, ne sait pas ce qu'on fait dans tel ou tel endroit. Le général est coupé de la matérialité de la guerre. Il n'a pas l'expérience de la balle qui pénètre dans la chair.[14]

However, if Simon's disagreement with Aron's attempt to justify the historiographical practice is predictable, the discrepancy between his view and that of Merleau-Ponty is more revealing. Although Simon joins Merleau-Ponty in this latter's condemnation of the historian's overview (PP, p.416), Simon's fundamental scepticism on the question

of meaning prevents him from sharing Merleau-Ponty's confidence in the Idée of each civilisation which manifests itself in every human gesture or word, and takes place in the intersubjective interstices at the confines of the multitude of individual human perspectives on phenomena (PP, p.xiii).

Georges and Blum, in La Route des Flandres, spend the best part of their time trying to breach the limits of their own perspectives and to identify imaginatively with the principal participants in a number of potentially analogous situations or 'events'. However, their hypotheses can never be stabilized into facts or even probable explanations and the information they have is an insufficient anchor for the definitive attribution of meaning. The concept of the sens (meaning and direction) of history central to the phenomenological view is likewise alien to Simon. In his early middle fiction, he is principally interested in the 'comment c'est'[15] of the empirical experience of the soldier who can see neither meaning nor direction in what he is doing. Georges is unable to ascertain the direction in which his troop or the prison-train is travelling, far less see the direction that history is taking.

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty sees no way to escape from the burden of humanistic meaning, from historical nomination:

> Parce que nous sommes au monde, nous sommes condamnés au sens, et nous ne pouvons rien faire, ni rien dire qui ne prenne un nom dans l'histoire. (pp.xiv-xv)

Simon's whole work, on the contrary, can be viewed as a challenge to the name, in its pretended capacity as univocal identifier and metonymic synthesizer of the disparate. In our last chapter, we showed the way in which he used the infinite extensibility of description to dissolve the facile

equation between word and concept/object, and to set up instead a complex system of relationships between token referents, on the basis of linguistic associations and the plural value of certain words which are equally applicable to a number of disparate things. So too in Histoire, the most sophisticated work of his middle period, we find him relaying the rather facile devices of delayed nomination, with more complex variations on combinations of previously used motifs and an often intricate interplay of analogy and differentiation. On pages 104-5, the description of the post-cards of Verdun - a taboo word for some even today - is introduced as a negative description of the time-honoured sunny ruins of Greece:

> et représentant, avec quelques variantes de détail, la même répétition d'amas, de débris (quelque chose à l'aspect de détritus plutôt que de décombres: pierres, boîtes de conserves, chevrons, grilles tordues, bidons, lits-cages, matériaux de démolition, moellons, tuiles cassées) non pas entassés ou éparpillés comme les linteaux, les dalles ou les portiques des cités atrides à la surface de mais se confondant en quelque sorte avec le sol.

The sharp contrast between the sunlit Greek monuments (with which we are familiar through photographic reproductions and which have lost the impression insolite of the disaffected)[16] and the sordid clutter of heterogeneous, damaged household objects - the mocking relics of man's 'domestication' of the world - scattered on the Verdun war-field, conveys something of the brutal shock of the war experience. Nevertheless, the relegation of the description of the effects of war to second-level representation in the form of the description of a post-card is a gauge of the way in which the emphasis is shifting in Simon from a renewal of the reader's sensory appreciation of war to a purely aesthetic interest in the

linguistic relationships (both negative and positive) between two disparate or conventionally contrasting scenes. The description of Verdun in terms of its opposite is an indication of the extent to which the foregrounding of the differential mechanisms of language has displaced the circumlocutory linguistic approximation of experience.

The Sequence or Period

Simon's critique of the historiographical reconstruction of a sequence of events linked by relations of cause and effect, influence and repercussion springs from the same origin as his critique of the event - a distrust of intellectual synthesis with its purposeful selectivity and disingenuous emphasis which render verification by the layman very difficult. Admittedly, Simon's own specific objects of attack are often vulnerable Aunt Sallies, set up by him as facile counterpoints to his own novelistic methods and principles. In La Bataille de Pharsale, he takes to task the professionally discredited 'scissors and paste',[17] compilation method of historiographical report, which is seen in its most adulterated and vulgarized form in the undiscriminating selections from famous historians' work in the potted histories of the travel-guide. We have already seen his harsh condemnation of the 'optique Michelin' or the selective and distributional procedures of the 19th-century novel. It remains highly questionable whether the schematic synthesis of historiographical speculations about the Gallic wars in a guide-book (e.g. pp.26-7) constitutes an adequate counterpoint to his own thorough-going questioning of the verifiability of personal memory (p.97).

More moderate than this disingenuously 'rigged' polarity is his explicit commentary in La Corde raide on his own sense of uncomprehending astonishment in the face of the anarchy of the Spanish Civil War, which, he claims, is irreducible to the statistically and economically based calculations of the socio-historian (p.34). The novelistic version of this critique in Le Palace takes the form of a factorization of the war into an inventory of movable furniture, and constitutes an obviously unfair reductio ad absurdum of the statistical and economic approach. The lengthy, facetious, pseudo-Marxist explanations, in which Simon situates everything in relation to the economics of consumption- and progress-obsessed exploitation, are equally specious and immoderate. However, his pursuit of the implications of certain premises and methods is often thought-provoking and constitutes a healthy challenge to facile, ideological dogmatism, examples of which so many disillusioned volonteers encountered in Civil War Spain.

In the end, the sociological value of Simon's work lies in just this sort of iconoclasm. He himself recognized early his own limitations and by implication the ineffectuality of a littérature engagée. Even in La Corde raide, the more strident moralizing passages show a tendency to peter out in resigned literary shoulder-shrugging before the incomprehensibility of the world. The rather self-righteous contrast, between the attention paid in selective historiography to the hostile relations of war-time and the lack of attention paid to the much more complex web of relationships in everyday routine life (pp.28-9), gives way to a weary admission of the indifferent fallibility of any explanation.

Nevertheless, his dismissal as a nihilist by a great many critics does not do justice to the qualified, positive dimension of his iconoclastic defamiliarization. He seeks not so much to make us learn from past mistakes as to make us review the time-honoured, but often speciously based assumptions and ideological representations which may or may not contribute to a certain historical situation. For Simon the activity of writing retains a modest and indirect political justification, in the crucial link between revolution and the renewal of vision:

> *'Pour transformer la vie, il faut d'abord commencer par la connaître'*, a écrit Léon Trotsky dans *Littérature et Révolution*, paroles que complète cette phrase de Proust: *'Nous ne connaissons vraiment que ce que nous sommes obligés de recréer par la pensée.'* Mieux connaître la vie, c'est donc *déjà* la transformer...
>
> Car un écrivain qui 'emploie' des formes mortes, c'est, en dépit du visage qu'il peut chercher à se donner en arguant d'un 'contenu' soi-disant révolutionnaire de son oeuvre, un écrivain qui n'a rien de neuf - encore moins de 'révolutionnaire' - *à dire:* un avion d'une conception révolutionnaire, c'est un avion qui, par sa vitesse, sa sécurité, son confort accrus, transforme les rapports que l'homme entretenait jusque-là avec le temps et l'espace, et par conséquent le monde: ce n'est pas un vieil avion aux performances surclassées que l'on s'est contenté de barbouiller de peinture rouge, même si l'on a peint en supplément sur la carlingue le portrait de Staline[18] ou de Mao Tse-toung.[19]

Simon's exposition of the modesty and indirectness of revolutionary art is matched by his scepticism regarding the ambitious Positivist concept of progress, with its subscription to the ideals of human inventiveness and maximum productivity, and its complacent review of the past in terms of achievement and distance covered. Simon, ever sensitive to the jarring note of intrinsic contradiction in any world view, focuses on two principal paradoxes in modern interpretations of the notion of progress. Firstly, in his many descriptions of the broken, soiled, impaired

and incongruous objects littered along the route of retreat in the débâcle, he suggests the way in which the abstract concept of progress as the 'transmission of acquired skills from one generation to another', the rational development of man's 'potential capacities by accumulating the experience of past generations' [20] has been transformed in our consumer society into an accumulation of concrete objects, which is thwarted by the like-minded international desire to accumulate territory. A similar point is made by the cynical, wilfully exaggerated sociological commentaries of the narrator of Le Vent on the history of the Mediterranean, from the tribal migrations to the transformation of the Riviera into a long line of various types of slot machines (pp.103-4).

The other paradox relating to 'progress' taken to task by Simon is its camouflaged, incongruous reliance on a teleological view inherited from Judeo-Christian eschatology.[21] The notion of progress in the abstract would survive with difficulty in a world where war and economic difficulty are commonplace, and so modern Enlightened history has replaced the unnaturalizable void intrinsic to the notion of infinite progress with a secularized version of the Christian goal which usually takes the form of one or a combination of the following - wealth, happiness, knowledge, health and prolonged survival, or moral improvement. The speciousness of this reconciliation consists in the marriage of a forward impulse with a retrospective explanation of the past in terms of since effected achievements. The practitioners of this credo have camouflaged its inconsistency by the schematism of their survey, and by the emphasis and air of definitiveness which any representational choice confers on its referent:

> cette photographie d'un champ de bataille prise d'avion ... et qui illustrait une des dernières pages du manuel d'histoire, comme si celle-ci (l'Histoire) s'arrêtait là, comme si la longue suite des chapitres avec leur résumés en caractères gras à apprendre par coeur, la longue suite des images qui les illustraient... n'avaient été écrites... qu'en vue de... ce seul aboutissement, cette apothéose. (Hist, pp.105-6)

Historical manuals are composed according to the same functional principles as the Realist novel. Their inevitable selectivity embodies an implicit ideological teleology which is communicated to the reader by the attractively schematic camouflage of its omissions. Simon further suggests, in his long, facetious teleological summaries, that taken to its logical conclusion this historiographical practice would culminate in a most absurd procedure of telescopic synthesis whereby a multitude of unrelated factors are amalgamated and subsumed in an explanation for the most trivial of results. The whole of the Second World War would, in this view of things, be simply the means by which a sedentary old lady is persuaded to leave her native valley (H, p.33). The selection of genes in the evolutionary process would be determined by the eventual production of a race of political demonstrators and placard-carriers (RF, p.69), i.e. by the need for an agent to carry the anticipated placard. Many of Simon's scathing, paradoxical teleologies rely on an effective reconciliation of the historian's overview of progress with the petty goals of the little man who can only conceive of progress in terms of immediate material gain. Thus, the whole of the Imperialist colonization of the Third World may have been dictated by the goal of the hypothetical purchase of a pair of crocodile shoes or by the desire to send one's daughter to a finishing

school (Hist, p.326). The inconsequence of an optimistic, materialist view of progress which results in large-scale systematic destruction is brought out with force in those capricious, but grim explanations of the design of particular consumer products in view of their reversibility in times of war:

> et encore quelques-uns de ces débris difficiles à identifier, de ces objets fabriqués semble-t-il tout exprès en prévision des désastres, tremblements de terre, émeutes, bombardements et inondations, c'est-à-dire qui semblent avoir été conçus en vue d'un double usage, une seconde fonction s'ajoutant à l'habituelle ... celle de se muer par simple rotation de cent quatre-vingts degrés autour d'un axe horizontal en autant d'épaves emphatiques et terrifiantes. (Hist, p.66)

By restricting his critique to a specific historiographical method, Simon can make an a-political, indirect attack on both simplistic Marxist positivism and the tawdry glitter of the consumer society, based on the capitalist exploitation of worker and soldier; he can defamiliarize the mechanisms of such ideologies, without committing himself to an alternative view.

The Document

Finally, in this section, I should like to turn to the way in which Simon makes us reconsider the status of concrete ancillary evidence, such as the archeological interpretation of stratified relics or the geological interpretation of fossils. Here, he is less interested in showing the foibles of such inquiry or the distortive emphasis of the diachronic perspective, than in alerting us to the semantic status of such evidence in the present. This he does in two principal ways - he defamiliarizes inveterate, assumption-ridden views of it, and he demonstrates the highly complex

semantic system to which these relics belong and of which we are generally unaware.

Many of Simon's descriptions are designed to dislodge assumptions instilled in the layman - no doubt by compulsory school museum trips - relating to the remoteness and awesome authenticity of the archeological relic, the 'specialness' conferred on it by its improbable survival. As with old photographs, a retrospective view confers on them a semantic plenitude which is extraneous to them. We identify the disaffected, broken tools and domestic hardware of past civilisations with a mythical authenticity, which expresses itself in an obsessional attention to dates, signatures, authorship,[22] and which would be incomprehensible to its erstwhile users who considered it as a means to an end and not an object of interest in itself. Simon relativizes this notion of authenticity, the absolute and priceless value of the relic, by a proliferation of references to the ubiquitous, ephemeral traces of our activities, left on all the objects we use and in all the places we frequent. For Simon, as for Merleau-Ponty, the notion of time is inextricable from the interaction between the subject and the individual items which he uses, acts upon in his Lebenswelt. The objects themselves, by their status as objects of a subjectivity and by the traces really or potentially left on them, constitute signs of human past:

> Le temps n'est donc pas un processus réel, une succession effective que je me bornerais à enregistrer. Il naît de mon rapport avec les choses... Cette table porte des traces de ma vie passée, j'y ai inscrit mes initiales, j'y ai fait des taches d'encre. Mais ces traces par elles-mêmes ne renvoient pas au passé: elles sont présentes; et si j'y trouve des signes de quelque événement 'antérieur', c'est parce que j'ai, par ailleurs, le sens du passé, c'est parce que je porte en moi cette signification. (PP, pp.471-2)

Thus in Simon's work, we find a quite astonishing number of references to the tell-tale signs of recent and less recent human action. A selective list will give some indication of the variety of the examples. There are references to smears on cafe tables (G, p.26, T, p.133), cigarette stubs in saucers the former bearing the finger-prints of the smoker (LT, p.118), an old battered case held together with string and handkerchiefs which do not 'belong' to the object and have been added by humans (LT, p.10), tarnished copper on a tap on to which someone used to screw a hose-pipe (Hist, p.94), ephemeral wrinkles in a sheet left by a man's body (Hist, p.282), scuffed walls of a tenement stair-case (BP, p.21), paint-splashes on the floor of an artist's studio (BP, p.197), wrinkles, folds and pin marks in old bank-notes (BP, p.234), staple holes in a picture which has been torn from a magazine (CC, p.25), stains of blood, mucus, sickness and mud on the crushed and torn clothes of a drunk who has been fighting (T, pp.185-6), the momentary swaying of a lamp-shade which must have just been knocked (T, p.85), marks left in long grass after the passage of a man on a motor-bike (T, p.19), and a friction-polished farm implement (T, pp.45-6). This proliferation exposes the relativity and paucity of the time-selected relics of history, preserved and turned into an awe-inspiring spectacle in our museums. It also alerts us to the fact that we are surrounded by potential museum-exhibits. Function-designed convenience objects, such as architect-urally uninteresting houses, factories and combine harvesters, are described as though they were the impressive fossils of some huge prehistoric animal (V, p.126; BP, pp.36, 161).

On pages 150-2 of La Bataille de Pharsale, there is a parodic, historico-geological commentary on the abandoned farm-machine. In contrast with verisimilitudinous and evolutionary explanations which seek to naturalize, render comprehensible to modern man the unfamiliar scale of animal life in prehistoric times, these tentative deductions and hypotheses alert us to the potential insolite in the function-built tools and commodities of our consumer society. By a neat transference of the fonction mythologique of the objet ancien to the objet fonctionnel,[23] Simon has both demonstrated the very relative and chance-governed source of the aura mystique which surrounds the museum object and has made us look anew at our relationships to the objects in our Lebenswelt.

But Simon's interest in the potentially uncanny impression of both the most banal everyday objects and the more complicated machines produced by modern technology (which are naturalized by the man in the street by reference to a kind of abstract, transcendant suprafonctionnalité)[24] is not restricted to the immediate succès de scandale of perceptual defamiliarization, which in itself becomes a familiar and predictable device in Simon. More important is his interest in the semantic dimension of the object, and the process by which the banal object of one age or civilisation becomes the mythical object of another one. While exposing the large chance factor involved in the disappearance of a multitude of human traces and the survival of a few which serve as metonymic, semantically overloaded signs of a past civilisation, he is at the same time fascinated by the way in which meaning is invested in these survivors. For ultimately, what

he is dealing with here is a semiotic system; the mythic objects themselves have no intrinsic value; nor does the archeological reconstruction of their original function explain their mythic value today. Their *sig*nificance - like that of the foregrounded pun - springs from their anomalous straddling of two semantic axes, the syntagmatic axis where the substantiality of the semiotic sign is eclipsed in favour of its significance or function in a certain finite and temporally defined context, and the paradigmatic axis where the functional hierarchization of uses gives way to a plurality and redundancy of meaning. The anachronistic mythical object - like those words which maintain an equilibrium between various meanings, despite the evolution of language and its general excision of those ambiguities likely to hinder seriously communication - foregrounds the relational production of meaning and perhaps indicates the points where the relationship between synchronic and diachronic views might be most fruitfully explored and reconciled:

> Tandis que la connotation naturelle sait se faire subtile, la connotation 'historique' crève toujours les yeux... Si beau soit-il [l'objet ancien] , il reste 'excentrique'. Si authentique soit-il, il a toujours de quelque façon l'air faux. Et il l'est dans la mesure ou *il se donne pour authentique dans un système dont la raison n'est pas du tout l'authenticité, mais la relation calculée et l'abstraction du signe...*
>
> Ce duel d'objets est au fond un duel de conscience: il signale une défaillance et la tentative de combler cette défaillance sur le mode régressif. Dans une civilisation où *synchronie* et *diachronie* tendent à organiser un contrôle systématique et exclusif du réel, il apparaît... une dimension troisième, qui est celle de *l'anachronie*. Témoignant d'un échec relatif du système, cette dimension régressive, trouve quand même refuge dans le système, à qui paradoxalement elle permet de fonctionner.[25]

The mythical object epitomizes the paradoxical hybrid nature of meaning; it is the spanner in the modern works, the semantically rich contradiction which prevents the total automatization of our responses and the world in a vast machine which would no longer need man.

The mythical object is the sign of the inextricability of the notions of humanity and meaning. Thus Simon's description of the heterogeneous architecture of New York (CC, p.45) and the Northern banlieue (T, pp.62-3) must not be read as a critique of inconsistency, but as a celebration of and fascination with those points of contradiction or opacity which are the carrefours of time and temporally distant semantic systems.

The coincidence between Simon's reflections on meaning and the definitions of the relationships between man and meaning and between reality and myth proposed by two of his contemporaries is very revealing. Michel Deguy, with whom Simon explicitly concurs in 'La Fiction mot à mot', claims that speaking man's use of metaphor epitomizes our limbo existence, unable as we are to achieve a self-defining, apocalyptic stocktaking, yet nostalgically aware of our alienation from Eden and Full Meaning:

> la condition de l'homme-parlant serait essentiellement métaphorique: déporté de toute saisie apocalyptique de son être, c'est-à-dire de l'immédiateté de son *identité*, il est hors de soi, séparé de soi d'une distance que mesure le *comme*. Il est sur le mode d'être de l'être-comme-ce-qu'il-est: à la distance d'un transport initial dans la métaphore pédagogique de ce qu'il est. Sa vie est une métaphore de sa vérité. Être chassé de l'Éden, non-lieu de la coïncidence 'primitive', c'est en être séparé par le *comme*. *Lieu* (espace) et *comme* (comparaison) sont identiques. Être déchu c'est être victime d'une métaphore, être frappé de connaissance symbolique. Il vit dans le symbole de ce qu'il est. Ce *symbole* est 'réel', est la 'réalité'. (NRII, pp.82-3)

In Simon's own Le Sacre du printemps, the stepfather/wise man makes the claim that art is a protest against one's condition and, as such, it was both the cause and the effect of man's expulsion from Eden. Adam's sin was to rival God's Creation in an attempt to represent the apple; this has not stopped man, however, from trying to recapture that plenitude through the establishment 'de mystérieux et irrécusables rapports' (p.301) between apparently discrete objects.

Jean Baudrillard likewise attributes the production of meaning to an attempt to return to the mythical authenticity of origin, the mythical Lost Paradise of Plenitude.[26] The proof and epitome of man's need for meaning, his desire to transcend his immediate contingent situation and refer to another time or place is, according to Baudrillard, to be seen in the 'neo-cultural syndrome' of restoration. Man does not feel at home in the completely functional milieu, though his evolutionary instinct for survival drives him on to seek comfort in modern conveniences. His solution to these conflicting demands takes the form of a paradoxical reconciliation of the old and the new through restoration or the multitude of neo-styles which disguise function-designed buildings.[27] Simon gives us a good example of this in the description of the conference hall in Les Corps conducteurs (pp.53-55) where the functionality of the building is disguised by its pseudo-Baroque architecture and interior decoration. The impression of insolite is increased by the contrast with the barren, primitive South American landscape in which it is situated, and highlights the element of exoticism inherent in the objet mythique. This exoticism forms an integral part of

the primitive nation's fetish for, and aspiration towards, the cultural, economic and technological respectability of the countries which represent power. The setting of the conference on the revolutionary role of the artist in such an adulterated medley of Western civilisation constitutes, therefore, a subtle irony on Simon's part - the ideas expressed by the conférenciers are as ideologically eclectic and mythical as the building in which they are expressed.

One must distiguish, however, as both Baudrillard and Simon do, between the mythical object and that which has simply gone out of date within living memory. The mythic value of the antique or relic is derived from its time-distorted uniqueness and anachronous 'authenticity' which clash with the synchronic system of economically (i.e. minimally) differentiated objects on which consumption-oriented serialization is based. The prestige value of the 'model' has a similar source, derived from its initial uniqueness and its apparent authenticity - i.e. its apparently intrinsic novelty, its immanent presentness in a system of negative and synchronic (i.e. a-temporal) relations. With the passing of time the model is serialized, assimilated into the system, and its apparently positive distinctiveness dissolves and is fragmented into a system of minimal and marginal points of differentiation. These differential points have no intrinsic, unique value in themselves - they are token indices of difference in a differential system. Furthermore, the serialized object exists in a kind of temporal limbo; it is never in the present, it always follows a little behind the real thing; it belongs to 'une espèce de secteur vide de la quotidienneté, dimension négative,

alimentée mécaniquement par la désuétude des modèles'.[28] Finally, the relationship between model and the system serves as an index of class - the inverse structural relationship between the limited variations of the objet de série and the infinite potential of differentiation in the model parallels.the inverse relationship between the alienation and depersonalization of the production-line worker and the individualistic potential of the privileged class.[29]

Thus in L'Herbe (pp.70-1), Simon ignores possible political or Marxist historical explanations, to sum up the differences between classes in terms of a semantically indicative décalage in fashion:

> il apparaît avec un peu de recul que pauvres et riches ont en commun exactement les mêmes goûts, le même comportement, la même façon de s'habiller, mais à quelques années d'intervalle, de sorte que ce qui sépare les pauvres des riches, ce n'est ni... le fait d'avoir plus ou moins d'argent, ni... quelque supériorité ou raffinement innés de l'esprit, mais seulement du temps... leur position respective dans le temps, ce pourquoi, sur les vieilles photos, les riches nous semblent toujours appartenir à une catégorie sociale assez vulgaire: parce que la dernière fois que nous avons vu cette façon de s'habiller, de se tenir, ç'a été par des gens de classes inférieures qui ne faisaient qu'imiter avec retard ce qu'ils avaient vu faire aux riches).

The historical dimension, which might express itself in terms of determinism, inveterate exploitation, the Industrial Revolution etc., is completely eclipsed in favour of a brief look at the semiotics of fashion. Simon does not try to offer sociological reasons for a particular change in meaning. On the contrary, the perspectival problems raised by the passage draw attention to the distortions inherent in the naive micro-diachronic[30] view which is the norm for the temporally situated human. Thus even the historical document (a photograph) from a period within

living memory' is partially invalidated by that very memory: a retrospective view of the once fashionable upper classes confers an anachronistic air of vulgarity on them because of the viewer's subsequent memory of the degradation and imitation of that fashion. The meaning of any document is an excess which varies according to the nature of the extrinsic subjective 'knowledge' which the perceiver brings to bear on it. This particular example sets up a highly complex set of paradoxical relationships between the notions of perceptual context, frames of reference, authentic evidence, imitation and representation which continually flout our attempts to establish a clear hierarchy between frame and form. The discrepancy between the denotation (the mechanically captured scene) and the connotation (aspects relating to the photographer's interventions and the spectator's reception) set up a tension which precludes uncritical access to the past on the part of the spectator.[31] The informational value of the photograph is undeniable, but the content is inevitably filtered through the subjective connotation 'anachronism'. A particularly vivid punctum may act as a catalyst to his imagination, but the recreation of the pristine conditions of the moment when the photograph was taken remains impossible. We are made particularly aware of our situated, finite perspective and the impossibility of ever acceding to an objective macro-diachronic perspective which is not determined by its cultural inheritance.[32]

The complexity of Simon's study of the objects which embody human activity and civilisation goes, then, far beyond the relativization of the aura of uniqueness, authenticity and authority which a museum cabinet signifying 'the survival

of the fragile' confers on them. Simon's historical interests have led him to a deeper understanding of the semiotic principles governing our attribution of value to things often completely worthless from a pure consumption perspective, and of the mechanism by which the relative priority of the relationship function/meaning, luxury/fashionableness of an object can be changed or reversed through the passing of time or intercultural transportation. Such a sensitivity to the system of meaning, into which we are born as humans and upon which we are constantly acting, belies both the chosiste label attached to the Nouveau Roman by its opponents and the more sympathetic interpretation put on it by Lucien Goldmann as an illustration of the auto-regulation of society, of the reduction of human activity to the passivity of the voyeur, of generalized reification. Despite his understanding of the devaluative mechanisms of serialization and mass production, Simon's work is not a political statement on reification; on the contrary, if anything, it demonstrates the irrepressible production and change of meaning in terms of which man has always defined himself:

> Un monde même momentanément privé d'art (c'est-à-dire privé de cette dimension qui ne peut se réduire à la matérialité, de ces ouvertures sur les espaces toujours libres et inaliénables de l'imaginaire, du merveilleux ou du songe), un tel monde serait tout simplement aussi cauchemaresque qu'un immense camp de concentration fonctionnel et bien organisé où la nourriture serait abondante, le travail peu pénible... et où croupiraient non plus des hommes mais des bêtes.[33]

II SIMON'S OWN CONCEPTION OF TIME AND HISTORY

The subversion of certain commonsensical historical tool-concepts and the reformulation of others, in terms which alert us to their fundamental and far-reaching implications, do not exist in an ideological vacuum. Simon's a-political and anti-commitment stand does not preclude a personal consideration of the broad moral and epistemological issues relating to time and history, and the narrower questions of the relationships between the novel and historiography, and between novelistic structure and readerly time.
This section proposes to outline the three main stages of this implicit meditation and to chart the shifts in emphasis which are to be detected.

(i) The Early Fiction: the Moral Issues

Simon's conception of time and history in his early fiction is essentially derived from his reading of Faulkner and is inextricably associated with their common interest in moral and epistemological questions. Since I have treated these questions in the first chapter, I shall restrict myself to a very brief summary, drawing out the more specifically temporal dimensions implied by a conception of human behaviour in terms of determinism and reponsibility. The former emphasizes the weight of intersubjectively inherited past governing future individual action, and excuses or explains to some extent that future action; in the latter case, the liberty of the individual regarding the future is qualified only by an acceptance or rejection of the responsibilities

incurred in one's own past. Simon's first novels are variations on man's paradoxical attempts to reconcile these two notions, whether it be in terms of an Oedipus complex (Le Tricheur), the Christian conception of original sin (Le Vent), or the myth of the éternel rœtour, where the individual's intense personal experience is shown to be an age-old paradigm common to those past generations with whom the young believe themselves to be in conflict (Le Sacre du printemps). Simon's own subscription or lack of it to any of these fairly familiar thematic exploitations of time is impossible to determine and ultimately much less important than his interest in the way in which man expresses, through mythical structures, his paradoxical position, subject both to the influence of the past and the demands of the future.

Simon's own aesthetic solution to the problem is equally interesting. We have already noted his anomalous use of the detective-novel structure in Gulliver, in order to multiply and foreground, as opposed to eliminate, the moral complexities and implications. Both Le Tricheur and Le Sacre du printemps are constructed in such a way that a central chapter dealing with the youthful experience of characters who are middle-aged, according to the predominant and co-ordinating time-scale of the novel, is framed by preceding and following chapters dealing with the comparable experiences of the rising generation. This play between novelistic structure and the theme of the generations is designed to relativize the temporal and emotional situation of the egocentric, absolutist protagonists. The use of the didactic mentor/apprentice to life device in the final section of Le Sacre du printemps is a variation on an age-old

initiation ceremony, whereby the youth is born into the adult world of inherited knowledge and intersubjectively transferred, immemorial meanings. It is this sensitivity to the relativity of any single perspective on the world or any one statement about the world, compounded with a converse awareness of all the other possible perspectives and statements, that is to determine in part Simon's shift in interest from moral problems in time to the relationship between personal memory and the collective memory of society, and finally to the more fundamental linguistic and structural relationship between syntagmatic formulation and paradigmatic potential.

(ii) The Middle Period: the Epistemological Validity of Memory

Intellectual Reconstruction versus Involuntary Association

In general, Simon's middle period of fiction is concerned more with the nature of memory and the process of rememoration, than with the influence of unconscious memories on future action and the conscious compromise between one's moral responsibility for one's past and to one's future. Furthermore, Simon's continuing debt to Faulkner's notion of sensory memory is complemented and rivalled by an equal debt to Proust's exploration of the differences between intellectual memory and the mémoire involontaire. We have seen Simon's challenge to assumptions concerning human identity in time and the integrity of the individual in our first chapter. Implicit in this is another challenge to the notion of the ready retrievability of particular, personal

memories. The conscious questioning of the past by the narrators of La Route des Flandres, Le Palace and Histoire, as for Marcel in A la recherche..., results only in frustration at the fragmentary nature of recall, and scepticism regarding the accuracy of these fragments.[34] Desperate phrases like 'Mais exactement, exactement?' (Hist, pp.78, 87, 93) mark intense moments of identity crisis and, by foregrounding the difficulties of this epistemological quest, highlight Simon's refusal to 'combler les lacunes' between the reconstructed fragments of the past, as a traditional continuous and chronological view of time would demand:

> L'archéologue comble les lacunes d'un monument en ruines par du ciment grisâtre, Pour moi, je refuse ce procédé, qui invente un ordre dont on ne saura jamais s'il est authentique.
>
> Je ne comble pas les vides. Ils demeurent comme autant de fragments. Ces bribes de souvenir pourquoi chercher à les classer en un ordre chronologique? Je ne me soucie pas de ce qu'on pourrait appeler la perspective du temps.[35]

The intellectual reconstruction of one's past is but a superficial and inadequate tool for ascertaining facts or salvaging order. Simon's narrators fail miserably in this enterprise, but the form that failure takes suggests the possibility of a much more fruitful interpretation of the word memory. Simon's conception of the process of memory corresponds closely not only to Proust's notion of the mémoire involontaire and to this latter's definition of it as an accumulation of associations in one's senses,[36] but also to Merleau-Ponty's conception of it as an associative process of sedimentation, which affects and is affected by the intentional relations linking us to the Lebenswelt in the present (PP, pp.468-96). In all of these writers' work, there is an emphasis on the synchronic co-existence

of memories from different periods in the present moment of rememoration. The emphasis is on the establishment of a relationship in the present between an aspect of one's present life-world with an aspect of a past life-world.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the catalytic mechanism set in motion by certain elements in our environment springs from the self-enveloping, interlocking structure of memory, a process of <u>emboîtement</u> whereby each new perception is assimilated by the memory, but not without altering the composition of that memory and the way in which associations are produced. The introduction of each new memory entails a recombination in which it takes its place. Thus he elaborates the notion of a set of interlocking, synchronic combinations which defies reduction to straight linearity and which, by the simultaneous preservation of the intentional relationships of the past, permits, through association in the present, often quite vivid rememorative access to situations in the past:

> La mémoire intellectuelle, au sens de Proust, se contente d'un signalement du passé, d'un passé en idée, elle en extrait les 'caractères' ou la signification communicable plutôt qu'elle n'en retrouve la structure, mais enfin elle ne serait pas mémoire si l'objet qu'elle construit ne tenait encore par quelques fils intentionnels à l'horizon du passé vécu et à ce passé même tel que nous le retrouverions en nous enfonçant dans ces horizons et en rouvrant le temps. (<u>PP</u>, p.101)

In one of his five fragmentary notes on Simon, Merleau-Ponty juxtaposes the notions of sedimentation and <u>vision</u> - described in terms of a screen where a multitude of thoughts take place synchronically - with a quotation from one of Simon's interviews evoking the <u>bouffée</u> of remembered sensory impressions which formed the <u>données</u> of <u>La Route des Flandres</u>. In both, the <u>presentness</u> of the experience

is stressed:

21 octobre 1960

Vision

voir c'est la permission de ne pas penser la chose *puisqu'on la voit*.
Toute vision, de n'importe quelle couleur, est cette pensée-écran (qui rend possible un foisonnement d'autres pensées) - *(Vorhabe)* (et sédimentation).
vision sensorielle est vision de visionnaire

Cf. Claude Simon *Lettres Francaises* Interview.

'Je vois encore devant moi, j'ai encore devant les yeux, les arbres comme tirés en arrière, d'autres apparaissant, prenant la suite des premiers, comme un paysage qui bascule, et aussi le vert presque noir de la haie. Et dans une fraction de seconde j'ai vu *la Route des Flandres*. Pas l'idée de ce livre mais ce livre tout entier.'[37]

The purely intellectual attempt to reconstruct past experience fails essentially because this process of emboîtement depends on a concomitant dislocatory process whereby remembered points in the past become 'Abschattungen' or a 'horizon de rétentions' (PP, p.477), in relation to which we subsequently perceive the world. In this process of rememorative assimilation every instance of perception loses something of its original immediacy, while the subsequent perceptions continually introduce modifications in the constitution of this horizon. This causes previous rememorative combinations to be relegated to the status of a remembered combination within a remembered combination, and thereby to lose still more of their substantiality. According to Merleau-Ponty, this process accounts for the sensation of glissement or of centrifugal fuite hors de soi, when the rational mind tries to sum up definitively the past of the subjectivity to which it belongs, but which is also linked to the world by a more fundamental

set of intentional, sensory relationships determining, as opposed to determined by, the outcome of our conscious intentions (PP, p.479).

Once again unknowingly or intuitively, Simon finds himself on common ground with one of the most influential philosophers of his time. Merleau-Ponty's use of Simon's work as illustrative examples in his philosophical lectures constituted a rare tribute to the writer of a genre so notoriously unrigorous and ideologically eclectic, while his own philosophical ruminations stand as an eloquent commentary on the principles or implications of Simon's exploration of the faculty of memory. Both the sensation of fuite hors de soi and the associative effects of emboîtement are well illustrated by the experiences of Simon's middle-period protagonists. The painstaking attempts of Georges, the student and the narrator of Histoire to fill in the gaps between a number of particularly vivid memories testify to the inadequacy of reconstruction which can only result in an infinite regress of possible questions and a dislocation of one's sense of identity. Simon's withdrawal of confidence in the integrative capacity of intellectual reconstruction has as its positive corollary an enthusiastic and fruitful exploration of the associations generated involuntarily in the memory during one's sensory contact with the world. The complex synaesthetic experience of the present, which we noted in our first chapter, is rendered infinitely more complex by the host of associations acting as a kind of paradigmatic context of experiences. In normal routine conditions this context guarantees the present experience by reference to a precedent; however, in certain reductive,

stress situations, it can disrupt and momentarily paralyse the sequential pursuit of present activities to a meaningful end. So in Histoire, the descriptions of the empirical tasks in the day of the life of the narrator are relayed and delayed by the evocation of the bouffée of simultaneous impressions and memories which every contact with a formerly familiar object or place is likely to arouse:

> tout revenant à la fois: les relents de réfectoire, de craie, de la peinture noire des pupitres, et cette odeur particulière des planchers gris, rugueux, arrosés chaque jour, fleurant le moisi. (Hist, pp.106-7)

This is far from the most usual use of the 'day in the life of...' formula in the psychological novel. There, it often provides a convenient framework for a nostalgic incursus into the past and for the pursuit of individual associative strands with a view to creating a number of picturesque tableaux each illustrating a potential might-have-been, which is contrasted regretfully, compromisingly or with relief with the present life of the narrator. In Simon, the simultaneity and fragmentation of the associations are constantly stressed by explicit commentary:

> capable en l'éclairant [une photo] d'en faire, surgir, exhumer non pas ce qui ne fut qu'un instant (une simple lamelle d'une infime épaisseur dans la masse du temps et sur laquelle on figure simplement assis dans un fauteuil d'osier) mais une confuse, une inextricable superposition d'images, mordant les unes sur les autres (Hist, p.286)

or by mise en abyme descriptions of the torn, unevenly superimposed and irrationally juxtaposed medley of old and more recent posters on a wall (passim). In all the novels of the period, we regularly encounter sentence spans which, through a number of parentheses and parentheses within parentheses, make associative references to four or

five different memories and situations. On pages 221-2 of Le Palace, the one sentence incorporates the description of an old man feeding pigeons in the park (an incident which belongs to the day before the American's disappearance), the description of the sky and weather conditions which have already been related to the day after the disappearance of the American (cf. p.215), a reference to the 'bière' which the narrator drinks fifteen years later on his return to Spain (it is coffee he drinks the day after the American's disappearance), a hypothetical projection into the future describing his anticipation of a visit to the public urinals which will become a textual 'reality', and a memory relating to the beer he drank earlier in the day. A similar juxtaposition of multiple temporal levels takes place on page 17 of Histoire, where the narrator describes the scene at the death-bed of his mother, during which a gesture of the priest initiates in the narrator a hypothesis based on a legend or religious story told to him in the past, which in turn reminds him of the reaction of someone to his question about the legend. The narration then returns to the original death-bed scene and a description of a photograph - which had been enlarged - of his father, no doubt as he had first appeared to the narrator's mother. The sequence concludes with a panoramic sweep referring to the multitude of post-cards sent by the father to the mother over a period of several years, which cover a multitude of times and places and refer implicitly to both the time of sending and that of reception.

Each of these examples illustrates the combination of centrifugal and cetripetal forces involved in every instance

of involuntary rememoration - the glissement which opens up the potentially infinite, perspectival regress into one's direct or indirect experience of other times and places, and the simultaneous projection and a-logical combination of a multitude of associations on the ever-present écran, single plan of memory:

> Dans la mémoire tout se situe sur le même plan: le dialogue, l'émotion, la vision coexistent... J'étais hanté par deux choses: la discontinuité, l'aspect fragmentaire des émotions que l'on éprouve et qui ne sont jamais reliées les unes aux autres, et en même temps leur contiguité dans la conscience. Ma phrase cherche à traduire cette contiguité.[38]

The whole question of memory is further complicated by the adherence of self as subjectivity to an intersubjective, prereflective consciousness, which in turn can be said to possess a memory in the form of an inherited corpus of myths, codes, beliefs, culture, etc., and which impinges upon the associative processes of our individual memories. Its effects and demands are well illustrated in La Route des Flandres, where Georges' own personal, remembered experience is supplemented by ancestral information passed on by Sabine, the personal memories of Blum and the insights he offers into Jewish culture, and the classical myths described in the Latin readers.

Furthermore, throughout Simon's middle fiction, his characters are constantly finding themselves in a few archetypal human situations - in particular, Sex, War and Death - which reveal to them at one and the same time their individual contingency and the immemorial endurance of the human race in general. These situations and the theme of the éternel retour have been much discussed in the majority of substantial works on Simon; I have nothing to add to the

detail or facts of these fairly exhaustive accounts. However, I would like to qualify somewhat the inference generally made that Simon himself is positing a view of history in terms of the myth of the éternel retour.[39] The majority of these critics read Simon's work in part at least as a positive, intention-determined statement establishing the cyclical nature of human history. I would argue that his use of this concept corresponds neither to the pagan regeneration myths nor to the eschatological interpretation of history, as outlined by one of the world authorities on this subject.

According to Mircea Eliade,[40] the primitive, pagan view of history as cyclical is related to a particular ontological conception, whereby an object or an act could not become real except in so far as it imitated an archetype. While it is true that Simon's protagonists do seem to experience a dissolution of their sense of identity, this is shown to be an anguishing existential moment rather than a positive process, and far from giving them a greater sense of reality, their archetypal gestures subvert the whole notion of an objectively definable 'reality'.

Again according to Eliade,[41] the belief in a cyclical view of history in theophanic cultures was generally inspired by a desire to explain away one's suffering in terms of a sin which had to be expiated in the apparently absurd cycle of history, but this cycle would culminate in some form of apocalyptic disaster, at which point judgement would be meted and man would be reintegrated into eternity and bliss. In Simon's work, the narrators' suffering and epistemological anguish is given no such explanation; nor is there any sense

that the catastrophic situations in which they participate will bring this suffering to an end.

In my view, the narrators' reading of their experience in terms of the myth of the éternel retour constitutes a synthesis and radicalization of the synchronic, structural relationship between the subjectivity and the intersubjective context in which they are situated, between the ephemeral circumstances and idiographic detail significant in anthropocentric historiography and the more longstanding and universal things which form the macrocosmic context in which they take place. In modern discourse, the individual syntagmatic combinations of individual myths have no meaningful currency; the specific stories they tell are remote to modern man; the beliefs they embody have long been devalued. What they do offer the modern, finite individual is a set of paradigms and a number of archetypal situations which evoke metaphorically the encounter of man's most fundamental instincts and aspirations with perennial natural forces. As such, they both represent and incorporate man's intersubjective transference and inheritance of behavioural trait and the cultural codes of reference by which he interprets it.[42]

We have already noted Simon's emphasis in his interviews on the elimination of a strictly temporal perspective, in favour of an attempt to present a host of impressions and associations with the immediacy of a two-dimensional painting. At one point he states that the section in the dictionary which interests him is not the encyclopaedic entries under the proper names of transiently spectacular men and events, but the dictionary section, which is concerned with the way in which we articulate the world through language.[43]

Such a remark testifies to a thorough-going indifference to history as such, and it would be difficult to imagine him scrupulously matching archetypal historical event with its variations on subsequent revolutions of the cycle. What interests Simon in this myth is the ever-present interaction between perennial elements of the world, such as 'le soleil' or 'l'eau', and the sensory encounter of individual human beings ('le creux de la main') with these elements in archetypal situations. One of his earliest statements of adherence to a belief in certain immutable constants in the human condition takes the form of a dismissal of superficial, historically determined trappings and a concentration on a more fundamental network of paradigmatic situations:

> j'avais la sensation de voir quelque chose de très typique et qui, si l'on faisait abstraction de la forme moderne (avions, tanks, etc...) devait ressembler point par point - feu et sang, cohortes, invasions - dans le fracas du temps et de l'espace s'écroulant, à ce qui se déroulait, il y a deux cents, deux mille ou dix mille ans. (CR, p.55)

The discrepancy between an historical and archetypal view is schematized into the discrepancy between the taxonomic vocabulary of human inventions which have appeared within living memory and the more general vocabulary related to sempiternal human activities.

In the light of what has preceded, I would argue that the word 'Révolution' in the epigraph (itself a dictionary definition) at the beginning of Le Palace refers neither to a single political event, nor to a mythical cycle of history on which could be charted the periodicity of Great Ages, of epochs of relative prosperity and recession, or of certain types of event. It refers rather to the

corpus of archetypal situations through which every finite individual must pass in one way or another in the course of his life, and to the linguistic set of paradigms through which he must likewise pass in his attempt to articulate experience. It refers to the encounter of one small mobile unit with the elements of a much larger intersubjective system which transcends it, and to the personal _parole_ of the writer, who likewise has to take up words used and re-used by those who have gone before him, which words are constantly being enriched by the traces/associations invested in them by those users.

In this perspective then, Simon's recourse to the myth of the _éternel retour_ and to the archetypal experiences of human life is not so much a statement about man's history and his historical situation, as part of an investigation of the archetypal structure of the intersubjective consciousness and its sedimentation, in the course of human civilisation, of a vast system of myths and codes, our relative awareness of which makes every moment of perception an intersection of references to other periods and places outside our direct experience.

Time and Art

Followed through, this perspective treats art as man's only real access to the past. The ordinary intention-determined discourse which is used in most documentary situations proves incapable of fixing reality, of preserving the past in a representational description or panorama. The _témoignage_ is shown to be ephemeral (e.g. newspapers) or unreliable (e.g. Caesar's topographical indications, _BP_, pp.90-1),

and overconcerned to put a personal interpretation on things (the narrator of Le Vent). The etymological approach to history seems to hold some weight with Simon in his notation of the dropping and reprise of the aristocratic de from 'de Reixach' according to fluctuations in social history and fashion, but such references are sparse. Ultimately, Simon is not tempted by the historical intricacies of a diachronic approach to language.

His interest lies in the survival of the literary text in the present. The individual modifications of language in time are completely neglected in favour of a study of the incorporation of the surviving document in an intersubjective culture into which we are born, and of the mythic capacity of the surviving document, by virtue of its anomalousness and difficulty of comprehension, to alert us to the element of the past inherent in the present. In his long parenthetic digression in L'Herbe on the Latin inscription (p.130), he suggests both the unconscious absorption, on the part of the child, of his intersubjective inheritance:

> cherchant les vieux, les indestructibles mots latins (matrone, mentule, menstrues), les lèvres tachées de violet mordillant le porte-plume rongé, comme si, avec l'encre qui les souille, elles suçaient sans comprendre le lait, le principe, non pas même d'une civilisation, de la poussiéreuse culture aux inutiles et poussiéreux bouquins, mais de la vie même (p.131)

and the durability of the language itself, which latter factor is described in terms which could apply to Simon's own language and style:

> les rangées de mots... semblables à d'indestructibles murailles destinées à durer plus longtemps que le temps même, avec la compacte succession de leur lettres taillées en forme de coins, de cubes, de poutres,

> serrées ajustées sans ponctuation, majuscule, ni le moindre interstice, à la façon de ces murs construits sans mortier, les mots se commandant les uns les autres, ajustés aussi par cette syntaxe impérieuse inventée sans doute en prévision des mutilations futures et à seule fin de pouvoir être reconstitués mille ou deux mille ans plus tard. (p.130)

Of particular interest here is the fact that the digression also almost certainly refers to Poussin's Et in Arcadia Ego. Not only is Simon illustrating the extent to which several different historical periods co-exist in a present work (here Simon's work of art), but the digression itself demonstrates the point he is making by animating descriptively Poussin's work:

> les mots... épélés par la main des bergers qui suit du doigt sur le marbre du fronton dans l'herbe folle de la verte Arcadie. (p.130)

For Simon, language, like all the cultural codes which form the intersubjective memory of civilisation, is a form of sedimentation, and the exploitation of it in the authentic parole of the artist both reactivates the time- and space-spanning connotations of its dead metaphors, and enriches it in the form of new metaphorical combinations. The exploitation of polyvalent elements of language such as puns and metaphorical clichés[44] are only the more obvious, concentrated examples of the sedimentation and ancrage of meaning in art. This is one of the implications of Simon's extensive use of recognizable paintings as points of departure for descriptions which reanimate the scenes depicted, through inferences and deductions about the time of day and the motivation of the figures, made on the basis of lighting, weather and gestural notations. This reanimation of paintings is a mise en abyme[45] for the general capacity of art to preserve time. The strict, historical perspective is devalued in

favour of a concentration on the structural relationship between a particular moment in the present and all of past civilisation to which we have access, through the synchronic and ubiquitous juxtaposition in our surroundings of a vast range of embodiments of human culture.

The optimism of this view of the durability of the work of art is qualified by Simon's awareness of the succession and devaluation of traditions. Our access to the classical languages remains limited and problematical. But the relative freedom of the authentic parole from the ephemeral ideology inherent in all 'realisms', and its capacity to retain and multiply, through its syntagmatic combinations, something of the polysemic potential of the paradigmatic context makes of it an embodiment of time, as opposed to a representation of history. The description in La Bataille de Pharsale of the curious hybrid architectural relief/anatomical model (pp.263-8) stands as a metonymic representative of this limited durability of the work of art. Like anything, it is condemned to decay; furthermore, with the passing of time and traditions, there comes an exposure of the internal structure and tricks of earlier traditions, and the particular work becomes a frozen form like the horsemen depicted on the frieze. Nevertheless, its general outlines remain intact and readable - 'le contour des têtes, des corps et des membres reste toujours lisible' - and, so long as they do so, afford an opening, in the present, of a perspective into the past.

La Bataille de Pharsale: Personal Memory versus Linguistic Recombination

Simon's attempt to create a flexible novel structure, which would accommodate a study of the individual in an archetypal situation and the perceptions of that individual in relation to subjective and intersubjective associations, resulted in a practically irresoluble problem, springing from the structural incapacity of the linear novel to rival the immediacy of pictorial art in the representation of sensory impressions. Simon's interviews are peppered with references to the difficulty of this enterprise, and it is this conflict between genre and desire - plus perhaps a recognition of the problematical distinction between his attempt to recreate the pristine conditions of perception and the realist pretention to represent certain impressions - which determined the shift in emphasis from sensory impression to purely linguistic association. Thus in La Bataille de Pharsale, there is a decrease in the impression of sensory substantiality created by the narrator's descriptions and in the attention devoted to the rememorative process which, in this novel, centres principally around the ironic, intellectual attempt of the narrator to recall a passage from Proust. Instead, in this work - and even in Histoire - there is an increasing preoccupation with the reactivation of general cultural associations and with the memory of the text i.e. with the accumulation of associations specific to the past text and with the constant reprise and re-use of certain motifs. In previous novels, this self-referential mechanism figured only sporadically, as at the end of Le Palace where the text, free of its ratiocinative narrator, brings

itself to a conclusion through the exhaustive recombination of motifs. In Histoire and La Bataille de Pharsale, the importance of the intratextual associations is paramount, and what is taken initially to be a personal memory constantly proves to be simply the recombination of previous passages. Compare, for example:

> le cheval couché sur le flanc moi-même à quatre pattes maintenant par terre en train d'essayer de savoir où étaient le haut et le bas ou même s'il y avait un haut et un bas et si j'avais encore des bras et des jambes c'est-à-dire si je pouvais encore me servir de mes bras et de mes jambes *je ne souffrais pas* constatant seulement qu'ils me soutenaient plutôt à vrai dire à la façon d'une bête que d'un homme puisqu'il me fallait quatre points d'appui (BP, pp.72-3)

and:

> comme dans l'excitation d'un combat le corps peut devenir insensible aux blessures à la fatigue (p.64)
>
> j'aurais pu compter les clous chacun des quatre trous pour les crampons choses qui s'immobilisent tout à coup et dont on garde l'image précise... et l'autre au-dessus de lui en l'air figure volante à peu près dans la même position c'est-à-dire les bras à demi repliés en avant de lui mains vers le sol comme s'il essayait déjà d'amortir sa chute les jambes peut-être moins ployées mais écartées aussi comme un cheval ruant les pieds.(pp.60-1)

Sometimes, the sensation and the element of personal memory which articulated the books of the early period are now subsumed to the point of syntagmatic anarchy in the play on motifs specific to this novel and on associations belonging to the paradigmatic axis of the cultural memory:

> je frappai encore... quelque chose se cassa sur le côté de mon poing à l'intérieur de l'oreille qui peut voir petits os carpe métacarpe le cheval marche sur un doigt la corne du sabot n'est qu'un ongle qui je pouvais les voir piaffant grattant la terre.(p.86)

The conception of memory as a personal psychological faculty, although quite strong in the first section, is gradually dislocated and increasingly assimilated to the process of linguistic association which is foregrounded in

the section 'Lexique'. The interest Simon once showed, in the description of the 'bouffée de regrets' experienced as he tried to escape from the Germans (CR, p.51), in the interpretation of the metonymic and symbolic aspects of personal memory has disappeared. There, he tried to identify retrospectively what a particular mental image stood for, and to elucidate it in a coherent syntagmatic commentary:

> je regrettais une lampe électrique qui était restée dans une des sacoches de ma selle... Enfin, tout cela s'effaça devant l'image du rideau de tulle de la fenêtre de ma chambre à Perpignan...
>
> Je n'ai pas pensé aux êtres que j'aimais véritablement. Peut-être la lampe électrique et le rideau firent-ils office de symboles pour celles qui me l'avaient envoyée et celle qui habitait la chambre... Probablement, appartenaient-elles... à un autre monde... que j'allais quitter... et leur souvenir ne pouvait-il plus me parvenir que sous la forme de ces choses inanimées, venant d'elles, ou se rattachant à elles.

By the time of La Bataille de Pharsale, the relationship between memory and the present act of linguistic formulation is essentially metaphorical. It constitutes a second-degree semiotic system specific to this text, where the associations established in the course of the work between certain words and motifs overdetermine those passages which ostensibly 'represent' memories, but which are actually new linguistic combinations with no referential value or determining motivation[46] outwith the text.

(iii) Recent Fiction: the Textualization of Time

As far as Simon's late fiction is concerned, referential, 'represented' time[47] is devalued, as we have seen, through a bewildering process of emboîtement, which renders it impossible to demarcate with any clarity the relationship

of one motif to another, and by reversals of what we have been conditioned to see as a normal sequence of events. Thus, in Triptyque, the description of the sexual encounter in the alley next to the café, between the bridegroom after his wedding and what would appear to be a former mistress preceded the description of the halt of the wedding party in front of the café just before or after the marriage and the exchange of glances between the waitress and the bridegroom. Furthermore, whereas the traditional novel generally developed an internal elliptic shorthand (e.g. a proper name around which associations could be built up) which allowed the narrator to concentrate on the crucial element of change in time (in the character's state or personality, in the action of the plot), in Les Corps conducteurs, Triptyque and Leçon de choses, there is no such reliance on textual shorthand. Frequently, the initial descriptions of characters are repeated in full, and the narrative sequence is refused the guarantee of continuity which was offered by the text centred round a set of recognizable characters. Sometimes, the narrator draws attention completely gratuitously, it would seem, to the absence of any change or the minimal changes in a scene already described, going on to repeat substantially the previous description:

> A part le cri de l'oiseau et le chant des grenouilles, aucun bruit n'est venu troubler le silence depuis la chute de l'unique obus et le tapage des deux rafales. (LC, p.74)

In short, a plot is not allowed to establish itself and gather momentum. The following passage from Les Corps conducteurs acts as a mise en abyme for this recombinatory procedure which renders irrelevant the notion of plot and

all those analyses which define the novel in terms of changes on the level of the action:

> Les visages, la longue table... baignent dans l'éclairage toujours égal que répandent les rampes électriques dissimulées dans les chapiteaux des colonnes. Aucune modification de la lumière ne signale un quelconque écoulement du temps ni ne permet de se faire une idée, même approximative, du moment... où en est la journée. Le débit presque indifférencié des voix parlant dans une langue étrangère, le retour périodique dans les interventions successives des mêmes mots, groupes de mots, ou de leurs synonymes, accentue encore cette sensation d'atemporalité. (p.177)

The reason for this devaluation of the capacity of the novel to represent time is rooted in Simon's earlier novelistic ambitions. As we saw earlier, Simon's interviews of the early sixties were predominantly concerned with an attempt to rival in writing the spatial simultaneity of pictorial art. This particular idea was, of course, one of the critical clichés of much theory and criticism of this period and the limitations of an exclusive concentration on the spatial image have since been recognized.[48] Simon's awareness of the difficult reconciliation of his aim and his medium seemed to develop with an unvoiced recognition and elimination of the remnants of representational intentions which remained in his formulated statements. Simon seemed to realize gradually that the attempt to recreate the conditions of perception still subordinates the form to a fairly ambitious project concerned with potential things and people. From Histoire on, gradually the emphasis shifts from perceptual to linguistic issues and there emerges a more subtle definition of the concepts of immediacy and spatiality in art, which depends on the reader's memory,[49] his capacity to make connections between previously read sections of a work and later ones, to read the printed page

in front of his eyes against the background of the rest of the text and already acquired information:

> Tous les éléments du texte... sont toujours présents. Même s'ils ne sont pas au premier plan, ils continuent d'être là, courant en filigrane sous, ou derrière, celui qui est immédiatement lisible, ce dernier, par ses composantes, contribuant lui-même à rappeler sans cesse les autres à la mémoire. (NRII, p.89)

This definition of immediacy in relation to the reader's memory depends on the one hand, on the discrediting of the notion of plot and a crucial modification in fictional circumstances and, on the other hand, on the promotion of the narratorial reprise of motifs and the exploitation of the plurivalence of homophony and homonymy. The immediacy of the texts springs from the interaction between linguistic sedimentation and readerly, rememorative competence. Each point in the text becomes the intersection of references to other points in the text, a reference to past and future moments in the reading of the text. Thus in Les Corps conducteurs, Simon draws attention not only to the fact that the world is a web of relationships between objects and between objects and time, but also that the passage being read is defined in relation to past and future moments of reading, and is part of a textual system whose components are constantly interacting:

> Aussi dense [la foule], pareille à ce qu'elle était tout à l'heure à ce qu'elle sera pendant les heures suivantes et jusqu'à la nuit (alors, devant les rectangles lumineux des vitrines, on ne discernera plus qu'un grouillement confus et noir) elle fait penser... à ces accumulations de confetti repoussées par les balayeurs dans les caniveaux, les lendemains de fêtes. (p.71)

In Simon's recent fiction then, he is elaborating a sophisticated paradox - the simultaneous effect of the text depends upon a process which occupies real time and

takes place in the real world, i.e. the act of reading. Thus throughout Les Corps conducteurs, Triptyque and Leçon de choses - and sometimes even in Le Palace, Histoire and La Bataille de Pharsale - we find him making a facetious and subversive use of the integrative indices which, according to Barthes,[50] unify the plot and serve to situate it in referential time and space. In none of these novels do we find any overall integrated plot. Yet frequently the most minimal details and 'non-events' are given extended treatment, the different stages in their referentially short process being described at fairly regular intervals in the text. There are detailed descriptions of the stages of the newspaper unfolding in Le Palace, the blood trickling down Corinne's leg in Histoire, the old woman crossing the hotel foyer in Les Corps conducteurs, the purely imaginary avalanche of snow sweeping over the man in Les Corps conducteurs, the dissolution of beer bubbles in the same novel, the banal manoeuvres of the fishermen and the man eating sardines in Leçon de choses. By identifying the parametric index, which normally assures the continuity of a work, with the stages of minimally informational 'incidents', Simon exposes the narratorial control over the frequency and duration of the account of anything and the completely arbitrary nature of the pseudo-time of the plot. Elsewhere, it is the traditional use of the informational indices which is subverted. This is, I think, the function of those lengthy descriptions which note with meticulous care the modulations in light and weather conditions, while stressing the lack of anthropologically interesting change in a scene. Traditionally, such indices were used to situate the events

described metonymically in relation to the real time with which the reader would be familiar, i.e. they were subordinated to the maintenance of an illusion and the creation of a verisimilitudinous fictional world. In Simon's work, all the other elements which contributed to this illusion have been eliminated or undermined, and a set of contradictory relations, subverting both the notion of temporal continuity and spatial coherence, have been set up between the principal motifs. In the context of so many factors working against illusion, the informational indices find themselves to be gratuitous and ineffective in their traditional function. Their gratuitous presence in the text foregrounds and renders inoperative the pact between author and reader they were supposed to bolster. Instead of acting as a familiar frame by which the reader could effect a relatively easy 'entry' into the fictional world and its temporality, they punctuate the passing of real time involved in the act of reading. The reader reads on, but nothing or at least nothing which could be called a coherent, continuous, significant action happens; yet suddenly he is reminded by a notation of a light-change that time has passed in the real world since the previous notation of light. Thus although a renvoi is set up between one temporal notation and another, establishing a spatial link in the reader's mind independent of fictional sequence, that same renvoi emphasizes the linear process of reading and of writing.[51]

In Triptyque, the constant return to the interior of the house in the pastoral motif, the repeated references to the clock and the notation of very slight changes, such as the fact that the intervals between the buzzing noises

of the dying fly are getting longer, remind us of the progress of the text. The proairetic labelling of actions has been suspended - here the events are too minimal to be namable - and attention has been diverted from the action to the activity of the distribution of _semes_, which the reader was prèviously required to naturalize and interpret. Here, the interpretative value of the _semes_ in terms of theme or character is nil; their _reprise_ serves simply to foreground the time-governed nature of the linguistic medium.

On pages 110-13 of _Triptyque_, Simon further complicates the paradox of the _renvoi_ which unifies things that are not juxtaposed in the text, but which, the closer it comes to literal repetitiveness, draws attention to the linear nature of language. Here the notation of the minimal changes in the scene described takes the form of the effacement of that scene as night creeps in, or rather as darkness becomes more prominent in the description. This notation of light changes is, in fact, a negative version of the initial description of the play of light and shadow. The resumption of the same detail in negative terms - 'on ne distingue plus la vache morte (peut-être là-bas ces quatre maigres poteaux verticaux et plus clairs)' (p.112) and 'On ne distingue plus les pattes de la vache morte' (p.113) - demonstrates the extent to which the illusion of time in the fictional world is simply the result of textual variations and has no referential status whatsoever. This is also brought out by the fact that despite the constant references to the church clock in _Triptyque_, reminding us of the progression of the text, there is no reference to the different times indicated on it, which would locate it in relation to

measurement extrinsic to the book and to the textual progression.

To sum up, in Simon's recent fiction, the theme of time has been textualized. Such temporal indications as there are are limited to notations about the weather and minor changes in the surroundings, which publicize the discrepancy between the lack of time-embodying events in the narrative and the number of pages read/readerly time spent. Simon reminds us of the essentially linear nature of language, through the choice of a referent which either does not change or changes minimally, while the text proceeds through its many linguistic combinations and recombinations.

The first part of this chapter on Simon's relativization of key-notions in traditional temporal measurement and historiography proved to be quite a useful means of determining both Simon's weaknesses and his strengths. The critique, by a novelist, of traditional novelistic representational ambitions says little about the perceptual and analytic competence of that writer outside his own field. However, Simon's attack on the authority of historiography and the tools by which it synthesizes the myriad and ubiquitously agitated world into an ordered framework embodied the limitations and partiality of the nouveau romancier. The critique was selective rather than rigorous; it was focused upon a vulgarized, commonsensical view of history which has prevailed despite centuries of ratiocinative and nuanced historical philosophy; it testified to Simon's prejudice in favour of the novel. Notwithstanding, his subversion of specific tool-concepts showed at its best

his sensitivity to paradox and his ability to follow the implications of a paradox to their irreconcilable conclusions. Furthermore, his reworking of some of these ideas in his own terms has to be seen in the light of a general valorization of synchrony and paradigm, of the codes through which we perceive the world but which normally are ignored.

The second part of the chapter tried to keep this latter point in mind in its study of Simon's own conception of memory and time, and of the evolution of that conception. In this respect, the early novels revealed little but a debt to Faulkner's foregrounding of the discrepancies in temporal value for different people and of the impossibility of reconciling different experiences of the same time into an ordered sequential narrative. Our discussion of Simon's middle period of fiction tried to show that his critique of traditional historical representation was not simply the expected sabotage of a nouveau romancier, but is closely connected with his interest in perception, and the formulation of the perceived. The simultaneity of the mass of sensations experienced at any one moment, the intermittent nature of our perception of time, the lack of continuity of the ego in time and the ambiguities of memory preclude any definitive, teleologically structured representation. This results in his work in an associative and Chinese-box structure which corresponds closely to Merleau-Ponty's description of memory as a process of emboîtement and which projects a multitude of levels of time on to the single surface of the page. In Simon, however, the parenthetic intercalation of material de-emphasizes diachronic distance in favour of synchronic association to a degree unmatched by Merleau-Ponty. For this

latter, the process of emboîtement remains a metaphor to convey the complexity of memory processes and the constant realignment of remembered content to accommodate new data. The spatial image translates something of the simultaneity of association, but the notion of a succession of emboîtements accords that of referential duration an undeniable validity. In Simon's recent novels, the attempt to evoke something of the complexity of temporal experience has been narrowed down to the only aspect which a novel can, considered rigorously, indicate - the relations of frequency and duration which mediate between the writer's and the reader's times, and the paradoxical establishment of simultaneous connections in the reader's mind between passages read at some temporal distance from each other. In these novels, time has no referential value - it is a textual product springing from an organization of elements in view of a certain order of reading. The writer capitalizes on the process of emboîtement at work in the reader's memory, this latter's capacity to see the passage he is reading in relation to what he has read, in order to foreground overall textual structure and individual textual renvois which will linger in the reader's mind after he has forgotten the specific order of narration. Simon complements and exercises this psychological process by the deployment of nesting and interlocking narrative motifs. Emboîtement becomes a narrative technique which counteracts somewhat the linear thrust of language, a macro-structure which underpins the detail of the text, makes the reading of it a dynamic process[52] and gives the spatial image a more precise applicability.

Conclusion

La 'preuve' d'une critique n'est pas d'ordre 'aléthique' (elle ne relève pas de la vérité), car le discours critique... n'est jamais que tautologique: il consiste finalement à dire avec retard, mais en se plaçant tout entier dans ce retard, qui par là même n'est pas insignifiant: Racine c'est Racine, Proust, c'est Proust. (Roland Barthes, Essais critiques, p.256)

The introduction to this study outlined two principal aims, the fulfilment of which I hoped would usefully complement an already impressive body of critical writing on Claude Simon. Firstly, throughout this thesis, I have tried to do justice to Simon's very complex evolution and to give ample weight to the twin interests whose relationship constituted the principal factor in that evolution - Simon's concern with questions of perception and representation. The fairly simple but often neglected fact to emerge from this was that despite quite drastic modifications in Simon's style, despite changes in direction effected by the various 'romans de transition', there remains a central, novelistic definition which maintains consistency amidst evolution - i.e. the work of art, for Simon, is a means of renewing our perception of things.

The definition itself is far from new, and Simon's repeated citation of passages to this effect from Formalist writing could be dismissed as facile plagiarism, were it not for the rigour with which he explores the implications and validity of the axiom. The detail of our argument has outlined the way in which Simon's conception of the mechanisms of perception impinged upon his representational preoccupations. Simon's own interpretation of the notion of defamiliarization

was shown to depend heavily upon that of intersubjectivity and a paradoxical response to language in the form of a gratified surprise ('inattendu attendu'). His understanding of the effect of the malfunction of a familiar tool on our perception of the world contributed equally to his defamiliarization of things in the world and to that of the traditional forms by which those things were (supposedly) represented. His sensitivity to the implications of the spatial relationship between _forme_ and _fond_ was extended to the structure of the novels, contributing to the _emboîtement_ of narrative motifs, and entailing a reconception of novelistic space, in terms which take account of readerly time and the association of textually distant passages through _renvoi_ and motif. Finally, to set the seal of the _mise en abyme_ on the other evidence of the indissoluble relationship between perceptual and representational interests in Simon, I should like to quote a passage from the work which embodies the elaboration of Simon's most sustained metaphor for the tentative process of aesthetic production-- _Orion aveugle_. The description is 'generated' on the basis of Poussin's painting _Landscape with Blind Orion_, and stresses the impossibility of distinguishing between the human/mythological figures and the natural surroundings:

> Quoique les règles de la perspective soient apparemment observées pour suggérer au spectateur la sensation de profondeur, le peintre s'est contradictoirement attaché à multiplier les artifices qui ont pour résultat de détruire cet effet de façon que le géant se trouve partie intégrante du magma de terre, de feuillages, d'eau et de ciel qui l'entoure... De ce fait le paysage perd toute dimension perpendiculaire à la toile. Au contraire il se bossèle, se creuse, projette en avant certains de ses éléments non pas selon leur proximité ou leur éloignement rationnel, mais selon les seuls besoins de cette rhétorique. Il cesse d'être ciel, cailloux, feuilles, pour se faire

> environnement, ou plutot gangue... Le rocher qui surplombe la colline, aux pans violemment éclairés ou obscurs, le bouillonnement tumultueux des nuées aux noirs replis, sont de la même nature que le dos musculeux, rocheux, du géant englué dans cette même argile où le créateur a pétri indifféremment les formes du monde vivant et inanimé. (pp.127-8)

This description sums up, without giving priority to either, both aspects of Simon's conception of the relationship between perception of the world and art - they draw attention to the inextricable interdependence of man and his Lebenswelt and to the aesthetic production of medium-specific correspondences between things which we would 'in reality' consider as discrete entities. Simon's idiosyncratic interpretation of Poussin stands also as a succinct summary of his own deployment of traditional techniques in such a way as to subvert their credibility and foreground the materiality of the medium used. Furthermore, this description presents in epitomizing miniature the ambivalent position of Simon's writing which, even when it seems to be dealing with a traditional thematic repertoire such as war, love or memory, evidences a dissatisfaction with the representational limitations of art and a self-reflecting concern with structural elements and linguistic patterns; which, even at its most formal and 'unrealistic' retains traces of a 'humanist' interest in the way in which we perceive reality. In short, Simon's coherence is based on a suggestive and dynamic ambivalence which, if it causes him to paper over the occasional philosophical crack, nevertheless involves him in an important personal study of the relationship between perception and representation.

Secondly, as a counterpoise to the potentially static insistence on Simon's fundamental coherence, I have tried in each chapter to produce a critical framework which might accommodate his marked evolution. The distribution of our material within each chapter took into account Simon's emphasis on the importance of tradition in aesthetic innovation, and tried to assess the relative prominence of the perceptual and representational interests at different points in his career. Thus the first section of each chapter consisted of an appraisal of the extent of Simon's debt to and reaction against tradition, while the second part showed the positive, productive correlative to this reaction and outlined both the idiosyncratic constants and the more dynamic trends in his work.

The complexity of this evolution is such that, while adopting in general terms the accepted view of a three-phase development in Simon, I have been at pains to stress the lack of drastic divisions, and to blur somewhat my own delimitation of stages with qualifications and cross-comparisons. I have tried to compensate for the inevitable simplification involved in the division of Simon's novelistic career into periods, by the claim that what takes place is a much more gradated shift in emphasis from one of his complementary foci of interest to the other. Thus while his perceptual interests initiated experimentation on the technical level, they also alerted him to the crucial differences between direct perception and linguistic formulation, and to the problematic nature of any attempt to reproduce the conditions of perception. In an interview given at the point when - having completed Histoire - he was about to embark upon the

novel inaugurating the third "stage" of his development, Simon refers to the contribution of Jean Ricardou's linguistically oriented theory to his thought and conveniently sums up his own mature understanding of the difference between seeing and writing:

> J'ai trouvé dans une étude de Ricardou à peu près cette idée: lorsque nous percevons un objet, le monde entier se trouve nié, annulé. Ce verre quand je le regarde, me prive de tout ce que je ne vois pas. Si j'entreprends de décrire ce verre - qui me cache tout quand je le regarde - je vais énumérer les qualités qui sont communes à ce verre et à beaucoup d'autres objets. Ce verre se trouve dès lors relié au monde qui se reconstitue dans le langage.[1]

According to Simon, the differentiation and focusing involved in perception isolates the object perceived from the rest of the world, relegates the rest of the world to the status of background. Description, on the contrary, establishes linguistic relationships which militate against the inevitable, if temporary, emphasis of linear expression, and confounds the object initially described with a multitude of other objects whose qualities it shares. The capitalization on this associative process opened up creative avenues which more than compensate for the representational limitations of language.

A final word should be said about my contextualization of Simon's <u>oeuvre</u>. While Merleau-Ponty's interest in Simon's work and Simon's own references to Barthes and Lacan provided the cues for the critical models used in chapters one and two, I have resisted the temptation to relate Simon's work exclusively to any one school of perceptual or linguistic theory. The question of precise influence has not been one of my chief concerns, and in my external reference I sought

simply to find convenient co-ordinates in contemporary thought by which to gauge Simon's own development. Thus in my third chapter, at the risk of occasional eclecticism, I tried to lift the question of temporal perception out of the mire of speculation about Simon's humanist, tragic or nihilistic view of history, by restricting myself to a discussion of the points of contention with traditional historiography to be deduced from his novels and the recognizable points of convergence between passages in his works and recent semiological studies. This chapter reached the conclusion that Simon was ultimately less concerned to put forward his own theory of history, than to suggest the paradoxes and inconsistencies intrinsic to traditional concepts and to explore the infinite manipulability of narrated and readerly time and its role in the production of meaning.

The rarity of my references to the Nouveau Roman in general has been determined by the same reasons which governed my reluctance to align Simon definitively with any single philosophical standpoint. This thesis has tried to show that the features which determined Simon's association with the loosely defined phenomenon of the Nouveau Roman derive not simply from a fashionable reaction against the conventions and complacency of what is described, in the rather unfair shorthand of some of the more vociferous nouveaux romanciers, as the Balzacian novel. It springs rather from a strong personal interest in questions of perception and representation. Simon has stressed on several occasions that the common ground among the writers of the Nouveau Roman consists essentially of a negative

dismissal of the traditional definition of the novel in terms of plot and character.[2] Furthermore, as Jean Ricardou remarked in his introduction to the Cerisy colloquium on Simon, the consideration of literature in terms of general intertextuality alone, while subverting the myth of originality, does not do justice to the specificity of the group of novels bearing a single signature (p.11). Our main interest, therefore, has lain in the intertextualité restreinte[3] of the body of texts filed under the name of Claude Simon, and in the dynamic interaction of his theory and practice. The thesis has been consistently more concerned with the specificity and coherence-within-evolution of the body of Simon's texts - a specificity and coherence grounded in his own constantly developing thoughts on both tradition and innovation. The relatively rare and laconic formulation of this theory is offset by its varied and experimental embodiment in his novelistic practice, which in turn enriches the theory and occasions the introduction of finer nuances into his critical terminology.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

1. The following abbreviations will be used to denote Simon's work in page references and footnotes: LT(Le Tricheur), CR(La Corde raide), G(Gulliver), SP(Le Sacre du printemps), V(Le Vent), H(L'Herbe), RF(La Route des Flandres), P(Le Palace), Hist(Histoire), BP(La Bataille de Pharsale), OA(Orion aveugle), CC(Les Corps conducteurs), T(Triptyque), LC(Leçon de choses). The colloquia proceedings Claude Simon: Colloque de Cerisy and Nouveau Roman, hier, aujourd'hui (2 vols) will be referred to respectively as Colloque and NRI/II. Full details of all works mentioned are included in the bibliography. Where possible, page references for quotations will be given in the text.

2. Simon ratifies the general critical division of his work into three main phases though he is not always consistent in the demarcation of their boundaries. I regard Le Vent (1957) and La Bataille de Pharsale (1969) as the two most significant transitional works each straddling two phases. While insisting on the fluidity of these categories, I shall divide his work until Leçon de choses as follows: 1st phase - Le Tricheur (1945) to Le Vent, 2nd phase - Le Vent to La Bataille de Pharsale, 3rd phase - La Bataille de Pharsale to Leçon de choses (1975).

3. See Problèmes du nouveau roman, Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, Nouveaux problèmes du roman.

4. Merleau-Ponty used examples from Simon's work to illustrate his lectures at the Collège de France. Of his thoughts on Simon, only the 'Cinq notes sur Claude Simon' (Médiations, no.4, 1961, 5-9) seem to have survived. However, the November 1981 issue of Critique publishes a letter from Merleau-Ponty to Simon (pp.1147-9).

5. I do not think that my consideration of Simon's own statements and my subsequent recourse to Structuralist concepts are necessarily inconsistent. Barthes and Ricardou object to the idea that a text has a unitary meaning injected into it by a unitary author, and attack the psychoanalytic interpretation and the critical approach based on a criterion of originality (See 'The Death of the Author' in Image, Music, Text and '"Claude Simon", textuellement' in Colloque). Barthes has not looked very far into the relationship between the theory and practice of a single writer. However, his early emphasis on the necessary ajustement of criticism to the historically determinate language of the writer (Essais critiques, p.256), his ascription of a restricted relevance to the 'auteur' considered as 'un être de papier' with 'une bio-graphie ... une écriture sans référent, matière d'une connexion, et non d'une filiation' (S/Z, p.217) and the importance he attaches to the interaction between the écrivain and language must logically accord the aesthetic reflections of the writer a certain, if limited, paper validity. Ricardou tackles this problem more directly in his distinction between the traditional notion of the auteur and his own definition and preference for the term scripteur (Colloque, pp. 11-12). The notion of the scripteur places the emphasis

on the restricted intertextual reading of a group of works bearing a single name, and gives considerable prominence to the mutually influential evolution of the scripteur's theory and practice (p.13).

6. 'Sifting the Fragments', p.282.

7. R. Garzarolli, 'Interview de Claude Simon. Pas de crise du roman français', p.25.

8. My italics.

9. See C. Duverlie, 'Interview with Claude Simon', p.19.

10. The Nouveau Roman, p.20.

11. Phénoménologie de la perception, p.450. Hereafter, page references to this book will be given after quotations and the title will be abbreviated to PP.

12. Simon, 'Littérature: tradition et révolution', p.12.

13. A. Poirson, 'Un homme traversé par le travail', p.36.

14. Duverlie, 'Interview with Claude Simon', p.17.

15. Répertoire I, p.8.

16. Julien Green à la recherche du réel, p.90.

17. Compare A. Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, pp.7, 74.

18. See Heath's attack on the notion that Robbe-Grillet is a phenomenologist (The Nouveau Roman, pp.67-120).

19. 'Pour Monique Wittig', p.69.

20. See also 'Pas de crise du roman français' and Entretiens, 31, p.16.

21. 'Débat. Le romancier et la politique', p.26.

22. G. Le Clec'h, 'Claude Simon: le jeu de la chose et du mot', p.6.

23. G. Le Clec'h, 'Je ne suis pas un homme-orchestre', p.19. Compare Merleau-Ponty's definition of the 'authentic parole' (PP, p.213) and Barthes' Utopian 'texte de jouissance (Le Plaisir du Texte, p.25). According to J. Culler ('Phenomenology and Structuralism'), both the phenomenological view as represented by Merleau-Ponty and the Structuralist approach of Barthes' S/Z are founded on the notion of the competence of the individual to understand the linguistic code into which he is born and to recombine elements of that langue into a new parole. Viewed in this light, the two approaches would be simply emphasizing two aspects of this competence, the first the competence of the reader, the second the competence of the writer.

Chapter 1.

1. Unless otherwise indicated, 'behavioural' and 'novelistic behaviourism' will refer to the fairly widespread conception of characterisation as an extension of the way in which, in reality, we 'know' others through a comparison with our knowledge of ourselves. In the novel, we are often granted a privileged access to the thoughts and motives of the characters, and the notation of behaviour is always pointedly significant; but it is generally supposed that in the interpretation of these notations of behaviour the reader is activating a process of 'extrapolation' on the basis of 'the aggregate of our experiences in a number of situations, relationships, contexts'. (W.J. Harvey, Character and the Novel, p.31)

2. Compare Chavannes and 'cheval'.

3. See D. Chizhevsky, 'The Theme of the Double' in Dostoievski, edited by R. Wellek, (pp.112-30).

4. Compare Faulkner, to whom Simon has often acknowledged a considerable debt. See A. Kinney, Faulkner's Narrative Poetics, p.33.

5. See S/Z, p.26.

6. See S/Z, p.26, Culler, Structuralist Poetics, pp.203, 236-7.

7. See Sykes, Les Romans de Claude Simon (pp.28-30) for a fuller discussion of the theme of saintliness.

8. The riddle presents in schematic form one of the defining characteristics of 'realistic' fiction - the attempt to transform an arbitrary gamut of alternatives into a quest for truth.

9. See S/Z, pp.98-100.

10. Note also Simon's attention to the movements of non-human mobile things in his ubiquitous comparisons with animals and robots. In Triptyque, Simon unhurriedly fills a page with the description of the manoeuvres of a trout (p.27) and a decelerated account of the stages in the process by which a cow raises itself to a standing position. Note too the description of the 'motions' of a parasol in Leçon de choses (p.152). Whereas in the character-based novel the interest would be in what the playful twirling of a parasol revealed about the person doing the twirling, Simon concentrates on the effects of the gesture on the various parts of the object. By breaking the motion down into its constituent stages, he demonstrates its complexity.

11. Compare Les Corps conducteurs, p.64.

12. See L'Herbe, pp.189-90.

13. The Craft of Fiction, (1921).

14. At my interview with him, Simon told me that he attended lectures on his own work given by Merleau-Ponty a few months before the latter's death.

15. 'Un bloc indivisible', p.5.

16. B. Knapp, 'Interview avec Claude Simon', pp.181-2.

17. 'A life-world is to be conceived of as an oriented world with an experiencing self at its centre, designated as such by personal pronouns.' (H. Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement, p.161)

18. 'Pour qui donc écrit Sartre?', p.33.

19. H. Juin, 'Les Secrets d'un romancier', p.5.

20. See G. d'Aubarède, 'Claude Simon. Instantané', p.7.

21. See A. Bourin, 'Techniciens du roman', p.4; D. Bourdet, 'Images de Paris', p.136. The two personal details enjoy a privileged prominence in Simon's interviews and are inextricably bound up with his conception of the evolution of his theory and practice.

22. 'Disons... que la vie de la conscience - vie connaissante, vie du désir ou vie perceptive - est sous-tendue par un 'arc intentionnel' qui projette autour de nous notre passé, notre avenir, notre milieu humain, notre situation physique, notre situation idéologique, notre situation morale, ou plutôt qui fait que nous soyons situés sous tous ces rapports.' (PP, p.158)

23. Even in fairly banal circumstances, Simon and his characters retain a capacity to imaginatively project their consciousness outside of their bodies and to envisage the view of their bodies acting in another's perceptual field. See La Corde raide, p.171, L'Herbe, p.15, Le Palace, pp.127-8.

24. Spiegelberg, p.550.

25. 'Rendre la perception confuse, multiple et simultanée du monde', p.V.

26. Situations I, p.68.

27. G. Genette, Figures III, p.108.

28. Sykes, Les Romans de Claude Simon, p.11.

29. There may be an intertextual reference to Baudelaire's 'J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans' and to Verlaine's 'Le piano que baise une main frêle'.

30. See P. Hamon, 'Statut sémiologique du personnage', pp.126-7.

31. pp.25-6.

32. C.f. the vectorial description in Triptyque (pp.167-8) of the relationships between the wedding-party halted at the cross-roads and the people standing at the café

entrance, and the notation of their visibility for each other.

33. 'Views through the Screen, In-Site in Claude Simon'.

34. Compare Phénoménologie de la perception, pp.108, 384.

35. Répertoire II, pp.42-50.

36. ibid., p.96.

37. See Les Corps conducteurs pp.15, 20, 48, 49; Triptyque pp.58, 60, 89, 113, 119, 147, 209; Leçon de choses, pp.46, 52, 141, 146, 148.

38. See also the description of the drawing in Simon's short text 'Deux personnages' and the bizarre effect produced by the absence of unconsciously expected shadows.

39. La Route des Flandres is punctuated by references to different types of eyes - human (p.167), animal (pp.130, 157), substitute (i.e. binoculars p.151), imaginary (i.e. 'des yeux dans le dos', p.228), and metaphorical ('se bombant comme une lentille', p.125).

40. 'Dès les toutes premières pages du roman, se trouve une description des lieux où il est dit qu'à partir d'un certain endroit (le haut de la cascade) l'on ne peut pas voir nettement à la fois le clocher et les ombelles qui se trouvent au premier plan c'est-à-dire que lorsque l'image du clocher est nette, celle des ombelles est floue et inversement, ce qui annonce très explicitement que ces images résultent du réglage de la lentille d'un objectif.' (Colloque, p.184)

41. See Histoire, pp.258, 280, 350, 366, 401; Les Corps conducteurs, p.81; Triptyque, p.138; Leçon de choses, pp.52, 160.

42. See Le Vent, pp.76-7; La Route des Flandres, p.239; Le Palace, pp.27, 75; Histoire, p.49.

43. Compare the odd discrepancy between sight and touch in La Route des Flandres (p.238): 'il éprouva d'abord la bizarre sensation de ne pas la toucher vraiment, comme lorsqu'on prend un oiseau dans la main: cette surprise, cet étonnement provoqué par la différence entre le volume apparent et le poids réel, l'incroyable légèreté, l'incroyable délicatesse, la tragique fragilité des plumes'.

44. See our chapter 2, pp.176-9 for a discussion of Simon's use of the manual.

45. Répertoire I, p.7.

46. T. de Saint-Phalle, 'Claude Simon: franc-tireur de la révolution romanesque'. p.7.

47. See the short text 'Sous le kimono', published in Les Lettres françaises, 19-25 janvier 1961, for an early variation on this theme, describing the guilt and sexual desire the narrator associates with fairgrounds. Likewise, our next example is a variation on a passage in 'Comme du sang délayé' (Les Lettres françaises, 1-7 décembre 1960, 1,5). In both cases, the original version consisted of a much more detailed, laboured analysis of contingent psychological causes. The greater concentration of the later versions gives more prominence to the phonetic factor in association and testifies to a siginificant change in emphasis.

48. Compare 'Un Homme traversé par le travail', p.39.

49. See E. Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale, p.259.

50. M. Chapsal, 'Le Jeune roman', p.32. This is an indirect account of the substance of Simon's statement.

51. See Théorie de la littérature, translated by T. Todorov, p.16.

52. ibid. p.21.

53. S/Z, p.26.

54. 'Claude Simon: franc-tireur de la révolution romanesque' p.7. Compare 'pour le lecteur, au moment où vous écrivez le mot 'syndicaliste' il s'agit d'un personnage qu'il connaît déjà: le lecteur a son idée toute faite sur le syndicaliste. Alors il faudrait pour décrire un syndicaliste arriver à le peindre sans prononcer le mot.' (A. Villelaur, 'Le Roman est en train de réfléchir sur lui-même', p.5).

55. A. Bourin, 'Cinq romanciers jugent le roman', p.8.

56. Sur la théorie de la prose, translated by G. Verret, p.72.

57. p.17.

58. The apocalyptic or catastrophic comparison is a prominent intertextual motif in Simon. See Gulliver, pp:44,45; Le Vent, pp.28, 34, 41, 153; L'Herbe, p.197; Le Palace, pp.170, 187; Histoire, p.110; Leçon de choses, pp.22-8.

59. 'Un Homme traversé par le travail', pp.34-5.

60. Compare 'Le contraste entre la nudité des deux personnages et le décor, les meubles de style, confère à la scène un caractère insolite...' ('Deux personnages', p.14).

61. See our chapter 2, pp.241-5.

Chapter 2.

1. i.e. what Barthes calls a punctum, a connotative detail which suspends the detached general interest or studium of the peruser of photographs. The punctum consists of a fortuitous, unintentionally recorded detail or the anachronistic index of the original recording conditions. See La Chambre claire, pp.47-52, 69-80, 148-51.

2. ibid. pp.148-50.

3. See Problèmes du nouveau roman, p.113; Pour une théorie du nouveau roman, p.111.

4. Note the banality of Simon's criteria of classification elsewhere. People in his novels tend to be categorized according to whether they are wearing Wellington boots or not (LC, p.108), the way they emerge from the métro and buy their newspaper (BP, p.96) or their resemblance to various types of animals (BR, p.79. Perhaps an irony at Zola's expense). Simon shows that people can be classified according to any principle one chooses to adopt and that the apparently watertight categories of 19th-century characterisation are arbitrary.

5. Note the negative emphasis of the last few pages of the first section of La Bataille de Pharsale culminating in 'Le couple ne présente rien de particulier' (p.98). This is a reversal of the traditional meaning-conferring principle whereby to mention something 'signifies'.

6. See Figures III, pp.122-4.

7. 'temps, combien, manger, fortune, Reixach', 'ce garçon, fils, votre nom, ne porte pas', 'j'imagine, doit avoir, père, quelque part, fabuleusement riche, lui aussi', 'lycée, sortie, pincée, sa poche, drogues? quoi? cigarettes? non? pire? fichtre!'

8. See L. Dällenbach's remarks in Colloque, pp.210-11.

9. See L'Ère du soupcon, pp.8-9.

10. P. Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, pp.268-9.

11. On page 21 of L'Herbe, Louise's 'mais ce n'est qu'une vieille...' would seem to abruptly recapitulate the preceding, apparently objective description on the part of the narrator and transform it into a transcription of Louise's thoughts or an indirect summary of her words. On page 206, what would seem to be the narrator's account of what is to be heard of the old couple's fight from Louise's point of view is suddenly subsumed in this latter's account of her perceptions of it to her lover the following day. Here, Simon is primarily interested in disrupting the reader's preconceptions about the relationship between narrative point of view and point of reference, our assumption that the former includes the latter. Compare the abrupt changes in the combination

narrator-interlocutor/listener, and in the narrator's situation in La Route des Flandres (pp.20, 27, 43, 49, 88, 93, etc.).

12. Note: 'En ce qui concerne la fragmentation de la fiction, je pense qu'il y aurait là, comme pour l'importance prise par la description, tout un travail à faire en rapprochant encore ce phénomène de celui qui s'est produit dans la peinture, en particulier avec le cubisme, sans parler des notions de continu et de discontinu que Flaubert semblait, avant les scientifiques, déjà avoir senti (Emma Bovary... revoit..."d'un seul coup... *et par tableaux détachés*" des figures, des lieux, des paysages, etc.).' (Colloque, pp.413-4)

13. See Lubbock, p.267.

14. Compare pp.213-4 of L'Herbe, where the initially panoramic survey of the changes in weather gives way to their description in terms of the dissolution of the paint of a picture.

15. This internecine strife may be seen to illustrate a point - derived from Novalis - which Simon makes frequently in interviews, claiming that those who try to manipulate language will find that it turns against them:

> celui qui veut se servir de [la langue] pour lui faire exprimer quelque chose, alors la langue se vengera et lui fera dire des sottises. ('Un homme traversé par le travail').

Simon gives a concrete example of this linguistic backfiring in the short text 'Le Candidat':

> Pour en revenir aux mots et aux formules clef, voici quels étaient les principaux... Kominform... Kominformistes... Prononcés par la voix à l'accent méridional encore amplifiée caricaturalement par la déformation du son dans les haut-parleurs, ces deux mots prenaient un aspect assez comique, quelque chose qui faisait penser à 'croquemitaine' et, par association sonore, à 'Conformistes' ou 'Formalistes', ce qui ne manquait pas d'une certaine saveur.

16. See A. Jefferson, The Nouveau Roman and the Poetics of Fiction, p.201; M. Deborne-Bonnefoi, 'Volumes - Feuillets - Planches', p.23.

17. Note the number of times people are described as framed by a door or window (e.g. BP, pp.90, 124, 131, 156, 161).

18. A Poetics of Composition, p.140.

19. These passages invite the reader to consider the rather different nature of the limitations of pictorial and verbal representation. The fragmentary nature of the image is communicated to the viewer by its circumscriptive frame and (in photography) by fortuitous, unthematized details of content. In contrast, linguistic formulation is infinitely extensible but is defined by the selectivity/gaps in its account and the inevitable, if temporary

emphasis/distortion of linear description. This discrepancy in nature means that even the attempt to produce an exact linguistic analogue for a pre-selective pictorial representation is bound to fail. See Barthes, Image, Music, Text, edited by Heath, pp.18-9.

20. See P. Macherey, Pour une théorie de la production littéraire, pp.98, 105-6.

21. Another example of a punctum. The butterfly is a disruptive, unintentional point of interest which suggests both the spatial and temporal champ aveugle surrounding, and preceding and following the recorded field/instant of the photograph. See La Chambre claire, pp.90-1.

22. See, for example, the vague and inclusive definition given by M. Price in Literary Theory and Structure, pp.177-8.

23. Compare Macherey, pp.89-90.

24. Compare 'You can't expect a man blind from birth to describe or paint a cloud and you can't expect a man deaf from birth to describe a sound. Now it isn't indispensable for a writer or painter to have direct knowledge or experience of what he is describing: he can have second-hand knowledge of it, from pictures or other descriptions. But [Robbe-Grillet] could never have written [Projet pour une révolution à New York] without having read or seen documents about the city.' (Duverlie, 'Interview with Claude Simon', p.16)

25. ibid., p.15.

26. See J. Meyers, Painting and the Novel, pp.136-47.

27. Spiegelberg, p.656.

28. On page 131, the narrator draws attention to the inevitable frustration experienced by the prospective cataloguer: 'On compte environ deux cents espèces à l'hectare... l'hévea, le palmier, le noyer, le manguier, le bananier, le calebassier... Tout de suite l'énumeration se décourage car elle ne signifie plus rien: dans la pantomime géante des ramures, l'éblouissante pyrotechnie des feuillages et la calligraphie des lianes...'

29. 'Entre les poutres sont posés des *chevrons* qui sont de petites poutres d'une section plus étroite et d'une longueur qui permet d'aller d'une poutre à l'autre... D'autres fois on cloue au-dessous de celles-ci des *tasseaux* qui soutiennent une *claie* faite de roseaux.' (pp.48-9). Compare the description in Histoire (p.179) of the 'Our town' or 'Occupations' type of educational illustration where everything is ordered and roles clearly demarcated, and whereby the child learns to see things in terms of lists of labels and archetypal examples. Compare too the extracts in Histoire (pp.415-6) from a geography or geology book and its confidence in its ability to explain away the passage of time in terms of geological traces.

30. See Figures III, pp.261-7.

31. pp.20-1, 87, 157.

32. S/Z, p.10.

33. See ibid., p.180.

34. ibid., p.188.

35. In their Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse Laplanche and Pontalis define overdetermination as the 'fait qu'une formation de l'inconscient - symptôme, rêve, etc. - renvoie à une pluralité de facteurs déterminants' (p.467). In this thesis, I should like to apply this notion specifically to the network of differential and associative relationships between words on the paradigmatic axis of language, while extending the range of determining factors to include phonetic, cultural and text-specific factors as well as psycho-linguistic and pathological (though this latter category will not concern us here) ones.

36. See Sturrock, Structuralism and Since, p.65.

37. ibid.

38. M. Joguet, 'Dialogue avec Claude Simon: le poids des mots', p.II (14). See also Entretiens, pp.26-7. Note too that both the Barthes of the Essais critiques and Simon explicitly limit the critic's freedom of interpretation. Compare 'si la critique a quelque chose d'un *jeu*, c'est dans son sens mécanique qu'il faut prendre le terme... non dans son sens ludique: la critique est libre, mais sa liberté est surveillée en définitive par certaines *limites* de l'objet qu'elle choisit' (EC, p.271) and 'it is possible to have five, ten, twenty different and juxtaposed interpretations of one text, but there are obviously not one thousand, and there can be some that are purely and simply wrong.' (Duverlie, 'Interview with Claude Simon', p.17).

39. See 'Claude Simon. Instantané', p.7.

40. See also La Bataille de Pharsale, p.18. Compare 'le Signe est une fracture qui ne s'ouvre jamais que sur le visage d'un autre signe', Barthes, L'Empire des signes, p.72.

41. Culler, Saussure, p.28.

42. i.e. as opposed to the Creation myth and its associations with active meaning production.

43. T. Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, p.84.

44. Compare 'les conseils de guerre (appelés en argot militaire de ce mot évocateur, "falot", qui fait surgir, dans la lueur de la lanterne tenue à bout de bras par un sous-officier ou posée à ses pieds, l'image blafarde et flageolante du condamné que l'on s'apprête à fusiller).' (BP, p.136)

45. See Répertoire II, pp.104-23.

46. Thus even the apparently exclusive proper name loses the associations deriving from its etymological root in favour of its current status as an element in the code of brand names: 'Le nom du constructeur (MAC CORMICK)... nom que sa répétition, sa fréquence sur ce genre de machines, a vidé de toute résonance écossaise (et même plus un de ces généraux nordistes à la retraite, à grand chapeau et barbiche blonde président des conseils d'administration dans des wagon-salons aux canapés de cuir capitonnés et empuantis par la fumée des cigares) et devenu (de même que ceux des concurrents: ALIS CHALMERS, SINGER, MASSEY FERGUSON), avec sa consonance sèche, son cliquetis métallique, comme le patronyme générique de tout ce qui, à la surface du monde, rampe dans un grincement de chaînes.' (BP, p.151).

47. See Simon's reference to Lacan's definition of the word - 'Le mot n'est pas seulement signe mais noeud de significations'-and his lengthy quotation at the Nouveau Roman colloquium (NR II, p.73) of Lacan's commentary on rideau.

48. Note, 'l'organisation de l'ensemble des éléments d'un roman ne diffère pas - sauf bien sûr par l'ampleur - de l'organisation des éléments à l'intérieur d'un détail, d'une page ou d'une phrase.' (NR II, p.92)

49. 'Un Homme traversé par le travail' p.35.

50. See The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp.71-6.

51. NR II, p.97.

52. P-A. Rieben, 'Claude Simon à Lausanne', pp.57-8.

53. Semiotikè p.16.

54. Lecture de L'Herbe, p.139.

55. ibid., p.244.

56. ibid., p.200

57. Compare the conjunction of linguistic connotation and Christian myth in the extended play on passion, p.13.

58. Other examples of the exploitation of homophony can be found on pages 16, 148, 199, 309, 311.

59. See Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p.213.

60. Compare Proust's use of bird imagery to describe Mme. de Guermantes. See V.L. Vance, 'Proust's Guermantes as Birds', and G. Brée, Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time, p.74. Simon is an avid reader of Proust; so the similarity may be intentional.

61. The text eventually comes full circle and concludes with a description of the narrator's mother who looks increasingly like, i.e. reverts to her origin as, a bird.

62. Compare Merleau-Ponty's commentary on Simon's and Butor's 'personnes intermédiaires' and the primacy of a linguistic conception of self which they imply: 'ceci ne se comprend absolument pas soit dans [la] conception classique du Je pense soit dans [la] conception de l'ipséité comme néantisation: car alors le cercle de l'ipséité je le tiens, je le trace - Ces usages du langage ne se comprennent que si le langage est un être, un monde, que si c'est la Parole qui est le cercle.' (Entretiens, 31, p.43.)

63. 'Claude Simon publie un nouveau roman', p.7.

64. See also pp.44, 46-7, 53-4, 77, 83, 109, 319, 341, 343, 362.

65. Note the association made on pages 45-6 between his linguistic play and his schoolboy commerce.

66. See also page 89.

67. One of the main points made by the use of point of view in La Bataille de Pharsale is that point of view and point of reference are both interdependent and interchangeable. The narrative consciousness is nothing without a (fictional) perceptual support, the object nothing without the consciousness which notes it; the narrative consciousness is made to recognize in the object another external potential point of view which could transform it, the consciousness, into a support. Note especially page 184.

68. Pages 26, 27, 37, 38, 39, 42, 46, 71, 74, 77, 97.

69. See Loubère's discussion of the pun 'o'/'aubepine', in The Novels of Claude Simon, p.161.

70. The measure of Simon's attempt to eliminate traces of contingent determination can be economically assessed by a comparison between the intertextual genesis of Les Corps conducteurs and the open-ended beginning of Le Sacre du printemps which tries to create the impression of an opening in medias res through heterodiegetic reference: 'C'est seulement au troisième coup de sonnette qu'elle vient m'ouvrir.' Beginnings of this type aim to naturalize the fiction by deflecting attention away from the arbitrariness of the narration and on to the progression of an already commenced sequence of action, and by implying a continuous relationship between the time of the fiction and that of the hors-texte.

71. See pages 21, 30-1, 36, 66, 83, 135-6, 157, 161. The novel also concludes with a rather contrived mise en abyme where the disappearance of Orion at the rising of the sun signifies the eclipse of the narrating consciousness (p.222). Unlike the recombination of motifs to the point

of exhaustion elsewhere, the fiction is gradually reduced to the description of the sick man lying on the floor. This realistically motivated situation allows a development on the metadiegetical level of the narration of a mise en abyme of the production of the novel, where the anatomical description of the eye illustrates the way in which the narrating consciousness has been reduced to an anonymous but subjective consciousness on which the world is reflected in a variety of recombinations. The close-up description of the thread-bare carpet with its human traces ('des brins de cheveux', p.226) reflects the reduction of the fiction to an archetypal narrative trame of threads and motifs held together by a human viewpoint which is just the shadow of the traditional narrator/character. There may be also a sly reference here to the Jamesian figure in the carpet.

The mise en abyme as a literary phenomenon has undergone considerable evolution and restriction since it was coined as a critical term by Gide (Journal 1889-1939, pp.40-1). There, it consists essentially of a small scale reproduction of any of the central themes of the work, and it was usually naturalized fictionally. In the Nouveau Roman, the mise en abyme has come to constitute the cachet or epitome of the self-reflecting work, and as such it points to the ultimate determined, if vague 'meaning' of the works which fall under this heading - it 'signifies' that the work which contains it is about the question of representation and linguistic potential.

Lucien Dällenbach's survey of the evolution of the mise en abyme in Simon (Cerisy, pp.151-71) suggests that this ambivalence or inconsistency is resolved in the most recent works. Here, the fact that the mise en abyme is no longer a pièce toute faite integrated into a larger montage, but is produced in the course of the 'glissement métonymique du récit' and the fact that there is no definitive mise en abyme of the method of production but only numerous partial mises en abyme offering different perspectives on that production relativizes its status as a seme signifying self-reflection. In Triptyque, the stability of the mise en abyme is only temporary; it is exposed as a mere point de caption where meaning is temporarily lodged by the forces of overdetermination.

72. Colloque, p.424. See Jiménez-Fajardo, pp.180-1 for a critical example.

73. Colloque, p.412.

74. For example: geometric motif, pointing finger, Charles Quint, birds, 'suspension', 'pli'/'ride', profiles, sunrays, 'ondulations', 'éclat', 'dent', 'paroi', 'guirlande', 'bosselé'/'ossements', 'verge'/'vergeture', 'déchirure', 'étoile', 'arc', 'ver/t', 'immobile', 'saccadé', 'croix', 'jaune', 'rose'/'rouge', 'bulle', 'colonne ', leaning posture, 'joues gonflées', 'saillies'/'bosses', etc.

75. Oeuvres complètes, Pléiade, p.398.

76. Tenor and comparison are now reversible: 'Le crépitement multiple des applaudissements parvient assourdi, ténu, comme ....ce chuintement lointain que l'on entend dans l'écouteur du téléphone.' (p.100) 'Dans l'écouteur du téléphone le bruit confus des applaudissements crépite de nouveau... comme ... l'ironique et bruyante approbation de milliers d'auditeurs invisibles battant des mains.' (p.104)

77. See NR II, p.91.

78. In Orion aveugle, at least there is considerable interest-value in the interaction between text and image. There, Simon subverts the principle of coherence which usually governs what Barthes sees as the two functions of the linguistic message in relation to an accompanying image and vice versa (See Image, Music, Text, pp.38-41). The most common of these functions is that of anchorage whereby the text elucidates, selects and controls the type of message received by the reader from the image, but remains dependent upon the information supplied by the image. In Orion aveugle, Simon selects certain information from the image (e.g. the shape of a winding river) but instead of formulating it immediately, he pursues one of its associations and 'describes' something completely different (e.g. a feather boa). The freedom of the 'commentary' alerts us to the passive nature of our perception of the relationship between text and image in things such as illustrated manuals, and to the dynamic potential of astute selectivity in the revelation of hitherto unperceived relationships.

The conventional function of relay is also subverted through the extension of its implications. According to Barthes, the linguistic relay is most commonly found in verbally interpreted sequences of images, such as comic-strips and films, 'where the words, as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis' (p.41). The necessary economy of the cartoon and the commercial film tends to entail the dominance of textual information over pictorial information (p.41). Similarly in Orion aveugle, the literary text carries the weight of the various potentialities of fiction (or 'bribes de fiction', Simon would say) which the writer generates from the images or pré-textes. However, whereas in conventional linguistic relay the explicitly verbalized data and the analogical image are informationally complementary and are made to coincide in a single fiction, in Orion aveugle text and image, though metaphorically related, remain independent on the level of relationships of logic and verisimilitude. Orion aveugle precludes the synthesis of image and text into a coherent story and promotes the perception of formal relationships between them. The descriptions related to the Warhol sequence of frames figuring the presidential assassination in Orion aveugle and Les Corps conducteurs is a good example of the refusal of a totalizing narrative commentary in favour of the creation of metaphorical links between this pré-texte and others.

Viewed in this light, the inclusion in La Bataille de Pharsale (pp.65-71) of an innocent-eye description of a cartoon, where what is usually given in terms of pictorial analogues - the setting, the physical appearance of the 'characters' - is verbally rendered, might be seen at one and the same time as a minor variation on the theme of the relationship between text and image and an instance of counterpoint, the cartoon constituting an example of fiction-dominated art (which Simon deplores) in its most schematized form.

79. Colloque, p.424.

80. More precisely, as Simon informed me, this motif was actually based on Max Loreau's analysis of Les Riches fruits de l'erreur in Jean Dubuffet: Délits, déportements, lieux de hauts jeux, pp.426-38. The November 1981 issue of Critique includes a letter from Jean Dubuffet to Simon on the subject of Triptyque (pp.1149-50).

81. Note the following motifs: 'rayure', pointing finger/index in crack, letters of alphabet, glance through half-shut eyes, amputation/decapitation, 'goutte', 'grelot'/'timbre', 'entrecroisement', excess of colour, 'fente', 'évasé', 'perles', 'voile'/'violent'/'violacé'/'violette', 'lac'/'lacis'/'enlacé', 'papillon'/'pavillon'/'papillotant,' 'tuile'/'tulle', 'clitoris'/'Clystère', 'île'/'archipel'.

82. This motif also has an intertextual generator within Simon's own work in the description of the boxer in Les Corps conducteurs: 'Le visage du boxeur n'est qu'une tache ensanglantée et informe où sur un fond rouge sombre le peintre a posé quelques accents vermillon' (p.106). In its turn, it probably generates the description of the injured soldier with his bloody head sticking out from under the covers in Leçon de choses (pp.150-1). Compare too the decapitation motif running throughout Simon.

83. See Ricardou on the mechanism of this pun in Colloque, p.186. Compare the way in which a combination of setting description and narratorial generalization on common cultural codes is used to suggest (produce) the death of the Resistance worker's child in Gulliver (p.28). But in the earlier text, the combinatory technique is subordinated to theme and the depiction of psyche - the passage economically suggests an element of the Resistance leader's background which is to determine his future approval of Gérard's assassination plan, while the use of an innocent eye point of view highlights Gérard's far from innocent moral blackmail.

84. See pages 8, 16, 56, 93, 104, 143, 157, 180, 191, 199, 206, 217, 221.

85. See Butor, Répertoire II, p.72, Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale, pp.254-5, Ricardou, Problèmes du nouveau roman, p.65.

86. Benveniste, p.252.

87. See F. Jost, 'Les Aventures du lecteur'.

88. Barthes, Introduction à l'analyse structurale du récit, p.21.

89. There is an element of playful ingenuousness in this parade of arbitrariness. The attentive reader will recognize that the opening description of the ruin, the adultery motif and the motif of the strategic defence of the shelled house have an intertextual, overdetermining source in the following qualified comparison in La Bataille de Pharsale: 'Boîte dont l'un des côtés a simplement été enlevé. Comme pour les comédies bourgeoises le mari la femme et l'amant. Papier fleuri sur les murs... le type en caleçon remplacé par un soldat... appuyé du dos au cadre de l'alcôve côté cour et contemplant d'un air morne... les gravats de plâtre qui parsèment le sol, la porte arrachée de ses gonds pendant de traviole et le groupe des autres soldats, côté jardin, blessés ou tiraillant encore...' (p.166)

90. Note the role of his artistic training in his comprehension of the way in which the representationally present can be used to imply what is representationally absent: 'intérieur hollondais petit maître école Vermeer... Effet de lumière sur un mur blanc au fond dans l'encadrement d'une porte ouverte Carrelage blanc et noir en perspective... un coffre de chêne dans *le jour oblique qui tombe de la fenêtre invisible à gauche éclairant le mur blanc crémeux*' ('Essai de mise en ordre de notes, prises au cours d'un voyage en Zeeland (1962) et complétées', p.11). My italics.

91. Note references to 'arc'/'croissant'/'circonflexes', 'collerette', 'accordéon', V, 'plis raides', 'succion', erosion, 'ondulation', dust on liquid, jockey posture, cows, 'tremblements', 'dragon', membrane, ships, 'saignée', sculpture, 'duvet', 'boudin', 'voile',

92. Compare the conclusion to the Spanish sequence in Le Sacre du printemps which takes the form of a newspaper clipping (pp.226-9). There, however, Simon was pointing to the discrepancy between the amorphous, uncomprehending nature of experience and the schematization of it in naive representations which try to give an appearance of authority to a collage of hearsay and deductions.

Chapter 3.

1. See pp.78-83.

2. In his short text 'Matériaux de construction', Simon reverses the perspective on human time and indicates a more readily conceivable (for the human if not for the fly) discrepancy in scale: 'mouches du vinaigre se reproduisant... à une vitesse qui permet... d'étudier sur elles les mutations de ces... (chromosomes, gènes?) éléments dont les modifications déterminent l'évolution de l'espèce plusieurs générations en quelques heures (ou jours) de sorte que c'est comme si à côté de notre temps se déroulait un autre temps filant à la vitesse accélérée comme un express doublant un train omnibus.' (p.112)

3. Le Vent, p.15; L'Herbe, p.158.

4. L'Herbe, p.110; La Route des Flandres, p.234; Histoire, pp.379-80; La Bataille de Pharsale, pp.101, 121, 169; Leçon de choses, pp.91, 95, 106, 163-4, 165-6. Note Simon's adoption of the Impressionist practice of describing something under different light conditions. By this he can illustrate the role of the comparison of different experiences of the one thing in our temporal articulation of experience.

5. Histoire, pp.179, 181, 197; La Bataille de Pharsale, p.97, 114; Leçon de choses, pp.148-9.

6. J. Baudrillard (b. 1929) is a lecturer in sociology at the university of Nanterre. His publications include Le Système des objets (1967), La Société de consommation (1970), Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe (1970), and Miroir de production (Tournai, 1973). In Le Système des objets (the only work to which we shall be referring), he carries out a Structuralist and semiological study of the consumer society.

7. Compare Les Corps conducteurs, pp.119-20.

8. Compare the contrast between Georges' experience and Pierre's regret at the bombing of Leipzig library (RF, pp.223-4).

9. Despite the classical reference here and the quotation of Valéry's 'Achilles stanza' as an epigraph, the tenor of this example is closer to the arrow paradox than to the Achilles one. (See The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol.8, pp.374-5.) A later variation in La Bataille de Pharsale on the theme of immobile mobility (p.263) introduces the notion of race central to the Achilles paradox. However, this later passage constitutes an idiosyncratic Simonian version rather than a testimony of fidelity either to the spirit or the letter of Zeno. Simon translates the lack of co-ordinates in the soldier's physical world by which to gauge movement into the static terms of a grisaille painting - out of this grisaille there then emerge the petrified forms of a frieze. The descrip-

tion of the immobile passenger in the moving train ('Voyage') is another variation. Simon is interested in this paradox as a generative seme rather than in its philosophical implications.

10. 'fut de nouveau', 'puis la forêt cessa, buta sur le vide', 'j'en vis un, puis deux, puis trois', 'puis elle bougea et je ne la vis plus', 'puis je restai là', 'puis il décrut peu à peu et de nouveau je perçus...'
Compare the motif of materialization applied to the sudden appearance of an object or person in a character's perceptual field. An atomistic perception of time disrupts the durational and graduated perception of movement, schematizes it into an appearance/disappearance contrast.

11. See S/Z, p.26.

12. See Barthes' commentary on the economic function of the name in S/Z, p.100.

13. Compare Le Palace (p.16) where Simon, playfully, does not identify the photographs of Marx and Stalin which he describes at length.

14. This book, Les Géorgiques, appeared on the 1st September 1981. Simon's anticipatory statement is largely borne out, though it does not adequately suggest the evolution in the General's understanding of military and political machinations.

15. M.Chapsal, 'Entretien. Claude Simon parle', p.32.

16. Contrast the element of reassurance offered by the mythical 'objet ancien' and the shock-effect of the malfunctioning tool. The 'objet ancien', despite its anomalous air in the synchronic sign system of consumer objects, appears to be a proof of the continuity of civilisation in time and reassures by its accomplished fixity, no longer subject to the unpredictable metamorphoses of the fashion/utility determined modern object. (See Baudrillard, Le Système des objets, pp.106-7).

17. ' [The scissors and paste method] consists in excerpting the required material from writers whose work cannot be checked on Herodotean principles, because the eyewitnesses who co-operated in that work are no longer alive.' (R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, p.33)

18. See note 13.

19. 'Littérature: tradition et révolution', p.13.

20. See E.H. Carr, What is History?, p.114.

21. ibid., pp.110-1.

22. See Baudrillard, p.108.

23. 'L'objet fonctionnel est absence d'être. La réalité fait échec à la régression vers cette dimension 'parfaite' d'où il n'est que de procéder pour être... Riche de fonctionnalité et de signifiance pauvre, il se réfère à l'actualité et s'épuise dans la quotidienneté. L'objet mythologique, de fonctionnalité minimale et de signifiance maximale, se réfère à l'ancestralité, ou même à l'antériorité absolue de la nature.' (Baudrillard, p.114)

24. ibid., pp.155-8.

25. ibid., pp.105, 115.

26. ibid., pp.107, 114.

27. ibid., pp.108-113.

28. ibid., p.181.

29. ibid., pp.208-9.

30. According to Barthes (Système de la mode, pp.300-1), the temporally situated individual only perceives the apparently anarchic, micro-diachronic changes in fashion from year to year; he does not have access to the macro-history of fashion which would reveal the semiotic principles of selection and combination underlying diachronic transformation.

31. See Barthes, Image, Music, Text, pp.44-5.

32. See Phénoménologie de la perception, p.383.

33. 'Pour qui donc écrit Sartre?', p.33.

34. Compare 'la mémoire ne nous restitue jamais que des fragments de notre passé. Vous souvenez-vous de ce manuel d'histoire de Mallet et Isaac que nous avions en classe? Une de ses illustrations représente une mosaïque, la défaite de Darius je crois. Rien que des morceaux, des fragments.' ('Techniciens du roman', p.4)

35. C. Sarraute, 'Avec La Route des Flandres, Claude Simon affirme sa manière', p.9.

36. Note 'Il y a trois ans, du train... j'ai vu deux ouvriers espagnols en train de refaire leurs valises sur le quai de la gare de Narbonne. Et brusquement, tout était là, tout était revenu: les odeurs, les images, les sensations... Ce que Proust appelle la 'mémoire involontaire'. La seule vraie, la mémoire des muscles. Vous savez, "Les jambes, les bras sont pleins de souvenirs engourdis".' (M. Chapsal, 'Entretien: Claude Simon parle', p.32)

37. Entretiens 31, p.42.

38. 'Avec La Route des Flandres, Claude Simon affirme sa manière.', p.9.

39. See Fletcher (p.223), Sturrock (pp.66-7), and K. Gould, Claude Simon's Mythic Muse.

40. Mythe de l'éternel retour, pp.18-9.

41. ibid., pp.137-95, 183-5.

42. See Phénoménologie de la perception, p.415.

43. M. Chapsal, 'Entretien: Claude Simon parle', p.33.

44. For example, the play on 'saumur' in La Route des Flandres (p.12), on 'chevaucher' (pp.227, 29, and La Bataille de Pharsale, pp.92-3, 244). Note also the reactivation of fossilized metaphors such as 'avoir une sensibilité d'écorché vif' (Triptyque).
Note especially the homophonous play which suggests a false etymology, creates a common past for several unrelated words: 'ce vieux monstre Plissé pliscénien ou quoi Plioscène Sans doute rien à voir mots qui simplement se ressemblent plésiosaure.' (Histoire, p.319)

45. The reference in L'Herbe (pp.203-4) to the various combinations of letters on initialed sheets, which are often the only traces of the people who used them and of their family history, is a mise en abyme of the embodiment of time in a recombinatory use of language.

46. i.e. other than the vague desire of the writer to write: 'Ce qui pousse un écrivain c'est l'envie d'écrire... Novalis dit "Un auteur a nécessairement pour but d'être un auteur."' (B. Knapp, 'Interview avec Claude Simon', p.181).

47. Genette's 'temps de l'histoire'. See Figures III, p.77.

48. See D. Carroll, 'Diachrony and Synchrony in Histoire'; M. Evans, 'Two uses of Intertextuality: References to Impressionist Painting and Madame Bovary in Claude Simon's Leçon de choses', p.34; and G. Hartman, Beyond Formalism, p.33.

49. In Les Romans de Claude Simon, Stuart Sykes offers a fuller and more nuanced study of the evolution of the spatial image in Simon's theory and its refinement in his practice. My analysis simply lays a greater emphasis on the role of the reader in the 'spatialization' of the text.

50. Introduction à l'analyse structurale du récit, pp.10-11.

51. The parallel relationship of the notations of change of light and shade and the progress of the writer is reinforced by the comparison between the shadows and ink spilt from an overturned bottle (p.199) and by the final obliteration of the countryside by inky night (p.206) - i.e. the text has reached saturation point.

52. Simon sums up this dynamic structure in the comparisons he draws between his art and that of the religious triptych, in itself a kinetic object and animated on the level of the representation by the renvois of form and colour from one panel to another. See Colloque, p.427.

Conclusion

1. J. Duranteau, 'Claude Simon: Le roman se fait, je le fais et il me fait', p.4.

2. 'Je ne suis pas un homme-orchestre', 'Techniciens du roman: Claude Simon parle', 'Il n'y a pas d'art réaliste', 'Pas de crise du roman français!'.

3. See footnote 5 to the introduction.

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8. Articles on the Nouveau Roman.
9. Theoretical and background material - books.
10. Theoretical and background material - articles.

The following abbreviations are used:

MLN	Modern Language Notes
NRF	Nouvelle Revue Française
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
TLS	Times Literary Supplement
YFS	Yale French Studies

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1. The bibliographies in Lecture de l'Herbe, Entretiens, 31 and the proceedings of the Colloque de Cerisy on Simon suggest that the short texts which I have asterisked here have been wholly or partly taken up in Simon's subsequent novels, This is a gross simplification. In fact, the discrepancies between early and later versions of the same episode are often considerable and reveal significant changes in Simon's priorities (see my note 47 to chapter 1). A notable instance is the difference in style between 'Le Cheval' and La Route des Flandres. The earlier text includes much more dialogue and is punctuated in a fairly clear, conventional manner. There the progression and coherence of the fictional episode prevail over rememorative and analogical association.

2. The numbering of the various series of Les Lettres nouvelles is extremely irregular. I have sacrificed consistency to the notation of the maximum of potentially helpful information.

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