

I M A G E A N D N A R R A T I V I T Y :

Robbe-Grillet's *La Belle Captive*

A novel by Alain Robbe-Grillet and René Magritte, containing more than seventy-five of Magritte's paintings and a text by Robbe-Grillet, *La Belle Captive* (1975) illustrates the procedure Jacques Derrida describes in reading photographs: the story does not precede the telling. Magritte's paintings have no syntagmatic or diachronic element, no chronology. Paintings cut an event from the temporal continuum, removing it from any prior or sequential events which might imply causality. For Robbe-Grillet, to engender a narrative from paintings allows him to replace the "generative idea of chronology that is continuous and leading to an end"—permitting him to create a narrative without prior referent.

Emma Kafalenos teaches comparative literature at Washington University in St. Louis, where she works in the areas and convergences of post-modernism, Stéphane Mallarmé, literary theory and comparative arts. Her present project is a book-length extension of the essay in this issue, proposing ways to create and define a typology of categories of indeterminacy in Postmodern narrative. Her articles have appeared or are forthcoming in the Chicago Review, Southwest Review, Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature and Studies in Twentieth Century Literature.

Emma Kafalenos
Campus Box 1107
Washington University
St. Louis, MO 63130
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Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, RI 02903

| A novel (*roman*) by Alain Robbe-Grillet and René Magritte, *La Belle Captive* includes more than 75 paintings by Magritte, reproduced with their titles, alongside a text by Robbe-Grillet covering an approximately equivalent space, the text and the paintings more or less evenly distributed among the 141 pages that contain painting or text or both.¹ Published in 1975, this conjunction of verbal narrative and atemporal paintings that proclaims itself a novel is one of more than half a dozen *picto-romans* (pictorial novels) that Robbe-Grillet produced in the early 1970s; all of them include texts by Robbe-Grillet and the photographs, lithographs, engravings or paintings from which the texts were generated.²

| Although in the other instances Robbe-Grillet worked in collaboration with a living artist, in the production of *La Belle Captive* the contribution of Magritte, who died in 1967, was to make the paintings and to give them titles. The creation of the text, the selection of paintings and the layout of paintings and text, the choice of title and the decision to print the word “roman” on the cover are all by Robbe-Grillet, who offers this explanation of his procedure on the back cover of *La Belle Captive*:

Traversant l'exposition rétrospective d'un peintre qu'il aime entre tous, l'écrivain aussitôt y choisit des objets, des histoires. Les figures s'animent, la répétition d'un thème devient développement diachronique, le titre d'un tableau surgit comme un mot de passe...

(Walking through a retrospective exhibition of a painter he loves the most of all, the writer immediately chooses objects, stories. The figures come to life, the repetition of a theme becomes diachronic development, the title of a painting looms like a password...)

| The development of the diachronic (the text) from the atemporal and merely adjacent (the paintings), and the resultant effect of the method for this narrative, and for narrative theory, is the focus of this study. But to be able to confront the general issue of narrativity, certain local relationships between painting and text must first be established.

| *La Belle Captive* is the title not only of the novel we are discussing, and of a film Robbe-Grillet made in 1983, but also of at least four paintings by Magritte, the last of which (from 1966-67) is included in this novel (pp. 54-55). It is a seascape showing beach, water, and sky, with a curtain on each side extending from the beach up to the top margin of the painting. The curtain on the left covers perhaps an eighth of the width of the canvas; the one on the right reaches almost to the middle of the painting. On the beach, somewhat to the left of the center, there is a spherical object, perhaps a ball, and on the right side there is an easel holding a painting. The painting on the easel covers much of the right curtain and extends beyond it to cover a portion of the seascape which the partly opened curtains reveal. The inner painting depicts, in the same proportions as in the rest of the painting, the sea and sky that presumably are behind it and behind the curtain.

| Generally translated as “The Fair Captive,” in French *La Belle Captive* indicates that what is imprisoned is feminine—or denoted in French by a feminine noun. For Magritte, the title in every case is given to a seascape or landscape that contains within it a painting placed on an easel; the interior painting depicts what we perhaps too facilely assume we would see if it were not there—or in this instance if the painting and the curtain behind it were removed.³ What is imprisoned, for Magritte, is a painting (*la peinture*): a painting that the exterior painting contains but that does not alter landscape or seascape. In effect the framing of a portion of a painting, the formula calls attention to the status of the painting as painting, to the painting as an opaque thing-in-itself instead of a transparent sign pointing to an external reality.

| Like Magritte’s paintings titled *La Belle Captive*, the book *La Belle Captive* draws attention to its status as thing-in-itself, without external referent. What we note initially is the emphatic shift such a structure produces in the relationship between the word and its referent. The book opens with a full-page reproduction (figure 1) of Magritte’s *Chateau des Pyrénées (Castle of the Pyrenees)* and on the facing page a text that begins: “Ça commence par une pierre qui tombe, dans le silence verticalement, immobile.” (“It starts with a stone falling, in silence, vertically, motionless.”)⁴ The image of Magritte’s deftly painted stone imposes itself between the word and anything outside the book to which the

word might refer. Just as the interior painting in Magritte's *La Belle Captive* informs us that the exterior painting is no representation of a real place where we could vacation, similarly, Magritte's painted image interferes with a correlation between Robbe-Grillet's word for "stone" ("une pierre") and the real object we might stumble over as we walk.

| The substitution of a painted image for an external referent, however, is only the first step in a complex process by which Robbe-Grillet achieves the creation of a text in which both individual words and the narrative itself escape prior reference. Analyzing the procedure first for the word, let us read on: "Elle tombe de très haut, aéroliithe...." ("It is falling from a great height, an aerolith....") An aerolith (or aerolite) is a meteorite; the new word shifts our perception of Magritte's image from unexplained stone to a substance identifiable both in its chemical composition and its origin. The entire second sentence reads:

Elle tombe de très haut, aéroliithe, bloc rocheux aux formes massives, compact, oblong, comme une sorte d'oeuf géant à la surface cabossée.

(It is falling from a great height, an aerolith, a massive block of rock, compact, elongated, like a kind of giant egg with a lumpy surface. [Trans. by Underwood, p.128])

| Stone, aerolith or giant egg: the words alter our interpretation of the painted image. Robbe-Grillet's text has already demonstrated that to name a thing—object or painted image—is to interpret it. To give it only one name, however, is to limit its significance.

| In an essay published in 1981, as a preface to a *roman-photo* (a collection of captioned photographs arranged in a narrative sequence), Robbe-Grillet proposes that the degree of interpretation is what distinguishes "realism" from the "real." Defining realism as a form of interpretation, a "totalitarian code" that imposes "a coherent and univocal totality of meanings," he describes the real—what we see and what we hear—as the not-yet-interpreted, as "made up of signs that are multiple and open, unceasingly

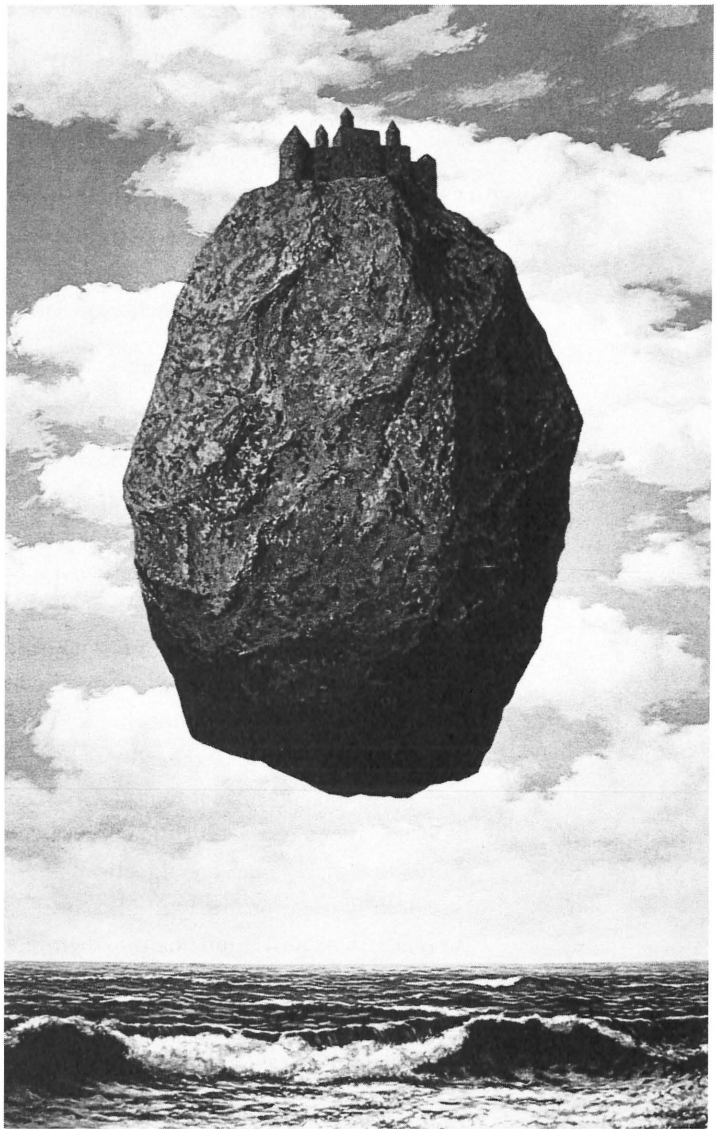


Figure 1.

René Magritte, Castle of the Pyrenees (Le Château des Pyrénées, 1926). Collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Gift of Mr. Harry Torczyner. Courtesy Mr. I. Herschkovici.

shifting and problematic.”⁵ Next, he draws a parallel between the real and the photographic image. The real object and “the effect of the real produced by the photographic image” both invite “a mobile universe of meanings that are multiple, contradictory, and shifting, ever provisional and ambiguous.”⁶

- | Clarifying that this is a theoretical position—that in an ideal world both the real and the effect of the real in photography invite multiple and shifting meanings—Robbe-Grillet then distinguishes between them in practice, proposing that the photographic image offers greater freedom of interpretation than the real, because the real has been interpreted by society to the point of being “*réduit au réalisme*” (reduced to realism, p. II); we perceive it as determinate and univocal. Thus the photographic image invites interpretation to a degree that the real no longer does.
- | Such a position suggests one reason why Robbe-Grillet turned to art works (paintings as well as photographs) in the 1970s as sources from which to generate texts. Magritte’s paintings, we can assume, offer an even greater freedom of interpretation than photographs. Even in the first two sentences of *La Belle Captive*, we have seen the shifting signification of the image at the center of Magritte’s *The Castle of the Pyrenees* from stone to aerolith to egg. By proposing several interpretations of Magritte’s image, Robbe-Grillet’s text avoids the univocal and determinate interpretation that marks (and mars) realism.
- | In addition to proposing multiple names for Magritte’s images, to retain their provisional nature, their openness to interpretation, Robbe-Grillet’s text also at times contradicts the painted scene. In the essay on the *roman-photo*, Robbe-Grillet expands the discussion to include the cinema, in particular Eisenstein, who in his manifesto of October 1928 expresses his presentiment of “*la catastrophe imminente*” (the imminent catastrophe) contained in the new invention of sound. Robbe-Grillet discussing Eisenstein says:

Renforçant l’effet de réel, l’image qui parle va, écrit-il, sombrer dans l’illusionisme, alors que les expériences sur le son devraient “être dirigées vers sa non-coïncidence avec les images visuelles.” (p. II)

(Reinforcing the effect of the real, the speaking image, he wrote, will sink into illusionism, at a time when experiments with sound should “be directed toward its non-coincidence with the visual images.”)

Eisenstein’s “non-coincidence” between image and word, which can liberate both, is also Magritte’s method; the titles of Magritte’s paintings expand, rather than limit, the signification of the assembled icons on his canvas. Most famous in this respect is his *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* (1928-29), the representation of a pipe with the words that declare “This is not a pipe” painted on the canvas itself. Although this particular painting is not included in *La Belle Captive*, the non-coincidence of image and text, and even the contradiction of image by text, is reflected in the book. For example, compare the fourth Magritte painting in *La Belle Captive*, *L’Assassin menacé* (*The Threatened Assassin*) of 1926 (figure 2) with the text on the facing page. (In the painting, which in the book is reproduced in color, the woman’s hair is much too dark to be considered blond.)

...touchant presque la tête blonde, à demi renversée, de la jeune fille couchée sur le dos dont la chevelure défaite pend jusqu’au sol en algues onduleuses, un homme à peine plus âgé (n’ayant pas atteint la trentaine, sans aucun doute) s’appuie d’une main distraite au dossier de la chaise en bois laqué; tout vêtu de noir—chaussures vernies, complet croisé très strict et cravate de soirée—, ganté, portant sur la tête un chapeau melon, il a l’air de rêver debout.... Il s’agit peut-être de l’assassin, bien que le personnage ressemble à s’y méprendre, par son visage comme par son costume, aux deux policiers en civil qui l’attendent derrière la porte, dans le couloir. (pp. 14-17; my italics)

(... almost touching the half-flung-back, *blond* head of the supine girl whose hair has come loose and hangs to the floor in rippling, seaweedy strands, a man who is not much older (being definitely under thirty) is leaning

Figure 2.

René Magritte, *The Threatened Assassin*

(*L'Assassin menacé*, 1926). Oil on canvas, 59 1/4"

x 6' 4 7/8" (150.4 x 195.2 cm). By permission of

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Kay Sage

Tanguy Fund.



with one negligent hand on the back of the painted wooden chair; dressed entirely in black—patent-leather shoes, extremely formal double-breasted suit, and evening-dress tie—gloved and wearing a bowler hat, he appears to be dreaming on his feet....This may be the murderer, although he bears a bewildering resemblance, both facially and in terms of dress, to the two plainclothes policemen waiting for him behind the door, out in the corridor. [Trans. by Underwood, p.130; my italics]

| The result of the contradictory, as well as the multiple signifiers generated from the paintings is a text as inherently provisional and ambiguous as the uninterpreted image from which it is gen-

erated. The text, like the image, is “unceasingly shifting and problematic.” It is also non-referential. Although we can trace the generative procedure from the image to each of several different words, the reverse does not hold. Whereas the individual name, generated from and juxtaposed against the painted image, appears to have that image as its referent—and certainly not to have a referent in the external world—the effect of multiple and contradictory nouns is to remove even the image as referent. The multiplicity and the contradictions in the words generated from the image undermine the referential relationship from word to image, leaving the word nearly as open to interpretation as the image, a sign without a prior referent.

| The degree to which the text separates itself from the images that generate it is described by Robbe-Grillet himself. His comments on the back cover of *La Belle Captive* conclude:

...ayant d’abord accepté les images comme impulsion génératrice, c’est bientôt l’écart variable entre elles et le texte—quelquefois aussi le rapport métonymique ou même l’opposition—qui devient le principal paramètre du jeu. Ainsi le lecteur-spectateur est-il convié à prendre part (créateur à son tour d’un itinéraire) à cette circulation du sens parmi les organisations mouvantes de la phrase qui donne à voir et du tableau qui raconte.

(...having at first accepted the images as a generative impulse, before long the variable divergence between the images and the text—sometimes also the metonymic relationship or even the opposition—becomes the principal parameter of the game. Thus the reader-spectator is invited to take part [as creator in turn of an itinerary] in this interchange of meaning amid the mobile organizations of the phrase that makes visible and the picture that narrates.)

| Although our discussion thus far has focused primarily on the relationships between images and words, largely nouns and adjectives, *La Belle Captive* is called a novel; Robbe-Grillet refers to “the picture that narrates.” If we look at Magritte’s paintings in the sequence in which Robbe-Grillet has arranged them in *La Belle Captive*, while remembering Robbe-Grillet’s explanation (in the passage cited earlier from the back cover) that when he walks through an exhibition “the repetition of a theme becomes diachronic development,” we find that an image or several images in each painting tend to recur, in the next painting or in the one following it. In the first eight paintings in the book, for example, there are five seascapes, three that depict stones (and a mountain scene in another), five that show an opening from inside to outside or to a painting of an exterior scene. Women or parts of women are in four; men wearing bowler hats in two. Roses appear twice, and the parallel lines of a wooden floor three times.

| Much like Robbe-Grillet himself, Magritte draws his imagery and thematics from a seemingly finite set, elements of which recur from work to work, even in works painted (or written) decades apart. Nonetheless, mere adjacency, or juxtaposition, does not constitute diachrony. Narration requires temporality, which is not inherent to painting. It is in fact the atemporal and non-chronological nature of painting, as we shall see, that is exactly what makes it ideal as a generator for the narratives Robbe-Grillet proposes to write.

| Already in the opening paragraphs the text establishes its temporality, in contradistinction to the static scene in *Le Chateau des Pyrénées* (figure 1). The initial event takes place “in silence” and is “motionless.” Nonetheless, in the first sentence, there is an event; the stone is falling. In the shift in signifier in the second sentence, from *Pierre* (stone) to *aérolithe* (meteorite), a past origin is implied, introducing casuality; we see the object here because it is falling to earth. The future comes into existence in the second paragraph, in which a question is raised about whether the object will land on the ground or in the water; in either case, apparently, a landing is expected to occur. When in the third paragraph of the text a woman’s cry shatters the silence, the painting’s

silence and immobility have been broken by motion and sound. Robbe-Grillet's text creates a temporal dimension that the paintings do not have.

| The fact that it is possible to generate a temporal narrative from static paintings, however, does not explain why a writer might choose this method of generating texts. For Robbe-Grillet, a part of the answer, we may assume, is that to move from an event, any event, to a verbal account of it raises the same problems that naming a real object does. The painted image, as we have seen, is more open to interpretations than the real object or, similarly, the real event.

| Additionally, because of the temporal dimension in which the event is situated, to move from event to text demands making decisions that interpret it: to cut the event from the temporal continuum requires defining a moment when it begins and a moment when it ends; to include prior events implies causality. If in response to a question about what I had for breakfast, for example, I reply that I drank some orange juice, consider what I have *not* said. I have not talked about selecting Temple oranges of exactly the perfect ripeness, crushing them lightly before slicing them with a knife reserved only for oranges, squeezing them directly into a chilled glass and drinking the juice immediately to savor its freshness. Nor have I said that what I drank came from a bottle of frozen orange juice, mixed days before. My account includes no prior past, no future, no casual dimension. Nonetheless, there is no zero-degree account. Even my simple statement about having drunk orange juice expresses an ideological position; a listener is apt to understand, from what my response does not include, that for me orange juice is not a very important topic. My point is to show that if a single event is unavoidably interpreted and limited in a verbal account of it, then the result of transferring more complex actions to words is to interpret and limit further.

| Another reason for selecting paintings to generate a narrative is suggested in an article Robbe-Grillet published in 1970, apparently immediately before he began the procedures which resulted in the *picto-romans* produced during the 1970's. Appearing first

in *Le Nouvel Observateur*,⁷ the article was revised and included as an insert in the French edition of *Projet pour une révolution à New York*.⁸ Proposing in the article a correlation between the social orders that have developed at different times and the novels each of those societies produced, Robbe-Grillet identifies the form of the novel that remains most popular even today as a construct comparable to the bourgeois society of the first half of the nineteenth century in France:

Continu, unilinéaire, objectif, ce discours est engendré par une force organisatrice: la chronologie. Il est garanti par une valeur: la vérité. Le récit, sous son empire, est définitif comme un jugement.

(Continuous, unilinear, objective, this discourse is generated by one organizing force: chronology. It is guaranteed by one value: truth. Narrative, under its empire, is final like a sentence in a court of law.)

| We recognize Robbe-Grillet's preference for works that provoke interpretations that are shifting and provisional, rather than the univocal and universal that is sometimes called "truth." In this article, pairing "truth" with the generation of discourse from chronology, he discusses the need to replace "cette idée génératrice de chronologie continue et tendue vers une fin" ("this generative idea of chronology that is continuous and leading toward an end").

| When we remember the questions we hear our children ask, or that we ask ourselves—"and what happened next?" or "and then?"—we know that Robbe-Gillet is not overestimating the power of chronology in generating narrative. Studies in narratology have taught us, however, to distinguish between two different types of sequence in narrative. The *syujet* is the sequence of the telling, the order in which the events are told in the narrative. The *fabula* is a hypothetical chronological sequence, the order in which the events would have occurred if they had taken place outside the story: a sequence we construct ourselves as readers from clues in the narrative. Although I choose to use the terms introduced by the Russian formalists, because they have not been

adopted for other purposes, the French terms *récit* and *histoire* are comparable to what I am calling *syujet* and *fabula*. To illustrate the importance of the distinction, let me use as an example a children's story, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

- | The *fabula*—the hypothetical reconstruction of the events in the order in which they take place—begins with two more or less simultaneous events: a little girl named Goldilocks goes out to explore; the bear family leaves its home to take a walk. While the bears are away, Goldilocks finds their home, goes in and discovers their chairs, their porridge and their beds; then the bears return.
- | Let us construct from this *fabula* two different *syujets* and notice how they alter our interpretation of the *fabula*. In one *syujet* we follow Goldilocks, who goes exploring, finds a delightful little house and goes in. She sits in each of the three chairs at the table and finds one that just fits. She tastes the porridge on the table in front of her and finds it so good that she eats every bite of it. And after all the excitement and the exercise and the food, she is tired, so she tries the three beds she sees and, finding one that is just the right size, she lies down and goes to sleep. Having found the house so perfectly suited to her needs, when the bears return she will be delighted to see them, and they will become friends forever.
- | A second *syujet*, which is the one some readers will remember, begins with the bears who, having gone for a walk, come home for supper. Discovering that their house has been broken into, their chairs disturbed and their food eaten, they search the premises until the baby bear calls out, "Somebody's been sleeping in my bed, and there she is now!" With this *syujet* we have a story about the invasion of privacy.
- | In the first part of this century, the Russian formalists recognized that a *fabula* could be expressed in more than one *syujet*, and that our response to a narrative is governed both by its *syujet* and its *fabula*. Although in some narratives *fabula* sequence and *syujet* sequence are identical, nonetheless it was assumed that every narrative could be analyzed to determine both a *syujet* and a *fabula*. By definition, the sequence of the telling is the *syujet*; it is a transparent sequence through which the *fabula* can be discerned.

The relationship between the *syujet* and its *fabula* is comparable to that between the word and its referent. A *syujet* has a *fabula* as its referent.

| In this context, if we reconsider the statement Robbe-Grillet made in 1970 about the need to replace chronology as a generator, it is clear that what chronology generates is a *fabula*. The question that generates the *syujet* is the very different one of what is going to be revealed in the next chapter. When we ask what *happens* next we are asking the question that generates the *fabula*.

| When the formalist Vladimir Propp analyzed the Russian folk tale as consisting of a total of seven “spheres of action” and thirty-one “functions,”⁹ it was in fact the elements of the *fabula* that he discovered. The “spheres of action” are abstractions of character (hero, villain, etc.); the “functions” are what the “spheres of action” do. Together they form a set, a paradigm, from which the elements of an individual *fabula* can be constructed. In addition to these elements, what is needed to create a *fabula* is a syntagm: a chronological sequence.

| Paintings offer a set or paradigm that is equivalent to Propp’s “spheres of action” and “functions”; what paintings do not bring to the construction of a *fabula* is the syntagmatic or diachronic element: a chronology. The words to conclude the argument I am constructing have been proposed by Jacques Derrida, but in another context, and much later than *La Belle Captive*. Writing in 1985, in a so-called “reading” (*lecture*) published at the end of another *roman-photo* (a sequence of photographs, in this case without captions), Derrida writes that in the situation of sequentially ordered photographs without text, “l’histoire ici ne précède pas le récit,” the *fabula* does not precede the *syujet*.¹⁰

| The similarity between sequentially ordered photographs and sequentially ordered paintings is clear. To generate a text from paintings is to establish the paintings as the source of the paradigmatic elements of a *fabula* but not to complete the *fabula* by introducing the syntagmatic element of chronology. The result of the procedure, as Derrida suggests, is a *syujet* without a prior *fabula*. But even Derrida in this instance is not proposing the construction of a *syujet* from which one cannot reconstruct a *fabula*. In *La Belle Captive*, just as the individual images in Magritte’s paintings generate multiple and sometimes contradictory words,

which as a result of their multiplicity lose their transparency and cannot return back to the image as referent, similarly the multiple and contradictory events in the *syujet* obstruct its transparency. The *syujet* has no *fabula* as its referent, nor can a *fabula* be reconstructed from it. The text of *La Belle Captive* is not only a *syujet* without a prior *fabula*; it is a *syujet* without any *fabula* at all.

Nor is *La Belle Captive* the first of Robbe-Grillet's works in which there is a *syujet* for which there can be no *fabula*. From our present perspective, consider Robbe-Grillet's description of the way he wrote his novel *La Jalousie*, published in 1957. I am quoting Robbe-Grillet's text, and inserting the terms *fabula* and *syujet* where appropriate:

Il était absurde de croire que dans le roman *La Jalousie*...existait un ordre des événements, clair et univoque [*fabula*], et qui n' était pas celui des phrases du livre [*syujet*], comme si je m'étais amusé à brouiller moi-même un calendrier préétabli [a prior *fabula*]. Le récit était au contraire fait de telle façon que tout essai de reconstitution d'une chronologie extérieure [*fabula*] aboutissait tôt ou tard à une série de contradictions, donc à une impasse.¹¹

(It was absurd to suppose that in the novel *Jealousy*. . . there existed a clear and unambiguous order of events [*fabula*], one which was not that of the sentences of the book [*syujet*], as if I had diverted myself by mixing up a pre-established calendar [prior *fabula*]. The narrative was on the contrary made in such a way that any attempt to reconstruct an external chronology [*fabula*] would lead, sooner or later, to a series of contradictions, hence to an impasse.)

Thus, as early as 1957, Robbe-Grillet reports, he was creating both a *syujet* that has no prior *fabula*, and a *syujet* that cannot refer to a *fabula* because no *fabula*—no chronological arrangement of the events—can be discerned in or through the *syujet*.

If one considers Robbe-Grillet's novels from *Le Voyeur* (1955) at least through *Djinn* (1981), as different as they are, one can dis-

cern that what they have in common is that there is no *fabula* to which their *syujets* refer and that it is probably this aspect that most clearly makes us cognizant of their autonomy. The emphasis on things—on the object—in *La Jalousie* was recognized when the novel was first published. *Projet pour une révolution à New York* (1970), the novel accompanied by Robbe-Grillet's call for a substitute for chronology as a generator, takes its themes from visual images in the world: posters, advertisements in magazines, the covers of cheap novels: atemporal visual generators. The experiment of *La Belle Captive* (and the other *picto-romans*) serves to help us understand the earlier works in which its origins lie.

| In 1976, Robbe-Grillet published the novel *Topologie d'une cité fantôme*, which is composed of all or part of the texts from seven of his *picto-romans*, including the first section of *La Belle Captive*, and five pages of previously unpublished text. His next novel, *Souvenirs du triangle d'or* (1978), contains the rest of the text of *La Belle Captive*, other previously published works and a greater proportion than in the preceding novel of previously unpublished text.¹² Neither of these novels includes any of the paintings, photographs, engravings or lithographs which generated the previously published material. The existence of these novels can serve as proof of the texts' freedom from a referent. Generated from images, but with no prior *fabula* and no discernible *fabula*, the *syujets* can stand alone, without the paintings that were their source.

| The two novels that are the result of the assemblage are not without meaning, because they are made of words—of what Jean Ricardou calls “signifying material”¹³—through which readers continue to find referents. But as a result of the procedures by which they were created, these novels remain as “multiple and open, unceasingly shifting and problematic” as Robbe-Grillet teaches us the real should be.*

Notes

- 1 Alain Robbe-Grillet and René Magritte. 1975, *La Belle Captive: roman*. Brussels: Cosmos Textes.

- 2 Bruce Morrissette presents a detailed description of these works in *Intertextual Assemblage in Robbe-Grillet from Topology to the Golden Triangle*. 1979. Fredericton, N. B., Canada: York Press.

- 3 Magritte's earliest *La Belle Captive*, from 1931, depicts a landscape with a road that traverses both paintings; in the exterior painting a man appears to be walking away from the interior painting, in which a man and a horse pulling a cart are facing in the opposite direction. In seascapes from 1947 and 1949, a fire in which a musical instrument is burning in the exterior painting is reflected on the surface of the interior painting, which otherwise depicts precisely the view the perceiver assumes the interior painting blocks.

- 4 Translated by J.A. Underwood, p. 128. All English translations of citations from *La Belle Captive* are by Underwood and are quoted from *Topology of a Phantom City*, 1977. New York: Grove—his translation of Robbe-Grillet's *Topologie d'une cite fantôme*. 1976. Paris: Editions de Minuit. Although *La Belle Captive* has not appeared in English translation, the text of the first of its four sections is included in *Topologie*. Translations by Underwood will be indicated hereafter by his name, followed by a page number referring to *Topology of a Phantom City*.

- 5 "Le réalisme est une idéologie, c'est-à-dire un code totalitaire... Le réel enregistré par mon oeil, ou mon oreille, est constitué de signes, multiples, ouverts, sans cesse mouvants et problématiques. Le réalisme en revanche est un ensemble cohérent et univoque de significations." Alain Robbe-Grillet. 1981. Preface to *Chasse-trappes*, by Edward Lachman and Elieba Levine. Paris: Editions de Minuit, p. I. My translation, here and wherever a translator is not named.

- 6 "Dans les deux cas—le réel ou l'effet de réel—les choses ne vont certes pas m'apparaître comme le *n'importe quoi* du non-sens, mais comme un appel au sens sans cesse déçu, un univers mobile de significations multiples, contradictoires, glissantes, toujours provisoires et ambiguës, univers qui est justement le lieu de ma liberté." *Chasse-trappes*, p. I.

- 7 June 26, 1970.

- 8 Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1970; translated by Richard Howard as *Project for a Revolution in New York*. 1972. New York: Grove. The English translation does not include this essay.
- 9 Vladimir Propp. 1928. *The Morphology of the Folktale*. Translated by Laurence Scott. 1958. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- 10 Jacques Derrida. 1985. "Lecture." In *Droit de regards*, by Marie-Françoise Plissart and Benoît Peeters. Paris: Editions de Minuit, p. v.
- 11 *Pour un nouveau roman*. 1963. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 132. Translated by Richard Howard as *For a New Novel*. 1965. New York: Grove, 154.
- 12 For a full account of the construction of these two novels, see Morrissette, *Intertextual Assemblage in Robbe-Grillet...*
- 13 Jean Ricardou. 1978. *Nouveaux problèmes du roman*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 16. Ricardou is writing about "production," the generation of text from signifiers (without reference to signifieds), which is another procedure by which a *syujet* can be created without a prior *fabula*.
- * *Note: An earlier version of this paper was presented at an interdisciplinary colloquium on Alain Robbe-Grillet's writings and films, organized by Professor Michel Rybalka and held at Washington University in St. Louis, fall 1988.*