La Belle Captivated in a Phantom City: Alain Robbe-Grillet's Visual Writing

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A first-person narrator who is about to fall asleep envisions a city ravaged by some unknown catastrophe; he mentions a weapon of death, "[a] knife with the broad, coldly glinting blade" (Robbe-Grillet, *Topology* 10), as he wanders through the destroyed city. "With the point of the broad-bladed knife," he writes the word "CONSTRUCTION," and begins "an illusionist painting, a make-believe construction," which he calls "Topology of a Phantom City" (*Topology* 11). Paradoxically, the narrative segments in this make-believe story constantly clash and cancel each other out, creating a "make-believe construction/destruction" rather than a "make-believe construction" (11). The narrative, therefore, establishes a strange resemblance between the positively marked notion of "construction" and its negative counterpart, "destruction." In other words, the dichotomy between construction and destruction is based on a peculiar kind of resemblance rather than an opposition. This relation of resemblance becomes the site of a strategically deployable series of duplicities, which generate a text in a state of constant flux.

The creation of the phantom city, as the narrator suggests, is an illusionist painting, a make-believe story that necessarily defies mimesis. Rather than imitating the reality of the outside world, Robbe-Grillet uses eidetic arts as the architectonics of his phantom city. The texts that comprise *Topology of a Phantom City* are drawn from Robert Rauschenberg's and René Magritte's paintings, Paul Delvaux's etching, and David Hamilton's photographs. The "First Space" of *Topology* includes the first seven texts of the Robbe-Grillet–Delvaux collaboration, which was initially published as a book of ten etchings and ten texts, *Construction d'un temple en ruines à la déesse Vanadé*. Robbe-Grillet has reinserted the last three texts in the "Third Space."

In an interview with Jeanine Warnod, referring to the process of its composition as a dialogue between text and image, Robbe-Grillet describes how the book came

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into being:

> J'écris le premier texte. Delvaux me répond par une gravure qui relance mes propres thèmes et les transforme. Je réponds à mon tour par un second texte et ainsi de suite jusqu'à dix. Les dix nouvelles seraient comme les dix chapitres d'un récit continu. (Warnod 5; qtd. in Morrissette 17)

Robbe-Grillet's expectations, however, were frustrated by Delvaux's tendency to illustrate the texts without introducing the transformations that Robbe-Grillet had hoped for. Hence, the dialogue he was expecting to create between writing and etching turns into a monologue, with Delvaux's etching merely illustrating Robbe-Grillet's text. This procedure would seem to make the image more important than the text, as if the text needed the etching in order to communicate its meaning. For Robbe-Grillet, this is the colonization of writing by the visual that he tries to subvert in his next collaborative effort with Robert Rauschenberg. The result is "a kind of give and take":

> I wrote an initial text and he sent back engravings that are nearly like lithographs, because he works with stone. These lithos have little connection with my text; they were a kind of reaction to it. So little by little I worked all of Rauschenberg's material back into my text. (Du Verlie 527)

Robbe-Grillet's collaboration with Rauschenberg is more interesting, because the text is free to move beyond Rauschenberg's lithos. In other words, Rauschenberg's lithos do not trap the text within the space of their frames, as Delvaux's engravings did. The procedure allows Robbe-Grillet to incorporate "little by little […] all of Rauschenberg's material into his text," which would indicate the recasting in verbal form of something both visual and fundamentally non-verbal.

"Pebble and Stylet" includes an intercalated scene that suspends the flow of the narrative and concentrates on an engraving of a nude model. Describing the image of a nude model in words, as Robbe-Grillet does in this scene, is an attempt to free the image from the circumscribing edge of the "sheet of polished copper" (*Topology* 26). In other words, this is the writing of an engraving that represents the collusion between writing and the visual arts, which occurs at two interrelated levels. The collusion first takes place implicitly within the larger context of the novel, since it is generated by Magritte's and Rauschenberg's paintings, Delvaux's etchings, and Hamilton's photographs, and then in the intercalated scene in which the narrator describes the process of engraving a nude model. In both cases, when writing assimilates the visual arts, the difference between the two genres is repressed, because the message that the visual arts are charged to present is represented in the form of writing. This is an attempt to overcome the dichotomy between binary opposites: writing/visual arts in the context of the novel, and writing/engraving in the intercalated scene. The dichotomy between the binary opposites is also at work on another level in the latter. An intercalated scene or story is also known as a frame story, a narrative device that suspends the flow of the main story, separating the smaller tale

from its larger context.[1] An intercalated story, thus, creates a boundary within which it is enframed. According to Jacques Derrida, the concept of the frame always entails the dichotomy between the outside and the inside.

"Pebble and Stylet" opens with a scene situated in a city with a rich historical background, where a group of four women, possibly tourists, are listening to the explanation of a tour guide. The women are dressed in "full skirt" with "whale bodice underneath." This is unmistakably an outside scene, which seems to be happening in an unspecified European city in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. There is a sharp contrast between this scene and the next one with the intercalated scene, which occurs inside a building in which an artist is in the process of engraving the fingers of a nude model. Art is enframed by a scene from life. The dichotomy between the inside and the outside in relation to the structure of the border in the framed scene of the art of engraving leads to the question of beauty, specifically what concerns the value of beauty intrinsically and what remains external to it. This is the question Kant raises in the "Analytic of the Beautiful," and Derrida provides an answer to it by emphasizing the impossibility of defining the intrinsic, the framed that would exclude from it the frame and what lies beyond the frame (*Truth in Painting* 37-82). This also seems to be Robbe-Grillet's approach to the question of the inside and the outside in relation to the frame. The content of the inside is art, and thus superior to the mundane life that is happening in the street. Furthermore, the women inside are naked, stripped of all the ornaments and accessories that may cover the essence of their beauty.

The dichotomy between the inside and the outside, between writing and eidetic art, tempts the reader to situate the text within the context of the *metaphysics of presence*, which is based on the concept of binary opposition (see Stoltzfus, *Robbe-Grillet* 103, 115). The inside and the outside could be argued as metaphors for the self and the other, whose separation in Hegelian dialectic is a necessary stage before the synthesis occurs. However, Robbe-Grillet's approach to the inside and the outside, the self and the other is not metaphysical. He does not try to reconcile the opposition between the inside and the outside, the self and the other, in order to achieve totality or *Aufhebung*. In Hegelian dialectic, the separation between the opposites is a necessary stage before the synthesis occurs. It is the stage that paradoxically insists on the difference and otherness within the individual before a state of perpetual transcendence is achieved.

In "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy," Robbe-Grillet does not directly attack Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung*, yet his criticism of anthropocentrism defies the possibility of eliminating the chasm between the self and the universe. In the eye of humanism, writes Robbe-Grillet, it is a crime to assert that "there exists something in the world which is not man, which makes no sign to him, which has nothing in common with him. The crime, above all, is to remark this separation, this distance without attempting to effect the slightest sublimation of it" (*For a New Novel* 52). Robbe-Grillet commits this crime. His eyes rest "on things without indulgence, he sees

them, but refuses to appropriate them, he refuses to maintain any suspect understanding with them, any complicity, […] and his passion, similarly rests on their surface, without attempting to penetrate them, since there is nothing inside" (*For a New Novel* 52-53). To sustain this cold look, Robbe-Grillet repudiates anthropomorphic analogies which he finds in the metaphorical use of language: "Metaphor […] is never an innocent figure of speech" (*For a New Novel* 53). The goal for the writers who use anthropomorphic analogies in metaphorical contexts is to "establish a constant relation between the universe and the being who inhabits it" (*For a New Novel* 53). Metaphor, in this context, creates a supramundane link between phenomena that have nothing in common with each other. For Robbe-Grillet, this is to turn human experience into a perpetual failure.

When impregnated with this reconciling power, metaphor, instead of functioning as a sign in the linguistic system, becomes the Hegelian sphere whose surface is the external world surrounding the individual that occupies its centre. The essence, and the very meaning of life for those who endeavour to create supramundane links between opposing phenomena, depends on the correspondence between the centre and what surrounds it. The world Robbe-Grillet creates in his novels does not have a specified centre or a single authoritative meaning; the literary techniques he uses, whether specular variants, labyrinthine imagery, or serial permutations, produce meanings that are in constant flux. Robbe-Grillet's experimentation with innovative literary techniques and his revolutionary attempts at merging genres as different as eidetic art and writing stem from a deep-seated desire to free meaning from the limitations that have been imposed upon it since the beginning of human civilization.

La belle captive, whose first chapter is inserted in the "Fifth Space" of topology, is an example of such an attempt, although the text provokes at least in two respects a Hegelian reading. In *La belle captive*, the painterly is decoded and interpreted through the written, reflecting in some chapters, such as the first, its accompanying image, and in others moving beyond what is encompassed within the framework of the canvas. This procedure creates a tension between writing and painting at the expense of the latter being colonized and consumed by the former. Yet, the result is not an *Aufhebung* or a sublimation. Were this the case, Robbe-Grillet would have considered writing the locus for an ideal or absolute meaning. This is, in fact, the logocentrism that Robbe-Grillet vigorously attacks in both his critical writing and his novels. Meaning is never at rest in Robbe-Grillet's work. As soon as the threat of imprisonment is raised, it bifurcates and multiplies, then starts a falling diminuendo, vanishes, reaches the zero degree, only to start its journey again.

The second trap that invites the reader to interpret *La belle captive* in terms of Hegel's dialectic lies in Magritte's paintings, some of which, such as *La condition humaine, Le soir qui tombe*, and *La domaine d'Anheim*, are clearly influenced by Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung*. Of *La condition humaine*, for instance, Magritte writes:

> I placed in front of a window, seen from inside a room, a painting representing exactly the part of the landscape which was hidden from the view by painting, therefore the rep-

> resented in the painting hides from view the tree situated behind the room. It existed for the spectator, as it were, simultaneously in his mind as both inside the room in the painting, and outside in the real landscape. Which is how we see the world: we see it as being outside ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of it that we experienced inside ourselves. (qtd. in Gablik 97)

La condition humaine serves as a metaphor that eliminates the distance between the self and the other and thus overcome discontinuities. Robbe-Grillet, however, repudiates metaphor as a transcendental means of reconciling the opposites. In Topology, toward the end of the "Fourth Space," the narrator says, "we've had enough outings into the country, voyages, adjectives and metaphor. *We tried that for fun*" (103-04; emphasis mine).

Rather than eliminating the chasm between the inside and the outside, Robbe-Grillet plays linguistic games that change the relationship between the inside and the outside. In "Pebble and Stylet," for instance, the generative sign that breaks the frame of the intercalated scene is the cry that first comes from the inside and is heard by the women who are outside, and then comes from the outside and is heard by the women who are inside. The "stylet" and "pebble" are the weapons that cause these cries of pain and connect the inside and the outside. In the scene inside the building, the sharp point of the stylet "in the engraver's hand pricking the image of the vulva and running it through" causes the model to utter a long piercing cry. The "pebble" first noticed on the ground by the women who are outside reappears in the inside scene, and is "picked up by a hand [that] throws it through the aperture [….] The cry of a wounded passer-by, outside, suddenly pierces the sweet calm of this late afternoon" (*Topology* 28-29).

The inside is invaded by what lies beyond it. The pebble seems to be a part of what is happening in the outside scene, but reappears in the inside and is thrown out again; the cry is heard back and forth from the inside and the outside, and vice versa. The relationship between the inside and outside is changed, but has not been sublated. Derrida recognized the same kind of relationship between the inside and the outside in the structure of *parergon* in relation to *ergon* and the milieu, which Kant discusses in *The Critique of Judgement*. Derrida argues that *parergon* always stands out against two grounds: *ergon*, the work, and the milieu, but with respect to each of those two grounds it merges into the other: "With respect to the work which can serve as a ground for it, it merges into the wall [….] With respect to the background, it merges into the work which stands out against the general background. […] *parergon* is a form [that does not] stand out, it disappears, effaces itself the moment it deploys its greatest energy" (*Truth in Painting* 61). A *parergon* is a composite of inside and outside, but a composite that is not half-and-half; it is an outside that is called inside the inside to constitute it as inside. The structure of the border that Robbe-Grillet creates in *Topology* is similar to the structure of *parergon* and defies the possibility of a sublation. *Topology* is an open-ended text that plays with the concept of binary oppositions in the same way that it plays with any other established idea and theory.

Moreover, in *Topology*, the inside does not occupy a superior position in relation to the outside; whereas in metaphysics, as Derrida observes, there is always a "return […] in idealization to an origin to a 'priority' seen as […] pure, self-identical, in order then to conceive of derivation, deterioration, etc." (*Limited INC* 236). In *Topology*, the inside and the outside are topological spaces, the boundary between which is blurred. There is no radical separation between the two spaces that would call for unity.

Robbe-Grillet also explores the possibilities of a new relationship between writing and eidetic art. In "The Inscription," the dichotomy between writing and engraving undergoes a radical permutation when the "stylet" that was used for engraving is now the instrument with which the inscription found in the ancient city of Vanadium is carved. The stylet is both for the making of images and the act of writing; the instrument that makes the inscription changes the act of writing into the act of engraving. Furthermore, according to the narrator, the inscription is written in cuneiform characters, but the content of the inscription refers to the image of a temple, being carved with a stylet on a red easel. In "The Ship of the Sacrifice," the difference between the act of writing and the act of engraving is further blurred when the "stylet" is described as being inscribed on flagstones. Here the title of the previous section, "Pebble and Stylet," refers to two objects that lie on the ground in the sun: "the inscription of these two objects, left there as if by chance, [on] flagstones nevertheless has the unyielding severity of the decisions of the goddess, occult […], a goddess of necessity" (33). The inscription of the "pebble and stylet" on flagstones seems to have been made possible by a natural procedure like the procedure that creates fossils. This mark left in nature is neither writing nor engraving, yet it may include both. For Derrida, this mark is an aspect of "*archiécriture* that opens up the possibility of the road and of difference, the history of writing and the history of the road, of the rupture, of the via *rupta*, of the path that is broken, beaten, *fracta*, of the space of reversibility and of repetition traced by the opening, the divergence from, and the violent spacing, of the nature, of the natural" (*Limited INC* 236). In "The Ship of Sacrifice," the pebble and stylet that are left on the ground in the sun gradually lose their original forms, reappearing as an inscription on a flagstone. This inscription offers an instance of the omnipresent sign of differentiation, which has always existed and is the condition of being.

Topology of a Phantom City has a mythical quality that connects it to "the history of writing and the history of the road," to spaces of "reversibility and repetition." The inscription that refers to the birth of David and the destruction of the ancient city of Vanadium, dedicated to David's female counterpart Vanadé, is a mythical story. Furthermore, the atmosphere of primitivism that pervades the text will automatically connect it to the time when nature began to be affected by the first signs of civilization. The entire text of *Topology* may be read as the history of writing and the history of the road, which, according to Derrida, are interrelated stories based on the economy of *différance*. In "The Inscription," writing is referred to "in cuneiform characters carved on the pediment of one of the temples in Vanadium" (*Topology* 31). In the next section, the narrator reconstructs a sentence from the letters "NAVEUAD,"

vestiges of a text carved in Latin, whose approximate meaning is "vacant she leaves on a vessel / voyaging toward the divine azure of david."

The history of writing begins with cuneiform characters carved on the pediment of a temple, then leads to a text carved in Latin and reaches into the text woven through *Topology of a Phantom City*. Furthermore, *Topology* is a heterogeneous text in which some of the characteristics of at least three literary movements converge. With its scientific precision and extreme objectivity, the geometric structure of the first space is reminiscent of Naturalism. The second "space" features a sudden shift in style, tone, and narrative structure. In contrast to the detailed descriptions in the previous "space" of objects and places that are rectangular, square, triangular, and the like, the only reference to shape in this "space" is "the triangle of the pubis." The texture of writing has a dreamlike quality that further separates it from the previous "space." There is some description of nature, derived from David Hamilton's photos, which in general is rare in Robbe-Grillet's writing. The narrative is reminiscent of Romanticism; instead of detached, minute, and rigid observations, it provides a Wordsworthian "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."

In the "Third Space," a first-person narrator develops the materials and the forms of the "First Space" with the same objectivity and precise scientific observation. The narrator, however, adds some of the structural elements of detective stories, such as serial murder, horror, suspense, clues leading to the possible solution of the murders, and other narrative devices common to detective stories. In the "Fourth Space," another first-person narrator, possibly a young girl, describes her daydreams in solitude. This "space" is similar in mood and atmosphere to the second "space," and both are texts written in response to David Hamilton's photographs. The "Fourth Space" is divided into two "cycles" that are each subdivided into shorter texts, some of which do not exceed five or six lines. According to Bruce Morrissette, "The publisher Laffont printed these texts as they had been written in the form of lines of free verse" (27). These narrative segments do resemble lines of free verse in terms of style and structure, as though the filtered eye of a camera follows a young girl and the movement of her thought in slow motion. The first "cycle" is saturated with poetic imagery: "pigeons that make love"; waves that "roll up the beach"; and a "sleeping girl who is standing in the roughest point of the surf" (*Topology* 93-94). In the second "cycle," the text gradually loses its poetic quality, adopting the characteristics of fairy tales. The same girl whose daydreams were recorded in the first "cycle" reappears here, accompanied by another girl, as they are bought by and brought to a Sultan who has hundreds of wives, whom he orders to be strangled to impress the two girls. But the girls are also the Sultan's victims: he tries to kill them by giving them poisonous books, but they manage to escape through one of the narrow windows of the castle. The "Fifth Space" again involves a retrospective movement toward the structural elements of the "Incipit," the "First Space," and the "Third Space." Themes of crime and violence are emphasized once more, but there is no resolution to these crimes. The space closes with a chapter that belongs to *La belle captive* without ever bringing the

pauses, the gaps, or the incompleteness of the previous spaces into a full cadence. These spaces, divisions, and subdivisions are all new beginnings that never reach an end. The denial of closure is a common practice in the *nouveau roman*, but in *Topology*, a text about writing, this narrative device is a necessity. Writing is an activity that does not seem to ever reach an ending.

Writing that starts with cuneiform characters undergoes many changes to reappear in the present text in the form of a hybrid myth and fairy tale, of naturalism and romanticism, of mystery tales and detective stories whose convergence brings about surrealistic effects.[2] Yet *Topology of a Phantom City* is not a novel about the history of writing; Robbe-Grillet is mainly interested in playing with the language and uses different literary movements to that end. Playing with words, numbers, colours, and letters produces a heterogeneous text that Robbe-Grillet calls *Topology of a Phantom City*, and this phantom city becomes the very source pleasure and delight for those readers who participate in the process of its construction. Roland Barthes refers to this type of text as a body "consisting solely of erotic relations" (16). Sexuality and textuality are closely related. In *Topology*, Robbe-Grillet uses the word "HYMEN" and "INSEMINATO" in capital letters (83, 125). He implies "hymen" is the borderline between the text and the visual art, or the canvas of Magritte's painting that the text is trying to inseminate. According to Derrida, "hymen is a marriage between desire and its accomplishment that eliminates the difference between these two contraries" (*Dissemination* 175). But "hymen" is also a membrane that

> both sows confusion between opposites "at once." What counts here is the between, the in-between-ness of the hymen. The hymen "takes place" in the "inter-," in the spacing between desire and fulfillment between penetration and its recollection. (*Dissemination* 175)

Topology of a Phantom City is not a novel in the traditional sense of the word. It is a text that "takes place" in the "inter, in the spacing between writing and eidetic arts. Likewise, *La belle captive*, whose first chapter reappears in the "fifth space" of *Topology*, is a text that "takes place" in the spacing between writing and painting. Both texts sow confusion between writing and eidetic arts, and stand between them at the same time. However, this in-between-ness can also be interpreted as a marriage between writing and eidetic art that abolishes the difference between these two contraries, allowing them to enrich each other's meanings. In "Jeu et enjeu du texte dans *Topologie d'une cité fantôme*," Françoise Dupuy-Sullivan argues that the text and the images inseminate each other (215). Likewise, in his translation of *La belle captive*, Ben Stoltzfus interprets the text and paintings as separate discourses that amplify each other's meanings.

In his introduction to the translation of the novel, Stoltzfus adopts a Hegelian approach and considers *La belle captive* "a transcendence, the *Aufhebung* of an *Aufhebung*, a perpetual movement a passing beyond that is capable of unifying separate discourses (image and text) by incorporating them into a new discursive genre:

the pictonovel" (*La belle captive* 3). Although *La belle captive* is a pictonovel, Robbe-Grillet does not intend to achieve a state of *Aufhebung* by incorporating Magritte's paintings into his text. In this pictonovel, as Stoltzfus observes, the text and the image enter occasionally into an exchange or a dialogue that enriches the possibilities of meaning in both cases, but the verbal text for the most part is dominant and controls the reader's interpretation of the painterly text. To sustain its hegemony, the verbal text violates some of the most inherent qualities of eidetic art. In contrast to verbal narrative, eidetic art is usually formed in spatial relationships and has no syntagmatic or diachronic dimension, no chronology. In *La belle captive*, however, Robbe-Grillet arranges Magritte's paintings in a sequence in which the recurrence of certain images compel the paintings to comply with the rules of temporality. On the back cover of *La belle captive*, Robbe-Grillet explains:

> 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 deviant développement diachronique, le titre d'un tableau surgit un mot de passe. (*La belle captive* back cover)

Both the sequence in which the paintings are arranged and the explanations of the text force the paintings to follow the rules of temporality. In the opening pages, with Magritte's painting *Le château des Pyrénées* on the left, the text imposes its rule of temporality on the painting:

> Ça commence par une pierre qui tombe, dans le silence, verticalement, immobile. Elle tombe de très haut, aérolithe, bloc rocheux aux formes massives, compact, oblong, comme une sorte d'œuf géant à la surface cabossée.

Le château des Pyrénées depicts a large rock capped with a massive stone castle that is left suspended between the sky and the ocean. The text, however, violates the spatial relationship between the rock, the sky, and the ocean, by changing the static position of the rock. The text announces that the rock is falling. If the rock is falling, it will be in a different position in relation to the sky and the ocean in every instant of its fall. Furthermore, the fall of the rock naturally must have a beginning and an end. The text does not specify the beginning of the fall, but asserts its end: "Il est difficile de dire, en raison de son altitude sans doute considérable, si la pierre va terminer sa chute sur le sable blond, ou bien va crever la nappe liquide" (*La belle captive*).

The atemporal, nonchronological painting acquires temporal dimensions that it lacks if it is separated from the text. Furthermore, the transformation of the "rock" in the opening paragraph to a "meteorite," as Emma Kafalenos observes, implies a past that introduces causality:

> We see the object here because it is falling to earth. The future comes to existence [when] a question is raised about whether the object will land on the ground or in water. When in the third paragraph of the text a woman's cry shatters the silence, the painting silence and immobility have been broken by motions and sound. Robbe-Grillet's text creates a temporal dimension that the painting does not have. (Kafalenos 265)

The relationship between Robbe-Grillet's text and Magritte's painting is therefore based on violation rather than collaboration. As Leslie Ortiquist points out, "Admittedly both artists are interested in violation: violation of the reader's expectation and of the convention of presentation, violations of laws of physical reality, the violation of women. But the most striking violation is clear in Magritte's captivity to Robbe-Grillet" (244). Robbe-Grillet changes the essence of Magritte's painting not only in terms of temporality, but also by transforming Magritte's concept of representation by adding new dimensions to painting. In *Le château des Pyrénées*, for instance, the suspended rock defies the law of gravity, but Robbe-Grillet allows the rock to fall. Therefore, the written text has the ability to imply a meaning that might not have been intended by the painting.

An additional advantage of the text lies in its ability to free the image from the circumscribing edges of the canvas. The written text not only puts the static rock in motion but also creates a world that does not exist in the painting. The narrator predicts that the rock might land on the "blond sand," which in the context of the painting does not exist: "Il est difficile de dire […] si la pierre va terminer sa chute sur le sable blond ou bien va crever la nappe liquide" (15). This statement directs the reader/spectator's imagination toward a space beyond the painting. Magritte could have added a beach to the content of his canvas, if he wished to, but he did not. This is an obvious case of violation that gives the text prominence over the image:

> Verbal text and image can neither merge nor interact. In one way or another, subordination is required. Either the text is ruled by the image (as those paintings where a book, an inscription, a letter, or the name of a person are represented); or else the image is ruled by the text (as in the books where a drawing completes, as if it were taking a short cut, the message that words are charged to present) […] What is essential is that verbal signs and visual representations are never given at once. An order always hierarchizes them, running from the figure to discourse or from discourse to figure. (Foucault 33)

In *La belle captive*, the order that hierarchizes the texts and the image runs from discourse to figure, thus subordinating the image to the text.

In *Topology of a Phantom City*, the images that accompany the original text are omitted; therefore, the tension between the text and image is less obvious. Nonetheless, the only justifiable reason to assemble these heterogeneous texts under one rubric seems to lie in the implicit theme of each text: writing. If *Topology of a Phantom City* is approached in terms of the conventional structure of the novel, writing could be considered the theme, protagonist, plot, and setting. However, writing is not a privileged focus for an absolute and transcendental meaning. In the dichotomy between writing and eidetic arts, writing occupies a higher position, merely as a space in which different meanings constantly clash and cancel one another out.

Does *Topology of a Phantom City* celebrate the polysemy of writing? Stoltzfus's comment on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* seems to be the best answer to this query:

> Joyce's signifiers no longer stand for something signified. They are objects in their own right, the subject of multiple intentions inviting different interpretations. Their complex-

> ity makes meaning not something already accomplished, waiting to be expressed, but is instead, a horizon, a perspective of semiotic production. (*Robbe-Grillet* 25-26)

Robbe-Grillet's signifiers do not stand for something signified. The "pebble" and "stylet" in *Topology* are subject to diegetic transformations that infinitely increase the possibilities of their signified meanings. Is "pebble" an object that relates modern time to previous centuries and before, to a mythical timelessness? Is "stylet" a metaphor for violence that contaminates the history of human civilization? Is the history of violence interrelated with the history of writing? The "stylet" is the weapon with which the four ritual murders are committed. The stylet is also the tool that the engraver uses in the "First Space" to trace the image of a nude model. It is the sharp point of the "stylet" that pricks the model's vulva, evoking a long "piercing cry", and that marks the inscription of catastrophic destruction of the city of Vanadium. Is representation, then, an act of violence? Are sex and creativity two interrelated activities based on violence? The list of questions that are subject to different interpretations is far from exhaustive. Indeed, even the shortest narrative segment raises a multitude of questions whose wide range of possible answers and interpretations create a "horizon, a perspective of semiotic production."

From playing with mythical stories proceeds a "phantom city" that reflects different aspects of the history of human culture and civilization. From the coalition of Romanticism and Naturalism emerges a text that questions the value of different literary movements. From the interplay of text and image, text and theatre, emerges an all-encompassing world that is the non-full, non-simple and differentiating origin of differences in literary histories and eidetic art. This is the world described in a schoolboy's notebook, which reads:

> Printed in capitals right at the top is the word plan; below are four lines in running hand, each with a number:
> (1) analysis of the probable meaning of the maxim, (2) it is quite true, (3) it is totally false, (4) conclusion suggesting other possible meanings. (Topology 78)

The maxim is an *archi-écriture*, a protowriting, which is the condition of speech and writing, which is the condition of différance and dissemination.

Notes

1. I have used "intercalated scene" instead of "intercalated story," because the former fits better in the context of Robbe-Grillet's novels, which, in general, do not tell a story in the classical sense of the term.

2. For further information on surrealistic aspects of Robbe-Grillet's novels, see Brochier 30-33; Roudaut 141-45.

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