NARRATIVE WORLDS AND FICTIONAL WORLDS: (BE) COMING AND GOING IN THE NOVELS OF RAYMOND QUENEAU, CLAUDE SIMON, AND ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Narrative Worlds and Fictional Worlds: (Be) Coming and Going in the Novels of
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Through a focused exploration of “experimental” novels by Raymond Queneau, Claude Simon, and Alain Robbe-Grillet, the reading experience is reexamined in this dissertation. Special attention is paid to the process of “worldbuilding,” namely the symbiotic relationship between synthetic reading competency and higher-level acts of interpretation. It is argued throughout that readers interact with literary texts not simply as verbal structures, but also by co-creating a multiplicity of imaginary worlds subtended by intentional structures that span the divide between reader and text. The intentional attenuation of subject and object is characteristic of the aesthetic experience as described by Dufrenne, Iser, and Merleau-Ponty, and it is further intensified in the novels of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet, which address the status of fiction in fiction. In this way, the reader’s attention wanders between the worlds depicted by texts and the words by means of which these worlds are depicted.

The work of these authors is marked by transition and transaction on the part of character and reader. Behind Queneau’s language-games, a multiplicity of fictional worlds rapidly cycles in and out of being. Simon’s densely packed prose shifts the novice reader into his fictional worlds through the figure of the “soldier-subject.” The geometric simplicity of Robbe-Grillet’s descriptions hides
the impossibility of deciphering the events of his fictional worlds. The reader’s interaction with these texts is dynamic, relying upon the basic process of building a world out of disparate textual and extra-textual elements.

Following possible worlds theorists such as Dolezel and Pavel, the two primary worlds engendered by the literary artwork are conceived of as (1) “narrative,” whereby the reader manipulates the linguistic building blocks of the text, and (2) “fictional,” in which the reader transcends such language-based constraints to emerge into a space clearly distinguished from everyday life. Examination of the reader’s nonlinear movement between intertwined narrative and fictional worlds demonstrates Matei Calinescu’s provocative notion that every reader is a rereader. It is suggested that understanding the reader’s movement between absorption in a text and interaction with a text by means of worldbuilding might elucidate a novel kind of “rereading” exemplified by new technologies.
Dedication

To Tricia. Thank you.
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Introduction

In Raymond Queneau’s 1937 novel *Odile*, Roland Travy, a mathematician who argues that numbers are more reality than abstraction, states, “There exists more than just one world.”¹ Nowhere does this affirmation ring more true than in regard to the heteroclite worlds brought into being by the reading experience. Even if we understand multiple *worlds* within the framework of an inclusive, singular *world*, this takes nothing away from the plural nature of experience—real, narrative, fictional, and otherwise—as embodied by the act of reading. Throughout this dissertation, I aim to establish some parameters for examining how the reader manages to find a way through the many and varied types of worlds related to the reading experience, especially when these worlds diverge from known reality.

Much of what I will be doing here is examining and expanding upon interconnected questions revolving around this concept of “worlds.” (1) How do we conceptualize “other” worlds (2) Why is the notion of a “world” such a useful device for talking about experiences alien to our own, a tendency we have seen time and again in recent years as we have discussed the “worldview” of other cultures? (3) Moreover, what do we do with worlds that are anchored in texts? How is it that literary worlds allow us to interact with the inert characters scattered across the pages of books? In particular, I am concerned with the hybrid worlds of the novel, which Mikhail Bakhtin describes as “dialogical” by virtue of its ability to bring together multiple strands of discourse.² It is my contention that making use of the concept of “worlds,” messy as it may be,

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¹ Queneau, *Odile, Oeuvres Complètes II*, ed. Henri Godard (1937; Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2002) 527. For ease, I have abbreviated this volume as *OCII* throughout the text.
allows us to approach literature as it is approached by the reader—without being overwhelmed by methodologies focused on questions of “theme” or “structure.” The dialogical structure of the novel here meets up with the unknown quantity of the reader, who, by virtue of his status as a living being, brings together an infinite and undecidable number of strands of discourse. By concentrating on the reader’s concrete acts of worldbuilding, I hope to grant fiction its own unique ontological status, one which is sometimes denied by the real-world focus of a socio-cultural or “scientific” approach, an approach which is also evinced by the formulas of narratology and discourse analysis. At the same time, I want to discuss fiction as it is read, not as it exists in some ineffable cloud of abstractions. What concerns me above all is the reader’s role in co-creating the worlds of challenging texts that are often studied more for their use of language than for the worlds propped up by this use of language. How does the reader’s participation in this act rely on the synthetic work of worldbuilding and how does it lay the ground for the higher-level work of interpretation?

Of course, any text can be “challenging”: just ask beginning students of a foreign language approaching its literature for the first time—or literature written in their native tongue, for that matter! But what do seminal twentieth-century authors like Raymond Queneau, Claude Simon, and Alain Robbe-Grillet, who are the subject of this dissertation—or, in the Anglophone tradition, James Joyce and William Faulkner—have to offer the reader? How is the reader who does read their novels motivated to continue doing so? One of my central assumptions is that reading challenging authors makes a spectacle of the breakdown of the process of reading, and thus allows both reader and critic
to understand that process better (even when it does not prove to be quite so challenging). If we can come to understand how the reader’s desire might lead him through novels as densely woven as *Le Chiendent*, *La Route des Flandres*, or *Le Voyeur*, then we might better understand what role the thwarting or teasing of such desire plays in any narrative, be it fictional, scientific, historical, or even virtual.

Moreover, readers *can* and *do* read these works in spite of their level of difficulty, which even spurs them on. They do this not through an overt focus on the verbal nature of the text, reading one word after the other as one would diagram a sentence, but through a process known as “worldbuilding,” one which relies on the dynamic tension between words and the worlds evoked by them. Without this basic readerly worldbuilding activity, which involves guessing, estimating, drawing conclusions based on scant evidence, and, inevitably, making mistakes, no higher-level interpretation would ever be possible on the part of the critic. It is not that I advocate “for” worldbuilding over the work of interpretation but rather that we take another look at the basic worldbuilding activity necessary in the pre-critical moment before interpretation can reasonably occur. Worldbuilding thus occurs as a condition of possibility for the interpretive task.

The main thrust of this dissertation, then, is the manner in which intentionality enables readers to encounter and move through distinct fictional worlds, here linked to the novels of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet. In this case, intentionality refers to the way in which subject (reader) and object (text) of aesthetic experience come together in the unique space and time of the reading experience, a space and time whose rules instantiate a kind of
heightened interaction not usually found in everyday life. The intentional field associated with the reading experience allows traditional notions of character and plot to be redefined without being destroyed, contrary to the claims of many trigger-happy theorists of the New Novel in the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, as I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters, a radical redefinition and reformulation of character and plot lends to the novels of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet much of their particular power to continually evoke strange new worlds for the reader.

Within their novels, these authors often self-consciously manipulate the double status of fiction as existing in the real world—the physical book in the reader's hands, the type on the page—as well as in an unknowable domain situated elsewhere—the lives of characters who never existed in the same certain way as the reader. The position of fiction as a bridge between worlds known and unknown ensures that traffic flows in both directions. Despite a high level of experimentation with language, coupled with brazenly bizarre or convoluted plots, the characters of Le Chiendent, La Route des Flandres, and Le Voyeur exist in social, historical, everyday, and fantastic worlds that are still familiar 76, 49, and 54 years later! A good way of conceptualizing this bidirectionality of fiction is to consider just how incredible the lived worlds of these fictional characters are, especially when there is little textual evidence to indicate the contents of these worlds. In order to construct the fictional architecture of characters' lives, readers give characters a great deal of credit, filling in the blanks of the worlds in which they exist in order to make them credible to themselves as readers. That the character possesses a world of his own at all is one of the central tenets of the novel—even novels like Le
Chiendent, La Route des Flandres, and Le Voyeur, which seem to rebel against this assumption, accept the basic premise.

It is the reader’s worldbuilding activity that provides characters with their lived worlds, and when that activity is challenged, one might assume that the “illusion” of these lived worlds disappears altogether. And the challenges proffered by Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet do make the reader sit up and take note of the constructed nature of the worlds that he himself is helping to posit. Yet this realization in itself becomes part of a new illusion, that of (literary) self-consciousness. Signaled by the text to pay more attention to the processes of the text, the supposedly aware reader is all the more ready to become absorbed by the text in new and different ways. In fact, a great chain of being seems to take shape during the reading experience, with characters “above” (i.e. more concrete than) the words of the text, and with (real) readers “above” (fictional) characters. In a certain epoch, we might then have considered the author of the work as a creator who sat high “above” both characters and readers. However, since I wish to emphasize the position of the reader, I argue that the work of the author is already done, and that that of the reader—even the rereader—is just beginning or always beginning again. As Roland Barthes wrote in his celebrated essay, “La mort de l’auteur,” “The unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination.”3 The many ambiguities of the reading experience, then, are a logical place to start exploring fictional worlds.

The end of Douglas Hofstadter’s magnum opus, Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid, which discusses the phenomenon of recurrence in math, art, and music, illustrates this transworld movement beautifully. The author,

much like Queneau at the end of *Les Enfants du Limon*, metaleptically joins the characters for a dialogue:

*Achilles*: Do you mean to say that we’re all NOW in a dialogue?
*Author*: Certainly. Did you suspect otherwise?
*Achilles*: Rather! I Can’t Escape Reciting Canned Achilles-Remarks?
*Author*: No, you can’t. But you have the feeling of doing it freely, don’t you? So what’s the harm?
*Achilles*: There’s something unsatisfying about this whole situation...

Achilles is stunned to discover that, although his part in the dialogue has been written by someone else, he still feels free to choose his own words (and vice-versa). Hofstadter here emphasizes the eerie semi-autonomy of fictional worlds, something that I explore in detail in Chapter One, where I lay out the theoretical framework of my argument. The fictional worlds associated with the work of art depend on the reader, and yet the reader also depends on them. This state of interdependence, a no man’s land of intentional interaction, is laid bare conspicuously by the novels of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet, where the very process of creating fictional worlds is frequently shifted into overdrive, thematized, or called into question.

The skeptic might wonder how the process of fictional worlding might be accelerated, when it could be claimed that such worlds do not exist at all. Since the 1980s, a hybrid branch of philosophy, linguistics, and literature known as Possible Worlds Theory, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter One, has examined the status of possible, non-existent, or fictional objects. This is reminiscent of Steven Dedalus’s ruminations in Joyce’s *Ulysses* about mythology and the ancient world while teaching:

Had Pyrrhus not fallen by a beldam’s hand in Argos or Julius Caesar not been knifed to death? They are not to be thought away. Time has branded them and fettered they are lodged in the room of the infinite

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possibilities they have ousted. But can those have been possible seeing that they never were? Or was that only possible which came to pass? Weave, weaver of the wind.\(^5\)

Here, Joyce appears to argue for fictional worlds in much the way that they are often defined in our day and age, as a list to be established in accordance with the text at hand, “lodged in the room of infinite possibilities they have ousted.” But Joyce's narrator demolishes this precise and misleading account of fictional worlds in the next sentence, questioning the usefulness of the notion of possibility in relation to things “that never were.” And “what comes to pass,” as I will argue from here on out, is in large part dependent on the reader, whose process of “weaving” relies on a great deal of ambiguity and undecidability! Studying the act of reading involves making allowances for this kind of undecidability. This is not to say that reading is an anarchic process or that interpretation is a relativistically open-ended one—far from it.\(^6\) Rather, the outcomes of individual reading experiences are never certain beforehand, and it is only by keeping this in mind that we may arrive at a higher degree of certainty concerning them as they develop!

Of course, there do exist differences between “difficult” novels like Le Chiendent, La Route des Flandres, and Le Voyeur and more traditional novels, such as the nineteenth-century novels of Balzac or Zola. In fact, the contemporary reader of Queneau is most likely to have been introduced to the author by Louis Malle’s film adaptation of Zazie dans le métro, by a language instructor’s use of Les Exercises de style, or, in France, by the presence of Les Fleurs Bleues on the list for the bac exam taken at the end of high school.


\(^6\) I will consider in detail the arguments advanced by Umberto Eco and others regarding what Eco has called the “limits of interpretation” in Chapter One.
Readers of Simon and Robbe-Grillet might be introduced to their work as representative of a certain moment in literary history, that of the “New Novel,” where plot, character, and linearity were viewed as cumbersome constraints. However, in making their case for the newness of the New Novel, its adherents, foremost among them, Jean Ricardou, as well as Simon and Robbe-Grillet themselves, have, ironically enough, overstated it. They overemphasized the role of the author—which they were criticizing—and did not pay enough attention to that of the reader. I will reevaluate the status of the New Novel in my chapters on Simon and Robbe-Grillet (Four to Six).

In this respect, it is revealing to situate each author on the spectrum of the narrative conceived of as beginning-middle-end, as this is the trajectory we often impose upon the reader of the novel (even when he does not follow it). The imbrication of Queneau’s novels with popular modes of storytelling, especially the cinema, allows for a spiraling path from beginning to end, which often resemble one another. Driven by desire, Queneau’s characters appear and disappear at an incredible pace that is reflected by the film’s ability to posit many worlds simultaneously. If beginning and end approach each other in Simon, as in La Bataille de Pharsale, it is usually within the space of a representation, not a great and total shift in being, as in Queneau. The constant state of war found in Simon’s novels means that the trajectory from beginning to end is undermined from the very beginning and remains undermined at the end. Yet this state of affairs frees the reader, who contends with the events of the novel’s fictional worlds from an “expanded” position outside of time and space as we usually understand them. In Robbe-Grillet, the reader—lured by an answer or a concrete ending, an illusory promise that will
not be kept—conducts a very determined search for something that does not exist. “Trapped” by crisp, geometrical descriptions and lucid prose, the reader finds himself facing blind alleyways and cul-de-sacs as he searches for answers to the questions posed by the novels’ characters. Each of these authors in his own way allows the reader to experience both the self-conscious (cerebral, interactive) and the emotional or absorptive pleasures of reading.

It is impossible to deny that all three authors are indelibly marked by the historical moments in which they write. What would Queneau be without the birth of the cinema, burgeoning popular culture, and the onset of the Great Depression? What would Simon be without his personal participation in the wars he depicts? Would Robbe-Grillet’s fictional worlds remain so alluring without the declining specter of colonialism and the rising post-WWII society of commerce and consumption? As these questions have been abundantly discussed by others, we will encounter their conclusions in the chapters to come. For me, it is the transformation of the referent in these authors’ works that remains truly astonishing. The lived worlds of their characters are easily located in certain historical epochs, but because the emphasis is placed on being and becoming rather than fleshing out the background, fictionality subsumes any durable link to the referent, modifying and manipulating the real time and again. These worlds create referents, rather than “make reference to” what already exists in the traditional sense.

On the one hand, I hope to resist codifying even further the categorizations of literary history by assigning authors to pre-ordained spots in groups, movements, and lineages. On the other hand, I would not go so far as to assign detailed abstract functions that describe my reader’s movement
through the text, as does Emma Kafalenos in *Narrative Causalities*. My reader is a reader who is reading in the present moment, and who is willing to reread even when the going becomes difficult. My reader can thus be considered a member or a subset of possible real-world readers. In this manner, I will study how the intensified process of rereading might shift the reader as he shuttles from absorption in the novel and inattention to the real world to self-conscious interaction with the novel, as well as to closer attention to his own worldbuilding processes. A certain level of absorption may bore the reader insofar as it does not present the obstacles needed to snare and maintain readerly attention. At the same time, a certain level of interaction may also become routine and provide the reader with a greater level of comfort in dealing with the fictional worlds of experimental texts. With Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet, interactive rereading proves necessary to create the absorptive experience often associated with the more conventional reading experience.

Of course, the fictional worlds of novels can only come about because of their language-based supports. This is why, until my last chapter on Robbe-Grillet, I spend one of the two chapters dedicated to each author talking about “narrative worlds,” or which I associate closely with the language of the text. I do this instead of talking about the text in isolation because I do not believe that such a thing exists. Rather, the reader progresses from text to narrative world to fictional world and back again by a process of synthetic worldbuilding which lays the way for the subsequent critical work of interpretation. The reader understands words via worlds and worlds via words. This is an untidy but necessary proposition for us to be able to continue to argue for the validity

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of literature in an increasingly post-literary world. Reading a book involves building a world step-by-step (without an instruction manual) as much as it involves scanning the words on a page. As Paul Ricoeur wrote in 1983, “[…] what is interpreted in a text is the proposition of a world that I could inhabit and in which I could project my most personal powers.”

Ricoeur’s linking of interpretation and worldbuilding admits motivation on the part of the reader, who, far from passive, “inhabits” the worlds that he projects in cooperation with the text. In the end, I aim above all to give this reader the credit he is due for building worlds that allow him to give an inanimate text many and multiple lives.

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Chapter One: Intentionality and Fictionality

A. Introduction: Icarus

FIRST POLICEMAN
We’re not dealing with a novel, but with a reality.
SECOND POLICEMAN
From which you don’t escape. 9

This exchange, from Raymond Queneau’s novel of 1968, *Le Vol d’Icare*, raises the quite radical issue of the autonomy of different types of worlds: the *real world* (RW) from whence hails the reader, the language-based *narrative world* (NW) projected by the text, and the *fictional world* (FW) that comes into being thanks to the interaction of the previous two. In the novel, a character, Icarus, escapes the pages of a novel—a novel within a novel, that is—and roams the streets of Paris, falls in love, and eventually dies, crashing to earth in a manner befitting his name. Before fulfilling his destiny, Icarus reminds us that the *being* associated with a *lived world* (LW) radiates from behind the mask of the character: “…behind the question of technique, there is a living character: himself” (1250). In fact, it is only by doubting his newfound existence outside the pages of the fictional novel that spawned him, and, unbeknownst to him, on the pages of the novel in our hands, that Icarus begins to grasp these plural modes of existence, asking himself: “This question of technique is tormenting me. Is it really a technical question or does it have to do with my existence?” (1253). Through Icarus, Queneau thus formulates the long-standing tensions between “technique” and fictional “existence” or being, or the *how* and the *why*

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9 Raymond Queneau, *Le Vol d’Icare*, *Œuvres Complètes III*, ed. Henri Godard (1968; Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2006) 1268. For ease, I have abbreviated this volume as *OCIII* throughout my text. Unless otherwise listed, all translations are my own. I give each reference in full in a footnote and subsequently use MLA in-text citations. A list of all references is found in the Works Cited.
of the work of art. I hope to demonstrate that this relationship does not necessarily end in opposition. In truth, the *why* and the *how* intertwine to form the ineffable and ephemeral worlds associated with the reading experience. In the act of reading, what seemed to be formidable barriers are shown to be semi-permeable; the RW of the reader, the “true reality” of the FWs that the reader helps to create as he reads, and the linguistic building blocks of the NW of the text are interwoven.  

By talking about “worlds” rather than the “story” (*histoire*) and “narrative” (*récit*) of classical narratology, I mean to indicate that the text is a dynamic starting point for interaction, not a set of “data” guiding machine-like stimulus and response on the part of the reader. Certainly, language is a key part of these worlds, but they are not reducible to language; unlike the more narrow categories of narratology, the concept of a world, messy as it might be, leaves room for the ambiguity of reader response, the coming into being of a reader as a reader in the first place. As readers, our position is radically dual; although we certainly do not, as Sigmund Freud argued, “adapt our judgment to the imaginary reality imposed on us by the writer, and regard souls, spirits and ghosts as though their existence had the same validity as our own has in material reality,” neither do we remind ourselves at every step of the way that what we are reading is nothing but paper and ink.

In Queneau’s novel, the questions of technique that obsess the group of authors pursuing of Icarus in hopes of reappropriating him for their own

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10 I use the pronoun “he” in reference to my reader for grammatical ease. My concern is the process of being and becoming experienced by the reader—male or female.

In order to indicate better the inherently undecidable nature of the worlds produced by the reading experience, I use NWs and FWs in the plural. Occasionally, I will use the singular (NW or FW) when I am emphasizing the concept itself instead of its manifestation.

novels—in *Le Vol d’Icare*, good characters are scarce—are directly related to the possibilities offered by the exploration of imaginary worlds, worlds which, however, cannot be reduced to the text. Readers shuffle between different understandings, reductive and expansive, of the literary artwork: immanence and transcendence are in this way related to NWs and FWs. For Gérard Genette, immanence corresponds to the physical, material work, “the work at rest (or rather in waiting),” whereas transcendence, or “the work in action,” indicates the ways in which the work goes beyond its unchanging condition as an object.\(^{12}\) As an “interpretation” or “version” of the text, the work is never interchangeable with it: this is why our relationship with texts proves to be as variable as our relationship to the world (269). While the seemingly self-sufficient worlds of fiction are not “language-dependent,” that is, reliant upon the referential nature of language for their existence, they are nonetheless called into being by and through language.\(^{13}\) It is the unknown quantity of the reader’s participation in the NW that allows a text to escape its linguistic or discursive boundaries and flower into FWs. Thus, according to Roland Barthes’s oft-quoted paraphrase of psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni’s formulation of disavowal, “I know very well, but all the same…”\(^{14}\): “the reader can say again and again: *I know very well that they are only words, but all the same* (I am moved as if these words were uttering a reality).”\(^{15}\) In this sense, disavowal and the negative connotations which accompany it are transformed into what I would call the fictional belief integral to the reader’s worldbuilding activities, however bound by the text the reader might be at the start. Rather


than establishing clearly defined zones of authenticity and inauthenticity, such as a work of non-fiction might, the “looking-glass” of fiction, like Alice’s, relies on inauthenticity as a guarantee of authenticity.

Characters, even ephemeral, ambiguous, or anonymous ones, gird the creation of multiple FWs from the more singular, textually centered NW. As Thomas Docherty points out in relation to the active stance that readers adopt in response to the challenges of the New Novel, the multiple and mobile positions afforded the reader by the writer’s language produce the space in which character comes into being. Since interaction with the text dissolves the reader’s individual self into a series of “reading subjectivities” (222), many FWs explode from the singularity of one unchanging text filtered through a series of NWs. NWs act as intermediaries between text and FWs; they are proof positive that, once part of the text has been read, it changes status. Once the reader has read a portion of a text, it becomes part of a shared world, and, if he later returns to it for answers, it will be a world to which he returns, not the text itself. “Behind the text, there is not someone active (the writer) and in front of him someone passive (the reader); there is not a subject and an object,” writes Roland Barthes (Plaisir 29). In this regard, possible worlds theorist Lubomir Dolezel affirms that, “Literary works are linked not only on the level of texture [wording] but also, and no less importantly, on the level of fictional worlds....” In fact, theorists like Kendall Walton, who try to redefine the

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17 PWs might be better understood if they were called Possible Real Worlds, so as better to emphasize that PWs deal with reality—which is one of the problems of the application of this concept to fiction—and FWs with fiction. See section D for a more thorough discussion.
aesthetic experience from the point of view of the participant, consider a 
renewed focus on worlds as more faithful to “the phenomenology of the 
xperience” of interaction with the work of art....” Walton contends that the 
“imaginings” sparked by the work of art devolve from the reader as much as 
from the text. The reader synthesizes textual givens by means of worlds both 
narrative and fictional. The duality between what Uri Margolin has labeled the 
“semiotic” (words) and the “representational” (worlds) thus subtends, to varying 
degrees, every reading experience. Dolezel, Walton, and other theorists 
conversant in Possible Worlds theory (PWT), might use the term “fiction” in a 
specific theoretical sense to mean “not reality,” while I am particularly 
interested in the way in which the genre of the novel frames the question of the 
reader’s interaction with and co-creation of a fiction that is as narrative as it is 
theoretical. As we will discover, using fiction to buttress unalterable 
theoretical points is usually counter-productive. (Non-linearity in the novel is 
so fascinating in part because the novel is such an inherently linear art form.) 
In this dissertation, I will turn my attention to the reader’s oscillation between 
NWs and FWs in the work of three French-language authors renowned for the 
experimental nature of their novels: Raymond Queneau, Claude Simon, and 
Alain Robbe-Grillet. Establishing the trajectories by which the reader moves 
from NWs to FWs and back again provides a fresh way of reframing the 

21 In *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: JHU P, 1999), Dorrit Cohn’s definition of fiction as a “literary nonreferential narrative” still privileges a critical act of reading over a phenomenological one (12). Cohn’s parsing of the characterizations of fiction as invented, as untruth, as conceptual abstraction, as (all) literature, and as (all narrative) are illuminating (1-2). My approach, though, aims to privilege what feels like fiction from the standpoint of the reader as he builds worlds in order to be able to read the text on the level of competency (even if we discover that acts of worldbuilding and interpretation are often mutually interdependent).
novelistic production of these authors, and of reconceptualizing the relation between basic reading competency, worldbuilding, and higher level acts of interpretation.

The central presupposition of this chapter is that, in the act of reading, reader and text are each reformulated in order to re-inhabit an existence altered by the other’s presence. Rather than simply switching places—the reader does not “become” a fellow character in the text and the text does not force the reader into one and only one specific reading of itself—the act of reading takes place via a transitional, transactional, and intentional “interworld” or “common ground.” Arguing for the necessity of the reader to the creation of a sense of textual causality, Roy Jay Nelson states: “Texts do not create their readers, nor readers texts: making a story is a creative enterprise. It is time to agree, as the physical scientists have done, that we are, in studying texts, both actors and observers in the production of meaning, partially creators of the texts we describe.” Since there subsists no absolute separation between the reader as subject and the text as object, the reader’s involvement is necessary for the production of FWs from NWs. Readerly reevaluation and reconstruction help to explain when, how, and why what happens fictionally comes to pass. Readers bring FWs into being by using the text as a tool or, as Umberto Eco puts it, “a machine for producing possible worlds.” Whereas Eco analyzes the pragmatic structure of the text combined with the inferences made by the reader along the way, I propose to study in more general fashion how the reader can make

inferences about a text in the first place, as well as what happens to the NWs and FWs created by those inferences once they have come into being semi-autonomously. More succinctly, I will address the ways by which the reader of novels by Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet passes from basic comprehension to higher-level interpretation and back again by means of NWs and FWs.

This is not to say that the reader is entirely free nor that all of his interpretations are equally plausible: reader and text are and remain interdependent. Despite his choice to soar through the sky in a homemade airplane, the story of Icarus, as retold in Le Vol d’Icare, finishes “as expected”: Icarus is fated to tumble to the earth because of his name (1359). Like Icarus, the reader discovers that his desire is unlimited whereas his choices are not; he still must interact with an unchanging text that has already been written (in a strict sense). Although the choice to read is most certainly voluntary, the reader is limited by what Paul Ricoeur calls the “encoded choices” of the text, which seal off certain possibilities of reading and leave others open. While it undercuts reassuring notions about clear divisions between subjects and objects of knowledge and of experience, the literary interworld remains all the same a playing field with limits and rules.

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Theories of narrative that focus on words rather than worlds may account for the varying functional relations among the actors (or the actants which, in Greimas’ semiotic reckoning, are the integral structural elements of the text).26 Such functional analyses tend however to ignore the reader. On the contrary, the reader-response criticism that emerged in response to structuralism opened up the field of the text by emphasizing the role of the reader. But it did so at times at the cost of the real reader’s existence: not a historical or social reader, as defined by an empirical approach, but the (phenomenological) reader who comes into being through the very act of reading that endows the text with full existence. By constructing a complex structural grid of possibilities in order to create a typology of narratives, Genette and Gerald Prince state again and again that the narrator and the narratee (to whom the narration is addressed) exist only as a function of the text.27 Prince’s model is so useful because it helps us to sift through the subtle shifts of levels of narration in a text; however, the “elephant in the room,” the reader, still remains unaccounted for. This argument causes problems for anyone trying to explain the fullness of the reading experience. As Genette himself argued in 1994, the text is linked to an “object of immanence” that may “determine or support several worlds” (Oeuvre 186). Until the reader comes into contact with the text, nothing exists in it but the letters on the page; these other worlds remain dormant.

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Genette’s notion of focalization, or point of view, as expounded in the early 1970s, describes which character “orients the narrative perspective.” Because focalization is rarely stable or fixed, it poses epistemic issues regarding the narrator, the narratee, and the other characters in the NW: Does the narrator know more than the hero? Does the reader know less than the narrator? How is the narratee different from the reader? Focalization becomes a particularly bothersome issue when one tries to account for the role of the reader. Genette writes, “Narrative always says less than it knows, but it often makes known more than it says” (Narrative 198). Thus the epistemic slippage—and the accompanying desire—created by the instability of focalization allows the reader to experience the text through different points of view. Even though Genette hypothesizes that the system of narration is set up so that the balance constantly shifts between the consciousnesses contained therein, his argument, at least in his groundbreaking study Figures III (Narrative Discourse, 1972), does little to account for the “permeability” at work in the transactional worldbuilding act of reading (Narrative 198). In Genette’s schema, rather than working with the text to construct a world, the reader enters a text that is above all defined by words. One of the reasons for this intense focus on the text is that the role of the reader as desiring subject or active consciousness proves difficult to theorize. In every reading experience, readers are equipped with extremely diverse apparatuses for confronting the text. These intangibles run the gamut from the reader’s age, sex, ethnicity, and socio-economic background to his previous readings, general cultural knowledge, and the vast permutations of idiosyncratic responses based on his life experiences. Accounting for the

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Each reader’s fears, desires, and fantasies are unique; therefore, each reader’s transformation of the words of the text into worlds is idiosyncratic. As I discuss in Chapter Two, this does not mean that all interpretations of a text are equally valid; although reliant on the reader’s acts of worldbuilding, interpretation occurs on a plane that is distinct from them. For Michel Picard and Norman Holland, the unconscious provides one way of linking worldbuilding and interpretation by giving the reader a personal conduit to FWs. According to Picard, because the reading experience opens a door to the unconscious, the reader hovers in a state between belief and disbelief.\footnote{Michel Picard, *Lire le temps* (Paris: Minuit, 1989) 56.} Holland uses psychoanalysis to discuss how the dynamic and transformative interaction between reader and text relies on unconscious fantasy. Reading takes the reader back to a developmental stage at which subject and object have not yet been differentiated.\footnote{Norman N. Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (NY: Oxford UP, 1968) 100.} For both of these theorists, the domain of the unconscious provides a third space for the reading experience, one which establishes a link between real and imaginary worlds. Whatever one’s views on the existence or nature of the unconscious, works like Picard’s and Holland’s provide a valuable counterweight to theories that center solely on the text. At the same time, there is a danger of venturing too far in the opposite direction:
indeed, Picard and Holland seem to place too much of a burden on the reader’s unconscious as a subjective network merely activated by the text, to the detriment of the various techniques and strategies employed by the author. In his exploration of fictional plotting, Peter Brooks employs psychoanalysis to different ends, looking at the structure of the text within a process of meaning itself activated by the act of reading. By emphasizing the role of desire both within the texts at hand and on the part of the reader, along lines that I explore in greater detail in Chapter Three, Brooks makes many excellent points about the ways in which various canonical texts set up reader-text interaction.\textsuperscript{32} Yet the more basic aspects of how full-fledged imaginary worlds spring from language, as well as the ontological premises of these FWs created by the interaction of reader and NWs, still demand explanation. Moreover, as James Phelan has pointed out, Brooks privileges endings over the middle spaces of the text: “what we read through.”\textsuperscript{33} Brooks’s idea that the reader’s desire is always desire for an end ignores this intermediary space (94, 96, 104). While Brooks does address the detours of the reader’s desire in the middle of texts, his approach—according to which the end, “across the bulk of the as yet unread middle pages...calls to the beginning, transforms and enhances it” (94)—remains troublingly teleological, dismissing the “obscure” processes of the middle of the text (96), as if the latter can only be inflected by the end and not the other way around. Evaluating the reading experience along the lines of psychoanalytic transference ignores the FWs created of necessity by the interaction of reader and the NW; it leaves an overly valorized RW reader


\textsuperscript{33} Brooks 47, 52; James Phelan, \textit{Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative} (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 111.
standing with text in hand: “Disciplined and ‘subjugated,’ the transference delivers one back to a changed reality. And so does any text fully engaged by the reader” (Brooks 235). What is missing in the preceding examinations of fictional texts is a real engagement with the slippery concept of FWs and what it might mean that they are fictional in the first place, as long we take pains not to define *fictional* in contrast to *real*.

It is crucial to recall that reader-text interaction does not occur in a closed-circuit: reader and text are fully *inter*dependent. The reader activates the grid of givens that is the structure of the text; so too does the text activate certain unknowable givens of the reader’s life. For instance, Gerald Prince’s idea of “reading interludes” theorizes the ways in which the text provides a map as to how it should be read. While such criticism does emphasize the interaction between reader and text, in its insistence on self-referentiality it falls short of analyzing the ontological consequences of such interaction. By abstracting the reader or bracketing him in favor of the narratee, reader-response theory may neglect the radical ontological shifts that take place during the act of reading—and that allow this act to take place in the first place—as Walton writes of FWs, “…from inside they feel actual—what fictionally is the case is, fictionally, really the case” (*Mimesis* 273). Fiction is endowed with an ontological status all its own. Because the parts played by the RW reader in fictional processes are difficult to quantify and even to qualify, we prefer most often to ignore them. In contrast to major functionalist theories of the 1960s and 1970s, Ricoeur’s theory of “encoded choices,” presented in the third volume

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of his magisterial study on time and narrative, develops along the phenomenological lines of understanding experience. Ricoeur criticizes the illusion that the reader comes to an autonomous text as an outsider, hat in hand, while, in truth, “…without the reader who appropriates it for himself, there is no world unfolded in front of the text” (Raconté 297; my emphasis). I will come back to this point, which informs one of my main premises, namely that the worlds that unfold, whether lived, narrative, or fictional, transcend the text that helps them to unfold. If Genette claims that the work of art transcends the text, one can equally argue that LWs, NWs, and FWs transcend the work that transcends the text.
C. Rereading and Intentionality

If my reader is neither an abstract entity nor an empirical subject, then, who is he? He is first and foremost a rereader, someone for whom the process of reading never ends. Reading may be second nature, but rereading is the second nature of reading; it was Barthes who, emphasizing the role of plurality and play in the reading experience, declared, “There is no first reading.”35 While rereading may occur without the reader’s conscious awareness of it, in the corpus considered here the reader has no choice but to become conscious of his rereading, as this act represents his only reasonable access to the complex worlds associated with the text. Since I am working within the domain of twentieth-century French literature, I have chosen to scrutinize the fictional worlds of the novels of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet. Yet my inquiry is distinct from both biographical criticism and language-based textual analysis. Reading these authors in particular involves discovering the ways in which rereading lays the foundations for the co-operative construction of worlds.36 To the extent that Queneau, Robbe-Grillet, and Simon may be said to represent the pinnacle of a certain notion of hyperfictional fiction, their novels present an ideal place for peeling back the multiple layers of interaction between reader and the worlds that he creates in concert with the text. Reading these authors furthermore reveals some significant difficulties that illuminate the conditions of possibility of the reading experience itself. The novels under study here bring to the fore a complex process of cross-referencing, verification, and problem

36 Throughout their careers, each author has expounded upon the reader’s role in deciphering, or walking into, the traps that they have laid. Yet, as we shall see, the author’s own comments are frequently the most misleading of all.
solving that accompanies every act of reading. Progress is often marked by error and guesswork; in the end, each problem posed and momentarily solved, or even unsolved, implicates the reader in a significant way (if only by inciting his desire for a conclusion).

Indeed, the considerable effort required to comprehend the most basic level of meaning in texts such as Queneau’s *Le Chiendent* and *Loin de Rueil*, Simon’s *La Route des Flandres* and *Le Jardin des Plantes*, and Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gommes* and *Le Voyeur* means that the rereader’s desire is bound to be deferred. Contrary to Brooks’ claim that desire is always desire for an end, readerly desire is by no means required to move in a linear manner toward that end; instead, it lurches back and forth towards knowledge as it negotiates a series of obstacles (Brooks 104; Picard 17-45). To the same extent that the teleology of the plot carries us “forward, onward, through the text” (Brooks 37), what Monica Fludernik calls a “narrative experientiality,” associated with consciousness, drives the text.37 This experientiality links reader to text in the co-creation of FWs. Just as consciousness in Hegel moves from situation to situation, discovering in each new situation the truth of the moment, so too does the reader progress through the text, though not necessarily toward the glorious final “synthesis” of the dialectic. In this way, one of Jean Hyppolite’s comments on Hegel provides an accurate description of the linkage of the disparate consciousnesses—real, narrative, and fictional—found in the reading experience: “Thus the various particular consciousnesses which meet one another in the *Phenomenology* are linked to one another, not by a contingent development, which is what is ordinarily understood by the term experience,

but by an immanent necessity which exists only for the philosopher.” The rereader posited in the pages to follow is as akin to Hegel’s self-reflexive philosopher as he is to the wandering consciousness. Both philosopher and reader are conscious of the fact that each new truth represents merely a stage, a transcendence of the self that contains all the previously attained truths. Although the rereader may seek cohesion and coherence, “an interpretation of the text in terms of a complete hermeneutic system in which the significance of each event is seen in light of the whole and that of the whole in each part,” the “oversophisticated games of attention and rereading” of these authors create a different kind of driving tension for the reading experience (Calinescu, *Rereading* 168, 213, 159). In other words, the reader may want one thing, but he often gets another. As Phelan writes with respect to the changeable nature of reading, “…since our sense of the whole is itself always in motion—it is also always corrigible” (112). The way these myriad manifestations of consciousness are bounded by NWs and FWs occurs, I want to argue, thanks to the web of *intentionality* activated by reading and rereading. For these particular authors who focus so intensely of the construction of their texts call for an active participant unafraid of continually being thrust into the role of a novice reader (even if he is far from being one). For this reason, any discussion of the reading experience as it is pushed to its limits must recognize and account for the work of the reader as rereader.

Unsure of his position but certain of the need for comprehension, the reader continuously shifts between activity and passivity, subjectivity and

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38 Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l’esprit de Hegel: tome 1* (Paris: Aubier, 1946) 30. Besides his commentaries on Hegel, which often criticized the teleologically progressive nature of the latter’s thought, Hyppolite produced the first French translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. 
objectivity. This phenomenon can be described as intentionality. Phenomenologically marked off from reality, reading is not something that we do automatically, and yet neither is it an act of pure intellectual cognition: the rereader experiences the text both emotionally and cerebrally (Holland 70). The reading experience occupies a liminal time and a space between the possible extremes of hallucination and cerebration. According to Picard, this “transitional surface” (95) is governed by its own rules, involving the continuous slippage and reversal of perspective so that, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose work provides the constant inspiration for many of my insights, would have it, the distinctions between thinking and being thought, speaking and being spoken to begin to blur.39

Compared to “objective thought,” which, according to Merleau-Ponty, is trapped inside the limits of the solely physiological body and dominates the world from a supposedly superior viewpoint, intentionality complicates the clear-cut division of the world between subject and object. Intentionality is a “third type of being,” in which the self loses both its “purity” and its “transparency”: for that reason, our intersubjective world has its roots in a shared “slippage” (glissement) of perspectives, not just in similar biological characteristics (Merleau-Ponty, Perception 407). Consciousnesses or subjectivities that we usually tend to consider separate are linked together by intentionality. Yet, as I pointed out in the Introduction, this is not a realm in which inquiry produces easily verifiable results of the kind that lead to scientific certainty: intentionality, like fictionality, is a slippery concept.

For my purposes, these artificially separated perspectives are those of reader and text, which converge in an intricate shadowy realm of half-existence—made up of worlds that stretch beyond the confines of the everyday “real world”—that confers on the reading experience its hypnotic power. Intentionality lays the groundwork for the understanding of consciousness as an act connecting self, world, and other, and, by extension, of the manner in which the reader’s consciousness and that of the text intermingle in a common space. Accepting the “messy” notion of intentionality clarifies the profusion of fictional consciousnesses encountered by the reader within the pages of the text and helps to dissipate some misunderstandings regarding authors one may classify as “challenging.” Understanding the basic phenomenological view of intentionality allows the critic to avoid a problem frequently encountered in functionalist or “classical” narratology, that of deciding just “whose” consciousness dominates the novels at hand. Rather than imposing an external structure on NWs and FWs that would be both decidable and objective, intentionality reveals the simultaneous organization, disorganization, and reorganization of experience and knowledge across the field of disparate consciousnesses encountered by, and including, the reader.

It is here that the distinction between intentionality as the underlying structure of all consciousness, real or fictional, and fictionality, as the specific mode of existence of fictional objects, becomes paramount. For the moment, I will simply state that intentionality in general is characterized by openness and linkage, whereas fictionality is characterized by constraint. Since I am not a philosopher, I have decided to skirt the ongoing debate about whether fiction and reality rely on similar structures by simply pointing out that, most often,
we feel that they do not, all the while admitting that they often do (and vice-versa)! I will follow most proponents of PWT in pointing out that, whereas the world in itself is complete, fiction is not. Even if the world relies on us in terms of our perception of it, it does not rely on us nearly as extensively as do the worlds given form by fiction. More than anything else, fiction’s constraints differentiate it from reality. Using intentionality as well as fictionality as a backdrop for my exploration of a series of texts leaves me just as free to move outside the novel, in discussing the reader, as to move inside the novel, in discussing the mode of consciousness proper to fictional character, as well as the points of intersection of these consciousnesses via closer readings of these texts.

In order to provide some background for my usage of the term *intentionality*, which has recently been understood in varying ways by philosophers of mind like John Searle and Daniel Dennett, I will briefly address some of the previous uses of the term. Most thoroughly explored by German and French philosophers associated with phenomenology in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, such as Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, intentionality was first discussed seriously by Franz Brentano. For Brentano, intentionality described the link between consciousness and the world. It established a correlation between psychic

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phenomena and objects, spawning Edmund Husserl’s observation that, “All consciousness is consciousness of something.” Although Husserl took many stances on intentionality throughout his teaching and writing career, he followed Brentano in elucidating intentionality’s “dative” function. Husserl understood intentionality as the mediation between intending act (noesis) and intentional object (noema), by virtue of which we can perceive the world’s objects. By the end of his life, Husserl was claiming that intentionality was a property of the transcendental ego, a universalized subjectivity available to any individual existence; this claim prompted Merleau-Ponty to comment, “Transcendental subjectivity is a revealed subjectivity, meaning [revealed] to itself and to the other, and in this way, it is an intersubjectivity” (Perception 415). Merleau-Ponty’s comment is telling, as his own work emphasizes the deeply communal nature of intentional interaction.

For Merleau-Ponty, as for Husserl, intentionality described the structural function of consciousness: every act of consciousness has a meaning or a noema, which is directed along intentional lines. Yet, because Merleau-Ponty conceived of intentionality as embedded in bodily experience, consciousness plays an active role in the world: embodied consciousnesses correspond in his view to enworlded objects. In the earlier part of the philosopher’s career, the

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body acted as the most important mediator between self, world, and others. By criticizing unembodied “objective” thought, Merleau-Ponty revalorized the human body as an intermediary in a world composed of “beings of depth, inaccessible to a subject surveying them from above.” Knowledge comes from, and to, the body that lives in the world. *Intersubjectivity* is here doubled by *intercorporeality*. The structural similarity of our bodies and their similar responses to shared stimuli demonstrate that we are interacting with the same world (183; see also *Perception* 402-6): “…the thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is to the contrary the only means that I have of going to the heart of things, by making myself world and by making them flesh” (176).

In marked contrast to Sartre, for Merleau-Ponty, our consciousnesses do not negate each other because they emanate from the same place: my unity is really our shared, incorporated experience of the world.

Later, Merleau-Ponty would come to understand language as mimicking one of the perceived “stumbling blocks” to intersubjectivity: *alterity* or the other’s presence in me and mine in him (Merleau-Ponty, *Prose* 194-195; see also *Perception* 414-415 and *Visible* 198). Since I am endowed with both a body and the use of language, consciousness is no longer the privileged possession of the individual. I accomplish this feat through acts of mutual recognition reminiscent of Kojeve’s discussion of the interaction between Master and Slave in Hegel. If I recognize the other as other, the only way to recuperate the part of myself that has accorded him this recognition is by entering into a reciprocal relationship with him so that I myself am then recognized in the

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same way. Although Merleau-Ponty’s thought is indebted to Kojève and Hegel, the reciprocal relation described by the French philosopher is not nearly as consumptive or destructive as it appears in the work of the Russian and German philosophers. The resultant intersubjectivity structures the interworld inhabited by both self and other through a “common operation which neither of us creates” (Merleau-Ponty, *Perception* 406-407). Like the body, language exemplifies connectivity and communication: “It is as if the visibility which animates the perceptible world has emigrated, not out of all bodies, but into another, less heavy, more transparent body, as if it were switching skins, abandoning that of the body for that of language…” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible* 198). Language proves to be a more solid connective thread than the body, as it is less dependent on the physical world; however, language also expands this physical world in new and different ways.

Merleau-Ponty proposed this embodied linkage between self, other, and world as a radically new concept in philosophy, called “the flesh” (*Visible* 193, 191). The flesh correlates to the thickness of the body between the self and the world. In actuality, by holding us together and keeping us apart all at once, this thickness is a distance that is also a proximity and vice-versa. As the concretization of the intentional structure of the world, the flesh permits the interconnection of consciousnesses. As Ralph D. Ellis, Shaun Gallagher, and Dan Zajavi have argued, Merleau-Ponty’s ideas on the inherently connective nature of these processes occupy a definite place in contemporary philosophy of

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48 These ideas on recognition, linked with Kojève’s lectures at the École des Hautes Études, transcribed by Queneau and attended by other future luminaries such as Jacques Lacan, play an important role in Chapter Three.
mind and neuroscience. Yet for Merleau-Ponty, the body transcends the physical in order to create the intentional linkage that ties together the field of distinct consciousnesses, removing the polar opposition between subjects and objects (Visible 171). Making reference to Husserl’s “intentional transgression,” Merleau-Ponty describes how

The spectacle invites me to become its suitable spectator, as if another consciousness than my own suddenly came to inhabit my body, or rather as if my consciousness were drawn over there and then emigrated into the spectacle that it was in the process of putting on for itself. I am caught up by a second myself outside of myself... (“Langage” 157)

Since the totality of the visible is never readily available to the limited perception of an individual, the only way to commune with it is through the experience of the eccentric or that which pushes one outside of oneself (Merleau-Ponty, Visible 178). Thus do FWs give readers a taste of the “possibilities” of fiction, which allow them to share their everyday corporeal body with the slippery “body” of the text. (Without the register of vocabulary involving devouring and destruction so present in the work of Hegel, Kojève, and Sartre.)

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D. Worlds Outside, Worlds Inside: Possible Worlds Theory

The way in which Merleau-Ponty unravels the concept of alterity sheds light on our discussion of the reading experience. Reading brings into being an alternate self, “another myself,” a “wandering double” who “haunts me” (Merleau-Ponty, “Langage” 153; Prose 186, respectively). This double is reducible to neither the narrator nor the narratee; in fact, its strange propinquity to the reader accounts for part of the “uncanny” experience of reading. Like Holland and Picard after him, Freud surmised that the affective component of reading results from the reader’s psyche bridging his life and fiction thanks to the cues of the text: the “peculiarly directive power” of the “storyteller” (228). Two-faced, the reader plays upon a double identity: lost in a book, the reader is still himself, yet, self-consciously puzzling over the intricacies of a thorny sentence, he is not wholly himself. Reading allows the reader a brush with the other without losing himself at the same time that it allows him to discover himself in the guise of another. Keeping this in mind might calm those who see in today’s television programming and highly interactive video games a threat to young people’s sense of identity—after all, in the 18th century, novels and, in the early 20th century, movies were once considered a similar threat!

During the act of reading, the “flesh of the world,” the bodily manifestation of our interconnectedness, transmutes itself into “flesh of the text.” The sum of the words associated with a text is greater than that of its parts; text becomes a “texture,” according to Dolezel.50 Just as the self transcends its immanent bodily existence through acts of consciousness, so too

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does the work of art elevate itself “above” the text, as Genette would have it.
Although Dolezel strictly equates texture to wording, I argue that texture (what I have been calling the NW) extends beyond the text’s condition of immanence to link it to the reader through the creation of FWs. Texture goes beyond the text and become a palpable part of the reader’s world. It should not be forgotten that the body plays a role in reading as well: Picard proclaims, “...the reader has a body with which he reads” (133). To borrow Picard’s vocabulary, the psychosomatic body of the reader (le liseur), situated in the RW, plays as significant a role as the lectant, the dynamic, voluntary, cerebral reader of the present moment, and the lu (the past participle of the verb lire, “to read,” in French), the reader as linked to his past unconscious fantasies. The act of reading concretizes these three positions—the reader sitting in his chair (liseur), his cerebral processing of what he reads (lectant), and his emotional life (lu).
Mediated by the body, the three characteristics of the reader come together to produce the manifold variations of the reading experience (Picard 131-75).

In hypothesizing the workings of reader-text interaction, literary theorists often point out the mutually inclusive revolving door of self and other whereby the reader discovers how the act of reading implicates both subjectivity and objectivity. In Jean-Paul Sartre’s schema, developed in L’Imaginaire, the reader’s implication in the language-based (NW) imaginary worlds (FWs) produced by the text results from the mental images that they call forth in him: consciousness fills in the requisite gaps. Yet as the imaginary must always work by using the supports of reality (in this case, language), the novel
objectively signifies a subjective world. The virtual world encountered by the reader of fiction is hence an interior one; for Mikel Dufrenne, the spectator comes into contact with the aesthetic object due to a “dynamic model” which is created inside of him. At the same time, the reader relates to these very interior images as to something exterior (Sartre 120). In the words of Roman Ingarden, these “represented objectivities constitute a separate world.” Thus, according to Picard, the playful and imaginary temporality of the reading experience has real effects or, at the very least, effects that are felt as real (56). Boundaries are crossed; with the reader’s help, the NW leads to FWs to which he himself reacts (internally) as something external or nominally “real.” (Of course, “real” here means less “realistically plausible” and more “able to be co-created or engaged with by the imagination.”) As the reader becomes the subject of another’s itinerant thoughts, the subject-object dichotomy between reader and text is attenuated: “Here, there is no problem of the alter ego because it is not I who see, not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility lives within both of us…” declares Merleau-Ponty (Visible 185). Intentionality is the mesh that holds together this operation whereby sameness and difference inhabit one another. This operation occurs in fiction whenever the reader confronts the givens of the text. (No such immutable givens exist in reality.) Reality, even when we consider biological life in a genetically determined manner, has no “script” as unchangeable as that of a text. In fact, one of my

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51 Jean-Paul Sartre, L’Imaginaire (Paris: Gallimard 1940) 105, 128, 357.
54 See section B for a psychoanalytic approach to this issue.
55 Queneau’s use of constraints provides me with an ideal opportunity to discuss this movement on a smaller scale in Chapter Two.
principal aims is to try to reframe the notion that the unchanging reference
point of the text—or of the real world—automatically holds precedence over the
varied and multiple worlds that the reader’s interaction with it produces.

A radical reader-response paradigm attuned to the work of
consciousness might deny the possibility that texts exist independently in the
world. According to Georges Poulet, a text achieves full existence only in its reader: “Whenever I read, I mentally pronounce an I and yet the I which I pronounce is not myself.”56 The ‘Je est un autre’ property characteristic of the reading experience—Calinescu imagines the reader as an actor who continually switches role (275)—gives the reader the unique opportunity to experience another consciousness from the inside by adopting what Dennett has called the “intentional stance.”57 That is, a position from which man assumes that the actions of other men are produced by inner states such as thoughts, desires, fears, etc.58 By positing the existence of inner states in fictional characters, imputing to them intention, motive, and meaning, just as he does with other people in everyday life—just as the characters he is reading about do with other characters—the reader makes inferences about character consciousness in order to draw conclusions about the text. He momentarily recognizes these fictional worlds as lived plain and simple (LWs). Alan Palmer labels the process of criss-crossing consciousnesses produced by fiction “the mind beyond the

58 However, this stance is nothing more than a “useful predictive tool” for Dennett, who also criticizes the infinite regress of original intention. By breaking down intentionality into smaller and smaller composite parts, he demonstrates how a system of miniscule micro-intentionalities can account for a more global macro-intentionality.
skin”59; for Docherty, this same question involves *being*: “The space between these two ontological positions is the space in which we real readers enter into the act of appropriating the text and adapting a position of our own in regard to it” (221). Docherty emphasizes that this is a process, rather than a finished product: fictional characters “ek-sist” in a Heideggerian way just as humans do for one another—they are both present as characters and absent as illusory people (xiv, 221). In discussing just how Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet deal with characters, which they each do in unique, groundbreaking ways, I will have recourse to the notion of LWs. That there might be a LW of the character at all, especially one to which we as readers might not be granted complete access—yet whose existence we still intimate—constitutes one of the marvels of the novel in general and of these novelists in particular, especially as they are alternately lauded and criticized for having done away with traditional notions such as character. While readerly consciousness is not trapped within the limits of the reader’s body, neither is textual consciousness imprisoned within the pages of the text. (The LWs of novels often remain with the reader long after he has finished reading.) Fictionality comes into being thanks to the play of intentionality across consciousnesses, which are distinct only on the level of abstract analysis. In the act of reading, consciousnesses are interlinked and intertwined in a Möbius structure—what Douglas Hofstadter would call a “tangled hierarchy” or a “strange loop”—so that it is hard to tell which is which or where one ends and another begins.60


If the intentional structure of the reading experience joins disparate consciousnesses from different worlds, then what measure of belief should the reader accord to the worlds associated with the reading experience? In what way can such worlds be said to exist? While PWT, which originated in formal logic, concentrates too exclusively on semantics to be useful for an inclusive study of literature, its description of the concomitant autonomy and incompleteness of fictional entities provides a useful way of discussing the links among the reader and the worlds associated with the text.61 FWs can be understood as a specific subspecies of PWs with particular characteristics. They are “non-actualized,” meaning that they do not take place in the RW; the set of possible FWs is unlimited; they are incomplete or “handicapped”62; they can be composite or heterogeneous; and they are constructed from texts. In sum, a FW is “a small possible world shaped by specific global constraints and containing a finite number of individuals who are compossible” (Dolezel, Heterocosmica 20).63 In a strictly existential sense, FWs are not “waiting to be discovered”; rather they are “waiting to be constructed.” The words on the page are there whether the reader reads them or not; they only become worlds, though, if he does read them. This peculiar form of dormancy gives NWs much of their allure; the book’s possibilities call to the reader more so than does the book itself (understood as an object). Readers, even critics, do not read novels

63 “Compossible” means that two characters inhabit the same universe. For example, Madame Bovary’s Emma Bovary and The Catcher in the Rye’s Holden Caulfield are not compossible whereas Moby Dick’s Ishmael and Queequeg are.
in order to read words as words, but rather as worlds marked by an ever-changing tension between words and worlds.

For Thomas Pavel, the task of PWT is to deal with the following paradox: “Works of fiction more or less dramatically combine incompatible world-structures, play with the impossible, and incessantly speak about the unspeakable. Yet they most often present themselves as linguistically coherent texts, gently obeying stylistic and generic conventions.”\(^\text{64}\) Most theorists agree that Pavel’s “tension between texts and worlds” is generated by the combination of autonomy and incompleteness that characterizes FWs (\textit{Worlds} 62).\(^\text{65}\) Dolezel notes that FWs depend on a different type of referentiality than the RW. The reader believes that he interacts with FWs when, in reality, he constructs them through the semiotic channels of the text (Dolezel, \textit{Heterocosmica} 20; Pavel, \textit{Worlds} 86). Dolezel understands extension as relating to Frege’s notion of reference and intension to Frege’s notion of sense. He distinguishes between an extensional narrative primary world, which contains the referents of the text and which has to be extrapolated by the reader, and an extensional narrative secondary world, by which these referents are individuated and interpreted, before being given meaning in the intensional NW, which includes the totality of the meanings of the text. Thus, by linguistically filtering specific aspects of a postulated fictional world, fictional texts “stipulate their own referential domain by creating a possible world” (Dolezel, \textit{Heterocosmica} 26). Dolezel’s ideas demonstrate one of the blind spots of PWT when applied to fiction, that of cataloguing aspects of a FW as if it were real. Such a catalogue, though, can

\(^{65}\) See Ronen on how islands of non-fictionality destroy fictional autonomy (153). For Pavel, this autonomy is characterized by the “unique ontological perspective” of the work. Pavel, “‘Possible Worlds’ in Literary Semantics,” \textit{Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism} 34.2 (1975): 175.
provide useful when examining the breakdown of the idea of a single FW through the multiple and often hyperfictional worlds of authors like Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet.

Extension, in Dolezel’s sense, does not exist “inside” the text; it works like a selective linguistic paraphrase of the textual fictional world. Unlike intension, extension makes reference but is not reliant on the actual wording of the text (136). The “intensional function” proposed by Dolezel “is a function from the fictional text’s texture [wording] to the fictional world” (139). This function, which I have been describing as the transition from the NW to the FWs, becomes easier to understand once we allow that it relies on the reader for activation. However, it must be noted that Dolezel’s reader is fully subordinate to the text, as he merely follows the author’s “instructions” on how to reconstruct the fictional world (203-5). For Dolezel, the “literary speech act” at work here seems to ignore the reader’s capability for idiosyncratic reaction and interpretation: “A non-actualized possible state of affairs becomes a fictional existent by being authenticated in a felicitously uttered literary speech act.”

In Heterocosmica, Dolezel relegates the question of individual reader response to the domain of “ethics” and not “theory” (205). Nevertheless, the “theory” only works once we take the “ethics” into account. Then we may see how the individual reader progresses from extension to intension and thus pinpoints the autonomous fictional “referents” of the text while also imbuing the text with meaning (Dolezel, “Intensional” 195-196). After all, stricto sensu, the totality of meanings of the text is not in the text; it does not exist anywhere! This is

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precisely what makes literature so infuriating for those whose approach to it is solely scientific.

It is the very incompleteness of the text that calls forth the participation of the reader. In order to progress from NWs to FWs—and back again—readers can be described as “following” several hypothetical principles which elaborate their relationship to the RW during the act of reading. Walton has codified two principles found in the writing of several other theorists: the “reality principle” (RP) and the “principal of mutual belief” (MBP) (Mimesis 144-169). The RP claims that fictional truths are extrapolated from the RW by the author and then compared to the RW by the reader: as philosopher John Woods puts it, “Roughly speaking, we seem entitled to make those fill-assumptions about fictional objects of kind Ki that we make about real objects of kinds Ki.”67 In this manner, learning more about the world means learning more about fiction, a problematic assertion at best, as it seems to deny fiction its own unique status while simultaneously suggesting the difficulty of reading about things we do not know about (wherein lies much the pleasure of reading).68 The MBP, by contrast, allows for intersubjective, socio-historical assumptions about the author’s intended audience as well.69 In a similar vein, Marie-Laure Ryan has proposed what she calls “the principle of minimal departure,” a combination of the RP and the MBP by which the reader turns to the FW as guide when his reliance on RW rules fails.70 What these rules ignore, in an intertextual sense,

is that the reader also relies on other texts and worlds of a similar genre, period, or author for guidance.\textsuperscript{71}

According to philosopher and aesthetcian Monroe Beardsley, new laws lead to fresh inferences, which lead, in turn, to new elucidations (245). The reader’s increasing familiarity with the “fictional encyclopedia” of the FW at hand is a dynamic structure; ensuring that “...as long as the reader reads, his or her knowledge expands by incorporating further and further fictional encyclopedias” (Dolezel, \textit{Heterocosmica} 181). Even should reality be used as a guide, the particular sensation of transition caused by the reading experience differentiates NWs and FWs from the RW. Eco has even proposed something resembling a version of Ryan’s principle of minimal departure for the character: “The character readjusts his own beliefs and accepts the world as it is outlined by the plot. He, so to speak, throws away his wrong belief as soon as he recognizes that the (fictional) reality is different” (“Lector” 243). While character consciousness is especially pertinent to my chapters on Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet, here, I am proposing to tackle the more global structures of intentionality that subtend fictionality. Most importantly from the point of view of a phenomenology of reading, all of these rules and guidelines also tend to forget the part played by blind faith, guesses, and errors in the reading experience.

It is critical to recall that, in PWT, the RW acts as the center to a “constellation” of distinct PWs. Similarly, during the reading experience, each FW has multiple centers of gravity each orbited by its own FWs. FWs are multiple by nature (thus the distinction between the FW in general and the

\textsuperscript{71}This is an aspect of reading Queneau and Simon that I explore in some detail in Chapters Two and Four.
discrete but interrelated FWs produced by a reader’s interaction with a given NW). In the act of reading consciousness, relocates itself to other worlds—and other worlds within other worlds—through a process of “recentering.” According to Pavel, consciousness reorganizes its universe around “a multiplicity of new bases” (Worlds 54). One need only think of a science fiction film such as *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999) for a demonstration of how this operation works. Having created a virtual reality, the main character in Josef Rusnak’s film briefly feels pity for one of the characters in this virtual reality before finding out that his own reality (the main character’s) is a nothing but a virtual one created by characters inhabiting a reality one level above his own. It is here that Genette’s recent insistence on metalepsis, or the crossing of representational levels within a narrative, as the basis for all fiction, gains credibility:

> This perpetual and reciprocal transfusion from the real plot to the fictional plot, and from one fiction to another, is the very soul of fiction in general, and of every fiction in particular. All fiction is shot through with metalepsis. And all reality, when it recognizes itself in a fiction, and when it recognizes a fiction in its own universe. (Genette, *Métalepse* 131)

Fictionalization, the reciprocal process by which the subject activates and virtualizes NWs, is embodied by this movement of crossing boundaries or “recentering.” In Chapters Two through Six, I will examine how this process—a movement of worlds within worlds—is a central part of the NWs and FWs of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet. The novels of these writers encourage us to enlist the different facets of PWT in combination with a greater reflection on the role of the reader. If this is so, it is because novels such as *Le Chiendent, La*

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Route des Flandres, and Le Voyeur already deconstruct and reconstruct their own worlds. They should not be dismissed from the discussion of consciousness merely because they demonstrate the process of worldbuilding explicitly as well as implicitly (Margolin 457; Dolezel, Heterocosmica 163-168). After all, if they completely ignored the construction of worlds, no one, not even academics or professional critics, would be able to read them.
E. Style: Words as Worlds

The concepts of NW and FWs come together under the rubric of *style* or a certain manner of being, an idea often cited by Merleau-Ponty in reference to intersubjectivity. The puzzling lack of comprehension produced in the reader by the style of certain literary works resembles that produced in us by strangers. In both cases, engagement is rewarded with new meanings and a mutual transformation of self and other. Since style puts us in touch with something other than ourselves, it makes the experience of reading a transformative one:

...if the book truly teaches me something, if the other is truly an-other, I must at a certain moment be surprised, disoriented, and we must meet one another, no longer in what we share, but in what makes us differ, and this supposes a transformation of myself and of the other as well: our differences must not remain opaque qualities; they must become *meanings*. (Merleau-Ponty, *Prose* 198)

Wolfgang Iser later followed Merleau-Ponty's nascent ideas by arguing that the work's own incompleteness acts as a “constitutive indeterminacy,” which is “rhetorically neutralized by” the reader whose task it is to fill in the gaps and blanks of the text. Based on language and not on perception, the text, relying on the reader’s increased participation—and perception—is never equivalent to the worlds that it spawns: “Whenever the reader bridges the gap,

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74 In *Écrits I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), Lacan writes that it is the “objet a”—i.e. the object cause of desire—that “answers the question of style” formulated by Buffon as “Le style est l’homme même” (17). Instead of equating style with the measure of man (Buffon) or with the decentered desire that drives him (Lacan), I use the word to describe how literary worlds are built in terms of form and content. Style exists on the levels of both worldbuilding and interpretation, indicating (1) how the reader may unknowingly enter the world of a work (2) the conscious conclusions that this reader may then draw about this process.

75 My italics: *sens* can mean “direction,” “meaning,” or “sense” (as in one of the five senses) in French.

communication begins,” writes Iser (Act 169). However, instead of communication, I would say “worldbuilding”; assuming communication as a goal immediately puts the reader or the critic on one set path—explication—that does not prove very fruitful, especially when it comes to difficult works like the novels of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet. While, as Ricoeur pointed out, the reader is certainly limited in his range of *choices*, he is not limited to one set of *decisions*: no two readers—or readings—are alike. Rather, the reader makes what Eco calls “forecasts” based on various intertextual frames, which include his own “*inferential walks*” (“Lector” 214). These inferential walks subsume many of the idiosyncratic variables related to the reader’s individuality that I mentioned earlier; they also include the reader’s previous experience with this and all other texts. For Eco, the plot delineates a strategy for cooperation between world and text, one that determines he outcome of the reading experience.

Whether one ascribes to Eco’s theory of gap-filling, Ingarden’s idea of indeterminacies, Iser’s theory of the relation between indeterminacies and the multiple perspectives that they enable, or Catherine Emmott’s more recent notion of “contextual frames” as a model of the reader’s dynamic interaction with the text in order to “assemble” a context for its FW, all of these activities occur in worlds that cannot be reduced to the text and the text alone.77 By the same token, words do not lead directly to worlds; Inge Crossman compellingly argues that “frames of reference” like those mentioned by Emmott allow the reader actively to collaborate in the creation of worlds. The fact that the “*referential function*” at work in fiction does not automatically correlate to the

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existence of a referent does not impede this process. Just as the adjustments made by the reader in dealing with the NW decenter this world from its position in regard to the text, the adjustments made in dealing with the FW decenter it still further from the more textually-defined NW. Both of these movements ensure that the reader’s attention never remains fully anchored in the RW. In 1978, Nelson Goodman linked style and discovery in just this way, writing, “The less accessible a style is to our approach and the more adjustment we are forced to make, the more insight we gain and the more our powers of discovery are developed.” Not only do “inaccessible” works hone our ability to read them, they thus redefine our reading of works judged more “accessible,” although the “insights” gained might not always feel so applicable once we have returned to the RW.

Through style, NWs and the ontologically distinct FWs they evoke feed into one another. Merleau-Ponty deserves to be cited at length here:

By entering into a book, I sense that all the words have changed, without being able to say how. Newness of usage, defined by a certain and constant deviation for which we do not know how to account right away, the meaning [sens] of the book is linguistic. The configurations of our world are all changed because one of them was torn from its simple existence in order to represent all of the others and to become the key or style of this world, a general way of interpreting it. (Prose 183-184, my emphasis)

Merleau-Ponty’s linguistic turn is evident from this quotation, which presages the ideas of the principle of minimal departure and the fictional encyclopedia I discussed in section D. Although I understand the process of reading as relying less on representation than Merleau-Ponty does, I find that his analysis rings true after all of these years. By modifying the RW through language, fiction

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becomes a privileged space, attributing a new meaning to the RW even as it engenders NWs and FWs. In this way, a literary work involves not just the attention of a reader but also his inter-subjectivity, the way in which he is connected to a world bigger than himself. Style constitutes the reversible semi-opaque link between RW, NWs, and FWs. As such, it cannot be discounted or placed in parentheses. In the chapters that follow, the first portion of my discussion of each author will directly address questions of style in regard to the reader’s interaction with NWs.

By means of style, communication thus exceeds the simple communication of information and becomes interpretation; as Walton has pointed out, language may be essential for communication but fiction is not (Mimesis 89)! The materiality of the verbal text is the nodal point of connection for all kinds of worlds. The RW appears different thanks to FWs—through self-reflexivity, or an exaggerated focus on the textual supports of the NW. The reality principle does not necessarily entail a mimetic representation of reality; it can also involve a self-reflection on language that, in itself, has nothing to do with reality—or even language, for that matter. Thus it might be better to say that the reader walks the tightrope of style between many worlds, occasionally leaning one way, then another, occasionally falling into one or another world, but never remaining there forever.

I have returned to my point of departure: how does the simple object that is a book becomes more than an object for the reader? On one level, we know that the reader is real and that the text is nothing more than an amalgam of printed pages. Like the “dual reference” of the body in Merleau-Ponty’s

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thought, the text leads a double existence: an object among other objects, it also orders and gives life to FWs (Merleau-Ponty, Visible 178-179). On another level, we witness that there is deep and meaningful interaction between the reader and the text. Intentionality removes this disparity because intentionality is always a two-way street: it sets up the parameters for reader-text interaction by delineating the shifting field in which fiction gains form. Reader participation in FWs vacillates between absorption and interaction. The term absorption implies that the reader is carried away by the text to the point that he is more a part of the FW than he is of the RW. Interaction, by contrast, implies that the reader retains his senses and only participates self-consciously in the FWs at hand. Perhaps the reader (1) now pays as much attention to the NW as to the FW, (2) reverts to the text taken as text, or, (3) faced with difficulty, he may have stepped back into the RW and ceased reading altogether. (Then again, as Merleau-Ponty reminds us, it will not be the same RW either but a RW¹, one which is constantly modified by each reading experience). What we often forget is that neither term excludes the other: there is interaction in absorption and there is absorption in interaction. In fact, Calinescu argues that it is absorption which stokes the reader’s desire to move through even the most difficult of texts, as he is eager to decipher them (167). Texts are “communicative transactions between authors and reader” with both a formal and an affective structure; Phelan reminds us that the privileged element of the equation is “the transaction itself” (209). Although we may not know for sure what is being communicated, we know for sure that the reader does not completely disappear into the text nor the text into the reader. Rather, reading
generates FWs that are virtual. Subject and object blend into the intentional web whose subspecies, in this case, is fictionality.

The highly indeterminate novels of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet require intense participation on the part of the reader. The role of the reader is heightened due to the need for the narrator to communicate an unusual experience whereby—and here, all experience seemingly becomes unusual—the reader’s interaction becomes part and parcel of a text that means nothing without the interrelated activities of worldbuilding and interpretation. In other words, the text depends on the reader even more than usual. Gifted with meta-textual and “hyperreflexive” awareness, the reader creates in his own way as actively as does the writer. In fact, here, interaction is so frequent that it actually becomes absorption: readerly self-awareness emerges as part of the process of absorption. The recognition of fiction as fiction does not prevent immersion in fiction. The characteristic of playfulness that we mistakenly associate only with so-called “postmodernist” fiction is in fact a necessary complement to any act of reading that is made up of both absorption and interactivity. As Brian McHale remarks, this playfulness is often defined by ontological questions, such as “What is a world? What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?” Readers may not realize it, but they answer such questions no matter what they choose to read.

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81 I have borrowed the term from Louis Sass, who uses it to characterize the “acute self-consciousness and self-reference” which characterizes the link between insanity and art in the twentieth century: *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998) 8.
In the same way, because of the experimental manner in which texts like those of Queneau, Simon, and Robe-Grillet are written, absorption becomes interactive: the reader who is absorbed by the text enters into language games that are deliberately interactive and perhaps even designed to appeal to a certain kind of reader.

Reader and text do not remain separate but neither do they coalesce into a singular entity. Just as for the spectator of a film or a play, the RW may fade away, but it never disappears. What differentiates the novel from genres such as cinema and theater—and even video games—is the level of possible interference from the outside world. The reader chooses at every moment to continue reading or not to continue reading; of course, in a very basic way, this is true of cinema and theater as well, where the spectator can close his eyes or even stand up and walk out of the building. But the movie theater and the playhouse are spatially constructed so as to seize and then hold both the spectator’s attention and his body, just as the gamer faces serious (fictional) consequences for continually pausing his game to deal with interruptions, whereas the reader is free to read when and where he likes. (In spite of technological advances such as mobile/digital readers and e-books, most books look remarkably the same as they did fifty years ago.) Although “being online” in itself constitutes a paradigm shift that is worthy of our attention in this regard, the same intentional structure underlies this interaction between the RW and its mediation via text and images. Where else, after all, do absorption and interaction work hand in hand as much as they do online, where one’s attention is constantly being interpellated and broken by a moving stream of tempting images and text offering us new worlds with just a click? The reader
is in closer proximity to the book than is the spectator to the screen or stage. Dufrenne and Ingarden conjecture that, for aesthetic perception to occur, a protective distance—in this case, an abstract kind of distance—between the subject and the work of art is necessary so that the work does not swallow up the subject. It is my contention that this distance is nothing more than the string of intermediary worlds that help the reader negotiate the words of the work. Pierre Bayard, whose thought is informed by psychoanalysis and reader-response theory, has labeled these worlds “intermediate worlds,” and connected them explicitly to the ways in which the reader fills in the blank spots of the world surrounding the character in a literary text. Here is the rub: although their worlds are never fully known to him, the reader thus creates an semi-autonomous world whose very creation and continued existence depend on the reader! The logic of fiction, then, is not the logic of physics for, as I have argued above, the sheer individuality of the reading experience “establishes points of impenetrable incomprehension at the heart of all critical communication” (Bayard Roger). Understanding the reading experience as relying on worlds and worldbuilding allows for such “points of incomprehension” by giving as much weight to the reader’s basic interaction with the text (competency) as to the critic’s interpretation of it. For Bayard, this spirit of openness in regard to our interaction with the weighty cultural objects that are books will allow us to understand that “a book is reinvented with every reading,” that it is not saddled

with a definite meaning before the act of reading, and that, even so, it certainly does not mean whatever we as readers want it to.\footnote{Pierre Bayard, \textit{How to Talk About Books You Haven’t Read}, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (NY: Bloomsbury, 2007) 184.}

Straddling reality and fiction, the reader in fact comes into contact with a multitude of worlds. Thus the reader envisioned by Sartre in \textit{L’Imaginaire} is likewise a spectator whose consciousness is merely displaced by participation in the discovery of FWs. The participation demanded by the work of art thus negates aspects of the RW in order to focus on the details of imaginary worlds (Sartre 105). Because consciousness—or, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer would put it, “attentionality”—is only displaced and not permanently dislocated, the reader is able to participate in the construction of a variety of contiguous worlds, from NWs, whose emphasis on verbal construction remains closer to the text, to FWs, whose vicissitudes might have as much to do with the reader’s own life as with the text. Through this double process of multiple negation and creation, the power of the imaginary relegates the RW to insignificance or, rather, to a kind of significance-in-waiting or background. This is not to say that FWs are not somehow anchored in the RW. We may consider too Walton’s claim that imaginings are often linked to features of the RW, which may prompt them, may be their object, or may aid in the generation of what he (Walton) calls “fictional truths” (\textit{Mimesis}, 21). The realist problem of equating RWs and FWs is easily sidestepped considering that the most important distinction made by Walton is that between fictionality and the imagination. Imagination is not the uninhibited act that we habitually take it to be, and neither is fiction; fiction,
especially when its markers appear before us in black and white\textsuperscript{88} on the pages of a novel, involves even greater constraints than does imagination—in the same way that reality might involve a stiffer dose of freedom that we might imagine! Just as, for Brentano, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty, consciousness was consciousness of something, fiction is a mandate to imagine something along broader intentional lines.

By what mechanisms is the transfer among all of these types of worlds effected? Brooks, for whom, as we have noted, the metaphor of the transference rules reader-text interaction, explains, along lines established by Holland and Picard, that fictional texts call up past affect and turn it into “deadly serious play,” which the reader understands on some level to be imaginary (235). Protected from physical harm—even if it feels like the reader does (on the level of analogy), he never physically enters the book as he might step off a plane and enter a foreign country—the reader is none the less subject to psychical modifications. Psychoanalytic studies like Mannoni’s 1969 essay, “I know very well, but all the same,” which I discussed previously, highlight the complexity of the reader’s belief in the text. Mannoni cleaves knowledge (the patient’s claim, “I know very well”) from affect (“but all the same”). Mannoni hypothesizes that, due to desire, knowledge here acts as in support of the very disavowal that it might be thought to render impossible (13, 22). The pleasure of the “but all the same” is impossible without the “I know very well.” This is

\textsuperscript{88} Interestingly recent technological progress in visual representation—the internet, CGI, flat screen televisions, high-definition television, DVDs, Blu-ray discs—involves greater and greater constraints. As more and more can be shown in greater and greater detail, more and more must be shown in such detail. Thus do constraints then affect production, as more and more comic books, graphic novels, and fantasy narratives are transformed into film. Greater realism in terms of form by no means equates to more realistic narratives, which often “realistically” portray what does not exist!
not the work of the unconscious mind; belief involves the conscious and intersubjective demand for the support of others.

The line of argument that I follow throughout my dissertation does not address the question of the oscillations between the conscious or unconscious—if such epithets are meaningful any more—mind. Instead, I wish to argue that, no matter the cause or level of conscious understanding by the reader of the processes at work, there is deep and meaningful interaction between reader and text by means of a variety of intermediary worlds, be they real, lived, narrative, or fictional. (By no means am I claiming that these four choices exhaust all the categories of worlds.) Worldbuilding is primary; other processes are secondary. Although worldbuilding and interpretation are interdependent, the first must occur for the second to be a possibility. In fact, in a study published in 2004, Genette understands the “fictional contract” between reader and text as being more self-conscious than do theorists like Schaeffer or Holland. Genette takes issue with the idea that the reader always believes what he reads, reformulating Coleridge’s famous dictum of the “willing suspension of disbelief” as the “willing suspension of belief.” Genette’s reader just pretends that fiction is not fictional without ever really falling prey to the illusion: in this “...paradoxical contract of reciprocal irresponsibility,” the reader feigns belief in what the author writes and the author accepts this feint, even though neither actually believes the other (Diction 10). The terms of this ambiguous contract allow the reader to continue reading, whether he “believes” or not, and it is a contract that reader and text continuously renegotiate with one another.

One could say that reader and text work hand in hand in order to efface the appearance of their own collaboration. Thus do Dolezel and Walton emphasize the self-conscious and playful nature of the transaction between reader and text. Dolezel holds that the reader is only a “cognitive resident” of the FW, not a true believer in it (Heterocosmica 181). For Walton, the reader only uses the text as a “prop in a game of make-believe.” Walton, “Fearing Fictions,” The Journal of Philosophy 75.1 (1978): 23. Aware of his own actions, the reader “projects a fictional counterpart of himself into the fictional world: rather than somehow fooling ourselves into thinking fictions are real, we become fictional” (Walton, Fearing 23). By accepting fiction as fiction, the reader willingly makes himself a part of the process, melding with the text to generate a virtual reality where, according to Ryan, he becomes a “pseudo-human” being who crosses the “ontological boundary” by attaching himself to imaginary beings (“Virtual” 49). The reader becomes fictional to the extent that the text becomes real; conversely, the text becomes real to the extent that the reader becomes fictional. Reader and text each constitute one half of an interlocking, rotating world. Fictional truths are quite different from real reality. The reader is not required to interrogate all of the text’s extensional references. He adapts himself to the text by means of various principles (RP, MBP, etc.) and moves through it by fits and starts. With the reader on one side of the equation and the text on the other, the act of reading functions by means of the worlds that stretch in between, and that connect all terms of this equation so as to transform the straight line from beginning to end of text into a circle or, more appropriately, a spiral, as each reading—and each moment of each reading—changes the give of any future possible readings—and any
previous ones. The text is a “black box” which the reader assumes must work in some determined way without examining the matter too closely—as Eco declares in regard to what he calls the “Model Reader”, “It is sufficient that he or she pretends to know them [a text’s references]” (“Small Worlds” 81). Each reader follows different paths and no reader follows the same path twice. This holds true even for texts that do not cast themselves as hyperfictional or metanarrative; however, it is the effort involved in the reading of hyperfictional or metafictional texts that lays bare the working of both types of texts.

All these theorists lay their emphasis on the transactional nature of the reading experience. This process creates a link deeper than mere identification, psychological projection, or cognition: reader and text both inhabit, even if only for a time and even if in different modes, the same transitional world/s. In some cases, such worlds even linger in the reader’s consciousness after he has ceased to read. This aspect of the reading experience has been inadequately explained (or not at all) and I will approach it more carefully in my chapters on Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet. That fictionality can somehow be held in the consciousness of the reader after the reading experience is over—sometimes years after the reading experience occurred or after the actual experience has been forgotten, in the case of childhood reading—proves that NWs and FWs are more than distinct from the text (and the language of the text)—even, as Bayard points out, in the case of books one has never read!

If having a footing in several worlds defines every reading experience, this same phenomenon comes to the fore—the reader realizes that such is the case—in reading authors such as Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet. Difficult texts are by nature an ideal vehicle for studying the reader-text relation; even as
they threaten to tear it apart, they reveal its inner workings. Whether it be Queneau’s experiments with *néo-français* or his meticulous novelistic constructions based on mathematical principles91, Simon’s thousand-word sentences held together by ambiguous present participles, or Robbe-Grillet’s relentless “geometrical” description, the reader of these texts is quickly confronted with a booby-trapped NW where, in order to take a first look, he must “first” take a second.

Yet my approach to Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet goes beyond the strictly textual. As Genette argues in *L’Oeuvre de l’art*, the text, considered as a “pure syntactic object,” is nothing but a “potentiality of the work” (274). Echoing Merleau-Ponty, he suggests that our relation to the work corresponds in some way to our relation to the world (269). According to Barthes, the very aim of such novels is to build up an artifice and yet to designate it as such at the same time. Thus, in *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes explains the meaning of Descartes’s catchphrase *Larvatus prodeo* (“I advance masked”) in terms of writing in the novel: “Its task is to put the mask in place and at the same time to point it out.”92 Undercutting illusions might be the illusion with which this kind of writing likes to clothe itself, and the illusions that this type of “experimental” writing supposedly undercuts might just occupy the role of the emperor’s new clothes. In other words, instead of seeing the work of these authors as a radical departure from a particular tradition, I will take a look at how intentionality and fictionality structure the work of the reader as he moves between NW and FWs; the procedure evident in all works of fiction is just visible

91 Expounded most famously in “Technique du roman” (1937) and later in “Littérature potentielle” (1964), collected in *Bâtons, Chiffres et Lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965) 27-33; 297-320.
in a different manner here, and works to more unsettling results. The virtual here wins out over both the magical and the scientific.

By focusing in a more global way on the peculiarities of reading these novels, I defend reading them in an ever-developing context that has already largely bypassed that of the comic and linguistically playful novel of Queneau, or the New Novel for Simon and Robbe-Grillet. Instead of labeling the novels of these authors with reductive epithets like “self-reflexive,” “metafiction,” “neo-realism,” or “image fiction,” I follow in the footsteps of Joseph Tabbi, who understands their literariness as being constituted by “an awareness that feeds back into itself”93. Rather than banishing these novels to the “writerly” side of Barthes’s divide between “readerly” absorption and “writerly” self-reflexive interaction, or again claiming them as “open,” “closed,” or “metanarrative” texts according to Eco’s definitions, I will explore how, by representing the many and varied shades of the literary spectrum, they assist in isolating what is proper to the “literary experience” itself (or “literary consciousness”)—a forgotten, much ignored notion (Barthes, S/Z 10-12; Eco, “Lector” 256). Properly redefining such a notion might help us better to understand both why and how readers read what they read.

The present dissertation, then, is more than a mere theoretical exposition of ideas related to phenomenology, narratology, reader-response theory, and PWT. My conclusions have arisen organically out of a close, repeated, prolonged, pleasurable, and sometimes painful reading of the novels of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet. The theoretical ideas that my reader will encounter here have been first sparked by the texts themselves: only later did I

discover their more abstract elaborations in other fields of study. These three authors represent an ideal choice for establishing a loose spectrum among different types of worlds. While it is my goal to talk about reading in general, many of my ideas about reading—and what limit cases of reading can tell us about reading—stem from reading and rereading these specific authors.
F. The Authors

Anyone more than mildly acquainted with Queneau’s work might suspect that it alone provides a theory of the character’s coming into and out of being—an aspect of fiction which Dorrit Cohn claims most differentiates it from the RW (Distinction 16). The appearance and disappearance of characters, and their transitory occupation of a body that they must inevitably share with the reader, is the subject of Chapter Three, “Queneau’s FWs: (Be) Coming and Going.” The formal concerns at work in Queneau’s work, such as his representation of popular speech with experimentations in orthography, vocabulary, and syntax of néo-français, have been abundantly discussed yet only rarely have critics moved beyond examining Queneau’s NWs as such and connected it to the multiple nature of his FWs, whose subject is often...FWs. Formal concerns are then the subject of Chapter Two, “Queneau’s NWs: Beyond Language.” While not limiting myself to them, in this chapter, I take a close look at two of Queneau’s novels: Le Chiendent (1933) and Loin de Rueil (1944). Thanks to the staging of the character and the reader in the process of becoming through the intersubjective chain of desire in Le Chiendent and Journal Intime, which is mediated by the movie screen in Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin and Loin de Rueil, these novels can be seen as emblematic of the reading experience in general. The characters’ progression towards a notion of identity constituted by self-reflexivity (in a greater philosophical sense, not a reductive, literary-critical one) helps create the ephemeral body of the reader-character. This metaleptic processs reaches its apex at the end of the novel Les Enfants du Limon when a certain Monsieur Queneau makes an appearance in the novel in order to accept the manuscript of a part of the text (the text of Les Enfants du Limon, that is!)—
a manuscript that, in the RW, Raymond Queneau had submitted for publication—from one of his own characters before then attributing it to another character in a novel that Monsieur Queneau claims to be writing. The nameless author-character mentioned by the Queneau in the novel strangely resembles the character, Henri Chambernac, who has just bequeathed the manuscript to Monsieur Queneau—showing the reader that no one, not even the creator of a work, may call himself the owner of the transitory body of the reading experience.94

That the spiraling workings of lived memory and perception in Simon’s novels destabilize objectivist and linear traditions of language and history comes as no surprise to the rereader of this author: “...maybe time is a notion ...that doesn’t belong here...” remarks Simon in the section labeled “Battle” in his 1969 novel La Bataille de Pharsale.95 Chapter Five, “Simon’s FWs: the Soldier-Subject” will focus on the relation between the reader and the Simonian “soldier-subject” as they muddle through the unique temporality of Simon’s FWs and his non-linear NWs, especially in La Route des Flandres (1960), Le Palace (1962), La Bataille de Pharsale (1969), Les Géorgiques (1981), L’Acacia (1989), and Le Jardin des Plantes (1997). Just as the movies provide a possible point of entry into Queneau’s novels, Simon’s representations of war allow us to attack the unique problematization of consciousness throughout his work. This takes place through the inseparable couplet of the soldier-subject. Simon presents the soldier as subject in a war that constitutes a world and the subject as soldier in a world that is defined like a war. For this soldier-subject, war and

experience are always conditioned by each other through an intentional *pellicule*, or “thin skin,” which stands for the materialization of the link between consciousness and world. In these novels, war has ripped apart the world’s surface so that its deeper intentional structure is now visible. By reducing the habitual structures of consciousness to their essentials, war returns fictional characters to a brute state of interaction with their FWs and the RW reader to a similar state of interaction with the NW, exposing the intentional structure of consciousness as a fragmented yet interconnected network of nodalities stretching across time and space. The fragmented time of the narration spirals through the disparate and yet connected moments of multiple lives and representations. This infinite dilation and contraction of FWs takes place in an enlarged present moment that contains all three. In philosophy, a similar notion of the deep present has been dealt with extensively by both Husserl and Heidegger. Yet here, in the literary text, this temporality is imposed upon the reader, whose reading experience is conditional upon the acceptance of this restraint. War novels tend already to dramatize what Margot Norris has called the epistemological “crisis” or “disorientation” of writing about war: the narrative’s attempt to make the unreal real (even in its unreality). The model of epistemic failure engendered by the simultaneous narration of war and an incipient “war of narration” creates the NW’s maelstrom of language. Much as

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96 In Chapter Four, I discuss in detail how this vision of consciousness is reminiscent of and yet distinct from that found in authors such as William Faulkner and Marcel Proust.
in Queneau, there results a tug-of-war between a NW which constantly calls attention to itself and FWs which develop from this NW, attempting to fill in its empty spaces. The role of the sentence, the place of intertextuality, and the function of the image in Simon’s writing will be explored in Chapter Four, “Simon’s NWs: Sentences and Other Stumbling Blocks.” I argue that, in Simon’s case, the author’s dense NWs often prematurely push the reader into FWs that might appear more comprehensible at first glance.

Finally, no reader of Robbe-Grillet needs to be familiar with Iser in order to know just how productive the blank spaces of a novel—or a character’s life—might become. In *Le Miroir qui revient*, the first volume (1984) of his autobiographical trilogy, *Romanesques*, Robbe-Grillet compared the existence of characters to that of “ghosts.” As if compelled by a spell to repeat the trajectories of their fictional lives, characters subsist without the reader ever being able to palpate concrete signs of their existence.99 In Chapter Six, “Robbe-Grillet’s Worlds: Wording and Worlding,” I conclude by studying Robbe-Grillet’s novels, with a particular focus on *Les Gommes* (1953), *Le Voyeur* (1955), and *La Jalousie* (1957). I have dedicated one chapter to Robbe-Grillet instead of two in order to test my presuppositions about the intertwined nature of NWs and FWs. Thus in this chapter, I will explore how the author’s seemingly crystal-clear NWs conceal the most ambiguous FWs of all these authors. Often the blank spaces encountered by these ghostly characters in their FWs are the very ones encountered by the reader in the NW. Empty spaces beckoning to be filled up, they stimulate the creation of FWs. As the plot progresses and characters try more and more desperately to seal the gaps

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around them, representation takes precedence over presentation, and
decentered FWs, along with the radical ambiguities at their core, multiply.
Lacan’s statement, “Those who are not duped make mistakes/wander” (“Les
non-dupes errent”) provides good guidance for both the character and reader of
Robbe-Grillet. Only those who are willing to make mistakes remain un-duped
by circumstances, and they remain un-duped precisely by wandering. (Lacan
here plays on the verb errer, which, in French, can have either meaning.)

The reader who does not strain himself to crack the case the first time around—
for, as Robbe-Grillet’s characters and readers often learn, there is perhaps no
case at all, nor any “first time around”—navigates the novel far more easily than
he who strains to solve the enigma, provided, of course, that he is willing to
reread! The relations between the epistemic void and a narrative
hypersubjectivity trapped within itself are the true motor of the FW for both
reader and character. Robbe-Grillet’s characters soon learn that telling stories
also means being told by them. Caught up in plots larger than themselves,
they can no longer fight the “readymade formulas” that spring to mind
whenever they try to figure out what is going on: detection quickly gives way to
imagination. Since the character is unaware of the constraints of fiction that
guide the reader, he posits via imagination a limitless FW of unreliable FWs
each of which usually presents itself as equally valid to the other upon first
reading.

transcription can be found here:
course, Lacan also plays here on the homophony of “Les non-dupes errent” with “les noms/nons du père,”
something I discuss in more detail in Chapter Six.
Each of these novels revolves around the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of experience and knowledge in terms of both reader and character. While there is no correct trajectory between NW and FWs, these novels problematize the very notion of linear trajectories that claim to map out the reader’s involvement with the text. The novels of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet are not simply models for the act of reading. Seeking to determine precedence among different readers’ versions of FWs—not to mention the “author,” about whom we have heard enough already—can only give rise to circular arguments. Both phenomena spring from the same source: the fount of intentionality. The novels of these three authors do more than describe their own conditions as works of art; they have something to do with the creative process as a foundational act of experience. In 1968, Norman N. Holland wrote that the reader comes to the novel seeking pleasure. That pleasure resides in the solution of a problem posed by the novel: “Literature creates a hunger in us and then gratifies us” (76). In reading these novels, the reader discovers that deferred gratification is the order of the day, and that it is just what he ordered.
Chapter Two: Queneau’s NWs: Language Games and Beyond

A. Introduction

In my Introduction, I have presented an argument that the linking together of disparate consciousnesses provided by intentionality structures our interaction with fictionality. Fictionality, the specific mode of existence of fictional objects as they are virtualized during the act of reading, manifests itself as a continual transition among worlds in the novels of Raymond Queneau, all the while allowing us to determine the specific rules of the game of the Quenellian text. What is to be fictioned, or fashioned, out of the reader’s collaboration with the text is determined by several sets of limits, but the end result is never certain. The impossibility of determining the intentions of the author, text, or reader, which has been pointed out by Calinescu, leads to multiple Iserian “points of indeterminacy” for the reader, whose behavior we can never quite predict (52, 263). These points are situated along a spectrum, which acts at the background for the reading experience. Situated along a spectrum, these points connect the more verbal NWs to the FWs that come into being as the result of reader-text interaction. In reality, the end points of this spectrum fold back on one another, making it hard to tell where wording ends and worlding begins. In closely examining the topics of being and becoming in two of Queneau’s novels, Le Chiendent and Loin de Rueil, as well as important passages from other novels and critical writings, I will in what follows try to establish how intentionality and fictionality allow both character and reader to move among worlds girded by this reversible spectrum between NWs and FWs. To quote again Roland Travy, the lovestricken protagonist of Queneau’s quasi-autobiographical novel, Odile, my task is to “describe a world, to discover it and
not to construct it or to invent it.”

I will leave constructing and inventing to the reader, whose constitutive role in regards to the text Queneau himself called attention to time and again, most pointedly when he declared, “Why don’t we require a certain effort on the part of the reader? We always explain everything to him, the reader. He ends up by getting annoyed at seeing himself treated so disrespectfully, the reader.”

Instead of constructing and inventing myself, I will do my best to describe how constructing and inventing work for the reader of Queneau’s novels.

The texts that I have chosen, *Le Chiendent*, Queneau’s first (1933) and arguably most dense novel, and *Loin de Rueil*, his eighth (1944), are exemplary in their treatment of worlds coming into and out of being, a topic that extends throughout all of Queneau’s work, but plays its largest role in these two novels. *Le Chiendent* contains in remarkably compressed form most of the issues that preoccupied Queneau throughout the rest of his career. *Loin de Rueil*, with its use of the cinema as a liminal point between worlds, provides a wonderful metaphor for exploring this issue throughout Queneau’s work, elements of which I will make use of in less concentrated fashion (most especially in reference to *Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin*, *Journal Intime*, *Les Fleurs Bleues*, and *Le Vol d’Icare*). Later novels appear structured by such concerns.

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102 Queneau, *Odile*, OCII 528.
103 Queneau, *Prière d’insérer* for *Gueule de Pierre*. See also Queneau’s comments on the author’s role as “apple tree” who is responsible for providing the fork and the knife for the apple: Jean-Louis Rambures, “Le cas étrange de l’académicien Queneau,” *Réalités* 216 (1964): 74.
on a less dense and more superficial level; it is for this very reason that I find
the spectrum between NWs and FWs to be defined in a more complex way in
novels from the first half of Queneau’s career.

One of my underlying assumptions is that the two end points on this
spectrum (NWs and FWs) do not prove to be as important as the multiple points
of transition in between. A thorough examination of the points in between
effectively calls into question the usefulness of endpoints at all. This is an
important distinction: when I talk about moving from NWs to FWs, or NW units
acting as building blocks for FWs, I am simply progressing with my argument,
which must remain linear, even while the spectrum that it describes is not.
Each point along the spectrum—and I have chosen seven global points for
Queneau, each illustrated by several smaller ones—remains interdependent
with all of the other points. Because of the nature of reading, the spectrum
between NWs and FWs could be filled in indefinitely—the reader can put down
and pick up his book again whenever he likes.

Even though there are similarities in the way all readers read Queneau,
each individual reader’s movement along the spectrum will ultimately be
unique. Calinescu’s “points of indeterminacy” will never be fleshed out in
exactly the same way. This characteristic of the reading experience permits
several readings—various possible positions of the reader—at each transition
point along the way. In each global point of this chapter, as well as its
subsections, the role of the reader is related to the specific texts at hand, as
well as concerns about the larger purposes and nature of fictional texts. Since
it is impossible to determine with certainty the exact interactions between
reader and text, the NWs to FWs model allows for the simultaneous existence of
many tracks along a bidirectional path. As I argued in my first chapter, reading is paramount to re-reading; the reader is a rereader by definition. Without rereading, the reader’s entry into FWs would prove far more difficult to explain. Furthermore, if we take rereading into question, the strange non-linear power of books to stay with us affectively after we finish reading them becomes clearer.\textsuperscript{105} If I overemphasize the preceding ideas in the following pages, it is because I want foreground the transactive nature of FWs, where interactions must be catalyzed by the reader. Incomplete by nature, language-based, semi-autonomous FWs may be separated from the RW by “long chains of intermediaries,” but they are also distinguished from the RW by the particular processes used by specific authors to inflect—not control—the imaginings of readers (Pavel, Worlds 70). An incessant coming and going between the NW as the \textit{textual barometer} of imaginary FWs—although by no means the equivalent of the text—marks the work of criticism as much as it does reading for pleasure. No matter how divergent FWs may become due to the vicissitudes of personal reader identification or even misreadings, the original verbal prompt persists right there on the page for all to see.

The nature of this study involves other disciplines that offer new and exciting insights into literature, provided that I question their underlying assumptions—and my own—along the way. Because I am dealing with a host of concepts inherited from the tradition of Continental phenomenology as well as Anglo-American analytic philosophy and PWT, I have already established a fairly precise schema for using these terms in the previous chapter. In that

\textsuperscript{105} This state of affairs may lead to some terminological confusion, so I have used the terms “reader” and “rereader” as follows. Every reader is by definition a rereader. However, when comparing the abstract notion of a linear reader to the more complex notion of a rereader, I may set up an opposition using both terms. Occasionally, I make use of “rereader” simply for emphasis.
regard, I would like to reemphasize the warning that I already provided in that chapter. Taking a set of terms from another discipline, such as narratology, psychoanalysis, PWT, or phenomenology, and simply “applying” it to the work of Queneau does nothing to explicate the unique literary quality of the works, and, moreover, it often serves as nothing more than a poor introduction to the tools of the other discipline. In this chapter and the following one, I will postulate that, by reducing Queneau’s fiction to the question of language alone, we miss the ways in which the writer’s experiments with language might themselves demonstrate the more global role of language in the creation of FWs. And Queneau presents us with such an ideal starting point precisely because of his interest in language games. At the same time that these experiments highlight language as language, they reveal the constitutive links between language and the worlds evoked by it through fiction. Furthermore, by relegating phenomenology to historical status (i.e. simply remarking that Queneau studied it under Kojève), critics ignore the phenomenological expression of the reader as he moves from NWs to FWs. At the same time that we “step outside of the box” by defining the role of the reader as transitional, we must take care to point out how Queneau’s reader relates to an overall hypothetical model of the reader.

This warning about overspecialization proves especially appropriate in studying the work of Raymond Queneau (1903-1976), who dabbled in everything from mathematics to mysticism. As with Claude Simon, to whom my fourth and fifth chapters are dedicated, Queneau’s critics sometimes miss the point by focusing too closely on individual works rather than extrapolating their concordances across a body of work. The abundant critical literature on Queneau often parses esoteric references—resulting in a “Raymond Queneau
and (fill in the blank)” mentality—rather than looking at the greater portent of his work understood as an organic whole. A brief look at the secondary literature reveals an abundance of good articles dedicated to very specific subjects, demonstrating, at times, a penchant for cataloguing disparate tendencies rather than elaborating a more global theory of fiction. As a result, Queneau’s place in a pre-established scheme of literary history often trumps the complexity of the ontological questions raised by his work. For example, a common misconception that will be one of my secondary concerns through this dissertation is the assumed parentage between Queneau and the New Novel. Alain Robbe-Grillet has repeatedly mentioned Queneau as one of the founders of the New Novel. Queneau’s work and the New Novel do share some common characteristics, but they are not limited to the formalist tendencies that have been remarked on so far, most notably by Vivian Mercier, who tries to establish an extended lineage going back to Queneau for the New Novel. Such tendencies run deeper and involve ontological concerns about FWs.

Overall, Queneau’s work—the humor, the penchant for games and constraints, the experimentation with language—has been examined without

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106 I cite my references throughout, but I must direct the reader to Father Charles Kestermeier’s formidable online Queneau bibliography, which has the advantage of being divided into both subject and author headings, and has recently been electronically relocated to the University of Dijon, due to Kestermeier’s retirement: http://www.queneau.fr/index.php?lien=bibliographie.htm.


109 These characteristics are all forerunners of OulIpo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, Workshop for Potential Literature), the group founded by Queneau and mathematician François Le Lionnais in 1960. See “Littérature potentielle” in Bâtons, chiffres et lettres for a brief introduction (297-320).
paying enough attention to what Nina Bastin has called “Queneau’s fictional worlds.” Formal concerns have often taken precedence over what Bastin has labeled “questions of significance.” As Bastin remarks, epistemological concerns in Queneau are deeply bound up with ontological concerns, and, over the years, the latter have generally been ignored in favor of the former (272). Like Bastin, I conceive of movement between NWs and FWs as inherently bidirectional, irrespective of labels or literary movements. The category of bidirectionality comes from Brian McHale, who uses it to describe the reversible movement of modernist and postmodernist works between epistemological and ontological concerns (11). But novels do not deal exclusively with either epistemological or ontological issues; these domains bleed into one another in the unique space that fiction carves out for itself. Zizek has recently declared, “as Hegel would have put it, subject and object are inherently mediated so that an ‘epistemological’ shift in the subject’s point of view always reflects an ontological shift in the object itself.” In other words, the formal concerns of Queneau’s novels call forth a dynamic movement of reading that causes the reader to shuffle between worlds; this constant change of position implies a change in state of being for both reader and text as well.

In fact, Bastin does much to redistribute the unequal focus on certain areas of Queneau’s work by making use of the “particular critical tools” of fictional-worlds theory. By emphasizing the dynamic process of reader-text interaction that is important to Queneau’s work (16, 31) and yet strictly relating FWs to the mental representation that a reader forms of a text world (33, 39), though, her vision of FWs remains closely tied to the text (22). The notion of

mental representation is not labile enough to take into account the particulars of the reading experience when rereading occurs after what we usually consider as “reading”—the active scansion of the text—has ceased (Calinescu xiv). The onus for a “correct interpretation” is placed too squarely on the shoulders of the reader, whom Bastin constructs as a cognitive capability rather than a being as such, one capable of becoming in any number of ways. Bastin’s approach consequently discards “outside” thematic questions about what Queneau’s text might express in favor of “inside” questions about how the reader manages to read it in the first place (80). Yet it is possible to link the “inside” and the “outside,” for the dynamics of reading need not involve massive generalizations about the reader’s responses to the text, just as focusing on the text does not have to mean overwhelming systematization of its processes of meaning. Queneau’s own novels set the reading experience up as an interconnective web of possibilities. The underlying intentional basis for fictionality makes it so that Queneau’s readers cannot be reduced to mere bystanders in literary history nor to exemplars of a cognitive psychology of reading.

Phenomenology, I want to argue, allows us to explore the intentional spectrum that stretches out from the unread text, the letters on the page, to the always multiple and protean worlds created by the reader’s interaction with the text. Their deep imbrication comes from the fact that they are two sides of the same (spinning) coin. Intentionality, understood in the phenomenological sense that I have given it in the previous chapter, helps to explain how both reader and character, “fellow travelers” from different worlds, may cross each other’s paths at all. The starting point of any such discussion is the reader’s interaction with the text, and yet intentionality situates itself beyond a “weak
ontology” that would claim $\text{reader + text} = \text{reading experience}$ in order to examine the transactional underpinnings of the question in general. The ontology of fiction, or of reading, becomes the ontology of ontology. The subtleties of the interdependence found in the many worlds associated with the reading experience escape cognitivist and analytic logic. As Saturnin declares in the midst of his treaty on “being” and “non-being” in *Le Chiendent*, “Of course, it’s beyond logic that you find all this” (215).

Blessed with a bizarre form of autonomy that remains hard to grasp, Queneau’s FWs are endowed with their own ontological status. This status has little to do with mimesis, or the representation of reality. However, nor is it completely closed in on itself, as Gerald Prince has suggested in arguing for the poetic autonomy of Queneau’s “anti-novel.” The true issue is boundaries. The metaleptic plots of Queneau’s novels remind us that characters too can cross the boundaries of FWs. Although dependent on the reader for their existence, FWs manage at the same time to escape his control. In introducing the third volume of Queneau’s work in the *Pléiade*, Henri Godard suggests that, for Queneau, this autonomy derives from the presence of fiction in fiction: “The doubling postulated by any first degree fiction has here been denounced by a second degree fiction, so that everything happens as if we had come back to a singular space, therefore to reality itself” (“Préface,” *OCIII* xxvii). While probably incapable of creating new levels of existence altogether, fictionality certainly modifies the very notion of existence. Does it matter that FWs do not exist in the traditional sense of the term? When talking about literature, the answer is a resounding No. In *Nonexistent Objects*, Terrence Parsons argues that the

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tendency to condemn entities to nonexistence results from a misunderstanding of the properties of these entities. Parsons postulates that existence is an “extranuclear” meta-property, and that nonexistent objects, including fictional ones, are all the same blessed with “nuclear” attributes, such as being blue, tall, etc. Fictional objects merely lack the extranuclear property of existence, but this does not prevent them from embodying a host of other, nuclear micro-properties. In dealing with the movement between NWs and FWs, existence is not nearly as important a criterion as interaction, transaction, and modification.

One of the points that I make time and again—and not in the same fashion in my chapters on Simon and Robbe-Grillet—regards Queneau’s “readability.” That is to say, even as Queneau makes his texts eminently readable, he also provides a maximum of textual interruption for the rereader as he progresses back and forth between NWs and FWs. Bastin points out that it “is a testament to Queneau’s ability to combine readability with such postmodernist disruption, that we continue, not merely to read, but to take pleasure in doing so” (205-206). Readability indicates, quite simply, that the reader can make enough sense of the text in order to read it: the text can be pursued in a variety of ways that produce a variety of interpretations and experiences. What comes to the fore in Queneau is that reader absorption into the text and reader interaction with the text occur at every step in the process of reading. Interruptive interaction turns NWs into FWs as easily as does projective absorption. FWs are not of necessity absorptive, identificatory worlds. Nor does consciousness of the NW imply a total loss of fictional

involvement on the part of the reader. According to Parsons’s spirited defense of nonexistent objects, reading is an extrapolation “beyond the printed words,” producing a “maximal account” as an end result (175-6). Dealing with Queneau changes the idea of the singular “maximal account” into plural “maximal accounts.” The very theory of fictional objects given fictional existence “through the creative act” elaborated by Parsons (188) also applies to texts whose multiplicity includes their ability to be read—and to be read in many, even contradictory, ways. These possibilities are present in the spiral world of rereading associated with Queneau’s novels, where Parsons’s “start to finish” (176) trajectory has been fragmented into many possible and recurrent paths (176).

In *Le Chiendent*, protagonist Étienne Marcel notices the “fictive banking operations” that cloak things and their appearances; in this case, he is ruminating on the possibility of suddenly disintegrating shoes. “Fictive banking operations” is also a good way to describe the ways in which Queneau’s novels allow both reader and character to move back and forth between the inert text and vibrant worlds overflowing with possibilities (*Chiendent* 187). The idea of a spectrum certainly fits Queneau, who once compared reading a masterpiece to peeling back the successive layers of an onion.114 In Queneau’s metaphor—he was talking about Joyce—some readers only peel off the top layer while others peel all of them off one by one. For Queneau, the true work of art can be experienced in more than one way: he describes how the reading experience eventually shades into interpretation, writing: “Thus *Ulysses* is read as a novel; only then, we can go beyond” (141). Queneau’s use of the onion metaphor has

often been used to construct arguments about various reading publics or to point out the depth of esoteric references in his novels. I believe that this is misunderstanding what was intended as a comment on the role of the reader and rereading as a process of peeling back the infinite layers of text that cover both what was intended and what was never intended at all. The reader can always go one step beyond the author.

I have defined the NW as closer to the text prior to the reader’s interaction but, in fact, as soon as the reader begins to read the text, he begins to transcend the NW. And, in Queneau, as soon as he begins to enter and inhabit a FW, he is called back to the NW. In one of the poems that make up Queneau’s dense *Morale élémentaire*, the reader who “thought that he understood and was turning the pages with satisfaction” must start all over again and discover that “the book meant something else.”\(^{115}\) If we understand Queneau’s reader as the sort of rereader previously discussed, many of the thorny questions related to trying to define the reading experience as an unbroken line from the words to worlds fade away. The line between “reading simpliciter” (lay reading) and “reading cultura” (professional, critical reading) proposed by Eric Livingston in his reading of *Zazie dans le métro* breaks down.\(^{116}\) In reality, the reader can move any distance in either direction, over and over again. As a rereader, he is supple; his progress is rarely linear and always reversible. For the rereader, the NW does not stay inert for long; the longer he reads, the less the text can be taken in isolation. Once the rereader becomes cognizant of the processes that underlie his reading strategies, once

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these processes are “deautomatized,” NWs and FWs move closer together without ever being reducible one to the other, because they move apart again in the very next moment (Calinescu 278). It is for this very reason that discussing Queneau’s NWs represents such an improvement over discussing his “language games” or “experimentation.” The formal, verbal aspect of Queneau’s writing already lays the groundwork for worlds that go well beyond the constrained limits of language understood reductively.

In order to place this chapter within the overall frame of argument established in the previous chapter, I have asked myself a few simple questions. I hope that they have allowed me to touch on many of the aspects that make reading Queneau into the unique experience that it is. First, what makes up Queneau’s NW? In other words, what makes a novel by Queneau textually (or, more appropriately, since I have argued that dealing with the text as nothing but text is impossible, texturally, to use Dolezel’s term117) different from other novels? Second, what makes up Queneau’s FWs, a subject that I will principally explore in the following chapter? All novels could be said to be about worldmaking in some way, and many are. However, many of Queneau’s novels themselves deal explicitly with this issue in a way that calls attention not only to the intersubjective structure of knowledge and desire, but also the crossing of boundaries between worlds. I have tried to ascertain the stance of the reader at key constitutive moments in relation to the FWs that he helps co-create, and that then return the favor by enabling his development as a reader, often rewarding his exploration of the unknown by then giving more shape to this unknown. Third, what are the points of transition and transaction among

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117 See Chapter One.
worlds? How can a material object like a book attain so much meaning? Where are the steps between A and Z when the route between A and Z is no longer clear? These questions are all the more important because of their simplicity; I will ask them of each author studied in this dissertation, and they will be inflected differently in every case.

In this first chapter, I will tackle what helps to make up Queneau’s NWs, starting with, among other things, the vocabulary, phonetic spelling, and broken syntax of néo-français, Queneau’s attempt to revolutionize written French by means of spoken French. Next, I explore the issue of constraints. Although I am employing the term that was later adopted by Oulipo, I am referring here to Queneau’s use of personal, numerological, character, and generic considerations in structuring the novel, what was referred to by an earlier generation as a “theory of composition.” If néo-français affects the construction of the novel on a micro level, then constraints are macro in nature, going beyond language to questions of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. Finally, I review the role of intertextuality in Queneau’s novels. Here, intertextuality goes beyond simple citation—whether intended or not—to a pluralistic, dialogic world of references, registers of language, and reader participation, often referred to as heteroglossia. These issues will give the novice reader a snapshot of Queneau’s NWs. For the veteran reader, I hope that this chapter places some eminently Quenellian issues—above all, language—in a larger framework that relates to the ontology of reading and its relation to the movement—and meeting—of worlds.
B. Queneau’s NWs

The formal aspects of Queneau’s writing strike readers first. This comes as no surprise, considering the amount of proselytizing that Queneau did on behalf of his linguistic experimentations. While the formal features of these novels must be taken into account, I would suggest that they have occasionally been used somewhat reductively over the years to explain what is in truth a much fuller body of work. In reality, Queneau’s work transcends linguistic aberration. More recently, as critics dare to step away from overly linguistic models of fiction, the study of language in Queneau’s novels has developed and expanded in more fruitful ways. Critics such as the recently deceased Christopher Shorley have done excellent work in describing in detail the many and varied roles played by language in Queneau’s novels.118 Shorley has suggested the importance of context in discussing Queneau’s treatment of language. Removed from the “utilitarian sphere” (17), “malleable” language (31) becomes “more than mere verbal texture” (57) in the domain of literature. The role played by language in Queneau’s novels thus changes the stature of language. Following in the steps of Jean-Paul Bordufor, who, in 1975, declared about néo-français, “Let us not be mistaken, the intended effect is exclusively comic,”119 Jane Alison Hale has drawn the link between Queneau’s use of

118 Christopher Shorley, Queneau’s fiction: an introductory study (NY: Cambridge UP, 1985). Chapter Two, “Raw material” is devoted to language (16-57).
language, humor, and the construction of worlds. The ability of language to create other worlds for the imagination goes hand in hand for Hale with a sense of playfulness and a style that emphasizes humor (102). Queneau valorizes poetic language instead of the rational language of the encyclopedia, which tied to a pre-existing order (64), remains as “a formal unifier of disparate domains of experience” (103). Hale’s work on the place of language in Queneau has the added benefit of extending to the worlds of the text in a transcendent, poetic sense, not that of the encyclopedia: “Like all of his other experiments with language, their goal is one of unification, not only of the various verbal elements of a phrase or text, but also of what words and texts represent” (127).

Establishing this kind of spectrum between NWs and FWs clarifies what is at stake—and for whom—at key steps in this process, rather than splitting words and worlds into two wholly separate entities.

Formal issues go hand in hand with ontological issues; they focus our critical attention on the NW side of the spectrum. Because the reference point of the NW is the sheer material existence of the text itself—in an abstract sense, words taken as words—the formal aspects of Queneau’s use of language are frequently the starting point for movement between NWs and FWs. As Étienne Marcel, the protagonist of Le Chiendent discovers, “Words are manufactured objects as well. They can be considered independently of their meaning” (104). While the author might put these “manufactured objects” together one way, there is no guarantee that the reader will follow suit. That is why I have provided only a few examples from Le Chiendent and Loin de Rueil of the formal features of Queneau’s work in the pages that follow; an exhaustive list of

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examples from all of Queneau’s novels would inevitably be taken out of context and might give the false impression that this kind of linguistic experimentation defines the author’s output above all else.

What follows substantiates my claim that even Queneau’s base level NW remains complicated. Aberrations in the words on the page jump off this very page at the reader even before he begins reading. Even if Queneau’s experimentations with French never lived up to the high standards set forth in several programmatic articles, what they produced does differ significantly from traditional written French. Queneau’s NW, although tied to the inherently stable text (Even if the reader can choose from among many paths, as in *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, the master text does not change), represents much more than a simple starting point; it is an already complicated step towards the other end of the spectrum (FWs). Just as none of the bigger steps between NWs and FWs is completely distinct from the others, none of the following categories is perfectly distinct from the others. The boundaries between Queneau’s myriad types of linguistic innovation and the worlds they evoke are semi-porous.
1. *Néo-français*

The first aspect of Queneau’s writing to which the reader’s eye is drawn in scanning a page of text involves what he retrospectively termed *le néo-français*. Queneau explained his use of *néo-français* most significantly in an article of 1955 and in the earlier “Écrit en 1937.” Here, he championed a triple reform of the French language involving changes in vocabulary, spelling, and syntax. Arguing that written French had become as much of a dead language as Latin, Queneau proposed transforming French so that it would privilege the oral over the written (“Écrit en 1937,” *Bâtons* 13-26). However, he did not advocate a global representation of “popular” speech; above all, he was aiming for a new *written* form of oral speech (25). In every article on *néo-français*, Queneau makes the point that orality does not necessarily indicate social popularity. Although Queneau used the example of the traditional, literary *Katharevousa* versus the everyday spoken *Demotic* forms of Greek, the effect he sought in his own fiction was ultimately literary: “It has to do with, as you put it, giving a style to spoken language” (“Conversation avec Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes,” *Bâtons* 40). In spite of possible appearances, *néo-français* is by no means a purely linguistic phenomenon. Its implications concern the ways in which language acts as a basis for literary renewal and, in consequence, for the expansion of the possibilities of the worlds evoked by fiction. What appears at first glance to be a pure instance of narrative “wording” reveals, after careful examination, already to involve fictional “worlding” as well.

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121 Queneau, “Écrit en 1955,” *Bâtons, chiffres let les lettres* 64. A few of the author’s early novels, such as *Odile* (1937) and *Un rude hiver* (1939), contain no significant linguistic experimentation like that which follow in this section.
**a. Vocabulary/Slang**

Queneau often claimed that the reform of vocabulary and the use of slang were secondary to the rest of his project. However, it is impossible to deny that the use of a certain register of vocabulary riddled with slang prevails as one of the most obvious, and most memorable, features of his NWs (Queneau, “1937,” “1955”, *Bâtons* 20, 67-68, respectively). It is easy to dismiss experimentation with vocabulary as little more than word games. But, as Thérèse reminds Lulu the maid, while showing her the foppish poet Des Cigales’s apartment at the beginning of *Loin de Rueil*, “It’s breath-taking, huh, Theresa said to her. All this mess isn’t junk either.”

Queneau’s use of *néo-français* is much more than “junk” as well. The writer liberally sprinkles his novels with such slang words as: *gosse, pioncer* (4, kid, to crash), *gourde, bobards* (113, dopey, tales), *poule* (131, chick), *oboles, balles, croquenots* (192, offering, bucks, shitkickers), *ladres, grigous* (193, misers, rogues), *fric* (205, cash), *bagnoles, piges, un couillon de marmot* (207, cars, years, an ass of a brat), *troufignon* (234, asshole). Yet, Queneau’s use of vocabulary works to more than just shock effect. When Théo, Étienne’s son in *Le Chiendent*, declares, “That gigolo was always coming on to my mother” (203, *Ce gigolo-là faisait tout l’temps du plat à ma mère*), his amusing use of slang may make the reader forget

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122 Queneau, *Loin de Rueil* (1944), OCIII 72.
123 The preceding examples are all taken from *Le Chiendent*, my point being to establish a starting point for the movement between NWs and FWs and not to conduct a thorough study of the instances of *néo-français* in Queneau’s novels. Throughout this chapter, I include the original French where I think translation fails to represent the uniqueness of the words. The difficulty of translation increases exponentially with slang, a matter that Suna Timur Agildere has probed in “Le Problème d’équivalence dans la traduction du langage argotique,” *Revue de Traduction et d’Interprétation* 8 (1998): 233-47. Barbara Wright, the principal translator of Queneau’s novels into English (and, like Shorley, recently deceased), deals with the more general subject of translating Queneau in “Translating Queneau,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 17.3 (1997): 75-9, drawing the conclusion that, despite the various problems posed by these novels for the translator, they are still “enjoyable to read.”
that Théo is one of the only characters to have understood Narcense’s obsession with his mother from the very beginning. He has seen clearly in a novel where appearance frequently, if not always, trumps reality; the very appearance of young Théo’s statement disguises this fact.

The following list of synonyms proffered by Des Cigales in Loin de Rueil when he mocks himself for being old and gullible attests in more obvious fashion to the veritable explosion of vocabulary in Queneau’s NW: un gâteux, une baderne, une guenille, un débris, un amoindri, une ganache, un décrépit, un caduc, un suranné, une ruine, un archaïque, un périmé, un défectif, un vioc, un con (111). Such a list calls attention to itself as a list, and to a synthetic approach to language usage. Queneau’s use of slang is so stylized that it does not necessarily purport to represent real speech patterns. The result is less a formal transformation of all the words in the text, thus rendering it unreadable, than a highly individual sense of style that catches the reader’s eye and gives him pause. At the end of Le Chiendent, when France goes to war against the Etruscans (Italy was perceived as the real fascist threat to France in 1933), the French begin to call the Etruscans Coches, just as, during the Great War, they called Germans Boches (224). Although apparently minor, this variation opens the text up to outside worlds of historical and intertextual understanding that keep the reader going just when the novel’s plot is at its strangest. (Mme Cloche the midwife will soon metamorphosize into the goddess Miss Aulini, whose name’s proximity to “Mussolini” is yet another hint of the war to come).

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124 The various shades of meaning of these words are harder to establish in English, especially because some of the nouns are adjectives acting as nouns preceded by an indefinite article: a senile (person), an old fogey, a rag, a debris, a retard, an idiot, a decrepit (person), a person who has outlived (his purpose), an outdated person, a ruin of a man, an archaic person, an expired person, a defective person, an old man, an imbecile.
In this manner, a verbal trick, which calls attention to the NW, propagates the reader’s ability to create FWs from worlds of reference familiar to him.

Beyond the affinity for slang, the variety of word choice displayed strikes the reader. Queneau has a penchant for moving from the particular to the general, what Simonnet has defined as “designating an object by the most general noun: calling a box a ‘recipient,’ young people ‘youth,’ oysters ‘seashells’ or ‘mollusks.’”¹²⁵ Present on almost every page of Le Chiendent, these alterations in vocabulary provide the reader with a distinct starting point for movement along the spectrum between NW and FWs. The reader, whether a native speaker or not, must reread, stopping to take another look at the profusion of synonyms, slang, and odd word choices sprinkled across the novel’s pages. This high level of reading activity is one of the reasons that I insist that the two end points on the spectrum—the “pure” NWs and the “pure” FWs—are nothing more than constructs and that the true movement of reading takes place in between. As we shall see, the intertextual implications of néo-français and its effect on the rhythm of reading connect to and co-create the FWs beyond the text.

b. Phonetic Spelling

Phonetic spelling represents another key component of néo-français. Queneau’s phonetic renderings chew up words and cut into the fabric of the worlds to which they give rise. Since the unread text is as close as we can get to a pure NW, phonetic spelling is just as important to the reading experience as vocabulary is, jumping off the page at the reader even before he begins to read. Queneau rails against the way in which modern French spelling has little or nothing to do with its pronunciation (Queneau, “1937,” “1955” 22-26; 72-80, 87, respectively). Although he proposes no overarch system for “correctly” phoneticizing French words, he provides a list of letters and examples, proposing to make written representations of the French language as phonetically faithful as possible (“1937,” Bâtons 23). Many of Queneau’s phonetic transcriptions of French words in Le Chiendent make sense. Monsieur (sir) becomes messieu (191), banlieue (the suburbs) becomes banglieue (93), and moi, quelque chose (me, something) becomes moua, quéquechose (191). These words not only remain recognizable; their new spelling makes a kind of phonetic sense.

A much more complicated category of phonetic spelling in Queneau involves stringing several words together. Gabriel’s initial disgusted query from the beginning of Zazie dans le métro: Doukipudontan (D’où qu’ils puent donc tant, 561, How can they smell so bad then) provides the most famous example. Appropriately enough, this example also demonstrates how Queneau raises spelling above a mere phonetic transcription of spoken language. In fact, what he calls the agglutinative tendencies of French, or extra syllables at the end of words, quickly render these words unrecognizable (“1955,” Bâtons 77). This
process goes beyond phonetic spelling to create different-looking words that require oral and visual retranslation before they turn legible. Thus the verbal entry into *Zazie dans le métro* prepares the reader for the continual process of discovery so integral to its plot. The same process occurs in *Le Chiendent* when Père Taupe, denying that he has any money (the central illusion of the novel for almost all of its characters), scands *pas le rond* (not a cent) into *pâleron* (which looks like a word, but is not) (193). These supposedly phonetic renderings of words act as puzzles or rebuses; they in no way make reading easier, or more akin to speaking and listening; they do, however, lend a kind of concrete validity to the universe of the characters who pronounce them.

Père Taupe provides yet another example that demonstrates just how *néo-français* transcends phonetics and how, in encountering it, the reader already vacillates between words and worlds. During the same exchange in which Mme Cloche says *miyonnaire*, Père Taupe pronounces the word *millionaire* (192, my emphasis). If, according to the tenets of *néo-français*, the “y” represents a more logical choice than the “Il” to represent the sound, why are the speech patterns of both characters not transcribed in the same manner?126 Does each character speak in his own “brand” of *néo-français*? The answer is simple: Queneau’s novel is not a treatise on phonetics; by employing this technique, the author aims for a literary effect. Such transcriptions represent key moments of the reader’s path between the words of the text and the worlds that they evoke. The same goes for the various versions of relative pronouns used to express the idea of “what.” When Théo meets the dwarf Bébé

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126 The question is all the more appropriate here seeing as the two characters hail from the same social milieu and, if anything, Mme Cloche is pretending to “speak well” at this point of the dialogue, as she is dressed as a priest.
Toutout, he leave the roof of his unfinished house to go there “what there is” (skeu cé 188, or what would be ce que c'est in traditional French). Yet when the owner of the bistro, Dominique, uses the same phrase in scolding his son, Clovis, for meddling in the affairs of adults, he says séksé (212). In the first case, we are dealing with third-person narration, in the second with dialogue, but the difference remains striking. Again, is néo-français supposed to depict individual differences in speech? Could the NWs and FWs of characters be as multiple as those of readers engaging with the text? We have most likely reached the impossible and highly suggestive limit of Queneau’s declared project: the tension between the individual and shared worlds of fictional characters.

The case of foreign words, often gallicized by Queneau, broaches vocabulary and spelling. Foreign words demonstrate once again that Queneau’s use of néo-français does not necessarily render his novels more readable on a superficial level, but rather represents a stylistic tic with important consequences for the reading experience. The reader does not have to understand the following references from Le Chiendent to engage with the text on some level. Nonetheless, the activation or non-activation of some of the following references paves the way for the reader’s idiosyncratic reading of the text: rédé (111, ready), l’Eau-Riz sacra femme S (209, literally “Rice-Water anointed Woman S,” but the reference here is to Auri sacra fames, Virgil’s “accursed hunger for gold,”¹²⁷), Yo soy, Ich bine (Ich bin), Haillame (244 for all three, I am). Not only does Madame Cloche say “I am” in several different

¹²⁷ “Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, auri sacra fames!” (“To what do you not drive human hearts, accursed hunger for gold!”), Virgil, The Aeneid, book III, line 56. (The Thracians murdered Polydorus for his gold; Aeneis tries to pull up the Polydorus saplings, and Polydorus encourages Aeneis to “flee the land, flee the greedy shore.” They do, after Aeneis lays Polydorus’s soul to rest by burying him properly.)
languages, the way that she says it in French comes across in several different ways: Zé souis and Ch’suis (244). As I intimated at the end of the last paragraph, being is decidedly multiple in this universe where even the verbal nature of the text, which has been decided before the reader sits down to read, appears unstable. Foreign words, just like vocabulary, remind the reader of the underlying verbal nature of FWs, at the same time as they highlight the use of language within these FWs by characters (and how bound these characters are by their own NWs). Since Queneau’s language games tantalizingly cross the ontological boundaries safeguarding the real world from FWs—characters speak and think in ways that cannot help but catch the reader’s eye—the reader is drawn all the more deeply into cooperation with the text. Rather than serving a revolutionary, pedagogical function, Queneau’s use of foreign words in fact strikes, in Philip Morey’s words, “a balance between suggestion and readability.”  

The pattern of use of such words—and not the use in and of itself—structures the reader’s trajectory from NW to FWs. As Morey further suggests, “…it is precisely the contrast between the expected framework of conventional orthography and spacing and the unexpected, disorienting appearance of irregular notation which provides the organizing principle of his [Queneau’s] visual comedy” (836). In this way, NWs always lurk behind FWs, and FWs lie in wait around every corner of NWs: participation in one entails participation in the other. The visual nature of the orthographic NW, which, due to the undecidability of the reading experience, is never reducible to the text, creates the very tension that helps to bring FWs into being.

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c. Syntax

Due to its relation to the underlying structure of a language, syntactic irregularities would constitute the biggest threat to its established order. Aside from pointing out and practicing one specific variation, though, Queneau’s sentences by and large follow traditional syntactic patterns. In Queneau, syntax does not have much to do with movement between NWs and FWs. One of the exceptions is a variation on French syntax, which Queneau called “le chinook,” referring to a Native American Eskimo language (“Connaissez-vous le chinook?”, Bâtons 55-57). It involves using abstract grammatical categories, such as pronouns, in the first part of the sentence and then replacing them with the appropriate referents in the second part of the sentence. The first sentence of Queneau’s 1951 novel Le Dimanche de la vie displays this proclivity for reversing nouns and pronouns: “Il ne se doutait pas que chaque fois qu’il passait devant sa boutique, elle le regardait, la commerçante le soldat Brû”¹²⁹ (He didn’t suspect that every time that he passed in front of her shop, that she was watching him, the shopkeeper, Brû the soldier). In a sense, the noun here modifies the pronoun, reversing the traditional relationship between these parts of speech. Since Queneau never applied this practice systematically, it gave him the opportunity to expand sentence structure at will, creating a greater base world for the NW. Syntactical variations alter the rhythm of the NW, allowing the reader to slow down and to speed up, yet they are the least important of Queneau’s three proposed changes concerning vocabulary, spelling, and syntax.

¹²⁹ Queneau, Le Dimanche de la vie (1951), OCIII 397.
d. A “Rout” of Néo-français?

In *Le Chiendent*, Queneau rarely employs *néo-français* in the narrator’s discourse, except when it occurs in the form of first-person stream of consciousness thought. In 1933 at least, Queneau is not actually trying to achieve a revolutionary victory over traditional written French in narrative; *néo-français* serves specific purposes at specific moments of the narrative.\textsuperscript{130} Bastin, Catonné, Sanders, Sareil, Shorley, and Léon concur that Queneau’s novels are in no way faithful to *néo-français*,\textsuperscript{131} a failure that Queneau himself admitted in 1969 and 1970, blaming it on the leveling influence of television and declaring “a rout of *néo-français*” (“Curieuse évolution du français moderne,” *Le Voyage en Grèce* 225).\textsuperscript{132} But this does not mean that *néo-français* does not still prevail as a good “way into” Queneau’s NWs, provided both reader and critic keep moving past it in order to connect it with Queneau’s FWs.

Part of Queneau’s stated program in reforming written French was directed at achieving a “new philosophy” as well as a “new poetry” (“Conversation,” *Bâtons* 40). The representation of spoken language was designed to spark parallel new ways of representing ideas (Queneau, “1955,” *Bâtons* 56-57). In reality, Queneau’s experimentations with *néo-français* reflect, on a linguistic level, his own further experimentations with structure, plot, and character. The programmatic aspects of *néo-français* do not suffice as the basis for a total revolution in written French; for the most part, Queneau even wrote his articles about *néo-français* in standard French (Queneau, “Chinook,” *Bâtons*\textsuperscript{133} 1955, “Bâtons, chiffres lettres” 68, 70, 76, 83-4.\textsuperscript{133} See also Queneau, “1955,” *Bâtons, chiffres lettres* 68, 70, 76, 83-4.\textsuperscript{131} Bastin 71; Jean-Marie Catonné, *Queneau* (Paris: Belfond, 1992) 74; Carol Sanders, *Raymond Queneau* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994) 26; Jean Sareil, “Sur le comique de Queneau,” *Herne* 115-24; Shorley, *Fiction* 23; Pierre Léon, “Phonétisme, graphisme et zazisme,” *Études de Linguistique Appliquée* 1 (1963): 70-84.\textsuperscript{132} See also “Errata” 219-22 in this same volume.
While paying lip service to syntax as the real underpinning of any linguistic revolution, Queneau consistently ignored it as a plane for experimentation in favor of the “symbolic and meaningful” phonetic changes in French spelling (“1955,” Bâtons 87).

One cannot help but think that the attraction of many of these innovations, particularly in regard to the agglutinizing feature of French—its ability to add syllables to words—have more to do with how the resultant word looks on the page than a desire correctly to represent speech mannerisms. As early as 1962, Simonnet distinguished the visual component of Queneau’s style from its supposed phonetic representation of speech as “an original writing style whose power over the reader is of an essentially visual variety” (82). For Simonnet, Queneau’s first—in many cases, most astute—critic, this experimentation with language is less about the parameters of phonetic reference than it is about returning the power of poetic and expressive meaning to words (83). Queneau’s sentences end up creating an atmosphere of “dense familiarity” where the natural and the artificial are poetically interwoven together (Simonnet 83).

After all, in Saint Glinglin, Queneau names an American movie star, Alice Phaye, changing the first two letters of the RW “Alice Faye” to “ph” from “f”! In the NW, how things look trumps how they sound, as “Phaye” and “Faye” are pronounced the same in French. In Queneau’s NWs, language comes alive in a new way that does more than imitate speech. Very early on, in 1928, when he was a fellow traveler of the surrealists, Queneau declared “How functions and words live, just like objects: ah!”133 The transition from spoken language to

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133 Queneau, Texte surréaliste, may 1928, OCI 1067.
literary language becomes a living “question of style” above all else (Queneau, “1955,” Bâtons 76, 84, 88). Verbal innovation prepares the reader for even greater structural and fictional disorientation. According to Jean-François Jendillou’s account of Queneau’s declarations about néo-français, speech replaces staid linguistic knowledge before both are swallowed up by Literature, which “ruins all legality.” In the next section, I will consider the literary stakes of Queneau’s structural innovations in novelistic composition as the next step from NWs to FWs.

2. Constraints

As I made clear in my previous chapter, fictionality reveals its specific nature through the use of constraints. If intentionality interweaves its way among NWs and FWs, fictionality involves a “mandate” to imagine something more specific: “Fictional propositions are propositions that are to be imagined—whether or not they are in fact imagined” (Walton, Mimesis 39). There exists a spectrum from the “instructions” for imagining FWs to the actualization of those FWs through imagination, and yet there is no one-to-one correlation between the two. In this section, Queneau’s constraints regarding numbers, genre, theme, and characters are considered as a bigger building block than néo-français en route from the material singularity of the text to the plural ineffability of NWs and FWs.

Queneau often composed his novels with highly specific, autobiographical, mathematical, structural, and synthetic constraints in mind. Even if the reader remains unaware of these constraints, he “intuitively perceives” them; they shape the alternate reality that he encounters on every page. Queneau seemed to change his mind on the question of whether these constraints should in fact be recognized by the reader or not, lamenting early on when they were not and then later, in 1962, claiming “And every construction, in principle, should not be apparent. For me, it was a sort of guide, and not a thing that was supposed to be obvious to the reader.”

As we have seen in regard to néo-français, Queneau’s theoretical declarations about his own prose must be taken with a grain of salt; his praxis is usually more

slippery than he admits in his diatribes against inspiration, genius, and chance—a tri-partite attack on his own surrealist heritage according to Warren Motte.¹³⁷ My approach to constraints is more global; it comes out of the reader's interaction with the NW. Because they are—or can be—all but invisible, constraints shape the reading experience and thus summon FWs. *Néo-français* and the subtle game of constraints remind the reader of *Le Chiendent*, for instance, of the artificial nature of the text at the same time that he is drawn still deeper into its structure. This verbal back and forth movement constitutes a part of the very FW evoked by the text even when it may be cause for confusion in the reader. If the reader directs his attention elsewhere, invisible constraints have sway over the worlds that he constructs in concert with the text. What appears ineffable is often structured, just as what appears structured may be ineffable, resulting from some idiosyncrasy of a particular reader’s experience. Whether the reader accepts these constraints unknowingly, discovers them, or ignores them on purpose, constraints involve subjectivity and objectivity in a novel way:

In the end, the significance of all these echoes might be simply that they *exist*, invisible to those who do not note them but nonetheless there; for those who do note them, on the other hand, they are perfectly visible but remain vaguely and uncannily inexplicable, insistently crying out for interpretation but never allowing themselves to be interpreted in any coherent and definitive way.¹³⁸

Unlike *néo-français*, which needs to be activated and put together piece by piece by the reader before it is understood, these constraints represent larger pieces of the puzzle, and that is why—whether the reader “believes in” them or not—

they represent a very important transitional building block from Queneau’s NWs to his FWs. In the end, their effect on the reader does not have to mimic the author’s supposed intention in order to structure the text. Since constraints were used to assemble large chunks of text in concert with other chunks of text, they affect the reader all the same.
a. Numbers

Some of Queneau’s constraints are personal and numerological in nature: “Although in appearance not autobiographical, the form of the novel was thus set by these totally egocentric motives: consequently, it expressed what the content was supposed to hide” (Queneau, “Technique du roman,” Bâtons 29). Queneau provides the example of the number of chapters of Le Chiendent (seven) multiplied by the number of parts of each chapter (thirteen) yielding ninety-one, numbers whose significance he further explains. The “sum” of ninety-one is one (9+1=10=1+0=1), indicating death and return to existence. The number thirteen is seen as “beneficial” because it “denies happiness.” Finally, Queneau sees seven as “the numerical image of myself because my surname and my two first names are each composed of seven letters and because I was born on the 21st (3*7)” (29). I have gone over Queneau’s explanation in full because it is often quoted and rarely explained, except to point out that Queneau believes that novels deserve to be more structured. Whether Queneau added correctly, or precisely to which numerological tenets he makes reference, is not the point. What matters is the overall effect that such ideas have on the trajectory of both character and reader as they build worlds based, at least partially, on verbal cues.

Whatever the specific instance of constraints, mistaken assumptions about them hide their radical nature, which involves what Husserl might call the (inter) subjective constitution of objectivity.\textsuperscript{139} The intersubjective

\textsuperscript{139} In the Pléiade notes for Les Derniers jours, Henri Godard comments on the intermixing of subjectivity and objectivity through numerical experimentation in Queneau: “...the numerical organization might be even more ‘objective’ because the substance is obviously autobiographical, which is a way of being subjective.” OCII 1734. See Eugen Fink, “Operative Concepts in Husserl’s Phenomenology,” Apriori and
confirmation and acceptance written about by Husserl as necessary for the constitution of objectivity could be provided by the act of reading in this case. Here, purely subjective concerns (personal, numerological) have intentionally structured the text, an object, and the author (Queneau) has admitted it. Actualized by the text, and moreover, virtualized by the act of reading, these subjective concerns become objective (the number of chapters and parts of each chapter). Part of the persistently readable nature of Queneau’s novels comes from the fact that the reader does not have to be aware of constraints for them to have an effect on him or to continue reading (i.e. Queneau is not Joyce, in spite of his own comments about Joyce’s readability).

The reader’s movement between NWs and FWs depends only partially on explicit knowledge of the synthetic nature of the text. James Phelan contrasts this *synthetic* function, by which the text highlights its own artificial nature, to the *mimetic* function, used to represent reality. Phelan also posits a *thematic* function, which concerns the possible message of a text. The question of the various possible functions of a text, as understood by Phelan, comes to the fore in *Le Chiendent*. Before introducing the last section of the novel, Queneau includes the section heading “XCI” (243)—the only such section heading in the entire novel. Theoretically, using this section heading as a reference point, the reader could count backwards through the text and discover the numerical division of the novel into seven sections, each composed of thirteen parts. Furthermore, this reader might now realize that the thirteenth section of every chapter, usually presented in italics, “is situated outside of this chapter, in

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another direction or dimension...Naturally, the 91st breaks the rule and becomes narrative again in order to finish it all” (Queneau, “Technique du roman,” *Bâtons* 30). But should we accept this claim about the reader’s possible level of interactivity with the text? Which kind of reader are we talking about anyway? Many times, when we discuss “experimental” authors and constraints, it seems that the reader loses all willpower, doomed to work along the lines of an automaton following instructions. In this model, which I am criticizing, constraints are important for what they say about literature as *literature*, not about the act of *reading*.

As I conceive of him, the rereader is never static. The more the reader is a rereader, of course, the more chance he has of noticing the features of the text mentioned above. However, the reader of Queneau in our day and age is likely familiar with Queneau’s ideas on the novel. And it is certainly not my aim retroactively to project the image of one of the very few first readers of the novel in 1933 from the present vantage point in 2009; this would be a socio-historical exercise without much merit for the kind of study that I am conducting. In other words, I assume that my reader is alive! Constraints should matter more for understanding how the reader manages to read in the first place than making historical claims about the position of the text in literary history. Moreover, they prove invaluable in establishing the ways in which readerly movement progresses and regresses between NWs and FWs. The “pauses” remarked by Queneau in the thirteenth sections of each chapter are pauses along this trajectory, as well as enigmatic FWs in themselves; the reader certainly interacts with them, but the results of this interaction are far from predictable.
The preceding considerations may seem superficial, but it helps to know what we are talking about when we talk about the reader, to paraphrase Raymond Carver. Are we really talking about the reader or the author when we confidently assert that a given text has a given effect on the reader? In his “Notice” for the novel in the Pléiade edition, Godard assumes the reader’s ability to follow instructions and arrive at the revelation of the numerical structure of the novel, as well as the resulting realization that “the invention of the story that he is reading was not the only purpose of the novelist” (“Notice,” Chiendent, OCII 1450). This claim belongs to the domain of literary history, not a phenomenology of reading. Does every reader who notices this section number (XCI) imbue it with the “correct” importance or does he just consider it one more oddity in an odd novel? Does the reader actually count back the appropriate number of chapters and sections? Obviously, the matter is closer to settled if the reader is reading the Pléiade edition of the novel, due to the third party instructions contained within the notes. (But if the reader is reading the Pléiade version, is he not probably already somewhat aware of Queneau’s place in the canon?). For Calinescu, the rereader may be a mere “hypothetical construct,” but even the most abstract analysis has to assume that this hypothetical construct reads books once in a while (xiv). Different possible readings conceptualized as layers of an onion, as Queneau proposed, leads to the idea that a particular reading remains superior to—or at least closer to the center than—others. Even if we mix Bastin’s “inside” (ontological) and “outside” (thematic) concerns, it is imperative to recall that a phenomenology of reading, even when it engages in interpretation, does not operate on the same plane as interpretation. Of course, based on textual
evidence, some interpretations prove more valid than others. In his essay, “Small Worlds,” Eco contrasts what I have been calling “worldbuilding” to interpretation: “semantic interpretation” or a “pragmatics of reading” serves quite a different purpose than “critical interpretation” focusing on metalinguistic activity (72, 77). Neither approach ignores the text; either way, “A fictional text has an ontology which must be respected” (72). Exploring possible readings through the worldbuilding activity of the reader implicates the underlying intentional structures of reading as a transactive activity. Whether it is an onion or a nondecidable geometric shape, the idea of a multilayered spectrum folded back on its many possible paths of activation is a preferable model of reading for our purposes.

Queneau may have complained that no one noticed his rigorous structuring of Le Chiendent (Queneau, “Conversation avec Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes,” Bâtons 41-42). But does this really matter? While Godard suggests that these constraints in Le Chiendent are “globally suggested” to the reader at the same time that their “detail is concealed,” the overall result is the objectification of a subjective given, not the deployment of the reader as a rat in a maze performing actions a, b, and c (Godard, “Préface,” OCII xxi.). (This is what happens when one take a solely cognitivist view of the reading process, one that usually ends up measuring, with great accuracy, apples with oranges.) Queneau declared in 1950 that he had moved away from the “arithmomanie” of his early novels, but as Chris Andrews provocatively suggests, the future co-founder of OuLiPo never fully gave up his odd combination of number
symbolism and mathematical formalism. I would agree with Andrews that throughout his whole career, “pre-formulated mathematical rules had relative rather than absolute value” (292, my italics) for Queneau. Whether or not the reader notices them, numbers remain a “hidden presence” in Queneau’s “textual architectonics.” According to Florence Wilson, the intermediary role of mathematics in Queneau’s fiction links heaven and earth, “the ephemeral material world and the eternal” (197). What interests me is how numbered constraints might begin to link reader, text, and worlds, regardless of the thematic and biographical issues explored by Wilson. Queneau made use of both numerology and mathematics yet went beyond both. Many of these numerical concerns became progressively ontological in Queneau’s later novels, as he concentrated on metalectic shifts between different realities in Les Fleurs Bleues and Le Vol d’Icare, for example. What Queneau hinted at with the use of numerical constraints earlier in his career gradually played an increasingly global role on the level of whole worlds rather than whole numbers.


b. Genre, Theme, Characters

According to Queneau, the volitional nature of these constraints differentiates him from the literary tradition of the *novel* in France: previous authors supposedly “pushed an indeterminate number of apparently real characters in front of them like a flock of geese through a wasteland the length of an indeterminate number of pages or chapters” (Queneau, “Technique,” *Bâtons* 27.) Whatever the validity of this particular critique, we have already seen just how the structuring role of constraints affects the use of genre, theme, and characters, as well as the repartition of the text into chapters and sections.

Generic considerations involve *how* the text is written. For instance, Queneau claims that each section of *Le Chiendent* acts as a unity in terms of theme. Not only do sections more or less observe the rule of the three unities inherited from Greek tragedy and French drama, they also follow highly specific generic considerations (dialogue, interior monologue, dream, etc). One of the more striking examples is presented by section five of Chapter Three, in which two men in a café watch Pierre Le Grand talk with Étienne Marcel and his wife Alberte about their son Théo’s second disappearance. The two men in the café then get into a fight. The whole section is recounted in short dialogue, with no transition from the conversation of the two men observing Pierre, Étienne, and Alberte talking to the conversation of Pierre, Étienne, and Alberte observing the two men fighting. Furthermore, Queneau highlights the synthetic nature of such a dialogue in the second part of the combat, during which Pierre, Étienne, and Alberte detail the nature of the fight:

- They have fallen to the ground.
- They are knocking their heads together.
- They are twisting each other’s arms.
- They are biting each other’s eyes.
- They are taking each other’s teeth off like shoes.
- They are rubbing each other’s ears.
- They are crushing each other’s toes.
- They are bleeding each other’s noses.
- They are knocking their shins together.
- They are blackening each other’s eyelids.
- They are hitting each other in the stomach.
- They are ripping each other’s hair out. (Chiendent, OCII 78-79)

Even within the loosely structured generic unities of the sections of the novel, other synthetic micro-constraints develop: a series of reflexive verbs and direct objects preceded by definite articles enhances the staccato effect of the list. Yet, even after the fighting concludes, and the reader understands, at the very least, that the dialogue in the novel he is reading does not purport to represent reality, Queneau, resorting to the grand style, brings him back to the thread of the plot: “Let us go back, said Étienne, into our demi-villa, to discuss the fate of Théo, who is once again a fugitive. Alberte is advising me to find Narcense and Le Grand is dissuading me from doing it. What will I do?” (79). If the reader has become lost, he is quickly found again, thanks to Étienne’s timely intervention. Recuperation into one of the major strands of the FW—the fate of Étienne’s son, Théo—follows fast on the heels of the disintegration of another aspect of the FW into a spectacularly dialogic and intertextual NW—the fight between the two men, whose conversational description à la Rabelais to which the reader is party. After all, nothing invites more participation on the part of the reader than these types of synthetic descriptions; for example, the oft-quoted sentence from Le Chiendent: “Description of a storm in Paris. In the summer” gives rise to all sorts of activity on the part of the imagination (10).

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142 This continues for another page and loses much of its comic effect in English. Furthermore, it is a reworking of the attack on the abbey of Seuillé in Rabelais’s Gargantua. Another good example of such stereotyped language is section nine of Chapter Four, an exchange of letters between Mme Cloche and her nephew, Clovis (124-128).
Such a “reliable narrative thread,” to quote Calinescu, proves its worth in novels that call into question the very existence of these (220). It is easier to imagine our rereader of Queneau taking pleasure in this highly conscious manipulation of the NW precisely because, by page 78, he is familiar with the rapidly-changing context of the novel and does not worry as much about losing the narrative thread (under whatever guise it appears).

Because of this highly developed narrative structure, the novel may more easily be arranged so that themes correspond to one another, providing a nice mixture of Phelan’s categories of the thematic (message) and the synthetic (artificial). Themes, like characters, come and go so quickly in Le Chiendent and Loin de Rueil that a constantly rotating series of concerns repeats throughout each individual novel and throughout the body of work in general. (I will address several of these concerns more closely in the following chapter.) In this way, Queneau developed his idea of novelistic “rhyming” situations: “One can make situations or characters rhyme just as one makes words rhyme” (“Conversations,” Bâtons, chiffres et lettres 41). By thus making the novel into “a sort of poem,” Queneau has more tools at his disposal than the novelist who is unmindful of his “geese.” Queneau’s preparatory notes, charts, and graphs for his novels, especially Le Chiendent, are highly informative in demonstrating an immense amount of planning.

Too many times, though, Queneau’s assertions about poeticizing the novel are interpreted too literally as involving the novel and poetry exclusively. Even Claude Debon, editor of Queneau’s poetry in the first volume of the

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143 See also Queneau’s letter to Le Figaro, dated September 14, 1940.
144 These are available at the CDRQ (Centre de documentation Raymond Queneau) in Verviers, Belgium. However, now that both volumes of Queneau’s novels are available in the Pléiade, a useful reflection on these preparatory documents can be found in the Appendices.
Pléiade, has commented, “Queneau’s novels are neither poems nor poetic novels.”¹⁴⁵ In reality, Queneau’s work makes a far more radical point about the boundaries of literature. In another essay, Queneau claims that revolutionizing the French language might mean “no more books” or even “no more literature at all” (“1955,” Bâtons, chiffres et lettres 87). Rather than making the poem a novel or the novel a poem, Queneau questions the logic of both. As Jean-Pierre Martin states, Queneau gives a “lower-case ‘I’” back to “Literature.”¹⁴⁶ Martin’s pertinent discussion of Queneau’s anonymous, fragmented narrative voice (in opposition to Céline’s booming, hyper-emotional subjectivity) is important to my discussion of intersubjectivity in the next section of this chapter. Part of Martin’s argument is that Queneau opens literature up to everything else: an intertextual sea of voices and references that remain structured in all of their chaos (or that remain chaotic in spite of all their structure).

The mimetic function of characters—their believability as real people—is lessened so that they may serve the author’s needs in structuring the text. According to Queneau, characters occupy a position somewhere between that of “homunculi” and “pieces on a chessboard” at the mercy of the author (Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, “Technique” 31-32). These miniature people are free to do what they please, including talk back to the author (Le Chiendent) and disappear into the movies they are watching (Loin de Rueil). Yet, in the end, they are as restrained by the strictures of the NW as is the reader. The fascinating nature of character development in Queneau has only begun to attract the proper amount of attention within the last decade. In the next

chapter, I will focus more exclusively on the unique role of the Quenellian character’s life cycle.

However, one example from the novel *Loin de Rueil* demonstrates the cyclical effect of character doubling or “rhyming” particularly well. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist, Jacques l’Aumône (Jacquot) is watching a movie with Des Cigales, an older poet. Jacquot (imagines that he) steps into the world of the movie. By the end of the novel, Des Cigales watches a movie with Jacques’s son, Michou, a movie which portrays Jacques as a young man stepping into the movie (194-5). As a movie star, Jacques has finally acceded to a position as actor in the movie; thus, Michou takes Jacquot’s place next to Des Cigales in the movie theater. Des Cigales, present both before and after Jacques’s disappearance, and thus something of a constant in this fragmented universe, has married Jacques’ wife, fulfilling Jacques’ s childhood fantasies of being cuckolded (going so far as to imagine Des Cigales as his own father), and at the same time overcoming his (Des Cigales’s) own history of being cuckolded by his wife taking up with another woman. Various thematic elements of the novel—the theme of being cuckolded, the young boy’s initiation to the movies under the watchful eye of the older man—rhyme with one another, yet the rhymes, embedded in prose, are circular or spiral in nature and infinite in scope. Due to these rhymes, the reader does not map the trajectories of Queneau’s characters as if they lived in the RW. Even if he recognizes similarities between Queneau’s FWs and the RW, the reader still maps the scope of their shifting, transient fictional *becomings*. The rhymes can only be recognized by a process of rereading.
If néo-français structures the surface of Queneau’s novels, then his use of constraints structures their structure. The relationship between subjectivity and objectivity via FWs—whether they are the world of the other’s access to knowledge or that of the big screen of cinema—remains one of the overriding concerns of Queneau’s work. Constraints may have played a different, more mathematical, role in the heyday of OuLiPo during the 1960s and 1970s, but the bigger issues at stake in Queneau’s novels stay the same where narrative is concerned: the shaping of texts that create unique FWs, even as they send the reader scurrying back to NWs.
3. Intertextuality/Heteroglossia

By employing such widely used terms as intertextuality and heteroglossia, I hope to set up a minor opposition that will lead us from Queneau’s NWs to Queneau’s FWs. The narrative and fictional space in which Queneau’s novels deploy their worlds stretches from Julia Kristeva’s ideas about intertextuality as “a meeting of words (from texts) where one can read at least another word (text)” 147 to Mikael Bakhtin’s claims about the dialogic plurality of voices found in the novel, as opposed to other art forms, which he called “heteroglossia” in his 1934 essay, “Discourse in the Novel.” 148 Because it specifically highlights multiple registers of language, the term heteroglossia proves apt at describing the structured symphony of voices interwoven throughout Queneau’s novels, a “plurality of discourse” that creates its “polyphony of voices” (McHale 166). Understood as two sides of the same phenomenon, intertextuality, conceived of as closer to the text, and heteroglossia, conceived of as closer to the worlds spawned by the text, highlight the transition between words and worlds and indicate an opening of the NW to other NWs and, in this manner, FWs.

Through a profuse combination of academic and popular references (the High and the Low), Queneau’s texts are intertextually linked to a wide variety of other texts that have come before. And through the lack of a dominating subjectivity or voice at work within the FWs of these novels, Queneau’s texts allow for a heteroglossic intermixing of voices, including the characters’ voices, as well as the reader’s own. In the model I am proposing, intertextuality,

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148 A lengthier version of this essay is found in his book, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays 259-422.
focused on the verbal links to pre-existing texts, stands on one side of the
divide between NW and FW, and heteroglossia, allowing for the reader’s
interaction with the various voices of the characters’ LWs, stands on the other.
Texts do not just encounter other texts; they encounter and cut through other
worlds, most importantly, those of the reader. If heteroglossia is “an opening
wedge, a means of breaking up the unified projected world into a polyphony of
worlds of discourse,” then intertextuality helps verbally to map the interaction
of those “worlds of discourse” across seemingly intractable boundaries of words,
works, and worlds (McHale 167). Intertextuality and heteroglossia thus provide
an important point of transition between NW and FWs. The intertextual echoes
and heteroglossic murmurings encountered by the reader in Queneau’s novels
include both direct and indirect quotation of sources, all the while undermining
the notion of a dominating source. In this way, the phenomena indicated by
terms like intertextuality or heteroglossia fit the definition of Barthes, who, in
describing connotation, spoke of an “undercurrent of noise” and an “intentional
cacophony” (S/Z 15).149

If, as Barthes claims, a first reading of a certain type of “writerly” text
(see previous chapter) does not exist, then that text may be read as a “galaxy of
signifieds,” shot through with other voices and other texts (Plaisir 23, 15, 59).150
For Barthes, the many nuances of the intertext are only reached by rereading, a
point of view with which Calinescu concurs (55). However, in her definition of
intertextuality, Kristeva, motivated by a desire to elaborate the dialogic nature
of the text and to shift focus away from the author, effaces the agency of the

149 For Barthes’s writing on Queneau, see “Le Degré zero de l’écriture,” Combat August 1, 1947: 2; “Pour
150 See also L’Aventure sémiologique (Paris: Seuil, 1985) 167.
reader and blindly replaces the “subjectivity” in intersubjectivity with
“textuality.” “By coming and going between the subject and the other, between
the writer and the reader, the author is structured as a signifier, and the text as
the dialogue between two discourses,” writes Kristeva, for whom texts thus
escape from under the thumb of an oppressive author figure (156). Although
my reader is undoubtedly the focal point of discourses, he himself is certainly
much more than a “discourse.” According to Kristeva, texts, because they are
cracked up in a network of other texts, “read” each other, then “reread”
themselves: thus, texts constructs themselves by mean of a sort of “destructive
genesis” (159). For Kristeva, the intertextual relation connects various subject
positions, which are constituted by “the ambivalence of writing” and its myriad
textual connections (145, 156, 149). For me, Kristeva’s brand of rereading
remains limited by the text; its “subject positions” do not take into account the
dynamic involvement and interaction of the reader posited by texts like
Queneau’s Le Chiendent and Loin de Rueil.

The role of the reader is considerably more significant than the status of
structural translinguistic productivity seemingly bestowed on him by
Kristeva(113), and literary texts quickly escape their status of “just words” as
well, by forming both NWs and FWs. The reader’s interaction with the text
quickly transforms it from language-based entity to fictional construct. In this
sense, intertextuality does not mean that the text is limited to being in a system
with other texts; on the contrary, intertextuality is directly linked to worlds
coming into being, and thus to subjectivity (Martin, “Voix” 296). If we cease to
define intertextuality so narrowly, and if we take into account the ideas of
polyphony and heteroglossia in Le Chiendent and Loin de Rueil, intertextuality
in Queneau becomes a kind of interworldality, whereby we see the connections between discourse and the process of narrative imagination (enworlding or worldbuilding). The intertextual web may very well be “polyvalent and multidetermined,” in Kristeva’s words, but texts only gain meaning when readers read them (144). While textual factors from outside the novel—elements drawn from the real world—do structure Queneau’s novels, the author consciously sets up webs of references within worlds that give equal weight to the mutterings of its lowliest characters. As Thomas Aron, invoking Bakhtine as well, argues, Queneau’s texts do not limit themselves to sheer intertextual reference.\textsuperscript{151} Emphasizing Queneau’s divergence from strict quotation, Aron takes into account the sheer variety of represented speech in \textit{Le Chiendent}. By emphasizing the role of the interlocutor, Aron highlights the dialogic intersection of anonymous discursivities, what he calls “the cohabitation, or rather the encounter, the collision, the dialogue, the dialectic interaction between languages of diverse levels, tonalities, and origins” (51, 53). Literary discourse, highlighted and problematized as such, is just one among many in a polyphony of voices, all put “on stage” in equal fashion in novels like \textit{Le Chiendent} and \textit{Loin de Rueil} in order to push the limits of literary codes (50, 57). If we recall that the text embodies fictionality as well as textuality, it is easier to see how the reader moves beyond the ambiguities of a confusing NW that interweaves a chaotic chorus of voices, styles, and references. The reader’s progress from NWs to FWs should not be predicted according to how many of these voices, styles, or references he activates during the act of reading. Taking into account the dynamic part played by the reader in the construction of NWs

and FWs, it becomes obvious that these acts of activation prove infinite, as they depend, in large part, on the unknown quantity of the reader himself, coupled with his desire to reread. Just as with respect to constraints, the issues of subjectivity and objectivity at work in the text via its references and its voices are best examined from the angle of the person who might (or might not) be turning them into worlds: the reader.

By making reference to other texts, intertwining High and Low cultural registers and using a far-from-omniscient, third person narrative voice capable of splitting into all kinds of other voices—stream of consciousness interior monologues, spirited dialogues, snippets of dreams—Queneau opens up the field of the text beyond the verbal NW that results from a first reading. Many of the linguistic oddities of his novels spring not only from néo-français but also from a mixture of the erudite and the popular combined in the popular speech of the period, such as when foul-mouthed Mme Cloche, disguised as a priest, suddenly proffers the following subjunctive construction immediately preceded by fric, a slang term for money: “Sors ton fric qu’on construise avec une splendide cathédrale” (193, my italics, take out your cash so that we might build with it a splendid cathedral). At the end of Loin de Rueil, Jacques, now James Charity, responds to his interviewer in a parodic and literal translation of English that somewhat resembles a bizarre manifestation of classical French, declaring, “Déjà, tant si jeune, j’assidûment fréquentais les salles obscures” (192, already, oh so very young, I assiduously frequented the darkened rooms) and “Ah! Les cow-boys du muet, les vampire du tacite, les maxlinder du silencieux, les charlot de l’aphone, combien passioné fus-je de leur geste, épique en son genre, dirai-je” (192, ah! The cowboys of the silent film, the
vampires of the tacit, the Max Linders of the mute, the Charlie Chaplins of the aphonius, how enthralled was I by their gestures, epic in their genre, I would say). The highlighting of the verbal NW here—among other things, the odd (Anglophone) placement of the adverb assidûment between the subject and the verb, the liberal use of commas, and the use of the passé simple in conversation—reminds the reader that this particular novel, so full of worlds, is ultimately made up of words. In this way, worldbuilding also makes a spectacle of the verbal construction of its worlds. At the same time, though, turning proper names like actor-director Max Linder and actor Charlie Chaplin (via his popular French nickname Charlot) into plural nouns referring to their films (les maxlinder, les charlot) reminds the reader of the intersection of his own world as a reference point with that of the text, where it is quickly modified.152 This becomes abundantly clear when Queneau quite noisily uses four synonyms in a row to designate early film as “silent.” Thus do NWs and FWs dispute the space of the text, a space that, according to Aron, is constantly “put into crisis” (57, mise en crise). One world does not disappear in favor of the other: different worlds come together to create a new, uneasy world in the process of becoming. The diverse strata of the French language assembled by Queneau create a hybrid language that has effects far beyond the text. “Unmindful of any program, the novel’s force of devastation no longer spares day-to-day language and trivial French, as sprinkled with clichés and fixed expressions as it is sprinkled with deathly academic language, covered in past tenses that are supposedly ‘simple’ and imperfect subjunctive moods that are, after all, rather

152 Moreover, Max Linder’s real life failure to make it big in Hollywood provides an interesting counterpoint not only to Charlie Chaplin’s successful independent career, but also to that of James Charity/Jacques l’Aûmone, the recently arrived Hollywood star of Loin de Rueil.
“ridiculous” writes Jean-Pierre Martin, who further develops Aron’s argument by focusing on the anonymous flow of voices at work in the Quenellian novel ("Voix" 296).

The heteroglossic bubbling of background voices notwithstanding, the amount of varied intertextual references in Queneau’s novels astounds the first-time reader. Whether these references—most of which are annotated in the notes of the Pléiade editions—go unnoticed, hinder the reader’s progress, or stop it all together, above all, they thicken the texture of the NW. At the same time that these references call the reader’s attention to the language-based nature of the text he is reading, they direct him not only to other texts but also to the worlds that go along with them. *Le Chiendent* and *Loin de Rueil*, plays on words with the names of popular brands of lamps—the “Mazda” lamp, made famous by Breton in *Nadja*, published in 1928 (*Chiendent* 18)—rub shoulders with abundant references to the cinema, where Jacques sees films reminiscent of William S Hart’s moralistic cowboy tales, a production of *Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde*, as well as identifiable news footage from the time period. Although RW identifiable referents exist for some of *Loin de Rueil*’s fictional objects, it is the world-swapping act of going to the movies that is emphasized above all by the author (as we will see in more detail in the following chapter). In the novel, references and quotations do not refer to static objects; the connective and associative act of *referring* takes on more significance than the *referent* itself.

The overdetermined nature of Queneau’s peculiar brand of intertextuality levels the playing field of possible references: “serious” figures receive the same treatment in Queneau’s NWs as do everyday objects and movies. In *Le Chiendent*, the reader comes across references to photos from Josef von
Sternberg’s 1930 film The Blue Angel, starring Marlene Dietrich, of whom Étienne’s son, Theo, is enamored—as was Emil Jannings’ character in the movie, to say the least (14)—as well as the story of Lot’s wife in the Bible (99): here, Mme Cloche is not only “immobilized, petrified, salted,” but also “kippered” (saure)! Among the constant references to philosophers and mathematicians in Le Chiendent, the reader discovers Descartes, whose Discourse on Method was not only long thought to have inspired Le Chiendent, but who is also referred to here both allusively, as when Étienne declares in the manner of the cogito that he is a “man who thinks” (106, un homme qui pense), and directly, in the guise of Saturnin’s joke about waiters and menus (53, des cartes). The reader also encounters Cantor, Pythagoras, famous French mathematician Henri Poincaré, and Italian calculating prodigy Jacques Inaudi populating the pages of the text (122). Whether the reader recognizes these references is not the overriding point here; even the young characters of Le Chiendent are none too confident in their manipulation of such illustrious names. The serious manner in which Queneau treats contemporary popular culture icons (Dietrich) is mirrored by the irreverent manner in which he treats weighty references, such as the story of Lot or the name “Descartes” in a joke about menus and waiters; this sense of play is one of the ways on which Queneau was truly ahead of his time.

Queneau refers explicitly to other texts as well, of course, mentioning works of literature, such as Lewis Carroll’s nonsense poem, “The Hunting of the Snark” (181), Marcel Proust—here, Ernestine, not Albertine, “disappears” (206)—

\[153\] In retrospect, it appears that J.W. Dunne’s 1927 essay, “An Experiment with Time,” acted as the immediate catalyst for the writing of Le Chiendent. However, Alexander Hertich has made a strong argument for Descartes’s influence on Queneau in The Möbius Strip: Intertextual Turns in Raymond Queneau’s Le Chiendent (René Descartes), diss, University of Wisconsin (Madison), may 2001.
Virgil (209), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (214), and Ubu Roi (227), as well as the productions of popular culture, such as the songs Rosalie, Madelon, and the British WWI ditty, It’s a Long Way to Tipperary (224). (Excluding the first, the preceding examples are all taken from Le Chiendent). What purpose can so many types of references possibly serve? These particular words intimate worlds beyond Le Chiendent; they demonstrate that Queneau’s fiction posits a multiverse, not a universe. In fact, as Benjamin Harshav theorizes, the interaction between references like these, which he calls “External Frames of Reference” creates the “referential grounding” for the “Internal Frames of Reference” projected by the text. At the same time that the text linguistically constructs this heteroclite Internal Frame of Reference, it refers to it as if it were already there, thereby endowing it with a certain autonomy (7). Yet even terms such as “frame of reference” do not do justice to the worlds at work within the words on the pages of Le Chiendent and Loin de Rueil, and vice-versa. Whether we categorize Queneau’s references as direct quotations, intertextual references, or the vociferations of a host of quasi-anonymous speakers, these elements drawn from historical or fictional domains help define the trajectory of the reader between the NW and FWs. Occasionally, they are misquoted; sometimes, understanding them adds nothing to the plot; and, once in a while, they seem to designate in part the key to the enigma. (Such is the case for Virgil’s “accursed hunger for gold” in Le Chiendent’s treasure hunt for a treasure that does not exist).

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155 Queneau’s novel, Les Enfants du limon, pushes the boundaries of citation by including as part of the novel the text of much of Queneau’s own research on les fous littéraires (literary madmen or crackpots).
Queneau mixes together different languages, and the worlds that go along with them. Intertextual references are given a voice—in fact, many voices—in Queneau’s novels. The contemporary reader might not recognize all the references of Queneau’s novels, but he certainly understands what it means to go to a boring job, or on a boring vacation (In *Le Chiendent*, Étienne does both), to take out the garbage like Des Cigales, to identify with a character in a movie like Jacques, or to fall in love with a movie star, like Paul Kougard/Nabonide in *Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin*. A combination of complexity and simplicity in each layer of the onion ensures Queneau’s readability—and the worldbuilding process of the reader. Queneau’s characters themselves make arguments for the desirability of the meeting of worlds. In *Loin de Rueil*, Des Cigales defends the artistry of the cinema to two young boys: “This art—because it is an art—makes us forget the miseries of everyday life” (91). Once various registers of culture have exchanged places, the system—and this applies to the entire system of Queneau’s FWs—becomes deliciously unstable. Des Cigales goes further in his apology for the everyday when, in the middle of a discussion about poetry, he declares to Jacques’ s father, a sock merchant, “You can sing about socks too!” (*Rueil* 83) In fact, Queneau also sings about garbage, the metro, liking young girls, and how bad people smell. Queneau’s erudite references have been grafted onto a poetics of everyday life, and vice versa, creating a world that is, above all, fictional.

Queneau’s characters, like his readers, must make up their own rules. In *Le Chiendent*, Étienne’s son, Théo, cannot manage to write a proper *alexandrin*. He questions the rule of prosody rather than continue to change his verse: “It’s a verse that will have thirteen feet; that is all. Why do verses
have to have twelve feet? It’s idiotic. Me, I am giving mine another foot. I’m within my rights” (211). Queneau’s characters live in a world of references, but these references—and the worlds that they bring along with them—do not remain unquestioned, as when, in Les Enfants du limon, Henri de Chambernac makes a gift of his manuscript on literary madmen to a certain Monsieur Queneau. The references that constitute a good part of Les Enfants du limon lose value when Chambernac realizes that he himself has become one of the very literary madmen that he has been researching so diligently. The value of these collected texts no longer lies in what they represent, but in their power to become fictional, as Monsieur Queneau remarks when detailing his plan to attribute them to a character in a novel he is writing. This resonates nicely with Henri Godard’s argument about fictional doubling in Queneau that I quoted in the Introduction to this chapter: fiction plus fiction does seem to equal a neat kind of (fictional) reality. Furthermore, as Martin has remarked, the anonymity proclaimed by the polyphony of voices in Queneau’s novels ensures that no one voice prevails—as Chambernac remarks to Monsieur Queneau, “And it truly does not matter much to me if my name survives or not. I will repeat it to you: I no longer have any vanity. Remake a new book with all these old papers if you feel the necessity; and if you are capable of it” (911). The writer—both fictional and real—works at destabilizing far more than the novel or poem genre; as Aron argues, language itself is put on display and dissected at the same time that it continues telling its stories. As with néo-français, this interlocking web of recycled textuality allows for a new and different kind of existence for both Queneau’s readers—whether they
understand all of the references that they encounter—and his characters—whether they understand all of the references that they use.

This intertextual collage of words does not just involve recycling “old papers”; it lays the groundwork for a new and shifting space of worlds. According to Martin, this impersonal linguistic space of “the one, the all that,” is cohabited by “extreme states of language” (296). In these novels, “the archaic and the ephemeral, the precocious and the trivial, the pedantic and the vulgar” fight against the totalizing tendencies of the first-person “I” (291-2). States of words and states of worlds evolve and devolve into one another at every turn, marking another important moment in the movement between NWs and FWs. Other worlds have been brought into play, worlds beyond the principally phonetic changes of néo-français and the structuring constraints related to personal, numerological, generic, thematic, and character concerns. Queneau’s “fictionalizing of the voice” is deeply intertextual and deeply heteroglossic—these categories exist internally to the work as well as externally—and there is a strong correlation between these slippery, non-authoritative voices and the processes at work in his FWs (295). As we move towards the FWs end of the spectrum, we will see how intertextuality, heteroglossia, and the second-order rereading that they entail, fulfill the “haunting,” “mythical,” and circular trajectory ascribed to them by Calinescu in his ruminations on rereading (xi, xiv, 55-6). A similar circular trajectory is of the utmost importance in regard to the role of repetition, character, lived worlds, desire, and appearance and disappearance in Queneau’s FWs, which are the subject of the following chapter.
C. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined some of the processes used to construct Queneau’s NWs. From néo-français to structuring constraints to intertextuality, Queneau’s characters and readers move back and forth along the path between NWs and FWs. For ease of argument, I separated this chapter “Queneau’s NW,” from the following chapter, “Queneau’s FWs.” However, Queneau’s NW serves as the basis for his FWs, and the two cannot be separated too distinctly. Néo-français is often intensely intertextual, and constraints lend themselves to the movement of appearance and disappearance, not to mention the phenomenon of repetition governing Queneau’s FWs. (In my last chapter, on Robbe-Grillet, I will deal with both NWs and FWs concurrently.)

My linear presentation in Chapters Two through Five is meant to demonstrate the ways in which these interrelated levels can be pulled apart, in hopes that avoiding both under- and over-simplification helps us to make Queneau’s model of the onion a more dynamic model of the reading experience—pulling characters and readers apart and putting them back together again. Words can evoke worlds with purpose, even as they call attention to themselves. The path between words and worlds is never as easy to traverse as we think and, with Queneau, “The initial experience of strangeness, then, is of the utmost importance: it simultaneously presents the reader with problems—with ‘resistance’—and invites him to transcend these by involving himself in the work before him” (Shorley, Fiction 5). Without this resistance, Queneau’s novels might be easier to read, but they would no longer be Queneau’s novels, nor would they call into question the barriers between FWs so exquisitely. As Ingarden and Iser have argued, the necessity for work
on the part of the reader is precisely what draws the latter into the text. In the next chapter, we will see how this same process is reduplicated on another level with Queneau’s FWs. Although fictionality separates the RW from NWs and FWs, intentionality allows both real reader and fictional character to confront similar issues regarding the worlds at stake in the reading experience.

Perhaps the most obvious link between words and worlds in Queneau is dreams. Freud’s project, further elaborated by Lacan, involved understanding dreams as a language whose method of communication differs from our everyday one. One of the fascinating aspects of Queneau’s break from André Breton’s surrealism seems to have been the discovery that the playfully dreamlike qualities of literature can be concretized in a novelistic world where the marquise still rarely leaves at 5pm—Valéry’s example of a typical bad first sentence of a novel, as reported by Breton in the First Manifesto of Surrealism.156 In defining the “fuzziness” of far more contemporary literature, Jean-Louis Hippolyte writes, “it is the very blurring of ontological boundaries and the persistent presence of formal determinisms that give a text its sense of purpose.”157 The “formal determinisms” of Queneau’s NWs compose the underside of his FWs, no matter how far the latter may stray from their textual underpinnings due to interaction with the reader.

156 Claude Debon has pointed out the importance of dreams as a link between Queneau and the surrealists, whom he frequented between 1924 and 1929 before breaking with Breton. See “Raymond Queneau et le surréalisme: perspectives critiques,” Oeuvres et Critiques 18.1-2 (1993): 159-63 for an explanation of this position, as well as a brief description of other critics who have come to a similar conclusion. See Chris Andrews, “Surrealism and Pseudo-Initiation: Raymond Queneau’s Odile,” Modern Language Review 94.2 (1999): 377-94 for a more recent perspective that scrutinizes Queneau’s work, life, and many earlier views on his involvement with surrealism.

Chapter Three: Queneau’s FWs: (Be) Coming and Going

A. Introduction

In this chapter, I take a more detailed look at the tricky question of how the reader colludes with text and narrative to produce FWs in Queneau’s novels, beginning with the double role played by repetition. Repetition occurs first on a strictly textual level: the same verbal signs are repeated in the same order in multiple places. Yet repetition also haunts the worlds of Queneau’s characters, who find themselves doomed to repeat the actions of their short lives in texts that also repeat themselves in iterative, circular, or spiral fashion. Repetition metatextually gathers together many of the processes that make up NWs, discussed in the previous chapter, and it provides an ideal starting point for analyzing the means by which FWs might begin to detach themselves from NWs, at the same time that they rely on them as a support.

Since I am studying the manner in which fictional characters come into and out of being, as well as the absorption and projections of the reader, in this chapter I establish some parameters of character LWs, or their worlds as they might experience them, were they able to experience them on their own (Bastin 106).\footnote{Bastin refers to these as TAWs (textual actual worlds), the RWs of the text. They are also referred to as sub-worlds (SWs).} By nature, the reader projects these internal textual worlds, which he never knows with certainty even though they only come into being through his projections. As the fictional experiences of fictional creatures, LWs require readerly interaction. Even though Queneau’s narrators provide remarkably little information about these LWs in comparison, say, to those who practice “psychological analysis” of whatever stripe, the reader “give[s] voice,
articulation, and shape to the text’s silent language” all the same (Calinescu 275). While novels like *Le Chiendent* and *Loin de Rueil* are neither lengthy nor visually descriptive, Queneau is all the same “highly successful in encouraging his reader to imagine physical details” (Shorley, *Fiction* 118). Since the reader rarely encounters a character presented as complete; he is encouraged to construct the *becoming* of the character, not his already established *being*.

Queneau’s plots frequently describe the process of *becoming* by focusing on characters that experience their worlds in a novel way. (Either the characters or the worlds they inhabit change). From novel to novel, Queneau’s LWs shift in their specifics, but their underlying characteristics—the milieu of burgeoning 20th century *popular* culture that Queneau was one of the first to enshrine as equivalent to High Art—are immediately recognizable. “In effect, it is all somewhat the same world, the same sort of people […] And always the same places,” declared Queneau in 1959.\(^{159}\) The same-but-different reaction created in the reader by Queneau’s FWs is essential to the reader’s progress. Furthermore, the suggestion of the character’s own unknowable yet always developing LW demonstrates the autonomy of these particular fictional creations.

Even the main character confronted by a verifiable historical situation still resides in a FW formed, in part, by the reader’s interaction with the text. As Iser argues, the intentionality underlying the reading experience relies as much on reader as on text, and so is always tied to the demands of its “activator” (Iser, *Fictive* 223). The meeting of these two worlds creates the “pseudo-real” world of *Le Chiendent* astutely remarked by Jacques Birnberg.

Birnberg posits that the period of economic crisis described in this novel forms both the suburban LW of the characters as well as the FW of the reader. The synthetic nature of the “fictive banking operations” of appearance and disappearance that Étienne discovers at work during *Le Chiendent* (187) constitutes a world resembling Depression-era 1931-2. At the same time, these operations act as a backdrop for the bizarre events of the novel, and the concomitant “crisis” of reading that they may produce. The anonymous nature of these characters, demonstrated by the blurring of their proper names, plays a part in shaping their LWs precisely by refusing to shape them too clearly. The reader, by helping to form these nascent LWs, begins to fill in the epistemic and ontological gaps of which Iser often writes. (That the FW is incomplete does not mean that it attains a certain percentage of completeness, but rather that it is incomplete-able).

Entertainment, especially the cinema, plays a highly significant role as a boundary space in these novels. The Quenellian moviegoer’s experience and the experience of the reader share some qualities; the reader’s real existence between two worlds is directly linked to the fictional boundary-crossing that characterizes Queneau’s moviegoers. In Queneau’s fiction, the admittedly bizarre LWs of the characters may seem real in comparison to the even more eclectic fictional sub-worlds with which they engage. In this way, the biopic of Jacques l’Aumône’s life at the end of *Loin de Rueil* taken as a reference point lends a sense of reality to that life, however odd its course and status as a film of fiction, to boot; in *Les Fleurs Bleues*, Cidrolin’s dreams about the time-traveling exploits of his counterpart, the Duc d’Auges, certainly lend an air of

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reality to his own relaxed existence on a houseboat—until the Duke himself materializes close at hand and Cidrolin’s dreams are no longer in such sharp contrast with his everyday life. In arguing for the multiplicity of the cinematic image, Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier takes note of this Quenellian tendency, by which “a philosophy that considers the real to be illusory thus draws from the sources of an art founded on the illusion of reality.” The way in which cinema is at the heart of multiple interactions between FWs of varying degrees of intensity makes Queneau’s use of cinema a significant step on the trajectory between NWs and FWs.

The richness of Queneau’s LWs—their proximity to historical experience—does much to explain Queneau’s readability. While Simon complicates character as a nodal link between history, self, and memory and Robbe-Grillet eviscerates character psychology more radically than does Queneau, Queneau’s more “middling” characters straddle disruptive NWs and strange FWs with ease. The characters of supposed “New Novelists” like Simon and Robbe-Grillet fulfill altogether different goals. For these novelists, under-evocation of character does not produce the same humoristic flowering of the infinite internal worlds of the novel as it does in Queneau. In fact, as the plots inhabited by Queneau’s characters are so strange, reconstructing fictional LWs entails a heavy dose of plot summary. But, as an act of synthesis, summary of Queneau’s carnavalesque plots, much like the work of the reader, proves to be a creative task in itself. The plural nature of these delightfully incomplete LWs, where characters spout one-liners and philosophy in the same breath, are

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evoked by a relative paucity of character development in terms of NW information about these characters.

The second to last issue that I examine in this chapter is how desire functions at the crux of the worlds of the reader and character, which coalesce into the transactional and intermediate FWs of the reading experience. The way that desire winds its way among characters in order to create the plots of their lives implicates the reader as well. *Plot* should also be understood connotatively. Appearance and disappearance of characters or objects from the text form a key element of Queneau’s FWs. The desire of the reader who, to some extent, wants to put the pieces of the puzzle together in order to continue reading, dovetails with the diegetic desire of these characters, whose projections of what they *want* sometimes resolve into attempts to accept what they *are*:

The reader’s process of monitoring this FW is thus at once dependent upon, and mirrored by, the characters’ own reconstruction of their world. Just as the characters themselves collate disparate fragments of data in their attempt to produce a coherent account of events, the reader also has to rely upon various different sources of textual information in his worldbuilding project. The common ground of both reader and character is not the text, to which only the reader has access; it is the textual world. (Bastin 99-100)

Yet even the concept of a *textual* world as it relates to the postulates of PWT does not take into account the interdependence between two domains: language and fictional constructs (Harshav 1). The common ground of reader and character is not the text; it is fiction, a virtual world created by interaction that is unaccountable for when we rely on the rule-based schemas of PWT. Queneau’s readers and characters vacillate on the edge of words and worlds, sustained by different forms of desire. In *Le Chiendent*, Étienne Marcel’s wide-eyed meditation on the world around him creates some very worldly desires for the novel’s other characters, as they embark upon a hunt for the non-existent
treasure behind Père Taupe’s door. Objects like the old man’s blue door act as catalysts for desire, which connects the worlds of the reader and text. In *Loin de Rueil*, what Alexandre Kojève interpreted as Jacques’s attempt at ascetic transcendence and wisdom is merely another role played by this moviegoer whose desire literally creates worlds wherever he looks. For Jacques, every object is pulsional, shattering the notion of a fictional *Heimwelt* (or “homeworld,” to borrow Husserl’s term for the central lifeworld in a series).

Here, homeworlds are only ever momentary and relational.

Although Kojève may err on the side of understanding Jacques as sage, his ideas on desire do help elucidate Queneau’s FWs. Elaborated through his lectures on Hegel at the École des hautes études between 1933 and 1939, and transcribed by Queneau, Kojève’s conception of desire as the desire for recognition must be taken into account in order to understand how desire permeates the LWs of Queneau’s characters. As Pierre David has remarked, connecting Queneau to Kojève continues to be a necessary stage for all exegetes. However, few critics, not even the philosopher Pierre Macherey, have then drawn the requisite conclusions relating desire to fictionality and plot; they tend to focus instead on individual characters in the roles of Hegelian wise men. Nor has anyone explicitly connected Kojève and another one of his students, Jacques Lacan, to the complex relationship between desire,

163 Kojève wrote one of the best known articles on Queneau in 1952: “Les romans de la sagesse,” in which he argues for the character of Jacques l’Aumône as a Hegelian wise man who has withdrawn from the world: *Critique* 60 (1952): 387-397.
knowledge, jealousy, recognition, appearance and disappearance at work in Queneau’s FWs.

Desire structures both actions and plots in Queneau’s FWs. Nonetheless, a state of desire does not correlate to attainment of the object of desire. Using Slavoj Zizek’s notion of the sublime object of desire, I scrutinize Lacan’s differentiation between desire’s goal and the aim that circles around it. Keeping desire alive provides sustenance for both character and reader, whose lives during the reading experience depend on desire and the ways in which it is thwarted. “The character (or reader) who has a satisfactory end in sight is actually derealized in ontological terms, for he or she is reduced to an economic factor with an essentially fixed meaning in the shaping for the static and dead plot of inanimate design,” writes Thomas Docherty, contrasting the role of the reader in the traditional novel with the role of the reader in the New Novel (212). I would argue that the role of the reader is in fact similar in both circumstances; what differs is the nature of the obstacles that encountered by him. Desire is the motor behind the appearance and disappearance of characters through Queneau’s novels.

Queneau’s novels present a unique opportunity to examine the phenomenon of appearance and disappearance through the framework of intentionality, as a process that stretches across the semi-porous boundaries of textual, narrative, lived, fictional, and real worlds. Appearance and disappearance come to be so significant in Queneau because the process loses

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its teleological character: characters appear and disappear at many moments throughout the text, often without apparent explanation. Characters deciding to erase their own novel (*Le Chiendent*), a character performing his life in a never-ending loop of representation onscreen (*Loin de Rueil*), movie star stepping down from the silver screen to return the previously unrequited love of a smitten spectator (*Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin*), and a character arguing about the events of her life with the supposed author of her own journal (*Journal Intime*) are not traditional ways for the character to step off stage, especially when that stage may have even seemed realistic at one point during the reading experience. The psychoanalytic concept of the *passage à l’acte*, in which levels of reality and fantasy shift, occurs in these novels under the guise of *metalepsis*: what the character and the reader assume to be real or fictional constantly changes in Queneau’s collaborative FWs. The reader’s incessant movement between the poles of NWs and FWs results from a process of dynamic illusions that catches him up in the text much as the character is caught up in his own lived world. Just like Lacan’s patient, who “steps off stage” during the *passage à l’acte*, Queneau’s characters disappear into a kind of preontological void, only to reappear at the beginning of the text, manifested by the act of rereading. The movement of appearance and disappearance ultimately enables both characters and readers to begin the process over again. Just as no true first reading of a text exists in a vacuum, even the first-time reader of Queneau senses that he is not constructing these characters for the first time. Rereader goes hand in hand with reborn character, as both are caught up at the intersection of intentionality and fictionality.
B. Queneau’s FWs

FWs are not out there awaiting discovery; they are constructed by the reader’s interaction with the text through NWs. The epithet of “worlds” underscores that reading is as much about the worlds constructed by language as it is about language itself. By the same token, these worlds are not equivalent to the plot. Rather than discovering plot as he would an already existing structure, the reader helps to build and rebuild its scaffolding. Whether the language of the text corresponds to well thought-out authorial diagrams or sparks intensely personal and individual readings, both models—the reader as discoverer and the reader as creator—point to the dual nature of reading as something that transcends text in order to create worlds apart. FWs, which are situated along a threshold, draw their power by highlighting the intersection of the many, not by a reductive act of mimicry. By focusing on the construction of FWs, we avoid two pitfalls: we neither reduce a text to its language nor do we assume that its projections are in some way natural.

Christopher Shorley delivers an excellent warning against analyzing Queneau’s novels from the top down: “Most conventional criticism of Queneau has taken little account of experiences of this order, concentrating instead on organizing and assessing the experiences that remain when a book has been read in its entirety” (Fiction 3). Exhaustively elaborating upon every aspect of Queneau is not our aim here. By selecting a few significant aspects of Queneau’s FWs, I hope to see how they inflect the concomitant virtualization of FWs by both the reader and the character.

As indicated above, I distinguish between Queneau’s FWs and the LWs of the characters for several reasons. “Queneau’s FWs” might be misleading, since
the FWs that I have been positing so far result from the interaction between reader and text; they are certainly not the property of Queneau, who is long dead in any case. The reading experience creates a FW that belongs neither to the author, nor to the reader, nor to the characters, who experience fictional LWs that we may never know (and whose existence we support, even without knowing them). Intentionality allows us to experience fiction, just as fictionality allows characters to experience fiction (including fictions that resemble reality). Using the term LWs to address the worlds of the characters as they experience them emphasizes their fictional autonomy and unique mode of existence, as it calls forth our participation in the text. The LWs of novel characters in Queneau are ontologically quite distinct from yours, from mine, or even from those of other characters in the same text, and those of other characters in other texts—even from their own, depending on how steeply the text shifts under their feet. Compared to his FWs, then, Queneau’s NWs represent a seemingly more stable point in this transactional universe where consciousnesses link through intentionality, and where fictionality opposes itself to reality, even as the two brush up against one another.
1. Repetition

In his novels, Queneau blurs the boundaries between many different kinds of worlds. Whether these worlds are real, lived, narrative, fictional, or subfictional, repetition structures the perceived movement among them. This movement is significant because it subsumes the more purely narrative categories that I have indicated in my previous chapter. Yet the reader’s path does not go straight from words to worlds; instead, it connects NWs and FWs at many nodal points. As a bridge between words and worlds, repetition presupposes a mutual state of interdependence between NWs and FWs, one whose trajectory is not linear. The very idea of the rereader—whether or not he voluntarily skips back-and-forth—is based on repetition. The reminded rereader moves around his immediate position by making projections and postulations about character and plot. Such movement through a text is not unique to Queneau, but the way it combines with the other attributes of his writing discussed here produces his unique FWs.

Repetition may apply to the repetition of certain words, phrases, turns of phrase, styles of speech, or registers of vocabulary, not to mention the reiteration of the positions of characters, rhyming situations, or themes. Queneau uses repetition in order to gather up the disparate pieces of the text—vowels, consonants, words, sentences, descriptions—which the author has already singled out in several essays as making up the synthetic material of his novels. Repetition also underlies the overall structure of the text: ends imitate, mirror, mimic, and spiral into beginnings. Through his consciousness of “the already said,” the tendencies of everyday speech, Queneau makes a spectacle of stereotype and banality so that the reader recognizes them as such, and as
much more. Words, tropes, and situations are repeated and gain new “poetic” meaning.\textsuperscript{167} Through repetition, Queneau’s reader passes from linear and cumulative models of writing and knowledge to repetitive, simultaneous, synthetic, and circular ones (Hale 120). “Diverse fragments of poetic knowledge” coalesce during this process, sparked by a reader who reads again and again (120).

Supported by the verbal repetition of the text, plotted repetition dominates the cycles of becoming and going of the characters’ lives, which are neither aleatory nor fully determined. Repetition’s linguistic role—the use of words or combinations of words more than once—cannot be divorced from its larger role in the plot. A perfect example is found in \textit{Loin de Rueil}, where characters continually talk about their experiences with lice. Every character seems to have encountered lice at one moment or another in his life: during military service or at school, they have killed lice by squeezing them between their fingernails, by means of a foul-smelling shampoo, or by having their heads shaved. The same set of concerns involving lice surfaces in every conversation in almost exactly the same manner, demonstrating how deeply implicated the characters—and lice!—are in one another’s lives, although neither characters nor reader might not suspect it at the beginning of the novel.\textsuperscript{168} The reprise of similar conversations about lice clearly functions discursively as a reminder of the synthetic nature of the text, not as an organic characteristic of the familiarity of characters with one another. (Characters who are ignorant of


\textsuperscript{168} I pointed this out in a very general way in Chapter Two. In this way, Lulu Doumer, a maid present in the first scene of the novel, weds Jacques l’Aumône and stars on screen with him in the biopic of his life by novel’s end; Des Cigales, the poet whom Lulu met along with Thérèse in the first scene of the novel, weds Jacques’s wife Suzanne, after Jacques disappears for his big screen début; and the sisters Camille and Dominique Magnin return at various stages of the plot as well.
each other’s existences parrot the same clichés.) In other words, the lice problem is as much about language as it is about lice. Like many other motifs particular to Queneau, lice never go away for good.

Similarly, in Queneau, disappearance is not death. Disappearance implies appearance or, more appropriately reappearance, just as the hidden face of appearance is disappearance. Linked to desire, lice may die but they never go away, and neither do the accepted ways of talking about them. It is significant that it is Jacques, the biggest dreamer and desirer of all, who tries to create a race of “giant lice” during his stint as a chemist. Jacques recognizes worth in lice, which are a nuisance for everyone else, as well as in daydreaming, even betting against the advice of his friends on a horse with Balzacian implications about the danger of wishing and dreaming called Peaux-de-Pou (Skins of a Louse).169 Whereas, in Balzac’s La Peau de Chagrin (The Wild Ass’s Skin), Raphaël de Valentin’s magical talisman shrinks each time he makes a wish, the skin of Jacques’s dreams—La Peau des Rêves (The Skin of Dreams) is the title of the movie in which he appears at novel’s end—expands. In fact, the “skin” of Jacques’s desire expands to such a degree that it turns into the “big” screen. Jacques’s dreams and the novel’s lice come together: constantly leaving one world of appearances—for example, his career as a boxer—for another—his career as a scientist—Jacques disappears in the end yet remains onscreen (and in the newspaper) as a representation. It is for this reason that Pierre David has homophonically labeled Jacques “l’époux des rêves,” the “husband” (l’époux) or “the lice” (les poux) of dreams.170 In Queneau’s words, Jacques the dreamer

“irrealizes” worlds of appearances at such a rate that their repetitions do not so much imitate one another, strictly speaking (*Rueil* 144). Rather Jacques’ worlds iterate at higher and higher degrees, until they flatten out in the bidimensionality of the movie screen. Repetition, desire, appearance, and disappearance all mingle in Queneau’s fictional worlds, a phenomenon ably demonstrated by the lice of *Loin de Rueil*. 
2. LWs and Characters

a. Unreality

In recent years, critics have begun to pay more attention to Queneau’s characters. Known for their manner of speaking, the strange jobs that they hold, and their renouncement of the world, these characters live in a universe parallel to and yet quite divergent from our own. Like the FWs of realism, Queneau’s FWs intersect with the RW in some places.\(^{171}\) In regard to their semi-permeable ontological boundaries, though, these FWs diverge radically from the RW. In order to account for the autonomy of fiction, Birnberg’s qualification of such a universe as “pseudo-real” should be inversed: Queneau’s FWs are “real pseudo-worlds” as well, endowed with a measure of autonomy that distinguishes them from reality on the one hand and the text on the other.

In Nelly Lecompte’s analysis, the sense of unreality that pervades the world of these characters matches their ephemeral textual lives. Unburdened with a past or a future, they often do not even survive the duration of the text, from which they tend to disappear in one way or another. Like many critics, Lecompte hypothesizes that this bizarre text-world is constructed in order to undercut the reader’s faith in the illusion of the characters, and yet, by piquing his interest, this operation draws the reader into the story all the same.\(^{172}\)

Along similar lines, Martin likens the Quenellian character to a passerby, destined for erasure and disappearance, and yet worth following for a brief

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\(^{171}\) For a helpful representation of the intersection of the parallel planes of the RW and FWs, see Harshav’s diagram of the relationship between the linguistic Internal Field of Reference and the External Field of Reference, which runs parallel to the RW, supported by the Internal Frame of Reference (29).

period of time. Reader and character inhabit the novelistic space situated between passerby and observer, partaking in the fleeting moment situated between appearance and disappearance. According to this model, the writer himself is the ultimate passerby; he leaves only a fleeting trace of his existence (Martin, “Le petit pas du passant qui passé,” Personnage 137-149). Thus Madeleine Velguth draws a parallel between the figure of the magician, frequent in Queneau’s work, and the respective situations of the character and novelist, who both perform vanishing acts throughout the text (Velguth, “Quelques personages opaques de Raymond Queneau,” Personnage 107-120).

Reader and character depend on the other in order to bestow virtual life on FWs in the process of becoming. Godard argues that Queneau’s most memorable characters are striking due to their “mode of being” rather than to any specific storyline. In this way, the actions of Cidrolin, the houseboat-ridden dreamer of Les Fleurs Bleues, matter much less than his existential attitude: he might have been in prison, but what the reader knows for sure is that Cidrolin now drinks and dreams atop his houseboat. Because Queneau’s characters are not just actors in a series of events, but ways of being as well, the reader, even if confused, develops an attachment to these characters that matches the fluidity of the Quenellian text. This general character-reader link makes itself known in different ways throughout Queneau’s novels. For instance, Jean-Pierre Longre insists upon the theatrical nature of Queneau’s fiction, both diegetically and stylistically, proposing the idea of a “reader-spectator,” who is drawn into these novels as much by their linguistic

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experimentation (NW) as by their dramatic situations (FWs). Not only is there spectacle on the level of the plot (Jacques’s obsession with the movies in *Loin de Rueil*, Pierrot’s job at the fairground in *Pierrot Mon ami*, etc.), there is, as evidenced by my discussion of néo-français in the previous chapter, spectacle inherent to the NW itself. As Dufrenne and Ingarden have argued about the aesthetic experience in general, for Queneau’s manipulation of language to be highlighted, a certain distance between the reader and the text writing is needed: it is often language as such that is *mis en scène* (Longre, “Métamorphoses et effacements (le personage théâtral),” *Personnage* 121-135). In the same way that the narrative leads to the fictional, the fictional showcases the narrative. By sparking the reader’s imagination, elements of Queneau’s willfully playful NWs are singled out to play a role in FWs as well. As demonstrated by Saturnin’s somber meditations on being and non-being in *Le Chiendent*, which are expressed in French slang (Queneau, *Chiendent* 214-216), here, character is as inseparable from its humble verbal beginnings as it is from the movement of appearance and disappearance that fills out its contours in the direction of a more complete FW (from which it will soon disappear).

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175 See Chapter One for a more thorough discussion of Dufrenne and Ingarden.
b. Professions

Although scantily described by the author, the bizarre LWs of Queneau’s characters account for much of the interest that they generate in the reader confronted by—and attempting to synthesize—these alternate realities. Shorley characterizes this tendency of Queneau as a continual tension between placing somewhat realistic characters in unreal situations and placing unrealistic characters in realistic situations (*Fiction* 124). For example, the characters of *Le Chiendent* hail from the nether regions of the 1930s French suburbs. Suffering because of the Depression and exploited by the scheming businessmen who have sold them their worthless land, they still lead extraordinary lives. By novel’s end, the midwife Mme Cloche has turned into a goddess with a decidedly fascist name, Miss Aulini; after a lengthy war between the French and Etruscan armies, the remaining characters make a conscious decision to erase the book in which they find themselves. Yet other characters, such as *Les Enfants du Limon*’s Purpulan, the demon employed by Henri Chambernac for the duration of his researches on literary madmen, and Icarus, who in *Le Vol d’Icare* starts out as a character in a novel written by a character, lead fairly normal lives until their disappearances. (Purpulan melts into a puddle of sulfur in the Seine; Icarus crashes to earth in a homemade plane.) The tension between reality and unreality activated by the reader as he moves back and forth between NWs and FWs expresses itself in the construction of the character’s world. Simultaneously, the realist and fantastic tendencies of this world draw the reader further into the text. Character and reader share a certain encounter with undecidability, which is rather noticeable in terms of the eccentric occupations of characters. These occupations often reveal more about
how the character’s LW relates to his ontological status than about his personal psychology.

In *Le Chiendent*, Étienne works, ironically enough, at a bank during the Depression; while discovering the world around him for the first time, he nevertheless takes the family on vacation and goes to work. Meanwhile, while working on a philosophical treatise about being and non-being, Saturnin works as a concierge in a hotel with one non-paying guest; his brother Dominique owns a small bistro, yet plans on opening a whorehouse. Narcense, Saturnin’s border, is an out-of-work saxophonist who dreams of murdering Étienne’s young son; Mme Cloche is a midwife; and Pierre contents himself with meddling in the lives of these characters. *Le Chiendent’s* characters straddle fault lines of transition; their dreams of becoming something else are accomplished one way or another. Saturnin ends up a high-ranking officer in the French army; Dominique gets his whorehouse up and running; Narcense is executed for desertion; Mme Cloche turns into the goddess, Miss Aulini; and Pierre disappears for sunnier climes with the neighbor’s maid. Since the novel’s concluding lines are the same as its beginning lines, and seeing as the characters choose to erase the events of the novel, the very end of the text acts as yet another transition (to a renewed beginning).

In *Loin de Rueil*, Jacques divides his time between a variety of professions. He is, at various moments, the cuckolded king of France and England, an explorer, a stroke victim, an artist, a boxer, a bar of soap, a spore, a thief, an inventor, a chemist, a theatrical director, an ascetic, an extra, a documentary filmmaker, and a Hollywood star. Figuring out which professions are real and which ones are imagined constitutes the reader’s principal
(unresolved) challenge throughout the novel. The worlds at work here are so many “perfectly constituted miniature fetuses” (*Rueil* 143)—incidentally, the same word Queneau uses to describe Étienne’s new take on the world (*Chiendent* 77). For this reason, Bastin hypothesizes that “the vast majority of readers are likely to recognize that it doesn’t *matter* which world we are in” (231-2). Jacques the movie star’s character is nothing less than character itself. “What a great actor!” exclaims his son, Michou, upon hearing of the movie in which Jacques, now transformed into the movie star *James Charity*, performs the story of his life (193). Impressed by his father the actor’s exploits, little Michou seizes upon the key to the situation, and to much of the properly *dramatic* irony of the novel, which revolves around the most elastic profession of all: acting.
c. Anonymity and Naming

Queneau’s characters’ names are just as strange as their jobs. No account of the formal and fictional aspects of Queneau’s writing would be complete without taking the problematic status of the proper name into consideration. Jordan Stump has exposed how the act of naming often self-destructs via a process of unnamning.176 My intention here is not to repeat Stump’s masterful studies of the proper name’s overdetermined role in Queneau’s novels. Rather, I would like briefly to point out that the act of naming occupies another important point on the trajectory between NWs and FWs. The reader may never activate the complex web of references embedded in the proper name the way that Stump, as critic, does. But, if the reader recognizes “Peter the Great” in Le Chiendent’s “Pierre Le Grand,” does his reading of the text really change? In the same novel, Étienne Marcel is told that he already has “his” street in Paris, thus keying the reader in on the reference to the 14th century provost of Paris with the same name. Does the reader then analyze the text within the context of what he knows—if anything—about the historical figure? Or, which seems more likely, does he merely recognize the name and move on? In Chapter Two, I discussed intertextuality as just such a force, one that models the reading experience without necessarily making itself known. Examples like “Pierre Le Grand” and “Étienne Marcel,” which activate a diacritical web of references, only deal with one specialized end of the spectrum, avoiding the larger transition between NWs and FWs. But how do properly Quenellian issues, such as multiple names for one character, slip through the aforementioned net of external references?

In Queneau’s linguistically polymorphous world, characters sometimes do not have the luxury of, to quote Gaston Bachelard, “assembling all their beings around the unity of their name,” as Pierre and Étienne do.\textsuperscript{177} This is not to say that names are not imbued with meaning; transformations of names may reveal a hidden past. In Les Enfants du Limon, le fils Bossu (Bossu’s son) soon becomes the pimp Toto-la-Pâleur-de-vivre (Toto-the-paleness-of-living), and, finally, Robert Bossu, illegitimate son of Henri Chambernac. Brabbant of Les Derniers jours has another existence as the thief Martin-Martin, Dutilleul, and Blaisolle, much to the disappointment of his new law-abiding friend, Tolut. And the policeman/satyr/deity pursuing Gabriel and Zazie throughout Zazie dans le métro changes names throughout the text as well, from Pédro Surplus to TrouscailIon to Aroun Arachide (just as Gabriel’s companion metamorphosizes from Marceline into Marcel in the final pages of the novel). Even Le Chiendent’s Etienne Marcel starts out as “the silhouette,” passing through “he” and “Anyman” before acquires a name (3-27). In Le Dimanche de la vie, which constitutes the limit case of naming in Queneau, Valentin’s brother-in-law, Paul, is saddled with more than a dozen names: Brolugat, Botugat, Botrula, Broduga, Brétoga, Butaga, Brelogat, Brodouga, Brodoga, Brodouillat, etc.\textsuperscript{178} Yet, in typical Quenellian fashion, Paul begins and ends the novel with the same last name, Bolucra (398, 554); the two fixed points are liminal, marking both a beginning and an end to this particular FW.

The ambiguous nature of the name testifies to the slipperiness of meaning-making processes in Queneau. The “rigid designator” of the proper name gives way in a fictional, plural world of rapid-cycling appearance and

\textsuperscript{177} Gaston Bachelard, La Poétique de la rêverie (Paris : PUF, 1960) 84.
\textsuperscript{178} This list is provided by Jean-Pierre Longre in Raymond Queneau en scènes 176.
disappearance. In fact, Queneau’s 1951 novel reverses the terms of Kripke’s 1980 argument whereby the proper name picks out the same person uniquely in every PW. In *Le Dimanche de la vie*, Valentin’s brother-in-law’s description remains the same, while his proper name undergoes a seemingly endless series of fresh iterations. In this way, fiction slips away from the constraints of analytic logic and requires its own set of parameters involving FWs—not possible ones. For Stump, Queneau’s experimentations with the proper name indicate a the valorization of anonymity over identity that Martin discusses in “Le roman à voix basse,” combined with “the adoption of a far more ambiguous way of being or speaking” (*Naming* 165). More than the triumph of anonymity over identity (which, after all, would turn anonymity into its own brand of identity), Queneau’s use of proper names depicts the vacillation between coming into being and going out of being that takes place along the sliding scale between NWs and FWs. Regardless of their referents, the multiplicity of proper names found in Queneau’s novels ensures that the reader pays attention to the worldbuilding process, all the while cracking a smile.

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d. Entertainment: the Cinema

In a recent article, Christopher Shorely has claimed that Queneau’s representations of social life are so convincing—even when mixed with the fantastic—because they do not try coherently to summarize the many and varied aspects of a world. Instead, Queneau represents the LWs of characters “by conveying the fragmentary, mobile and contingent nature of the experience.”\(^{180}\) One of Queneau’s most spectacular tools in bringing the fragmentary worlds of fiction to life is the cinema, the signature “darkroom of his imagination.”\(^{181}\) What better place to examine the elaboration of FWs in Queneau than at the fictional movie theater, where they are already being elaborated on the fictional space of a fictional movie screen? Along with myriad references to the cinema in his poems, novels, and other writings, Queneau has written two novels in which the cinema plays a central role in the plot: *Loin de Rueil* and *Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin*. In *Loin de Rueil* and *Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin*, the cinema mediates the character’s interactions with FWs: Jacques steps *into* the movie screen and Paul’s movie star love interest steps *out* of it. But the number of Queneau’s film novels is less important than the way in which the cinema highlights the unique FWs inhabited by readers and characters.

According to Gabriel Moses, the film novel’s attributes are more *discursive* than *thematic*: that the novel deals with cinema does not matter as much as the effect that dealing with cinema has on the construction of the novel. Through this “extraliterary” renewal of the novel by film—by testing the


\(^{181}\) Jean-Pierre Martin, “Le spectacle est dans la salle,” *Spectacles* 269.
limits of the novel as genre—the film novel creates a “new syntax,” as well as a “cinematic reader.”182 For this reader, the film novel heightens “...the need to become part of the act, the expectations discursively embedded into certain kinds of text that the reader assume part of the creative burden” (145). The film novel thus co-creates a certain kind of reader who takes a greater responsibility for his interaction with the text, the kind of reader we have been imagining all along. In Loin de Rueil and Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin, such interaction is further doubled by the interaction of spectator-characters and film across the boundaries of internal FWs.

Queneau’s treatment of the cinema resonates with the crossing of boundaries between worlds: Loin de Rueil and Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin provide a good way of understanding the broader ontological shifts in character and reader characteristic of FWs throughout his work. In referring to the work of cinema theorists such as Christian Metz, Edgar Morin, and Vivian Sobchak, I hope to clarify some of the salient aspects of the fictional movie-watching experience in Queneau.183 I do not aim to produce a list of all the references to cinema in Queneau’s work; I focus on more global relations between words and

182 Gabriel Moses, The Nickel was for the Movies: Film in the Novel from Pirandello to Puig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 122-4, 128, 147, respectively.
Before anchoring spectator-screen interaction across fictional LWs, the movies constitute a novel form of social life, “a new mode of expression for humanity” (“Lecture pour un front,” Bâtons 173). For me, the widespread presence of cinema in Queneau’s novels has to do with its role as a semi-porous boundary between worlds that are crisscrossed by escape routes. A “sociology of cinema” plays an integral role in a “phenomenology of cinema” focusing on the spectator’s inner experience. The reader’s experience of this fictionally represented experience raises the following questions. In these novels, how do the movies, already situated within FWs, represent the door to other FWs? What is the relationship, if any, between the different levels of worlds presented by the text? How does the reader’s experience of fictional spectatorship cause narrative threads to coalesce as he moves back and forth between NWs and FWs? In this section, I sketch a more general outline of the part played by cinema in the social LWs of Queneau’s characters as well as examine the particular cases of Paul (Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin) and Jacques (Loin de Rueil) as exemplary of how the movies provide a highly significant nodal point between Queneau’s NWs and FWs.

Depicted socially, the cinematic imaginary lays the foundation for FWs. Queneau’s grasp of burgeoning popular culture and its places—half-completed suburban houses, hardware stores, fairgrounds, fry stands, whorehouses, houseboats, and movie theaters—allows him to create an intermediary world between different types of worlds, a composite world whose ontological status is both assured and assuredly different. Descriptions of movie-going crowds in Un Rude Hiver (937), where the cinema functions as a meeting place for prostitutes,

184 Marie-Claude Cherqui has recently finished compiling such a list (personal communication, October 2007).
children, soldiers, prude matrons, and the staid French bourgeoisie, do more than just establish the setting (Martin, “Salle,” Spectacles 269). At the apex of an imagination freed from constraints and yet bound to the world, the cinema—an early cinema, still connected to its popular roots—acts as an “elective meeting place,” reminiscent of the fairground from which many of its traditions hail (268). Nowhere is the unique status of Queneau’s FWs, vacillating at the periphery of a plethora of worlds, more vividly in evidence than when Quenellian characters go to the movies. The cinema, like dreaming, sustains a pleasure on the borders of everyday life, a “hole’ in the social fabric, a gap which opens on something that is a little bit crazy, a little less approved than what one does the rest of the time.\textsuperscript{185} Though the movies are an accepted part of everyday life, they also open onto other worlds.

“The movie house is more than a new novelistic place, much more than a decor. It is a privileged, fundamental scene for the Quenellian novel,” writes Jean-Pierre Martin (“Salle,” Spectacles 267). The transformations and transactions achieved at the movies bleed into the everyday life of Queneau’s characters. At the movies—even more so at fictional movies—surface and substance become interchangeable: the imagistic narrative and fictional worlds of cinema are intertwined in a more immediate way than the linguistic narrative and fictional worlds of the text. Presence (image) and absence (referent) meet onscreen, one logical endpoint for the Quenellian character caught up in an unending process of (be) coming and going. The fictional character-spectator sees the FW on screen in a different way from the reader—who must make a leap of faith from the words on the page—yet both follow similar processes of

“projection-identification,” by which they become part of another world at the same time that they make that other world more human. Jacques’s mentor Des Cigales succinctly describes this process, “When I see a film like the one we just saw, I transport myself onscreen by a somewhat magical and in any case transcendental act, and I discover myself regaining consciousness of myself as one of the heroes of the story told to us by means of flat but moving images” (Rueil 91). At the movies, both fictional character-spectator and real reader awake to alternate realities and alternate fictions. It is the intentional field’s ability to enable affective and cerebral participation that renders perception and expression reversible, and redefines the ontological status of character and reader at the movies in Queneau. Fictional interaction transcends the sheer materiality of the screen or the text due to the intermingling of consciousnesses. “Projecting” the movie or the text, the spectator or reader creates the space in which “introjectively” to accept that movie or text as significant: “Setting it in motion, I am the apparatus of projection; receiving it, I am the screen” (Metz 72). Through participation, the reader reaches towards the text just as the spectator reaches towards the screen, and, just as does the screen, the text reaches back by requiring his fictional interaction.

188 Lacan’s diagram illustrating how the gaze determines the subject from the exterior demonstrates the underlying intentional, back and forth nature of the movie-watching situation remarked upon by Metz: Concept 121.
Because this interaction is often depicted as real, representations of cinema in Queneau raise particular questions about perception, representation, fictionality, and intentionality. More paradigmatically than in his other novels, *Loin de Rueil* and *Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin* bracket boundaries in order to permit interaction between the inhabitants of one FW (the TAW) and its internal FWs (or SWs): this is to say that the metadiegetic cinema functions as an alternate reality within an already fictional text (Genette, *Narrative* 228). The cinema affords the character-spectator access to another world: the filmic apparatus integrates the spectator in the flux of the film at the same time that it integrates the flux of the film into the spectator’s psychic life (Morin, *Imaginaire* 107). The presence of fiction at the center of fiction undermines the strict borders delimiting various kinds of worlds. For the reader, the character’s symbiotic interaction with the cinema mimics his own interaction with the text on a fictional level. The same intentional flux that allows the reader’s interaction with the text creates fictionality *within* the text. If we pursue Walton’s idea, discussed in Chapter One, by which the reader *fictionally* experiences fictional situations by projecting a fictional self, the true recursivity of the trajectory from NWs to FWs in Queneau becomes apparent. The reader fictionally experiences the fictional experience of a fictional character fictionally experiencing fiction! Intentionality structures the symbiotic relationship between character and projected world in these novels just as it structures the
RW reader’s fictional experience of FWs; intentionality guarantees the possibility of such seemingly impossible (fictional) experiences.

Yet the constraints of fictionality operate in the internal FWs of the fictional text as well (SWs); for example, Jacques, who certainly “knows something about double lives,” is moved to tears by a viewing of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in Loin de Rueil (128). In fact, the grand spiraling biopic of Jacques’s life at the end of Loin de Rueil operates as the biggest constraint of all. Jacques does not break on through to the other side of the screen so much as he is doomed to repeat the actions of his own life as a bidimensional being trapped on screen. His plural self now holds him back; his infinite becoming has turned into a finite progression of becoming himself infinitely: in a tight, flat pattern onscreen; Jacques performs an endless spiral. Just as Brentano and Husserl declared that consciousness had to be consciousness of something, fictionality means that fiction must be fiction of something. Jacques’s fiction, the fantasy of infinite lives, sparked by film, has turned into a fiction whose main goal is quite simply to produce fiction. The free movement of Jacques’s consciousness, which, in actuality, always already expressed itself in a stylized manner, is now represented itself—presented to others—as a fiction. Some of the radical nature of Jacques’s movement among worlds is in fact attenuated by the fact that this movement is contained so neatly on screen at the end of the novel.

Paul’s relationship with the cinema creates the context for his relationship with the movie star once she appears in the Ville Natale. Obsessed with the movies and, in particular, Cécile Haye (Les Temps mêlés)/Alice Phaye (Saint Glinglin), Paul treats going to the movies like receiving a sacrament. He believes that the power of his affect, liberated by the movies, enables him to
reach the faraway movie star. Unlike Jacques, who projects himself onto the movie screen, Paul reaches beyond the screen in order to seize the hybrid being—half-real and half-fictional—of the movie star and bring her down to earth:

That the star did not know me, did that stop my thought from reaching her? How can you suppose that the force of a feeling does not attain its goal, no matter where it is? And didn’t the ideal rapport that I was creating have as much force and value as any rapport established by the spirit between two things separated in space? The violence of imagination established a link between us that she could not escape ...

(Temps, OCII 1030)

Paul’s imagination crosses seemingly impossible boundaries in order to create a link with the actress, whose professional identity is already elastic. In fact, restrictions intensify imaginary interaction: “distance” becomes a “link.” Paul’s love, projected from his seat in the dark theater, even constitutes part of Cécile/Alice’s personality: “Among all the attributes whose interferences composed her personality, you had to count—and among the most important ones, even if unknown by her—my love...” (1030). This passage, written under the sign of intentionality, demonstrates the intermingling of consciousnesses across the unbounded internal fictional worlds of the text. Whereas in Loin de Rueil, the movies call into question the possibility of a homeworld, in Les Temps

189 This passage echoes an autobiographical text by Queneau, Alice Faye au Marigny, which serves as a precursor for Paul’s meditations on Cécile and in which the idea of intentionality comes through more clearly:

And what does my love for AF have to do with all the ideas of these men on the reality of the imagination and all the rest. My love is real, and I am real as well, and she is also real. And the homage that I pay to her is also real...The links that I have created between us, separated as we are by the curving kilometers which lie between Paris and the coast of the Pacific ocean, the links hold up. They are braided with threads of gold, a gold that is not worth the realities of this world. And if over there this woman does not know me—no I have not written to her asking for a signed photograph—however there must still be something in her life like a caress that comes from me. Thoughts do not go long without echoes and love always attains its goal (OCII 1426).

In the autobiographical text, Queneau is more vehement, making reference to Sartre’s work on the imagination (see Jean-Philippe Coen’s note in OCII 1745).
mélés/Saint Glinglin, the movies move first in, then out of this homeworld, as we will discover. In both novels, fictional boundaries are fictionally crossed, resulting in consequences for fictional worlds. Either way, the movement between NWs and FWs is mirrored at the center of the FW of the text, providing a possible stumbling point for the reader as he attempts to get his bearings, as well as a possible roadmap for the kind of text that he is up against.
3. Desire and Plot

As we near the fictional end of our trajectory between NWs and FWs, it becomes increasingly difficult to draw clear-cut lines between the interstitial phenomena linking one segment to the next. As we will soon ascertain, Queneau’s texts often resolve this difficulty by taking up their own beginnings in one way of another. Before we too are swept up in these reframing devices, we need to unravel how desire and plot work to underpin fictional worlds. In Queneau, the specter of desire ultimately produces continual appearance and disappearance, both of characters and, ultimately, of the reader. The link connecting the two sides of the equation—the character inside and the reader outside the pages of the text—is intentionality. An intentional framework allows us to understand the desires of reader and characters as interdependent within fictional space, the space of worlds which function by means of internal and external fields of reference (Harshav 22, 29). Such frames of reference become all the more important when desiring characters give them greater shape and function for both themselves and the reader simply by acting as if they were already there.

In considering the active part played by desire in shaping Queneau’s FWs, it is essential to recall how finely desire and plot are intermeshed in the creation of any fiction. Brooks has claimed that textual desire is the initiatory desire that first provokes the act of reading combined with desire for an end that transformatively stretches across the middle of the text (96). I hope to nuance this claim by understanding desire along intentional lines, as working to connect different types of worlds. Whether the desire of the reader is thwarted or fulfilled, it fuels the creation of FWs. Moreover, in Queneau’s
novels, whose endings complicate the traditional notion of closure, desire does not move the reader from beginning to end, but rather around and through a certain partially textual space (FWs). Highlighting the unique beginnings and ending of complicated FWs, Phelan distinguishes closure, or the way a narrative signals its end, from completeness, or the degree of resolution accompanying closure. Our discussion of FWs bridges the gap between completeness and closure (18).

Brooks’ elaborate psychoanalytic readings of desire in canonical nineteenth-century texts and Bastin’s densely argued studies of the cognitive difficulties presented by Queneau’s texts shift the critical emphasis away from Queneau as author to the intersecting slices of these virtual fictional worlds created between reader and text. Since FWs are much more than the sum of their parts, the reader may miss many of the specifics of Queneau’s novels and yet still grasp the overarching movement of the text. He definitely notices—if he makes it to the end of the novel—that Étienne and the other characters in Le Chiendent decide to erase the novel in which they live. The basic competency of the reader that I have been trying to define in my first three chapters is to have read the text and nothing more. This is where FWs come into being, where the whole matters more than its constituent parts. When I refer to the reader’s desire, I am referring to the fact that the reader keeps reading, not to long-repressed psychoanalytic desires nor to his everyday desires. The desire of Queneau’s characters goes beyond mere want as well. Rather than actively “having” desires, characters often seem passively to be “had by” desire in a more general sense.
Starting from Queneau’s studies under Kojève, whose lectures highlight the humanizing role of the desire for recognition in Hegel’s metaphorical fight to the death between the Master and the Slave, desire serves a crucial function in establishing Queneau’s unique FWs.\textsuperscript{190} Much like reading, which forges FWs out of NWs, the process described by Kojève entails the creation of subjective reality (12-3). Desire energizes the complex web of intentional relations between text and worlds across seemingly impassible boundaries. The desire of the character intersects the reader’s desire by means of the structure of the text, whose plot appears inflected by the characters’ desires at the same time that it lays out their path in black and white. In its simplest form, my argument could be expressed as $\text{desire} + \text{plot} = \text{FWs}$. Just as desire helps Jacques and Paul cross the barrier of the silver screen, desire underlies the progression from text to worlds. Worlds and language depend on the reader’s synthesis: his desire transmogrifies language into NWs and plot into FWs. Plot reassembles the earlier building blocks of both NWs and FWs by acting as a support for the more specific possible FWs that may come into being as a result of the reader’s interaction with the text. The text constitutes a pregnant or latent NW; the interaction of reader and text sparks a NW in progress, which soon extends beyond itself to FWs. As a world, the NW moves beyond the words on the page (the seemingly stable linguistic point of departure that we used as a definition for the NW). Similarly, FWs may depend on plot, but they are not reducible to it. In either case, the creation of worlds requires more than the text: it requires the animating force of desire as a catalyst that nourishes the act of reading, continued reading, and rereading. Reader, character, and text conspire (desire)

to create plot, a higher step towards possible FWs. In contrast with
*actualization*, the first step of fiction by which the reader activates the givens of
the text without yet synthesizing them into a world, acts of reading go beyond
the reader’s basic comprehension of a text and *virtualize* FWs. As I indicated in
Chapter One, *actualization* refers to the construction of the text by the author,
who puts all of the elements into place from the outside, while *virtualization*
refers to the work of the reader, who brings them to life. In this way, the
reader’s desire turns dead singular plots into dynamic plural ones. Highly
dependent on the reader for its vitality, plot meaningfully structures a text’s
transformation into a world. The reader’s interaction with the language of the
text leads to the plot; with plot, the NW is already moving in the direction of
FWs. The desire of the reader, connected to plot, draws power from the desires
operating in the internal FWs of the text, just as the LWs of the text are only
*lived* thanks to the reader.

How do these desires bring FWs to life through plot? As Brooks has
astutely pointed out, plot and desire are caught up in one another by way of
their relationship to the reader: “Desire is the wish for the end, for fulfillment,
but fulfillment must be delayed so that we can understand it in relation to
origin and desire itself” (111). Although Brooks might overprivilege the end in
regard to the rest of the text, his point about desire being tied up with the
reader’s wish for answers in the form of a conclusion is a good one. Nowhere is
this claim more applicable than in the work of Queneau, where this process
might be confusing, complicated, or even highlighted, displayed, or enacted
within his novels. In Queneau, this self-conscious process takes aim at the
reader. “The end-point of desire satisfies and kills desiring...the character (or
reader) who has a satisfactory end in sight is derealized in ontological terms, for he or she is reduced to an economic factor with an essentially fixed meaning in the shaping of the static and dead plot of inanimate desire” (212), argues Docherty. Sustained readerly desire, even if it results from irritation with the text, keeps both reader and text alive, revealing some key structures of the reading experience already in play and iterating them on a higher level. Difficult texts lead the reader to FWs in different ways, which is why they are a good place to start when talking about how reading works. In claiming that the reader’s “transindividual and intertextually determined desire as a reader” trumps his individual desire, Brooks highlights the overdetermined deep structure of desire at work during the act of reading (112). It is desire that moves the reader between the different points of the spectrum between NWs and FWs that I have laid out in these past two chapters.

Desire plays a particularly important role in the LWs of the characters of Queneau’s novels. It rules their fantasies, desire for recognition, and relationship with the reader. To begin my discussion of desire, in section a, I present a brief reading of Jacques as a model “desire-er” in Loin de Rueil. In section b, I examine the various ways in which desire acts as a catalyst for the appearance and disappearance of characters in Le Chiendent. In section c, I approach how, in Le Chiendent, desire for recognition, desire for someone else’s objects of desire (envy), and the desire of the reader cross paths throughout the text. While the first third of this section focuses on Loin de Rueil and the second two thirds on Le Chiendent, I also use some material from Journal Intime, seeing as young Sally’s quest for knowledge—and subsequent deflation—
resembles Étienne’s. The issue of desire prepares and crosses into that of appearance and disappearance (part 4); the notions are complementary.
a. Self and Other: Actors and Extras

“I am not an actor! I am only an extra” (Rueil 153)

“A vulgar extra, that is what I agreed to be even though I knew the great actor that I was supposed to be one day…” (Rueil 193)

(Jacques l’Aumône)

The case of Jacques supplies us with a transition from the role of the cinema as a nodal point on the trajectory between NWs and FWs to the function of desire, which animates internal plots and the FWs to which they contribute. Jacques’s desires thrust him onto the movie screen and Paul’s desires pull a movie star down off of the screen. In both instances, desire allows characters to cross intrafictional boundaries. The principal difference lies in the effect of these transactions: Paul remains whole (in fact, one could say that Cécile/Alice completes him), while Jacques’s interaction with the cinema undermines the idea of an integral self. Paul disappears completely from the text while Jacques remains visible within it. Jacques’s fragmented desire has great consequences for the FWs which involve the reader as well. Jacques’s desire materializes all of its objects at the same time that it fragments its subject (Jacques), causing his fantasies of dissection: “Sometimes, I picture myself being dissected” (158). In Bachelard’s words, “Reverie idealizes the object and the dreamer at the same time” (49). During a showing at the Rueil Palace, when the face of the cowboy hero is revealed, Jacques is “not at all surprised to recognize in him Jacques l’Aumône” (88). Jacques’s inner state of fragmentation matches the multiplicity of his world so well that it is impossible to distinguish which causes the other. Jacques resembles nothing so much as the fragmented ego posited by Deleuze...
as an intersection of decentered multiplicities: “...the multiplicity towards which he is inclined at all costs is the continuation of another multiplicity that works on him from the inside. So much so that the ego is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities.”

Jacques’s ego is in itself unstable; in Deleuze’s terms, it is merely the transition from one pluralistic world to another. One need only refer to the list of Jacques’s professions (see page 99) to see how Jacques epitomizes—and goes far beyond—the notion of the split subject, even identifying with a dual character like Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde (128).

Jacques displays no discomfort at finding himself onscreen because there is no originary world from which he hails. All of his worlds, identities, and experiences are fragmented and woven together by his imagination. Jacques’s many lives imply many Jacques as well, even one who pretends to be a stroke victim: “Suddenly this being became Jacques L’Aumône, and the latter felt so forcefully struck by this identification that he sat down on a couch facing the old man and started repeating along with him, ‘Doing great, me, doing great me’ just to see what it was like” (96). In consequence, Jacques “sees behind him the whole course of his life in a new way” (96). In pondering his metamorphosis, Jacques meditates on the notion of the other as character, wondering if he will ever find anything so pleasant as imitating the stricken old man (97). This babbling, repetitive “fallen watchdog” (the concierge’s husband) is a momentary case study for the young Jacques. In Loin de Rueil, as in many

of Queneau’s novels, “life” already plays the part of fiction, and desire splits
fiction into fictions.

Rather than representing a Hegelian sage in retreat from the world, as
critics have claimed (see notes 6 and 8), Jacques instead shows what happens
when desire runs rampant across worlds, affecting the FWs where character
and reader meet. Even during his ascetic phase, desire holds sway over
Jacques, who covets childhood friend Dominique Magnin, posing the question,
“Why couldn’t wisdom have a feminine face?” (159). Hired as an extra, Jacques
informs Dominique, “You cannot stop yourself from wanting to seem” (153).
Consequently, he refuses to take a dive in the second round of a boxing match
filmed for the movie, as required by the script. Instead, he flattens his
opponent, who “did not look like a champion, even an imaginary one” (162).
The line about the “imaginary champion” reminds the reader that this is a
fictional boxing match in a fictional text at the same time that the reader is
pulled deeper into the microplot at hand. By assuming that Jacques’s boxing
skills are just a leftover from his boxing career, described in Chapter Three and
often referred to in later chapters by other characters in the novel, the reader
grants a greater sense of reality to this world, as opposed to that of the movie in
which he is acting. The desires of textual reality (the boxing career) would seem
to trump illusion (the role as an extra combined with the annoyance that the
other actor did not fit his role). However, this reading conveniently forgets that
Jacques’s original boxing career is just as fictional as everything else in the
novel; our world champion ends up retired in Texas, growing cotton, smoking
opium, and perishing in a shipwreck only to be transformed into a ghost (100-
101)! The key to Loin de Rueil is the lack of a homeworld from which to make
consistent judgments about character; Nina Bastin summarizes this nicely in writing that the “subject-matter of the novel centres around a general pursuit of ‘otherness,’ the construction by the characters of a space which is resolutely not textual reality” (213). What Bastin neglects to mention is that this refusal of textual reality is the textual reality of Queneau’s text; singular textual reality has morphed into plural textual realities, moving the novel closer to the collaborative FWs end of the spectrum between NW and FWs.

The word “fictional” fits Jacques better than the word “imaginary,” often invoked by critics, as it takes into account the reader’s possible participation in FWs. After all, Jacques’s “imagination” is only an extension of his LW as character, and this LW is only a small part of the overall plurality of FWs at work here. Jacques's world-creating and world-destroying desire cuts across all possible FWs and undermines the possibility of a central fictional homeworld. Akin to the flickering worlds projected on the movie screen, the “worlding” and “unworlding” movement of Jacques’s desires proves more important than the worlds in which they result. These desires animate the plot, which opens onto shifting worlds of appearance and disappearance that extend beyond the text. The fact that Jacques ends up in a movie commented on by his family and friends does not mean that he has escaped their world. Jacques has certainly moved into a different plane of being, but he remains trapped in a two-dimensional representation—a movie (and a newspaper, to boot!)—forever repeating his previous actions. Moreover, in a knowing wink at the reader, by means of which he assumes responsibility for his part in creating these FWs, Queneau gives the name of the production company responsible for the film: the Ramon Curnough Company (194, my italics). Jacques’s desire may split the
world of *Loin de Rueil* into a series of worlds, but it does not have the last word. The association of a homonym for Raymond Queneau with the production of a film whose story mimics the plot of the novel, as well as Des Cigales’s possible status as fictional author of the text that the reader holds in his hands—the second to last line of the novel is, “He puts his manuscript away in a drawer that he locks with a key” (195)—conveys the repetitive and circular effect of such desire on FWs, as well as the author’s part in setting up these textual worlds.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Aside from the end of *Les Enfants du Limon*, which I discussed in Chapters One and Two, suggestions regarding the author abound in Queneau’s novels. For two more examples, see Gabriel’s speech in the middle of *Zazie dans le métro*, “All this story is just the reverie of a reverie, the dream of a dream, barely more than a delirium typed up by an idiotic novelist (oh! Excuse me)” (*OCIII* 619) and the end of *Le Vol d’Icare*, after Icarus’s mortal fall from the sky, “HUBERT (closing his manuscript on Icarus): Everything took place as predicted; my novel is finished” (*OCIII* 1359).
b. The Role of Desire in *Le Chiendent*

Étienne: “Yes, it’s a desire that I had just like that” (21)

Faced with a carnivalesque plot, experimentations with language, humor, different kinds of philosophical discourse, and a fantastical dénouement, the reader might miss how intricately the web of desire underlies the interlocking worlds of *Le Chiendent*. Here, desire inspires a whole cast of characters. Three types of fictional desire coalesce: the desire for recognition, the interwoven tapestry of fantastic desires, and the desire of the reader as self-consciously manifested within the text. The complicated plot of *Le Chiendent* occupies a unique place in the panoply of Queneau’s “untellable” tales, necessitating summary, and such a summary strains at the limits of narrative (and, of necessity, involves some interpretation). Sections i, ii, and iii will deal with an extended analysis of desire in *Le Chiendent*.

The first act of the novel involves bank employee Étienne Marcel’s newfound attention to the world and his concomitant “rapid three-dimensional development,” which is predicated upon the recognition of a rich young man, Pierre Le Grand (19). Desirous of this recognition, Étienne develops in direct consequence of it, questioning the world around him in a way that recalls both Cartesian doubt and Husserlian reduction. His character grows in consistency—like Sally during her quest for sexual knowledge and experience in *Journal Intime*, he passes from “discovery to discovery” (*Journal* 46)—as Pierre observes him. The two become fast friends and spend time at a working class suburban bistro, where they discover that Narcense, an unemployed young man who has been following Alberte, Étienne’s wife (and, unbeknownst to
Étienne, also an acquaintance of Pierre’s) plans on hanging Étienne’s son. (The latter, Théo, had earlier noticed Narcense ogling his mother, as well as masturbating in front of the family villa.) Pierre gives Narcense a ride to the location of the planned hanging—instead, Narcense makes a failed attempt at hanging himself—without informing Étienne. Étienne’s engagement with the world results in a state of nearly continual astonishment at the duplicitous nature of the world’s conflicting appearances.

The second act of the novel follows from the massive lack of communication created by the interlocking and projected desires of the characters. The sister of the bistro’s owner, Mme Cloche, soon remarks the “bourgeois” presence of Étienne and Pierre at the bistro. Inspired by a newspaper article, she assumes that they plan on stealing money—whose existence she imagines—from the shack of a destitute old man, Père Taupe, who lives behind the bistro. This supposition starts a chain of events and machinations that eventually leads to the marriage of Père Taupe and the waitress Ernestine, and her subsequent mysterious death. Étienne goes on vacation only to discover that his new sense of wonder at the world disappears without Pierre at his side. An evil dwarf, Bébé Toutout, invades Étienne’s house; Étienne is soon drafted to take part in France’s war with the Etruscans. At the front, he meets up with Mme Cloche’s other brother, Saturnin, a philosophizing hotel clerk, who also took part in the ephemeral “treasure hunt.”

The third act takes place as the novel finishes; the characters directly address the “dear, dear reader” and their own status as language-based beings (233). With his unfinished house in the Parisian suburbs now a brothel run by Bébé Toutout (who denounces Narcense for desertion), Étienne, Saturnin, and
Mme Cloche, transformed into the goddess Miss Aulini, decide, during the final scene of the novel, to erase the whole thing, upon which the novel prepares to begin anew.
i. Recognition

Étienne’s desire for recognition shapes the amorphous world of the text into a unique FW governed by appearance and disappearance. His attempts to understand the surrounding world leave him insecure and in need of Pierre’s questionable guidance. Étienne begins to suspect the shifting subjective nature of the world around him, which he has so far taken for granted. From the moment he sees some plastic ducks floating in a waterproof hat in a shop window, he progresses through the stages of a joyous metamorphosis: from a “silhouette” (3) to a “flat being” (6), “So and So” (8), a “being of some consistency,” a “being of some reality,” “a being of choice” (11), a “being of singular form,” a “being of lesser reality” (19), a “being of reduced consistency” (23), a “being of minimal reality”, “this bourgeois” (25), and, finally, “Étienne” (27). His changes, predicated upon the physical presence of Pierre, first as an observer and later as a friend, belong to the realm of phenomenological reduction sustained by desire more so than Descartes, in my opinion. (Of course, Descartes was one of Husserl’s largest influences, so this is not an Either/Or proposition by any stretch of the imagination!) Husserl’s phenomenological reduction—after all, Queneau labeled Le Chiendent a “phenomenological novel” (OCII 1459)—calls into question presuppositions about reality, a path followed by Étienne, who questions everything from his relationships with other people to his relationships with words. One of Queneau’s other characters caught up in the process of becoming, Sally, whose desire for sexual knowledge and experience in Journal Intime shapes the world around her in a radical way, experiences a similar progression from “tons of things that seem obscure to me and that I never suspected before” to ephemeral
states of illumination: “...multitudes of things, of facts, of acts, of words, were suddenly becoming clear...Associations were establishing themselves between gestures, sentences, objects...” (63). An ideal reader, Sally activates networks of associations contained within a text—and here, she differs from Étienne, of which she is herself the author: “Everything comes together, everything is explained— or at least, that’s how it seems to me” (92). Étienne and Sally’s steep learning curve sets the stage for an equally steep fall from grace.

Étienne’s search is less particular than Sally’s; with no specific goal in mind, he gains consistency through a kind of guided “disorientation.” Étienne’s disorientation allows him to begin to transcend the world around him. Étienne leaves behind the social world of the Depression and the limit space of the suburbs; although, as several critics have pointed out, the outlying suburbs geographically—not to mention the fact that his house is only half-built—embody the other boundary-crossing aspects of the novel.194 His new state of mind also allows Étienne—to great excitement, and then great chagrin—to escape the world of the text as text. When Pierre disappears for a brief period of time, Étienne’s begins to disappear as well. Without Pierre, “an involuntary actor of his transformation,” “an attentive and vigilant spectator” (42-3), Étienne feels diminished:

He did not reproach the world with anything, because the world only existed in such a diminished form that it could barely be said to exist...The universe, squeezed like a lemon, appeared to him now only as

a contemptible rind, without attraction, like an infinitely thin skin to which he could not (did not want or know how to) adhere (116).

Appearance and disappearance represent a crucial aspect of any work of fiction; what differentiates Queneau’s FWs from those of other authors is the rapid-cycling pattern followed by appearance and disappearance. For instance, Pierre’s return and confession that he drove Narcense to the woods to hang Étienne’s son quickly revive Étienne’s dormant connection to the world: “This revelation shook him up. He believed that he knew and he did not know. The world, like a game of hide and seek; once again, he had this vision. Was life a continual surprise?” (123). For much of the novel, the trajectory in and out of being is unpredictable.

As Étienne solidifies as a character, Pierre affirms his metaphysical meanderings without argument, only stopping to guide him away from skepticism, “a dangerous obstacle to your meditation” (136). Questioning the possibility of knowledge, after all, would undermine Étienne’s progression, which is based on interrogating habit and appearances, not the ability to know in the first place. Asking Bill Clinton’s question more than 60 years beforehand, Étienne wonders, at the end of a series of questions on identity, “Does the word to be have a meaning?” (124). Pierre labels this “great progress in metaphysics” (124). Shortly thereafter, Étienne asks himself one of the key philosophical questions of the novel, “Why am I not Narcense?” Without an assuring response from Pierre, he “worried about the meaning of such a question” (135). This question presages that of the diners at Ernestine’s wedding banquet—the novel’s greatest disappearing act—once they learn of her imminent death: “Ernestine, who is she anyway?” (169). Just as the reader needs some mystery to push him to continue reading, the unraveling of these
characters’ worlds occurs as a result of losing the ability to ask such questions; paradoxically, asking doubt-ridden questions fills out the contours of their worlds. This is why, as we shall see, the novel’s ultimate moment of doubt invokes the novel as novel, and relaunches the whole process for character and reader.

Pierre’s interventions in Étienne’s life definitively change its course; it is he who reveals to Étienne the nature of Mme Cloche’s suspicions regarding their supposed status as international bandits planning the robbery of the old man. Étienne’s question about Narcense and identity is closely linked to Pierre’s revelations; the chain of events and appearances that constitute Étienne as Étienne through a reflection on otherness has already started. Unbeknownst to Étienne, Pierre plays a part in activating various sections of this chain. Étienne’s desire for knowledge and enlightenment becomes caught up with the desires of others, who have misidentified Étienne’s desire as something else, and now act on it. While most of these points have been made before in varying fashion, they deserve to be made again in order to demonstrate the complexity of the long and convoluted trajectory between NWs and FWs in Queneau.

A close reading of the novel strongly suggests that Pierre, whom Simonnet has called a “virtuality” (116) and linked to the personage of the author, is the character in the thirteenth section of Chapter Five, who tries on the masks of a gypsy and a white magician, before settling for the “usual appearance” (Pierre) (180-2). Moreover, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, the thirteenth section of each chapter is situated “outside” the rest of the narrative, as Pierre most certainly is as well (65)!

Linked to the troublesome Gnostic God
who interferes with life on earth\textsuperscript{195}, this character discusses the “big secret” of death, and declares, “Like ourselves, we erase ourselves” (180). Furthermore, like this character, Pierre accompanies characters to their “fatal dissolution” (180), making an entrance at a key juncture of the novel in order to solidify Étienne’s place at the center of the chain of earthy desires, telling Étienne, “The strangest thing is that this woman [Mme Cloche] is not crazy and that it really seems like a million francs would be the inevitable consequence of our machinations” (135). Pierre even attempts to buy Père Taupe’s door on his own (195). However, the key to this scene, in which Pierre acts as the link between Étienne’s own desire for self-actualized recognition and other characters’ desire for money, is his next statement, “But how could we look like we were preparing this swindle; that is what appears very singular to me” (135). Whether or not the treasure is real—and Pierre’s later behavior suggests that he thinks it is—what piques his interest above all is the game of shifting appearances. While Pierre disappears early, eloping with the maid Catherine just as war breaks out in Europe (220-3), Étienne consciously opts for “final dissolution.” Like Saturnin attentively observing the diners at Ernestine’s wedding reception, Étienne’s musings on the hidden nature of the world’s appearances eventually demonstrate for him that, “the full dish hid an empty dish like being hides nothingness” (152). The obverse, though, is also true; it is, as we have seen, the starting point for characters such as Étienne. The emptiness of the

\textsuperscript{195} Queneau studied Gnosticism with Henri-Charles Puech at the École Pratique des Hautes Études from 1933-9. See Puech’s “Phénoménologie de la Gnose” and “La Gnose et le temps,” \textit{En quête de la Gnose I: La Gnose et le temps et autres essais} (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 185-270. Queneau’s readings of spiritual literature, particularly René Guenon, have been well-documented and are, indeed, a point of contention between Queneau scholars. See Claude Debon’s article, “Queneau saisi par les agélastes,” \textit{Doukiplédonktan} 217-227, André Blavier’s notes in \textit{Les Temps mêlés} 45/46 (1990), and Emmanuël Souchier’s \textit{Raymond Queneau} (Paris: Seuil, 1991) for some points of contention.
everyday world and its objects can often assume an immense importance, though without the intense emphasis on the object itself, as often happened with the surrealists. Instead, we encounter more of an emphasis on the intersubjective chain of desire of which the finder was already a part without knowing it.
ii. Desires of the Other

The second type of desire ruling over this universe is best understood in a Lacanian sense, where desire signifies desire of the other.\textsuperscript{196} As Lacan—and, more importantly for Queneau, Kojève—argue, desire entails the desire of the other, meaning, in French, not only desire for him, but also desire for what he desires. Desire for the desire of the other might entail his objects of desire, but the very nature of desire makes it hard to determine what these objects are. In Queneau, ineffable desire goes hand in hand with the multiple and tricky nature of appearances, which are the sole means by which characters can judge one another. In \textit{Le Chiendent}, this kind of desire raises its Hydra-like cluster of heads when Étienne sees the sign next to of the railroad tracks advertising French fries, and conceives of his plan to visit the bistro (19). Once there, his simple desire to eat French fries becomes “a truly extraordinary project” (19), born of a new way of looking at his environment—”the ideal of a fetus” (77)—is ensnared in the desires of others, giving the “adventure of the Taupic treasure” its initial impetus (209). In this way, Étienne’s real desire for French fries eventually fans the flames of Mme Cloche’s fantasies involving young gigolos, champagne, foie gras, caviar, jewels, cakes, and big cars (90). “The fries gave me a new appearance,” declares Étienne when he realizes that how his presence at the bistro has contributed to Mme Cloche’s suspicions (187). Étienne’s appearance, the desire it supposedly reveals, and the desires that it then creates instigate a chain reaction of events because desire and recognition depend on one another.

Once Pierre, the guarantor of this symbolic order, disappears, Étienne’s newfound sense of wonder at the “continual surprise” of world disappears as well, killed by the same doubt that originally sparked it: “In turning his head, he thought that he saw behind him something like happiness” (220). Étienne now understands—and this becomes abundantly clear in the last scene of the novel—that his LW relies upon a web of desire that entraps more than the individual, a web in which he is more and more tightly wound as the text arrives at its end: “The series of incidents that led him from a waterproof hat to a dummy door seemed like a marvelous adventure to him; and the time that this adventure took up, a blissful time” (220). The end of *Le Chiendent* does not close the door on LWs still in session; the LWs of *Le Chiendent* terminate, for the time being, along with the end of the text; its FWs continue on by tying ending to beginnings, and moving beyond the worlds of the text to those of the reader.

In other words, although Étienne’s LW depends on the novel in a radically strict way—his becoming occurs at pace with the reader of the novel. Étienne alone cannot sustain a FW: “But, since he still doubted appearances, he doubted, and he understood that never, never had he been so unhappy” (220). By doubting the world, Étienne discovers it, but by doubting the happiness that this doubt has given him, Étienne disappears from the world and from the text. At the end of *Pierrot Mon ami*, Pierrot undergoes a similar experience, contrasting the standard detective novel with the novel he has just lived through, “a novel so devoid of artifice that it was barely possible to know if there had been an enigma to solve or if there had not been one” (1227). In texts that animate complex LWs rather than provide the illusion of fully fleshed out
lives, novels themselves are a reference point; they provide an appropriate way of gauging experience. While the standard detective novel (*roman à énigmes*) resembles an algebraic problem, whose pleasure resides in the solution of the very puzzle that produces pleasure in the first place, Pierrot’s pleasure comes from spectacle, and his “novel” leads nowhere (in spectacular fashion). The combination of the enigma with the lack of a solution ensures that the desire of Queneau’s rereader comes into play as much as the desires of his characters in order to create FWs. In the case of both Étienne and Pierrot, a reluctant worldbuilder realizes towards the end of the novel that the recent animation of the world was his own doing as much as the world’s!

For Lacan, the paranoid structure of human knowledge revolves around jealousy; the subject relies on the other for his own unity as subject (*Psychoses* 39). Consequently, the inferences made by other characters about Étienne end up creating Étienne as a subject. Every ego reveals an alter ego: the object of desire is unstable and unknowable because it comes from others. Thus the classification of *Le Chiendent* as a “treasure hunt” misses the point. The buried treasure is nowhere to be found; the hunt itself constitutes the characters through a dynamic series of combinations and oppositions (Pierre and Étienne; Mme Cloche and Ernestine; Ernestine and Taupe; Saturnin and Narcense; Étienne and Saturnin, etc). These characters all desire recognition; at the same time, they create nothing but misrecognitions. Mme Cloche imagines that the object of Étienne and Pierre’s desire must be a hidden treasure squirreled away by Taupe based on certain appearances. In this case, her projections are based on Étienne’s clothing, a newspaper article about hidden treasure, and her nephew’s reports, “He looks like a sir (*monsieur*). He must work in an office”
In this way, she stokes the fires of her own desire for the same object, forgetting in the process that she created this object. By linking herself to Étienne’s discovery of the world, Mme Cloche’s attempt at blackmail—first forcing Ernestine to marry the old man and, when Ernestine dies, dressing up as a priest and demanding his money for the construction of a new suburban (!) cathedral—are bound to fail—and because Étienne’s project is linked to Pierre, it is destined to fail as well. The chain reaction of intersubjective desire is powerful enough that it reaches back to Étienne and Pierre, who should know better than to get caught up in something they have inadvertently created (77). When the adventure disappears, as he soon will, Étienne, like Pierrot (Pierrot 1226-7), feels disappointed when confronted with the memory of “something like happiness” (220). The desire for recognition, quickly entwined in the desires of others, brings these FWs to their apex, from which they can only decline.
iii. Desire(s) of the Reader

Finally, the desire of the reader comes into play in a very specific way at the end of *Le Chiendent*. The drunken rant of Saturnin, a writer as well as a concierge, during the Franco-Etruscan war explicitly addresses itself to the “dear, dear reader,” invoking his desire in contrast to the soon-to-be filled with regret reader driven on only in hopes of reaching the end (233-234). Congratulating the reader on arriving at page 233 of the novel, Saturnin teases him about the novel’s difficulty: “It is possible that a few readers, simple NCOs or corporals, have managed to make it here, desirous to instruct themselves and avid to comprehend” (233). Admitting the part played by the reader’s desire in overcoming the hindrances of the text, Saturnin then points out to the “dear reader” that his work is almost done: “Look at the page number on the top right and compare it to the last page number; well then, there’s not much left to read, right?” (233). Saturnin’s harangue, coming as it does a few pages before the characters decide to erase a world they now understand as text, directly associates the desire of the reader with the appearance and disappearance of FWs, as well as contrasts the reader making a headlong dash for the end with the rereader:

Some will be very satisfied. I can see them from here, the pretenders, the lazy ones, those who are already rubbing their hands together because it will soon be done. You will regret it...Then to imagine to myself that there are others who will continue to read, who continue to read. No, it’s true. Come here, against my heart, my children, so that I can hug you. You want to continue? But go for it! Continue! Forward! Forward! Courage! (233-4)

The choice of continued reading dominates Queneau’s novels, where endings often frame beginnings: while the readers are filled with regret, the rereaders’ desire sustains them beyond the linear limits of the text.
Understood through the lens of the writer Saturnin’s apostrophe to the reader, the recognition Étienne demands devolves as much from this reader as from Pierre Le Grand and the other characters of the novel. In fact, when asked, Pierre rejects the profession of novelist in order to choose a less precise condition; he ambiguously qualifies both Étienne and himself as “character[s]” (18). In order for Étienne to strain at the limits of character, he and Pierre must occupy precisely such a middle ground between author and character. In keeping with the intersubjective makeup of desire in the LWs of this novel—and as we have already seen in regard to Ernestine—Étienne is not the only character to disappear. The Franco-Etruscan war spares two Belhôtel siblings as well: Miss Aulini (formerly Mme Cloche) and Saturnin. The three plot their own demise in a way that again takes into account the desire and consciousness of the presence of the reader:

“— What book? Asked the two errant marshals.
— Well, this one. This one where we are now, that repeats what we say as we say it and that follows us and tells us, a real ink blotter that someone has plastered onto our lives.
— That’s another bizarre story, that, said Saturnin. We create ourselves in time and the book grabs you at the same time with its little fly’s feet” (245, my italics).197

Understanding the world as text and the text as world, they decide to “deliterature-ate” (littératurer) all of it in order to escape from fiction itself. Miss Aulini/Mme Cloche’s continued anger at having been taking in by the hunt for the Taupic treasure now expresses itself as a metacommentary on fiction.

“What is infuriating is that what happened is exactly what is written all along,

197 In the original text, Queneau has reversed the central syllables of “fly” and “feet,” leaving the reader to synthesize pattes de mouche out of paches de moutte. The manipulation of the text only serves to underline Saturnin’s point about characters as language-based entities, as well as Longre’s claim that the theatrical reader-spectator focuses as much on the language of the text as what that language might represent—all the while being absorbed enough by the story to miss such manipulation occasionally (see page 96).
even right now. Oh shit!” (246) she exclaims, unable to put her finger on the
links between words and worlds. Attempting to demonstrate their autonomy,
these inky beings use what power they still hold to set the clock back to page
one.
4. Appearance and Disappearance

Appearance and disappearance in Queneau’s novels, particularly *Le Chiendent*, *Loin de Rueil*, *Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin*, and *Journal Intime*, reveal something about the autonomy of FWs at the same time as their dependence on the RW of the reader for virtualization. The study of the role of the character in Queneau leads to conclusions about appearance and disappearance. However, the scale of this transformation dwarfs the character; it involves Queneau’s FWs, which take into account the role of the reader and his transformations.

What happens after the end of the text? Although we examined the constitutive links between Étienne’s disappearance, desire, and the reader in the previous section, disappearance structures Queneau’s FWs in other ways, even suggesting the possibility of a fictional “afterlife” beyond the bounds of the text. This afterlife organizes the text, setting up a kind of preontological void out of which characters seem to emerge and into which they seem to disappear. While Jacques, onscreen, eternally repeats the actions of a life imbued with imaginary power by the cinema, the last lines of *Le Chiendent* send both reader and characters back to the first. In *Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin* and *Journal Intime*, Paul and Sally disappear into lives of married banality once they find what they are looking for, whether it is the movie star, in Paul’s case, or sexual experience, in Sally’s. Unless one counts his appearance in *Saint Glinglin* as Paul Nabonide, Paul Kougard is never seen again, but Sally makes her triumphant, argumentative return in the preface to her complete works, disputing many of the author’s claims about her and demonstrating that FWs stretch beyond the text and leave it subject to revision. These depictions of
disappearance give the lie to the illusion that the novel frames an ordered world already in progress, where what takes place before and after the text is easily projected based on the text. Appearance and disappearance demonstrate that, just as the act of reading ignites the transcendence of NWs by FWs, this same act transcends FWs in their status as FWs. The suggestion that FWs stretch beyond the text (and beyond themselves) in this manner is one of Queneau’s most significant contributions to literature.

The appearing and disappearing acts enacted in Queneau’s fiction help us to move beyond creation myths about the author. Is *Le Chiendent* based on Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* or rather J.W. Dunne’s book on dreams, *An Experiment with Time* (1927)? To which real movies do the movies that Jacques sees correspond? Can we identify the relevant strains of anthropology at work in *Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin*? Going beyond these sorts of questions allows us to treat even Sally’s character development, largely presented as humorous, as inflected by global phenomena at work in Queneau’s FWs. In this way, the appearing and disappearing acts of characters underlie Queneau’s FWs, which reach beyond linguistic experimentation, beyond the plot, to the reader, who reaches beyond the plot, beyond linguistic experimentation, to FWs. The Quenellian text demarcates a brief flash of being, a corporeal virtualization of both reader and character, where each strives to conquer the incorporalinity of the void outside of the text. When Étienne, Jacques, Paul, and Sally begin to fade away, they shape FWs as much as when they come into being. At the same time, the reader follows a similar trajectory of rapid inflation and deflation. The material end of the text (i.e. the last page) does not close the reader out of its FWs. Rather than presenting a solid collection of intertwined
LWs in a permanent central FW, Queneau’s FWs themselves are appearance and disappearance. Beyond the reader’s explicit grasp, they continue the dynamic of his interaction with the text. In the following two sections, I will take a closer look at appearance and disappearance in Queneau.
a. Be Careful What Your Wish For: Desire and its Fulfillment

“It is when I lose life as man understands it that I attain the object of my search.”

In *Saint Glinglin*, Pierre Nabonide makes the above statement in the midst of his reflections on the great chain of consciousness, as it begins in marine life and works its way up to humans. As he points out, though, he only begins to approach the lowest forms of consciousness by leaving his own. In Queneau, disappearance follows fast upon the heels of the character that has found what he is looking for. Lacan’s comments on the non-linear workings of desire and Zizek’s notion of the structure of the sublime object provide a good way of understanding what happens to these FWs when the desire-inducing tension (or tension-inducing desire) of their plots is resolved. These models work to approximate some features of the narratives in question, as well as the more global structure of fiction as symbolic discourse—in no way am I making claims about their general validity outside of fiction.

The act of desire changes the relationship between desiring subject and desired object. When Paul, in *Les Temps mêlés/Saint Glinglin*, watches Cécile/Alice’s movies, he gains sympathy for something more than her role (1028). Moving beyond the “hypocrisy” of this role, he reaches the movie star “herself,” caring so little about the fiction on screen that he routinely leaves before the movie ends. Paul turns “she who was going to disappear” (1028) into

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200 See Chapter Two for more information on the genesis of *Les Temps mêlés* and *Saint Glinglin.*
what Zizek, drawing on Lacan’s ideas about desire circling its goal in lieu of achieving it directly, calls a sublime object. For Lacan, desire never attains its supposed goal because, related to sublimation, it goes beyond the fulfillment of a biological drive (Concepts 186). For Lacan and Zizek, there exists a lack at the center of the subject around which the subject constructs his being; Mme Cloche’s baseless suppositions about Étienne work quite well as an example here. While not intrinsically sublime, an object elevated to the status of the lack becomes a sublime object; Père Taupe’s door is one such object (206).

According to Zizek: “The sublime object is an object which cannot be approached too closely: if we get too near it, it loses its sublime features and becomes a vulgar ordinary object” (17). When the object elevated by the character reveals itself to be an ordinary object after all, the character disappears from the text. Thus Narcense and Saturnin hack Père Taupe’s door into pieces when they realize it is does not fit any doorway to hidden treasure, and the old man’s disappearance is almost commensurate with that of his door (218). Elevated to the place of the sublime object by the characters in the novel, the door now returns to its status as an everyday object, and the characters along with it. To stay in place, the object pursued by the subject should retain its imaginary, lost character; for Lacan, desire and reality exist in two different orbits (Ethique 65; Concepts 123). When desire and reality cross paths, the subject “passes to the act,” a process even more fascinating in fiction, as the notion of textual reality is quite different from that of everyday reality (even if we accept the Lacanian idea that discourse about reality is structured along the lines of fiction). For a fiction that concerns itself with the constant transgression of barriers, the passage à l’acte (passage to the act),
originally proposed by Freud, clarifies the shifts that occur in Queneau’s FWs when both character and reader are suddenly faced with disappearance. The \textit{passage à l’acte} constitutes a radical step for the subject, who steps of the stage of his fantasy and into the world.\footnote{Lacan, “Passage à l’acte et \textit{Acting out},” \textit{Angoisse} 135-153.} Confronted with the movie poster of Cécile/Alice, Paul tears it down “in order to make of it an image of an image; I recreated a reality for myself alone” (1029). In Queneau, the fictional iteration of fiction (Cécile/Alice’s movies and her movie poster) can produce a false sense of reality that may materialize—even in person, as Cécile/Alice does—but only later to disappear. When we combine the idea of the \textit{passage à l’acte} with Genette’s ideas on \textit{metalepsis}, the crossing of representational levels within a work of art, we observe how an overly close confrontation with the object of desire itself precedes a shift between the levels of what is imaginary and what is real, a process here mediated by the movie screen. Stepping off stage into an underlying reality means disappearing from the game of the text.

By returning Paul’s previously unrequited love, Cécile/Alice tumbles from the exalted position of movie star, a contrast made more than evident by Paul’s lamentations about living in the countryside and the starry register of his vocabulary when pining away for her: “My mother the earth, I am abandoning you; my father the sky is spangled” (\textit{Temps} 1033). The personal, familial identity she gains in the Ville Natale, the everyday identity that usually escapes the movie star, is anathema to her stardom (\textit{Gl"{u}nglin} 203). Paul’s speeches to Cécile/Alice highlight her transition from an image or “phantasmagoria” to a reality endowed with a body. The two lovers achieve banality in declaring their love to one another like two characters in a movie: “It is you that I love,
yourself, in your body and in your heart and in your soul” (1071). Their volatile happiness results from the impossible collusion of worlds. Having a body—fictional or not—also means being able not to have one; as Ernestine discovers in Le Chiendent, incarnation means eventual disappearance. During her deathbed speech, Ernestine laments the disappearance of the “little voice that talks in your head” and “all the body you feel living and everything that you can do with it,” posing the question, “If I don’t have a body anymore, how can I say that it is still me?” (172). In fact, Ernestine remains the most pure case of disappearance in Queneau’s novels; driven to marry Taupe by Mme Cloche’s desire for the non-existent treasure, her death is never explained (despite Mme Cloche’s paranoid fantasies about Pierre and Étienne as murderers). But her disappearance is explainable; it is directly connected to the web of desires stretching out from the moment that Étienne decides to stop in at the bistro for some fries to the mutual decision of the characters to end the novel. Queneau’s characters, even the more self-conscious ones, often seem to forget that their inner states produce outer actions.

Paul, now happy, disappears after the star Cécile/Alice accepts her mundane, terrestrial role as his wife, “a star that appeared right here” (242). In fact, Paul’s final affirmation in Les Temps mêlés, “And we will have a lot of children!” sounds like the last line in a fairy tale (1092). Another variant of the line crops up in Saint Glinglin. After Alice becomes pregnant, she and Paul vanish: “Paul resigned from his duties and headed abroad with Alice, who had just discovered that she was pregnant. We never saw them again. They had shitloads of kids” (Glinglin 265). Once the object is removed from the place of sublimity—in this case, the movie screen—it is no longer sublime; in this way,
Saint Glinglin’s more vulgar “shitloads of kids” proves even more apt than the formulation “a lot of children” in *Les Temps mêlés*. In fact, disappearance associated with the cinema follows a pattern in Queneau, often ending with the departure of characters from active participation in the text and for movie careers in “Holy Wood” (*Bois Sacré, Glinglin* 148), proving a threefold link between a geographical exotic elsewhere, the oneiric elsewhere of movies, and that of the *hors-texte*. Queneau’s FWs are made up of a more general movement towards FWs; this movement is repeated on each successive level of interaction with the text, from the vicissitudes of *néo-français* to the plurality of characters appearing and disappearing in the always ephemeral worlds created by the reader’s interaction with the text. Instead of setting up a static FW from which the reader is elided, Queneau’s FWs are about...FWs.

This vacillation between appearance and disappearance does not limit itself to the movies. In *Journal Intime*, Sally and Barnabé follow a similar trajectory; their marriage ends what Sally’s French tutor calls a “true transformation” (182). Having created a dynamic state of tension with the reader who, in order to enjoy the text in true voyeuristic fashion, must pretend that Sally does not know the import of her endless sexual double entendres and faux pas, Sally finally announces without ceremony, “Hang on; I was going to forget; yesterday Tim deflowered me” (183). More than deceiving, the act takes place—and will continue to take place—”in darkness” (185). Sally’s female body, which is on display throughout *Journal Intime*, melts away in tandem with

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202 See Gilbert Pestureau, “Mythes croisés: France-Amérique,” *Mythes et mythologie en histoire de la langue et de la civilisation*, ed. Daniel Briot (Nantes: Presses de l’Université de Nantes, 1992) 138-151. In fact, in Queneau’s preparatory notes for *Saint Glinglin*, Alice takes up cinema again but it turns into an “Exhibition de striptease” and Alice turns into Hélène, Paul’s sister. The triple message is clear: Alice cannot stay in the Ville Natale without becoming one of the family; Alice cannot stay away from the cinema; and, once in the Ville Natale, Alice must become a vulgar, everyday object. CDRQ, folder 113H.
the end of the text. The final lines of the novel reveal disappearance by means of a shift from metaphor to mundane reality: “Then Barnabé yelled to me, ‘Sally, hold on to the railing!’” (190). Until this point, the rope railing by the docks has stood in for the erect male member. However, Sally’s marriage with the bland Barnabé changes things: “I advanced my hand in the darkness, but I only found a humid and cold rope. I understood that my honeymoon had just started” (190). The sudden literality of Sally’s world indicates imminent disappearance for both character and reader, who have gotten what they want, and now understand that the “honeymoon” is over and just how impediments to desire are necessary instruments for building a world.
b. Fictional Afterlives

In this chapter, I have argued that Queneau establishes a contrast between disappearance and death through the indestructibility of the lice found throughout *Loin de Rueil*. At the end of Jacques’s first movie-watching experience, having entered into the world of a cowboy film, Jacques chooses death over disappearance (here, a traditional life of marriage with Daisy, the damsel in distress). An “end” indicates disappearance; the story is discursively over. On the other hand, a fictional “death” means the story can continue: “...he doesn’t want it to end he prefers to acclimate himself a fatal bullet in the chest at the risk of resuscitating later” (90). Later on in this fantasy, after Jacques’s fatal balloon crash, his ghost emerges from the Pacific Ocean in order to follow people in the street (101). At first, reappearance brings the reader back to Jacques’s “everyday” world—in this case, the streets of Paris—and helps to propagate the illusion that there exists a clear line between fiction (here, fantasy) and reality in *Loin de Rueil* when, in truth, the rapid-cycling appearance and disappearance at the heart of the novels give the lie to any such definitive contrast. This lesson is not lost on the reader who thus adjusts his strategies of reading: “As he becomes increasingly aware of the constitutive rules of the text, he develops the strategy of not establishing too rigid a protocol,” explains Bastin (207). The reader’s creation of FWs has something to do with the ghostly nature of Jacques’s consciousness as he appears and disappears among the other people of the city. “Which one of these people deserves a ghost?” Jacques asks himself (101). Like Jacques, although with less freedom of choice, the reader follows: “Sometimes Jacques follows a *character* of the street less to discover this other than to clothe himself in him
for several minutes” (101, my italics). In spite of the strangeness of their LWs, the reader follows Queneau’s characters, filling in the space between passerby and observer (see Martin, “Passant,” Personnage 73–5), but he never follows for very long because these characters themselves never stay in one place for very long.

And yet, the characters never disappear for very long either, provided that the reader keeps reading. Étienne and his cohorts disintegrate in the clearing at the end of Le Chiendent, “They separated from one another without saying anything, for they no longer knew each other, since they had never met” (247). Yet out of this magma of FWs whose very reason and logic for being have just vanished (How could they never have met, the reader might ask himself), a new FW—one that remarkably resembles the one that just disintegrated—forms: “A mask flew through the air, effacing characters and their complex, multiple lives and took human form at the terrace of a café” (247). This mask highlights the double life of artificiality and reality of the character. Madeleine Velguth suggests that the mask is related to the vanishing acts that link the magician, the novelist, the character, and the reader, first intimated by of Pierre’s choice of masks in the last section of Chapter Five. After all, the reader “vanishes” too, when he puts down the book, abandoning FWs which will nevertheless continue to linger (Velguth, “Opaques,” Personnage 107-120). Once again, the mask produces “the usual appearance” (182), leading to the silhouette of a man who might be a reincarnation of Étienne: “The silhouette of a man stood out, simultaneously, out of thousands. There were many thousands” (247). All the reader has to do is to follow Saturnin’s advice, when he advises his sister the goddess to turn back time, “All you need to do is start
over again” (246). Even if he does not begin reading the novel in its entirety again, the reader—let us hope—flips back to the first page and discovers that the first and last lines of the novel are the same. Fiction mediates precisely this tension between multiplicity and becoming, evoked by Narcense during a philosophical discussion with Saturnin: “Well, I remain attached to multiplicity, all the while still suffering from becoming” (185). The sensation of individuality in the midst of multiplicity that Saturnin calls a “dreadful conclusion” concerns the combination of appearance and disappearance that underlies fiction; it is characterized by the construction of FWs and allowed for by intentionality (246).

And Queneau’s characters are not blind to the seesaw workings of the world in which they live. In Queneau’s third novel, Les Derniers jours, Tolut exclaims, “So many tombs! So many tombs! Think about how many dead people a big city like Paris furnishes. And one day, soon, it will be my turn.”203 As his newfound friendship falls apart, Tolut plots his own disappearance. Combined with the surface phenomenon of linguistic experimentation, the movement of appearance and disappearance lays the groundwork for Queneau’s FWs. In our day and age, narratives with self-conscious characters are not new. Neither are narratives whose ends meet up with their beginnings. However, novels gifted with the humor, philosophical density, and linguistic experimentation of Queneau—that still manage to tell stories—are hard to find, and this is thanks to Queneau’s unique FWs, which still work their magic on the modern reader, provided he is willing to read more than once.

203 Queneau, Les Derniers jours (1936), OCII 482.
More clearly than any other character, Sally Mara returns with a vengeance after the end of the text, suggesting that Queneau’s FWs transcend the material boundaries of the text. Unlike the “star,” that is Jacques, or the blank slate that Étienne wants to be, she again dons the role of a character in order to raise her voice in protest against the outlandish claims of the book’s author. Having conquered the kingdom of death—according to “Michel Presle’s preface,” she dies in 1943—she reemerges in good form (“nothing like a ghost, almost to the point of corpulence (7)) in order to write the preface to her own complete works (published by Queneau in 1962, twelve years after the publication of Journal Intime). The reader, having most likely forgotten this preface after beginning to read Journal Intime—provided that he reads the novels in the edition of “Sally’s” Collected Works—ought to take another look at it.

Sally, a fictional character, therein denies the content of the journal, relegating it to the status of a “product of my imagination” (7): even the fictional text is a fiction produced by a fiction. By admitting that she was never born (7), Sally reclaims for herself a brand new form of existence: “...it is not because the name of a so-called real author graces the cover of a book that he is the true author of works that have appeared beforehand under the name of a supposed imaginary author” (5)! Assuming the status of a character by means of a preface that would usually be closer to the RW than a fictional text, Sally moves away from the text at the same time, rejecting the imaginary world that she claims to have created. Yet, in doing this, she admits that relations between

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the two worlds just might be possible: her “imaginary tutor” has after all taught her things that he learned from a “so-called author who is so-called real” (7). It is here that the interlinking of intentionality and fictionality provides a clear basis for FWs as a no man’s land of interaction and transaction. Neither Sally nor the reader can any longer distinguish the different levels of worlds and fictions at work in these reading transactions. The reader must begin his reading again, this time in a reflexive mode that will take into account the many intertwined strands of autonomous FWs buzzing with being. The relations at work here couple worlds to one another; as endowed with different scales of being, they are relations of intersection, not equivalency.

In fact, by taking a closer look at Lacan’s theory of the relationship between desire—whose centrality to Queneau’s fiction we have already demonstrated—and drive, we can provide a model of one possible way that desire, appearance, and disappearance might work to create this virtual afterlife, whose seemingly extra-textual secrets are concealed even from the reader. The diagram, which resembles a pacifier, or a nipple, for that matter, illustrates the interrelation of the goal (le but), aim (la visée), and objet a (the object of desire, represented by the a at the center) (Concepts 200).
The looping path of the aim ascends from the circular baseline of the rim to circle, but never attains, a, the object/s of desire, before it redescends to the rim. “The drives goes around” (La pulsion en fait le tour, Concepts 189) declared Lacan; it never reaches its goal. In this way, the long circuit of desire, given its obstacles, is “healthier” than the short-circuit of instant gratification. As Brooks and Docherty have pointed out, these principles can be used to understand the role of unfulfilled desire as a catalyst for the reading experience. Brooks explicitly links plot and rereading: “It is the role of fictional plots to impose an end which yet suggests a return, a new beginning, a rereading” (110). In the case of Queneau, the circular baseline of the rim represents the pre-ontological void out of which story and characters rise. They then follow the looping path of the aim around a, which represents the objects of desire of characters and the objects of desire of the reader created by his interaction with the NW. The looping path of the aim—the way in which the act of reading virtualizes FWs from the text—gives an idea of the centrality of appearance and disappearance to Queneau’s FWs by focusing our attention on the significance of beginnings and endings in Queneau’s novels. Queneau’s novels escape even
this neat illustration, though, because they enact appearance and disappearance multidimensionally.

We find the “afterlife” of the FW along the circular rim. Here, beginnings and endings coalesce, “like a man who, after having walked for a long time, finds himself back at the point from which he started,” as Queneau said of the plot of Le Chiendent (Queneau, “Technique,” Bâtons 31). Appearance and disappearance belie strict circularity; the difference in positioning of beginning and endpoint on the diagram results from the fact that the text has already been read, so the two can never be exactly the same; there is no straight line from one to the other. Queneau’s walker returns to his point of departure, but this does not erase the fact that he has taken a walk: “Disciplined and ‘subjugated,’ the transference delivers one back to a changed reality. And so does any text fully engaged with by the reader” (Brooks 235). In reality, the circular experience of reading this novel is cyclical or spiral, as Alain Calame has remarked in explicating Queneau’s use of the number thirteen. Whereas the number twelve, that of the seasons, brings them full circle, the number thirteen (12+1) restarts the cycle. For this reason, the thirteenth section of the last chapter of Le Chiendent is not in italics, unlike the thirteenth sections of the previous chapters.206 The action of +1 is the impetus provided by the act of reading. An even more intricate example is Jean’s mythical self-sacrifice at the end of Saint Glinglin. By climbing up into the sky and stopping the rain with his body, Jean becomes the “cloud chaser” that provides such good weather for the Ville Natale throughout the novel, while Jean is still alive (!), and whose breakdown requires him to sacrifice himself (again). The mythical world of Saint

Glinglin helps explain the temporal disparities of Queneau’s FWs, as we tend to forgive myth a lack of linearity that we do not when it comes to other kinds of narrative.

In comparison with Saint Glinglin, the ending of Loin de Rueil provides a far more instantly self-reflexive take on the previous action of the novel. The ending of Loin de Rueil provides the reader with another take on the novel that he has just finished reading. At this juncture, James Charity onscreen performs the actions of Jacques l’Aumône’s life. The spiral iteration here involves the fact that the spectator can now see Jacques’s interaction with the movie from a bigger vantage point, that of the movie screen itself:

One of them, it is James Charity, gets up, climbs onto the stage, enters into the screen. He has grown, he has become a man, he is dressed as a cowboy now, he jumps on a horse and look at him gallop. Chases, pistol shots, young blonde girls with boots who are kidnapped by brown boot ed traitors, Indians with feathers, violent deaths. The action is finished. James kisses the heroine on the mouth, then he leaves the screen and retakes his place, once again a little boy (194).

This description at first appears to clear up much of the reader’s uncertainty regarding situating the novel’s action. Jacques actually did get up and enter the movie. Or did he? Is James merely acting out Jacques’s state of mind? Queneau provides no resolution; there are never any definite answers, just attempts at describing the processes whose non-textual representations we must create for ourselves. When Gaëtan Picon commented in 1975 that, in Loin de Rueil, “It is the novel that has taken itself as object,” he was on the right track. Only, the operative word should be worlds. Here, the reader is faced with an “opalescent” fictional universe, where no world takes precedence over the other (Bastin 189). While Bastin argues that the key to this world is the

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reader’s recognition that there is no central or “home” world—we are always “far from Rueil”—the desire to figure out the enigma keeps the reader going, even when he knows there is no answer (231-2). As for Sally, she has all the answers, although they do not jibe with logic. Instead, her reappearance calls into question many claims of the text devoted to her. This radical reconstruction of a character outside the proper bounds of the text, away from the reader’s invasive gaze, belies the reputation of *Journal Intime* as nothing more than a humorous and vaguely prurient experiment on the part of Queneau. Along the lines of *Miracle on 34th Street*, Sally’s message for us is yes, there are fictional worlds; like her, they were never born, they never died, yet they occupy quite a lot of time and space, and they are connected to us by our interaction with them...whether we believe in them or not.
B. Conclusion

The intermingling of the alpha and omega points of these fictional words seems to defy logic, but it does not defy the logic of the reader’s *experience* where, as Calame’s discussion of numerology pinpoints, ends often frame beginnings. So what differentiates Queneau from his precursors and influences, like William Faulkner (whose relation to Simon I will discuss in the next chapter), André Gide, and James Joyce, who also did pioneering work in establishing new ways of creating FWs? An of necessity brief look at Gide and Joyce demonstrates just how Queneau’s manner of evoking FWs differs from theirs. In his 1926 novel, *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, Gide uses a carnavalesque plot, a multitude of characters, and a *mise en abyme* structure, where the character Edward is writing a novel whose title is *Les Faux-monnayeurs* (in which there will be a novelist character…), in order to elicit a different kind of fictional reality, denoted by the prefatory statement, “This is not a novel.” Precisely. *Les Faux-monnayeurs* is far more bound to a realistic representation of the world than any of Queneau’s novels. In fact, *Le Chiendent*, *Loin de Rueil*, and *Journal Intime* explode the infinite reflections of a particular representation at work in a *mise en abyme* by emphasizing multiple crossings across the mirror. Queneau simply will not content himself with mirroring gimmicks; for him, representational logic is uninteresting compared to fiction as a mode of being, and the discourse it affords. While characters such as Étienne and Jacques may find themselves caught up in iteration, their fantastic and undecidable worlds, even when they are as pseudo-realistic as *Le Chiendent*, combined with the language-based NWs on which they are based—the slang, strange word choice, phonetic spelling, and broken syntax of *néo-français*—
constantly break the rules necessary to sustain a *mise en abyme*. Joyce’s experimentation with the creation of new words and myth might seem closer to Queneau. However, Joyce’s linguistic experimentation is far more—and his experimentation with the ontology of fictional characters far less—radical. Almost every word in *Finnegans Wake* is deformed by the intermixing of different languages. However, even the famous circularity of the novel never quits the ontological domain of dreaming and myth. As we saw in Chapter Two, this difference is partially due to the French language, which Queneau felt, due to its classical academic traditions, needed massive phonetic revision (in a way that differed from Céline’s hyperactive use of syntax and popular slang).

Queneau’s novels call attention to language as language, just like *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, yet their worlds are calculated to engage the reader on a less complicated level. As I have argued throughout these chapters, understanding all of Queneau’s references, while essential for constructing an expanded critical rereading of his texts, is not required for a first reading. Even though Queneau lays out his metaphor of the layers of the onion as a model for reading none other than Joyce, the outer layers encountered in Queneau’s work are far more accessible than Joyce’s. A lack of knowledge about Catholicism, other world religions, and of Greek and Roman myth dooms the first time reader of *Ulysses*, to say nothing of *Finnegans Wake*, whose global level of linguistic experimentation and “flowing” structure, although circular, renders it almost unreadable. Queneau’s relatively short, humorous novels—and the transformative worlds that they explore—occupy a rank all their own in the history of the novel.
Perhaps the best example of Queneau’s teeming FWs ruled by continual appearance and disappearance occurs in the previously unpublished text, *Hazard et Fissile* (2008), which displays many of the tendencies I have discussed at length above. Throughout this text, the narrator constantly addresses the reader, daring him to disagree with authorial choices, such as giving a main character the profession of mathematician rather than, say, a botanist or a zoologist.\footnote{Queneau, *Hazard et Fissile* (Paris: Le Dilettante, 2008) 12.} In fact, this narrator seems angered that there is a reader at all, “What are you waiting for now, reader with breath bated by the stories that you just read? What do you want me to do with these characters gathered in the sand on a day of boredom and who manage but painfully to distract me? Do they really amuse you?” (56). While the overbearing narrator of this fantastic and decidedly surrealistic detective story has thankfully disappeared in Queneau’s later novels, replaced by the much more ontologically challenging LWs of the characters themselves, the reader is confronted by some of the traits of what will later make up Queneau’s FWs. The clearest example of this is certainly the blatant ignorance of the law of non-contradiction that turns one character into another with no explanation save the challenge, at the very end of the novel, “And if it pleases me to change the name of MY characters?” (90). The progress of Queneau’s later novels lies in the disappearance of that personal pronoun “my” so that the FWs are presented as such, with the reader thus able to take more responsibility for their co-creation. Of course, hints of a creator persist, but this creator has most certainly lost some degree of control over “his” worlds, and his nervous concern about directing the reader has taken its proper place in Queneau’s theoretical writings. While *Hazard et Fissile*...
remains a provocative combination of a statement of novelistic esthetics and an early attempt at its implementation in fiction, it best demonstrates for the rereader of Queneau just how far the author moved beyond his surrealist roots, which so emphasized readerly interaction over absorption. At the same time, this short text shows the student of Queneau just how early in his career the author had in place some of the characteristics of his FWs that we have explored in this chapter: unique LWs marked by repetition, unreality, and strange professions, where characters, driven by desire and unable to resist the pull of recognition, undertake seemingly absurd tasks—here, the recovering of a shipment of octopi, only to disappear, and reappear throughout the text. The weight of experimentation present in a short text like *Hazard et Fissile*, though, only holds up if the much maligned reader really does have a reason to continue reading, as Queneau provides in the elaborate, amusing, and multi-layered FWs of novels like *Le Chiendent* and *Loin de Rueil*. 
Chapter Four: Simon’s NWs: Sentences and other Stumbling Blocks

A. Introduction

As we saw in Chapter Two, NWs are an intermediary way of linking text and reader; they represent one of the paths by which the text “comes alive,” and they lay the groundwork for the virtual, cooperative operations that instantiate FWs. Without properly distinguishing the NW as a world—one that, even though closely linked to the verbal nature of the text, begins to emerge as distinct from the text—the gap between text as inert object and the reader’s more cohesive experience of FWs remains puzzlingly wide. Although the world itself—the one outside the text—is invariably implicated by the text, the interrelation of NWs and FWs demonstrates a remarkable degree of autonomy on the part of the work of art. One of my main contentions in this chapter will be that fictionally referring to another world does not necessarily equate to representing this world. NWs, like the FWs to which they give birth, escape easy categorization; these worlds in the making are best explored through an analysis of the reader’s dynamic participation.

When discussing a novelist such as Claude Simon (1913-2005), it is crucial to grasp the unique density of the writer’s NW, characterized as it is by several factors which limit the reader’s immediate understanding. These factors, which I will explore in detail in this chapter, are an expansion of the role of the sentence, marked by increased phrase length, tortuous syntax, frequent recourse to the present participle, and non-standard use of punctuation. On a more synthetic level, Simon’s NWs also present the reader with significant intertextual references to material from canonical authors like
William Faulkner and Marcel Proust. Finally, the reader is confronted with the author’s reliance on recurrent images or other visual motifs, which act as bridges between the words of the text and the frequently spatially or temporally disconnected worlds which they construct. As will become apparent in this chapter, Simon’s densely textured NWs present such an obstacle to understanding that the reader may, in a seeming contradiction in terms, rely on the author’s FWs to understand his NWs. In other words, the NWs which recursively lay the foundations for FWs, may prove too difficult to grasp, while the more global FWs may end up being more comprehensible. This entails surrender on the part of the reader; rather than seek mastery over the elements of these worlds, he must savor them for their poetic interaction and shifting semantic values. This continual back and forth of the reading process means that the reader assumes an active role in world construction, one that goes beyond mere “activation.”

At the 1974 colloquium in Cerisy dedicated to his work, Simon himself highlighted the importance of the intermediary stages by which reader and text collaborate in order to produce a series of worlds: “...there is no book if there is no reader; every text constitutes a proposition by means of which every reader is going to conduct his own reading; that is to say, write a book in his own way.”

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209 It is useful to recall, as we did in both Chapters Two and Three, that NWs and FWs are above all useful devices for organizing our knowledge about the reader as he progresses through the text. They are not a map of the reading experience, but rather two poles between which the reader oscillates during the act of reading.

210 Please see my discussion of Dolezel’s “intensional function” in Chapter One. For Dolezel, the reader activates the FW by means of the latent instructions contained in the text.

1960s and early 1970s, relates to the nature of reading as a unique act of consciousness, capable of permeating worlds perceived as separate, and even of creating these worlds in the first place. But, as this chapter will make clear, turning a critical eye on high formalism’s obsession with the text as sole producer of meaning does not mean accepting wholesale the contrary notion of the text as requisitely linked to real-world referents. Emphasizing the intentional nature of the reading experience is not the same as equating the world represented in the text to the RW outside of it. Instead, intentionality allows us to link reader and text on a deeper level, by showing how the structures of each already allow for the other, even if it is only to create the impression of interaction. In the previous quotation, Simon implies that the reader’s role is potentially as meaningful as those of the author and the text. In one sense, Simon’s claim about the dynamic nature of the reader’s interaction with the text may situate the writer’s texts on the “writerly,” interactive side of Barthes’s divide between “writerly” texts and “readerly,” absorptive ones. Christine Genin, who has written the sole book-length study of the role of the reader in Simon’s novels, gives credence to such a point of view, stressing the “active role” of the reader and arguing that, “The reader is the intimate spectator of this construction, at the same time as the actor, to the extent that his reading contributes to the reconstruction of the real” (333, 281). Yet this is not the whole story; to insist that texts be classified as “writerly” or “readerly” is

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212 Much of the critical activity of high formalism was at this stage spurred on by Jean Ricardou’s attempts to elucidate the features of the “New Novel,” in which Simon himself was a more than willing participant. See, for example, his much reproduced talk, “La fiction mot à mot” in the proceedings from the 1971 colloquium at Cerisy on the New Novel, *Nouveau roman, hier, aujourd’hui, v.II: Pratiques*, ed. Jean Ricardou (Paris: U.G.E, 1972) 73-97.

213 For a more through discussion of Barthes’s distinction between “readerly” texts, which allow the reader to maintain a passive role in the reading experience, and “writerly” texts, which demand of the reader a more active role in this experience, please see Chapter One.
to forget that every text is “worldly” first and foremost. I would argue not that
the reader is “rebuilding the real,” as Genin would have it, but rather that,
through NWs and FWs that are as distinct from the real as they are from the
author’s original “intention” in writing the text, the reader builds the fictional.
No matter their level of difficulty, without the ability to posit worlds that the
reader can inhabit (and invest with meaning), texts would remain unreadable.
After all, reading language as language and nothing more means that one is
insane, rather than a critic.214 (Although the two conditions certainly may
appear to approach one another from time to time). Simon’s statement
regarding the necessity of the reader to the book’s existence links what I have
called the NW (in the author’s words from 1974, the “proposition” put forth by
the text) and the FW (once again, in the author’s words from 1974, the reader’s
“own reading” or “book”).

Following the organization of Chapters Two and Three, I contend in
Chapters Four and Five that the novels of Claude Simon are best understood in
a framework that moves between words and worlds, not one that focuses
unduly on either side of the spectrum (as would a high formalist poetics or a
mimetic perspective). At the crowning moment of his career, while accepting
the Nobel Prize for literature in 1985, Simon evoked the confrontation of words
and worlds within himself, the collision of “the troubled magma of emotions,
memories, and images which is located within me” with “the language, the
words for which I search in order to express them, the syntax by which they are

214 In fact, reading language as nothing but language is impossible; it goes against the very nature of the
reading experience, which, even when this language is fragmented and “exploded,” as in Simon, is still an
act of worldbuilding.
ordered and within which they will in some way be crystallized.” An equally ineffable process on the part of the reader mirrors the process described here by Simon. The reader is capable of putting the pieces of the text together precisely because the notion of living in a world, even if it is not a NW or a FW (as far as he knows), is not unfamiliar to him. The tension between interior perception and exterior expression described by the author, and the ways in which fiction allows perception and expression to switch places with one another through the acts of writing and reading, generates NWs and FWs.

Before approaching the question of Simon’s NWs in a more detailed manner, we must take a closer look at the way that literary criticism has traditionally segmented the writer’s career into several distinct stages. In this way, by emphasizing the overall coherence of a body of work marked by an uneasy state of contradiction—what one of its greatest proponents, Ricardou, has called “discoherence”—we can examine Simon’s NW as a self-consistent unity, even if the texts from which it springs remain easily distinguishable from one another. According to the standard division of the author’s career, in “stage one,” although already demonstrating a predilection for the fragmentation of his later writing, as well as a few of its themes, such as memory, history, and war, Simon treats plot, character, and language in a linear fashion. Critics point to his long out-of-print early novels from the 1940s and 1950s as examples (Le Tricheur, 1945; La Corde Raide, 1947). “Stage two,” prefaced by his 1957 novel Le Vent: tentative de restitution d’un retable baroque,

finds Simon turning to the theme of the impossibility of uncovering the truth behind an event, which is found most clearly in two novels from the turning point of the decade (Histoire, 1958; La Route des Flandres, 1960). In “stage three,” Simon, an enthusiastic participant in the debates about the role of the novel that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, “produces” texts distinguished above all by imagistic “generating structures,” designed to decentralize traditional plot progression (La Bataille de Pharsale, 1969; Les Corps Conducteurs, 1971; Triptyque, 1973). Finally, in “stage four,” the author returns to the less elliptical pseudo-autobiography of the 1980s and 1990s, inspired by, or so it is claimed, the events of his own life (L’Acacia, 1989; Les Géorgiques, 1981; Le Jardin des Plantes, 1997).217

Evidently, there is some truth to this chronology. As during any writer’s career, the formal characteristics of Simon’s novels do change. It is difficult to link a novel as readable as L’Acacia, where the reader skips among the wartime experiences of various generations of a family, to novels like Triptyque and Les Corps Conducteurs, where plot degenerates into a fragmented and iterative series of microplots seemingly connected only by recurrent images. In the latter works, a steady progression away from subjectivity and towards self-generating and productive spatial structures occurs. This process undermines traditional plot progression through the privileging of spatial, linguistic, and imagistic relations over the chronological paradigm that usually governs the act of reading. But the question of consciousness and man’s intentional link to the world around him, even if it is a world from which he remains separated, still

dominates these “experimental” novels, just as it does in those that Simon published in the 1980s and 1990s.

Such clearly defined stages may prove useful in situating Simon in a certain version of literary history related to the “New Novel” and its other practitioners, especially Robbe-Grillet, whose turn to “autobiography” also occurred in the 1980s. However, beyond the fact that Simon’s “autobiographical work” dismantles the notion of standard autobiography, those interested in “stage three” and dismissive of “stage four” tend to forget that the preceding stages laid much of the groundwork for “stage four”? In fact, Alistair Duncan claims that the utility of Simon’s work lies, despite its oftentimes autobiographical and historical trappings, instead in the elaboration of a certain idea of fictionality linked to many different types of discourses hailing from many different types of worlds. Somewhat like the role of humor in Queneau’s fiction, the resulting hybrid pseudo-historical appearance of Simon’s fiction, which brushes up against generic boundaries, is in fact one of the reasons that it remains readable at all. Furthermore, from novel to novel, regardless of the supposed “stage” of his career, Simon returns to the same subjects: history, war, violence, sex, depersonalization, family, and art, to name a few.

For this reason, not all commentators have divided Simon’s career in this way. Some critics, such as Michel Deguy, one of the first to have examined the futile search for the wholeness of the imaginary through “ways of seeing” in Simon’s novels, have grasped Simon’s career as a whole since the early

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1960s. This viewpoint has recently become more widespread (see notes 9 and 10 above). The writer himself has argued persuasively for the artistic unity of his work, claiming in 1971 that his work “consists of assembling and organizing, in that unity of which Baudelaire spoke and where they should respond to one another as echoes, all the components of this vast system of signs that make up a novel” (“Mot,” Pratiques 96). In his book on the semi-autonomous, non-referential status of the image in Simon’s novels, Pascal Mougin proffers the following warning against an overly deep involvement in debates about the status of representation in Simon: “This chapter will attempt to show how Simon’s writing is not inevitably divided between representation and anti-representation...” This is to say that representation is not a static issue; Simon’s work is characterized by a tension revolving around the question of representation (rather than an “attack” on representation itself).

Instead of dividing Simon’s literary production into distinct phases, I would like here to foreground the question of consciousness throughout his novels. In this way, I can focus on the rapport between words and worlds for the reader, instead of reducing an organic oeuvre to nothing more than different stages of textual “production,” a word in vogue during what I have labeled “stages two” and “three.” Ironically enough, the approach of “stage three,” which isolates the text in somewhat radical fashion, has been quickly followed by one that relies on personal myth and history (“stage four”). Thus, in the intervening decade, when critics of Simon—or Simon himself—have not been

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219 Michel Deguy, “Claude Simon et la représentation,” Critique 187 (1962): 1026. Deguy states, “First of all, we believe, contrary to certain critics, that the perspective of Claude Simon entailing the novelistic mise en scène of representations in the specified manner that we have seen does not change from one novel to another” (1026).

busy searching out ways by which the text unfolds the fictional map describing its own operations, they have been lost in a thicket of referents, attaching various portions of Simon’s FWs to his own life or to the history of the 20th century. Once in a while, the two approaches collide, for example during the séance at Cerisy devoted to the Nouveau Roman, at which the participants argued the importance of a mysterious letter that Simon had received.221 The author of the letter described his shock at finding his own experience of the debacle of 1940 so well depicted in La Route des Flandres, where lieutenant De Reixach marches inexorably to his death on a sunny country road. The debate sparked by this letter among Robbe-Grillet, Ricardou, and others centered on the intervention of the referent in a work of fiction at a critical moment at which such questions were often bracketed.222 Such an incident demonstrates the error of either removing fiction from the real, or of reducing fiction to the real. In any case, the reader works hand in hand with the fictional text to build a world. As we will discover, this caveat is especially useful when it comes to the role played by history in Simon’s novels. Just as Queneau’s depictions of Depression-era Paris and the suburbs in Le Chiendent do, Simon’s history certainly shares much with historical reality; yet fictionality itself subsumes any durable referent. My approach to Simon is not so naive as to ignore the interrelation of textual and fictional meanings, nor that the processes of language and fiction do mirror one another in some ways.223 Nor, on the other

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222 Simon has the final fictional word on the matter, sarcastically describing the incident in his second-to-last novel, Le Jardin des Plantes: “By making such a document public, had not S. contravened the theories of which the adepts of the movement claimed to be representatives? Was he not thus excluding himself from the community of thought that presided over the group’s research?” (1997), Oeuvres 1161.
hand, that Simon in his fiction draws upon the events of his own life, events as constitutive of the past century as the Spanish Civil War and World War Two. After all, in 1987, the author himself pointed out the futility of writing in a truly non-linear manner: “telling” is by definition linear, since that is the very framework of writing and language itself, which can only say things one after another.”

In this chapter and in the next, I would like, as I attempted to do in regards to Queneau, to shift the attention to the ways in which the reader—a rereader of necessity—works with the text to produce worlds. (Focusing solely on the ways in which fiction imitates the writing that “produces” it is indeed as much of a one-way street as claiming that fiction’s primary purpose is to imitate reality!)

Simon returns in each of his novels to a certain set of themes, which he treats like one of the mobiles or revolutions whose circular motion he constantly invokes in these novels. His NWs behave similarly by elaborating the givens of the language of the text in such a way that they come alive for the reader as more than “the words on the page.” The way in which Simon’s reliance on the sentence as an infinitely expandable unit of creative and expressive meaning, combined with the effect of intertextuality on narrative voice in his work, and the role of the image as a crossover between NWs and FWs, create a language-based “jumping off” point for the reader, one to which he will return when the synthetic acts of reading and co-creation demanded by FWs become to difficult for him to achieve. This is to say that the NWs disrupt and disorient the reader moving toward the more global FWs of the text. Even if the reader is, in a way, evocatively drawn to Simon’s FWs before his NWs, the

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enigmatic NW, though, is also the place to which he returns for (textually supported) answers when he finds the FW lacking. Beyond the reader's own reading strategies and knowledge of other texts, the NW constitutes the best "hard" evidence that he can consult close at hand.

In fact, Simon’s FWs are full of examples that might be used to illuminate the rich experience of the reader as he makes his way through the writer’s NW. These examples often deal with the work of perception as it puts things together and takes them apart again. It might seem paradoxical to introduce Simon’s NWs by discussing the state of language in his FWs but, as I have previously insisted, in reality, NWs and FWs are interdependent. However paradoxical it may sound, Simon’s reader might more easily comprehend descriptions of NWs in the FW, even though the former provides the verbal support for FWs. Here, Simon’s metaphors for writing and reading come into play. For instance, the description of the complicated machinery of the reaper-binder in *La Bataille de Pharsale* or the flight of the crows in *Les Géorgiques* can be taken as embodiments of the circular feedback loop of process of reading and writing (*Pharsale* 658-662; *Géorgiques* 67-68). I will examine the status of language in Simon’s FWs in greater detail at the beginning of Chapter Five. However, a few key examples of the role of language in Simon’s FWs will allow me better to introduce what I want to say about Simon’s NWs in this chapter. Furthermore, this brief foray into FWs before NWs is likely to mimic the naive reader’s path of least resistance (FWs), and therefore most likely path, into the novel.

Although Simon’s detailed descriptions of the work of perception are a long way from encapsulating the myriad process at work in the acts of writing
and reading—as the theorists of the high formalist years sometimes claimed—they do occasionally function as wonderful metaphors for the work of the reader momentarily blocked by the obstructions of the NW. Like the boys in *Triptyque* trying to reassemble a roll of film, the reader, kept alert by the difficulty of this text, tries to reassemble the disparate pieces of the NW:

> After having eliminated a certain number of fragments of films that they have looked through...the two boys...have finally kept five that seem to them to present a certain unity and that they are now trying to classify in an order about which they remain, however, uncertain, arguing amongst themselves, and reexamining them several times.  

Like the boys, the reader, stuck at the level of the NW, and perhaps even struggling to put together a NW out of the dense text (or to enter the interstitial space unfolded by it), manipulates the verbal fragments of a representation without ever resolving a totality. The reader must constantly reexamine the givens of the text; although he too, like the boys, has images to guide him, these images, as will become evident towards the end of this chapter, are language-based! The perpetual uncertainty that results from this state of affairs is why, in *Le Palace*, for the student in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War, an overload of perception quickly turns the order usually associated with reading a newspaper into disorder: “[The title] now only looked like a series of letters taken at random from the alphabet and of bereft of meaning.”

Yet, for the same student a few moments later, disorder becomes order once more, “…no longer an incomprehensible series of printed capital letters, but words, and the words themselves forming a sentence and the sentence itself an equivalent, or a translation, or a representation, by means of conventional signs of a fact, an

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event…” (497). In any case, the triumphant return of representation is not to be trusted; the reader, like Simon’s student, quickly learns that the supposed equivalency between what Narcense in Queneau’s *Le Chiendent* called “multiplicity” and “becoming” goes in both directions (185). Language can build a world, but it can also show this world as it falls apart. These examples help to distinguish the NW from the text taken in isolation, as well as from the FW. The NW is not the text; it represents a means of understanding the text; nor is it the FW; rather, it represents a reversible bridge from the text to the FW. Due to its constant undermining of the text as a means of easily understandable communication, Simon’s NW presents a tremendous stumbling block to the reader. Let us take a closer look at why NWs in Simon prove to be so problematic.
B. Simon’s NWs (versus Queneau’s NWs)

Since I have examined two of Queneau’s novels, *Le Chiendent* and *Loin de Rueil*, from the perspective of narrative and fictional worlds, I will first briefly compare and contrast Simon’s NWs with those of Queneau. Whereas my chapters on Queneau revolved around two novels, my chapters on Simon will revolve around a greater number of novels, including, but not restricted to *La Route des Flandres, La Bataille de Pharsale, Les Géorgiques, L’Acacia*, and *Le Jardin des Plantes*. The greater unity of Simon’s work, combined with its less complex plots—although not less complex on the level of their elaboration for the reader in the NW—makes it easier to move from example to example in Simon than it is in Queneau. Hopefully, such a comparison will serve to remind the reader of the nature of my overall argument, which regards the reader’s movement between NWs and FWs. It will only be in Chapter Six that the addition of the third term to this equation, the novels of Robbe-Grillet, will allow me fully to explain the intricacies in these three authors of what Nina Bastin, in reference to Queneau, has called the process of “worlding” (as opposed to claiming that there exists a one-to-one web of interrelations among the three).

In one sense, Simon’s NWs are less disruptive than Queneau’s. While Queneau disrupts the individual unit of semantic meaning that is the word itself, Simon does no such thing; he conducts no linguistic experiments comparable to the most salient aspects of *néo-français*: its neologisms and unorthodox phonetic renderings of words. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, though, Queneau’s “language games” affect how words *look*, not how they *work*. These games create a spectacle that could easily be ignored by a reader.
concentrating on the most superficial, outer rings of the “onion,” to use Queneau’s celebrated metaphor for the varieties of the reading experience. Simon’s NWs accomplish the converse of Queneau’s NWs: they affect how words work, not necessarily how they look. By altering the more syncretic structure of discourse, from the level of the sentence on up, Simon’s NWs are unarguably more disruptive than Queneau’s. This disruption, which is sustained by consistent manipulation by the author of the length, syntax, and punctuation of the sentence, creates greater demands on the reader’s ability to synthesize information usually contained in “packets” or “bundles,” to borrow computer terminology. The reader of Le Chiendent can easily progress from start to finish without understanding any of the puns, alternate spellings, or borrowed vocabulary that the author uses. Queneau’s NWs amalgamate so many different levels and sources of discourse that the writer’s protest seems to be as much against what constitutes an “appropriate” subject for the novel as it is against a certain style in which to write one. A veritable explosion in the types of discourse present in a novel such as Le Chiendent leads to an explosion in the infinite possibilities of FWs. However, this fragmentation is held together by the innovative status of the character, who, as a meeting point or intersection of these discourses, never really disappears from the text because he has never really appeared in it in the first place.

With novels from “stage three” of Simon’s career, such as Triptyque and Les Corps Conducteurs, there is no tenuous certainty enabled by a host of rapidly appearing and disappearing characters, as there is in Queneau. Even in a novel from “stage two” with a more identifiable plot, like La Route des Flandres, Simon’s reader must immediately come to terms with the expanded
role of the sentence, the alternative being to stop reading altogether. In other words, there is no “quick and dirty” reading of Simon; in order to reveal its layers, the “onion” needs first of all to be peeled! This is not to say that the trajectory of the reader of Le Chiendent between NWs and FWs does not become immeasurably richer the more he understands Queneau’s linguistic experimentation. However, to put it bluntly, néo-français is not a do-or-die limiting factor in the reader’s ability to come to grips with the text, whereas Simon’s manipulation of the syntactic and semantic unit of the sentence is.

Simon’s NWs are constructed differently from Queneau’s NWs. In the former, before the reader can achieve the base level of linguistic competence needed to progress through the text, he must confront sentences themselves as, in Michel Erman’s words, tantalizingly non-totalizing “acts of consciousness.”

For Erman, these sentences complicate communication in such a way that they achieve a manner of consciousness all on their own. In Queneau’s NWs, the reader is invited to participate in the spectacle of a language that plays its part “on stage,” to take a cue from Jean-Pierre Longre’s work on the spectacular and theatrical nature of Queneau’s writing. Queneau’s NWs open outwards, onto a multiplicity of possible FWs, so that the reader never knows what plot shift to expect next without transitions. Without a careful consideration of the role of FWs in both authors as well, such a comparison would present a very unnuanced view of things. Therefore, in Chapter Five, I will explore how the repetitive FWs of war presented by Simon’s novels play a similar role as humor in the relative accessibility of Queneau’s NWs. Intended, of course, as a reaction against the elaborate plots of Naturalist or Realist novels, Simon’s plots, once

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the reader is able to distinguish them from the surrounding inchoate chatter—and this “once” includes complicated acts of consciousness that allow us to reconstitute the plot—are disarmingly uncomplicated. To the incredible complexity of Queneau’s “untellable” FWs corresponds the sheer linguistic density of Simon’s NWs. Thus, as I pointed out earlier, the NWs and FWs of Queneau and Simon serve quite different functions. The reader is not required to enter into NWs and emerge into FWs: the “hook” may reside in one domain, the other, or both. Again, it will be my contention in what follows that Simon’s NW presents a far greater challenge for the reader than his FWs. Yet, because the reader first encounters the NW and in order to keep a sense of parallel structure with my chapters on Queneau, I will deal first with Simon’s NWs and then with his FWs—whether or not in reality the reader progresses from NWs to FWs or vice versa in the course of reading this author.

228 It would be hard to imagine a greater compliment to the high formalism of what I have called “stage three” than to argue that Simon’s FWs are in fact his NWs, that narration has become fiction and that fiction has become narration. This would be overstating the case, though, because both would still be worlds in any event.
C. The Ever-Expanding Role of the Sentence

Although I will be making reference to many of Simon’s novels throughout this chapter, I will return again and again to *La Route des Flandres*, not least of all because I feel that it best embodies the unified nature of what have sometimes been considered the disparate stages of the author’s career. Displaying a discernible narrative voice that subsumes other voices, as well as some of Simon’s most salient themes (history, time, war, perception, etc), this work from “stage two” also demonstrates significant experimentation at the level of NWs, even if it does not take place on such a global scale as the experimentation of novels written during “stage three.” The best way to begin exploring Simon’s NWs in detail is, in fact, closely to follow the peregrinations of one of Simon’s lengthy sentences. The first sentence of *La Route des Flandres* has the benefit of possibly being our possible reader’s first introduction to Simon’s NWs, as the novel is the author’s most celebrated and widely read work. In any event, the incipit plays an important role for the reader of any text, even more so for the reader of a difficult text, as this is where the work of acclimatization to the NW begins. For my purposes, I need to quote the entire first sentence, of *La Route des Flandres* which, due to its length and complexity, is not an easy one to read (or, in my case, to translate):

He was holding a letter in his hand, he raised his eyes looked at me again then again the letter then again me, behind him I could see the mahogany ochre red splotches of the horses that were being brought to the trough coming and going, the mud was so deep that we were sinking into it up to our ankles but I recall that during the night it had abruptly frozen and Wack entered the room carrying the coffee saying The dogs have eaten mud, I had never heard the expression, I seemed to see the dogs, some kind of infernal mythical creatures their mouths bordered with pink their teeth white and cold like wolves chewing the black mud in the darkness of the night, maybe a memory, devouring dogs cleaning making a clean sweep: now it [the mud] was grey and we were twisting
our ankles while running, late as always for morning roll-call, almost
twisting our ankles in the deep imprints left by the hooves which had
become as hard as rock, and a moment later he said Your mother wrote
to me.\footnote{Simon, \textit{La Route des Flandres} (1960), \textit{Oeuvres} 197. I have been greatly aided in revising these
translations by consulting Richard Howard’s 1961 translation of the novel (NY: George Braziller).}

Sentences like the preceding one create significant obstacles for the reader;
almost immediately, the reader must to cross back and forth between NWs and
FWs. It is the length, punctuation, role of present participles, and the
disturbed syntax of such a sentence that make it so difficult to read. It is worth
mentioning, even if FWs are the subject of the following chapter, that the reader
must also make more global assertions about the text, usually associated with
FW-building, from the first word of the first sentence. Who is “he”? Why is “he”
holding a letter? Where have the horses come from? Who is “Wack”?\footnote{In terms of a phenomenology of reading, certainly the strange-looking and sounding name matters more
for the reader than the fact that, as Duncan points out in his notes for the Pléiade edition of the novel, one
of the other soldiers in Claude Simon’s in 1940 platoon had this very name (1313).} Why is
there so much mud? Whose mother has written to whom, and on the subject of
what? What relation is there between “he,” the mother, and “you”? It is
important to keep these questions in mind, as, concomitant with the sheerly
verbal obstructions of the sentence itself, they demonstrate the way in which
the reader is often as immediately drawn to Simon’s FWs as to his NWs.

In terms of the NW, one of the first notable aspects of this sentence is its
length: over 180 words long in the original French. This length, coupled with a
non-standard application of punctuation marks, makes it difficult for the
reader’s attention to follow the play of pronouns and present participles across
the sentence. What role does punctuation play in this sentence? On a very
superficial level, the suppression of quotation marks for the two reported
quotations, “The dogs have eaten mud” and “Your mother wrote to me,” gives
the reader pause. Lured by the capital letters of the first word of the quotations, the reader is tempted to think that these capital letters indicate the first words of new sentences that are not set off by periods. Some attention to the preceding verbs, “saying” (disant) and “said” (dit), however, quickly reveals that these “new sentences” are in reality quotations. Otherwise, the punctuation of the sentence is not overly discordant. Some commas are missing, but it is not so much that the punctuation itself is discordant; rather, nonstandard punctuation is merely one of the many strategies employed by Simon to prolong the sentence.

The presence of the two quotations calls attention to another key issue with the NWs posited by these sentences: the shadowy and indeterminate existence of characters. In a sentence in which the former exists only as a pronoun and the latter as an odd proper name, the existence of “il” and “Wack” is indeterminate at best. The shadowy existence of other characters intimated by this first sentence forces the reader to make important conclusions about FWs based on scant NW evidence. The breathless pace of the sentence is not only due to the absence of commas where they might be expected, such as before the reported quotations, nor to the presence of commas or semicolons in other places where periods might be expected, but also to the fact the reader simply has no idea what is going on. Commas like the one that separates the description of horses being brought to the trough from that of the mud (“...the horses that were being brought to the trough, the mud was so deep...”) certainly alter the rhythm of the text. If “The mud was so deep...” had been the beginning of a new sentence, preceded by a period, the reader would pause for a moment, instead of hurtling headlong into the rest of the paragraph. When
rereading, Simon’s reader can make the appropriate adjustments in terms of missing or displaced punctuation. Such extemporaneous adjustments are, in the end, how the NW, which encompasses much more than the text as text, comes into being. The role of punctuation in Simon is a crucial but not fatal barrier to the reader’s construction of a NW. Therefore, punctuation should be considered within the framework of the other constitutive features of the author’s NW.

Another one of Simon’s strategies, the reliance on present participles as a linking device, is connected to the author’s modified use of punctuation. The six present participles of the first sentence of La Route des Flandres (carrying, saying, chewing, cleaning, making, missing) serve an integral function in the sentence itself, one whose ramifications once again extend into the FW. Present participles blur the boundary between subject and object so that the dogs imagined by the narrator do not engage in a series of actions, which are defined by both subject and verb, such as would occur in a sentence like, “The devouring dogs, they clean, they make a clean sweep.” Instead, the actions themselves, conducted in a kind of eternal present moment, take center stage. The agency of the dogs is reduced at the same time that they become mythical beasts so that the adjective “devouring” (dévorants) is easily understood as a present participle itself, “devouring cleaning making a clean sweep.” Moreover, the lack of any punctuation between the three present participles creates a new sort of syntactic and semantic unit that bypasses the limits of the traditional subject-verb-object sentence. The verbs “to devour,” “to clean,” and “to make a clear place” do not necessarily go together, but they do hail from the same wide semantic field (getting rid of things). The syntactic cohesiveness of this
semantic unit, the placement of three similar grammatical structures in a row, lends it even more power. As Michel Erman points out, one of the overall effects of present participles in Simon’s expanded sentences is the reduction of the traditional syntactic unity of the sentence. However, in actuality, this unity is expanded across a larger field of relations. What was a distinct segment of meaning characterized by subject, verb, adjective, and object becomes a more ambiguous entity endowed with new internal relations among its constituent parts (words) as well as new external relations to other like entities (other sentences) (Erman 14). The modified syntax of the sentence makes each sentence read as if it contained several other sentences. As critics like Ludovic Janvier have argued, the piling up of present participles and adjectives, as well as the modified punctuation, make all of these larger sentences made up of “mini-sentences” function as one novel-length sentence. For Janvier, these meta-sentences compensate for the difficulty of figuring out the events of the FWs of Simon’s novels. In Janvier’s words, “vertige” invites a flood of stabilizing “paroles,” which themselves ensure the necessity of rereading. Without rereading, the reader can never manage to synthesize either these mini-sentences or the larger ones that contain them. For Simon, the subjective effect achieved (mythical in this case) shifts the reader away from concrete conclusions towards the undecidability of the imaginary. “If instead of ‘He opened the door,’ I write, ‘Opening the door,’ which suggests ‘I see him doing it again’ or ‘I imagine him in the middle of doing it,’ I affirm nothing more than a

231 In fact, a simple and not altogether accurate way to grasp the concept of NWs and FWs would be to compare NWs to syntax and FWs to semantics.

vision, and not what happened,” declared Simon in 1967.\textsuperscript{233} The eternal present of the present participle turns concrete representation (the act that would be specified by using a subject and a verb) into subjective repetition, a phenomenon that extends into FWs as well (Deguy 1030). As Jacques Guicharnaud writes in an article dedicated to how Simon’s sentences render particular FWs present to the reader, “Hence acts and gestures are grasped while happening and not as completed.”\textsuperscript{234} In other words, reconstruction of reality and exploration of reality occur at the same time. This state of incompletion is partially the result of the reader’s participation, which solidifies these indefinite acts and gestures. Reliance on this grammatical construction aids in creating what Henry Rousso, referring to a war that Simon knew intimately, has called “a past which does not pass.” In adjusting to the flood of words characteristic of Simon’s novels, the naïve reader becomes a careful rereader, wary of conclusions about represented reality and increasingly open to the notion of ambiguity.

Before moving on to how Simon’s textual encounters with other authors expand the NW, I will examine one more sentence. This sentence hails from one of Simon’s other more widely read novels, \textit{La Bataille de Pharsale}, published near the apex of “stage three” of the author’s career. Once again, I have chosen the opening sentence, as it provides the reader’s initial contact with the NW, and the FW. Even if the reader has read the text before, I am assuming that he starts rereading it from the beginning. In this case, the beginning is not the

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 easiest place to begin; the opening sentence of *La Bataille de Pharsale* opens
gaping holes in the first-time reader's world construction:

Yellow then black in the time it takes to bat an eyelash and then yellow
anew: wings deployed in the form of a rapid crossbow between the sun
and the eye darkness for an instant on the face like a piece of velvet a
hand darkness for an instant then light or rather recollection
(premonition?) memory of the shadows shining forth from bottom to top
at a palpable blistering speed that is to say successively the chin the
mouth the nose, the forehead being able [*pouvant*] to feel them and even
olfactivly so their moldy odor of a wine cellar of a tomb like a fistful of
black earth hearing at the same time the noise of ripped silk the air torn
or maybe not heard perceived only imagined bird arrow flaying whipping
already disappeared the feathers vibrating the mortal lines interlacing
drawing a sibilant [*chuintante*] arch like in this painting seen where?
(569)

One could make the argument that the sentence does not stop there, that the
question mark after the word “where” is merely a brief pause before the writer
continues describing the painting. For reasons of economy, I have chosen to
stop my reading of the sentence at the question mark, but the very fact that one
could make such an argument demonstrates how the infinitely expandable
creative unit of the sentence functions as the cornerstone of Simon’s NW. One
of the reasons I have stopped before the description of the painting is precisely
because the ekphrastic depiction of the painting, which constitutes one of the
touchstones of the FWs of *La Bataille de Pharsale*, is in fact more detailed and
linear than the first fourteen and a half lines of the novel, which leave the
reader few points of reference. It is no accident that the return towards order—
something the reader has a greater chance of following—occurs right after the
word “like,” which prefaces the comparison of the preceding description—a
description of what, exactly?—to Tintoret’s painting, *The Battle of Zara*. Without
such representative reference points, the reader would be completely lost.
The colon in the middle of the second line of the sentence, after the description of the alternating of colors accompanied by the act of blinking, grammatically signals a more ordered presentation of discourse for the reader constructing a NW. But can the reader construct any worlds upon first reading the sentence? Because of the colon, which indicates that what follows belongs in some manner to what precedes, the reader knows that the act of blinking referred to in the first line of the text encompasses the subsequent evocation of sensual experience. Yet it requires a fair amount of reading competence to comprehend the relation between the specific act of blinking and the overall one of perception. (Blinking is a cue, not a key: having understood the reference, the reader will have a better chance of parsing the sentence and reading it pictorially.) The lack of any punctuation, save one parenthetical phrase accompanied by a question mark, “premonition?” in the lines that follow, presents the reader with a series of obstacles. Whereas in the first sentence of La Route des Flandres the reader discovers other characters, actions, and setting, in the first sentence of La Bataille de Pharsale, he only comes into contact with sensations. It is such differences, on a much grander scale, that make critics inclined to classify Simon’s work by stages. However, whatever the specific obstacles posed by the text to the reader’s formation of NWs, in both cases, the limiting factors are still the same: the length of the sentence (here, a little over 130 words in the original French), punctuation, the present participle, and syntax. Whether the author uses commas instead of periods, as in the opening sentence of La Route des Flandres, or no commas at all, as in the opening sentence of La Bataille de Pharsale, the sentence acts in either case as an expandable unit of meaning modified by the author in a heterodox manner.
“Words in Simon thus signify *seriously*, which confers upon them a force and a resonance that could be qualified as poetic,” writes Genin (330). Genin points out that, although Simon’s referents may not refer in the traditional sense, the play of their possible conscious and unconscious referents affects the reader. The “poetic” nature of Simon’s language is deeply connected to how much their NWs slow the reader’s progress (330). One can argue that the whole of Simon’s project is aimed at creating a kind of suspended reading experience, where readerly consciousness itself is always in abeyance, occupying the space and time of the present participle. Poetically enigmatic, Simon’s language molds sentences into entities capable of creating new dimensions of fictional time and space.

In the first sentence of *La Bataille de Pharsale*, the role of the present participle is more ambiguous than ever, delineating the very acts of “shining forth,” “being able,” “hearing,” “flaying,” “whipping,” “interlacing,” and “drawing,” without ever indicating just who is doing what (or why, for that matter). Because of the lack of punctuation after the colon, the present participle bears much of the burden of supporting the NW in the opening of *La Bataille de Pharsale*, and this heightens the tension between verbal linearity, on the one hand, and simultaneous imagery, on the other. This situation matches the FW of the text, where everything described after the colon—that is, during the minute space and time of a blink—occurs simultaneously. The interlinked simultaneity made so evident by the NW’s reliance on the present participle mirrors the correspondences that subtend the rest of the novel. The reader does not discover the true significance of the first paragraph of the novel until he arrives at its last paragraph, “O. writes: Yellow then black in the time it
takes to bat an eyelash and then yellow anew” (740). Here, the reader at last encounters the period that signals the finality of what he has been reading: the unformed mass of perceptions and sensations indicated by the present participles on the first page of the text. This concurrence between NW and FW could be seen as more proof of Simon and Ricardou’s claims in the 1960s and 1970s that the fiction should imitate the language in which it is written. (Ricardou’s readings are clever, self-reflexive ones, but they assume that the text has already been read!)

In truth, no discussion of Simon’s work should ignore the reader and his worlds. Instead of it being impossible for the reader to arrive at Simon’s FWs, the very density of his prose and the obstacles posed to the reader by the writer’s NW push him very quickly into the domain of FWs. In other words, for Simon’s reader, making global assumptions about FWs is often easier than making local assumptions about the NWs, more closely associated with the language of the text, that subtend these FWs. The sentence is the first aspect of Simon’s NWs with which the aspiring reader of Simon must contend. Furthermore, the sentence in Simon is not stable; it can expand or contract, as the staccato rhythm of the first chapter of Les Géorgiques, a summary of the French Revolutionary War general L.S.M.’s life, demonstrates. Yet this first chapter is followed by the longer and longer sentences of the second chapter describing the drôle de guerre (the “phony war”), where parentheses begin to encroach upon the normal progression of the sentence. The point is not that Simon’s sentences are uniformly long and difficult; it is rather that they are infinitely elastic, expandable and contractible. Considering Simon’s work as a whole, sentence malleability obstructs reading as much as, if not more than,
sheer sentence length. Without achieving some mastery of the writer’s sentences—and this may be achieved by a detour through his FWs or through an action so simple as “letting go” and moving forward through the text regardless of a feeling of mastery over it—the reader of Simon, quite literally, has nowhere to go. Such a process might even necessitate reading faster—not more slowly, as we traditionally assume that the reader does when encountering an obstacle—so as more rapidly to create some semblance of a beginning, middle, and end from the multifaceted syntactic and semantic unit with which he is confronted. As will become clear in the next two sections, the way in which Simon’s narrative voice envelops other narrative voices present as intertext, citation, or collage, as well as the way the author returns to certain recurring images, gives the reader other straws at which to grasp. (For Queneau, of course, intertexts opened outwards, not inwards, acting as oases of reference in the midst of a multitude of ever-splitting words.)
D. The Anxiety of Intertextuality: the Plural Voices of Faulkner and Proust

In 1979, Simon stated, “You know, my brain just like yours is made up of a veritable salad of texts. They nourish it. In large part, we are constituted by our readings.” The aim of this section will be briefly to explore how, upon entering an author’s NW for the first time, the reader, formed by his own readings, interacts with the constitutive readings of the author. Simon’s awareness of the positioning of his own texts in reference to other texts is acute:

Our thought receives from the world but a coded tradition of conventional forms...I observe just how much my perception (and, consequently, my memory) are encumbered with a multitude of these “coded traditions” which, since my childhood, have come to distort it: is it necessary to enumerate, in disorder, [my] memories of the scriptures, paintings representing their events, Latin texts (or others) that I was forced to learn by heart in school, as well as classical mythology, mathematical figures and reasoning, cinematographic images, etc, etc?

Whether these “coded traditions,” which I have called “intertextual,” occur on a conscious or unconscious level is not the point. The point is that these “coded traditions” are a key part of world construction in Simon.

In order to reconstruct the NW as experienced by the reader, it is imperative to situate the writer in regard to previous “distorting” source material without “losing” the writer or the reader. The presence of Proust and Faulkner in Simon’s novels involves a profound modification of the writing of all three authors. It is this modification—the way that Simon positions himself as distinct from these two canonical authors at the same time that he cannot help but indicate his debt to them—that determines the reader’s path through the NW and creation of the NW in collaboration with the text—whether he

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235 Interview with Jo van Apeldoorn and Charles Grivel, in Ecriture de la religion, écriture du roman (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1979) 87-107.
recognizes the modification as modification or not. The global and dynamic modifications created by the intertextual encounter lay the groundwork for one of the major features of Simon’s NW, the author’s unique narrative voice. An analysis of the place of either Faulkner or Proust in Simon could easily turn into a full-length book. Here, I will limit myself to an abbreviated comparison of the place of intertextuality in Queneau and Simon, some considerations on Faulkner’s stylistic influence on the construction of the sentence in Simon, and an analysis of Simon’s inversion of the synthetic structure of memory that has come to be associated with Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

In place of an introduction, I contend that intertextuality in Simon differs greatly from intertextuality in Queneau in ways that reflect the differences of the authors’ NWs and FWs. The esoteric references and citations that distinguish Queneau’s NWs prepare the polyphonic and heteroglossic cacophony of voices underlying discourse in his FWs. According to Genin, Simon’s novels are characterized by a “polyphonic quality” (353). These novels do evince a hypersubjectivity that is at once both dense and fragmented, condensing the plurality of voices found within Queneau’s FWs, while at the same time going beyond the minor experimentation of Queneau’s NW, thus lending to them more weight. While Queneau’s worlds may be more far-flung than Simon’s, Simon’s worlds, by turning ever inwards on a pulsating axis of subjectivity, achieve a degree of intensity that is not present in Queneau. By modifying other texts, Simon pre-structures the act of reading so that a collision of possible NWs occurs. In Simon, the agglomeration of references piques the reader’s referential curiosity while ensuring that this curiosity remains impossible to satisfy during the act of reading. Here, correctly
identifying citations and references may enrich the reader’s reading experience, yet, as for Queneau, it is not a “cognitive” prerequisite for reading the text. In order to construct a NW in tandem with the text, Simon’s reader must allow himself to be borne along the back of subsequent and simultaneous waves of references, whose “orchestration” shapes the reading experience. The adaptability of this orchestration becomes clear only through rereading, which involves the reader’s continued elaboration of NWs and FWs.

A consideration of the confrontation of the work of Faulkner, Proust, and Simon allows us to determine how the latter’s novels, through the reader’s elastic elaboration of NWs and FWs, come to have meaning in the first place. Mary Orr frames her discussion of intertextuality in Simon by means of Harold Bloom’s argument about the “anxiety of influence,” or the way in which an artist contends with his precursors. Although I disagree with Orr’s claim that Simon progressively “liberates” himself from his influences, the critic’s methodology does take into account the effect of intertextuality on the reader. Orr compares Simon and his influences along relatively broad lines that take into consideration the relation of the intertext to worlds as well as words. Such a distinction is important; as Alistair Duncan remarks, the intertextual play encountered by the reader of Simon might temporarily obstruct his reading, but it does not conclusively limit it: “By introducing variety of style, manner and technique, intertextual play helps involve the reader in almost forgotten ways” (*Adventures* 87). These “forgotten ways” involve the intentional framework that

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supports the particular type of worldbuilding created by the collision of the words and worlds of one author with those of other authors. Much of this depends, of course, on the reader, but, even for the reader with very little knowledge of Faulkner or Proust, Simon’s intertextual references still produce an effect. Intertextuality adds supplementary layers of richness to Simon’s NWs and FWs, providing the reader with new enigmas at the same time as new tools by which to navigate them (Genin 377-387).

In this way, Christopher Shorley’s exhortation against writing about Queneau as if his texts had already been read and understood applies to the “worlding” process in Simon as well. By focusing on the minute differences between texts taken as endpoints in and of themselves without taking into consideration the position of the reader, we tend to lose sight of what Shorley calls the “initial experience of strangeness” associated with the reading experience (Fiction 5). After all, as I argued in Chapter Two, this experience does not only take place before new and unfamiliar words, but also new and unfamiliar worlds. Studying, through the lens of another author, the way in which the reader encounters both words and worlds simultaneously in an author such as Simon reveals something about the phenomenology of reading as well as about the text itself.
1. Faulkner: The Persistence of the Past

“It blew away, though not out of memory.”

Indicating his awareness of the “anxiety of influence,” Simon did not shy away from embracing William Faulkner’s influence: “So I descend from Faulkner? That does not bother me. We all descend from someone.”

According to Mary Orr, the influence of Faulkner on Simon rivals that of Proust (Intertextual 140). The purpose of this section will be to determine the broad parameters of this influence on the reader’s synthesis of immediate textual givens in order to create an intermediary NW. Putting aside for the moment what Sartre, in his 1938 article on Faulkner, called “the novelist’s metaphysics,” I will confine myself to examining certain similarities regarding the role of the sentence and the treatment of characters in both authors.

While what Duncan refers to as the “bleak view of man and his place in the universe” present in both authors is thematically interesting, I am more interested in the NW as a bridge between text and FWs. In the creation of his own unique narrative voice, Simon modifies certain techniques honed by Faulkner in 1928’s The Sound and the Fury and 1936’s Absalom, Absalom.

While Proust (born 1871) precedes Faulkner (born 1897), Faulkner’s effect on Simon’s sentence-level style warrants being discussed first. In my analysis, basic stylistic influence constitutes a more fundamental level of the NW than Simon’s more complex inversion of the teleological structure of La

240 “Claude Simon parle,” Interview with Madeleine Chapsal, L’Express April 5 1962.
Recherche du temps perdu. Attempts to connect the work of these two authors have remained incomplete; critics have often posited the writer’s “Faulknerian” phase in parallel with what I have labeled “stage two” of Simon’s career.243 Even Orr, who has written the only book-length study of intertextuality in Simon, argues that the writer progressively frees himself from the influence of Faulkner.244 Orr even claims that the references to Faulkner in Simon’s “later” period are narcissistic and “introtexual,” i.e. references to his own earlier references to Faulkner’s 1936 novel Absalom, Absalom! (147-148, 175-191). These are fascinating and provocative claims. Nonetheless, since my focus is on the way in which intertextuality helps to mold the reader’s NWs, and ultimately his FWs, I am more concerned with the effect that the author’s narrative voice has on the reader’s worldbuilding initiatives.

As any reader who has read both authors can attest, the way things are said in Simon often remarkably resembles the way things are said in Faulkner. In Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner depicts Quentin and Shreve evoking the sordid past of Quentin’s family:

the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them, at least, to Shreve) shades too) quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporizing breath. (243)

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243 As well as the Alistair Duncan article cited in the previous note, see Jacqueline de Labriolle’s comprehensive article on Faulkner and Simon, “De Faulkner à Claude Simon,” Revue de littérature comparée 53.3 (1979): 358-388; Orr’s Intertextual Dimension; and S.W. Sykes, “The Novel as conjuration: Absalom, Absalom! and La Route des Flandres,” Revue 53.3: 348-357. I will refer to these articles and books more explicitly throughout this section.

244 If we are going to make claims that rely on understanding authors in such a combative way—as Orr puts it in regard to Simon and Proust, as “two proses locked in combat, in a battle of writings” (122)—I prefer Duncan’s evaluation that Simon was definitely “strong enough” to be influenced by William Faulkner “without being swallowed up by the American novelist” (Duncan, “Faulkner,” Forum 252).
In much the same way, in *La Route des Flandres*, Georges and Blum reconstruct the past life of their dead captain, George’s relative, De Reixach:

the perfidious world once again inoffensive, familiar, deceptive, while passed in front of him sometimes confusingly the emaciated faces of Blum and Iglésia when they cooked pancakes, and the obscure equestrian silhouette, raising its arm, brandishing its sword, slowly crumpling on its side, disappearing, and it, as he, or rather they...(that is to say he, Blum—or rather their imagination, or rather their body, that is to say their skin, their organs, the adolescent flesh, deprived of women) had materialized it... (355)

Both quotations are fragments of much longer sentences that deal with characters resurrecting—or creating—a past to which they themselves have no direct access.245

As we see above, Simon’s greatest stylistic debt to Faulkner involves the expansion of the sentence as a narrative unit. Jacqueline de Labriolle has extensively studied the technical details of stylistic relationship between the two authors.246 She notes their liberal use of adjectives and metaphors to create a mass of details that almost “asphyxiates” the reader (369-370). Along with this descriptive overload comes an extensive use of parentheses and italics (visible in the previous quotations), which indicate a “rupture of communication,” embed acts of narration within one another, identify speakers, as well as indicate the subjective nature of thought (Labriolle 370, 373). Adjectives, metaphors, parentheses, and italics all allow the author more freedom to explore subjectivity; by the same token, they tend to slow down and break up the reader’s ability to follow the text in a linear manner.

245 Another good pair of quotations to analyze tackles the cruelty of war, and how ordinary men become caught up in something that has nothing to do with them. Although this is one of Simon’s major themes, it is described particularly well in *Les Géorgiques* 103-107; for Faulkner, see *Absalom, Absalom!* 94-98.

246 However, Labriolle, whose article was written in 1979 (and thus without a chance to take into account the rich Faulknerian resonances present throughout *Les Géorgiques* (1981)), concludes by stating her preference for the supposedly “Faulknerian” period of Simon’s career, ending with the publication of *La Route des Flandres* in 1960.
Yet another obstacle for the reader is the non-standard and intermittent use of punctuation in both authors. For instance, though Simon uses
punctuation with increasing frequency throughout *La Route des Flandres*, he avoids it when recounting moments of extreme stress (Labriolle 371). By the same token, Faulkner’s use of italics to indicate temporal shifts is also intermittent; the temporal shifts that define a novel like *The Sound and the Fury*
are sometimes, but not always, set off by italics. Even syntax is situational in the two bodies of work: normal, broken, or simplified, it often stretches the sentence over a lengthy series of conjunctions (372). Experimentation with punctuation and syntax, even with italics that indicate movement forward or backward in time, might slow the reader down at first, but the more he encounters them, the more he knows what to do with them. It is thus hard to establish a true “poetics” of experimentation in Faulkner and Simon because these authors expand, contract, and alter the sentence to fit the narrative needs of the moment. Each author remains readable in his own way, though, because experimentation is rarely rule-based, and it never completely overruns the text.

Instead, the stylistic characteristics of the NW, such as extensive use of punctuation, italics, broken syntax, present participles, and repetition determine the reader’s particular path from NWs to FWs. They also inflect the treatment of characters. The use of ambiguous personal pronouns, accompanied by the lack of proper names, forces the reader to pay close attention to the lengthy sentences unfolding before him. The act of rereading, hinging in part on the present participle, creates an elasticity that allows
worldbuilding to progress in several different directions. As a way of retaining readerly attention during this process, both writers employ a quasimechanical repetition of certain phrases, especially the ones used to indicate the act of speaking. This pattern is the noticeable in *Absalom, Absalom!* when Quentin and his college roommate Shreve reconstruct the history of Quentin’s family. Although Faulkner takes care to point out that the string of personal pronouns without antecedents does not mislead Quentin and Shreve, this may not be the case for the reader: “(neither of them said ‘Bon’. Never at any time did there seem to be any confusion between them as to whom Shreve meant by ‘he’)” (249). In fact, the reader only gains certainty when it is pointed out that the two characters need no such assurance! Without such points of reference, however ambiguous they may be, even intensive rereading would founder.

The epistemic gap at the base of memory and imagination is central to both authors (Duncan, “Faulkner,” *Forum* 240; Sykes 356). Faulkner solicits the emotional response of the reader by covering a time span of several generations through a variety of interlocutors (Labriolle 381-383). In Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin Compson’s college roommate, Shreve, Quentin’s father, and Miss Rosa herself all take part in the actual elaboration of the narrative. However, in Simon, the absence of any real interlocutors, combined with sentence-level distortions, makes it hard for the reader to judge the information he receives. Simon’s interlocutors, if there are any, blur into

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247 Labriolle provocatively claims that Francophones perceive this grammatical construction as being less fluid than do English speakers, thus giving Simon’s text an even greater density than Faulkner’s (374).

248 In *The Sound and the Fury*, the fragmentation of Quentin’s self reaches such a point that the personal pronoun “I” ceases to have much meaning: “I was not who was not was not who” (New York: The Modern Library, 1929) 211.

249 Readers of Faulkner will recognize Quentin as Caddy’s mentally disintegrating brother from *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), published seven years before *Absalom, Absalom!* yet dealing with a slightly earlier time period in Quentin’s life.
one another at a frightening pace. In *La Route des Flandres*, Georges recalls his obsession with De Reixach and his own experiences during the Second World War in the course of a passionate and yet unsatisfying night in a hotel room with De Reixach’s young widow, Corinne. Any other acts of narration in the novel are filtered through Georges, thus creating one monstrous narrative voice. In *La Route des Flandres*, unlike *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, the NW provides no counterweight to Georges, who is always the focal point of the narration.

Certainly, the “linguistic turn” evident in Simon’s work divides the two authors, who were born twenty-six years apart on different continents. But Faulkner too plays with language. The best-known example occurs at the beginning of *The Sound and the Fury*, when Benjy, the disabled younger brother of Quentin, hears golfers talking to their caddies, which then sparks traumatic memories of his promiscuous sister, Caddy. The homonym Caddy/caddie thus functions as what Simon calls a “mot carrefour”, a point of intersection between the words and worlds at work within a text (Simon, “Mot,” *Pratiques* 84). Furthermore, just like Simon, Faulkner meditates upon the insufficiency of language to represent human experience. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin’s father, while recounting the tragedy of the Sutpen family, states:

—Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen, all of them. They are there, yet something is missing, they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (80)
The comparison of characters to empty words—for Quentin’s father, even rereading does not bring them life—is one that returns again and again in Simon. In the novel *Les Géorgiques*, two hundred years after the French Revolution, the executed general L.S.M.’s crumbling papers are still stained with the bloodlike trace of ink: “One could almost say that the assembled words, the sentences, the traces left on the paper by the troop movements, the battles, the intrigues, the speeches, are flaking off, crumbling, and falling into dust, leaving on one’s hands only this intangible powder, the color of dried blood.”

For both authors, the impossible experience of the past remains difficult if unrecoverable by means of language. They address the failings of language through what they say and how they say it. For the reader confronted with the explorations of the failing of language in language, FWs provide the clues by which to interpret problematic NWs more so than the heuristic activity of interpretation.

Simon and Faulkner may share many stylistic traits at the level of the sentence, yet the worldbuilding experience of the reader is distinct in each case. Simon’s NWs are so dense as to require explanation by way of FWs; Faulkner’s NWs never attain this degree of complexity. Like Faulkner’s FWs, Simon’s stretch across generations, but the reader is never sure, even in a more explicitly “autobiographical” novel such as *Les Géorgiques*, just whose generations these are. Moreover, Simon’s narrative voice, and his use of “generating structures,” lends to his FWs a murkily monolithic aspect that is lacking in Faulkner; it is precisely this added degree of complexity that may

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distinguish readers of Simon from readers of Faulkner. Although Faulkner remains difficult to read and the deep-seated motivations of his characters remain obscure, with patience, the reader can eventually reconstruct, in linear fashion, the family trees, geographies, and events in question, even across generations torn apart by a war (thus the genealogies included in the appendices some of his novels). Making his way through Faulkner’s convoluted NWs, the reader is at some point rewarded with a comprehensible FW. Such an exercise proves less fruitful when it comes to Simon, whose FWs are, in one way, simpler—there are fewer characters and fewer events to keep track of—but, in other ways, harder to grasp, as they remain even more tightly nested within the author’s impenetrable NWs. In Simon’s novels, the event as event is never really reconstructed and its lingering existence in the form of traumatic memories often assumes a far greater importance than the event itself.

In the end, the question of the relation of language to meaning separates the two authors more radically than the question of language itself. Although Faulkner’s work is imbued with the aftereffects of the bloody American Civil War, the reader of Faulkner encounters no parallel to one of Simon’s greatest obsessions: the disintegration of French troops stationed in the Ardennes when faced with the German advance of May 1940. Rather, both The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! depict the slow and tragic decline of Southern families in time with the decline of the South itself, not the instant obliteration of all assumptions about the known world, as occurs in Simon’s descriptions of the Second World War. Despite both writers’ obsession with memory and imagination, no event in Faulkner ever annihilates the possibilities of perception—at the moment of the event and forevermore—in the way that the
German advance does in Simon’s FWs. While Faulkner laments the inability to discover the rationale for protracted dislocation and disintegration, Simon dissects the universal effects produced by a blinding moment of pure destruction in the arena of language. To this effect, Simon’s guiding questions—"How to know?", “But how was it, how was it?” and “But how to know, what to know?”—have to do with technique and differ quite a bit from Faulkner’s “Why? Why? Why?” and “Why and Why and Why,” which have to do with justification.251 Simon’s “vertiginous” questions call for an impossible act of infinite description, linked, for Celia Britton, to the fullness of the imaginary and the visible. In spite of this lure, this fullness, however, remains unrepresentable. While never establishing for certain what this knowledge is, Faulkner’s questions still imply some secret key to the mysteries of the world.252 For Simon, this kind of knowledge is, to borrow Lacan’s phrasing, “always already lost.” This difference is best illustrated by one of the characters from *La Bataille de Pharsale*, who fails to find the site of the Battle of Pharsalus with a friend. Rather than elaborate a shared history with this friend, as is often the case in Faulkner, Simon’s character is embarked on a solitary quest for the thing itself, thus a quest that must fail.

Even if the present moment of narration is easier to puzzle out in Faulkner, the focus of Faulkner’s narrative is resolutely turned towards reconstructing the past, a task impossible to achieve in Simon’s universe. In Simon, the present moment may be more difficult to identify, but the haunting, direct, and immediate trajectory from the past to present is more significant than any static instant, past or present. In *La Route des Flandres*, Georges

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imagines captain De Reixach as haunted by memories of an ancestor from the time of the French Revolution: “as if war violence murder had in some way resuscitated him in order to kill him a second time as if the bullet from the pistol fired a century and a half earlier had taken all these years to reach its second target to put the final period to a new disaster…” (246). If we hypothesized the trajectory of a similar bullet in Faulkner, the trajectory would not be so straight—first of all, the faulty trait would not skip a generation—as Faulkner studies in detail the individual psychology and interrelated histories of the characters he creates, an aspect of the novel that is definitively—and defiantly—missing in Simon. 253 Even if the reader cannot immediately identify Simon’s relevant influences, such as Faulkner, these influences structure the text, which repeats, modifies, and reintroduces elements which form NWs so that the reader can progress through Simon’s unique NW and towards his FWs with a lower level of anxiety.

253 In fact, in Absalom, Absalom! Rosa’s running from her house to the plantation at Sutpen’s Hundred, where her nephew has just shot her niece’s husband, could be compared to the bullet that kills De Reixach. What is, in Simon, a decidedly inhuman trajectory is humanized in Faulkner: “…a woman saying ‘Yes, Rosa?’ calmly into the midstride of my running which (I know it now) had begun five years ago…” (120).
2. Simon and Proust: Time Lost, Time Regained, Shattered Time

More than any other French author, discussions of Marcel Proust—Simon’s French “maître à penser”—dominate debates about intertextuality in Simon’s novels. These debates often center on identifying Simon’s myriad references to and quotations of Proust. A new perspective becomes clear, though, if we examine the relationship between the global “projects” of two authors under the aegis of the reading experience. I will contend in this section that Simon inverts Proust’s overall project involving the synthetic powers of art and memory, all the while working within same set of interests. In this manner, Georges Poulet’s phenomenological reading of Proustian space as relational, “out of time, but not out of space,” could as easily apply to Simon: “a plurality of episodes are ordered and construct their own space, which is the space of the work of art.” What differentiates the two authors is the elaboration of this fictional space, as well as the purposes served by this elaboration. An exploration of the trajectory of the reader as he moves between NWs and FWs can only enrich the detailed recognition of the relevant intertexts provided by criticism, research, and rereading; after all, identifying the possible sources of intertextual modification only disables one level of the text’s resistance. Obstructed by the Faulknerian sentence-level difficulties of Simon’s NW, the reader simultaneously engages with Proust’s overall narrative structure.

254 Orr’s chapter on Simon and Proust in Claude Simon: the intertextual dimension covers most criticism on the subject (122-137). As Orr would have it, Proust is the “master” and Simon “the apprentice.” Orr hypothesizes that Simon gradually liberates himself from slavery to the Proustian intertext by progressively freer manipulation of Proustian citations (137).

The subsequent articles cited in this section focus mainly on finding and explaining specific references to Proust in Simon, only drawing any global conclusions about the interrelationship of the two authors in a few sentences. There are recent micro-comparative articles on Proust and Simon as well. See Marie Miguet-Ollagnier’s “Claude Simon face à Proust: exercices d’admiration” Esprit Créateur 46.4 (2006): 100-112, which draws some conclusions about the “painterly” aspect of both writers.

and its relation to memory. “Pulling back” in order to take a more general look at the two authors enables us better to discern the specificity of Simon’s NWs, as well as to point out once again that sometimes the writer’s FWs give the reader access to his NWs.

In 1962, Simon tantalizingly compared Faulkner to Proust, revealing in the process something about his own conception of the latter: “Faulkner is completely impregnated with Proust; he knows him by heart. ‘There is no such thing as memory,’ he says, ‘the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no more, no less: and its resultant sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of dream.”

In a demonstration of the “anxiety of influence” argued for by Orr, Simon here addresses two important predecessors, filtering Proust through Faulkner. Simon rereads the canonical French novelist through the American one, in the process arguing for the fundamental incoherence of sensual experience. Given that this kind of coherence or synthesis, made possible by the body and achieved through literature, constitutes the end point of À la recherche du temps perdu—as the title of the enterprise, as well as of its last volume, Le Temps retrouvé indicates—the intersection of these three authors is an ideal place to start investigating Proust’s presence in Simon’s NWs.

In fact, Simon’s truncation of Faulkner’s actual quotation confirms his willing revision of Proust. In Absalom, Absalom!, it is Miss Rosa, last member of the Sutpen family (by marriage), who makes this claim about memory to Quentin Compson, who is about to leave Mississippi for Harvard University. However, Miss Rosa does not deny memory outright, as Simon’s modification of

256 Chapsal 1962. The quotation is taken from Chapter Five of Absalom, Absalom! (115).
the quotation would imply. Rather, she interrupts her narrative of the day she learned that her nephew had killed her niece’s fiancé to state, in reference to the wisteria vine’s meandering progress through the lit and unlit portions of the room, “That is the substance of remembering—sense, sight smell: the muscles with which we see and hear and feel—not mind, not thought” (115) before continuing in the manner quoted by Simon. Simon removes the positive part of the statement, “the substance of remembering” that Faulkner uses to define memory, and keeps only its negative part, which states “There is no such thing as memory...” In reality, Miss Rosa criticizes only a certain vision of memory, not its very existence. No misreading, Simon’s modification of Faulkner’s quotation supports his own idiosyncratic reading of memory in Proust, whose vision of memory is usually thought of as synthetic, rather than fragmented (as Simon seems to suggest here).

Rather than objectifying the products of memory, both Faulkner and Simon share a great interest in elaborating the “dream” that, for Miss Rosa, takes its place.

Whereas it is Faulkner’s dense verbal style that provides the material for Simon’s even more condensed narrative voice, it is Proust’s insistence on the ability of memory to attain and then reorder a confused and faraway past that Simon turns on its head. From the beginning of Du côté de chez Swann, where the taste of the madeleine causes the town of Combray to burst forth, like a Japanese flower, from Marcel’s cup of tea, to the end of Le Temps

257 Even if we accept Deleuze’s argument regarding time’s non-totalizing function in À la recherche du temps perdu, or, for that matter, Genette’s argument regarding the “indefiniteness” and “incompleteness” of Proust’s project, Simon’s novels are even less totalized, more indefinite, and more incomplete than Proust’s. Deleuze, Proust et les signes (Paris: PUF, 1964); Genette, Narrative 267.

258 Although it is not my main focus in this section, as is the case with Faulkner, Simon’s reader is also forced to come to terms with Simon’s Proustian “distension” and “enriching” of the sentence, one whose poetic quality may give more weight to Simon’s individual sentences than to Faulkner’s—and thus create the temptation to interpret such “poetry” as synthesis. Robin Lefere, “Claude Simon et Marcel Proust,” Studi Francesi 100 (1991): 91-100.
retrouvé, where the uneven cobblestones and the evening at the Duke of Guermantès’s house cause Marcel to realize his vocation as a writer, Proust’s grand contention is that the ravages of time are not irreversible. Involuntary memory, sparked by the senses, can prompt us to recall what we thought had been lost forever. By actively pursuing these newly discovered memories, which indicate our malleable link to the past, we fill in the details of an elaborate “lost” world.

For Simon, memory is more than involuntary; it is uncontrollable. Molded and activated by any and every sense impression, the flood of memories levels distinctions between the past and the present. Always subject to revision, Simonian memory races through time far too quickly and erratically to gather disparate episodes together in durable fashion. The overwhelming sensual nature of memory hints at a previous cohesive corporeal and preontological experience of a world torn apart by war or other forms of corporeal or symbolic violence. Yet this unified experience of the world remains unattainable and the reader is in fact led to question whether such a moment of edenic unity outside of time ever existed or whether these moments are only a momentary respite, as the bucolic scenes preceding the blitzkrieg German attack in May 1940, depicted in La Route des Flandres, Les Géorgiques, L’Acacia, and Le Jardin des Plantes, appear to indicate.

259 Thus, in the scene in Du côté de chez Swann where the madeleine first actualizes Marcel’s memories of the past, the narrator insists, “It is clear that the truth that I seek is not in it [the tea] but rather in me” and, at the beginning of the party whose description concludes Le Temps retrouvé, he understands that “only vulgar and erroneous perception places everything in the object, when everything is in the spirit.” Marcel Proust, Du côté de chez Swann (1913; Paris: Folio, 1987) 45; Le Temps retrouvé (1927; Paris: Flammarion, 1986) 309.

260 I will examine this process—the construction and destruction of what I call the “soldier-subject”—in more detail in the next chapter.
In Simon, moments of “Proustian” synthesis, wherein memory synthesizes diverse worlds of experience are temporary. These same moments are found at a multitude of points throughout Simon’s novels. Whereas, for Marcel, the door to the past is stable enough that, starting from the products of involuntary memory, he can elaborate his childhood and entire life—even, as Genette points out, those lives, that, like Swann’s, have come before his own—Simon’s characters are submerged in a unstable and menacing flow of memories over which they exert minimal control. Simon’s characters do not so much “mold” their memories as they “experience” them. In Proust, the spark of involuntary memory creates the possibility of elaborating intricate past worlds. Involuntary memory takes on an even more radical aspect in Simon, where the constantly shifting worlds of the past encroach upon the present, jarringly dislocate the subject from the here and now, and create a state of constant revision. This never-ending revision also forces the reader to rebuild past worlds from the foundation on up. Thus Simon passes along to the reader the job of finding correspondences, whereas Proust quite consciously accomplishes this task for the reader. Even so, neither Simon’s worlds nor his reader ever achieves anything resembling the ontological security of the fullness of the worlds given life by involuntary memory for Marcel in Du côté de chez Swann, nor the latter’s triumphant meditations on the recuperative power of art in Le Temps retrouvé. Unable to access and, ultimately, to dominate his own memory as Marcel does, Simon’s characters, and by extension his reader, fight to hold onto the precarity of the present moment of narration, which shuttles incessantly between a variety of FWs separated by time and by space. Helping to create the “coherence in incoherence” particular to Simon’s fiction, the
dispersal of nodal or “rhizomatic” syncretic instants when memory momentarily
tames the flood of past experiences is one of the defining characteristics of
Simon’s work.261

As in Proust, the temporal web of Simon’s FWs is given meaning by a
series of novels, but the cumulative and teleological organization of À la
recherche du temps perdu is absent from Simon’s work.262 No moment of
encompassing finality via overall narrative cohesion comparable to Marcel’s
musings on the power of art to resurrect and encompass life in Le Temps
retrouvé, the seventh and last novel of À la recherche du temps perdu, ties
together the disparate strands of Simon’s novels. If anything, the last pages of
Le Jardin des Plantes, Simon’s last full-length novel (1997), add to the earlier
texts yet another level of smoke and mirrors. Here, Simon includes a screenplay
detailing a key scene, repeated in several novels, in which a French officer is
shot and killed by a German sniper on a country road. Although the screenplay
presents, for the first time, the perspective of the German sniper himself, the
reader achieves no more certainty regarding an event that is now mediated by
cinema, the art of illusion!263

The extensive elaboration in three out of Simon’s last four novels (Les
Géorgiques, L’Acacia, and Le Jardin des Plantes) of events presented in earlier
texts does not furnish an equivalent of Le Temps retrouvé, without which
Proust’s project would remain unfinished.264 Rather, Simon’s novels never stop

261 According to Deleuze, any point of the rhizome can be connected to any other point (Oedipe 13).
262 Thus Randi Birn sees Simon’s modification of Proust as a rejection of the “quest novel”, “Proust,
263 Simon, Le Jardin des Plantes, Œuvres 1169-1178. I am leaving out Simon’s last short novel, Le
Tramway, as it is short enough to be a novella.
264 See Jean-Claude Vareille on the “inevitability” of L’Acacia because, in the sense that Simon goes over
the same ground time and again, “it had already been written” (“L’Acacia ou Simon à la recherche du
describing the impossibility of such finality: FWs often seem incomplete until another—but not necessarily later—novel has been read. Each novel informs every other novel, and each FW every other FW in ways that it is up to the reader reconstruct. Furthermore, this reconstruction follows no preset order, unless the reader insists on reading the novels in the order of their publication. (In contrast, who has ever started reading Proust in the middle?)

But the structure of Simon’s novels should not be understood solely in relation to Proust, for Simon’s novels allow increased and dynamic participation on the part of the reader, on whom more of the burden of world-construction falls. Simon’s reader, like the character caught up in his discordant memories of war, can enter into the fictional world at any point on the spectrum: past, present, or future (which is best explained as a kind of “future perfect” tense where the character can look back at himself, can experience the past as present, and the present as future, but is unable to link the two).

It is to the idiosyncratic nature of time in Simon that the reader owes his own unique style of interaction with NWs. Past, present, and future are contained by the moment in which perception and memory encounter imagination—Miss Rosa’s “dream.” No point, even the present moment of enunciation, which is often difficult to discern, turns out to be more stable than the others. In this way, Françoise Van Rossum-Guyon reads Simon’s use of Proust’s text as a replacement of the unified time of memory with more elastic “fictional time.” Equivalence and reversibility stand in for Proust’s “hierarchy of temps perdu,” in Le Nouveau Roman en questions, tome 1. Nouveau Roman et archétypes (Paris: Minard, 1992) 189-214).

Proust’s elaborate NW descriptions lay the groundwork for a FW that must be construed as lost in order to be regained. Simon follows Proust by constructing elaborate NW descriptions of FWs that, however, can only be grasped for a moment (if at all) before they disappear again.

This “bidirectional” movement, which the reader must accept in order to continue reading, means that the synthetic work of memory, once accomplished, can move once again towards disorder and destruction, and so on ad infinitum. Character and reader play the part of time travelers heading off in all directions, instantaneously shifting from one point to another and traversing the infinite space of consciousness—the NWs and FWs that they create in collaboration with the text—by means of contractions and dilations that resemble memory’s movements of retention and protention. Among other things, temporal fragmentation and dislocation increase reader participation in NWs and FWs. “Simon’s oeuvre becomes, in the course of successive rereadings, a moving constellation constantly being reorganized. The reader, by means of his textual memory, is led to participate in this reorganization,” writes Genin (349). As an example of intertextuality, Simon’s engagement with the Proustian conception of memory, an unattainable mirror image of possibility for the reader, reorganizes and reverses narrative structure, as well as moves the reader one step closer to Simon’s own FWs, which involve a more demanding type of “activation.”

E. Seeing is Believing: the Image as Crossover between NW and FW

One of the two epigraphs for Simon’s short novel, *Le Tramway*, published in 2001, reproduces the following quotation from Proust, found in *Du côté de chez Swann*, “the image being the only essential element, the simplification that would consist simply and purely in doing away with real characters would be a decisive improvement” (84). Here, Marcel explains that the novelist’s ability to evoke emotion in the reader results from his skill in manipulating images. Whereas real people remain opaque, the immateriality of fiction allows the reader to interiorize its worlds—in this case, the image—in a more complete way. Although Simon certainly “does away” with characters in a way that irrevocably distinguishes him from an author such as Proust (or, for that matter, Queneau), his masterful use of the image creates a sufficient world of its own. In fact, the irreal nature of the images that, replacing linear plot progression and the traditional elaboration of characters, may at first disorient the reader, ultimately help the latter to make sense of Simon’s NW. “What is exact is precisely this irreality in which everything seemed to take place,” declares the writer S. in *Le Jardin des Plantes*, insisting to a journalist that the blurring of his memories does not result from age, but from this fundamental sense of irreality that was present in the past as well (1092). Emphasizing *irreality* rather than *unreality*, the author calls attention to the verbal nature of images; as a result, when they do coalesce for the reader, images seem to detach themselves all the more from their verbal supports. In fact, as Ralph Sarkonak argues, it is precisely because of the limited mimetic capabilities of language that the “junction of the world—including that of the world of
language—and word remains forever problematic.”267 World and words clash because the former is infinite and the latter finite. This clash is both problematic and productive.

By translating irreality through a freer use of images, Simon places emphasis upon the experience of experience, not the objectification of that experience. For Pascal Mougin, who has written a lengthy study of the function of the image in Simon’s novels, where it has been liberated from its referent, this double-edged “image-effect” creates the phenomenon of “emergence.” Always incomplete, the image emerges out of the complex interaction of reader and NW. Since Simon resolutely refuses to anchor his images to referents, but rather repeats and continuously modifies images—often, what something is being compared to is described in more detail than the original object—these images, linked more to the dynamic act of vision than to its static, objectified product, gain a new kind of power. This is why, in Histoire, the narrator’s uncle does not ask him the specifics of his participation in the Spanish Civil War, but rather to “see” the events of the past (173).268 “Seeing” represents a first step towards worldbuilding (Mougin 152). Partially anchored by the text, images such as the dying horse in the barn in La Route des Flandres, whose gaze seems to concentrate “on an interior vision that was more peaceful than the incessant agitation of reality, a reality more real than the real,” enable the reader’s movement from NWs to FWs (282-283). The image of the dying horse, which is neither purely referential nor purely verbal, does not represent an inert object among other objects, but rather a dynamic entity endowed with its own

unknownable vision of the world. As the reader moves between NWs and FWs, he soon discovers world-constructing elements other than himself at work in Simon’s novels, foremost among them series of images. Summaries of these novels, constructed along the lines of Genette’s “macropropositions,” whereby the novel can be summarized in a single sentence, often turn into a list of related and recurring images. Genette’s celebrated example concerns À la recherche du temps perdu, which he wryly transforms into, “Marcel devient écrivain.” For the beginning reader of Simon, it may well appear that the (imaged) meanderings of fiction have macropropositionally taken the place of “plots”.

For example, as I discussed earlier, the most basic summary of La Bataille de Pharsale would indicate that the novel contains a multitude of interlinked images that pass through the writer’s mind in the blink of an eye. (And it would already take quite a bit of reading competency to come up with the previous summary!) In this instant, consciousness expands to take in, among other things: the flight of a pigeon, people ascending and descending the stairs of the metro, various paintings of war, the defeat of the French military in May 1940, an enraged soldier, an affair with a sculptor friend’s wife, a search for the battlefield of Pharsalus, a detailed description of a reaper-binder, two young boys on a farm, a critique of art history, schoolboy Latin homework, photographs of the Spanish Civil War, a visit to Lourdes, and a visit to a museum. The same goes for the novel Triptyque, which presents the reader with a succession of images: a young boy doing his homework, his grandmother

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269 I am excluding the rather larger category of ekphrasis in order to focus more narrowly on the role of the image, rather than its possible referents, for fear that the latter would limit me to a reductive level of reading that does not have much place in a discussion of the phenomenology of reading.

killing a rabbit, two young boys assembling the fragments of the reel of film, a film shown in a barn, a couple having sex in the barn, a movie star in a hotel room in a resort town, a young married couple fighting in a northern region of France. These images, though described in detail by Simon, do not mean anything in isolation from one another; they are so connected as to impinge upon the seemingly neat division of the novel into thirds, whereby three different settings and plots blur into one another in ways that defy the laws of logic. From the point of view of literary history, such reliance on a rapid succession and repetition of images may be construed as a rebellion against the traditional linearity of the novel. Yet, from the point of view of the reader struggling to understand a difficult text, these images also represent positive and significant elements in the worldbuilding process. It is this duality of the image in Simon’s NW—its propensity for creating confusion in the reader at the same time that it acts as a foothold in texts which constantly highlight their own verbal nature—that makes Simon’s NWs so unique. The reader, as he integrates various aspects of the NW in order to lay the foundation for FWs, avoids reducing the image, a language-based construction, to language alone. My discussion of the image concludes my chapter on Simon’s NWs because the image functions as a point of intersection between NW and FWs. While Simon’s NWs prove to be nearly inexhaustible, the image manages to shift even the most uncomprehending reader, however briefly, into the author’s FWs.

Simon’s repeated images give the reader a point of reference in an ever-shifting NW marked by the expansion of the sentence and constant intertextual references. One of the most celebrated images in Simon’s work, repeated in many of his novels, is that of the army captain unsheathing his sword as he is
hit by the German sniper’s bullet during the German advance through France in May 1940. This image, which, along with the image of the dead horse liquefying by the side of the road, is one of the lynchpins of La Route des Flandres, also returns in Les Géorgiques and Le Jardin des Plantes. Without adventuring too far in an analysis of the role of this image in Simon’s FWs, I would like to point out what effect such images have on the reader comprehension of the basic NW of La Route des Flandres. The swirling embedded narration of this novel, filtered through the character of Georges, combined with its constant temporal shifts and sentence-level distortions make it hard for the novice reader to make much headway. However, certain images pop up time and again.

Images like the moment of De Reixach’s death, the dying horse in the barn, or the dead horse on the side of the road, represent key points in the immense discursive webs of signification of the novel, points that allow the reader to seize something more solid than language alone on which to pin his continued act of reading. The liberation of such images from a well-defined outside world of reference, as well as their continual iteration throughout the text, is certainly disorienting. However, even the most virginal reader of La Route des Flandres knows that someone is killed while riding a horse, that another horse lies dying in a barn, and another dead on the side of a road. In short, horses occupy a central place within the text. While such a simplified level of analysis may seem almost childlike, it is, in fact, far from it. The reader knows these basic facts, even if he does not seize all of their possible implications. Such basic knowledge provides the background that enables the

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271 See, for example: Flandres 266; 282-282; Géorgiques 53; Jardin 1169.
reader to continue reading—and to desire to do so. The events of a novel like La Route des Flandres are not so numerous that such basic understanding does not significantly advance the reader’s comprehension and his ability to elaborate on this understanding as he encounters new features of the author’s NWs and FWs. Once he has finished the text, the rereader has little trouble establishing a list of the “macropropositional” events that define the FW, although organic connections between them may be harder to come by during the act of reading. These events, in and of themselves, are less important than their elaboration by means of overdetermined and constantly modified images stretching stretch throughout both NW and FWs.

Yet, while Simon’s images are more than verbal, they also never quite reach the plenitude of reality. Rather, according to Britton, these images approach the fullness of the imaginary without ever quite reaching it. In La Route des Flandres, De Reixach’s death begs continual description precisely because there exists no complete image which corresponds to it. Georges, marching behind his captain, only sees half of what happens; in order to have seen the whole event: “I would also have to have been he who was hidden behind the hedge watching him advance...” (399). Georges believes that bringing the other point of view, that of the German sniper, together with his own will, quite literally, connect both sides of the story (and create a greater image than that which his limited perception could supply, providing an interesting analogy to reader/author complementarity):

seeing so to speak the other side of what I could see or I the back and he the front that is to say that between us me following him and he watching him advance we possessed the totality of the enigma (the murderer knowing what was going to happen to him and I knowing what had had happened to him that is to say after and before, that is to say
like the two halves of a shared orange split in two which fit together perfectly) (411-412)

Yet, as the reader of Simon learns in *Le Jardin des Plantes*, published in 1997, even a filmic image of the German sniper does not quite bring the “two halves of the orange” together. Cinematic point of view too must alternate and the image of the captain exemplifies what Mária Mínich Brewer, writing about experiences of shock in relation to Simon’s descriptions of war, calls “the impossible point of encounter of the incommensurable.” Brewer analyzes this state of separation by making reference to Simon’s “mobile and flexible writing process,” which ties “a particularly modern subjectivity” to “an increasingly linked but abstract world” (60). Connected to an ever-changing act of vision, lived experience turns Simon’s impossible image par excellence into an act of vision and description, which takes precedence over the objects and events that it sees and describes. In a similar manner, Deguy argues that, in the end, the Simonian need for constant representation renders *everything* seen irreal (1019). Yet Simon’s images allow the reader to stop and start his reading time and again. Once the reader understands that this troublesome—and unstable—image will be elaborated time and again, that the “climax” of the novel already occurs on its third page, following a brief summary of many of the events of the FW of the novel (199), his passage back and forth between NW and FWs becomes more manageable.

Although it is unstable, NWs and FWs converge by means of the image, which thus acts as a kind of Lacanian “quilting point” for the organization of different threads of narrative and fictional discourse (Lacan, *Psychoses* 260,

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For Lacan, who even referred to the novel in his discussion of the quilting point, this mechanism symbolized a conjuncture of visible signifier with ambiguous signified, and thus constituted a point of reference lending meaning to the threads of the act of interpretation. For Simon, however, one must imagine these nodes stacked on top of one another throughout the whole of the text: as soon as the reader realizes that he has encountered a particular aspect of the text before, he may search it out, and thus lose the momentary cohesion he had achieved, even if this cohesion is itself a product of the nodal structure of the text. In this way, the “quilting points” of Simon’s NWs often fulfill a very basic role in worldbuilding for the reader; they give him the illusion of possible future cohesion and allow him to continue reading. Simon designates such points as “intersection words” (mots carrefours), whose verbal nature cuts across the various FWs in which they exist (“Mot,” Pratiques 84). The points of intersection discussed by Simon, because they share both in NWs and FWs, lead to worlds as well as words. (In this way, worldbuilding lays the groundwork for interpretation, and interpretation allows for further worldbuilding.) A similar image from Histoire displays the microscopic structure underlying the interlinking of images so characteristic of Simon: “the foliage stirring again: by looking closely you could see that each minuscule drop of dried blood was joined to the next by even smaller microscopic droplets sometimes a thin red line: like a silk thread on which you would have tied knots” (381). Images reveal interconnections, which are themselves made up of further interconnections or “knots.” It is by means of these knots, what Simon himself called, quoting Lacan, “knots of meanings” (noeuds de

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273 I have been greatly aided in revising these translations by consulting Richard Howard’s 1968 translation of the novel (NY: George Braziller).
signification), that the reader, having familiarized himself with the author’s disruptive sentences and constellation of intertextual references, can move more easily throughout his NWs.

In fact, as demonstrated by the preceding quotation, images in Simon’s novels are often somewhat self-reflexive; they reveal something, although not everything, about the difficulty of reading these novels. In Les Géorgiques, Simon describes at length the statue of L.S.M., a general from the period of the French Revolution, commenting both on the massive, solid aspect of the sculpture, as well as its fleeting nature: “There emanates from the conflict between the weight of the ton of polished marble and the ghostly grayness in which flesh, hair, and clothing are indistinctly joined something contradictory, like the apparition of some specter without real existence and yet palpable” (68). The enormous block of marble, an image of stability, is also categorized as “ghostly.” Background mixes with figure; the features and clothing of L.S.M. are almost indistinguishable from one another so that the statue gives the impression of simultaneously being there and not being there. Furthermore, this image of an image is one of the few closes glimpses that the reader has of L.S.M., despite the long lists of his activities and achievements liberally sprinkled throughout the novel. This statue disorients the reader as it orients him, demonstrating perfectly the intermediary function of the image in Simon’s NW. Those most interested in the high formalist years of Simon’s career might understand such self-reflexive descriptions as fiction describing the language that created it. Of course, the descriptions of the flowers stained with blood and the statue can be taken as a description of the creative process of language. Another example that springs to mind would be the meticulous description of
the interlocking parts of the reaper binder in *La Bataille de Pharsale* (658-662). In the same movement, though, the reader manages to move forward, filling in the pieces of a world that is more than just text. Confused (a ghostly statue?) and comforted (L.S.M. really did exist; there is a statue of him; I can continue reading), the reader oscillates between NWs and FWs. As a principal intersection between the two, the image helps to explain how and why a reader might actually wish to read—and continue reading—an author as difficult as Simon.

Simon’s images do deal with the act of writing, but they also tie together words and worlds in a regenerative manner. At the end of *L’Acacia*, when, following a period of convalescence upon his return from a German prison camp, the protagonist sits down at his desk, the act of writing makes its presence felt in the descriptive image of the acacia tree next to the house. There, NW and FW come together:

One of the branches of the big acacia tree which was growing in the yard almost touched the wall, and he could see the closest boughs lit by the lamp, with their grooves (*feuillures*) like feathers (*plumes*) feebly palpitating against the background of darkness, the oval leaflets (*folioles*) tinged a raw green by the electric light moving sometimes like creses (*aigrettes*), as if suddenly animated by their own movement, as if the whole tree were waking up, shaking itself, after which everything became peaceful again and they [the leaves] were again immobile.\(^{274}\)

That the semantic field of vocabulary used to describe the tree is “writerly”—"plume” also means “pen”—does not mean that the image of the tree is any less a worldbuilding element. That such passages might make the reader take note of the structure of the text is a very real possibility; however, it is only one possibility in the complex series of levels that make up the reading experience. As Yocaris claims, Simon’s “discoherence-effects,” which entail a seeming

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logical contradiction in the text’s FWs, do more than highlight the “materiality” of the text. They also contribute to a “narrative universe” centered on ontological indeterminacy. Just as Parsons argues that non-existent objects can be characterized even though they might not exist, ontological indeterminacy does not preclude the act of worldbuilding. In fact, such indeterminacy enables a different kind of worldbuilding.

This “ontological indeterminacy” helps create workable NWs and FWs for the reader of Simon. The series of “Aha!” moments encountered by the reader is never-ending. As Mougin points out, the reader, fooled once, is eagerly fooled again (27-29). In fact, the desire of the reader to find out what is “really real” frequently defines the reading experience of novels, such as Triptyque or Les Corps Conducteurs, that are resolutely set against the idea of any kind of concrete decidability. In other words, even Simon’s most imagistic novels, where “one and only one designator refers simultaneously to two ‘objects’ of different ontological status,” can be animated by basic readerly demands.

Like the pieces of the puzzle described on the last pages of Triptyque, interconnected images in Simon to lead from words to worlds and back again, creating a reversible chain that the reader uses to navigate the text via narrative and fictional worlds. “Their meandering edges have been calculated in such a way that none of them, taken in isolation, offers the entire image of a character (personnage), an animal, or even a face,” writes Simon of these puzzle pieces (224). By using the word “character” (personnage) instead of “person,” Simon

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275 See Chapter Two.
276 See also the diagramming of the logical impossibility of the intertwining of the three sections of Triptyque in Yocaris’s article.
alerts the reader that, even when connected to each other, the edges of this puzzle will not display reality, but rather fictional reality (or fictionality).

Because the reader’s desire leads him to try to determine which images are “really real,” and which are not, does not mean that such a desire ever has to be satisfied. Such desire allows readers to push through even the most difficult of novels; the reading of these difficult novels may transpire initially at such a basic level that we are quick to pretend never existed, once we have gained some sort of mastery over the reading material. Through the mediation of readerly desire by the image, words and worlds trade places with each other time and again. Out of the order of language arises the chaos of the image; out of the chaos of language arises the order of the image. The phenomenon of emergence, where NW and FW come together, is momentary because construction and deconstruction occur in tandem with the reader’s desire. In Simon’s own words, “All these images, all these apparently scattered sensations, sometimes disseminated without any apparent link, there is a moment when it all coalesces, when it ‘takes,’ as you say when talking about a mayonnaise.”277 As the reader soon discovers, this process can suddenly be reversed. Just by being rotated, images can “recall that at any instant the orderly and reassuring world can suddenly capsize, fall over and put itself on its back like an old whore rolling up her skirts...returning to the original chaos” (Histoire 66). The image does not furnish definite answers; it is merely a step that can be taken in either direction on the trajectory from NWs to FWs. As we will see in the next chapter, the ways by which images cut across time and space define the contours of FWs in which the character is constantly

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confronted with death. The density of Simon’s NWs means that the resulting FWs are always under construction. This state of affairs suggests that these FWs, although in part sparked by a “world of images,” go beyond this world of images in their recreation of the vagaries of sensuous as well as cerebral perception. Rather than existing only as an “object of consciousness,” Simon’s FWs, as we shall see, become something akin to consciousness itself.
C. Conclusion

Set apart by constant expansion and contraction on the level of the sentence, modulation of intertextual references, and iteration of images, the reader of Simon is not assured easy passage through the writer’s NWs. Again, a brief comparison best serves as a conclusion here. Whereas, in Queneau, the reader’s desire is put to the test by rapidly multiplying FWs, in Simon, the reader’s desire is immediately strained by the demands of the NW. Without the desire to differentiate representation from “reality” that helps the reader—now a rereader—progress through the author’s incredibly dense and difficult NW, the novice reader would be lost. This desire allows Simon’s reader to treat the author’s novels as, in the words of Sykes, “space in which to do work; the usefulness of the analogy of spatial form is that it allows us to appreciate the text as the place of a constant and synchronized activity, and that it does not allows reading to content itself with a passive role.”278 The argument has often been made that experimental novels are constructed in order to put the creative role of the reader on par with that of the novelist. But the world-constructing role of the reader works along very distinct lines from that of the novelist. Driven by desire, the reader must build worlds just in order to interact with the worlds suggested by the author on the pages of the text. The two sets of worlds may interact, but they are never fully commensurable with one another.

While present in all texts, this intermediary worldbuilding process stands out most clearly in relation to texts that remain, for lack of a better formulation, “difficult to read.” Simon’s novels, easily reduced to summary in the space of a few sentences, contrast with Queneau’s, which often require a full blackboard

for something resembling a plot summary. Yet the NW issues peculiar to
Queneau, discussed in Chapter Two, do not derail the reader; he can ignore
them, continue reading, and gain an intermediate level of comprehension and
interaction with the text. This is not so for the reader of Simon, for whom the
NW represents a possible obstruction to the reading process. Thus we see that
NWs and FWs do not function in the same way in every author. In the next
chapter, I will use Simon’s novels in order to explore the construction of a
character-like entity, what I call the “soldier-subject” as the touchstone of FWs
which often revolve around the experience of experience at the very moments,
such as war or revolution, when this experience is being torn apart.
Chapter Five: Simon’s FWs: The Soldier-Subject

A. Introduction: the War of the Worlds

Claude Simon’s FWs are dominated by the figure of the “soldier-subject,” who is both more than a soldier and more than a subject. A subject in a war that quickly becomes his world and a soldier in a world that ceaselessly resembles a war, the soldier-subject is caught up in a true war of the worlds. Furthermore, the soldier-subject is deeply divided from his habitual world by a heightened sense of self-consciousness brought on by impending death. Yet this perception of a rapidly growing distance from the world on the part of the soldier-subject also reveals his concrete connections to this world. For the soldier-subject, perception thus works hand in hand with expression. The perception of imminent death allows him to express his world to himself—to represent it to himself—in new ways, including temporal displacement. Such acts of self-expression and self-representation are then taken up again as perception, resulting in a perpetual decomposition and recomposition of worlds. Simon’s reader undergoes a similar process when confronted with Simon’s difficult and dense NW; it is only through the act of rereading that he can move in an agile enough manner to make connections between NWs and FWs. Of course, there is much more to Simon’s FWs than the soldier-subject. Since I am most interested in what makes the reading experience possible in the first place, my contention is that Simon’s representations of the soldier-subject and war are usually the easiest entry point into his work for the reader who is not familiar with it.

Intentionality allows both soldier-subject and reader to remain connected
to FWs at the same time that they are disconnected from them. The structural
connections between perception and expression, and decomposing and
recomposing worlds, take root in the intentional field that links subject and
object beyond a seeming state of separation. No longer existing in a world
governed by the sharp differentiation between subjects and objects that
subtends his everyday experience of reality, the soldier-subject’s experience of
“world,” like the reader’s, stretches beyond the domain of the possible. After all,
“possibility” implicates only one actualized world, with the others relegated to
the status of possibility. Rather, the soldier-subject, and the reader along with
him, exist in the domain of the fictional, whose logic of being is multiple by
nature.

By manipulating the NW and thus hampering the reader’s ability easily to
understand the text from a secure position on the outside, Simon places the
reader in a similar position to that of the soldier-subject. The reader is as
intimately connected to the apparent “incoherence” and “coherence” of his own
attempt to produce meaning from the text as the soldier-subject is to the
decomposition and recomposition of his world. In Simon’s FWs, the soldier-
subject discovers simultaneously his deep division from and deep attachment to
the world just as the reader makes his way through the dense thickets of a
difficult text. And, like the soldier-subject, the reader has the ability to cross
spatial and temporal borders in the space of a sentence. For the reader, who is
just starting to get to know the text, the annihilation of the soldier-subject’s
carefully ordered world is mimicked by the radically reordered textual terrain.
Yet whereas the soldier-subject, as a fictional character, interacts with his LW
in a largely unknown way, the reader explores the collapse of the soldier-
subject’s world with the aid of NWs that function as lifelines. This is the moment at which the NW is truly differentiated from the text and the FW. For the reader, upon returning to the text to unravel a part of the text’s FWs, does not return to the text at all, but rather to the intermediary zone of the NW. Once the text has been read, the text cannot again be read as simple text; the process of worlding required to read the text in the first place quite simply gets in the way. As I have argued in Chapter Four, in Simon, this process is more *retroactive* than in Queneau. The intentionality at work in Simon’s FWs, then, is manifested a very concrete way for the soldier-subject; it is mediated by the *pellicule*, the “thin skin,” “film,” or “shell” that lies between the soldier-subject and the world. This *pellicule* corresponds to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “intercorporeality,” by which the responses of our bodies to similar stimuli indicate the intersubjective nature of our world.279 If the “words on the page” represent one possible limit for the reader in his interaction with the text, then the *pellicule* represents one limit point of the soldier-subject’s interaction with his world.

In this chapter, my first task will be to explore Simon’s FWs in relation to ideas about history, a discipline centered around invoking the worlds of the past. Simon’s approach to history relies on an exploration of the multiple and fragmented stories that can be produced by history when it is viewed as a concatenation of a finite but indeterminate number of lived experiences—not as an overarching pattern of progress throughout time. It is important to note that I myself am not denigrating views of history—or time—as progress-oriented or

279 See Chapter One for a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon. In fact, in 1961, the philosopher even declared to the author, “I have found in your books many things that went in the same direction as my own work.” Merleau-Ponty, “Merleau-Ponty répond à Claude Simon,” *Critique* 187 (1962): 1147-1148.
marching relentlessly forward. Such teleological visions have in fact dominated much of the discourse relating to Western philosophy and the canonical structures of the European novel for centuries.\textsuperscript{280} It is precisely because of the significance of teleology, especially for the reader, that its seeming subversion becomes so overpowering in Simon. In fact, seeing Simon as either theorizing or counter-theorizing the discipline of history misses the point. The history at work in Simon’s FWs is a monstrous, natural entity; the author’s cry of rage is not the cry of anger at the ideas of progress expressed by Hegel or the economic determinism of Marx. It is the cry of the sensuous individual, who has been a sometimes willing and often unwilling witness and participant in the wave of history that has unfurled throughout the twentieth century, unaided by the relentlessly recuperative assumptions of humanism. In this way, as with Queneau, the LWs of Simon’s characters are not so out of line with the possible LWs of people in France during the time period. The point that Simon makes time and again in his fiction is that the only logic capable of encompassing all of these events is that of fiction. This logic may stand opposition to certain teleological tendencies associated with progressive views of both time and

\textsuperscript{280} The subject matter is enormous, but it is worthwhile to note in terms of worldbuilding that the narrative strategies of movements such as Realism and Naturalism sought deploy FWs whose detail and plot would absorb the reader and minimize his interaction with the textual mechanisms by which this absorption was produced, a narrative technique quite opposed to that of Simon, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Thus NW slipped under FW like signifier under signified in Lacan. In the same way, as Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer argued in \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment} (trans. John Cumming; 1944; NY: Continuum, 2002), the glorification of rationality and progress achieved by Enlightenment thought, “as totalitarian as any system,” allowed the problems that accompanied progress (24). In the case of Realism and Naturalism, “mechanics” became a blind spot; in the case of the Frankfurt School, “mechanics” were glorified. In both cases, though, the effect produced was confidence in forward movement, whether of narrative or of history.

Whether or not such confidence is justified is not for me to discuss; nevertheless, it is precisely this confidence that falls under such close scrutiny in Simon’s novels. Simon does not so much build his FWs in opposition to what he perceives as dominant trends in history, temporality, and narratology as he builds around and through them, weaving alternative worlds that emphasize the simultaneity of a world governed above all by perception (by which the mechanics of fiction are used to produce and expose illusions).
history but, as we shall soon see, it does not reject them out of hand. In this way, I would argue that it is unproductive to get caught up in debates about Simon and history when Simon is really elaborating an argument about fiction in fiction.

This reevaluation of teleology has usually been framed against the background of the New Novel. However, the radical aspects of Simon's work have less to do with the internecine battles among literary and philosophical movements, and more to do with the reader, whose involvement in the New Novel is often forgotten. As we shall see, Simon's first-time reader may feel that the author has rejected teleology in favor of chaos but nothing could be further from the truth. The kind of order found in the disorder of Simon's FWs may not shine forth with the clarity attained by the FWs of Balzac, Zola, or even Camus, but the rereader can attest that it is an order, even if a shifting and perceptual one, all the same. In fact, the rereader discovers that Simon's prose often resembles the way that we speak more than the way that we write; this may discombobulate the first-time reader, but it also allows this reader to be tempted by the search for answers which often drives the act of reading. Simon thus critiques a vision of history and temporality that acts as the crumbling framework for his own.

Simon argues for the limitless meanings inherent in any use of language, particularly when that language is being used to describe something as shifting and ephemeral as lived experience. For our purposes, these lived experiences are principally those of the soldier-subject taken at the moment of perceptual breakdown, as he is threatened by death in battle, as well as those of the reader confronted with a text that may seem, at first glance, unreadable. In fact,
according to Alistair Duncan, it is the use of the perspective of “an ordinary soldier” who “sees the war from the bottom up” that gives the reader a manageable point of entry into Simon’s text (Adventures 144). The reader there confronts what Thouillot calls an “exploded war” (Thouillot 118-121). This “exploded war” results in the fragmentation of the soldier-subject’s own perceptual world, which cannot possibly register the explosion of the battle that rages around him in a linear manner. Thus the fragmented perception of the “exploded subject” owes its existence to the presence of an “exploded war,” one which undermines “continuity,” “linearity, “the cohesion of the subject and his relationship to the world” (Thouillot 120). Finally, an “exploded” reading experience corresponds to an “exploded” war.

Throughout this veritable explosion of experience, the soldier-subject can no longer perceive his place in the grand scheme of a history intent on creating “progress.” Instead, because death has stripped away his habitual relation to the everyday, the soldier-subject understands that his relation to the world, even at the moment of his erasure from it, is simultaneously real, concrete, and malleable. The pellicule in which he finds himself enclosed functions as a sort of primitive perceptual window, both shielding him from the chaotic world of war and demonstrating to him that he remains connected to such a world, however alienated from him it he may initially appear.

The soldier-subject’s mind can wander to other places and, more importantly, other moments of his existence. Crisscrossing the boundaries of space and time, the soldier-subject wanders in a manner much like the reader, who is freed by the act of reading from many of the perceptual givens of

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everyday experience. With time, once he has moved beyond the immediate near-death situation and grown older, the soldier-subject discovers new relations among the past events of his own life and the larger events of history. Yet he does so neither by reducing the events of his own individual life to insignificance, nor by totalizing a series of individual lives or events into a progressive kind of history which would move ever onwards and upwards, whatever the cost.

Simon resets the links between history and language to zero, in order further to explore their relation to fundamental questions of writing and reading. Does an incoherent sequences of events, such as those undergone by the French soldiers caught off guard by the surprise German attack in May-June 1940, necessarily give rise to an incoherent account? This certainly seems to be the case even in novels not dedicated to war, such as Le Vent: tentative de restitution d’un retable baroque, where the narrator’s attempt to give form to Montes’s chaotic life only underlines his inability to rationalize “this incoherence, this brutal juxtaposition, apparently absurd, of sensations, faces, words, and acts.”

The complex interrelation of the event, the experience of the event, and the representation of the event, but also the secondary relation of the reader to the experience and representation of the event, will occupy us for much of this chapter. Often having been transformed into a writer of sorts, the soldier-subject contemplates the effect his story will have on an audience and judges whether this audience will ever be able to bridge the epistemic gap between its own lack of experience and the soldier-subject’s. In the end, though, Simon seems to suggest that it is this very gap that provides the

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impetus for the act of reading; for if the reader knew everything ahead of time, why would he even begin to read at all?

In this chapter, I will pay close attention to many novels of Simon, among them: *La Route des Flandres* (1960), *Le Palace* (1962), *Histoire* (1967), *La Bataille de Pharsale* (1969), *Les Géorgiques* (1981), *L’Acacia* (1989), *Le Jardin des Plantes* (1997). I have chosen to focus on more novels of Simon than of Queneau because the FWs of these novels more closely resemble one another than do those of Queneau’s novels. Furthermore, I have chosen these specific novels for a very simple reason; as well as spanning almost forty years of the author’s career, they most closely address the experience of the soldier-subject. If Queneau’s characters routinely appear and disappear at great frequency, no such epithet as the soldier-subject, however reductive it may be, could be found to summarize their experience. Simon, who depicts war so often and so well without the interconnected humanism of an author like Henri Barbusse in *Le Feu (Journal d’une escouade)*, uses war to explore man’s position in the world outside of war as well. For Simon’s soldier-subject, as for Charles Bukowski’s poet, it is truly “war all the time.” War is a device that demonstrates the breakdown of apparently “natural” attitudes towards the world, but war is not the “point” any more than the cinema is the “point” in Queneau. Without the experience of the soldier-subject in such seminal novels as *La Route des Flandres* and *La Bataille de Pharsale*, the reader has little hope of entering into the less linear FWs of imagistic novels like *Triptyque* or *Les Corps conducteurs*.
B. *Histoire*: History and Stories—Tellable and Untellable

Essential to my arguments about NWs and FWs is the idea that building a world—for the character, for the reader, or even in everyday life—requires fiction. By the same token, fiction itself requires a world, or many worlds, in which to deploy its potential (but not necessarily “the world”). The fact that worldbuilding takes place in reality as well does not mean that the FWs of literature must mimic reality. The reality of the worldbuilding experience that accompanies reading is firmly anchored in the reader who, even if we know that the information that he receives is filtered through the text, is never a predictable or fully known quantity. This dual nature of FWs reveals the importance of intentionality to worldbuilding; intentionality straddles both reality and fiction. For these reasons, my examination of Claude Simon and history will be conducted on the level of worldbuilding, and not those levels more commonly explored by the writer’s critics, like Lucien Dällenbach, Anthony Cheal Pugh, and Celia Britton, among others. Although none of these critics goes so far as to privilege the part of history over the part of fiction, they often forget to suggest the part of the reader in turning fiction into history and history into fiction.

While the coincidence of many events occurring in Simon’s novels with events from history or the author’s life cannot be denied, privileging the RW over FWs takes away from the sheer depth and complexity of the author’s FWs. It is here that Paul Ricoeur’s reflections on the interrelation of history and fiction as modes of narrative best illuminate the construction of FWs in Simon’s

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283 Simon’s father did die in WWI; Simon did participate in the Spanish Civil War; Simon was a cavalryman on the front lines of German drive through the Ardennes forest in WWII; and Simon was captured by the Germans, spending time in a German POW camp.
Ricoeur’s argument is twofold. As the French word *histoire*, meaning both “story” as well as “history,” suggests, history involves stories as much as it does factual events. According to Ricoeur, history uses the mechanisms of fiction in order to validate the unobservable events of the past that it posits. In a similar manner, fiction uses the procedures of history to lend itself veracity. Fiction is mediated by the transformative process of reading, which requires the reader’s prolonged involvement with and in the text. In sum, history “stands in” for the past, which remains experientially unknowable, while, through fiction, the reading experience opens onto other worlds as well. Each in its own way, history and fiction work to render present worlds that lie outside the bounds of everyday experience. Simon himself glosses “histoire” in a third way, pointing out the idiomatic use of the word in French to mean something that it is impossible to talk about: “I found in the *Littré*, among others, this accepted use of the word ‘history’: In everyday language, it is used in reference to any object that one cannot or does not want to name.”

This statement becomes more meaningful when we examine the work of Celia Britton regarding the unrepresentability of History in Simon. The three uses of the word—History, story, and an event that is impossible to describe—come together in the work of Simon, for whom one category thankfully does not cancel out any of the others.

Critics like Anthony Cheal Pugh, who have studied the intertwining of history and fiction in Simon’s work, have drawn the conclusion that the author’s work deconstructs the manner in which unreliable representations

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underlie the constructed imaginary space shared by history and fiction. Freed from the need to depict an unequivocal version of events, Simon conceives of history as, at base, an incomprehensible force of nature; the unstoppable and unrepresentable movement of history gives way to the constructed language of stories. Yet we must extend these arguments further and insist on the shifting and multiple idea of worlds as well. Thinking in terms of worlds eliminates the need for considering the processes of history or fiction in opposition to one another, so that we do not have to separate out Simon’s “history” from his “fiction” and vice-versa. It is my contention that, for the reader to be able to interact with the text, he must do so via NWs and FWs that may or may not brush up against history and autobiography. Well-known historical events might help the reader who is so inclined in building a more accessible FW, but they should be understood within the context of this given FW, not within the context of history as an academic discipline that aims, at least in one of its variants, to read some level of positive knowledge of past events.

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1. The Role of War

Simon critiques the tendency of history to create coherence at all costs, rather than looking for a deeper pattern of coherence that may, at first, appear chaotic. I hope to argue, by focusing on the relation of lived experience to worldbuilding, that what at first appears incoherent to the soldier-subject and to the reader may later, once the appropriate worlds have been established, assume another kind of coherence. In other words, incomplete worldbuilding is still worldbuilding, especially for the reader trying to make sense of the text—no FW is “untrue,” as truth is not a criteria of FWs. In the end, Simon’s stories remain faithful to the very irreality of experience: what Simon depicts is the experience of constructing the reality or irreality of this experience in the first place, rather than objectifying the finished product of experience into its own reality. The reader’s attempts to create coherence out of incoherence send him, in the case of Simon, from the NWs of the text to its FWs and back again. Since the dense and slippery NW may not offer the reader any toeholds at first, the reader may then turn to FWs, which for Simon are often associated with the universal subject of war (before returning once again to NWs, of course).

To this end, Simon’s portrayals of war often work against stereotype. Descriptions such as the following from Le Jardin des Plantes may lead the first-time reader to assume that the author does nothing more than describe the absolute absurdity of war. As we will see, though, chaos is followed by order, just as order is then again followed by chaos:

…it would be more exact to say not that I fought in the war but that I had simply found myself swept up inside of it like you can find yourself caught in a storm or in a cataclysm and that even those were not the right words (storm, cataclysm) because they were meant to give an impression of devastation, of a countryside that had been turned upside down, a
lunar landscape, while in reality it was green, lush, and pastoral, except that at certain moments without warning this thing was happening to you all of a sudden upon you: explosions, the crackling of the machine guns, shouts, orders, counterorders, neighing, bolting horses, after which everything would become calm again... (956)

There is an eye at the center of this storm; in Simon’s accounts of battle, sunny afternoons alternate with bloody slaughter. “Having fought in the war” (avoir fait la guerre) means as much being in the wrong place at the wrong time when war is “going on” as it indicates a voluntary choice entailing knowledge about the consequences of such an action. In Simon’s formulation, “avoir fait la guerre” loses the transitivity that it has in French; instead, it indicates discovering the world of war, as well as discovering how this world of war shatters preconceptions, both about war, as well as about the soldier-subject’s everyday world by realigning his perceptions. War is a door to something else entirely and that something is the world upon whose structure war is predicated in the first place.
2. The War of Language, the Language of War

Part of Simon’s problem with history has to do with the language in which it is often couched. This is part of a larger argument about the motivation of the reader that I will make at the end of this chapter, but I introduce it here in order to explain Simon’s dissatisfaction with “official” versions of history. As the descriptions of modern warfare in Simon’s novels make clear time and again, language itself falls short of representing the horrors of war:

...between reading it in books or seeing it artistically represented in museums and touching it and getting splattered by it it’s the same difference that exists between seeing the written word shell and finding yourself from one instant to the next clinging to the earth and the earth itself where the sky should be and the air itself which is collapsing around you like broken concrete shards of glass and mud and grass where your tongue should be, and you yourself strewn and mixed with up with so many fragment of clouds, of stones, of fire, of dark, of noise and silence that at that moment the word shell or the word explosion doesn’t exist any more than the word earth, or sky, or fire, which makes it so that it is not any more possible to recount this type of thing than it is to experience it again afterwards, and yet all you have at your disposal are words...

(Histoire 152).

The words contained in books and even the wordless representations in museums do not come close to the sensuous experience of the soldier-subject described here. Trying to give an accurate account of the events of war pushes the limits of language and brings up a key issue in our discussion of the role of history in Simon’s novels. Caught up in the seeming disintegration of his everyday world, the soldier-subject, no longer sure of his relation to this world, often bears witness to the very impossibility of bearing witness. In other words, although the language of the witness may be an improvement over the language of the historian when examining how worlds are built, presence at an event does not necessarily help the witness to see, understand, or represent that event correctly.
Presence does not indicate here the misleading fullness of what Jacques Derrida, in criticizing the Western philosophical tradition, has famously labeled “the metaphysics of presence.” A perfect example is the Simonian character caught up in trying to track down the traces of the past. While searching the Greek countryside for the contemporary site of the legendary battle of Pharsalus, the protagonist of the first part of La Bataille de Pharsale discovers that pinpointing the battlefield in peacetime thousands of years later can prove to be just as difficult as it is for the soldier-subject to pinpoint his location and purpose in the heat of battle. His friend, annoyed with this endless quest for the real-world referent of something that the protagonist only knows from books, argues, “Anyway, what difference does it make this hill or that one over there things never happen like we imagine or if you prefer we never imagine things as they happen in reality and even if you are there for them you can never see them as...they are.” After an interruption, he continues, “So do what everyone else does and decide that they are what you believe you are seeing or imagine them and decide that that is how it happened and then it will really have happened here” (620). In passing from the commands of the imperative mood (fais; décide; imagine; décide) to the simple past (s’est passé) to the future perfect (se sera passé), what happened effectively turns into “what happened.”

The friend, understanding past events less as concrete certainties and more as what Pierre Nora intended by coining the phrase “memory places,” argues for the imaginary and constructed nature of past events. Of course, Nora insists on the collective nature of the remembrance occasioned by monuments, symbols, and narratives, whereas Simon’s “memory places” are far more

individualized—yet they remain important for the reader trying to make sense of his FWs. The web of narrative underlies the relation between present and past in both cases. In *La Bataille de Pharsale*, the link between reality and imagination is broken, and, the friend argues, it is up to the protagonist to repair it by telling himself a story, by building himself a world that has little to do with the real world in which they have been wandering for hours. Worldbuilding is as malleable for the character in search of the truth about the past as it is for the soldier-subject whose world—one of whose worlds—is falling apart.

But how does this process of worldbuilding engaged in by the character relate to the process of worldbuilding engaged in by the reader? How can the reader understand the soldier-subject’s experience when the soldier-subject finds himself so alienated from the products of his own perception? As we shall see in what follows, Simon’s criticism of “a certain kind of theorization of history” has as much to do with how we understand the constructed nature of the worlds around us, both past and present, writing, and reading as it has to do with history (Britton 146-147). Simon’s argument concerning language does not so much dismiss the possibility of meaning in language as it reveals the possibility of the multiplicity of meanings inherent in any use of language, particularly when that language is being used to described something as already constructed as lived experience.
3. Language as Impotent in the Face of History

Does the decomposition of the soldier-subject’s world mean that Simon is dismissing history and language as a means of communication? After all, in *Histoire*, Simon describes language in Shakespearian and Faulknerian terms, as “a frenetic accumulation of signs devoid of meaning, the bizarre and laborious stuttering of an idiot, the incomprehensible vestiges of an incoherent language” (378). In the same way, after the battle, the absurd numerical dictates of would-be official versions of events never correspond to the individual experience of meaningless sacrifice. Describing the detailed preparations of the French Revolutionary general L.S.M. in *Les Géorgiques*, Simon writes, “As if History were first and foremost an affair of accountants and of long additions of numbers whose balance sheet is summed up in a few minutes of clamor and murder” (*Géorgiques* 446). The official version, even when it does intersect with personal experience, can always be expanded and woven into a gigantic tapestry with many unanticipated zones of intersection, coherence, and incoherence. In *Le Jardin des Plantes*, the author writes of the official reports of the Fall of France as codifying what cannot be codified: “And no longer blood, fire, fear, courage, or fatigue, but only words aligned on sheets of paper that are filed away in yellow cardboard folders held together by thin olive green ribbons and stored on kilometers of shelves...” (1049). Official versions of events do not represent a personal, lived link to the past; they may, at best, intersect such links, as this image à la *Citizen Kane* shows us. Simon’s brutal descriptions of the experience of the soldier-subject work at a reverse transcription of this officially codified material, revivifying it through the explosion of organized language.
Because these descriptions are so brutal, the perceived breakdown in habitual order brought about by war may initially appear to be pure disorder. The initial piercing of the French line of defense, what Simon calls in *Les Géorgiques* “the end of the so-called coherent phase of the battle,” is followed by total chaos. After this piercing of the French lines, “there will no longer be from then on any kind of order, even a disastrous one” (44). In this way, the versions of history and writing that Simon is arguing against—history as meaningfully teleological and writing as representative of reality—cannot be sustained in the face of the monstrous oncoming German attack. This new kind of war leaves nothing in its path, not even a language capable of describing it. The soldiers have “all, one after another, been poured out, swallowed up, disappeared without leaving a trace, stricken from the ranks without what was happening (what they (the cavalry) were now going through) even resembling in any way something like a war, or at least what they confusedly imagined war should be...” (*Acacia* 39-40). The standard, progressive ideas of history and the notion of writing as able to represent the real both make an abstraction of the individual horror of the soldier-subject’s experience. Even if he is reexperiencing it through memory, the soldier-subject experiences the threat of death as collapse of the present and actual world, not the preserved world of history nor what he has “confusedly imagined war should be.” Disorder and chaos mark the event and, through remembrance, they mark the perceptual system overcome by the event.

That these decomposing worlds represent a paradigm shift on a level that goes beyond the individual universe of the soldier-subject is clear from any of

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289 I have been greatly aided in revising these translations by consulting Richard Howard’s 1991 translation of the novel (NY: Pantheon).
Simon’s many accounts of the German advance through France in May-June 1940. It is not only the threat of death that derails the soldier-subject. The radical threat of this new and absolute kind of annihilation causes him to construct the world around him at the very moment of its collapse—that is, the only moment when its structure becomes visible. The annihilation of experience on a grand scale threatens to annihilate language along with human beings. As Simon remarks in *La Route des Flandres*, the total nature of modern warfare creates an epistemic gap between experience and the communication thereof:

But what to call this: not war not the classical destruction or extermination of one of the two armies but rather the disappearance the absorption by nothingness or by the originary all (*le tout original*) of what one week earlier were still regiments batteries squadrons squads of men, or better yet: the disappearance of the idea of the very notion of a regiment a battery a squadron a squad of men, or better yet: the disappearance of any idea of any concept... (*Flandres* 402)\(^{290}\)

The Second World War’s destruction of an order that only existed as such (visible) once it began to be destroyed undermines the integrity of ideas and concepts in general. Simon passes quickly from battle units grouping different numbers of men (regiments, batteries, squads) to the abstract (idea, concept) in order to deny the existence of the abstract as well as the individual. By enacting the individual perceptual drama of the soldier-subject and his world on a variety of levels, the shared intersubjective world of history is redefined. In the face of so much specific violence, directed, in the eyes of the soldier-subject, at himself and his brothers in arms, generality is unsustainable.

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\(^{290}\) For similar descriptions, see also 390; *Histoire* 106; and *Jardin* 930.
4. Creating a New Language

Recording history in this manner undermines both the comfortable assumptions of history understood as a process of ordered understanding and the language that supports such a progressive idea of history. Through Simon’s descriptions of war, changes in the making of history are reflected by changes in language. Language as a rational tool for communicating experience breaks down, but, instead of disappearing, it is replaced by a new language—and the reader by a new reader, a rereader. The violence of this new language no longer strives to reflect or represent a static image but rather an ever-changing state of affairs. “The only language that would be suitable is that which is diametrically opposed: it is that imprecise language of ‘sensation,’ synesthesia, and not that of ‘coherence’ and ‘logic’,” writes Thouillot, describing the “polemical” nature of Simon’s prose, its call for active and sustained involvement on the part of the reader. But Simon’s “polemical” language does not defy coherence. NWs and FWs come together to create the possibility for a new kind of coherence that emerges from the complexity of incoherence, and that has something to do with temporality, as we will see.

In fact, the failure of language described at length by Simon in many of his novels represents the point at which NWs cross over into FWs. Here, hybrid sensations take the place of language’s habitually linear ordering of perception. One could say, following Lacan’s claim that the unconscious is structured like a

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291 Thouillot 128, 201.
See also Simon, “Parvenir peu à peu à écrire difficilement,” L’Humanité 13 Mar. 1998: rubrique cultures.
language, that, in Simon, sensations are ordered like a language and language is ordered like sensations. These crossover moments of failure coincide with what could be referred to as Simon’s guiding questions, posed in both *Le Palace* and *La Route des Flandres*: “How to know?”, “But how was it, how was it?”, and “But how to know, what to know?” Such questions point up epistemic gaps which then elicit descriptions of experience. Because there is no one-to-one equation between text and worlds, what is not said—the blank spaces between the two, these questions to which neither the soldier-subject nor the reader ever receives satisfactory answers—are just as important and productive as what is said. Weighing what Simon calls in *Les Géorgiques* the “whys and the wherefores” may not allow either soldier-subject or reader to come to a definitive conclusion, but such questions can still be useful in producing multiple answers implicating multiple FWs (264). The qualitative nature of experience on the part of the character and reader is simultaneously used—in the heat of battle, or in the initial discovery of the NW—to build worlds and, later—when many years have passed, or at the moment of rereading—in order to remember them, and thus to rebuild them.

In Simon’s novels, the qualitative experience produced by perception outweighs any quantitative formula for determining, with precision, what did actually happen. Memory occupies such a predominant role in Simon because even the soldier-subject’s perception of the present, separated from that present by impending death, itself resembles a memory. As Georges’s ruminations about De Reixach’s past in *La Route des Flandres* show, the present must in

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293 This is, of course, a recurrent theme for Lacan, but it is most clearly articulated in “L’instance de la lettre dans l’inconscient,” *Écrits* I 249-289.
294 See Chapter Four for full references for the preceding quotations.
some way be filtered through narration about the past. As we will see later when discussing the soldier-subject’s movement about in time, the soldier-subject experiences the present like a memory; conversely, he can remember the past as if it were a present experience. In fact, the soldier-subject spends most of his time shuttling back and forth between past as present and present as past (much as the Quenellian character does between being and non-being).

However, imminent oblivion does not wipe away all possibility for interaction with the world on the part of the soldier-subject or for interaction with the text on the part of the reader. I hope to show that this threat of oblivion potentiates this interaction, or at least its possibility. After ten days of continuous, harried retreat at the ever-contracting front, Georges, the protagonist of La Route des Flandres has “abandoned once and for all this mental attitude that consists in searching for a logical cause or explanation for what one sees or for what happens to you” (209). The soldier-subject under duress grasps that this “mental attitude” was a crutch that helped to hide from him other, more menacing aspects of the world. Abandoning one mental attitude leaves the soldier-subject open to other, more flexible stances that might be more able to convey the fluid nature of his relation to the world.

So what language, then, would be appropriate for conveying these worlds of war, this history, experienced by the soldier-subject? For Simon, the individual experience of war in the face of the history understood as an ineradicable, cyclical force of nature—as voracious as a “carnivorous flower” (Acacia 42)—can only be approached by representing the intersections of radically fragmented, shifting, and multiple LWs. Thus the specific LWs of characters gain a status equal to that of any other world; they are
autonomous—and incomplete—FWs in their own right. When, in *La Route des Flandres*, Blum finally acquiesces to Georges’s never-ending storytelling in the German prison camp, he also admits the constructed nature of both history and fiction: “Fine, fine: let us also work at History, let us also write our quotidian little page of History!” (327). “History” with an upper-case “h” here quickly becomes “history” with a lower-case “h” because of the scale of the “story” being told. Later on, though, “history” with a lower-case “h” becomes “History” with an upper-case “h” once again, only this time from the viewpoint of one who has experienced it in its lower-case form, a soldier-subject who realizes that his individual story is only one small piece in the continuously moving puzzle of history. After all, as Simon makes clear in *Le Jardin des Plantes*, even state leaders such as Churchill gave highly individual accounts of their participation in the vast panoply of activities and movements across different countries and continents that constituted the Second World War. And, as S. declares in *Le Jardin des Plantes*, it is equally “worth it to try to imagine” the “imperturbable or rather the invincible—like the admiralty of which he was at the time the First Lord—man with the cigar and the pout,” as well as the “tanks of the Huns dashing down the road firing at random in all directions,” and “at the same time, the exhausted cavalrmen half-asleep on their exhausted horses” (*Jardin* 1056). It is important to remember that Simon is not “against History.” It is the impossible interrelation of the conniving politician, the multiple tanks, and the individual soldiers that makes up the spectacular panoply of war.

The inability of history to totalize a multitude of interwoven individual experiences (LWs) is not the whole story (*histoire*). Fictional worldbuilding
provides a way to bypass the official dictates of accepted history. As was the case for the two friends searching for the site of the Battle of Pharsalus, the true importance of history lies for Simon in its relation to the productive act of storytelling. I introduced Britton’s ideas about the relations of the visible and the invisible in Simon to Lacan in Chapter Four and I will expand on them here. In Simon, the tension between visibility and invisibility, what Merleau-Ponty has called the “structure or invisible membrane of the visible,” often shapes the soldier-subject’s intentional relation to the world. By making use of Lacan’s concepts of the Real and the Imaginary, Britton demonstrates how history produces fiction in Simon’s novels. She claims that, for Simon, history is located in the domain of the Real, that which the subject can never confront—or “that which escapes us,” to use Lyotard’s formulation. Therefore, history remains invisible; as the narrator of Le Palace muses, “That is to say that what was really happening was invisible” (467). While war makes the invisible forces of the world visible to the soldier-subject for a time, the invisible forces of History, linked with the domain of the Real, remain however unrepresentable.

Rather than an over-arching architectonic history or story, such as that composed by Proust in La Recherche du temps perdu, Simon writes a series of variegated non-histories. These non-histories can never fully be told, even on the most basic, macropropositional level, without significant interaction on the part of the reader. (Of course, Proust’s work requires significant interaction on the part of the reader as well; it is just not interaction on such a basic level of worldbuilding because the text provides this for the reader.) These non-histories exist in what Lacan has defined as the domain of the Imaginary, where

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296 Jean-François Lyotard, Discours, figure (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971) 82.
they attempt to appropriate the fullness of the visible by producing iterative
description and repetition (Britton 163). The lack of objective history produces
*stories*, which try, and fail, to fill the void. “Nevertheless continuing to
dialogue,” even if only with themselves, their doubles, or the ghosts of their
friends and ancestors, Simon’s soldier-subjects endlessly fill the void with their
narration, as we have seen in Chapter Four (*Flandres* 387). An unconvinced
reader of Simon might be tempted to say that they fill it with the void of their
narration as well, but, for the less dubitative rereader, the fount of narration
produced by the invisibility of the Real and the temptation of the fullness of the
Imaginary represents perfect conditions for multiple and continued
worldbuilding.

What I started out defining as a critique of history has broadened into a
critique of reading and writing. Since faith in the representative ability of
writing underpins the idea of history as progress, Simon’s work attacks both
the writing of history as teleological and the history of writing as moving
towards realism. Both history’s progressive purposefulness and writing’s
mirroring of reality are called into question. In *Le Jardin des Plantes*, the report
of the French officers who were in charge of one of the units of the French
cavalry overrun by the Germans in May–June 1940 is riddled with ellipses,
fragmented, and, as such, unreliable. Simon writes, “Even by looking at a map
afterwards one cannot see what he did next, what it is that these ellipses are or
are not hiding, or if it is just that it is too much to expect that a cavalry officer
would write something coherent—or whether this dotted line might not be a
sign of the incoherent chaos that prevailed at the time...” (1058). Asked by a
journalist about this unsatisfactory official report of the early days of the war,
the protagonist of the novel, S., provides several possible explanations for such textual disorder. Multiple explanations are necessary because the real answer, namely that no language is sufficient to express the events, would not satisfy the journalist, whose profession relies on reproducing reality. Instead, multiple explanations highlight the importance of the kaleidoscopic patterns of perception as they move to form worlds, rather than some final epistemic truth about these worlds.

For Simon, the impossibility of finding the correct language with which to represent an event does not necessarily entail a revolt against the mimetic logic of representation, even though this last was certainly one of the author’s stated goals at certain moments of his career. For an author like Simon, the very existence of language, both on the level of NWs and FWs, results in incomprehension as much as it does comprehension. Thus the incomprehension produced by language can, for the reader, achieve an effect like that of the incomprehension produced by the experience of war for the soldier-subject. As has been argued by Iser, among others, this incomprehension can lead to productive work, both on the part of the soldier-subject at war and the reader grappling with a difficult text. As I have argued in the preceding chapter, a world in which language proves problematic can still act as a bridge between reader and text. Language as a mediator and creator of meaning breaks down while indicating the nature of the problem—the impossibility of one-to-one representation—to the reader. Though the initial impulse that sparks NWs and FWs of course remains linguistic, these worlds

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297 See, for example, Simon’s intervention at Cerisy in 1971, “La fiction mot à mot.” Here, the author discusses formal “productive” and “generating” concerns versus realist “verisimilitude” (81, 97).

298 See Chapter One.
quickly develop beyond the parameters of the words on the page. The co-
creation of experience which structures intentionality means that, in war, self
and world reach toward impossible and explosive communion at a moment
when communication is doubtful. Thus communication of experience becomes
the experience of the impossibility of communication—and therefore the
communication of this very impossibility. *Histoire* becomes the possibility of a
new kind of history, predicated upon a new and less certain usage of language.
Simon’s novels make abundantly clear that worldbuilding, as the basis for a
radically decentered kind of history, is an inherently incomplete process.
C. The *Pellicule*: The Thin Skin In-between

Simon’s critique of history and language is evident to any reader who has made it through at least one of his novels. What happens, though, if we delve more deeply into the FWs of the soldier-subject? How exactly does he interact with the rapidly decomposing world around him? If he is quickly being separated from it due to external circumstances, then what still connects him to it? Why does he not lose his grip completely? By the same token, why does the reader not stop reading when he encounters difficulties? The answer lies in an examination of the *pellicule* often described as covering the soldier-subject in wartime.

For the soldier-subject, the process of worldbuilding is as much corporeal as it is mental. The *pellicule*, or shell, that Simon describes time and again as encasing the body and mind of the soldier-subject faced with the chaos of war is in fact nothing so much as an intentional link across boundaries. During the act of perception, this link bypasses the standard opposition between subject and object. The *pellicule* then acts as a double-edged sword, both limiting and expanding the soldier-subject’s relationship to his own world. What appears, at first glance, to be a physical barrier erected between the soldier-subject and the world is, in fact, the concretization of his relation to it. Through the pellicule, he sees what is in fact his most intimate connection to the world as something exterior to himself (and vice-versa). The interdependence of self and world becomes *visible* outside of the soldier-subject; the link between the two is unveiled as a material reality only when its existence is threatened, which is certainly the case during wartime. This process of unveiling throws the soldier-subject off balance, causing, in *Histoire*, the sensation of being caught between
two worlds, accompanied by a nausea that is quite unlike Roquentin’s existential angoisse in *La Nausée*. For the soldier-subject, nausea results from not knowing his place in the panoply of worlds that have suddenly opened up beneath his feet:

Like when you feel dizzy or you’ve drunk too much that is to say when the visible world separates itself from you in some way losing this familiar and reassuring visage that it has (because in reality you don’t look at it), suddenly taking on a vaguely terrifying unknown aspect, objects ceasing to be identified with the verbal symbols by which we possess them, by which we make them ours (*les faisons nous*), thinking What is it, thinking But what’s happening to me what’s happening? (*Histoire* 177).

Language, made up of the “verbal symbols” by which we usually “possess” objects, is of no help to the soldier-subject, who is completely depersonalized by this rapid shift between the inner and the outer. Language cannot act quickly enough to take measure of the soldier-subject’s relation to the world. This relation predates the division of the world into subjects and objects; it is more primal than language—what Merleau-Ponty calls the antepredicative unity of nature. The *pellicule* thus solidifies the soldier-subject without inhibiting him. Perception itself takes physical form in the world because it is an extension of both self and world: the *pellicule* is a co-creation of the symbiotic relationship between the soldier-subject and the world. In *Les Géorgiques*, the *pellicule* brings the soldier-subject nearer to the reality of death, but it also keeps him at a safe distance; it covers his whole world and “keeps him from

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299 In the Preface to *La Phénoménologie de la perception*, Merleau-Ponty addresses this issue succinctly, “It is the function of language to cause essences to exist in a state of separation that, in truth, is only an appearance, because by means of it [language], they [the essences] still rest upon the antepredicative life of consciousness” (x). In even more direct terms, the philosopher describes unbroken unity of the world that gives rise to consciousness, “The world is there before any analysis that I might make of it…” (iv); “The world is not an object the law of whose making I possess right in front of me; it is the natural setting of, and the field for, all my thoughts and of all my explicit perceptions” (v). In other words, I as subject emerge from and exist in the natural unity of the world; I do not dominate it from a position of authority (see Chapter One). The soldier-subject is quickly reminded of this state of affairs by his experiences in war. (I have been greatly aided in revising these translations by consulting Colin Smith’s 1958 translation of the text (NY: Routledge).)
In fact, the very encounter with the possibility of destruction makes visible how the soldier-subject ever inhabited a world—when it was not at war with itself—in the first place. War helps both character and reader perform something akin to Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, breaking down stereotyped beliefs about history, time, experience, and perception. By reducing habitual structures of consciousness to their essentials, both fictional soldier-subject and real reader are returned to an intense state of interaction with world and text. Just as, for the reader, the pages of the text act as both a barrier and a bridge between FWs and himself, so too does the *pellicule* indicate that the soldier-subject’s perceptual world is a two-way street. (The fact that it is about to be destroyed means that it must, once upon a time, have been built.) And the resulting sense of fragmentation and division allows the soldier-subject to move about more freely in time as well as space, experiencing different geographies and different lifetimes. Both soldier-subject and reader participate in worlds that they stand back from and observe. Like the reader of Queneau, the reader of Simon becomes a spectator, unable to take in and synthesize all that he encounters in the text. Genin emphasizes that reader and text work together to build a world, “The reader is the intimate spectator of this construction, at the same time as the actor, to the extent that his reading contributes to the reconstruction of the real” (281). The state of interaction and boundary-crossing necessary for any aesthetic experience takes place on the backs of worlds that Pavel has called “a long chain of intermediaries” (*Worlds* 70). By attempting to understand the confused and fragmented perceptions of

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300 In the same novel, see also 51-53, 264-266, and 323, among others.
the soldier-subject under extreme duress, the reader builds FWs in concert with the text.

At these moments of danger, such as the mother’s imminent death in *Histoire*, the *pellicule* between subject and world is unveiled as the invisible structure of the visible. Dying, the mother in *Histoire* sees “some gluey and greenish amalgamation of creepers, leaves, branches, above some gluey and greenish amalgamation of water, moss, rushes, mosquitoes, and, between the two, something which seems to take part in both of them: at the same time vegetal...and aquatic...” (65). Death removes the false separation between the different objects that make up the visual world so that everything swims before the dying woman’s eyes, resembling a painting by Cézanne (one of Merleau-Ponty’s favorite painters for having rendered concrete the act of vision as well as its products\(^{301}\)). The space of the in between assumes great importance as the certainties of the world fall apart.

Imminent death may reveal the workings of the world, but the soldier-subject never has direct contact with the world outside of the intentional field across which stretches his own perception; such contact is impossible without intermediary worlds. In a similar vein, after the sniper shoots the colonel in *L’Acacia*, a scene obsessively depicted in many of Simon’s novels, the narrator describes “the world, things still behind the thick bell jar of sleep in the blinding sun, yellow and black, the distended forms telescoped by the inner walls of glass...” (305-6). The soldier-subject now discovers that proximity to the brute forces threatening his world uncovers the manner in which they nourish this world as well. The acts of seeing and seeming are replaced by a very

Heideggerian revealing of mysterious forces. Outer worlds, which are in the midst of collapsing due to war, melt away to reveal inner worlds that are still perceived as outer. Likewise, in La Route des Flandres, for the terrified French soldiers hiding from the Germans in a barn, the surroundings melt into one another, as if the soldiers “had left nothing there but their imprint in this inconsistent, spongy and uniformly gray matter that now filtered little by little into the barn...” (218). The process of worldbuilding engaged in by Simon’s soldier-subject involves conceiving of space as full and waiting to be uncovered, not as empty and waiting to be filled with a series of objects.

Yet the pellicule does more than restrict and disorient the soldier-subject. In a way, it also frees him from his previously fixed position. By making clear that he is connected to the world in a deeper way, the pellicule shows the soldier-subject that he is free to move about this world in new and unanticipated ways. In La Bataille de Pharsale, the designation “O.” functions as a placeholder for different people at different places and times. While this conception of character may appear more formalist than in Simon’s earlier or later novels, the main thrust is the same: subjectivity, even the subjectivity of one’s proper self, is malleable in a world governed by intentionality. The “exploded” war presented by the author through the use of iterative and circular plot devices results not in the destruction of subjecthood altogether, but rather in an “exploded subject” who can move more easily across the intentional field:

That is to say that for O., moving with rapidity from one place to another the world does not appear at any instant identical to what it was in the immediately preceding instant, so that, if we take into account the multitude of points of observation...we should imagine the whole of the system as a mobile ceaselessly distorting itself around some rare fixed points... (683).

Virtualized by the reader, the various perceptions of O. make up the overall
apparatus of perception that develops as a result of reading *La Bataille de Pharsale*, whose incipit I discussed in Chapter Four. Perception winds its way among individual consciousnesses, binding them together in the same movement by which it keeps them apart, creating a “parallax effect” whereby the position of the viewer affects what he sees. Whether events do, in fact, take place linearly is not the author’s concern. In this constantly moving world of ever-shifting relations, perception dominates “reality” to the point that the reader, although he may be driven on by desire through the text in search for the latter, the ever-present temptation of the concrete, only ever encounters the imaginary dictates of the former. Neither does the act of reading create linearity out of chaos; even if it is sometimes driven by a desire to establish linearity, the act of rereading necessary to enter into the author’s NWs and FWs is anything but linear, and the reader searching for concrete answers to the questions posed by Simon will be disappointed.

Instead, the reader encounters a different kind of coherence, one which relies on the more fluid relation of parts to the whole. For Philippe Crippa, this perceptual “bricolage” between perceiver and perceived is the “only viable space for intimacy, the only possible reality.”302 This space also extends, in Simon’s words, to the writer’s “artisanal” and “productive” construction of the text, as well as to the reader’s work in deciphering that text (“Mot” 96). Using a process that Crippa has dubbed “readerly memory,” the reader builds worlds that allow for and explain these peregrinations of self and other (42). These worlds can be built because the writer’s work is *not* incoherent. In many respects, Simon’s reliance on bricolage or collage as a method of sewing together descriptions of

episodes, paintings, photographs, film, and literature lends to his work a
certain consistency (Thierry 117). Although it applies to the role of the sentence
in Simon, the following assertion by Michael Erman stretches beyond the
author’s NW to include his FWs: “To use the terms often employed by the
novelist himself, we could say that to the discontinuity of the architectonic
elements of the sentence corresponds their contiguity as acts of consciousness”
(17). The disorder of the soldier-subject’s consciousness faced with extinction
need not be linear; put on display in his world through the pellicule and
materialized for the reader through FWs, this disorder becomes a
transformative spectacle—for both the soldier-subject himself as well as the
reader. The “acts of consciousness” assembled in Simon’s FWs come alive in
relation to one another and to the reader through the act of rereading, which
creates patterns of coherence where no coherence might be visible at first
glance.

The pellicule is not without its links to representation, even if it
“represents” much more concretely than traditional methods of representation.
In this way, the pellicule, which also means “film,” carries the subtext of the
cinematic, as suggested earlier, and transforms our everyday interaction with
the world, to which we do not usually pay attention, into the spectacular.
Michel Deguy, one of the first to examine the phenomenology of the “way of
seeing” found in Simon’s novels, even proposes that the Simonian character
resembles the film spectator par excellence (“Représentation” 1015).
Surrounded by the spectacle of a world that is coming apart at its seams, the
soldier-subject represents himself to himself, and represents the world to
himself, simply in order to survive. This process, even though it also
demonstrates the soldier-subject’s close ties to the world, not to mention the reader’s, renders this world unreal and alienates him from it. In fact, the “unreal image” that has overtaken the world that the character is connected to by the \textit{pellicule}, is the very thing that precludes the traditional perceptual separation of this world into subjects on the one hand and objects on the other (Deguy 1015-1019). Thanks to the author’s linguistic manipulations, though, the succession of such “unreal images” recreates a corresponding state of unreality in the reader. It is the intentional field between subject and object of aesthetic experience that allows the reader to continue reading in the face of this “unreality.”

This rejection of separation applies to time as well as space. By confronting the physical limits of his connection with the world, the soldier-subject opens himself up to temporal discontinuity. To the same extent that the soldier-subject’s spatial perception of his world always takes place through the \textit{pellicule} that, like an umbilical cord, attaches him to it, his experience of the world is further disrupted by the fact that this experience, as far as the reader can tell, never seems to take place in linear order. As we shall see in the next section, some semblance of linearity is restituted to these FWs only after the fact, and it usually depends on retelling, writing, or, for the reader, rereading the story.
D. Mortality, Temporal Discontinuity, and Freedom

Since the imminent collapse of his world frees the soldier-subject to move about in time, it works against the tendency of history to fix him once and for all, in time. That is to say that time’s mutability emerges at moments when a breakdown in the soldier-subject’s perceptual apparatus appears to “freeze” his world. More than any other aspect of Simon’s FWs, temporal discontinuity confuses the reader, who often wonders just which character, which country, and which war the author is describing! Attached to his world by the *pellicule*, which stretches across time as well as space, both character and reader are free to travel through time. The relentless forward march of time becomes, according to the narrator of Chapter VIII of *L’Acacia*, “a notion devoid of meaning” (240). The abstractions of linear time do not concern the soldier-subject, for whom, as Simon’s ekphrastic description of Ucello’s painting *The Battle of San Romano* has it, “...maybe time is a notion...that does not belong here...” (632). Even this very assertion itself is fragmented; the sentence is broken up by an italicized depiction of the narrator’s flight during the crushing defeat of France by Germany in May-June 1940.\(^{303}\)

The clearest explanation of how this movement through time occurs in *Le Palace*, Simon’s novel about the Spanish Civil War. Here, while the younger student takes place in the proceedings, the grown student remembers this participation. The two components of one self thus turn into time travelers, moving through:

a sort of fifth element composed it seemed of equal parts of the four

\(^{303}\) What further confuses the reader trying to make sense of these depictions of war is that, just as in Faulkner, Simon’s use of italics is not stable; italics in this part of the text also indicate passages that refer to Caesar’s descriptions of war in *The Civil War* (633).
others…and of the same density as his flesh, his muscles, without a great
difference in temperature either, so that his skin no longer constituted an
envelope between the outside universe and himself... (540-541).

“He who had been the student” metamorphosizes into “the student,” moving
through time by means of “this kind of gluey thing, lukewarm and sticky,” the
embodied “pellicular” relation of self to world (504; 547). Once again, the in
between “stuff” of the soldier-subject’s world is in a state of constant,
constitutive movement. This particular character from Le Palace, caught up in
the past, exists in the conditional mood of repetition:

...then he would enter, he would climb the three flights of stairs—because
the elevator would never work...and he would enter the office...they would
all be there...with their inscrutable faces...a little mummified, a little
dusty—but from whence would always be exhaled this indestructible
something...and they would welcome him...as if they had still expected,
even after so many years, that he would finally come to rejoin them...(547-
548; my emphasis).

The repetition of the conditional mood used artfully by Simon stands in marked
contrast to the past repetition usually indicated by the imperfect tense.
Whereas the imperfect would signal continual repetition of the past in the past,
the conditional here signals repetition in the sense that these events seem as if
they have yet to take place. This period of the soldier-subject’s life is always
vividly available to him; it is as if the event has happened and has not yet
happened at the same time. In Simon’s FWs, the ontological boundary between
past and present remains porous.

As we can see from the quotations above, movement through the stuff of
time is described as spatial displacement. In Merleau-Ponty’s famed
formulation, individual “flesh,” because it cannot be disconnected from the
surrounding world that once seemed exterior, becomes “flesh of the world.”

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304 See Chapter One.
Merleau-Ponty’s “flesh of the world” is analogous to the *pellicule* of Simon’s time-traveling soldier-subject. When self and world are revealed as being deeply interconnected, “real time” appears to be replaced by individual “psychological time,” created by the expanded—or reduced—perceptions of the character. When character and world draw closer to one another, as in *Le Palace*, the border between one character and another is attenuated: “...the American, the Italian and the student—or rather these three parts, these three fragments of himself that were an American, a rifle-man and a young birdbrain...” (504). This is why the detail of the Italian anarchist’s description of his assassination of the right wing potentate in *Le Palace* so outweighs the short duration of the event itself (and, in general, how Simon’s novels expend so much energy going over small events in detail while also taking massive leaps in time and space). When the student tries to imagine the assassination attempt, he does not dismiss the anarchist’s perceptions as the result of psychological time. Rather, he understands that global worldbuilding processes are at work here: “...the student trying to imagine this...the threshold, this moment, this minute *pellicule*, this invisible sliver of time that isolated two universes...” (468). While the student-in-the-past tries to imagine how the *pellicule* works, the student-from-the-future has crossed a far greater barrier than the Italian anarchist ever did! The soldier-subject can avail himself of different worlds on the vertical axis of time as well as on the horizontal axis of space; the difference between worlds in themselves and perceptions of worlds is attenuated by the intensity of the moment.

For his part, Merleau-Ponty discusses temporality in Simon through

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305 In this same novel, see also 541 and 544 for similar descriptions of the division of self.
recourse to the metaphor of magma, a term used by Simon himself many times throughout his work (Notes 202-220). Because it exists between two states, the solid and the liquid, magma is an ideal metaphor for the philosopher keen on explaining the mutual links between inside and outside, subject and object, self and world. Merleau-Ponty writes that time in Simon’s novels is a sort of magma which fluidly encompasses different times and spaces while managing to avoid separation and totalization (Notes 211). The idea of magma as an intermediary between self and world goes hand in hand with pellicule. Magma, though, also takes on a writerly and readerly connotation that pellicule does not explicitly have. Writing the story of his life, the aged general L.S.M. from Les Géorgiques frequently crosses out words, which remain struck through, “sous rature” in true Derridean fashion: “...the erasures multiplying, as if in his old, poorly irrigated brain everything were becoming cloudy, piling up, dissolving into a kind of indistinct magma” (374). Unable to think clearly, the general can no more remove the symbols of his experience than he can use them reach the reality of that experience. Because of the physical impression made by words in this magma, total deletion is impossible; rather, terms remain visible as traces under the lines that indicates their erasure.

In this way, magma functions as the elementary writing tablet of consciousness. Primitive impressions made upon it remain beyond the reach of more formal language so that, in Le Jardin des Plantes, S. has difficulty accessing the experiences about which a journalist is eager to hear. S. is “trying to remember with precision something that happened (that he lived

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306 Unfortunately, the philosopher, who died in 1961, never had the opportunity to see Simon’s even more extensive use of the term later in his career.
307 See Palace 469, 495, 529; Géorgiques 208 for just a few of Simon’s uses of the word “magma.”
through) more than forty years before, which in his memory is no longer anything but a magma of images and sensations” (1112). Experience leaves a physical trace in the life of the soldier-subject, yet it is difficult to resurrect this trace through traditional means of writing or speech for that matter. Therefore, the violent nature of Simon’s prose matches the violent nature of war; this energetic and convoluted prose shifts the reader, by means of the NW, into a position akin to that of the soldier-subject. Drawing a map for the student in Le Palace, the Italian anarchist presses “as hard as he can on the pencil, tracing deep lines not on but in the page of the notebook, as if the paper, the fragile, dangerous, and intangible support of signs, of abstractions, should be confronted and mastered by means of a violent physical effort” (526). As Les Géorgiques, in which the life of L.S.M is relived in a series of chapters, demonstrates, the violence embedded in writing leaves a trace that must then be re-expressed just as violently. In the same way, L.S.M.’s leave their blood-like trace on the hands of the reader described in the text (Géorgiques 76). The link between words and worlds goes deeper than mere representation; words fictionally contain the material lived experience of the world. Simon’s constant depiction of lived experience aims to make tangible the intangible lived experiences of death and dying. After all, expressing such experiences constitute the key to the liberation of the consciousness of the soldier-subject from everyday reality.

Immobility is yet another trait of the soldier-subject’s world that permits intense perceptual action. The structure of the soldier-subject’s LWs may be revealed to him in the instant that his life is threatened in the heat of battle, but these worlds stretch across larger periods of time as well (even ones that he
himself has not “lived” but which he sees as analogical to his own, as is the case with Marcel in À la recherche du temps perdu as well). Paralyzing and liberating the soldier-subject by turns, perception flits across the interstitial space of consciousness, between events and lifetimes that strangely resemble each other. As we have seen in the case of the Italian anarchist’s assassination attempt, short periods of “real,” clock time can correspond to entire and infinite worlds of existence. It is the continual nature of worldbuilding activity that allows both the soldier-subject and the reader to explore time in all directions. In Les Géorgiques, the French troops engaged in a meaningless march in the frozen countryside during the Phoney War suddenly experience “the sensation that the world, the night, the entire earth had stopped” (288). Not only does immobility allow for movement on the part of the individual soldier-subject, though; it also allows for simultaneity. In Histoire, the dying mother is unable to move, surrounded on her bed by the mass of postcards that her friends have sent her: “...everything was stopped now at present immobilized all of it there in one moment forever images instants voices fragments of the time of the world...” (385). Because time is “stopped” in this way, the character, as well as the reader, replays the same scenarios “without hope that it will ever stop,” as the narrator of Le Palace discovers (549). Given form by the many dials of the journalist’s watch in Le Jardin des Plantes, time goes around and around as well as forward, “As if time were not marching on, turning around on its own axis, always going by the same places again, running in place so to speak” (959). But these circles in which time is “stuck” are often connected to one another, just as the reader discovers here once again the FW reflexively

308 See also 1087-1089, 1032-1033, and 1035-1036 for similar descriptions of watches.
commenting on its own NW.

Like the soldier-subject, the reader often encounters events belonging to the past, present, and future of the FW, without knowing where and when to place these events. The textual ground, moving forward too quickly, slips out from under his feet in the same way that it does for the soldier-subject, whom Deguy calls a “perpetual paramnesiac” (“Représentations” 1014) This “paramnesiac” remembers in all directions; he moves freely through time because of a divorce between the gaze by which he takes in the world, and the body by which he is in the world. Deguy writes, “the gaze too outstretched from its point of attachment due to moving back, leaves his body...then the world suddenly comes to him like a hallucination” (1012). The soldier-subject’s movement in time and space has something to do with the repetition of representation, and even self-representation, as we have seen in the case of the student in Le Palace. The soldier-subject may represent his own experience to himself, as in the case of the student, or the lives of others, as in the case of Georges from La Route des Flandres. This “position of immutability in speed” allows the mind repeatedly to roam while the body remains paralyzed (Deguy 1012). Once the world is stopped, frozen by the shock of the cataclysmic events of war, perception and memory are fragmented in the manner of a kaleidoscope. They may malfunction like a reel of film running backwards, as in Les Géorgiques, when O., terrified, tries to run but feels the grounds slip away backwards from underneath him, “so that he seemed so to speak to move forward while going backwards...” (360). Whatever direction the soldier-subject attempts to move, even if he attempts not to move at all, the world around him slips away and changes at an astonishing pace. Yet he is not trapped in just
this one world.

Since the soldier-subject is in the world by means of his body, his position in these worlds changes at an astonishing pace. War threatens corporality, and artificially separates mind from body, thus allowing the mind to return again and again to the scene of this separation. Freed from linear temporal constraints by approaching death, Simon’s characters move forward and backward in time. In this way, the pregnant woman in *L’Acacia*, upon returning from the colonies to France so that her husband can fight in the Great War, seems to lose part of her sight. She can only make out the scene before her in blurred colors; instead of the crowd, she sees “a vague mass of multicolored particles, bright or dark, clustered together and moving” (149). With no obvious threat of imminent death to herself, the woman’s powers of expression precede her powers of perception; having perceived no present threat, she reacts to a future menace. And she is right, for her husband will soon die in the Great War. In 1939, her son, en route for the front, experiences a similar premonitory phenomenon. Faces in the crowd degrade into spots, dots, and finally “nothing but an indistinct and dark jumble on the quay of the station...” (160). What is fascinating is that the reader, who is called upon to build worlds in cooperation with the text, encounters the description of the breakdown of the son’s vision before that of the mother. In other words, by the time the reader encounters the pregnant mother’s experience of simultaneous connection to and disconnection from the world, he has already experienced her grown son’s experience of this experience. Through a kind of textual montage, the reader lives the mother’s premonition before he ever encounters it. Thus, Simon reminds the reader that, although his narratives may move about a
given timeline in a non-linear fashion, it is the reader who virtualizes these asynchronous experiences and helps to construct for them a new and fluid timeline, that of rereading. In Chapter One, I discussed narratology’s subtle opposition between the story (histoire) and the narrative (récit). Yet worlds that so explicitly go beyond the text in order to invoke the participation of the reader emphasize the productive tension between the two notions, and explore how this tension may potentiate or undermine NWs and FWs.

Of course, time moves backwards as well as forwards in these novels that celebrate the vicissitudes of memory. For the old woman in Les Géorgiques, hiding from the world in the ruined familial chateau, thought to be based on the character of Aunt Rosa in Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!, “Time had already stopped before her birth” (199). Her existence has been reduced to reciting the inscriptions that, even though they are found on the solid rock of the tombs of L.S.M.’s two wives, remain meaningless and, moreover, worn away by time, so that they remain incomplete for the reader: “a simple series of sounds, absurd, invented in order to speak about things without real existence” (159). But, the fact that time moves both backwards, through retention, and forwards, through protention, does not mean that that the action of Simon’s novels takes place in an eternal present ruled by repetition. Such a reading may be tempting for the first-time reader of a novel like La Route des Flandres, where the text returns again and again to the main events (or macropropositions) of the plot: De Reixach’s ancestor kills himself because he is cuckolded, De Reixach might have been cuckolded by his jockey, Georges goes to war with Iglésia, De Reixach’s jockey, and Blum, De Reixach is killed by a sniper, Georges, Iglésia, and Blum are captured and sent to a German POW camp where they conjecture
about De Reixach’s life, and, finally, after escaping/surviving, Georges sleeps with Corinne, De Reixach’s widow. As I pointed out in Chapter Four, the reader has encountered (but not comprehended) most of these events a few pages into the book, but, because of temporal discontinuity, he does not know how they fit together.

What hooks these events together is not the eternal present of the act of narration; rather, the act of narration allows the reader to move among the events in a way that emphasizes his own worldbuilding responsibility. Although the narration shifts between these different events with alarming speed, the only way they can be said to be occurring at the same time is if one focuses on the time of narration, provided by Georges, and ignores the time of reading, which is properly unknown. Worldbuilding, on the part of the soldier-subject or on the part of the reader, takes place in the revisable space of perception, which creates to the same extent that it perceives. As long as he lives—and, unlike Beckett, the perceiving subject of these novels always lives—it is often to try to piece together the perceptions of another character who dies, as in La Route des Flandres. Thus do the soldier-subject’s perceptions and memories remain continuously open to revision. Similarly, as long as the reader continues to read and to reread, the worlds that he co-creates remain open to revision as well.

Simon’s conception of time could be said to resemble Martin Heidegger’s reflections on the threefold “ecstatic” unity of time in Being and Time whereby every moment, by dint of its direction towards the future, is linked to death (308-321). For Heidegger, death shatters our conformist obedience to the dictates of the everyday world (Being 219-246). Thus the threat of death can
aid in creating the recognition of freedom as an active response to our position in the world, even if this position may already have been determined by many external factors. The past, having taken place in the specific way it did, organizes the present, and the present implies communication with both the contingency of the past and the unavoidable mortality held by the future. The breakdown of the overwhelming abstraction of the everyday world, whose carefully constructed nature the subject now grasps for the first time, allows him to discover his primal connection to temporality as an interrelation between past, present, and future. Rather than seeing the soldier-subject principally as a time traveler, then, I would argue that he, like the reader, is fundamentally a world-builder, and that time is an irreducible component of any world. Given that the soldier-subject occupies many FWs, there is no need for him to adhere to the temporality of one FW alone.

If we focus on the act of reading Simon rather than imputing to the author some specific belief-system, the link between Heidegger and Husserl in relation to a phenomenology of reading becomes more clear. Heidegger’s conception of the present in fact heavily borrows from Husserl’s notion of the present moment as made up of a chain of retentions from the past and protentions towards the future. The phenomena of retention and protention are linked to the way in which the reader wends his way through the novel. Because of the tension between story and narrative, the way the reader encounters his FWs on the page (récit) never resembles the way in which they could be diagrammed on a time-line (histoire). This is even true once the reading experience is complete; however, the reader does not encounter FWs on the page; he encounters intermediary NWs. This is the blind spot of classical narratology. The in
between space of the act of reading itself is, I have argued, what most closely parallels the experience of the soldier-subject in Simon’s FWs. As I pointed out in Chapter Four, if we must assign a tense to Simon’s novels, it would have to be that of the future perfect (177). The past and future of the soldier-subject shift about until the reader may feel that what he is encountering in the text has already happened—it probably has—at the same time that what he may experience it as wholly new. As we will see in the next section, this attitude on the part of the reader towards the text’s temporality is matched by that of the soldier-subject. The unfamiliar time with which the soldier-subject is confronted reflects the convoluted time of the reading experience. Surrounded by the ghosts of fellow soldier-subjects, family, and friends that he cannot help but revisit and set upon by the memories of events that he cannot help but relive, the soldier-subject is pushed out of his own body by the triple presence of past, present, and future into a “thicker” kind of time over which he has little control. Ultimately, control over this new temporality rests with the reader. In his worldbuilding, the soldier-subject then actively enters what Simon, in Le Palace, calls “a kind of inexhaustible and vague reserve” (430). This reserve involves all types of worlds which, by virtue of intentionality, stretch across the divide between reader and text.
E. Points of View Subjective and Retrospective

Having survived the Second World War and reached old age, the narrator of *Le Jardin des Plantes* feels that he has been manipulated by “a sort of vague and facetious entity (History?), impersonal, stupid, and pitiless...like a trauma so to speak encysted in him like a foreign body, lodged there forever” (1148). Yet all is not chaos; the nothingness that once threatened the soldier-subject is no more “valid” as a world than the “progressive” or “objective” idea of history that once veiled it. That the soldier-subject and the reader’s experience of time as fragmented or discontinuous does not mean that time is entirely devoid of meaning. Both soldier-subject and reader endure a process of rereading. While this process does not fix the meanings and implications of past events once and for all, it does provide another reference point besides perceptions gleaned during the heat of battle. With the passage of time—that is, from the vantage point of the future—the soldier-subject gains perspective on the very history which once threatened to swallow him whole. On the one hand, he understands that cataclysmic events, such as the resounding defeat of the French army in 1940, happen to individuals, who have their own experiences of these events. On the other hand, the soldier-subject realizes that the experience of simultaneity that was one of the hallmarks of his wartime experience stretches in truth beyond himself as an individual (although never as far as the dictates of traditional historiography would claim). Thus, as I mentioned above, in *Le Jardin des Plantes*, the individual LW of S. is intertwined with those of Erwin Rommel and Winston Churchill, as recorded by these historical actors in various texts. The intersection between the presence of S. at the front during the German attack in May-June 1940, Rommel’s
vigorous participation in that same attack, his recording of his experiences in field journals, and Churchill’s presence at a celebrated cabinet meeting in France as the Germans were overrunning the country, and the chancellor’s recounting of this episode in his 1949 work *Their Finest Hour*, is revealed: “From that moment several events are going to take place simultaneously, events which, in spite or perhaps by the very reason of their apparent incoherence, constitute an almost homogenous or coherent whole” (1048). For Simon, the simultaneity of these events indicates that they have something to do with one another, and delineating the LWs of the soldier-subject is one way of connecting the various parts into some kind of whole. Here, we again encounter the idea of coherence in incoherence; the interpretation of these three events as interconnected plays as large a role in their coherence. The more that the event recedes into the distance—even as it remains accessible via a memory that presents it as present—the more the overall possible multiple frameworks of history become clearer. History with a capital “H” is mostly a retrospective phenomenon; its order quickly collapses when it tries to include the perspective of the individual. This kind of History remains alien to the individuals who have experienced experience, not history. However, Simon’s work argues that there is a h/History that exists at a crossroads between the unassailable givens of lower-case individual perceptual experience and the totalizing tendencies of upper-case History. This middle ground is made up of intermediary FWs governed by a multitude of stories. As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the French lexicon, in which *histoire* may mean

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309 In his interview with the journalist, S. argues that “speaking” and “writing” lack the ability to portray such simultaneity; what is needed are “several screens on which would be projected different images” (*Jardin* 1055).
“history,” “story,” or something that cannot be described makes such thinking even more applicable when dealing with a French-language writer.

The soldier-subject constructs a world at the same time that he is fashioned by it. Operating by means of an infinite intentional field, war and history work, to use Deleuze’s terms, on a molar level, which deploys its concepts in an overarching, global manner, as well as a fragmented, molecular level, where subject-object differentiation is not so complete (Oedipe 340-341). In *Le Palace*, Simon describes the manner in which “internal mutations” and “molecular displacements” escape the individual’s perception; they also create that perception, as the individual tries to fill in the blanks (417). For Simon, the line between the internal and the external is cut through by the intentional field best exemplified by the *pellicule*. O. realizes that, “History reveals itself (is evidenced by) through the accumulation of insignificant, even derisory, facts...” (304). Putting aside ideology, which has blinded him to the partisan realities of the conflict in Spain, even among those on “his side,” O. must scale down his understanding of his part in the proceedings: “While he had considered his trip in terms of distances, it really had to do with an internal mutation of his own self...” (266). Just as the larger correlates of time and space make it hard to discern the LWs of individual experience, these worlds make it equally hard for the soldier-subject to move beyond his own part in the proceedings.

This shift away from meta-narratives on the part of the soldier-subject is accompanied by a similar shift on the part of the reader, who can no longer trust in the overall thrust of the NWs and FWs that he hesitantly co-creates in order to progress through the text’s many hurdles. The consolidated nature of Simon’s plots, the minimal “macropropositional” nature of their summaries,
means that the reader relying on the overall thrust of plot may well be disappointed; he has often had all the requisite plot elements at his disposal since page one. That he may not have recognized them as the necessary elements for synthesizing a plot from the text is a testimony to the way in which Simon’s novels demand continued back-and-forth interaction between NWs and FWs. For the reader, Simon’s meta-narratives, such as the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and love triangles whose sex scenes are described at length, are just as necessary as his “micro-narratives.” Even if driven by the desire to find out “what really happens,” the reader must proceed cautiously. That is, once again, the reader must become a rereader; or, to put it more appropriately, the reader must rely upon his rereading tendencies, ones which are at work minimally in any act of reading. Even if, as I have suggested in Chapter Four, the reader finds Simon’s FWs easier to grasp than his NWs, the FWs created by reading one novel are not sufficient; one of Simon’s novels furnishes only a glimpse of the FWs that it evokes. In a more overt manner than Queneau, Simon’s FW project stretches over a series of novels published throughout the author’s career. (There is no greater testament to this sense of project that the fact that Simon selected which of his novels were to appear in the Pléiade editions of his work after his death.\textsuperscript{310})

Even the veteran soldier-subject quite literally rereads the terrain of his previous experiences. Passing over the battlefields of the Meuse long after the end of the Second World War, one of the narrators of \textit{Le Jardin des Plantes}, realizes just how irretrievable history is:

\textsuperscript{310} “The choice of Claude Simon’s works that have been included in the present edition was made by the author himself. The novels that he retained illustrate the course of his novelistic work starting with \textit{Le Vent: tentative de restitution d’un retable baroque} in 1957 up to \textit{Le Jardin des Plantes} in 1997.” Duncan, “Note sur la présente édition,” \textit{Oeuvres} lxxiii.
During the day, one time, from a plane, while going to Cologne, I tried to recognize the places. Clearly saw the Meuse at the bottom of its valley. Searching desperately to figure out where I was there. The routes the villages that railroad trench where thrown from my horse I ran bullets which passed with a noise like hornets. Out of breath. Quite simply continued to walk despite the hornets. Those who say that danger or fear give wings never

It really seemed to me that it was down there but these days planes fly too high too fast. Everything far away behind already slipping swept away. Laughing countryside. (1012)

As he gazes at the battlefield of two world wars, Simon’s narrator finally finds himself in a position from which he can see the whole theater of war, the landscape of the most memorable and most horrific portion of his existence. Yet now that he has a bird’s eye view of the area, time has rushed the specifics of the war behind him, just as, when threatened with annihilation, he was set free to move about in time and space. The phrase “searching desperately to figure out where he was down there” applies to the time of the German advance and to the present moment. What remains is nature, the “laughing countryside,” and the reader does not know whether it is laughing at the soldier-subject or merely eternally laughing because it is beyond the ken of man. The act of constructing and reconstructing the worlds in which the soldier-subject’s experience takes and took place is never-ending. Writing itself is not enough to arrest its movement. At times, Simon’s narrators appear almost nostalgic for this horrific time when, although trapped by circumstances, they were able to move about in time and space in a virtual manner not permitted by the everyday world. In a modern passenger plane flying over head, the possibility of knowledge regarding this bygone era seems to disappear just like the countryside.
F. Writing It Down

In Simon’s novels, the relation of writing to experience (or LWs) is connected to the relation of individual experience to different kinds of history. When words are allowed to become separated from their referents, as frequently occurs in the war-torn landscapes depicted in Simon’s novels, the assumed certainties of language disappear, just as did those of history. In *La Route des Flandres*, Georges, unaware that the Germans have already bypassed his position in their headlong race to the interior of France and then the English Channel, is chastised by a villager for still believing in the notion of a “front”:

“The front? Poor bastard! The front...There’s no more front, poor bastard, there’s nothing!” (268-269).311 The front has disappeared from the soldier-subject’s world because the front, much like Merleau-Ponty’s “flesh of the world,” envelops the soldier-subject. Although the soldier-subject does not experience the world from the privileged position of knowledge, he does experience it from multiple positions that would usually be separated from one another by space and time, and his attempts at ordering his experiences by writing them down will reflect this disorder at work in the LW.

Chronology thus becomes one of the principal problems for the soldier-subject constructing a narrative. The chronological ordering of the soldier-subject’s memories is difficult due to “holes in the plot, obscure points, even incoherencies” (*Géorgiques* 311). Furthermore, such chronological ordering does not necessarily correspond to (1) the order of the events themselves, or (2) how he remembers these events. To deal with divergences in memory, the

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311 The student in *Le Palace* poses a similar confused question about “fronts” when he is told that the American whose murder he suspects has been sent to the “front” (538).
narrator of the sections of *Les Géorgiques* dealing with the endless waiting period of the phoney war before the Second World War creates “parentheses.” These parentheses provide several possible explanations for the series of bizarre events that occur during a night march across the frozen snow (82). In the same novel, the first German bombing of the French troops on the Western front in May 1940 destroys the normal order of things even more radically: “*In effect, everything happened in several instants, almost simultaneously, and it will be impossible for him to say with certitude in what order the diverse phases of the action follow one another...*” (176). Perhaps, as Simon writes again in *Les Géorgiques*, war can only be depicted “in a fragmentary manner in the image of the phenomenon itself of fragmentation itself” (97). But the depiction is only half of the story, just as the text is only partly responsible for the NWs and the FWs by which it reaches the reader. I will in fact argue in what follows that it is precisely because the experience of war exceeds description that the reader *can* interact with it at all.

One of the soldier-subjects of *Les Géorgiques*, in this case O. as he writes his account of the Spanish Civil War, realizes that writing, like worldbuilding, involves choices that open and close possible avenues of meaning. “Constantly worried about the effect produced,” O. understands that his exercise in fictional worldbuilding involves, or will involve, a similar exercise in fictional worldbuilding on the part of the reader (*Géorgiques* 314). Neutral expression is an illusion, as it always implicates another who will perceive this expression, and so on and so forth. In *Le Jardin des Plantes*, S. insists to the overbearing journalist that it is “impossible for anyone to recount or describe anything in an objective manner” (1100). But objectivity is not necessary when the number of
worlds involved exceeds one. In fact, as is quite evident from his critique of history, for Simon, objectivity flattens the marvelous complexity of LWs and FWs: in the end, they are always experienced, in one way or another, by both soldier-subject and reader. The soldier-subject turned writer wonders how the reader could ever bridge the epistemic gap between his own experience (or lack thereof) to that of the soldier-subject. Thus in *Les Géorgiques*, Simon writes, “They then understand that they have fallen into an ambush and that almost all of them are going to die. Immediately after having written this sentence he realizes that it is pretty much incomprehensible for anyone who has not found himself in a similar situation and he lifts up his hand again” (47). Yet it is this very incomprehensibility—it is difficult to say whether it is O. or Simon himself who points it out here—that motivates the reader to explore the worlds that it separates; moving between the various positions laid out by the text, the reader establishes different kind of worlds and, in the process, his own idiosyncratic reading of the text.

Translating the experience of *war* into *words* requires following the same process of revealing by which the *world* uncovers its brute presence to the soldier-subject. In Simon, *worlds* are the link between *war* and *words*. The brute presence of the world, may, as Britton claims, elude representation except via a “countervailing illusionist discourse” which “modalizes the visible in order to produce it as a phantasized object of desire” (Britton 165, 171). But the transformation of one world into another world does not elude representation, and Britton points this out in her own way, by arguing for the “co-existence of two contradictory effects arising from one discursive feature” rather than “a clear-cut opposition of two entirely separate discourses—one promoting the
visible and the other negating it” (172). Britton establishes the productive tension that lies not just at the heart of the visible in Simon, but also at the heart of the worldbuilding process of both soldier-subject and reader. The proliferation of LWs in Simon’s novels allows the author to depict a constellation of worlds that only appears fragmented because of this very process of transformation. One of Simon’s most notable achievements as a writer is to describe in detail the “phase shifts” between one world and another. The soldier-subject may not be able perfectly to recall what it felt like to be threatened with death, but the very process of shifting worlds demonstrates the power of the transformation to reach across the habitual boundaries of the everyday world:

...as if everything were taking place in slow motion, so that, later on, when he tried to tell of these things, he realized that, in place of the formless, the invertebrate, he had fabricated a relationship between events

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312 Critics have tended to isolate a specific slice of this transition from one world to another. Since Simon, as we saw at the end of the last chapter, often uses images to shift from one narrative to another, these “phase shifts” have most often led critics to focus on the role of the image. We have already discussed Pascal Mougin’s study on the “image-effect” in Simon’s novels, but critics such as Michael Evans have discussed the author in terms of modern art’s tendency to break free from the framing device of realism (Claude Simon and the Transgressions of Modern Art (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1988)) and Brigitte Ferrato-Combe has examined the author more specifically within the aesthetics and practices of painting (Écrire en peintre: Claude Simon et la peinture (Grenoble: Ellug, 1998)).

Others have focused on Simon’s relation to the cinema. Recently, Bérénice Bonhomme, has published “Claude Simon. L’écriture cinématographique,” Loxias 12 (2006) regarding the links between cinematic “writing” and Simon’s own style. Wolfram Nitsch has published, “Supplementary Organs: Media and Machinery in the Late Novels of Claude Simon,” Retrospective 152-167, in which he discusses what Simon’s characters learn from the breakdown of machinery around them. (For full reference, see Chapter Four). Jochen Mecke has analyzed the way in which cinematic time acts as a metaphor for the decentering of the Simonian subject in “Images-temps: métaphores, temps et techniques cinématographiques dans La Route des Flandres,” Transports: les métaphores de Claude Simon, eds. Irène Albers and Wolfram Nitsch (NY: Peter Lang, 2006) 283-304.

However, a FW is much more than the images that it might evoke, cinematic or otherwise. Few have seen in the many transitions within Simon’s novels a worldbuilding process that involves the reader. Notable exceptions remain Genin’s L’Expérience du lecteur dans les romans de Claude Simon: Lecture studieuse et lecture poignante (full reference in Chapter One), as well as a little cited article by Pat O’Kane, “La Route des Flandres: the Rout(e) of the Reader?” in Claude Simon: New Directions 50-60, in which the author declares, “…far from being the result of a current critical fad, the reader, reading, and the way in which they are portrayed, constitute an important if as yet largely unexplored aspect of the Simon text” (60).
such as the mind of a normal person (That is to say that of someone who had slept in a bed, gotten up, washed himself, gotten dressed, eaten) could conceive of it after the fact, having gained some distance from it, in conformity with an established usage of agreed upon sounds and of signs; that is to say calling forth more or less clear images, distinct one from another, while in truth, it had neither definite forms, nor names, nor adjectives, nor subjects, nor objects, nor punctuation (in any case, no periods), nor exact temporality, nor sense, nor consistency except for that, viscous, cloudy, inert, undefined, which reached him through this more or less transparent glass bell jar under which he found himself trapped. (Acacia 286-287)

The act of “trying with words to make the unsayable exist” itself reveals the chasm between words and reality, a chasm, just like that between reader and text, only bridgeable by means of worlds (Acacia 348). “Like a narrative, sentences whose syntax...noun, verb, object—were absent”, signs and symbols are replaced by a flowing liquid relation which depends on the act of reading for its existence; life’s “superb and unbowed independence” violently explodes out of the glue of everyday language, which conceals a multitude of worlds from the soldier-subject (Vent 137).

In Simon, writing fails in its representative role, but exceeds in an imaginary one. Even when he tries to commit things to paper, as O. does in Les Géorgiques after the Spanish Civil War, no certainty is achieved; the author feels “like someone who cannot manage to persuade himself that neither what he saw nor what he lived through are totally real” (310). Yet, if we recall Parsons’s argument that the “extranuclear” property of existence does nothing to prevent nonexistent objects from being endowed with more specific, “nuclear” properties, FWs need not be “real” to have attributes.313 Faced with the prospect of death, unmoored from the comforting perceptual world with which he was familiar, the soldier-subject turns against the language of

313 See Chapter Two.
representation. In order to live, he turns to the language of *imagination* so as to better deal with both an excess of *world*—which is trying to kill him—and an excess of *words*—which he uses to make sense of this new world (and which the first-time reader may feel are trying to kill him!). Since there is no stable meaning to be found in the logorrheic flow of words of culture, exemplified by the father-figure’s obsession with words in *La Route des Flandres* and *La Bataille de Pharsale*, the soldier-subject turns elsewhere (*Flandres* 260, 361; *Pharsale* 615). Yet these rejected words and images are powerful enough that the son from *La Bataille de Pharsale*, later, will try to find their referent: the battlefield of Pharsalus. (Just like the reader, whether he likes it or not, references and images do indeed have an effect on him!) Imagination brings life to the sterility of history and language which, without the appropriate worlds in which to exist—and whose existence, in turn, they support—are without power. It is because of their lack of imagination—not because they are words—that the combinatory and restorative power of words championed by the father of Georges proves ineffectual on the front lines of the war and especially in the German prison camp where his son questions his own romanticization of De Reixach’s death, a tale that he has been elaborating in time with his own (394). For these captured soldiers, words no longer support a rational means of communication; rather, they provide an imaginary way out of a brutal situation.

The propinquity of the soldier-subject to death first reveals to him the deep mutual imbrication of subjects and objects in his perceptual field, then unmoors him from a fixed position in space and time. Finally, this propinquity to death passes into the act of writing itself (as has been argued by many
theorists, Derrida among them). But Simon ties together the experiences of writing and death on both a practical as well as a theoretical level by means of his focus on the lived experience of war. Because of this imaginary explosion of stories, which I explored in Chapter Four in relation to Simon’s kinship with Faulkner, the domain of the imaginary—that is, FWs—is attached to survival itself. Telling stories, which then develop a life of their own, becomes a contagious work of survival that affects those around the soldier-subject, as in RF where Georges and Blum weave many different versions of the “whole story” in order to “make unnamable reality digestible” (287, 320). These stories, in turn, themselves metamorphosize into FWs that are as autonomous as the events that they can never completely represent, as is the case with the Italian anarchist’s stories in Le Palace: “...once it is told, once it is put in the form of words, all this begins to exist on its own without him needing to support it any longer...” (456). What is “unnamable” never really becomes “digestible,” but the soldier-subject usually succeeds in putting together a tale that “begins to exist on its own,” provided that this tale has a reader.

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314 In other words, because the soldier-subject does not die, he can write; in this way, his previous brush with death impregnates the tales that he tells. For death to be expressed in writing, the soldier-subject must live. In this manner, death’s hold on the soldier-subject grows stronger the longer the soldier-subject survives. Though not death itself, writing here is a sign of death, not least the death of his everyday self that the reader must endure in order to enter and exist in the FWs of Simon’s work.

In De la gramma\(\text{t}\)ologie, Derrida insists that “writing carries death” because of the absence inherent in the fact that there is no longer anyone behind the signs on the page (Paris: Minuit, 1967) 413. In Simon, the play between presence and absence, death and life becomes more complicated due to the intentional correlates of fiction. This is to say that, for the soldier-subject, writing carries death as absent because, without death’s absence, the soldier-subject would not have been able to write about death’s presence. And for the reader, the writing that carries the possible death of the soldier-subject signals, on the one hand, the reader’s disappearance from the everyday world, but also his becoming as a reader. For soldier-subject and reader, the writing that underlies Simon’s FWs carries the tension, created by death, that in reaction creates a new kind of life (or being).
G. Conclusion: Reading

Thus Simon’s “art of war” is transformed into an “art of reading” (Ellison 135-151). Both of these arts suppose a knowledge of what, in Le Jardin des Plantes, Simon blames the French military for having lacked in May-June 1940: “...an aptitude for evaluating in a battle what is unexpected in a situation and modifying in consequence the initially anticipated plans or orders” (1117).315 A successful reading of Simon requires the same kind of elasticity that the author of Le Jardin des Plantes believes central to the successful waging of war. This elasticity, which helps to define Simon’s soldier-subjects as survivors, stands in sharp contrast to De Reixach’s inexorable and seemingly fated march to death, “repeating, redoing what one hundred and fifty years earlier another De Reixach...had already done,” a death march performed over and over again in RF, as well as Simon’s other novels (249). A military man, such as Les Géorgiques’s L.S.M, may frame the question in terms of practical experience: “...it is one thing to be sit in an office and draw up a plan of attack and another to carry it out: while working in the office nothing troubles one’s mind...in battle, defeat or success depends upon a moment: noise, danger, smoke are so many obstacles preventing one from seeing clearly” (49). This is where the line between the reader and the soldier-subject becomes clearer. Unlike the reader of Simon, who is free to meditate on the book at hand as much as he pleases, Simon’s soldier-subject cannot find answers in books because books do not respond to the question of why he is fighting at that moment. Hiding from the communists during the Spanish Civil War, in Les Géorgiques, O., a volunteer for the more anarchistic POUM, searches through the books at hand for answers:

315 See also the author’s lengthy critique of army leadership in Chapter Two of Les Géorgiques (79-139).
However, none of the authors selected by Penguin had apparently ever thought of writing a work (but such a work must have existed) dealing with this sort of situation and which would have allowed him to confront the problem with which he was faced, that is to say to understand the whys and the wherefores of what he was doing there. (302)

Answers to the question “Why?” can only come after the fact, when the necessary vantage point on events is that of the reader—a vantage point on their own FWs that remains impossible to obtain for Simon’s characters, who, even when writing about the events at hand, do not seem to know that a reading experience outside of themselves is going on. (That is to say that O. pictures an audience, but he certainly does not picture the audience of Simon’s novel!) In this way, the relation of Simon’s characters to their FWs differs significantly from that of Queneau’s characters, who often grasp their FWs at the moments of their coming into and out of being. Although the basis of these worlds may not be completely fictional, this effort of expansion relies on the processes of worldbuilding common to fiction. One of the fascinating aspects of Simon’s FWs is the vivid and horrible nature of processes of destruction that continually threaten them; this is quite different from the usually rather nonchalant rapid-cycling appearance and disappearance of Queneau’s FWs. Whereas Queneau’s multiple FWs and unique characters come rapidly into and out of being at pace with one another, Simon’s soldier-subject is frequently caught up in disastrously decomposing worlds of war that threaten his survival in a permanent manner. (Even if we expand our study of Simon to his descriptions of peacetime, we could expand this argument along similar lines; here, these worlds of war become a war of worlds, in which different subjectivities clash violently.) Much like Queneau’s characters, however, Simon’s soldier-subjects are moving towards the intermediary stage of being a
character, but, like the movie-goers in *Les Géorgiques*, trapped in “this beyond (or that within) where they seemed to be held in reserve, only having been extracted from there for a brief appearance,” they never quite arrive (214). The character moves towards a fullness that he can never achieve by means of indescribable LW experiences, what S., in *Le Jardin des Plantes*, thinks of as “as unbelievable for himself as for his interlocutor...” (1112). The “unbelievable” aspect of the LWs of Simon’s characters is deeply tied up with their deployment of RW referents such as history, wars, and autobiography, which then assume their own fictional status as the reader makes hesitant headway into the text.

One of the reasons that Simon’s characters seem trapped in a kind of ontological limbo in comparison to Queneau’s, for example, is that the reader of Simon is given far greater access to the interior states of characters. This access is sometimes indicated by the first-person pronoun “I,” but it is also indicated by the sheer amount of personal perceptual detail provided by Simon. We may not know who is perceiving or when a perceptual shift occurs so that someone else—or a series of someone elses—are perceiving, but we definitely can tell that someone is perceiving in agonizingly sharp detail. In contrast, the reader of Queneau frequently stays on the surface because the character with whom he might identify might also disappear, start dreaming, or turn out to be the fragment of someone else’s dream! To put it quite simply, the consciousness at work in Simon’s FWs never quite gets up and walks about in the world in the way that that of Queneau’s does. This means, though, that the reader who has managed to grapple with this character-encompassing voice enough to follow it without trying to understand the object of all of its perceptions, is able to spend more and more time reveling in the dense NW of
the text. Thus, as I argued at the beginning of the preceding chapter, does the direction of the reading experience in Simon find itself reversed from that of Queneau.

These ambiguities of the soldier-subject’s experience of his own—and other—worlds draw out the reader, who must, however “formalist” his literary disposition, interact with the soldier-subject’s world in order to move on—or even to begin reading. While my comparison of the soldier-subject and the reader certainly relies on ideas regarding personal and psychological identification with characters, as well as the way in which narrative focalization works through characters, FWs are a more basic category than both of these.

Description of FWs helps to explain how we as readers manage to read anything in the first place. With such difficult texts as those of Simon, they help us delineate the shifting field of possibilities experienced by the reader as a result of his interaction with the text. Although Simon’s characters certainly build their own worlds, the full extent of these LWs is unknowable for the reader. Such unknowability is a structural necessity which induces the reader to build FWs from the text, a necessity which will gain even more concrete form in the following chapter on Robbe-Grillet. By means of these LWs, the novels of Simon engage the reader in a shifting game of words and worlds whose mystery and power belie the reduction of fiction to “text.” Intentionality and worldbuilding are in fact the veritable “blind spot” of the formalist poetics associated with the New Novel, which tend to theorize writing from the outside—and not reading from the inside.
Chapter Six: Robbe-Grillet’s Worlds: Wording and Worlding

A. Introduction

While NWs and FWs readily can be described as separate entities, they remain, I hope to have shown, fundamentally interdependent. In this chapter, I will tackle Robbe-Grillet’s worlds—both narrative and fictional—as they spring into being during the act of reading, without pushing the “narrative” into one corner and the “fictional” into another. I will examine the movement of the reader between the seeming certainties of Robbe-Grillet’s “concrete” NWs and the gaping uncertainties of his undecidable FWs. In the year 2000, explaining the genesis of La Jalousie, the author stated, “in a very clear and very pure language, I tried to create novelistic structures that would formulate a response (but a response impossible to formulate in any other way) to the fundamental question: What am I and what am I doing here?” (Voyageur 318). Robbe-Grillet went on to explain that such questions are necessitated by the essential non-comprehension of the world. This fundamental incomprehension is akin to that of the reader, who is drawn into the FWs of the text by its limpid and alluring NWs. In the end, Robbe-Grillet’s reader must ask himself much the same questions in regard to the complex and overdetermined worlds of the author’s novels.

My switch in methodology does justice to the complicated and unique worlds at hand and represents a desire to demonstrate how closely interrelated the concepts of NWs and FWs are. After all, Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet emphasize above all else the transition among worlds. So far, I have accomplished this by examining NWs and FWs as somewhat distinct entities.
In Chapter Two, I explored how experimentation with certain surface attributes of language characterizes Queneau’s NW. This experimentation involves language games (altered spelling, word choice, and syntax), along with the willful manipulation of various constraints and playful intertextual references. Yet Queneau’s linguistic experimentation never seriously impedes the reader’s progress into an eclectic and shape-shifting series of FWs. In Chapter Four, I took a closer look at sentence-level experimentation in Simon’s NW. This experimentation entails the expansion of the sentence as a narrative unit, as well as a self-conscious exploration of relevant intertextual influences. Simon’s sentence-level and intertextual experimentation is accompanied by an emphasis on the double nature of the image as a bridge between the text and the FWs produced by the reader in cooperation with the NWs. In each case, the NW acts as intermediary between reader, text, and FWs.

Admittedly, the NWs of Queneau and Simon create quite different effects in the reader, who remains the catalyst of the worldbuilding process. In the case of Queneau, as Longre reminds us, the writer’s experimentation with language serves primarily a spectacular purpose, jolting the reader out of complacency, while prompting him—even if he does not recognize certain words, constraints, or references—to follow a profusion of multiple FWs in a constant state of flux. The multiplicity of these worlds depends on the equally protean and eccentric Quenellian character. In the case of Simon, the writer’s relentless variation and repetition of certain structures such as the present participle shifts the reader from a dense and difficult NW into meta-suppositions regarding the timeline of FW events. Suppositions about story (histoire) and narrative (récit) are undermined from the start by a series of
representations that disrupt the reconstruction of a coherent, linear timeline. Simon’s intertextual recourse to the work of Faulkner and Proust simultaneously creates complications and reference points for the reader lost in a chaotic sea of words. Simon’s novels demonstrate that the intermediary of NWs may be retroactive as well; NWs act as touchstone for the reader reconstructing the reading experience from finish to start.

Maintaining the separation between NWs as closer to and FWs as further from the text was initially necessary in order to define my terms: a phenomenology of reading gains nothing by mimicking perfectly the ambiguity of this experience (or the experimentation of the authors discussed)! As we have seen in the previous chapters, NWs and FWs stretch out along a spectrum, not a straight line from start to finish. However, by continuing to prop up this separation, I risk alienating myself from the experience per se of reading—"murdering to dissect," in the words of Wordsworth. The rich ambiguities of this experience do not support a strict hierarchy between different sets of worlds on the “chain” of intermediaries proposed by Pavel. For Pavel, this lengthy chain is necessary to connect live, organic “worlds” and “human texts,” the links of which I have referred to as the RW, LWs, NWs, and FWs (70). From the reader’s point of view, though, NWs and the FWs do not exist in a rarified state of opposition. The ends of Pavel’s chain are linked together so that the reader moves from one portion to the other, occasionally shifting from NWs to FWs with agility and speed and, at other times, with great clumsiness—without necessarily touching upon every link in between, and without necessarily understanding what he is doing or why. Just as the Quenellian character vacillates between appearance and disappearance or, just as the Simonian
soldier-subject’s worlds oscillate between decomposition and recomposition, so too does the unstable reader’s movement between NWs and FWs never cease. In the act of reading are deployed the raw materials of the reader’s worldbuilding experience as well as the seeds of interpretative activity of the critic.

Due to the combination of an economy of words with uncertain plots, Alain Robbe-Grillet’s novels provide an ideal opportunity for examining the interdependence of NWs and FWs. The career of Robbe-Grillet, shrouded by debate and controversy from the publishing of his first novel in 1955 until his death in 2008, has been linked to the trajectory of the New Novel, where ambiguity often played an important part in undermining the reader’s expectations. Among the authors and theoreticians associated with the New Novel, such as Claude Simon, Claude Ollier, Marguerite Duras, Robert Pinget, and Jean Ricardou, Robbe-Grillet was known as the “pope of the New Novel” for his role in proselytizing for non-linear, circular narratives with vague characters caught up in ambiguous plots. However, Robbe-Grillet transcends, especially for his first-time reader in our day and age, his association with the New Novel. While displaying a return to phenomenology in terms of how we perceive the world without the habitual narrative structures of linear plot and well-defined character, Robbe-Grillet’s NWs contain portentous structures of meaning associated with psychoanalysis, particularly symbolic ones, that beg for interpretation on the part of the reader. The economy of Robbe-Grillet’s prose clearly differentiates him from a more poetic and verbose writer such as Claude Simon; this same economy makes it easier to see what Robbe-Grillet “is doing” as well. However, the debates about the role of the novel in France from the
mid-1950s to the 1970s might better be reframed as a continuation of the exploration of fictional consciousness earlier highlighted by novels like Gide’s *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925), Queneau’s *Le Chiendent* (1933), Sartre’s *La Nausée* (1938), and Camus’s *L’Etranger* (1942), to name but a few. On the other hand, this is not to say that I accept the denials of Simon and Robbe-Grillet of their previous rejection of the referent as they began to explore the ways fiction and fact came together in the genre of autobiography in the 1980s. The FWs of their novels were all along more complex than their statements about the aesthetics of the New Novel indicated during the 1960s and 1970s. By posing questions that they refuse to answer in a definite manner, Robbe-Grillet’s FWs force the reader into closer complicity with the NWs which underlie these FWs. If we take Robbe-Grillet to be an example of a certain type of writing rather than as an author who is actually and actively read, we are at risk of missing how his readers manage to read him at all.

In fact, it is this seemingly contradiction between the power exerted on the reader by the FWs of Robbe-Grillet’s and the formalist poetics associated with the New Novel and his own statement of aesthetics, *Pour un Nouveau Roman*, that initially attuned me to the ambiguous role of Robbe-Grillet’s reader. In fact, in 1991, Robbe-Grillet distanced himself from what he called Ricardou’s “Stalinesque” rejection of the referent in fiction (*Voyageur* 273). Furthermore, his three-volume autobiographical text, *Romanesques* (1985, 1988, 1994), certainly demonstrates a desire further to examine the intersection of fiction and autobiography. The power of fiction to draw the reader in while also making him self-aware is even more evident in Robbe-Grillet’s early novels, *Les

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Gommes, Le Voyeur, and La Jalousie, which demonstrate complex NWs and FWs that push the limits of the reader’s comprehension—and patience—all the while remaining readable because of the author’s willingness to situate his FWs within what Jean-François Lyotard calls “grand narratives,” such as Christianity, Marxism, or, in the case of Robbe-Grillet, myth, the sexuality, violence, and crime of the detective narrative, and colonialism. The back and forth between (1) popular genres and (2) their undecidable manifestations in the author’s novels—which we have already seen in regard to Queneau—creates a unique blend of tension between NWs and FWs, a tension that is obscured by focusing too narrowly on autobiography. This tension is marked by a particularly intense intertwining of the acts of worldbuilding and interpretation. Robbe-Grillet’s novels involve worldbuilding on the part of the reader because all novels do: the act of reading lays bridges between these hermetically sealed written objects (texts) and their incomplete lived virtual worlds (activated by reading). And Robbe-Grillet’s FWs eventually call for constant acts of interpretation on the part of the reader, ones which are then further reformulated in the worldbuilding experience (and so on and so on).

The blind spot in the attitude of literary criticism to the history of literary movements is clearest in Anglo-American criticism regarding postmodernism, for example in Brian McHale’s classic Postmodernist Fiction. The category of postmodernism does not help us to read Robbe-Grillet any more than the category of the New Novel does. Focusing on the movement of the reader through the NWs linked with the text and the more imaginary FWs produced by the encounter with the NW will give us a better idea of how Robbe-Grillet’s

fiction works in action (the conditions of possibility for its being read). Finally, if we follow in detail just how the reader’s worldbuilding activities act to support or undermine certain interpretations, which are then fed back into a further cycle of worldbuilding and interpretation, we might better be able to track the possible outcomes of the reading experience.

In this chapter, I will argue that the rapid-cycling movement between Robbe-Grillet’s NWs and FWs demonstrates a radical level of uncertainty that entices the reader precisely because of his inability to find answers to the many questions raised by the plot. This is not to say that NWs and FWs in Queneau and Simon do not exist interdependently as well, merely that Robbe-Grillet’s work provides an ideal way of demonstrating how this interdependence works and what it has to do with the reader and readerly desire. In discussing Robbe-Grillet’s novels, the question of “what happened” remains eternally in the form of a question without an answer. “What happened” becomes “what happened?” Of course, Queneau’s FWs may be, as critics have argued, “untellable” in their eccentricities. Because so much has transpired, the author’s redefinition of traditional notions of plot and character causes an overload. Being and becoming flourish for Queneau on even the most microscopic level; this cycle of appearance and disappearance affects everyone, minor and major characters alike, as well as the reader. It may be possible for the rereader to establish the events of Simon’s FWs on the summary level of macropropositions, but, for the first-time reader, the facts (what happened) quickly become an eternally second-degree “what happened.” “What happened” is a supposition based on the remembered contents of a fractured perceiving consciousness. For Simon, the subjective nature of memory and individual LWs—one singular, monolithic
memory that becomes the intersection of a multitude of LWs, that is—linked to reading, always trumps the totalizing demands of history and writing. By dint of the precision of their NWs, Robbe-Grillet’s FWs may appear to present themselves as less than what they are. However, the continual shuttling between NWs and FWs ensures that they are as dense and rich as those of Queneau and Simon.

As readable as Queneau and as ambiguous as Simon, Robbe-Grillet brings NWs and FWs together by heightening the state of confusion in the consciousnesses of character and reader, and by using this state of confusion to heighten narrative desire. Drawn into the NW by its apparent simplicity, the reader performs a “double take” when he realizes the radical level of confusion and ambiguity that reigns in the author’s FWs. The second movement of this “double take” occurs when the reader, who should know better, joins in this FW in search of an answer to his questions all the same. In other words, there are moments when Robbe-Grillet’s reader might seize upon the impossibility of his quest to find out what “really happened,” yet these moments (if the reader continues reading) merely increase his desire for answers. (As we shall see, even “critical” readers fall into this trap.) This process is underlain by the tremendous lack of communication present in Robbe-Grillet’s FWs, where worldbuilding and interpretation, fueled by errors of perception, judgment, and temporary hypotheses follow fast on one another’s heels.

As was the case for Queneau and Simon, the singularity of Robbe-Grillet’s novels takes root in the level of the NW. In fact, it is the very clarity of these NWs, marked by a penchant for precise geometric description, that first poses a problem for the reader. Robbe-Grillet’s NWs present themselves as denotative,
clear, and comprehensible, though the reader may only seize one rudimentary level of their semantic import. Relieved (or numbed) by their seeming simplicity—and, occasionally, monotony, in which arrangements of chairs, tables, boats, ports, houses, and plants are meticulously depicted and situated in space—the reader is all the more easily trapped, visualizing worlds a little too well, buying into a stability that is belied by the later twists and turns of the text. Robbe-Grillet gives consciousness the coordinates it needs to expand beyond the words on the page but, when it needs to contract in order to clarify a given situation, those coordinates are no longer lurking there: the words now seem to have a different meaning altogether. Since the text becomes the NW as soon as it is read, even when the reader returns to the text, it is not the same text that he read before, as his expectations and assumptions have been changed by the very processes of reading that have moved him beyond the text. The act of worldbuilding feeds into that of interpretation and vice-versa. It is for this reason, among others, that I rely on the concept of plural NWs as related to the text and yet including more than the text. The crystal-clear verbal descriptions related to the NW shatter into myriad narrative fragments that the reader must assemble in order to answer questions regarding the events of the plot. These questions are further complicated by the fact that the reader’s attitudes towards his own reading—and ever-shifting set of coordinates—contribute so much to determining the answers. Character and reader consciousness in Robbe-Grillet come together because both are defined by a state of confusion and a lack of knowledge about what is going on in the FWs of the text due to NWs that say enough to provoke interest, but not to provide answers. As Robbe-Grillet pointed out in a radio interview from 2005 in which
he discusses Hegel, Queneau, Sartre, Husserl, and intentionality, consciousness “devours” both NW and FW alike (“Monde”). This devouring consciousness that devours itself in the end is distinct from that which arises in Queneau or Simon, and it poses problems for the reader as well as for the character. For the former, consciousness creates a plurality of worlds; for the latter, consciousness is always exceeded by the world that it attempts to seize. For Robbe-Grillet, consciousness is both annihilating and inexact, and so are the narrative and fictional worlds that it calls forth.

Critics have explored the effect of a dominating character consciousness on worldbuilding in Robbe-Grillet’s novels. Most notably, Bruce Morrissette argued in a pivotal study published in the same year as Pour un Nouveau Roman (1963), that the writer’s descriptions evince an intense hypersubjectivity whereby objects function as the supports and reflections of human existence and emotions. At the other end of the spectrum from a meta-discursive reading of Robbe-Grillet’s novels that would focus on self-reflexive figures, Morrissette suggest that these figures might be a trompe l’oeil concealing a traditional narrative structure. The hypersubjectivity that Morrissette detected in Robbe-Grillet’s novels does constitute one appealing layer of their rich tapestry of interwoven NWs and FWs; much like the author’s use of stereotyped “psychological” themes or grand narratives, it helps the reader get his footing in a decidedly formal textual environment.318 Such assumptions concerning the inherent validity of FWs—Morrissette claimed in 1963 that these were nothing more than the “mental content” of their narrators (115-116)—remain one-

Let us postpone discussing the “mental content” of fictional characters until we know how the reader creates a FW for them to inhabit.

In reality, the combination in Robbe-Grillet’s fictions of “things” and a hypersubjectivity that imbues them with meaning come together in the hybrid symbols that are a part worldbuilding experience, such as the Oedipus motif in *Les Gommes*, the figure eight in *Le Voyeur*, or the native’s song in *La Jalousie*. The same “things” act as shifting mechanisms between divergent experiences which take root in the convergence of two very different worlds: the character’s experience of his own LW on the one hand and the reader’s experience of FWs on the other. As we will see, in *Le Voyeur*, a bit of rope may evoke an innocent childhood memory of the protagonist, Mathias—but it may equally well foreshadow his participation in an episode of torture, rape, and murder. Here the symbol lies at the intersection of the character’s fictionally lived experience and the reader’s attempt to rebuild a world in which said experience may occur.

In Robbe-Grillet’s novels, then, the reader’s acts of worldbuilding are the phenomenological foundation of the worlds of both the character and reader alike. This is not to say that the reader necessarily identifies with the character. Rather, the true struggle for Robbe-Grillet’s reader is to understand that he as reader animates the character by building multiple worlds, not merely by following a narrative that is “focalized” in different ways. Robbe-Grillet’s exceptionalism resides in the fact that the oscillation between fictional...

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319 Articles as recent as 2002 still make this claim, analyzing *La Jalousie* only in function of the relation of the geometric gaze to the psychology of the novel’s characters, rather than exploring the complex interrelations between the reader and the building blocks of the worlds that he co-creates. See Rose Marie Kuhn, “Chiffres, mille-pattes et géométrie: la structuration métaphorique de *La jalousie* d’Alain Robbe-Grillet,” *Dalhousie French Studies* 58 (2002): 105-117.

320 For a more complete discussion of Genette and the notion of focalization, see Chapter One.
“things” and fictional consciousness is so swift that the reader has a hard time differentiating one from the other. In *Le Voyeur*, Mathias’ contemplation of a bit of rope on the deck of a ship soon removes him from the present and displaces him to his childhood, where he kept similar bits of rope in a box. This shift, though, is presented in such a way that the reader himself must judge when present becomes past and when past becomes present again—as well as when a bit of rope is just a bit of rope and when it is something else! Taking a page from Sartre, sometimes this reader understands NW things as FW consciousness, and sometimes he understands FW consciousness as a NW thing. Even when made aware that it is *he* who is animating this process, the reader participates in it all the same.

Due to the multi-tiered structuring ambiguity of Robbe-Grillet’s novels, the reader becomes caught up in building FWs from seemingly clear NWs that reveal uncertainties as he tries to answer unanswerable questions, hazarding, rejecting, revising, and rehazarding worlds and interpretations at a prodigious rate. The many and varied narrative and interpretive ambiguities do not prevent the reader from coming up with many and varied solutions—no matter how provisional—to them. For this reason, Alain Goulet, writing about *Le Voyeur*, states: “slippages of meaning/changes of direction (*glissements du sens*) do not at all prevent a meaning/direction from taking shape in the reader.”321 Even understanding that Robbe-Grillet’s FWs might be defined by the existence of many possible FWs accompanied by many possible interpretations does not stop the reader driven on by the desire for a solution. The reader’s endless

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string of untenable hypotheses regarding the FWs of novels like *Les Gommes*, *Le Voyeur*, and *La Jalousie* are in fact often connected to the “things” that Robbe-Grillet is so famous for describing in their NWs.

Fictional “things” provide an interesting test case for exploring NWs and FWs, as these things are verbal in nature and yet are meant to be seized by the reader as more than words alone. For Robbe-Grillet, things are less interesting than our attitude towards them, the productive role that they play when we feel obligated to reach out and fill in the gaps of non-consciousness surrounding them. Thus debates regarding possible references to outer or inner worlds, discussed in the conferences at Cerisy on both Simon and Robbe-Grillet, miss the bigger point regarding the reader’s productive and ambiguous role in worldbuilding. Continuing in our day and age to understand the author’s descriptions as an objective or *chosiste* depiction of the world, as Roland Barthes was the first to claim in 1954, does not takes into consideration the complex and multiple nature of worldbuilding on the part of the reader.322 Barthes later revised his opinion, stating in 1962 that Robbe-Grillet’ seemingly empty forms “irresistibly call for something to fill them” (*Oeuvres complètes* 1322). In each case, Barthes located Robbe-Grillet’s importance in the very structure of the author’s fictions. I would argue that Barthes’ readings are more reductively NW-centric than FW-centric, as they tend to focus on the synthetic nature of the text rather than the profusion of fictional possibilities that flow from it. And these myriad possibilities depend as much on the reader as they do on the text. In 1963, Robbe-Grillet announced, “And yet the world is neither meaningful nor absurd. It is, quite simply. That is, in any case, what is

most remarkable about it...All around us, defying the pack of our animist or protective adjectives, things are there.”

This early statement of the author’s poetics is often misread; the argument proffered in *Pour un Nouveau Roman* centers on the imagination, not on reality. The author’s claim that “things are there” should be the starting point for our reflections, not their conclusion.

Robbe-Grillet’s reader, in linking together the many inanimate objects of his NWs and FWs, fictionally reenacts what Robbe-Grillet claims that we do on a daily basis when faced with the mute presence of objects. Since it is difficult to imagine that these objects could exist in a world without our presence, we posit a world in which their existence is meaningfully connected to ours. Robbe-Grillet’s things lie at the center of the NWs and the FWs of his text; as the reader searches for answers to the problems posed by the plot, he rapidly shuttles back and forth between the verbal nature of the text and the imaginary worlds that it supports.

That Robbe-Grillet mocked realism’s reliance on human psychology does not mean that his reader can automatically ignore the temptation to analyze character psychology while reading. Characters and plots are integral parts of the FWs of even the most experimental works. The underlying claim of *Pour un Nouveau Roman* and, even more so, in the essays contained in *Préface à une vie d’écrivain* (2005), is that the work of the imagination as it fills in the empty spaces between the letters and words on the page is sparked by our incomprehension of the material world surrounding us. Robbe-Grillet’s work allows us to examine NWs and FWs as both sides of the same coin because the material world encountered by the reader is fictional; with little to lose, the

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reader is all the more likely to participate in such a world. Robbe-Grillet’s tempting objects—vacillating between things, figures, images, metaphors, and symbols—are arguably less magical than Queneau’s and less mythical than Simon’s. These objects allow NWs and FWs to exist in a close relationship, drawing the reader in while ensuring that he will never find an answer to his questions. Robbe-Grillet’s reader often thinks that only one more clue is needed to solve the “problem” posed by the FWs of the novel—in Norman O. Holland’s terms—when in fact the novel is merely posing the problem of itself.

The NWs of experimental fiction, even when they inventory a great quantity of fictional objects, create FWs for the reader—and the reader co-creates these worlds, reformulating these objects in the process. This process of worldbuilding explains why novels such as Robbe-Grillet’s can be read at all. Readability represents an important benchmark when dealing with Robbe-Grillet because a reader fluent in the French language (or in translation) can follow the basic meaning-making patterns of the sentence across the page. The first section of this chapter will present the opening sentences of *Les Gommes* (1953), *Le Voyeur* (1955), and *La Jalousie* (1957) in comparison with examples from Queneau and Simon. As the initial foray into the author’s NW, the first sentence offers a unique occasion to judge the difficulty of the worldbuilding endeavor on which the reader is about to embark by hinting at FWs that are still latent. As in a detective novel—one of Robbe-Grillet’s favorite genres to pastiche—the opening gambits of these novels catch the reader’s interest while revealing more than the he might yet recognize. *Les Gommes, Le Voyeur,* and *La Jalousie* represent limit cases of both “readability” and “unreadability.”

Eminently readable at first glance, the text and its worlds also present immense
difficulties for the rereader. In this regard, the FWs of these seminal works are defined by a deep epistemic gap. (This is somewhat the case with Simon, yet the gap is never complete as it is linked to hyperproductive acts of memory.) The productive tension of these holes in the fabric of the text takes on the aspect of obsessively imagistic “generating structures,” figures or symbols whose repetition seems to dictate the FWs of the text as much as questions of plot and character.

In the second section of this chapter, I will examine the role played by these symbols as the intersection of NWs and FWs in *Les Gommes*, *Le Voyeur*, and *La Jalousie*. For Lucien Dällenbach, these symbols of *mise en abyme* are emblematic of Robbe-Grillet’s novels. Rather than argue that these figures are some kind of encoded instructions for the text, its “recipe,” I want to follow Dällenbach, who emphasizes their productive nature. Such symbols self-reflexively demonstrate how the reader fills in blanks, makes blanks, and makes blanks by filling them: “...only a perforated text lends itself to reading,” declares Dällenbach. For Véronique Simon as well, Robbe-Grillet’s work coheres by means of the Merleau-Pontyian *interworld*, a dreamlike space for fantasy and lived experience. The multilayered nature of the author’s texts is thus made possible by the interaction of the *intertext* and the *interworld*. The

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324 Kris Vassilev, “Fiction Théorique: la Planche Anatomique de l’Écriture dans *La Jalousie*,” *The Romanic Review* 92.3 (2001): 297-322. Vassilev argues that Robbe-Grillet’s novels include metaphors which delineate the author’s poetics. For Vassilev, because Robbe-Grillet’s novels use non-linear metaphors to illustrate their own theory of composition, they are ultimately caught up in a system of representation involving the outside world. I believe that this is giving the author too much, and the reader too little, credit. Such an interpretation is quite possible, but Vassilev’s clever reading assigns one and only one value to metaphors that fulfill an immense variety of roles for the reader of Robbe-Grillet’s novels, not least of all connecting and animating NWs and FWs. What Vassilev has seized upon is the close proximity of Robbe-Grillet’s NWs and FWs, but these starting points are already removed from the text itself.

*intertext*, as the tapestry of all the other texts to which this text might make reference, multiplies the possibilities of the text, and the *interworld* multiples these possibilities *beyond* the text to involve the unknown LWs of readers as well.\(^{326}\) The security of these NWs, characterized by repetitive pseudo-scientific description, is undermined from the inside by these multi-FW-producing symbols, such as the omnipresent figure-eight seen everywhere by the protagonist of *Le Voyeur*, Mathias, or the native’s song in *La Jalousie*. While not symbols in the traditional literary sense—making reference to a world outside of the text—they determine the worlds of Robbe-Grillet’s novels as much as they determine character and plot, both fiercely attacked in *Pour un Nouveau Roman*. Symbols in Robbe-Grillet cross the slippery slope between NWs and FWs, causing problems for the reader eager to differentiate between constantly alternating form and content, figure and ground. By privileging the readerly act of worldbuilding over the interpretive work of criticism, we can ask ourselves what such symbols have to do with the many possible iterations of the reading experience as it is built from the ground up. Rather than conflating self-reflexive symbolic processes with the act of writing, we should look for their more fundamental ability to potentiate worldbuilding.

Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I will study the workings of the imagination present in each novel in order address the question of enigmatic FWs for character and reader. Robbe-Grillet’s novels often potentiate worldbuilding when there does not appear to be much of a world in which to build. I will contend that the process of rereading engaged in by the reader of Robbe-Grillet never achieves anything resembling an answer. Instead, the

reader must adopt a tactical worldbuilding strategy: that of keeping the
decision-making process (judgment) at bay. Lacan’s statement, “Only those
who are not duped make mistakes/wander” is particularly helpful when
discussing Robbe-Grillet, and I will explore it at length in the last section of this
chapter. Here, withholding judgment allows the reader to spend his time
exploring FWs, like Wallas wandering the intricate streets of the city (*Les
Gommes*), Mathias meandering over the many paths of the island (*Le Voyeur*), or
the gaze of the narrator-husband roaming over the grounds of his plantation
(*La Jalousie*). We will see how Robbe-Grillet valorizes the process of wandering
which, by activating certain paths and leaving others dormant, establishes
plural virtual worlds, both narrative and fictional, in a creative, “writerly” way,
to take up again the Barthesian terminology that I discussed in Chapter One.
In this way, the novels of Robbe-Grillet, economically precise on the level of
NWs and infinitely hypothesizable on the level of FWs, represent a fitting end to
our discussion of NWs and FWs; they demonstrate just how deeply
interconnected NWs and FWs are. The NW acts as a nexus of a multitude of
FWs that then return the reader to a revised and renewed NW nexus.

Since readers of Robbe-Grillet are rarely given definitive answers, they
must make their way through a sea of descriptions, where a series of
representations anchored in the NW evokes many different FWs. This inability
to get a proper foothold in the FWs applies to the character as well as to the
reader: even though the reader of *Les Gommes* and *Le Voyeur* is assured that
the character occupies a LW which he has known since childhood, this
character still seems to be at a loss in this world. The clearest example of this
complicity between reader and character occurs in *Le Voyeur*. Here, neither the
reader nor Mathias has access to character’s activities during a crucial portion of his day, when he might have raped and killed a young girl. Robbe-Grillet’s characters are so alienated from their LWs that the reader might have difficulty apprehending them as *lived* worlds at all. Experience of the world from a character’s own perspective, which is always tantalizingly out of reach for the reader, moves in this case even further out of reach. At the same time, the fact that the reader can continue to read will help me to indicate how Robbe-Grillet’s novels incite the readerly desire behind the worldbuilding experience by challenging it. With both reader and character lost in unknowable FWs, the process of worldbuilding continues nevertheless. Worldbuilding implies an ability to “get by,” not to understand everything; it is a competency, and not a skill.

In Robbe-Grillet’s novels, the character’s struggles with the plots of their LWs are mirrored by the reader’s struggle with the text, as works to move beyond the text as text into the domain of NWs and FWs. Even when such attempts involve a childhood home, as in *Les Gommes* or *Le Voyeur*, or the characters’ own homes, as in *La Jalousie*, the worldbuilding attempts of these characters usually fail. In *Les Gommes*, the detective, Wallas, returns to the scene of the crime, only to shoot the supposed victim of the would-be original crime, Dupont, who had never died and whom Wallas now assumes is the original assassin returning to the scene of the crime. Through his attempts to determine the structure of a very fictional world—the feigned murder—Wallas ends up creating this FW. In *Le Voyeur*, Mathias, the traveling watch-salesman, leaves the island having sold far too few watches to justify the expense of his taking the ferry there; in the process, he just might have sexually
assaulted and murdered a young girl as well. Although Mathias himself undergoes the events on the island, by the time he leaves it, the fictionality of these experiences outweighs their reality. In *La Jalousie*, the unnamed narrator can only jealously obsess over the state of his plantation and the fate of his wife, in town with a neighbor. This narrator’s position of power as man of the house is belied by a series of fantastic and paranoid FWs whose temptations are too strong for him to resist. These characters’ own acts of worldbuilding fail precisely because they remain trapped inside a text whose myriad blank spots challenge the reader. Despite their fantasies, these characters lack the Quenellian character’s ability to recognize FW existence as (meta)textual—that is, inherently linked to NWs—and cyclical, as well as the Simonian soldier-subject’s freedom to move about in space and time, thanks to his intentional release from the givens of the everyday world by impending death.

Instead, Robbe-Grillet’s characters are unknowingly stuck in a never-ending circle of representation where each FW seems as real as the next and where they never suspect the textually-predicated nature of their narrative predicament. Even making representation more elastic, as Robbe-Grillet does by alternately animating and freezing characters and objects, does not undo the circular logic of representation. In *Le Voyeur*, the description of Mathias’s drawing of a bird “turns into” a “real” bird in front of Mathias as an adult in a moment of what Ricardou, eminent theorist of the New Novel, has called—one hopes with a hint of irony—”liberation.” At the same time, “liberation” implies the reverse movement, whereby a description of the real live bird on a branch turns into a description of the child’s drawing, what Ricardou has called
“capture.” The image itself is the NW-based nexus between several possible FWs. Liberation and capture help to create the tension of a “half-world” in constant movement. In Les Gommes, the oscillation between the house where Dr. Dupont is supposedly murdered and the photograph of this house prominently displayed in a store window lures the reader further into the guessing game set up by the novel. In reality, the novel may present no secure, central FW for the reader, relying instead on the reader’s instinct for worldbuilding; the temptation of textual “reality” lures reader into building the FWs which then draw him in even further. By turns believing and unbelieving, Robbe-Grillet’s reader forgets that the tension sparked by the search for answers on his part is precisely what allows him to continue co-creating the various FWs in question.

327 In fact, “capture” belongs to a more specific subset, called “la mise en image” by Ricardou. It is fitting that Ricardou, in his love for categorization, elaborates several different terms for the act of “capture” and only one for the act of “liberation,” as if all of these moments were not different points on the same spectrum. Jean Ricardou, Le Nouveau Roman (Paris: Seuil, 1973) 121-133.
B. Diving in: Readability and First Sentences

One need only study the first sentences of the Queneau and Simon novels I have already examined to establish by contrast the unusually clear contours of Robbe-Grillet’s NWs. This is a particularly productive activity, as Robbe-Grillet pointed out in 2005 when discussing the impact of the incipit, especially as regards novels whose worlds are not immediately comprehensible for the reader (“Monde”). Here, the reader discovers straightaway that the text will evoke something other than everyday reality—or, if it does evoke everyday reality, it will do it in a way that renders it unrecognizable. Because of the relative lack of linguistic experimentation, Robbe-Grillet’s novels open up a productive chasm between NWs and FWs. The unsuspecting reader, though, only realizes the complicated nature of the text’s FWs when it is “too late,” once the twists and turn of the FWs have led him to re-analyze the clues of the NW. Briefly reviewing the relation of NWs and FWs in Queneau and Simon should provide an appropriate introduction to the relation of the unique intertwining of Robbe-Grillettian NWs and FWs with the reader’s desire.

The rereader of these authors can find indications of the intersecting characteristics of their various types of worlds in the first sentences of their novels. Queneau’s sentences share similarities with Robbe-Grillet’s on the level of the NW: for all their particularity, they remain readable. However, the profusion of being and becoming animating all matter and creatures in

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328 In fact, it is this lack of linguistic experimentation in Robbe-Grillet that so differentiates the role of the image from the one that it plays in Simon. Simon’s images are reference points for the reader lost in his immense sentences; they allow him to pause for a moment and reassemble the strands of his reading. In Robbe-Grillet, these images or symbols actually further fragment the reading process. In the first case, the number of FWs seems momentarily to have been narrowed; in the second, it seems as if it has been expanded.
Queneau’s FWs is noticeably absent from the more arid atmosphere of Robbe-Grillet’s FWs. As NW gateways, the lengthy and complicated first sentences of Simon’s novels stand apart from the more comprehensible openings of both Queneau and Robbe-Grillet. Yet a comparable search for answers characterizes the FWs of both Simon and Robbe-Grillet. My presentation of the various incipits in the subsequent paragraphs will be followed by further analysis.

For example, Queneau begins and ends *Le Chiendent* with the following, abstract sentence that emphasizes the emergence of the one from the many (as well as the possibility of reabsorption), “The silhouette of a man stood out, simultaneously, out of thousands. There were many thousands” (3, 247). We have not previously examined the first sentence of *Loin de Rueil*, the novel that describes Jacques’s meteoric ascension to movie stardom; it begins as follows: “The garbage tumbled down into the metallic box and dropped like a whirlwind into the garbage can, eggshells, apple cores, greasy papers, peelings” (71). While the sentence from *Loin de Rueil* makes up for what the sentence from *Le Chiendent* lacks in terms of specificity, an examination of the contents of a garbage chute, though closer to everyday reality perhaps, certainly leaves the reader wondering what could possibly come next.

The lengthy and complicated first sentences of Simon’s *La Route des Flandres* and *La Bataille de Pharsale* are analyzed in Chapter Four, but I will once more present the first sentence of *La Route des Flandres* for the sake of comparison. *La Route des Flandres* begins:

He was holding a letter in his hand, he raised his eyes looked at me again then again the letter then again me, behind him I could see the mahogany ochre red splotches of the horses that were being brought to the trough coming and going, the mud was so deep that we were sinking into it up to our ankles but I recall that during the night it had abruptly frozen and Wack entered the room carrying the coffee saying The dogs have eaten
mud, I had never heard the expression, I seemed to see the dogs, sorts of infernal mythical creatures their faces bordered with pink their teeth white and cold like wolves chewing the black mud in the darkness of the night, maybe a memory, dogs devouring cleaning making a clear place: now it [the mud] was grey and we were twisting our ankles while running, late as always for morning roll-call, missing twisting our ankles in the deep imprints left by the hooves which had become as hard as rock, and at one moment he said Your mother wrote to me. (197)

The relationship between Queneau’s eclectic sentences and Simon’s lengthy sentences will help me to identify the uniqueness of Robbe-Grillet’s NW, displayed by the first sentences of Les Gommes, Le Voyeur, and La Jalousie.

Simon’s sentences push the limits of the NW in a different way than do Queneau’s: at first reading, Simon’s apparently disparate clauses are just barely linked together by temporally ambiguous present participles. The reader’s initial introduction to Queneau’s NW is smoother. The first-time reader of Queneau’s Le Chiendent understands that a process of singling out is taking place and the first-time reader of Loin de Rueil understands that someone is taking out the (carefully detailed) garbage. While not necessarily difficult to understand, the reader might wonder how Queneau’s worlds of silhouettes and garbage chutes might develop. In both cases, the phenomenon of emergence is clear. But who is emerging from what? What is a mass of garbage doing on the first page of a novel? One thing is for certain. This act of taking out the trash, like the emergence of the “silhouette” from the many “thousands” around him, hints at the plurality of the Quenellian world, including its smelliest, dirtiest parts! In fact, the initial scene of Loin de Rueil could even represent a more general statement of the author’s aesthetics, which put a premium on mixing the High and the Low. Taking out the trash is an oft-ignored activity that
Queneau dignifies by in detail, at the beginning of the novel, no less.\textsuperscript{329} Simon’s initial sentences, however, alter the reader’s expectations for the narrative to follow; even if he begins avidly to reread from the moment he opens the book, he must await a more definitive framework for the information he has just received. For the moment, Simon’s reader must content himself with the knowledge that this FW has something to do with the army in winter, and that the narrator’s family is involved. It is for this reason that I argued in Chapter Four that the difficult terrain of Simon’s NWs thrusts the reader into the author’s FWs in a search for answers at an earlier moment than do the less troubling NWs of Queneau’s novels.

Robbe-Grillet’s worlds, though, combine features present in the NWs and FWs of Queneau and Simon within a framework that is uniquely their own. Robbe-Grillet’s first sentences are designed to move the reader into the worlds of the text, not to give him pause. These initial sentences grab hold of the reader’s attention without opposing to it too many obstacles while simultaneously increasing readerly desire by not saying everything. These first sentences frame a world into which entry is not difficult, yet one which never reveals answers to certain questions. In Les Gommes, Robbe-Grillet’s second novel, the prologue begins, “In the semidarkness of the café, the owner arranges the tables and the chairs, the ashtrays, the siphons of soda water; it is six o’clock in the morning” (11).\textsuperscript{330} There is nothing difficult to understand about this sentence \textit{per se}; its full import will only become clear as the cyclically progressive nature of the plot, in which characters pass through set positions

\textsuperscript{329} A detailed description of a character sweeping fulfills much the same function in \textit{Les Enfants du Limon} (795-797).

\textsuperscript{330} I have been greatly aided in revising these translations by consulting Richard Howard’s 1964 translation of the novel (NY: Grove Press).
with clocklike regularity, gains form. This plot involves one Professor Dupont who, having narrowly escaped death the night before, moves closer to his death throughout the next day. Due to its very clarity regarding the actions of the café owner, therefore, the first sentence of Les Gommes masterfully keeps the reader at a necessary distance from the soon-to-develop problematic FWs of the novel. Were the reader to progress too quickly and find out that Dupont, having cheated death once, does die at novel’s end, the desired tension propping up this particular reading experience would disappear. In contrast, were the reader of Queneau’s Le Chiendent to discover that, at the end of the novel, characters decide to erase themselves from the text and return to its very beginning, it would not shock him, as the very first sentence of the novel emphasizes precisely these kinds of transitional worlds. As for La Route des Flandres, the reader holds most of the pieces of the puzzle regarding De Reixach’s life and death early on in the novel; only sustained rereading allows these pieces to be put together. Queneau’s reader is soon overwhelmed by so many worlds that it almost seems natural for them to begin disappearing once they have started to develop. Simon’s reader spends much of his time puzzling out the FWs that correspond to the verbal signs of the text. By provoking a different kind of rereading, Robbe-Grillet creates worlds in which an answer seems much more probable than in the worlds of Queneau or Simon but where, in the end, the possibility of an answer is undermined in a much more brutal way than in these other two authors. Because the lure is that much more attractive, the reader runs that much faster in order to remain the same distance behind it. In this way, by dint of its clarity, the incipit in Robbe-Grillet acts as a catalyst, an enticement for the reader.
The first sentence of Robbe-Grillet’s *Le Voyeur* is more ambiguous than that of *Les Gommes*: “It was as if no one had heard.”331 This indeterminacy is fitting, as the detective drama of *Les Gommes* is tied together more neatly in the end than is that of *Le Voyeur*. And yet the key to the enigma of the rape and murder of the little girl is contained within the first sentence of *Le Voyeur* because no one, not even Mathias, the possible perpetrator and the novel’s protagonist, hears or sees anything regarding this rape and murder. Even the reader himself is famously presented with a double blank page at the moment that the act might be occurring (87-90). In a 1991 talk on the nature of reference, thirty-six years after the publication of the novel, Robbe-Grillet still insisted on the significance of this lack at its center: “*Le Voyeur* is a novel that tells, or rather does not tell of, a sexual crime, that I did not commit, and that is not committed in the novel either” (*Voyageur* 277). In this way, the lure of the NW allows for many possible FWs, but only in retrospect. After reading the first sentence, the next logical question that the reader poses to himself is, “Heard what?” The reader will need this desire to find out “what happened”—to access the multiple FWs hidden below the illusion of a singular FW—to propel him through the next few pages of description detailing the ballet of shifting shapes that accompanies the arrival of Mathias’s ferry in port. For the first-time reader, the insistence on detailing the geometric shapes of the ship, the water, the port and its surrounding area may seem like a feint, a movement away from the riddle posed by the first sentence of the novel. Yet, as will become more apparent in the next section of this chapter, many of these shapes, such as the figure-eight, do in fact contain further hints to excite the curiosity of the reader

in his desire for a solution. This readerly desire for knowledge is the counterpoint to what can sometimes appear to be the delaying tactics of the author’s rigid descriptions. At the same time, geometric descriptions help to distract the reader from several common-sense questions that he might ask regarding the activities of Mathias. For example, why does Mathias not stop selling watches when he realizes that his plan cannot succeed and that he is thus simply wasting time and money? Robbe-Grillet’s NW, seemingly clear and concise, moves the reader away from “psychologizing” questions regarding Mathias’s memory, questions which might allow for more accurate fictional-world-building. For not only can Mathias not remember what he was doing at the moment of the young girl’s murder and rape, nor can he remember anything about the island itself, where he supposedly grew up. Thus the lure dangled in front of the reader can also be a thorn in his side as he tries to build FWs. In both cases, the desire of the reader to find out “what happened” is what gives him the ability to continue the worldbuilding process even when all the available evidence argues against the fulfillment of this desire. Robbe-Grillet’s NWs suggest concrete—at the very least, geometrical—FWs which hide other FWs which, in turn, lead back to NWs, as the reader searches for clues concerning enigmatic plots.

A similar geometrical FW is revealed in the first lines of La Jalousie, which describe the colonial house of A... and (the character we assume to be) her narrator-husband: “Now the shadow of the pillar—the pillar that supports the southwestern angle of the roof—divides into two equal parts the corresponding
angle of the terrace." This simple and precise description belies the hallucinatory possessive, jealous, and dominant nature of the gaze which encompasses the house. It is a challenge extended to the reader to try and imagine the scene that is presented point-by-point; at the same time, the reader must figure out why he is being asked to do so. The house’s precisely delimited spaces of trap A... and the reader just as they trap the centipede on the wall of the dining room; the narrator-husband’s imagination traps A... in a similar manner when she is imagined as perishing in a fiery car wreck with Franck. The carefully declined spaces of Robbe-Grillet’s novels lend an aura of objectivity to FWs that, from contextual clues associated with the NW, the reader might suspect as being far from objective. Simultaneously, though, the narrator-husband is trapped by the limitations of his own gaze, which are belied by the omnipotence of his imagination. In this way, FWs dispute other FWs for predominance in Robbe-Grillet’s novels. Because space itself is overdetermined here, character and reader must feel their way through it without the possibilities for becoming that are available in Queneau’s novels or the freedom that goes along with the decentered temporal movement of Simon’s novels. The language of the text returns to certain images time and again; described with obsessive rigor (or rigorous obsession), they join together the verbal (NWs) and the imaginary (FWs) only to split them apart again. Verbal in nature, they are connected to a web of fictional possibilities that the reader must explore if he wants to progress through the text. NWs and FWs here come together and branch apart as the reader vacillates between worldbuilding and interpretation, the latter of which partially sustains his desire to find out just

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332 Robbe-Grillet, La Jalousie (Paris: Minuit, 1957) 9. I have been greatly aided in revising these translations by consulting Richard Howard’s 1959 translation of the novel (NY: Grove Press).
“what happened.” I call these images “symbols” not because they stand in “for” something else, but because they play the role of transition points between NWs and FWs as they are co-created by text and reader.
C. Symbols

Many of Robbe-Grillet’s symbols, such as the image of the centipede on the dining room wall in *La Jalousie*, return time and again in a particular novel; they lie in a borderlands where the ontological status of representations—and of the worlds to which these representations never fully correspond—fluctuates. Neither alive nor dead, neither fully “captured” nor fully “liberated” in Ricardou’s terms, these symbols act as a switch between the descriptive excesses of the NW and the multiple imaginary structures of the FW. The freezing and unfreezing movements by which what is “real” becomes a representation and a representation becomes real—“capture” and ‘liberation”—are among the most salient features of Robbe-Grillet’s prose. Emma Kafalenos calls them “hinge situations,” which create a “bidirectional temporal sequence in which the causal relations among events and the function of events depend on the sequence in which the events are read” (184). In other words, Robbe-Grillet’s symbols, like Simon’s images, allow the reader to stop and then start again, yet in the direction of his choosing (which may be difficult to decide). Each micro-adjustment on the part of the reader has serious consequences for the resultant FWs.

In order to demonstrate better how Robbe-Grillet’s NWs and FWs tend to revolve around recurring images, I have chosen one such symbol from each of the three Robbe-Grillet novels of the 1950s under study. In the case of *Les Gommes*, this symbol is an elaborate window display depicting a painter and his model, which catches the attention of the failed gumshoe Wallas as he wanders about the city in search of Dupont’s supposed killer. In *Le Voyeur*, I
concentrate on the ubiquitous symbol of the figure-eight, glimpsed everywhere by Mathias as he traipses about the island. Finally, in *La Jalousie*, I have decided, following the lead of Jeremy Lane, who explores the implications of Lacan’s theories of *jouissance* for postcolonial thought, to take a closer look at the native song heard by characters at several important moments of the novel. More than mere images, these complicated symbols shift the reader’s attention to the plural fictional nature of the universe that he is occupying and constructing. At the same time, they encourage him to continue reading for answers to the enigmas at the heart of the novels’ plots.

The symbolic processes underlying the window display of the painter and his easel, the figure-eight, and the native’s song straddle the gulf between NWs and FWs without ever clearly occupying one side or the other. Unlike the differentiated moments of “capture” and “liberation” mentioned above, these processes emphasize the middle, transitional ground of worldbuilding on the part of the reader, when worlds remain in a state of flux. Because Robbe-Grillet’s symbols act as conduits between NWs and FWs, they have serious consequences for the reading experience understood as an experience in its own right, outside of what the author called “any system of reference, whether it be sentimental, sociological, Freudian, metaphysical, or otherwise” (*Roman* 20). This is not to say that Robbe-Grillet’s writing is not open to interpretation on these levels; rather, I believe that we should first explore the implications of the symbolic processes at work in his novels for the reader’s worldbuilding project. Examining the ways in which the reader builds different kinds of worlds does not require us to rely on a predetermined system of reference; instead, it is a

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way to examine how what we already know to occur—the reader’s deep and meaningful involvement with the text—manages to “happen” in the first place, prior to interpretation proper.

In Robbe-Grillet’s novels, the symbol does not share the reassuring traits of the Simonian image, scrutinized above at the end of Chapter Three. In Simon, the repeated yet always mutable image provided an island of readability, a concrete description that allowed the reader to relax for a moment. Simon’s images act as gateways between NWs and FWs as well, but they function more in the manner of Proustian involuntary memory: they provide key sensuous junctures between past and present. Linked to the art of painting, Simon’s images serve a poetic function acting in the service of a phenomenological tendency: they bind disparate LWs together and serve as signposts for the reader, who might otherwise become completely lost in a sea of extended sentences. Although symbols in Robbe-Grillet work in the service of a phenomenological tendency as well, here they more often than not create confusion by increasing the number of FW possibilities for the reader, who is rarely afforded a moment of rest. While the LWs found in Simon’s novels are fragmented, they are still well defined by their (shifting) subjective position in the intentional field between soldier-subject and world. In Robbe-Grillet, by contrast, LWs produce an effect of deep alienation on both character and reader: the reader senses that the LWs of the characters are close at hand, but he can never quite grasp them in a satisfying manner. This is why Robbe-Grillet nuances his argument about the relationship between the gaze and subjectivity in Pour un Nouveau Roman, arguing for the ontological implications of point of view while also insisting that such implications are not set in stone:
Obviously, it can only ever be a question, anyway, of the world as it is oriented by my point of view; I will never discover another one. The relative subjectivity of my gaze allows me precisely to define my situation in the world. I myself am simply avoiding turning this situation into a constraint. (66)

The conflicting subjectivities categorized by unique and eccentric characters in Queneau, and the rapidly fragmenting (and freed) subjectivity of the soldier-subject at war in Simon, have here become a subjectivity that is constantly turned inside out, in the manner of a non-linear structure. The reader of Queneau is quite aware of the plurality of subjectivities vying for his attention. Likewise, the reader of Simon cannot help but notice the intense state of fragmentation implied by the character’s subjectivity. On the other hand, unaware that points of view carry equal ontological weight, Robbe-Grillet’s reader begins by taking things at face value, much like Robbe-Grillet’s characters do. Internal states and external states of being are hence presented in much the same manner. Where readers of Queneau and Simon may continue to “discover” when they are in reality “creating,” readers of Robbe-Grillet may soon wonder if what they are creating is all there is. Thus the role of the symbol in Robbe-Grillet proves to be provocative and worrisome for the worldbuilding reader. Certain symbols are repeated so frequently, and their various descriptions resemble one another so closely, that the reader, even as he recognizes the marks of the author’s conscious production of textual reality, cannot help but feel they represent a key to the secrets of the otherwise rather readable text. In this way, Robbe-Grillet uses symbols to manipulate the reader’s expectations of FWs, increasing the desire for an answer on the part of the reader, who having been fooled once, should know how to avoid being fooled twice. Instead, the reader attempts to discern the best FW path through the
work, when it is clear from the beginning that there is more than one.
1. *Les Gommes*: the Window Display

If we put to the side for the moment the subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways in which the story of Oedipus underlies the plot of *Les Gommes*, we can highlight the key symbolic moment of photography, which introduces a second-order or embedded representation. Wallas, the agent investigating Dupont’s supposed death, frequently passes by a local paper shop. The shop’s window display consists of a mannequin dressed like a painter seated in front of an easel. The mannequin is considering his model, which is a Greek countryside. However, on his easel is propped a large photographic reproduction of the intersection where one finds Dupont’s house. This “bizarre” (*drôle*) window display is not only “funny” or “interesting” (*amusant*) as the shopkeeper claims; it is also, in the words of Wallas, “curious” (*curieux*, 131). When Wallas attempts to interrogate the shopkeeper, under the pretense that he is searching for a certain type of eraser, the *gomme* of the novel’s title, she quickly becomes suspicious. This interrogation demonstrates just how closely Robbe-Grillet follows the detective novel paradigm—and ultimately, how completely he subverts it. Following the rules of the genre, the reader of the detective novel is habituated to a search for answers. Even though this search may be long, he knows that the author leaves clues, like Aridane’s thread, along the way. If Robbe-Grillet’s reader makes the same assumption, he will end up building contradictory FWs; the author’s clues fan out in all directions because the “crime” at the center of the plot will not even be committed until the last pages of the novel. The question of the eraser is an not an innocent one, in particular for the reader who is engaged in a process of continual erasure and revision, constantly reviewing and updating his assumptions about the novel’s
FWs. In fact, in response to the question “What kind of eraser?”, Robbe-Grillet writes, “In point of fact, that is precisely the whole problem (histoire) and Wallas undertakes once again the description of what he is looking for…” (132). For Wallas, this “whole story” (histoire) is a feint, and yet, for the attentive reader, this “whole story” really is the “whole story,” if he considers his participation in the process of worldbuilding as necessitating continual acts of meta-erasure required to create the fiction at hand. (Here, as in Chapter Five, we encounter the third idiomatic usage of “histoire” to mean something that cannot be named.) This little scene, repeated several times throughout the novel (65, 132, 177, 229, 239), does indeed contain the key to the murder mystery plot, and its importance is underlined by the very title of the novel: The Erasers. What link exists between the subject of erasers and the reproduction of the act of painting displayed in the shop’s window?

First of all, Wallas’s actions in the paper shop highlight the reader’s own participation in constructing the worlds of the work of art. The NW does not pose great problems for this reader until he has already entered the LW of the character (a subset of the FW) and is beginning to turn again towards the NW, in order to (re)interpret it as a set of clues. These problems result from the fact that this particular character, Wallas, is carrying out his own analysis of the link between NWs and FWs by studying the “text” of the display in the store window. In this display, representation loses its ability faithfully to describe a referent; the painter, who is inanimate, appears to be painting from a painting.

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334 On page 177, the narrator even provides a mirror image of this painting, a painter standing in the “ruins of Thebes” and seemingly painting a detailed photograph of Dupont’s house from the natural scene around him. At the moment of representation, though, Robbe-Grillet’s narrative itself changes directions, switching from the description of the painter in the Greek countryside to another description of Wallas with the employee in the paper shop.
Although the links between the three types of representation—sculpture (the mannequin), painting (the subject), and photography (the painting)—are not visible at first glance, Wallas begins to create them. According to the shopkeeper, the painting is a view of the Ancient Greek city of Thebes. But the broken link between this model and the “painting produced,” in reality a photograph of Dupont’s house, bothers Wallas, all the more because he is looking for Dupont’s killer and suspects that the person who has ordered the photographic enlargement might be the killer. If we were further exploring the Oedipal subtext—Oedipus was king of Thebes—we could continue and argue that it bothers Wallas because the story of Oedipus provides a frame for the interpretation of Wallas’s own story, as Dupont (whom Wallas eventually kills) may in fact be the detective’s father, as several clues in the text suggest.

But the story of Oedipus is not the whole story; it is merely a useful narrative thread to which the reader can return, if he recognizes it. This tension between fiction and metafiction occurs throughout Robbe-Grillet’s work: whereas the former invites absorption, the latter calls attention to its own status as fiction, inviting second-degree interpretation and interaction. The line between the two is not always clear, and, as we have seen in regard to the detective narrative, the reader must navigate Robbe-Grillet’s references to myth and popular culture with an ever-shifting amount of ironic distance. In fact, as Ben Stoltzfus argues, discerning the metafictional aspect of Robbe-Grillet’s fiction may sometimes prove difficult for the absorbed reader lacking the appropriate critical distance.335 In any case, narratives, such as the story of Oedipus, are complicated and overdetermined moments of the reading

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experience designed to invite multiple interpretations on the part of the reader. For her part, Olga Bernal reads the Oedipal motif in *Les Gommes* as a trap set for the self-satisfied reader happy to have a concrete reference point in a somewhat ambiguous FW—and, moreover, who is forgetful that this “concrete” reference point is nothing but a myth with many different versions.\(^{336}\) While construing the references to Oedipus in *Les Gommes* as a trap provides more ammunition in an interpretation of Robbe-Grillet’s writing as subversive of tradition, it also ignores the fact that even a false step by the reader is still a significant step in the worldbuilding process. Reducing *Les Gommes* to an Oedipal story is at any rate a vast oversimplification. As Page Dubois writes in an article that attempts to restore some of the socio-political background to the post-war epoch of *Les Gommes*’s publication, “*Les gommes* sends out feelers in many directions, toward Greek antiquity, myth, Sophocles, Freud, and also toward the recent past of France, the war fresh in memory in 1953.”\(^{337}\) While the story of Oedipus may provide the confused reader with one guiding narrative thread, this thread is one among many, and it is not necessary for comprehension of the NWs and FWs at hand. In fact, it may lead one astray, as it appears to have done to Dubois, who accepts without contention that Dupont really is Wallas’s father, when this is never established with certainty in the text (Dubois 106). Here, the reader’s interpretations are once again taken up as part and parcel of the worldbuilding process.

After all, one need not grasp the references to Oedipus in order to understand the irony of Wallas possibly killing his own father, no less killing

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the supposed victim of the crime that he was originally dispatched to solve! The
properly *narrative* tension here results from the collision of worlds and
intertextual networks given form by the reader in what Véronique Simon has
called Robbe-Grillet’s “interworld.” What is more significant in terms of
worldbuilding is the multilayered obstruction between referent and
representation enacted by the display in the shop window. First, the view of the
Greek countryside is already a representation in itself, one that suggests that
the chain of representations never ends; the artist can never sufficiently remove
himself from this world to get an “objective” view on his subject matter.
Second, the “artist” here is himself a model, in this case a mannequin made out
of plastic. Third, besides the fact that the mannequin’s painting does not
resemble his model, he has also switched genres and somehow ended up
painting a photograph (as one could claim that Robbe-Grillet is making a
detective story out of a myth). Fourth, Wallas ends up buying a post card
reproduction of the shot of Dupont’s house (134): a miniature reproduction of a
reproduction that, according to the logic of the display, was painted by a
reproduction from another reproduction that looks nothing like it.

This attack on mimesis is perfectly in line with Robbe-Grillet’s stance on
writing, enumerated in the many essays collected in *Pour un Nouveau Roman*
and, later, *Le Voyageur: Textes, causeries et entretiens* (2001). Yet, if we include
the reader in our consideration of this scene, the issue at stake is no longer
strictly *representation*, but rather *worldbuilding*. Wallas’s inability to “catch” the
criminal lies to a certain degree in his inability to interpret properly the signs
contained in complex representations, such as the one in the paper shop
window; it also lies in his inability to do much of anything at all. If we view the
plot from the standpoint of representation alone or of the failures of representation, which indicate a kind of finality, we ignore the fact that the reader understands some of these representations as real. As I will argue in the last section of this chapter, the plot progresses by dint of a continued attempt at always-incomplete worldbuilding by the character. Robbe-Grillet’s novels unfold in a series of representations that beckon to the reader. But if we insist on discussing them as mere representations rather than as “worlds,” we risk hovering high above the text in the position of the critic, not that of the reader/rereader.338 Wallas’s attempt is so bungled that it entices the reader to think that he can do a better job himself at detection than the detective; the reader may think that he is one step ahead of Wallas. The reader knows for instance that, as Dupont is not really dead, there is no corpse, which would be the standard starting point for any detective novel. Since the murder was never committed and the detective looking for the supposed murderer ends up committing the crime, the corpse and the murderer are in the process of being created throughout the reading of the novel; the images present in the novel’s NWs are meaningless without their elaboration by the FWs. (The reader in a sense becomes an agent of the murder.) At the same time, though, the FWs of the novel cannot come into being at the proper pace without the delaying tactics of the novel’s NW and its mysterious symbols. As Morrissette argues, “Here, in mid-novel, one becomes increasingly aware that the full knowledge given to the reader of Dupont’s true situation hides some developing mystery, and that the reader, instead of watching a group of characters uselessly struggling to

338 One could make the argument that worlds are representational paths that have been activated by the reader. However, as I have been pointing out all along, the reader’s set of attributes before the reading experience and behavior during it are far from predictable. Thus, I would rather speak of representations as one of the lower-level components of more global worlds.
discover what has already been revealed to him [the reader], is instead witnessing the preparation for an unsuspected dénouement” (47). In other words, the reader knows, but he does not know; he has an inkling, and that is why he continues reading, which allows the mystery to develop. Manoni’s “I know very well, but all the same...” is still in effect here, as Robbe-Grillet subverts and perverts the sort of disavowal related to the detective novel.

The display in the shop window and the idea of copies are in fact related to the supposed murder of Dupont. And the reader is not the only one who has his suspicions about this murder, a fact that the chief of an intelligence service in Paris, worried by the chain of murders of important men that has culminated in Dupont’s “murder,” points out to a subordinate: “What happened in the town house of professor Dupont on the evening of October 26? A double, a copy, a simple reproduction of an event whose original and whose key are elsewhere” (206). For this man, who sees events in a national perspective, Dupont’s murder is more of the same. Similarly, the painterly moment staged in the shop window is more than just a copy of a copy of a copy by a copy, more than just an infinite mise en abyme of the act of writing, Wallas’s quest as detective, or a never-ending series of assassinations of important French figures, as the boss suspects. The window display is a temptation that induces on the reader’s part a double reading for plot and “symbol” (supposed key to the plot).

Thus does the scene in the paper shop both entice and disappoint; it offers a riddle without hope of a solution to Wallas and to the reader; yet both have a vested interest in acting as if this riddle does indeed have a solution. Wallas’s repeated trips to the paper shop serve both to defer and pique the curiosity of the reader as he moves from the NW of the symbol to the FWs engendered by
the symbol’s links with the novel’s plot. Both Wallas and the reader encounter the scene of the crime in magnified photographic detail and yet neither “gets” it; neither puts together the crime that supposedly occurred and the one that will soon occur—if only for the simple reason that neither has yet occurred. At a certain point towards the end of the novel, though, the reader, who, after all, has known that Dupont was alive all along, completely outpaces Wallas. In the manner of the board game *Clue*, the reader now waits for the inevitable murder of Dupont by Wallas with the gun in the study. This outpacing is necessary, though, so that the reader may be in a better position from which to enjoy the detective’s predicament—a simple pleasure of a job well done that is much harder to find in the novels of Queneau or Simon, or in Robbe-Grillet’s subsequent novels. In fact, now the reader’s enjoyment of the text comes from watching how the process of worldbuilding within the LW turns out for the characters as much as it does engaging in it for himself. In *Les Gommes*, solving the crime creates the crime; from beyond the ironic twist of Wallas’s—like Oedipus’—tragic fate, the solution of the crime, for character and reader, necessitates the building of many worlds along the way. The transitional nature of this worldbuilding process is on full display thanks to the bizarre scene of painting depicted in the shop window.
2. *Le Voyeur*: Crazy Eights: Caught up in Figure-eights

On a functional narrative level, *Le Voyeur*, Robbe-Grillet’s third novel, resembles *Les Gommes*. In both, a character returns to a childhood place that he no longer recognizes, fails in a quest, commits a crime (perhaps) and departs a day later. *Les Gommes* follows clock time, which moves in a circle and yet progresses by degrees, thus placing Wallas the detective in the position of the killer twenty-four hours after the supposed murder of Dupont that he was sent to solve. *Le Voyeur* follows a more convoluted sort of time that continually loops back on itself before moving off again in another direction, as underscored by the prevalent symbol of the figure-eight, which, as Alain Goulet remarks, connects two narrative loops: “the present perception of the traveler [voyageur] and the phantasm of the voyeur.”

For my part, I am as interested in the perceptions and phantasms of the reader as I am in the diegesis. The point of intersection at the center of the two loops mentioned by Goulet is calculated by none other than the reader who, even if he is confused by the text, has more substantial access to both “loops” than does the beleaguered character.

*Le Voyeur* is riddled with references to the figure-eight and the following list is by no means exclusive. My aim is not to enumerate and categorize all the instances of the figure-eight in *Le Voyeur*, but rather to see what this figure has to do with the reader’s construction of NWs and FWs in concert with the text.

The figure-eight is present on the second page of the novel in the form of a rope that the protagonist, Mathias, sees on the deck of the ferry. This rope is then immediately associated with one that Mathias is said to have kept in a box.

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340 Morrissette provides a fairly exhaustive list of the figure eight motif (96).
when he was a child. The symbol of the figure-eight is straightaway attached to the idea of fiction, as this anecdote is introduced by the sentence, “He has often been told this story,” a formula that is repeated throughout the novel (9). This same figure-eight will appear as a ring on the wall of the port as the ferry is docking, providing a telling signpost—“carved with enough precision so as to serve as a reference point”—for both character and reader alienated from themselves (16). It also appears above a doorway where Mathias imagines that “…you could barely have been able to knot anything else but thin ropes” (36-37), and in the shapes of seashells (140), as well as interlocking flights of seagulls in the sky (140).

Furthermore, the figure-eight is repeated in the ropes with which Mathias might or might not have tied up the young girl, who is called either Jacqueline or, tellingly, Violette (viol being the French noun for “rape”). The link between the rope and the young girl is already established on the second page of the novel when Mathias is still standing on the deck of the ferry. As Mathias bends down to pick up the rope, he notices the girl watching him and smiles at her. The play of ambiguous pronouns in one of the next sentences leaves the reader undecided as to whether Mathias is talking about the rope (une cordelette, une belle prise) or the girl (une petite fille), which are both feminine, singular nouns and thus both replaceable by the direct object pronoun “la”: “For an instant, it seemed him that he recognized her/it” (10, Un instant il lui semblait reconnaître). Yet, as soon as the reader begins to wonder about Mathias’s possible relation to the young girl, the narrative, like a figure-eight, loops back on itself and closes off this path of interpretation: “A thin rope just like this must already have occupied an importance place in his thoughts. Was it
located along with the others in the shoebox?” (10). For the time being, the direct object pronoun “la” seems to refer to the piece of rope and its connection to Mathias’s childhood, not the girl. As the reader weaves his own figure-eight, though, he will discover that the relation between girl and rope is one of the keys to *Le Voyeur*; in contrast to *Les Gommes*, he will never be able to say exactly what the nature of this relation is.

Here, I will focus on the looping path of the series of figure-eights taken by Mathias around the island on his bicycle as he unsuccessfully attempts to sell his suitcase of watches. Caught in the “inextricable network of paths” that make up the island’s terrain, which veers quickly from the rocky cliffs of the coast to farmland, Mathias retraces his steps both literally and figuratively (120). Literally, he rides and walks his bicycle over the same paths time and again. At the beginning of the novel, Mathias admits to having a bad memory, but his problems go far beyond “the imprecisions and inexactitudes of his own memory, of which experience had taught him to be wary” (25). Landmarks like the lighthouse seem to have changed position since he was last on the island; Mathias’s connection to reality is tenuous enough that he even invents childhood friends (61), who then seem to appear in reality (134). It would be putting it mildly to say that Mathias does not have a good sense of direction.

Figuratively, Mathias tries to figure out if he possibly could have committed the rape-murder about which the islanders keep gossiping. The reader can follow in Mathias’s footsteps relatively easily in the NW. It is not difficult to understand what the inefficient traveling salesman has been doing: walking and riding about the island trying to sell watches from his briefcase. Despite all of his meticulous calculations, which resemble the calculations of
the plantation owner surveying his domain in *La Jalousie*, Mathias cannot sell enough watches to make the trip to the island worth his while. Both he and the reader understand this, and then quickly forget it, early on: “Even by ignoring all hesitation on the part of the client, all complementary explanation, all discussion relating to the price, how could he expect to give a complete sales pitch in so little time?” (35). The reader quickly realizes that the narrative thrust of the novel will not be provided by Mathias’s watch-selling extravaganza. It is when the reader reaches the juncture of NWs with FWs—the intersection of the two loops of the figure-eight, the set of blank pages in the middle of the text—that the reader, like Mathias, must slow down and begin the process of rereading and the weighing of possibilities against one another. In my chapters on Simon, I argued that what happened becomes “what happened” due to the multitude of LWs that make up the larger process of history. Here, “what happened” shifts into what *may have happened*. (If Simon’s “tense” is the future perfect, then Robbe-Grillet’s is assuredly the past conditional.) Since, as we can see from Robbe-Grillet’s own statement about the novel above, there is no way to know for sure what happened, the possibilities are endless. The reader follows in the steps of Mathias, for whom, “Success today seemed to be above all an affair of imagination” (32). This is how Robbe-Grillet’s NWs open into the domain of FWs in an even more radical way than Queneau’s, where the competing imaginations of a multitude of characters act as a check on one another. While Queneau enumerates many minuscule worlds teeming with life, Robbe-Grillet provides several possible directions for the reader, and gives each one the same ontological weight. Surface and substance contend with one another at every turn. This is, after all, how the moments of “capture” and
“liberation” found throughout his novels work so well; they not only give form to
the play of representations across barriers, but also constitute an intimate shift
in the reader’s expectations regarding fictional reality throughout the
worldbuilding process.

In large part, Robbe-Grillet’s NWs and FWs shift back and forth by the use
of symbols such as the figure-eight, which enjoy a discursive (figural) existence
as well as a diegetic (relating to the contents of a described world) one. Aside
from its many specific manifestations throughout the novel, the figure-eight
structurally implies both a going away and a coming back together of the
threads that make up the novel’s FWs; this process implicates the novel’s
reader as much as it does the character. Thus, at day’s end, when Mathias
tries to map his wanderings across the island, he is still stumped, unable to
identify the paths which he followed earlier in the day. The reader, whose
ability to map the peregrinations of the fictional character has been severely
tested by Mathias’s comings and goings, is stumped as well. Despite the
relative clarity of Robbe-Grillet’s NWs, the reader still has difficulty keeping up
with the shifting terrain under Mathias’s feet. Furthermore, Robbe-Grillet’s
FWs quite literally throw the reader off track by describing events, whether they
might be remembered, imaginary, or “real,” with equal clarity. In fact, trying to
figure out just which of the events presented in the novel are real or imagined,
even when such an exercise ultimately proves fruitless, provides much of the
“forepleasure” of reading Le Voyeur. Although this forepleasure is initiated by
what Kochnar-Lindren calls the search for “a stable difference” between the
“real” and the “unreal,” it ultimately does not depend on satisfaction of this
criteria, but rather the slightest hint of satisfaction to come.\textsuperscript{341} The “imaginary” is not quite satisfactory as a category when there is nothing “real” to oppose it too—it is this that Robbe-Grillet’s reader discovers as he encounters the fictional in every form. As many critics have pointed out, Mathias and the reader thus both become, to quote the movie poster glimpsed by Mathias in the village, “Mr. X. on the double circuit” (167):

> Unfortunately, none of the numerous existing paths coincided with the theoretical direction determined by Mathias—who was obliged, from the beginning, to choose between two possible detours. In addition, they all offered a sinuous and fragmented route, bifurcating, coming back together, ceaselessly intersecting, even stopping short in the middle of briar patches. This geography called for multiple false starts, hesitations, and retracing of one’s steps; it brought up new problems at each and every step, and forbade any assurance as to the general orientation of the path adopted. (186)

One need scarcely push the comparison to see that such a statement provides an analogy for reading the work of Robbe-Grillet’s fiction. More than that, it provides a good analogy for worldbuilding in general. Admitting the often circuitous nature of the reading experience is in no way to admit a failure. On the contrary, Mathias’s inability to find his way is accompanied by the rich imaginary activity that constitutes his attempts to figure out what he was doing at the point in the afternoon in which the young girl was—or might have been—raped and killed.

Neither the category of psychological “projection” nor that of Morrissette’s “hypersubjectivity” are radical enough to describe appropriately the intertwining of the symbol of the figure-eight with Mathias’s LW. Mathias’s mind manifests itself in the world in the form of the figure-eights that he sees everywhere. Just like the face of one of Mathias’s first customers, the figure-eight moves towards

meaning and away from meaning, “although the figure had in all evidence possessed a meaning—a very banal meaning that you at first thought that you could easily discover—it ceaselessly fled from the references in which Mathias tried to trap it” (40). Calling this the work of the imagination is not reductive; the brand of imagination at work here is much stronger than the itinerant daydreaming of Queneau’s characters, for example. The imagination in Robbe-Grillet is associated with fiction and the fictional. The imagination manifests itself in incomplete and autonomous FWs that have power over both Mathias and the reader. Mathias’s imaginings have been going on long before he begins imagining the fate of the young girl, as he seems to see the murder of another young girl when he stops to spy inside a window on his way to the ferry that will take him to the island (28-29). When, in the second part of the novel (around page 108), Mathias begins to suspect himself, he is suspecting nothing more than his own worldbuilding capabilities, and the reader can enjoy what follows because both he and Mathias are still in the process of constructing these worlds. Whether or not these imaginings are the result of a “generating” myth about a young virgin sacrificed to the ocean that Mathias hears in a bar before leaving the island is not the point (221). The process of what, in the 1960s and 1970s, formalists might have called “generation” or “production,” and what I am here referring to as “worldbuilding,” has no beginning or end. And any process of worldbuilding of necessity ignores other possible paths of worldbuilding to which it may well return when it loops back on the other track of the figure-eight.
3. *La Jalousie*: Name that Tune: the Native’s Song

The figure-eights seen by Mathias in *Le Voyeur* demonstrate incessant movement between NWs and FWs, tying reader, character, and victim up in knots. In *La Jalousie*, the symbol of the native’s song has sparked competing interpretations. When the novel begins, the narrator-husband, whose existence the reader might infer from such details as the number of place settings or chairs on the terrace, is obsessively detailing his house, his rows of crops, and the activities of his wife and neighbor. The “jealousy” (*la jalousie*) of this all-encompassing gaze is in fact blocked at many key moments of the story, most notably by the “blinds” (*les jalousies*) over his wife’s bedroom window. It is important to note in passing that, at several points in the novel, this gaze could not be that of the husband either. In tune with an apparently dominating masculine gaze, Robbe-Grillet develops the symbol of the native’s song or “poem,” which is repetitive and circuitous. For the narrator-husband, the complexities of this song seem associated with the complexities of his wife, A... The nature of the relation between the narrator-husband’s gaze and A...’s proximity to the native’s song has provoked debate over the years. I will try to demonstrate a possible blind spot at the center of this debate, since I believe that it avoids dealing with the reader’s transformation of words into worlds by jumping several levels of analysis in order to focus on political or ideological issues. For my part, I will discuss how the native’s song is instrumental to such bypassed levels of worldbuilding. In *La Jalousie*, the reader encounters a FW more bizarre and barren than that of *Le Voyeur*, whose protagonist (Mathias) is in actuality quite visible as he moves through the landscape of the island. Yet in spite of the different levels of textual reality posited by *La
Jalousie, the reader slips into its FWs, without ever really knowing just what these FWs are! That is to say that with no specific formal experimentation beyond a reliance on repetition that creates temporal discontinuity, La Jalousie contains a set of readable NWs and FWs—which is not the same as saying that they make sense. Such readability is due to a certain extent to the author’s use of themes such as jealousy and intertexts such as the colonial novel, whatever their sociopolitical consequences.

Even an interpretation of the passages which demonstrate the limits of the narrator-husband’s gaze is itself dependent upon a “realist” reading of the novel, as if everything that the husband were seeing were being faithfully recorded on the page. Such a reading becomes impossible as the reader progresses further into the novel’s imaginary iterations of its own central events. Without entering into the specifics of the debate sparked by Jonathan Culler’s insistence on the absurdity of the narrator-husband interpretation of the text, I will simply point out that I am only interested in determining what “really happens” in the diegesis to the extent that such temptations intensify the reader’s interaction with the NW. Whether the worlds created by this interaction follow the law of non-contradiction is not as important as the fact that they do in fact exist at one point or another of the reading experience.\(^{342}\) I would argue that, for the reader, part of the game is to figure out where this gaze comes from and to be always disappointed by the answer. Textual clues cannot provide all the answers as the act of reading rapidly transforms text into subjective NWs, which exist in a realm beyond the level of “words on the page.”

\(^{342}\) For more on this debate, see Jonathan Culler, \textit{Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) 214, as well as Gale MacLachan’s article, “Reading in the Jealous Mode,” \textit{Australian Journal of French Studies} 27.3 (1990): 291-302.
In my view of things, concerns of readability should be treated as laying the groundwork for the act of interpretation. Only in this way can we examine more closely how NWs and FWs develop while integrating the possibility of interpretation into the worldbuilding experience.

A… is the first to hear the “native song made up of incomprehensible words, or even without words” on p. 99. The asynchronous nature of the song is immediately noted; the listener’s expectations about where the song might begin and end are belied by the movement of a song unconcerned with “continuity” (101). The listener “believes himself to be transported to the very heart of the song…when then everything stops without warning” (101; see also 119). It is meaningful that the song makes its appearance at the more basic crossroads of perception and expression implied by the act of writing: A… is writing a letter. The repetitions of the song are not without meaning, nor are they completely aleatory. Rather, by means of “variations” and “modifications,” these repetitions help the song to move forward, “quite far from its point of departure” (101). Through modification and without direct textual representation, the song helps to fashion a world whose parameters are unknown to both character-listener and reader.

The native’s song highlights a clash between ways of worldbuilding. In 1973, Jacques Leenhardt proposed a “political” reading of this text in which the “power” of the unseen “colonizer-narrator” is “contested” by younger technocrats, here the neighbor Franck, with whom A… appears to have an affair during a trip to town. More recently, Lane has nuanced this reading by

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adding to it treatment of the Lacanian notion of jouissance. For Lane, A...’s sexualized behavior, combined with her seeming proximity to the natives, threatens the colonial order as such, including Franck (206). Lane argues that A...’s seeming comprehension of the native song and the native language demonstrate that she has greater access to some forbidden kernel of pleasure—Lacan's agalma or “objet a”—a “precious treasure” hidden from European men like the narrator-husband and Franck (194). In this way, sexual anxieties and colonial anxieties come together in the figure of A..., who epitomizes worries about the concomitant loss of boundaries and control (206). But what does this mean for the reader, who confronts similar issues in Robbe-Grillet’s text? Construing jouissance as threatening any and all established order in this way is a clever reading of the text, but it does not take into account the ways in which this order, as well as the possibility for jouissance that undermines it, are constructed as worlds in the first place. Lane’s interpretation seizes the text by the interpretive end rather than the readerly beginning.

In hopes of bracketing the question of politics in favor of a perspective more amenable to worldbuilding, I turn to Abbes Maazaoui who contends that Robbe-Grillet’s treatment of native populations derives from the author’s conscious modification of stereotypes; these references bear out a commentary on fiction itself—not on the status of the stereotyped group.344 Even when the geographies of Robbe-Grillet’s novels resemble real places, such as New York, Hong Kong, or Brittany, they are recognizably “made up” (fabulée), in the words

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of Tom Bishop. In a similar way, Eric Gans treats the presence of colonial motifs in *La Jalousie* as undermining *all* cultural discourse, not just the colonizer-colonized relationship. Robbe-Grillet deftly weaves generic constraints and readerly expectations together by means of a NW marked by colonial narratives as well as by the fragmented plot and characters of experimental fiction. As is also the case with *Les Gommes*, the clash of expectations that takes place between stereotypes and innovation in such a novel provides much of the fodder for the reader’s role in co-creating its multiple FWs (MacLachlan 300). Even if we consider stereotypes as distastefully failed representations, they do allow the reader’s fictional worldbuilding process the opportunity to deploy itself.

Of course, mine is not a naïve reading. A partially political reading of this song is certainly justified by the assertion, near the end of the novel, that, “The poem so little resembles what is commonly called a song, a lament, a refrain, that the Western listener is within his rights to wonder if it is not something else all together” (194-195). The political subtext of plantation life in the colonies is unmistakably clear throughout *La Jalousie*. However, by focusing on this subtext exclusively, we risk missing out on Robbe-Grillet’s conscious manipulation of this paradigm and thus of the reader’s transition between NWs and FWs. While A...’s proximity to the natives may indicate in the eyes of the narrator-husband and Franck a mysterious feminine access to native *jouissance*, the reader must also deal with Robbe-Grillet’s attempts to undermine the traditional concept of character. Whatever its merits as a

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cultural critique, magnifying the political question of this novel, as Kristin Ross does by claiming that Robbe-Grillet’s work involves a certain “redemptive hygiene” reflecting obsessions in post-war French culture, takes away from the particular—and novel—brand of Robbe-Grilletian fictionality. This novelty takes us out of a world where such character-based assertions are all that matters, all the while creating a new, incomplete manner of character endowed with its own ontological status.347

One of the aspects of La Jalousie that supports a more open-ended interpretation of the native’s song is the cornucopia of parallel chaotic forms described throughout the novel. There are the noises heard on and around the plantation, including carnivorous animals and crickets, which also resemble the noise of Franck’s truck, the comb in A...’s hair, and the fire with which this noise is associated when A... and Franck’s accident is imagined. There are also elaborate descriptions of the interaction between the grain of the wood and its layer of peeling paint inside and outside A...’s house. The movement of the lizard—in one “liberated” scene, a real lizard, in the next “captured” one, a statue—resembles the buzzing flight of the mosquitoes around the lamp on the terrace, as well as the cycle of work on the plantation, the night as it falls over the countryside, and, even more significantly, the ironwork on the back of A...’s chair in the photograph depicting her in a café. The intertwining ironwork of photographed chair and table in turn mirrors the rich undulations of A...’s hair itself, as it cascades down her back and over her shoulder while she combs it. While even Lane associates many of these “non-teleological” forms with A...’s burgeoning sexuality, such categorization is problematic for the novel’s

attentive reader (Lane 202-203). If we begin to assemble a series of oppositions, we soon find that the gaze in this novel is undone by almost everything, including the gaze itself, which is by no means as linear as some critics would have us believe. The NWs related to the descriptions of what the gaze sees are undermined by the multiple and possible FWs evoked by these descriptions; these multiple FWs go far beyond A...’s sexuality! In the end, Robbe-Grillet’s descriptions of the native language and the native song sung by the worker as he passes by the house provide a good tool for understanding the double role symbols play in Robbe-Grillet. As it involves the native language, the song frames a fictional attempt to discern meaning in an unknown medium and thus a fictional reframing of worldbuilding itself (much as did the window display in *Les Gommes*).

The conclusions reached by the reader in regard to women, colonizers, and the colonized are only ever temporary conclusions preparing the stage for the next bifurcation of FWs. We must consider all ways of worldbuilding on the part of the reader as valid, whether they end up leading to plausible interpretations or not: worlds must first exist for interpretations to be applied to them. In *La Jalousie*, characters engage with impenetrable intratextual NWs like the native’s song, which, because it is never represented in the text, is only apprehensible through the surrounding worlds. Thus this NW within the text provide a pretext for the construction of unknown FWs by the characters, just as the NWs of the text do for the reader. By highlighting the construction of a NW—the song—within the character’s NW and by linking this to the reader’s expectations and choices regarding FWs, Robbe-Grillet separates himself from both Queneau and Simon, whose experiments with embedded NWs depend
more on intertextuality and less on meta-reflexivity. That A... herself ends up singing a song “whose words remain unintelligible” at the very end of the novel does not necessarily mean that she has “gone native,” but rather that she is experimenting with new ways of worldbuilding that she herself might not understand—a perspective shared by the reader (207). Perhaps this act moves her closer to the colonized; perhaps it moves her closer to the writer spinning out the text. To do either of those things, however, it must first posit the ontological bases for worlds in which those more complex interpretations can exist. The reader must accept that there is a world or that there are worlds in which A... can sing such a song without understanding the words before he can begin to interpret this action as significant.

The seemingly political overtones of the native’s song in *La Jalousie* initially have to do with communication and a clash of worlds, including that of the reader with the NWs and FWs of the text. This is why the incomprehension described by the novel is mutual among all of the denizens of its FWs, colonized or not. Despite the boy’s “correct” way of speaking, the narrator-husband “does not always understand what one wants from him. A..., however, manages to make herself understood without any trouble” (51). A...’s ability to communicate with the boy would seem to support Lane’s claim regarding her proximity to the natives. Yet A...’s ability to communicate with the boy takes place via her own language, not the native one. Certainly, for the narrator-husband, the natives remain more difficult to communicate with, as his trips to the kitchen (50) and discussion with the boy the morning after A... has spent the night in town with Franck appear to indicate (175). But the boy’s miscommunication with the narrator-husband has as much to do with the
latter's own (creative) ability, like Wallas or Mathias, to turn singular events into chaotic multiplicities, as it does with language abilities. Taking any of these interactions for a “real reality” or a central FW on the interpretive level undermines the layered nature of the narrative and the many other equally weighted FWs it evokes. If the narrator-husband’s gaze is an attempt at domination, the desire which underlies it is motivated by a blinding jealousy, as the play on words present in the novel’s title indicates. What is fascinating is how this limited perspective, rather than reducing this narrator-husband to complete impotency, opens up his field of possibilities—and the reader’s field of FWs—through the imaginary, much as it did for Wallas and Mathias. As much as politics or morality, the powers of worldbuilding are here being played out.

Thus does the narrator-husband muse on the boy’s choice of the word *ennuyée* (annoyed, bothered) to describe his wife’s late return from town:

> He is using this adjective in order to designate any kind of incertitude, sadness, or trouble. Without a doubt it must be “worried” (*inquiète*) that he is thinking of today; but it could just as well be “furious” (*furieuse*) “jealous” (*jalouse*), or even “desperate” (*désespérée*). Moreover, he has asked nothing; he is about to leave again. However, a neutral sentence, without any precise meaning, causes a flood of words from him, in his own language where vowels abound, above all “a” and “e.” (178)

The narrator-husband does attempt to analyze the native language to a greater extent than his wife, who seems more content just to listen. Of course, the play of subject pronouns in the text is ambiguous; the reader has no assurances as to whether it was the narrator-husband or the boy who “asked nothing.” And is it the arrogance of the narrator-husband that assures the reader that the sentence spoken by the messenger which causes such a reaction in the boy is “without any precise meaning”? Unless we accept an interpretation of the text as nothing but the warped perception of the narrator-husband, this sentence
most likely signals the existence of another consciousness at work in the text—or, better yet, the impossibility of determining such questions with certainty when using only narratological evidence. Understanding La Jalousie as the meeting point of NWs and FWs tied together by certain key scenes and symbols of the text allows us to keep more specific interpretation at bay until we have outlined at least several possible paths for the reader.

In any case, assuming that A... interacts fluidly with the natives avoids the crucial fact that, at least partially, the reader's only access to A... is through the voyeuristic viewpoint of the narrator-husband who, as both Lane and Kochnar-Lindgren point out, must imagine her as secretly desiring the natives. A...’s skill at communicating with the natives is contingent upon the reader accepting that his view of her is not clouded by that of the narrator-husband. We should neither wholeheartedly accept this viewpoint nor reject it: A... is definitely seen through the screen of the narrator-husband’s gaze, but this gaze is by no means absolute.

Faced with the conversation between the messenger from Franck’s plantation and his own boy, the narrator-husband is just as quickly befuddled by the native language as is his wife by the native’s song: “The boy speaks very quickly, as if his text did not contain any punctuation, but in the same sing-song tone as when he speaks in French” (178). Several remarkable things happen here. First, the messenger from the other barn, one assumes a fellow native speaker of the native language, shows no sign of comprehension when faced with the boy’s “flood of words”; in fact, he turns and leaves again without saying anything. Second, the metaphor of a text and its “punctuation,” also present in the scenes describing A...’s letter-writing and those describing her
eraser (130, 138), reappears. Since the text of the boy’s words is not given by Robbe-Grillet, the reader cannot follow the exchange from a position of knowledge either. It is “as if” the boy were reading from a text without punctuation, a NW related to language but never reducible to it. This analysis would seem to support the canonical reading of the novel as the failed attempt of the dominant gaze to take in and control everything in its domain. In this reading, the narrator-husband, confronted by something he does not understand, would immediately compare it to a text, something with which he is more familiar. This reading is not without its validity. However, the text from which the boy is speaking is implied by the NW of the novel, and the reader must step into the breach to supply this text, as well as that of the native song. The ways in which the reader does this through co-creating FWs turn out to have something to do with the ways in which the narrator-husband moves beyond the contours of his limited world through the use of the imagination. In the end, all of the limitations found in the NW of the novel: A...’s, Franck’s, and the reader’s help to construct the shifting contours of many different FWs.
D. Looking for an answer: “Seul les non-dupes errent”

Just as Simon’s characters seem to be caught up in an *esthétique de la déroute*, Robbe-Grillet’s characters seem to answer the call of a “poetics of failure.” After all, the protagonist of *Les Gommes*, charged with finding the killer, ends up killing the supposed victim, and that of *Le Voyeur*, having rigorously calculated his watch-selling schedule for his day on his native island, sells no watches, and quite possibly rapes and kills a young girl; at the very least, Mathias suffers the “quasi hallucinations of a protagonist struggling against a failure complex,” as Morrissette writes (91). Finally, the possibly cuckolded narrator-husband of *La Jalousie* is never explicitly mentioned in the novel, and the reader must infer his possible presence from contextual clues as he (the narrator-husband) thus floats in a realm between NWs and FWs. Yet, as we have seen time and again with Queneau and Simon, undermining the traditional, psychologically motivated concept of character can give the resulting NWs and FWs new ontological weight. Instead of disappearing, narrative building blocks like plot and character can take on new forms. In Queneau, this modification takes place through the never-ending cycle of appearance and disappearance. In Simon, it results from the infinite expansion of LWs across the bounds of time and memory. In Robbe-Grillet, the power of imagination to build new FWs whose amplitude threatens to overwhelm the FWs in which they are conceived complements the “failures” of the protagonists in their own lives.

The title of Lacan’s unpublished seminar from 1973-1974, “Les non-dupes errent” best expresses the resounding success of the imagination in the LWs of Robbe-Grillet’s failed characters. As I pointed out in Chapter One, there are
two puns at work in Lacan’s title. First, in French, *errer* can mean either “to wander” or “to make a mistake,” two activities of which Robbe-Grillet’s characters are enamored. Second, *les non-dupes errent* is a play on *les noms du père* (the names of the father) as well as *les noms du père* (the “No’s” of the father), both ways of placing the father, or father-figure associated with the Law, as the guarantor of the Symbolic order. As I explained in Chapter Five, Lacan opposes this Symbolic order, associated with writing, to the order of the Real, which is impossible to grasp, and that of the Imaginary, whose impossible fullness feeds the fire of the divided subject’s desire. The puns involving the word “father” certainly apply to Wallas, who is caught up in a narrative resembling that of Oedipus, imagining that his victim might be his own father. But in this section, it is the first pun, between “to wander” and “to make a mistake,” that I will focus on. For Lacan, wandering represents the “long circuit” of desire, which must be obstructed for the subject to function in a healthy manner. And this wandering, much like the reader’s worldbuilding, is conditioned by the desire to stop wandering; as Lacan declares at the beginning of his lecture, emphasizing the ever-present temptation of the ending, “I am starting over insomuch as I had believed that I could finish.” In this way, those who think that they are taking a short cut to the object of their desire reap none of the experiential benefits of wandering.348 The itinerant pathway of wandering, like the path of consciousness in Hegel, allows for making mistakes that do not turn out to be mistakes, but rather necessary detours—a panoply of worlds rather than the singular world.349 As Judith Butler writes of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “…reading becomes a philosophically instructive form

348 See Chapter Three for more on Lacan’s conception of desire.
of travel."\textsuperscript{350} This concept is instructive for worldbuilding. While, for the critic, there might be more and less plausible interpretations of texts, for the reader engaged in the process of making his way through a text, particularly a difficult one, there is no "wrong" way to build a world, especially as he is in the midst of doing so. Umberto Eco has suggested something similar in \textit{The Limits of Interpretation}: context allows the reader to choose between plausible and implausible interpretations; in this way, interpretations are "indefinite," not "infinite" (21). Whereas Eco valorizes context over "a hallucinatory response on the part of the addressee," I argue that such missteps by the reader, even when egregious or "hallucinatory" and even when adjusted for later on, still play an important and necessary role in the worldbuilding process (21). Worldbuilding and reading go hand in hand; the reader, as a rereader, may always—and will always—revise the worlds that he is building/has built. The wandering process of Robbe-Grillet's characters brings to the fore the act of continual revision, fueled by desire, that creates FWs out of NWs.

1. *Les Gommes*: Wandering, Wondering Wallas

Conceiving of Wallas as a failed detective is no stretch for the reader, who is presented with evidence of Wallas’s incompetence at every turn, not least of all in his propensity to get lost in the winding streets of the city. Manipulation of the generic conventions of crime fiction is present in the NWs throughout Robbe-Grillet’s work, but in *Les Gommes* in particular it is easy for the reader to forget that he is not in fact reading a traditional detective novel and that the FWs he is producing in concert with it have rather a different effect. The reader’s reactions to Wallas are at first conditioned by the constraints of this genre. However, as Simon Kemp points out, “crime fiction’s unique approach” is here turned on fiction itself, along with its attendant “epistemologies and ontologies.”

This means that experimentation with narrative forms is matched by a construction of fictional experience as fluid and plural; the FWs lying underneath the NW will never be analyzed as clearly as were those of Sherlock Holmes or Philip Marlowe. Kemp writes, “Indeed, this fluidity and plurality may even be seen as an affirmative value, the embracing of experience as experience...” (147). Wallas’s “failings,” including his inability even to pay attention to the case at hand, are not failings when the requisite character trait necessary for navigating multiple FWs is being open to “experience as experience.”

As we saw with respect to Simon, such openness allows the character to traverse and to create FWs that are not propped up by linear logic. This world-embracing indecisiveness is clear in Wallas’s conversations with police.

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commissioner Laurent. During these conversations, Wallas always has the impression of responding “badly” to the commissioner's questions. But Wallas's lack of skill as a detective make him a better student of narrative, especially the hyperproductive relationship between NWs and FWs which subtends his existence. After one unsatisfactory conversation with the commissioner, he reflects on his own inability to understand the situation: “And, without a doubt, the story might be totally made up so that it would let everyone, each in his own fashion, believe in it—or not—and these successive deviations, in one direction or another, would only modify its nature in an identical manner” (176). Again, the temptation to read Robbe-Grillet’s fiction as commenting on Robbe-Grillet’s theory of fiction is strong when faced with such a passage. However, if we stay within the parameters of FWs, we can see that what Wallas is commenting on is function as well as form: the equal ontological validity of a multitude of narrative alternatives or FWs. Although he is no great detective, and does end up killing a man he is sworn to protect, bumbling Wallas comes closer than the other characters to the ontologically leveling truth that makes one FW associated with Les Gommes as likely as the next. This truth concerns the multiple nature of the FWs making up the supposedly singular FW. This process is deeply meaningful for both reader and character of Robbe-Grillet, and it goes beyond the reductive notion of “textual production” which is too often associated with this multifaceted author.

Thus Robbe-Grillet’s worlds are structured by the reader’s expectations regarding the predominance of reason within crime fiction, what Kemp calls “the organizing principle behind crime fiction’s narrative structure” (105). Applying his own reason to the plot unfolding before him, and sure that he is
more cognizant of what is going on than the fumbling detective whose actions he has been following, the reader is caught up in the same trap as Wallas. Reader and character transpose the generic conventions from one set of NWs to another set of NWs where they do not necessarily apply. Similarly, Wallas and Doctor Juard, who has helped Dupont to fake his death, become caught up in their own generic conventions, their own intratextual NWs, responding to the commissioner’s queries automatically with “readymade formulas” (174) and “fictions…automatically dictating to him the right answers” (213). Unable to uncover any stable clues, incapable of understanding that he is building the very world he is investigating—and that this world is fictional, as are all the others he will encounter in the course of the novel—Wallas begins “imagining” (186). In fact, Wallas’s detours, fantasies, and memories make him, in the end, much more suited for the vagaries of Robbe-Grillet’s FWs than the reader. Wallas, a “defective inspector” in the NW, which resembles that of a detective novel, is a wanderer in FWs, a wanderer whose very meanderings create these FWs in the first place. In this way, we can see that two types of worldbuilding, the narrative and the fictional, here come together in Les Gommes to trap and liberate character and reader.
2. *Le Voyeur*: Mapping Mathias

While Mathias definitely pushes the limits of a character who cannot “read” his own life, this very inability is what allows his imagination to open up so productively to the multiple FWs in which his life takes place. Mathias’s decentered imagination at first filters the world through a one-to-one correlation between perception and world: although the voyeur spies on another world, he can only spy on that world from his position in this one. Established in contrast to others’ worlds, the voyeur’s world slowly crumbles under their weight, which is precisely what happens to Mathias. Just as Paul pines for the movie star across the ocean in Queneau’s *Les Temps mêlés* and *Saint Glinglin*, Mathias fails in ways that demonstrate the creative and productive nature of his limitations when it comes to FWs. The protective *pellicule* connecting Simon’s soldier-subject to nature, even when he is faced with death, and liberating him to move about various inner worlds, has no parallel in Robbe-Grillet’s FWs. Mathias is trapped in a world full of FWs whether he likes it or not. Mathias does not believe that his relation to the world has altered, despite all the available evidence to the contrary, and this is why the world in which he exists suddenly seems so alienating, so menacing, so multiple. With Mathias, Robbe-Grillet turns the situation of the voyeur inside out. Rather than peeking in on everyone else, Mathias feels the intense gaze of others on himself: once on the island, “he imagines that gazes settle on him” (41). In Lacan too, even in the case of inanimate objects, the gaze determines the subject from the outside in.\footnote{Lacan, *Concepts* 109-111.} Because of this, for the reader, Mathias’s fervid imaginings have the same ontological weight as the reality for which this character is always searching (in
contrast to Simon’s soldier-subject, who could be said to move about fluidly in a constellation of FWs). Isolated on a singular rocky outcropping of an island, Mathias encounters myriad FWs that his own uncertain behavior potentiates.

The same could be said of the reader, who often continues to read Robbe-Grillet’s novel when the answers are staring him in the face. After all, after having read fifty pages of *Le Voyeur*, who could, if he thought about it logically rather than fictionally, believe that the novel would come to a concrete resolution? This dilemma is the dilemma of any reader who knows that he can flip to the back of the book at any moment, not just of Robbe-Grillet’s. The desire brought about in the reader by Robbe-Grillet enables the former to continue reading even when “flipping to the back of the book” would produce no tangible results. Some critics have argued that Fictional Worlds Theory does no more than attempt to argue for the contents of implied FWs. While establishing a tally of what is or is not in the FWs of a given novel is certainly not my purpose here, I do believe that examining the reader’s movement between NWs and FWs as driven by desire certainly helps to explain some of the more counterintuitive behavior of the reading experience, especially in the case of experimental fiction.

So where do the paths of the *voyageur*, who is outer-directed and travels inwards, and the *voyeur*, who is inner-directed and travels outwards, intertwine? If there is a concrete representation of the bifurcation between the loops of the *voyageur* and the *voyeur*, it occurs between parts one and two of the novel, on pages 88, 89, and 90. These pages separate Mathias the incompetent traveling salesman from Mathias the possible killer and rapist (of

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course, each loop contains hints pointing towards the other loop). Yet is Mathias’s failure to account for fictional reality, in every sense, a complete failure? The activity of Mathias’s imagination, and the suspicions that it raises for the reader, help to fill the epistemic void at the center of the narrative by populating it with many possible FWs. Unlike Les Gommes, though, the pieces of the puzzle are never neatly assembled for the reader, and unlike later novels of Robbe-Grillet, such as La Maison de Rendez-vous (1963), where a circular narrative takes the reader from the moment of one Edouard Manneret’s death to the moment of one Edouard Manneret’s death, Le Voyeur does not achieve eerie circular closure either. Instead, in Le Voyeur Robbe-Grillet plays upon the reader’s desire to know what happened by continually setting forth the semi-pornographic details of Mathias’s possible assault on Jacqueline/Violette. Once again, as with the detective scenario of Les Gommes, the possibility of the rape/murder in Le Voyeur is the NW thread to which the reader confused by the many imaginative FW scenarios spun by Mathias always returns. The profusion of these FW scenarios, and the fact that they result, as in Les Gommes and La Jalousie, in a failed attempt at quantification in the NW, constitutes the unique underlying structure of Robbe-Grillet’s fiction, which explores the rending of one character’s consciousness into a multitude of worlds.

For Mathias, quantification remains an impossible activity that he nonetheless feverishly pursues. Mathias’s failed attempts at mapping the island reach their peak when he consults the natives—and is not Mathias himself a native?—for directions:

Two of the sailors, who wanted to get the opinion of their spouses, asked the traveler to stop by their homes after lunch. They lived in the village,
whose topography was not at all complicated; however they entered into very long explanations so as to situate their respective residences. They were presumably giving a great quantity of useless or superfluous details, but with such precision and such insistence that Mathias was getting lost in them. A description of the area that contained voluntary errors would not have misled him as much... (125)

This discussion resembles that of the two natives in *La Jalousie*. A stopped watch is right at least twice a day, but Mathias cannot even rely on the regularity of a completely fragmented sense of temporality. Wandering, Mathias cannot get lost; trying to find his way, he surely will. The same inability to follow rule-based behavior confronts Mathias when he wishes to leave Jean Robin’s house after dinner: “Once again he could not manage to follow any rule at all that he might have been able to remember—which could have served to explain his conduct—behind which he could have, if necessary, taken refuge” (144). On a global, metatextual level, the situation of Mathias resembles that of Robbe-Grillet’s reader. If we drop the guise of the critic and focus on the worldbuilding activities of this reader, though, we discover several differences. The reader is straining to overtake Mathias by proving his guilt or his innocence, whereas Mathias is simply trying to catch up—in his LW, Mathias is actually, hopelessly lost. This reader will remain even more disappointed by his inability to act as judge when Mathias’s ferry finally leaves the island. In fact, as Peter Brooks might argue, whether or not Robbe-Grillet’s fictional descriptions resemble the author’s stated theories of fiction, Mathias’s continued condition of being lost is a perfect way in which to spur the desire of the reader, as well as his continual return to the NW for clues regarding the multiple FWs that he keeps encountering.

Unlike the reader, though, Mathias never achieves a conscious understanding of what is happening to him. Instead, he obsessively mixes
together childhood images of birds and rope; the young girl seen on the boat, in the photographs in the islanders’ houses and in movie posters with those of rape and murder. His activities, however, highlight different ways of being in the world and, by the end of the novel, even he has learned to “mistrust shortcuts” (189). This is why, when confronted at the site of Jacqueline/Violette’s death by Julien, the youngest child of old friends, the Mareks, Mathias can no longer contain his solitary intense imaginative activity and begins to babble. Unable to tune in to this NW conversation just as he remained in the dark about the native’s song and the boy’s conversation with the messenger in La Jalousie, the reader can only imagine the conversation from Julien’s responses, as well as from his own knowledge of Mathias’s rapidly fraying psyche: “The traveler had begun talking again, in order to mask his agitation, talking quickly and without interruption—without any worry, either, as to appropriateness or coherence...He continued speaking. And the ground, from sentence to sentence, was giving way a little under his feet” (214-215). This sudden flow of speech from one who has had so much difficulty speaking throughout the novel occurs in the presence of an auditor who is not even listening! Thus the reader, by the end of the novel, is privy to a NW still associated with crisp and clear sentences of geometric precision, allowing him maximum entry into the FWs at hand. However, what is he to make of these NWs, where a character speaks, in every sense of the expression, without being heard? Compared to Queneau and Simon, Robbe-Grillet’s NW presents a seemingly clear path to undecided and ambiguous FWs. Both NW and FW, however, are inextricably intertwined with a consciousness whose principal activity is imagining. The negotiation of Le Voyeur’s NWs conceals the
profusion of FWs that all claim the right to exist in the mind of the *voyeur*, as well as in that of the reader. (Furthermore, the character’s own incomprehension of his interaction with others makes it seem that he is privy to his own kind of intermediary, intratextual NWs!)
3. *La Jalousie*: Glancing Glances

If we compare the FWs of these three novels, the characters of *La Jalousie* might appear, at first glance, to have the least ontological weight of all. If Wallas is a failed detective and Mathias a failed salesman, what is the narrator-husband of *La Jalousie*? He is a barely noticeable presence—some would say a textual effect—whose existence the reader must deduce from clues such as the number of place settings at the table and the number of chairs on the terrace. At the same time, even if we admit that this narrator-husband is not the only gaze at work in the novel, he nonetheless makes himself known insistently. Unable to see all, he ends up, through imagination, seeing more than all, constructing what is not there to be seen on his own. Because the reader must work with what he is given by the verbal cues of the text in order to form NWs and FWs, he at first gives great ontological weight to these imaginings. Later, when presented with multiple variants of the same episode, such as A... and Franck’s night in town, the reader adjusts his strategy, revisits ever-changing NWs, and encounters multiple FWs. The narrator-husband, who fails in what Sartre, among others of a phenomenological bent, liked to call *being there (être là)*, succeeds in fact in *being everywhere*, even beyond the bounds of a fictional reality that is impossible to determine from the book that the reader holds in his hands. By means of this alternation between failure and success, blindness and (in) sight, “our narrator plays with reality by playing in reality.”354 Here, treating things as a game, by means of the imagination, recursively alters the structure of the world in which things are being treated like a game, and so on

and so forth. The reader of the novel discovers this as soon as the ground shifts under his feet due to each temporal alteration and alternative explanation for an event. Try as the reader might, the Humpty Dumpty-esque FWs of a novel like La Jalousie can never be put back together again. (Returning to the NW will only send the reader off in a different direction.)

But the reader is not the only one who gives credence to what might at first seem to be mere imaginings. In one of the celebrated motifs of the novel, A... and Franck discuss a “colonial novel” that Franck has read and that A... has just begun reading. While I remain guarded about analyzing such Robbe-Grilletian sequences as being so perfectly recursive as to comment on the text at hand, this particular sequence provides some clues as to the nature of the worldbuilding going on in this novel (much like the conversation between the two natives in La Jalousie, Wallas’s conversations with the commissioner in Les Gommes, or Mathias’s conversation with the villagers in Le Voyeur). In their discussions, A... and Franck avoid casting aspersions on either the verisimilitude or the quality of the novel. Instead, they speak “to the contrary of places, events, characters, as if it were a question of real things” (82). Of course, A... has spent time in Africa, where the action of the novel takes place, and one of the novel’s characters finds herself sick, much like Franck’s wife, Christine, on the neighboring plantation. But none of this indicates that the colonial novel is in fact the novel that the reader is reading, if only because it transpires in Africa and we are lead to believe that the plantation is elsewhere. What is most important here is A... and Franck’s attitude towards the colonial novel, and not just insofar as it presents a mocking portrayal of realism. A... and Franck treat the colonial novel “as if” it were real, knowingly plunging into
the delusion of fiction in the manner I discussed in Chapter One. The process
of ontological leveling found throughout Robbe-Grillet is highlighted by the
characters’ interaction with fiction, as A... and Franck tally the FWs of the
colonial novel in their own way, constructing their own hypotheses about the
plot and even multiplying its “bifurcations” in order to arrive at new and
different endings (83). Franck’s decision to “sweep away in one fell swoop the
fictions that they just constructed together” should not be seen so much as
commentary on the relationship between A... and Franck as it should be
considered another bifurcation, followed as it is by their spoken reconstruction
of the day that they spent in town together. Here, the process of worldbuilding
is far more important than Franck’s aggressive conclusion that “you cannot
change anything about reality” (83). Isn’t this what he has been doing during
the discussion of the novel, after all? Isn’t that the principal activity of the
narrator-husband as well as the reader? The worldbuilding process engaged in
here by A... and Franck is shared by the narrator-husband as he sorts through
the possible ends to the night that his wife spends in town with Franck. It is
not that the reader perfectly mimics the characters’ acts of imaginations: how
could he, not being a character himself? Rather, as with Queneau and Simon,
Robbe-Grillet’s FWs themselves involve acts of overdetermined worldbuilding,
thus providing a delightfully complex play of worlds for the motivated rereader,
whose movement between NWs and FWs is incessant. This reader is at once
freer than the characters he encounters, able to move from one point of view to
another, draw his own conclusions, and open and close the book at will, and, at
the same time, doomed never to discover to his satisfaction the LWs of the
characters.
E. Conclusion

Understanding Robbe-Grillet’s early novels as dominated by the supposed objectivity of objects or a dominant subjectivity that attempts, and fails, to assert itself avoids some fundamental questions about the reading experience. I hope to have lent new weight to those questions here. What is needed is a way, momentarily, to separate formal questions from thematic ones, before seeing how each ties into the other. Working with NWs and FWs allows us to discover anew the interdependence of these two aspects of the reading process, and to attenuate a false separation which sometimes favors the formal, the historical, and the cultural over the thematic, thus ignoring the lively and organic relation to reading that drove many of us to read in the first place. By drawing the reader into such endlessly murky FWs so adroitly, Robbe-Grillet’s NWs demonstrate for us just how tricky the relation between the formal structures of a text, and the worldbuilding processes that they support, can be. By continuing their wanderings, even when they have obviously passed the point of no return, Wallas, Mathias, and the narrator-husband of La Jalousie remain unduped, even when they do not know it, and even when they try to be duped with all their might. While the readership for Robbe-Grillet’s novels (or those of Queneau or Simon), might not be immense, these novels demonstrate how the tension existing between different types of readability implied by a text’s NWs and FWs may help us to discover something more about how and why people do read what they read. If we focus on the act of worldbuilding, there is no need to confine ourselves to “Literature” with a capital “L,” as Queneau might have said. Instead, we might begin to elaborate the proper scholarly context for exploring how both readers and spectators integrate
movies, television shows, and even video games into their experience of worlds that are never so flimsy as when we think that they are complete.
Conclusion

How do we read? There is no satisfying answer to this question as, even in the face of self-reported data, we have little idea of what actually transpires in the reader’s mind at the moment of reading. One aim of this dissertation, then, has been to establish and delineate some possible points of entry into the many types of worlds that come about through the reading experience. Another aim here has been to demonstrate how both reading and critical acts of interpretation prove impossible without reader-built worlds in which they can occur. The number of worlds activated by the reading process might be infinite, but NWs that appear more closely tied to the verbal nature of the text and FWs that appear more closely tied to the idiosyncratic work of the imagination are two central points around which these other types of worlds are elaborated. When we speak of a certain book, we are usually speaking of the worlds associated with this book, not the book itself. I hope to have revalorized the role of the worldbuilding process in the act of reading as a process that cannot be reduced to simple scansion of lines of text.

Constant and ever-changing movement back and forth along a spectrum stretched between NWs and FWs seemed to me a good way to encapsulate the reader’s engagement with the work of authors like Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet. NWs and FWs indicate varying levels of tension as reader and text cooperate to move beyond sheer everyday materiality. Even if the reader does progress to more cerebral acts of interpretation through rereading, he cannot do this without first building a world hand-in-hand with the text. This is not to say that encountering néo-français or the appearance and disappearance of
characters in Queneau, or expanded sentences and the soldier-subject in Simon, or the search for answers in Robbe-Grillet occurs in a predetermined manner. My contention is simply that a certain back and forth movement between words and worlds is a crucial element of an initial reading of these primary authors. While these authors certainly self-consciously manipulated this movement, as did many other authors of the twentieth century, I believe that such movement underlies the reading experience as such, especially as it occurs in relation to the novel.

When fiction takes fiction as its subject, though, the resulting worlds move further from reality, as they are doubly fictional. But they also move away from fiction; the double dose of fiction does not cancel itself out, but alerts the reader to fiction’s status as fiction. The eccentric and ephemeral characters of Raymond Queneau, the intense exploration of subjectivity menaced with destruction found throughout Claude Simon, and the never-ending search for non-existent answers that draws the reader into Alain Robbe-Grillet all give the reader something that is absent from everyday life: the freedom to, as Walton says, “become fictional” all the while remaining aware of this process (see Chapter One). Since in this life the world presents itself to the reader in far more concrete fashion than on the pages of a book, real-life worldbuilding choices are limited. In confronting the novels of the these three authors, the reader then has the opportunity to engage in a more radical manner of worldbuilding, where the boundaries between inner and outer seem to be momentarily suspended and where the calibrating demands of Freud’s reality principle give way.
All three authors create worlds where transitions between states and levels of being engulf both character and reader. Fictional worldbuilding moves the reader out of the limitations of the present and enables him to move backwards in time (retention) or forward in time (protention). Since he controls his interaction with the text to a degree, though, this reader may also step in and out of being by suspending the act of reading and restarting it again later. Because the reading experience is never so total as to permanently displace the RW, it provides the reader with an outside view on the inside, on the one hand decentering him and on the other, (fictionally) putting him right in the thick of things. It is no accident that this kind of decentering and the attendant shift between the inner and the outer also aptly describes the life of Robbe-Grillet’s confused and searching characters. Interaction with fiction lies at the heart of the work of these three authors.

Yet what happens when the process of reading breaks down altogether? What of the reader who chooses not to continue reading these texts precisely due to the many obstacles that I have claimed act to spur him on? I might sidestep the question by arguing, as I have throughout, that my reader is by definition a rereader, that is to say someone who is willing to give the text another chance by increasing the degree of his interaction with it. This is true enough, but I think that the question supplies its own answer. I can address this issue by pointing out that the process of reading often does break down completely, whether we are reading the newspaper, a romance novel, a thriller, or experimental fiction, and this for many reasons, some of them as simple as the phone ringing or someone walking into the room. In fact, finishing a book is nothing so much as the ultimate breakdown in the process of reading—but
also the point at which fully cognizant rereading becomes a possibility—and it is a goal which is necessary, as I have claimed, following Brooks, in order to draw the reader through the reading experience. Individual readers react differently to different texts. The readers who do end up reading Queneau, Simon, or Robbe-Grillet, though, usually pass through some of the stages that I have described here. Were they not to experience micro-breakdowns in the reading process along the way, these readers would never become the rereaders that they need to be in order to experience the macro-breakdown of actually finishing the book! Unlike Brooks, who centers on narrative teleology, I am more interested in the process of worldbuilding as it occurs by means of hypothesis-making and rereading throughout the text; beginning, middle, and end cease to be as important when the rereader ably moves between all three points. This is one of the reasons why I have privileged worldbuilding over the \textit{histoire} (story)/\textit{récit} (narrative) divide of classical narratology: such clear causality can only be established from the point of view of one who has finished and understood the text, whereas my reader is in the process of becoming a reader.

Furthermore, I believe that my conclusion are applicable to “texts” in the wider sense understood by Barthes when he used the term to delineate the role of the “sign” to advertising, relationships, and the mythologies of popular culture. Today, such “texts” have taken on an even more dynamic role thanks to advances in digital technology affecting the production and distribution of movies, television shows, video games, and internet. These are areas in which my argument about how we manage to create many types of worlds with the help of certain objects can be fruitfully applied, and that call for further
research in the vein of Marie-Laure Ryan’s work on virtuality (see Chapter One). That there are those who might cease reading Queneau, Simon, or Robbe-Grillet altogether once their attention is tested allows me better to define paradigmatic shifts in attentionality—in regard to the Realist or Naturalist paradigms against which these authors were sometimes reacting, and in regard to the virtual and digital that have developed since they stopped writing. The same readers who might not wish to finish a novel like *Le Chiendent*, or *La Route des Flandres*, or *La Jalousie*, might be more willing to delve into difficult readings of challenging digital “texts” as they negotiate the myriad intersections of technology with their everyday lives. For this reason, I hope in the future to use my argument about worldbuilding in these three authors to talk about other types of “reading” and “rereading” that have recently gained prominence under the sway of technology. In order to talk about the flood of “texts” with which new technologies have surrounded us, though, literature, whose texts are relatively stable in comparison with new media, is not a bad place to start, especially as models devised to describe IT interaction have themselves recursively changed the way we think about literature—Possible Worlds Theory owes as much to emergent virtual technologies as it does to philosophy. The worlds of Queneau, Simon, and Robbe-Grillet question reader absorption *into* the story as the dominant paradigm of fiction. They also, each in its own way, turn reader interaction with *the way the story is told* its own kind of absorption so that, to take Virginia Postrel’s line of argument, what we thought was surface is now substance, and what we thought was substance, is now surface.\(^{355}\) The shifting paradigm of passive absorption and active interaction just might help to

explain our mixed attitude towards new technologies that also combine absorption and interactivity to an unheard of degree.
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