FRAGMENTATION IN THE MIDDLE NOVELS OF CLAUDE SIMON

LE VENT TO HISTOIRE

by

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ABSTRACT:

This study of narrative fragmentation concentrates on three major novels of Claude Simon's central period — La Route des Flandres, Le Palace and Histoire — though it also looks at the foreshadowing of their composition in the theme of fragmentary vision in Le Vent, a work which, while it does not fully realize its own stated aims, constitutes the novelistic credo of the central period.

By narrative fragmentation is meant the discontinuity produced by dechronologization, abrupt sequence shifts, and other devices that disrupt the accustomed continuity of narrative. Only what Ricardou has called "la fragmentation majeure", that is, the major breaks between sequences, and not the minor interruptions or digressions within sequences, are dealt with in detail. It is considered first in the general context of the fragmentedness of much twentieth century fiction and art, with special reference to the parallel with Cubism. Some of the forms fragmented narrative may take are suggested, together with their possible functions and significance as well as the effect of fragmentation on the reading process.

The fragmentedness of Simon's novels was viewed initially by many critics as a mimetic reproduction of mental processes, notably those of memory. One aim of this study is to examine narrative fragmentation in the light of that interpretation, showing how and to what extent it serves to evoke mental processes, but also how it often fulfils an anti-realist function, undermining the coherence of the récit.

Analysis of the breaks in the narrative and the transitional devices connecting juxtaposed or interwoven sequences in La Route shows that far
from imitating the workings of memory, they fulfil mainly thematic functions, serving to superimpose related scenes and figures in a spatial composition in which every element reflects the others. Narrative fragmentation in *Le Palace* is analyzed for its rendering of a certain experience of the passage of time (discontinuity, alternate slow-motion and lightning progression) through the alternation of two sequences in a rhythmic pattern of interruptions and reprises. In *Histoire* narrative fragmentation is shown to play a significant role in suggesting the fragmentariness and discontinuity of memory, but here, in this the most fragmented of the three novels analyzed, the exploration of the possibilities of fragmented form is carried to its furthest extent, resulting in a collage type composition of great inventiveness.

Narrative fragmentation in the novels of Simon's central period is thus shown to contribute to a certain psychological realism in the twentieth century tradition of stream of consciousness fiction. But its thematic and formal role is shown to be of far greater importance and originality. The replacing of chronological order by a compositional method that juxtaposes or interweaves fragmented sequences emphasizes thematic relations between narrative elements and favours the creation of formal symmetries and patterns. Beneath the surface incoherence and disorder of fragmented narrative lies a tightly knit and formally rigorous composition, made possible by that very fragmentation.
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The first-time reader of La Route des Flandres or Histoire is struck most forcefully by the fragmentation of the narrative which is one of the fundamental features of Claude Simon's mature novels. Scenes are interrupted by new episodes which are themselves in turn interrupted or curtailed. Past and present intermingle in a chaotic succession in which chronology plays no part. At times the text resembles a collage of fragments that include quotations from other texts, slogans, headlines, recurring phrases. The reader's expectations of narrative continuity are continually unfulfilled. At the same time, no matter how chaotic or fragmented the text may appear, the reader is aware, however vaguely, that some overall pattern governs its development. Who could fail to notice, when reading La Route des Flandres for the first time, for instance, the frequency of triple elements: the novel's division into three parts, its three narrative frames (train, prison-camp, hotel room), its three triangular dramas — to name the most obvious.

This combination of a fragmented narrative and complex underlying patterns is particularly exciting to a reader interested in composition. To read a Simon novel is to embark almost immediately on an increasingly complicated system of cross-reference. Simon is fond of describing his writing as "bricolage", which suggests the construction or assemblage of an object (in this case a text) out of whatever materials are available.
I see my own approach to his work as the reverse of that process: a deconstruction or disassemblage, as it were, a taking to pieces of the text to see how it works, how the parts fit together and how its mechanisms function.

My study has necessarily been limited. Since fragmented composition by its very nature requires detailed analysis, it has simply not been possible to include as many of the novels as I had at first hoped. Selection was essential and though it was made partly on grounds of personal preference, it was largely guided by the desire to concentrate on a unified group of novels.

The work of Claude Simon up to the present falls into three broad phases: the early novels (Le Tricheur, Gulliver and Le Sacre du Printemps) in which he was attempting to find his way, the novels between Le Vent and La Bataille de Pharsale which constitute a middle period (L'Herbe, La Route des Flandres, Le Palace and Histoire) of which Le Vent and La Bataille de Pharsale, both transitional works, mark the opening and closing stages, and finally the more recent works (Les Corps conducteurs, Triptyque and Leçon de choses) which are a definite departure from what had come to be considered as a distinctively Simonian manner.

In the view of Gérard Roubichou, whose work offers one of the most systematic and rigorous approaches to Simon's writing currently available, the novels from L'Herbe to Histoire form a unified body of writing — "un univers romanesque global régi par d'analogues lois d'écriture et de production".1 These novels are related to each other not only because characters and incidents reappear from one book to the next, and because of the recurrence of certain themes, but more fundamentally, because of the similarities of style and composition which mark this period of Simon's
writing. Roubichou calls it "la période centrale". Central not merely because of its position but because in his view, it is "la plus remarquable, la plus 'achevée' de la production simonienne". Not all readers would share this estimation of course. For some, on the contrary, it is the most recent novels that constitute Simon's greatest achievement, since, freed of the psychological and representational concerns that, in their view, mar the earlier work, the later novels are his fullest and most sustained realisation of the power of a text to generate its own themes and fictions without reference to any supposedly pre-existing reality. Personally, however, I tend towards Roubichou's judgement, for while I admire Simon's most recent work, I find it over-contrived and lacking the textual richness and density of his previous novels. Conceivably, it was the necessity for excessive control of the text in the attempt to eradicate psychological or referential elements that has led to the loss of lyrical intensity regretfully noted by Roubichou:

On peut se demander si la disparition -- ou la diminution -- de cette force lyrique (vis lyrica) dans les dernières œuvres n'est pas une perte importante pour l'univers simonien.

Many readers, no doubt, will share this sense that, despite the formal perfection of the later work, something vital has been lost.

I have chosen to limit myself in this study, to the novels of the central period. This choice does not merely express personal preference, but also the belief that these novels form a unified group within which, it would be possible to study certain types and effects of narrative fragmentation in depth and to trace their evolution from one novel to the next. This seemed more satisfactory than the most obvious alternative of a broad but inevitably more superficial study of narrative fragmentation in the whole of Simon's work. Such a study would, in any case, tend to
split in two because while fragmented composition continues to characterize Simon's novels, its nature and functions differ significantly in the later works. Another alternative would have been to select one or more novels from the central and later periods and to study the changing role of fragmented composition by contrasting them, but some of the rich variety of compositional effects in the central period would have been passed over in such a project. It seems altogether more satisfying to explore the composition of one particular group of novels in its full range and depth than either to contrast works of a quite different character or to attempt to deal with the evolution of Simon's compositional techniques across a period of thirty years and a dozen novels.

My study of fragmented composition begins with Le Vent, which, though it does not properly belong with the novels of the central period, announces them. In style and composition, it is closer to the more conventional works that precede it, but its reflections on narrative convention prepare the way for the highly original novels that were to follow. The theme of fragmentary vision (the fragmentedness of experience, the fragmentary knowledge we have of our own and other lives) which appears from the opening pages, could almost constitute an aesthetic programme for the succeeding novels. It is for this reason that I have devoted a whole chapter to Le Vent, even though it cannot be placed on the same level as the mature work that was to come.

I have not dealt at all with L'Herbe, the novel which followed Le Vent and which is the first of Simon's mature works. It has already been the subject of Roubichou's minutely detailed Lecture de "L'Herbe" and I have therefore preferred to concentrate on the three major novels that succeeded it, which have not yet received the same kind of exhaustive analysis of
narrative method and composition that Roubichou has performed for *L'Herbe*

The scope of the topic itself still needs defining before we go any further. In the novels of the central period, the narrative is fragmented on two levels, that of the overall composition with its interrupted episodes and disordered time-sequence and that of the sentence by sentence development. Jean Ricardou has made a useful distinction between these two levels:

Ce qui déroute la lecture, en effet, d'emblee, ce sont les bifurcations incessantes dues à un morcellement à deux niveaux. D'une part, une fragmentation *majeure*: ainsi rencontrons-nous des séquences, si l'on appelle ainsi une suite cohérente d'éléments fictionnels, et des ruptures, si l'on nomme ainsi la séparation de deux séquences. D'autre part, une fragmentation *mineure*: ainsi rencontrons-nous, à l'intérieur des séquences, des *coupures* ou séparations relatives obtenues soit par métaphore, soit par comparaison, soit par alternative, et des *fragments* ou segments obtenus dans une séquence par l'intervention d'une coupure.4

What Ricardou calls "la fragmentation mineure" -- the breaks *within* a sequence brought about by comparisons, alternatives and so forth -- has from the start, attracted much comment and its mechanisms have been the object of detailed analysis.5 The major fragmentation, that of the progression of sequences, has received little systematic analysis to date. For this reason, although the two levels of fragmentation are clearly connected and equally contribute to the general fragmentedness of the novels, I propose to deal only with the major level of fragmentation.

Throughout, I have been conscious of having to confront two conflicting attitudes towards the question of fragmented narrative. On the one hand, there is what might be termed the neo-realist attitude, which sees fragmentation as the mark of the novel of memory: the fragmentation of the narrative mirrors the double fragmentedness, both of experience itself and of the traces it leaves in the mind. On the other hand, there is the Ricardolian
approach which has dominated Simon criticism since about 1970, which would interpret fragmented narrative on the contrary as a deliberate subversion of the realist illusion and as a sign of the growing pre-eminence accorded to the autonomous development of the text. I have attempted in my third chapter, to give some account of these two conflicting positions in order to provide a critical context for discussion of the novels.

In my own view, neither approach is sufficient by itself to explain the novels of the central period, for there is a tension in them between the twentieth century tradition of psychological realism to which they partly belong and the novel of pure textuality towards which they are moving. This tension, far from constituting a flaw, accounts in part, for their richness, for the reader's sense of their inexhaustibility and for a certain elusiveness in the face of systematic analysis, for they can be read on so many levels at once. I have attempted throughout, to maintain a balance between these two approaches and not to distort or deny the psychological elements in the novels through retrospective awareness of the direction Simon's writing was to take. It seems to me, somewhat regrettable that Simon himself should now consider these elements as flaws in his work.

My first chapter is an examination of fragmented narrative in general terms, which attempts both to define it and to suggest in broad outline the types of representational, thematic and formal effects it can achieve. The secondary aim of this chapter is to evoke, however sketchily, the wider twentieth century background, both of the novel and of the visual arts, against which the significance of fragmented composition can be better understood.

From there, I go on in my second chapter to look at the theme of fragmentary vision in *Le Vent*, to see the way in which it foreshadows the
subsequent novels and to assess Simon's first attempts at creating a fragmented narrative. The third chapter as already mentioned, reviews differing critical interpretations of the fragmented composition that marks the novels of the central period.

The remaining chapters are devoted to detailed analysis of *La Route des Flandres*, *Le Palace* and *Histoire*. I have tried in each case to concentrate on a particular aspect or function of fragmentation. In the two chapters on *La Route*, I have first examined very closely the breaks in the narrative and the transitional devices that link fragmented sequences, before going on to look at the role of these breaks in the overall composition of the novel. With *Le Palace*, I have tried to show how narrative fragmentation contributes to rendering a certain perception of time. In the case of *Histoire*, which is in some ways a more traditional novel, I have tried to indicate to what extent the fragmentation of the narrative fulfills a psychological function — the representation of consciousness — while also reflecting the growing autonomy of the text and the importance of fragmentation in its own right as a compositional mode, akin to collage in the visual arts. Whenever feasible, I have attempted to schematise the progression of the narrative, so that both the extent of its fragmentedness and its characteristic structural patterns may be grasped in an overall view.

I hope to have shown in my analysis of these three novels, how the fragmentation of the narrative contributes to their thematic and formal patterns and thus to the total significance of each work. In uncovering the basic framework of the narrative and its articulations and in suggesting some of the structural elements in each novel, I have no illusions of having done more than take the first step towards accounting
for their compositional richness and complexity, which seem almost inexhaustible. The search for further connections and patterns is a pleasure to be renewed with each subsequent reading.
CHAPTER I

FRAGMENTED NARRATIVE: ITS NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE

Literature, which has traditionally projected a coherent view of the world, is now grappling with its fragmented form; and like the modern painter, the modern novelist is now reassembling the pieces in a new order.

Claude Simon interviewed by Claud DuVerlie, Sub-stance, 8 (Winter 1974).

Many of the novels that one thinks of as essentially modern are notable for their fragmented composition. This is as true of works such as Ulysses, U.S.A. and The Sound and the Fury, which marked the great renewal of the novel in the twenties, as of recent writing in the sixties and the seventies which have produced not only the fragmented narrative of the nouveau roman in France, but also such works as Uwe Johnson's Speculations about Jakob, Grass's Pages from the diary of a snail, John Berger's G, Julio Cortázar's Hopscotch and many others.

A variety of explanations have been offered to account for this fragmentedness. It is a critical commonplace, according to Eric Rabkin, who, discusses the role of fragmentation in his article "Spatial Form and Plot", to view the fragmentation of twentieth century literature as "an analogy for the felt fragmentation of twentieth century culture." He himself sees it as one of a number of techniques that serve to revitalize familiar literary forms.

Another commentator, Michel Zéraffa, in his study of the novel of
the twenties, *La révolution romanesque*, advances the thesis that narrative forms are always dictated by the currently prevailing image of man. In his view, the fragmentation that marks the novels of Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner and others, is directly related to new conceptions of personality. The same belief has been eloquently expressed by the novelist, Anais Nin:

Much has been written about the fragmentation of the novel, but this reaction stems from an outmoded concept of wholeness. Wholeness in the past was a semblance of consistency created from a pattern, social and philosophical, to which human beings submitted. This artificial unity of man was dissolved by a new vision into the selves which were masked in order to achieve a semblance of unity, a new vision into the relativity of truth and character. Man is not a finite, static, crystallized unity. He is fluid, in a constant state of flux, evolution, reaction and action, negative and positive. He is the purest example of relativity. We as novelists have to make a new synthesis, one which includes fluctuations, oscillations and reactions. It is a matter of reassembling the fragments in a more dynamic living structure.

This split from an unreal uniformity of pattern, this fragmentation has been the theme of modern literature beginning with Proust's microscopic analysis through the dissolutions of Joyce's play on words; but neither of these processes needed to be fatal to the ultimate integration . . . . What remains to be created is a new synthesis to include all the newly discovered dimensions.  

Nin is defending the modern novel against those critics who have attacked it specifically for what they see as its fragmentation of the person. Like Virginia Woolf, who, in a celebrated lecture, called on novelists to abandon the artificial construction of "character" and in its place, depict the individual consciousness traversed by a multitude of fragmentary impressions and responses, Nin seeks in the novel a portrayal of personality in keeping with the constant state of flux in which the self exists. The rendering of that state of flux necessarily entails a fragmentation of the stable, coherent processes of narrative.

Nin's words are echoed by the critic Sharon Spencer, writing of modern novelists in *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*:

Like the Cubist painters, they are determined to shatter the old
idea that reality is clear, simple, coherent and unified .... all refuse their readers the assurance of easy conclusions and quick judgements. They are asking, instead, that their readers observe and acknowledge that reality is polymorphous, illogical, fragmented, chaotic, and, above all, myriad faceted.6

Both Nin and Spencer are writing from what might be termed a neo-realist standpoint. Implicit, in what both of them say here, is the view that the novel depicts reality and that reality, internal or external, being multi-faceted, constantly changing and therefore fragmented, the serious novelist will attempt to represent it thus.

While this view may go a long way towards accounting for the fragmentedness of novels that seek to render the flow of consciousness or the complexity of modern life, it would certainly not be acceptable to many of the contemporary writers whose novels could also be described as fragmented. In their works, on the contrary, the fragmentation of the traditional elements of the narrative can be seen as a challenge to the whole notion of realism, a means of systematically undermining the representational tradition of the novel. In the most recent novels of Claude Simon, for instance, the methodical interruption of the narrative is one device among many that remind the reader that the novel is a text, a sequence of words related to other words in a formal composition and not an imitation of life.

There is an interesting parallel to be made here with fragmentation in the visual arts, a parallel that has been suggested by Simon himself, whose long-term interest in painting is evident in his fondness for analogies drawn from that domain. Simon sees the novel as having reached the same point in its evolution as painting at the end of the nineteenth century:

... c'est-à-dire lorsque celle-ci a cessé de raconter ou de
représenter des événements (Enlèvement des Sabines, Noces de Cana ou Massacres de Scio) pour entreprendre de présenter sans autre justification que lui-même un objet pictural.\textsuperscript{7}

The disappearance of the anecdote in painting is paralleled by the diminishing importance of the story in the nouveau roman. Just as, in a painting, an object (door, table, etc.) serves as a pretext for an arrangement of colours and shapes, so too, in a new novel, the fictional elements may be seen as no more than that: a pretext for a composition to which they are subordinated. In this light, the fragmentation of the narrative might be viewed as one stage in the gradual displacement of the story, with the proviso, of course, that this process cannot go as far as it has in the visual arts, since words, having meanings, cannot be used like colours on canvas, purely abstractly.

Simon has expressly linked the fragmentation of the narrative to fragmentation in the visual arts. Speaking at the 1974 Cerisy Colloquium devoted to his work, he said:

\begin{quote}
En ce qui concerne la fragmentation de la fiction, je pense qu'il y aurait là, comme pour l'importance prise par la description, tout un travail à faire en rapprochant encore ce phénomène de celui qui s'est produit dans la peinture, en particulier avec le cubisme \ldots \textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

The comparative study Simon proposes, is altogether beyond the scope of this thesis, but a few general observations can be made on the parallels between Cubist painting and the fragmented novel, that may throw some light on the general significance of fragmentation as a compositional technique.\textsuperscript{9}

Even the most uninformed spectator looking at a Cubist painting can see that the subject has been broken into fragments which are reassembled in a new, incomplete image.* The fragmentation of the pictorial subject

\textsuperscript{* There is an interesting demonstration of this process in the accompanying illustration, which has additional significance for us, since it was with André Lhote that Simon studied painting for some time.}
After a sketch by André Lhote, demonstrating how he combined various elements of a glass into a single Cubist image (1952)

From Herschel B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art
is paralleled by that of the narrative subject: in both painting and novel, the elements of the subject are broken up in order to create a new synthesis. Just as the shifting planes of the Cubist painting abolish fixed temporal and spatial relations, so too, the destruction of narrative continuity in the fragmented novel creates a new mobility among the elements of the text which are no longer fixed in a time sequence. Spectator and reader alike, are therefore confronted with multiple and discontinuous viewpoints, which permit the exploration of multiple, inter-related, or even contradictory aspects of the subject. In the case of both canvas and text, the spectator or reader's creative participation is sought: the fragmented elements can be reassembled in an indefinite number of ways, but an active "reading" of canvas or text is necessary for this potential to be realized. At the same time, the focus is away from the subject itself and onto the composition for which it provides the pretext. A Cubist portrait, for instance, does not aim at capturing resemblance; the subject is a pictorial creation, not a representation of the actual sitter (though the sitter's qualities or state may be quite vividly expressed none the less). The composition itself, and not the persons or objects in the real world which have provided its starting-point, is now the true subject.

These are by no means the only analogies to be found between Cubist art and the fragmented novel, but they are the most important for our purposes. What they suggest about the possible significance of fragmentation in the novel is that, far from fulfilling the realist aims implied by Anais Nin, it may mark a movement away from the imitation of the real world towards a greater concern with formal composition. The fragmentation of the narrative might thus be seen as part of the general trend in the arts towards the abandonment of representation in favour of an exploration
of the specificity of the art-form itself (i.e. coloured pigments spread on a flat surface or sequences of words related to other words).

While fragmentation in the visual arts is generally seen as reflecting new conceptions of the nature of art, the fragmentedness of the modern novel has most often been explained in terms of changing conceptions of personality or a new epistemology. However, the balance has slowly shifted away from such neo-realist explanations towards a re-evaluation of the nature of the literary work, in which fragmentation takes on a different significance. This shift, as we shall see in a later chapter, is reflected in the critical response to the fragmentedness of the narrative in the novels of Simon's central period.

I. What is fragmented narrative?

It will be apparent even from the novels referred to thus far that the term "fragmented narrative" covers a wide variety of works of vastly different subjects and aims. While this diversity makes it difficult, if not impossible, to generalize about the role of fragmentation in the modern novel and its significance, it is possible nonetheless to arrive at some general idea of what constitutes fragmented narrative. This will provide a context for the detailed analysis of narrative structure in the novels of the central period, a context within which it will be easier to grasp both the traditional and the innovative aspects of Simon's work.

It may be helpful first to make some distinction between the related and often interchangeable terms "fragmentary" and "fragmented". I have found it expedient to use "fragmentary" to mean "not complete or entire" and "fragmented" to mean "broken into fragments" (Oxford English Dictionary). Thus, a fragmentary narrative will be one that contains a
significant number of gaps and omissions, whereas a fragmented narrative will be one that is broken up and disconnected. In practice, the two tend to overlap: a fragmentary narrative will always be broken into fragments by its very incompleteness; a fragmented narrative may often be fragmentary too, although this is not necessarily the case, since narrative may be fragmented by constant digression, for instance, but not reveal any gaps or omissions in the story it tells. It is thus the characteristic of incompleteness, essential to the notion of fragmentary narrative but not to that of fragmented, which distinguishes them and which gives to fragmentary narrative its particular significance.

i. Fragmentary narrative

In the most literal sense, a narrative may be fragmentary, either through loss or deterioration of part of a manuscript, or through the incompleteness of the narrator's account of events.

The first possibility has often been exploited in the novel for realist purposes, most notably in the epistolary and personal journal genres, where lacunae in the supposed original are foot-noted by a fictitious editor, as, for instance, in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or a contemporary Québec novel by Hubert Aquin, *Trou de mémoire*.

The second possibility (the narrator's incomplete account) is also used for realist ends. The gaps in the narrative are intended to impart an air of authenticity to his narration in contrast to what is evidently felt to be the inauthenticity of omniscient narration. In Simon's early novel, *Le Vent*, as we shall see later, the narrator is constantly at pains to stress his incomplete knowledge of events and the consequent gaps or distortions in his account, an attitude which reflects the author's often
expressed view that we can only attain to a fragmentary knowledge of our own and other lives.

Similarly, the acknowledged fragmentariness of the narrative may serve to highlight the bias of any one perspective on events, as in Uwe Johnson's *The Third Book about Achim*, where we are told about Achim's biographer:

Karsch didn't want everything about Achim, he only wanted to pick what distinguished him (in Karsch's opinion) from other people . . . . for that was the purpose of his choice among the different episodes of a life, that's what he wanted of the many truths. And what do you want with the truth?\[11\]

The question leads the reader to reflect not only on the meaning of truth, particularly in the context of the opposing views of social reality in the two Germanies, but beyond that, on the role of the novelist and the nature of fiction itself.

In general, fragmentariness, whether used as an occasional realist device or as a consistent principle of narration, almost invariably reflects a particular view of truth and knowledge. Fragmentary narrative, therefore, has a thematic role; it is part of the general meaning of the work.

ii. Fragmented narrative

All narrative, because of its necessarily selective nature, contains gaps and omissions -- periods of time passed over in silence, events ignored or cursorily dismissed. But it will not appear fragmentary unless attention is called to those gaps in one way or another. Generally, as Jean Ricardou points out in his study of narrative in the *nouveau roman*, these gaps are dissimulated in such a way as to maintain an appearance of continuity:

Passer d'une séquence à l'autre, c'est traiter le hiatus qui les sépare. Cette lacune, le texte peut la travailler de deux manières: en la formulant, en la passant sous silence. En chaque cas, l'effet
est paradoxal. Formuler le hiatus, c'est moins le montrer que l'escamoter. Si fréquente, la formule "huit jours après" semble insister, en l'évaluant, sur la fissure qui sépare deux séquences; mais, en fait, tout son travail consiste à remplir le vide en décrivant l'intervalle, à donner une substance à la béance. Bref a substituer une arche à un abîme: c'est une procédure de continuité. Passer le hiatus sous silence, c'est moins l'escamoter que l'accuser. Loin de recevoir entre elles le tampon de quelques mots intermédiaires, les deux séquences jointes restent séparées par un vide abrupt que le texte ne franchit qu'en les entrechoquant: c'est une procédure de discontinuité.\textsuperscript{12}

Ricardou's comments have something to tell us, not only about fragmentary narrative but also about fragmented narrative, for in both cases, the presence or absence of transitional or connecting elements is vital. In a fragmentary narrative, the absence of the conventional formula "Huit jours après", or its equivalent, means that the gap is left visible, the incompleteness declared. In the fragmented narrative, the absence of a transitional phrase creates discontinuity in place of the expected continuity of narrative. Where the conventional narrative bridges gaps with a convenient formula of one kind or another, the fragmented narrative, on the contrary, juxtaposes sequences without benefit of transitional or connecting elements — connecting elements of a conventional kind, that is to say, for the fragmented text has its own kind of connections that must be sought by the reader. The principal effect of the lack of overt transitions is that each sequence remains isolated and disconnected, an individual fragment instead of a link in a narrative chain.

The notion of fragmentedness is indeed best grasped by contrast with the continuity that the reader is accustomed to find in narrative, a continuity that, according to Roland Barthes, is an essential feature of all conventional texts:

Le Livre (traditionnel) est un objet qui enchaîne, développe, file et coule, bref à la plus profonde horreur du vide.
Barthes is writing here about one of the most fragmented of contemporary works — Michel Butor's *Mobile* — and attempting to explain the generally negative reaction of critics and public alike by the fact that it infringes the norm of continuity. If lack of continuity is thought to disconcert the reader in a work such as *Mobile*, which does not bear the title of "roman" but of "étude pour une représentation des Etats-Unis", how much more disorienting it will be in a narrative work — "cette grande catégorie du continu . . . le récit".

Narration in its widest sense, however, is not inherently continuous. In everyday life, the continuity of the informal accounts we give or receive of events is affected by a variety of factors. Emotion, memory lapses, listener reaction or interruption and so forth, can all undermine continuity to a greater or lesser degree. Narrative in the formal sense, however, is expected to offer a high degree of continuity and various principles and conventions serve this aim. The novelist may, of course, for the sake of realism, exploit the discontinuity of the informal account, but the conventional novel, on the whole, conforms to the principle of narrative continuity.

Continuity in the novel is derived in large part from the conventions of narration, but also, as we shall see later, from the material nature of the book itself, from the linear sequence of the text. The fragmented narrative may disrupt continuity on both those levels.

The principle of narration that governs most novels may be characterized as the progressive unfolding by a narrator of a series of causally and chronologically connected incidents. Observance of time sequence would thus seem to be an essential component of narrative continuity. To this
might be added a certain degree of continuity in narrative voice or perspective and in narrative subject. Significant departure from any of these sources of continuity may lead to fragmentation of the narrative.

iii. Time-sequence and fragmentation

Interference with time-sequence, because it is so fundamental to narrative, is the most likely to bring about narrative fragmentation. Naturally, observance of time-sequence does not preclude flashback or anticipation, which can easily be integrated into the progressive unfolding of events. Flashback, in fact, has been so widely used in cinema as a narrative method that it has come to seem the most conventional of devices. But when temporal sequence is seriously disrupted, the narrative is split into disconnected fragments of time that the reader must reassemble like a jigsaw. The systematic disordering of chronology is one of the principal techniques of fragmentation in the novels of Claude Simon's central period, as it is in the work of many other twentieth century novelists including that of Faulkner, whose writing has been one of the most marked influences upon Simon.14

iv. Narrative subject and fragmentation

Traditional narrative frequently includes the parallel narration of one or more sub-plots and may contain mini-narratives within the main one. Digression and commentary may also interrupt the unfolding of events, but continuity is not broken when these additional elements are well integrated with the main subject (each episode being brought to an appropriate juncture before another one commences, temporal indications — "Meanwhile", etc. — to show their position in the overall time scheme, and so forth).
One does not think of *War and Peace* as a fragmented novel, even though it moves from drawing-room to battlefield, from Pierre to Andrew, Natasha to Princess Mary, but a multiplicity of different narrative subjects will fragment the novel if procedures that ensure integration and continuity are absent. The contrast between the conventional use of parallel narratives and the fragmenting effect of multiple narratives has been made by Jean Ricardou:

As Ricardou shows, the multiplication of narrative series makes the narrative unstable, but even the alternation of two narratives, when it is done without the conventional techniques that ensure continuity, can fragment the narrative, as indeed it does in all the novels of the central period but especially in *Le Palace* as we shall see later on.

v. **Narrative voice and fragmentation**

Just as sub-plots or digression do not necessarily destroy narrative continuity, so the presence of more than one narrator does not inevitably fragment the narration. There may be narration within narration, for instance, as in *Manon Lescaut* or *Wuthering Heights*, or a principal narrator may be temporarily replaced by another who has particular knowledge of
certain events. The progression of the narrative is not thereby made discontinuous or disconnected, but a multi-voice narration will almost certainly fragment the narrative, whether each voice is limited to a self-contained section of the whole as in The Sound and the Fury, or whether they are interwoven in passages that are themselves fragmentary, as in Claude Mauriac's Le Dîner en ville, composed of the intermingled conversations and interior monologues of eight dinner guests, or Uwe Johnson's Speculations about Jakob which also interweaves several voices. Although, in the novels of the central period, Claude Simon has not used a multi-voice or multi-perspective narration of this kind, there is in each one, as we shall see, a doubling of voice or perspective that breaks the unity of the narration and adds to the overall fragmentedness of the text.

Thus, the continuity of the narrative may be disrupted through systematic interruption or disordering of its time-sequence and also through the multiplying of subject or voice, which, in each case, depending on the degree to which procedures of transition and integration are absent, may bring about its fragmentation. It is not necessary, however, that continuity be broken in all these areas for a narrative to be fragmented. Le Dîner en ville, for example, observes the unities of time, place and subject but is fragmented by its multi-voice narration. La Jalousie has a remarkable continuity of perspective and subject, but a disrupted time-sequence which fragments it.

There is still to be considered one more source of continuity in the novel, which is derived from the sequential nature of the text. The writer of a fragmented work may either accept textual sequence, in which case there will be an interesting divergence between text and narrative,
or manipulate the text in various ways to make it reflect the fragmentation of the narrative.

vi. Textual sequence

The fact that one line follows the next and that pages are in a bound and numbered sequence, imparts a material continuity to the novel that few novelists have as yet tried to break in any radical way. Marc Saporta's Composition no I -- an unbound and unnumbered collection of fragments that can be read in any order of the reader's choosing -- is an interesting example of an attempt to escape from the confines of the book as we know it. A work by a contemporary Latin-American novelist, Julio Cortázar's Hopscotch, can, the novelist informs us, be read in different sequences of chapters, each of which will modify the reader's perception of events. But most novels, however innovative their form, are still printed in a traditional manner.

With a conventional novel, the reader expects to progress steadily from start to finish. Chapters, although they serve primarily compositional ends, also provide convenient halting-points along the route. Division into chapters does not create a felt discontinuity, in part perhaps because they are accepted as a convention like paragraphs and punctuation, but mainly because of the procedures of transition and integration that ensure continuity between them. Thus, although there is some material discontinuity in the conventional novel, it is part of what might be called the rhythm of reading and does not in any way disorient the reader.

Some theorists would maintain that the sequential nature of the book is inescapable, not only because of the established conventions of book production, but because reading itself is an inherently sequential process. Yet Saporta's example, successful or not, is an indication of
how far this fixed pattern can be broken, in a way that profoundly affects the reading process as well as the appearance of a text. Without even departing from the standard bound format, there are, as Michel Butor has described in "Le livre comme objet", many ways in which the writer can manipulate the text to affect the nature of the reading process: lists, marginal notes, italics, broken lines of print or isolated words, repetition or reprise, all arrest or divert the eye in its left to right, top to bottom progress through the text.  

The sequential process of reading has long been undermined by the modern novel. As Hugh Kenner has pointed out, a novel like Ulysses has broken with the traditional narrative convention that we are listening to the telling of a tale and that the written book is a record of that telling. The text of Ulysses, he says:

... is not organized in memory and unfolded in time, but both organized and unfolded in what we may call technological space: on printed pages for which it was designed from the beginning. The reader explores its discontinuous surface at whatever pace he likes; he makes marginal notes; he turns back whenever he chooses to an earlier page, without destroying the continuity of something that does not press on, but will wait until he resumes.  

One is indeed obliged to do so, by a work as complex as Ulysses, which necessitates a constant turning back to search for connections, or to reread a passage only now fully comprehensible in the light of what has followed. The exact sequence of the text is soon overlaid by new combinations of its elements in the reader's memory. A novel like Histoire is built on the presupposition that this is how we read now, and takes for granted this kind of effort on the part of the reader. Its multiple connections depend on the reader's ability to move back and forth in the text.

Even if the linear sequence of the text may be inescapable on the
word by word, line by line progression of the eye (though Butor has shown how this can be changed), there are still a number of ways in which the text may be manipulated to make it reflect the fragmentation of the narrative.

Most obviously, the text may be broken up into typographically delineated fragments: individual words or phrases isolated on an otherwise empty line, or blocks of prose distributed unevenly within the space of a page instead of running back and forth between the usual margins, as in Mobile. Claude Simon has not explored these possibilities to the same degree as Butor, but his use of broken lines of dialogue without quotation marks or the usual "dit-il", gives many pages of his novels a fragmentary appearance. The orthodox paragraph may be turned into a fragment by the use of punctuation that marks discontinuity and incompleteness (suspension points, for instance), or by the absence of punctuation — no capital letters at the beginning or full stop at the end — a frequent device in Simon's writing. The insertion of quotations, of headlines or slogans, particularly if another type-face or a foreign language are used — also produce a visible fragmentation of the page, that Simon frequently exploits.

On the other hand, the novelist may choose to accept the linear sequence of the text and to create a productive tension between its continuity and the discontinuity of the narrative. Thus, a text may appear continuous, without chapters or even paragraphs, as is the case in Les Corps conducteurs, but in fact be composed of discontinuous sequences with no conventional connection between them whatsoever. This procedure, systematic in Simon's later novels, is also to be found in the novels of the central period. A narrative switch to a new episode may take place
within a paragraph or in mid-sentence even, with no punctuation or break in the text to indicate that it has occurred. The text will thus appear continuous and even the language may temporarily dissimulate the switch, as we shall see in *La Route des Flandres*. Thus, there is created a tension between an apparent continuity and an actual discontinuity, a discrepancy between text and narrative, which significantly affects the reading, since the reader must be constantly on the look-out for unannounced breaks. The linear sequence of the text is thereby revealed as deceptive and continuity is once again undermined.

vii. Language and fragmentation

In all this, the role of language itself, in contributing to or contrasting with the fragmentation of the narrative, has been neglected. Although the purpose of this study, as stated in the introduction, is to examine what Ricardou has called "la fragmentation majeure" and not the minor breaks within sequences brought about by verbal mechanisms, the role of language cannot be totally overlooked.

Briefly, then, it can be seen that the disruption of normal syntax, the interruptions constituted by parentheses or alternatives, the use of broken dialogue, disconnected sentences, fragmentary words or phrases, whether they represent the flow of consciousness or the disjointed monologue of a narrator, are all means of breaking the continuity of the text and as such they may contribute significantly to the general fragmentation of a narrative. Again, it should be stressed that this is not an essential feature of the fragmented text: the language may be formal, coherent and ordered, yet the narrative highly fragmented, as in *La Jalousie* or in Simon's later novels. In the novels of the central
period, of course, the character of the language is an important element in the overall fragmentedness of each work, constituting the pretext for, when it is not the actual cause of many of the breaks in the narrative, whether through the divagations of an oral narration or through the use of association and other mainly verbal mechanisms of transfer.

II. Fragmented composition and its effects

The fragmented narrative, as we have seen, is one in which the usual sources of continuity (narrative, textual or syntactical) are disrupted to a greater or lesser degree and which lacks the customary causal or temporal connections between sequences. We have examined in broad outline, some of the ways in which narrative fragmentation comes about and how the fragmented narrative differs from the conventional narrative. What we still lack is a general description of the alternative principles of organization that govern the fragmented novel, before we can consider its effects.

The fragmented narrative is constructed according to what Sharon Spencer, in her book on the "architectonic" novel, has called the principle of juxtaposition: that is "the setting beside one another without connectives of units of prose that can vary in length from a few words to several pages." Spencer's definition of juxtaposition can be extended to include the alternation or interweaving of two or more fragmented sequences, a frequent compositional pattern in the novels of the central period.

Unlike chronological narration, which is so standard as to seem self-evident and therefore of no especial significance, juxtaposition is a conspicuous mode of organization. In the first place, it sets difficulties in the way of the reader, forcing one to look for the connections between fragments. This, in turn, focuses attention on the composition as a whole
because the reasons for the overall order of the fragments are not self-evident as they are with time-sequence. The composition itself, therefore, is perceived as significant and a potential source of meaning, to a degree that is far less frequently found in conventional narrative.

Time-sequence is almost always disrupted in the fragmented novel but even if it were not, if the narrative consisted of fragments juxtaposed in chronological order, the absence of conventional transitions and the disorienting effect of the fragmentation would tend to put the emphasis on other connections between fragments than their relation in time. As in a personal journal, the selection of these particular fragments of reality out of all the possible ones is generally more significant than the fact that they happened in a certain order.

But when time-sequence is disrupted, as in the novels of Simon's central period, the full potential of the principle of juxtaposition can then be realized. As Ricardou has remarked, once chronology is no longer the principal structuring device, other more productive possibilities of ordering the events of the narrative emerge:

... la déchronologie joue un rôle capital. Libérées de la pure succession chronologique qui les eût liés par une seule de leurs faces, les événements sont rapprochés de toutes les manières, mis en présence selon une sorte de présent-éternel, où l'ordre chronologique le cède à un ordre morphologique. 19

With chronology no longer the organizing principle, the events of the narrative can be ordered according to thematic or formal imperatives. Instead of the single connection of time, a multiplicity of connections can be made.

There is, of course, still a kind of chronology in effect: not that of the order of events in time but that of their occurrence in the text. But this order is less binding. For when narrative elements are arranged
according to thematic or formal principles, a constant process of re-ordering takes place as their multiple connections are perceived by the reader. The text becomes a mobile in which the relation of each part to the others is continually changing in the course of reading. The more fragmented the text, the greater the possibility of re-ordering it, of discovering new connections and relations among its elements. Some of these connections will be clearly indicated by the text, others only latent, dependent on an individual reading for realization.

The flexibility gained by the abandonment of conventional principles of narrative continuity opens up a wealth of possibilities. Not only are there the formal and thematic effects to be achieved through juxtaposition on the minor scale and the possibility, on the major scale, of organizing the elements of the work to form a spatial design or a rhythmic composition. The techniques of juxtaposition may also be used to render the simultaneity of events or mental states or to create a simultaneous perception of separated elements in the reader's mind. Fragmentation can revitalize familiar forms and renew traditional functions of the novel. Finally, the fragmented text both requires and educates a higher response in the reader, transforming "a process of passive recreation into one of active re-creation".

Each of these aspects of fragmented composition could well occupy a chapter in itself. But since the purpose of this account of fragmentation in the novel is not to cover all its possibilities in depth but merely to provide a context in which the work of Claude Simon can be better understood and valued, they can only be dealt with in broad outline. The detail will come in the analysis of the novels themselves, which offer a wide range of types and uses of fragmentation. In the meantime, the
principal effects of fragmented composition already mentioned can be briefly enlarged upon.

1. Fragmentation as a technique of defamiliarization

One of the simplest effects of narrative fragmentation is that the main traditional function of the novel -- that of telling a story -- is revitalized. In the article mentioned earlier, Eric S. Rabkin extends the Russian Formalist Shklovsky's notion of plot as defamiliarized story to suggest that the aim of many narrative techniques, including fragmentation, has been to revitalize familiar literary forms, a particularly strong imperative for writers in the twentieth century. Put quite simply, telling a familiar tale (of young love frustrated, of the forming of an artist or leader, or of the rise and decline of a family, and other traditional subjects of the novel), in an unexpected or difficult manner, renews its interest.

The same might be said with relation to another traditional function of the novel -- the portrayal of character. If the reader's perception of a character grows out of the piecing together of fragments, not only might it bear a closer resemblance to the way in which others are perceived in real life, but its interest will be considerably enhanced by the more complex process of apprehension and interpretation involved.

Finally, could it not be said that fragmentation, by defamiliarizing the narrative process, renews not only that particular instance of it, but also our perception of the whole genre? The unusualness of the form must cause the reader to give some general thought to the nature of narrative, so that one's pre-conceived ideas are re-examined and the idea of the novel itself revitalized. This has clearly been the effect not only of
the great experiments in the novel form of the twenties but also of the
nouveau roman and other contemporary experiments, in which fragmentation
is one of the principal, though by no means the only, techniques of
defamiliarization.

ii. Juxtaposition and the production of meaning

In "The Art of Stillness", Roger Shattuck has distinguished between
two types of juxtaposition, which he calls classical and romantic.22
"Classical" juxtaposition, in his definition, is the combination of
homogeneous elements; "romantic" juxtaposition is the combining of
heterogeneous elements. "Classical" juxtaposition will produce effects
of repetition and variation, of circular movement — one thinks of La
Jalousie, with its recurring descriptions of the same few scenes marked by
minor variations. "Romantic" juxtaposition, which combines dissimilar ele­
ments, works with conflict, contrast, incongruity even, to produce effects
with a strong emotional impact. As we shall see, there is a predominance
of "romantic" juxtaposition in the work of Claude Simon.

Shattuck's definition of "romantic" juxtaposition, as Sharon Spencer
points out,23 bears a strong resemblance to the concept of montage, developed
by the Soviet film maker, Sergei Eisenstein, which is based on the notion
of conflict or collision — "The conflict of two pieces in opposition to
each other".24 From the collision of two opposed depictive shots,
Eisenstein asserted, arises a concept, which is not expressed by either one
of them but emerges solely from their juxtaposition. This could equally
well apply to the effect of juxtaposition in the fragmented text. Combin­
atons of fragments or juxtaposed sequences, often of vastly different
content (though not necessarily as conflicting as Eisenstein insists),
produce a meaning that is not expressed in any one of them and derives solely from their combination. Because juxtaposition, like montage, eliminates connections and explanations, it requires the reader's active participation, as Spencer indicates in the following passage:

The meanings... are not in the words themselves. They are in the interstices among the phrases and sentences; they are in the various relationships among the elements of the work, and they must be actively sought by the reader if they are to be found. He must move quickly among the various elements in an attempt to supply relationships that are barely implied... The reader, if he wishes truly to enter into the experience of the book, must transfer to his apprehension of the novel the same high sensitivity and alertness that he has been accustomed to bring to the reading of poetry.25

The emergence of meaning in the fragmented text from the relations between juxtaposed elements is perfectly characterized here; the necessity of a highly concentrated reading if it is to be realized is a subject to which we will return later.

The fragmented novel, in addition to the usual modes of conveying theme and meaning, possesses in the technique of juxtaposition a method all the more subtle because it does not employ explicit statement. Simon spoke at Cerisy in 1971 of suppressing the word "comme" in the text in order to make metaphor more concrete by a direct juxtaposition of two images, but this was in some ways what he had been doing all along through his narrative technique, as we shall see.26

iii. Fragmentation and the rendering of simultaneity

The example of the character in Dorothy Richardson's twelve-part novel Pilgrimage, listening to Miriam read aloud "thinking of the reader as well as of what was read and with her own thoughts running along independently", has been used by many critics to illustrate the problems of rendering simultaneity. In Time and the Novel, A.A. Mendilow has said:
To convey this temporal multiplicity in the linear progression of language is the main problem of the modern novelist. Fragmentation, through its disruption of the linear progression of language, text and narrative, prepares the way for the creation of effects of simultaneity that might seem impossible within the restrictions of a sequential reading. Not only does it serve the obvious realist function indicated by Mendilow, conveying the multiplicity of events, external or mental, that take place in an instant of time, or the overlapping of past and present in the mind; it also serves a thematic role by making possible the simultaneous perception by the reader of elements that are non-contemporaneous in the narrative, in order that resemblances or contrasts may be intuitively grasped through juxtaposition rather than explicitly stated.

The suggestion of simultaneity may be achieved by a variety of devices: the juxtaposition of fragments brief enough to be held together by the eye and the reading memory, or the breaking of syntax to link two images that would normally be in separate clauses and therefore sequential; the interweaving of fragmented sequences so that the events they describe are tightly intermingled; the overlapping or superimposition of one sequence upon another through the use of identical words so that momentarily the reader cannot tell which is being narrated. All these techniques will be fully illustrated in the analysis of Simon's novels.

While it is true that sequence can never be entirely eluded, it is astonishing to what degree the novel can achieve the illusion of simultaneity. The effect in the text is not unlike that produced by photographs which superimpose the successive phases of an action, or by a painting like Duchamp's *Nude descending a staircase*, where a whole sequence is perceived globally and simultaneously.
This leads us to the most extended kind of simultaneity which, in the view of some critics, is the central aim of the fragmented novel: the simultaneous perception of all its elements, its apprehension as totality and not sequence, by the reader. This extended conception of simultaneity has been given the name of spatial form.

iv. Fragmentation and spatial form

Spatial form has been defined in a recent article as:

"... a form that grows out of the writer's attempt to negate the temporal principle inherent in language and to force apprehension of his work as a total "thing" in a moment of time rather than as a sequence of things."  

The theory of spatial form in the novel was originally formulated by Joseph Frank in an article published in the *Sewanee Review* in 1945, but it has been the subject of renewed critical interest in the last few years. Proceeding from Ezra Pound's definition of the image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time", Frank attempted, through analysis of Joyce, Proust and others, to show that in the modern novel as well as in modern poetry, the meaning of the work does not depend on sequence, on temporal relations, but on the perception of other relations between disconnected elements, which must be juxtaposed and perceived simultaneously for full understanding. Of writers like Eliot, Pound, Proust and Joyce, he wrote:

All these writers ideally intend the reader to apprehend their works spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence.

An excellent characterization of spatial form is to be found in Gerard Genette's essay "La littérature et l'espace". Writing of Proust, Genette says that he asked of the reader an attentiveness to:

"... ce qu'il appelait le caractère "télescopique" de son ouvrage,"
c'est-à-dire aux relations à longue portée qui s'établissent entre des épisodes très éloignés dans la continuité temporelle d'une lecture linéaire (mais singulièrement proches, remarquons-le, dans l'espace écrit, dans l'épaisseur paginale du volume), et qui exigent pour être considérés une sorte de perception simultanée de l'unité totale de l'œuvre, unité qui ne réside pas seulement dans des rapports horizontaux de voisinage et de succession, mais aussi dans des rapports qu'on peut dire verticaux ou transversaux, de ces effets d'attente, de rappel, de réponse, de symétrie, de perspective, au nom desquels Proust comparait lui-même son oeuvre à une cathédrale. Lire comme il faut lire de telles œuvres (en est-il d'autres?) c'est seulement relire, c'est toujours déjà relire, parcourir sans cesse un livre dans tous ses sens, toutes ses directions, toutes ses dimensions.  

Like Frank, who maintained that Joyce cannot be read, only re-read, since knowledge of the whole is essential to the full understanding of any part, Genette makes the important point that reading is not a straightforward sequential process with such works but must involve a constant reference back and forth for all the relationships of the work to be grasped. The Proustian "moment privilégié", when past and present are simultaneously perceived, could be taken as an instance of what techniques of spatialization aim at, just as the ten Albertines the narrator sees as he leans forward to kiss her cheek are paralleled by the multiple images of the subject that the fragmented text presents to the reader.  

The notion of spatial form is still controversial, however, and some critics have argued that, since a text is inherently sequential in nature, as is the process of reading, the possibility of apprehending the whole work in an instant of time is illusory. Frank's own reply to one such critic is to be found in an end-note to the reprint of the original article in his later book, The Widening Gyre, where he says:  

His major objection is that, since reading is a time-act, the achievement of spatial form is really a physical impossibility. I could not agree more. But this has not stopped modern writers from working out techniques to achieve the impossible -- as much as possible.  

Some of the difficulty originates with the term "spatial" itself, which
Frank no doubt adopted because the starting point of his article was Lessing’s distinction in the *Laocoon* between form in literature and form in the plastic arts; the one necessarily sequential, according to Lessing, because of the nature of language, the other spatial, that is, based on the relation of objects in space at a given moment in time. In trying to show that modern poems and novels aim at a global and simultaneous perception of their subject, analogous to that of a painting or sculpture, Frank took over the vocabulary of spatiality, when what he is really talking about (simultaneity replacing sequentiality) is still, properly speaking, a temporal rather than a spatial phenomenon.

Nonetheless, the idea of spatial form as Frank and others have applied it to modern literature, is illuminating, despite the inappropriateness of the term, which is now widespread enough, in any case, to be generally understood. It is particularly apposite to the novels of Claude Simon, who has spoken on many occasions of the linearity of language as an obstacle to be overcome in the pursuit of simultaneity. In an interview published in 1969, he talked of the problem a writer faces in description, obliged to set down in sequence perceptions that are in reality simultaneous:

... j’enumerate dans une duree, je suis en train de decomposer en petits morceaux cette chose qui dans ma perception est un tout, apprehendé en fait en une fraction de seconde. C’est le probleme qui se pose tout le temps dans l’ecriture. Le temps romanesque ne peut donc pas etre lineaire, collé -- un fil sur lequel les evénements viennent se placer les uns apres les autres comme dans le temps des horloges; mais au contraire une sorte d’englobant, une sorte de gelatine ou de materie plastique transparente dans laquelle tous les elements du roman sont enserrés et dans laquelle ils coexistent, simultanément.36

In this image of the novel’s contents embedded in transparent plastic and therefore all simultaneously visible, Simon has provided us, as he so often does in the case of critical concepts, with an expressive illustration of spatial form.
As we will see when we come to look at the individual novels, the whole thrust of their composition, in its fragmentation of narrative and destruction of chronology, is towards a simultaneous perception of all the elements of the work, whose full meaning can only be grasped through this global realization.

v. Fragmentation and formal design

The fragmented work lends itself to the creation of formal design by the flexibility which results from the absence of conventional structure and continuity. Its elements could conceivably be left in the exact order in which they were written, reassembled in any order of the novelist's choosing, or, on the contrary, written to fit into a pre-established structure. Claude Simon has given a fascinating account of the "montage" of La Route des Flandres, which, he says he composed like a picture, with a different colour accorded to each character and theme:

A un moment donné, en effet, j'avais écrit des fragments mais ça ne faisait pas un livre. Alors, j'ai inscrit, chaque fois sur une ligne, un petit résumé de ce qu'il y avait dans chaque page et, en face, j'ai placé la couleur correspondante, puis j'ai punaisé l'ensemble sur les murs de mon bureau et alors je me suis demandé s'il ne fallait pas remettre un peu de bleu par ici, un peu de vert par là, un peu de rouge ailleurs, pour que ça s'équilibre. Ce qu'il y a d'intéressant, c'est que j'ai "fabriqué" certains passages parce qu'il manquait un peu de vert ou un peu de rose à tel ou tel endroit.37

Other novelists employ a variety of compositional methods, some of which, in the case of the French new novelists, are to be found, with accompanying documentation of great interest (original diagrams and graphic designs), in Jean Ricardou's book Le nouveau roman.

While the fragmented work lends itself to formal organization, it is also clear that it requires it, if it is not to become what Mendilow, writing of the danger of formlessness in modern psychological fiction, calls
"an unorganized catalogue of the ingredients of personality", or what Simon, describing the Surrealists' experiments with automatic writing, has termed a succession of parentheses opened but never closed. Whether the fragmented text is an evocation of inner life or an exploration of the productive possibilities of language (or a representation of a place or society, or any of the other ends for which fragmented narrative has been used), it requires some controlling design to give it artistic integrity or to bind together its multiple elements in one vision.

The ways in which this has been achieved are innumerable. It may be done through the imposition of a mythical or archetypal pattern, as in Ulysses. The creation of effects of symmetry and parallelism, like the predominance of triple elements in La Route des Flandres, for instance, can be a sufficient source of order in itself or be carried to a degree as rigorous as that of a musical composition -- the length of fragments strictly controlled, their development or repetition ordered according to a mathematical sequence. It may even, as Mendilow points out, be "organized in the formal structures of musique -- the sonata, the symphony, the canon, the fugue and so forth". While such rigour in composition can become monotonous, it can also create a subtle rhythm in the reading, a sense that nothing in the work is gratuitous, but that everything has its place in the production of a coherent and unified whole.

Quite frequently, the novelist will describe the composition of the work in terms of a spatial image -- Proust's cathedral, for example, or the clover leaf that Simon refers to as the controlling design of La Route. Such images, of course, are simply metaphors for design, since the book cannot actually take the form of a cathedral's ground plan or a leaf. It is virtually impossible for the reader to perceive this kind of design
unaided — without prior information, that is, or indications in the text such as sub-headings. Certain simpler and more abstract spatial designs, like the circular or spiral effects of *Le Palace*, are undoubtedly discernible by the reader, however. Whether the effects are apparent to the reader or not, it is an interesting fact that a novelist may conceive of form, not only in sequential terms such as those of music, but also in spatial terms, thus corroborating Frank's theory that the modern novel tends towards spatial form.

Needless to say, formal design of whatever kind, is not limited to the fragmented novel, but is to be found in more traditional texts as well. There is a kind of novel, however, in which structure is more than merely one among the artistic problems the novelist must solve. Sharon Spencer has given the name "architectonic" to those novels of which structure, rather than theme, character or plot, is the essential element:

(Their) goal is the evocation of the illusion of a spatial entity, either representational or abstract, constructed from prose fragments of diverse types and lengths and arranged by means of the principle of juxtaposition so as to include a comprehensive view of the book's subject. The "truth" of the total vision of such a novel is a composite truth obtained from the reader's apprehension of a great many relationships among the fragments that make up the book's totality.40

The similarities between the fragmented novel, as I have defined it, and Spencer's conception of the "architectonic" novel are obvious, but while fragmentation is an essential characteristic of the "architectonic" novel, clearly not all fragmented novels are necessarily "architectonic" — the stream of consciousness novel, for instance. The architectonic novel represents the fullest realization of the potential of the fragmented text, for what fragmentation has to offer above all is the possibility of a composition unhampered by the constraints of chronology, causality or
realism, a composition therefore which may achieve the highest degree of
significance and formal perfection.*

vi. Fragmented narrative and the reader's response

It is clear that the kind of texts we have been considering require
an active reading. They are not for the reader who passively follows
the unfolding of a narrative, interested mainly in what happens next.
Obviously, many other kinds of novel require an active reading for their
full significance to be realized. The difference is that in the case of
a fragmented narrative, like that of The Sound and the Fury or La Bataille
de Pharsale, active participation is necessary if the reader is to make
any sense of the work at all, let alone discover its multiple connections
and meanings.

In the passage quoted earlier, Ricardou comments that repeated breaks
in the narrative make the reader "singulièrement vulnérable aux impacts
du similaire et du répétitif", as he watches for the return of an interrupted
sequence. In other words, the difficulty of following such a narrative
makes for a more perceptive reading, a particular attentiveness to anything
that might connect fragments. This observation is developed further by
Wolfgang Iser, who has concentrated on the reading process itself. In his
view, too, the very breaks in the narrative which cause difficulty are
ultimately responsible for the more dynamic reading necessary to overcome
the difficulty, for by forcing the reader to search for the connections

*Although Spencer does not deal with Simon's novels in her study of the
architectonic novel, he is mentioned in the introduction as one of the
writers whose work might have been included. The relevance of Spencer's
study to his novels which are both fragmented and spatial, is obvious
and has provided some of the inspiration for my own approach.
between fragments, they develop his connection-making capacity.

Iser has drawn a suggestive picture of this process in his essay "The reading process: a phenomenological approach". He is not only dealing with fragmented narrative, since in his view, all narrative contains gaps and it is in the filling of those gaps that the reader's creative participation is engaged:

... whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections -- for filling in the gaps left by the text itself.

For this reason, one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed. By making his decision he implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text; at the same time it is this very inexhaustibility that forces him to make his decision. With 'traditional' texts this process was more or less unconscious, but modern texts frequently exploit it quite deliberately. They are often so fragmentary that one's attention is almost exclusively occupied with the search for connections between the fragments; the object of this is not to complicate the 'spectrum' of connections so much as to make us aware of our own capacity for providing links.

Iser goes on to develop this view that the function of fragmented narrative in the modern novel is to make the reader more aware of the activity of his perceptual and interpretative faculties in general, of the tendency to link things together in consistent patterns which characterizes his apprehension of reality. Iser believes that the awareness of the reading process which the modern fragmented text seeks to produce can thus illuminate basic patterns of experience.

Iser's wider hypothesis, though appealing, would be very difficult to test. Whether or not it is true, however, it is certainly the case that the fragmented text not only develops the reader's capacity to perceive connections and patterns, but also makes one more conscious of the operation of this faculty in reading and of its appropriateness as a response to a
text. It is a commonplace that one's reading or re-reading of traditional or more conventional narratives is enhanced by the experience of the fragmented text. By drawing attention as it does, to its own techniques and creative mechanisms, it stimulates reflection on the process of writing and the relation of fiction to reality.

This is particularly true of composition. In the enforced search for connections between fragments, in the expectancy of interruption and reprise, the reader cannot but become more aware of composition. The composition of the conventional novel is either self-evident -- a series of events in chronological order -- or, if the novelist has been concerned with the creation of a more significant pattern, may easily be overlooked by the reader not attuned to the perception of form in narrative. The fragmented novel, however, by its infringement of the norm of continuity, forces the reader to notice that its composition is significant, is a source of meaning in itself.

Thus, the fragmented novel educates a higher or more complete response on the part of the reader than the "And then? What next?" of E.M. Forster's caricature -- or at least in those readers who do not declare it unreadable and give up in disgust.

To the reader willing to overcome the initial difficulty, the fragmented text can be the source of a peculiarly satisfying experience, because it requires his creative participation. This experience can best be summed up in the words of Sergei Eisenstein. Writing of montage, the cinematic equivalent of the juxtaposition of fragments in narrative, Eisenstein said:

And now we can say that it is precisely the montage principle, as distinguished from that of representation, which obliges spectators themselves to create and the montage principle, by this means, achieves that great power of inner creative excitement in the spectator which distinguishes an emotionally exciting work from one that stops without going further than giving information or recording events.
CHAPTER II

THE THEME OF FRAGMENTARY VISION AND THE CONCEPTION
OF A FRAGMENTED NARRATIVE IN "LE VENT"

Une technique romanesque renvoie toujours à la métaphysique du romancier.

(Sartre)

La donnée première, on pourrait dire la catastrophe initiale, pour Simon, c'est la fragmentation généralisée de l'Être. Le monde est perçu comme éclaté; la perception est une brève hallucination rétinienne: des impressions, surgies dans un demi-éclair de conscience, se pressent, sans s'organiser, se suivent, sans se relier. La forme du vécu, c'est un informe conglomérat d'instants purs . . . .

(Serge Doubrovsky, "Notes sur la genèse d'une écriture", Entretiens.)

Le monde extérieur vient s'inscrire en nous sous la forme de fragments. Nous sommes absolument incapables de saisir une continuité.

(Claude Simon)

Nous n'avons de l'univers que des visions informes, fragmentées et que nous complétons par des associations d'idées arbitraires, créatrices de dangereuses suggestions.

(Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu)

In an answer to one of Ludovic Janvier's questions in Entretiens, Simon situates the first phase of his development as a writer in the group of novels from Le Tricheur to Le Vent, with the succeeding novel L'Herbe differing significantly from the earlier ones, marking the fact that a corner has been turned. He describes his second book, Gulliver, as an attempt to write a novel "de facture traditionnelle".
Le Vent seems to mark the culmination of that period of reflection, both in its implied criticism of the conventional novel and in its suggestion of the basis for a new narrative method. It is worth examining in some detail, since the conception of fragmented narrative it contains, though not successfully realized in the novel itself, foreshadows and explains the composition of the novels of the middle period.

I. The broken mirror: image of a narrative style

From the very outset (the second page of the book), Le Vent states its intended principle of composition:

... et maintenant, maintenant que tout est fini, tenter de rapporter, de reconstituer ce qui s'est passé, c'est un peu comme si on essayait de recoller les débris dispersés, incomplets d'un miroir .... (p. 9)

The narrative thus promises to be fragmented, subject to constant question and possible rearrangement, a process of tentative reconstruction rather than a straightforward account. The elements of the story may be pieced together in any possible order. Whether it is intentional or not, the image of the mirror seems a clear allusion to the Stendhalian definition of the novel as "un miroir qui se promène sur une grande route". The fact that the mirror in Le Vent is shattered suggests that the realist conception of the novel as a reflection of reality has fallen to pieces. For the piecing together of events that the narrator proposes reflects his belief that reality is unknowable and that all we possess, even of events that have affected us personally, is:

... cette connaissance fragmentaire, incomplète, faite d'une addition de brèves images, elles-mêmes incomplètement appréhendées par la vision, de paroles, elles-mêmes mal saisies, de sensations,
elles-mêmes mal définies, et tout cela vague, plein de trous, de vides, auxquels l'imagination et une approximative logique s'efforçaient de remédier par une suite de hasardeuses déductions . . . . (p. 10)

Such a classically sceptical attitude towards the apprehension of reality must not only affect the presentation of events and character in the novel, but equally must lead to the creation of a type of narrative that will reflect both the uncertainty and the fragmentedness that are felt to mark our knowledge of reality. The image of the shattered mirror evokes two opposing types of narrative, for the assemblage of fragments in an uncertain and always contestable version of events that it proposes is in complete contrast to the conception of narrative implicit in the Stendhalian mirror on the road that it tacitly recalls. What the latter would seem to imply in terms of composition is a sense of the novel as a regular progression in a predetermined direction, an orderly accumulation of material from which will emerge an objective reflection of events, character and society. As things arise along its chosen course, so, and in that order, will it reflect them: a chronological narrative, in other words. But this orderly progression has been totally abolished by the image of the shattered mirror, with its suggestion of an entirely different attitude to composition as well as a different conception of the novel's relation to reality.

At the same time, as he reflects on the impossibility of a complete account of events, the narrator warns himself of the danger of imposing a logical framework on them, of giving them a false coherence:

... notre esprit, ou plutôt notre orgueil, nous enjoint sous peine de folie et en dépit de toute évidence de trouver à tout prix une suite logique de causes et d'effets là où tout ce que la raison parvient à voir, c'est cette errance, nous-mêmes ballottés de droite et de gauche, comme un bouchon à la dérive, sans direction, sans vue . . . (p. 10)

The word "logique", always pejorative in Simon's use of it, occurs three
times on this page, suggesting how dangerous a temptation it is felt to constitute. What it represents is a desire for coherence, a desire which leads to the search for causal explanations, to the attempt to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of events. But the coherence thus created is always artificial, an evasion of the disturbing and ungraspable confusion of existence — "cette errance . . . . comme un bouchon à la derve, sans direction sans vue". What this "logique" implies in terms of narrative composition is obviously the well constructed plot with all threads tied at the end, causality and motivation clearly established by a psychology of which convincingness is thought to be the chief merit. The notary whose words open the novel seems to represent the worst of that school, with his preference for simplistic explanations which reduce events and behaviour to what is immediately graspable and in accordance with common sense and conventional wisdom. It is precisely in opposition to this that the narrator envisages his reconstitution of those scattered fragments of knowledge which is all he or anyone can possess of events.

Within its first two pages, *Le Vent* has thus taken an epistemological stance — scepticism — which will continue to characterize the succeeding novels and, directly derived from it, the basis of a narrative structure — the assemblage of fragments — capable of preserving the confusion and incoherence of experience and offering only a tentative and partial account of events. Though we have to wait for the major novels of the middle period to see the creation of such a structure, *Le Vent* offers us its justification through its continuing reflection on the process of narration and the apprehension of reality.
II. The role of the narrator in "Le Vent"

The sceptical attitude clearly excludes the omniscient author/narrator, while it equally undermines the privileged status of a personal narration. How then is the role of the narrator perceived? The following passage provides an apt image:

... ces jours, ces heures inconnues hors desquelles il apparaissait à nos regards comme un acteur surgi de derrière un rideau, puis disparaissait de nouveau. -- parfois, je restais plus de quinze jours sans le voir --, réapparaissant à l'improviste (devenant entre temps quoi? éprouvant quoi?: ce que les ragots rapportèrent? ce que lui-même m'en raconta? ou crut pouvoir m'en raconter? ou put vouloir se rappeler? ou crut pouvoir se rappeler? ou simplement se rappela?), apparitions, ragots, souvenirs, récits, à travers quoi nous ne faisions qu'entrevoir (et de même lui pour les autres: Rose, l'enfant, le boxeur, le fâcheur congédié, son oncle, le notaire, Maurice?) une sorte de plesiosauroïque réalité reconstituée de brique et de broc à partir de deux vertèbres, un frontal, un demi-maxillaire et trois métacarpiens pêchés dans la grise vase du temps et assemblés au petit bonheur des goûts et prédilections de chacun... (pp.106-107)

The archaeological metaphor with which the passage ends, is akin to the earlier image of the shattered mirror: the narrator (like the other observers or actors in the events narrated) must piece together such fragments of the past as he can salvage or uncover, to arrive, at best, at a hypothetical version of reality in which conjecture plays a large part. The narrator is thus archeologist or (to take up the image of the sub-title -- "Tentative de restitution d'un retable baroque" -- restorer, a role emphasized by his actual calling: he is a history teacher writing a study of Romanesque chapels.

In evoking the various sources of information about the character's activities -- "apparitions, ragots, souvenirs, récits" -- each of which, even his own personal account, is biased and incomplete, the novelist seems to be moving towards a narrative method based on multiple points of view. The passage, like many others in Simon's work, is reminiscent of
Faulkner. But in fact, Simon has never really experimented with multiple points of view, though there is a constant thematic emphasis in his work on the distortions and limitations of the individual point of view.

What his novels do have in common with those of Faulkner with respect to narration is their emphasis on the role of conjecture and imaginative identification in the narrator's reconstitution of another life. What Louise does with the meagre facts of Tante Marie's existence in *L'Herbe*, Georges and Blum with the Reixach family legend, or the narrator of *Histoire* with what he knows of the lives of his mother and uncle, is closely related to Quentin and Shreve's mythologising of the Sutpen story in *Absalom! Absalom!* The degree to which this process of invention is highlighted, makes it the vehicle for reflection, not just on the novelist's own activity — the creation of fictions — but equally on the elements of such fictionalizing in our perception of others.*

The narrator of *Le Vent* is wryly aware of the elements of fiction in his perception of Montès:

Et au fur et à mesure qu'il me racontait la scène il me semblait maintenant la vivre mieux que lui-même, ou du moins pouvoir en reconstituer un schéma sinon conforme à ce qui avait réellement été, en tout cas à notre incorrigible besoin de raison. (p. 138)

He admits to having succumbed to the temptation he warned of at the beginning of his narrative: that of imposing a falsely logical order onto something fundamentally confused and incoherent. But in the phrase "il me

*A curiously personal light is thrown on this by the following statement taken from a 1962 interview given by Simon:

Comment voyons-nous les gens? Par de petites lucarnes, une heure, deux heures, trois heures par jour, mais le reste du temps, où sont-ils? Ils disparaissent dans de grands trous. On ne les voit plus. Qu'est-ce qu'ils font pendant tout ce temps? On tâche de meubler les vides par une espèce de ciment, d'histoire fabriquée qui se veut rassurante, mais qui, en fait, ne l'est pas du tout, qui finalement est désastreuse et affolante. Je ressens tout cela d'une façon violente et même cela m'obsède.3
semblait maintenant la vivre mieux que lui-même", we see the process of imaginative identification at work, a process constantly recalled by such narrative formulae as "il me semblait le voir" or "je pouvais l'imaginer".
The narrator's consciousness of his limited knowledge and his need to fall back on speculation and imaginings provides an interesting commentary on the narrative process itself. By creating the character of a highly self-conscious narrator, instead of presenting Montès' experience directly from the inside, Simon gave himself a vehicle for his reflection on narrative method, in addition, of course, to gaining the other benefits of detachment and perspective which that kind of narration affords. The slightly artificial and didactic tone of some of the narrator's remarks is, on the whole, outweighed by the interest of the reflection on the novel that they provide.

III. A phenomenological justification for fragmented narrative

As the novel develops, a continuing process of reflection on narrative structure takes place through the narrator's observations on how Montès appears to experience things or how he recounts his experience:

... (car ce ne fut que par bribes qu'il me raconta tout cela, et peu à peu, et non pas à proprement parler sous la forme d'un récit mais quand la mémoire de tel ou tel détail lui revenait, sans que l'on sût jamais exactement pourquoi -- si tant est que l'on sache jamais exactement ce qui fait ressurgir, intolérable et furieux, non pas le souvenir toujours rangé quelque part dans ce fourre-tout de la mémoire, mais abolissant le temps, la sensation elle-même, chair et matière, jalouse, impérieuse, obsédante) ... (p. 175)

This evocation of involuntary memory is characteristically less euphoric than in Proust and closer to the anguished obsessive memory -- "intolérable et furieux" -- of a Faulknerian character. In stressing the fragmentary and non-chronological nature of Montès' own account, Simon appears to be leading up to a narrative mode which would be truer to the way in which experience is recalled, one based on the vagaries of mental association and involuntary memory rather than on the chronology of events. He was not able to achieve it in Le Vent, which still adheres to a basically chronological sequence
and whose non-participant narrator has reorganized the confused account he has supposedly received. But in passages such as the one just quoted, Simon is laying the groundwork for the dechronologization of the narrative that will mark all the subsequent novels.

A particularly vivid contrast of two opposing conceptions of time forms part of that process of reflection on narrative and as it were, education of the reader:

... (celui-ci le temps non pas filiforme, comme ces brins tressés porteurs de noeuds dont se servent pour leurs messages les Indiens primitifs, conception d'une durée à une seule dimension le long de laquelle les événements-noeuds, le passé, le présent et l'avenir, se suivraient sans bousculade, sagement à la queue-leu-leu: mais au contraire (le temps) semblable à une sorte d'épais magma où l'instant serait comme le coup de bêche dans la sombre terre, mettant à nu l'indénombrable grouillement de vers) ... (p. 163)

Metaphor for a particular conception of time, the braided Indian messages also serve as an image of conventional narrative, which relates a series of events by means of an unsophisticated technique allowing of no more complexity than the order of events in time. The one-dimensional conception of time (and along with it chronological narration) is rejected in favour of that represented by the strange and striking image of the upturned clod of earth and its swarming population, which evokes the multiple elements, past and present, of a single instant of consciousness. The passage could well symbolize the difference between a conventional chronological narrative and one of Simon's later novels — *La Route des Flandres*, for instance, with its intricate composition evoking the chaotic present of consciousness where past and present are coiled inextricably round each other.

Another passage on time is concerned more particularly with the way in which Montès experiences it. For it is not merely that he recounts his experience in a fragmented manner — "par bribes ... quand la mémoire
de tel ou tel détail lui revenait" — but that the experience itself is fragmented:

Non, ce n'était pas le fait de son récit, de l'apparente incohérence de sa mémoire: tout cela dut effectivement, je pense, se dérouler pour lui d'une façon presque irréelle, le temps se télescopant, s'im-mobilisant ou se dilatant tour à tour, et cela non pas tellement à cause de sa fatigue, de la nuit blanche . . . que de son inaptitude fondamentale à prendre conscience de la vie, des choses, des événements, autrement que par l'intermédiaire des sens, du coeur (inaptitude que nous corrigeons d'ordinaire, à laquelle nous remédions par un effort de l'esprit qui s'emploie à calfater les séquences de temps échappées à notre perception, comme dans ces exercices de vocabulaire pour classes enfantines consistant à remplacer dans une phrase les pointillés par le mot approprié, de sorte que selon la paresse, le manque d'imagination, ou l'extrême lassitude du moment, le même événement pourra, les vides une fois remplis, se présenter aussi bien sous le rassurant aspect d'une terne banalité du déjà vu, ou au contraire d'un angoissant chaos). p. 146.

Though Montès is presented as exceptional, it is not because the way in which he perceives time is thought to differ significantly from that of other people, but that he fails to make the mental corrections and adjustments that, in the narrator's view, most of us make to our actual perception of events. Montès does not go through the process of "filling in" the blanks. This is a further dimension of his role as "idiot" or innocent: his apprehension of reality is represented as being simpler, more direct, less rationalized than that of the majority, exemplary because truer.

The gaps in Montès' recollection of events and the irregularity of the passage of time as he perceives it, serve as what might be termed a phenomenological justification for a fragmented narrative. Such a narrative is now doubly called for: by the fragmentary knowledge of events and other people which the narrator claims is all we can possess and by the fragmentedness of our own experience and recollections. The artistic message of Le Vent, the sum of Simon's reflections on the novel up to that point, is that the novelist must create a form which will embody this
IV. The problem of language

The creation of a fragmented narrative structure alone, however, will not suffice, for the most basic level of narration is the individual phrase or sequence of phrases and here too, the principle of fragmentation must be applied:

"Car, me dit-il, ce fut ainsi que cela se passa, en tout cas ce fut cela qu'il vécut, lui: cette incohérence, cette juxtaposition brutale, apparemment absurde, de sensations, de visages, de paroles, d'actes. Comme un récit, des phrases dont la syntaxe, l'agencement ordonné -- substantif, verbe, complément -- seraient absents. Comme ce que devient n'importe quel article de journal (le terne, monotone et grisâtre alignment de menus caractères à quoi se réduit, aboutit toute l'agitation du monde) lorsque le regard tombe par hasard sur la feuille déchirée qui a servi à envelopper la botte de poireaux et qu'alors, par la mague de quelques lignes tronquées, incomplètes, la vie reprend sa superbe et altière indépendance, redevient ce foisonnement désordonné, sans commencement ni fin, ni ordre, les mots éclatant d'être de nouveau séparés, libérés de la syntaxe, de cette fade ordonnance, ce ciment bouche-trou indifféremment apte à tous usages et que le rédacteur de service verse comme une sauce, une gluante béchamelle pour relier, coller tant bien que mal ensemble, de façon à les rendre comestibles, les fragments éphémères et disparates de quelque chose d'aussi indigeste qu'une cartouche de dynamite ou une poignée de verre pilé . . . . (pp. 174-175)

Once again Montès' experience is presented as fragmented:

"comme un récit, des phrases dont la syntaxe, l'agencement ordonné -- substantif, verbe, complément -- seraient absents"

The metaphor is highly significant, for if his experience can be likened to a newspaper story from which words are missing or to a phrase with disordered syntax, it follows that a faithful account of his experience will possess these same or analogous characteristics. The artificial order and coherence that language imposes on experience must be counteracted. For it is not just the shoddy writing of sensational journalism that is seen as falsifying experience, but the order and continuity inherent in
written language:

"la syntaxe, . . . . cette fade ordonnance, ce ciment bouche-trou"

"Ciment" is a term used elsewhere by Simon for anything that imparts an artificial coherence and continuity to the disjointed fragments of experience and memory:

L'archéologue comble les lacunes d'un monument en ruines par du ciment grisâtre. Pour moi je refuse ce procédé, qui invente un ordre dont on ne saura jamais s'il est authentique.

Je ne comble pas les vides. Ils demeurent comme autant de fragments. 4

When the term "ciment" is applied to syntax, therefore, it suggests that language by its very nature is felt to be liable to falsify experience. That the ordering effect of language can be counteracted or undermined, however, is suggested by the image of the torn newspaper:

. . . . par la magie de quelques lignes tronquées, incomplètes la vie . . . . redevient ce foisonnement désordonné, sans commencement ni fin, ni ordre . . . .

and contained in this passage is the germ of the two methods by which this will be achieved in the subsequent novels:

1. the infringement of syntactical norms — separation of subject from verb, of verb from complement, use of multiple parentheses, etc. — an ensemble of devices that Serge Doubrovsky has called "l'anti-syntaxe simonienne" 5

2. the fragmentation, through interruption or abrupt curtailment, of sentences, paragraphs and dialogue.

The image of the torn newspaper, complements that of the broken mirror, which opens the book. Together they embody the aesthetic of fragmentation that emerges in Le Vent though it will not find its full realization until subsequent novels.

V. Narrative structure in "Le Vent"

How far does Le Vent succeed in embodying the principle of composition
suggested by the images of the broken mirror and the torn newspaper and promised by its sub-title -- "Tentative de restitution d'un retable baroque"?

The overall narrative structure is conventional: events are related in chronological order with the exception of one flashback (Hélène's discovery of the gypsy in bed with her maid). Though it is not until the seventh chapter that the narrator explains his own connection with Montès and the notary, such a delay in identifying the narrator is a traditional device to be found in Balzac's Le Colonel Chabert, for instance, where the narrator is not identified until the final page.

There are in fact no significant gaps or rearrangements of the sequence of events, and the reconstruction that the narrator undertakes appears relatively unproblematic, or, at least, nothing like as tentative and uncertain as his initial reflections had led the reader to expect. For though he may have had to reconstruct the sequence of events for himself, as he suggests by his allusions to the disjointed nature of the account Montès gave him, that process of reconstruction is not especially evident in his own account, where the order of events is never unclear. The reader does not see the reconstruction taking place, the pieces have all been fitted together before the narrative commences.

Neither is there any uncertainty as to the place of these events in time. There is none of the interweaving of past and present until they are indistinguishable, which will characterize the later novels. It is clear that the narrator's recollection of these happenings takes place during his conversation with the notary the day after the departure of Montès:

... tandis que le notaire parlait donc, je ne pouvais m'empêcher d'imaginer l'autre -- tel que je l'avais vu la veille encore ...  
(p. 10)  
(cf. also pp 40, 108, 237-238)
Each incident of the narrative can be situated in relation to the others in an easily apparent time-scheme. There is thus no fragmentation of the narrative in so far as the sequence of events is concerned.

The same is true of the other major element of narrative composition: point of view. The opening pages seem to announce a multi-perspective narration with their immediate opposition of narrator and notary, their allusion to the "chronique de la ville" and their suggestion that if reality is not totally unknowable, then it is constituted by the "mille et une versions, les mille et un visages" of events. However, the narrative does not actually provide us with such a fragmented, multi-faceted version of what has taken place. It is not even a genuinely double perspective (narrator and notary) because the notary's point of view is given too little space in comparison with the narrator's and, more importantly, because it is not presented autonomously. From the start the narrator casts doubt on the notary's professional honesty (pp. 25-26) and mocks his judgement (pp. 9, 81) and the character is somewhat of a caricature in any case. Thus the reader is led almost immediately to reject the notary's view of events and people as narrow, biased and possibly self-interested. Consequently, the notary's point of view does not become a genuine alternative or complementary perspective, one of those "mille et une versions". The narrator's point of view is the privileged and ultimately the only one, supported as it is by constant reference to the fact that Montès confided in him, as the frequent use of such phrases as "comme il me dit" ("raconta", "décrit la scène", etc.) makes clear.*

*Extremely frequent: as many as thirty variants in one chapter of twenty pages.
Moreover, the narrator's honesty in always making it clear when he is speculating or surmising—

... cela il ne me le dit pas, je l'imaginais, j'essayais moi-même de comprendre ... (p. 95)

— helps to ensure the reader's trust in his account. The real function of the notary's point of view is to give an outside view of the character, which does not in any way deepen or extend our knowledge, but serves to enhance by contrast the narrator's inside view. The conflict between the inside and outside views has the effect of imparting a certain mystery and even pathos to this exemplar of the misunderstood hero, outsider or "idiot". But it does not provide either the multi-perspective narrative or the fragmented vision of events that are suggested by the opening pages.

If, in its overall structure, the novel is fairly conventionally composed, at the level of individual incidents, the narrative is more faithful to the principle of fragmentation. Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate this is through the analysis of a particular chapter. The sixth provides a good example, since it is an important one, setting Montès on an irrevocable course as he watches the gypsy at the rigged boxing match and trails him to his home, then hears Rose's account of her life as they sit beneath the plane-tree in the square — "cet étrange et nocturne duo d'amour". Most of what can be said about the composition of this chapter applies in general to the narrative method of the rest of the novel.

VI. Narrative method in the sixth chapter

The chapter begins with two paragraphs which describe how Montès experienced this period of his life and how he recounted it to the narrator.
As we have already noted, such passages generally serve to propose or justify a narrative mode. The second paragraph of Chapter VI is a particularly good example of that procedure:

Et autour de lui ces silhouettes floues, entr'aperçues, incomplètes — se dessinant vaguement dans une durée elle-même floue, incertaine, car il n'y avait aucun lien dans son récit entre les différents épisodes ou plutôt tableaux qu'il évoquait, comme dans ces rêves où l'on passe subitement d'un endroit à l'autre, d'une situation à l'autre sans transition . . . (pp. 82-83)

The narrator's comment on the abrupt switches in Montès' account is particularly significant, for it is precisely that feature in the chapter under consideration which brings about the fragmentation of an otherwise conventional chronological narrative.

The lack of connections in Montès' story arises no doubt largely from his fragmented perception of time and that inability to fill the gaps, which were analyzed earlier. But the comparison that the narrator makes with the sudden changes of scene in a dream does implicitly suggest that beneath the apparent lack of connections in his account lie unconscious connections of a different nature from those of a causal or chronological kind. Since, however, the narrative progression of Le Vent is basically straightforward, despite the abrupt switches between scenes, the full implication of the dream metaphor will not be fulfilled until La Route des Flandres, where the abrupt narrative switches back and forth in time, are triggered by association and correspondence very much in the manner of dreams. In Le Vent, though, the psychological function of the abrupt breaks in the narrative is to render the character's fragmented sense of the passage of time and the resulting disjointedness of his account of events.

This disjointedness is further stressed by the narrator's rejection of the word "épisode" in favour of "tableau" to characterize Montès'
description of events. For whereas "épisode" suggests an event or series of events recounted in their entirety, "tableau" evokes merely a frozen instant, a fragment rather than a whole. It recalls the "brèves images" of the novel's opening page, the fragmentary images of memory.

Like the opening page of the novel, the first pages of the sixth chapter have served to prepare the reader for a narrative method. How far does the chapter fulfill these expectations?

Each of the three scenes described is introduced abruptly, without explanation or preparation, plunging the reader in medias res.

i. pp. 83-85

The first scene — a brief conversation with Maurice in his room — begins in this way:

Et ainsi je pouvais le voir, comme il me le raconta, hypnotisé, fasciné par cette tache de soleil en train de ramper lentement mais irréversiblement sur le mur, changeant peu à peu de couleur et de forme, tandis que le jeune représentant en phosphates, engrais et poudres cupriques recommençait pour la vingtième fois à lui expliquer toute la sympathie qu'il éprouvait pour lui. (p. 83)

The time, place and other circumstances of this meeting are unclear.

Nothing in the preceding two paragraphs or even in the ending of the previous chapter has led up to it. It is a fragment of time, apparently at random in the narrator's recollection or in Montès' account. Unfortunately, Simon somewhat spoils the effect by underlining the device in the next two sentences:

Il ne me dit pas comment il y était venu. Il me dit seulement qu'il y était. Sans doute l'autre le rencontrant, le croisant . . . . (p. 83)

It is as though he cannot yet trust in the reader's capacity to follow him. So the narrator is made to explain and justify the abruptness and its
effect is thereby diminished. We have not yet reached the kind of switches from one narrative element to another, from past to present, operated by an image or association, left totally unexplained and demanding an attentive and retentive reader, that will mark the subsequent novels.

ii. pp. 85-90

The switch to the following scene is equally abrupt:

.... répétant maintenant: "Non, je vous dis qu'il faut que je parte. Excusez-moi. Je dois ...."

Puis il y fut — un autre repère dans ce temps flou, un autre décor — il me dit qu'il avait vu l'affiche .... (p. 85)

Again, time, place, purpose and significance of this new scene are unclear to begin with. The previous paragraph has spoken of some obsession, some urgent matter to be attended to, but without further precision. Once again the abruptness of the transition is underlined — "un autre repère dans ce temps flou" — but this time at least the uncertainty is maintained for a little longer by the description of the poster that follows, which announces some unspecified event in which some unnamed person is to take part. The narrative thus retains the vague and disconnected character of the original account.

iii. pp. 90-102

The last scene in the chapter shows the same characteristics: abruptness of transition and a regrettable compulsion to explain that abruptness. The final paragraph of the preceding scene has Montès returning from the gypsy encampment. The next paragraph is a piece of dialogue, spoken by an unnamed woman, condemning the gypsy. The following paragraph compensates for its abruptness and uncertainty:
Elle se tut, chercha à voir son visage dans l'ombre. Il me raconta qu'il était maintenant assis à côté de la serveuse sur un des bancs de la place, et autour d'eux c'était la paisible nuit de printemps. (p. 90)

Not only is the gap filled here, unfortunately, but it is done awkwardly and far more artificially than in a conventional narrative.

The juxtaposition of these scenes in the sixth chapter is typical of the whole novel. Sometimes the switch from one scene to the next is made within a paragraph or in mid-sentence, which has an even more fragmenting effect on the narrative. The method is reasonably successful in spite of the compulsion the writer still feels to justify what he is doing. The separation of the scenes from each other, their juxtaposition without benefit of connecting elements, creates a disconnected narrative that adequately represents the disjointedness of the character's experience and, to a certain extent, conceals the straightforward composition of the novel as a whole.

VII. Images of fragmentation

A final element contributing to the fragmentation of the narrative are the many images of fragmentation within it. These serve both to reiterate the theme of fragmentary vision with which the novel opens and to echo its fragmented composition.

The chapter that has just been examined, has several such images. In the first scene there is a reflection in a mirror. Although the mirror itself is not shattered, the scene it reflects is fragmented through movement:

... et dans la glace du battant repoussé d'un coup de pied Montès pouvant se voir, un instant, entraîné avec le minable décor où il se tenait debout dans une giration étincelante, météorique, qui s'arrêta sur un angle de la table, un de ces cendriers-réclame de café débordant de mégots, deux cartes postales représentant des pins au bord de la mer fixées au mur, le tout tremblotant quelques
dixièmes de secondes et finalement s'immobilisant . . . (p. 84)

Maurice (since it is he who kicks the wardrobe door shut), Montès and Maurice's room, the scene of their conversation, must all be reflected in the mirror, but only fleetingly as it pivots on its hinges. Thus the whole scene is never reflected in its entirety, but only as a succession of rapidly eclipsed fragments. The image is a mise en abyme of the novel's narrative structure, with its rapid succession of fragmentary scenes.

Throughout the sixth chapter, images of light and shadow help to convey a sense of that fragmentary vision composed of fleeting glimpses into the mystery of other lives, which, in the narrator's view, is all we can know of them. Thus he imagines Montès returning from the gypsy encampment —

Et il me semblait le voir passer, traversant les zones d'ombre et de chatoyantes lumières . . . . (p. 90)

— alternately revealed and concealed from his sight as by the intermittent nature of their meetings, or as in Montès' disconnected account of his life.

That image of alternating light and shadow is developed in the scene that follows. Throughout Montès' conversation with Rose, he can only intermittently see her, as light from the street lamp is filtered through the leaves of the plane tree, fluctuating as they move in the breeze:

. . . . autour d'eux c'était la paisible nuit de printemps, et de l'autre côté de la place la terrasse de l'hôtel encore allumée, projetant sur le trottoir et la chaussée un trapèze de lumière, et ça et là quelques fenêtres posant leurs touches orangées dans l'obscurité . . . . (pp. 90-91)

. . . . tous les deux assis sur ce banc dans l'obscurité, avec éparpillés sur eux, les confettis de lumière déchiquetée qui leur tombaient dessus à travers le jeune feuillage vert cru . . . . (p. 92)

. . . . de nouveau elle se tut, resta immobile, les fragments de lumière verte et déchiquetée jouant sur elle, entrecroisant leurs taches, se mouvant sur son dos, ses épaules immobiles . . . . (pp. 96-97)
These images of fragmented light in the surrounding darkness convey a sense of Montès' momentary glimpse into Rose's life. She is hidden from him by the darkness, only briefly and intermittently revealed by the flickering light. The intermittent light is in harmony with the fragmented dialogue, as well as contributing to the melancholy atmosphere of the scene in which the few patches of light from windows or street lamps seem to emphasize their solitude.

All these descriptions of light culminate in two images at the end of the chapter, which achieve a final and perfect expression of the theme of fragmentary vision. First the description of a lighted window:

... cette dernière boutique encore allumée, insolite dans la nuit, trop loin pour qu'il pût entendre, saisir autre chose que cette fraction muette de vie s'inscrivant dans le rectangle lumineux que découpaient les vitres de la devanture ... (p. 99)

Too far away to hear or make sense of anything that is happening within the shop, Montès nonetheless has this brief glimpse into another life -- "cette fraction muette de vie" -- just as, during their brief talk, he has been granted a momentary and incomplete glimpse into Rose's life. The fleeting character of this glimpse is epitomized by his few seconds' vision of her face:

... et soudain, en face, une fenêtre s'éclaira, une silhouette se pencha, et avant que les volets se fussent refermés Montès eut le temps de voir à côté de lui le masque blanc exhumé de l'ombre, l'espèce de visage de morte, les joues barrées de deux trainées luisantes ... (p. 100)

In the time it takes for shutters to be drawn across a window, her face has been revealed by the light, a fragmentary vision, one more in that "addition de brèves images", which, in the narrator's view, constitutes our sole knowledge of others.
Conclusion

In its images at least, if not in its narrative structure, *Le Vent* succeeds in conveying that sense of the fragmentedness of knowledge and experience expressed in its opening pages. There is one further image, which, together with those of the broken mirror and the torn newspaper, will serve both to sum up that vision of experience and to prefigure the composition of the subsequent novels, that were to embody it more successfully:

... placé dans la perspective de ce temps qui s'allongeait comme un mur gris sans commencement ni fin, décrépi, avec ses vieilles affiches déchirées aux pans soulevés par le vent, leurs couleurs fanées, ou quelquefois encore vives, criardes, leurs caractères délavés, leurs fragments de textes sans commencement ni fin non plus, sans suite, se juxtaposant, se contredisant, apparaissant entre deux déchirures comme les visages de leurs personnages réclames amputés d'un œil, d'une joue, d'un côté entier (et parfois réduits à une joue, un œil vous regardant, vous dévisageant, énigmatique au fond du temp énigmatique entre deux lambeaux de papier comme entre deux portières écartées) . . . . (p. 149)

In this strangely Cubist image of the wall and its layers of torn posters, which serves as metaphor for the past as it appears in memory, there is also to be found a prophetic description of most of the major compositional features of the succeeding novels: the fragmented text with its juxtaposed or overlapping sequences that interrupt or efface each other, the fragmentary and enigmatic scenes and characters, the collage-like effect of certain arrangements. The description of a wall with torn and overlapping posters, or half-effaced slogans, will itself appear again and again in the later novels, an image of fragmentation that eventually, in *Orion aveugle*, will join with its artistic counterpart, the collage, to provide both analogy and inspiration for the composition of a text.
CHAPTER III

REPRESENTATION OF AN INNER WORLD OR PRODUCTIVITY OF A TEXT? CRITICAL RESPONSE TO THE FRAGMENTED NARRATIVE OF THE NOVELS FROM "LA ROUTE DES FLANDRES" TO "HISTOIRE"

Before we approach the major novels themselves, it will be helpful to look first at the two schools of thought that have dominated critical reaction to them and which must be taken into account in any analysis of fragmented composition, since they pose a fundamental question as to its significance. Critical writing on the novels of Claude Simon's central period reflects the evolution in the approach to fiction that has taken place over the last fifteen years, an evolution which has been heavily influenced by the theory and practice of Jean Ricardou, who is now the doyen of Simon studies, as is evident from his role at the 1974 Cefisy Colloquium devoted to Simon. It can be described briefly as a rejection of the idea of the novel as a representation of reality, in favour of a conception of narrative as a fabrication of language in which fiction and theme are generated by the text itself through the associative power of words.

This shift in critical thought is reflected in the varying interpretations of the narrative fragmentation that marks the novels of the central period. After the publication of Ricardou's influential articles on La Bataille de Pharsale, there was a new awareness of the "textual" elements in the earlier novels. In the light of this, narrative fragmentation
could be seen as a consequence of the autonomy of a text which, no longer subordinated to a pre-established fiction, follows its own dynamic, constantly branching off in a new direction as a result of the productive mechanisms of language. Fragmentation could also be seen as one of an assortment of devices that undermine the realist illusion and challenge the supremacy of the story, confounding the reader’s expectations of narrative continuity and, by the attention they draw to the internal mechanisms of the text, revealing it as text and not a representation of reality.

Critical reaction when the novels first appeared, however, was quite different. For a start, the fragmentation of the narrative, now so established a compositional practice in Simon’s writing that Ricardou can speak of "la loi de la fragmentation", was found disconcerting. Yves Berger in an early review of La Route des Flandres in the Nouvelle Revue Française, described readers’ reactions:

La surprise et, si j’en crois de nombreux aveux, le désarroi du lecteur est d’autant plus grand que, là encore, rien ne l’a préparé à ces changements de plans et modifications des perspectives habituelles du temps. Il faut plusieurs fois lire le roman et s’être, en quelque sorte, familiarisé avec les mécanismes de la mémoire, pour ne pas perdre longuement pied et réussir, avec un retard honorable, à prendre conscience qu’une scène est terminée: nous étions dans la suivante et nous pensions encore dans la première, sans connaître qu’elle s’était évanouie. . . . Aucun argument de l’habituelle logique ne rend compte de ces continuelles apparitions et disparitions: il faut que le lecteur entre dans le jeu, et s’il veut connaître les secrets de la mémoire comme romancière, qu’il cherche le mot privilégié qui déclenche les apparitions et dont la présence provoque l’éclipse des précédentes.3

It seems surprising that the novel was found so disorienting nearly forty years after Ulysses and The Sound and the Fury; indicative perhaps of a certain conservatism that may well help to explain the sometimes excessively aggressive stance of the partisans of the nouveau roman. What is most noteworthy, however, is that Berger ascribes the novel’s composition, its interrupted or overlapping scenes, to the mechanisms of memory.
This reaction was general. The fragmentation of the narrative was interpreted by most critics within a framework of psychological realism, Claude Simon was hailed as the novelist of memory and La Route des Flandres provided Merleau-Ponty with a source of illustrations for his lectures on the phenomenology of consciousness. 4

In 1963, at the Cerisy Colloquium devoted to the topic "Une littérature nouvelle?", Jean-Pierre Faye placed Simon firmly in the stream of consciousness tradition -- "le roman du flux et du souterrain" -- as a descendant of James, Proust, Joyce, Woolf and Faulkner. 5 He described La Route des Flandres as "une dernière récapitulation de la durée", a judgement which does not seem to have been disputed in the discussion that followed. 6

In the following year, Jean-Luc Seylaz in an article entitled "Du Vent à La Route des Flandres: la conquête d'une forme romanesque", relates the narrative method of La Route directly to the processes of memory:

Voici définie ce que sera La Route des Flandres dans l'oeuvre de Simon: la tentative la plus poussée (et la plus réussie) de réaliser un roman qui respecte à la fois le processus créateur chez le romancier et la structure fondamentale de la mémoire. 7

He goes on to summarize the characteristics of memory that in his view, the narrative is adhering to:

Car ce que cette narration (fictive mais inévitable) respecte, ce sont les caractéristiques de la mémoire, son ignorance de la perspective historique, l'éternel présent du souvenir . . . . et enfin le mécanisme de l'association d'images, de sons, de couleurs, d'odeurs, de postures. 8

It was the perception of a relation of this kind between narrative form and the processes of memory that led Jean Rousset to define Simon's novels as "romans de la mémoire". In an article published in 1965, entitled "Trois romans de la mémoire", he distinguishes between two types of novels dealing with memories. 9 In the first, the traditional "roman-mémoires", the narrator is drawing on his memory in order to recount his past, but it is that past rather than the act of remembering which is the subject
of the novel. In the second, which he calls "le roman de la mémoire" and believes unprecedented in literature until recently, memory itself and the processes by which the past is reconstituted have become the true subject. After a brief glance at its antecedents, Rousset discusses the novel of memory through reference to the work of Butor, Simon and Pinget. Of Simon's novels, he says:

Ces livres sont d'authentiques romans de la mémoire vivante; c'est la mémoire du protagoniste qui, placée au premier plan et au centre du tableau, recompose son histoire. Il s'agit d'un projet délibéré que l'auteur oppose aux anciens modèles du récit rétrospectif.  

Commenting on the incomplete and fragmentary character of memory as it is represented in Simon's novels, Rousset sees that as being one of the major determinants of their structure. Taking Le Palace as an example, he writes:

En se modélant sur les mouvements de cette pensée remémorante, le roman s'organise en un découpage irrégulier de tronçons: le bureau dans le palace, le récit de l'homme-fusil, l'enterrement vu d'une fenêtre, etc. Ces segments, ces lambeaux, toujours incomplets, toujours coupés ou troués, glissent les uns sur les autres, comme une jeu de cartes déchirées qui tantôt se recouvrent, tantôt se découvrent, jeu dispersé mais toujours tenu, pour éviter l'éparpillement, par la force agissante de la pensée actuelle périodiquement réintroduite. Ainsi se compose le livre, ainsi va la mémoire chez Claude Simon. 

The composition of the novel, in Rousset's view, recreates both the wayward movement of memory (its abrupt and irregular transitions from one moment of the past to another) and its fragmentariness. Thus the fragmentation of the narrative is explicitly linked to the nature of memory.

Unfortunately, Rousset's account of the novels is too brief and impressionistic to deal with those of their features which do not accord with such an interpretation, attractive though it may be in general terms.

Other commentators were more alert to such difficulties. Yves Berger, for instance, although, as we just saw, he ascribed the fragmented composition of La Route to the mechanisms of memory, nonetheless began his review with
the statement that it was not "le roman de la pure mémoire". He went on to analyze systematically those features of its narration, such as the use of indications of time, the commentary of the narrator and the book's division into three parts, which in his view were incompatible with the representation of memory. He seems doubtful in any case whether memory in its purest, most immediate state could be rendered realistically. What Simon does in this novel, in Berger's estimation, is to recreate a secondary level of memory -- the stage at which memory images are translated into language:

Je constate seulement que Simon donne à voir autre chose: pour la première fois en littérature, les mécanismes par lesquels la mémoire se fait langage . . . Non pas, donc, la mémoire telle qu'elle est . . . mais telle qu'elle se fuit . . . la mémoire comme passage,12

Nonetheless, he goes on to say that it is memory which determines both the style and the structure of La Route. Thus, those features of the novel which at first seemed incompatible with the representation of memory are either seen as regrettable flaws in an ambitious undertaking or reassimilated to a realist interpretation by means of this notion of a secondary stage of memory, instead of being seen as evidence of some different principle of composition at work.

As we saw in the passage quoted earlier, it is specifically those compositional features which fragment the narrative (the interrupted scenes, the a-temporal progression, and so forth) that Berger attributes to memory. Thus, he too, like Rousset, interprets the fragmentation of the narrative in terms of psychological realism.

That early critical reaction to the works of the central period placed them in the twentieth century tradition of psychological réalism is hardly surprising. Memory and its processes are a major theme in all...
these novels and the techniques of the stream of consciousness novel are extensively, though not exclusively, used in them. While the reader of a Robbe-Grillet novel — *La Jalousie*, for instance — could not fail to see that here was something radically new and different, the reader of *La Route* or *Histoire*, particularly one well-versed in Anglo-American fiction of this century, would tend to notice all that links Simon with Proust, Joyce, Woolf and most particularly Faulkner, whose influence on *La Route* is unmistakable.¹³

Claude Simon himself, moreover, in his declarations to interviewers, gave credence to the view of his novels as representations of memory by continually invoking mental processes to explain their composition and style. In an interview in *Le Monde*, after the publication of *La Route*, he said:

... en ces quelques heures d'une nuit d'après guerre que je retiens, tout se presse dans la mémoire de Georges: le désastre de mai 1940, la mort de son capitaine à la tête d'une compagnie de dragons, son temps de captivité, le train qui le menait au camp de prisonnier, etc. Dans la mémoire tout se situe sur le même plan: le dialogue, l'émotion, la vision co-existent. Ce que j'ai voulu, c'est forger une structure qui convienne à cette vision des choses, qui me permette de présenter les uns après les autres des éléments qui dans la réalité se superposent, de retrouver une architecture purement sensorielle.¹⁴

Seven years later, with the publication of *Histoire*, he was still speaking in similar terms. When asked what the function of his long sentences was, he replied:

De rendre cette espèce de magma qu'est notre vie mentale, la perception confuse, multiple et simultanée que nous avons du monde. Tant de choses coexistent et s'interpénètrent dans notre conscience: Le point, la phrase courte, amènent des césures, coupent ce qui n'est pas coupé dans la réalité mentale.¹⁵

Not only did Simon clearly invoke the nature of memory to explain the composition of *La Route* ("ce puzzle" as the interviewer called it), but several years later he was still explaining his writing in terms of
the representation of consciousness. Although these statements, and others like them, probably accurately express what he conceived his intentions to be, he would now almost certainly disavow them. In a more recent interview, he told Claud DuVerlie:

... I laid myself open to this kind of misinterpretation precisely because, like Stendhal, I only developed this awareness little by little. Naively, I explained my work by saying that I was merely following the associations and combinations of memory -- like the famous story of Proust's *madeleine*.16

But in the light of the earlier declarations, it is hardly surprising that the novels were seen as continuing in the stream of consciousness tradition, when the novelist himself presented them in such terms. It is clear that there has been a definite evolution not only in Simon's writing, but also in his conception of his work, as can be seen from the various interviews over the years. While his attitude to representation has never been naive, it seems evident that at one time he believed in the possibility of a kind of psychological realism he would now reject, and that it coloured his conception of his work, whether or not it influenced his actual practice.

It has really only been retrospectively, with the appearance of *La Bataille de Pharsale* and the subsequent novels, which reveal a new orientation in Simon's writing, and with the publication of Jean Ricardou's articles on that novel, that the standard view of Simon as the novelist of memory has been challenged. Although Ricardou's early article on *La Route* ("Un ordre dans la débâcle") contains the germ of many of his later ideas and no doubt influenced other commentators, it was his articles on *La Bataille de Pharsale*, with their systematic and detailed analysis of textual mechanisms, that really opened up a new critical approach to Simon's writing. These articles deal only with *La Bataille*, but the new way of reading they propose, cannot but influence any subsequent reading of the preceding novels.
In an important article on La Route published in 1973, and heavily influenced by Ricardou's theory of the primacy of the text, Dominique Lanceraux takes up where Yves Berger had left off, confirming and adding to the latter's argument that La Route is not a representation of memory. Like Berger, he makes the point that the text is, at least in part, narration rather than pure interior monologue:

Like Berger, he makes the point that the text is, at least in part, narration rather than pure interior monologue:

... le narrateur précise, explicite ses souvenirs, les tourne en récit; ce dont témoigne le recours au discours personnel et fortement évaluatif ...

The status of the narration is unclear:

Ce champ mémoriel, on ne saura donc pas de sitôt s'il est "espace mental", parole ou rédaction en cours, ni découvrir la position énonciatrice.

But even more problematic in Lanceraux's view is the movement between the three narrative frames and the alternation of first and third person narration, which he judges incompatible with the representation of consciousness:

... on ne peut les concevoir qu'en termes scripturaux, hors d'une justification psychologique. Les parcelles dispersées du récit ne rejoignent pas la continuité d'un courant de conscience, de mémoire ou de parole, ni même la permanence d'un sujet ...

In other words, the fragmentation of the narrative connot in his view, be explained in terms of psychological realism.*

Lanceraux is not merely concerned with the question of vraisemblance,

*Lanceraux is surely mistaken in saying that there is no permanent subject, for despite the switches from first to third person, the point of view remains that of Georges throughout. Even the alternation of first and third person, though it is deliberately anti-realist in La Route, is not inherently so, as the example of Ulysses shows: the Leopold Bloom sequences alternate between the "I" of interior monologue and the "he" of external description, achieving through this combination great psychological realism.
however, More central to his rejection of the novel of memory interpretation is his analysis of the role of language in giving direction to the narrative. Developing Ricardou's remark that the language of the text "se procré(e) en quelque sorte lui-même par d'étranges aptitudes", he shows how the progression of the narrative is influenced by the power of individual words, through connotation, association, sound or appearance, to call forth other words and images. Instead of attributing this progression through free association to the nature of memory, he sees it as an indication of the dynamic of the text generating its own meanings and continuation:

Là où une vue réaliste expliquerait que ce roman, l'un des premiers, démontre l'importance des faits de langage dans le fonctionnement de la mémoire (de l'imagination, de l'inconscient . . . . ), on jugera que le champ mémorial constitue le détourn, l'alibi autorisant à déployer un champ textuel.  

Lanceraux goes on to show how much of the narration has the quality of "un discours qui s'improvise": the conversational turns of phrase, the repetitions, the hesitation among alternative formulations and so forth, which suggest a narration in progress rather than the flux of consciousness. To the uncertain status of the narration, then, must be added the impression that the discourse is being elaborated as we read it, that it is the process of composition that is revealed rather than the mechanisms of a consciousness.

The same view has been advanced by Gérard Roubichou:

Claude Simon est depuis longtemps considéré comme le romancier de la mémoire, de la sensation, voire de l'Histoire. Mais il n'y a chez lui aucune recherche du temps perdu. La mémoire, l'imagination sont la justification, l'alibi, dans la fiction, des pouvoirs créateurs de l'écriture.  

Elsewhere he maintains that the temporal switches of La Route have been mistakenly seen as mechanisms of memory when they are in fact "mécanismes visibles de production de l'écriture". In a more recent article, however, he seems to admit, somewhat reluctantly, that the representation of mental
processes does play some part in the novels of the central period:

Dans la mesure . . . où Histoire est marquée par une recherche quelque peu entachée de psychologie (il s'agit bien d'une conscience — le je du narrateur — en lutte avec un passé et un présent fragmentaires . . . . , cette tension entre continu et discontinu pourrait s'expliquer par les caractéristiques de l'esprit et de la mémoire dont nous parlions les romans précédents . . . . 25

While Roubichon concedes that many passages of Histoire might be read as the transcription of the contents of a consciousness, he reaffirms the limitations of such an interpretation, which would come close to imputing realist intentions to the novel. It is difficult not to wonder, noting Roubichou's embarrassment at conceding this much, whether the current scorn for "psychology" might not lead critics to distort or simplify the text in the interests of "scripturalisme" almost as much as through a narrow realism.

Representation of a memory of growth of a text?

Are we to see memory as no more than an "alibi", as both Lanceraux and Roubichou put it, for the productivity of the text? Are we forced to align ourselves on one side or the other of the realist/scripturalist controversy?

An alternative position is to be found in Berger's review:

. . . . le romancier a conçu entre autres desseins celui de montrer que les mécanismes de la création romanesque sont identiques à ceux della mémoire.26

An almost identical view was expressed by Jean-Luc Seylaz in the passage quoted earlier, where he called La Route Simon's most successful attempt to write a novel which respected both:

. . . . le processus créateur chez le romancier et la structure fondamentale de la mémoire . . . . 27

Irrespective of what Simon's intentions may have been, it is possible to
maintain that the mechanisms of creation in his novels are related to
or identical with those of memory, in so far as both are based on the prin­
ciple of association.

This connection has been categorically asserted by the Soviet film­
maker and theoretician, Sergei Eisenstein, writing of the use of inner
monologue in the cinema:

Inner speech, the flow and sequence of thinking unformulated into the
logical constructions in which uttered, formulated thoughts are ex­
pressed, is based on a quite distinct series of laws. What is remarkable
therein . . . is that the laws of construction of inner speech turn
out to be precisely those laws which lie at the foundation of the
whole variety of laws governing the construction of the form and
composition of art-works. And there is not one formal method that does
not prove the spit and image of one or another law governing the
construction of inner speech, as distinct from the logic of uttered
speech.28

If the laws governing "inner speech" and artistic creation are identical,
it is not surprising that the same passage in a novel like La Route can be
read either as a representation of the workings of memory or as an example
of the productivity of the text, since identical processes are involved.

Moreover, Eisenstein remarks that inner monologue (as a narrative method)
can be used not only to depict the inner monologue of a character or charac­
ters, but also "to construct things", by which, presumably, he means as
a source for the generation of new elements. This would be an apt des­
cription of what is happening in many passages of La Route or Histoire,
where the rendering of an inner monologue itself gives rise to new, more
purely verbal associations which then take the text in a new direction.

The actual mechanism of association is more or less the same whether
it is of a personal, private character (derived from individual experience)
or accessible to all (derived from the sounds or connotations of a word or
from a general cultural context). For instance, the word "switch" which I
shall have the occasion to use frequently, in the discussion of narrative
structure, evokes for me "light switch", "hazel switch" and "witch", associations which anyone might have. But it also produced an unexpected visual image of the railway station of my former home town, derived from a combination of its name — Ipswich — allied with my current preoccupation with "switch" as "aiguillage" which conjures up railway lines. This latter association might well be one that only I could have. A writer wishing to create the inner world of a character will almost certainly find similarly personal associations and combinations of images arising in the course of writing, but many others will come from the common pool of language and culture. These associations will in turn generate others, contributing to the expansion of the inner world thus created. But the process of association is virtually identical whether it serves the depiction of a consciousness or the autonomous growth of a text. In both cases, spontaneous association must be followed up with productive combination and manipulation of the elements thus generated. Simon has given his own vivid description of this process in the text he wrote for the series

Les sentiers de la création:

L'un après l'autre les mots éclatent comme autant de chandelles romaines, déployant leurs gerbes dans toutes les directions. Ils sont autant de carrefours où plusieurs routes s'entrecroisent. Et si, plutôt que de vouloir contenir, domestiquer chacune de ces explosions, ou traverser rapidement ces carrefours en ayant déjà décidé du chemin à suivre, on s'arrête et on examine ce qui apparaît à leur lueur ou dans les perspectives ouvertes, des ensembles insoupçonnés de resonances et d'échos se révèlent.

Chaque mot en suscite (ou en commande) plusieurs autres, non seulement par la force des images qu'il attire à lui comme un aimant, mais parfois aussi par sa seule morphologie, de simples assonances qui, de même que les nécessités formelles de la syntaxe, du rythme et de la composition, se révèlent souvent aussi fécondes que ses multiples significations. 29

He goes on to say that all his novels from La Route des Flandres on have been written in this manner. The difference between a work such as La Route
and a later novel like *Triptyque*, however, in this domain, is that in *La Route* and *Histoire* the associations, no matter how they have been generated, are attributed to the protagonist, arise out of his experience and personality, whereas in the later novels, there is no-one to whom they might be said to belong and they are perceived as textual mechanisms. In *La Route* in particular, the voice and presence of Georges are so strong that it is impossible to see him merely as a fictional pretext for the elaboration of the text. He exists in the text as voice, memory, vision, not just as a support for a system of images. The same is true for the narrator of *Histoire*, though less so for the narrator of *Le Palace*, which is closer to the later novels in that respect. Although these protagonists may lack the detailed physical and social identity of characters in the conventional novel, they exist as centres of consciousness reflecting a world which we perceive through their eyes. The text is anchored in their experience to which it is drawn back all the time in spite of the constant pull of other currents.

In the novels of the central period, the mechanisms of association serve both in the representation of consciousness and as productive sources in themselves, generating and directing the narrative. There is, as we have seen, no necessary incompatibility between the two functions, but, on the contrary, a close connection. Nonetheless, while the claim made by Lanceraux and Roubichou, that memory or consciousness are merely a disguise for the autonomous development of the text, can thus be set aside, not all their objections to the realist interpretation of the novels can be dismissed likewise.

Each of the three novels we are going to examine resists assimilation to a coherent psychological framework in some essential way. The lack of
a stable centre of narration in *La Route*, for instance, or the doubling of the narrative "je" in certain sequences of *Histoire*, create what Ricardou has called "discohérence", that is, not the calculated incoherence: or "suspended coherence" of inner monologue that mimics inchoate thought, but:

... une cohérence contradictoire, multipolaire, que nulle unité ne peut subsumer à son niveau ...

In *Histoire*, for example, the "je" of certain sequences seems to belong to both uncle and nephew, so that both appear to be having one and the same experience in a way that is clearly impossible. There is no way of resolving the contradiction and the apparent realism of the rest of the narrative is subtly undermined by this procedure. Ricardou gives the name of "discohérence" to the effect thus produced. A number of the procedures that fragment the narrative contribute to this undermining of narrative coherence, preventing it in the long run from being seen as a representation of consciousness, despite the presence of stream of consciousness techniques.

There is an evident tension in the novels of the central period. On the one hand, there is the undeniable preoccupation with the phenomena of consciousness (memory, perception, the experience of time), and with the raw material of experience. On the other hand, there is the deliberate undermining of the realist illusion through the procedures of "discohérence", the revealing of the text as text. Nowhere is this tension more evident than in the fragmentation of the narrative, which at times fulfills a subtle psychological realism, at other times serves to shatter the illusion of reality.

It seems essential, therefore, that any satisfactory analysis of the novels of the central period must acknowledge the presence of these
apparently conflicting elements, without either dismissing them as regrettable flaws, as seems to be the current tendency, or attempting to assimilate them to textual devices and ignoring their other effects; nor, on the other hand, falling into the opposite trap of ignoring the non-realist elements and the productive role of the text. It is to be hoped that the following chapters, in their examination of the effects and significance of fragmented composition, will succeed in maintaining all these elements in as delicate and dynamic a balance as the novels themselves do.
CHAPTER IV

THE TECHNIQUES OF MONTAGE IN "LA ROUTE DES FLANDRES"

C'est probablement cette conception du roman, totalement subjective, qui m'a conduit à un mode de travail assez proche des méthodes employées dans le cinéma. Par exemple, j'ai écrit mon dernier livre (dont le véritable titre, auquel j'ai dû renoncer pour des raisons pratiques, était: Description fragmentaire d'un désastre) par petits morceaux, fragments sans suite que j'ai ensuite "montés", articulés les uns aux autres au moyen de charnières (associations -- ou, à l'opposé, contrastes -- de sensations, d'émotions, ou parfois même simplement de mots, d'assonances)) comme on procède, je crois, pour un film.

(Claude Simon, Réponse à une enquête, Premier Plan, 18.No date)

... tout dans la femme Centaure est gratieux, et délicat, et tout mérite d'être regardé avec une attention particulière le noeud et la jointure où la partie humaine finit avec la partie cheval est certainement admirable ... .

(La Route des Flandres, p. 55)

The narrative of La Route des Flandres has a disorienting effect even upon a reader accustomed to the discontinuity and constantly shifting focus of the stream of consciousness novel. It sequences are continually interrupted, often in mid-sentence, only to be reverted to with equal abruptness pages later. But still more disconcerting is the fact that many of these breaks are not immediately apparent, so that the reader realizes only after the fact that a new sequence has intervened. The continual movement between past and present, a familiar enough feature of inner monologue, is also more perplexing here, for the present of narration is
unstable. There are not one but three narrative frames: that is, three sequences (the train journey with Blum, the prisoner-of-war camp and the post-war night with Corinne) which apparently represent a time and circumstances in which the narration is taking place. But the narrative shifts between the three in a manner that, even at first reading, seems fraught with internal contradiction. The narration itself moves abruptly and with no immediately apparent logic between first and third person, though it remains within the protagonist's consciousness throughout. Thus every aspect of the narrative is marked by discontinuity to a degree that obliges the reader to be constantly alert.

Initially, as we saw in the preceding chapter, most critics interpreted the structure of La Route in psychological terms, as a representation of memory: Georges, lying in bed with Corinne after the war, recalls his experiences of defeat and imprisonment, the direction of his thoughts continually diverted, not only by the erratic nature of memory itself, as it shifts from one event, one period to another, but also by the erotic context, which both interrupts and colours the flow of memory. The fragmentation of the narrative, with its constant digressions and reprises, was seen as an attempt to render the wandering of Georges's memory. The role of association in bringing about many of the abrupt narrative shifts was particularly stressed by those who took this view of the text, because of its significance as a mechanism of memory.

But on closer examination, many of the breaks in the narrative do not fit into such a scheme. As we are going to see, there is in fact an element of internal contradiction or inconsistency apparent in certain transitions and in the movement between the three frames, which cannot be reconciled with a psychological interpretation of the novel's structure. What we are
going to discover in looking closely at the breaks in the narrative and the transitions between sequences is that they serve primarily compositional ends, of which the ultimate aim is the creation of a "spatial" or simultaneous apprehension of all the elements of the work.  

Detailed examination of the transitional devices is of paramount importance in determining whether or not *La Route* can be considered as a representation of memory. But beyond that, it is essential to an understanding of the work as a whole. For the meaning of a fragmented composition must be sought first in the relation between individual fragments at the point of juxtaposition or articulation, since it is here, in the connections between fragments, where thematic or formal links have replaced chronological or causal sequence, that the larger patterns of the work are first discerned. We need a complete grasp of the processes of juxtaposition that have replaced conventional narrative sequence before we can fully perceive the symbolic, formal or thematic patterns they serve to create.

Claude Simon has often used the term "montage" to describe the composition of *La Route*, though he is always careful to stress the essential difference between a visual and a verbal art. But the notion of montage, in both its literal and theoretical sense, seems particularly appropriate to that novel. In the literal sense, the actual method of composition as Simon has described it, resembles the cutting and splicing of shots in cinematic montage. In the theoretical sense, the conception of montage as a method of expressing through the juxtaposition of two shots, a meaning not contained in either one, is equally illuminating as a description of the relation between juxtaposed fragments in the text. Eisenstein himself, of course, applied the term to literary technique, using the example of
Flaubert as a pioneer in the development of montage and citing the scene of the "Comices" in Madame Bovary for its "cross-montage" of dialogue. It seems entirely appropriate, therefore, to describe the ensemble of transitional devices connecting the fragmented sequences of La Route as montage techniques.

"L'embranchement du huit": a narrative junction

A passage of central thematic importance, which offers a virtual paradigm of the montage technique of La Route and contains into the bargain an image that symbolizes that process, is to be found, significantly, at the very heart of the book, either by a happy accident or as Simon suggests:

... par l'effet de mécanismes très certains, même s'ils me restent obscurs, déclenchés par mon travail.4

It provides an ideal introduction to the novel's composition, with its juxtaposition of different times and different fictional elements; here, the two fatal points of Réixach's career, as witnessed or imagined by Georges:

... pouvant voir comme s'il n'en avait été qu'à quelques mètres l'encolure de la pouliche couverte d'une écume grise à l'endroit où frottait la rêne, le groupe, le cortège hiératique et médiéval se dirigeant toujours vers le mur de pierre, ayant maintenant traversé l'embranchement du huit, les chevaux de nouveau cachés jusqu'au ventre par les haies de bordure disparaissant à demi de sorte qu'ils avaient l'air coupés à mi-corps le haut seulement dépassant semblant glisser sur le champ de blé vert comme des canards sur l'immobile surface d'une mare. Je pouvais les voir au fur et à mesure qu'ils tournaient à droite s'engageaient dans le chemin creux lui en tête de la colonne comme si ç'avait été le quatorze juillet un puis deux puis trois puis le premier peloton tout entier puis le deuxième les chevaux se suivant tranquillement au pas ... . . .

pp. 154-155

The passage demonstrates one of the novel's most striking and characteristic features: an unannounced switch of the narrative, often in mid-
sentence, to a different incident and time. The quotation is taken from
the place where the narration of the pre-war steeplechase, in which
de Reixach replaced his jockey Iglésia, gives way to an account of his
leading the squadron into the ambush in which it is wiped out. The account
of the race will not be resumed for another eleven pages (p. 166) when it
in turn interrupts the narration of the ambush, which is thus framed by
it in a sequence: Race/Ambush/Race.

The point of transition between the two scenes is invisible, for the
description of the horses and riders glimpsed over a hedge is common to
both incidents. The text is clearly still concerned with the race-course
in the phrase "l'embranchement du huit", though the term "embranchement"
in its general meaning of a branching-off or a junction signals or some
might say, produces the narrative switch that follows. With the reference
to the "chemin creux" seven lines below, the attentive reader realizes
that another scene has superimposed itself and this is immediately confirmed
by the image of de Reixach at the head of his column. Though the hedge
forms a visual link between them, there is nothing in the narrative to
provide a realistic motivation for the switch from the first scene (recounted
by Iglésia but transfigured in Georges' mind) to the second (witnessed
by Georges himself).

It is evident that this interweaving of the two incidents at the very
centre of the novel, is significant. They represent the double defeat
of de Reixach as jockey and commander, which, linked with the narrator's
speculations on his failure as a husband, provides evidence for the likeli-
hood of his death being in the nature of a suicide. Thus this particular
narrative switch, and the superimposition of the two different times and
incidents that it permits, has a clear thematic function. The parallel
between these two rides towards defeat is all the more subtle and effective for not being explicitly stated but for being instead rendered in a concrete, literal manner. The fact that for six lines or more, the words of the text could apply equally to either the race or the ambush, creates the possibility of a simultaneous dual vision of de Reixach, just as the combining of full-face and profile in a Cubist portrait allows the simultaneous perception of different aspects of the subject. The superimposition of different elements in this way is one of the most original and important features of the composition of La Route des Flandres.*

The procedure that makes this possible -- the unannounced switch to another narrative element -- is as unorthodox as it is characteristic of this novel and clearly fragments the narrative, despite the deceptive continuity of the text. Not only is narrative sequence disrupted by the switch, though in a manner the reader has by now become accustomed to, since it has already occurred many times in the course of the novel, but the passage also switches without warning from the third person ("pouvant voir comme s'il n'en avait été qu'à quelques mètres") to first person ("je pouvais les voir"). Such switches between first and third person, with no change of perspective, are an additional source of discontinuity.

The passage typifies the narrative pattern that characterizes La Route: the interruption of a narrative sequence and the branching-off into a new sequence which may then temporarily become the principal one, until it in turn is interrupted, either by the resumption of the original or by the

*Lucien Dallenbach suggests the term "chevauchement" (overlapping) in preference to "superimposition". But I have preferred to retain "superimposition" in order to emphasize that this is what takes place, even though it is only momentary.
switch to yet another sequence. This process continues throughout the book, occurring well over a hundred times in the course of three hundred or so pages. The term "embranchement" could provide a not inappropriate name for the procedure and the figure of eight of the race-course is a perfect structural image of the narrative loop that the text is about to take here before returning again via the junction of the eight to complete the previous loop.*

Such interruptions cannot be assimilated to the flashbacks and digressions of conventional narrative. They represent something radically different. For flashback implies an otherwise chronological order, just as digression supposes a main narrative thread, but there is neither chronological order nor main narrative thread in La Route. The movement of the narrative is not a linear progression in which each new incident forms a link in a temporal chain, but, rather, a mobile system of returns and repetitions, a turning in endless circles like the wanderings of the survivors after the massacre of the squadron.

There are no aids to the reader in this passage, other than those available through close and retentive reading. The novelist no longer feels the need to explain and justify the disconnectedness of such a narrative as we saw him do with some awkwardness in Le Vent. It is now the

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*Gérard Roubichou uses the expression "bifurcation temporelle", particularly apt because of the link he suggests with "biffure" (erasure), which is what the new sequence performs with respect to the previous one. Lanceraux and others have used the term "aiguillage", which captures the abrupt and deliberate nature of the switch.
reader's task to accomplish that piecing together of scattered fragments which the narrator saw himself as undertaking in *Le Vent*. It is a process which perfectly illustrates Iser's view of the function of gaps in a text. The abrupt breaks in the narrative of *La Route* demand a far greater attentiveness on the part of the reader than usual. In so doing, they contribute to forming a reader who seeks for connections between the fragmented sequences and who may thereby realize as much of the text's potential as possible.

**Types of transition**

The switch from the narration of the steeplechase to that of the ambush, is made imperceptibly by means of the image of horses and riders above a hedge, that is common to both of them. While this is perhaps the most characteristic of the montage techniques of *La Route* — the overlapping of two sequences by means of a common element — it is by no means the only kind of transitional procedure to be found in the novel. There are unconcealed breaks as well as disguised ones, abrupt switches as well as gradual transitions, some that are realistically motivated and others that deliberately undermine the realism of the narration. The relation between the two sequences thus juxtaposed is naturally affected by the mode of juxtaposition, although quite varied means may produce similar effects.

Jean Ricardou, in his early article "Un ordre dans la débâcle", was one of the first to note the role of puns and other forms of verbal association in bringing about narrative switches. Other commentators have looked at other devices: Gérard Roubichou, for example, has dealt with the role of the parenthesis in permitting a bifurcation of the
narrative. But so far there has been no systematic analysis of the techniques of montage in *La Route*.

Perhaps this represents a more general gap, as has been suggested by a critic writing of spatial form in the novel:

> We have no exhaustive, systematic discussion of the types of linkages used to join juxtaposed fragments in spatial form narratives . . . . and we know very little about the perceptual demands of these different kinds of linkages.  

The point of such a study would not simply be to catalogue techniques, but to reach a better understanding of the ways in which meaning is produced through juxtaposition, the effects created by different types of "linkage" or transition, and their influence upon the process of reading itself. This chapter is an attempt to provide such an analysis of the linkage of fragments in *La Route*, which, for both the variety and the originality of the effects it achieves, amply repays close examination.

The transitional procedures of *La Route* fall into three general categories which are unevenly distributed throughout the book. There are first of all the transitions of a more or less realistic or conventional kind, which naturally tend to predominate in the first part of the book. They are of two types. On the one hand are those which appear to derive from psychological processes: the wandering of Georges' memory or imagination, or the natural incoherence induced by certain mental or physical states. On the other hand, are the transitions which constitute a conventional alternation between an oral narration and the description of the time and circumstances in which it is taking place. The apparent realism of both kinds may prove deceptive, however, as we shall see.

Then, there are a large number of narrative switches which cannot in any way be accounted for realistically, but which, on the contrary, represent what Ricardou has called "la discohérence", a deliberate non-coherence.
The internal contradictions or inconsistencies that mark certain transitions cannot be attributed, as in a stream of consciousness novel, to the incoherence of memory or other mental processes, but resist all such attempts to assimilate them to a psychologically realistic mechanism. They serve as a reminder that the novel is a text, a verbal construction and not an imitation of consciousness.

Ricardou himself, however, seems to feel that "discohérence" is less apparent in La Route than in other novels of the central period:

Dans la plupart des livres de Simon, l'incohérence apparente est toujours travaillée par des dispositifs articulaires qui tendent vers une cohérence, mais cette cohérence est elle-même toujours travaillée par les manoeuvres de la discohérence. Seulement, les rapports des trois activités se transforment. Dans La Route des Flandres, par exemple, le rapport incohérence-cohérence domine si bien que la discohérence reste un peu en sourdine.9

While this certainly seems the case in the initial readings when most readers are inclined to attribute the incoherence of the narrative to the workings of Georges' memory, with an ultimate coherence thus in sight, the "manoeuvres de la discohérence" become more and more apparent as one examines the structure of the narrative, and influence one's reading of the rest of the text.

Under the heading of "discohérence" can be placed switches introduced by an adverb of time that deceptively promises continuity; those that are temporarily concealed by the use of an indeterminate pronoun; and some of the transitions effected by means of a parenthesis that effaces the sequence which contained it. But one of the deepest sources of "discohérence" is to be found in the use of the three frames; many of the switches between the three frames or times of narration are, as we shall see, simply incompatible with a coherent temporality.

Finally, there are the transitions brought about by the mechanisms
of association, whether through analogous images, sensations or incidents, or through purely verbal means -- puns, repetition of sounds, and so forth. These could be classed as realist or non-realist, depending on whether they are attributed to Georges' consciousness, or viewed as purely verbal phenomena arising out of the text itself. They constitute the largest single group, accounting for nearly a third of all the transitions in the novel. They predominate, however, in the third part of the book, which differs somewhat from the other two in composition, being noticeably more fragmented, made up largely of brief interwoven fragments rather than the longer sequences of the other two parts. The predominance of associational transitions in number does not therefore mean that they are the most characteristic of the novel as a whole.

The approximate numbers of the various transitional devices are as follows:

Transitions based on psychological states or processes 18
Alternation of frame and narration 27
Misleading adverbs and conjunctions 15
Indeterminate pronouns 3
Extended parentheses 10
Association 33

But such a list does not really convey an accurate idea of their relative importance, since that is also affected by their additional use within sequences to produce minor digressions or shifts of focus, as well as by their impact on the reader and the significance of the effects they produce, which are impossible to measure in quantitative terms.

All the transitional devices, whether realistic or non-realistic, produce in the reader an alertness to the possible meaning of the breaks
in the narrative and the relations between the elements thus juxtaposed, because each in some way departs from the expected, thereby heightening the reader's awareness of the transitional process and the composition of the work, instead of lulling it with the familiarity of conventional connectives.

i. Transitions based on psychological states or processes

The switch from the narration of the race to that of the ambush, infringes the norms of coherence and continuity that the reader is accustomed to expect from conventional narrative. But not all of the narrative switches in La Route are as completely disorienting. The majority of such transitions occur in the second half of the book by which time the reader has become attuned to its non-chronological narration and familiar enough with its fictional elements to make identifications and connections. In the early part of the novel, the switches tend to be of a less obviously unorthodox character, though this appearance may be deceptive.

The opening pages (9-20), which constitute a kind of overture to the work, consist of an interior monologue, marked by digressions followed by a return to a central preoccupation -- the figure of de Reixach. The digressions, produced by the mechanisms of free association and justified by the rambling tendency of memory, are natural in the context of interior monologue. They present no difficulty for the reader familiar with stream of consciousness fiction and its conventions -- the beginning in medias res, the use of pronouns instead of names, the presence of private implications and associations, the movement between different periods of time, a certain incoherence, all of which mark these first pages. The initial transitions, abrupt but natural, prepare the way for the fragmentation of
the narrative that is to come.

The first switch, from the opening scene (Reixach and Georges at the "cantonnement") to the next (the final ride towards the sniper), occurs quite naturally, as the narrator's mind moves from considering Reixach's traditional reflexes to an example of them:

... comme par exemple ce réflexe qu'il a eu de tirer son sabre quand cette rafale lui est partie dans le nez de derrière la haie: un moment j'ai pu le voir ainsi ... (p. 12)

Although the introduction of a new episode after a colon is perhaps unorthodox, the narrative progression is so spontaneous that this can hardly be considered a narrative switch of the kind described earlier, from one sequence to another.

The next break, a clear switch to another sequence this time, is also natural enough within the context of interior monologue. Speculating on what the topic of conversation between captain and lieutenant may have been as they rode unwittingly towards the sniper's bullets, Georges imagines them conversing of hunting and racing. The word "courses" provokes an evocation of an elegant race-course. The transition is clearly indicated by the phrase "Et il me semblait y être, voir cela" (p. 19), which evokes
the narrator's tendency to visualize as a realistic justification for the
switch. There is an ambiguity about the tense, however, as Dominique
Lanceraux has noted. Is the visualization taking place in the present
of narration, or at the time narrated? The use of the imperfect seems to
lead away from the present of narration into an uncertain moment of the
past. This is one of the first hints of the novel's deliberately non-coherent temporality.

Similar phrases are used to introduce four more narrative switches,
all of them significantly in the first part of the novel:

Et de nouveau il me semblait voir cela (p. 22)
Et cherchant (Georges) à imaginer cela (p. 48)
il lui semblait toujours voir (p. 72)
il lui sembla qu'il le voyait réellement (p. 79)

Only once in the rest of the novel is a break thus motivated by direct
allusion to Georges' mind wandering (p. 230). In the same category, however,
fall those switches introduced by direct reference to Georges' train of
thought:

pensant à son père (p. 33)
et je me demandais (p. 33)
je pensais qu'il l'avait tenue (p. 261)
je me rappelle (p. 261)
pensant que c'était cela qu'il aurait dû lui dire (p. 243)

But such explicit indications are rare.

Twice, attention is drawn to a switch that has already taken place,
when Blum points out that Georges is confusing two different incidents or
people:

Et Blum: "Mais qu'est-ce que tu racontes? Première fois que je vois
un type mettre deux semaines à sortir d'une cuite . . . ."

Et Georges s'arrêtant pile de parler, le regardant avec une sorte
d'incrédule perplexité . . . et Blum disant: "Ce n'était pas du
génievre, pas cette-fois là" . . . . (pp. 125-126)

Here there is a superimposition of two different occasions: drinking with
Blum during the autumn manoeuvres and drinking with Iglésia after Reixach's death. On another occasion, Blum interrupts Georges when he has passed imperceptibly from talking about the ancestor to talking about his descendant (p. 228). In both cases, Georges' confusion is invoked to justify a narrative switch, but the procedure is only superficially realistic and does not bear too deep an analysis. Blum's intervention calls attention to the switch so that the reader may be fully aware of the superimposition and its thematic significance.

The same is true of the various transitions through sleep, whose apparent realism is deceptive. In several of the major episodes (the ride through the rain during autumn manoeuvres, the wandering after the ambush), Georges is in a state of exhaustion from lack of sleep, which causes him to doze momentarily or, on arrival, (the barn, the friendly civilian's house), to fall into a deep slumber. In two of the narrative frames as well (the train of prisoners, the night with Corinne), Georges drifts between sleep and waking. Lying in bed with Corinne in the darkness, Georges, like the sleeper in Combray:

.... tient en cercle autour de lui le fil des heures, l'ordre des années et des mondes ....

In the final pages of the novel, the narrator "luttant pour ne pas céder au sommeil" wonders if he has dreamed the whole story:

Mais l'ai-je vraiment vu ou cru le voir ou tout simplement imaginé après coup ou encore rêvé, peut-être dormais-je n'avais-je jamais cessé de dormir les yeux grands ouverts en plein jour .... (p. 314)

and thus the entire narrative is placed in the unreal world of sleep and dreams.

These states of semi-consciousness are exploited to provide transitions to another period of the narrative. The text can move from Georges falling
asleep beneath Corinne's body to his waking half stifled in the cramped and airless space of the cattle-truck of prisoners, six years earlier, as though he might be dreaming himself back in the past after describing it to her. But the passage that follows is narrative and has none of the qualities of a dream or recollection. Georges' falling asleep has merely been the pretext for a narrative switch and not a psychologically realistic cause. The same lack of *vraisemblance* is true to an even greater degree of the other instances. Georges may fall asleep in one period to waken in what is, relative to that period, the future, as when he falls asleep in the barn and the narrative switches to him lying awake beside Corinne after the war. The fact that the barn sequence is then resumed as direct oral narration (Georges now recounting it to Corinne) does not lessen the temporal incoherence of the switch, since there had been nothing in the first part of the barn scene to indicate that it was being remembered or recounted later. It reads as autonomous narrative. Sleep (and sexual desire) provides an analogous sensation or situation to link these two sequences, but it is not one to be taken literally. It does not serve as a realistic cause of transitions from a present of remembering to a remembered past but rather as a parallel or analogy for the abrupt, atemporal progression of the narrative:

... il n'y avait aucun lien dans son récit entre les différents épisodes ou plutôt tableaux qu'il évoquait, comme dans ces rêves où l'on passe subitement d'un endroit à l'autre, d'une situation à l'autre sans transition . . .

_Le Vent_, p. 83

In the second part of the book, as Lanceraux has pointed out, drunkenness offers a similar analogy for the incoherence of the narrative and its abrupt transitions:
95

... l'ivresse du personnage annonce clairement celle qui s'empare de l'écriture ... 12

But here too, though the text may mimic the rambling disconnected speech of intoxication (pp. 117-118, 121-125), there is a problem of temporality, for it is actually several weeks later when Georges, completely sober, is describing the incident to Blum. The drunkenness belongs in the period narrated, yet it is manifesting itself at the time of narration, a temporal contradiction that can only be understood in terms of "discohérence".

The other emotional or physical state to provide a major source of transitions is, as every commentator has noted, that of erotic excitement. This is particularly marked in the third part of the book where the night with Corinne provides the narrative frame, but it is present throughout the entire narrative. The transitions operated by erotic associations are, interestingly enough, the most psychologically realistic. Perhaps this derives from the fact that sexual preoccupations, conscious or otherwise, frequently translate themselves into verbal ambiguities, from the slip to the double entendre, as Freud has made us all aware, and thus are naturally related to the verbal mechanisms that generate a text. Or perhaps it is because a subject of such obvious power for the novelist, as each of his books testify, resists the kind of subversive attack that strips the novel of its realist illusion. Thus, the transitions through erotic association, as we shall see later, are the ones that would most support the placing of La Route des Flandres in the stream of consciousness tradition.

Apart from the erotic transitions, however, it is evident that many of the other transitional devices which are linked to Georges' mental or physical state, and which therefore might appear to be realistic, do not always stand up to careful analysis. They serve as signals that a switch
is taking place, or as an analogy for the mode of transition, rather than as its cause. Quite often, therefore, they contribute as much to the undermining of narrative or temporal coherence as do the more obviously non-realistic transitions.

ii. The alternation of frame and narration

Alternation between a direct oral narration and a narrative of the circumstances in which it is taking place, is a classic procedure: in Wuthering Heights, for example, Nelly Dean pauses in her tale to make up the fire or bid goodnight to her listener, Lockwood, who may then add his own story of a further encounter with his surly landlord Heathcliff. Many of the narrative transitions in La Route mark a similar alternation of narration and frame, particularly in the second part of the book, in which a considerable amount of the narrative consists of direct oral narration or dialogue in the setting of the prisoner-of-war camp, where Georges, Blum and Iglésia reminisce over the past or embroider fantasies to obliterate the present. The apparent realism of such an narrational mode is in fact always highly questionable, as the first narrator of another "frame" novel, Manon Lescaut, only emphasises when he claims to have written down Des Grieux' story immediately after hearing it. Perhaps the invention of the tape-recorder has finally imparted plausibility to the convention, as in such works (fictional or otherwise) as Oscar Lewis' Children of Sanchez. In La Route, however, any appearance of realism it possesses is rapidly undermined by the proliferation of frames.

Nowhere are the "manoeuvres de la discohérence", more subtly effective than in the relation between frame and narration, which is constantly undermined, first by the shifts between the three frames and then by the
instability of the narrational mode. The text moves from direct interior monologue (je), to indirect interior monologue (il), to oral narration or dialogue ("je"), each of which in turn, may abruptly revert to one of the other modes. The whole narrational process is inherently unstable in La Route, shifting between different modes and different times of narration without attempting to reconcile them realistically but, on the contrary, leaving their incompatibility apparent.

Thus, in the first part of the novel, the status of the initial interior monologue (pp. 9-20) is suddenly thrown into doubt by the introduction of an interlocutor not previously posited by the text:

"Ouais! ... " fit Blum (maintenant nous étions couchés dans le noir ... . (p. 20)

Delayed presentation of the circumstances of narration is a conventional device, but here Blum's interjection carries the implication that the preceding pages have been oral narration rather than the interior monologue they appeared to be. The dialogue that follows, however, reverts naturally enough to inner monologue with the phrase "Et de nouveau il me semblait voir cela" on the following page (p. 22). But the reader's initial assumptions about the nature of the narrative are even more rudely jolted a few pages later, when, in mid-sentence, the narration switches from the first person of direct interior monologue ("Je dû être par là que je le vis pour la première fois") to the third person of indirect interior monologue ("Georges se demandant sans exactement se le demander"). These disorienting moves are the first of many. When, some twenty pages later (p. 42), a different time and different circumstances of narration are posited by the appearance of a new interlocutor, an unnamed woman, in a period that is clearly later than the first, the status of the narration
becomes even more confused. The text returns twice to the first frame, the train with Blum (pp. 70-77, 97-100), and twice to the second, the hotel room and the still anonymous woman (pp. 93, 95-97), continuing to tease the reader with the expectation of a realistic solution to the narrational enigma, until, at the end of the first part of the book, each apparent frame is thrown into doubt:

Ce n'était pas à son père qu'il voulait parler. Ce n'était même pas à la femme couchée invisible à côté de lui, ce n'était peut-être même pas à Blum qu'il était en train d'expliquer en chuchotant dans le noir que si le soleil ne s'était pas caché ils auraient su de quel côté marchaient leurs ombres: maintenant ils ne chevauchaient plus dans la verte campagne .... (p. 100)

What is most disorienting here is not the uncertainty as to the interlocutor, but the fact that each frame is presented as simultaneous with the others, a temporal confusion which is compounded by the "maintenant" that paradoxically introduces a return to the past. What it does, obviously, is to assert a textual present, a "now" of narrational sequence, that has nothing to do with represented time. At this point, it becomes clear to the reader that the narrative cannot be assimilated to a realistic framework, that there is going to be no one stable locus of narration, but instead these shifting frames, each of which in turn eclipses the others, only to be eclipsed itself. When the text returns to an oral narration, in the context of yet another frame (the prisoner-of-war camp), introduced as abruptly as its predecessors, the resulting confusion of time and place resembles that of Georges after Reixach's death, so that his words apply both to his own state and that of the narrative:

.... je ne savais plus très bien où j'étais ni quand c'était ni ce qui se passait .... (p. 117)

While the presence of three distinct frames is already confusing enough by itself to create a certain "discohérence", it is the shifts between them
that most effectively subvert realist logic. A passage of oral narration may begin in one frame, for instance, but end apparently in another, as with Blum's account of his background, which begins in the camp (p. 284) but finishes in the barn (p. 287), at least a year earlier. Similarly, though less incoherently, Georges' narration of the events leading up to Reixach's death begins in the camp with Blum as audience and ends -- with only suspension points and a new line to mark the switch -- in the scene where Georges meets Corinne (p. 229). Thus there is a continuity of subject but a discontinuity of frame. The reverse procedure is to be found in parts of the text where there is continuity of frame but discontinuity of subject. This is the case in the race/ambush/narrative, which starts as oral narration with Iglesia speaking (p. 143), moves into a visualization of the scene by Georges (indirect interior monologue), switches abruptly to his recollection of the ambush (direct inner monologue), before returning eventually to Georges' visualization of the race and thence to the dialogue between the three men (p. 182). This kind of narrational drift, not only from one mode to another, but from one subject to the other, constantly carries the narrative away from its original source, undermining the realism of the frame construction.

The confusion created by the shifts between the three frames is exacerbated by the parallel (though not simultaneous) shifts between interior monologue and oral narration, the switches from 'je' to 'il' to "je" (see Figure 2 on the next page). It is not that such switches are inherently unrealistic or confusing. The transference from an initial oral account, with the stylistic limitations it imposes, to the greater flexibility of third person narrative is conventionally acceptable. A combination of first and third person in the form of direct interior monologue and omniscient external description can also be realistic, as the example of _Ulysses_ shows:
the sequences centred on Leopold Bloom alternate between the two, a combination which largely contributes to the psychological realism of Joyce's portrayal of Bloom.
PRONOMINAL SWITCHES IN LA ROUTE DES FLANDRES

Any apparent discrepancies in page numbers are due either to the blank pages between the three parts, or to the fact that in certain sections of the text no pronoun is in use and the narration is momentarily indeterminate.
But Joyce uses the two consistently, so that the reader accepts the convention and eventually becomes unaware of it (the secret of all realism), whereas in La Route the alternation of first and third person is deliberately disorienting. Many of the changes of pronoun come in mid-sequence, mid-sentence even, like the first one. Sometimes they accompany a transition from one sequence to another, as in the switch from race to ambush and back again, but often they do not. These switches cannot be satisfactorily explained in psychological terms, as some critics have attempted, suggesting that Georges sees himself in the past from the outside and therefore uses the third person. For in fact, third person occurs in the sequences relating the present as well (pp. 42 and 93 for instance), while first person is also used in some of the past sequences, such as the account of Georges' escape from the ambush. It is this lack of consistency in the use of first and third person, the absence of any procedure that would account for the switches or integrate them realistically with the movement of the narrative, that put them among the "manoeuvres de la discohérence", and not the alternation in itself, as the example of Ulysses shows.

But it is not merely with the aim of disorienting the reader that the novel alternates between first and third person, since there are obvious advantages in the combination that amply explain it. What it permits is a stylistic richness that would be limited by the use of first or third person alone. The passages of direct oral narration are in a vivid colloquial style which renders the prevailing speech and tone of the group of soldiers and conveys the "jeune chien" aspect of Georges. The passages of direct interior monologue render the flow of Georges' thoughts in a style that is partly colloquial still but more imagistic,
more lyrical and impressionistic. The indirect interior monologue of the third person sequences allows a richer, more complex language than would seem appropriate for the speech of a young soldier in the rough world of war and imprisonment, though occasionally the oral passages become quite highflown, as the following exchange seems to wryly acknowledge:

Et Blum: "Mais tu parles comme un livre! . . . ."
Et Georges relevant la tête, le regardant un moment perplexe, interdit, et à la fin haussant les épaules disant: "C'est vrai. Excuse-moi. Une habitude, une tare héréditaire. Mon père a absolument tenu à ce que je me fasse recalé à Normale. (p. 222)

The passages in the third person are more descriptive and meditative, in a more ample and rhetorical vein. While certain basic stylistic patterns (the present participles, for instance), common to all three modes give them an underlying unity, the combination permits an exceptionally rich and varied verbal texture.

The narrative procedures of *La Route* are not inherently unrealistic in themselves, since all realism depends on artifice and the acceptance of its narrative conventions: what could be less *vraisemblable*, for instance, than the supposition that we are within another consciousness? — and yet some of the greatest examples of psychological realism in the novel depend on our acceptance of that premise. It is the way in which the narrative procedures are used in *La Route*, rather than the procedures themselves, that creates "discohérence". The internal contradictions set up by the movement between different periods and frames, which the text draws attention to rather than concealing (and whose effect might be likened to that of the impossible perspective in the drawings of M.C. Escher), make it impossible to see the novel as a representation of consciousness, or to interpret the movement between different times and incidents as that of memory.
Yet the effect of this deliberate non-coherence is not totally anti-realist. *La Route* does not subvert the realist illusion as the later novels do — *Triptyque*, for instance, in which each scene or episode eventually appears in one of the others as postcard, jigsaw, poster, or other illustration, thereby destroying any illusion of its "real" existence. The "discohérence" of *La Route* has a different effect upon the reading. The shifts between frames and modes draw attention to the narrational process itself: to the way in which experience is transformed in the telling, which is one of the book's central themes, dramatized by Georges and Blum's reconstructions of Reixach's and the ancestor's lives.

Even more important, however, is the effect of the temporal confusion created by the three frames. "Je voudrais amener le lecteur à confondre son temps avec le mien," Simon declared to Claude Sarraute, after expressing his customary nostalgia for painting, in which all the elements of a composition can be grasped simultaneously. What the non-coherent temporality of the narrative clearly aims at is the undermining of the reader's grasp of the sequence of events, a necessary first step in producing that simultaneous apprehension of all the novel's elements, towards which every aspect of its composition is directed.

iii. Misleading adverbs and conjunctions

Among the transitional procedures that contribute to the non-coherent temporality of the novel are those which use adverbs or conjunctions suggestive of continuity. Since the progression of episodes is not chronological, the suggestion of temporal continuity is deliberately misleading, momentarily deceiving the reader until the fact that a different sequence has supervened becomes apparent and the reason for the sudden transition must be sought.
The transition itself, while temporarily concealed, is ultimately highlighted by such procedures.

In a number of places, a new sequence is introduced by an adverb of time or a conjunction ("puis", "et", "alors") that suggests continuity where there is in fact a break, seems to indicate a return to the present ("maintenant", "à présent") which is not taking place. Thus, on page 29, for instance, the phrase "Puis il cessa de se demander quoi que ce fût" seems to refer back to a phrase in the preceding paragraph — "Georges se demandant comment la guerre répandait" — but in fact the two occasions are months apart. The earlier paragraph describes a scene after the ambush, the following paragraph has moved back in time to the period of autumn manoeuvres. But the use of "puis" and the repetition of "se demander" give a promise of continuity which the ambiguity of the succeeding description does not at first dispel. Here, as elsewhere, the effect is double. First, there is the shock to the reader's expectations of a realistic sequence, a shock that will still probably be felt at this early stage in the narrative when the modes of transition and the discontinuity they produce are not yet familiar, especially since in this case it is a new episode (the autumn manoeuvres) that is being brought into the text for the first time. Second, there is the thematic effect of the transition. The two episodes are temporarily superimposed, so that their similarity is underlined: they fuse momentarily into the single image of the "chevauchée" that is endlessly repeated throughout the book.

Elsewhere, two contrasting scenes may be superimposed in this way, through the use of a misleading adverb. In the middle of a scene from the night with Corinne, on page 97, the phrase "puis tout à coup l'air entra" (the adverb not even capitalized this time) marks a switch to the train of
prisoners, a scene which had been abandoned two pages earlier. Again, the continuity suggested by the adverb "puis" is deceptive, but temporarily dissimulated by the ambiguity of the preceding description of stifling beneath the weight of another body, which could refer to either situation. There is an exact parallel to this transition in the third part of the novel, on page 293, when the narrative again switches from the night with Corinne to the train of prisoners, a switch which is also introduced by the adverb "puis", misleadingly used after a comma to suggest continuity. What both the transitions achieve is a superimposition of the two situations, so dramatically contrasting in some ways, yet with the common elements of tangled bodies, darkness, the view of the night sky through a small window and the sensation of stifling, that permit their comparison.

This is clearly an instance of what Roger Shattuck calls Romantic juxtaposition, one based, that is, on relations of contrast, shock or incongruity, rather than harmony or complementarity. The underlying significance of this unexpected superimposition of two such different episodes is indicated by a passage where Georges feels himself and the other prisoners in the cattle-car reduced to a state of bestiality like the victims of some enchantment:

... nous serions devenus sans nous en rendre compte quelque chose comme des bêtes, il me semble que j'ai lu quelque part une histoire comme ça, des types métamorphosés d'un coup de baguette en cochons ou en arbres ou en cailloux, le tout par le moyen de vers latins .... (p. 100)

This state of being turned into an animal is evoked again, though in a lyrical vein, in the scenes of love-making with Corinne:

... je n'étais plus un homme mais un animal un chien plus qu'un homme une bête si je pouvais y atteindre connaître l'âne d'Apulée poussant sans trêve en elle .... (p. 292)

The implicit allusions to a witch or enchantress like Circe, or the one
who turns Lucius into an ass, add to the mythic aura of the female figures in the novel, who bind all the men under their spell. The repeated juxtaposition of the cattle-car and the love-making scenes is thus highly significant. 17

Some of the temporal adverbs that introduce new sequences merely serve to emphasize the discontinuity of the narrative by their deceptive promise of continuity. But others, as we have just seen, contribute to what may be called the "palimpsest" effect, that is the superimposition of two different figures or scenes by means of a text ambiguous enough to be read doubly, which is one of the most important of the montage techniques of La Route. It can be achieved, as in the case of the race/ambush sequence, through an image common to both episodes; or, as we have just seen, through a misleading suggestion of continuity. Not only adverbs and conjunctions but, as we are about to see, pronouns, too, can dissimulate a change of sequence beneath an appearance of continuity. Though less common, they produce even more striking superimpositions.

iv. Transition by means of indeterminate pronouns

Among the innovative stylistic devices that Ricardou attributed to Simon at the Cerisy Colloquium was "l'indétermination des pronoms qui permet d'accomplir ce qu'on peut appeler une rotation des substitués". 18 There are many indeterminate pronouns within sequences, most notably the ambiguous "elle" that refers to both Corinne and the "alezane" owned by Reixach and ridden by Iglésia. 19 But there are also several instances where an ambiguous pronoun is the pivotal element that permits transition between sequences, and an accompanying superimposition of two scenes or characters.

The first of these follows from Georges' evocation of the ancestor's
suicide, which has taken the form of an eighteenth century print. The
description has centred on the naked body and the penis, with no mention of
the head or face. Thus when the following paragraph begins with speculation
as to facial expression:

"Et je me demandais s'il avait alors lui aussi cet air étonné
vaguement offusqué le visage d'idiot de Wack quand il avait été arraché
de son cheval gisant mort la tête en bas me regardant de ses yeux
grands ouverts la bouche grande ouverte sur le revers du talus . . .
(p. 88)

the natural tendency, given our longstanding expectations of narrative
continuity and coherence, as well as the assumption that a pronoun will
refer back to the most recent plausible noun, is to read the "il" as
referring to the ancestor. And indeed everything that Georges goes on to
say could apply to him as well as to de Reixach who is the "real" subject
of the passage:

. . . . alors peut-être son visage exprimait-il cette espèce de surprise
de réprobation mais son visage seulement parce que je suppose qu'en
ce qui concernait son esprit il devait y avoir longtemps qu'il avait
franchi le seuil au-delà duquel plus rien ne pouvait le surprendre ou
le décevoir après la perte de ses dernières illusions dans le sauve-
qui-peut d'un désastre . . . (p. 89)

There are, in fact, two indications which serve as a reminder that the
ancestor's suicide has merely constituted a long digression and that the
text is now reverting to an earlier narrative focus. These indications
in order of appearance (though not necessarily of impact on the reader) are,
first, punctuation (suspension points marking the interruption of the ancestor
sequence at the end of the paragraph, immediately followed by inverted
commas marking the resumption of oral narration at the beginning of the
next paragraph) and, second, the reversion to a first person narration.
The new paragraph, in fact, marks a return to the interrupted narrative of
page 79, after a nine page interval. But it is not likely that the reader
will immediately leaf back over nine pages to discover this and moreover,
the continuity of the text, which has been leading up to a description of the ancestor's face, is clearly intended to carry the reader on and permit the ambiguity of the succeeding paragraph. So despite the indications that the true referent of the pronoun "il" is de Reixach, the effect is ambiguous and clearly intended to be so.

The process of superimposition here, as Lucien Dallenbach pointed out in his extremely interesting presentation at Cerisy, resembles the dream phenomenon which Freud called condensation, in which a dream figure can be simultaneously two different people because of common elements in the dreamer's perception of them. Freud compared this to the family portraits of the photographer Galton, who used multiple exposure as a means of revealing family likenesses, a technique that reminds Dallenbach of the portraits in La Route in which Reixach's ancestors "se confondaient, se superposaient dans la bitumeuse et ombreuse profondeur". The superimposition of one Reixach upon the other in the text through the indeterminate pronouns or other devices is clearly related to the doubling of the narrator in certain sequences of Histoire. Both, as we shall see in a later chapter, are an expression of the theme of inheritance, of family patterns tragically repeating themselves, which runs through all the novels of the central period.

In the passage we have just examined, the indeterminacy of the pronoun is exploited for this and additional thematic purposes: first to show the fusing of the two figures, ancestor and descendant, in Georges' imagination and the resultant influence on his reconstruction of both their lives and deaths, and second, as a means of expressing the theme of the eternal repetitions of history, which underlies many of the juxtapositions of the two Reixachs:
... les Espagnols les avaient rossés à cette bataille où Reixach commandait, et alors ils durent battre en retraite par toutes les routes qui descendaient des Pyrénées, c'est-à-dire, je suppose, de vagues chemins. Mais routes ou chemins c'est toujours la même chose: des fossés bordés de morts, des chevaux crevés, des camions brûlés et des canons abandonnés ... (pp. 215-216)

The theme of history as an unending repetition of war and invasion is one that runs through all the novels of the central period culminating in *Histoire*, where the final illustration in the child's history text is an aerial photograph of a battle-field, which the narrator ironically describes as the goal, the apotheosis, of all the preceding chapters and illustrations.

Another such clandestine transition from one Reixach to the other occurs later in the novel, when Georges imagines the ancestor's retreat from Spain, only to project onto it his own memories of retreat after the ambush of the squadron (pp. 225-228). Again the description at mid-point could apply to either, though the incident of the lost soldier seeking to attach himself to the captain happened specifically after the ambush, as the following page makes clear and as an earlier allusion on page 47 has indicated, though not in such a way that the first-time reader would recognize it when it reappears. Blum's interruption ("Mais qu'est-ce que tu . . . .") underlines the superimposition of one figure on the other, which has of course been facilitated not only by the indeterminate reference of the pronoun, but equally by the common name.

A final instance is to be found towards the end of the novel, though here it is in their capacity as betrayed husbands that Reixach and the ancestor are presented as doubles.* In this case, the superimpositions are multiple. The text moves first from the description of de Reixach after

*A similar parallel is created on page 289 between the ancestor and the "pay-san boîteux" (also presumed to have cause for jealousy) again by means of an indeterminate pronoun.
the ambush, conversing with the lieutenant, apparently unconcerned as they ride unwittingly towards the sniper, to the ancestor riding home after the Spanish defeat and also perhaps hoping to find death at the hands of a sniper, with the phrase "magnifique cible" in the middle of the passage providing a pivot for the transition. As the passage continues, with speculation about the ancestor's discovery of his wife's infidelity providing the immediate motive for his suicide, it moves by means of pronouns back to de Reixach and Corinne:

... peut-être fut-ce seulement en arrivant qu'il trouva quelque chose comme une preuve comme par exemple ce palefrenier caché dans le placard, quelque chose qui le décida, lui démontrant de façon irréfutable ce qu'il se refusait à croire ou peut-être ce que son honneur lui interdisait de voir, cela même qui s'étalait devant ses yeux puisque Iglesia lui-même disait qu'il avait toujours fait semblant de ne s'apercevoir de rien ... . (pp. 312-313)

While the "palefrenier" belongs indisputably to the story of the ancestor and Iglesia to that of de Reixach, the three lines in between could refer to either because of the indeterminate reference of the pronouns. Thus, once again, we have a double text that can be read in two ways.

In each of the three instances, the indeterminacy of the pronouns permits the creation of a palimpsest by means of which two stories are being told simultaneously, giving the reader a dual vision of de Reixach and the ancestor. The indeterminate pronouns provide not so much a concealed transition to a new sequence, as an intermediate sequence in an overlapping of the two that is very characteristic of the novel's composition. This too, belongs among the procedures of "discohérence", because while indeterminate pronouns are typical of unspoken thought (the mind not needing to name or identify for itself that which it knows perfectly well) and are therefore used as a device of interior monologue, it is clear from the examples we have seen, that Simon's use of them here is not in imitation
of mental processes but carefully contrived to manipulate the reading of
the text and produce the palimpsest effect we have observed.

v. Sequences contained in extended parentheses

The parenthesis in Simon's writing may serve functions as contrary
to established usage as the adverbs and pronouns we have been examining.
As Gérard Roubichou nicely puts it -- "le 'soit dit entre parenthèses' est,
chez Claude Simon, loin d'être innocent". The parenthesis in Simon's use of
it, he points out, far from constituting the brief interruption of the
main narrative that it is in orthodox usage, often opens a new narrative
element of equal importance with the main one. The narrative in this case
can only be grasped in its totality by the combination of main subject and
parenthesis: were one to suppress the parenthesis, the narrative would not
properly exist:

Il s'est donc produit un renversement dans les rapports des
constituants traditionnels de la phrase: au lieu de représenter des
excroissances parasitaires, les parenthèses sont devenues le centre
de la phrase -- non seulement par leur importance quantitative, mais
aussi par leur fonction dans la constitution du récit.

By its length and complexity, especially when there are parentheses within
parentheses or connected chains of them, the parenthesis in Simon's writing
of the central period significantly affects the development of the main
narrative phrase. Parentheses in Simonian usage almost always have a
fragmenting effect on both the syntax and the content of the text in which
they occur. The drift they provoke by their proliferation of comparisons,
alternatives, qualifications, explanations or ironic comments not only
destroys the unity of the narrative but may also divert its course.

Some parentheses in La Route are extended enough to constitute a
separate sequence. Certain episodes are in fact narrated almost entirely
within parentheses. There are thus parentheses which fragment the text not just on the minor level within sequences but also on the major level of the progression of sequences, permitting, in Roubichou's words, "une bifurcation temporelle", one which is long enough to become "biffure" as well, effectively erasing the previous sequence. There are about ten of these in the course of the novel, with a particular function to perform (pp. 20-21, 42-43, 93-95, 118-121, 135 x 2, 183-184, 216-222, 265-269, 270-275). The parenthesis must therefore be considered among the other techniques of montage in *La Route* when it introduces a separate sequence instead of a mere digression.

The role of the first three parentheses of this type is to present each of the three narrative frames:

1. p. 20 (maintenant nous étions couchés dans le noir . . . . )
2. p. 42 (il ne dormait pas, se tenant parfaitement immobile, ; . . . )
3. p. 118 (le bras de Georges décrivant un demi-cercle . . . . )

Thus the train of prisoners, the night with Corinne and the prison camp make their first appearance in the text in parenthesis:* To a certain extent, this might be seen to represent a concession to narrative convention, since putting the frame into parenthesis is a way of subordinating it to the narrative proper, keeping the narration and the description of its circumstances in an appropriate relation to one another. The apparent conventionality of the procedure is soon undermined, however, because in their subsequent appearances the frames are no longer in parentheses and

*The prison camp appears earlier than this, in fact, on page 93, but simply as a recollection and not as a frame at this point, so the reference given denotes its first appearance as frame.
therefore the initial distinction between frame and narration is not maintained. Nonetheless, the fact that the first appearance of each frame is in parentheses is undoubtedly an aid to the reader.

The second frame, however, (the prisoner-of-war camp) is very substantially narrated within parentheses, from its initial appearance in Part I throughout Part II, where it is the only frame. It alternates with a largely oral narration of other sequences, a narration that represents the prisoners' response to the privations of captivity:

... rassemblant et combinant tout ce qu'ils pouvaient trouver dans leur mémoire en fait de connaissances vues, entendues ou lues, de façon — là, au milieu des rails mouillés et luisants, des wagons noirs, des pins détrempés et noirs, dans la froide et blafarde journée d'un hiver saxon — à faire surgir les images chatoyantes et lumineuses au moyen de l'éphémère, l'incantatoire magie du langage, des mots inventés dans l'espoir de rendre comestible — comme ces pâtes vaguement sucrées sous lesquelles on dissimule aux enfants les médicaments amers — l'innommable réalité . . . (p. 184)

Accounts of life in the camp are to be found, always in parentheses, on pages 118-121, 135 (a brief parenthesis of half a page, plus a second for which there seems to be no closure), 183-184 and 216-222. The only evocation of the camp that takes place out of parentheses in the second part of the book, in fact, is that between pages 169-174. Thus, apart from the two brief returns to it in the third part of the novel, virtually all the narration of the camp episode takes place in parentheses. The same is not true of the other frames (the train, the night with Corinne), although their first appearance in the text is in parentheses. The second part of the novel, in which most of the camp scenes are located, is also the site of the elaboration of two of the three fictions that engage Georges and Blum's attention: the ancestor's suicide and de Reixach's life with Corinne. Though these are distributed across the entire novel, their elaboration as fiction is concentrated in the second part of the novel and interwoven
with the evocation of the camp where it is taking place. Thus, "reality" (the prisoners' life) is confined to parentheses while "fantasy" occupies the main narrative. The structure of this part of the novel in itself symbolizes the psychological function of their fantasies: to blot out reality —

des sons, du bruit pour conjurer le froid, les rails, le ciel livide, les sombres pins . . . . (p. 184)

Thus the parentheses in the second part of the novel have a very specific role and significance.

As for the remaining major parentheses, which occur in the third part of the book and mark a return to the autumn manoeuvres sequence (pp. 265-269 and 270-275) it is not clear why these sequences are in parentheses at all. Only their length, which makes them somewhat different from the short alternating fragments that have predominated in the third part until then, might account for it. But then there is no consistency to be looked for in a text that, as Ricardou points out, is marked by its subversive and unpredictable use of conventions.

vi. Transition through association

The third part of the book is where most of the transitions through association, by far the most numerous group in the novel, are to be found. Conceivably this may have something to do with the genesis and writing of the novel -- the novelist feeling increasingly able to allow the dynamic of the text free rein. But more probably it has to do with the fact that all the narrative subjects are now well established, so that the network of connections between them will be readily recognized by the reader, even though new episodes are still being introduced. It may also be that the main narrative focus of the third part -- the night with Corinne
lends itself particularly well to the use of association as a means of transition, since the erotic imagination is prone to this kind of verbal play and it is the phases of love-making that now dominate the movement of the text:

Extraordinaire massif d'écriture que cette dernière partie (p. 255-314) — "phrase" infinie, haletante, à peu près non ponctuée, issue du narrateur (sauf p. 279-287) —, qui porte le vertige à son comble. Délire érotico-scriptural, en ce sens que la narration accompagne les phases d'un coût, mais surtout parce qu'elle ne progresse plus que par constants déplacements de cellules (ou de scènes), ces derniers reposant sur des associations sexuelles. C'est la règne des mots-charnières: "racine", "bouffant", "glands", "affamés" . . . 24

The "mots-charnières", or verbal mechanisms of transfer, represent one category of associations. Of these, the greatest number is made through repetition of a word in a dual context, of which one component is generally erotic:

... je boufferais les pissenlits par la racine bouffant là où elle pisse . . . (p. 259, hiding in ditch/night with Corinne)

... l'herbe aussi était grise couverte de rosée que je buvais la buvant par là tout entière . . . (p. 260, imprisonment/oral sex)

... nous restions à grelotter tremblant de tous nos membres étroitement encastrés enlacés je roulaï sur elle l'écrasant de mon poids mais je tremblais trop fébrile tatonnant à la recherche de sa chair de l'ouverture de sa chair . . . . (p. 262, imprisonment/lovemaking)

The effect of the repetition is to create a parallel between two different acts or sensations. The qualities of the one are thereby carried over to the other: much of the text is eroticized in this way, but at the same time sexuality is placed in the same context as the most elemental needs (hunger, thirst, warmth) with which it is here juxtaposed. Purely verbal mechanisms, however, are infrequent as transitional devices between sequences, though they operate within sequences, producing digression or otherwise diverting the development of an episode. The famous puns, noted by Ricardou and others, are actually far rarer than their impact would suggest. There are only one
or two, apart from the notorious "virginal/vierge", which serve as transitions between sequences: the play on the sexual versus the botanical connotations of "gland" (pp. 259, 290) on the meanings, argotic and other, of "moule" (p. 258) and the standard double entendre of "tirer son coup", which provides a transition from the ancestor to the "paysan boiteux" on page 123. There are a couple of instances where the rearrangement of syllables produces a new word generating a new sequence:

La gent d'armes/la plaque d'argent (p. 258)

.... l'acier du sabre brandi/et elle me remplit encore une fois à ras bord ce petit cône qui tenait lieu de verre (p. 125)

but these are rare between sequences. Equally rare is the case of a word used metaphorically in one sequence which generates another sequence based on its literal meaning: thus "cette même nuit, cette même encre" on page 33 produces a scene where the father of Georges is writing. But on the whole there are surprisingly few instances of purely verbal associations providing the transition to another sequence. This is by no means to say that verbal associations or other verbal mechanisms are not an important element in the juxtapositional process. Clearly many of the novel's parallels and echoes are created by the recurrence of key words in different sequences, or through play with other connotations of expressions used in one particular context -- the sexual connotations of the equestrian vocabulary, for instance. But verbal association does not predominate in the immediate linkage between sequences.

Not all associations are of a purely verbal kind, however: An additional group of transitions are effected through association of image or situation. In this category belongs the switch between the steeplechase and the ambush which is made by means of the image of horses and riders above a hedge,
common to both scenes, together with the transition back to the race
through an image of clouds that is again common to both. It is the image
as a whole, rather than any particular word or phrase, that provides the
link.

Many of these associations are implicit only, dependent on the reader's
recognition. Such is the case with a transition on page 261 from Georges'
sensation of Corinne's nipples against the palms of his hands to a memory
of imprisonment:

... s'érigéant s'appliquant comme deux taches, comme les têtes
des clous enfoncés dans mes paumes pensant ils ont compté tous les
os, pouvant semblait-il entendre mon squelette entier s'entrechoquer,
guettant la montée de l'aube froide, agités d'un tremblement continu
nous attendions le moment où il ferait suffisamment jour pour qu'on
aie le droit de se lever ....

Unless the reader seizes the scriptural connection (the passion of Christ)
the cause of the switch will be obscure. The same is true of the transitions
between the sequence where Georges hides in the ditch and the love-making
scenes (pp. 257 and 258) where the thematic connections — Georges' thoughts
of death and the "petite mort" of orgasm; the return to the matrix (earth
or the female body) — and all the metaphorical connections — ditch/vagina,
grass/pubic hair — must be made through the recollection of passages scat­
tered through the book.

It is the implicit nature of many of these connections that to a
large extent give the third part of the book its poetic quality. The
transitions are not the explicit causal or chronological links of conven­
tional narrative; they depend on image, allusion and association like the
connections between elements in a poem. Together with the heightened
intensity of the narration, the vivid images and the verbal rhythms that
convey the urgency of sexual desire, almost literally mimicking the
rhythm of coitus at times, the transitions in this part of the novel
contribute to its highly lyrical character.

In the sources of many of the associational transitions, we discover that "architecture purement sensorielle" that Simon sought to create, for the pivots on which the narrative turns in the third part of the book, are sensations and elemental desires. Some of the juxtapositions thus produced would fall into Shattuck's category of Romantic juxtaposition because of the element of shock, contrast or incongruity they contain. For instance, though the vocabulary of eating and drinking is commonly used for oral sex, the literalness of its use comes as a shock in the transitions between Georges' memories of extreme hunger and thirst as a prisoner and his desire for Corinne in the love-making scenes. The vitality of the words themselves is renewed by the juxtaposition, as is our perception of the acts involved. The same is true of the juxtaposition of Georges' escape from the camp, running on all fours like a dog, with his making love to Corinne in the position often characterized as "dog-fasion". The literalness of the juxtaposition has something of a surprise in it and the impact of both sequences is thereby intensified. The qualities of each carry over to the other: an element of sexual excitement is suggested in the escape bid and a sense of vigorous, powerful animality imparted to the sexual scene. But beyond this, the juxtaposing of the escape with coitus, brings to its culmination the theme of sex as an attempt to escape from the prison of the self, expressed in the earlier erotic sequence. In that sequence, there was the even more striking and unexpected juxtaposition of Corinne's cries during orgasm with those of a mad prisoner locked in a hut by the Germans. What this conveys in part is a sense of the sexual experience as beyond restraint, beyond rational control, a kind of momentary madness. But it is the idea of imprisonment, of solitary
confinement, that is developed by the text. The momentary sensation of limitless freedom is presented as illusory and the individual is still confined within his own solitude:

... comme si notre vie tout entière s'était précipitée avec un bruit de cataracte vers et hors de nos ventres s'arrachant s'étirant de nous de moi de ma solitude se libérant au dehors se répandant jaillissant sans fin nous inondant l'un l'autre sans fin comme s'il avait pas de fin comme s'il ne devait plus jamais y avoir de fin (mais ce n'était pas vrai: un instant seulement, ivres croyant que c'était toujours, mais un instant seulement en réalité quand on rêve que l'on croit qu'il se passe des tas de choses et quand on rouvre les yeux l'aiguille à peine changé de place) puis cela reflua se précipitant maintenant en sens inverse comme après avoir buté contre un mur, quelque infranchissable obstacle qu'une petite partie seulement de nous-mêmes aurait réussi à dépasser en quelque sorte par tromperie c'est-à-dire en trompant à la fois ce qui s'opposait à ce qu'elle s'échappe se libère et nous-mêmes, quelque chose de furieux frustré hurlant alors dans notre solitude frustrée, de nouveau emprisonné, heurtant avec fureur les parois les étroites et indépassables limites ... (p. 265)

But the note of pessimism with which this first sexual sequence ends is counterbalanced by the images of escape that triumph in the later sexual scene, though here, too, a renewed suggestion of confinement and frustration marks the fall of erotic tension:

... sourds tous les deux tombés inanimés sur le côté mes bras l'enserrant toujours se croisant sur son ventre sentant contre moi ses reins couverts de sueur les mêmes coups sourds le même bélier nous ébranlant tous deux comme un animal allant et venant cognant allant et venant et violemment dans sa cage ... (pp 292-293)

And Georges' escape bid ends in failure too, for he is recaptured and returned to the camp (p. 184).

In both cases, the theme of sex as a momentary escape from the confinement of the self finds expression largely through the juxtapositional process. It is based here on relations of contrast or even incongruity which perfectly illustrate the Eisensteinian conception of montage: the clash of two disparate images produces a meaning that is not contained in either of them independently. Clearly the processes of association
are very important in this type of juxtaposition, where the connections between the elements juxtaposed are latent, to be made by a leap of the imagination. The significance of the juxtaposition cannot be stated or it would lose its point; it must be conveyed by the association that connects the two elements. Associational processes are one of the subtlest and most effective techniques of montage used in La Route, not only because of the way in which they engage the reader's active participation in the text, but also because their impact is not limited to the actual connection point of two sequences but extends throughout the book, contributing to the way in which each narrative element reflects or echoes the others through the vast network of repetition and association on which the novel is constructed.

Because they are still rooted in the experience of a narrator/character, the associational processes of La Route are not yet in the same category as the autonomous verbal mechanisms of the later works, that function independently of attribution to a character's mental life. The transitions by association (classic stream of consciousness devices because they correspond to the mechanisms of unformulated thought and memory) are the only ones in the novel that can be considered realistic, since, as we have seen, all the other modes of transition are marked by the "discohérence" of the narrative framework. Even their realism, however, is undercut by the "discohérence" of the whole, which prevents the novel from being interpreted as a representation of memory, despite the power of its interior monologue. The associational transitions are ultimately more important for their thematic and structural functions, for their effect on the reader's perception of connections than for their revelation of a psyche.
Conclusion

Viewed from a narrational perspective, the transitions in *La Route* are notable for their disruptive and misleading character: the adverbs and conjunctions that promise continuity where there is none, the parentheses that contain a whole new sequence, the images that lead surreptitiously into another episode. All of these devices temporarily dissimulate the transition, creating what Ricardou calls "une coupure clandestine". They add an additional confusion to a narrative that is already discontinuous, fragmented, and impossible to fit into a coherent framework.

Viewed from a thematic perspective, however, the transitions appear, on the contrary, as unifying agents: the overlapping of scenes and figures they permit, the palimpsest effect of the text that can be read doubly, the linking of two disparate sequences so that the qualities of each colour the other, all serve to connect the scattered fragments of the narrative thematically. They are techniques of "spatialisation", juxtaposing in the space of the text elements that are far apart in time, aiming through this juxtapositional process to induce in the reader a simultaneous apprehension of all the elements of the work.

The montage techniques of *La Route* are diverse and original, not merely serving to link episodes but productive of meaning in themselves. Their effect on the process of reading varies. Some challenge the reader's expectations of a certain realist logic and continuity, undermining both the conventional notion of narrative coherence and the illusion that the work offers a representation of consciousness. Others stimulate the reading memory, aiding in the perception of the network of connections between the elements of the narrative. All, by whatever means they employ, draw attention to the novel as composition, to its arrangement of episodes
in an order other than the causal or chronological sequence of conventional narrative, gradually leading the reader to an awareness of its thematic and formal patterns.
CHAPTER V

IN THE LABYRINTH: THE COMPOSITION OF "LA ROUTE DES FLANDRES"

Ts'ui Pen diría una vez: Me retiro a escribir un libro. Y otra: Me retiro a construir un laberinto. Todos imaginaron dos obras; nadie pensó que libro y laberinto eran un solo objeto.

(J.L. Borges, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan")

Tempting as it is at first reading to see in the fragmented narrative of La Route, the erratic (erotic) wandering of Georges' memory as he lies in bed with Corinne after the war, all that we have discovered in the previous chapter precludes such an interpretation. The temporal discontinuity of the narrative does not derive from the mechanisms of memory, but from the thematic imperatives that govern the juxtaposition of episodes. This is clearly revealed by the analysis of transitional procedures, of which, as we have seen, only a certain number can be considered psychologically realistic, while many are definitely non-realist in character. Confirmation is also to be found in a more recent statement of Simon's which reverses his declarations to Claude Sarraute at the time of publication:

I can show you the plan de montage and you will immediately see that it developed in no way as an imitation of memory, but only in terms of what Tynianov calls the "necessities of construction".

La Route is not a novel of memory, though memory is one of its themes, nor a representation of consciousness, though it contains many brilliant passages of interior monologue. Its fragmented composition and subtle montage
technique serve other ends.

I. The patterns of fragmentation

Such is the complexity of the novel's composition that it needs to be represented in schematic form if its narrative patterns are to be fully grasped. The noting and analysis of transitions between sequences leads naturally to the drawing up of a diagram of sequence breaks and switches, which provides a comprehensive view of the narrative structure. The extent of its fragmentation is only then fully apparent.

The object of these diagrams is to record the breaks between sequences. Since each change of sequence, with only one or two exceptions, marks a shift backwards or forwards in time, the simplest method of schematising the narrative is to place each sequence under the heading of the temporal period in which it belongs. The alternative -- indicating the exact subject-matter of each sequence or part of a sequence -- would require annotation too complicated for a diagram, though it would of course be more faithful to the composition of the narrative than the use of broad temporal periods. The distribution of the sequences under the heading of temporal periods does have one advantage, however, which is to make the novel's destruction of chronology evident at a glance.

The text moves back and forth between nine periods, of which three serve as frames: that is, they represent a supposed time and circumstances (the train of prisoners, the prison camp, the night with Corinne) in which episodes from the other six periods are being recalled or reconstructed. The first two frames also become subjects within the third frame -- the night with Corinne -- which eventually predominates. The nine periods among which all the narrative sequences can be divided are as follows:
1. the ancestor's life and death at the end of the eighteenth century
2. the pre-war life of Reixach, Corinne and Iglésia
3. the pre-war scenes of Georges and his parents
4. the autumn billeting at the barn during the "drôle de guerre"
5. the ambush and wandering of the survivors, May 1940
6. the prisoners' train journey
7. the prisoner-of-war camp
8. the post-war period and first meeting with Corinne
9. the night with Corinne

While 8 and 9 clearly belong to the same broad period, they are treated separately, since 8 is only a narrative subject and never a narrative frame and cannot therefore be subsumed under the heading of 9. The same is true for 2 and 3, which belong to the same period but are best treated separately in order to distinguish their different subject matter.

The diagrams deal only with the major level of fragmentation: that is to say, they record clear switches to another sequence, but not allusions or brief digressions within a sequence. In general, the distinction between the two is clear: most sequence shifts are unmistakable, even when the new sequence is very brief or two sequences are interwoven in short alternating segments, because they have the quality of autonomous sequences and not that of digression or allusion. There are, however, a small number which are problematic. This is either because they are closer to constituting a digression than a sequence proper, or because at times frame and narration are intermingled in a relatively conventional manner so that
between them does not constitute a switch of sequence. There are also one or two passages which present two or more frames as though they were simultaneous, making it difficult to situate the passage in one or other period. These passages are marked with an asterisk. On the whole, however, changes to another sequence are obvious and unambiguous and easily recorded by the diagram. The one or two occasions when a change of sequence does not mark a change of period present no problems.

With these minor limitations, the diagrams do offer a useful overall view of the narrative composition of La Route which makes its fragmentation and its non-chronological progression easily visible.
NARRATIVE SWITCHES IN PART I (PP. 9-101) OF LA ROUTE DES FLANDRES

*problematic.
NARRATIVE SWITCHES IN PART II (PP. 105-252) OF LA ROUTE DES FLANDRES

* problematic
FIGURE V

NARRATIVE SWITCHES IN PART III (PP. 255-314) OF LA ROUTE DES FLANDRES
The diagrams clarify and confirm the general impressions of the reading, revealing not only the fragmentation of the narrative and its temporal mobility, but also the predominance of particular periods and the presence of certain patterns in the composition.

There are approximately 113 narrative switches in 301 pages of text, more if the breaks between Parts I/II and II/III with their epigraphs are counted as part of the text. The rate of fragmentation is not constant, however. While there are about 28 switches in the 93 pages of text in Part I, the much longer second part contains only about 38 switches to 148 pages of text. The third part, with only 60 pages of text, is the most fragmented of all, containing approximately 47 switches. The reason for this greater fragmentation is perhaps to be found in the predominant subject matter of the third part. The interweaving of two or more narratives in brief fragments of no more than a few lines each, a page at the most, expresses the erotic tension of that part of the book, creating a rapid almost breathless rhythm that is particularly appropriate. The already noted predominance of association as a mode of transition in the third part also contributes to this rapidity and fragmentedness by its flexibility, and the ease with which a single word can effect a switch.

The length of the fragments clearly affects the reading in other ways than the creation of a certain rhythm. The more frequent the switches and the more fragmented the text, the greater the effort demanded of the reader. Short, interwoven fragments of the kind to be found in the third part are still within eye-range on the page as well as in the memory and thus the effects of simultaneity so important to the composition of La Route, can easily be created. In the case of longer sequences, which tend to efface the previous one in the reading memory, effects of simultaneity
must be achieved at the point of transition, through the various devices of
that produce an overlapping two sequences. In general, the shorter the
fragments, the more the reader can perceive the connections and echoes
between the different elements of the narrative and the richer the potential reading.

Each of the novel's narrative subjects is fragmented in its narration,
ot only by the constant interruptions of "rival" subjects, but also by
the destruction of temporal sequence, which together isolate each partial
episode from its context. Thus a scene may be interrupted and its different
elements spread across the book and in addition they may not be in chrono­
logical order, which separates them further from each other, turning
them into isolated fragments instead of steps in a narrative progression.

As the diagrams demonstrate, the text moves back and forth between different
periods or different moments of a period. This abolition of chronology
is to be found not only within the overall narrative composition, but also
in the progression of a particular episode. Thus, in Part II, to take just
one subject -- the events surrounding the massacre of the squadron and
Reixach's death -- the narration progresses from Georges' drunkenness after
Reixach's death (p. 125) back in time to his recollections of the ambush
and his own escape from it (p. 155) then forward again to the General's
suicide (p. 202) switching back abruptly to Georges' drunkenness and
continuing that scene with his first sight of the invading forces (pp. 205-
214) then finally back to an incident immediately before Reixach's death
(p. 227). Instead of the chronological progression 1-2-3-4, we have
therefore 3-1-4-3 continued-2, with, of course, several other episodes
from other periods (the autumn billet, the steeplechase, the ancestor,
the prison camp) intervening as well, to make the narration of events
surrounding Reixach's death completely fragmentary and disordered. While not all of the episodes are as non-chronological in their development as this, it is certainly typical of the novel's narrative patterns.

Another pattern that emerges clearly from the diagrams is the alternation or interweaving of two sequences, which begins to establish itself as the characteristic compositional mode of the third part and will be very prevalent in the two succeeding novels, *Le Palace* and *Histoire*. Alternation, or interweaving as it is best described when the sequences are broken into very short segments, can be used for a variety of effects. The simultaneous awareness of two or more sequences it produces in the reader can be used for thematic purposes, to suggest relations of similarity or contrast between the sequences thus interwoven, or for psychological purposes, as is often the case in *Histoire*, to suggest the simultaneity of mental phenomena — perception of external environment, for instance, accompanying a particular train of thought, or even different trains of thought occurring simultaneously. Other uses will be seen in *Le Palace*. It is probably the most typical of Simonian narrative patterns.

These and other patterns and symmetries observable in the diagrams lead us on now from the recording of narrative fragmentation to an examination of its broader functions and significance. Some of these have already been suggested at the level of the individual break in the preceding discussion of the novel's montage techniques, the importance of which is even clearer now that the degree to which the narrative is fragmented and its chronology disordered has become fully apparent.
II. A fragmentary vision

The provisional title of *La Route* — "description fragmentaire d'un désastre" — recalls the opening pages of *Le Vent*, which seem to prefigure Georges' attempt to reconstruct the past:

... n'ayant eu des événements qui s'étaient déroulés depuis sept mois, comme chacun, comme leurs propres héros, leurs propres acteurs, que cette connaissance fragmentaire, incomplète, faite d'une addition de brèves images, elles-mêmes incomplètement appréhendées par la vision, de paroles, elles-mêmes mal saisies, de sensations mal définies, et tout cela vague, plein de trous, de vides, auxquels l'imagination et une approximative logique s'efforçaient de remédier par une suite de hasardeuses déductions ....

(*Le Vent*, pp. 9-10)

These words perfectly describe the dubious process of deduction and imaginative speculation through which Georges and Blum try to reconstruct the events of de Reixach's life, events of which (even the ones they themselves lived through) they have only a fragmentary knowledge. The deep scepticism as to the possibility of really knowing what has happened, that finds expression in *Le Vent*, is echoed in the final pages of *La Route* by Georges' reiterated expressions of doubt — "Mais comment savoir? que savoir?" — and his final suspicion that he has invented or dreamed it all. The novel is full of images of the fragmentariness of knowledge, the limitations of any single perspective: all Georges possesses of Reixach and Corinne's existence before the war are:

... ces quelques images muettes, à peines animées, vues de loin ...

(p. 50)

... de fugitifs tableaux printaniers ou estivaux, comme surpris, toujours de loin, à travers le trou d'une haie ou entre deux buissons ...

(p. 48)

His slow extraction of Iglésia's story is likened to the restoration of a painting:

... ce n'était pas jour après jour mais pour ainsi dire de place
en place (comme la surface d'un tableau obscurci par les vernis et la crasse et qu'un restaurateur révélerait par plaques — essayant, expérimentant ça et là sur de petits morceaux différentes formules de nettoyants) que Georges et Blum reconstitué peu à peu, bribe par bribe ou pour mieux dire onomatopée par onomatopée . . . l'histoire entière . . . (p. 137)

This image in turn echoes the sub-title of Le Vent — "tentative de restitution d'un retable baroque" — and the piecing together of the fragments of a shattered mirror which the narrator of that novel uses as a metaphor for his reconstruction of events. In the composition of La Route, with its assemblage of broken sequences and disconnected episodes, can there not be found an embodiment of that piecing together of fragments which represents the attempt to reconstruct the past?

The narrative itself is fragmentary, containing noticeable gaps and omissions. The absence of the actual moment of capture or surrender is the most significant of these, together with Corinne's acceptance of Georges as a lover, both of which would almost certainly be accounted for, however briefly, in a more conventional narrative. Iglesia's fate is also passed over in silence — "(mais cette fois Iglesia n'était plus là . . . . "(p. 183), though we know he has survived since a phrase at the end of the book informs us that he and Corinne made no attempt to see each other after the war (p. 304).

But it is not so much the existence of such lacunae, but rather the incompleteness of each episode that gives the narrative its fragmented character. Most sequences are left unfinished, either abruptly interrupted by another one, or allowed to tail off into silence marked by suspension points, or gradually effaced by means of an image or digression which leads imperceptibly to another sequence. When there is a continuation or sequel to the events narrated, it often appears so much later (or earlier)
in the text, that the connections are not clear. Thus each sequence is itself a fragment, like the broken shards of mirror, that the reader must piece together to gain a sense of the chaotic ten days of war that form the central episode. But it is not merely on the basic level of incident, but more importantly, in the piecing together of the multiple connections and echoes among the different narrative subjects, that the reader's reassembling of the fragments must take place.

In its narrative structure, *La Route des Flandres* succeeds in creating the fragmented composition that *Le Vent*, with its constant reiteration of the fragmentariness of knowledge, the fragmentedness of experience, called for but could not achieve. The task of the narrator in *Le Vent* must now be undertaken by the reader of *La Route*.

### III. In the labyrinth: The book as symbolic space

The fragmented composition of *La Route* has its own symbolic function, however, that of representing the wanderings of the survivors after the ambush. The scene of the four horsemen, eventually reduced to two by the sniper's bullets, turning in circles in a futile and doomed attempt to regain the front or find a place of refuge from the surrounding enemy forces, provides the central image of the novel and its dominant episode. The green country lanes along which they ride, have become a treacherous maze from which there is no way out but capture or death:

> . . . la campagne avait l'air d'un jardin bien émondé, quels sont ces arbustes buis ou plutôt conifères je crois boulingrins que l'on taille géométriquement jardins à la française dessinant de savantes courbes enchevêtrées bosquets et rendez-vous d'amour pour marquis et marquises déguisés en bergers et bergères se cherchant à l'aveuglette cherchant trouvant l'amour la mort déguisée elle aussi en bergère dans le dédale des allées . . . . (pp. 78-79)
The text itself is like a maze (and at its centre too "l'amour la mort"), a maze in which the reader has the sense of turning in circles, of finding himself again and again at what seems to be the same point, like a wanderer in a labyrinth. This effect is produced in part by repetition: the repeated allusions to particular incidents of the retreat (de Reixach riding ahead ramrod stiff, pp. 17, 72, 89, 229, 313; Iglésia's wound, pp. 77, 51; the attempt of another lost soldier to join them, pp. 47, 229, for instance) and the recurrence of certain images or passages, like the following:

... et tout juste utilisable peut-être pour des ferrailleurs ou des chiffonniers . . . (p. 205)

... juste bonne pour l'équarisseur: sans doute passerait-il avec les chiffonniers et les ramasseurs de ferraille d'ordures . . . . (p. 309)

... ces civils qui s'obstinaient de façon incompréhensible à errer trainant une valise crevée ou poussant devant eux de ces voiturettes d'enfants chargées de vagues bagages . . . . (p. 17)

... Georges se demandant comment la guerre répandait (puis il vit la valise éventrée, laissant échapper comme des tripes, des intestins d'étoffe) cette invraisemblable quantité de linges . . . . (p. 29)

... femmes protégeant l'enfant sorti de leur ventre le fruit de leurs entrailles serré contre elles transportant des ballots des édredons rouges crevés dont les plumes le duvet se répandait trainant au dehors les entrailles les tripes blanches des maisons . . . . (p. 309)

But certain incidents, of which the most obvious and the most significant is the sighting of the dead horse, represent actual recurrences, indications that the survivors, with no map or guide to aid their escape, are simply turning in circles: Georges sees the dead horse first just before Reixach's death and then again another three times, in a more and more advanced state of decomposition.

The labyrinthine effect of the text is created not just by the recurrence of incidents connected with the retreat, however, but by all
the repetitions and reprises of the narrative. The reader, with each return of an image or sequence, feels like Georges gazing at the dead horse:


Whether one sees in this circularity the text imitating the fictional world it describes, or, with Ricardou, the fiction imitating the structure of the text that produces it, it is clear that the book has become a symbolic space. It does not simply describe space as milieu or décor in the manner of the traditional novel: it creates a space in which the reader turns in circles like the protagonists. The fragmentation of the narrative and the reorganization of its elements in recurring patterns makes the process of reading analogous to the wandering of the survivors.

The labyrinth, as Ludovic Janvier points out in his study of the nouveau roman, has become commonplace in modern writing as a symbol of the human condition:

Le labyrinthe est devenu la banale — parce que la meilleure — traduction de la posture dérisoire d'un individu que le monde engloutit et dèroute. Ecrasé ou chassé par une histoire de plus en plus complexe à laquelle il ne saurait plus prendre part, cherchant vainement une porte de sortie, il est radicalement séparé.2

The image of the Flanders countryside as a maze is hardly banal or hackneyed, however, but singularly appropriate as a symbol of the soldiers' plight, trapped in a diminishing space by the encircling enemy forces and searching hopelessly for the last remaining escape routes, victims of a historical process over which they have no control. The image has, moreover, been infused with new life retrospectively by Simon's later use of a similar metaphor for the process of writing, which he compares, in the preface of Orion aveugle, to the wanderings of a traveller lost
in a forest:

... il tourne et retourne sur lui-même, comme peut le faire un voyageur égaré dans une forêt, revenant sur ses pas, repartant, trompé (ou guidé?) par la ressemblance de certains lieux pourtant différents et qu'il croit reconnaître, ou, au contraire, les différents aspects du même lieu, son trajet se recoupant fréquemment, repassant par des places déjà traversées, comme ceci

et il peut même arriver qu'à la "fin" on se retrouve au même endroit qu'au "commencement".

Aussi ne peut-il avoir d'autre terme que l'épuisement du voyageur explorant ce paysage inépuisable. A ce moment se sera peut-être fait ce que j'appelle un roman ... .

(Claude Simon, Preface, Orion Aveugle)

Here the image of a lost traveller turning in circles carries no tragic implications but, on the contrary, a sense of exploration and discovery, experienced by the writer initially but shared eventually by the reader who follows in his traces, using the resemblances and echoes of the text to guide him through its labyrinthine composition.

IV. Repetition and symmetry in the composition

The four appearances of the dead horse which serve to indicate that the soldiers are turning in circles also provide one of the book's main structural elements, as Simon has stated on numerous occasions:

... les chevaliers dans leur errance (ou le narrateur errant dans sa forêt d'images) repassent par ou reviennent toujours à ces points fixes que sont Corinne ou, topographiquement, le cheval
The image of the dead horse appears close to the beginning and end of each part of the novel. (Part I: pp. 27, 101; Part II: pp. 108, 242; Part III: pp. 258, 308). It thus imparts a loose symmetry to the whole, symbolized by the *trefle* "trefoil" of which the three leaflets correspond to the book's three parts.* The dying horse in the autumn billet sequences also appears four times (pp. 44, 67, 130, 270) in a corresponding structural pattern. The other most obvious source of symmetry in the composition is the fact that the novel opens with Georges' first meeting with de Reixach, closes with his final sight of Reixach just before his death, while its probable cause — the massacre of the squadron — is placed at the exact centre of the book, framed by the account of his earlier defeat in the steeplechase. This pattern was illustrated by Simon at Cerisy in 1971 with a geologically inspired diagram:

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*The source of this structural image is perhaps suggested by the following lines from *Histoire* — "un trefle, des huits entrelacés comme ces ornements en galon doré sur les képis des officiers" — which link the "trefle" and the "embranchement du huit".*
Divers épisodes, différents thèmes (comme celui des paysans du cantonnement) apparaissent et réapparaissent de part et d'autre de l'élément central, l'ensemble se présentant en somme comme ces coupes de terrains au centre desquels se trouve un puits artésien et dont les différentes couches superposées (sableuses, argileuses, etc) décrivant une courbe sous-jacente, toujours présentes, donc, en profondeur, affleurent à la surface de part et d'autre du puits.

The loose overall symmetry of the composition revealed in Simon's diagram is reinforced by the innumerable parallel elements that subtly connect all the episodes, giving formal shape and unity to a text that at first seems bewilderingly diffuse and fragmented.

Many of the novel's elements are to be found in triplicate: the three frames, the three triangular dramas imagined by Georges and Blum, the three "suicides" (that of the general, and the suicide-like deaths of Reixach and the ancestor). Not only the major fictional elements are thus trebled: among the lesser incidents that appear in three variants are the drinking scenes (Reixach buying beer for the soldiers at the inn, Blum and Georges drinking grog the previous autumn in the village cafe, Iglésia
and Georges getting drunk after Reixach's death); the card-playing scenes (in the farmhouse, in the prison-camp, after the war); Georges being struck (by horses' hooves in the ambush, by the boot of another soldier in the train, by Corinne's shoe thrown at him in anger); his escape on all fours (from the scene of the ambush, from the sentinel at the crossroads, from the prison-camp), and many others.

On the level of minor detail, the three-fold repetitions are even more striking. To take just one instance, that of the three female figures (Corinne, the "fille laiteuse" and the ancestor's wife), each of whom is the centre of a triangular relation, real or fantasized: all of them are described in similar, almost identical terms. The first reference to Corinne by means of the pun on "virginal/vierge" — "Seulement, vierge, il y avait belle lurette qu'elle ne l'était plus" (p. 13) — is paralleled by Blum's remark on learning that the name of the ancestor's wife was Virginie: "Beau nom pour une putain. Donc cette virginale Virginie". . . . The farm-girl's first appearance has something virginal about it — "sa chair laiteuse, le cou laiteux et pur qui sortait de la grossière chemise de nuit" (p. 39); she is "la liliale princesse" (p. 267), "la belle au bois dormant" (p. 289), yet she too is transformed into whore as "la chèvre-pied" (p. 128) with its connotation of animality and perversion. Her appearance in nightgown and shawl is echoed in the descriptions of Virginie — "vêtue — ou plutôt dévêtue — d'une de ces chemises" (p. 191) in an imagined erotic scene, or in the second portrait.

... dans ce costume qui était comme une négation de costume, c'est-à-dire une simple robe, c'est-à-dire une simple chemise et à demi transparente, et qui la laissait à demi nue . . . (p. 281)

Corinne's dresses are also likened to nightgowns:
. . . . une de ces espèces de robes violentes, non pas aggressives mais en quelque sorte agréées, c'est-à-dire dont la fragilité, l'inconsistance, les dimensions exigües donnaient l'impression qu'on en avait déjà arraché la moitié et que le peu qui restait encore ne tenait guère que par quelque chose comme un fil, et plus indécente qu'une chemise de nuit (ou plutôt qui sur toute autre femme eût été indécence mais qui, sur elle, était quelque chose d'au-delà de l'indécence, c'est-à-dire supprimant, privant de sens toute idée de décence ou d'indécence) . . . . (p. 147)

Each passage stresses the near-nakedness, the sexual availability of the woman, in clothing that is frequently likened to the wrappings enclosing some luxury object or delicacy (cf. pp. 44, 191, 289). Corinne's "transparente auréole de cheveux blonds" (p. 148), is matched by Virginie's "lourde chevelure blonde" (p. 198), while the luminosity surrounding the farm-girl seems to emanate from her skin rather than from the lantern she carries (p. 41). Each is associated with a bird motif: the peacock on the lace curtain which hides the farm-girl, becomes her symbol, the ancestor's wife is called "sa petite pigeonne", Corinne's skin is likened to the softness of down or feathers, the rise and fall of her breast to that of a frightened bird (pp. 238, 270).

That the three women should be described in almost identical terms, with details of clothing and physical appearance repeated from one to the other, is not surprising, given that they are merely interchangeable embodiments of feminine desirability, conjured up in the fantasies of soldiers deprived of sexual fulfillment. Thus the farm-girl is described as "l'idée même de la femme" (p. 41), a primitive fertility figure, while Corinne seems to Iglésia "la femme la plus femme qu'il eût jamais vue" (p. 140), and the account of Virginie's portrait gradually moves away from the historical individual to the object of desire:

. . . . cette bouche cachée secrète -- femme non pas simplement étendue mais renversée, culbutée . . . . (p. 191)

The three women, invisible, absent or long dead, are mere ciphers onto
which is projected male desire in all its ambivalence, as the virgin/
whore dualism makes clear. Since all are equally objects of fantasy, their
images, particularly those of the ancestor's wife and Corinne, blend in-
dissolubly, each influenced by and in turn influencing the others.

But while such threefold repetition is explainable in psychological
or thematic terms, particularly in this instance, it is generalized to
a degree that makes it of formal as well as thematic significance. It
is tempting to look for some tri-form structure that might encompass
all the triple elements. Naturally the notion of a triptych comes to mind,
because of the title and composition of Simon's recent novel Triptyque.
The earliest meaning of triptych, moreover, was a set of three writing
tables hinged or tied together (Shorter Oxford Dictionary), which would
make it an appropriate enough image for the structure of a novel divided
into three parts.

While La Route can probably not be seen as a triptych in the traditional
sense, since its episodes are both too numerous and too fragmented (spread
across the whole text rather than contained in one of the "panels"), the
triptych provides an illuminating analogy for the formal composition of
the work. Simon's description of triptych composition at Cerisy in 1974,
though he was referring specifically to Triptyque, has much that is
applicable to La Route:

Je propose un mode de lecture en évoquant ces peintures composées
de trois volets qui représentent quelquefois des scènes totalement
différentes et quelquefois un ensemble homogène (la vie d'un même
saint). Mais ce qui fait l'unité de ce genre d'œuvres, c'est une
unité de nature picturale, c'est, disons, que tel rouge en haut du
volet de gauche peut renvoyer à tel autre rouge ou encore à tel
vert en bas de celui de droite, si bien que les trois tableaux sont
composés de manière à n'en former qu'un seul. Cette harmonie des
couleurs et ces renvois de l'un à l'autre, voilà ce qu'indique le
titre Triptyque, du moins dans mon esprit.
Just as in a triptych, which may or may not possess narrative or thematic continuity, the three panels are unified into one work by formal elements such as colour, so in a novel like *Triptyque* the three narrative subjects (totally unrelated to each other as anecdotes) are bound together by formal elements that not only give artistic coherence to the work but are productive of meaning through the network of connections -- "renvois" -- they create among its diverse sequences. In the same way that the spectator's eyes are drawn from an incident in the life of a saint to his triumph in paradise, by a particular colour repeated in different panels, the reader is led to connect different sequences in the novel and to discern implicit relations between them, by the repetition of an image, a certain configuration of words, or even, quite literally, by the use of colour.

For the colour relations, Simon refers to, are no metaphor for more purely literary devices, but an important element in the composition of *Triptyque*.

Colour is also one of the formal elements in *La Route*, though used perhaps less systematically. The major incidents of de Reixach's story are all in the same tonality: the steeplechase and the final ride towards the sniper are both afternoon scenes in brilliant sunshine against the vivid green of spring. The green of the race-course -- "l'immense et luxuriant tapis vert" -- with its boundary hedges and little wood, is matched by that of the hawthorn hedges, "le vert chemin", "la verdoyante campagne" of Flanders. The racing colours chosen by Corinne -- "rose vif tirant sur le mauve" -- that Reixach wears when he replaces Iglesia and that are compared to a silken feminine undergarment (pp. 23 - 24), are echoed by the "chiffon rose" caught in the hedge that Georges notices just before Reixach's death. Both in turn are repeated by the
"rose-parme" of Virginie's dress in the second portrait and the "châle violet" that covers the farm-girl's nightgown, and complemented by the "ciel tout rose de l'aurore" in the ambush scene. Such colour harmonies are clearly not accidental. The green underlines the thematic link between the race and ambush scenes, while the series of pink notes serves to recall the erotic defeat Reixach has suffered. At the same time, the concordance of colours helps to bind all these varied elements into a satisfying composition, in very much the same way as the colours of a triptych unify its three panels. Similarly, the frame sequences in which Reixach's story is related or the various fantasies with which Georges and Blum console themselves are elaborated, are all characterized by sombre shades: the darkness of the cattle-car and the hotel room, the gray rain in the autumn billet and in the yard where the prisoners shovel coal, the dark pines of the German landscape. Again, this colour concordance serves to link them formally, while providing a tonal contrast with the brilliant colouring of the stories themselves — "les images chatoyantes et lumineuses" (p. 184).

What Simon has to say about the role of colour in the triptych applies quite literally, therefore, to the composition of La Route as well as to that of Triptyque, since the use of colour undeniably fulfills some of the same unifying functions, both thematic and formal, as that of a triptych. But the more general aspect of the analogy is equally appropriate to La Route. In using the title Triptyque, Simon was not merely alluding to the book's three interwoven fictions, but seeking to evoke the "mode de lecture" that such a work invites or even necessitates: the search for the relations between the three, La Route, too, calls for a special kind of reading, one that is alert to the connections between disparate elements
of the text, and one of the primary functions of the three-fold repetitions that characterize the work is to provoke the recognition of these connections. As an analogy for a type of composition and the mode of reading it requires, the triptych is every bit as appropriate to La Route as to Triptyque itself. It has an advantage over the stated structural image of the book, the trefoil (whose tri-partite form prefigures it), in that it specifically involves the joining of three different subjects (scenes from scripture or the life of a saint, representations of sacred personages or those who have commissioned the work), while the trefoil is simply an abstract design. When one recalls the sub-title of Le Vent — "tentative de restitution d'un retable baroque", (the retable or altarpiece being often, though not always, in the form of a triptych) — it is tempting to see the triptych as a latent structural image which only required the stimulus of the Francis Bacon exhibition, with its striking contemporary versions of the genre, to surface as a conscious design in Triptyque.*

There is in fact a virtual triptych in La Route, for the three subjects around which Georges' and Blum's fantasies revolve can be seen as the three parts of a triptych devoted to the theme of the eternal triangle. The story of Reixach, Corinne and Iglesia must, by its predominance in the text, occupy the centre, flanked on the one hand by the imagined history of the ancestor, his wife and the "palefrenier" which is its prefigurement, and on the other hand by the "drame paysan" which offers a burlesque version of it, in much the same way as a sub-plot in a Shakespearean play duplicates the main plot but with characters of lesser importance or

* Simon stated at Cerisy that it was the Bacon retrospective of 1971 that inspired him to add a third series to the two existing ones and to use the title "Triptyque".
stature -- attendants, servants, rustics and the like.

The term *mise en abyme* generally used of such devices is not entirely appropriate in the case of *La Route*, however, since it implies a hierarchical and one-way relation between the two (the duplication of a major subject by a minor subject or its reflection in miniature), whereas in *La Route*, if the ancestor's story serves as prefigurement of de Reixach's, it is also in turn coloured by it, since the few real facts Georges knows about the ancestor's life are gradually supplemented by what he knows of de Reixach's, until the ancestor's story comes more and more to resemble his descendant's. It is not a straightforward reflection but a two-way process for which Simon's own formulation -- "jeu de miroirs internes" -- seems more appropriate, evoking as it does the way in which all the novel's subjects repeat or reflect each other. 7

Speaking of the relation between the three stories in an interview shortly after the publication of *La Route*, Simon likened it to that among the parables in a sacred text:

Ainsi, m'a-t-on dit, le Talmud serait l'éternel commentaire d'un fait ou d'un épisode par d'autres épisodes semblables ou contraires qui le complètent, qui s'opposent à lui, qui présentent un autre aspect du même thème. 8

He also compared it to the relation of the voices in a fugue, but the analogy of a text in which all the episodes are designed to illuminate, through repetition, variation or contrast, the significance of some original, seems altogether more appropriate and captures an essential quality of *La Route*. The most distinctive features of its composition are directed towards such an end: the montage of fragmented sequences that makes possible the superimposition of one figure or incident upon another, and the juxtaposition or interweaving of chronologically remote but thematically related scenes; the repetition of many elements in three or more variants; the recurring words and images and the allusions that keep all the subjects
present in the text by maintaining the reader's recollection of previous sequences. Few episodes can be read without evoking others, counterparts or contrasts that point to new facets of meaning, for each episode is part of a constellation which in turn intersects with others, and its full significance derives from the total context.

V. Archetype and variation

Like the conversation of Georges' mother, with its three or four themes: 

. . . . autour desquels sa pensée semblait graviter avec le monotone, opiniâtre et furieux acharnement de ces insectes suspendus dans le crépuscule, voletant, tournoyant sans trêve autour d'un invisible — et inexistant, sauf pour eux seuls — épigone (p. 53)

the narrative revolves around three or four thematic centres: love, death, war and history. Two archetypes underlie most of the major episodes: 

the triangle, prototype of all the sexual relationships in the novel, and the "chevauchée", which encompasses all the scenes of men on horseback. Instead of a progression of events towards some resolution, the narrative consists of a succession of overlapping images, variations upon an archetypal pattern. Each variant recalls the others, reiterates and enlarges their significance and reinforces their power. The absolute superimposition of one scene upon another produced by certain montage devices is simply the most extreme version of a process to be found everywhere in the book.

The triangle is the most obvious of these series of variants and may conceivably account for the predominance of triple elements in the composition of the novel. It underlies the three "fictions" that Georges and Blum, "adolescents sevrés de femme" (p. 304) elaborate in the prison camp around the supposed relationship of Reixach, Corinne and Iglésia and that of the ancestor, his wife and the invented "palefrenier", and the village drama centred round the "fille laiteuse". But the triangular relation is not
limited to these three stories, for Georges himself, in becoming Corinne's lover, creates an additional triangle, of which the dead Reixach, rather than Corinne's second husband, is the true third party. There is the additional intertextual irony, for the reader familiar with L'Herbe, that Georges himself is the husband, not the lover, in that work. Even the allusion to Sabine's endemic jealousy in La Route (p. 53), with its reminder of the virtual triangle in L'Herbe of which the imagined "other woman" is the third element, maintains the pattern. Every sexual relationship, real or imagined, in the novel, reproduces the triangular model, which is indeed the characteristic one in Simon's writing. The ambiguous pronouns that produce a momentary fusion of the male figures, the repetition of details such as the "robes qui ressemblaient à des chemises", or the echoes like the description of the the carnival mask that Virginia holds in the portrait (p. 190), which repeats almost word for word the descriptions of Iglésia's profile (pp. 43, 172), underline the basic structural similarity of the relationships, making each in turn reflect the others.

The same is true of the many images of men on horseback that pervade the book: the "quatre cavaliers" in retreat after the ambush, the "chevauchée nocturne" through the autumn rain, the ancestor riding homewards after the defeat in Spain, and the image, at the very centre of the novel, of the column of horses and riders advancing unawares at dawn on a May morning into the ambush. Each of these images recalls the others and adds to the cumulative effect of an unending cavalcade, "la longue théorie des chevaux en marche depuis toujours", "cheminant depuis la nuit des temps" (p. 37). The archetypal character of these images is constantly underlined by the text. It is as if the advance of armies on the march has never ceased, and the motorized German column that Georges and Iglésia watch from behind the hedge is merely another version of the "chevauchée". Even the
race, an apparently peaceful variant, is assimilated to the sphere of war, first by its juxtaposition with the ambush scene, but more importantly through comparison of the jockeys and mounts with the combatants in a joust:

... avec les taches bariolées et mélangées des casques, les queues ondoyantes, la démarche hautaine des bêtes sur leurs pattes pas plus grosses que de minces brindilles, apparition, groupe médiéval, chatoyant au loin (et non pas seulement là-bas, au bout du tournant, mais comme s'avançant pour ainsi dire du fond des âges, sur les prairies des batailles éclatantes où, dans l'espace d'un étincelant après-midi, d'une charge, d'une galopade, se perdaient ou se gagnaient des royaumes et la main des princesses)... (pp. 153-154)

Thus every description of horses and riders becomes another version of the archetypal image of cavalry on the march, a fact that is underlined by the frequency with which one image dissolves into another: the ride of the four horsemen is transformed into the "chevauchée nocturne" (p. 29); the group of jockeys dissolves into the leaders of the column riding towards the ambush (p. 155); the ancestor riding in retreat becomes de Reixach (p. 227).

The erotic scenes and the "chevauchée" are themselves linked by the imagery centred upon the familiar double entendre of "mounting" — succinctly expressed in the traditional toast of the French cavalry: "A nos chevaux, à nos femmes, et aux hommes qui les montent!" The two series constantly intersect through the "femme-alezâne" and "homme-cheval" allusions, through the erotic symbolism of the race and Reixach's handling of the mare, and through the dual role of Iglesia, de Reixach's jockey but also the lover of his wife:

... celui — une sorte de domestique ou faisant fonction — qui avait chevauché, sailli sa femme ni plus ni moins qu'une jument (p. 283)

as well as through a host of other connections throughout the book, culminating in the delirious passage close to the end in which the erotic and the equestrian themes unite:
The sexual act becomes a variant of the "chevauchée" (or vice-versa). Thus the two poles of the narrative, around which all its images cluster, are intimately connected, a connection which is further reinforced by the characteristic Simonian association of sexuality and combat. The ramifications are simply endless, in fact, and it would require a detailed study to show how all the elements of the work reflect each other in that "jeu de miroirs internes" that Simon believes the novel should be.

The effect of these repetitions and variations, these episodes and characters that are versions of underlying prototypes, is to convey a sense of History as an unending cycle; not only on the larger scale of the sempiternal succession of wars and invasions, but also on the individual level, with ancestor and descendant fulfilling the same tragic pattern, like uncle and nephew in the later novel, *Histoire*. This pessimistic vision is expressed not only through the many superimpositions of the text, and the parallels and echoes that link sequences, but also through its central structural image — the circling of the survivors, passing and repassing the same points in a closed space.

At the same time, however, the superimposition of different periods and wars — the fall of France in 1940, the defeat in Spain one hundred and fifty years earlier — tends towards myth rather than historical perspective. The passages in which Georges imagines the "fantomatique cavalcade" of warriors advancing from the dawn of history to the end of time, or the description of the four horsemen riding through the countryside, present the defeat as the repetition of an eternal situation rather
than as a specific historical event. Although the aircraft and motor
vehicles of modern warfare make a brief appearance in the text, the central
images of the cavalry, the dead horses and fleeing civilians could belong
to any era:

Mais, route ou chemin c'est toujours la même chose: des fossés bordés de
morts, des chevaux crevés, des camions brûlés et des canons abandonnés
. . . . (pp. 215-216)

Just as, in the series of paintings of battle scenes from Breughel to Poussin,
described in La Bataille de Pharsale, costumes and weaponry may change,
but the attitudes of the warriors depicted are copies of classical archetypes,
so too, in La Route, the horsemen repeat ancestral gestures, following
in the train of the "vieux lansquenets, reîtres et cuirassiers de jadis"
. . . . (p. 32)

The image of war and love that emerges from the accumulated episodes
of La Route is one in which the eternal archetypal aspects rather than the
contemporary, historic ones are paramount, an emphasis which, according
to Joseph Frank, is characteristic of the major works of modern literature:

What has occurred . . . . may be described as the transformation
of the historical imagination into myth -- an imagination for which
historical time does not exist, and which sees the actions and events
of a particular time only as the bodying forth of eternal prototypes.9

Frank sees a close relationship between this move towards myth in modern
literature and a parallel move towards spatial form, which aims at
abolishing sequence and producing in the reader a global and simultaneous
awareness of all the elements of the work. The mythical imagination,
Frank concludes, finds an appropriate aesthetic expression in spatial form,
which does away with time sequence and juxtaposes past and present in a
simultaneous vision that reveals their common underlying pattern, the unity
beneath apparent diversity.
VI. The spatial form of "La Route"

That the whole impetus of the composition is towards the creation of a "spatial" vision of all its elements, scarcely needs to be said after the many instances we have seen in which the text gives rise to a simultaneous perception of two or more characters or scenes: de Reixach riding in the race and into the ambush; de Reixach and the ancestor riding into retreat; Georges lying in the dark in the train and in Corinne's bed; Georges lying on his face in the ditch, in a field between Corinne's legs, drinking the dew, "la buvant par là tout entière"; Georges telling Corinne (telling Blum) the story of Reixach's death . . . . The list could continue indefinitely.

It is not only the ambiguous pronouns and misleading adverbs, that we saw in the montage of sequences, which engineer such simultaneous perceptions. It is clear that the fragmentation of the narrative has as its principal function the production of a "spatial" apprehension of the work. The destruction of chronological order is the necessary first step in that direction: the events of the narrative are seen not in their historical sequence, but juxtaposed in a non-temporal arrangement in the timeless continuum of the text. And even that new order is not fixed but mobile, for in the process of reading new juxtapositions and groupings arise, both in the text and the reader's mind, as new connections become apparent. It is the fragmentation of the narrative, the breaking up of its episodes, that makes it possible to interweave or superimpose sequences which, though widely separate in time, can be perceived simultaneously, their significance illuminated through juxtaposition.

Those episodes which are not actually juxtaposed or interwoven are linked to each other by the network of repetitions and common imagery that extends throughout the book, keeping every element constantly present in the text.
and in the reader's memory:

Tous les éléments du texte . . . sont toujours présents. Même s'ils ne sont pas au premier plan, ils continuent d'être là, courant en filigrane sous, ou derrière, celui qui est immédiatement lisible, ce dernier par ses composantes, contribuant lui-même à rappeler sans cesse les autres à la mémoire.10

This system of echoes and allusions results in the most astonishingly dense passages, such as the one connecting Blum's evocation of his Jewish background with Georges' final lovemaking with Corinne (pp. 287-289), where not only do all the major fictional elements appear (the autumn billet, the dying horse, the ancestor's portrait, the "drame paysan", the general, the "paysan boîteux", de Reixach, the ancestor's suicide, the stories of Georges' mother, "la fille laitéeuse", the ancestor's wife in the two portraits), linked by the common themes of death and passion, but each one carries with it, in addition to the immediate association connecting it to what precedes and follows in the text, other associations that spread, like ripples on a pond, to encompass episodes and characters not explicitly alluded to. The race-course scenes, for instance, which are not directly mentioned in the course of the two pages, are recalled to the reader's awareness through the description of the general "avec sa petite tête ridée de jockey ses étincelantes petites bottes de jockey", which evokes the image of the jockey Iglesia in his "bottes de poupée", and, in particular, the scene where the discarded betting slips that symbolize de Reixach's failure, fall to the ground between Iglesia's feet, in their much polished boots and Corinne's, in their fragile sandals (p. 182). The reference to the general's suicide --

. . . . qui n'avait pas fait beaucoup plus de tapage qu'une branche pourrie se brisant . . . . (p. 288)

-- echoes the sound of the jockeys' crops in the race:

. . . . le claquement sec (comme le bruit d'une branche cassée) . . . .

( p. 175)
and, more distantly, the despair of Georges' father:

... malgré sa totale absence de réaction apparente Georges perçut parfaitement et plus fort que l'assourdissant caquetage de Sabine comme une sorte de craquement, comme le bruit imperceptible de quelque organe secret et délicat en train de se briser (p. 233)

In this way, the seven lines devoted to the general call up another set of images (the race-course scenes) and evoke, as counterparts to the general, two other examples of disappointed hopes and personal defeat, de Reixach and Georges' father.

Each of the other fragments on these two pages contains as many echoes and allusions, so that, as one reads, the whole novel rises before the mind, producing a sense of vertigo almost, like being in the centre of a carousel with shapes and faces whirling past, returning and vanishing almost before they can be identified. That many of these connections will not be apparent on first or even second reading does not lessen the claim that the impetus of the composition is towards a "spatial" or simultaneous apprehension of its elements. For, as Gérard Genette has said of the spatial form of A la recherche du temps perdu, in the passage quoted earlier:

Lire comme il faut lire de telles œuvres (en est-il d'autres?) c'est seulement relire, c'est toujours déjà relire, parcourir sans cesse un livre dans tous ses sens, toutes ses directions, toutes ses dimensions.

And since, with each reading, new associations become apparent and further aspects of the relations between episodes are discerned, the reading process is both endlessly rewarding and endlessly tantalising, for the network of connections seems almost inexhaustible.

Conclusion

The fragmentation of the narrative that we have seen in La Route is not, after all, realistic in aim or effect. La Route is not a novel of memory, in the sense defined by Jean Rousset, despite the initial
impression of many readers and despite the fact that Simon himself at one
time, invoked the nature of memory to justify its form. What has become
clear through close examination of the structure of the narrative is that
the fragmentation of its episodes, like the disruption of its chronology,
serve to create a "spatial" form in which meaning emerges from the jux­
taposition or interweaving of sequences, made possible precisely by their
fragmentation and temporal dislocation. The montage that replaces sequential
narration is itself productive of meaning through a rich variety of devices.
The simultaneous perception of different characters or events that the
composition induces in the reader's mind should ideally encompass the whole
novel and all its complex network of connections and associations. And
there are moments in the rereading of *La Route*, when the reader achieves for
a dizzying instant what feels like a total vision of the work, something
akin perhaps to the experience that Simon has described himself having at
its inception, in a passage that makes a fitting end to this study of the
novel:

Je revenais d'Etretat avec Jérôme Lindon. Nous venions de mettre la
dernière main à *L'Herbe*. Dans le car qui nous menait vers la gare,
Jérôme me demanda si je songeais à un autre livre. Le car, au moment
où j'ouvrais la bouche, prenait un virage. Je vois encore devant moi,
j'ai encore devant les yeux, les arbres comme tirés en arrière, d'autres
apparaissant, prenant la suite des premiers, comme un paysage qui
bascule et aussi le vert presque noir de la haie. *Et dans une fraction
de seconde, j'ai vu "La Route" ... Pas l'idée de ce livre, mais ce livre tout entier.*

(my underlining)
CHAPTER VI
FRAGMENTATION AND THE PERCEPTION OF TIME IN "LE PALACE"

Autant chercher à retenir l'eau dans ses doigts. Essayez. Essayez de vous chercher. "Je est un autre." Pas vrai: "Je est d'autres". D'autres choses, d'autres odeurs, d'autres sons, d'autres personnes, d'autres lieux, d'autres temps. J'admire la continuité et la logique exemplaire qui conduit l'évolution des héros de romans pour arriver au socialiste parfait et enthousiaste à la six cent vingt-troisième page. Comment peut-on être toujours conséquent pendant six cent vingt-trois pages. Voilà ce que je me demande, moi qui ne suis jamais le même pendant dix minutes à la file, moi qui ne suis pas le même pendant la durée d'un millième de seconde, puisque je ne suis pas moi.

(Claude Simon, La Corde Raide, pp. 175-175)

The novel which followed La Route des Flandres is considerably less fragmented and its narrative structure, though by no means straightforward is far less complex. For a start, the narrative subjects in Le Palace are limited to three: a man's return to a Spanish city where, as a young student, fifteen years earlier, he had been an observer of certain events during the early days of the Civil War; the narration of those events themselves; and, contained in a separate chapter, the "Récit de l'homme-fusil", a story within a story, told by another character, of an assassination he had carried out a few years earlier. Narrative progression is not fragmented by a multiplicity of different episodes and periods as in La Route. The switches are between no more than two periods at a time, making for a much simpler narrative structure.

The function of narrative fragmentation in the two novels is also
quite different. In La Route, its main purpose was to create a composition which would of itself express the thematic relations between the elements of the narrative, the parallels and echoes between them being implicitly suggested by the juxtapositions or interweaving that the fragmentation of the narrative made possible. In Le Palace, narrative fragmentation does not fulfil a thematic role of this kind. The overlapping of sequences, for instance, which plays such an important part in the thematic structure of La Route, serves a temporal function in the later novel: it forms a transition between past and present by means of elements common to both (the pigeons, trams, and heat of the unchanging Spanish scene). The evocation of this commingling of past and present in the protagonist's consciousness is the most immediately obvious function of narrative fragmentation in Le Palace. It is achieved largely through the alternation or interweaving of two sequences, a technique used mainly for thematic purposes in La Route.

The principal function of narrative fragmentation in Le Palace has to do with time as well, but with time as durée, that is, with the characters' perception of the passage of time, like Montès in Le Vent, whose awareness of time is intermittent and full of gaps, the Italian in the "Récit de l'homme-fusil" perceives its passage as:

... cette progression bizarre et saccadée, discontinue, du temps fait apparentment d'une succession de (comment les appeler?) fragments solidifiés ... (p. 53)

His sense of discontinuity is recreated by the fragmented narrative structure of the "Récit". Both there and in other chapters, narrative fragmentation is a means of conveying additional elements of the sense of time: the discrepancy between the length of a period and the brief flash in which it can be recalled, or between the actual duration and the felt duration of an incident. While time is a major theme in most of Simon's writing, it is
Le Palace which offers the most extensive exploration of the way in which it is perceived and narrative fragmentation plays a major role in rendering this.

While some of the techniques of fragmentation to be found in La Route are also used in Le Palace, most notably the alternation of sequences, the sudden return to an abandoned sequence and the abrupt introduction of a new sequence, they are used for the most part to different effect in Le Palace. The most characteristic feature of the book's narrational style is the prolonged description of objects or simple actions, which slows the narrative to the point of effacing the connection with what has preceded, turning each episode into a succession of static, disconnected images.

It is in fact the importance assumed by description in Le Palace that takes it further from conventional narrative than La Route which, for all its "discohérence", its undermining of the fictional illusion, had many of the basic ingredients of the traditional novel still -- action of an exciting and moving character, erotic interest, romantic figures like Corinne, triangular intrigues. While many of the episodes in La Route, by the standards of conventional fiction, were incomplete and unresolved, the "plot", if such it may be called, of Le Palace is far more fragmentary and undeveloped. The reader never discovers what, if anything, happened to the American, or whether the Italian's assassination attempt had been successful and what its consequences were, because that is not the purpose of the novel. While the uncertainty surrounding these events is due in part to the protagonist's fragmentary knowledge or recollection of them, their undeveloped character is mainly due to the fact that neither they nor even their historical context are the principal focus of attention in the novel. What the text concentrates on is the experience of the characters at
its most basic level: the painstaking description of auditory and visual perceptions, of sensations and impressions. Because of this focus, the narrative in the conventional sense (that is, the relation of the story or plot) is both fragmentary and fragmented: fragmentary because the events themselves, being of secondary interest, are almost effaced by the detailed description of the experience to a degree they could not be in a conventional novel*; fragmented because of the fragmentedness, the discontinuity, the chaotic multiplicity of the perceptions and sensations described. Claude Simon has consistently rejected the imputation of any historical value to the work, pointing to its deliberate confusion of factual detail, to the vagueness of the setting and action and to the incompatibility of the novelist's and historian's enterprises. His intention he insists, was not to give an account of the situation in Barcelona in the summer of 1936 but rather to describe:

... des odeurs, des images, des sensations tactiles, des émotions ... J'ai voulu décrire ce qu'a été pour moi la révolution espagnole. D'abord par honnêteté: tout ce que je peux savoir sur la guerre d'Espagne, c'est ce que j'ai ressenti avec mes sens. Et aussi par goût, c'est ce que j'aime faire, traduire en mots, en langage, ce que Samuel Beckett appelle le "comment c'est". Ou plutôt le "comment c'est maintenant", comment c'est désormais dans ma mémoire. "Comment c'était", je n'ai pas pu le savoir.¹

The phenomenological description of impressions and sensations has replaced action of the conventional sort in Le Palace, a further manifestation of the scepticism expressed in Le Vent as to the possibility of knowing anything.

*What was the identity of the Italian's victim, or the reasons for his assassination, for instance? The "Récit" is not concerned with such conventional details of plot, but with the sensations the Italian felt on entering the restaurant.
other than through the fragmentary impressions of the senses.

The composition of the novel

The novel's five chapters form a symmetrical design, described by Simon at Cerisy:

Autre exemple de composition symétrique, *Le Palace* qui s'ouvre par un chapitre intitulé *Inventaire*, se ferme sur un autre intitulé *Le bureau des objets trouvés*, le chapitre central, sur les cinq que comporte l'ouvrage, intitulé *Les funérailles de Patrocle* (décivant l'enterrement d'un chef révolutionnaire assassiné) lui-même encadré par les chapitres 2 et 4 qui relatent chacun un meurtre, le premier raconté par son auteur, le deuxième soupçonné par le narrateur qui en est le témoin incertain.

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<th>V</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inventaire</td>
<td>Homme-fusil (meurtre)</td>
<td>Funérailles de Patrocle</td>
<td>Dans la nuit (meurtre ou arrestation)</td>
<td>Bureau des objets trouvés</td>
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But their individual composition is by no means as uniform as the overall symmetry might seem to suggest. The first two chapters in particular differ quite considerably from the other three in narrative structure and in the degree to which they are fragmented. While "Inventaire", as the name suggests, is composed of a succession of fragmentary images and scenes, the "Récit de l'homme-fusil" is based on the systematic alternation of two sequences, each fragmenting the other by interruption. The narration of events in the remaining chapters, which are more uniform in composition, is fragmented in part by the growing predominance of description over action,
but also by the unpredictable returns to the present which interrupt the
narration of the past.

i. "Inventaire"

The first chapter is the most fragmentary part of the book, appro­
priately enough since, in addition to the literal catalogue of the
contents of the room in the Palace, it constitutes an inventory, as it were,
of the subjects and themes to be developed in the rest of the novel.

It begins with the description of a pigeon on a windowsill, whose
unseen arrival --

\[\ldots\text{comme s'il avait non pas volé jusqu'au balcon mais était subite­ment apparu, materialisé par la baguette d'un prestidigitateur \ldots}\]

provides an image for the abrupt emergence of the text. The pigeon image
recurs in an almost identically worded passage in the final chapter
(pp. 203-204), one of the text's many devices of circularity, which also
contribute to the novel's temporal effects, to the sense of time immobilised
that characterizes so many of its episodes. The pigeon's departure -- "aussi
brusquement qu'il s'était posé, il s'envola" --, like its arrival, serves
to prefigure the discontinuity and the abrupt transitions of the text.

The introduction to the description of the requisitioned hotel room
that follows -- "Et ceci: la pièce lambrissée" -- maintains the abrupt
feeling of the text, since the "Et ceci" with its colon seems to indicate
a new departure rather than a continuation of what has preceded. The two
passages are separated into disconnected fragments by this means. A couple
of pages later, the text becomes visibly fragmented with the inventory of
furnishings in brief, indented notations "premièrement: \ldots septièmement:
\ldots \ldots \ldots") into which there creeps, in the guise of a parenthesis, the first
fragment of the scene from the past which forms the basis of the narrative:
The scene re-emerges in the text on page 28, only to be set in doubt two pages later in a brief return to the present:

.... -- ou peut-être ne dit-il rien, peut-être l'autre n'avait-il rien dit non plus, peut-être rien de tout cela ne s'était-il jamais produit, peut-être y avait-il toujours eu là, de tout temps, une banque, peut-être n'avaient-ils jamais existé réellement .... (p. 31)

It is briefly reverted to in a single paragraph on the following page, then ousted again by another return to the present which leads back finally to the inventory:

Et encore: quelque part dans un coin (mais était-ce là qu'il les vit? .... (p. 34)

with a recollected image of gold bars, itself fragmented by the long parenthesis evoking the flight and eventual return of the wealthy proprietors of the city. The scene surfaces again in the course of this passage:

.... et l'Américain disait (c'est-à-dire peut-être pas ce matin-là, dans le bureau -- mais à un autre moment .... (p. 36)

only to be gradually effaced a few pages later by another image, that of two men on a station platform, which leads into the narrative of the next chapter. The office scene, split into four separate fragments in "Inventaire", will not reappear until the third chapter, when it is reverted to completely unexpectedly after the sixty page interruption of the "Récit".

The scene from the present which provides the frame for the other elements of the chapter is itself no more than a fragment in the composition, albeit longer than the rest. Introduced as abruptly as all the other elements:

Puis il se vit, c'est-à-dire des années plus tard, et lui, ce résidu de lui-même, ou plutôt cette trace, cette salissure (cet excrément en quelque sorte) laissée derrière soi .... (p. 20)

it confirms their status as memories, revealing the source of the ironic
perspective from which they are presented as that of a disillusioned older self. This doubling of the point of view which characterizes *Le Palace*, adds to the fragmentation of the narrative. The switches from past to present, from younger to older self, disrupt narrative continuity throughout the book until its final pages when, after several pages of rapid alternation of past and present, the two become indistinguishable.

Despite the introduction of the present -- the circumstances of recollection -- the effect of the fragmented composition in "Inventaire" is not that of a stream of consciousness rendering of memory. Though several of the individual fragments are presented as memories, the text does not represent the flow of memory. Rather, as the title indicates, it offers an enumeration of the remnants of the past, the raw material out of which fiction may be constructed, already in the process of transformation, as the final fragment exemplifies. We know from Claude Simon himself that one of the stimuli for the writing of *Le Palace* was the sight of two men on a railway platform:

> Il y a trois ans, un soir, du train, j'ai vu deux ouvriers espagnols en train de refaire leurs valises sur le quai de la gare de Narbonne. Et, brusquement, tout était là, tout était revenu: les odeurs, les images, les sensations . . . . Ce que Proust appelle la "mémoire involontaire" . . . 3

In the text, this experience appears after a reflection on the universality of certain types, which leads to a three page parenthesis describing two men on a station platform, as they might be observed by a traveller, awakened by the stop. When the parenthesis ends on page 44, the impersonal "voyageur" of its initial phrases has been replaced by the protagonist:

> . . . l'étudiant pensant: "Mais où donc? où . . . ", puis il se rappela: les mêmes regards, les mêmes visages inusables, impénétrables, interchangeables et sans âge . . . . 9P. 44)

The general allusion to trains stopping in the middle of the night has led abruptly into the specific instance of the student's arrival in Spain,
accompanied by the Italian. The real-life experience described by Simon in the interview has undergone a fictional transformation: no longer situated in the present of the older self's recollections, it is now a remembered event in the past, reminding the younger self of a still earlier sight. It is this kind of process that "Inventaire" embodies: the recording of the origins or stimuli (real or imagined) of the fiction to be developed by the succeeding chapters. Its structure -- the succession of fragmentary images and scenes, numbered as in a catalogue or prefaced by conjunctions that give them the character of items in a list:

Et ceci: la pièce lambrisée . . . . . . . . . . . . p. 10
Et eux (les quatre hommes . . . . . . . . . . . . . . p. 32
Et encore: quelque part dans un coin . . . . . . . p. 34

expresses this function, which explains why the composition is quite different from that of the succeeding chapters, which develop the themes and subjects it merely indicates in fragmentary form.

ii. "Le Récit de l'homme-fusil"

The "Récit" is constructed on the principle of alternation: two narrative subjects alternate, each in turn interrupting the other but both receiving equal coverage in terms of pages. The Italian relates his story to the student and at the same time the circumstances of that relation (the train journey, the arrival in a Spanish city, the hair-raising taxi ride) form the subject of a second parallel narration. This narrative structure can be schematised as follows:

47-56 récit 67-76 récit 87 89-90 98-98
47-56 voyage 67-76 voyage 87 r 89-90 r récit 98-98 r
57-66 77-87 88- 90- 89 92

A passage within the chapter offers an analogy for this narrative
method:

.... l'étudiant relevant un instant la tête, voyant défiler à travers l'obscur reflet de leurs deux visages dans la vitre brouillée de pluie les rares lumières, la logue rouge et noire, les spectres indignés des vieilles señoras rhumatisantes appuyées sur leur canne d'ebène, puis plantés sur le quai, indifférents ou insensibles à la pluie qui continuait à tomber, les deux policiers de la Seguridad .... 9p. 66)

The double image on the train window -- the reflection of their faces superimposed on the succession of figures (real and imaginary) in the lighted station outside -- is a counterpart to the double narrative of the chapter, to the way in which the Italian's story runs parallel with the student's impressions of the journey:

.... (l'étudiant ne l'écoutant plus -- mais apparemment l'Italien (ou la voix) ne s'en souciant pas, et continuant -- quoiqu'il ne pût s'empêcher de l'entendre, de sorte que plus tard il devait se rappeler le tout (images et paroles) courant en quelque sorte paral- lèlement comme dans ces films où une voix invisible dit un texte sans rapport avec la suite des images qui défilent .... (p..84)

This simultaneity, which a text, unlike a film, has no means of reproducing, is effectively suggested nonetheless by the alternation or interweaving of the two narratives. At the same time, the interruptions created by the alternation can convey the intermittency of the student's attention or of the account itself when the Italian falls silent.

The rate of alternation echoes the rhythm of both subjects: long sequences and infrequent alternation to begin with, in keeping with both the leisurely pace of the train journey and the Italian's long hesitation outside the restaurant; rapidly alternating short sequences in the second part complement equally the speed of the taxi ride across the city and the Italian's flight from the restaurant after the assassination. But the relation between the events described and the rhythm of their alternation is more complex than this, since the principal function of the composition is to recreate the Italian's distorted sense of time.
The "Récit" (as in its way does the account of the wandering of the survivors in *La Route des Flandres*) describes an unaccustomed awareness of time: that of a man undertaking an unfamiliar and dangerous mission which both intensifies and alters his perception of reality:

... le paravent ... dégringolant dans un fracas de lattes brisées, et, pour lui, dans l'espèce d'univers second, lointain, et pour ainsi dire décollé de la réalité où il se mouvait, cela ne fit, dit-il, pas plus de bruit que le contenu d'une boîte d'allumettes en se répandant ... 9P. 90)

The sense of unreality particularly affects his awareness of time. This manifests itself in two ways: first a feeling of discontinuity or fragmentedness, of gaps in his perception of the passage of time; then, as the situation develops and the tension and danger grow, an illusion of time slowed to a standstill, in which actions are experienced as if in slow-motion, impossible drawn out. This feeling culminates in the loss of any realistic sense of the passage of time, so that, on leaving the restaurant and seeing outside the same taxi with the same passengers that he had noticed before entering it, he is overwhelmed to realize that the whole sequence of events has taken no more than a moment or two:

... que tout ce qui venait de se passer depuis qu'il s'était engagé dans la porte-tambour (cette énorme suite, ou plutôt masse, ou plutôt magma, ou plutôt maelstrom de sensations, de visions, de bruits, de sentiments et d'impulsions contraires se pressant, se bousculant, se mélangeant, se superposant, impossible à contrôler et à définir et qui avait entouré avec pour ainsi dire toute la pompe, le faste et l'abondance nécessaire la mort d'un homme) n'avait en réalité pas duré, ou rempli, plus de temps que de regarder la somme inscrite à un compteur, déboutonner une pelisse, sortir des billets d'une poche, attendre que le chauffeur ait ouvert son porte-monnaie, compté les pièces, lui en tendre une, et se redresser en rempochant les autres. (p.98)

The reader shares the character's astonishment, for the structure and rhythm of the narrative are such that they have produced an equivalent confusion about time in the reader's mind. The way in which the Italian's experience is presented -- the elaborately detailed description of each
movement or action — slows the account enough by itself to make the
duration of the incident seem interminable. But the alternation of the two
narratives not only adds to this slowness by the interruptions which leave
the Italian's account suspended, but also contributes to the distortion of the
reader's time-sense by the double time-scheme involved: the length of the
journey imparts a false extension to the incident narrated during its course.
The discrepancy between the actual duration of the incident and the time
it is felt to have taken is recreated for the reader through the effect of
the narrative structure on the experience of reading.

The same is true for the Italian's sense that time was standing still,
that everything was taking place in slow motion, which is rendered tangible
to the reader by the composition of the chapter. The breaks in the narrative,
by effectively freezing an instant of the action for several pages (the
Italian firing the revolver, or the waiters blocking his escape), create a
textual equivalent for the sense of dreamlike slowness he experiences:

... tout s'immobilisant alors pendant un temps qui lui parut
très long et où il se souvint d'être resté là, étonné que ce fut
déjà le moment, presque surpris, désorienté ....
toutes ces choses dans un silence devenu complet, de sorte, dit-il
qu'en réalité cela n'avait même pas dû se produire (ce long moment
pendant lequel .... il se trouva dans l'incapacité absolue de faire
le moindre geste) sinon dans son esprit .... pp. 74-75.

...... cette impression de ralenti, comme dans les rêves .... p. 96.
The discrepancy between this sense of immobility the Italian experiences
and his rational awareness that things are actually happening very fast is
recreated textually through the counterpoint of the two narratives. In
the juxtaposition of the dangerously fast taxi ride with the Italian's
account of his flight from the restaurant, the description of the ride pro-
vides the feeling of desperate speed which his account conspicuously lacks.
It is the combination of the two narratives -- the slow-motion sequences of
the assassination and its aftermath, interwoven with the sequence of the
precipitous car ride, which together produce in the reader the Italian's impression that "tout allait à la fois très vite et très lentement" (p. 90).

There are gaps in the Italian's awareness of time, blank moments of which he has no recollection, as when he finds himself revolver in hand "incapable de se rappeler à quel moment il l'avait sorti" (p. 74), and these gaps make both the original incident and his account of it fragmented and discontinuous. He experiences the passage of time as
cette progression bizarre et saccadée, discontinue, du temps fait apparent d'une succession de (comment les appeler?) fragments solidifiés . . .
p. 53.
Perhaps this fragmentedness is accentuated by the danger and the unfamiliarity of the circumstances in which he finds himself, but it is common to all Simonian characters to a greater or lesser degree. The narrator of Le Vent, describing the fragmentedness of Montès' experience suggests that he failed to fill in the blanks as the rest of us do, retaining in his account all the original discontinuity of events without the reassuring padding of narration. Elsewhere, his experience was likened to a fait divers in a torn newspaper in its fragmentedness. In the "Récit", the gaps in the Italian's awareness are paralleled by the breaks in the narrative which imparts its own textual discontinuity to the incident. The interruptions of the second narrative, by breaking up the Italian's story and freezing the action, turn it into something approaching the "fragments solidifiés" of his perception of time.

The account itself is doubly fragmented, by the Italian's abruptness and by the student's intermittent attention:

... soit que l'étudiant ait complètement cessé pendant un moment de la percevoir [the Italian's voice], soit que durant le temps où elle s'était tue l'Italien (c'est-a-dire son esprit, sa mémoire) ait continué le récit pour lui tout seul, soit encore que son esprit ou sa mémoire eussent sauté sans transition -- comme la flèche -- d'une position à l'autre, de sorte qu'il manquait un maillon intermédiaire...
p. 87.
The student bears somewhat the same relation to the Italian as the
narrator of Le Vent to Montès: in both cases the text records not the
original account of the protagonist but its transformation in the imagination
of a more sophisticated and articulate listener, a further significance of
the double narrative of the "Récit". In the "Récit", however, far more
than in Le Vent, we witness this process taking place: the Italian with
his pencil stub marking out the positions of the protagonists, the student
visualizing the scene --

... il lui semblait voir, se reconstituer l'action ... sous
forme d'une série d'images fixes, figées, immobiles (comme les
diverses flèches lumineuses qui composaient la réclame s'allumant
et s'éteignant à tour de rôle), chacune trop différente de la
précédente pour qu'il fût possible d'établir entre elles un élément
de continuité...

p. 66.

The double version -- the Italian's story overlaid, almost obscured by
the student's visualization of its events -- is made possible by the dual
narrative structure of the chapter, by the way in which the frame is given
equal space and status with the narrative it encompasses.

To this, and to other, more common, functions of a frame (the creation
of suspense through interruption, the setting in a certain perspective of
the events narrated) must thus be added the specific effects of the frame in
the "Récit": the recreation through the alternation of the two narratives
a particular experience of the passage of time, a sense of time immobilized,
broken into discontinuous fragments, an experience that is rendered tangible
to the reader by the structure of the text with its pattern of interruptions
and frozen moments.

Already distinguished from the rest of the novel by its status of
a tale within a tale, a parenthesis to the main action, the "Récit" differs
significantly from the other chapters through its systematic use of
alternation, which will not be used again until the final pages of the book.
Nowhere in Simon's writing, in fact, is alternation more rigorously effectively exploited than in the "Récit". Although it is frequent in Histoire and La Route (particularly the third part), its use is not as sustained and gives way to other less regular compositional patterns. The "Récit" stands on its own in the writing of the central period as a model of this particular type of fragmented composition.

iii. "Les Funérailles de Patrocle"

After the major digression of the "Récit" with its double flashback (to the night of the student's arrival in Spain and to the evening in Paris several years earlier of the Italian's story), the text abruptly reverts to the fragmentary scene in the office, faded out on page 40 of "Inventaire". It is as though the scene has been frozen in the interim --

... le maître d'école toujours immobile derrière sa table dans la position qu'il avait aussitôt reprise après avoir boutonné sa veste ...  
(p. 102)

The characters, immobilized in their positions for sixty pages, are now set in motion again.

Fragmented from its initial appearance in the text and split in half by the chapter-long interruption of the "Récit", the scene in the office continues in a series of disconnected, static images like the barely perceptible movement of the funeral procession in the street below -- "une série de plans fixes" (p. 114). The conversation that takes place, significant because it is the American's provocative remarks that may have led to his subsequent disappearance, is related at widely separated intervals (pp. 101, 109/110, 117/118, 140/141). It is fragmented not only by the lengthy description of the slow funeral procession outside but also by the intercalation of yet another conversation, this one between the American and the student at some uncertain time:
... la voix de l'Américain disant toute proche (mais était-ce le soir (ou la veille ou le matin ?)): à ce moment, l'étudiant et lui étaient assis tous deux sur l'esplanade ...

(p. 119)

The locus of this conversation provides the transition for a return to the present, where the protagonist, having left the bar, is now sitting on a bench in the square where the Palace once stood. The two scenes, past and present, alternate for about seventeen pages and it is not until page 135 that the narration of the funeral procession and the scene in the office recommences, introduced by the reiterated phrase "mais comment était-ce donc, comment était-ce?...". The conversation between the American and the "maître d'école" is concluded with the final revelation that it has taken no more than a few seconds in reality:

... (l'étudiant se rendant compte alors qu'il ne s'était écoulé qu'un instant, quelque secondes peut-être, depuis que le maître d'école avait parlé, après que l'Américain avait raconté l'histoire des sept oncles ... (p. 141)

The repetition of "Nosotros?" on page 141 -- the American echoing the reply given by the "maître d'école" to his question back on page 110 -- serves, like the detail of the taxi and its occupants in the Italian's story, to signal the discrepancy between objective and subjective time. A few seconds only have elapsed, but filled with the student's impressions of the funeral procession -- "la lente et irrésistible marée" -- they have seemed infinitely longer. Once again, the character's distorted sense of the passage of time has been made palpable to the reader through the structure of the narrative. The slowing of the action by the elaborate description of the funeral procession has contributed in part to the illusion of a long expanse of time, but the fragmentation of the scene and its vital dialogue by the interruptions of other scenes and the return to the present has an even more deceptive effect on the reader's time-sense.
The interchanges themselves are highlighted, their significance stressed, by the way in which the fragmentation of the narrative isolates them from each other. At the same time, this isolation makes the protagonist's memories of the scene appear fragmentary and uncertain, contributing to the general sense of doubt as to whether the student's suspicions concerning the American's disappearance are justified or purely imaginary.

The structure of the chapter, which can be summarized in the following diagram—

though less fragmented than the two preceding chapters, maintains their pattern of freezing a scene to return to it after a long textual interlude that represents only the briefest of time-lapses in the scene itself. Once again, therefore, one of the main functions of narrative fragmentation in this chapter has to do with the rendering of time. Just as the sight of the "maître d'école" still in the same position after rebuttoning his jacket connects the first and third chapters after the long interlude of the "Récit", so the third and fifth chapters will be connected by the completion of an action (an old man and a child's scattering of a bag of grain for the pigeons in the square), which again has taken only an instant but will have been split in two by eighty or so pages of text, calling attention this time to the disproportion between the length of a period of time and the brevity of the flash of memory that can contain it.

iv. "Dans la nuit"

This chapter, the shortest of the five, is also the least fragmented, as the following diagram shows:
It uses a reverse order of narration, beginning with the morning following the funeral, then relating the events of the previous evening and night, returning to the morning in the final three lines which lead directly into the following chapter. There is a brief reminder of the protagonist's present situation towards the centre of the chapter:

l'étudiant (c'est-à-dire celui qui avait été l'étudiant) pouvant les entendre (c'est-à-dire, si, comme on l'affirme, un homme est constitué par la somme de ses expériences, pouvant entendre cette partie de lui-même qui avait la forme d'un Américain dégingandé ......en train de dialoguer avec cette autre partie de lui-même qui avait la forme d'un type chauve .................. tous les deux se tenant dans cette partie de lui-même qui avait la forme d'une petite place du vieux quartier ...

(p. 156)

But otherwise the narration of the night is not interrupted by the intercalation of other episodes. The action is minimal -- the conversation in the cafe where the American makes further provocative remarks to the "maître d'école", the student's insomnia, the real or imagined sound of voices in the corridor during the night, the cries of a woman in a room across the courtyard and the brief glimpse of her as she draws the curtain across the window. But these events, such as they are, almost vanish behind the elaborate development of the text. In the four-page long description of the cigar pack on which the student focuses his attention in order to distract himself from his anxiety, the reader loses sight of the original context and significance of the object. The same is true of the description of the woman's body as she draws the curtain, a movement which takes over three pages to describe, though its duration cannot have been more than a few seconds, and which effectively obliterates the question of the American's
whereabouts until the final words. In both these instances, it is not that the narrative has been fragmented by the interruption of other episodes, since this chapter unlike the others is restricted to one episode and period of time, but that the description of objects and movements has usurped the role of the action, making the narrative disconnected and fragmentary. This tendency was already discernable in the earlier chapters but is most pronounced in "Dans la nuit". No doubt it can be justified in realistic terms as conveying the mood and sensations of insomnia, but that would be to ignore the extent to which the text has now become its own end, its own raison d'être. Le Palace is in some ways the most "textual" of the novels of the central period, not simply because like La Route and the others it exploits verbal mechanisms of creation and development, but because of the importance assumed by description at the expense of conventional narration.

v. "Le Bureau des objets perdu"

Two thirds of the final chapter are occupied by the narration of the student's investigation of the American's disappearance. In the remainder of the chapter, sequences from past and present alternate, though they overlap to such a degree through their common elements (the protagonist's nausea, his location on a bench in the square, the pigeons and trams, the time of day and movement of light and shade) as to be barely distinguishable at times.

The narration of the present, which begins again on page 214 (though there has been a brief notation earlier on page 187 that indicates the protagonist's present situation), takes up where it left off eighty pages earlier, with the scene of the old man and the child feeding the pigeons. This device — the use of an insignificant action, taking place outside the main sequence of events, interrupted and then resumed many pages later —
creates the illusion that the events of the intervening pages have occupied only a few seconds in the protagonist's memory, out of all proportion with their actual duration. Like the similarly banal details of the taxi, the "maître d'école" buttoning his jacket or the repetition of "Nosotros?", it serves to evoke the discrepancy between subjective and objective time, in this instance between real time and the time of memory, the few seconds in which a complicated sequence of events or a whole period of time can flash before the mind's eye.

The narrative composition of this final chapter is impossible to schematise because of the way in which past and present overlap in the final pages. Sometimes a return to past or present is no more than a sentence in parenthesis; elsewhere a passage may belong equally in either. With the present tense of the last two pages, the two sequences have become one in a textual present that makes all their elements contemporaneous.

In this final chapter, fragmentation becomes subject as well as method, with the description of a certain experience of fragmentation of the self. The student, in his anxiety about the American's disappearance, experiences himself as split in two, in reality paralysed by indecision but in imagination performing a series of actions:

. . . et quoiqu'il -- c'est-à-dire son corps -- se tint toujours immobile devant la croisée ouverte, ce quelque chose en lui qui n'avait pas besoin d'un corps, de membres pour se mouvoir retra- versant la chambre, sortant, reparcourant le couloir, comptant une fois de plus les portes et vérifiant le numéro sur la petite plaque d'email ovale tandis qu'il lui semblait entendre simultanément résonner le panneau de bois sous l'assaut furieux de ses pieds alors que, cramponné de nouveau des deux mains à la poignée il tournait et secouait, tournait, secouait, frappait, tournait...

(p. 182)

Even when he does act, a part of him is still split off as observer:
This extreme state of dissociation that he finds himself in because of the strangeness and uncertainty of the situation is underlined by the increased disjointedness of the narrative at this point. It progresses in abrupt stages, new phases of the action already being described before the reader is aware that a previous one has ceased, due to the lack of connectives or explanations.

But such dissociation is not just the result of danger or unfamiliar surroundings, though both may be seen as exacerbating it. It is a common experience of the Simonian character in one form or another. The older self of the protagonist experiences a parallel fragmentation as he relives the past in imagination, seeing himself from the outside — "le double microscopique et lointain" (p. 215). This doubling of the protagonist is another element of the general fragmentation of the novel: sometimes the two figures — "l'étudiant" and "celui qui avait été l'étudiant" — almost completely coincide, (as in those visual tests where one is called upon to superimpose one figure upon another so that they merge), but for the most part they are not completely overlapping. Behind the figure of the student on the bench can be glimpsed his older self — like the "gravures galantes" underneath the notices of meetings, resolutions and bulletins tacked on top of them (pp. 196-197). It is not until the final pages of the novel that the two selves merge into one, only to disappear as the text grows increasingly depersonalized, no longer mediated through a consciousness.
The experience of fragmentation goes beyond a mere doubling of the self as actor/observer or older and younger selves, however. The view of personal identity expressed in the passage quoted earlier — that a man is constituted of the sum of his experiences — is reiterated in the frequent references to the other characters or elements of the scene as parts or fragments of the protagonist:

... sa peau ne constituait plus une enveloppe, une séparation entre l'univers extérieur et lui mais semblait englober indistinctement comme les inséparables parties d'un même tout le ciel métallique, la monotone et uniforme gangue jaunatre des maisons, les gens, les odeurs, et ses propres os — debout donc (c'est-à-dire cette partie de lui-même qu'était son corps) devant une de ces autres parties de lui-même qui pour l'instant avait la forme du personnage à tête de chimpanzé qui se tenait assis dans un fauteuil d'osier tiré sur le trottoir à côté de la porte de l'hôtel, répétant (cette partie de lui-même qui était l'étudiant, l'homoncule) encore, pour la troisième fois de la matinée, la même question . . . (p. 216)

The passage is one of many in the final part of the book where past and present are so intermingled as to be barely distinguishable. But two distinct experiences of fragmentation are described, one of which may be common to both moments of the protagonist's life, while the other belongs more clearly in the present. The first seems to derive from the disappearance of the normal boundaries of the self and the resultant perception of external objects as parts of the same encompassing whole, which leads, however, not to a sense of union with the external world, but rather to a feeling of generalized fragmentedness, a sense of unreality which persists throughout the student's search for the American. The second type of fragmentation, which belongs clearly to the present, is the state of recollection itself, in which the mind revivifies those elements of its past which have now become part of it. The characters of the novel, as we are frequently reminded, are not real existing beings but "fragments de lui-même", moving and acting only in his memory or imagination. The people
and places of the past, no longer in existence or no longer what they were then, still exist as part of him, fragments in the mosaic of experiences that have gone into the making of the person he has become. In this light, the title of the first chapter takes on an additional significance: if the protagonist is constituted of all the elements of his past, the Inventory is not only a catalogue of the furniture in the office or the fictional materials to be developed in the rest of the novel, but is also a portrait of the protagonist. In an interview several years later, on the publication of Histoire, Simon said that he had tried to tell "l'histoire d'une sensibilité". What Histoire does for a character's entire life, from the moment of conception or even before, Le Palace does for a phase in the protagonist's existence -- the end of adolescence and the loss of illusions, a period paralleled by that of the revolution itself as it is presented in the novel -- the end of anarchistic libertarianism and idealism.

Conclusion

The fragmentation of the self described in the final chapter of the novel is a further instance of the generalized fragmentedness of experience in the works of the central period, which provides a realist motivation for their fragmented narrative composition. Yet while the composition of Le Palace undoubtedly has as one of its functions the rendering of this fragmentedness -- in particular, the recreation for the reader, through the rhythm and pace of reading, of a certain experience of the passage of time --, this novel, like its predecessors, is in no way limited to such psychological realism. It hardly fits the description of a "roman de la mémoire", of which Rousset chose it as a prime example, for despite the importance of memory as theme, the fictional anchoring of the text in the situation of a
man recollecting and reliving his past, it does not offer a recreation of the flow of consciousness, and its patterns of development are not those of involuntary memory (though it may occasionally exploit them), but are, as we have seen, carefully structured to produce other effects. It is not, as in the case of *La Route des Flandres*, that the illusion we are within a remembering consciousness is constantly challenged by non-realist procedures, but simply that the text never resembles a stream of consciousness, a memory in action, despite Rousset's claims, which really do not stand up to a careful reading. The text follows its own momentum, erecting on the basis of a handful of memories an elaborate and baroque construction in words, resembling the Palace itself. This can be seen in the degree to which description has replaced action -- the meagre fiction seems a mere gesture towards accommodating the conventional expectations of the reader --, in the elaborateness of detail, and in the concentration on elements that bear little relation to plot or character or any other traditional concern of the novel but are there for themselves like rococco ornament. In this light, the fragmentation of the narrative can be seen as a deliberate move towards diminishing its importance and granting supremacy to the text. This tendency, less apparent in *Histoire* which, as we are going to see, accords far greater latitude to its fictional base and has a much more extensive fictional content, was nonetheless the direction which was to triumph with *La Bataille de Pharsale* and the later novels, to which *Le Palace* is in many ways more closely related.
CHAPTER VII

THE MOSAIC OF THE PAST: THE FRAGMENTED TEXT OF "HISTOIRE"

... la mémoire ne nous restitue jamais que des fragments de notre passé. Vous souvenez-vous de ce manuel d'histoire de Mallet et Isaac que nous avions en classe? Une de ses illustrations représentait une mosaique: la défaite de Darius, je crois. Rien que des morceaux, des fragments.


J'ai voulu dire l'histoire d'une sensibilité, des temps forts subis ou éprouvés par quelqu'un qui marquent une mémoire, se réunissent et se rassemblent spontanément.

Claude Simon, interview on publication of Histoire, Le Figaro Littéraire, 6 avril 1967.

Of all the works of the central period, Histoire most closely fits the conception of a novel of memory, as Jean Rousset, writing of Le Palace, defined it:

... nous sommes dans une mémoire en travail et... nous assistons à l'opération originelle, à la reconstitution d'un passé personnel dans une conscience actuelle. 1

Indeed it might be said to be the only one that does fit this description, despite Rousset's claims on behalf of the others. For while both La Route des Flandres and Le Palace are concerned with the recollection of the past, neither one, on careful examination, really lives up to Rousset's use of it to illustrate his conception of the novel of memory: La Route, because of the way in which its narrative structure deliberately undermines the illusion that we are within a remembering consciousness, Le Palace, because, for all its interweaving of past and present, much of it has the feel of written narrative and not of an evocation of mental processes.
Memory is a major theme in both novels, but they are not consistent representations of "une mémoire en travail".

_Histoire_, however, seems an almost perfect example of the novel of memory (though it did not, of course, appear until several years after Rousset's article). It does not recount the past in the manner of the memoir type of novel like _Adolphe_; instead, it shows the re-emergence of the past in the protagonist's memory, recording the way in which the significant moments of his life are brought to the surface of his mind by the stimuli of the present and the process of association. In place of a continuous chronological narrative, shaped by a narrator's retrospective understanding of events, _Histoire_ offers a succession of fragmented and discontinuous sequences in an order governed by internal connections or associations rather than by the place of events in time. In style as well as in structure, it succeeds in evoking the nature of memory, with its abrupt shifts and its predominantly visual character.

There are some difficulties, nonetheless, with the interpretation of _Histoire_ as a novel of memory. There is first the fundamental question as to whether any novel can do more than create an illusion of memory, given its essentially non-verbal character, an illusion which may destroy rather than illuminate the mental processes the novel seeks to represent. Secondly, Jean Ricardou has claimed that _Histoire_ is even more marked by "discohérence" than _La Route_ because of the double narration which undermines any realist explanation of the text. And, finally, the compositional originality of certain parts of the book is not sufficiently recognized in any interpretation that views their collage-like arrangement of fragments of narrative interspersed with other material solely in terms of the representation of consciousness. _Histoire_ contains a very convincing
evocation of the workings of memory, but it is also quite clearly more than that -- an exploration of the possibilities of language and composition for their own sake, resulting in the combining of elements according to their formal and thematic connections rather than their place in a chronology of events or in the narrator's consciousness.

I. Memory as subject

Even more than Georges, lying in bed with Corinne, or the protagonist of Le Palace, returning fifteen years later to the scene of a former experience, the narrator of Histoire finds himself in a situation that precipitates a flood of memories. He is at a critical juncture of his life, having recently lost (or perhaps merely separated from) his wife and returned to the empty and dilapidated family house in his former home town, filled with relics and reminders of the past. Obliged through financial circumstances to mortgage part of the family property and to sell some antique furniture, he moves through a day filled with these and other activities, constantly reminded of the past by all that he encounters in the present. The events of the day are not important for themselves, but for the memories they trigger: the present, in both its trivial and accidental aspects and in its more significant ones (the crisis in his life), plays a crucial role in determining which elements of the past will surface in his consciousness. The grief of loss coupled with the return to the familiar surroundings of childhood and youth naturally provokes a surge of recollection.

Some of these memories he holds on to and tries to recall more clearly, like the one of the musical evenings in his home -- "Mais exactement, exactement ?" (pp. 78,87); while others, like the recurring image of his wife's tear-filled eyes, are too painful to be borne and are quickly blocked
There is a blank spot at the heart of the novel, for the reader never knows for certain whether the wife has died or committed suicide, or perhaps only gone away. The allusions of relatives and acquaintances, even the narrator's own thoughts of her, allow of all these interpretations. All the other indications are equally ambiguous. Even the obsession with the newspaper headlines of a suicide -- "ELLE SE JETTE DU QUATRIÈME ÉTAGE" -- which appear several times in the text, could point to the narrator's temptation to end his own life as much as to the possibility that his wife has killed herself.

In part, this uncertainty arises from one of the more original features of the novel's evocation of memory: its rendering of the "censorship" of painful recollections. This process is seen most clearly in one particular instance, a memory of parting at a railway station, that first appears in the second chapter* as a dream or half-waking image and intrudes more and more frequently and with growing anguish upon the narrator's thoughts in the last part of the book. Each time, the image of his wife is concentrated in the description of her eyes --

ses yeux agrandis immenses me fixant mais pas de pleurs lacs seulement immobiles tremblotants. (p. 39)

The sequence ends on the following page with the single phrase "lacs de larmes" isolated in the middle of an otherwise empty line. When it next appears, not until the eleventh chapter where the narrator is driving back to town from the coast, attention is again focussed on her eyes --

* For convenience' sake, I have called the novel's twelve divisions "chapters", even though, since they are neither numbered nor titled and lack the episodic unity of a conventional chapter, some other term might be more appropriate.
Yeux immenses me regardant humides mais pas de . . .
(p. 322)

It is followed a page later by a fantasy of escape; he imagines continuing to drive without stopping through the night:

. . . et demain matin il y aurait des montagnes l'air pur de la neige un lac avec des voiles doubles ailes de mouettes entrecroisées tout serait de ce bleu à la fois léger et profond les pics les glaciers se reflétant je me rappelle ce bateau à aubes avec sa cheminée jaune chapeautée de noir inclinée dans le ciel et des banquettes peintes en blanc sur le pont TRAVERSEE TOUR DU HAUT LAC il y aurait des enfants avec des sacs d'excursion des culottes et des bretelles de cuir les genoux nus de grands batons avec des flammes de couleur criailant se bousculant envahissant l'embarcadère dans le soleil de vieux messieurs coiffés de panamas un groupe jouant de l'harmonica le vent du lac froissant les vaporeuses robes des femmes effarouchées les plaquant de leurs bras contre leurs cuisses des mouettes criardes . . . yeux humides scintillants un tremblotement au bord des cils mais pas de . . . voletant ça et là poussant leurs cris discordants éraillés sauvages la tour du vieux château se reflétant dans les eaux tranquilles le pont se mettrait à trembler aux pulsations de la machine je pourrais sentir ses lattes frémir sous mes pieds les roues à aubes commençant à tourner battant l'eau avec un bruit de moulin et moi me penchant pour la regarder fuir écumeuse se tordant le long de ses flancs pouvant sentir . . . émouvantes rides qui . . . la fade et verte odeur de vase remuée s'élevant fraîche des bouillonnements des remous les tourbillons ramenant à la surface le parfum croupi des herbes d'eau il y aurait des sons d'accordéon des voix fraîches d'enfants il y aurait je voudrais . . . (pp. 324-325)

It seems probable that the original description of the wife's tear-filled eyes -- "lacs de larmes" -- has generated the fantasy of the lake excursion. This can be seen both as an example of the verbal mechanisms underlying the autonomous development of the text and as the imitation of a psychological phenomenon: the substitution of an innocuous image for an emotionally charged or disturbing one, such as takes place in dreams and other unconscious mental processes. As suggested in an earlier chapter, the textual and the psychological interpretations are far from being incompatible and this is a case where the same mechanisms that produce the text also serve
a sophisticated psychological function.

The fragmentation of the narrative and the interweaving of the two sequences has a clear psychological significance in this instance. In the first place, it is a means of overcoming the limitations of a linear text in order to create a sense of the simultaneity of different mental activities. As Simon said in an interview after the publication of *Histoire*: "Tant de choses coexistent et s'interpenètrent dans notre conscience!" This passage offers a particularly vivid and effective example of his attempt to render that interpenetration, both through the literal insertion of one sequence into another, and through the internal echoes that connect them. The "pulsations de la machine" (p. 325) in the lakesteamer sequence recall those of the train in the station parting scene a page or so earlier -- "la machine haletait régulièrement" (p. 322). The narrator imagines watching the wake of the steamer -- "me penchant pour la regarder fuir", a phrase which recalls the wife's departure. These and other echoes suggest the underlying presence of the parting scene in the narrator's consciousness as he tries to block it out with the lake fantasy. The mass of detail in the fantasy, in contrast with the fragmentariness of the memory and its truncated phrases, suggests the urgency with which he is attempting to erase it from his mind. In the image of the muddy depths stirred up by the paddle steamer --

... les tourbillons ramenant à la surface le parfum croupi des herbes d'eau...
(p. 325)

there is an analogy for the whole process. Beneath the smooth surface lie the troubled depths from which memories are dredged up.
The phrase with which the passage ends — "je voudrais..." — will recur nine times in the remainder of the book (pp. 345, 350 x 2, 365 x 3, 369, 387 and 388), sometimes accompanied by the parting scene or the lake fantasy, sometimes in isolation, but always suggestive of the attempt to block out the unbearable, to escape from the pain of recollection: once after the description of a coffin being lowered into a grave (p. 345), again at the thought of facing another day (p. 350), then after a description of the scene between the couple (alternately Charles and his wife or the narrator and Hélène), lying in bed in a darkened room talking of the husband's affair with a model (p. 369). But its most poignant expression comes in the following passage:

. . . pareille à une de ces choses desséchées, mortes, ces couronnes de mariées que les vieilles femmes conservent à l'abri de globes de verre, se décomposant lentement dans l'odeur de renfermé, sure, cadavérique des chambres closes, le formidable silence de . . .

je voudrais je voudrais je voudrais si je pouvais l'enlever l'arracher de moi retrouver la fraîcheur l'oubli Déjanire les coins de sa bouche tremblant légèrement s'abaissant de façon imperceptible très vite me regardant les yeux arrondis noirs brillants je dis Mais nous ne pouvons pas nous perdre . . .

(p. 365)

Although the metaphor of the decaying bridal wreath is actually applied to the city of Barcelona, where the hopes of revolution are dying with the naval blockade, it leads naturally to the station parting scene, symbol of the death of the narrator's marriage. The phrases "chambres closes" and "formidable silence" are repetitions of key-phrases from the scene between the couple in the darkened bedroom and the parting scene, and are thus associated in the text with the narrator's two most painful memories. The bridal wreath itself calls up other images from earlier sequences -- of Hélène "couronnée de roses" (p. 113), of Corinne as an adolescent trying on the wreath of white roses for her solemn communion (p. 143), both erotic and romantic images, but also of the "couronnes démantibulées" in the
cemetery described in Charles' letter about his wife's grave (p. 131).

Thus a few words suffice to suggest the memories underlying the surface, which emerge inevitably despite the narrator's efforts to evade them. The reference to Dejanira stresses their inescapable character: the wife of Hercules, believing him unfaithful, sent him (in the mistaken belief that it contained a love-charm) a poisoned garment which once put on could not be taken off, leading him to commit suicide in order to escape its torments. The allusion suggests the degree of pain and remorse the narrator feels at the thought of his wife, as well as the inescapability of her memory. This time the attempt at blocking it out fails, as the desperation of the thrice repeated "je voudrais" indicates, and the parting scene returns to dominate the text along with other memories of Hélène in the succeeding pages.

As a novel of memory, Histoire captures not only the processes of association that resurrect the fragments of the past, but also the defence mechanisms that the mind sets in motion in order to escape painful or disturbing memories. The novel is particularly successful in conveying the poignancy of memory, its painful vividness, the tenacity with which certain images return and reawaken past feeling. In part, this is due to the narrator's situation and experience, for death is the common theme of many of his memories: the tragically early deaths of his parents, the apparent suicide of his aunt --

... j'ai grandi dans les lamentations les histoires d'hypothèques et l'odeur du crêpe ... (p. 76)

as well as the unstated but probable death of his wife. But, as all Simon's writing emphasizes, it is in the nature of memory, even of happy things, to have a certain poignancy, since it is a reminder of what is irrevocably past, of the flight of time, and of mortality. It is this
aspect of memory that is uppermost in Histoire. Jean Rousset remarks of the image of memory in Simon's novels:

Cette mémoire est très loin de détenir les privilèges que Proust reconnaissait à sa mémoire heureuse, elle ne peut ni dominer le temps, ni posséder un passé plein et complet. 4

Far from being a source of almost mystical joy as it is to Proust's narrator, memory for the Simonian character is more often accompanied by melancholy or self-deprecatory irony. The protagonist of Le Palace, typically, sees himself in memory as follows:

... ce résidu de lui-même, ou plutôt cette trace, cette salissure (cet excrément en quelque sorte) laissée derrière soi: dérisoire personnage que l'on voit s'agiter ridicule et présomptueux, là-bas, très loin, comme dans le petit bout de la lorgnette, gesticulant, répétant éternellement à la demande de la mémoire (et même sans sa demande: faisant irruption sans même y avoir été invité, comme ces acteurs, ces cabots de cinéma morts et oubliés depuis belle lurette et toujours prêts à faire révéler sans fin sur l'écran scintillant la même stupide scène de séduction ou d'héroïsme ... (Le Palace, p. 20)

The language is particularly strong here and the rejection of the younger self more violent than in Histoire, though there too, significantly, it is the episode of the Spanish Civil War that provokes the greatest irony, expressed through the alter ego, Uncle Charles. But the narrator's attitude to the past and to his younger self, though still mocking, is tempered with understanding in the later novel.

But if memory is not a source of lyrical celebration for the Simonian character, it is above all because it does not offer that total restitution of the past that the Proustian narrator experiences through the madeleine and other stimuli, but merely a succession of fragments. The snapshot of the artist's studio, which has almost accidentally preserved an isolated moment in a whole period of Charles' life, offers an analogy for memory:
The unfinished phrase and the suspension points convey the fragmentariness of memory; only certain moments of the past are visible, the rest fade into the shadows like certain parts of the photograph. And what stands out is consequently a little distorted and not quite true to life because it is cut off from its background, like the model in the photograph.

It is this aspect of memory which is most effectively rendered by the fragmented narrative composition of Histoire, in its succession of brief disjointed images of the narrator's life, linked to each other not by their order in time, but by a system of affinities and associations that imitates the process of recollection:

... les éléments éclatés, dissociés se regroupent selon le foisonnant et rigoureux désordre de la mémoire ... (p. 273)

In its style and composition, in the visible fragmentation of the text, Histoire more than any other novel of the central period embodies the idea expressed in Le Vent of the past as a broken mirror of which only scattered fragments can be recovered.

II. Memory and language

A brief exercise in introspection is sufficient to reveal that memory at its most basic level is essentially non-verbal: a rapid and somewhat blurred mental impression, most frequently visual but also auditory or olfactory, more rarely tactile or gustatory, seems to contain encoded a whole incident or period of one's life, which can then be verbally re-
constituted in a secondary phase of remembering. Words may be present in the primary phase but are generally limited to snatches of dialogue or identificatory labels.⁵

A text can describe or analyse this process but, to some degree, putting it into words may distort the original wordless phenomenon by creating the false impression that it was verbal in character from the start. Almost inevitably, the description of a memory will take longer than the fleeting impression itself, and its global character will be lost by being translated into the sequence of language. But, as the narrator's uncle remarks in connection with the impossibility of expressing certain experiences:

"... et pourtant tu ne disposes que de mots, alors tout ce que tu peux essayer de faire ...
"... je veux dire que tout ce que tu peux faire c'est d'essayer de mettre l'un après l'autre des sons qui ..."

(pp. 152,155)

The very way in which the words tail off into silence is itself eloquent, underlining the speaker's sense of the futility of the enterprise, a view often found in Simon's declarations on the novel — although so much of his writing succeeds so brilliantly in translating the raw stuff of experience (perception and sensation) into words, that the novels themselves belie their author's stated views.

Many stylistic features of Histoire clearly derive from an attempt to overcome this dilemma. Chief among them is the fragmentation of the sentence unit, which parallels that of the narrative on the larger level. Such features as the frequent omission of the article, the breaking up of syntactical units (subject and verb, demonstrative and noun), sometimes by the interruption of other material but more often by the phrase being abandoned incomplete, all contribute to a generalized fragmentation of the
text. This fragmentation is enhanced typographically by the unorthodox use of indentation: that is, not to denote a paragraph (a complete and independent unit of narrative), but to create a succession of fragments, ranging from the isolated phrase to the longer block of words, marked by incompleteness of syntax as well as content, and often terminated by suspension points, as already noted in several examples.

A principal effect of this fragmentation is to suggest the discontinuity and fragmentariness of memory. But in addition, the fragmentedness of the language and its infringement of syntactical norms are means of conveying the non-verbal character of memory. This is the case, for instance, in the following passages, where an abbreviated notation lacking the articulations of regular syntax is used to create the impression of a wordless flash of memory:

(léger tissu couleur de fruits de feuilles taché sous ses aisselles arrêtée devant cette vitrine qu'elle faisait semblant de regarder Visite tous les jours sauf le lundi de 9h à 16h, dim. de 9h à 13h; samedi de 20h à 23h, essaim d'ailes nid comme si le mot lui-même était plein de battements de froissements feuilleux soyeux bruisant des plumes s'envolant de sous ses . . .
(p. 115)

Yeux qui semblaient envahir son visage s'étaler gagner comme des taches s'agrandissant envahissant A un moment nous avons dû nous écarter pour laisser passer un petit train de chariots le timbre avertisseur tintant sans arrêt impérieux furibond (p. 370)

cerisier sauvage dans le mur écroulé du portique. Aigres. Parois intérieures de la bouche qui semblent se rétracter, se tordre T'en fais une grimace! Sur sa jambe l'égratignure séchée avait la forme d'un petit carré irrégulier strié de raîes parallèles pointillées chaque point constitué par une microscopique goutte de sang coagulé Baronne Cerise (p. 380)
Depuis qu'il a fait construire cette villa il file là-bas aussitôt qu'il peut s'installer sur la terrasse à l'ombre des pins avec pour tout costume le même et invariable short crasseux et surtout un chapeau pour le cas où un malheureux rayon de soleil passerait à travers les arbres éclusant whiskies sur whiskies en regardant me rappelant ces

chapeaux en coutil blanc piqué qu'il nous fallait absolument garder une bride passant sous le menton comme si le soleil était quelque chose de mortel. Sans doute est-ce de cette époque qu'il a gardé cette habitude terreur inculquée par grand-mère du soleil en même temps que l'horreur allergique de l'eau froide . . .

(p. 233)

All but the last of these passages have been quoted in full to show their character as fragments on the page. (The last has been curtailed as it turns into a scene lasting a page and a half.) The feature that the first three (and the indented section of the fourth) have in common is that they all open with a noun or noun phrase not preceded by an article. This is a stylistic trait which seems especially frequent in Histoire. The absence of the article and the indentation of the phrase create a sense of discontinuity, and highlight the noun, which thus emerges in the text with the abruptness of a memory surfacing in the mind. This process is fully visible in the fourth example (rather awkwardly so, in fact), where the syntactical unit "ces chapeaux" is broken up to place the noun in the highlighted position at the beginning of a new block of text, and the words "me rappelant" clearly indicate the emergence of a memory.

Invariably concrete, such initial nouns are often qualified by a vivid descriptive phrase which imparts to the passage the quality of a visual memory, as in the following additional examples, chosen at random:

archet incliné couleur acajou descendant lentement de la gauche vers la droite . . .

(p. 87)

l'opulente masse de lierre retombant par-dessus la murette . . .

(p. 93)
The sharpness of the first detail is often in contrast with the imprecision of the rest, which is another characteristic of many memory images. The famous present participles, much in evidence in all the passages quoted above, add to the fragmentedness of the style by the air of incompleteness they impart to a phrase from which a finite verb is lacking. As Claude Simon himself has often pointed out, they are particularly suited to the rendering of memory because they are atemporal and can straddle past and present, unlike a tense which situates an action in one or the other. Simon once said that only the risk of monotony prevented him from using the present participle throughout. It has the additional advantage of not requiring a subject pronoun, thus enabling it to express the ambiguous status of the self in memory -- both subject remembering and object remembered, observer and actor. Other elements of the style of these passages, such as the unidentified pronouns and private associations, belong to the common stock of stream of consciousness devices, too well-known to need analysis here.

While the typographical division of the text into fragmentary blocks of words creates a visible discontinuity, other features, such as the consistent absence of the initial capital at the start of a fragment, and the suspension points or total lack of punctuation at the end, seem on the contrary to eschew the conventional divisions of the written language, imparting a certain paradoxical continuity to an otherwise discontinuous
text. This apparent contradiction is easily resolved if the play of continuity and discontinuity is seen as rendering different aspects of consciousness. When asked what purpose his long phrases served, Simon replied:

De rendre cette espèce de magma qu'est notre vie mentale, la perception confuse, multiple et simultanée que nous avons du monde. Tant de choses coexistent et s'interpénètrent dans notre conscience! Le point, la phrase courte amènent des césures, coupent ce qui n'est pas coupé dans la réalité mentale. 7

Punctuation and the standard divisions into sentence and paragraph impose an artificial order on the representation of consciousness, separating things that are interconnected, translating into a sequence things that in reality coexist simultaneously. The abolition of the orthodox divisions of written language is thus a partial means of suggesting that simultaneity, while the unorthodox divisions with which they are replaced make it possible to convey the multiplicity and interconnectedness of mental phenomena, either through the breaking up and interweaving of two or more sequences, or through the juxtaposition of a series of brief fragments -- both characteristic compositional devices of Histoire. Continuity and discontinuity can thus be seen as related aspects of the text, serving the same end, that of rendering the complex life of the mind.

In an interesting article on the composition of Histoire, Gérard Roubichou reluctantly acknowledges the plausibility of such a view:

Dans la mesure . . . où Histoire est marqué par une recherche quelque peu entachée de psychologie (il s'agit bien d'une conscience -- le je du narrateur -- en lutte avec un passé et un présent fragmentaires, cette tension entre continu et discontinu pourrait s'expliquer par les caractéristiques de l'esprit et de la mémoire dont nous parlions les romans précédents et que Montès représentait admirablement: fragmentarité du souvenir, courts-circuits, associations, tentatives de relier les différents fragments, etc. En ce sens, le texte discontinu d'Histoire serait une remarquable machine mimétique de ces faits, visuellement sensibles dans la matérialité de la page -- de la même façon que bien d'autres moments de l'œuvre tenteraient de rendre compte, dans les limites de la linéarité, de la simultanéité des sensations et des notations . . ., des images et des souvenirs . . .
ou, dans un autre ordre d'idées, que la transcription d'un contenu de conscience serait à la base de l'absence de ponctuation . . .

But having thus most effectively summarized the evidence for interpreting _Histoire_ as a novel of memory, he refuses to accept it:

Il serait vain de s'limiter à cette interprétation qui donnerait presque au texte lui-même une valeur réaliste, puisqu'il traduirait en le mimant, le contenu d'une mémoire ou d'un esprit. Ce serait oublier le travail de/sur le texte que représente la mise en pages du livre et qui -- sans chercher à se faire passer pour une transcription de phénomènes _mentaux_ -- fait partie de son "projet", puisqu'il se donne à lire -- en ce sens qu'il est une "donnée du li(v)re". 8

Of course Roubichou is right in insisting that to see _Histoire_ solely as a novel of memory is too limiting an approach to the work. While there are many parts of the text where both language and structure clearly serve to evoke mental processes, there are other extended sections of the book in which the language has none of the characteristics of a stream of consciousness style but on the contrary manifests a rhetorical eloquence and elaboration characteristic of written language and not of "inner speech". The illusion that we are within another consciousness is not rigorously maintained throughout, and in certain chapters, as we shall see, the text follows its own autonomous direction without clothing itself in a realist disguise.

But Roubichou is perhaps unduly doctrinaire in his reluctance to concede that many of the novel's most typical features serve the goal of psychological realism, or that such an enterprise might be worth taking seriously. For surely no reader can dispute that certain parts of the text are pure stream of consciousness and a particularly successful example of it at that. And the "travail de/sur le texte" that Roubichou invokes as counter evidence is not totally incompatible with the evocation of mental phenomena, but seems rather to grow naturally out of it, perhaps because as Eisenstein maintained (in the passage from _Film Form_ and _The Film Sense_.}
quoted in an earlier chapter), the laws governing "inner speech" and artistic creation are the same, both based on principles of association; or perhaps because in attempting to recreate mental processes in words, the writer naturally tends to have recourse to their verbal mechanisms such as association, double meaning, and so on, and consequently the stream of consciousness novel easily veers towards the exploration of the possibilities of language for their own sake. *Ulysses*, to take the obvious example, is infinitely more than a stream of consciousness novel; through pastiche, parody and other forms of verbal play, it exploits many levels of language, consciously elaborating a text. Even in the stream of consciousness sequences, there are many moments when the language bursts out of the confines of an individual consciousness to follow its own momentum. Yet it is, nonetheless, an astonishing evocation of the inner life, as well as a self-conscious text inventing itself before the reader's eyes and demanding to be read as text and not as an illusion of reality. To deny or denigrate one of these aspects of the work out of a greater esteem for the other would surely be to deform its whole nature.

The same holds true of *Histoire* in my view. In many places the text develops its own momentum, exploring the possibilities of a word or image, allowing them to determine the course of the narrative. There is an example of this in one of the passages quoted earlier, where the word "aisselles" in the description of Hélène gives rise to the following lines:

> . . . essaim d'ailes nid comme si le mot lui-même était plein de battements de froissements feuillus soyeux bruissant des plumes s'envolant de sous ses . . .
> (p. 115)

The exploration of language for its own sake is explicitly engaged in here, but while this passage and others like it clearly reflect the autonomous creative processes within the text rather than the narrator's personal
thoughts, they never reach the point of taking over the book or becoming its entire substance, as in the case of the novel that was to follow, La Bataille de Pharsale. The psychological context mainly prevails. Unlike Ulysses, which departs from the stream of consciousness mode for lengthy intervals, to exploit with conscious irony and playfulness other narrational possibilities, the narrative of Histoire remains far more consistently (though by no means totally) within the framework of its narrator's consciousness.

Even the postcards and the quotations from other texts, which have the quality of extraneous material that at times threatens to take over the text, do not present a serious challenge to the realist coherence of the narrative because they are accounted for in realist terms: the postcards are found by the narrator when he empties the drawers of the chest he has sold, and the quotations are from the books of his schooldays. Although in certain chapters, both cards and quotations are used for their intrinsic interest in a collage-like composition that departs entirely from the stream of consciousness mode, this does not undermine the psychological realism of other parts of the book.

There is, however, one aspect of the novel that has been seen as a subversion of realist coherence, and that is the problematic status of the narration in certain sequences where the "je" appears to be double. Given the ambiguity that then arises as to the identity of the narrator, and the logical impossibility that two people have had the identical experience, has the realist illusion been deliberately undermined? Is the double narration a device that destroys the illusion of another consciousness, forcing the recognition of the text as text? Like the incompatibility of the three frames in La Route des Flandres, this is a problem that requires careful consideration.
III. The indeterminate "I"

Although much has been made of the "dédoublement narratif" in Histoire by Jean Ricardou and others, it is limited in fact to two sequences: (i) the transformation in Chapter 10 into a "lived" experience of the photograph of a painter's studio described at length throughout Chapter 9; (ii) the scene in a darkened bedroom where a husband and wife acknowledge the rift in their marriage caused by the husband's affair with a young model, presumably the one described in the snapshot of the studio. The visitor to the studio -- "le studieux jeune homme" -- and the husband in the bedroom sequence are one and the same person, who at first appears to be the narrator's uncle Charles and then seems to be the narrator himself. It is worth examining in some detail exactly how this ambiguity is brought about.

The parallel between uncle and nephew has been indicated as early as the third chapter, with the narrator's ironic remark to the indiscreetly curious old acquaintance that widowhood is a family tradition (p. 69), suggesting that he, like his uncle before him, is now a widower. It is further developed in the fifth and sixth chapters of the novel, where the narrator recalls his experience in the Spanish Civil War, not at first directly but through a remembered or imagined conversation with his uncle, in which the uncle acts as ironic narrator of the nephew's experience:

Comment as-tu dit que c'était ? : vous preniez vos repas dans cette salle à manger de palace, assis sur des chaises Louis XVI habituées jusque-là aux fesses des milliardaires mâles et femelles anglo-saxons ou sud-amé...
    et moi: Non: des bancs. Les chaises...
    ... avaient sans doute été transportées dans une école ou un jardin public. Après tout il faut bien que les révolutions et les guerres apportent quelques changements.

Et toi jeune chien, vaillant boy-scout assis là entre un pistolero italien et un ...
(pp. 147, 148)
In the following chapter, still using the second person singular, he recounts or rather reconstructs the street-fighting incident as though he had been present (pp. 173-174), until the nephew ceases to recall this conversation and tries to recapture the original incident itself — "Comment était-ce?" — and the narration returns to the first person.

The procedure is explained psychologically in an interesting passage that sheds some light on the later identification of the two characters:

... c'était comme si je dialoguais avec quelque fantôme, ou peut-être avec mon propre fantôme -- car peut-être ne parlait-il pas, n'avait-il même pas besoin de parler, immobile paisible et taciturne à côté de cette flamme immobile elle aussi, et non pas deux voix alternant mais peut-être une seule, ou peut-être aucune, peut-être le silence ...

(p. 151)

In recalling his Spanish adventure, the narrator, who now feels somewhat scornful of this youthful escapade, cannot but think of it with the mockery accorded it, he imagines, by his uncle, who has become an internalized judge and critic now inseparable from his own older self. Thus the conversation does not need to have taken place in reality, for the nephew can only too easily imagine the judgement of this "fantôme" who is now part of himself. In the idea that the two voices have become one, interchangeable, we find the first indication of the identification of uncle and nephew that prepares their interchangeability in the two later sequences and in the text of *La Bataille de Pharsale*, where the procedure is further exploited.

In the sequence just described, there is no uncertainty as to whose experience is being described, because of the second person narration, even though the uncle is relating things that only the nephew can have seen. But this is not the case in the two later sequences. In the first -- the scene in the artist's studio -- it is only towards the final part of the sequence that uncertainty arises, when the third person description of the photograph
abruptly gives way to a first person account of precisely the same scene. Throughout Chapter 9, which is entirely devoted to the narrator's contemplation of the faded snapshot and his attempt to imagine the circumstances surrounding its taking, the figure of the studious young man is identified as Charles and referred to in the third person. It is only in the tenth chapter, where this sequence is now interwoven with a scene in the present, that the narration switches to first person. The initial appearance of the "je" is in parenthesis (p. 287), which perhaps signals the changed status of the sequence, though at first the parenthesis adds to the confusion by making it seem like another sequence altogether. The content makes it immediately clear however, that they are one and the same, except that what was, or seemed to be, an imaginative reconstruction of a scene, is now presented as a personal memory. The photograph has come to life. From then on, the narration of the sequence is largely first person, though certain passages are mixed or indeterminate. 10

The transition from third to first person, from imagined to remembered scene, has been prepared by the growing intensity of the narrator's reconstruction of events. In the midst of the speculative series —

et monté peut-être en passant . . . (p. 272)

. . . bougeant peut-être instinctivement le fauteuil d'osier . . . (p. 273)

Ou peut-être, après tout, était-il coutumier de ces séances, peut-être a-t-il fait irruption sans s'étonner ni s'excuser, peut-être était-ce dans les habitudes de la maison . . . (p. 275)

there is a passage of pure inner monologue:

éventail de plis rassemblés par la tête du clou rouillé lourde queue d'étalon noir peignée parmi les rameaux de roses éteintes, plage, amas confus nacré noir ivoire, coude dans la flasque mollesse de coussin olive éclaboussé d'ombre vert pomme mais impossible de voir la peau légèrement rugueuse . . . (p. 274)
It is significant that the text is filled with colour here, although the photograph is black and white. The passage clearly prefigures the switch to a first person account in the next chapter.

The implication of the switch to first person narration is either that Charles himself is now the narrator, or that the narrator has so strongly identified with his uncle as to be imaginatively experiencing the scene in the studio as though he were there, or that the experience, though clearly attributed to Charles in the previous chapter, was really that of the narrator himself all along and that he has now dropped the subterfuge. None of these explanations is really satisfactory, as we shall see.

While the studio sequence occupies a whole chapter before any obvious indeterminacy of reference occurs, the second sequence (the couple confronting the rift in their marriage) very quickly blurs the identity of the subjects. It is aided in this process by the uncertainty now established by the earlier sequence. The second sequence, first introduced towards the end of the eleventh chapter, begins in the third person and follows upon some remarks about Charles, his wife and the model (p. 351). It is the dialogue between the couple at the end of the chapter, naturally in the first person, which prepares the switch to first person narration in the next chapter (p. 369). What is clearly the same scene with the same couple becomes alternately "elle et lui" and "elle et moi". The sequence is highly fragmented and interwoven with other focal episodes -- the station parting scene, for instance, which is clearly established in the text as the narrator's experience -- in a way that can only increase the indeterminacy rather than clarifying the question. Eventually the scene becomes muted, as the couple lying in the darkened room -- "les deux gisants" -- are assimilated to the sculpted effigies on a tomb (pp. 377-378) and the narration becomes impersonal and purely descriptive, though it continues to
be interwoven with the station parting and other significant scenes. In its final appearance (p. 383), it reverts to first person narration and is followed by an extract from the letter Charles wrote to his sister on visiting his wife's grave -- almost a word for word quotation of the original passage in the fourth chapter (pp. 131, 132), but without quotation marks so that the "je" could easily stand for either man, especially as it is juxtaposed with a description of Hélène's breasts beneath her flower-patterned summer dress. The final appearance of the sequence thus links the two women in death, one more of the ambiguous references from which the reader may infer that Hélène is dead.

There is no way of solving the puzzle. It is logically impossible for the two men to have shared the same experience -- an affair with the same eighteen year old model -- given that in Charles' case the affair would have taken place when the narrator was still a small child. Yet in the third person sequences, it is clearly his experience, while the first person sequences, reinforced by the interweaving of scenes connected with the narrator, give it all the appearances of being the latter's personal experience. What are we to make of this confusion? Can it be explained in realist terms?

For Jean Ricardou, it is definitely an anti-realist procedure, a prime example of "discohérence", more apparent even than that of La Route des Flandres:

Dans la plupart des livres de Simon, l'incohérence apparente est toujours travaillée par des dispositifs articulaires qui tendent vers une cohérence, mais cette cohérence est elle-même toujours travaillée par les manoeuvres de la discohérence. Seulement, les rapports des trois activités se transforment. Dans La Route des Flandres, par exemple, le rapport cohérence-incohérence domine si bien que la discohérence reste un peu en sourdine. Dans Histoire, la discohérence se fait plus sensible en raison notamment de L'Irréductible dédoublement narratif. 11
I do not altogether agree with Ricardou's judgement here. The sources of "discohérence" in La Route are both varied and numerous, as we saw earlier, and in my view, more visible to the reader than Ricardou seems to think. In the case of Histoire, however, the "discohérence" is limited to the single device of the double narration, which, disturbing as it may be to realist coherence, is nowhere near as extensively used as are corresponding procedures in La Route.

In the first place, the switches between third and first person narration are limited to two sequences and to the last three of the twelve chapters. It is true, of course, that retrospectively, once the identity of the subject of these sequences is open to doubt, other parts of the text may fall into the same indeterminacy. Yet rereading does not seem to bear this out. In the other sequences relating to the narrator and Hélène, it is impossible to confuse them with the uncle and his wife. The scene in the Greek museum, for instance, which is equally concerned with the breakdown of their marriage, does not lend itself to any indeterminacy, fragmented as it is. We know from the long dialogue in which the narrator announces to Corinne his forthcoming marriage with Hélène and their planned honeymoon in Greece (pp. 112-113) that the couple in the museum, silent after a quarrel, are the narrator and his wife, and indeed her name appears in the text (p. 122). The two or three erotic passages in the same chapter might perhaps carry a certain indeterminacy in that the woman they describe is not named or identified, and their connection with Latin erotic texts might link them with either the narrator or his uncle, since if it is the boy who breathlessly translates them (p. 108), it is to the uncle that the book belongs. But again, since the first such passage follows immediately upon the announcement of the narrator's marriage, the reader naturally identifies the woman as Hélène and nothing in the passages themselves
contradicts that. She is named in the second occurrence of the station parting scene (p. 322), so that this too is identified with the younger couple and only with them.

In none of these other sequences is there any pronominal switch or other indeterminacy of reference. Only in the letter written by Charles to his sister (pp. 129-130, 131, 132-133, 134), describing his feelings as he stands beside his wife's grave, is there any real uncertainty, for though the letter is specifically identified as his and is found among the postcard collection by the narrator (p. 129), the use of the first person in it and, even more, the lack of any change of style, makes it potentially assimilable to the experience of the narrator himself -- though we never know for certain that his wife has also died.

No other episode in the novel presents the same indeterminacy as the two "double" sequences, nor could any other experience in it be attributed to the uncle as well as the nephew. This in itself is significant, for the pronominal switches are limited to those two sequences in which the narrator tries to imagine what lay behind the marital unhappiness of his uncle and aunt, which seems to have led to her suicide.* The fact that the memories of his wife which haunt the narrator are subject to constant censorship and evasion and accompanied by almost intolerable anguish, make it psychologically plausible that he should project his own experience onto his uncle until the two are inextricably bound together. The process of imaginative identification with another that seems to take place in the bringing-to-life of the studio snapshot has been suggested as early as Le Vent, with the narrator's reiterated comment as he listens to Montès' story: "il me semblait

* This is the implication of the scene towards the end of the book, in which Charles reacts violently to the discovery that the adolescent Corinne is taking sleeping pills. (pp. 392-400)
le vivre mieux que lui-même". A similar process takes place in all the protagonists -- Louise as she examines the photograph of Marie in *L'Herbe*, Georges in relation to the two Reixachs, ancestor and descendant, the student in *Le Palace* as he listens to the Italian's story -- each in some way feels him or herself living the scene, an experience which perhaps has its origin in the novelist's own use of family documents and other material as stimuli for the creation of fiction.

The linking of uncle and nephew that takes place in *Histoire* is a further expression of the theme of the double which recurs throughout Simon's central period, from *L'Herbe* where Louise is the successor of Marie, even symbolically dying with the old woman through the "petite mort" of orgasm, to *La Route* with the overlapping and at times indistinguishable histories of Reixach and the ancestor, which prepare the way for the superimposition of the uncle's story upon the nephew's in *Histoire*, with its suggestion, as in *La Route*, of family history tragically repeating itself:

Oui c'est une tradition de famille chez nous Je veux dire le veuvage Une de ces maladies de femmes vous savez Congénitale comme on dit Oui Transmissible aux hommes du clan par voie utérine . . .

(p. 69)

Within this context, the "dédoublement narratif" can be seen as a literal expression of the theme of the double implicit in the novel from very early on. It is a further development of the palimpsest effect of certain parts of *La Route*, where the text could be read doubly, with the figure of the ancestor momentarily fused with that of his descendant. In *Histoire* the effect is even more striking since it affects the "I" of narration, but it serves a similar thematic purpose.

This does not solve the problem of the source of the narration in these sequences, however, since it is irresolvable. Given the limited extent of the pronominal switches and the fact that none of the other
experiences narrated are attributable to the uncle, it seems implausible to suggest that the novel has two narrators.\textsuperscript{12} Simon's own statement that he was uncertain himself whether uncle or nephew was the narrator, and that the uncle may have imagined a nephew, seems more like a defence against interviewers over-eager to identify the novel as disguised autobiography.\textsuperscript{13} For the notion that the "I" of the entire novel should really be the uncle projecting himself onto an imaginary nephew and only accidentally speaking in his own voice seems not only less plausible than the converse (the nephew projecting himself into his uncle's experience but speaking in his own voice throughout the rest of the novel), but also less satisfying psychologically and artistically. Simon's other explanation -- that the nephew, unwilling to admit to certain experiences, attributes them to his uncle but then forgets the subterfuge and reverts to a personal account -- is quite plausible in a confessional novel or monologue, but less so in a stream of consciousness work which aims at producing the illusion of a private inner world with no listener assumed.

Whichever interpretation of the switches between first and third person is favoured, the indeterminacy of reference cannot be completely resolved and the "discohérence" it produces must be acknowledged. Nonetheless, this "discohérence" is not all-pervasive, even in a retrospective reading. For the first three-quarters of the novel, the reader is aware of one consciousness to whom all the memories, experiences and perceptions of the text are attributable. When uncertainty as to the identity of the narrator does arise in the tenth chapter, the impact of all that has preceded tends to outweigh the effect of the "discohérence", even though it is recognized as problematic. The realist force of the rest leads to an assimilation of the indeterminacy into a psychological process, that of identification and projection, which the rest of the text has amply prepared and motivated.
If the indeterminate status of the narration in these sequences can be seen in part as an anti-realist device undermining the illusion of the stream of consciousness, it can equally be viewed, in the context of the theme of the double, as a narrative procedure of considerable psychological significance and originality. To make such a claim is not to assimilate Histoire to the ranks of the conventional novel, but simply to acknowledge the presence of different and perhaps conflicting elements in its make-up, for it is neither a consistent rendering of the narrator's stream of consciousness nor a pure text devoid of any representational elements, but a complex blend of both these strands of modern fiction.

IV. Patterns of fragmentation in the composition of "Histoire"

The composition of the novel displays the same eclectic tendency. Longer than either La Route des Flandres or Le Palace, and composed of more numerous narrative elements than either, Histoire is even more fragmented than the two preceding novels. But although this fragmentation plays more of a psychological role than in either of the others, it also contributes to an originality of composition which is by no means limited to rendering the flux of consciousness and which represents a further step in Simon's exploration of the possibilities of fragmented structure.

The narrative is set within the basically straightforward chronological frame of a day in the narrator's life, though the narration of this day runs only from the second to the eleventh chapter, the first and final chapters making no specific reference to it. That it is a frame nonetheless, and not merely one among many fragmentary elements, is clear from the way in which other elements are contained within it or inspired by its incidents, as, for instance, when the sight of a group of drunken soldiers in a café triggers memories of military service, or children leaving school at noon awaken recollections of illicit childhood reading. Chronological though
fragmented, the frame is the most developed piece of narrative in the book, occupying a larger part of the text than any other individual episode. It is the most predominant sequence in chapters 8, 10 and 11 and occupies a major place in chapter 3. It provides -- to use an image justified by the origins of the word 'text' -- the warp of the composition into which other more irregular patterns are woven, some strands disappearing for long stretches, others a more constant element of the design, but all present even when invisible, like the threads of a woven cloth, because of the network of echoes and associations which, as in La Route, connect all elements of the text.

At Cerisy in 1971, Claude Simon gave the following account of the composition of Histoire:

... la composition d'Histoire pourrait être schématisée sous la forme de plusieurs sinusoides de longueur d'ondes variables qui courent tantôt au-dessus, tantôt au-dessous (invisibles alors) d'une ligne continue AA', apparaissant, disparaissant, se confondant, se coupant, interférant ou se séparant, la ligne étant en réalité une courbe de

très grand rayon, un cercle qui revient à son point de départ (le narrateur étendu sur son lit) cependant que les périodes d'oscillation des diverses sinusoides raccourcissent de plus en plus, leurs crêtes alternant et se succédant à un rythme de plus en plus précipité.

Simon’s description of the novel’s structure confirms the role of the narrator’s day as frame. Once again he stresses, as he did for La Route, the continuing presence of all the elements in the text even when temporarily invisible.
The appearances of each element may range from a sequence of several pages to a mere phrase like "lacs de larmes". Unlike the narrative switches of La Route, many of which occur deceptively in the middle of a sentence unmarked by any typographical or even syntactic change, those of Histoire for the most part are clearly indicated by the transition to a new line and indentation, which as Roubichou points out, gives Histoire a characteristically fragmented appearance:

"c'est surtout l'emploi massif de l'alinea (à la fois passage à la ligne et masse spatiale d'éléments textuels) qui représente le mieux cette fragmentation physique et visuelle du discours." 15

The fragmentation of Histoire, far more so than that of the preceding novels, is visible and concrete. The effect is to make the text seem more like a montage of fragments than a narrative, especially with the incorporation into certain chapters of quotations from other texts, in a way that resembles the use of extraneous materials in the art form of collage.

The rate of fragmentation varies, as Simon's own diagrams make clear. The least fragmented chapter is the ninth, which concentrates on a single narrative topic (the narrator's scrutiny of the studio photograph). Though it is not fragmented like the other chapters by the interweaving of numerous elements, it is still fragmented none the less by the way in which it describes in minute detail individual aspects or moments of the scene, like examining enlarged reproductions of detail instead of a whole work of art. The most fragmented chapters are the fourth, eighth, eleventh and twelfth, in particular the latter, which is the most fragmented of all.*

* The far larger number of narrative elements and their greater fragmented-ness, as well as the greater length of the book, unfortunately make it too difficult to schematize the composition as a whole in the way it was done for the preceding novels. The schemata from which I worked in analysing the structure depend on a wide range of colours to differentiate the various elements, and such colour diagrams are regrettably too difficult to reproduce.
The structural pattern already observed in *La Route* and *Le Palace* of an interweaving of two sequences (a/b/a/b) is still much in evidence in *Histoire*. While it is used, as in the preceding works, to juxtapose thematically related sequences or fragments, in *Histoire* it often has the function of suggesting psychological processes, as in the passage where the lake fantasy is interwoven with the image of Hélène's tear-filled eyes.

Equally characteristic of the novel's composition is the juxtaposition of a large number of short fragments, disconnected in terms of narrative continuity but linked by internal associations. The bundles of postcards in the chest of drawers, no longer in the sequence in which they were received or sent, or even in any kind of grouping of place or subject, can be seen as an image of this particular kind of juxtaposition, that groups a number of short blocks of words (descriptions, memories, observations, quotations) in an apparently pell-mell succession.

The interweaving of two or more sequences and the juxtaposition of short disconnected fragments, interspersed with longer blocks of extended narrative, together make up the characteristic compositional pattern of *Histoire*. Some of the psychological functions they serve have already been suggested: the sudden emergence of a memory evoked by means of the disconnected fragment, and the coexistence of simultaneous mental phenomena conveyed through the interweaving of different sequences. But the variety of other functions, thematic and formal, that they fulfil will become more apparent from the following examination of two extended sections of the text: the café scene from the eleventh chapter and the whole of the fourth chapter, chosen because they offer an interesting contrast between the realist and the non-realist uses of fragmented composition in this work.
V. Narrative fragmentation and the rendering of consciousness

The interweaving of the frame with other sequences or short fragments is a means of conveying the constantly shifting focus of consciousness, in which awareness of the present is mingled with thoughts of the past. What this interweaving achieves on the larger level of composition is reinforced within sequences by the use of words and images that echo other sequences, indicating underlying preoccupations or unconscious connections. Language and composition thus combine to evoke the way in which the mind moves almost unaware from one thing to the next, guided by a mixture of external stimuli and internal association.

The public scenes, in the restaurant, café and other places where the narrator is constantly distracted by his surroundings, provide particularly obvious instances of this. In the section of text framed by his supper in a café (pp. 333-351), the name of the café itself, as well as the presence of a group of soldiers and their noisy conversation, start the narrator on a train of thought which begins with recollections of a bar he frequented during his military service:

... cette guinguette comment s'appelait-elle Frascati un peu en dehors de la ville sur la route de Nancy ...

(p. 335)

These memories begin in a stream of consciousness passage interwoven with the soldiers' dialogue and separated from it by suspension points and indentation. The process of reminiscence is highlighted and analyzed on the following page:

... fracas aussi dans Frascati Et alors sans doute à cause de la consonance italienne du mot l'image stéréotypée non de soldats en uniforme de la dernière guerre mais les silhouettes ... des zouaves pontificaux que je pouvais voir dans une des rosaces quadrilobées de ce vitrail de la chapelle ...

(p. 336)

The name of the "guinguette" thus leads away from military service back to
schooldays and the classmate Lambert, glimpsed earlier in the chapter as candidate at a political meeting. From Lambert as schoolboy, the text moves to the memory of a later meeting with him during the period of military service, a sequence interrupted by the briefest of returns to the present in the form of a single sentence, separated from the rest by indentation and suspension points again. It is the headline ELLE SE JETTE D'UN QUATRIÈME ÉTAGE PAR LA FENÊTRE, printed upside down to suggest the narrator is reading it in someone else's copy of the newspaper, in which he has also read the headline earlier in the day. Its recurrence here suggests his underlying preoccupation with death and suicide, which will reappear in the text later in the scene.

The next return to the present, still in the course of the Lambert anecdote, is the sound of distant applause coming from the political meeting (p. 338). It emerges in mid-sentence unmarked by any form of punctuation, with the ironic effect of the pompous young Lambert already, as it were, hearing the plaudits he hopes to receive as a political leader. The memory of the "guinguette" and the sexual encounters of the period of the narrator's military service then intervene, again interwoven with the drunken dialogue of the soldiers in the café (pp. 338-341), the two sequences separated by suspension points and indentation. The presence of the soldiers influences the process of recollection: the red hands of the conscript fumbling with his fly on the way to the washroom clearly inspires the sexual image that follows, of conscripts coupling with girls met on the dance floor of the "guinguette" —

... leurs têtes rougeaudes leurs mains rougeaudes et sans doute au moment de l'accouplement un membre énorme rougeaud gonflé pour les saillir ...

(p. 341)
The description of the soldiers' girls evokes thoughts of Corinne and her sexual experiences, in a passage of brief fragments of dialogue from an exchange of taunts between her and her brother. It leads to an erotic fantasy centred around Corinne and the jockey Iglésia -- "Imaginant quelque chose de faunesque . . .", which moves, without any break or punctuation, into a memory of making love to an unnamed girl during the period of military service, one of the longer fragments in the series (pp. 342-344). Again by means of an erotic connection, (the girl keeping her coat ready to cover her naked body if someone should come), the text moves to a description of the artist's model wearing only a man's jacket between nude posing sessions. This leads without transition to a description of Charles beside his wife's grave as the coffin is lowered into it. Both these passages are in the third person, though the indeterminacy of the sequence involving the model is reflected here in the "je" of the obsessively recurring phrase "je voudrais . . .", by now synonomous with the narrator's attempt to block out painful memories, which follows immediately upon the description of the grave, without break or transition (p. 345). A fragmentary paragraph follows, evoking graves, archeology and museums, in words that echo earlier passages connected with the Greek honeymoon of the narrator and his wife, narrated, like the scene of Charles at his wife's grave, in the fourth chapter. The fragment culminates in the phrase --

... les peignes les bijoux de bronze grumeleux et verts les agrafes les boucles heureux celui qui dénouera ta

(p. 345)

The return to the present that follows reveals the textual mechanisms that generate new elements, for the next fragment begins with the word COIFFURE, ostensibly read on the shop-window opposite the café, but clearly produced by the associations of "peignes", "boucles" and "dénouer" in the preceding fragment.
The description of reflections in the café window that ensues seems to represent an attempt to escape painful memories by concentration on something external. But, significantly, the reflected images of the customers are like ghosts or deaths' heads:

"... se détachant sur l'écran de la nuit comme s'ils flottaient, impondérables, dans l'air, en fragments éparpillés sur une lamelle, une pellicule vernie de ténèbres, et sans plus de réalité ni d'épaisseur que des fantômes, sans regards, sauf deux cavernes marron à la place des yeux..."

(p. 346)

The narrator's underlying preoccupation with death colours all his perceptions.

The sandwich in his hand and the white spongy aspect of the bread start another memory sequence, this time of the hunchback eating bread in the Spanish Civil War episode, already familiar from the seventh chapter. But then his mind comes back to the never absent source of anguish and the need to escape it:

"De mon lit je pourrai le voir blafard se reflétant sur les feuilles vernies se colorant peu à peu les oiseaux criards fous déchirants quel lac je voudrais glissant sur le reflet renversé immobile des montagnes enneigées ses roues à aubes battant l'eau rapétissant emportant les sons d'harmonicas les voix d'enfants je voudrais..."

(p. 350)

The scene ends at this point, with him paying and leaving the café.

This summary has not even attempted to do justice to the complex network of associations surrounding all these narrative elements, but merely to suggest the psychological function of the scene's composition, its rendering of the narrator's drifting thoughts as he sits in the café. The interweaving of the frame with the other sequences mirrors his fluctuating awareness of his surroundings; it is naturally most acute at the beginning while he listens to the soldiers' conversation, but becomes intermittent as he recalls memories of military service, and vanishes entirely as his thoughts intensify with the erotic memories, only to return abruptly as he attempts to erase
the mental image of the coffin being lowered into the grave.

These pages are among the most psychologically realist in the novel and there is no doubt whatever that the fragmentation of the narrative serves a psychological function here. The narration is entirely in the stream of consciousness mode and though the textual mechanisms that inspire certain transitions or produce particular elements are apparent, that does not detract from its effect. If the entire novel were in this vein, it would provide a perfect example of Rousset's "roman de la mémoire". To balance that impression, therefore, we must look closely at another chapter where the fragmentation of the text serves other and very different ends.

VI. The text as collage: anatomy of a chapter

The fourth chapter, one of the most fragmented in the novel, is also one of the most interesting and original from a compositional perspective. Significantly, it is one with few returns to the frame, which only appears in its first half (between pages 95 and 115), its broken sequences adding up to less than four pages in total out of the chapter's thirty-six pages. For the role of fragmentation here is not to evoke the mingling of past and present in the narrator's consciousness, but rather to create a kind of collage of texts on the themes of Eros, death, and History.

Apart from the brief passages on the present (conclusion of the scene in the bank and description of the narrator's walk through town at noon), the narrative elements centre around four focal figures: Hélène (the visit to a Greek museum on their honeymoon, and a tender love-scene where, inspired by memories of Latin erotic texts, he asks her to shave her pubis); Corinne (the conversation in which he tells her of his forthcoming marriage, and the cherry-gathering scene); Lambert (with whom he swaps his uncle's copy of The Golden Ass for the book on the Russian Revolution);
and Charles (the Latin homework scene, and the letter describing his wife's
death). These fragmentary narrative elements are interwoven with a series
of quotations from various books from the narrator's adolescence and de­
scriptions of their illustrations, in addition to the usual postcards with
their messages and captions. The longest of these fragments does not
exceed four pages, but most are roughly half a page in length, making this
one of the most discontinuous parts of the book.

Many pages of this chapter are among the most strikingly fragmented in
appearance of the entire novel: quotations from other texts in italics
(pp. 108, 111, 118, 119-120, 121, 122 and 127-128); lists of Latin words or
phrases accompanied by their French translation, which occupy only part of
a line of text (pp. 108-109, 119 and 128); short lines of dialogue (pp. 112-
113, 122, 124, 126-127 and 128-129); words or phrases in capitals that
stand out from the rest. These visual effects, in particular the use of
italics or capitals for quotations, give certain pages a patchwork
appearance, highlighting the fragmentation of the text. The discontinuity
and brevity of the narrative elements, coupled with the incorporation of
such a large number of extraneous elements -- not only the quotations, but
also the descriptions of postcards and pictures of every sort, from the
bas-reliefs of the Greek museum to the comic strip in the morning paper --
turn the text into an assemblage of fragments. The chapter has clearly
departed from the representation of the narrator's stream of consciousness,
though certain of the fragments that compose it are still in that mode. But
now they are reduced to being elements of a composition rather than its
mainspring.

The composition may be described as a collage, a term which Simon
has himself applied to it, though in a somewhat restricted sense. Speaking
to Claude DuVerlie in 1973, he said:

You are also familiar with what artists call constructions or collages. Picasso invented the genre and he has been followed by such outstanding figures as Schwitters and Rauschenberg. Lately literature has also produced collages or what we call "intertextuality". I experimented with this in Histoire and later again in Pharsale. 17

It is not only through "intertextuality" (the insertion of quotations from other texts) that parts of the novel resemble a collage, however. For while the essential feature of collage is the incorporation of extraneous materials, its composition is no less significant: in keeping with its Cubist origins, it is one of the most fragmented of art-forms, since it is composed of actual fragments, brought together to create a new entity. It is the extreme discontinuity of the text, evident in its visual appearance, just as much as the use of quotation, that turns the fourth chapter into an assemblage of fragments, a textual collage.

There is nothing particularly new, of course, in the use of quotations from other sources: Dos Passos exploited it extensively in the "Newsreel" sections of U.S.A., for instance, but with the difference that there it was in the service of a certain social and historical realism, to evoke the background of his characters' lives, whereas in the new novel it is more likely to be used as a stimulus or source from which to generate new elements of the text. This is one of the ways in which Simon uses the quotations from Valéry and Proust that appear in La Bataille de Pharsale. 18

The effect of quotations from classic sources is to draw attention to the writer's relation to literary tradition, in somewhat the same way as Rauschenberg's inclusion of reproductions of well-known paintings in Charlene provides a set of references to the history of art, which act as a foil for the artist's own enterprise, whether they are used in a spirit of homage or iconoclasm. Whatever the character of the materials used in collage, it is a provocative genre, drawing attention to its mode of
production instead of concealing it beneath a surface of illusion, and thereby raising fundamental questions as to the nature of art. The incorporation of other materials destroys illusionism, drawing attention to the canvas as flat surface and not a window onto an imaginary world. Similarly, the insertion of other texts draws attention to the novel as text, undermining the illusion of reality.

The "intertextuality" of *Histoire* is not completely anti-realist in effect, however, since all the quotations are from works that are presented as significant elements in the narrator's development or experience: the book on the Russian Revolution lent by his more sophisticated schoolmate in exchange for the loan of the Latin erotic text, *The Golden Ass*, stolen from his uncle's library, both of which are equally illicit reading, representing the narrator's first steps away from the orthodoxy of his Catholic education; the other Latin texts translated for homework; the extracts from a museum guide, linked to his honeymoon in Greece. Only the geological passage (p. 120) is not clearly accounted for by the narrator's biography, though it may well be a school book too. But if all these texts can pass as memories, nonetheless, by the conspicuousness of their insertion, they draw attention to the text as composition rather than representation of consciousness. Their significance is still to some degree psychological, however, since they are elements in the composite portrait of the influences that have moulded the narrator's personality, that "histoire d'une sensibilité" which Simon said he wanted the novel to be.

The secondary implications of the novel's title -- "Histoire" as History -- are also much in evidence in this collage, with its evocation of ancient world through quotations from Latin texts and the Greek museum catalogue, and of the modern era through the postcards and the quotations
from the book on the Russian Revolution. The image of History that emerges from the collage is a pessimistic one, despite the vigorous description of the ancient world, for it is the death of civilizations and the repetitions of History that the text harps on, from its first evocation of the ruins of Mycenae (p. 103) to its modern equivalent, the ruins of Verdun depicted in the collection of postcards:

... le même et unique paysage à l'aspect uniforme de décharge publique, hérisssé non de pattes de chevaux morts mais de poutres cassées, de ferrailles, d'échardes, et chaotique ...

(p. 105)

Mentioned among the illustrations recalled from the history book are the _Très Riches Heures_, with their brilliant images of courtly life, but invariably it is the darker aspect that prevails in the narrator's memory, like that of the last picture in the book:

et encore cette photographie d'un champ de bataille prise d'avion (pas la terre, le damier des prés, des labours, des bois: une étendue croûteuse, pustuleuse, comme une maladie du sol même, une lèpre, ........ ........ ........ ........ ........ 
qui illustrait une des dernières pages du manuel d'Histoire, comme si celle-ci (l'Histoire) s'arrêtait là, comme si la longue suite des chapitres avec leurs résumés en caractères gras à apprendre par coeur, la longue suite des images qui les illustraient ........ ........ n'avaient été écrites, sculptées, peintes, gravées, qu'en vue de cette seule fin, ce seul aboutissement, cette apothéose: les étendues grisâtres, mornes, informes, sans traces humaines ...

(pp. 105-106)

This image of devastation is recalled throughout the chapter in other similar scenes and by the repetition of "apothéose" in the English phrase "apotheosis and millenium without end" twice used ironically of the inscriptions on tombs --

... racontant perpétuant quel triomphe quel apotheosis and millenium without end massacre ... ...

(p. 118)

... les lignes dépouvrues de sens apotheosis and millenium without end gravées pour toujours ... ...

(p. 121)

and both times in connection with the massacre of a battlefield, thus
seeming to suggest the narrator's pessimistic view of the likely fate of humanity. The same irony is applied to the role of its leaders, ancient and modern, through the juxtaposition of a quotation from the book on the Russian Revolution with one from a Latin text:

Le commissaire du peuple à la guerre grimpa sur l'automobile aidé par de nombreuses mains qui le poussaient en avant et en arrière. Trapr court de jambes et tête nue il ne portait aucun insigne sur son uniforme. Camarades soldats je n'ai pas besoin de vous dire que je suis un soldat. Je n'ai pas besoin de vous dire que je veux la paix.

(commemoravit: il rappela, testibus se militibus uti posse: qu'il pouvait prendre à temoin ses soldats, quanto studio: avec quelle ardeur, pacem petisset: il avait demandé la paix (p. 128))

The point is made simply through juxtaposition of the two passages, without need for comment: History is repeating itself in identical words. The chapter thus contains as it were an alternative version of the "manuel d'histoire", a highly personal one, marked by irony and a deep pessimism.

The relations between the historical and the personal themes of the chapter are too many and too complex to trace here. But what principally unites them as fragments within the collage is the motif of the inscription. The extract from the Greek guidebook reads "Salle IV: inscriptions" and the fact that we are within the fourth chapter is not coincidental. From the inscriptions on tombs and monuments of the Greek episode, almost indecipherable with the wear and tear of time

... quel orgueilleux MARCELL vainqueur ou quoi DIVIN illisible USQUE ...

(p. 118)

to those in the cemetery where Charles contemplates his wife's grave

... les lettres incomplètes d'inscriptions, de formules de regrets ...

(p. 131)

their fragmentariness echoes the fragmented composition of the chapter.
The desire to record, to preserve for posterity, that underlies these monumental inscriptions, also marks most of the written texts used in the chapter — the Latin history, the story of the Russian Revolution, and, in a different way, the newspaper headlines, and the captions on the postcards, which are themselves monuments to an era; and even on another level, the Latin dictionary. On the personal level, there is the letter from Charles to his sister, describing his wife's grave:

... n'attendant pas tellement d'elle une réponse mais qu'elle lui rende le service de l'enfouir au fond d'un tiroir comme elle conservait, nouées d'une faveur, les photographies des étendues grisâtres couvertes de décombres, celles de groupes de femmes Somali, des huttes de Moïs, les vues du Mont-Dore ou de Karlsbad ... (p. 129)

The letter in its way is a funerary inscription like those on the ancient tombs, linking the personal to the larger historical themes of the chapter. The text juxtaposes all these disparate manifestations of the need to record and preserve the past, commenting sarcastically after a reference to de Reixach and the ancestor:

Bon alors inscrivons ça aussi pour l'édition des générations futures et même si elles ne savent pas lire ce sera toujours (p. 122)

The incompleteness of the sentence underlines the felt futility of the desire to record, already expressed on the previous page in a description of a scene that must be Poussin's well-known painting *Et in Arcadia ego*, of shepherds discovering an overgrown monument:

... découvrant essuyant le marbre le débarrassant des feuilles collées de la terre le bras appelant les autres faces velues stupides doigt qui ne sait pas lire suivant les lignes dépourvues de sens apothéosis and millenium without end gravées pour toujours afin que des bergers même pas capables de ET EGO ... (p. 121)

Symbol of the ruin of a civilization, the tomb in the text's account of it has also come to express the futility of attempting to record or glorify
anything for an uncomprehending posterity, a reflection of an indirect
kind, perhaps, on what has traditionally been seen as a principal aim of
the writer.

It is not possible, unfortunately, to explore further the multiple
relationships between the various elements of this chapter, since the aim of
this brief sketch was to examine the significance of its fragmented com­
position. It should be clear by now that that fragmentation does not serve
psychological ends. While the chapter has many of the same features --
narrative discontinuity, movement between different periods and subjects,
transition by means of association, and so on -- that elsewhere in the
novel are used to represent the narrator's stream of consciousness, here
they are simply part of the dynamic of the text. They are exploited for
their own potential without being attached specifically to the narrator's
thought processes: a development that opens the way for La Bataille de
Pharsale, where the movement of the text is autonomous and no longer tied
to the consciousness of a character -- or, as certain critics would say,
no longer uses the pretext or alibi of a character's inner life to justify
its own.

This chapter exemplifies the new freedom that Simon apparently dis­
covered in the writing and composition of Histoire, which was to reach its
culmination in the following work, La Bataille de Pharsale, perhaps his
most free-flowing and experimental book. He has described the importance
of Histoire in his development as follows:

... c'est seulement en écrivant Histoire que j'ai commencé à avoir
une conscience plus nette des pouvoirs et de la dynamique interne de
l'écriture et à me laisser guider plus par ce que l'écriture disait --
ou "découvrait" -- que par ce que je voulais lui faire dire -- ou
"recouvrir". 19
The creation of a text out of the diverse elements of this chapter shows a new use of fragmentation: the incorporation of literal fragments exactly paralleling the artist's use of scraps to create a collage. It reminds us of another term Simon likes to apply to his writing -- "bricolage" -- which he uses not just in the artisanal sense but with reference to Lévi-Strauss's application of it in La Pensée Sauvage to the way in which primitive thought proceeds by analogy and proximity. In part, therefore, the term suggests the way in which the text is "constructed" out of the available materials. But it may equally be applied to the way in which collage as a literary method can be used to express ideas and reveal connections through its juxtapositional techniques. It is not to be construed in any naïve sense, however, as the joining together of some odds and ends to concoct a text, for the chapter, like the whole novel, is an intricately wrought composition. Just as the materials of a visual collage are not glued on arbitrarily (as a child might do in a scrapbook), but are integrated with the rest to form part of a formal design, so, too, the different fragments that compose the chapter are linked to each other in the verbal and thematic unity of the text. It is an original and stimulating example of the power of juxtaposition as a compositional mode and of the rich potential of the fragmented work.

Conclusion

Histoire marks the culmination of the central period of Simon's writing. It is the work that comes closest to embodying the idea of a fragmentary vision expressed in Le Vent, its conception of the past as a broken mirror to be pieced together bit by bit, the result always uncertain, always incomplete. The reader, trying to fit together the scattered fragments of the narrative, can never resolve the uncertainty at the heart
of the novel, since certain essential pieces are missing and others too ambiguous to complete the picture. One stands in relation to the narrator somewhat like the latter with respect to his uncle, as he contemplates the photo and the letter, combining them with remembered incidents to form a fragmentary picture of his uncle's life, but never possessing the whole truth. Histoire, too, is the most successful rendering of that fragmentedness of experience and perception constantly referred to but never really captured in Le Vent.

But while it comes closer to being a novel of memory than either La Route des Flandres or Le Palace, evoking, through its fragmentation of syntax and narrative and its techniques of juxtaposition, the discontinuity of consciousness and the mingling of past and present in the mind, its use of fragmentation goes well beyond the rendering of inner life. The collage composition of certain parts of the novel takes the fragmentation of the narrative to its furthest degree. Although Histoire does not possess the same degree of formal perfection as La Route, which is still probably Simon's greatest novel, it is perhaps the most inventive exploration of the possibilities of fragmented structure in the work of the central period.
CONCLUSION

... le notaire me parlait, se relançait encore -- peut-être pour la dixième fois -- sur cette histoire (ou du moins ce qu'il en savait, lui, ou du moins ce qu'il en imaginait, n'ayant eu des événements qui s'étaient déroulés depuis sept mois, comme chacun, comme leurs propres héros, leurs propres acteurs, que cette connaissance fragmentaire, incomplète, faite d'une addition de brefs images, elles-mêmes incomplètement apprèhendées par la vision, de paroles, elles-mêmes mal saisies, de sensations, elles-mêmes mal définies, et tout cela vague, plein de trous, de vides, auxquels l'imagination et une approximative logique s'efforçaient de remédier par une suite de hasardeuses déductions ...
Le Vent, pp. 9-10

One cannot but be struck, looking back to the way in which the narrator of Le Vent characterizes the story he is about to tell, by the degree to which it foreshadows the fictional pattern of the succeeding novels. For in each of the works we have examined there are unanswered questions, "trous" or "vides" which the narrator or protagonist attempts to fill, through a process of imaginative reconstruction that ultimately takes the place of a plot in the conventional sense. Just as Georges and Blum can never finally ascertain the truth about de Reixach's death (and still less about the ancestor's), neither will the protagonist of Le Palace ever know what really happened to the American -- whether he went to join friends at the Front, or was assassinated, like other dissident elements, during the night. The narrator of Histoire "s'acharnant à scruter pour la millième fois la mauvaise photographie" (p. 283) cannot penetrate his uncle's life, any more than the reader, piecing together the ambiguous references of the text, can penetrate his. The same is true of the other novels of the central period.
Louise in L'Herbe can only speculate about the life of Tante Marie, inferring a sacrificed love-affair from the old snapshot, but never knowing for certain. And the narrator of Le Vent, the only one to have been the recipient of confidences, is nonetheless constantly aware of the gaps in his knowledge of events.

The theme of fragmentary vision, which the novels of the central period embody with increasing power, is constantly reiterated. Georges' repeated question "Comment savoir? Que savoir?" leads to his final recognition that he needed to have been on both sides of the hedge, as it were:

... à nous deux moi le suivant et l'autre le regardant s'avancer nous possédions la totalité de l'énigme (l'assassin sachant ce qui allait lui arriver et moi sachant ce qui lui était arrivé...

La Route, p. 313

In the narrator's frustrated exclamation in Histoire, as he studies the photograph of the artist's studio: "Mais quoi encore? Quoi encore? Encore? Encore? Encore?" (p. 283), there is the same sense of the incompleteness of the evidence, the impenetrability of other lives, and the inadequacy of any one perspective. The scepticism expressed in Le Vent as to the possibility of attaining to more than a fragmentary knowledge, even of events one has experienced oneself, translates itself into the plots of the subsequent novels, all of which are based on the same pattern: the imaginative reconstruction by a narrator or character of events in the life of another. The fragmentation of the narrative in the work of the central period clearly corresponds to the fragmentary character of this fictional pattern. The breaks and interruptions of the narrative underline the gaps and uncertainties in the narrator or character's knowledge of events. Or conversely, the relation between narrative structure and subject may be seen, as Ricardou suggests, in terms of the plot taking on the characteristics of the composition, rather than the composition reflecting the plot, as it
is more orthodox to assume:

Toute fiction peut-être, au moins par intuition, tend à produire une image des principes narratifs qui l'établissent.

Thus the turning in circles of the survivors in _La Route_ may be seen as an allegorization of the circular construction of the narrative (rather than the converse). And the fictional pattern common to all the works of the central period — the narrator/character piecing together his fragmentary knowledge of another life — could be interpreted as a representation of the reader's relation to the fragmented text, or as an allegorization of the novelist's creation of a fiction, since the events themselves are less central than the endless process of speculation, reconstruction and, ultimately, fictionalization, that replaces the conventional progression of a plot. This is most notable in _La Route des Flandres_, where the creation of a fiction or fictions has become the main fictional theme. Whatever the direction of influence, it is clear that there is a close connection between the fragmented composition of the novels and the fragmentary character of the story they narrate.

The same fragmentariness, according to the sceptical stance of _Le Vent_, must characterize even the individual's knowledge of his own experience, because of the way in which the incomplete and arbitrary nature of memory further affects our already limited perception of events. It was this theme, as we saw, that many critics initially seized upon in explanation of the fragmented narrative of the novels. Their discontinuity and the disorienting effect of their non-chronological progression were interpreted as an imitation of the arbitrary shifts and associations of memory; an interpretation encouraged by Simon's many references in interviews to the fragmentedness of memory.

But as detailed analysis of the narrative structure of these novels has
shown, only *Histoire* can be seen as a novel of memory in any strict realist sense, and even then memory does not suffice to explain all aspects of its fragmented composition. In *La Route*, as we have seen, there is a deliberate subversion of narrative coherence that makes it impossible to see the novel as a whole in terms of the representation of memory, despite the brilliance of its many passages of interior monologue. And the fragmentation of *Le Palace*, apart from the first chapter "Inventaire", is too systematic to be intended as an imitation of the workings of memory.

Nonetheless, narrative fragmentation plays a more realist role than certain critics would have us believe. We have seen in *Le Palace* how through its effect on the process of reading it may serve to recreate a certain experience of the passage of time -- the sense of discontinuity, of alternating slow motion or lightning speed, experienced by the Italian in the "Récit de l'homme-fusil". In *Histoire*, the interweaving of fragmented sequences serves as we saw to evoke the mingling of past and present in the narrator's consciousness, or the simultaneity of different trains of thought, and to suggest, most effectively, the processes of censorship that block out painful images.

The real originality of Simon's use of fragmented structure does not lie here, however, but in the close and productive relation between theme and form that it achieves. The fragmentation of the narrative in the novels of the central period disrupts chronological order and narrational continuity, the two main principles of organization in the conventional novel, replacing the orderly unfolding of a sequence of events by a montage of fragmented scenes and episodes in which events are situated according to thematic or formal imperatives rather than their place in time. This juxtaposing of temporally separated elements may be used to reveal underlying similarities or connections, as in the overlapping of the race and ambush sequences in *La Route*; or to suggest meaning or convey the quality of an experience
through contrast, even incongruity, as when Georges' escape from the camp is interwoven with his making love to Corinne. What is essential is that in each case the connection or the meaning emerges from the form itself and not from any explicit statement or commentary. Juxtaposition and its variants (superimposition or overlapping, and alternation or interweaving) are themselves productive of meaning. The montage of thematically related elements is infinitely richer in significance than a straightforward narrative based on causal or chronological connections could be. It is the fragmentation of the narrative that makes this possible, both through the flexibility it permits in the overall arrangement of episodes, and through its potential for various kinds of productive linkage at the actual point of juxtaposition. We have seen some of the effects produced by different transitional devices in the chapters on *La Route*. I argued there that the ultimate aim of that novel's fragmented composition was a spatial vision of all its elements, perceived by the reader in a simultaneous global apprehension. Whether or not this is possible of the novel as a whole, it is certainly the case that on the individual level, many of the text's juxtapositions of incidents or figures create a momentary superimposition, a palimpsest effect of a text that can be read doubly, giving the reader a simultaneous dual vision of two widely separated elements. Thus fragmentation can be seen as a technique of spatialization, undermining the linearity of the narrative to aim at that global apprehension of the work that Simon has constantly stated as the goal of his compositions.

The flexibility of a fragmented composition also contributes to the creation of formal design, such as we have seen in the symmetries and patterns of *La Route* and *Le Palace*. Taken to its furthest degree, fragmentation produces the collage composition of certain parts of *Histoire*, its most inventive realization. Here too, the notion of spatiality is
central since collage depends on spatial proximity instead of temporal sequence, on fertile juxtapositions of disparate elements brought together to create a new entity.

It is in this creation of expressive form, in the unity of theme and structure, vision and design, that Simon's greatest achievements of the central period seem to me to lie. The fragmentation of the narrative is not only the expression of a vision, but also the basis of a series of compositions that, in the level of participation they demand of the reader, provide one of the richest and most stimulating reading experiences in contemporary literature.
NOTES

Introduction


3 Roubichou, Lecture de "L'Herbe", p. 307n. 60.


5 Almost all commentators have touched on the subject, but see especially the studies by Roubichou, Dominique Lanceraux, Monique Hyde, and Jean Ricardou, listed in the Bibliography.

Chapter I


4 Instances of such criticism are cited by Zéraffa, La Révolution romanesque, pp. 109-114.


9 The type of study that Simon proposes has been attempted by E. Jaffe-Freem in her book Alain Robbe-Grillet et la peinture cubiste, (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1966).

10 The parallel between Cubism and the modern novel has been drawn from the opposite standpoint by an art historian, Robert Rosenblum, who, in his book Cubism and Twentieth Century Art, (New York: Abrams, 1961), compares the work of Picasso and Braque with that of their contemporaries Joyce and Woolf. Much of what he says would apply equally well to the nouveau roman.


14 For the best comparative studies to date, see works by Cobley, Duncan, and Hyde listed in Bibliography.


18 Spencer, p. xxi.


21 Rabkin, "Spatial form and plot".


23 Spencer, p. 117.


25 Spencer, p. 123.

26 Simon, "La fiction mot a mot," p. 91.

27 Mendilow, p. 215.


30 For discussion of the notion of spatial form, see Jeffrey Smitten, "Approaches to the Spatiality of narrative," in Papers on Language and Literature, 14, no. 3, (Summer 1978), pp. 296-314, which gives a broad account of all treatments of the topic to date.

31 Frank, p. 9.


33 Genette, p. 46.

34 Smitten and Holtz both give some account of the objections to Frank's view.

35 Frank, p. 60n.


38 Mendilow, p. 212.

39 Mendilow, p. 217.

40 Spencer, Intro., xx-xxi.


42 Iser, p. 280.


44 Eisenstein, "Word and image," in Film Form and The Film Sense, p. 35.

Chapter II

Le Rouge et le noir, Part II, Chapter 19, (epigraph).

Claude Simon, interviewed by M. Chapsal in L'Express, 5 avril 1962.


Chapter III


2 Ricardou, "'Claude Simon', textuellement," p. 17.


4 Five notes from these lectures are reprinted in Entretiens, 31, pp. 41-46.

5 Jean Pierre Faye, "Nouvelle analogie?" in Tel Quel, 17, (Printemps 1964), pp. 3-11.


Seylaz, p. 236.


Rousset, p. 79.

Rousset, p. 81.

Berger, pp. 96-97.

Quentin and Shreve's reconstruction of the Sutpen story in Absalom, Absalom! has clearly served as a model for Georges' and Blum's fantasies around the Reixachs, even down to the interchangeability of the two voices: "... both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking became audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who had perhaps never existed at all anywhere ...", Absalom, Absalom! (1936; rpt. Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 249-250. This passage and all the other remarks to the effect that it could have been either of them speaking have an exact parallel on many pages of La Route (cf. p. 188 "... et Blum (ou Georges): 'C'est fini!', et Georges (ou Blum): 'Je pourrais continuer' ..." as well as the preceding page.).


DuVerlie interview, p. 6.


Lanceraux, p. 237.

Lanceraux, p. 238.
Chapter IV

1 This view of the novel's structure was suggested as early as 1966 by Vivian Mercier in his article "Claude Simon: order and disorder," Shenandoah, 17, No. 4. He characterised the effort of the new novelists as an attempt to convert the novel from an art of time to one of space "so that when we have read a book through -- probably not for the first time, however -- we can get the impression of 'seeing it all at once' just as we do a painting or a map". This view seems only to have come to the fore again very recently in Stuart Sykes' study Les romans de Claude Simon, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979), which confirms and adds to my own account of the importance of spatial composition in Simon's work and its relation to his interest
in the visual arts.

2 See the passage quoted earlier (Chapter I, p. 37), for Simon's account of the "plan de montage" as well as the statement from Premier Plan at the beginning of this chapter.

3 Eisenstein, "Through theatre to cinema," in Film Form and The Film Sense, pp. 12-13.


5 Lucien Dällenbach, "Mise en abyme et redoublement spéculaire chez Claude Simon," in Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, pp. 159-160. See also the discussion following this paper, in particular p. 179.


7 Roubichou, "Aspects...", pp. 201-204.


9 Ricardou, Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. 25.

10 Lanceraux, p. 240.

11 Examples are to be found on pages 30/32, 37/38, 41/42, 97, 256 and 293.

12 Lanceraux, p. 245.

13 These terms are derived from Humphrey, (Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel). They correspond to Genette's use of "monologue immédiat", "discours indirect libre", and "récit oral" in Figures III.


16 Examples are to be found on pages 29, 37, 70, 97, 100, 125, 133, 205, 214, 239, 264, 277, 278, 290 and 293.

17 The theme of animal metamorphosis is a rich source of imagery throughout the novel, particularly in the "homme-cheval" and "femme-jument"
allusions of the Reixach sequences.


19 See pp. 24, 154 and 185 for Corinne/"alézane" doubling, but also p. 308 where the object pronoun in "une dernière fois je le vis" could refer either to the dead horse or to Reixach's corpse.

20 D'Hillenbach, pp. 158-159.


23 An interesting parallel is to be found in the title of another highly fragmented work, In Parenthesis by the Welsh writer and artist David Jones, describing his experiences in the first World War. He explains the significance of the title in his Preface as follows: "This writing is called In Parenthesis because ... for us amateur soldiers (and especially for the writer, who was not only amateur, but grotesquely incompetent, a knocker-over of piles, a parade's despair) the war itself was a parenthesis -- how glad we thought we were to step outside its brackets at the end of '18..." In Parenthesis, (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), xv.

24 Lanceraux, p. 246.


26 Claude Simon, Le Monde, 8 octobre 1960.


Chapter V

1 DuVerlie, interview, p. 5.


3 Claude Simon, "La fiction mot à mot," , pp. 88-89.
Claude Simon, "La fiction mot à mot," p. 93.


Claude Simon in discussion following "La fiction mot à mot," p. 108.

On the suitability or otherwise of the extended use of the term mise en abyme, see the discussion that followed Lucien Dällenbach's presentation at Cerisy in Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, pp. 173-179.


Claude Simon, "La fiction mot à mot," p. 89.


Chapter VI

Claude Simon, interview in L'Express, 5 avril, 1962.

Claude Simon, "La fiction mot à mot," p. 93.

Claude Simon, interview in L'Express, 5 avril, 1962

Chapter VII

Rousset, p. 80.

See pp. 322, 325, 365, 370, 375, 376, 380, 381, 390 and 392.


Rousset, "Trois romans de la mémoire," p. 79

According to F. Bartlett, Remembering: a study in experimental and social psychology, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1950), still a classic text on the subject, most people have predominantly visual memories.

7 Claude Simon, interview in Le Monde, 26 avril, 1967.


9 See the discussion following Ricardou's presentation at the 1974 Colloque de Cerisy, in Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, pp. 21-25.

10 See pp. 287-288 je, 288 il, 289 il, 290-291 je, 292-293 je, 295-296 il, 299-300 je/il/je and 301 il.

11 Ricardou, in Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. 25.

12 See remarks by A.C. Pugh in Claude Simon: analyse, théorie, p. 22.

13 See interview in La Quinzaine Littéraire, 15-31 dec. 1967.

14 Claude Simon, "La fiction mot à mot," p. 94.


16 See especially passages on pp. 109, 113 and 123-124.

17 DuVerlie, p. 8.


Conclusion

1 Ricardou, "Un ordre dans la débâcle," p. 55.
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