

Distance, Aspect, Origin

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The importance of Robbe-Grillet is measured by the question which his work poses to any work contemporary to it. It is a fundamentally critical question, bearing on the possibilities open to language: a question which in their leisure critics turn into a malign questioning of the right to use any other language, or even one close to that of Robbe-Grillet. The objection is usually made to the *Tel Quel* writers (the existence of this review has altered something in the space in which one speaks, but what?) that Robbe-Grillet was there before them and is there in front of them, not perhaps to reproach them or to show their presumption, but to suggest that several of these writers who thought they might escape it have found themselves in the labyrinth of this sovereign, obsessive language, that they have found in this father a trap which captures, captivates them. And since they themselves, after all, hardly speak in the first person without referring and leaning on this prominent third person ...

To the seven propositions which Sollers has advanced on Robbe-Grillet¹ (placing them almost at the beginning of the review, like a second 'Declaration,' close to the first but imperceptibly advanced) I am not, of course, going to add an eighth, which, final or not, would judge the seven others as good or bad; I am rather going to try, in the clarity of these directly enunciated propositions, to bring to light a relation which is a little withdrawn from them, interior to what they propose, and as if diagonal to their line.

It is said that in Sollers's writing (or in Thibaudeau's) there are figures, a language, a style and descriptive themes which are imitations or borrowings from Robbe-Grillet. I would rather say: there are objects woven into the tissue of their words and present under their eyes which owe their existence and the possibility of their existence to Robbe-Grillet. I am thinking of the iron balustrade of which the black, rounded forms ('with its foliage transfixed along rounded, blackened stems that move symmetrically now one way, now another'²) limit the balcony of *The Park* and form an openwork through which can be seen the street, the city, trees, houses: a Robbe-Grillet-object which is a dark outline against the still luminous evening, an object constantly in view which articulates the visual spectacle, but also a negative object through which the gaze moves towards a depth which appears slightly floating, grey and blue, those leaves and those shapes without branches which can hardly be seen, a little further back, in falling darkness. And it is perhaps not indifferent that *The Park* unfolds its own distance around this balustrade; nor that it opens onto a nocturnal landscape in which the values of light and shadow, which in Robbe-Grillet trace out the outline of forms in full daylight, are inverted in a distant scintillation. On the other side of the street, at a distance which is not certain and which the darkness makes even more doubtful, a 'vast and very bright apartment' hollows out a luminous, mute, accidental and uneven gallery — an interior of theatre and enigma beyond the iron arabesques obstinately maintaining their negative presence. From one work to the other there is the image not perhaps of a mutation, or a development, but of a discursive articulation; and it will become crucial one day to analyse phenomena of this type in a vocabulary which does not use the curiously bewitched terms of influence and exorcism familiar to the critics.

Before coming back to this theme (which I confess is the basis of my concerns) I would like to say two or three things about the coherence of this language which is common, to a certain extent, to Sollers, to Thibaudeau, to Baudry, and perhaps to others. I am not unaware of the injustice of speaking in such general terms, or that one is immediately caught in the dilemma of the opposition: author or school. It seems to me, however, that the possibilities open to language in a given period are not so numerous that isomorphisms cannot be found (thus enabling the possibility of reading several texts

¹ See *Tel Quel* (1960).

² Philippe Sollers, *The Park*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London, Calder & Boyars, 1968), 12.

against each other) or that the frame should be closed for those who have not yet written or those one has not yet read. Because these isomorphisms are not 'visions of the world', but folds interior to language; the words pronounced, the sentences written, pass through them, adding their own specific lines.

1 — Perhaps certain figures (or perhaps all) of *The Park*, of *Une ceremonie royale*³ or *Les images*⁴ are without interior volume, lightened of this dark, lyrical kernel, of that insistent yet withdrawn centre whose presence Robbe-Grillet had already conjured. But in a quite strange sense they do have their own volume, beside them, above and below, around them; a volume in a state of perpetual noninsertion, which floats or vibrates around a figure which is outlined but never fixed, a volume which advances or withdraws, hollows out its own distance and thrusts itself right up in front of the eyes. In fact, these satellite, wandering volumes do not make manifest either the presence or the absence of the object, but rather a distance which at the same time maintains the object far from the gaze and separates it irreducibly from itself: a distance which belongs to the gaze (and seems therefore to be imposed on the objects from the outside) but which renews itself at every moment in the most secret heart of things. These volumes, which are the interior of the objects outside them, intersect, interfere with each other tracing composite forms which have only one face and which slip around each other consecutively: thus, in *The Park*, under the eyes of the narrator, his room (he has just left it to go out onto the balcony and it is thus floating beside him, outside, in an unreal and interior dimension) communicates its volume to a small painting which is hanging on one of the walls: the latter opens in its turn behind the canvas, pouring its interior space out towards a seascape, towards the masts of a boat, towards a group of characters whose clothes, physiognomies and slightly theatrical gestures unfold according to a scope so excessive, so unmeasured in any case to the dimensions of the frame which encloses them, that one of these gestures imperiously returns us to the present position of the narrator on the balcony. Or to someone else perhaps making the same gesture. For this world of distance is in no sense that of isolation, but of a proliferation of identity, of the Same at the point of bifurcation, or on the curve of its return.

2 — The milieu, of course, makes us think of a mirror — of the mirror which gives things a space outside them and transplanted from them, which multiplies identities and mixes differences in an impalpable knot which cannot be unknotted. Let's remind ourselves precisely of the definition of the park, 'the composite of very beautiful and very picturesque places,' each has been taken from a different landscape, has been displaced from its natal site, transported itself, or a close version of itself, to that disposition where 'everything seems natural except the whole assemblage.' Park: mirror of incompatible volumes. Mirror: subtle park where the distant trees are interwoven. Under these two provisional figures it is a difficult (despite its lightness), regular (under its uneven appearance) space which is in the process of opening out. But what is it made of, if it is not completely a reflection, nor a dream, nor an imitation or a reverie? A fiction, Sollers would say, but let's leave aside, for a moment, this word, which is so heavy and yet so thin.

For the moment I would rather borrow from Klossowski a very beautiful word: simulacra. One could say that if, in Robbe-Grillet, objects persist and are obstinate, in Sollers they simulate each other; that is, following the dictionary, they are the image (the vain image) of themselves, the inconsistent spectre, the deceptive thought of themselves; they represent themselves outside their divine presence, while nevertheless signalling it — objects of a piety addressed to distance. But perhaps we should listen to etymology with more care: does not 'to simulate' mean 'to come together,' to be at the same time as oneself, but shifted slightly from oneself? To be oneself in a different place, which is not the place of birth, the native ground of perception, but at an unmeasurable distance, in the most proximate outside? To be outside oneself, with oneself, in a 'with' where distances intersect. I am thinking of the simulacra without depth, perfectly round, of *Une ceremonie royale*, or of another also arranged by Thibaudeau, of the *Match de football*: the football game hardly unstuck from itself by the voices of the reporters finds in this sonorous park, in this noisy mirror, its meeting place with so much

³ Jean Thibaudeau, *Une ceremonie royale* (Paris, Minuit, 1960).

⁴ Jean-Louis Baudry, *Les images* (Paris, Seuil, Coll. *Tel Quel*, 1963).

other reflected speech. It is perhaps in this direction that we should understand what Thibaudeau says when he opposes to the theatre of time, another, in space, as yet sketched out only by Appia or Meyerhold.

3 — We are dealing, therefore, with a displaced space, at the same time behind and in front, never completely present, and in fact no intrusion into that space is possible. The spectators in Robbe-Grillet are men, upright and on the move, or still hiding out, watching out for shadows, traces, breaches, displacements; they penetrate, have already penetrated, right to the heart of the objects which are presented to them in profile, turning as they move around them. The characters of *The Park*, of *Les images*, are sitting, immobile, in areas a little uncoupled from space, as if suspended, on café terraces or balconies. Areas which are separated, but by what? Perhaps by nothing more than a distance, their own distance: an imperceptible empty space, but one which cannot be reabsorbed, nor furnished, a line which is constantly crossed without being effaced, as if, on the contrary, it is in constantly crossing it that it is all the more marked out. For this limit does not isolate two parts of the world: a subject and an object, or objects positioned opposite thought; it is rather the universal relation, the mute, laborious and instantaneous relation by which everything is knotted and unknotted, by which everything appears, sparkles and is extinguished, by which, in the same movement, objects propose themselves and efface themselves. Perhaps it is this role that is played out by the obstinately present form of the division in the novels of J.-P. Faye (lobotomy, frontier within a country) or the impenetrable transparency of windows in Baudry's *Les images*. But the essential aspect of this infinitesimal distance, like that of a line, is not what it excludes, it is more fundamentally what it opens out; it liberates, on either side of its lance, two spaces whose secret is that they are the same, that they are totally here and there, that they are where they are at a distance, that they offer their interiority, their warm cavern, their dark face outside themselves and nevertheless in the nearest proximity. Around this invisible knife all beings pivot.

4 — This torsion has the marvellous property of focusing time: not to make its successive forms cohabit in a space of traversal (as with Robbe-Grillet) but to allow them to converge in a sagittal dimension - as arrows penetrating the density in front of us. Or otherwise they are overhanging, the past no longer being the ground on which we are, nor a surging up in the form of memory, but on the contrary arising in spite of the oldest metaphors of memory, arriving from the depth of the most proximate distance and with it: time takes on a vertical stature of superimposition where the oldest level is paradoxically the nearest to the summit, ridge-pole and flight line, high place of reversal. A precise and complex sketch of this curious structure is given at the beginning of *Les images*: a woman is sitting on a café terrace, with in front of her the large, framed windows of a building which dominates her; and through these glazed surfaces come a continuous flow of images which are superimposed on one another, while on the table there is a book whose pages she rapidly flicks through between her finger and thumb (from bottom to top, thus backwards): appearance, effacement, superimposition, which echoes in an enigmatic mode, when her eyes are lowered, the framed images which accumulate above her when she raises her eyes.

5 — Stretched out beside itself, the temporality of *Jealousy* and *The Voyeur* leaves traces which are differences, thus ultimately a system of signs. But the time which arises and superimposes makes analogies flicker, shows nothing other than the figures of the Same. Such that with Robbe-Grillet the difference between what has happened and what has not happened, even though (and to the extent that) it is difficult to establish remains at the centre of the text (at least in the form of a lack, a white page or a repetition): it is a limit and an enigma. In *La chambre secrète* the descent and the re-ascent of the man up and down the staircase to the body of the victim (dead, wounded, bleeding, struggling, dead again) is after all the reading of an event. Thibaudeau, in the sequence of the assassination attempt, seems to follow a similar course: but in fact, in this circular procession of horses and carriages, it is a question of unfolding a series of virtual events (movements, gestures, shouts, cries which perhaps arise or do not arise) and which have the same density as 'reality', neither more or less than it, since they are carried along with it up to the final moment of the parade when in the dust, the sun, the music and the cries, the last horses disappear behind the closing gate. Signs are

not deciphered through a system of differences; isomorphisms are followed through a depth of analogies. Not a reading, but rather a drawing together of the identical, an immobile advance towards a state lacking difference. There, the distinctions between real and virtual, perception and dream, past and fantasy (whether they are static or moved across), have no more value than being moments of the passage, relays more than signs, traces of steps, empty surfaces where the Same, from the beginning, does not linger, was announced in the distance and is already insinuating itself (and time, the gaze, the discernment between things, is turned around on the horizon, but also here and now, in each instant, the other side of things always appearing). This, precisely, is the *intermediary*. Sollers writes:

Here you will find a number of texts which appear contradictory, but whose subject, in fact, turns out to be the *same*. Whether it is a question of paintings, or of real events (but at the same time at that limit where the real turns into dream), of reflections or of rapid descriptions, it is always the intermediary state in a movement towards an overturning which is provoked, suffered, or pursued.⁵

This almost static movement, this focused attention on the Identical, this ceremony in the suspended dimension of the Intermediary, reveal not so much a space, nor a region or a structure (words which are too embroiled in a mode of reading which is no longer applicable), but a constant and mobile relation, interior to language itself, which Sollers designates by the decisive word 'fiction'.⁶

If I have insisted on these slightly meticulous references to Robbe-Grillet, it is because it was not a question of deciding on originalities, but of establishing, from one work to another, a visible relation, nameable in each of its elements, which would not be of the order of resemblance (with the whole series of badly thought and frankly unthinkable notions of influence and imitation), nor of the order of replacement (of succession, development, of schools): a relation such that the works might define each other against, beside and at a distance from each other, taking support at the same time from their difference and their simultaneity, and defining, without privilege or culmination, the scope of a network. Even if history makes the short-term movements of this network appear, its intersections and knots can and must be apprehended by criticism according to a reversible movement (a reversal which changes certain properties, but does not contest the existence of the network, since it is precisely one of its basic rules); and if criticism has a role, I mean if the necessarily secondary language of criticism can cease to be a derived, aleatory language, fatally effaced by the work, if it can be at the same time secondary and fundamental, it is to the extent that it brings in to play for the first time, at the level of words, this network of works which, for each of them, is their own silence.

In a book whose ideas will play a leading role for a long time to come, Marthe Robert⁷ has shown what relations *Don Quixote* and *The Castle* had woven, not with such and such a story, but with the conditions of the very existence of Western literature, with its conditions of possibility in history (conditions which are works, thus permitting a *critical* reading in the most rigorous sense of the term). But if such a reading is possible, it is thanks to the works produced now: Marthe Robert's book is of all books of criticism the closest to what literature is today: a certain self-relation which is complex, multilateral and simultaneous, where the fact of coming afterwards (being new) is not in any sense reducible to the linear law of succession. Perhaps a historically linear development, from the nineteenth century to the present, appears in the forms of existence and coexistence of literature: it had its highly teleological place in the both real and fantastic space of the library: in which each book is made to include all others, to consume them, reduce them to silence and finally to take its place beside them, outside them and within them (Sade and Mallarme with their books, with *The Book*, are by definition the library's damned books). In an even more archaic mode, at the time of the great transformations contemporary to Sade, if literature reflected on itself and criticized itself in the mode of Rhetoric, it was because it relied, at a distance, on a withdrawn yet demanding Word (Truth and

⁵ Sollers, *L'Intermediaire* (Paris, Seuil, Coll. *Tel Quel*, 1963).

⁶ Sollers, 'Logique de la Fiction,' in *Logiques* (Paris, Seuil, Coll. *Tel Quel*, 1968).

⁷ Marthe Robert, *L'Ancien et le Nouveau* (Paris, Grasset, 1963).

law), which it had to restore to figural language (whence the indissociable opposition of Rhetoric and Hermeneutics). Perhaps one could say that today (since Robbe-Grillet, which is what makes him unique), literature which had ceased to exist as rhetoric has disappeared as a library. It is in the process of constituting itself as a network — and as a network where neither the truth of the word nor the series of history can function, where the only *a priori* is language. What seems important to me in *Tel Quel* is that the existence of literature as a network never ceases to be more clearly defined, ever since the liminary moment when it was pronounced that:

What must be said today is that writing is no longer conceivable without a clear predication of its powers, a *sang-froid* to the measure of the chaos in which it awakes, a determination which puts poetry at the highest place of the mind. The rest will not be literature.⁸

We must finally come back to this word fiction, brought up several times and then abandoned. Not without some trepidation. Because it sounds like a term from psychology (imagination, fantasy, reverie, invention, etc.) because it has the appearance of belonging to one of the two dynasties of the Real and the Unreal. Because it seems to lead back — and this would be so simple after the 'literature of objects' — to the inflections of a subjective language. Because it offers so much to the grasp but escapes it. Cutting diagonally across the uncertainty of dreams and of waiting, of madness and wakefulness, does not fiction designate a series of experiences which the language of Surrealism has already expressed? The attentive glance which *Tel Quel* brings to bear upon Breton is not one of retrospection. Yet Surrealism had engaged these experiences in the search for a reality which made them possible and gave them an imperious power over any language (playing upon it, or with it, or in spite of it). But what if, on the contrary, these experiences can be maintained where they take place, at the level of their surface without depth, in that indistinct volume from which they come to us, vibrating around their unidentifiable kernel, on their ground which is an absence of ground? What if dream, madness, and night do not mark out the stakes of any solemn threshold, but ceaselessly trace and efface the limits which wakefulness and discourse cross over, when they come towards us and reach us already doubled? What if the fictive was precisely not the beyond nor the intimate secret of the everyday, but the flight of the arrow which hits us right in the eyes and offers us everything which appears. In that case the fictive would be also that which names things, makes them speak and gives them in language their being already split by the sovereign power of words: 'landscapes split in two,' writes Marcelin Pleyenet. This is not to say, then, that fiction is language: this trick would be too simple, despite its familiarity. It is rather to say with more prudence that between them there is a complex adherence, a dependence and a contestation, and that, maintained for as long as it can keep to its word, the simple experience which consists in taking up a pen and writing, disengages (in the sense of liberates, un-buries, takes back a pledge or goes back on a word) a distance which belongs not to the world nor to the unconscious, nor to the gaze, nor to interiority; a distance which, in its naked state, offers a grid of lines of ink and at the same time a labyrinth of streets, a city being born, always having been there:

Words are lines, facts when they intersect
we would represent in this manner a series of straight lines cut at a right
angle by a series of straight lines
A city.⁹

And if I was asked in the end to define fiction I would say, without skill: the verbal nervure of what does not exist, such as it is.

I would efface, in order to leave this experience to what it is (in order to treat it, therefore, as a fiction, since it does not exist, that we know), I would efface all the oppositions by which it might be

⁸ 'Declaration', *Tel Quel*, 1 (1960). Since then, J.-P. Faye has actually joined *Tel Quel*, Faye being a writer who wishes to write novels not 'in series', but establishing between each of them a certain relation of proportion.

⁹ Marcelin Pleyenet, *Paysages en deux* followed by *Les Lignes de la prose* (Paris, Seuil, *Tel Quel*, 1963), 121.

easily dialecticised: confrontation or abolition of the subjective and the objective, of the interior and the exterior, reality and imaginary. This whole vocabulary of dualism needs to be replaced by one of distance, thus allowing the fictive to appear as a distancing specific to language — a distancing which has its place within it, but which, at the same time, stretches it out, disperses it, divides it up and opens it. Fiction does not arise because language is at a distance from things; language is their distance, the light in which they appear and their inaccessibility, the simulacra where only their presence is given; and any language which rather than forget this distance maintains itself within it and maintains it within itself, any language which speaks about this distance in advancing within it, is a language of fiction. It can therefore cut across any prose and any poetry, any novel or any reflection, indifferently.

Pleyner designates the bursting out of this distance in one phrase: 'fragmentation is the source.' In other, less felicitous words: a first, absolutely original enunciation of faces and of lines is never possible, no more so than that primitive appearance of things which literature has often given itself the task of focusing upon, in the name or under the sign of a diverted phenomenology. The language of fiction inserts itself into an already spoken language, into a murmur which never began. The virginity of the gaze, the attentive step which raises words to the level of discovered and circumvented things, do not concern it; what does is usury and distance, the pallor of what has already been pronounced. Nothing is spoken at dawn (*The Park* begins in the evening; and in the morning, another morning, it starts again); what would be said for the first time is nothing, is not said, loiters in the confines of words, in those rifts in white paper which Pleyner's poems sculpt and ornament, open to the daylight. There is however in the language of fiction an instant of pure origin; it is that of writing, the moment of the words themselves, in scarcely dry ink, the moment when is sketched out what by definition and in its most material being can be nothing but trace, sign, in the distance, to the anterior and the ulterior:

As I write (here) on this page with uneven lines justifying prose
(poetry)
the words designate words and relate each to the other what you
understand.¹⁰

On several occasions, *The Park* invokes the patient gesture of filling the pages of an orange exercise book with blue-black ink. But this movement is only totally present, in its precise, absolute present tense, at the last moment: only the last lines of the book bring it forward and join up with it. Everything said before, and by this writing (the tale itself) is sent back to an order commanded by this present minute or second: it is resolved in this origin which is the only one present and also the end (the moment of becoming silent), it folds in on itself completely, but at the same time, in its unfolding and its itinerary it is at every moment upheld by this moment, distributed across its space and its time (the page to complete, the words which are aligned), the writing finds there its constant present tense.

It is not a case, then, of a linear series running from the past which is remembered to a present defined by the rerum of a memory and the moment of writing. But rather a vertical and arborescent relation in which a patient present tense, nearly always silent, never given as itself, supports figures which, rather than ordering themselves according to time, are distributed according to different rules: the present itself only appears once the present tense of writing is finally given, when the novel ends and language is no longer possible. Before, and everywhere else in the book, another order reigns: between the different episodes (but this word is too chronological, perhaps it would be better to say 'phases', with close attention to its etymology), the distinction of tenses and modes (present, future, imperfect or conditional) only relates very indistinctly to a calendar: it sketches out references, indices, relays in which the categories of completion, Incompletion, of continuity, iteration, immanence, proximity, distancing, come into play, categories which grammarians would define as those of aspect. Perhaps emphasis should be given to this sentence of discrete appearance, one of the first of Baudry's novel: 'I arrange what is around me for an indeterminate length of time.' This is to say that the division of time of tenses, is not made imprecise in itself, but entirely relative and ordered according to the play of aspect — to that play which is concerned with distancing, the movement away, arrival and

¹⁰ Marcelin Pleyner, *Comme* (Paris, Seuil, Coll. *Tel Quel*, 1965), 19.

return. What secretly inaugurates and determines this indeterminate time is a network which is more spatial than temporal, but one would still have to strip from the word spatial that which attaches it to an imperious gaze or a successive approach; it is more a question of that space below space and time, which is that of distance. If I have deliberately fixed on the word aspect, after that of fiction and simulacra, it is at the same time for its grammatical precision and for a whole semantic kernel which turns around it (the *species* of the mirror and of analogy; the diffraction of the spectre; the doubling of spectres; the exterior aspect, which is not the thing itself nor its definite circumference; the aspect which is modified with distance; the aspect which sometimes misleads but is not effaced, and so on).

A language of aspect which attempts to bring up to the level of words a play more sovereign than that of time: a language of distance which distributes spatial relations according to a different foundation. But distance and aspect are interrelated in a much closer manner than space and time; they form a network which no psychology can untie (aspect offering not time *itself* but the moment of its *coming forth*; distance offering not things in their place, but the movement which presents them and makes them pass). And the language which brings to the light of day this profound adherence is not one of subjectivity; it opens and, in the strictest sense, 'gives rise' to something which might be designated by the neutral word experience: neither true nor false, neither wakefulness nor dream, neither madness nor reason, it removes everything which Pleyne calls the 'will to qualify.' Because the space of distance and the relations of aspect do not relate to perception, nor to things themselves, nor to the subject, neither to what is deliberately and strangely called 'the world;' they belong to the dispersion of language (to that originary fact that one never speaks at the origin but in the distance). A literature of aspect such that the latter becomes interior to language; not in that it treats it as a closed system, but because it is sensitive to the distancing of the origin, its fragmentation, its scattered exteriority. It finds its landmark and its contestation in literature.

Whence several characteristics specific to such works:

Effacement to start with of any proper name (even reduced to its initial letter), to the profit of the personal pronoun; effacement, that is, of a simple reference to the already named in a language which has always already begun; and characters who are designated only have the right to an indefinitely repeated substantive (the man, the woman), modified only by an adjective buried far off in the depth of familiarities ('the woman in red'). Whence also the exclusion of the unheard of, of the never seen; precautions are taken against the fantastic, the fictive existing only in the support, the sliding, the arising of things (not in things themselves) — in the neutral elements devoid of any oneiric prestige which lead from one surface of the story to another. The fictive has its place in an almost mute articulation: large white interstices which separate the printed paragraphs or the thin almost punctual particle (a gesture, a colour in *The Park*, a ray of sun in *Une ceremonie royale*) around which language pivots, disintegrates, recomposes itself, assuring passage through its repetition or its imperceptible continuity. A figure opposed to the imagination which opens fantasy at the very heart of things, the fictive lives in the vectorial element which little by little is effaced by the central precision of the image — a rigorous simulacra of what can be seen, a unique double.

But the moment before the dispersion can never be restored; the aspect can never be led back to the pure line of time; the diffraction which is signified in *Les images* by the thousand framed openings cannot be reduced, no more than that which *The Park* recounts in alternatives suspended from an 'infinitive' (to fall from the balcony and to become the silence which follows the sound of the body or to tear the pages of the exercise book into little pieces, to watch them flutter in the air for a moment). The speaking subject thus finds him- or herself pushed back to the exterior limits of the text, leaving only an intersection of wakes (I or He, I and He at the same time), grammatical inflections among the Other folds of language. Or again, with Thibaudeau, the subject watching the ceremony, and also watching those who are watching it, is probably situated nowhere else but in the 'spaces left between the passing figures;' in the distance which makes the spectacle distant, in the grey caesura of the walls which hide the preparations and the Queen's secrets. In all of these spaces one can recognize, but as if blindly, the essential empty space which language takes as its own; not a lack, like those that Robbe-Grillet's narratives never cease covering over, but an absence of being, a whiteness

which for language is paradoxical milieu and at the same time unerasable exteriority. The lack is not, outside language, what it must mask, nor, within it, what tears it irreparably open. Language is the empty space, that exterior in the interior of which it never ceases to speak: 'the eternal streaming of the outside.' Perhaps it is in such an empty space that echoes, to such an empty space that is addressed, the central gunshot of *The Park*, which arrests time at the mid-point of night and day, killing the other and also the speaking subject (according to a figure which is not without relation to *communication* in the sense intended by Bataille). But this murder does not affect language; perhaps even, at this moment which is neither shadow nor light, at this limit of everything (life and death, day and night, speech and silence), it opens the issue of a language which had always begun before any time. Because, perhaps, it is not death which is at stake in this rupture, but something as if withdrawn from any event. Might one say that this gunshot, which hollows the most hollow place of the night, designates the absolute withdrawal of the origin, the essential effacement of the morning in which things are present, when language names the first animals, when to think is to speak? This withdrawal deems us to a sharing out, a division (an initial sharing constitutive of all others) of thought and language; in this fork in which we are caught is sketched out a space onto whose surface the structuralism of today proposes a gaze whose meticulousness cannot be doubted. But if this space is interrogated, if we ask of it from whence it comes along with the mute metaphors on which it obstinately rests, perhaps we will see sketched out figures that are no longer those of simultaneity, but the relations of aspect in the play of distance, the disappearance of subjectivity in the withdrawal of the origin; or, inversely, that retreat bestowing a language already scattered in which the aspect of things shines out of the distance right up to us. More than one writer is watching out, at dawn, for these figures, in the morning in which we exist. Perhaps they announce an experience where a single *sharing* will reign (a law and a reckoning of all others): to think and to speak, this 'end' designating the *intermediary* which falls upon us shared and within which a few works are presently attempting to maintain themselves.

'Of the earth which is only a sketch,' writes Pleyne on a white page. And at the other end of this language which is one of the thousand-year-old signs of our earth and which also, no more than the earth, has never begun, a last page, symmetrical and also intact, allows another phrase to come before us: 'the background wall is a wall of chalk,' thus designating the whiteness of the background, the invisible empty space of the origin, that pale burst from which words come to us — these words precisely.