Mental-Representation Fiction

. . . n'ayant eu des événements . . . 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, elles-mêmes mal définies, et tout cela vague, plein de trous, de vides, auxquels l'imagination et une approximation logique s'efforçaient de remédier par une suite de hasardeuses déductions—hasardeuses mais non pas forcément fausses. . . .

(. . . having had of events . . . only that fragmentary, incomplete knowledge, made up of a sum of brief images, themselves incompletely apprehended by vision, of words, themselves ill grasped, of sensations, themselves ill defined, and all of that vague, full of holes and voids, which imagination and a logical approximation strove to remedy by a series of hazardous deductions—hazardous but not necessarily false. . . .)

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Having discovered themselves imprisoned behind the filters of their own problematic senses, postexistentialist inferred authors and their narrators could no longer evoke with the same authority and authenticity the truth about their fictional people and events. Fiction that recognized the difference between words and things could not talk without contradiction about what we used to call, with willing suspension of disbelief, "reality." Instead, the "new novel" (astutely tagged at first as "new realism") gradually replaced depiction of persons and events with descriptions of mental representations thereof, as they might appear in the mind of a character or narrator; in this fiction we would read less about things and more about mental images of things.

It may be argued that that is what we have been reading all along.
Narrowly viewed, that argument appears incontrovertible. When Flaubert offers us, in passages of *discours indirect libre*, glimpses of Emma Bovary's inner reaction to events, he is providing a look at her mental representation of them. Zola's third-person narrators give us in the *récit* their picture of the *histoire*. When Gide's intradiegetic narrators and Camus's Meursault express themselves in the first person and limit their tales to those things which they as characters perceived, they are presenting simply a mental image of a series of events. But the primary distinction between these elements of traditional mental representation and the innovative French fiction of the 1950s and 1960s is the ever-supposed presence of an observable offstage reality, of an arbiter of truth to which the mental representation could be compared. Emma Bovary's reactions will end up being in accord—or not—with the "reality" in which she lives. Third-person narrators, especially of the omniscient kind, consistently present themselves as factually reliable and base their authority on "truth." "Reality" will rise up to judge the skewed perceptions of the pastor in Gide's *La Symphonie pastorale*. *L'Etranger* is more innovative: Meursault (reminiscent of Gide's Jérôme) gives us two versions of events—his own and the prosecutor's—without providing the authority of an authentic "reality" to which we can compare them, in order to judge between them. Yet Meursault's personal belief in the existence of such a reality is a constant underpinning of his story: when he says, for example, that, in the shadow of the rock on the beach, the Arab appeared to be laughing, he is suggesting that the fact of the matter could have been verified by a well-placed, objective observer. And of course he wants us to believe that what he says happened to him in court and in prison corresponds to an objectively verifiable reality. The mental representations we meet in the "new" French fiction propose, in general, no such comparison.

Simon's *La Route des Flandres*, for example, presents a flood of memories and imaginations, with the only "present reality" being Georges's presence in bed with Corinne, to which only a few pages are devoted directly, and those serve to reveal Georges's perception of his surroundings. Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* provides a series of ruminations based upon the subjective observation of "real" things by an apparently jealous narrator, in whose mind readers dwell throughout. Nathalie Sarraute's "subconversations" are interior experiences arising during verbal interchanges between characters; the spoken words are assumed to be verifiably "real," but the subjectification of them is the privileged, important end.
product. Early “new” novels, like Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gommes*, still offer consequential and supposedly verifiable events: readers “know” that Dupont has survived the bungled attempt on his life, that he is in hiding to foil possible new efforts to kill him, and that his incontrovertible ruse to dissimulate the absence of a *corpus delecti* has successfully fostered among the detectives the belief that he is indeed dead. But even there, the mental representations of events in various characters’ psyches are individually unverifiable subjective interpretations, with their source in personal perceptions of the “real,” as in other “new” fiction.

The taxonomy of literary imitations of mental representations is highly complex. Certainly the old terms “interior monologue” and “stream of consciousness” are less than adequate to this analysis, because they emphasize flow or continuity of mental images. A primary characteristic of the images we shall be examining (and they are not necessarily “images” either, since they need not be visual or visualizable) is their static quality, even when they represent action. A better metaphor for our purposes might be found in the field of stop-action photography, or in cinematic jump cuts, which immobilize a moment in time. As we shall see, such moments are indeed often interconnected in these novels, but by a single semantic thread, like discrete elements only partially conjoined. Claude Simon’s well-catalogued discovery of the virtue of present participles for the expression of mental representations illustrates the unstreamlike character of fictional consciousness; in an imagined adultery scene, for example, the husband returns unexpectedly to find his wife, who has barely managed to bundle her lover into a closet, feigning passion for her spouse:

... puis elle, là, puérile, innocente, désarmante, se frottant les yeux, souriant, lui tendant les bras, lui expliquant qu’elle s’enferme à clef par crainte des voleurs tandis qu’elle se presse contre lui, l’enlace, l’enveloppe, la chemise glissant par hasard sur son épaule, dénudant ses seins dont elle presse, froisse les tendres bouts meurtris sur la tunique poussiéreuse qu’elle commence déjà à dégrafer de ses mains fébriles, lui parlant maintenant bouche à bouche pour qu’il ne puisse voir ses lèvres gonflées sous les baisers d’un autre. ...  

(. . . then she, there, childlike, innocent, disarming, rubbing her eyes, smiling, holding out her arms to him, explaining to him that she locks herself in for fear of robbers while she presses herself against him, embraces him, envelops him, the nightgown slipping by chance from
her shoulder, baring her breasts whose tender, love-scathed tips she presses, rubs upon the dusty tunic she is already beginning to unhook with her feverish hands, speaking to him now with her mouth against his so that he cannot see her lips swollen from the kisses of another.

As the present participles stop the action in a series of "still" images which flash upon the consciousness of a character, the present tense in the subordinate clauses performs essentially a descriptive, not a narrative, function. Indeed, in the "new" French fiction, mental representations in general tend to be described states, as much fictional "existents" as recounted "events." 3

My primary aim in this chapter is to describe the roles that causality can and cannot play in novels in which such mental representations predominate. First, however, we shall need to undertake a typology of the various mental representations one can experience. While I plan to draw examples from the mental representations attributed to fictional characters in postwar novels, allusions to the mental projections of readers will emerge, here and especially in the conclusion. Representing sights, sounds, and other sensations in the mind is an activity, even if it seems to stop the "action" of represented events; mental representations are therefore susceptible to classification in the manner of verb forms in the natural languages. Specifically, I suggest that they admit of analysis by voice, mode, and tense.

By voice I mean to designate the origin or stimulus of what we represent in the mind's eye. Voice may be direct or indirect, depending upon whether it is stimulated by perception or by a coded report from someone else. (Whether what I "perceive" is real or not, or whether "someone else" really exists, is unessential to the analysis. I am personally persuaded they are often quite real, but I seek no quarrel with idealists!) Indirect voice is always accompanied by direct voice, while the reverse is not so. One may directly perceive persons acting; one may also indirectly perceive persons acting (in the mind's eye), while perceiving directly a printed page on which words refer to persons acting. In this instance, indirect voice yields a message, while direct voice offers the encoded form of the message. (When the code is "music" or "film," the distinction is more complicated, for the code itself is both iconic and indexic. In these cases, only the indexic elements—in film, notably camera angle, distance, and movement with respect to the subject—are in indirect voice. But these subtleties are of importance in the novel, on the level of the characters, only when characters
register mental impressions of music or movies.) In fiction, a character or represented mentality may perceive or experience an event (direct voice on the level of the *histoire*) or may know it vicariously through notification in a message (indirect voice on the same level); obviously, since a *récit* may be defined as a coded message to readers, at least two levels of indirectness may coexist. Examples of the distinction between voices in literature, as well as of the modal and temporal distinctions to follow, will appear later in the chapter.

Regardless of the directness or indirectness with which the representations arise in the mind, one may be aware of differences in their nature or "mode" of being. I use the terms cognitive, hypothetical, counterfactual, and imaginary to describe the modes of mental representation. In addition, we may attribute a relative time value or tense to the representations, associating them in general with past, present, or future.

In the cognitive mode, the tenses are memory, perception, and prediction or project. That is to say that, in this most common of modes, the mind may permit us to experience or envision again something we perceived in the past (past tense); it may also provide us an awareness of what we are experiencing now (present tense); furthermore, it may allow consciousness of what we intend (have already begun) to accomplish, or of what we firmly believe will inevitably occur (future tense). In the cognitive mode, as in all the others, each tense obviously admits of direct or indirect voice. We can be in direct contact with our own past, present, and future, and we can also take cognizance, through messages, or others' memories, perceptions, and projects. We have already examined the interrelationship between voices in the past cognitive with respect to Proust. When we read, for example, the childhood reminiscences in *Combray*, we are learning of Marcel's fictional memories (past cognitive, indirect voice). But when, in retrospect, we remember those memories, it is because they have become a part of us: we remember ourselves reading, living, particular passages, experiencing associated emotions. These memories of ours are quite direct. The reminiscences have reached us in indirect voice, but, as they and their narrator are assimilated into our own past, we transform them into past cognitive, direct voice. This capacity of memory to transmute indirect cognizance into direct experience places readers on a separate narrative level, symmetrical to the position of the author. For just as, for the writer, her or his *narration* includes and envelops the *récit* and its narrator along with the events and
mental images which “make sense” of our world. To discover the past, for example, we reason from effect to cause (e.g., he must have studied ancient Greek, since he can translate this passage of Aristotle). We apply the same sort of logic to the present (it must be cold outside; people in the street are bundled up and shivering), and to the future (she will probably be in an unpleasant mood; she always gets angry when I am late like this). In each of these situations, through the use of a causal hypothesis, we are creating a mental representation of our environment—its past, present, or future. The future hypothetical is sometimes not readily distinguishable from the future cognitive. The difference lies in the degree of perceived inevitability: if you catch sight of a boulder a few feet above your head and falling, you are probably justified in forming a mental representation of disaster (future cognitive), but if you have time to envision a quick leap forward saving you, you are clearly in the future hypothetical. Firm intentions are future cognitive (e.g., I’ll go to the phone and call my friend), while mental reservations (. . . unless the doorbell rings, . . . unless I can remember the information without bothering him) indicate rather the hypothetical mode.

Counterfactual mental images also follow a causal model, but they posit at the outset the absence of the cause (if he had been more charming, she would have invited him in; but he wasn’t, and she didn’t). Counterfactuals are most common in the past, where they are characterized by the mental image of a more successful, but alas unreal, self: I should have said . . . , esprit d’escalier, etc. In the present, they conjure visions of absent conditions (if I were rich, if I had time, if I were in London now . . . ), pleasant or unpleasant (if I had missed this plane, I would be in serious trouble now). As for the future, it is, while not inherently counterfactual, usually not factual at all. Still, one may occasionally envisage impossible options to an apparently inevitable tomorrow: “If I had the wings of an angel, over these prison walls I would fly. . . .”

The final mode of mental representation is imagination or fantasy. In my experience of it, the time is nearly always a vague “present”—that is to say, any time at all. It may of course be specifically time-related, as in a fantasy about a particular period in the life of a person now deceased, but
never necessarily so. The absence of tense as a required component of this mode indicates that causality is not necessary to it either. Indeed, the absence of perceived, essential causal relationships is what distinguishes the imaginary mode from the counterfactual. Counterfactuals have their basis in perceived reality, a “fact” to which they are contrary. While the imagination may possibly be grounded in “reality” (I may imagine myself in the amorous embrace of a woman whom I know, even when, in “reality,” she has no interest in me), it remains pure (or impure) imagination, unless causation becomes involved. I may imagine the embrace occurring on the leather-covered divan in the sumptuous library of the seaside estate I wish I owned; the imagination does not enter the counterfactual mode until I begin to consider the luxurious surroundings as a necessary condition for the seduction (if I had the estate, the library, and the divan, then she would . . . , and so on). While imagination may have its origin in an identifiable time frame, in a memory, a perception, or a project, it is not internally dependent upon time, nor upon a causal model.

Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gommes* (1953), although it contains elements of traditional third-person narration, provides clear examples of characters’ mental representations and their causal functioning. The first paragraph of I, 2 (p. 51) illustrates how the modes of a character’s mental representations interact to determine the future course of the text. Wallas, on his first morning in the city, has arisen and set out on foot, before sunrise and without breakfast, in a direction he supposes will lead him to the center of town, where he plans to make contact with Commissioner Laurent at the central municipal police station. Dawn has come, and Wallas still has not reached “downtown”:

Sans s’écarter de son chemin ni ralentir son allure, Wallas marche. Devant lui une femme traverse la rue. Un vieil homme traîne vers une porte cochère une poubelle vide restée sur le bord du trottoir. Derrière une vitre s’étalent trois rangs de plats rectangulaires contenant toutes sortes d’anchois marinés, sprats fumés, harengs roulés et déroulés, salés, assaisonnés, crus ou cuits, sauris, frits, confits, découpés et hachés. Un peu plus loin, un monsieur en pardessus noir et chapeau sort d’une maison et vient à sa rencontre; âge mûr, situation aisée, digestions souvent difficiles; il ne fait que quelques pas et pénètre immédiatement dans un café d’aspect très hygiénique, plus accueillant certainement que cet autre où lui-même a passé la nuit.
Wallas se rappelle qu'il a faim, mais il a décidé de prendre son petit déjeuner dans un grand établissement moderne, sur une de ces places ou avenues qui doivent, comme partout, constituer le cœur de la ville.

(Without deviating from his path or slowing his pace, Wallas keeps walking. In front of him, a woman crosses the street. An old man drags an empty garbage can, left at the curb, toward a porte-cochere. Behind a window, three rows of rectangular trays are stacked containing all sorts of marinated anchovies, smoked sprat, herring, rolled and unrolled, salted, seasoned, raw or cooked, kippered, fried, preserved, fileted and chopped. A bit farther on, a gentleman in a black overcoat and hat comes out of a house and heads toward him; middle-aged, comfortable income, frequent digestive trouble; he takes only a few steps and turns at once into a most hygienic-looking café, certainly a more inviting spot than that other one where he himself spent the night. Wallas remembers that he is hungry, but he has made up his mind to have breakfast in a big modern establishment, on one of those squares or avenues which must, like everywhere else, make up the heart of town.)

The conventional third-person narrator is obviously speaking here from within Wallas’s mind, reporting to us whatever comes up on that interior viewscreen, including Wallas’s judgments, and thus himself disappearing, replaced by the character’s mental images. Wallas operates in the present cognitive for the first four sentences: awareness of the constancy of his own direction and speed, consciousness of others in the street, detailed perception of the contents of a delicatessen window. The fifth sentence, about the man in the black overcoat, slips into the realm of hypothesis: clothing, facial features, and expression (present cognitive) lead Wallas to infer the man’s general age, his economic status, and the unfortunate condition of his digestive tract (present hypothetical). This is an example of intermodal causation, for perception is a contributing cause and condition for the inferences. The judgments passed on the café (“hygienic-looking,” “inviting”) also contain hypothetical elements: if it looks clean and friendly, I will probably be safe from disease and unpleasantness there. There is perhaps a further, unstated hypothesis: if the neighborhood dyspeptic, who could afford to eat anywhere, will have a meal in the place, it must be safe; this would exemplify intramodal causality, for it involves hypotheses arising from other hypotheses. With the comparison to the café over which Wallas
had rented a sleeping room, memory also intervenes in the judgment. But when our hero “remembers” that he is hungry, memory is not really involved: the hunger pangs are present. The memory word merely evokes the notion that the hunger, although generally subliminal, has been present for some time; perhaps the memory of leaving “that other” café too early for breakfast calls to Wallas’s attention the length of the fast. The paragraph has now reached its critical point, where the text could deviate from its consistent direction and speed. The detective could turn into the apparently hygienic café, taking his mental representations, and thus the text and us, with him. Detailed awareness of food has prepared Wallas (and us readers) for the choice, raising subliminal hunger to the level of present perception; hypotheses have led to the conclusion that this café is a satisfactory place to assuage it. The decision will be determined by intramodal and intermodal comparisons.

Beside the present temptation exists a project (future cognitive): Wallas’s image of breakfasting in a large, modern restaurant, located on a wide avenue or city square. The existence of such squares or avenues in this city is present hypothetical (“doivent”): Wallas has never been here before. The hypothesis springs from the memory of other downtowns, from which a general law has been derived (“comme partout”): if downtown, then avenues and squares. Whence a further, implied hypothesis: if avenues, then large, modern restaurants. These hypotheses, while not linearly causal (downtowns do not cause avenues, nor avenues “big modern establishments”), arise from an underlying causal assumption: that the same socio-economic forces that produce wide-avenued downtowns also lead to the establishment of a particular kind of restaurant in these areas. Wallas has enough confidence in this assumption to predict that he can safely take the text past the door of the clean, inviting café. But it is more than confidence; Wallas’s future-cognitive image (his prior firm decision—what certain critics might call “desire”) is stronger than present perception of hunger and of a potential, satisfactory means of relief. Thus, on the causal basis of a character’s mental images, in which perception, memory, hypothesis, and project combine, the text will avoid diversion.

The imaginary mode appears in *Les Gommes* with respect to Garinati and to Wallas, notably in the latter’s fantasies about his boss, the legendary Fabius, detective extraordinaire and master of disguise. Glimpsing (for example) a face in a window across the street from the scene of the crime, Wallas infers that it may belong to a habitual busybody, who might have
caught sight, while keeping an eye on the neighborhood, of the "assassin" entering or leaving the area. Perhaps, he speculates, her attention was attracted by "a scream, an abnormal noise, or anything at all" (II, 3, p. 108). With this past-hypothetical sentence, the paragraph ends; the next paragraph begins:

Fabius, having closed the garden gate again, inspects the surroundings; but he does so unnoticeably: he's just a peaceful insurance agent leaving a customer's house and looking at the sky, right and left, to see which way the wind's blowing. . . . Right away, he spots a suspicious character spying on him from behind the curtains, at a third-floor window.)

Now Fabius, according to the fictional reality of the novel, is elsewhere, and, even if he were to show up now at the scene of the crime, Wallas would surely approach him and speak to him; this is therefore not a fictionally "real" event but a mental representation in the imaginary mode: Wallas imagines what Fabius would do under the circumstances in which Wallas finds himself. In the rest of the passage, he pictures Fabius returning under the guise of an awning salesman, obtaining authorization on these grounds from the concierge of the apartment block across the street to call on all the south-side tenants (including of course the busybody), and thus gaining admittance to question a potential witness, without alerting the concierge to his identity as a detective. After the successful exchange of conversation between Fabius and the building superintendent, we read: "Wallas sourit à cette pensée" (p. 109); "Wallas smiles at this thought." Thus we return from the imaginary mode to present cognitive, wherein Wallas will adopt a different and even more promising ploy to dupe the concierge and to interrogate the busybody.

Until the word "pensée" just cited, the four-paragraph mental representation is never tagged as such; absence of the standard markers (such as "Wallas drifts into a daydream" or "Wallas can imagine Fabius . . .") not only makes the mental-representation status of the passage a matter of reader inference on first reading, but it also diminishes the role of the
narrator, as explainer of the tale, almost to the vanishing point. The reader is here essentially in direct contact with the *histoire*, of which this mental representation is an element. And indeed the Fabius fantasy fits into the causal chain of the *histoire* just as if it were a physically perceivable "event": arising from Wallas’s reverence for Fabius and his methods and from a project or "desire" to interview the busybody without disclosing his own identity, it leads Wallas to discover the parameters of a successful ruse in this circumstance. Mental representations, although relatively closed and static blocks or *Gestalten*, can have causes and effects, even when they are imaginations or dreams. Although this reverie has the superficial earmarks of the counterfactual mode ("If Fabius were here, he would . . ."), Fabius does not qualify as an "absent cause": it is Wallas who invents Fabius’s ruse, and who will profit from the experience to find a still better one. Only if we read it as in the imaginary mode can it here take its place in the causal chain of the *histoire*: imagination leads to project (future cognitive), which immediately becomes present cognitive as our hero acts.

Furthermore, the eclipse or ellipsis of the narrator (the words *éclipse* and *ellipse* play a significant role in the story: III, 4, p. 170) places the reader in immediate contact with the mental representations that are "events" in the novel. The words of the text seem less a coded communication from a narrator to us readers than the verbal transcript of characters’ thought processes. The "voice" of the text for the reader, while by definition indirect, thus shifts toward the experiential and the direct, toward the supreme form of narrator-absent fiction, which is theater. Much has been written on the use of theater vocabulary in *Les Gommes*, often to suggest a relationship between its plot and Sophocles’s tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, a subject to which I shall return. But the theater connection also turns on the shift toward direct voice, a device common to much "new" fiction. At the theater, spectators observe most of the *histoire* without the intervention of a narrative voice and the causal connectives it can supply; narratorial tags ("she exclaimed," "he said," etc.) disappear, as we experience "directly" the source and interrelationship of acts and utterances: the *récit* is largely "mimed." *Les Gommes* has, in this sense, aspects of a play performed in the theater of characters’ minds, as readers experience the mental representations of a number of characters—Wallas, Garinati, Laurent, the *patron* of the café. Mental representations pass from mode to mode, from tense to tense, for causes which the reader infers.

Whatever it is for readers, the Fabius fantasy is direct voice for Wallas.
But indirect voice, on the level of the characters, can lead to inference as well, as Wallas discovers when he asks directions of the woman with the broom (I, 2, pp. 54—56). The inferences she draws from his verbal communication nearly suffice to unmask his subterfuge, intended to conceal his police connections. Her inferences arise from causal questions: why is he looking for a post office, and why does he insist upon going all the way to the main post office, when there is a substation nearby? Her detective work mirrors the causal structure of a major portion of the text, which is in the hypothetical mode.

Indeed, the primary conflict of the novel is between the hypothetical and the cognitive modes. Wallas pounds the pavement in search of the realities of the crime. He is the eyes of the investigation and represents the cognitive mode. Laurent, the local police commissioner, remains in his office, where he receives information and hypothesizes. To be sure, Wallas creates hypotheses, as we have seen (often about the modalities of observation), and Laurent perceives and remembers. But Wallas’s method is observation, while Laurent’s is inference. The commissioner conjures up a series of hypothetical scenarios: Dupont committed suicide, was killed by his ex-wife or by his housekeeper, or by Wallas, or died of a heart attack, or was shot by his illegitimate son. He tests each scenario against the known facts, eliminating those contrary to the data. Since reports and testimony are his sole source of knowledge, he makes inferences about the relative validity of these. Operating almost entirely in the hypothetical mode, he solves the crime, just as Wallas “solves” it on the more pragmatic, cognitive level.

Dupont, the supposed victim, is, as previously noted, not dead. While Wallas is reinspecting the “murder” room, some twenty-four hours after the crime, Dupont slips back into his house in search of certain papers. Fearing that the murderer is again waiting for him in his little upstairs study (a hypothesis based on a door Wallas left unlocked downstairs when he came in), Dupont bursts into the study, revolver in hand. Expecting the murderer’s return himself (an unfortunate hypothesis), and seeing a gun aimed in his direction, Wallas shoots Dupont dead. The fact that “the detective did it” makes a delightful parody of standard crime fiction. But when Wallas surmises at last (anagnorisis!) the identity of his victim, now truly dead, he phones Laurent at headquarters, only to hear the commissioner announce the results of his hypothetical analyses: “J’ai fait une découverte—you ne devineriez jamais! Daniel Dupont! Il n’est pas mort
du tout!” (V, 6, p. 254); "I've made a discovery—you'd never guess! Daniel Dupont! He isn't dead at all!"

Wallas's fatal assumptions—that, if someone enters the house fur­
tively, it is the murderer, that the gun pointed at him will fire (readers know
that it cannot), are untested hypotheses arising directly from cognitive
perceptions: quietly approaching footsteps, a door that bursts open, a light
that flashes on, a gun. Wallas, moving about in "reality," must operate very
close to the cognitive mode, his perceptions producing projects, which are
thwarted or abetted by the causation of random circumstance, or side­
trapped by the "halo of error and doubt" that surrounds objects and sepa­
rates the perceived from the comprehended. Yet he discovers Dupont alive
and standing before him at approximately the same moment when Laurent
reaches his correct conclusion; Wallas perceives but does not comprehend.
Shut away in his office, Laurent is less affected by immediate causation and
more able to grasp a causal function. Thus it is that Laurent can compre­
hend but not perceive. The lesson to be derived from the double "error"
seems not unoptimistic. Laurent is not faced with psychological questions
like the premeditation problem facing Meursault's prosecutor, but he does
better with "the facts" than Denizet. Despite the divorce between psyche
and reality, it would seem that the mind can formulate on occasion rela­
tively valid hypotheses about its own perception of the real. We must,
however, be willing to accept and evaluate new data, and be flexible enough
to reformulate even our most cherished hypotheses when the information
requires it. With patience and care, successive hypotheses will, like an
asymptote, approach ever nearer to the truth. It is unlikely (perhaps tech­
nically impossible) that the hypothetical mode will ever attain the truth,
however, for, by the time one comprehends reality, it has changed. "He isn't
dead at all!" is the solution to the problem, but it comes too late to be
"true," to stay Wallas's finger on the trigger. Wallas would have to perceive
and comprehend at the same time to avoid the killing. The time between
perception and comprehension is too long to provide for useful reactions.
But the hypothetical mode holds some promise in securely stable situa­
tions, or with highly predictable processes. Laurent, because he does not
"see," errs in treating the transitory as static. Still, he would have hit the
bull's eye, had not the target moved.

Like Laurent, readers of the novel receive their information in indirect
voice and, in order to understand, create hypotheses about it. Perhaps the
best known, brilliantly put forward by Bruce Morrissette, holds that the
text is a reworking of the Oedipus myth, and thus that Dupont is Wallas's long-lost father. The twisted causal chain that leads Wallas to the fatal encounter with Dupont would be, in that case, an example of the ironic mythical causation evoked in chapter eight above. As Morrissette demonstrates, the novel is awash with mythical allusions, references to Thebes, the Corinth road, the riddling Sphynx, killed, rescued, and ungrateful children, etc. It is also replete with examples of textual reworking (for one example among many, Wallas "reworks" the Fabius fantasy to interview the busybody), the process of mythic fiction. Is Morrissette's hypothesis "correct"? It fits all the mythic details, but what of the other information? The problem is perhaps perceptible in the headlines of a newspaper Wallas scans in an idle moment (I, 3, pp. 64–65). They read: (1) "Grave accident de la circulation sur la route de Delf" ("Serious traffic accident on the Delf road"); (2) "Le Conseil se réunira demain pour l'élection d'un nouveau maire" ("Council meets tomorrow to elect new mayor"); (3) "La voyante abusait ses clients" ("Fortuneteller abuses her customers"); (4) "La production des pommes de terre a dépassé celle des meilleures années" ("Potato production exceeds previous annual records"); (5) "Décès d'un de nos concitoyens" ("Local man dies"). The fifth article is the official announcement of Dupont's "murder": it is myth-related only if he is a Laius figure. The first three can all be read to suggest events in the myth, thus tending to confirm the mythic character of number five. But the fourth headline? Prior to anagnorisis and atonement, according to Sophocles's version of the myth, famine rather than plenty characterized Theban agriculture. Should astute readers allow one apparently out-of-place detail to destroy a hypothesis that fits the other four? This is precisely the sort of question faced by the intradiegetic Laurent; the smallest crack—"la plus petite faille"—as the text reminds us with mock sententiousness on several occasions, can destroy an otherwise perfect project. In fact, the narration appears to be producing a récit with sufficient causes to encourage the Oedipal interpretation, but with enough contrary and irrelevant information to prevent absolute confirmation. If so, despite the static character of the text, the hypothesis remains an interesting inference, separate from the novel's reality, a comprehension that cannot perceive all the details, such as headline number four.

The narration suggests in many ways that the hypothetical mode produces problematic results for characters and readers alike. To enjoy the phenomenon, one need only sketch, while reading, a map of the city in which the crime occurs, showing Wallas's peregrinations. Enough details
are provided for relatively accurate depiction of the principal streets and landmarks, with compass bearings and an approximation of scale, for we know how fast Wallas walks the first morning, and for how long. Still, the order in which the information is given will oblige amateur cartographers to work in pencil, with frequent recourse to the item that holds the title role, as natural but erroneous assumptions need to be erased in favor of ever more nearly accurate hypotheses. Likewise, bits of our own reading must, at times, be effaced and replaced, when the voice of the narrator, who might have told us how to read, has been eclipsed or ellipsed or erased. One can read, for example, the first sentence of the Fabius fantasy as straightforward narrative (cognitive mode, indirect voice), until the clues that Wallas is imagining this tale sink in. The entire initial passage of chapter III (pp. 141—43) can be attributed to the narrator; not until "Ici Laurent s'arrête" ("Here Laurent stops") are we aware whose mental representations we are reading. Unless a clever guess was made early on, readers will need to "erase" and reformulate the "point" of this passage, its role in the novel, after reading it through. The source of the passage, its "first cause"—a narrator recounting, a character thinking, etc.—is fundamental to readers' hypotheses about its meaning. The foregrounding of the hypothetical mode in this novel points to the importance of causal hypotheses in reading and in daily life, and to their problematical nature. Our other "detective stories," *La Bête humaine* and *L'Etranger*, also evoked the problems with hypothesizing and privileged the "eyewitness" account (of the narrator, of Meursault) over the hypothetical reconstructions (of Denizet, of the prosecutor); *Les Gommes* suggests that eyewitnesses, with inadequate grasp of causal chains, are at least as apt as the hypothesizers to make incorrect decisions.  

Like hypotheses, counterfactuals have a causal structure, but they are rare in *Les Gommes*. Wallas's final regrets are an example: "Dans son extrême fatigue, des bribes de sa journée perdue viennent encore le tourmenter: '. . . et si, à ce moment-là, j'avais pensé à . . . et si j'avais . . . .'" (Epilogue, p. 259; "In his extreme fatigue, bits and pieces of his wasted day return to torment him: '. . . and if, right then, I had thought of . . . and if I had . . . .'". The grammatical structures suffice to evoke the mode, which is itself the substance of our hero's thought; the ellipses eclipse the useless absent causes, now absent from the text as well as from Wallas's reality.  

Causal vocabulary functions within mental representations (particularly in the hypothetical mode) and between them (notably to designate the
origin of a cognitive representation), just as in more traditional novels. It abounds in *Les Gommes*, although much of it is of the less obvious variety (e.g., “c’est très rare qu’un cambrioleur . . . se trouble, à la vue du propriétaire, au point de se croire obligé de le tuer,” [I, 5, p. 80; emphasis mine]). According to Allott and Tremewan, 

\[ \text{parce que} \]

occurs only eight times in the novel, and *car* only thirty-four times, most often in Laurent’s meditations, where the word *cause* (twenty occurrences) seems at its most frequent. *Par* recurs more than three hundred times, often to express agency (e.g., “réveillé par ses cris,” [Prologue, p. 29]), but not always (“Par où était-il passé?” [Prologue, p. 28]). Agents here, of course, are more often hypothetical ones than in traditional fiction, and the verbs *devoir* and *pouvoir* return with relative frequency to mark the hypothetical mode (e.g., “La balle a dû dévier,” [III, 5, p. 172]; “On a pu lui raconter souvent cette journée,” [II, 6, p. 137]), although hypotheses are quite often stated as fact (e.g., “Il a eu peur, surtout,” [I, 5, p. 80, for “Il a dû avoir peur”]). Of the obvious causal vocabulary, *pour* is the most common term, expressing intention (e.g., “pour masquer son énervement—et le maîtriser en partie—il se force à cette modération exagérée,” [IV, 6, p. 216]); *pour* occurs over five hundred times, and, although it is not always causal, its frequency (averaging twice per page) suggests the importance of prediction and project in the novel. Projects may be either cognitive or hypothetical (inferring the intentions of another), but there subsists a framework of fictional “reality” to which most hypotheses in *Les Gommes* can be compared.

To summarize, then, causal reasoning is the motive force of mental representation in the hypothetical and counterfactual modes. When such representations are imitated in a text, the text advances by means of expressed or inferable causation. In the cognitive mode, cause is present at its origin, and its nature differs by tense. Memory is stimulated by perception, imagination, or by other memories. Perception is (presumably) stimulated by an exterior “object”—light, sound, etc. Prediction arises from desire (project) or from fear, and from understanding resulting from combinations of perception, memory, and hypothesis. The imaginary mode, internally free of logical causation, may spring from memory, perception, desire, fear, or from no precise stimulus at all. With the exception of texts composed entirely in the imaginary mode (of which we will examine an example), causal language (*récit*) and causal inferences (*histoire*) connect mental repre-
sentations in the “new” French fiction just as they did events in the more traditional texts; they now allude more frequently to conditions than to the determining causes of traditional fiction, however.

Mental-representation fiction tends to reproduce, by different modalities, the fundamental causal structures we have seen before. Les Gommes produces a parodic form of mythic structure, with, as its myth, the traditional detective story (crime and solution), of which Oedipus Rex serves as the partial prototype. Simon’s La Route des Flandres has elements of Proustian structure, liberating readers within the space of the text. The most common pattern is doubtless the “fragmented” or “broken-line” model, suggesting kinship between much mental-representation fiction and its existentialist predecessors.

Daphne Patai9 has carefully charted the interplay of tenses in the cognitive mode in Butor's La Modification—perception, memory, and project, with the final intervention of the imaginary mode in Léon's “fantasy”—noting that, within the novel, “Butor has utilized a traditional (temporally sequential) form as well as a new fragmented one.” The fixed train route from Paris to Rome and the processes of the modification provide the linear substratum, while the alternating and increasingly conflictual interaction of perception- and memory-stimulated recollections and both general and specific projects fragments the sequence of mental representations, as well as Léon’s identity.

In Les Fruits d’or (1963), Nathalie Sarraute creates a series of literary conversations at Parisian parties, all of which concern a fictive novel called “Les Fruits d’or.” The famous Sarrautian subconversations—interior monologues sparked within a character by a verbal encounter and usually simultaneous with it—transform the conversations into mental representations, perceptions giving rise to more voluminous hypotheses and imaginations. Causation is thus at work in microcosm, as the spoken words engender subjective images in the unidentified conversationalists themselves or in witnesses to the discussions. The subconversations are most often metaphoric in character, expressing the sensation that what is happening in the verbal exchange is comparable to another sort of activity. As I have argued elsewhere,10 the subconversational metaphors in this text most often evoke elements of what has been called “animal” behavior: dominance-and-submission games, territoriality, peck order, and herd psychology. For these salon or cocktail-party conversations are only ostensibly concerned with the artistic merit of “Les Fruits d’or”; they are at bottom the personal
power ploys of a would-be intellectual élite, using literary conversation as a means to demonstrate superiority. The psychological effects of their calculated utterances, on themselves and on others, emerge in the subconversational metaphors: X dominates Y, or Z joins Y's "harem." With one or two exceptions, it is impossible to determine the identity of speakers or listeners; it is even probable that nearly every chapter has an entirely new cast of characters. Such fragmentation makes impossible any objective determination that the discussions are presented in chronological order.

Yet, in the early chapters, "Les Fruits d'or" is virtually unknown; further along, it is admired by the intellectual élite, which is imposing its judgment upon others; still later, the book is the talk of Paris, "all the rage," while at the end it drops into nearly universal indifference. This progression itself suggests linear, chronological development. And the text reveals that, despite fragmentation, a kind of double causal law is at work on this larger scale: the first part of the law suggests that one's power is measured by the number of intelligent people upon whom one can impose one's opinions; the second part holds that superiority resides in difference, in one's ability to distinguish oneself from the masses. Thus a following is good, but a nearly all-inclusive following is undesirable. The popularity of "Les Fruits d'or" is dependent upon the operation of this double law: passing favorable judgment upon the novel is, at first, a sign of rallying (or submitting) to the leaders, while later on, when everyone has rallied, the opinion makers no longer wish to be associated with it. This two-part causation produces the curve of the book's rapid rise to popularity and its still more rapid decline, reproducing, from the level of animal behavior, the "K extinction curve," by which population biologists describe the "crash" that follows too sudden an increase in population in animal and insect colonies. The functioning of this curve in the novel is, of course, based on a causal principle; a law of increase with an upper threshold that triggers an immediate decrease is a causal matrix providing a high degree of predictability. Thus, despite the fragmented mental representations that make up the text, traditional causation, reinstated at the metaphorical level, gives the novel a linear ("broken-line") structure.

A series of fragmented mental images conjoin in linear progression in Robbe-Grillet's La Jalousie (1957) as well, as the narrator evolves from suspicion to jealous frenzy. The best-remembered marker of progression is the mental representation of the centipede: finger length on page 62, it "grows" to the size of a dinner plate, page 163. That jealousy is the cause of
these mental transformations is inferable from the obsessive memories always uniting A. . . and Franck, while separating the Other, who is obviously A. . . 's husband and the narrator. The growing jealousy feeds upon a succession of disconnected memories: A. . . talking to Franck about a book they are reading; the crackle of a comb through A. . . 's thick, long hair; A. . . perhaps passing a note to Franck; A. . . 's chair placed closer to Franck's than to her husband's; Franck, in a virile and protective gesture, killing the centipede that frightens A. . .; A. . . 's day in town with Franck, an absence prolonged unexpectedly until the next morning, and so on. These memories generate the hypotheses which cause the linear sub­stratum; that A. . . and Franck are engaged in a love affair, that the trip to town was really a tryst, despite the explanation of car trouble the pair offers upon return. Linear progression is there in time (marked by the changed position of the pillar's shadow upon the porch where the narrator ruminates) as well as in the rising jealous passion; the multiple memories, and the imaginations they inspire, produce the linear histoire, a line of progression which in turn infuses the distinct mental representations of the récit with ever more violent imagery.

As these examples indicate, the continuous, causal, linear vectors and curves come into being as constituents of the histoire (or of the narration/lecture in the case of Les Gommes), as a creation of readers' inferences. These inferences (readers' hypothetical mode) are conditioned by lexical data in the récit (e.g., metaphors in Les Fruits d'or, contrast of comparable items early and late in La Modification and La Jalousie). Once the linear hypothesis is formulated by readers, it creates an expectation (project) which bears upon our perception of subsequent data in the récit, for we are no longer "open-minded," but in search of confirmation in each new element of the récit for our linear hypothesis. Thus, as we advance, we tend increasingly to foreground confirming details and to background the others, a mechanism we observed ex post facto in the Oedipal reading of Les Gommes. Such closedmindedness, which would be ill-advised in scientific observation, is not necessarily undesirable in the reading of fiction, or even in criticism, for reasons I will indicate in the conclusion.

In mental-representation fiction however, causality is not solely a matter for reader inference. It can also exist within the récit, linking mental representations explicitly to one another by means of triggers (déclencheurs) and shifters (embrayeurs) which function intermodally and intramodally.
Certain triggers operate intervocally for readers, as well as intramodally for characters. Thus, so long as we are not entirely in the imaginary mode, a causation of sorts remains alive and well in the récit itself. But such causality exists as a condition of passage from one mental representation to another, rather than as a force entailing the shift; it therefore provides, as we have noted, virtually no predictive capacity, although it helps to explain after the fact. Causal functions in mental-representation récits are well illustrated in La Jalousie and in Simon’s La Route des Flandres.

The narrator of La Jalousie loses his openmindedness in a manner akin to that ascribed to readers above. As he broods, for example, upon A... ‘s failure to return home after the day in town with Franck (perhaps he is recalling the anguished night spent in her absence), he catches sight of the stain on the dining room wall, left by the crushed centipede. This perception triggers the memory of Franck’s manly gesture, using his napkin (serviette) to smash the little beast, crushing its fallen body again on the floor. But this time, instead of squashing it on the tiles (carrelage) of the dining room floor as in the previous obsessive accounts of this memory, he tramples the myriapod on “le plancher de la chambre” (p. 166; “the bedroom floor”). His serviette now designates a hand towel, which he hangs up near the wash stand: imagination has transferred Franck from dining room to hotel room. A... ’s presence there is suppressed, but someone is waiting for Franck in bed, clutching the sheets, as A... had clutched her knife when she glimpsed the centipede. Drawing the mosquito netting around them, Franck climbs into bed; then, in his haste to reach his goal, we are told, he accelerates the pace, and the jolts become more violent. A sex scene? Obviously. But with the shifter “jolts” (cabots), we slip into another mental image, of Franck driving his car home on the rutted dirt road at night (presumably with A... ?), hitting a sinkhole at top speed, crashing into an embankment: “Aussitôt des flammes jaillissent” (p. 167; “Immediately flames spring up”). Two hypotheses explaining why A... has not returned (hotel room tryst, serious accident on the road) fuse together through the common language of a shifter phrase, just as Franck-killing-the-centipede became Franck-the-hotel-room-adulterer. At this point, however, they are more than hypotheses, for the logical connections have disappeared between images, replaced by associations, which are the causal connectors either of memory (but the narrator could not “remember” these scenes) or of imagination, the basic mode of the passage.
The causal chain which conditions the development of the text passes from present cognitive (wall stain) to past cognitive (scene that caused the stain), to a past hypothetical quickly colored by the vivid images and illogical connectors of the imaginary mode. Movements of this kind from perception to imagination, through words each belonging to two semantic fields (serviette, cabots), are not, however, ends in themselves: the emotion involved in the imaginary mode returns to the point of departure, coloring the narrator's perception of reality; it is this sort of effect that increases, for example, the apparent size of the stain left by the centipede.

Imagination is an even more powerful contaminant of memory, which often lacks objective confirmation. Toward the end, the narrator, unable to confirm or to confound his hypothesis of an adulterous affair between A. . . and Franck, recalls their animated conversation about a novel they have both read but which he has not. His memory of the conversation (p. 216) is a confused jumble of contradictory sentences. Since it is extremely unlikely that A. . . and Franck could be in such utter disagreement about the histoire of a conventional novel, we must lay the contradictions at the door of the narrator's imagination. As it is a question of a financially sound (or shaky) corporation, and of predecessors and successors, honest or dishonest, in the corporate management, one may hypothesize that the narrator is associating randomly the book's plot with his own marriage. The half-remembered snatches of conversation are now contaminated by imagination, as the imaginary mode impinges upon the cognitive, which triggered it. The narrator's conditioned trajectories, from memory to hypothesis and imagination, and thence back to memory or perception, parallel the succession of mental states in a reader involved in constituting a fictional text.

In La Route des Flandres, the only perceptions of the narrator (Georges) are those of the bedroom in which he is spending a night of love with Corinne. The rest is, superficially at least, reminiscence: memories of defeat, capture, transport to and life in a Nazi prison camp; memories of memories, things remembered as a prisoner about his former French commanding officer, Captain de Reixach, a distant relative, and about the captain's wife, Corinne, with whom Georges now lies; memories of family legends and stories associated with the bedroom, which the narrator has only heard in indirect voice. The novel begins in the past cognitive, and only gradually do we become aware of the narrator's intradiegetic identity and present situation, and of the relationship of that situation to the flood of reminiscences which make up the novel. Readers' hypotheses about the text
slowly approach and finally grasp the kernel of perceived reality at the center of the construction.

But the linear text itself advances through remembrances, by a series of associations, which are the "causal" structure of memory. Here again, shifters represent the passage from one remembrance to the next. Doubtless the most evident of these are related to virginity. De Reixach, very "old nobility" and "old cavalry," had died on horseback, leading his decimated mounted unit against the invading Panzers. Georges, a surviving member of the unit, has a clear mental image of his captain's glorious final pose, horse rearing, sabre aloft:

... un instant l'éblouissant reflet du soleil accroché ou plutôt condensé, comme s'il avait capté attrîé à lui pour une fraction de seconde toute la lumière et la gloire, sur l'acier virginale ... Seulement, vierge, il y avait belle lurette qu'elle ne l'était plus, mais je suppose que ce n'était pas cela qu'il lui demandait espérait d'elle le jour oû il avait décidé de l'épouser. ... (P. 13)

(. . . for an instant the dazzling reflection of the sun caught or rather condensed, as if he had captured drawn unto himself for a fraction of a second all the light and the glory, on the virgin steel . . . Only, a virgin, it had been ages since she had been one of those, but I suppose that wasn't what he asked of her expected from her the day he decided to marry her. . . .)

Thus the association virginal-vierge conditions the shift from the captain's heroic death to his marriage to Corinne. Later, we will recognize as the prime cause of all the "Corinne" memories, and of the erotic images which seep as if by osmosis into other recollections of other times, the presence of Corinne in his bed: present perception is also facilitating the glide from one memory into the next.

However, the memory of the early years of de Reixach's marriage is not, we soon discover, in direct voice. Georges has learned about them from Iglésia, a fellow member of the cavalry unit and fellow prisoner during the war, who had been the jockey for de Reixach's string of race horses, and who had had no qualms about cuckolding his future captain, in the horse barns, with the ever-eager Corinne. Yet the detailed images derived from such accounts (pp. 22-25, 51-54, 137-54, 166-69, 174-83) go far beyond the general comments of Iglésia in the narrator's actual memory (pp. 49-51, for example). Thus, "Et cette fois Georges put les voir, exactement
comme si lui-même avait été là” (p. 144; “And this time Georges could see them, exactly as if he had been there himself”) represents a transition from memory, the remembered words of an account of a competition between Iglésia and de Reixach, to imagination. Georges’s mental representation includes color, clothing descriptions, facial expressions, attitudes, bits of conversation, representing what it might have been like to be present the day de Reixach took his jockey’s place, riding in a race, as his jockey had replaced him, “riding” Corinne. But the associations remain operative (e.g., mounting a horse, mounting a sexual partner), interconnecting memory, present perception, and imagination, so that the imagination is constrained by a kind of causal probability: these people, in this situation, would have doubtless behaved in this way. Accounts of events, and the narrator’s acquaintance with all the participants, prohibit wild flights of fancy: Georges is approaching a hypothesis. For, in a sense, these imaginings are to form the basis for the justification of one of a series of hypotheses formulated early in the text: when de Reixach assumed his statuelike pose in the face of enemy fire, he was perhaps (a) enjoying a noble, heroic death, or maybe (b) seeking to draw enemy fire toward his unit, hoping that Iglésia would be killed—a cuckold’s revenge—or, more probably (c) drawing fire upon himself, committing suicide (pp. 14-17). Other hypotheses in the text concern possible reasons for suicide on his part, and for other suicides—ancestral, political, national—and the relationship of sexual satisfaction and dissatisfaction to the death wish and to the general entropic disaggregation reaching culmination in World War II.

These hypotheses develop discontinuous thematic strata within the text, which the reader’s memory can collect into at least four themes: the suicide of a nineteenth-century ancestor, de Reixach’s death, the fall of France in 1940, and the accompanying disintegration of European culture. As these thematic strands are connected by association in the narrator’s mind, the text itself begins to cause or condition reader reaction to its structure in two primary ways.

First, in almost Proustian fashion (de Reixach falls in battle into an intertext, as it were, smack in front of a “perfumed, springtime hedge of hawthorns,” [p. 314]), mental images trigger other mental images, causing the text to advance. As readers assimilate the system of associations, they may begin to move about in the space of the text, as with Proust, whenever later images (such as that of the less-than-virginal Virginie) trigger their own memories of themselves mentally creating earlier ones
(such as the glint of the sun on the sabre’s “acier virginal”). In a stricter sense, of course, when we collect bits of text to constitute a “theme,” or associate similar images, we are moving about, not in the space of the text, but in that of our memory of it. This is, then, an example of intervocalic shift, when present reading (indirect voice) triggers our memories (direct voice) of assimilation, of our imagination fleshing out a spare linguistic tale, as the narrator had vivified in imagination Iglesia’s accounts.

Second, as readers become aware of the spatial nature of the text, they recognize that there is indeed no movement, except perhaps the rhythm, the repeated (and therefore “static”) movements of Georges’s copulations with Corinne. The microcosmic triggers that advance the text from one mental representation to the next are not creating a space but exploring a preexisting space. The awareness that imagination penetrates our perception of all accounts of the past, indeed infuses human memory (is any narrator “reliable”?), invalidates them as grounds for the justification of our inferences. We may constrain imagination sufficiently to formulate memory-based hypotheses, but not enough to justify them. For the truth value of hypotheses depends upon the soundness of objective, logical causation, which can coexist only with movement. The text rarely tells us which details are remembered and which imagined; it is likely the narrator has no greater certainty about such things than do the readers. Indeed the novel ends on this uncertainty, as Georges again recalls de Reixach’s (mock?) heroic posture just before he was killed:

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 cessé de dormir les yeux grands ouverts en plein jour bercé par le martèlement monotone des sabots des cinq chevaux piétinant leurs ombres ne marchant pas exactement à la même cadence de sorte que c’était comme un crétatement alternant se rattrapant se superposant se confondant par moments comme s’il n’y avait plus qu’un seul cheval, puis se dissociant de nouveau, se désagrégeant recommençant semblait-il à se courir après et cela ainsi de suite. . . . (P. 314)

(But I did really see it or believe I saw it or simply imagine it after the fact or even dream it, maybe I was sleeping had never stopped sleeping with my eyes wide open in broad daylight rocked by the monotonous pounding of the five horses’ hoofs stomping their shadows not advancing exactly in the same cadence so that it was like an alternating
Hypotheses, memory, and imagination blend, like the shadows of the horses, and their hoofbeats, as punctuation falls away, allowing each phrase to melt into its successor. Like the precious Leipzig library, the carefully collected and preserved record of expanding human wisdom which proved powerless against the bombs that destroyed it (pp. 222–25), memory, infused with imagination, is unable to act or guide action, useless as a tool for explanation, prediction, or project.

Of the two oft-noted tendencies that structure this novel, aggregative and disaggregative, the former (by means of which, for example, we compare the Leipzig library to Georges’s memory) relies solely on the principles of comparison and psychological association. Having lost its modal purity, memory cannot serve as the basis for hypothetical reason, in which the causal assumption forms the ground of movement and action. Readers can construct in memory four main “themes” in parallel lines (as Marcel’s memory did the Combray walks), so that a note struck on any one of them resonates on all the others. But with causation limited to the little triggers of psychological association, only the récit can advance: the histoire is static.

Belief in the potential validity of the causal assumption, and therefore of the hypothetical mode for readers, at least, if not for characters as well, appears a necessary condition for an histoire that advances, that moves with direction. The histoire of La Jalousie can be said to move forward insofar as causality is at work: suspicion generates imagination, which provokes even wilder imagination, whence frenetic jealousy, and so on. One cannot advance along La Route des Flandres as histoire, only rise higher above it, for an ever broader view of its preexisting totality.

More recent mental-representation novels have tended to exclude the cognitive and hypothetical modes and to dwell almost entirely in the imaginary. One thinks of the later novels of Marguerite Duras, beginning approximately with Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (1964)—with the exception of her presumably autobiographical L’Amant (1984), in which inference returns in force. In Dans le labyrinthe (1959), with its famous multiple beginning (Outside it’s raining . . .; Outside it’s sunny . . .; Outside it’s snowing . . .), Robbe-Grillet situates us in the freely associating mind of an inferred narrator-author, who tests out meteorological
settings until one is found to generate the desired (by whom?) thematics. The famous loop in his *La Maison de rendez-vous*, in which the image of a person in a printed picture leaves the frame and eventually finds herself in position to become a potential observer of the picture, typifies the sort of implausibility that is the hallmark of imaginary-mode fiction. Even though the vocabulary remains quite referential (one can of course visualize clearly each phase of the loop), the temporal relationship among the elements displays a certain "real-world impossibility": it is causality that is out of joint.

As a mental-representation text composed entirely in the imaginary mode, Robbe-Grillet's *Souvenirs du triangle d'or* (1978) will serve to exemplify the exclusion of traditional causation from the novel. Some meager grounds remain, as we shall see, for causal inferences about the narration on the part of readers, but the absence or implausibility of causation in the récit precludes the constitution in readers' minds of a meaningful *histoire*. An "*histoire*" subsists, in that one can visualize or reconstitute each of the "scenes" described, but the absence of inferable causal relationships among them precludes the kind of meaningfulness of which we have been speaking. There are no narratorial perceptions to cause memories (the word *souvenirs*—"memories"—in the title, in the absence of plausible relationships, seems an ironic reference to the contamination of memory by imagination) or to stimulate projects, no valid hypotheses, no facts on which to base counterfactuals. We read simply a series of mental images, a number of which are neurotically erotic, violent, or sadistic—almost always with women as victims. A text made up entirely of imaginary-mode representations gains certain attributes lacking in works with reality-referential elements, but it also loses interesting characteristics found in novels in which cause and effect play a role. Since the absence of a structuring device may often be as informative as its presence, a survey of the "losses" and "gains" in this apparently extreme sort of fictional structure will provide an instructive conclusion to this chapter. What major narrative concepts are lost in mental-representation fiction limited to the imaginary mode?

1. The identity of the narrator. When a narrative consists of causally interrelated or interrelatable events, or of causally associated mental representations, readers are justified in presuming that the narrative voice retains a consistent identity. While the narrator may undergo change within certain parameters (*La Nausée, La Jalousie*), we expect her or him to be the "same" person. When the text presents simply a series of implausible
imaginations, none of which have consequences in any of the others, there is no reason, beyond our traditional habits, to suppose that a single, constantly identical narrator is speaking to us from the printed page. True enough, there is sufficient parodic (or pseudoparodic—without objective standards, one cannot tell) pornography in Souvenirs du triangle d’or, it seems to me, to lead one to posit a narrator of obsessive tendencies. But there is quite enough material of other kinds—scenes of incarceration and escape, of exploration and investigation, of bouncing balls and pearls bouncing on a mirror—to leave that hypothesis unconfirmed. As if to reinforce our doubts, the “narrator’s” name seems to change as well. On page 46, he appears to be “Franck” (later known as the police official “Franck V. Francis,” a.k.a. “Francis Lever,” a.k.a. “Francisco Franco”); on page 91, however, the narratorial “I” meets Franck, although we will be told on page 101 that Franck V. Francis is indeed “le narrateur.” Later, a female “character” (“Lady Caroline”) narrates a segment (pp. 154–68) in which she has some of the experiences previously attributed to a male identity, until she becomes again a “third person,” at which point all the characters we meet, including Franck, are presented in “third person” for a time. One narrative voice splits into two before our eyes as he criticizes his own “narrative” act (“Ne me faites pas rire,” [p. 198]; “Don’t make me laugh”). When narrators do remain “themselves” throughout a text, there is a presumed cause for it, as I suggested earlier with respect to the surrealist novels; in these shifting sands, where causation cannot be presumed, constant narratorial identity cannot be presumed either.

2. The concept of character. Characters have traditionally been defined either in terms of “traits” (whether these are named in the récit or inferable from their recounted actions) or as functions of plot structure called actants. Without causality, there can be no “plot,” no actions of consequence; as a result, the linguistic imitations of persons which inhabit texts like Souvenirs can scarcely be analyzed as actants. One might see the narrator as consequentially active and construe an histoire which would be: “The narrator imagines . . .” followed by the text of the novel. But, if the narrator is not necessarily the “same” person, such an histoire is meaningless and the “narrator(s)” undefinable as “character(s).” The concept of character “traits” presupposes a certain essence or constancy of identity of dubious validity in Souvenirs. Gender does appear to remain consistent throughout (a notion which gains increased significance because of the shifting, causeless structure); men are men and women, women; but sex alone defines categories
rather than individuals. One would be hard put to find the complex or paradigm of traits required for the depiction of an individual character, beyond the attributes of gender. Imagination is free, and there is therefore no cause for a human entity to retain any constant set of traits, even contradictory ones, in the imaginary mode.

3. The notion of fictional reality. The causal implausibility of "events" that marks Souvenirs as a text in the imaginary mode also deprives it of the benchmark of reality. For example, the "narrator" supposedly sees, from his seat in a seaside café, a naked adolescent girl on horseback, riding up the beach at water's edge. When she has passed behind him, a triad of hunters arrives in the same direction. As soon as they too are behind the "narrator," a shot rings out, followed by screams, which a second shot silences, and by the sound of some sort of "body" falling into the water (pp. 10—12). One may infer causation, that the hunters have shot the girl, but the "narrator" fails to turn his head, so as to be able to provide an eyewitness account, and the "event," if it is one, has no further consequences in the novel. Implausibility itself does not destroy fictional reality, so long as the "laws" of causality are not tampered with. A science fiction text may be implausible, but it will provide causes and effects consistent with its own system. In fairy tales, a pumpkin may become a coach, but only according to the rules: fairy godmothers may cause such things, but no one else can; an internally consistent causal system still functions. In Souvenirs, causes remain absent. Why did the hunters fire? Why did the narrator refrain from looking? What were the results of the supposed murder? In a world in which people can sometimes pass Alice-like through a looking glass (pp. 112—13), readers have no use for their common sense and life experience in making the inferences essential to the constitution of a meaningful histoire.

4. The concept of time. Souvenirs du triangle d'or is composed, like much mental-representation fiction, largely in the present tense, which wavers often ambiguously between description and narration. With no causes and effects to order the mental images, readers are at sea in the question of chronology. Did the scene on the beach occur before or after the imprisonment? (Which scene on the beach? Whose imprisonment?) Logic, in the absence of causal connectives, cannot distinguish "before" from "after." Interrogators ask the imprisoned male, near the end of the novel, to provide a chronological summary, thus pointing ironically to the meaninglessness of time in the text. The prisoner obliges, spreading the contradictory "events" of the fiction (and a few new ones) over a period of eight hours and
thirty-six minutes, divided into twelve-minute segments. This imposition of a temporal "order" on incongruous "events" in the present tense endows them with the stasis of stop-action photography, to which I have alluded, but it does nothing to connect or organize them, or to render them plausible: it merely derides the concept of temporality. The time in which the "events" may be said to have taken place is the time it took to imagine them. But who imagined them, if not the reader? Fictional time and reading time are no longer distinct concepts.

5. The notion of predictability. Without reality-based causation, we obviously have no capacity for predicting what might or might not happen in coming segments of the récit. Curiosity (desire to know what will turn out to have happened), and suspense (desire to know what will happen) must therefore also remain inoperative in such texts as Souvenirs. Predictability allows us to determine that a character is in danger, or that a revelation about the past is forthcoming. Lack of knowledge, which is the basis for both curiosity and suspense, is a prime attribute of this text, but knowledge here is not simply deferred but absent. So, in the knowledge that we will not acquire knowledge, we perceive curiosity and suspense as idle.

6. The notion of explicable. Having perused all the words of the text, readers cannot connect the "events" (qua events) in any order which will render them comprehensible in relation to one another. Thus, if we have continued to read out of a belief that all would eventually come clear, we have erred.

7. Traditional narrative units. Narratologists distinguish in traditional novels certain crucial events, which determine by causation the direction of the text (they are called noyaux or "kernels"), and those lesser, though enriching, events that could be eliminated "without disturbing the logic of the plot," and which are termed catalytes or "satellites." The absence of causation eliminates all notion of "plot" in Forster's sense by definition, and with it the distinction between noyaux and catalytes. Since movement and change are present in Souvenirs, it remains possible to speak of "events" (or "imagined events") in the text. Few of them, however, can be said to have "consequences," although most of them are potentially consequential. As a result, at first reading, it remains difficult to determine when an event ends, for its potential effect hangs fire. Likewise, beginnings of events are difficult to pinpoint, since one tends to suspect that unstated antecedent reasons for them must exist. Thus, there is "no telling" what the
boundaries of events might be, for in a sense there is "no telling" in the novel at all.

8. The notion of importance. At one point in the narrative, young Angélica, operating on orders from Lady Caroline, has gotten herself arrested by a person purporting to be a police inspector named Franck. But is he really with the police?

Dans la Cadillac noire qui l’emmène à vive allure, Angélica essaie en vain de résoudre cette grave question. Par instant le cœur lui manque, en brusques bouffées brûlantes, à la pensée qu’elle vient de commettre une faute impardonnable: si ce prétendu inspecteur était en réalité le faux médecin? (P. 171)

(In the black Cadillac that is speeding away with her, Angélica tries in vain to resolve this grave question. At times, her heart falters for an instant, in sudden burning bursts, at the thought that she has just committed an impardonable sin: what if this self-styled inspector were in reality the false doctor?)

In the absence of causal connectives, nothing can be of consequence; no questions are therefore "grave," and there are no "impardonable sins"—indeed, no sins at all, since judgment would reinstitute causation in the text. As figments of the imagination, little Angélica and her burning palpitations remain unimportant. Words like "grave," "impardonable," and especially "en réalité," in this realm of shifting "character" identity, acquire a special irony unattainable in cognitive-mode texts. Perhaps the most amusing example of it occurs when the narrator of the moment is instructed, in preparing his final chronology, to leave out "useless details" (p. 225).

In addition to this peculiar irony, Souvenirs du triangle d'or gains, as an imaginary-mode text, other distinctive characteristics. Since no continuous histoire can be constituted, readers' hunger for structure drives them mercilessly toward the narration. Internal repetitions and intertexts attain increased significance as the only remaining clues to potential order. Among the internal repetitions are the limited number of settings, which perforce recur. Indeed, each time the décor changes, we appear to be in a new mental representation, so that series of potentially comparable narrative units can be envisaged on the basis of setting: beach, prison, temple of the secret society, and so on. Recurring images, of bouncing white spheroids, for example, and of triangles, provide further ground for comparison. Tri-
angles emerge in the title, in the image of the pediment of a Greek-style temple, in the references to the upper front of a woman’s pointed shoe, in images of the exposed pubic hair of females, and in the name of the “Société du Triangle d’or” (“Society of the Golden Triangle”), accused, in imagination at least, of sponsoring sadistic orgies. All occurrences are at least distantly sex-related. Even the pediment contains as a frieze an inverted equilateral triangle with an eye in it, set on end on the vertical axis; little imagination is required of readers to see in the frieze a schematic representation of the female genitalia. The recurrence of erotic and voyeuristic imagery might suggest the periodic return of desire, here employed as a structuring device.

The intertexts also attain exceptional significance as indices of order: allusions to Robbe-Grillet’s own early fiction (Les Gommes, Le Voyeur, La Jalousie), as well as to Alice through the Looking Glass and to Valéry’s Cimetière marin (quoted on p. 112). Since the girl “character,” who, at this point, passes through the “peau de panthère et chlamyde trouée” which is the surface of a mirror, bears the name “Temple,” it is tempting to undertake a reading of the text as a dark-side parody of the famous poem. The occasional sea imagery, and the “temple” headquarters of the secret society provide further encouragement. “Cruel Zeno’s” paradoxes about stasis and movement are inherent here in the present-tense conflict between narration and description, between the successive fantasies and the final imposed “chronology.” If Valéry’s poem traces an evolution from belief in eternal, rational order governing human existence to the understanding that life is an interplay of irrational, dynamic, and mortal forces, his imagined “Temple du Temps, qu’un seul soupir résume,” is “dead in the water” before the end of the poem. But instead of finding, like Valéry, beneath the surface of the soul, in the fear of death, an emotional and quasiexistential reason for attempting to live and act, Robbe-Grillet’s text uncovers in introspection the hideous dynamic of sadistic desire (which one might associate with the “panther”) and the masochism relatable to the pilgrim wearers of the ragged “chlamyde.” The inactivity of neurotic imagination would replace, in such a reading, existential choice and action.

The golden triangle of the title might also refer to the Pythagorean mysteries, to the secret order of the universe, or perhaps to the logical structure of abstraction or of the syllogism. Symmetries in triangles, trajectories, and mirror images also suggest structural order, or the before-and-after of Pythagorean metempsychosis. Psychoanalytical readings are disap-
pointingly easy, the "ego" having bothered little with censorship; and if this is the text of a dream, whose dream is it (cf. Alice's problem with the Red King)? Since the inferred author is free, in the imaginary mode, to present any images in any order, the narration need not represent a consistent intent: readers are equally free to attribute significance to any aspect of repeated images or of intertexts and to structure them all at will in a lecture. We are left, in the virtual absence of a syntagmatic axis, with the pseudotask of constituting an unverifiable paradigmatic one. And gone is the pleasure to be derived from the discovery of an author's skill in creating entities that combine temporal and eternal functions in a text. In its place remains the reader's free but inconsequential creation.

One escape from such futility is to read the text as text, remaining as close as possible to syntax and signifiers and restraining the imagination from embroidering on the signifieds. The evil experiments of the scurrilous Dr. Morgan may be described as "expériences sur les comportements oniriques tertiaires" (p. 184); "experiments on tertiary (REM) oneiric behavior"—but they are also "textual experiments" (p. 155; "expériences textuelles"). While in context readers can scarcely fail to note the potential substitution of the near-rhyme "sexuelles" for "textuelles," the book is not only a succession of separate dreams, like separate pearls bouncing off a mirror (described as an "experiment in structural organization," [p. 103]), but an experiment in the texture, in the weaving together, of words. So it is, for example, that the "narrator" in his jail cell perceives a yellow object and a red one, which, we are told, would produce "une orange, qui ne saurait donc tarder à paraître" (p. 149; "an orange, which can therefore not be long in making its appearance"). Sure enough, in the next fantasy, Lady Caroline finds, in her bathing cabin at the beach, "a large, perfectly spherical orange" (p. 151; "une grosse orange parfaitement sphérique"). Words generate words on the level of individual signifiers, independently of a generalized meaning of the text. Such generation would appear caused only if one could infer the inferred author's intent.

Novels of mental representation continue to make use of causal elements for unifying and structuring purposes, for the constitution of a definable syntagmatic axis, so long as the mental representations involve the cognitive or the hypothetical mode. In the former, a series of unrelated perceptions is conceivable, but in practice, characters' memories begin to connect them by associations, which will become the causes of later recall. In the future cognitive, the inherent perceived inevitability is causal in
nature. The hypothetical mode, the domain of inference, uses causation as its essential logic.

But the imaginary mode, the realm of fantasy and dreams, escapes internal causation, and with it not only a major structural armature, but primary tools of meaning production. As the basis for explanation and for inferable intent, causation has served as a source of metonymic understanding, as a fundamental determiner of meaning in fiction. It is precisely this linear, “narrative” notion of meaning that imaginary-mode texts undertake to subvert. Their intent, if we can infer it, is to revitalize fiction on other, nonnarrative grounds, free at last from causal chains.

Notes

1. See Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) for a thorough analysis of linguistic imitations of mental representations. Her notions of “consonance” and “memory monologue” are quite relevant to this chapter.


5. The causal effect of the imaginary mode can occur, of course, only in a fictionally “real” world. In novels composed entirely in the imaginary mode, the causal function on the level of the *histoire* is tenuous or absent.


7. Although *L’Etranger* privileges Meursault over the prosecutor, the narrator’s
account is hardly above suspicion (chapter nine, above). Such doubt about an eyewitness account situates the work clearly between the Zola and Robbe-Grillet texts.


15. Chatman, pp. 107-45, outlines the notion of "character" as defined by theorists from Aristotle to Todorov, with a refutation directed at extreme structuralist positions. "People," in *Souvenirs du triangle d'or*, function almost as "settings," as defined in the latter part of Chatman's chapter.

16. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking Glass* are both imaginary-mode stories (not fairy tales), but they are provided with cognitive-mode frames, which are their contact with "reality" and their cause. This is an essential structural difference from *Souvenirs du triangle d'or*.
