

“Outside, it is snowing”:

**Experience and finitude in the non-representational landscapes
of Alain Robbe-Grillet**

Environment and Planning D: Society & Space, 2008 vol.26 pp. 795-822

José Luis Romanillos

Geography
College of Life and Environmental Sciences
University of Exeter
Amory Building
Rennes Drive
EX4 4RJ

j.l.romanillos@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper presents and explicates the anonymous and impersonal spatialities tentatively mapped in the novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet. Emerging from the kinds of landscapes and visualities articulated, these spatialities are at odds with the kind of anthropocentrism characteristic of phenomenological narratives of spatial experience that would start from an apparently stable human-subject position. It is argued that his body of literature dismantles the anthropocentric narratives and biographies that would produce in both the space of the world and the 'phenomenological subject' an unwarranted depth and naturalism. Importantly, and reflecting the theoretical turn towards the being of language (Foucault 1997, 2000a), Robbe-Grillet questions the legitimacy of linguistic subjects to capture the spaces of the visible. As such, it is argued that his literature reflects an *experience* of the critiques of phenomenology. Importantly, this 'critique' goes hand in hand with the kinds of spatialities and landscapes that are rendered in the novels – the indefinite perspectives they open up, the paradoxical visualities they sustain or deny, and the disorientation they inject into the heart of spatial experience. These literary effects produce a *non-anthropocentric and non-personal spatiality* which, although contributing to an erasure of the 'subject', at the same time expose and open up a socio-spatiality based on singularities, intensities and finitude (Nancy 1991).

Key Words

Robbe-Grillet; landscape; visuality; subject; any-space-whatever; experience; finitude

Strange to think that the question ‘who am I?’ can be answered by a landscape. Yet not so strange. (Tuan, 2001 p.8)

The whole landscape – low sky, patch of ocean, cliff, garden, – was composed of various flat, lustreless, greyish hues. (Robbe-Grillet, 1965 p.148)

Introduction

This paper explores the sense of landscape as a modality of ‘spatial experience’. Further, it questions the nature of ‘the subject’ that is often uncritically and problematically located as the heart and measure of this experience. It has been said many times before, but as geographers *writing* the earth it is imperative to reflect on the nature of that writing in its varying modes of expression. For example, how can we write landscape? – a space which folds experience and the subject together (Wylie 2006). In relation to the writing of spatial experience and its ‘subject’ I argue that a certain sense of phenomenology has exerted an unhealthy hegemony in our ‘narratives’. What this hegemony draws on and produces is a certain structuring and *logos* of orientation within the very grammar geographers use to frame spatial experience. Hence, perhaps it has not been sufficiently explored just how it is that ‘[t]hinking about space occurs through the medium of language’ (Cragg & Thrift, 2000 p.4), particularly as regards the productivity and force of language, writing, and texts as constitutive of spatialities. Beyond the spatial metaphors of structural linguistics (*ibid.*) there is the everyday and ‘literary’ deployment of language that consolidates and reproduces certain spatial logics and subjectivities. As I go on to argue there is a structuring and foundationalist orientation at work within language and grammar which is overwhelmingly anthropocentric. The process of critique and deconstruction of this perspective, with attention to the spatialities articulated through a particular form of writing, is the key concern of the paper. To uncover and expose what is at stake within the languages that frame and imagine our spatialities I turn to a literary figure, Alain Robbe-Grillet, whose work directly speaks to these geographic concerns. This body of literature, in its attentiveness to the practice of writing; its communication between philosophy and ‘literature’; and its linguistic experimentations, creates a series of spatialities which problematise this anthropocentric sense of ‘spatial experience’, and in so-doing are evocative of different kinds of subjectivities. In order to frame this discussion, the opening quotations outline two diametrically opposed senses of spatial experience.

The first statement places the human subject within space. A landscape here is intimately reflected in and with the individual located before it. It is articulated from a phenomenological position that places the embodied intentional human subject at the heart of spatial experience as a form of appropriation, identification, naming and reflection of depth. Within Tuan's work this sense of landscape can be framed as an aesthetic criteria of contemplation that also tends towards a moral imperative to *meaningfully* ground spatial experience through self-identity (for example, Tuan, 1977, 1979). We can imagine that an answer to this subjective question, 'who am I?', 'given' by a landscape, would involve a series of metaphorical expressions that would describe a series of attributes, qualities, emotions and 'character' traits reflecting a fetishised streaming of this subject into space – an anthropocentrism without reserve. This landscape, whatever it may be, in answering the question of self-identity, would be turned into a *narrative* of the subject, such that the space would become familiar, personal, and therefore reassuring to the self in its apparent groundedness and stability. In a word, this space is humanised. Now, the opening quotation may seem extreme, even absurd. But do we not find the same basic linguistic anthropocentrism in those apparently inconsequential metaphoric descriptions that would *identify* and *name* a place as 'frightening'? Hence, it should be noted that this use of Tuan is to characterise, perhaps unfairly, a certain 'way of looking' at landscapes that is arguably more pervasive and subterranean than acknowledged: a grammatical spatial projection and normalising orientation that is appropriative and possessive in relation to a subject. Indeed, writing on contemporary theoretical texts, Ian James (2006) describes what he calls a 'residual logic of the subject' – a logic that seems to persist under deconstruction, and one that is bound up with a distinctive spatiality. As a form of humanist phenomenology, the above also serves to render and make clear the specific differences and consequences of alternative perspectives.

The second quotation, taken from a novel that questions the very sense and value of narrative (Barthes, 1972; Moore, 1969; Heath, 1972; Jefferson, 1980; Abbott, 2002), refrains from granting a depth to this spatial experience – the depth that would make of this landscape a space *for* the subject, as its property, and naturalised attribute. As such, it is a description that places limits on the linguistic capacities of the 'I' to capture the visible spaces of a landscape. It is surely a description of a landscape, but here one cannot be sure of the stability and presence of the subjective perspective that has articulated it. It is figured as an 'any-space-whatever' (Deleuze, 2005a ch.7); one of those paradoxical expressions of a 'landscape before man, in the absence of man' (Deleuze & Guattari 2003b, p.169). In its

bare visual description of this landscape (patch of ocean, cliff... etc.¹) we see no attempt to tether this to the interiority of a personal identity (histories, desires, character, meaning, emotional registers etc.) – it remains as an anonymous space. This paper argues that the literary rendering of certain landscapes, such as those presentations of spatialities outside-the-subject, of the anonymous *there is* of spaces, contribute to a dismantling and erasure of the phenomenological subject. In so-doing they both work against and render visible a certain residual anthropocentrism characteristic of discussions of spatial experience that would move uncritically from the space of the world to the interiority of a subject.

Thus we arrive at what in recent years has been a sustained questioning of the phenomenological subject (for example, from a range of different perspectives, see Butler, 2001; Latour, 2005; Nancy, 2001; Badiou, 2002). Within geography we can turn, in the context of landscape, to the work of John Wylie (2002, 2005, 2006). This paper acknowledges the ways in which Wylie's work has rendered acute the need to think through such things as landscape, experience, visibility and subjectivity from post-phenomenological perspectives. A crucial development is the critique of the position that would take the self and the world as *a priori* givens. This critique operates through an emphasis on how a general field of visibility and 'depth' (Merleau-Ponty, 1997 ch.4) produces and makes possible the tentative achievement of self and world. Spaces and landscapes, rather than acting as receptacles and attributes of intentional subjects, now act as a condition of possibility for their constitution. This movement from phenomenology to post-phenomenological perspectives therefore re-thinks both the space of the world and the sense of 'the subject'. The world, now seen in an impersonal anonymity before and in the absence of 'man' is as open to change and chance as the 'subject' that comes to register it; and the fact that a world has to be *constructed* sees the 'subject' removed from the (eternal) transcendental registers found in phenomenology, now flickering in the finite and tentative perspectives that might sustain it.

Now, if a landscape can act as a condition of possibility of a figure, a perspective, or body-subject, it stands to reason that certain ways of looking, and certain spatial experiences, can deconstitute and *erase* the intimacy and stability of those relations. Hence, what happens when we have a landscape that provokes a *failure* of visibility; a landscape of the night (Blanchot, 1989 pp.163-170), in which a 'subject' can no longer find their way and direction? What kind of spatiality is at play here, with what consequences? And what is 'experienced' in these moments where space unworks the subject? This paper argues that these kinds of spatial experiences and questions are expressed in the literature of Alain

Robbe-Grillet. The literary experiences correspond to a phenomenology in wreckage and a correlated human ‘subject’ under erasure. Crucially for geographers, these anti-foundationalist effects arise precisely out of the spatialities solicited and exposed. The key argument I want to develop revolves around how these literary effects produce a *non-anthropocentric and non-personal spatiality* – one which, although destructive of the ‘subject’, opens up a socio-spatiality based on singularities, intensities and finitude (Nancy 1991).

So, writing from the *milieu* of continental philosophy, it is argued that Robbe-Grillet has produced a body of literature that communicates *experiences* of thoughts that have circulated around the critiques of identity, intentionality and (transcendental) subjectivity that have dogged the phenomenological project from the beginningⁱⁱ. In relation to this work the paper makes explicit the parallels between his literature and the philosophical exploration of the *being* of language, crucial in the critique of phenomenology, both in terms of its difference in and for itself – its spacings, drifts and derivations (Derrida, 1997; Malabou & Derrida, 2004) – and in terms of its autonomous difference with respect to the spaces of the visible (Foucault, 1983, 2000a, 2000b; Deleuze, 1999). Thus, respectively, between the spaces of the linguistic articulations of a subject. and the spaces of the world, things, and visibilities; an abyss is rendered, like a ‘thin film’ or surface (Deleuze, 2003b). It is this surface between words and things which is precisely what was missing from phenomenological accounts.

Finally, and crucially in terms of the current of continental thought today, to trace out a post-phenomenological perspective we must therefore emphasize the rendering of this surface as what makes tangible the *radical finitude* of any-given subject position – and the erasure of the sense of control and stability that would be granted by its dissimulation. By ‘finitude’, I have in mind a certain ‘grammatological’ logic in which the signs, images, words, inscriptions and traces that constitute a particular perspective already call for and presuppose its erasure – thereby negating the sense of stability any articulation or naming might carry. As Derrida notes, ‘all graphemes are of a testamentary essence’ (1997 p.69; see also Derrida, 1998). This finitude of the inscriptions that would produce a given subject-position operates both in relation to the absent and murmuring space of language (Derrida 1991), and in relation to the images and visibilities that are radically divorced from the linguistic spaces of the subject (rendered by the surface and limit between them, Foucault, 2000b). For example, turning to work on the being of language (Heidegger, 1959; Foucault, 1997a), if this abyss does not exist, then the words one uses to code the space of

the world become simply natural extensions of a personal being, rendering an unproblematic, essential familiarity with the world. Within phenomenology we can see this in terms of the things, objects and spaces of the world as correlates of the acts which intend them – as already socially produced and mediated, in which we immediately find the human subject as their anthropocentric measure (Heath, p.86-110)ⁱⁱⁱ. These thoughts on finitude thus articulate a toppling of the ‘masterful’ subject and its anthropocentrism.

Importantly, in discussing these philosophical thoughts on language and subjectivity through an enquiry into a literary figure, this ‘finitude’ is also *experienced* (Blanchot, 1989 pp.87-90). It is the theoretical legacy of Heidegger that has most influenced this concept of finite thought as experience. Hence, the being-towards-death that most constitutes *Dasein* carries with it the *force* of its sense; it shocks and awakens mood, consciousness and so on. (Safranski, 1999). Recently, ‘finitude’ has come to take on a sense as precisely that which ‘is’ communicative and shared in the force of its exposition. For example, for Nancy this sense is disseminated as experience in *literature* that, above all, does not submit to the imperatives of ‘intelligibility’ but to an abandonment and openness that characterises our ‘exposure’ (1991 p.64-70 & ch.3, 2001). Another perspective on ‘finitude’ concerns its ‘ontological’ coherence: it is an ‘experience’ which troubles the very sense of experience as that which is derivative and ‘possessed’ as an attribute of a subject (Derrida, 1993). For how can one ‘possess’ as a ‘proper’ experience that which is not a phenomenological ‘object’ or ‘existent’ but as what, by definition, passes and disappears? (*ibid.*). Hence, as Nancy notes, ‘finitude itself *is* nothing; it is neither a ground, nor an essence, nor a substance. But it appears, it presents itself, it exposes itself, and thus it *exists* as communication’ (Nancy, 1991 p.28). After the work of Bataille (1988, 2000) and Blanchot (1988) Nancy signals a shift in the sense of finitude from that of an overly *individualised* conscious experience towards a sense of *community* that is not a work, project or definable ‘object’ of isolated ‘subjects’, but as something that is *shared* and spaced in its expenditure – an ‘originary’ sociality marked by the *Mitsein* of *mortal* singularities ‘comparing’ (Nancy, 1991, 2001; James, 2006; see also Strauss, 2000 for a critique of ‘individualised’ and ‘proper’ senses of finitude). Interestingly these three thinkers turn to literature to ‘present’ and ‘expose’ a finite sense of community. The present paper maintains that these senses of finitude and language are entangled and rendered through the spatialities Robbe-Grillet exposes us to.

This paper is then written alongside a series of non-representational geographies which have produced understandings, typologies and topologies of spatialities beyond the

intentional, phenomenological humanist subject. This is found for example in the exploration of affect in a transcendental-empirical field of Spinozist ethical relations (McCormack, 2003); the theoretical exploration of the event (Dewsbury, 2000, 2003); the non-intentional and non-autonomous relations of exposure that ‘ground’ the figure of the Other (Harrison, 2007a, 2007b); or the embodied and fluid materialities and sensibilities of a body-in-landscape (Rose, 2002; Wylie, 2002, 2005; Rose & Wylie, 2006), (see also more broadly, Pile & Thrift, 1995; Thrift, 2000). Within geography, non-representational theory attends to these open spatialities through its development of a series of performative stances that allow us to sense and make-sense of things and experiences that might not have the phenomenological existence of a present object (existent), capable of being known, framed, taken stock of and judged. In being open to the presentations of *experience* in Robbe-Grillet’s literature the paper questions the limitations of aesthetic and moral interpretations to ‘grasp’ the irreducible uncertainties, vulnerabilities and excessiveness of a world created and destroyed before our eyes. As such, this addresses the wider breakdown of faith in the stabilities of social progress, metaphysical presences and the depth, unity, order and meaning of a ‘world’ that would already be ‘ours’ (Harrison, 2007a; see also Robbe-Grillet 1989). Hence, certain authors have commented on how what we now share among irredeemably finite ‘modern’ subjects is the erasure of the very things that once ‘grounded’ us (Nancy, 1991). It is an experience of this *exposure*, (that I argue is communicated in the literary works of Robbe-Grillet), which is beginning to be recognised as a communicative ‘medium’, lacking in consistency, but ‘present’ in its passing and expenditure (James, 2006). This is contiguous with a developing form of sociality – one less certain of the terms and structures of its composition (see Harrison, 2007b).

Taking as its premise the belief that concepts and experience can be presented in literature, the paper focuses on a key set of novels from the 1950s that signalled a birth of a new ‘genre’; the *Nouveau Roman*. These novels are the masterworks, or ‘trilogy’ of Robbe-Grillet: *The Voyeur* (1955), *Jealousy* (1957), *In the Labyrinth* (1959)^{iv}. For Robbe-Grillet it was the classical novel, with its narrativised forms, that once provided a reassuring model of socio-historical truth (Robbe-Grillet, 1989; see also, Barthes, 1972, 1975b). When looking into the mirror of this ‘narrative-story’ what was reflected was a stable and assured subject that had both a historical destiny and a necessarily anthropocentric control, direction and orientation with respect to spaces, things, experiences. But a new narrative, a new novel, calls for a new sense of subjectivity (and hence of sociality more broadly), and new experiences. Not only does it call for this. As literature it also performatively enacts

and expresses these experiences (in different guises see Barthes, 1972, 1975a; Vernon, 1973; for a general outline of the work of narrative, Abbott, 2002) .

Hence, the landscapes and spatialities articulated through his writings are studied here under a renewed engagement with the notions of literature, narrative and writing that have haunted geography's dealings with landscape (see Wylie, 2007; and the essays in Barnes & Duncan, 1992), particularly as regards a sense of literature as 'experience'. It has been argued that the notion of 'landscape as text' falls within a representational mode of analysis (Dewsbury et al. 2002; Wylie 2006). Here landscape is studied as (re)productive and constitutive of social relations. Arguably, this structure informs a wide range of differing modes of writing on and with landscape – from biographical, travel-writing, cultural-historical, feminist and radical-Marxist forms. Whilst developing a profound geo-historical critique of 'landscape', I would claim that this research has often not gone far enough in thinking through what is meant by text, literature, writing and inscription – particularly insofar as the stories that social scientists produce can lead to the production of singular readings and kinds of narrative depth. Perhaps a distinctive approach could be argued for a 'geography of the literary' in which we find deployed a wider sense of the nature, practice and affects of writing and literature in the constitution of specific spatialities and subjectivities.

It is again to the continental *milieu* that we can turn to further explore the nature of this language through which we think space, and, in particular, through the phenomenon of 'literature' as a distinctive mode of writing. One of the most important figures in this respect has been Jean-Paul Sartre who developed a powerful and coherent exposition of the nature of literature. His work also put into play the complex and contested relations between literature and philosophy, for example with the immensely influential novel, *Nausea* and the programmatic *What is Literature?* Robbe-Grillet himself attests to Sartre's profound influence on several occasions (1989, 2005). A brief discussion of Sartre will further help frame the position of Robbe-Grillet's literature.

Sartre's existentialist project frames literature in a Hegelian fashion as a radical form of Historical action and utility. Literature must be put to work in the context of 'freedom' – both in relation to the conceptual freedom of a being-for-itself and its capacities for self-conscious realization; and in relation to concrete political action in a given time and place. This is a specific contextual configuration in which literary communication appears as a clear transmission of meaning and commitment between the (self)presences of authors and readers (Sartre 1973, 1978). From the perspective of this

authorial imperative and responsibility, Robbe-Grillet's work appears as a kind of useless squandering of the capacities of the writer. We can gauge this with Sartre's comment that he could not read Robbe-Grillet in an 'underdeveloped country' (Heath, 1972 p.31).

However, this is a judgement arising from a particular sense of politics and the political. From other perspectives the work of Robbe-Grillet's literature attains political and ethical force not determined or constrained by particular contextual moments of political action (for a series of feminist, psychoanalytic, post-colonial and political-economic readings see Roland, 1993; Lane, 2002; Jameson, 1976). More broadly, the nature of literature and writing that is distinctive in Robbe-Grillet has been praised by authors for whom 'communication' *qua* 'literature' is not thought as the process of a transmission of meaning and content beneath an imperative of 'utility'. Rather it is experienced precisely as the failure and ruin of this transmission; not the work of a project, but a work of fire (Bataille, 1973; Blanchot, 1995). As such, literature figures as both destructive and creative, working at an ontological and philosophical level as a crucible of experimentation on language and narrative that interrogates and troubles traditional notions of 'reality' and the discursive constitution of substances, spaces and subjects. Indeed, early in the 20th century, Heidegger drew attention to the insidious work of certain forms of thought embedded in and through *language*. He argued that our very linguistics over-code and disable an adequate conception of the existential spatiality of Dasein *qua* being-in-the-world. His style of thought, from one perspective, could itself be seen as an experimentation with language prompted by the difficulty of thinking beyond traditional metaphysical 'substantive' conceptions of 'the human'. As he notes, for this task 'we lack not only most of the words but, above all, the 'grammar'' (Heidegger, 2003 p.63). Grammar here is thus 'spatializing' as much as 'temporalizing', and the communication of distinctively different forms of spatial expression through literature therefore carries a philosophical import with its experimentation. Following the spirit of Bataille and Blanchot the further sections will unfold how the spatiality of these literary ruins and experimentations operate a critique and dismantling of the phenomenological subject.

Substantively, I will argue that this is achieved in Robbe-Grillet's literature in three main ways. After briefly introducing Robbe-Grillet, the paper therefore moves through three separate though connected sections. The first section looks at the key techniques and 'spatial images' that are expressed through the novels. In particular, it focuses on the striking expressions of non-human and paradoxical visualities and perspectives that are composed from pages of meticulous, unsettling and excessively precise spatial *descriptions*.

These descriptions have an irreducible spatial presence that disperses and dismantles the historical and biographical narrative of the traditional novel (Jefferson, 1980; Abbott, 2002; Harvey, 2006). The second section develops the enquiry into his fragmentary and non-totalisable visualities in terms of the presentation of superficial landscapes and ‘any-space-whatevers’, in relation to their non-human or ‘impossible’ *visualities*. It also traces out the wounding and erasure inflicted on the phenomenological subject through the separation of the autonomous spaces of the visible and the articulable, rendered as a surface or limit. The final section concentrates on the disturbing and nauseating *spatialities* at play, which exacerbate the erasure of ‘subject-characters’. Although these three aspects of his literature are too often dismissed as destructive, or negative, they have an affirmative side that traces a different kind of *spatial experience* and, indeed, ethic – one altogether less anthropocentric. One characterised by the finite experiences presented in his literature through a careful deployment of *spatialities and landscapes outside-the-subject*. This tentatively maps out new kinds of socio-spatial interaction and communication no longer based on historical and discursive recognition (of subjects), but on the intensities and finitudes experienced in the spacings of the present. The paper then concludes with a close examination of the title sentence, re-tracing the key singularities and style of the ‘any-space-whatevers’ (Robbe-Grillet, 1988 p.27; see also Deleuze, 2005a, 2005b) and superficial landscapes of Robbe-Grillet. The passages reproduced from the texts are attempts at presenting snapshots of these landscapes and the finitude they share with and through us.

Discovering the Surface: Introducing Robbe-Grillet

Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to *live*: what is needed for that is to stop bravely at the surface, the fold, the skin; to worship appearance, to believe in shapes, tones, words – in the whole Olympus of appearance! Those Greeks were superficial – *out of profundity!* (Nietzsche, 2003 p.8-9)

This discovery of the surface and this critique of depth represent a constant in modern literature. They inspire the work of Robbe-Grillet. (Deleuze, 2003b p.336)

For over half a century Alain Robbe-Grillet has written novels, screenplays, literary criticism, and directed a series of films^v. Born in 1922, Brest, France, he worked as an agronomist until his literary career began in 1953 with the publication of *The Erasers*. His second novel, *The Voyeur*, won the prestigious *Prix de Critiques*, following the favourable reviews of Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot and Jean Paulhan^{vi}. He is intimately

associated with the *Nouveau-Roman*, and the work of other *Nouveau-Romanciers* such as Nathalie Sarraute, Claude Simon and Michel Butor. As one of the more outspoken writers associated with the *Nouveau-Roman*, Robbe-Grillet published a series of polemical essays entitled *For a New Novel* (1989) in which he theoretically reflects on traditional and ‘modern’ narrative forms. As a brief introduction to the key singularities of his style, we can explore the way *For a New Novel* develops both a ‘critique of depth’ and affirms a ‘discovery of the surface’.

For Robbe-Grillet the craft of the traditional novel utilized a series of linguistic techniques that worked to produce a ‘story’ – but it did so whilst naturalising and dissimulating that very construction and fabrication (Jefferson, 1980; Barthes, 1972). A coherent story reflected a sensible and ordered world, with ‘man’ placed at its centre, rendering its spaces familiar and personal. This anthropocentric world is populated by subjects, or what he calls ‘characters’, that are intentional, that submit to a ‘teleology of action’ and destiny, and whose subjectivities are transparent, known and rendered visible.

Such things as the fabrication of a linear ‘story’, the grammatical tenses of the ‘classical’ novel (the past historic, or preterite), and the focus on ‘characters’; their emotions, histories, and the projections of their personality onto objects and spaces – in short, their psychologism – all these narrative traits come under attack. Above all he is distrustful of the *depth* that this form of writing produces in both the world and in the subject. This depth, he argues, is a product of the 19th century when the author had a social role – reassuringly stitching the world together, producing the depth of the individual, the world and the *meaning* and historical purpose that joins them (Robbe-Grillet, 1988 pp.26-7; see also Robbe-Grillet, 1989, pp.25-75).

Opposed to this Robbe-Grillet argues for a writing that is attentive to the open, complex and tentative spacings of the present; a writing which refuses to partake of the production of depth that, in its dissimulation of the anonymity and impersonality of the world, would produce a ‘sentimentality of space’ (Bogue, 1984). Writing now rises to the surface and to experience – to the creation of the text itself as a *practice* whose superficiality resists the projection and framing of a ‘meaning’ and a ‘reality’ (Heath, 1972; Moore, 1969; Jefferson, 1980). There is an insidious and imperceptible violence to this literature that infects and *affects* the reader. One’s perceptual faculties are dis- and re-organised towards spatial experiences in which one will now struggle in vain to produce the order, meaning, direction and composure characteristic of the unconsciously familiar territory of a ‘story’. Hence, despite his repeated claims to grant the art of literature a

sovereign space outside of imperatives determined by the wider cultural, economic or political field, Robbe-Grillet does emphasise the value of literature in terms of making interventions in the world, imagining, producing and shaping new kinds of experiences, creating new senses of consciousness adequate to a modern world (Robbe-Grillet, 1989 pp.133-156).

Now, the ‘discovery of the surface’ finds positive affirmation in *For a New Novel* as Robbe-Grillet traces out the singularities and styles that mark his texts as distinctively ‘modern’. First, there is his emphatic use of the present tense which opens experience outside of the historicism of a linear narrative retro-actively constituted through the past-historic (Harvey, 2006). Second, the uncertain and non-autonomous nature of subjectivity finds an expression in the suppression or even erasure of the first person pronoun. Characters are reduced to a single name, “Mathias” (*Voyeur*), or even to a letter, “A...” (*Jealousy*) – as if the full name already contained too much history. As a corollary to this there is a dearth of direct speech, limiting the depth one can project onto the protagonists and narrator. Finally, there is the meticulous and precise descriptions of objects, things and spaces that replace the internal monologues and barometers of emotion that constitute a ‘character-subject’. The excessive nature of these descriptions, in the effects of their ‘over-determination’ of the visible surfaces of things^{vii}, forces language to present the limit between words and things. This is played out through a constant battle between the visible surfaces of things, objects, spaces and the repetitive attempts at articulating these perspectives through description.

The following section takes as its focus these spatial descriptions – perhaps the most striking and original feature of his novels. It is argued that the multiple perspectives presented through repetitious descriptions render a spatiality of the surface expressed most forcefully through his landscapes. This ‘surface’ is characterised by its irreducible presence and its autonomous and anonymous difference with respect to a given subject-perspective that it constitutes and that would in turn demand of it an immobile meaning and orientation.

Perspective, Description, Repetition: Surface

If one was to turn at random to a page in the trilogy named above one would no doubt be presented with some kind of description of space. Perhaps we would find described a dark corridor with a door ajar; or the positions of the pieces of furniture in a

room from the perspective of a curtain (*In the Labyrinth*). Perhaps the interlacing and forking pathways on an island (*The Voyeur*); or, again, the locations and distributions of the rooms, bodies, objects and centipede in a house on a banana plantation (*Jealousy*).

To the left of the door with the ill-fitting leaves there are only two windows, then the quoin of the house, then perpendicularly a new succession of identical windows and doors, like images of the first, as if a mirror had been set up there, forming an obtuse angle (a right-angle plus half a right angle) with the plane of the houses; and the same series is repeated: two windows, a door, four windows, a door, etc.... The first door is slightly open on a dark corridor, its two unequal leaves leaving a black gap just wide enough for a man to slip through, or at least a child. (*Labyrinth* p.17)

From this point she [A...] sees the whole house down the middle: the main room (living-room on the left and dining room on the right, where the table is already set for dinner), the central hallway (off which open five doors, all closed, three on the right and two on the left), the veranda, and beyond its open-work balustrade, the opposite side of the valley. (*Jealousy* p.58)

Each of the descriptions is inherently visual. It is as if the words that make up a given description were the simple content of the light that hits a retina (or indeed a film camera) at a given moment in time and space. But this is not to claim some ‘autonomy’ for this type of vision, as any given perspective is radically finite and limited. A line of vision may be meticulously described, but when it reaches a door; an obtuse angle, darkness, or the back of a figure, it becomes impossible to say what is happening behind it, or what the arms in front of the body are doing, and so on.. This vision, in its affirmation of what is presented in experience (necessarily perspectival and fragmentary), abnegates a claim to an all-seeing and all-knowing subject in control of space. Two examples of this follow, taken from *Jealousy*:

Since Franck says nothing and does not return, A..., doubtless supposing he sees something, also stands up, supple and silent, and moves away in the same direction. Her dress is swallowed up in its turn by the opaque darkness.

After quite a long time, no word has yet been spoken loud enough to be heard at a distance of ten yards. It is also possible that there is no longer anyone in that direction. (*Jealousy* p.99)

After looking a little longer, she straightens up and remains motionless, elbows close to her body, forearms bent and hidden by the upper part of her body – probably holding a sheet of paper between her hands. (*Jealousy* p.11)^{viii}

Hence, it is primarily through vision that Robbe-Grillet’s spaces are rendered – through finite, singular, perspectives. The space one is presented with (a corridor, a set of spatial relations) thus tends towards a *scene* – it is a ‘spatial-image’. Apparently fixed and immobile, this spatial-image rises up into an autonomous space: a visibility. It is perhaps this constant association between space and vision that makes each ‘scene’ – whether of a café, a series of houses on a street, or a group of sea-gulls – in a Robbe-Grillet text tend towards a flat-canvas *landscape painting*^{ix}. As Blanchot notes, his writing is pervaded by a

‘spatial clarity’ in which the ‘calculated system of perspectives and perceptions...on the smooth surface of the present [are] attempts to represent a shadeless depthless space where everything is spread out, described with the simultaneity of painting...’ (Blanchot, 1982 p.209).

[The sea gulls] were sitting in profile, from where he was standing, all three facing the same direction and as identical as if they had been painted on canvas with a stencil... (*Voyeur* p.111)

Usually this landscape has little relief and looks rather unattractive, but this morning... Certain outlines are emphasized, others are blurred; here and there distances open out, unsuspected masses appear; the whole is organised into a series of planes silhouetted against one another, so that the depth, suddenly illuminated, seems to lose its natural look – and perhaps its reality – as if this over-exactitude was possible only in a painting. (Robbe-Grillet 1987b p.79)

The relief was both more apparent...and more unreal, made noticeable by the shadows that were emphasized – exaggerated, perhaps – without quite giving the impression of real outcroppings: as if they had been painted in *trompe-l’oeil*. (*Voyeur* p.217-8)^x

Now, as I have noted above, this vision is singular and finite and runs up against limits. We know this because of the open ended and elliptical nature of certain kinds of visual descriptions, as the presence of the night stalls vision etc. But we also know it indirectly through the non-linear and non-chronological trajectory of the novel itself, moving from description to description, from scene to scene^{xi}. The failure of vision to achieve a total and complete perspective, sure of itself and the position rendered by its articulation, is attested to by the hallucinatory *repetition* that marks each description and perspective. For a perspective in Robbe-Grillet is never isolated and self-same – it opens out, *a priori*, onto a multiplicity of fragmentary perspectives with which it differs. But this differentiation, often at an imperceptible level, means that any given articulated perspective ultimately *differs from itself*. This produces a perpetual doubt, failure and incompleteness at the heart of the visual field that constitutes spaces and subjects. This doubt is transposed onto the reader as much as to the narrator or ‘protagonists’ of the novels. As an example, the following quotations are taken from three consecutive pages of *The Voyeur*:

Yet this room, where he had settled down to work, was lighted by only one small, square window deeply recessed in the wall... (p.12)

He is sitting at the table wedged into the window recess, facing the window. (p.13)

The rest of the room is very dark, for in spite of its rather large size it has only this one aperture, which furthermore happens to be located in a recess in the wall. (p.14)

It is the ‘furthermore’ which here acts as the excessive sign of Robbe-Grillet. It is a tracing-out of a spatiality that, on account of a radical incompleteness and *glissement* in

spatial experience, negates the sense of a grasped, mastered and named space^{xii}. The identity and stability granted by the notions of origin and end are done away with through the surface opened by repetition. As such, this repetition is as unsettling as it is liberating. Then, as if to further multiply the descriptions, one could interpret several passages within his texts as self-reflexive commentaries on his own repetitious textual practice. For example, in *Jealousy*, the absent narrator-husband describes a gardener who is singing a poem, a description which itself points to the movements between descriptions of his own novels.

It is doubtless the same poem continuing. If the themes sometimes blur, they only recur somewhat later, all the more clearly, virtually identical. Yet these repetitions, these tiny variations, halts, regressions, can give rise to modifications – though barely perceptible – eventually moving quite far from the point of departure. (*Jealousy* p.51)

The movement and sliding instigated by repetition, from perspective to perspective, serves to render the surface limit between words and visibilities – insofar as the verificational realism and subjective certainty that would unite the two is denied. The formalism and realism of the descriptions, with passages of text often repeated many times with slight variations, produce images *for themselves* that slowly detach from the primary sense of words: their signification and representational economy. These ‘scenes’ and ‘spatial-images’ communicate amongst themselves in a ‘spatial presence’ indifferent both to the individuals-characters that might articulate them and the discursive, representational narratives that sustain those articulations and ‘subject-positions’. With the proliferation of these images we soon get the feeling that ‘[s]ometimes the movement of the description obliterates the thing described. [For], as Rene Magritte noted, an image is more like another image than it is like the object or person represented in the image.’ (van Wert, 1977 p.8; see also Foucault, 1983; Robbe-Grillet, 1996)

This ‘movement of description’ is the repetition and difference that returns to any given set of spatial relations. Each time a description is once more taken up, developed from a different perspective, what is being traced – the things, objects, light, sounds, figures – start suffering from an ‘overdetermination’ (Deleuze, 2003b p.40), an excess of descriptive precision that makes their consistency and stability dissipate (see also Deleuze, 2005b p.42-5). This dissipation is at once the making-tangible of the limit between words and things, and the un-working or erasure of the subject that would require the consistency, stability and sedimentation of a naturalised relationship between words and things for its *endurance*. Indeed, a coordinated subject cannot endure a formless landscape, its objects,

lines and figures blurred.^{xiii} But it also cannot endure the surface that arises from the excessive precision of description-painting that denies the possibility of producing the depth, layers of meaning and association that might act as a bridge between word and world upon which the subject might locate itself (see also the experience of the abysmal line of Olsson, 2007).

The multiplicity of perspectives, in their converging indeterminacy move through a myriad of possible meanings. This produces the open ended disappointment whereby a coherent meaning is never finally stitched together. Not being able to produce the attachments and grounded perspectives that would appropriate these spatial experiences ultimately leaves the simple manifest presence of things – the anonymous *there is* of existence ultimately indifferent to the meaning that would account for its profusion^{xiv}.

...Wallas keeps going back to the sight of the little man in the green coat standing in the middle of the pavement, as if this presence had something irreducible about it which no explanation – however plausible – could account for. (Robbe-Grillet, 1987b p.156)^{xv}

Each of Robbe-Grillet's descriptions; each scene or spatial-image, is given *now*, and one will try in vain to compose some kind of order and sequence that would lend the successive presentations at least the sense of a chronology. This is a writing actively working to avoid the production of 'biography' and its sentimental spatial appropriations – a character-subject is not constructed. And, instead of the expectations of seeing this fully formed edifice, we are only given a series of ruins – like the ruins of the city in *Topology of a Phantom City* (Robbe-Grillet, 1978). Indeed, the reader, turning page by page, can't help but generate some kind of historical causal order, attesting to the well-worn habit of linear *historical* projections that would reassuringly construct experience of the world as a 'story'. As Barthes noted in *Writing Degree Zero*, the use of the past-historic, found in traditional narrative forms, has an efficacious and comforting power wherein a verb,

implicitly belongs with a causal chain, it partakes of a set of related and oriented actions, *it functions as the algebraic sign of an intention* [of a subject-character, with clear will, autonomy, normalised capabilities etc.]...*it calls for a sequence of events*, that is, for an intelligible narrative. This is why it is the ideal instrument for every construction of a world; it is the unreal time of cosmogonies, myths, History and Novels. It presupposes a world which is constructed, elaborated, self-sufficient, reduced to significant lines, and not one which has been sent sprawling before us, for us to take or leave. Behind the preterite there always lurks a demiurge, a God or a reciter. *The world is not unexplained since it is told like a story...*(1972 p.26, cited in Jefferson, 1980 p.30).

As noted the visibilities of Robbe-Grillet are emphatically in the present. His desire to stop at the surface of things, at the object, at the space traced by light, at the gesture,

reflects a dismantling of this historicization and accounting of experience that the 'classical' novel constructed, producing a different spatiality of literature (Vernon, 1973).

We had thought to control [the world around us] by assigning it a meaning, and the entire art of the novel, in particular, seemed dedicated to this enterprise. But this was merely an illusory simplification; and far from becoming clearer and closer because of it, the world has only, little by little, lost all its life. Since it is chiefly in its presence that the world's reality resides our task is now to create a literature which takes that presence into account. (Robbe-Grillet, 1989 p.23)

This opening up of the space of the present is reflected in his admiration and affinities for the medium of cinema. He notes, "[b]y its nature, what we see on the screen *is in the act of happening*, we are given the gesture itself, not an account of it." (Robbe-Grillet, 1962 p.11) In this way, his novels, though not being screenplays or films, do tend towards the cinematic image in its presence and in its possibilities for non-chronological expression. Hence the possibility for both 'cinematographic novels' and a 'literary cinema' (van Wert, 1977 p.7).^{xvi}

We can summarise the nature of the descriptive and experimental writings of Robbe-Grillet in the following way. Firstly, the descriptions that constitute the perspectives of superficial landscapes, and the emergent 'radiant presence of space' they expose (Blanchot, 1982 p.209), all work through the *repetition* contained in the sense of his 'furthermore'. Secondly, what is opened in this 'furthermore', is not a developing character or subject – there is no depth being produced either in the landscape, in the multiple perspectives it tentatively renders or indeed in the novel itself. Rather, the descriptions remain at the impersonal surface of things, doubling the impossibility to constitute a familiar and personal space. Finally, the descriptions have an emphatic *presence* which, in their bare being-there, stall the possibility of framing a chronology or biography and the sense, meaning and order that they would carry. These novels therefore ask geographers to be aware, and indeed value, the non-significative and non-historicizing aspects of writing in the articulations of our spatial narratives – particularly if these narratives are to attend to the ruins of 'modernity', its idealisms of order, progress and identity.

The disappointing erasure of the phenomenological subject

From one visual description to the next (same?) description we are *disappointed*. We do not reach an original position, the definitive distribution of things, nor an exact chronology of events. Indeed, Robbe-Grillet notes that disappointment is a constitutive feature of a whole series of modern literary works (1989 p.148 & p.155-6)^{xvii}.

Disappointment is produced through the repetitions of descriptions that reflect a failure of vision to fully immobilize and frame a set of anonymous objects and spaces as if possessed by a subject. But it is not merely in relation to objects in space that his vision fails. In a radically discontinuous and finite gesture the failure of visibility also extends to that of the look of the Other.

The child was still staring in his direction, but it was difficult to be sure she was looking at him and not at something behind him, or even at nothing at all... (*Voyeur* p.4-5)

Among the passengers lined up in front of him he looked for the little girl who had been staring into space; he did not see her any more – unless he was looking at her without recognizing her. (*Voyeur* p.32)

These examples question the sociological and philosophical premise that the eye cannot fail to be a social-communicative organ (Simmel, 1997), one which is necessarily ‘reversible’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1997). We cannot be sure if the discontinuous and finite Other sees us^{xviii}. Hence, the reciprocal need for (self) recognition by and with the Other (see Kojève, 1980) is also suspended through the visualities of these novels.

A grey gull...gliding at the level of the bridge without the slightest movement of its wing, its head cocked, one eye fixed on the water below – one round, indifferent, inexpressive eye. (*Voyeur* p.5)

The vision of Robbe-Grillet is paradoxically both distanced, often non-human, indifferent, almost disembodied – verging on the anonymous eye of a camera; and at the same time it is ‘haptic’ or tactile, and in this way (de)constitutive of the subject-character. The effect of this on the reader is to also question and reconfigure *our* way of seeing, our perceptions and consciousness of space. We can turn first to an example of a non-human and anonymous visuality found in *Jealousy*. Like many of his novels, in this text we are presented with the conspicuous absences of an identifiable narrative voice, first person perspectives, first person pronouns; giving way to the anonymity of the third person pronoun (Levinas, 2001; Blanchot, 1989, 1982). In *Jealousy*, everything leads one to believe that the text is the narration of a husband who is desperately trying to piece together the sense of his wife’s actions who, the reader assumes, may be having an affair. But this is only an indirect possibility produced from the multiplicity of perspectives and descriptions, it is never definitively articulated. There is an *absent subject-narrator* in the same way that the possible events and actions attributed to subjects [i.e. a clandestine affair] are also absent whilst inhering in the movement from description to description. Within the text we find descriptive statements such as, “[n]ow the house is empty” (*Jealousy* p.60). This statement, within a so-called ‘phenomenological’ novel (Carrabino, 1974) meticulously

registering space, is almost impossible – it would presuppose someone there who can see and relate that it is empty. The impossibility of the sentence is that the author of this statement would have to rub themselves out, whilst stating/viewing it – like an anonymous camera that is not there^{xix}. This produces a spatial absence outside-the-subject that is nonetheless *there* in its impersonal anonymity:

Where I am alone, I am not there; no one is there, but the impersonal is: the outside, as that which prevents, precedes, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relation. (Blanchot 1989 p.31)

Turning to the other aspect of his paradoxical visualities, the tactile and ‘haptic’ vision of the novels presents itself in landscapes through the work of sunlight which acts as the condition of possibility for a subject to become consistent. However, this light is often too bright and dazzling, or perhaps not clear enough. In both cases this leads to the impossibility of definitely grounding a perspective necessary for the depth of a subject.

Mathias had to screen his eyes with his hand to protect them from the sun. (*Voyeur* p.35)

Symmetrical to those of the bedroom, the three windows of the office have their blinds more than half lowered at this hour. Thus the office is plunged into a dimness which makes it difficult to judge distances. Lines are just as distinct, but the succession of planes gives no impression of depth so that the hands instinctively reach out in front of the body to measure the space more precisely. (*Jealousy* p.40)

Now the eye can distinguish nothing any longer...(*Jealousy* p.67)

The state of things around him furnished no point of reference... (*Voyeur* p.121)

The vague light brought no detail into relief, nothing solid to *hold* on to. (*Voyeur* p.41, my emphasis)

These statements reflect a complex and ambiguous relation to phenomenology in that they point to the necessity to tether space to a subject through the senses, but do so emphasising its impossibility and dissolution. Vision is then rooted in impossibilities: the impossible perspectives found in certain statements and descriptions; and in the impossibility of a character-subject, and consequently the reader, to adequately grasp the light, such that one slips on the surface.

“Anyone can lose his footing,” the salesman said. (*Voyeur* p.100)

Even if it is a force of habit (Deleuze, 1991), we must no doubt ask at some point – who is it who is viewing, recording, describing? Paradoxically, and as intimated, it is always both a singular viewpoint, and a view from nowhere. This does not correlate to the seemingly unlimited sovereignty of a God-perspective, for we have already outlined the doubt, failure and insufficiency installed at the heart of this kind of visibility. And if the

vision tends in part towards a disembodiment it is not for all that a form of power – it is in fact a *loss* of sovereignty as the autonomous subject is erased along with the ordered, named, controlled and personified spaces of experience.

Much has been written on the critique of the ‘view-from-nowhere’; its residual Cartesianism, masculinism, disembodiment and intimate connections with the production of rational ‘truth’ (see for example, Berger, 1986; Haraway, 2004; Foucault, 2000b; Latour, 1999; Rose, 1993, 2001). Now, it is surely possible and necessary to develop a critique of this stance through the emphasis of positionality, visceral embodiment and relational contextuality. Robbe-Grillet, despite appearances, also works to undermine the techniques of Cartesianism – but it is through the use of those techniques themselves, from within. Hence, the multiple perspectives do not triangulate to complete an adequate mapping; space is not penetrated, it resists the production of depth of an illuminating eye. Above all, he forces us to ask – why would the movement of description through the novels, with each perspective developing, undergoing modifications, constantly beginning again, why would these repeat in their differences if they did achieve a final ‘truth’ adequate to their vision? Finally, in not adding up, they produce a different sense to the ‘view from nowhere’ which now carries the meaning of a view from no-where-in-particular in which any given determinate perspective and inscription (of a subject) is erased in favour of an open spatiality, an ‘any-space-whatever’ [*espace quelconque*].

Adopting the term from Pascal Augé, Deleuze articulates this spatiality through a visuality where “[s]pace becomes tactile, as if the eye were a hand grazing one surface after another without any sense of the overall configuration or mutual relation of those surfaces...whose fragmented components may be assembled in multiple combinations, a space of yet-to-be-actualized possibilities” (Bogue 2003 p.80). Deleuze frames this through the films of directors such as Antonioni in which an any-space-whatever is constructed through both a spatial *disconnection* lacking in ‘total’ co-ordination, and an *emptiness* or absence of ‘action’ that would ordinarily tie the ‘scene’ to a subject (see Bogue 2003 pp.80-85; Deleuze 2005a pp.111-126; 2005b pp.7-9). Hence, and mirroring the kind of visuality present in *Jealousy*, ‘[t]he connection of the parts of space is not given, because it can only come about from the subjective point of view of a character who is, nevertheless, absent, or has even disappeared...’(Deleuze 2005b p.8).

If the presentation of an any-space-whatever carries with it an erasure of the stability and location of any given subject-perspective, this erasure is also carried out through the novels of Robbe-Grillet through the relations he sets up, or rather, tears down,

between words and the visible. We can comment here on the (de)constitutive nature of this kind of visibility as developed in Wylie (2006). I would like to emphasise here, in Wylie's discussion of the later work of Merleau-Ponty, the movement from the idea that vision is *my* [possessive, intentional] vision, towards the idea that 'the subject' becomes (de)constituted out of an anonymous field of visibility *in general* that acts as its condition of possibility^{xx}. This post-phenomenology can be developed by returning to the idea that these visibilities are almost as bare as the simple recording of light hitting a retina or camera. An important theoretical aspect of this is the denial of the always already socially mediated nature of the senses – it is a rejection of the idea that things in the world are the correlates of the acts which intend them (as an *a priori* association). This is a key critique of phenomenology insofar as it opens up the 'thin film' and surface between words and visibilities, granting them their own autonomy and presence – denying any essential, necessarily anthropocentric, connection between the two. At the same time this undermines the stability of a subject that would naively feel control both over the being of language and the world before the eyes. For Robbe-Grillet, symbols, similes, metaphors, adjectives are the *anthropocentric* projections which produce a bridge between the space of words and the surface of the visible – the personifying tools that would make of the world of things, spaces, a mere extension or streaming of the located human subject^{xxi}. What his texts uncover is the manner in which these humanist linguistic devices, in their orientating *logos*, comfortably work to dissimulate their role as *construction*: through their fetishising articulation they produce an apparently inconsequential self-evidence and naturalness that hides their own contingency. The movement to description, rendering the surface limit between words and things, limits the efficacy of these 'tools', and in so doing opens an 'experience of the void'^{xxii} in which the subject is erased from its position of apparently naturalistic appropriation of things and spaces. As such the experiences (of finitude) expressed in his literature reflect a keen desire to go beyond anthropocentric framings; this experience being communicated through the kinds of superficial spatialities developed.

...not only do we no longer consider the world as our own, our private property, designed according to our needs and readily domesticated, but we no longer even believe in its 'depth'. (Robbe-Grillet, 1989 p.24)

Importantly, and as intimated, this 'bare' description is not unfolded within a vain desire to achieve objectivity or truth^{xxiii}. It rather corresponds to an ethic of dismantling a certain residual anthropocentrism in literature and language – the anthropocentric *logos* of orientation in grammar is itself displaced.

To describe things, as a matter of fact, is deliberately to place oneself outside them, confronting them. It is no longer a matter of appropriating them to oneself, of projecting anything onto them. (*ibid.* p.70)

As such, the presentation of the surface corresponds to an ontological flattening in which, he notes, “[t]he exclusive cult of the ‘human’ has given way to a larger consciousness, one that is less anthropocentric.” (*ibid.* p.29 my emphasis)

And suddenly the obviousness of this strikes us with irresistible force. All at once the whole splendid construction collapses; opening our eyes unexpectedly, we have experienced, once too often, the shock of this stubborn reality *we were pretending to have mastered*. Around us, defying the noisy pack of our animistic or projective adjectives, things are there. Their surfaces are distinct and smooth, intact, neither suspiciously brilliant nor transparent. (*ibid.* p.19)

Surely there is no greater body of literature that presents us with an *experience* of Foucault’s *thoughts* on the being of language, the difference between the visible and the articulable, and its painful consequences for the autonomous, masterful subject?:

It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted with the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other’s terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. And the proper name, in this particular context, is merely an artifice: it gives us a finger to point with, in other words, to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as though they were equivalents. (Foucault, 2000b p.9)

To pass from one to the other, from the seen to the said, whilst dissimulating the fact that one has crossed an abyss, is for both Foucault and Robbe-Grillet the heart of an intentional-humanist anthropocentrism. It presupposes the assurance of a masterful subject, in which the space of the world is a kind of continuous extension of man, a naturalised property. The subject become God; the world simply there to confirm and reflect the depth of this thing called “I”.

In *Foucault*, Deleuze (1999) diagrammatises these thoughts as a kind of ‘battle’ between the discursive and the non-discursive, between the articulable and the visible with arrows shot from both sides, neither one achieving a comprehensive victory. There is no such ‘battle’ for a humanist, intentional phenomenological subject^{xxiv}. Robbe-Grillet’s ‘phenomenology’, unlike that to be found within a humanist phenomenology, refrains from making this intentional leap – it refuses to imperceptibly move from what is given in spatial experience to a meaningful, co-ordinated world, as is found in narratives, personification and histories of place. There is no authority to step in and confirm the correspondences between word and world the reader would so dearly like – a confirmation that would

ground a 'subject'. In taking a fine tooth comb to experience, the present and the surface, he senses that life resides in this raging battle, not in fetishising forms of appropriation and possession (see Robbe-Grillet, 1988, 1989). Thus it is that spatial experiences of the surface of things, their anonymous presence, unsettle and disquiet our smooth, reassuring projections over the world.

The visualities Robbe-Grillet renders are creations and constructions of any-space-whatevers that make acute this disruption of human-centred spatial projections. In summary, these work through the paradoxical presentations of absent subject-narrators, and a failure of the visible: these have affects on the reader, reflecting a different sense of spatial cognition, and hence of subjectivity. If there is a failure of the visible, then in the repetition of descriptions there is also a failure of words to adequately capture and immobilise the visible: thus a surface and limit is rendered. By severely limiting metaphors and adjectival projections in his novels, perspectives are divested of the interiority of a character-subject, opening space to registers beyond the human subject, and thus to an expanded spatial imaginary and consciousness, one much less anthropocentric. Thus, his novels provide a valuable resource for geographers thinking through how to grasp and present an anti-foundationalist world in which the starting point is now beyond the phenomenological subject. What this 'beyond' signifies, however, is a certain mode of thinking which is attentive to the specific logic of this paradoxical space – one in which the very gesture of origins and foundations is itself suspended, this suspension inhering through the communication of the work itself. Literature is a particularly useful resource in this context because of its capacity for experimental and performative expression. As James (2006) has noted in relation to the *style* and fragmentary writing of Nancy, the logic of this critique requires a kind of performative retention of its very sense through the act of writing.

Spatial Nausea^{xxv}

The new advertisement represented a landscape. At least Mathias thought he could make out a moor dotted with clumps of bushes in its interlacing lines, but something else must have been superimposed: here and there certain outlines or patches of colour appeared which did not seem to be part of the original design. On the other hand they could not be said to constitute another drawing entirely; they appeared to have no relation to one another, and it was impossible to guess their intention. They succeeded, in any case, in so blurring the configurations of the moor that it was doubtful whether the poster represented a landscape at all. (*Voyeur* p.143)

Jean Genet once commented on the writings of Jacques Derrida. He remarked that they induced a 'horizontal vertigo' (White, 2004 p.658). Similar effects emerge from Robbe-Grillet's texts: the landscapes and spaces expressed produce experiences that *wound* the reader. The constant doubting and excessive number of perspectives to be articulated produce disturbing spatial affects, which both result from and are productive of a radically unstable 'subject'. The emergent effects of these fragmented visibilities, perspectives, descriptions and repetitions produce a nauseating spatiality (beyond the mere disappointment in reading the open ended nature of his novels), disruptive of the landscape and 'ground' upon which a subject might become constituted. The excess of precision in the articulation of the different *forms* of landscape perspectives (through the vision that sunlight renders possible), paradoxically leads to a *formlessness* characteristic of the night (the failure of the visible). His insidious, proliferating and communicating spatial-images disrupt not only the ability to achieve a geographical identity and location, but also, as a corollary, the geo-history that could ground a subject through the historical-personal attachments to such things as 'home' and 'birthplace'.

The houses on the island were so much alike that he was not even sure he could recognize the one in which he had spent almost his entire childhood and which, unless there was some mistake, was also the house where he had been born. (*Voyeur* p.17)

The nauseating effect of his descriptive form of writing is exacerbated by the spaces and landscapes selected for the locus and object of description. The spaces of 'action' are often distinctive due to their pared-down, everyday nature. A corridor, a house, a veranda, a café, a path, one's own home. These are spaces and landscapes so apparently familiar, that one immediately feels that the techniques of the observer are sure to triumph. One is therefore subject to a heightened degree of spatial-nausea and disturbance when *even these spaces* become detached, flattened and stripped of familiarity, control and the stability of a single definable perspective. Again, in a reflexive gesture that could apply to his own writing style, we find the protagonist of *The Voyeur*, Mathias, assaulted by the excessive nature of directions, details and descriptions given by two sailors trying to guide him to their respective dwellings – despite their location in a village whose 'topography could scarcely be complicated' (*Voyeur* p.105).

They probably gave him a number of useless or redundant details, but with such exactitude and such insistence that Mathias was completely confused. (*ibid.*)

In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze articulates a paradoxical philosophy of sense. He notes how '[g]ood sense affirms that in all things there is a determinable sense or direction (*sens*); but paradox is the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time.' (2003b p.1). This paradoxical sense is one of the surface, something he finds expressed in the works of Lewis Carroll. 'Paradox appears as a dismissal of depth, a display of events at the surface, and a deployment of language along this limit.' (*ibid.* p.9). These concepts can also be applied to the hallucinatory scenes and landscapes of Robbe-Grillet which defy the articulation of a 'proper' sense, a grasped spatial orientation and direction, and as a consequence the 'fixed identities' of a proper name that could be 'grounded' in its attachments to 'substantives and adjectives' (*ibid.* p.3). As if inhabiting the non-place of this 'thin film' or 'looking-glass' surface, Robbe-Grillet forces the subject to accept its lack of control over spatial experience. In so doing, the subject as an autonomous project is erased.

In the mirror flickers the reflection of this ghost, already almost completely decomposed... (Robbe-Grillet, 1987b p.4)

This lack of autonomy and failure of the visible which would make of the space of the world an identity, a sense and direction, is reflected back into the labyrinthine space of language in which the subject is constituted^{xxvi}. The following passage from *The Voyeur* reflects the impossibility of articulating a specific sense or direction, in which one is perhaps confronted either with a description of a succession of scenes and images, or, indeed, with the very spacings and driftings of language (Malabou & Derrida, 2004).

Unfortunately none of the numerous existing paths coincided with the theoretical direction Mathias had selected; he was therefore confined, from the start, to one of two possible detours. Besides, every path looked winding and discontinuous – separating, uniting, constantly interlacing, even stopping short in a briar patch. All of which obliged him to make many false starts, hesitations, retreats, posed new problems at every step, forbade any reassurance as to the general direction of the path he had chosen. (*Voyeur* p.159)

The spacings and repetitions of images or 'scenes' in their autonomous superficiality lead to the break down of the representational capture and historical narrative that could frame an individual. Slowly, space is disassociated from its role as simple property of a subject, as medium for its locating, positioning and naming – spatial awareness and coordinates break down, even those that are most corporeal and essential. As Tuan notes, the necessity to tether space to the subject begins with the work of the body:

What does it mean to be in command of space, to feel at home in it? It means that the objective reference points in space, such as landmarks and the cardinal positions, conform with the intention and the coordinates of the human body. (Tuan, 1977 p.36)

But when presented with a spatiality of the night, coordinates dissolve along with the situatedness of a stable, and by implication, intentional perspective.

...the points of nocturnal space do not refer to each other as in illuminated space; there is no perspective, they are not situated. There is a swarming of points. (Levinas, 2001 p.53)

Within *The Voyeur*, the hallucinatory repetition of spatial perspectives and descriptions lead to one such nocturnal spatiality in which the ‘cardinal positions’ are lost in the murmurings of images and words.

His mind grew so confused between what he saw with his own eyes and his recollection of the previous scene that he began to muddle right and left himself. (*Voyeur* p.90)

Several times he even had the impression that one of the two men was using the words ‘to the right’ and ‘to the left’ almost by chance – indiscriminately. (*Voyeur* p.105)

Ultimately these styles of expression lead to the presentation of a thoroughly indeterminate spatiality where specificity, ‘place’ or geographic location lose their meanings.

It was no different now from anywhere else. (*Voyeur* p.88)

This is a presentation of an ‘intimacy with the outside which has no location and affords no rest.’ (Blanchot 1989 p.31) At once horrific to the subject, I want to emphasise here that for Robbe-Grillet it is also a space of freedom, an any-space-whatever, liberated from sentimental historicizing and personal attachment^{xxvii}. This is not however to deny moments or knots of intensity in spatial communication (Nancy, 1997). But, ‘grounded’ in an absent and ‘swarming’ spatiality, these can no longer be of the order of attachments or properties of subjects, individual possessions. Rather, they are singularities marked by finitude, inhering as moments of vulnerability and disorientation (Harrison, 2007a; Libertson, 1982). This is a generous sociality beyond the name, a spatial intimacy which, as noted by Bataille, is characterised by a ‘passion of an absence of individuality.’ (Bataille, 2001 p.50)

A: What is your name?

X: It doesn't matter. (Robbe-Grillet, 1962 p.99)

The literary critic Stephen Heath writes that Robbe-Grillet '[e]vades the question of the other' (1972 p.95-109). Indeed, studying the visualities of Robbe-Grillet we can appreciate this criticism. However, I would argue that this portrayal is not entirely accurate. It is a different kind of sociality and community that is presented here, one not based on historical and discursive recognition and intentional relationality^{xxviii}. One cannot claim these texts to be a-social. As mentioned previously, there are no 'characters' in Robbe-Grillet's text, but *there are* people, singularities, events, figures which we are open upon. As Ann Jefferson notes,

The man's importance lies not in what he represents, but in his appeal, and the narrator's function is not to name him but to respond to that appeal. (Jefferson, 1980 p.66)

Character is no longer important as a kind of representation, and instead, its value consists now in its existence as a form of communication. (*ibid.* p.67)

We can start to see a different kind of spatial ethic – as a positive aspect to the nauseating spatialities expressed – working against the appropriating drives of a subject in which figures can begin to communicate spatially, without historical recognition, in the finite experiences they may share. This spatiality and spacing of a community outside-the-subject has been taken up from Bataille origins by Nancy (for example see Nancy 1991 and, especially in the context of 'landscape', 2005 pp.51-62; for a series of expositions within geography, see: Popke, 2003; Harrison, 2007a; and the 'subjunctive' subjectivity traced through open spatialities in Dubow, 2004).

The subject as autonomous project, with its naturalised forms of linguistic appropriation of space (its 'subject-as-measure'), and stability is erased. But rather than nothing remaining, we are left with two things. The *experience* of this erasure which is communicated to us; and the *singularities* and *intensities* that we are now open upon at the surface of the present. In many ways what remains after the subject through this particular species of spatial experience is still to be written and developed. For example, Nancy has developed the following question: 'behind the theme of the individual, but beyond it, lurks the question of singularity. What is *a* body, *a* face, *a* voice, *a* death, *a* writing – not indivisible, but singular?' (Nancy, 1991 p.6; see also Nancy, 2002 pp.5-10) Given that one of its aspects is the experience of finitude which 'exists' only in its passing, perhaps what is required for its communication is greater experimentation with these languages and spatialities (Nancy, 2001 pp.xv-xvi & pp.33-4), and, following Nancy, greater value placed on the efficacy and force of literature as a communicative medium.

In summary, Robbe-Grillet's novels, in the proliferation of perspectives, their hallucinatory repetition and difference, create affects in both the 'protagonists' of the novels, and in the readers themselves. The nauseating spatialities express a loss of orientation and control – which at the same time cripples the ability to name and recognise, or better, to *familiarize* spatial experience. This is destructive of the personal subject that would unthinkingly appropriate these spaces – in which space would anthropomorphically measure up to the human. But it also opens, in its erasure, a spatiality of singularities and intensities that are vulnerable, finite and that 'share' this exposure. These novels thus speak to geographers attending to the visceral and affective registers of spatial experience, particularly through their presentation of the *force* of spatial experience.

Conclusion

Communicating finitude – “Outside, it is snowing”

I want to conclude this exploration of the spatialities of Robbe-Grillet by analysing the title sentence of this paper, taken from *In The Labyrinth*. In this final exegesis I will retrace and return to the singularities and style of Robbe-Grillet. I also want to develop and 'present' the sense of finitude alluded to above. The communication of this experience of finitude is something that I feel arises from the geographic presentations in his literature – presentations of anonymous spatialities that, in their superficial indifference to the subject, render visible a desire to have done with anthropocentric perspectives.

It has been noted that an anonymous, indifferent 'relation' to space un-moors the subject – the surfaces of landscapes unfurling the paradoxical senses and directions disruptive of identities, names, coordination. Now, the anonymous spatialities of Robbe-Grillet, in their presentation of the *there is* of space, are nowhere greater condensed than in those sparse descriptions such as,

Outside, it is snowing. (*Labyrinth* p.8)

Perhaps this sentence is the purest, or most classical, example of what is communicated by the name Robbe-Grillet. Firstly, this sentence produces a perspective. We are told of an outside. But this outside, perhaps a view through a window, remains undefined. If the 'outside' here is a landscape it is not a formalised or well defined one. This positioning also indirectly implies an 'inside'. But given Robbe-Grillet's insistence that the only reality is the world present(ed) upon us, we have to say, as a reader, that what

is not present in this landscape-image *is not there* – there is no inside. Alongside this the perspective given is so loose and open-ended that there is actually an absence of a definite ground that could act as a locatable perspective for a given character-subject. Thus we are taken ‘outside’ of an inside that would be the possibility of an ‘interiority’, of a located subject-position. The space of this sentence is then, already, an ‘any-space-whatever’: a spatial ‘preposition that has no position of its own and is [therefore] available for every position’ (Nancy, 2001 p.62). Robbe-Grillet’s literature thus acts as a kind of pedagogy to these kinds of anti-foundational spatial encounters, open to non-human and non-essentialist frames, which it has been the concern of this paper to explicate.

Further, the sentence is emphatically in the present tense. This affirms that what is given and presented – what we read – is, as in experience, *in the act of happening*. Now, if one couldn’t position a subject in relation to the ‘location’ of this ‘any-space-whatever’, perhaps it can be achieved temporally? After all, the sentence, by the fact that it is on a certain page describing a current state of affairs, holds open the possibility for framing it within a linear historical narrative whose direction might reflect the intentions and destiny of a stable subject. It may not have snowed before this articulation, and later, perhaps, the snow will melt. However, in this experience now we can only remark that outside, it is snowing. Furthermore, the use of complex non-linear series disrupts the familiar procedure of placing different ‘nows’ into a sensible chronology.

Outside it is raining, outside in the rain one has to walk with head bent, hand shielding eyes that peer ahead nevertheless, a few yards ahead, a few yards of wet asphalt; outside it is cold, the wind blows between the bare black branches; the wind blows among the leaves, sweeping whole boughs into a swaying motion, swaying, swaying, that throws its shadow on the white roughcast of the walls. Outside the sun is shining, there is not a tree, not a bush to give shade, one has to walk in the full sunlight, hand shielding eyes that look ahead, a few yards ahead only, a few yards of dusty asphalt where the wind traces parallels, curves and spirals. (*Labyrinth* p.7)

Finally, what is happening? It is ‘snowing’. The anonymous, impersonal nature of this spatiality is rendered by its detachment from an ‘author’ or ‘subject’ – it goes on irrespective of the utterance. Through its bare registration, which nevertheless issues from an (indeterminate) perspective, the notions of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ (and the possibility of their separation) are complicated (Robbe-Grillet, 1989 pp.143-156; Deleuze, 2005 p.7) – a problematic which lies at the heart of geographical ‘narratives’ of spatial experience. Robbe-Grillet’s distinctiveness however is, again, to move beyond the taken-for-granted position of the subject. We could frame the spatiality here through the ontological enquiries into the *there is* of Levinas who writes,

The indeterminateness of this ‘something is happening’ is not the indeterminateness of a subject and does not refer to a substantive. Like the third person pronoun in the impersonal form of a verb, it designates not the uncertainly known author of an action, but the characteristic of this action itself which somehow has no author. This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable ‘consummation’ of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is*, The *there is*, inasmuch as it resists a personal form, is ‘being in general.’ (Levinas, 2001 p.52)

It was noted above that if viewed from a window this ‘landscape’ of snow could not be defined. Indeed the light filtered through snow does not produce definitive lines, planes, depths. It disturbs the clear boundaries of things, buildings, roads etc. Echoing the many ways in which vision fails in Robbe-Grillet’s novels, its indistinct spirals and the blur of its infinite particles tend towards a smudged painting-canvas lacking in the distinctions and discontinuities with which one might coordinate oneself. Indeed, for Robbe-Grillet, a landscape never really has more than two dimensions.

Instead of the spectacular perspectives which these rows of houses ought to display, there is only a meaningless criss-cross of lines, and the snow that falls continuously, removing all depth from the landscape as if this blurred view were a badly painted *trompe-l’oeil* on a flat wall. (*Labyrinth* p.12)

Turning to the medium itself we find that, as with sand on a beach, one has a spatiality that allows for inscriptions, traces. But these auto-erase, through the medium itself, making the trace at turns both possible and impossible: it is a ‘grammatological’ landscape. The discernments, traces and inscriptions that constitute a perspective can only exist in the surface of the present, they can only have a finite existence. Crucially, these ‘signs’ do not necessarily add-up: ‘[t]he significations of the world around us are no more than partial, provisional, even contradictory, and always contested.’ (*ibid.* p.141; see also Dewsbury *et al.* 2002). The inscriptions and discernments that would tentatively constitute a subject-perspective are not then derivative from the apparently stable ‘psychologism’ of an *a priori* intentional self. Rather, in their shifting forms, they point to the radical *finitude* of any-given-perspective or trace over a landscape. Reading his novels therefore communicates the visceral spatial *affects* associated with a kind of irreducible ‘non-relationality’ (Harrison, 2007a); and they do this without a closure that would attempt to ‘recover’ this horrific exposure by framing it, for example, as tragedy (Robbe-Grillet, 1989 pp.49-75). In articulating the affects and percepts of this kind of landscape and its distinctive spatiality we therefore have undertaken an exploration of the work of writing in (de)constituting landscapes and subjects, not just in relation to notions of landscape as

(social) text, but rather in the mode of experience, exposure, and its particular logic of communication, spatiality and subjectivity.

Operating solely in the spaces of the present, Robbe-Grillet's subjects cannot exist outside of the articulations, inscriptions and signs that they emit or receive, like figures or segments on a landscape-canvas that only has absence beyond its surface. There is a profoundly superficial interaction between these novels and the theory of statements, the spacing of language operating on the surface, to be found in Foucault's works. There, one does not peer behind the surface of a statement to explore the 'treasure of intentions and meanings' that a subject might hide behind a name (Foucault, 1997b pp.ix-xix, 2000a). Instead of this psychological depth, the subject appears as a finite constituted form alongside the statements uttered. In his novels, Robbe-Grillet leaves us with inscriptions, traces of figures, harbouring nothing secure behind them, not even their history. Traces marked over landscapes of the night, with as little stability as a line drawn in the sand (Foucault, 2000b).

These traces or signs (discernments) that we produce point to nothing 'behind' them. Robbe-Grillet's spatialities 'present' finitude: the void inhering through the inscription. We have then an open, superficial landscape which is no longer discrete, possessed, nor reflective of the depth of a certain (human) subject-perspective. Exposed to these distinctive spatialities, 'constructed' through a literature of spatio-grammatical experimentation in erasure and finitude, there is nevertheless something created, an 'experience' and 'communication' of an 'any-space-whatever' which, in rising to this surface presence, bears us unto space and finitude. It is a shared erasure.

The footprints of the late passer-by who is walking past the houses with head bent, from one end of the rectilinear street to the other, appear one by one in the even surface of the snow, now intact again, and into which they already sink half an inch at least. And behind him the snow at once begins to cover the hobnailed pattern of the soles, slowly reconstituting the original whiteness of the crunched-out shape, restoring its grained, velvety, fragile surface, fading out the sharp edges, blurring the outline more and more and finally filling in the whole depression so that there is no perceptible difference in level with the surrounding areas, and the continuity is re-established, and the whole surface is even again, intact and unimpaired. (*Labyrinth* p.64)

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the funding from *The States of Guernsey Department for Further Education*. Also, many thanks to Dr. JD Dewsbury, Dr. C Rolfe, Richard Carter-White, James Ash and Naomi Millner. The paper was much improved thanks to the comments of the referees. During the process of revision and correction for this paper Robbe-Grillet passed away on 18th February 2008.

References

- Abbott HP, 2002 *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, (Cambridge University Press)
- Armes R, 1981 *The Films of Alain Robbe-Grillet*, (John Benjamins BV: Amsterdam)
- Badiou A, 2002 *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, (Verso: London)
- Barnes T & Duncan JS (eds.), 1992 *Writing Worlds: Discourse, text and metap[hor] in the representation of landscape*, (Routledge: London)
- Barthes R, 1972 *Writing Degree Zero*, (Hill & Wang)
- Barthes R, 1975a *The Pleasure of the Text*, (Hill and Wang)
- Barthes R, 1975b *S/Z*, (Jonathan Cape: London)
- Bataille G, 1973 *Literature and Evil*, (Calder & Boyars: London)
- Bataille G, 1985 *Visions of Excess, selected writings, 1927-1939*, (University of Minnesota Press)
- Bataille G, 1988 *Inner Experience*, (SUNY Press)
- Bataille G, 2000 *On Nietzsche*, (Athlone Press: London)
- Bataille G, 2001 *Theory of Religion*, (Zone Books: New York)
- Berger J, 1986 *Ways of Seeing*, (BBC & Penguin Books)
- Blanchot M, 1982 'The clarity of fiction', in *The Sirens' Song: selected essays by Maurice Blanchot*, edited by Gabriel Josipovici (The Harvester Press) pp.207-212
- Blanchot M, 1988 *The Unavowable Community*, (Station Hill Press)
- Blanchot M, 1989 *The Space of Literature*, (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, London)
- Blanchot M, 1995 *The Work of Fire*, (Stanford University Press)
- Bogue R, 1984 'Meaning and Ideology in Robbe-Grillet's Topologie d'une cité fantôme', *Modern Language Studies* vol. 14(1): 33-46
- Bogue R, 2003 *Deleuze on Cinema*, (Routledge; London)
- Bourdieu P, 2000 *The Field of Cultural Production*, (Polity Press)
- Brée G, 1983 *Twentieth-Century French Literature: 1920-1970*, (University of Chicago Press)
- Butler J, 2001 'Giving an Account of Oneself', *Diacritics*, vol.31(4): 22-40
- Canetti E, 1982 *Kafka's Other Trial: The Letters to Felice*, (Penguin)
- Carrabino V, 1974 *The phenomenological novel of Alain Robbe-Grillet*, (CEM: Parma)
- Céline LF, 2004 *Journey to the End of the Night*, (Calder: London)
- Cosgrove D, 1985 'Prospect, perspective and the evolution of the landscape idea', *Trans. Inst. Br. Geogr.* Vol.10(1): 45-62
- Cosgrove D & Daniels S, (eds.) 1989 *The Iconography of landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, (Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography: Cambridge University Press)
- Crag M & Thrift N, (eds.) 2000 *Thinking Space*, (Routledge: London)
- Crary J, 2001 *Suspensions of Perception: attention, spectacle, and modern culture*, (MIT Press: Cambridge)
- Davidson J, 2000a 'A phenomenology of fear: Merleau-Ponty and agoraphobic life-worlds', *Sociology of Health & Illness*, vol.22(5): 640-660
- Davidson J, 2000b '...the world was getting smaller': women, agoraphobia and bodily boundaries', *Area* vol.32(1): 31-40
- Davidson J, 2003 'Putting on a face': Sartre, Goffman, and agoraphobic anxiety in social space', *Environment and Planning D*, vol.21(1): 107-122
- Davis C, 1996 *Levinas: an introduction*, (Polity Press)
- Deleuze G, 1991 *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, (Columbia University Press: New York)
- Deleuze G, 1999 *Foucault*, (Athlone Press: London)
- Deleuze G, 2003a *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, (Continuum: London)
- Deleuze G, 2003b *The Logic of Sense*, (Continuum: London)
- Deleuze G, 2005a *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, (Continuum: London)
- Deleuze G, 2005b *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, (Continuum: London)

- Deleuze G & Guattari F, 2003a *Kafka: toward a minor literature*, (University of Minnesota Press)
- Deleuze G & Guattari F, 2003b *What is Philosophy?*, (Verso: London)
- Derrida J, 1991 'Signature, Event, Context', in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (ed.) Peggy Kamuf (Columbia University Press: New York) pp.80-111
- Derrida J, 1993 *Aporias*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford California)
- Derrida J, 1997 *Of Grammatology*, (Johns Hopkins University Press)
- Derrida J, 1998 *Archive Fever: a Freudian impression*, (University of Chicago Press)
- Derrida J, 2004 *Writing and Difference*, (Routledge: London)
- Dewsbury JD, 2000 'Performativity and the event: enacting a philosophy of difference', *Environment & Planning D*, vol.18(4): 473-496
- Dewsbury JD, 2003 'Witnessing Space: knowledge without contemplation.' *Environment & Planning A*, vol.35(11): 1907-1932
- Dewsbury JD, Harrison P, Rose M, Wylie J, 2002 'Enacting Geographies', *Geoforum*, vol.33(4): 437-440
- Dubow J, 2004 'The mobility of thought: Reflections on Benjamin and Blanchot', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol.6(2): 216-228
- Foucault M, 1983 *This is not a Pipe*, (University of California Press)
- Foucault M, 1996 *Foucault Live: collected interviews, 1961-1984*, (Semiotext(e): New York)
- Foucault M, 1997a *Foucault/Blanchot*, (Zone Books: New York)
- Foucault M, 1997b *The Birth of the Clinic: an archaeology of medical perception*, (Routledge: London)
- Foucault M, 2000a *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (Routledge: London)
- Foucault M, 2000b *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the human sciences*, (Routledge: London)
- Freud S, 2002 *The 'Wolfman' and other cases*, (Penguin Classics)
- Freud S, 2003 *The Uncanny*, (Penguin Classics)
- Haraway DJ, 2004 *The Haraway Reader*, (Routledge: New York)
- Harrison P, 2007a 'Corporeal Remains. Vulnerability, proximity and living-on after the end of the world', *Environment & Planning A*, vol.40 (2): 423-445
- Harrison P, 2007b "'How shall I say it...? Relating the nonrelational.'", *Environment & Planning A*, vol. 39(3): 590-608
- Harvey J, 2006 'Fiction in the present tense', *Textual Practice*, vol.20 (1): 71-98
- Heath S, 1972 *The Nouveau Roman: a study in the practice of writing*, (Elek: London)
- Heidegger M, 1959 *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, (Yale University Press)
- Heidegger M, 2003 *Being and Time*, (Blackwell: Oxford)
- Howells C, 1999 *Derrida: deconstruction from phenomenology to ethics*, (Polity Press)
- James I, 2006 *The Fragmentary Demand: An introduction to the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Stanford University Press)
- Jameson F, 1976 'Modernism and its Repressed: Robbe-Grillet as Anti-Colonialist', *Diacritics*, vol.6 (2): 7-14
- Jay M, 1994 *Downcast Eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought*, (Centennial Book)
- Jefferson A, 1980 *The nouveau roman and the poetics of fiction*, (Cambridge University Press)
- Kojève A, (1980) *An Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: lectures on the phenomenology of spirit*, (Cornell University Press)
- Lane J F, 2002 'The Stain, The Impotent Gaze and the Theft of *Jouissance*: Towards a Žižekian Reading of Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie*', *French Studies*, vol.56 (2): 193-206
- Latour B, 1999 *Pandora's Hope: essays on the reality of science studies*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge Mass.)
- Latour B, 2005 *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford)
- Levinas E, 2001 *Existence and Existents*, (Duquesne University Press: Pennsylvania)
- Libertson J, 1982 *Proximity: Levinas, Blanchot, Bataille and Communication*, (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers: London)

- Malabou C & Derrida J, 2004 *Counterpath; travelling with Jacques Derrida*, (Stanford University Press)
- McCormack D, 2003 'An event of geographical ethics in spaces of affect', *Trans. Inst. Br. Geogr.* NS Vol.28: 488-507
- Merleau-Ponty M, 1962 *Phenomenology of Perception*, (Routledge: London)
- Merleau-Ponty M, 1997 *The Visible and the Invisible*, (NorthWestern University Press: Evanston)
- Miller J, 1993 *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, (Harper Collins)
- Moore HT, 1969 *Twentieth Century French Literature*, (Heinemann: London)
- Nancy JL, 1991 *The Inoperative Community*, (University of Minnesota Press)
- Nancy JL, 1997 *The Sense of the World*, (University of Minnesota Press)
- Nancy JL, 2001 *Being Singular Plural*, (Stanford University Press)
- Nancy JL, 2005 *The Ground of the Image*, (Fordham University Press)
- Nash C, 1996 'Reclaiming vision: looking at landscape and the body', *Gender, Place and Culture*, vol.3: 149-169
- Nietzsche F, 2003 *The Gay Science*, (Cambridge University Press)
- Olsson G, 2007 *Abysmal: A critique of cartographic reason*, (University of Chicago Press)
- Pile S & Thrift N (eds.), 1995 *Mapping the Subject: geographies of cultural transformation*, (Routledge: London)
- Popke JE, 2003 'Poststructuralist ethics: subjectivity, responsibility and the space of community', *Progress in Human Geography* vol.27(3): 298-316
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1962 *Last Year at Marienbad*, (Grove Press: New York)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1965 *The Voyeur*, (Calder Books)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1978 *Topology of a Phantom City*, (Calder Books: London)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1984 *Recollections of the Golden Triangle*, (Calder: London)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1987a *La Maison de Rendez-vous & Djinn*, (Grove Press: New York)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1987b *The Erasers*, (Calder: London)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1988 *Ghosts in the Mirror*, (Calder: London)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1989 *For a New Novel: essays on fiction*, (Northwestern University Press: Illinois)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1996 *La Belle Captive: A Novel*, (University of California Press)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 1997 *Jealousy*, (Calder Publications: New York)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 2000 *In The Labyrinth*, (Calder Publications: New York)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 2001 *Le Voyageur*, (Seuil: Points)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 2003 *Repetition – a novel*, (Grove Press: New York)
- Robbe-Grillet A, 2005 *Préface à une vie d'écrivain*, (France Culture: Seuil)
- Rodaway P, 1994 *Sensuous Geographies: Body, sense and place*, (Routledge: London)
- Roland LD, 1993 *Women in Robbe-Grillet: A Study in Thematics and Diegetics*, (Peter Lang: New York)
- Rose G, 1993 *Feminism and Geography: the limits of geographical knowledge*, (Cambridge: Polity Press)
- Rose G, 2001 'Geography as a science of observation: the landscape, the gaze and masculinity' in Agnew J et al. *Human Geography: an essential anthology*, (Blackwell: Oxford) pp.341-350
- Rose M, 2002 'Landscape and labyrinths', *Geoforum* vol.33: 455-467
- Rose M & Wylie J, 2006 'Guest Editorial: Animating Landscape', *Environment and Planning D* vol.24 pp.475-479
- Safranski R, (1999) *Martin Heidegger: between good and evil*, (Harvard University Press)
- Sartre JP, 1973 *Politics and Literature: signature § 13*, (Calder & Boyars)
- Sartre JP, 1978 *What is Literature?*, (Methuen)
- Sartre JP, 2000 *Nausea*, (Penguin)
- Segrott J & Doel M, 2004 'Obsessive-Compulsive disorder as spatial practice', *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol.5 (4): 597-614
- Simmel G, 1997 *Simmel On Culture: selected writings*, Frisby D, & Featherstone M, (eds.) (Sage: London)
- Strauss J, 2000 'After Death', *Diacritics*, vol.30 (3): 90-104
- Surya M, 2002 *Georges Bataille, an intellectual biography*, (Verso: London)
- Sylvester D, 2002 *The Brutality of Fact: interviews with Francis Bacon*, (Thames & Hudson)

- Thrift NJ, 2000 'Afterwords', *Environment & Planning D*, vol.18(2): 213-255
- Tuan YF, 1977 *Space and Place: the perspective of experience*, (Edward Arnold Publishers: London)
- Tuan YF, 1979 'Thought and Landscape: the eye and the mind's eye', in Meinig DW (ed.), 1979 *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford) pp.89-102
- Tuan YF, 2001 'The desert and I: A study in affinity', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, vol.40 (1): 7-16
- Van Wert WF, 1977 *The film career of Alain Robbe-Grillet*, (George Prior Publishers: London)
- Vernon J, 1973 *The Garden and the Map: Schizophrenia in Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture*, (University of Illinois Press)
- Vidler A, 2001 *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture*, (MIT Press: London)
- White E, 2004 *Genet*, (Vintage UK)
- Wylie J, 2002 'An essay on ascending Glastonbury Tor', *Geoforum*, vol.32: 441-54
- Wylie J, 2005 'A single day's walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path', *Trans Inst Br Geogr*. NS Vol.30: 234-247
- Wylie J, 2006 'Depths and folds: on landscape and the gazing subject', *Environment and Planning D* vol.24(4): 519-535
- Wylie J, 2007 *Landscape*, (Routledge: London)

Filmography

Last Year at Marienbad, (1961) Director, Alan Resnais

ⁱ This landscape, remaining at the surface of the visible, is opposed to Tuan's 'biographical' methodology which urges the geographer 'to see *from* the landscape *to* the values and pathos of a folk'. (Tuan, 1979 p.93).

ⁱⁱ On critiques of phenomenology see Howells, 1999, Davis, 1996; on the relations between Robbe-Grillet and the theoretical 'milieu' of Foucault, Barthes, Blanchot and others see Miller, 1993 ch.5; for a broader socio-economic outline of the twentieth century French context in which he wrote see Brée, 1983.

ⁱⁱⁱ We can turn here to Tuan's work in which he explores the thoughts of Merleau-Ponty: "Spatial prepositions are necessarily anthropocentric...As Merleau-Ponty put it: 'When I say that an object is *on* a table, I always mentally put myself either in the table or in the object...Stripped of this anthropological association, the word *on* is indistinguishable from the word *under* or the word *beside*.'" (Tuan, 1977 p.45)

^{iv} These dates refer to the original French publications. For the remainder of the paper, when citing passages from the novels I will use the following shorthand: *Voyeur, Jealousy, Labyrinth*. The page numbers refer to the English language publications, respectively: Robbe-Grillet (1965, 1997, 2000).

^v For example, a selection of novels: Robbe-Grillet (1965, 1978, 1984, 1987a, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2003); Literary criticism, Robbe-Grillet (1988, 1989, 2001, 2005); Screenplay/Cine-Novels, Robbe-Grillet (1962); and a range of films – for details see van Wert, 1977; Armes, 1981.

^{vi} See the following for an account: Robbe-Grillet, 1988, 2005 ch.21, 22.

^{vii} See also the example of Francis Bacon, and the destruction of 'clarity by clarity' found in the 'mechanical precision' of newspaper texts in certain of his paintings that work against the production of a 'figuration' or a 'story' (Deleuze, 2003a p.6). Also, for Robbe-Grillet vision is less laden with, and less productive of, emotional 'interiority' and depth than other senses (see Deleuze, 2005b p.12).

^{viii} For example, the omnipotent storyteller would give the reader the knowledge that would be impossible in experience (i.e. that the hand is in fact holding a bloody knife, and that the individual is thinking about hiding it).

^{ix} On the intertextuality between the *form* of 'scenes' in Robbe-Grillet's novels, screenplays and films see the introductory essay in van Wert (1977). Incidentally, the series of Magritte 'landscape' paintings such as *La Condition Humaine* (1933, 1935) and others, display a profound communication with the sense and experience of landscape in Robbe-Grillet's texts and films. I should also note here that Magritte and Robbe-Grillet published a book together (Robbe-Grillet, 1996).

^x In this context we can remark on the painted shadows of the figures in *Last Year at Marienbad* (van Wert 1977).

^{xi} For Deleuze this movement of description operates a dual seriality, between words and visibilities (2003b pp.36-41). Commenting on this interpretation, see Robbe-Grillet, 2001 pp.263-272.

^{xii} For further reflections on the logic and spatiality of sliding and slippage, or *glissement*, see Libertson, 1982 pp.9-30 and Derrida, 2004 ch.9.

^{xiii} One could think here of the blurred and scratched ‘figures’ that populate the ‘landscapes’ of Francis Bacon. For example, see the Bacon paintings: *Figure in Landscape* (1945), *Figure in a Landscape* (1952), and the texts: Deleuze, 2003a; Sylvester, 2002. On the necessity for the constantly vulnerable body-subject to grasp, compose, and achieve an ‘unthinking rapport’ with a potentially *unheimlich* spatiality, see the excellent work on spatial pathologies developed by Davidson (2000a, 2000b, 2003; see also Segrott & Doel, 2004). For example, quoting Merleau-Ponty, Davidson notes: ‘The ‘synthesis’ of space by the subject is ‘a task that always has to be performed afresh’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.140), a (usually unconscious) project of mediation that can never be completed once and for all. *Only* by means of this ‘composure’ of space do we come to distinguish ourselves.’ (2000a p.645) In this paper I focus on the forms of ‘composure’ such as linguistic and visual appropriation of spaces in their dual roles as productive of historical and geographical positioning. For a wider context of the history of spatial pathologies see: Vidler, 2001; Freud 2002, 2003; Simmel, 1997.

^{xiv} See Levinas on the *there is* (2001 pp.45-60); And also Robbe-Grillet, (1989 pp.15-24) where he talks in similar terms. We should note too that Levinas mentions the possibility of literature producing experience of the *there is*— particularly the ‘naturalistic’ literature of authors inspirational for Robbe-Grillet’s style: Zola, Flaubert, Maupassant (Levinas, 2001 pp.54-5; Robbe-Grillet, 2001).

^{xv} The following description of Kafka’s writing could equally apply to Robbe-Grillet. “The visible world of his novels is certainly for him the real world, and what is behind (if there *is* something) seems without value, faced with the manifest nature of objects, gestures, words, etc. The hallucinatory effect derives from their extraordinary clarity and not from mystery or mist. Nothing is more fantastic, ultimately than precision. Perhaps Kafka’s staircases lead *elsewhere*, but they are *there*, and we look at them, step by step, following the detail of the banisters and the risers. Perhaps the grey walls hid something, but it is on them that the memory lingers, on their cracked whitewash, their crevices. Even what the hero is searching for vanishes before the obstinacy of his pursuit, his trajectories, his movements; they alone are made apparent, they alone are made real.” (Robbe-Grillet, 1989 p.165; see also see also Canetti, 1982 and Deleuze & Guattari, 2003a for commentary on the destruction of symbols and metaphor in Kafka and the deterritorialising force of repetition on the ‘regime of signification’.)

^{xvi} The key work in this juncture is the Resnais film *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). For Deleuze’s analysis of the film in the context of neo-realism, see Deleuze, 2005b pp.98-130.

^{xvii} We would have to site the elliptical dots of Céline (2004) in this context as a particularly precise grammatical example of this ‘failure’ to achieve closure or totalization characteristic of a modern, fragmentary and finite subjectivity divested of the intentionality and purpose of a teleological project.

^{xviii} The eye is the organ that can most express indifference and impersonality (perhaps because of its very capacity to communicate in a personal manner). New identity-measures such as optical scans will no doubt further the destruction of the ‘personal’ aspect of the eye – coding it into even more anonymous relations (angles, width, colour bands, geometric patterns, random spots etc.). For more on the history of the sociality of vision see Jay (1994) and Crary (2001), and on the destruction and failure of the visible, Bataille (1985).

^{xix} On this absence that paradoxically makes possible these articulations, see the footnote in Blanchot, 1982 p.212; and on this type of ‘narrative voice’ that ‘has no place in the work’ without thereby hanging over it as a ‘superior transcendence’ see Blanchot 1988 p.xii). Incidentally, at other times, the author-narrator makes a perspective impossible by his presence. For example, in *Topology of a Phantom City*, Robbe-Grillet’s head of curly hair halts a description (Robbe-Grillet, 1978 p.28): ‘Unfortunately this area is, to tell the truth, usually absent, like a sort of blank, uncharted space...so that the precise meaning of the gestures and objects located in it is not clearly discernible, apparently because of the narrator’s head coming right in front, its thick, curly hair obscuring the view.’

^{xx} Although it should be noted there are several differences at work between Robbe-Grillet and Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts on vision. For Robbe-Grillet vision is neither necessarily *reversible* (for Robbe-Grillet we look at the world, the world does not look back), nor a constant human capability. Merleau-Ponty remains with the subject-object distinction as end states, admittedly to be achieved rather than given. Robbe-Grillet could be seen to un-work this movement, looking instead at the deconstitutive processes at work in landscape and vision and as such opening up non-human spatialities.

^{xxi} We could give the following examples: a place being frightening; a tree as old and tired; a dusty, dark, avaricious ledger immediately suggestive of a miserly accountant etc. In relation to landscape, we can then give an example from Robbe-Grillet: ‘To identify in this way my own melancholy with that which I attribute to a landscape, to admit this link as more than superficial, is thereby to acknowledge a certain predestination for my present life...’ (Robbe-Grillet, 1989 p.56) In all their apparent inconsequentiality these adjectival/metaphoric projections (which are limited in Robbe-Grillet’s texts) both reflect an essentialised streaming of the human into space, and also unveil a hidden horror at the indifference and the *unnameable* of spaces, figures, objects (Blanchot, 1989).

^{xxiii} This is how Robbe-Grillet indirectly characterises his novels in his autobiographical piece *Ghosts in the Mirror* (1988 p.36)

^{xxiii} ‘Objectivity in the ordinary sense of the word – total impersonality of observation – is all too obviously an illusion.’ (Robbe-Grillet, 1989 p.18)

^{xxiv} See also the critical work on Foucault by Blanchot (Foucault, 1997a); and especially Foucault’s short monograph on Magritte (1983). For Foucault’s relation to Robbe-Grillet, one of his favourite novelists, see Foucault, 1996 ch.48; Miller, 1993.

^{xxv} As mentioned previously, Robbe-Grillet’s relation to Sartre is a complicated and contested one. Let it be noted however that the sense of nausea developed here is divorced from the precise sense articulated in Sartre’s novel of that name, particularly as regards the existential project of freedom and commitment that it carries. It moves closer towards the sense of affect and percept developed by Deleuze & Guattari 2003b.

^{xxvi} This is not to deny the multiple ways in which a body-subject composes a space. For example through the hand, the foot, and the other senses of touch, sound, smell etc. (Rodaway, 1994). But, again, to focus on Robbe-Grillet is also to concentrate on vision (see Deleuze, 2005b p.12) – a focus which for many is a key figure of the sense of ‘landscape’ (see Cosgrove, 1985; Cosgrove & Daniels, 1989; Nash, 1996; Wylie, 2006).

^{xxvii} In this way, compare the following statement of Bataille: ‘How can we not immediately see, in history itself, an evil greater than oppression?’ (cited in Surya, 2002, p.380)

^{xxviii} For a provocative series of ethical reflections in this vein see Butler, 2001; Libertson, 1982.