

## The Making of an Avant-Garde: Tel Quel

# Approaches to Semiotics

113

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# The Making of an Avant-Garde: Tel Quel

*by*

Niilo Kauppi

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*To my parents,  
Ellen and Risto*



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## **Translator's note**

Existing translations of cited passages have been used whenever possible. Bracketed English translations following cited passages from untranslated works are mine. Very short quotations in the running text appear only in English (usually my translation) with page references to the French sources. Well-known French terms from linguistics, philosophy, and literary criticism may appear in italics, followed in brackets by accepted English equivalents (mostly taken from English translations of works in these fields). Terminology relative to the French education system for which no satisfactory English equivalent exists may appear italicized, with explanatory comments by the author in a note at the end of the text.

Anne R. Epstein



## Introduction

For intellectuals, a new historical situation is always a challenge: as both products and agents of socio-historical processes, they must improvise in order to accommodate it.<sup>1</sup> In the French intellectual world of the 1960s, the social conditions existed for the convergence of old avant-gardist traditions (for example, the legacy of authors such as Bataille and Blanchot) and the intellectual field's innovations, mostly in the social and human sciences. Under these circumstances *Tel Quel*, a quarterly review founded by the publishing house Seuil in 1960, could become both a "parody of Surrealism" (Roudinesco 1990: 530) and a new symbolic good - the result of changed conditions.<sup>2</sup>

*Tel Quel* is considered one of the foremost instances of diffusion and legitimation of the French symbolic goods developed in the 1960s. At that time, the watchwords of the new generation were structuralism and poststructuralism (Bourdieu 1988: 122; Pavel 1988). *Tel Quel* contributed to the crystallization of a new style and, as symbolic police, to the creation of new discourses and disciplines (such as semiology and semiotics) in the intellectual and institutional revolution which ensued. The review participated in the transition from Sartre's hegemony to that of the human sciences (*sciences humaines*) (Bourdieu and Passeron 1967: 162-212).

The works of the *Tel Quel* team developed in a period characterized by the expansion of what might be termed an intermediate intellectual culture (Pinto 1992: 99-101). This expansion was tied to important changes in the processes of reproduction of social classes, especially because of the emergence of new social groups: the new *bourgeoisie* and new *petite bourgeoisie* (Bourdieu 1979: 10-31). The main characteristics of this intermediate intellectual culture were its ambiguous relationship to legitimate culture and the formation within it of unstable and fragile positions. As new positions developed in the social class structure, *Tel*

*Quel's* members and collaborators participated in the creation of new positions in the structure of the intellectual field.

These innovations appeared in a context in which the intellectual field was undergoing important changes. The scope of academic production expanded beyond the limits drawn by the peer group. Production became professionalized; a symptom of the modification in the objective relationship between production for peers and large-scale production. This phenomenon can be explained by the transformation of the social characteristics of the producers and particularly by the emergence of *fonctionnaires de lettres* and other institutionalized producers, mostly editors and marginal academics who were simultaneously critics, essayists, and journalists. In terms of diffusion and reception, numerous transformations were at work. Paperback production that attempted to link scholarly and popular culture developed, and in fact, became a condition of possibility for avant-garde productions in this new context (cf., Kauppi 1993: 87-100). This relationship was two-sided: avant-garde productions were counterbalanced financially by omnibus productions; and even more importantly, avant-garde works were published in paperback collections. Publication in paperback more rapidly conferred classic status upon these works, combining exclusivity with sales volume.<sup>3</sup>

Other transformations were taking place in the intermediate sector of the intellectual field. New instances of diffusion and new segments of diffusers emerged, especially through cultural intermediaries such as television, radio, journalism, which led to a "journalization" of the intellectual. With the expansion of higher education, the quantity and quality of the intellectual public changed. In terms of reception structure, a wide public replaced the restricted intellectual public of the interwar period, thereby making financially advantageous publication of works that previously would have been destined for a small audience. Intellectual culture could be updated via attachment to scientific culture (especially to new sciences such as semiology and semiotics).

While the criteria of intellectual excellence were also changing, especially as a result of the differentiation of intellectual labor, the avant-garde ideal remained close to that of the interwar period, with the theoretical essay as



preferred form of expression. The crucial difference between the interwar period and the 1960s is that in this respect in the 1960s theoretical essays were published in paperback form. By combining topicality and timelessness, the theoretical essay opposed both traditional *belles-lettres* and the academic thesis. Through rapid circulation it facilitated creation of effects of anteriority. In theoretical essays, an intellectual could be both literary and scientific: more modern and conceptually more sophisticated than the writers, and more innovative than the academics. Moreover, avant-garde products in the form of theoretical essays could be diffused to a large audience, enabling the intellectuals who produced them to accumulate capital of intellectual fame regardless of the internal criteria of either the literary or university fields.

In the 1950s and 1960s, an important transformation in the dynamics of the French intellectual field took place in the intermediate sector: the sector between scientific culture and literary culture (the poles of the professor and the creator) as well as the sector where the internal legitimation circuits (peers) and external legitimation circuits (the layman public) merged.<sup>4</sup> The relatively rapid structuration of this intermediate space attracted marginals from both the university and literary fields. A growing inter-field exchange allowed agents to accumulate and reutilize capital as new means of social ascension in the initial fields were created. This intermediate sector was the space in which symbolic struggles were the most virulent, and profits and uncertainty the greatest. In this context, *Tel Quel* could present and diffuse avant-garde symbolic goods - paradoxically, those destined for a restricted public - to a relatively large public at a relatively low price.

By combining their positional spaces at the fringes of science (i.e., the human sciences and disciplines such as philosophy) and literature, the members of the review were able to set into motion, through external legitimation circuits, an economy which allowed some intellectuals possessing specific social properties to accumulate capital (especially capital of intellectual fame, the "exchange rate" of which multiplied in this context) with minimal investment and to convert other capital more rapidly than before. Correlatively, the problem of the different temporalities of the field

became crucial, with the two extremes being that of the academic thesis (especially the traditional *doctorat d'état*) and that of the cultural chronicle. The relationship between capital of intellectual fame and other types of capital, namely literary and academic capital became crucial.

The present work will examine the constitution of *Tel Quel*'s multipositionality (Boltanski 1973: 3-26), or function as a geometric locus, as the social creation of a symbolic good that combined all signs of intellectual radicality characteristic of the period. My aim is to analyze *Tel Quel* as a relatively heterogeneous and changing object by exploring in a specific context its constitution, ascension, and decline as an intellectual avant-garde. The methodology to be applied here is an adapted structural constructivism. The main principles of this approach have been articulated by Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., Bourdieu 1966: 865-906; 1971: 49-126; 1984) and more specifically adapted to analysis of French intellectuals by a number of researchers (cf., Boschetti 1988; Charle 1990; Fabiani 1988; Kauppi 1992a: 84-91; Pinto 1987). For the purpose of this study, these instruments of analysis will be used to examine the interactive relations between the literary and university fields in France (and the intermediate space between them); the temporal aspects of different structures ranging from intellectual events to deep structures such as demographic developments; the connections between positions and intellectual productions (especially in relation to the new sciences); and the dialectic between field and specific habitus in the case of the members of *Tel Quel*.<sup>5</sup> The narrative encompasses the period from approximately the second half of the 1950s to the end of the 1980s. Its emphasis will move from social, economic, and political conditions, and from modifications in the structure of the field and its subfields, to the review, its collaborators, and its dominant members - especially its leader, Philippe Sollers. I collected the material upon which this analysis is based during extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the Parisian intellectual milieu from 1986 to 1990. It combines the testimony and retrospective rationalizations of individuals both directly and indirectly involved with *Tel Quel*. To obtain this information, I conducted personal interviews with these individuals, and utilized a wide range of written and

oral sources (television and radio interviews, autobiographical works, etc.).<sup>6</sup>

The evidence provided herein should be read obliquely, as it sheds an indigenous light on the events under study. Some of the light is distant and dim, some near and strong. In both cases, the light is directed by the perceptions of the agents and their positions in the intellectual field. The final product of this research - which is an attempt to translate these other texts into a chosen idiom - is the result of the interplay of sign systems which clash and sometimes contradict one another. My position in relation to the object, although exterior, has been one of shifting otherness: moving from insider's proximity (based on common intellectual positions and cultural references resulting from a French primary, secondary, and higher education) to the distance of a definite outsider - a distance which was especially pronounced during the interviews.



## Chapter I

### The logic of succession

#### 1. Seuil and modifications in the publishers' space

*Things change swiftly . . . in the world of books. Over the last decade everything has been transformed - books, readers and literature*  
(Escarpit 1966: 9).

Éditions du Seuil was well positioned for expansion in the 1940s. Founded in 1935 by Henri Sjöberg, the publishing house Éditions du Seuil had been taken over in 1937 by Paul Flamand and Jean Bardet. Flamand directed publishing while Bardet headed the firm's commercial activities. At the end of World War II, the publishers benefited both from the general disarray and from the fact that a considerable portion of the publishing industry had been compromised by collaboration with the Germans. In 1944, the two men - both of provincial, Catholic, bourgeois origin - had significant financial resources from their families and friends at their disposal,<sup>7</sup> and Seuil flourished (Winock 1975: 240-244).

In 1936, Flamand had met Emmanuel Mounier, the director of the review *Esprit* (founded in 1932). Mounier was then one of the most visible figures on the Parisian intellectual scene. Later the same year, Flamand had presented to him a text Mounier found too exotic. Nevertheless, a friendship between Mounier and Flamand had developed and in 1944, the relationship between Seuil and *Esprit* began. The reorganization of the literary field offered them the opportunity to carry out a "coup": to present something new under exceptional circumstances. From Mounier's perspective Éditions du Seuil seemed the ideal companion, for the director of *Esprit* was anxious to enlarge and develop his book series.<sup>8</sup> Flamand,

## 2 *The logic of succession*

for his part, saw considerable advantage in collaborating with Mounier and *Esprit* because the review seemed likely to attract quality writers to Seuil.

Thus Seuil's second debut began with the creation of the "Esprit" series, which included novels and covered the entire editorial spectrum. This collection rapidly became the core of Seuil's publishing enterprise, to the extent that the house is said to have been in danger of turning into "Éditions Esprit" (Winock 1975: 244). To counter Mounier's influence and guarantee the independence of his publishing house Flamand founded two new series' "Pierres vives" and, at the beginning of the 1950s, "Écrivains de toujours". However, fiction remained the weak point of the enterprise.<sup>9</sup> In 1956, Seuil began publication of the "Écrire" collection, with the intent of promoting provocative literature.

Though financially and administratively independent from Seuil, Mounier's review was located at the same address, Rue Jacob, and indeed, would always have an intellectual hold over the publishing house. Seuil is often identified with left-wing Catholicism and with *Esprit*'s ideology of political commitment. As a result of the cooperation between Seuil and *Esprit*, Flamand himself joined *Esprit*'s editorial board, and Albert Béguin - admirer of Péguy, Mounier's successor as director of the review from 1950 until his death in 1957, and member of the editorial board of *Esprit* - became a member of Seuil's reading committee. Jean-Marie Domenach, Béguin's successor, also became a member of the reading committee. One member of this committee, Francis Jeanson, friend and future biographer of Sartre, acted as the link with *les Temps Modernes*, the editorial board of which he was a member (Boschetti 1988: 149).

*Esprit*, one of the representatives of left-wing Catholicism in the 1930s, and of the third force (i.e., the Catholic and humanist version of socialism beyond capitalism and communism), attracted a new generation of politically committed Catholics after the war (Winock 1975: 107-111). To many, *Esprit* embodied Sartrian political commitment. Seuil became activated during the 1950s, leaning to the left politically and taking clear stands during the Algerian war. Incited by the audacity of some of its editors and by sympathy for the "New Left", as well as by interest in the

human sciences, Seuil created *Tel Quel* and *Sociologie du travail* in 1960. In 1961, Roland Barthes's initiative led to the creation of the review *Communications*. Over the next ten years, a number of book series' and reviews were founded: the collections "Combats", directed by Claude Durand, and "Le champ freudien" in 1967; the reviews *Scilicet*, directed by Jacques Lacan, and *Change*, founded by Jean-Pierre Faye, in 1968; and the review *Poétique*, founded by Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, in 1970. Paperback collections such as "Points" were also established. These investments were made financially possible in part by the success of Giovanni Guareschi's *Le Petit Monde de Don Camillo* (1950), which had sold nearly one million copies by 1966 (Prasteau 1966: 4). In the 1970s, Seuil was the second largest publisher of literature in France.

Seuil occupied an intermediate position within the publishers' space as a whole and also in the subfield of publishing houses targeting the intellectual public which had developed in the postwar era. Seuil combined two production modes: it published works for rapid consumption, as well as slower cycle, avant-garde productions (Bourdieu 1977: 25). Seuil was positioned between the large publishers like Laffont, which invested in short-cycle, relatively quick-profit productions, and publishers such as Éditions du Minuit, with a longer production cycle (Éditions de Minuit published fewer than twenty titles annually during the 1970s). Joining Gallimard at the dominant pole of the subfield and Éditions de Minuit at the dominated pole of the same field, Éditions du Seuil became one of the largest publishers investing in the human sciences. These investments were connected with the institutionalization of the human sciences and the creation of new positions in the intellectual field.

The rise in the total number of copies of books published during the 1960s bears witness to the expansion of the publishing industry: 167,122,000 published in 1960, and 322,489,000 in 1970 (Lough 1978: 383). The 1960s represented a peak period in the history of French publishing (Escarpit 1972: 33; Flower 1983: 131-150). According to the French National Syndicate of Publishers, the publishing industry as a whole grew 26 percent (fixed rate) in volume between 1955 and 1960

(Dumazedier and Hassendorfer 1962: 5). The social conditions for this level of investment included: morphological and demographic modifications in the audience, a growing portion of which was comprised of liberal arts students; generational change, resulting from an influx of new producers into the intellectual field and from the loss of a number of writers during and after the war; structuration of the publishers' space, especially the emergence of new publishing houses in the intermediate position and at the dominated pole of the space (Seuil, Minuit, Seghers, and Julliard, among others); and finally, modifications in France's class structure.

Enrollment in the faculties of letters, one basis for modifications in the symbolic market, doubled during the 1950s, from 35,156 during the 1950-1951 academic year to 73,376 in 1961-1962 (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979: 106; Bourdieu 1988: 248-249). The "democratization" of education led to a rise in the number of female students in the faculties of letters, from 54 percent in 1960 to 63 percent in 1961. The average percentage of female students in all faculties combined was 41 percent. During the 1961-1962 academic year, the occupational background of the parents of 67 percent of the students in the faculties of letters could be classified as follows: 23 percent middle-management, 25.1 percent white-collar professionals and upper management, and 18.9 percent directors of industrial and commercial enterprises. During the 1960s, the number of students in faculties of letters tripled (from 70,000 in 1961 to 200,000 in 1969). The increasing size and importance of this sector of the intellectual public made opposition to the Establishment economically and symbolically profitable.

According to some estimates (Jourdain 1960: 3), during the 1950s the circulation of the largest reviews - notably *la Nouvelle Revue Française* (known as *la Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française* between 1953 and 1959), at the dominant pole of the literary reviews' space, and *les Temps Modernes*, dominant among the intellectual reviews - declined, respectively, from 26,000 to 10,500 and from 15,000 to 9,000. Jean Paulhan, director of *la Nouvelle Revue Française*, was not alarmed, making the drop in readership seem an advantage and choice:



Un déclin des revues? Tant mieux. Quand elle a commencé, *la Nouvelle Revue Française* était lue par 3 Japonais en France et 54 au Japon. 25,000 lecteurs, c'était ridiculement trop. Nous avons voulu décourager les lecteurs indignes d'elle. Même s'il fallait être un peu ennuyeux. Ceux qui restent sont les meilleurs. (Jourdain 1960: 3)

[A decline of the reviews? So much the better. When it started out, *la Nouvelle Revue Française* was read by 3 Japanese people in France and 54 in Japan. 25,000 readers, that's ridiculously high. We wanted to discourage readers who weren't up to par with the review. Even if it meant being a bit tiresome. Those who remain are the best.]

Changing circumstances also lead to changes in presentation as in the case of *Esprit*, which started a new series in November 1957. From a publisher's point of view, low readership of the large reviews could only be due to the fact that there were no longer any that interested the public. This situation created the impetus for renewal. According to the perception categories of certain publishers (in both dominated and intermediate positions in the structure) and other professionals in symbolic goods production (especially cultural journalists), modifications in the quantity as well as the quality of consumers (growth of the intellectual public, rise in the general level of schooling, dispersion of the audiences) had created the social demand for new productions. On a more complex level, relations among different structures of the intellectual field, each having its own temporality, had changed. These changes provided publishing houses in the intermediary position and at the dominated pole with a means to survive by developing an entire range of new productions, with new formulas and images, in the literary as well as university fields. New reviews multiplied. Modifications in the consumer population also resulted in the formation of new organizations for cultural goods distribution supported by an expanding cultural press. The latter in turn helped to transform the circulation of knowledge in the intellectual field.

Beginning in the 1960s, Seuil implemented a conversion strategy to accommodate the changing situation. Traditional sectors were left to

François-Régis Bastide (winner of the Fémina Prize in 1956 and later, French ambassador to U.N.E.S.C.O.) and to Luc Estang,<sup>10</sup> both of whom remained skeptical or cautious with regard to the human sciences. Jean Cayrol and François Wahl took charge of the new formulas. Cayrol, born in Bordeaux in 1910, was the son of a doctor and had a law degree. A writer and librarian, deported to Mauthausen in 1942, he joined Éditions du Seuil as an editorial consultant in 1949.<sup>11</sup> Wahl, *agrégé* in philosophy<sup>12</sup> and close to Barthes and Lacan, joined Seuil in 1957. He was placed in charge of the human sciences section. In the 1960s, he founded collections such as "L'ordre philosophique", "Des travaux", and "Le champ freudien".<sup>13</sup>

Given Seuil's internal split and its position in the publishers' space, Seuil's positional strategy consisted of combining Mounier's personalism and Lacan's psychoanalysis without destroying the house's unity. In this sense, Seuil was very much an old-style, artisanal publishing house:

Elle a toujours cristallisé des images douteuses, contradictoires: progressiste, humaniste, catholique de gauche, avant-gardiste, tiers-mondiste, gauchiste. Une maison comme Minuit n'as pas ce caractère: Jérôme Lindon est plus singulier, plus définissable, plus explicable. Le Seuil est très disparate. Il est le produit très collectif de personnalités qui se combattaient. (Denis Roche 1989: 6-7)

[It had always crystallized uncertain, contradictory images: progressive, humanist, left-wing Catholic, avant-gardist, "Third Worldist", leftist. A house like Minuit doesn't have this character: Jérôme Lindon is more singular, more definable, more explainable. Seuil is very disparate. It is the very collective product of personalities in combat.]

Such an internal structure enabled each editorial consultant, within his or her domain, to prevail somewhat over the publishing house's general policy, and thus reinforce Seuil's personalist facade. However, it also resulted in a certain lack of clarity in Seuil's editorial policy. Editorial consultants' relative independence was due to the multi-investment

orientation of the house - a combination of experimental and consumption publishing (Escarpit 1984: 643). The consultants, known for their personalities, published mainly their friends' works. Seuil's internal structure was relatively less hierarchical than that of the larger publishers (such as the large family firms), reflecting the contradictions of the field as a whole. Seuil's position in the intermediate space allowed it to maintain a certain editorial ethic ("we don't publish just *anything*"), linked above all to the left-wing Catholic image. No right-wing or Catholic integrist texts would be published, and pro-Third-World positions were always taken. The publisher could thus de-emphasize profitability and invest in products characterized by sophisticated popularization, such as the reviews *La Recherche* (1965) and *L'Histoire* (1977).

### *1.1. The new literary collections*

Increased competition, due to the structural modifications of the literary field, incited the publishing houses to create new formulas. The "Écrire" collection was presented as a compromise between a journal and a book series. In it, the first works by writers such as Philippe Sollers, Jean-Pierre Faye, Denis Roche, Pierre Guyotat, Jean-François Josselin, Jacques Coudol, and Boisrouvray, were published. In order to minimize its financial risks, Seuil had created a medium that was a hybrid of book and journal, in which short stories of a few dozen pages could be published. For an editor, the success of the first work of an unknown writer depended largely on luck; and using this new formula or little collection as some called it, minimized the risk, uncertainty and chance involved in publishing a new author. At the same time, it promised the debutant an opportunity to "get a foot in the door". From this collection young writers could move on to the house's regular collection. Given the difficulty of controlling this economy of launching new authors ("Guessing which way to move, that's the key," Wahl 1989: 6), the practice of commissioning works was indirectly favored in the editors' investment strategies and in literary

production models. A few unknown newcomers could be grouped around a young but promising and well-known (that is, already consecrated) author - such as Philippe Sollers in 1958. This leader figure could be used to create an image by presenting a team of authors, or literary group, to the public. If debutants succeeded in making a name for themselves, which in the best of circumstances would contribute to the creation of a myth, the editor could require that the team produce a succession of works written in a similar style or dealing with similar themes.

This unified public image, constructed by critics or commentators making determined and determining judgements, contributed to the construction and production of trademarks different from those of other producers. For the writer, the principal danger in these social constraints was that he or she be locked into an intellectual ghetto. After a literary renewal, a writer might stray from his or her audience and peers or enter a phase of negative fame. At the same time, this type of editorial policy could be coupled with another technique prevalent in the various domains of artistic activity, especially in the visual arts - iconoclasm:

L'appartenance au secteur avancé du champ artistique (les tendances esthétiques constituant ce secteur variant selon le moment historique) apparaît comme le moyen le plus sûr depuis le début du XXe siècle, et comme le moyen le plus rapide, au cours de la période récente, d'atteindre le degré le plus élevé de la visibilité sociale. (Moulin et al. 1985: 96)

[Since the beginning of the twentieth century, belonging to the advanced sector of the artistic field (the aesthetic trends constituting this sector varying according to historical period) has been the most certain means (as well as the most rapid during the recent period) to attain the highest degree of social visibility.]

With their glorious history of heralding the new within the literary field, literary critics would cringe at the thought that they might be missing something essential. When faced with the audacity of aspirants and new

arrivals, the initial irritation of the press quickly turned into praise. Anticipating trends and thereby identifying challenges to established authors meant avoiding scorn. It also allowed young hopefuls to appropriate symbolic value at minimal cost while turning other agents heads and avoiding the path of difficulty and hard work. Furthermore, through the dialectical formation of self-image and public self-image, aspiring authors could make themselves believe, true to the "conformity of non-conformism" which reigned in the intellectual milieu, that incomprehension by one's contemporaries was a necessary condition for immortality. The incomprehension, if not real, could be invented (as if it existed) or even provoked. The success of such provocations depended on social demand for geniuses and on the structural tendencies of certain producers, distributors, and consumers to rally around authors usually presented as discredited or marginal in order to oppose to the field's dominant values.

The dominant values of the literary field were attached to an established clientele and to old literary values (resulting in declining circulation) which incarnated the French literary tradition and were more rigid and less permeable to innovation than those of the newcomers. In order to challenge these old values, Seuil attempted to present alternative literary values. Finding itself in a phase of expansion after stabilizing its financial situation, the publishing house was encouraged to take risks. Politically this renewal coincided with the interests of the Catholic left, which presented an alternative to Sartrian political commitment. More conservative Catholics, such as the academician François Mauriac and those associated with his review *la Table Ronde* (1948-1969), as well as Marxists, especially Louis Aragon, who was director of *les Lettres françaises* (1942-1972) and anxious to attract new productions, also favored alternative values. These intellectuals represented the writers as opposed to Sartre and the academic bourgeoisie. Sartre was seen by Mauriac and many others as the main promoter of the subordination of literature to philosophy. Mauriac's review attempted to take the place of *la Nouvelle Revue Française* after the war.

Social demand resulted from the growth of the young intellectual public. This in turn created a need for young authors and editorial strategies which

could be carried out by publishers seeking to conquer this new audience. The demand indirectly put pressure on the recruiting and training mechanisms used by reviews and publishing houses because it led to modification of the "supply" and "demand" of the productions (Chamboredon 1975: 41-43; Williams 1983). The training period for writers tended to become shorter, for incitement to convert the "raw material" into symbolic and economic capital was exceptionally strong. A review no longer functioned as a training site, as *la Nouvelle Revue Française* had fifty years earlier: "les éditeurs sont devenus pressés" [the publishers are now in a hurry] (Jourdain 1960: 3).<sup>14</sup>

Le mal, c'est l'inflation. Trop de textes publiés, et pour des raisons qui n'ont pas assez à voir avec la passion littéraire . . . Ils (les prétendants à la carrière littéraire) croient entrer dans une catégorie raffinée, une élite, les délices du petit nombre? En fait, ils sont déjà - mais par des voies détournées - roulés dans la vague du grand nombre, de la surpopulation littéraire . . . On ne peut pas "aérer" la littérature autrement qu'en y faisant circuler moins, beaucoup moins de monde. (Nourissier 1960: 17)

[The problem is inflation. Too many texts published, and for reasons having nothing to do with literary passion . . . They (aspirants to a literary career) believe they are entering a refined category, an elite, the cream of the crop? In fact, they are already - but via roundabout routes - riding the wave of the mass, of literary overpopulation . . . We cannot otherwise "air out" literature than by having fewer, considerably fewer, people circulating there.]

According to Marissel, *Réforme's* literary critic, there were two main reasons for this accelerated recruiting activity: the race to discover young talent, the next generation of great writers; and second, the example set by Françoise Sagan whose works, published by Julliard, had reached heretofore unheard of publication levels. Her success, according to Marissel, was comparable to that of Brigitte Bardot in the cinema. Sagan's

novel *Bonjour tristesse* held the publishing record of 750,000 copies. The advent of new formulas and publication of young authors were also accompanied by new promotional techniques such as "American style" advertising (Marissel 1961: 12).

For some aspirants to a literary career the "exchange rate" for transforming initial social capital into literary capital through co-opting was particularly favorable. By contrast, from the editor's viewpoint the threshold to access had to be lowered in order to accelerate recruitment. This encouraged publishing on the basis of promise rather than proven success. One solution was to create a graduated recruitment process that combined recruitment series' (or the classic formula of *notes de lecture*) and normal book collections. Selection of new authors was thus deferred in the publishing houses. The struggle to appropriate a social image as a publisher of young talent became more difficult. Although they were still unable to rival Grasset and Gallimard in institutional capital ("traditions"), several publishers like Seuil were thus led to create a young, innovative image, which in Seuil's case allowed it to attract the "young" novel and therefore guarantee the existence of a certain amount of "human reserves." This would increase the legitimacy not only of the house but, perhaps most of all, of the editor who had first discovered a promising talent.

The publishing houses situated in the intermediate and dominated areas of the structure were the most open to new producers and productions. Seuil, which combined two production modes for symbolic goods, could thus take risks and finance avant-garde essays via economically profitable productions. For debutant authors, this context of increased competition provided a means of putting pressure on publishers ("if you don't publish me, I'll just go to x"). For some, this situation of urgency, the need for exceptional talent, meant the chance to accede relatively more rapidly than before to the literary and/or editorial professions and to literary consecration. Some of Philippe Sollers's statements concerning the beginning of his literary career and his precocious success (part of an overall reconstruction of his personal history) provide confirmation of this situation:

J'étais surpris. J'avais fait, comme ça, des petites gammes, et tout le monde applaudit: j'étais très gêné . . . Tout le monde, ou presque, semblait me trouver doué, en avance, alors que je ne me sentais pas au point, en retard. (Sollers 1981a: 59 and 65)

[I was surprised. I tried a few simple scales and everybody applauded: I was very uncomfortable . . . Everyone, or almost everyone, seemed to think I was talented, ahead of the times, while I myself felt I wasn't up to scratch yet, that I was behind.]

Thus, the conception, execution, and publication of a text could sometimes occur within a relatively brief time period. Similarly, consecration as an author was facilitated (making the relative value of consecration decline) by a proliferation of minor literary prizes destined to encourage young authors. This modified the temporality of literary consecration (these were minor prizes like the Médicis and the Fénéon, as opposed to major prizes of the period, such as Interallié, Goncourt, Fémina, and Renaudot) (cf. Pivot 1966a: 9). With the creation of the Médicis prize in particular, avant-garde and literary consecration were wed.

The balance between recruiting, training, and consecration destabilized as a result of modification of the different specific rhythms of the field and of reproduction strategies. This destabilization, as a symptom of the expansion of the literary field, led to the creation of new formulas such as "Écrire" and to the development of new productions and positions. The fluidity of the writer's profession encouraged this process. The journalist François Nourissier notes the application of new policies by certain publishers.

Tout jeune homme ayant vu quelques-unes de ses pages acceptées dans une publication de cette sorte serait lié, mis en réserve, au frais - "mis au contrat". Ainsi se trouvait résolu un des problèmes les plus irritants qui se posent à l'éditeur français d'aujourd'hui: s'attacher par de solides liens légaux de jeunes auteurs, sans avoir pris pour autant le risque de publier leur premier livre (un livre représente, pour l'éditeur, un



investissement proche d'un million), sans même avoir eu à attendre que ce premier livre fût écrit. Désormais, dix ou vingt bonnes pages suffiraient. Une promesse, ne fut-elle encore que balbutiée, serait à coup sûr entendue . . . Plus c'est jeune, plus c'est beau . . . *Jamais pour l'inconnu les conditions n'ont été plus belles* (emphasis added). On ne tire plus la sonnette de l'éditeur: l'éditeur est descendu sur le trottoir. (Nourissier 1960: 17)

[Any young man having had a few pages published in a work of this sort would be linked, placed in reserve, kept cool - "put under contract". Thus one of the most irritating problems for the modern French editor was solved: how to attach young authors with solid legal ties, without having to take the risk of publishing their first books (a book represents, for the editor, an investment of nearly one million francs), without even having to wait for that first book to be published. From now on, ten or twenty good pages would be enough. A promise, even mumbled, would certainly be heard . . . . The younger, the better . . . . *Never had conditions been more favorable for an unknown* (emphasis added). You didn't need to ring the editor's doorbell any more: he would come down to meet you on the sidewalk.]

In order to stimulate the search and recruitment of young writers, Gallimard founded "Le chemin" in 1960 (directed by Georges Lambrichs) and the "Jeune Prose" series during the following year. Since 1955, Julliard had been publishing the trimonthly review and series *les Cahiers des saisons* (directed by Bernard Frank and Pierre Brunner) where texts by Jean Donassot, Jean-Claude Hénary, Robert Paris, Françoise Sagan, Jean-François Revel, and Barthélémy were published. Julliard also published the collection "Les Lettres nouvelles" (1953), directed by Maurice Nadeau, which included works by Solange Farquelle, Mathieu Galey, and Jean-François Revel. All were collections of authors' first texts. Bernard Grasset founded "Les chemins de l'écriture", led by Dominique Fernandez. This included not only book collections but also reviews, alone and in combination with book series'.

The presentation of young authors always took place in accordance with a logic of succession in which the new was under the protection of the old and sure. Succession occurred through sponsorship by an authority, and thus, via symbolic capital transmission. This could take the form of prefaces written by well-known writers or critics; the appearance of new authors' works within the same pages as those of known, reputed writers (who were thus legitimate); or even publication of new works under the direction of a consecrated author. Seuil, in spite of its "Écrire" series, did not intend to be left behind; investments had to be augmented because of competition with other publishing houses.

Various strategies for conquering new readers and increasing revenues, especially in the subfield of publishing targeted mostly at an intellectual public, also resulted in the metamorphosis of purely literary reviews such as *Tel Quel* into polyvalent reviews. Such reviews could accommodate the latest developments in the division of symbolic labor, above all the rise of the human sciences. Different methods of ennobling literature, which had been relegated to an inferior position in the new division of symbolic labor, were also applied.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. The formation of the first group and the founding of *Tel Quel*

### 2.1. *The formation of the first group*

The young unknowns grouped around *Tel Quel* at the time it was founded in 1960 had been acquainted at least since 1958, and some had known each other even longer. The three organizers of the review were Jean-René Huguenin, Jean-Edern Hallier, and Philippe Sollers. Hallier and Huguenin, as well as Renaud Matignon, had attended the Lycée Claude-Bernard, an upper-middle-class high school in the sixteenth *arrondissement* of Paris, and were the favorite pupils of one of the teachers, the writer Julien Gracq

(pseudonym of Louis Poirier). He was to be their mentor, which would facilitate their entry into the literary field.<sup>16</sup>

In 1958, close friends Huguenin and Matignon also became acquainted with Claude Simon and Jean-Pierre Faye. Faye was making his debut as a writer at Seuil (Huguenin 1987). Sollers, meanwhile, had studied at the École Supérieure des Sciences Économiques et Commerciales (E.S.S.E.C.) of the Institut Catholique; and his friends at the École des Hautes Études Commerciales (H.E.C.), another business school, were Fernand de Jacquilot du Boisrouvray, son of a noble family (Class of 1958); and Jacques Coudol, who, like Sollers, was a native of Bordeaux (Class of 1959). Coudol was the recipient, thanks to Cayrol, of the half of the Del Duca prize intended for writers without resources.

Jean-René Huguenin, meanwhile, was the brother-in-law of François-Régis Bastide, an editor at Seuil. He thus maintained a direct, familial link with the publishing house. Born in Paris in 1936, son of a professor of cancerology, by 1958 Huguenin was already writing for *le Figaro littéraire*, *les Nouvelles littéraires*, *les Lettres françaises* and *Réalités*. He also contributed to the review *La Table ronde*, directed by François Mauriac, his mentor and a "big boss" compared to Cayrol. A member of the editorial board of the review *Arts*, Huguenin received a philosophy degree in 1957 and a degree from the Institut des Études Politiques, which would ensure him a top administrative post. He then entered the École Nationale d'Administration, or E.N.A. (a school which trained high-level civil servants and business executives), but abandoned his studies to devote himself to a career in journalism and literature. Renaud Matignon was a friend of Huguenin. *Agrégé* in letters, Matignon taught at a high school in Clamecy, then became involved in the publishing field, first at Pauvert and later at Mercure de France.<sup>17</sup> He eventually became a literary critic at *L'Express* and a board member of *Cahiers de l'Herne*. Jean-Edern Hallier was born in 1936 near Paris in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the son of General André Hallier - a former Vichy prefect who had hosted a literary salon frequented by, among others, André Maurois. The youngest in a family of industrialists, shipowners and military people, Hallier had inherited very

significant social and cultural capital. He had studied at the Lycée Claude-Bernard in Paris and the Lycée Pasteur in Neuilly-sur-Seine, as well as at the Pierre-qui-vire convent school. With a degree in comparative literature, Latin, Greek, and philosophy from Oxford he decided to try his luck at journalism, starting out as a free-lance journalist for the review *Arts*.

Philippe Sollers (b. Joyaux) was born in Bordeaux in 1936, son of an industrialist who was himself the son of an industrial worker. Sollers's mother's origins were in Bordeaux's *bonne bourgeoisie*. The family's economic capital was considerable, its cultural capital more modest. After attending the best high schools in Bordeaux, Montesquieu, and Michel-Montaigne, Philippe Sollers was sent to study at the École Sainte-Geneviève in Versailles (outside of Paris), a Jesuit school, to prepare for the *Grandes Écoles*.<sup>18</sup> He was expelled from Sainte-Geneviève for chronic disobedience and for reading banned books. His father then sent him to Paris to study economics at the Institut Catholique, hoping he would continue the family's hardware manufacturing business. Sollers's academic performance was only passable. In Paris, he befriended Jean-Edern Hallier and companions and decided to try to break into the literary field. Having received his introduction to literature at the relatively late age of sixteen (Sollers 1981: 37), he attended Francis Ponge's lectures at the Alliance Française and submitted some of his texts to Ponge. The latter presented them to Jean Paulhan of *la Nouvelle Revue Française*. At the same time Sollers contacted François Mauriac and Jean Cayrol.<sup>19</sup> His contact with them was facilitated by their amicable relations with Huguenin and Hallier. Sollers had also met Mauriac in Malagar, at Mauriac's summer house, in 1956 (cf. Mauriac 1989; Paulhan and Ponge 1986).

Il suffisait de se présenter en lui envoyant une lettre écrite de façon correcte. Je voulais voir Mauriac pour de multiples raisons: ses livres très présents dans ma bibliothèque, Bordeaux et puis son attitude politique à propos de l'Algérie. A mon âge, c'était important de le rencontrer. (Sollers 1988: 30)

[It was enough by way of introduction to send him a properly written letter. I had several reasons for wanting to meet Mauriac: his books, so present in my library, Bordeaux, and finally, his political stance on Algeria. At my age it was very important to meet him.]

Encouraged by Mauriac (who saw his own beginnings in Sollers's itinerary), Ponge, Paulhan, and Cayrol, Sollers published his first text, *Le Défi*, at Seuil in Cayrol's new "Écrire" series (Number 3) in 1957. A short while later he published a short story, *Une Curieuse solitude*, an excerpt of which was published with the help of Ponge and Paulhan in *la Nouvelle Revue Française* in March 1958 (*la Nouvelle Revue Française* 63: 405-413). He received a minor prize, the Félix Fénéon prize, for *Le Défi*, and the text was praised in *L'Express* by François Mauriac. It also received notice from Louis Aragon, former companion of Breton and Eluard, who had followed in Mauriac's footsteps at *les Lettres françaises*. Seuil, with its young, innovative profile and its desire to invest in debutant writers, saw in Sollers a young, promising author who could improve the publisher's competitiveness on the literary market.

Following his initial contacts with Ponge (who on several occasions sent Sollers's poetry to Paulhan) and Mauriac, Sollers was launched as a result of a veritable race for recognition. François Mauriac wrote a laudatory article in *L'Express* entitled "Une goutte de la vague" (December 12, 1957: 36), and mentioned Sollers in his June 12, 1958 column. Mauriac's piece was followed by an article by Émile Henriot, the academician who had aided Alain Robbe-Grillet in getting his start (Kanters 1981: 260), in the November 5, 1958 edition of *Le Monde*; and then by an article by Louis Aragon in *les Lettres françaises* on November 20. Mauriac answered with another laudatory piece on November 27. For Sollers, the result was an impressive accumulation of recognition and transmission of symbolic capital, as well as precocious and rapid success based on the rivalries between the literary authorities of the moment.

*L'Express*, Mauriac-style, attached the most importance to Sollers, reflecting the various affinities between the right- and left-wing Catholics.

This was also illustrated in the fact that *L'Express* publicized *Le Défi* (December 26, 1957: 22). After the Fénéon Prize went to Sollers, *L'Express* published excerpts of pieces praising his work: "Je suis heureux de saluer un tel début presque vertigineux; et si l'on veut inquiétant" [I am happy to salute such an almost breathtaking, and if you like, disturbing, debut] (Roger Kemp, *L'Express* 390, December 4, 1958); "J'ai promis la gloire à Philippe et je ne m'en dédis pas" [I promised Philippe Sollers glory and I am not going back on my word] (François Mauriac, *L'Express* 392, December 18, 1958). Repeated advertisements increased the number of potential readers affected.

The initial, socially homogeneous *Tel Quel* group was composed of young writers who showed promise and had published relatively short texts (Coudol, Sollers) or had started out in cultural journalism (Hallier, Huguenin).<sup>20</sup> As the result of assembling a group of friends based on a certain social capital, the initial team exemplified one of the fundamental problems of the literary field: the production of independent or free intellectuals as opposed to intellectuals linked to the university. For Mauriac in particular, Sollers's success had to be as rapid and brilliant as his own. Having himself been encouraged initially by Barrès, Mauriac saw Sollers as the bearer of a tradition of which he was probably the most eminent representative: in Mauriac's eyes the aging Mauriac was Barrès, and Sollers was the young Mauriac. At the same time, the academician Émile Henriot saw in Sollers's *Une Curieuse solitude* a new *Éducation sentimentale*, which spoke with "a marvelous accuracy", comprehensibly and reflecting the dominant values of the field: "le jeune Sollers tout à coup m'accroche en me parlant de moi, c'est-à-dire de vous, directement" [young Sollers engages me all of a sudden by speaking to me of myself, that is, of you, directly] (Henriot 1958: 8). Like Henriot and Mauriac, Aragon, who was at first opposed to awarding Sollers the Fénéon prize, saw him as a representative of classical literature, although this did not stop him from seeing a bit of himself in Sollers. Sollers was the young Aragon:

Je lis cette assez simple histoire, je crois la lire au moins, je souris de ses maladresses . . . mais cela ressemble, comme cela ressemble, à ma propre jeunesse . . . Ce jeune homme bourgeois, comme on dit ici et là, n'a rien des préjugés anciens . . . Est-ce-que je m'intéresse vraiment à ce Philippe de seize ans qui ressemble à l'auteur comme un frère, ou à moi-même, à cette enfance de moi-même? (Aragon 1958: 1-4 and 5) [I read this rather simple story, or at least believe I am reading it, I smile at his awkwardness . . . but it resembles, how it resembles, my own youth . . . This young *bourgeois*, as they call him, has none of the old prejudices . . . Am I really interested in this sixteen-year-old Philippe who resembles the author like a brother, or in myself, in my own childhood?]

Mauriac made Sollers feel the weight of tradition - the debt that he, the beginner, should feel toward the great Catholic writer - more than did Henriot or Aragon who only compared Sollers to Barrès, Proust, Stendhal, and Laclos. A panegyric, each sentence of which should be underlined, Mauriac's review illustrates both the specific dependency relationship between dominant and dominated within the field and also, the logic of succession:

Ce Philippe retrouve dans mes livres l'odeur de la banlieue où, en 1936, il est né, des adolescents qui lui ressemblent et qui souffrent et s'irritent au contact de la même faune. Il tient à moi par les racines et, si vieux qu'il vive, il n'oubliera jamais, je le crois, la lumière de ce jour doré, l'année de ces dix-neuf ans, où il vint pour la première fois à Malagar . . . Voilà donc un garçon d'aujourd'hui, né en 1936. L'auteur du *Défi* s'appelle Philippe Sollers. J'aurais été le premier à écrire ce nom. Trente cinq pages pour le porter, c'est peu - c'est assez. Cette écorce de pin dont, enfant, je faisais un frêle bateau, et que je confiais à la Hure qui coulait au bas de notre prairie, je croyais qu'elle atteindrait la mer. Je le crois toujours. (Mauriac 1957: 18)

[This Philippe discovers in my books the scent of the suburbs where in 1936 he was born, of adolescents who resemble him and who suffer and get irritated at contact with the same nature. He holds to me by the roots, and he will never forget, for the rest of his life, I believe, the light of this golden day, in his nineteenth year, when he came for the first time to Malagar . . . Here is a young man of today, born in 1936. The name of the author of *Le Défi* is Philippe Sollers. I will have been the first to write this name. Thirty-five pages to bear the name is not much - but it's enough. This pine bark from which, as a child, I built a frail boat, and which I placed in the care of the Hure which flowed at the foot of our prairie, I believed that it would reach the sea. I still believe it.]

According to the logic of succession, trust and the promise of glory are bestowed and must be maintained and nourished in accordance with tradition. Mauriac - who had himself been chosen by Barrès as "this unknown" and "the author of a book so 'frail'" (Pivot 1968: 179-180) - thus designated his successor. He legitimized the writer who resembled him most closely, the one who was best able to preserve and maintain the literary values Mauriac incarnated and also to reproduce the structures upon which these were based. Mauriac increased his own credit by transmitting credit to the individual who was socially disposed to receive it. Sollers would have to elect his own successors in the same way - those troublemakers or transgressors who would most closely resemble him and who, unlike Mauriac, would move forward rather than retreat. The creative gift seemed to be something which could be passed on, with impersonal rather than personal characteristics. It was a question of extraordinary, yet transmissible qualities.

Sollers, who was relatively well known after the publication of *Le Défi*, was reimbursed for his work in the form of a monthly salary. Kept in reserve and thus available, drifting around the publishing house, he soon joined its more or less regular staff. Literary success had been immediate. By 1960, *Le Défi* had been translated into several foreign languages. As a



result of a spectacular introduction involving the mobilization of a legitimization circuit that included Aragon, Mauriac, Paulhan, Ponge and Cayrol (i.e., a significant portion of the dominant writers of the period), Sollers was soon being compared to Gide or to Malraux (who represented traditional psychological literature) and perceived as having exceptional gifts. The writers all saw something of their own debuts in that of Sollers. He represented what they were or, as in Aragon's case, what they had been, as well as the literary values they incarnated, represented, and reproduced. A clear example of the rapid conversion of initial social capital into literary capital, Sollers's rise illustrated the state of emergency that reigned in literature. Sollers was a prism of multiple interests - anti-New Novel, anti-Sartrean political commitment and ultimately opposed to the dominant pole of the literary field, and both for and against the traditional novel. In a word, he was original (a positive appreciation as opposed to marginal), somehow incarnating the diverse structural conflicts of the times.

After his premature literary consecration Sollers's conversion to the New Novel - the avant-garde of the time - was encouraged by the rapid rise of this avant-garde between 1958 and 1960. Michel Butor had won the Fénéon in 1957, the Renaudot in 1960, and the Grand Prix de la Littérature in 1961. The Médicis Prize had been created by Robbe-Grillet in 1957 in order to promote young literature. As the example of the New Novel shows, traditions in the intellectual world are (as opposed to folklore) directly attributable to one or several persons.

Sollers later refused Mauriac's sponsorship, which he had previously taken advantage of. As Mauriac would remark dryly, "Jeune homme qui renie ses aînés" [Young man who disowns his elders] (Costa 1965: 83). Mauriac nevertheless encouraged Huguenin and Sollers to join *le Figaro littéraire* staff in 1961 and in 1963, and he was invited to attend *Tel Quel*'s meetings (Mauriac 1981: letters 350 and 363).

Applying an iconoclastic strategy, Sollers seemed to distance himself from cultural consecration in order to move in the direction of the New Novel, which was the literary avant-garde of the moment. Because of his precocious success he had to succeed, and his initial bluff - translating a

structural state of affairs into a personal quality - would be prolonged and modified throughout Sollers's entire trajectory. The critic Jean Tortel explicitly referred to the creation of legitimate expectations on the part of peers and journalists (Tortel 1959: 163): "Il n'a plus le droit de nous décevoir" [He no longer has the right to disappoint us]. Similarly, the potential power granted to the review as a result of comparison with Surrealism would exceed its real power because its social age was very low. This predisposed its contributors to be constantly at countercurrent and to preserve a young profile in order to be consistent with the public image of the review.

From the beginning of his literary career, Philippe Joyaux used a pseudonym for reasons having to do with his family background, the laws regulating book production and the ideology of artistic creation. Sollers's family, expecting him to continue the family business directed by his father and brother, was not in favor of Philippe becoming a writer. In addition, according to laws in effect at that time, Sollers was still a minor. Finally, the pseudonym was a way to hide, to isolate himself, and to present himself as free of any social identity; he could thus be without attachments, family, relations, or cultural qualifications. The baptismal act - detachment of the patronymic - reinforced his state of marginality and the polyphony of the "me/I". This mode of presentation was also a way of prolonging social indeterminacy and of breaking away from the insignificance and anonymity of the student's condition. Classifying himself as unclassifiable by fleeing the well-ordered, *bourgeois* life, he escaped from assignment to a certain position in the social space.

As part of an individualist ideology, the pseudonym as an expression of a taste for disguise reinforced and legitimized individual deviance. It also contributed to the mythologization of the writer by identifying him/her with a superman or woman free of social connections, fleeing from the social production of geniuses.

## *2.2. The founding of the review*

The social capital of the members of the first *Tel Quel* group was thus very high. The only well-known writer in the group was Philippe Sollers, who functioned as a leader figure. A relationship of proximity existed from the beginning between Sollers and *Tel Quel*.

For Seuil, investing heavily in founding a review was considered profitable because one or several of its young contributors could become accumulators of symbolic capital, or "greats". A review functioned as an instrument of accumulation of literary capital. With the modifications in the field, the importance of social capital was increasing; and because of its flexibility and the low degree of codification within the field such capital could be converted easily. Some of the review's members - Boisrouvray, Coudol, and Sollers - published in the "Écrire" series; Hallier and Huguenin were occasional, free-lance contributors to reviews and newspapers; and Matignon, who had just passed his *agrégation*, was teaching in a high school. The "Écrire" series and the new review served as instances of legitimation and diffusion. These author machines multiplied the value of the raw material and functioned as a space of ontological promotion and social metamorphosis. The creation of a quarterly review like *Tel Quel*, an instance of legitimation aspiring to legitimacy (as opposed to those at the dominant pole of the field, which were already legitimate instances of legitimation) by a group composed essentially of novices further underscored the significant expansion of Seuil. The increased competition in the field is evoked by the journalist and writer François Nourissier:

Les éditeurs . . . ne savent malheureusement pas s'entendre entre eux afin d'imposer à leur compétition des limites raisonnables. Ils ont le vertige. Aussi longtemps qu'ils l'auront, on jettera chaque mois sur le marché quelques brochures de plus que personne ne lira, quelques "futurs écrivains" qu'on risque ainsi de dégoûter de devenir des écrivains tout court. Aussi longtemps que le vertige durera, on publiera comme premier texte d'un auteur (Georges Perros, *Papiers collés*) des

fragments, aphorismes et notes comme *Valéry s'en permettait à soixante ans* (emphasis added); on lancera un revue faite, certes, par des garçons de vingt ans, mais dont la nouveauté date - avec ses parenthèses, ses exquises satisfactions, ses paulhaneries en tous genres (Paulhan c'est tellement mieux qu'ils ne croient!) - *date d'avant hier* (emphasis added). Aussi longtemps que le vertige durera, au lieu de choisir, on tassera, au lieu d'élire on empilera. (Nourissier 1960: 17)

[The editors . . . unfortunately cannot reach agreement among themselves about imposing reasonable limits on their competition. They suffer from vertigo. As long as they continue to suffer from it, they'll throw a few more pamphlets that no one will read on the market each month, a few more "future writers," that will thus be discouraged from becoming writers at all. As long as this vertigo lasts, they will publish fragments, aphorisms and notes as an author's first text (Georges Perros, *Glued Papers*), the likes of which *Valéry would have published at age sixty* (emphasis added); they will launch a review done entirely, true, by youths of twenty, but whose newness dates - with its parenthetical additions, its exquisite satisfactions, its *paulhaneries* of every kind (Paulhan is so much better than they thought!) - *dates only to the day before yesterday* (emphasis added). As long as this vertigo continues, instead of choosing, they cram; instead of electing, they pile on.]

The first issue of *Tel Quel* appeared in March 1960. According to some sources, initial print runs ran to 700 copies; other sources place the figure at 3,000 copies (Jourdain 1960: 3).<sup>21</sup> The following quotation from Nietzsche appeared after the table of contents in the first issue of the review, an apparent indication of its leitmotif:

Je veux le monde et le veux TEL QUEL, et le veux encore, le veux éternellement, et je crie insatiablement: bis! et non seulement pour moi seul, mais pour toute la pièce et pour tout le spectacle; et non pour tout le spectacle seul, mais au fond pour moi, parce que le spectacle m'est

nécessaire - parce qu'il me rend nécessaire - parce que je lui suis nécessaire - et parce que je le rends nécessaire. (*Tel Quel* 1960a: 2)  
[I want the world and I want it AS IS, I want it still, eternally, and I cry out, insatiably: encore! and not only for myself, but for the entire play and for the entire show; and not only for the entire show, but really for me, because I need the show - because the show makes me indispensable - because it needs me and I render it indispensable.]

This quote was followed by a declaration of the review's editorial policy. The editors' goal was to distance the review from Sarttrism and in general, from "committed literature" such as the works of Camus. They also wanted to remain distinct from those in the academic branch of the intellectual field (designated as that of the ideologues) who subjected literature to moral and political imperatives (Jourdain 1960: 3). In Jourdain's words, "l'existentialisme littéraire a fini d'étonner" [literary existentialism no longer amazes] (Jourdain 1960: 3).<sup>22</sup> Instead, the members of the *Tel Quel* group placed themselves in the literary camp. They presented themselves as convinced defenders or devotees of literature, which was consistently perceived as an object of contempt, and was often defined negatively, as open and thus subject to all interpretations.<sup>23</sup>

As *Tel Quel's* "Declaration" stated: "Ce qu'il faut dire aujourd'hui, c'est que l'écriture n'est plus concevable sans une claire prévision de ses pouvoirs, un sang-froid à la mesure du chaos où elle s'éveille, une détermination qui mettra la poésie à la plus haute place de l'esprit. Tout le reste ne sera pas littérature" [What must be said today is that writing is inconceivable without a clear estimation of its powers, the sangfroid to meet chaos wherever it arises, a determination that places poetry at the highest place in the mind. All the rest will not be literature.] (*Tel Quel* 1960b: 3). The discovery of the world through writing in its infinite richness, was accompanied by a desire to be entirely dissolved in its sensory appearance. "Vouloir le monde, et le vouloir à chaque instant, suppose une volonté de s'ajouter la réalité en la resaisissant et, plus qu'en la contestant, en la représentant. Alors, l'oeuvre pourra vraiment devenir, selon les mots de

Valéry, un 'édifice enchanté'" [Wanting the world, and wanting it at every moment, assumes a will to add to reality by taking hold of it and, rather than contesting it, representing it. Thus the work may truly become, in the words of Valéry, an 'enchanted edifice'] (*Tel Quel* 1960b: 4). The "declaration" describes several simultaneous intentions: *Tel Quel*'s will to position itself in opposition to the "-isms" (Marxism as well as Sarttrism) and (indirectly) alongside both the New Novel and the traditional novel; to present itself as the continuator or new incarnation of *la Nouvelle Revue Française*; and to approach the world (via literature) as a sensory whole. At the same time, the Telquelians wished to leave open and indeterminate the future choices of young writers, to avoid taking overly categorical positions and confining themselves to a well-defined domain, and thereby to assemble "ce qui s'écrit - ou s'est écrit - de meilleur dans toutes les directions où il nous paraîtra bon d'avancer" [the best of what is being written - or has been written - in all directions into which we feel it would be good to move forward.] (*Tel Quel* 1960b: 4). This declaration, as a logic of promotion, was curiously analogous in a number of ways to that of the Surrealists, published thirty-six years previously in the first number of *La révolution surréaliste*:

Le surréalisme ne se présente pas comme l'exposition d'une doctrine. Certaines idées qui lui servent actuellement de point d'appui ne permettent en rien de préjuger de son développement ultérieur. Ce premier numéro de la *Révolution Surréaliste* n'offre donc aucune révélation définitive. (*La révolution surréaliste* 1924: 1)

[Surrealism does not present itself as the exposition of a doctrine. Certain ideas which serve it at present as a starting point do not in any way allow its future development to be influenced. This first number of *Révolution Surréaliste* will offer thus no definitive revelation.]

The provocative declaration by *Tel Quel*'s members (all of whom were young writers under twenty-five years of age) of their intent to include only literature and to propagate the "non-contestation of the world" ("Oui, nous

aimons cette phrase parce qu'elle signifie la non-contestation du monde" [Yes, we like that phrase because it signifies non-contestation of the world] [Constant 1960: 14]) could not, in the midst of the Algerian War, be considered anything but provocative: the field was completely divided by the events taking place in North Africa. The name of the review, "*Tel Quel*", alluded to Nietzsche and to Paul Valéry - an iconoclastic philosopher and a consecrated writer - and clearly reflected the aesthetic posture of the review toward the world. *Tel Quel* wanted to approach the world without prejudice, as a totality. Such phenomenism indirectly reinforced the idealizing conception according to which the world exists "as is" (*tel quel*): such a conception reflected the social origins of the Telquelians. The innocent world thus found its basis in the social experiences of these apprentice writers. By presenting themselves as protagonists of art for art's sake, promoters of a discourse devoid of political interests (Sartrian political commitment in particular), the Telquelians had chosen the camp of *la Nouvelle Revue Française* and the New Novel. Indeed, the review's title was aimed at a literary audience and allowed identification with certain of Valéry's works via an effect of continuation.

Would the review become the *rose des vents* of French literature, to borrow the imagery used by François Mauriac in referring to *la Nouvelle Revue Française*? Some journalists reinforced this image, which was widespread in the field. *Tel Quel* and *Seuil* imposed themselves through recognition in the cultural press, which certified the endeavor as legitimate and objective: "Cette revue de jeunes, à l'équipe très soudée, établissant des sommaires très solides et cohérents, pourrait bien apparaître bientôt déterminante pour nos lettres, comme *la Nouvelle Revue Française* à ses débuts" [This young peoples' review, with a very close-knit team, establishing very solid and coherent summaries, may soon prove determining for our belles lettres, like *la Nouvelle Revue Française* in the beginning.] (Marissel 1961: 12). A product image was created by presenting as definitive both those of the review's characteristics which were simply a by-product of the discourse of journalists anxious not to miss out on anything, and also those characteristics which (re)produced the product image by

presenting it as a direct result of the review's activities. *Tel Quel* was also regarded (and regarded itself) as heir to the symbolic capital of the Surrealists - capital which far exceeded its own capital - as well as to that of *la Nouvelle Revue Française*. Some remained skeptical however: "Une revue, faite par des moins de 25 ans, voudrait jouer le rôle de la N.R.F. Son premier numéro justifie-t-il cette ambition?" [A review, put together by people under 25, would like to play the part of the N.R.F. Does its first issue justify such an ambition?] (Pingaud and Magny 1960: 28-29). Bernard Frank made the following comment, citing and responding to another critic:

Il suffit donc pour vous plaire que l'on dise et que l'on écrive: "Printemps 1960. Un groupe de courageux jeunes gens vient de fonder une revue littéraire qui a bien des chances par son austérité, son refus de compromissions, de jouer le rôle qui fut celui de *la Nouvelle Revue Française* entre les deux guerres". Recherches mallarméennes, etc. Refus de soumettre la littérature à ce qui n'est pas son exigence profonde etc. (Frank 1960: 21)

[So all they have to do to please you is to say and write: "Spring 1960. A group of courageous young people has just founded a literary review which because of its austerity and its refusal to compromise, has good chances to play the role which was played by *la Nouvelle Revue Française* in the interwar period." Mallarmean research, etc. Refusal to submit literature to anything but its very own standards, etc.]

Criticism in the press corresponded to journalists' positions within the press, with the most ardent struggle taking place between those who were also editors or writers working for publishers in the intermediate area of the publishers space, especially Julliard and Seuil. Moreover, if comparison, reinforced by certain Telquelians themselves ("C'est sans doute le surréalisme qui m'a touché le plus" [It is without doubt Surrealism that has affected me the most] [Sollers 1962: 2]), made journalists and critics tremble, reviews and presentations expressed the different modalities of perception and of categorization linked to positions in the intellectual field.



Journalists' orchestrations testified to the existence of mutual legitimization circuits - more or less invisible groups in operation. Although journalists such as Frank who were in an intermediate position tended to disqualify *Tel Quel*, those at the dominated pole tended to compare the review to surrealism while those at the dominant pole likened it to *la Nouvelle Revue Française*. Through this process the review appropriated an avant-garde label for itself which was a more intense specification than the editorial label. Only talent could authorize such an investment; consequently, its members had to be talented, and they found themselves invested with a certain authority guaranteed by Cayrol who, as a consecrated author and editor, was qualified to be a transmitter of symbolic capital.

Relations between Ponge, François Mauriac (Mauriac 1957: 32), and Jean Paulhan on the one hand, and Robbe-Grillet - presented as the figurehead of the "new school" about which *Esprit* published a special issue in 1958 ("Le Nouveau Roman", *Esprit* 7-8, July-August: 1-111) - on the other, were very hostile. These poor relations deepened the division between avant- and arrière-garde. Robbe-Grillet published a very critical article on Ponge in *la Nouvelle Revue Française* (Robbe-Grillet 1958: 580-604), while correspondence between Ponge and Paulhan also illustrated the hostility (Paulhan and Ponge 1986: 248, 623, 625-626):

M. Robbe-Grillet, ennemi juré du roman psychologique . . . Mais la technique de la surface et sa haine de la profondeur, j'ai grand-peine à y déceler un enrichissement. (Jean Paulhan, lettre 248)

Robbe-Grillet: en tout cas, diablement simpliste. Il n'avait qu'à le dire tout de suite, que c'était à Dieu qu'il en voulait. (Jean Paulhan, lettre 625)

Robbe-Grillet, un zéro pointé; j'aime un certain simplisme, mais obtenu, pas celui-là (qui n'est qu'un simplisme par manque); vraiment, une imposture. (Francis Ponge, lettre 626)

Quant à Robbe-Grillet, c'est un vrai con. (Francis Ponge, lettre 623)

[Mr. Robbe-Grillet, sworn enemy of the psychological novel. . . . But I have a great deal of difficulty detecting any enrichment in the surface technique and his hatred of depth.] (Jean Paulhan, letter 248)

[Robbe-Grillet: in any case, damn simplistic. He should have just said that it was God he had a grudge against.] (Jean Paulhan, letter 625)

[Robbe-Grillet, a big zero; I like a certain degree of simplicity, but earned, not that kind (which is only simplicity by default); really an imposture.] (Francis Ponge, letter 626)

[As for Robbe-Grillet, he's a real bastard.] (Francis Ponge, letter 623)

Some of its literary attachments were revealed within the review's first issues: modern poetry (especially Francis Ponge), which had been neglected by the New Novel; the New Novel (Simon, Ollier, Pinget); and the modern novel (Cayrol and Claude Durand, for instance). The temptation to reappraise dominant values increased and *Tel Quel* rapidly became an intellectual review linking the arts and literature while keeping Surrealism as a model. The literary choices of the review remained up-and-coming authors and the best values on the literary stock market.

Thus from the very beginning *Tel Quel*, firmly anchored at Seuil, brought together intellectuals with diverse interests. It distributed a vulgate targeted at the new cultivated audience and updated via attachment to the new literary and intellectual radicality. Structurally, the major challenge the review faced was to reconcile its aspirations as a new avant-garde and its intermediary position in the reviews' space (analogous to Seuil's position in the publishers' space).

### *2.3. Internal struggles*

According to the only account written during this period, the posthumous journal of Jean-René Huguenin for 1964 (prefaced by François Mauriac), relations between the friends were far from perfect. Huguenin and Matignon, both partisans of a traditional psychological literature (classi-

cism), were cultivating a different type of literature from that of Hallier and Sollers. It seems that Hallier, anxious to take over direction of the review himself even before its founding, wove intrigues behind Huguenin's and Sollers's backs. This in turn led to the formation of tactical alliances between the two (Huguenin and Sollers). With regard to Hallier's personality, Huguenin states: "Après tout, si les mensonges de Jean-Edern font partie de son talent, qu'il mente" [After all, if Jean-Edern's lies are part of his talent, let him lie] (Huguenin 1987: 12). By December 14, 1958, Huguenin already felt desperate confronting Sollers and Hallier, who considered literature an end in itself, a pure art. Huguenin considered Sollers an already-consecrated writer who lacked a sense of tragedy, madness and despair (Huguenin 1964: 77): an intellectual who was troubled by language and adored words for their own sake. Bataille and Klossowski, venerated by Hallier and Sollers, angered Huguenin, as did Coudol's poetry (which to him was composed of "the vague, the imprecise, the complicated"). He considered himself a romantic (Huguenin 1987: 166). If Huguenin, closer to journalism, was contemptuous of Sollers, Hallier felt inferior not only to Sollers (who was already recognized) but also to Jacques Coudol, who had just published his first text in Cayrol's collection and had already been praised in the literary press. "Philippe Sollers - *Une Curieuse solitude* - et Jacques Coudol - *Le Voyage d'hiver* - sont en mesure, nous le croyons, de devenir de grands écrivains" [Philippe Sollers - *Une Curieuse solitude* - and Jacques Coudol - *Le voyage d'hiver* - are in a position, we believe, to become great writers] (Marissel 1961: 12). Hallier supposedly said to Huguenin, "A côté de Coudol et Sollers, je m'aperçois que nous ne sommes que de la crotte de bique" (Marissel 1961: 12). Identifying Sollers as someone seeking intellectual power, Huguenin gradually discovered that Sollers's activities were no more than politics (Huguenin 1987: 199). In his journal entry for Wednesday, April 22, 1959, he wrote, disgusted: "Tout l'après-midi gâché par Sollers et Jean-Edern. Quand travaillent-ils?" [The entire afternoon wasted by Sollers and Jean-Edern. When do they work?] (Huguenin 1964: 92).

The struggles for domination between different fractions within the group were thus already underway - and not only latently - even before the creation of the review. *Tel Quel's* founding accentuated the tensions, and as of 1960, led to Huguenin's "resignation". He was definitely the one who was the least dependent on the review, due to his reputation in journalism and his impressive social capital. Huguenin's "resignation" was probably the result of an alliance between Hallier, who presented himself as the general secretary of the review (without having published anything), and Sollers. According to Huguenin himself, he had resigned because his initiatives were not being taken into account, his articles were not being published, and he was not being kept informed about the review's activities. *Tel Quel's* editorial board sent him a letter of expulsion on May 27, 1960, giving Huguenin's negligence as the reason for its decision:

L'avertissement que vous a adressé le comité de la revue, le 11 mai dernier, et les commentaires qu'ils vous en avait faits précisaient que vos absences n'étaient pas seulement regrettables aux réunions du mercredi. Votre présence aujourd'hui nous eût été précieuse et, pourquoi pas le dire, nécessaire. Or, votre nouveau départ en vacances, fussent-elles studieuses et romanesques, démontre le peu d'importance que vous avez attaché à notre avertissement, et nous oblige à vous exclure de ce comité pour une durée d'un mois. Signé: Jean-Edern Hallier, Philippe Sollers, Jean Thibaudeau. (Costa 1965: 84)

[The warning addressed to you by the editorial board last May 11 and the commentaries it contained specified that your absences were not only regrettable at the Wednesday meetings. Your presence today would have been valued and, why not say it, necessary. However, your latest departure on vacation (be though it may for study and writing), demonstrates the minimal importance you attributed to our warning, and obliges us to expel you from this committee for a period of one month. Signed, Jean-Edern Hallier, Philippe Sollers, Jean Thibaudeau.]

After Huguenin's expulsion, the power struggle between Sollers and Hallier intensified. Hallier remained isolated, whereas Sollers utilized the support offered by his friends Boisrouvray, Coudol, and also Jean Thibaudeau, who joined the board officially in the fall of 1960. Now, having accumulated some literary and social capital through these friends, Sollers no longer needed his old friends Hallier and Huguenin. This clean-up accompanied the gradual recruitment of new members who supported Sollers, and reinforced Hallier's isolation and inability to call into question Sollers's dominant position within the group. Following several turbulent years Hallier found himself excluded from the group. The most docile of the remaining members, Boisrouvray, Coudol, and Matignon, resigned politely, as if stricken by a gradual asthenia. Hallier allegedly said that "il n'y a pas de place pour deux hippopotames mâles dans le même marigot" [there is not enough space for two male hippopotamuses in the same water hole] (Robbe-Grillet 1988), indicating the relentlessness with which he and Sollers had engaged in this struggle for intellectual prestige and symbolic power. The exclusion of Hallier at the beginning of the year 1963 was proclaimed with the following note, sent to the press: "Afin d'éviter tout malentendu, le comité de rédaction de *Tel Quel*, qui poursuit normalement ses activités, précise que M. Jean-Edern Hallier n'est plus aucunement habilité à parler au nom de la revue. Le secrétaire de rédaction est désormais M. Marcelin Pleynet. Le comité de la revue *Tel Quel*" [In order to avoid all misunderstandings, the editorial committee of *Tel Quel*, which continues its normal activities, states that Mr. Jean-Edern Hallier is no longer authorized to speak in the name of the review. The editorial secretary is henceforth Mr. Marcelin Pleynet. The editorial committee of *Tel Quel*] (Pivot 1963: 2). Investments by the members of the first group in the form of articles provide an indication of both their connection to and their degree of identification with the review. The scope of their investments also separates Huguenin and Matignon from Boisrouvray, Coudol, and Hallier. Huguenin and Matignon had only published a few articles, whereas Coudol and Hallier participated more actively in the review, publishing six or seven articles in the first twelve issues. Boisrouvray,

Coudol, and Hallier clearly attached more importance to the review, and for this reason it was also more difficult for them to leave it.

#### *2.4. Social trajectories of the first group's members*

Of the members expelled from the group between 1960 and 1962, Boisrouvray and Coudol rapidly abandoned literature, probably discouraged by the ferocity of the review's internal struggles as well as by the lack of literary recognition.<sup>24</sup> Matignon moved into publishing (he was the literary director at the Mercure de France in 1970), while attempting to begin a career as a literary critic, first at *L'Express* and later at *le Figaro*. Huguenin died in a car accident in 1962. Hallier, initially a free-lance journalist at the review *Arts*, published his first work at Seuil, but outside the "Tel Quel" collection, in 1963 and the same year entered publishing. He would simultaneously engage in careers as a writer, editor/publisher, and journalist. With Dominique de Roux he founded the paperback series "10/18" (1962) and the *Cahiers de l'Herne* (1961) at Julliard, Seuil's main adversary. A literary counselor at Albin Michel, he founded Éditions Hallier at the beginning of the seventies and took over management of the Maspéro bookstore at the end of the decade. A real intellectual manager, in accordance with the structural modifications affecting the field, he launched himself simultaneously in careers in literature and in the expanding area of cultural journalism; he created the daily paper *Action* in 1968 and *l'Idiot International* (a refuge for certain Maoists) in 1969 (re-edited in 1984 and 1989); and he contributed to *Paris-Match* and *le Matin* until 1987. He established the first independent radio station in 1987 and continues to hold a seat on the High Council of the Paris Opera along with, among others, Jean Lacouture.<sup>25</sup> In the seventies, Hallier became involved in the Socialist party and developed a personal friendship with François Mitterand. Although this multi-investment strategy led to a certain intellectual notoriety for Hallier (he was mentioned in the *Who's Who in*