In the labyrinth meaning is mute and appearance speaks in many tongues. It is a place where the unseen and unheard are to be feared. The sacred visions of a secret self and a beyond of language are but myths from a more secure age. The labyrinth is in a state of siege.

The soldier is a mythic figure, entering the city from this outdated past of signification. He feels his mission with a consuming sense of urgency. The burden he carries for a comrade must be delivered to someone who will recognize and comprehend the contents. The soldier is inarticulate in the exchange; the identities of both the box's contents and the recipient are unknown to him. Instead, he awaits a moment of revelation when the goal of uniting box and recipient is realized. The soldier is language, a speech of pregnancy and eschatological heft. But he has entered the future. The "disparity between possibility and fact" which T.S. Eliot perceived a generation earlier has come to blows in Robbe-Grillet's world. And the defeat at Reichenfels was decisive; possibility vanquished, fact has triumphed.

In the labyrinth the soldier's mission goes unfulfilled precisely because of his strong but obscure sense of a goal. He is "struggling in his own nets" (p.117), failing to make a connection because he will not articulate his purpose: "...it must have occurred to him: (but this now seems incredible) that the man he has been running after since his arrival in the city was perhaps this very man..." (p. 117). What is necessary is to advertise. Language is a flag, a demilitarized zone where buyer and product may connect in an auto-recognition of needs and desires. This is the reign of the marketplace. Language here is no bridge, no path to the Other: but a mere tool for shoring up the ruins of self against the disintegration of all identity. This is a reign of terror.

Finally then this lock-down vision of a world subdued and systematized displays its essential weakness. The icon is static, the totalitarian world it portrays unwieldy and graceless: "the impulse has lost its intention and its meaning. There longer remains, in their place, anything but excess, and strangeness, and death (p.90). Imagination and possibility are beyond death, greater than any defeat. The soldier who carried along his friend's soul, the doctor who eased the soldier death, the woman and child who guided him--none of them are fools but, of all things, heroes. Their belief in a future will be rewarded with its incarnation and a triumphant return from exile. Time is on their side.
Laurie - This is utterly dazzling. You have gone to the - God forbid - core of R-G, and come back to tell. And you tell it exceedingly well. I have studied, taught & written on this book, but I've never read a page that distilled its meaning & its tides as perfectly as this. Please give me a copy of this for my files.