

H.U.O.: What book are you working on now?

N.S.: I have just finished a book, *Ouvrez* (Open), and now I am working on a piece for radio. It's a kind of pause, an interlude that I have between books.

H.U.O.: So the radio is peripheral work for you?

N.S.: No, it's an ensemble; it's a whole. I hardly ever re-read my books; I let myself go. I let myself go because of the need to look for a new form.

H.U.O.: A short while ago I read a critique that relates your theatre to that of Ionesco or Beckett..

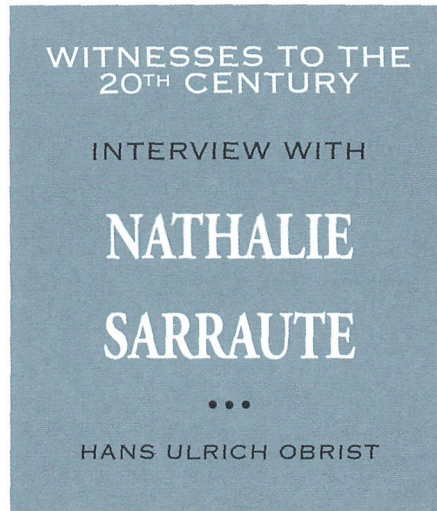
N.S.: I like Ionesco and Beckett a great deal. But their sensibilities are very different from mine.

H.U.O.: One can't say that your theatre is anti-theatre...

N.S.: It's theatre. As soon as a novel isn't like the usual novels, they say it's anti-novel. Why anti? It's a novel, it's theatre.

H.U.O.: Was it important for you to alter the rules of theatre?

N.S.: No. I'm not interested in doing less well what others have already done admirably. I prefer to do something personal, even if it's not so good. Otherwise it's not interesting. What's important is having a feeling of one's own...



H.U.O.: Even with regard to the history of the theatre, doesn't it seem important to you to establish a connection?

N.S.: I never think of what was done before, or what it will be possible to do afterwards. I am submerged in something that I try to catch.

H.U.O.: Then it's the present?

N.S.: It's what arouses my enthusiasm, what interests me. I have never theorised about what the theatre should be, or what other people do... THE character as such doesn't exist, but merely carries the movement. What really plays a part is these internal movements that I have called "tropism"; it's that what counts. I assign the sex, for example, quite arbitrarily because that concerns everybody. I write an "M" or a "W" for the radio because it's necessary to differentiate between the voices.

H.U.O.: That's giving something a name without really naming it.

N.S.: Yes. I think that happens with people of both sexes and nearly all ages.

H.U.O.: You said, "I never imagine my characters specifically, I only hear their voices."

N.S.: Yes, that's true. When Barrault staged a play, he used to say, "He's a man of what age? 30? I have no idea." It's an awareness in which things happen.

H.U.O.: Could you tell me about the famous ellipsis in your plays?

N.S.: It's for rhythm. They are unfinished sentences. They mustn't be read too quickly. And more often because the sentence needn't be ended grammatically. I look for the word, the feeling, but I don't say to myself, "You are a good woman in the act of writing." I don't think of myself, I forget myself.

H.U.O.: Gilles Deleuze used to say, "being in the midst of things but at the centre of nothing".

N.S.: That's beautiful, it's good..

H.U.O.: Could you talk to me about your beginnings as a writer?

N.S.: I started by writing a piece that seemed alive to me, it didn't appear to me to resemble anything that was being done at the time. I thought that one could no longer write the traditional novels; it was one of the first tropisms. I have done more, in which the characters didn't play much of a part, and their feelings were rather up in the air – just some basic support. So I called them "tropisms" because they were movements caused by someone else.

H.U.O.: Before writing a novel, is there any preparatory research?

N.S.: Of course. I always have *notebooks*, in which I jot down all these movements. I work slowly.

H.U.O.: Is this work an amalgamation of all these movements?

N.S.: No, it's not an amalgamation. It develops in accordance with a particular theme, a particular line. One must have a theme before starting a novel.

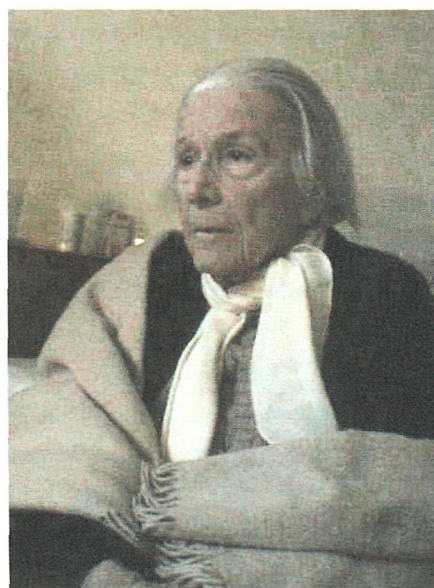
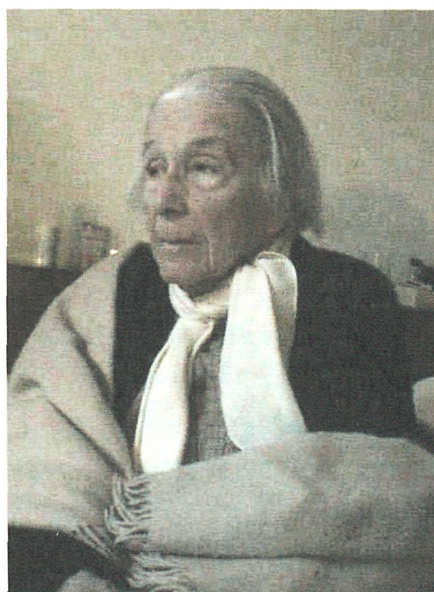
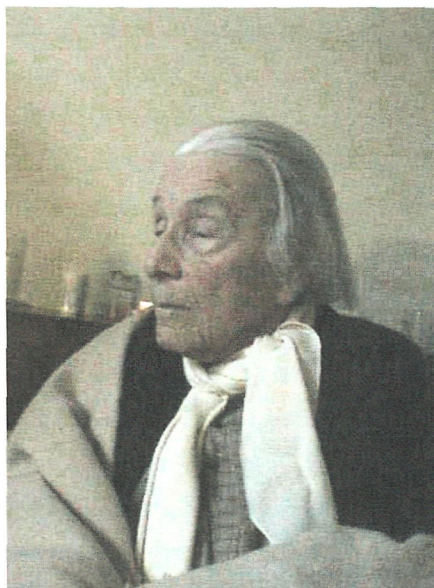
H.U.O.: You say that your art is a change, a transformation. Is it, in fact, a non-static notion of the work?

N.S.: It's the feeling of movement that interests me; it's the thing in the process of changing and moving – not anything stable. There are great masterpieces with static objects and characters, but what interests me is seeing things moving, finding out where they are going...

H.U.O.: Many artists have referred to your work, because plastic art has transcended static work. Gerard Richter has said, in a general way, that informal art could be everything that includes chance and movement through change, which in a sense counter-balances the *constructive quality of the classic age*. Is your work informal in that sense?

N.S.: I hope so. What is interesting is that which is in a process of gestation. It's a sort of perpetual present.

H.U.O.: I have the impression that all your work is in tropisms.



N.S.: That's true. It seems to me that that's where I started. Afterwards I developed it elsewhere. It's invisible movement. *Tropisms* come from a feeling, in the same way that one writes a first poem.

H.U.O.: And before this first book in 1932, you had never written anything else?

N.S.: Never. Except for the conventional exercises at the Sorbonne.

H.U.O.: Your work has been associated with the new novel. Sartre even associated it with the anti-novel.

N.S.: What's the anti-novel? A novel is a free thing. Anti? That sounds like saying that novels have a specific form. There aren't any. If I have written like that, it's a novel, a work in prose; I'm not against novels.

H.U.O.: Where does your work stand in relation to classical novels? Sartre said that to a certain extent you preserved the appearance of a novel, such as, for example the 19th-century novel.

N.S.: No. I don't think so. That seems to me like a work in prose with the form of a novel, but it doesn't have the intrigue, or characters, of any particular kind. That doesn't mean that I don't admire Balzac or Dostoyevsky enormously. It doesn't mean anything, but things change. They have to change.

H.U.O.: Are there writers whom you feel close to?

N.S.: Shakespeare, Dante, Dostoyevsky,

Kafka. Balzac's way of writing was necessary at the time, but one can't write like Balzac anymore. If one copies, that would be plagiarism.

H.U.O.: Roland Barthes once said that being modern means being what is no longer possible.

N.S.: If it's not possible I can't do it; I think it's difficult but it must be possible. I believe it has always been like that; every century has its difficulties.

H.U.O.: In 1936 you were an activist on behalf of women's right to vote...

N.S.: Only Swiss and French women didn't have the right to vote, and it was de Gaulle who gave it to them on returning from England. I was in favour of equality, I have never had anything to do with politics.

H.U.O.: Did you have any other connections with the feminist movement?

N.S.: I have mainly been taken up with literature, but within myself I have always been for absolute equality. My writing is not committed to any cause. I have been busy with my tropisms. Everything is there, in this internal movement, right up to my last book. Seeking something other than what has already been done, even by you yourself.

H.U.O.: How would you define "Tropisms"?

N.S.: They are the internal movements that are not governed by your will. They just happen within you. I have felt them. It's possible that you can't define them, but they are made inside you, you feel

them. Without being in the least organised, they are made inside you. In my latest play that is now running, well, that's good...; in the interval there is something that's unpleasant for the other person, something indefinite, well it's just that, a tropism.

H.U.O.: And "That's Good", is that the title?

N.S.: No, the title is *Pour un oui ou pour un non* (For a Yes or for a No).

H.U.O.: Does contemporary language influence you?

N.S.: No, I only work with languages that I know well. There are always new languages; I am only interested in my own. You know, today's language will no doubt appear outdated in twenty years' time, but I don't really know what "outdated" means. Has something superseded the language of Balzac or Dostoyevsky? No, nothing. It's their language that we need. It's an absolute need.

If you reproduce Balzac's language, that amounts to academising, to copying. You have to find your own language, which enables you to use forms that don't yet exist; that's what's interesting.

H.U.O.: You have often mentioned *Le Planétarium* (The Planetarium). How did it come into existence?

N.S.: It's a false universe, a copy of the real world; do you know what a planetarium is? It's false stars that imitate the great sky outside, but it's enclosed and man-made.

H.U.O.: Have the lecture cycles that started in 1959 been important to you?

N.S.: Yes. I like dialogue a lot, talking to young people, even if we don't always agree.

H.U.O.: In his theory of chaos, Prigogine talks about the non-equilibrium process. He shows that according to the classical rules of science there are rules and certainty, whereas science in this century is plunged into uncertainty – an ever – greater uncertainty.

N.S.: I am in a constant state of uncertainty; I think that perhaps this word is able to get hold of feeling. I do everything I can because words do not kill feeling.

H.U.O.: Prigogine talks about time as a basic existential dimension...

N.S.: Everything I write is in a present that moves.

N.S.: Can one talk about the present as a whirlwind?

N.S.: Whirlwind would perhaps be a little strong; the present moves at a rather slow pace.

H.U.O.: Your books appear to talk about non-linearity. Our history is linear and Manuel de Landa shows that our history is more often non-linear; it is free of rigid theology and also free of a naive notion of progress...

N.S.: I don't even understand what progress means. I don't see what progress there was between Virgil and Kafka; there was change...

H.U.O.: Can you talk to me about your 1983 book on childhood?

N.S.: Again, it's just tropisms.

H.U.O.: So it wasn't a book on childhood?

N.S.: I hope not... there are two characters, two consciences... one corrects the other.

H.U.O.: Is the book autobiographical?

N.S.: Not at all; first of all because that would have involved people that I don't want to involve in it.

H.U.O.: How would you define the present?

N.S.: One doesn't feel the present; in order to judge it one must leave it; if one does experience it, there is no consciousness; it escapes us...

H.U.O.: I felt very strongly the need of seizing the present in *Les fruits d'or* (The Golden Fruits). Is it the possibility of an impossibility?

N.S.: One can reconstruct the present; the present only counts when it has past... But then it's no longer the present.

H.U.O.: You have said that in your writing we are more in the relative than in the absolute. Is there a connection between this and the theory of relativity?

N.S.: There's here's no explicit connection with scientific theories; I only work with my feelings.

H.U.O.: Butor said that all characters are potential novelists...

N.S.: No, because three-quarters of the time they are not aware.

H.U.O.: How do you view this notion of a peripheral character?

N.S.: They can become important or not. A young woman whom you have noticed because she has beautiful golden locks can become the centre of your life.

H.U.O.: As there is no hierarchy in your plays, are all the characters equally important?

N.S.: Everything is important – that depends on what one does with it. The reader must collaborate.

H.U.O.: So does the reader do at least half the work?

N.S.: Yes, you know it was Valéry who wrote about the muse, "It depends on you whether I am tomb or treasure... Friend, don't enter without desire."

H.U.O.: Were there any witnesses of your first books?

N.S.: My husband; he gave me enormous support...

H.U.O.: In *Ici* (Here), can one talk about the eternal return of tropisms?

N.S.: I wanted to amuse myself by treating words as if they were human beings, animated beings.

H.U.O.: So there is no narrative?

N.S.: I never write narrative, or any story where you want to know what's going to happen.

H.U.O.: Especially in *Ici*?

N.S.: In all my work.

H.U.O.: Does this disappearance of narrative mean that genres are also abolished?

N.S.: I do that because narrative bores me... With regard to tropisms, one is on neutral ground, and everyone feels them as I do – men as well; at this level there's no question of sex.

H.U.O.: A few words about *Ouvrez* (Open)?

N.S.: The characters, in other words the beings, or the actors, are words. When the people arrive, only the appropriate words remain and all the others are shut up behind a screen and they see what is going on. Sometimes they can't stand it any more because it seems to them not right, not correct, so they cry out, "Open, open", so that they can join in...

H.U.O.: Is each word an actor?

N.S.: Every word is a living being.