# SEEING IMPOSSIBLE THINGS:
# PROUST AND THE READER'S VISUAL IMAGINATION

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ABSTRACT

Maury Bruhn: Seeing Impossible Things:
Proust and the Reader's Visual Imagination
(Under the direction of Jessica Tanner)

My dissertation examines how literature prompts us to visualize complex, multisensory and multidimensional images that push the boundaries of our cognitive capacities. Rather than considering descriptive power in literature in terms of perceptual mimesis, I argue that the imaginative challenges posed by literary images help us think outside of the habitual conceptual constructs that structure our normal perception of the world around us. Taking Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*) as a case study, I investigate how Proust guides the reader to visualize certain sets of objects: food and other mealtime accoutrements, seascapes and skies, planes and people in motion, and churches and people through time. Using approaches drawn from literary studies, art history, and cognitive science, my chapters examine how Proust asks us to reconsider four conceptual categories: matter, space, energy, and time.

My first chapter argues that materiality in the *Recherche* is both presence and absence, combining vivid sensory details with an awareness that our material impressions are transitory and impermanent. In my second chapter, I explore imaginative immersion through Proust's sea and sky images, and situate these images within a broader dialogue about theories of landscape representation from nineteenth-century painting to contemporary ecocriticism. My third chapter demonstrates how Proust's images create imaginative energy by evoking speed, light, and

fragmentation. My fourth and final chapter looks at Proust's images of churches to show how the cumulative imaginative training the reader has done throughout the *Recherche* prepares them for the novel's concluding image of spatialized time. Ultimately, "Seeing Impossible Things" both advances our understanding of Proustian aesthetics through close analysis of his descriptive techniques, and demonstrates the experiential specificity of how we imagine when we read.

To my parents, Mark Bruhn and Kelley Young, who taught and teach me how to read.

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# INTRODUCTION: SEEING IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

> "I can't believe *that*!" said Alice. "Can't you?' the Queen said in a pitying tone. 'Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes. "Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said: "one *can't* believe impossible things. "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." (Carroll, 220-221)

The White Queen's confident proclamation in *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* of believing "six impossible things before breakfast" is enduringly popular, available on posters and greeting cards for modern-day fans of Lewis Carroll's upside down and backwards universe. Something in this line resonates with contemporary readers, thrilling us with the possibility of engaging with the impossible. In this scene, the White Queen makes several impossible claims to Carroll's heroine Alice, such as her ability to remember the future. She begins screaming and tells Alice she has just remembered that she will prick her finger on her broach when she tries to undo her shawl. When, several seconds later, she does indeed prick her finger, she does not scream at all, having already gotten that out of the way (219). This disconnection between action and reaction, or action and emotion, accounts for one sort of logical impossibility: the disorder of cause and effect. But the claim that Alice cannot believe in the above quote is somewhat less dramatic: the Queen states her age as one hundred and one. Alice refuses to believe that this could be true, and the Queen admonishes her to try with instructions to take a deep breath and to close her eyes. She emphasizes that this is a question of practice: she herself devoted a half hour a day at Alice's age to believing impossible things. By meeting Alice's confident "I can't believe *that*!" with the prosaic suggestion that it just takes

practice, the Queen opens up a new conceptual space within the text. The impossible, instead of being the binary and invisible face of the possible, emerges as cognitive space that can be entered with concentration and practice. As with the example of remembering forward, which asks Alice to consider a reciprocal relationship between the future and the past, this famous passage asks Alice to consider a bi-directional relationship between the possible and impossible. The possible is a subjective mindset and not an empirical absolute, and it opens into a space of exchange with the impossible.

In order to practice believing impossible things, Alice must turn away from the perceptual world around her, thus the instruction "close your eyes." Her eyes are part of the process by which she has determined that the Queen is not of the age she claims, and in order to detach from that belief enough to allow a different one, she must detach herself from her perceptual habits too. But what result could have been expected from Alice's experiment, had she considered trying what the Queen is asking? When she opened her eyes again, would she find the same Queen in front of her, or another one? What does believing the impossible actually look like?

To explore this visual realm of the impossible, I turn to Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which foregrounds the relationships between perception, conception, and imagination. Proust's novel, published in seven volumes between 1913 and 1927, features a narrator who is extremely attuned to moments when the perceptual data we receive is in contradiction with our conceptual structure of the world around us. In the novel's opening scene, the narrator recounts the confused territory between waking and sleeping, when the sleeper "tient en cercle autour de lui le fil des heures, l'ordre des années et des mondes," a reorganized temporality reminiscent of the White Queen's (5). Even with his eyes open, Proust's narrator is

apt to see impossible things. A cloud in the distance turns out to be solid rock, a brown insect in the evening sky turns out to be an airplane, a telegram from his dead lover turns out to be from an old friend, a sketchy figure exiting a sketchy building at night turns out to be a respectable aristocrat. Proust's narrator documents both his perceptual mistakes and their logical resolutions, dramatizing the process by which impossible things enter our field of vision and slowly become legible in the realm of the possible: the opposite of the process the White Queen would like Alice to undergo. Reading Proust asks us to pay close attention to the bumps in the narrator's perceptual road, rather than assuming a smooth translation of perception into understanding.

However, when we enter the textual world of Proust's *Recherche*, we are not only analysts following the explicit lessons provided by the narrator's experiences. We are visitors to a textual world that demands our imaginative as well as analytic engagement. We follow the narrator into the deep past and into the projected future, and through temporal folds where disparate moments seem to meet. We attend to the everyday object world of bedrooms and tables set for lunch and cast our gaze on paintings no one has ever seen outside of their mind's eye. We watch scenes with the narrator that he himself tell us are impossible, where, for example, his fast-moving friend appears in seven different places simultaneously. We see a teacup in which there is and is not an unfolding paper flower that is and is not a whole town. If we heed the White Queen's instructions to take a deep breath and to "close our eyes" by detaching from the perceptual world around us and entering the imaginative world the text inspires, what do we see? Through the process of reading Proust, how is he asking us to improve our ability to see impossible things—and when we close the book at the end of our reading, will the perceptual world around us contain new sights?

Proust is the focus of this exploration not because he is the only author whose images are worth attending to in this particular manner, but because the scope of his work provides many examples of each kind of image I examine, allowing patterns and variations to be observed over extensive text. Additionally, and equally importantly for my purposes, Proust's interest in what could be broadly characterized as the realm of the visual is vastly inclusive. Truly encyclopedic, Proust treats the narrator's lived visual experiences, daydreams and (to a lesser extent) dreams while sleeping, visual illusions, extra- and intra-diegetic visual art (painting and sculpture), theater, fashion, furniture and other household objects, the impact of new technologies on perceptual experiences (cars and planes), and, more abstractly, larger patterns and symbol systems such as aristocratic lineages and place-name etymologies.[1] It is thus consonant with the larger field of Proust studies to ask questions about how the visual functions in Proust and the connections with larger questions about visualization and imagination drawn from cognitive literary studies and the neuroscience of aesthetics.

Before jumping into the imaginative world the reader enters when they pick up the *Recherche*, we need to take a closer look at what is at stake when we talk about the imagination. Alan Richardson writes that despite a long tradition of distrust or disregard for the imagination, from Greek philosophy to twentieth-century science, it has now emerged as a vital topic in both the humanities and the sciences: "The surprising rise to prominence of imagination within twenty-first-century mind and brain science, along with its rich literary and philosophical pedigree, make imagination one of the most promising areas to date for interdisciplinary engagement within the growing zone of contact between literary studies and cognitive research" (2014: 225). In a 2003 book chapter, Francisco J. Varela and Natalie Depraz guide the reader to a

[1] See Deleuze's *Proust et les signes* for more on the *Recherche*'s abstract symbol-systems.

multilevel understanding of imagination through three interlocking sections. “Embodiment” corresponds to the empirical work done on the neuroscience of imagining, while “Phenomenology” treats the philosophical question of the relationship of imagination to perception, and “Transformation” offers a practical application of their central thesis: that “[i]magination is central to life itself, not a marginal or epiphenomenal side-effect of perception” (202). Like Varela and Depraz’s chapter, the goals of this introduction will be threefold in order to prepare the reader to for my central argument, which is that sustained engagement with Proust’s images guides the attentive reader through imaginative experiments that invite them to reexamine four conceptual categories that structure our habitual perceptual relationship to the world: matter, space, energy, and time. This introduction will first define what I mean by an image, which requires a conversation between empirical and theoretical levels. On an empirical level, I briefly summarize what we know about images from work in cognitive and neuroscience that treat image formation in the mind. On a theoretical level, I look at the ways in which literary theory, and aesthetic theory more broadly, have defined an image. The third goal of this introduction will be to suggest a literary model for the transformative potential of engaging with Proust’s images.

On an empirical level, before we can discuss the importance of visualization to the reading experience, we need to get at a sense of what exactly visualization is. Research in cognitive literary studies and in neuroscience is still debating and defining the ways in which our imagination (visual and otherwise) works, both when engaging with a text and during other forms of mental action such as daydreaming. While a complete overview of the research is beyond the scope of this introduction, I will highlight two general principles about visualization that are important for my larger argument before turning to the specific research on visualization

and literature. The first principle is that the world that we imagine is not necessarily a copy of the world that we perceive. While it may seem intuitive to see imagination as a secondary faculty after perception, the links between the sensory world we perceive and the mental world we imagine are complex and multifaceted. Antonio Damasio, talking about the use of the term "representation" to describe mental activity, nuances our common use of the term: "I do not have any idea about how faithful neural patters and mental images are, relative to the objects to which they refer. Moreover, whatever the fidelity may be, neural patterns and the corresponding mental images are as much creations of the brain as they are products of the external reality that prompts their creation" (320). Damasio distinguishes between "brain" and "mind" levels, the former consisting of neural patterns we cannot consciously access and the latter consisting of the images that do enter our consciousness, but he gives a certain autonomy to both levels relative to the sensory world outside of the body. While we do not know the exact nature of the relationships between all three levels (brain, mind, sensory world), Damasio does not establish a hierarchy of impression and impressed upon. The imagined world is not bound by the perceptual world. Varela and Depraz go a step further and argue that the imagination is in fact the basis for perception and not the other way around. Given that the flow of images in the brain never stops, as evidenced by the fact that we dream, they argue that "[o]rdinary perception is, to an essential degree, sensori-motor constrained imagination" (202). Cognition is not a "representational" or "accurate" copy of the world around us, it is the ground from which we are able to have perceptual experiences at all (202). The importance of this point for my argument about literature is fundamental, since "seeing the impossible" requires a mental flexibility that exceeds any perceptual experience we have had. Additionally, for literature to expand our perceptual

horizons, the relationship between imagination and perception must be one that goes two ways, not one in which the things that we read merely evoke copies of the real world in our minds.

The second insight that I draw from Damasio's work in particular is that imagination is not exclusively visual. He defines the term "image" as "mental patterns with a structure built with the tokens of each of the sensory modalities—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and somatosensory" (318). This definition of image as fundamentally multisensory is worth keeping in mind as we build an expansive notion of the Proustian image. Proust is certainly extensively engaged with the visual world, but to focus exclusively on the visual is to ignore his interest in other senses such as smell and taste. In addition to the five physical senses, Proust writes in great detail of the affective sensations of suffering, sorrow, desire, and longing. Drawing on insights from neuroscience, Renate Brosch argues that it is not purely realistic descriptions that enable readers to visualize the scene before them, but that texts are particularly rich when they draw on "not only readers' cognitive faculties but their empathy as well. This sort of challenge to readers' embodied and enactive responses can provoke especially vivid images" (2017: 264). Images can depict an active and changing situation rather than a fixed and static object, and thus include affective details and other relational information. Damasio includes this notion in his definition of an image as well, writing that "[i]mages in all modalities 'depict' processes and entities of all kinds, concrete as well as abstract. Images also 'depict' the physical properties of entities and, sometimes sketchily, sometimes not, the spatial and temporal relationships among entities, as well as their actions" (318). The Proustian image is fundamentally a process, one that incorporates sensory references, state changes through time, and affective and bodily information, and one that both insists on the active participation of the narrator in what he sees

and imagines and on the active participation of the reader in engaging with the imagined textual world.

Theoretical and empirical work on reading and visualization remains divided on the role played by perceptual mimesis. Elaine Scarry argues that reading allows for enhanced vividness in imagination as compared to non-directed forms of imagining such as daydreams, but she unites these forms of visualization under the umbrella of "perceptual mimesis": "Imagining is an act of perceptual mimesis, whether undertaken in our own daydreams or under the instruction of great writers" (6). Anežka Kuzmičová, on the other hand, leaves open the possibly of non-mimetic imagination in the following summary of her research on literary description and visualization: "Is imagery from visual description perceptually mimetic? (No.) If it has no correlate in perceptual experience, what other sort of experience does it resemble, if any? (The experience of voluntary visual imagery)" (275). Unlike Scarry, who is interested in what makes literary information in general visualizable, Kuzmičová discusses literary description only in the specific case of the description of objects. This is because in her analysis other sorts of textual information (i.e., landscapes, interpersonal relationships, etc.) do encourage perceptual mimesis, because the reader is imagining these things in an embodied and interactive way (278-279). The lack of embodiment characterizes literary description as such for Kuzmičová, because only there can imagining be purely or primarily visual. For the purposes of my argument, however, I will not be using perceptual mimesis as a criterion for evaluating images in Proust. Rather, my evaluation will be of the ways in which Proust's images manifestly do not resemble real or habitual perceptual experience.

As research in neuroscience and aesthetics is demonstrating, by engaging readers in new and surprising ways art can increase cognitive flexibility. G. Gabrielle Starr writes of the neuroscience of aesthetic experience that

> It is not just that ideas and perceptions, however, become newly linked in aesthetic experience but that the *hedonic value* assigned to these perceptions and ideas at a neural level enables powerful connections that had not existed before. Aesthetic experience thus makes possible the unexpected valuation of objects, ideas, and perceptions and enables new configurations of what is known, new frameworks for interpretation, and perhaps even a new willingness to entertain what is strange or to let the familiar and the novel live side by side. (20)

For Starr, aesthetic experience exists on the threshold between what is known and what is new, and that combination of the comfortingly familiar and the thrillingly unexpected can change the way we think. This is a fine balance: too much of the known, and the audience will not be pushed towards expansion; too much of the unknown, and the audience will become overwhelmed and frustrated. Starr is interested in "emotion and reward" rather than "perceptual modes" such as vision in her understanding of aesthetic experience (35). She writes, "[w]hen we approach aesthetics thus in terms of events—and not primarily in terms of objects—we foreground dynamism and temporality, even at a minute level: for example, the emotions that help define aesthetic experience are far from static, having varying durations and changing intensities" (18). It is this practice that I find in Proust's descriptions: images as dynamic events unfolding in expected and unexpected ways through time. Reader engagement is unlikely to stay uniform across an entire description which can unfold over several pages (such as the narrator's initial experience of involuntary memory in *Du côté de chez Swann*), let alone across image instances through a volume (seascape images in *À l'ombre de jeunes filles en fleurs*) or across the novel as a whole (churches from the narrator's childhood memories of Combray, to his visit to Saint Marc's in Venice, to remembering the Combray church when it is destroyed in World War

I). Yet in each one of these examples, the invitation is constantly open to the reader to engage with descriptive information on multiple levels: concrete and abstract, visual and other-sensory, similar to their own perceptual experience and outside of it entirely.

Moving into the fields of literary criticism and aesthetic philosophy, my analysis of Proust dialogues with two main bodies of work. The first is, of course, the field of Proust studies, especially insofar as it deals with questions of imagery and/or verbal versus visual art in the *Recherche*'s descriptions and/or theoretical apparatus. The second is the larger field of work about text and image, ekphrasis, and related fields which examine the question of the image from the joint perspective of the verbal and the visual (and sometimes beyond). To address this second category first, I draw on WJT Mitchell's work, which defines images in visual and verbal art in terms as broad and flexible as Damasio uses to define images in the brain and mind. Mitchell's early work already argues that "images 'proper' are not stable, static, or permanent in any metaphysical sense; they are not perceived in the same way by viewers any more than are dream images; and they are not exclusively visual in any important way, but involve multisensory apprehension and interpretation" (1986: 13-14). Consequently, "[t]here is no 'essential' difference between poetry and painting, no difference, that is, that is given for all time by the inherent natures of the media, the objects they represent, or the laws of the human mind" (1986: 49). While Mitchell is writing against a strict division of verbal and visual imagery, the lack of an essential difference should not be taken to mean there is no difference, but rather that the elements at work in any given piece of artwork (media used, objects represented, and the mind that focuses on them) create individual iterations of imagery. The first line quoted above about images not being "stable, static, or permanent in any metaphysical sense" is in line with Damasio's note that representational accuracy is not a feature of images in the mind or brain.

Mitchell's later work will propose that images are not identical with the pictures that contain them,[2] meaning that images are not contained somewhere 'out there' in the world.

This nonconcrete, multisensory nature of the image has important consequences for our understanding of how writers and readers are able to incorporate the nonverbal into literary production and reception. The field of intermediality looks at the exchanges and blends between mediums, not only as theoretical inspiration but as actual combination. While this may be easiest to see in contemporary art that incorporates sound and image, or in Wagner's notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or in textual experiments such as the incorporation of photographs into André Breton's *Nadja*, critics working on this topic also propose that intermedial effects can be found in the absence of the literal inclusion of multiple art forms. In his work on narrative literature and intermediality, Jørgen Bruhn argues against "the idea that literature has only recently been overrun by numerous non-literary forms and content" (4). This understanding of intermediality privileges the imaginative collaboration between art forms both in creation and in reception over their literal copresence. This same conception of collaborative possibility is present in recent work on ekphrasis. In her introduction to the 2018 *Poetics Today* special issue on ekphrasis in the digital age, Brosch argues that we must move beyond a reductive understanding of ekphrasis as the verbal representation the visual. She proposes a definition of ekphrasis that is instead "interest[ed] in adaptive and collaborative processes," "a literary response to a visual image or visual images," and "performative instead of […] mimetic (2018: 226, 227). This contemporary understanding of ekphrasis can change our retrospective view of writers highly engaged with

[2] He writes of the distinctions that "[y]ou can hang a picture, but you cannot hang an image" because [t]he image seems to float without any visible means of support, a phantasmatic, virtual, or spectral appearance" and "[t]he picture is the image plus the support; it is the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium. That is why we can speak of architectural, sculptural, cinematic, textual, and even mental images while understanding that the image in or on the thing is not all there is to it" (2005: 85).

visual art as well. Brosch's emphasis on process is apparent throughout her discussion, as is obvious in the lexicon of adaptation, collaboration, response, and performance in the above quotations. Inspired by these theoretical approaches, I consider Proust's textual visuality to be a composite practice of transformation, where the visual elements that inspired the text, the text in and of itself, and the reader's imaginative response represent three linked but not identical realms.

Literary critics concerned with images and aesthetics in Proust have similarly recognized the multimedial nature of the *Recherche*, which incorporates no explicit extraliterary material (in the form of pictures, etc.) and yet seems saturated with art forms outside of the literary. Momcilo Milovanovic writes, somewhat rhapsodically, that "l'atmosphère du roman apparait saturée par ces présences réelles des autres formes d'art. Par le biais de la référence elle absorbe différentes formes esthétiques, et les incorpore, les fond dans sa matérielle en perpétuelle fusion" (258). The "atmosphère" Milovanovic mentions seems to be both the fact of Proust's references to extraverbal art forms and the experiential reality of the text as it exists in the process of creation and consumption. By implying a separation between "roman" and "atmosphère du roman," it is possible to speak of the transformative process (incorporation, melting, fusion) in a meaningful way despite the concrete reality of the novel-as-object as a collection of 'just' words. Mieke Ball writes "on pourrait dire que les métaphores sont les images verbales d'images mentales, tandis que les descriptions sont les images verbales d'images perceptuelles. Toutes deux les images mentales et les images perceptuelles, sont susceptibles, à leur tour, de se référer à des images graphiques, visibles, mais par le biais de cette médiation 'en cascade'" (11). While she will ultimately affirm that Proust's images are "après tout, des produits langagiers," her understanding of these literary images is formed through a blend of multiple but specific

interactions between the verbal, the mental, the perceptual, and the graphic. This is backed up by the science of imagery; as Varela and Depraz write "although visual and verbal activities are quite distinct cognitive entities, there is a coherent cross-model activation that works in imagery just as well as in actual cross-model perception" (198). Distinct but entwined, these realms of the verbal and the visual and the mental and the perceptual will be drawn upon throughout my dissertation to illuminate the ways in which Proustian imagery draws us out of conceptual clarity and into the realm of imaginative (im)possibility.

To reconcile the multifaceted nature of the image with the specific goal of understanding how Proust's particular images work, my analysis will be rooted in close readings to balance the theoretical complexity of the subject. As Hugues Azérad writes, in Proust "[t]he image provides true cognition, combining normally conflicting qualities: the imaginary and the senses, absence and presence, past and present" (86). These "conflicting qualities" will all play a part in my analysis, but they are not equally at play in every image. Each of my chapters looks closely at imagery sets to illuminate how these qualities are evoked throughout the *Recherche*. The structure of each chapter links the broader conceptual category addressed (matter, space, energy, and time) to certain sets of images. Matter is explored through the images linked explicitly and implicitly to still life painting, as well as imagery evoked in the process of involuntary memory. Space is explored through the broad concept of the landscape, with particular attention to the role of light as a spatial organizer and the seascape as a particularly present and potent landscape subcategory. Energy is examined through the character of Saint-Loup and images of planes. Finally, time is examined through images of churches and through Proust's attempts to image human life, particularly at the very end of the novel. The passages chosen are not and cannot be exhaustive, but where possible represent many iterations of each image over volumes (and, in the

case of still life images, though a text anterior to the *Recherche* as well). Throughout, my goal is to excavate as fully as possible the complexity of the imaginative tasks Proust is inviting or prompting the reader to perform. Each reader may not choose to engage with each of these images, and, indeed, some readers will not visualize much at all while reading given the variability of imaginative function while reading.

It is thus not my intention to propose that readers must visualize certain things (or not) while reading Proust. What I do want to propose is that the process of grappling with Proust's images, on a variety of individual levels, pushes readers to become more cognitively flexible. Even in the absence of visualization, surprising language forms can stimulate the mind and brain in new ways. As Philip Davis writes,

> A reading expert, Keith Oatley, reports that scanners show that once a metaphor becomes clichéd it no longer activates the brain's motor system across domains as it did when it was new; my own collaborators in cognitive science have demonstrated how a dramatically compressed Shakespearean coinage such as 'this old man godded me' excites the brain in a way that 'this old man deified me' or 'made a god of me' does not. (5)

Surprising language can indeed be a hinderance to visualization, as Brosch demonstrates, noting that visualization is "prompt and smoothly affected" when it draws on the "common storehouse of iconic topoi in cultural memory" (2017: 257) whereas "complicated spatial or imagistic relations that necessitate a realignment of spontaneous imaginings are not productive of more intense imagery" (2017: 266). As Kuzmičová has argued, detail in images can prohibit clear visualization. She writes of texture and pattern details on described objects that "[a]lthough the reader may not cease to experience visual imagery while processing references to visual complexity, the images experienced are no longer experienced as images of the central object

proper" (309). Accordingly, my goal is to ask what heavy lifting[3] the reader is doing when engaged with Proust's images rather than trying to demonstrate, as Scarry has done in *Dreaming by the Book*, where a reader is likely to find particularly vivid images. When vividness or vibrancy is evoked (in certain examples from my third chapter on energy, for example), it is for a restricted case, and the potential imaginative vividness or lack thereof of Proust's images is not a criterion for inclusion in my analysis.

Having looked that the empirical and theoretical background for my analysis of Proust, we can turn now to what I see as the transformative practice of reading Proustian impossible images. Below, I sketch out a model for thinking about literary images not as models of or variations on perceptual experience, but as new mental structures. Because of the newness and the complexity of these image structures, they cannot necessarily be visualized clearly in their entirety. Rather, they hover on the edge of visibility, challenging us to incorporate very complicated information (multisensory, spatial, temporal, process-oriented, or all of the above) into our understanding of what is being described. Davis writes of John Milton's description in *Paradise Lost* of Satan falling through Chaos that "[i]t feels like some mind-spinning idea in poetic physics, making us take in thoughts we cannot really think" (81). The scope of the spatial and temporal relations involved in the description of Satan's fall take us far outside of the conceptual constraints we use to navigate our day-to-day lives, and thus hover at the edge of thinkability. Proust's subjects are not so classically epic, but my chapters will explore how his

[3] In an essay on self-reflexive fictions, Joshua Landy refers to this type of work as "mental calisthenics": "By gradually increasing the size of the cognitive weights we have to lift—by putting additional pressure on our simultaneous ability to have and to stand back from a given mental attitude, whether belief, desire, or feeling—reflexive fictions […] give an intensive workout to our capacity for simultaneous trust and distrust, readying us for the difficult business of life" (2015: 572).

dining room tables, his seascapes, his people and planes, and his churches and memories pose the same sort of challenges to the reader.

How do we interact with things we cannot imagine concretely? A straightforward attempt to translate Proust's images into normal perceptual information is a limited way to approach them.[4] I propose Edwin Abbott's novel *Flatlands: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, which looks at the imaginability of dimensions beyond our own, as a model for the kind of imaginative work Proust's images require. *Flatland* narrativizes its protagonist's conceptual movement from visible surface to intimated depth. Malcom Bowie writes of a scene in the *Recherche* in which the writer Bergotte marvels at the painter Vermeer's "petit pan de mur jaune" that "Bergotte discovers in Vermeer's exquisite detail what the narrator has already found in Bergotte's prose: a flat surface that is suddenly stratified and opened up into the dimension of depth" (118). This relationship of depth and surface, this notion that a small patch of color could contain within it whole new dimensions and depths, provides a model for understanding the imaginative work of Proust's images throughout the novel. This is also the imaginative work Abbott's protagonist, two-dimensional Flatland resident "A. Square," must perform as he shifts from the (perceived) surface of his world to the (imagined) depth of a three-dimensional one, and beyond. With this model in mind, we can consider Proust's images as invitations to his readers to reconsider the "surfaces" (in this case, conceptual categories) that bind our habitual perceptual experience, and

[4] That is not to say it cannot or should not be done. If the narrative of the *Recherche* is prioritized, it can be useful to chunk images in terms of what the narrator might 'really' be seeing at any given moment. For example, Stéphane Heuet's graphic novel adaptation uses two straightforward, temporally disjointed but narratively sequential, images to show *Du côté de chez Swann*'s involuntary memory. First, the teacup and madeleine, and then the town of Combray. There is only the use of the stream from the tea across the initial drawings of Combray to represent the process-oriented textual image by which teacup becomes town. This choice of narrative progress over descriptive strangeness is a wholly valid one, but it is not the only possible approach to a retelling of Proust.

through this process to find unexpected openings into unthinkable thoughts and impossible sights.

Abbott's 1884 novel is fictionalized physics, a narrative attempt to help a lay audience imagine relationships to space that are not our own. Since we are always inhabiting three-dimensional space, our conceptual notions of what is spatially possible are structured in the same way. In order to make us more conscious inhabitants of our own relationship to dimensionality, Abbott asks us to follow a character who lives in Flatland, a two-dimensional plane, and must grabble with learning of the existence of Pointland (no dimensions), Lineland (one dimension) and finally Spaceland (the three-dimensional world). Davis writes the following about the relative difficulty of Spaceland for Abbott's protagonist in comparison to Pointland or Lineland: "this is a mind now blindly struggling to think outside its own framework or configuration whilst still embodied within it. It is easy for the creatures in each successive dimension to look down on the level below them and recognize the limitations there: what is harder is to imagine that their own dimension is, likewise and analogously, not the ultimate one" (73). When Abbott's protagonist visits lands with one dimension and with no dimensions, he easily sees how he himself can move in ways that the inhabitants of these other worlds cannot. For the three-dimensional reader, we just as easily perceive the constraints of A. Square's two-dimensional life. Conversely, A. Square cycles through doubt, disbelief, fear, and anger as he is told of the three-dimensional world and must be brought into it before he is able to believe it is real. His conceptual struggles mirror our own struggles if we are confronted with the idea that there are dimensions beyond our own. My second and fourth chapters engage more concretely with the specifics of dimensionality in Proust, but in general, this push to think outside our "own framework or configuration while still embodied within it" is challenge the *Recherche* poses to

us. Abbott's protagonist makes his rallying cry "Upwards, and yet not Northwards" (Davis 73) as he is exploring the three-dimensional world, knowing that he must find a direction of motion that, unlike north, does not exist in his homeland plane. Proust challenges us to recognize the limitations posed by our own embodiment by giving us a narrator who is hyperaware of his own (restless, ill, tired, or desiring) body, but to nonetheless persist through these challenges in our imaginative work to visualize what could lie beyond them.

Both the *Recherche* and *Flatland* ultimately propose that learning how to see, literally and conceptually, is a multilevel, open-ended process. Proust's narrator learns this throughout the *Recherche*, finding that his interactions with works of art have the power to influence his interactions with the world around him. He compares his reading of the novelist Bergotte, whose works he knows so well that "ses phrases étaient aussi claires devant mes yeux, que mes propres idées, les meubles dans ma chambre et les voitures dans la rue" (*Côté de Guermantes* 316). Note that this clarity is both conceptual ("mes idées") and concrete ("les meubles" "les voitures"). Proust here links artistic experience with both internally oriented cognition and externally oriented perception. As the narrator considers new innovations in art, brought about by an unnamed novelist and the painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir, he proposes that a truly original artist recreates the world for us, inviting to us with a "[m]aintenant regardez" to look anew at the visible universe. This is a process that, again, links cognition and perception; in the case of Renoir, for instance, "[d]es femmes passent dans la rue, différentes de celles d'autrefois puisque ce sont des Renoir, ces Renoir où nous refusions jadis à voir des femmes" (317). Proust is not only saying that we see things differently after being exposed to new and surprising works of art, but that we see things where we did not even recognize them before. Renoir's women are not just

a new way of looking at women, they expand the very category. This is a process without end, as our minds will grow accustomed to each new way of thinking and seeing.

In *Flatland*, we see a similar linking of conceptual understanding with perceptual possibility but done in such a way that makes it clear that the concept and the perception are inextricably linked. When A. Square asks the three-dimensional Sphere who has been his guide to Spaceland to take him up to a place where he can see inside of solid objects (as he could see inside of the inhabitants of Lineland, and as the Sphere can see inside of him), his interlocuter casts doubt on the possibility that beings exist in more than three dimensions. Of potential visitors from these theoretical lands, he explains "most people say that these visions arise from the thought—you will not understand me—from the brain, from the perturbed angularity of the Seer" (73). This does not dissuade A. Square, who does not separate conception and perception in his response, entreating "that if this other Space is really Thoughtland, then take me to that blessed Region where I in Thought shall see the insides of all solid things" (73). To be sure, there is a certain logic operating here: the narrator calls it analogy. He has been perceiving two dimensions, and now he perceives three. It stands to reason minds accustomed to three dimensions live in ignorance of a fourth dimension, and beyond. But the process he has gone through to get to this conclusion is in fact much less linear than that. Before Spaceland, he visited the lands of one dimension, Lineland, and no dimensions, Pointland. He has moved downwards before moving upwards. He has taken the role both of would-be instructor to the inhabitants of fewer dimensions and of impatient, disbelieving student to the inhabitant of three. Theory and practice have not succeeded one another neatly but have advanced in fits and starts. Substituting the experience of the narrator for the experience of the reader, they themselves grappling with the notion of four dimensionality, we can see that the reconditioning and

recreating effect of art is thus not linear: change your thoughts → change your sight. Rather, it demonstrates the entanglement of thought and matter, which change together in unpredictable, not sequential, ways.

Consequently, my chapters function both individually and sequentially. They are both four individual case studies of certain sets of images, and one possible iteration of the progressive imaginative skills a reader might learn from deep engagement with the text of the *Recherche*. Here, I will briefly outline the progressive path, and end with a few words about the choice of image-sets. My opening chapter builds a Proustian notion of materiality that is intimately concerned both with real sensual presence and with the intimation, now familiar from quantum physics, that the object-world we can see and touch is not reality as such but a construction of our cognitive constraints. This fluid notion of materiality—materiality as spectrum, rather than absolute—is the basis from which my other chapters build. As such, I do not adhere to strong distinctions between spiritual and material, art and life, and involuntary and voluntary memory. The work the reader does with the *Recherche* is an invitation to reimagine, in different combinations, the variants of these categories. From this foundation, my second chapter examines how Proust describes space, specifically landscapes, not as something out there in the world, but as something into which the reader can penetrate. This inviting-in, however, is not an attempt to recreate our habitual perceptual experience of space, but rather to show that spatial understanding is a process of negotiation between conception, perception, and representation. After matter and space, my third chapter tackles energy, both in the everyday sense of motion in a direction and in a specifically literary sense of feeling an imaginative pulse from a description. My final chapter aims for a cumulative, if necessarily incompletely so, effect, showing how this work of rethinking materiality, space, and energy within the text prepares the reader to take on

the imaginative challenge of the book's closing lines, to see with something resembling simultaneity the many disparate moments of one life.

Because of concerns for clarity and length, each chapter will address two descriptive clusters (still lifes and involuntary memories, light and Balbec seascapes, Saint-Loup and airplanes, and churches and subjective appraisals of life experience). There is a certain textual logic to these pairings: the narrator's first involuntary memory arising from a now-iconic tableau of teacup and madeleine; the presence of luminosity as a major descriptive feature of many of the narrator's Balbec experiences; the association between Saint-Loup, airplanes, and war; and the use of temporal spatialization to describe the Combray church and the narrator's sense of the span of life at the novel's close. On an evaluative level, these seem to me to be the clearest examples for the argument on each chapter. However, these are certainly not the only places where each imaginative skill is tested throughout the *Recherche*, nor are they necessarily developed in an orderly, progressive nature throughout the text (though, as stated above, the reader does need all of the preceding practice to grapple with the final image). Nor are they distinct. The Combray involuntary memory description, for example, requires the reader to consider the distinctions between material objects, sensory properties, visual metaphors, and memories (tools from chapter one); to move from a mental model of miniaturized town in a teacup to a scaled-up model of a town inhabited by the young narrator and his family (tools from chapter two); to process images in motion such as unfurling paper flowers and the appearance of the town (tools in chapter three); and, finally, to simultaneously consider two normally disparate temporal moments in the narrator's life (chapter four). The *Recherche* is rich in opportunities to imagine the impossibly complex, and to take pleasure in the moments when something hitherto unknown starts to form in the mind's eye.

# CHAPTER 1: MATTER

While watching children build a toy model of the camp their parents have made for shelter, the protagonist of Hernán Díaz's 2017 novel *In the Distance* notices something strange about the scene in front of him: "[p]erhaps because the miniature emphasized the vastness of the surroundings, it seemed denser, heavier with actuality than the real thing" (86). That the miniature camp seems "denser, heavier with actuality" than the properly sized, usable camp points to a strange feature of representational models: they sometimes feel more real than the real thing. Art, and images in general, can not only mimic reality but supplant it. Art objects impress themselves upon our mind and we in turn use these impressions to create art of our own or simply construct our understanding of the world based on our artistic experiences and observations. Far from being copies or shadows of the material world, art objects are training grounds where we learn about and deepen our relationship to this world in myriad ways.

This chapter argues that the *Recherche* offers an important exploration of how art and reality are mutually self-constituting. To understand their overlaps and mutual influence, we can look at how Proust portrays the material world and the materiality of art throughout his novel. I propose that the *Recherche* develops the complexity of this relationship by offering two distinct and paradoxical attitudes towards materiality. The first of these attitudes is wonder at the marvel of tangible sensual presence, of the play of colors, sounds, scents, textures, and other material phenomena both in the real world and in art. The second attitude is an awareness that this sensually present object-world around us is not solid and permanent as it appears to be but is

rather a by-product of our physiological constraints and perceptual biases. The second of these attitudes may seem more intuitive to reading Proust than the first, because as a novel the *Recherche* is an artistic production in a medium that presents a comparatively low level of sensual stimulation (as opposed to visual art, for example), and because Proust embeds in his narrative a multitude of ordinary objects that are primarily valuable not for their own material qualities but because they provoke involuntary memory. And yet these features of Proust's work do not indicate a denial of materiality but instead invite a meditation on the mixed sensations of presence and absence that are susceptible to arise in all of our interactions with the world around us. Art such as Proust's invites us to look closer at the things around us and to notice when they press close to our consciousness as well as when they remind us of their own instability and impermanence.

When thinking about material presence in Proust, I follow critics such as Hannah Freed-Thall and Thomas Baldwin who have recently called for an increased attention to objects in the *Recherche*, especially those which are not explicitly aesthetic. Freed-Thall invites the reader to reconsider the priorities of the *Recherche*: in her reading, "Proust's novel looks less like a heroic monument to high art and more like a guide to commonplace, modest modes of enjoyment. I argue that Proust teaches us to value the formal and material vibrancy of inestimably ordinary things" (3). Bowie's earlier work on Proust does not explicitly deal with materiality but notes that an expansive variety of objects inspire the narrator's interest and analysis in the world of the *Recherche*: "[t]he work of art triggers in the narrator as an exemplary reader, hearer, or beholder a sensuously enlivened process of construal and interpretation, but then so does sunlight falling on walls, the noise of gossip, the blossoming of shrubs" (114). The ordinary, everyday, and banal: Freed-Thall and Bowie point out that these categories of objects are as compelling in the

Proustian universe as the extraordinary, rare, and precious. Baldwin also highlights the importance of the object world, arguing that "[i]n Proust, objects are—or at least become—world making. They are not rocks around which the fiction swirls" (2005: 27). In his analysis, objects such as *Sodome et Gomorrhe*'s "jet d'eau d'Hubert Robert" are neither used exclusively for visual effect (as the reference to Robert, an eighteenth-century genre painter, would seem to imply) nor exclusively as narrative props or décor. This ambiguity is part of why objects are powerful for both the narrator and the reader, who balance between a fascination with their marvelous material qualities and a curiosity about their status and their importance within the text.

These important reexaminations of materiality within Proust's work all highlight how the narrator, and the reader through him, are inspired by these objects to ask bigger questions about their own cognition, including their consumption of artistic work. The second attitude toward matter that Proust delineates is a result of this questioning, which leads to an awareness that we are constructing the material world as we interact with it. The material world is thus absent even at the heart of its sensual wonder. Here I am drawing on the ideas outlined by Daniel Tiffany, who examines the aesthetic response to the suggestion in science that the real content of the world is imperceptible to the eye and potentially unrepresentable to consciousness. Advances in quantum mechanics through the twentieth century led scientists to understand that the reality of the physical world is very different from our everyday experience of it: "the real is in fact inaccessible to the human senses without technological aid, and perhaps not even then" (293). At the quantum level, physical objects are largely composed of empty space, and the scattered particles that compose them behave in ways contrary to the laws that govern them at the level of our experience. Tiffany argues that these advances, like scientific advances before them, pose a

representational problem: how can they be understood by laypeople, when visual representations such as diagrams inevitably distort and oversimply the reality? Applied to literature, this problem of representing what cannot be seen may initially seem to lend itself to "abstraction or extreme formalism" but instead Tiffany finds in modernist poetry "a symbolic mode in which images of ordinary experiences betray, but don't represent, impossible bodies and events" (273). Instead of choosing not to represent the material world, the poets he finds "most compatible with quantum representation" (273) give the reader "a conception of the body that is at once intuitive and abstract, mundane and phantasmagorical, real and unreal" (293). Proust's materiality is similarly double sided; it draws attention to itself and in the same moment draws attention to what it is not. Involuntary memory, as my second section will argue, provides an encapsulation of this dynamic in which a strong sensual experience gives way to the paradoxical presence of that which is not there. This process teaches us a great deal about cognition, inspiring critical works such as Evelyne Ender's on memory, but it also teaches us about our relationship to material objects as such.

The aim of this chapter is to consider what Proust can show us about our relationship to material objects by closely examining the areas of contact and overlap between art and reality and how they illuminate this joint dynamic of material presence and absence. The second half will use involuntary memory to explore the cognitive and phenomenological experience of materiality as absence. The first half will look at material sensual presence in Proust through his references to the eighteenth-century genre painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin. Chardin is a major intermedial reference for Proust in the *Recherche* and in his earlier work, and an important figure in French art criticism from Diderot to the Goncourt brothers. Since Lessing's *Laocoon* argued forcefully against the idea that visual and verbal art could portray the same thing,

examining literature and painting together has raised the question of the suitability of the written word to portray material reality. Nicolas Valazza's work has nuanced this discussion, showing that Proust explicitly explores the interaction between the real and the aesthetic without establishing a binary parallel or contrast between art and painting: "[il] ne se contentera pas d'assujettir son écriture 'artiste' à la sensation de la chose peinte: la reconnaissance d'une peinture souveraine l'amènera plutôt à se dégager de l'espace du tableau afin d'incorporer les choses qui y sont figées dans le temps de la narration" (293). Through a close exploration of Proust's textual objects inspired by Chardin, I will show how the painted world teaches his narrator to better understand the sensual marvels that surround him.

**Proust's Chardin**

Chardin painted portraits and other genre scenes as well as still lifes, but his still lifes left the strongest impression on Proust. Proust's preference is not without precedent here. These still lifes were highly regarded by Chardin's most important eighteenth-century commentator, Diderot, who wrote extensively about his paintings when reviewing Parisian art salons for the periodical *Correspondance littéraire*. They were also essential for the later rehabilitation of his reputation in the nineteenth century when much of the French art of the previous century had fallen out of favor.[5] The Goncourt brothers include Chardin prominently in their *Art du XVIII siècle*, published between 1859 and 1875. They center their praise on the marvelous sensation of reality a Chardin painting generates: "[q]ui a rendu, comme il la rend, la vie inanimée des choses? Qui a donné aux yeux une pareille sensation de la présence réelle des objets ?" (115). Chardin's ability to create a reality effect is almost magical, in their estimation, as his work gives

[5] Gita May writes of this rehabilitation that Chardin's later admirers included Delacroix, Fantin-Latour, Pissarro, Cézanne, et Manet, while artists such as Greuze and Van Loo that had been more famous during his lifetime had fallen permanently out of favor by the nineteenth century (404).

one the impression of the real presence of material objects. His talent was such, the Goncourt brothers continue, that he achieved the full illusion of three dimensionality on the two-dimensional surface of the canvas: "C'est là le miracle des choses que peint Chardin : modelées dans la masse et l'entour de leurs conteurs, dessinées avec leur lumière, faites pour ainsi dire de l'âme de leur couleur, elles semblent se détacher de la toile et s'animer, par je ne sais quelle merveilleuse opération d'optique entre la toile et le spectateur, dans l'espace" (118). His work is miraculous, but that miracle seems scientific: objects in his work are marvelous because they seem to retain their weight and their shape, because they fool our eyes into attributing to them density and dimensionality.

Diderot's extensive writings about Chardin's still lifes are a vibrant introduction to the visual power of his painting and of the aesthetic puzzles it raises. Diderot's review of the painter's work at the 1763 salon mentions "plusieurs petits tableaux de Chardin; ils représentent presque tous des fruits avec les accessoires d'un repas" (483). The resulting descriptions make clear the paradox at the heart of the praise he will give these paintings: what is so marvelous about Chardin's work is how extremely ordinary it is. Diderot insists on the one-to-one correspondence between the painted representation and its real referent: "C'est que ce vase de porcelaine est de la porcelaine, c'est que ces olives sont réellement séparées de l'œil par l'eau dans laquelle elles nagent" (483-484). His praise becomes almost whimsical in its rhapsodies: rather than layers of paint, "c'est le substance même des objets, c'est l'air et la lumière que tu [Chardin] prends à la pointe de ton pinceau et que tu attaches sur la toile" (484). These are, of course, great exaggerations; no one has actually mistaken painted olives for real olives, painted light for real light. The game Diderot is playing, by insisting there is no difference between seeing a Chardin still life and seeing an actual arrangement of objects, is to lead his readers to

question their own perceptual habits. But how, indeed, does our perception of an aesthetic object differ from that of a real object? Where are these boundaries, and how do we establish and enforce them?

Rather than a simple correspondence where the painted world is a copy of the real world, Diderot suggests that the aesthetic and the real influence one another dialectically—in other words, that our experiences with aesthetic objects change how we interact with real objects. It is easy to understand that after seeing many olives and many porcelain bowls, we are prepared to judge the verisimilitude of a painter's representation of olives and porcelain bowls. But Diderot (and Proust is very explicit about this as well, as we will see) is insisting instead that the way painters paint informs the way non-painters see actual objects. For a sophisticated twenty-first century art viewer, saying that Chardin paints with the real substance of objects can at first seem to be a rather unsubtle method of praise.[6] It has been a long time, after all, since verisimilitude was a valuable category by which art was institutionally judged. Examined more carefully, however, the radicality of this reading begins to emerge. Indeed, it seems to anticipate a question that would later preoccupy artists like Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol: what is the actual distinction between aesthetic substance and real substance, between aesthetic objects and other objects? Diderot plays with these distinctions and their relationship to the viewing process throughout the years. In 1763 he writes, "[p]our regarder les tableaux des autres, il semble que j'aie besoin de me faire des yeux; pour voir ceux de Chardin, je n'ai qu'à garder ceux que la nature m'a donnés et m'en bien servir" (483). The salon of 1765, however, posits that rather than echoing our natural vision Chardin too participates in this process of teaching us how to see.

[6] May suggests that while Diderot is often taken to be "un adepte un peu simpliste d l'imitation servile de la 'belle nature'" in fact "il n'en conseillait pas moins aux peintres d'interpréter largement et de refondre en une nouvelle harmonie humanisée et épurée, l'harmonie toute accidentelle de la nature" (409).

Diderot apostrophizes the painter's ability to refresh his sight: "[v]ous venez à temps, Chardin, pour récréer mes yeux" (485). There could be many reasons for this change from natural sight to recreated vision—perhaps the difference in the paintings exhibited, or Diderot's lack of concern about consistency in his descriptions. But taken together, these two statements offer an invitation to consider the complexities of the links between art and nature, and reveal that rather than simply praising Chardin for his approximation to nature Diderot posits a much more complex perceptual relationship: aesthetic objects change how we view all objects, and this relationship continually evolves as we see more art. The marvel of Chardin's work is not that it is a perfect copy of the objects it represents, but that it provokes the viewer's curiosity about the areas of linkage between the aesthetic and the ordinary.

The *Recherche*'s exemplary painter, Elstir, does not immediately recall Chardin. The lengthy ekphrasis in *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* (henceforth *JF*) of Elstir's *Porte de Carquethuit,* which typifies the painter's current work at Balbec, elucidates a method of aesthetic creation which aims to restore the pre-conceptual immediacy of visual impressions. In the *Carquethuit* ekphrasis, this restoration is achieved by the disorganization and confusion of the relationships between the composite parts of a landscape. This type of perceptual decomposition, however, is not the only relationship to materiality suggested by Elstir's work. In the narrator's visit to Elstir's atelier and his subsequent viewing of Elstir paintings owned by the duke and duchess of Guermantes, he is exposed to several phases of the painter's work, and thus multiple lenses through which to view the relationship between material reality and aesthetic creation. The copresence of these different modes of representation in Elstir's work testifies to Proust's complex understanding of the relationship between the real experience of a thing represented and its representation. Rather than decomposing our normal organization of the visual universe as the

*Carquethuit* ekphrasis does, the painting of a young Odette Swann dressed in men's clothing as 'Miss Sacripant,' has a mysterious potency that is *too* close to strong impressions of beauty in the real world. While Elstir's seascape paintings are reminiscent of James Abbott McNeill Whistler's attempts in his *Nocturnes* to render on canvas the fleeting impressions of lights and shadows and fog,[7] the wonder the narrator feels in front of 'Miss Sacripant' is closer to the wonder Diderot and the Goncourt brothers felt in front of Chardin's hyperreal still lives.

In fact, before moving into his detailed description of the "métamorphoses des choses représentées" in Elstir's Balbec seascapes, the narrator's initial pleasure in the painter's atelier seems to come from how clear and lifelike some of his paintings are (*JF* 469). Elstir, in a "nouvelle création du monde," has taken ("tiré") the objects in his paintings from the real world: "une vague de mer écrasant avec colère sur le sable son écume lilas" or "un jeune homme en coutil blanc accoudé sur le pont d'un bateau" (468-9). The wave and the young man's jacket take on "une dignité nouvelle" because, although merely painted, they seem somehow to retain "ce en quoi ils passaient pour consister" (469). The narrator finishes his description by reemphasizing the distinction between painting and reality, as though he needs to remind himself that it exists: "la vague ne pouvant plus mouiller, ni le veston habiller personne" (469). The work does not remake the narrator's perspective on the world by making its elements unrecognizable, as Elstir's seascapes do. Instead, these paintings remake his perspective by inciting awe in the face of vivid material presence. This side of Elstir's work allows for a super-defined, detail-oriented aesthetic awareness grounded in the impression of intense materiality.

[7] In his 1878 libel trial against John Ruskin, Whistler describes a *Nocturne* as "arrangement of line, form, and color first, and I make use of any incident of it which shall bring about a symmetrical result" (*Art in Theory* 835). See chapter two for further discussion of Whistler.

If the lesson of the *Porte de Carquethuit* ekphrasis is how to unlearn our perceptual habits and see familiar objects anew, the narrator's description of the wave, the young man, and 'Miss Sacripant' place more value on the *what* than the *how* of representation. When the narrator discovers the 'Miss Sacripant' painting, he is filled with "cette sorte d'enchantement" that one feels in front of a work that is remarkable not only in execution, but also in the choice of a subject that is "si singulier et séduisant" (483). The narrator's description of the painting focuses on the precise details of the accessories and clothing (484), and his theoretical explanation of his delight focuses on the materiality of the painting: "Que de tels objets puissent exister, beaux en dehors même de l'interprétation du peintre, cela contente en nous un matérialisme inné, combattu par la raison, et sert de contrepoids aux abstractions de l'esthétique" (483). Material power and material beauty, Proust suggests, are their own aesthetic justification.

*Le Côté de Guermantes* explicitly associates Chardin and Elstir, identifying the former as one of the painters the latter admires (407). Both make "le même effort […] devant le réel" to remake it according to their own vision (407). The narrator comments that this comparison between Elstir and Chardin would scandalize traditionalists who see no commonalities between the contemporary experimental painter and the previous century's canonized portrayer of domestic scenes, but their acceptance of the latter is only possible because his work is temporally distant, and thus no longer has the power to scandalize.[8] The occasion of this *rapprochement* is the narrator's viewing of the Elstirs at the Guermantes residence. The narrator is "ému" before these paintings, "plus réalistes" than Elstir's current works, due to their apparent reality. He

[8] Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature* describes the false dichotomy between sanctified dead artist and contentious living artist: "C'est une fête […] quand les auteurs contemporains lui font la grâce de mourir: leurs livres, trop crus, trop vivants, trop pressants passent de l'autre bord, ils touchent de moins en moins et deviennent de plus en plus beaux" (34). He goes on to mention "Bergotte, Swann" as "des acquisitions récentes" (the text was published in 1948).

notices the same figure in several paintings, and muses that it must be a real friend or patron in Elstir's life (470). He describes a river scene as "carré de peinture […] découpé dans une merveilleuse après-midi" highlighting the notion that art is taken is taken directly from real experience (407). The intermedial relationship between Chardin's painting and Proust's writing is a productive space of contemplation about the overlaps between art and reality.

Before turning to a more explicit discussion of Chardin's role in Proust's work, however, I want to briefly raise the question of materiality and medium specificity. In addition to the interactions between art and reality that inform all artistic creation, the specific interaction between Chardin's paintings and Proust's novels raises the question of compatibility versus exclusivity between visual and verbal art. Namely, can literature produce visual cognitive sensations, and should it? One of my overarching goals is to move past a contrast between material presence in reality and its corresponding absence in artistic production—past a point of view, in other words, that draws a sharp distinction between art objects and other sorts of objects. This larger art/non-art binary is reproduced on a smaller scale in discussions of medium specificity that draw a sharp material/immaterial binary. In other words, theories that consider architecture or sculpture as more material than literature or music because they are more directly and sustainably available to the senses. I argue here against readings of Proust's aesthetic philosophy that hierarchize the *Recherche*'s attitude towards different artistic mediums, which tend to echo a *Laocoon*-esque distinction between arts with a stronger material presence (painting, architecture) and ones with a comparatively weaker one (writing, music). These readings downplay the importance of the material world in Proust's literary universe, and risk obscuring the ways in which visual art and architecture influenced how Proust constructed his novel.

A quick detour through two critics, one discussing Proust's views on architecture and one his views on visual art, demonstrate this type of hierarchization. Anne Henry has argued that architecture is the "plus bas" level of the arts for Proust, because "historicité n'est pas un élément valorisant mais aliénant, qui maintient l'esprit du monument prisonnier d'un style qu'on ne comprend pas, donc d'une matérialité" (284). The question of historicity and the difficultly of 'reading' past works of art outside of their historical context is certainly present in Proust. As Françoise Leriche notes of Proust's interest in art manuals and reproductions, he was "perfectly aware […] there is a cultural history of art and *of the gaze*, that renders illegible to him most works from past eras, unless he approaches them with the aid of works of erudition" (170). However, this awareness does not preclude Proust from allowing his readers to access architecture through two strategies (both discussed at length in my fourth chapter). The narrator himself develops intimate relationships with certain architectural spaces, notably the Combray church of his childhood and Saint Marc's basilica in Venice. Additionally, throughout the *Recherche*, the cathedral is a leitmotif in discussions of literary construction.[9] For Jonathon Paul Murphy, visual arts are "relegated to the rank of illustration" by the end of the *Recherche* "as the written word finally ascends to a central position of certainty" (12). For Murphy, the written word is central because it offers the narrator more imaginative freedom, a "mobile form of desire, less tied to a specific object" (12). In my reading, however, the mobility of desire in Proust is generated in part by the interaction between art forms, and particularly between literature and painting. Chardin's paintings are an example of the cross-productivity resulting from these interactions.

[9] Although in *Le Temps retrouvé* the narrator ultimately decides against viewing his novel as a cathedral, he ultimately compares it to a dress: "je bâtirais mon livre, je n'ose pas dire ambitieusement comme une cathédrale […] mais tout simplement comme une robe" (338). A humbler comparison, certainly, but one that presents the same problems of materiality and changing styles.

By way of a short essay written in 1895 and its eventual rewrite in *JF*, we can see how Chardin's vibrant still lifes inspired Proust's writing about vivid sensual impressions not only in Elstir's paintings, but in quotidian life. In the posthumously published essay "Chardin et Rembrandt" still life paintings become a paradigmatic lesson on ordinary life and aesthetic perception. A young, disaffected would-be artist is instructed to go to the Louvre and see Chardin's paintings in the hopes that their aestheticization of quotidian objects will teach the young man how to see beauty in his day-to-day surroundings. The aesthetic potential of the ordinary is both the impetus to create and the outcome of creative work. "Chardin et Rembrandt" is in part a pedagogical demonstration: an art-loving young man finds himself depressed by the banality of his surroundings. The essay's narrator offers a prescription to cure his malaise: follow the lessons of Chardin and learn to transform your perception of the ordinary world, not to escape it. What a painter like Chardin teaches is not that the world-made-art is superior to the real world, but rather that there is a radical equality of aesthetic potential in all things in the eyes of the artist. Christine McDonald summarizes the lesson Chardin imparts: "[w]hat Proust has learned from Chardin, he writes, is that a pear is as alive as any precious stone because the painter has declared the equality of all things before the painter's thoughts" (42). Art valorizes the marvel of material presence without attention to the objective worth of the object represented. When Proust's young man feels suffocated by "la banalité traditionnelle de ce spectacle inesthétique" of his shabby home (68), the remedy is to look at Chardin's paintings of "la vue d'un buffet, d'une cuisine, d'un office, d'une chambre où on coud" and learn from them the aesthetic potential of any object (69). Chardin's buffet, kitchen, or sewing room already gave him pleasure; by painting these settings that pleasure becomes accessible to the viewer.

In the essay's opening paragraph, the initial description of the young man's despair at his surroundings does not so much serve to reify the distinction between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic as to provide a lesson in the fact that we are always inflecting what we see around us with a certain perceptual tint:

> Prenez un jeune homme de fortune modeste, de goûts artistes, assis dans la salle à manger au moment banal et triste où on vient de finir de déjeuner et où la table n'est pas encore complétement desservie. L'imagination pleine de la gloire des musées, des cathédrales, de la mer, des montagnes, c'est avec malaise et avec ennui, avec une sensation proche de l'écœurement, un sentiment voisin du spleen, qu'il voit un dernier couteau traîner sur la nappe à demi relevée qui pend jusqu'à terre, à côté d'un reste de côtelette saignante et fade. Sur le buffet un peu de soleil, en touchant gaiment le verre d'eau que des lèvres désaltérées ont laissé presque plein, accentue cruellement, comme un rire ironique, la banalité traditionnelle de ce spectacle inesthétique. Au fond de la pièce le jeune homme voit sa mère, déjà assise au travail, qui dévide lentement, avec sa tranquillité quotidienne, un écheveau de laine rouge. Et derrière elle, perché sur une armoire, à côté d'un biscuit qu'on tient en réserve pour une 'grande occasion,' un chat gros et court semble le génie mauvais et sans grandeur de cette médiocrité domestique. (68)

It is not that the young man is seeing the banal objects around him objectively and without aesthetic gloss and he will be taught to perceptually transform them into something beautiful. Rather, he was already distorting the objects around him with his initial attitude, and thus the inflection of that distortion (exasperatingly banal versus aesthetically rich) can change. His dejection at "la salle à manger au moment banal et triste où on vient de finir de déjeuner et où la table n'est pas encore complètement desservie" is heightened because his imagination is occupied with the paintings of cathedrals, seas, and mountains he saw earlier that day. This imaginative contrast is what makes his surroundings ugly, rather than anything inherent in those surroundings themselves.

Looking closer at the description of the dining room table that follows the essay's opening, we see myriad hints of intentionality in the negative aesthetic valuation the young man makes of his home. A ray of sunlight hitting a water glass "accentue cruellement, comme un rire

ironique, la banalité traditionnelle de ce spectacle inesthétique." The light accentuates the young man's impression of the banality of the scene the way light might accentuate certain features in a painting. It is, like the ironic laugh it is compared to, an intentional inflection. This display is not only a scene but a "spectacle," as if it is in some way being performed for the viewer. The young man goes so far as to project intentionality onto "un chat gros et court" that seems to be "le génie mauvais et sans grandeur de cette médiocrité domestique." What this attribution to the cat hides is that the animating force behind the young man's disgust is his own manner of evaluating and organizing the objects that surround him. In this case he has compared them to his existing list of valuable objects (museums, cathedrals, seas, mountains) and found them to be "inesthétique" and unworthy of the attention he is nonetheless forced to give them. Taken one by one, the objects that compose his dining room scene are hardly incompatible with the aesthetic, even by pre-nineteenth century standards: the young man's mother "assise au travail, qui dévide lentement, avec sa tranquillité quotidienne, un écheveau de laine rouge" could easily be found in a domestic scene by Chardin or Greuze; at least one of Chardin's still lives also features a cat as the essay's narrator indeed points out to the young man (69).

Compare this to Proust's use of ordinary objects in *JF*. The narrator and his grandmother receive a box of fruits from Madame de Villeparisis, and the narrator experiences these plums, grapes and pears as objects of wonder. They draw the narrator's attention because they were originally given to Mme de Villeparisis by the Princesse de Luxembourg, and because their luminous surfaces remind him of the sea at Balbec. The strange sea-effects on these fruits show the permeability of interior and exterior spaces in Proust's Balbec descriptions, which I explore in chapter two, but it is worth anticipating them here to show the compatibility of the ordinary (food) with the beautiful (the sea). The plums the narrator sees being delivered to the hotel are

“glauques, lumineuses et sphériques comme était à ce moment-là la rotondité de la mer” (325). The first two adjectives describe a contradiction: “glauques” indicates both a greenish-blue color and the general appearance of murkiness, while “lumineuses” suggests exactly the opposite quality. The effect, magnified by the reference to the sea that immediately follows, is one of light reflecting off a surface that nonetheless gives the impression of depth, that retains a deep coloring. These plums not only resemble the sea; they seem to influence how the narrator perceives it. If their murky yet luminous coloring seems to suggest the sea, the sea’s “rotondité” seems to be suggested by the plums themselves. The descriptions continue, and continue to be marvelous: there are also “des raisins transparents suspendus au bois desséché comme une claire journée d’automne, des poires d’un outre-mer céleste” (325). The grapes “suspendus” in their box recall the descriptions of Chardin’s fruits suspended in his paintings as if in real air in Diderot and the Goncourts. They seem to capture and contain that which is much larger: a clear autumn day, as the plums are the murky, luminous, rotund sea. When the narrator and his grandmother receive the fruits later that day, they have undergone, as it were, a sea-change: “les prunes eussent passé comme la mer à l’heure de notre dîner, au mauve et que dans l’outre-mer des poires flottassent quelques formes de nuages roses” (325). The plums are now mauve in color, and it is now the surface of the pears that seems to have taken on the living aspect of the sea with the reflection of pink clouds floating across it. These twin sites of fascination for the narrator—the luscious fruits, particularly valued as the narrator’s grandmother finds the ones served by the hotel “généralement détestables” (323), and the sea—share a set of material qualities and reciprocally lend form and color. There is no aesthetic hierarchy here, only the wonder of material presence.

"Chardin and Rembrandt" ultimately rewrites this "spectacle inesthétique," advising the young man to return to the Louvre, study the still lifes, and use Chardin's loving gaze on the objects around him as a way to reevaluate his appraisal of his home. In *JF*, Proust uses this rewritten description from his earlier essay as the basis for his most still-life-like dinner scene at the Balbec hotel. Yae-Jin Yoo writes of this scene that "la description métaphorique du spectacle banal correspond à la transcription littéraire d'une toile de Chardin" (43).[10] The narrator takes delight in the objects left undone and half-empty on the table at the end of the meal, because "[d]epuis que j'en avais vu dans des aquarelles d'Elstir, je cherchais à [les] retrouver dans la réalité, j[e les] aimais comme quelque chose de poétique" (506). Proust's advice from his earlier essay is fully dramatized here: the narrator has learned to see beauty where (for him) there was none before. Whereas prior to his experience with Elstir he had spent meals gazing "uniquement du côté de la mer," now he feasts his eyes on a host of miraculous sights at the table:

> [L]e geste interrompu des couteaux encore de travers, la rondeur bombée d'une serviette défaite où le soleil intercale un morceau de velours jaune, le verre à demi vidé qui montre mieux ainsi le noble évasement de ses formes et au fond de son vitrage translucide et pareil à une condensation du jour, un reste de vin sombre, mais scintillent de lumières, le déplacement des volumes, la transmutation des liquides par l'éclairage, l'altération des prunes qui passent du vert au bleu et de bleu à l'or dans le compotier déjà à demi dépouillé, la promenade des chaises vieillottes qui deux fois par jour viennent s'installer autour de la nappe, dressée sur la table ainsi que sur un autel où sont célébrées les fêtes de la gourmandise et sur laquelle au fond des huîtres quelques gouttes d'eau lustrale restent comme dans de petits bénitiers de pierre. (506)

The narrator's new appreciation of the beauty of the dining table is an appreciation for the harmonious play of form, color, and light suggested by the descriptions quoted in the last sentence. This appreciation contains a strong element of aesthetic reverence. He continues his

[10] Yoo notes as well the value of reading "Chardin et Rembrandt" and this dining scene in tandem: "l'article nous offre une source précieuse pour la compréhension de l'évolution du langage descriptif de Proust. Le langage plat et sec de l'article se transforme en langage suggestif et riche que le narrateur de la *Recherche* emploie pour décrire une table desservie au Grand-Hôtel de Balbec" (42).

description of the table with the tablecloth draped over it as if "sur un autel où sont célébrées les fêtes de la gourmandise." The religious lexicon continues with "quelques gouttes d'eau lustrale" resting in oyster shells as if "dans de petit bénitiers de pierre."[11] The harmony and beauty of the objects on the dining table becomes the stuff of religious ritual but rather than a transmutation to the immaterial, this comparison locates transformative aesthetic power as always already possible in the material world. The particular texture and sheen of drops of water within an oyster shell is doubled with the slightly different texture and sheen of water in a stone font to create a reverence rooted in material presence rather than transcending it.

The dining room description I have been quoting from is all contained within one of Proust's paragraph-length sentences, which begins with the reference to Elstir's watercolors and ends with "la vie profonde des 'natures mortes'" (506). This account of the narrator's attempts to find beauty in "les choses les plus usuelles" is thus bookended with art references, beginning with the narrator's specific desire to find the objects from Elstir's watercolors in real life so as to experience them as beautiful, and ending with an evocation of the compellingly lifelike quality of still lifes in general (this evocation is doubly compelling in French—"the deep life of 'dead natures'") (506). Both of these references grammatically confuse the two levels of art and reality; the narrator is looking to find what he has seen in Elstir's paintings, putting representation and thing represented on the same level, and looking to find beauty in the most normal things, the "vie profonde" of still lifes while he is looking at a "real" dining room table (506). All of this is being communicated in writing to the reader, who is not in a strict sense seeing either painting or table, but rather words on the page. Depending on the individual reading, these words could

[11] *Le Côté de Guermantes* repeats this comparison: "[…] bénitier rugueux de l'huître dans lequel restent quelques gouttes d'eau salée […]" (110).

evoke mental images of real tables or of painted objects, or impressions or flashes of shapes and colors and lights, or simply conceptual understanding of the objects mentioned.

Proust's material world in this dining room scene is neither purely a description of a real dining room table nor purely the ekphrasis of a Chardin still life. It incorporates both of these visual sources but cannot be limited to them, inviting us to consider literature's unique potential to ask us to examine the relationship of art to real materiality. Gillian Pierce describes Diderot's project in his salon reviews as "a radical attempt to come to terms with the individuality of the experience of viewing, with the difficulty of rendering the visual into the verbal, and with the relationship between art and *la nature même*" (16). This tripartite description of the problematics that must be considered when writing about visual art provides a roadmap for exploring the radical theoretical potential of *JF*'s verbal still life of a dining room table. First, what Pierce describes as "the individuality of the experience of viewing": Proust's 'viewer,' his narrator, has in fact seen this dining room table many times, but he is only just now learning to see it as a tableau, with the help of lessons from a more experienced 'viewer' (Elstir). The narrator's viewing habits are guided by his own interests: as noted above, he used to only look out on the ocean during meals, and in fact still does should there be a chance the "jeunes filles de la petite bande" might pass by (506). While the dining room table is a consistent presence in his day-to-day life at Balbec, his attention to it is only intermittent. The reader's 'viewing' is equally individual: to the already-variant experience of literary visualization is added an individual history or lack thereof with still life paintings and dining room tables.

Next there is "the difficulty of rendering the visual into the verbal": as expected, Proust's dining room table description consists in part of a list of objects ("couteaux" "serviette" "verre") with which the reader is most likely familiar from their own daily life. The facility of imagining

a common object, though, is not the same as conveying an individual experience of aesthetic pleasure. Guiding a reader to imagine a knife through the narrator's eyes trained by Elstir's still lifes, or through Proust's eyes trained by Chardin's, or both at once, is a much trickier task. In general, the lexical references to still lifes might help the reader by reminding them of paintings that they themselves have seen to help them contextualize the narrator's experience in this scene. More importantly, Proust's descriptive skill instructs the reader on how to imagine these ordinary objects in order to see the strange aesthetic power possible within them. The description itself is dense with words referencing light ("soleil" "lumières" "éclairage"), color ("jeune" "vert" "bleu" "or"), and form ("rondeur" "formes" "volumes"), all of which add a painterly element to the description by reminding the reader that it is composed and not accidental. There is, in addition, a kind of energy in this description due to a series of nouns referencing physical changes: "évasement" "condensation" "déplacement" "transmutation" "alteration." These are not so much the concrete changes or motions enacted on objects in ordinary life as they are subtle transformations caused by light and shadow, by attention and by imagination. The effect on the reader is unlikely to be a clear mental image of a collection of objects on a dining table, which they could get more effectively from observing their own table or visiting the Louvre's collection of Chardins. Rather, the imaginative effect is likely to be a series of strange impressions, of fragments of shape and light, that might encourage one to notice more attentively, and thus potentially more aesthetically, the objects in their own life. This textual materiality impresses itself on the reader through the seemingly sensual impoverishment of the written word, not despite it.

Finally, there is "the relationship between art and *la nature même*." Without a background in art history and theory, it is easy to see a still life and assume a simple one-to-one

relationship of representation to object represented. In other words, to presume that the painter placed in front of him an apple and then painted that apple. Writings about or inspired by visual art such as Proust's description of the dining room and Diderot's *Salons* introduce a third term, writing, into this equation of representation and object represented, and this increasing complexity draws attention to the oversimplification of the initial formulation. In the case of Proust's dining room still life, what, in fact, is the object represented? Is it Proust's own experiences of dining tables or of still lifes, or is it a re-representation of those things as represented in "Chardin et Rembrandt"? Is it the narrator's imagined experience of dining rooms or of still lifes? By multiplying the possible references and possible points of view, Proust evokes the complexity of all of these relationships. Material presence in Proust is multilayered, drawing on real experience and on visual art to ultimately guide the reader to a specifically textual sensuality.

Reading the opening of "Chardin et Rembrandt" next to the dining room description in *JF* show the multiplicity of visual interpretations similar objects can have within art. With the *Recherche*'s narrator, fresh from his perceptual lessons at Elstir's studio, taking the role of the young man from the earlier essay, objects which caused the young man's despair delight the narrator, and through him, the reader. In the opening of "Chardin et Rembrandt," the "dernier couteau" left on the table seems to indicate disorder and ugly hazard, while the *Recherche*'s "geste interrompu des couteaux encore de travers" is a much more lively and engaging description of the same utensil. The heavy irony of the glass of water touched "gaiement" by "un peu de soleil" accentuates the banality of the scene while in the later text the description of wine left in a glass as "scintillant de lumières" creates a pleasantly shifting and sparkling object. The essay's sad ray of sunlight is further contrasted to the Balbec sunlight that can "intercale un

morceau de velours jaune" onto an undone napkin, evoking the richness of color. While the essay's young man imagines the cathedrals he wishes he could see, the narrator in the later passage finds the cathedral (at least, its alter) right at the table, which becomes "un autel où sont célébrées les fêtes de la gourmandise." Hints of the ocean and mountains, other cherished objects for the essay's young man, find their way into the *Recherche*'s dining room table passage as well. References to liquids are a major lexical component of this description; in particular the interplay of light and water (a leitmotif of the narrator's stay in Balbec which will be more fully discussed in chapter two): the "vin sombre, mais scintillant des lumières," "la transmutation des liquides par l'éclairage," and the "quelques gouttes d'eau lustrale […] au fond des huîtres." The description of the surface of plums turning from green to blue and from blue to gold also seems to evoke the changing surface of the sea throughout the day. The lexical resonances of mountains are less frequent, but can be seen in "la rondeur bombée" of an undone napkin and perhaps even in the "pierre" of the font to which the oysters are compared.

These two fictional dining room tables, one ugly, one beautiful, are shaped by the complex interactions between the cognitive and affective dispositions and previous aesthetic experiences of their viewers, and the (diagetically) literal collection of objects present before them. Both young men are sensitive to their surroundings and both have a strong interest in art; both have come to this scene fresh from experiences with paintings that have shaped their evaluations of knives and glasses. The *Recherche*'s narrator has seen Elstir's scenes of ordinary subjects and their striking material power. The young man of Proust's early essay, on the other hand, has recently visited the Louvre to see "des visions de palais à la Véronèse, de princes à la Van Dyck, de ports à la Claude Lorrain" (69). Objects that have not been sanctified by these masters appear to him covered by "un laideur ambiante," the adjective already belying the

nonessential nature of the young man's judgement of ugliness (69). In fact, a further lesson from Chardin that Proust incorporates into the *Recherche* is that the apparent ugliness of objects does not prevent them from having aesthetic power.

The celebration of everyday experiences of beauty is one possible reason for the representation of ordinary objects in art, but it is not the only one. The unpleasant or the revolting can be part of an aesthetic investigation of the material presence of the world as well. Diderot writes of Chardin's painting *Raie dépouillée* that the "objet est dégoutant, mais c'est la chair même du poisson, c'est sa peau, c'est son sang; l'aspect même de la chose n'affecterait pas autrement" (484). The viewer's sense of wonder due to the perceptual proximity of art to nature; Chardin seems to have produced flesh by paint. Diderot attempts to explain what could have caused this effect, though he warns us "[o]n n'entend rien à ce magie," noting that this artificial nature produces the opposite aesthetic effect of a real fish served at dinner—the effect of the painted fish is marvelous (484). He describes the 'flesh' of the creature as a mix of layer and texture effects: "des couches épaisses de couleur appliquées les unes sur les autres et dont l'effet transpire de dessous en dessus," "une vapeur qu'on a soufflé sur la toile," and "une écume légère qu'on y a jetée" (484). This reality effect is thus the product of an inexplicable alchemy of substances behaving oddly; colors showing through one another as if they were blood visible through and animating living flesh, and a vapor or a light foam one imagines clinging to the surface of the canvas.

Proust takes this image of the fish and inverts the relationship of art and nature to highlight the same sense of the marvelous. Chardin's *raie* has left the salon and found itself on the dining room table at Balbec. The narrator's desire to think of himself in Balbec as at "la pointe extreme de la terre" means he is most interested in the dining table when "quelque vaste

poisson" reminds him "des époques primitives" (321). Just as in Diderot's description of Chardin's painting, the fish becomes the sign of an intensity exceeding the normal experience: Diderot's fish defies the laws of paint and canvas; Proust's is the image of an impossibly faraway past. Like Diderot, Proust focuses on the strangeness of the literal substance of the fish to highlight its mystery. Diderot uses vapor and foam in his description as if the real surface of the sea had been fixed to the surface of the canvas, while Proust's description of the fish has anthropomorphic artistic intention structuring narrator's daily meal: "le corps aux innombrables vertèbres, aux nerfs bleus et roses […] avait été construit par la nature, mais selon un plan architectural, comme une polychrome cathédrale de la mer" (321). The fish is pushed back into a deep, oceanic past, but the final description of the creature is imbued with art in the spectacular image of a "polychrome cathédrale de la mer." The disgusting object of the dead fish undergoes multiple transfigurations in the hands of Chardin, Diderot, and Proust, becoming the source of aesthetic pleasure. Gita May writes that Diderot and Proust were faced with an important aesthetic question looking at the *Raie dépouillée*: how do things that would not seem aesthetically appealing in real life "se trouvent-ils enrichis d'une signification expressive transcendante, d'une espèce d'enchantement lorsqu'un grand artiste les reproduit sur la toile?" (406-407). Proust's ultimate configuration of the fish—finding a cathedral within its natural architecture—suggests that it is not art that gives status to certain objects, but art which permits us to see the strange sources of delight always waiting in the familiar.

The lesson that Proust takes from Chardin about the omnipresent possibility of artistic material in the physical world is one of the importance of a certain type of attention, but not that of an attention to exact details. Proust's material universe is not model of representation built from intense observation and documentation. The *Recherche*'s narrator indeed feels himself to

lack observational skill. After finding a fictional passage in the Goncourt brothers' *Journals* describing the guests at the Verdurin salons in vivid and merry detail, the narrator reflects on what he still believes to be a fatal flaw in his ability to write: unlike the Goncourt brothers, "je ne m'étais jamais dissimulé que je ne savais pas écouter ni, dès que je n'étais plus seul regarder" (*Le Temps retrouvé* 23). Rather, the narrator's model of attention is based on affective sensations of interest, admiration, delight, and this sort of attention can be wandering, inexact, and prone to overemphasize certain elements of an object and ignore or diminish others. Bal writes that what we see in a Chardin still life is the gaze itself, but not, perhaps, as we are accustomed to imagining it: "C'est comme si ce qui est dépeint était moins l'objet que le regard qui le contemple, non pas un regard doté d'une acuité d'observation mais, au contraire, un regard doté d'une sorte d'inattention, promue et dirigée par le hasard de l'œil détendu et intime" (43). This idea of the gaze recalls (and recuperates) the narrator's confession he is not very good at listening and watching. What art such as Chardin's or Proust's does is to capture the experience of seeing in a way that is caught up with myriad other related impressions and textures, sounds and smells and tastes, as well as affective signals—Bal's "œil détenu et intime."

This inattentive, wandering eye demonstrates the complex temporality of artistic experience, which is both the singular instance of viewing and the habitual nature of this type of sight. Robin Adèle Greeley identifies two distinct relationships to time in Chardin's paintings of domestic work: "Time here is at once linear and circular, bound by the illusion of the scene on offer and separate from it as it verges into our own lived time of viewing" (282). The painting she uses as an example, *La Ratisseuse*, does this through its domestic subject of a woman cleaning radishes. Household chores, she argues, have a double temporal nature: they are both an endless repetition (of radishes to be cleaned in a lifetime), and a succession of tasks to be

completed one by one (in a day). Viewing a painting in a gallery, similarly, is both a repeatable and repeated event (it can be and is viewed many times by many people) and a moment in a series (of paintings in a gallery, of events in the daily life of a spectator). The explicit and implicit use of Chardin's still lifes in "Chardin et Rembrandt" and *JF* creates a similar double temporality of art in ordinary experience. The narrator is progressing in his aesthetic apprenticeship by learning how to see the world through the eyes of the artist. At the same time, there is a circularity to this experience. In "Chardin et Rembrandt," the capacity to see beauty in the ordinary, once discovered, becomes infinitely repeatable. As McDonald writes, the young man of Proust's essay would only need to see Chardin's paintings once because after that "he can see them everywhere in his own kitchen. That is, Chardin's work will be integrated to the point where it infuses all space as though it were a still life" (42). The material world is not just the thing that art represents, our perception of the objects and scenes around us is conditioned by our experiences with art.

Returning now to Diderot's descriptions of Chardin's still lifes, we can see that the vivid presence of the object world the critic so loves goes beyond mimesis into a relationship of mutual transformation. In order to help his readers grasp the incredible experiential effect of seeing a Chardin, Diderot writes "[c]'est toujours la nature et la vérité. Vous prendriez les bouteilles par le goulot si vous aviez soif, les pêches et les raisons éveillent l'appétit et appellent la main" (481). This description evokes a tactile sensuality that moves beyond the merely visible to imply a relationship of direct contact, a give and take of touch, between the viewer and the painting. Thirst can be an aesthetic desire as well as a physical one, such as the idea of "drinking in" the sight of someone or something. Taking the bottles by the neck implies most immediately that you could reach into the painting, but this also recalls notions of sight based on the

projection of the eye towards an object in sight—a relationship of touch between the eye and the material world. This multisensory contact continues with peaches and grapes that awaken the appetite and call to the hand—a seemingly simple example of effusive praise that is in fact the description of a multifaceted network of interactions. The peaches and grapes act on the viewer, stimulating their desire, they call the hand of the viewer towards them even as the viewer knows they are not literal objects. Art and the real world interact in a cycle, animated by mutual hunger and mutual agency. Diderot calls Chardin's work "entre nature et art" (495). To exist between nature and art is to be both and to be neither. For Diderot and for Proust, Chardin is part of a network-building effort that results in a multiplicity of ways of experiencing the material. Chardin will remind you of the ripe fruits and full bottles you have known at dinner tables of your own, and subsequent interactions with those objects will remind you of the Chardins you have seen. Diderot is correct, in the end, to insist that you could reach out and take the objects in his paintings and bring them to your lips: as McDonald points out, the end goal of Proust's advice to the young man of "Chardin and Rembrandt" is that the still life he sees at the Louvre "infuses all space." The fruit he bites and the wine he drinks at his own dining table has become what it always was—the material of a brilliant still life painting.

**The Matter of Memory**

Alongside Proust's writings on Chardin, involuntary memory gives us a second lens through which to examine the multilayered nature of materiality in the *Recherche*. Examining Chardin's influence on Proust puts at the forefront strong visual impressions, the imposition of objects on our senses in the real world and in art. Involuntary memory, on the other hand, is the experience of the immediate material world receding to give way to an unusually vivid memory. Properly speaking, though, involuntary memory is not really remembering at all but

reexperiencing. It is thus inescapably entwined with the physical and material rather than with the abstract and idealized. In experiencing an involuntary memory, we are taken away from the world around us only to be given to a different iteration of it, as sensually plentiful as the world we left. At the same time, we are reminded of the importance of material objects, which can provoke an involuntary memory despite not having been physically present in the initial experience involuntary memory reproduces. Involuntary memory is a play of absences that shows the multiplicity of materialities we can access or intuit.

In *Du côté de chez Swann*, the narrator describes his childhood relationship to the object-world around him as a mixture of two competing sensations. On one side, he feels a sensual fascination with the colors and forms and scents of the world, the experiences of which are pleasurable and satisfying in and of themselves. On the other side, however, these experiences spark in the young narrator a feeling of curiosity and expectation: an intuition, like the feeling which precedes the adult narrator's fully realized experiences of involuntary memory, that there is something more to discover beyond this play of sensually appealing surfaces. Given the prominence of involuntary memory in critical and popular responses to Proust's work, this second sensation of curiosity and expectation may seem to be more essential to the *Recherche* than the former. However, rereading Proust with attention to the sensual world (including the materiality of the involuntary memory experience itself) demonstrates that this impression is limited. Freed-Thrall discusses the value of both types of experience for the narrator, using the examples of viewing Elstir's painting of asparagus and of involuntary memory. She argues that both require important cognitive operations on the part of the narrator and the viewer, and simply differ in focus, representing "the difference between an open-ended, object-oriented metamorphosis and a subject-centered one" (79). If involuntary memory teaches the narrator

about himself and his past, viewing a still life such as Elstir's asparagus requires confronting the mystery and the potency of the object world.

The young narrator himself worries that his interest in the world around him is antithetical to his vocation as a writer. As a child, he assumes the myriad experiences that appeal to his senses— "un toit, un reflet de soleil sur une pierre, l'odeur d'un chemin"—must exist "bien en dehors de toutes ces préoccupations littéraires" (176). The "plaisir irraisonné" and "illusion d'une sorte de fécondité" that the narrator feels while interacting with alluring material objects is contrasted to the "ennui" and "sentiment de mon impuissance" that the narrator feels when looking for a fitting philosophical subject for his work. Despite his boredom and frustration with abstract ideas, he still believes that rooftops, reflections, and odors, however pleasing, cannot be the literary inspiration he is searching for. These "impressions" are "toujours liées à un objet particulier dépourvu de valeur intellectuelle et ne se rapportant à aucune vérité abstraite" (176-177).[12] If it were indeed possible to find the deeper philosophical meaning behind the sensual impressions "de forme, de parfum, ou de couleur" it would no doubt be hard work, and the young narrator looks for excuses which "me permissent de me dérober à ces efforts et de m'épargner cette fatigue" (176). The impressions themselves cannot be enough, the narrator thinks, they must be transformed into proper literary material through rigorous intellectual work—work he doubts he is capable of performing. However, taken as an aggregate, the *Recherche* amply demonstrates that sensuality is not merely a lazy enjoyment ultimately devoid of intellectual and aesthetic value. *Le Temps retrouvé* indeed suggests that "[i]l n'est pas certain, pour créer une œuvre littéraire, l'imagination et la sensibilité ne soient pas des qualités

[12] Despite this belief, the narrator's first literary production and his sole literary production that is "reproduced" whole in the *Recherche*, will be on the subject of just such an object, or to be more precise, just such an "impression" (in this case, a momentary perception taking into account real objects and subjective placement) of the Martinsville bell towers in *Du côté de chez Swann*.

interchangeables et que la seconde ne puisse pas sans grand inconvénient être substituée à la première" (207). Experiential awareness can also be the basis for literary accomplishment.

When the narrator first experiences involuntary memory, the strangeness and the fluctuation of the material world is foregrounded again and again. Instead of an escape into the abstract, the text lingers on the material substance(s) of the narrator's childhood not in an attempt to model in a typically realist manner the sights, sounds, and smells of his memories, but instead to highlight the oddities of our emotional and aesthetic engagement with the world around us. Recall Diaz's description from above of the miniatures "heavier with actuality" than the objects they model. Similarly, the narrator re-lives Combray not as an accurate topographical copy of the town, but as a strange miniature. The town is initially reduced to the church, which "summarizes" or "represents" the rest of it. Combray "n'était qu'une église résumant la ville, la représentant, parlant d'elle et pour elle aux lointains" (47). The church exerts a gravitational pull, "tenant serrés autour de sa haute mante sombre […] les dos laineux et gris des maisons" resulting in an image of the town "aussi circulaire qu'une petite ville dans un tableau de primitive" (47). What emerges from Proust's experiment in describing the unexpected and euphoric experience of plentitude that is involuntary memory is not a conventionally realist description of a town but rather a reconstruction of perceptual and emotional distortions. Involuntary memory provides less a map of the past in which the narrator can move around, and more a powerful imagescape that is both the center and the container of Combray and the narrator's childhood. The material power of this memory experience could not be replicated by revisiting Combray as an adult because the material specificities of the narrator's childhood cannot be experienced again at a later date by returning to the same location. The world of his childhood was "peinte de couleurs si différentes de celles qui maintenant revêtent pour moi le monde" that it seems to belong to the

world of the marvelous, not the real (48). He compares this difference to the illusory images the magic lantern projected on his childhood bedroom walls, and this analogy does leave open the possibility that these material differences are, fundamentally, simply surfaces. That is, that the real material of the world could be uniform and continuous, as in a realistic view of the object-world. The narrator's subjective perception, bound to develop between childhood and adulthood, makes him see Combray differently just as the projection of the magic lantern on his childhood bedroom walls temporarily changed their appearance, but neither of these necessarily undermine the solidity and continuity of the world.

However, this play of (changing) surface and (stable) depth is then undermined during the narrator's continued mediations on the spaces of his childhood. As the description of Combray continues, the material differences he senses between the world he knew as a child and the world he knows as an adult are not only a question of surface appearance, but a matter of imperceptible physical machinations that, unseen, inhabit and structure the world in which we live. His aunt's rooms are paralleled to the surrounding countryside because in both of these spaces the air-bound miasmas of vegetal, terrestrial, and human elements form an undeniable but inexplicable material atmosphere. In the country, "des parties entières de l'air ou de la mer sont illuminées ou parfumées par des myriades de protozoaires que nous ne voyons pas" (49). While we cannot see what is causing these effects, we experience them, and we experience them aesthetically—the air is illuminated and perfumed, adjectives we might normally use to describe human-created lights and scents. The reference to "protozoaires" grounds human subjective experience (our perceptions of color, light, scent) in its scientific rationale (these sensual effects are created by real physical processes), but these processes are made up of elements invisible to the human eye, and, for most of us, not clearly grasped beyond a simple causality (the world is

composed by many things we cannot see). The narrator is not creating a simple opposition between perception-subjectivity-visibility, on one hand, and scientific understanding-objectivity-invisibility, on the other. Rather, these air-bound effects "nous enchantent des milles odeurs qu'y dégagent les vertus, la sagesse, les habitudes, toute une vie secrète, invisible, surabondante et morale que l'atmosphère y tient en suspens" (49). The visible and human is not to be contrasted with a complex physical world acting by its own laws outside of human understanding, instead, the total whole of an atmosphere and the distinct and sensuous pleasure it provides is composed of an indescribable blend of elements. This the "vie secrète" of the material world is composed in part by and is certainly not antithetical to the human.

This meditation on the narrator's childhood has begun our discussion of involuntary memory at the end of the process, rather than at its beginning, which is anchored in the sensual properties of a given object. In *JF*, the narrator reflects on his once-passionate love for Gilberte Swann. While he is now mostly indifferent to her, the only reminders capable of reigniting his formerly all-consuming love for her are banal things from their relationship. Direct references to her and memories of sentimental moments produce no emotional effect. Musing from the particular case of his feelings about Gilberte to the general pattern they reveal, he makes the claim that most of our memory is actually stored "hors de nous, dans un souffle pluvieux, dans l'odeur de renfermé d'une chambre ou dans l'odeur d'une première flambée," because memories that are useless to the intellect take up residence anywhere they can (266). He revises this initial formula of intellectually unimportant memories living "hors de nous" to these memories living "en nous" but hidden (266). Neither of these formulas is quite correct as the "real" site of these memories might be said to be in the meeting between their internal and external containers. They are less objects that can be found at a specific location and more the product of a specific

interaction. The passage continues with a theoretical description of what one feels during involuntary memory that draws attention to the important bodily reality of the experience.

Proust's exploration of materiality indicates the always-embodied nature of experience, insisting on the importance of spatial relationships and of the tactile in art and cognition. Proust is working neither in the realm of empiricism nor that of immaterial abstraction; the body's relationship to the world around it is always important but never transparent. Maurice Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that any sensory experience we have necessarily occurs from an embodied point of view: "le sentir […] investit la qualité d'une valeur vitale, la saisit d'abord dans sa signification pour nous, pour cette masse pesante qui est notre corps, et de la vient qu'il comporte toujours une référence au corps" and Proust's descriptions, including those of involuntary memory, are embedded with references to the physical (79). Starr suggests that we should pay more attention to touch and tactility in our discussions of literary imagery: "Motor imagery is, I believe, a better paradigmatic case for imagery than is visual imagery: the mind's body is more encompassing than the mind's eye" (82). Note, for example, this tactile description of the narrator's cognitive sensations when "[j]e regardais les trois arbres, je les voyais bien, mais mon esprit sentait qu'ils recouvraient quelque chose sur quoi il n'avait pas prise, comme sur ces objets placés trop loin dont nos doigts, allongés au bout de notre bras tendu, effleurent […]" (*JF* 345). The double sight verbs *regarder* and *voir* give way to the figuration of the narrator's interest in the three trees as a cognitive act of reaching, the stimulation of something tactile in the mind.

In the case of involuntary memory, these experiences allow us to "retrouver l'être que nous fûmes" and to "nous placer vis-à-vis des choses comme cet être l'était" and "souffrir à nouveau" (266). This description of the way we can "be" again during involuntary memory

focuses on the concrete experience of the internal and external world. This phrasing seems almost clunky, compared to the initial involuntary memory scene of *Du côté de chez Swann* and the suite of involuntary memories the narrator experiences before the Guermantes matinée in *Le Temps retrouvé*, which use sensually vivid language to express the awe and the pleasure the narrator feels. This attempt to theorize involuntary memory strips away some of that magic. 'We can place ourselves in relationship to things as the being that we were before had' is an oddly specific way to describe the reality effect of involuntary memory. One outcome of this specificity is an invitation to edge away from a primarily visual understanding of the effect of involuntary memory. *Du côté de chez Swann*'s image of the town twisting and unfurling out from a cup of tea is a marvelous one but, just as Diderot and the Goncourt brothers insist on the fact that Chardin's painted objects seem to exist in relation to one another in three-dimensional space, the subject's ability to re-experience their being in proper spatial relation to other objects in a given field is of prime importance to this experience. This theorization of the spatial reality of involuntary memory is immediately followed by another capability the body has during this experience: to "souffrir à nouveau" (266). Given that this passage will be followed by an exploration of the problems a suffering body might have while travelling, it seems very possible that Proust wants to reinforce the link between involuntary memory and physical sensation.

That Proust is well aware that there's no necessary distinction between the mental and the physical is shown again and again in the *Recherche*, both in his discussion of involuntary memory and in his descriptions of the suffering body in general. The narrator understands part of the work of consciousness as erasing much of our physical experience, in the way, for example that habit makes familiar surroundings reassuring and comfortable by allowing their initially overwhelming material presence to recede from us and become unobtrusive: "C'est notre

attention qui met des objets dans une chambre, et l'habitude qui les en retire et nous y fait de la place" (*JF* 291). His own body teaches him this lesson in reverse, because as a "nature nerveuse," he tells us, his internal boundaries and hierarchies do not function as they should, meaning that this material erasure is often not possible. He is someone "chez qui les intermédiaires, les nerfs, remplissent mal leurs fonctions, n'arrêtent pas dans sa route vers la conscience, mais y laissent au contraire parvenir, distincte, épuisante, innombrable et douloureux, la plainte des plus humbles éléments du moi" (296). If involuntary memories, joint citizens of a deep internal reservoir of forgotten things and of a simple sensual object or impression, disrupt the internal/external boundary by belonging to both, this short description of the suffering body disrupts the internal boundaries between somatic functionality and consciousness.

In the *Recherche*'s first and most famous scene of involuntary memory, the madeleine and tea of *Du côté de chez Swann*, the narrator describes the past as "caché […] en quelque objet matériel" and then, in parenthesis, writes more precisely that they are hidden "en la sensation que nous donnerait cet objet matériel" (44). The magic is neither in the material world nor in its transcendence; it is in the interaction between the external world and the largely unconscious cognitive processes that collect and store memories. It is not reducible to this sensation, but this sensation is its necessary condition. Our intellectualized understanding of the material world and our interactions with it are insufficient to explain our actual experiences, as involuntary memory cannot be summoned or repeated and its process of causation, though clear in hindsight, is certainly not scientific. That is not to say that these experiences are beyond the material or antithetical to it. Rather, Proust is among the twentieth-century thinkers, within art and within

science, whose work deals with the uneasy possibility that our understanding of the universe is, perhaps constitutively, misguided and partial.

The *Recherche* includes definitions that distinguish the conscious process of voluntary memory from the unconscious process of involuntary memory and differentiate between the material world that sparks an involuntary memory and the essence of that memory itself. The presence of these definitions seems to imply that a rigorous philosophical structure underlays the contradictions and wanderings of the *Recherche.* These distinctions, however, do not need to be absolute for them to be meaningful. The productive work of these distinctions is in their moments of confrontation and contradiction. Acknowledging this allows us to see these distinctions along a continuum rather than as absolutes, a procedure that Proust builds into his description of the narrator's first experience of involuntary memory. Even within a material object, there is a descriptive play of material and essence. The madeleine itself is described in terms of its self-contradiction. Its "petit coquillage […] si grassement sensuel" is directly contrasted to its scent as odor and taste are "plus vivaces, plus immatérielles, plus persistantes, plus fidèles" than other sensual qualities (47). Rather than a sensuous whole, a material trap to which revelatory experience cannot and should not be reduced, the madeleine is itself the site of conflicting materialities. Scent, Proust writes, is more like a soul than other material qualities of an object (47). A pure essence/material distinction would seem to make that nuance impossible or beside the point.

For from ignoring the material, Proust's descriptions of involuntary memory are full of sensual wonder, as he uses synesthetic description to allow the reader to cognitively reconstruct an analogous state to that of involuntary memory. The imaginative power of his description of the narrator's memories of Combray hinges on the association between the taste and smell of the

madeleine dipped in tea with the surprising visual—but visually mobile (see chapter three)—images of pieces of paper untwisting into flowers and houses when placed in water and the town of Combray emerging complete from the cup of tea and gaining "forme et solidité" (47). The images of the paper moving in water and of the town gaining in solidity as it emerges fully formed from the teacup, as well as the initial evocation of taste and scent, create a strikingly complex cognitive model of the experience of involuntary memory. As *Le Temps retrouve*'s final set of involuntary memory experiences prepare the narrator for the revelations that will lead him to finally fulfil his vocation as a writer, Proust mixes increasingly synesthetic descriptions of the material experiences that lead to these memories and the sensual content of the memories they evoke. Sensory references in this passage include: "un azur profond" "des impressions de fraîcheur, d'éblouissante lumière" "je goûtais la saveur" (173) "la vison éblouissante et indistincte me frôlait" "la sensation que j'avais senti jadis sur deux dalles inégales" (174). The visual, the tactile, the gustatory, and their intermixtures are evoked to help the reader construct the overwhelming sense of "félicité" that "invades" ("m'envahit") the narrator in these moments. Of the narrator's list in the 'adoration perpetuelle' of partial or total experiences of involuntary memory he has had in his lifetime there are sensations which are haptic (uneven paving stones), visual (views of trees and church steeples), gustatory and olfactory (the madeleine dipped in tea), and aural (Vinteuil's music, the sound of a spoon hitting a plate) (173-174). Using this scene as one of his examples, Fredric Jameson argues that the resurrection theme in modern literature "is scarcely to be understood in any religious sense;" that is, it is separate from the division between matter and spirit and between immanence and transcendence fundamental to religious thinking (196). Instead, Jameson explains, "resurrection expresses the euphoria of a secular salvation otherwise inexpressible in material or social terms, religious language here offering the means of

rendering a material possibility rather than the other way around" (196-197). We can look at involuntary memory as just such a *material possibility;* the language of revelation does not divorce the experience from the material world, but rather guarantees that this experience will be understood as something exceptional, a rare occurrence of a purely distilled joy.

In this final suite of involuntary memories, Proust emphasizes that much of our experience goes unnoticed as we are living it. The deep truths accessed during involuntary memory are those that "la vie nous a malgré nous communiquées en une impression, matérielle parce qu'elle est entrée par nos sens, mais dont nous pouvons dégager l'esprit" (185). Cognition and sensation are connected and work with one another to create the revelatory effects of involuntary memory. These effects, in Proust's description, are quite concrete: the "joie du réel retrouvé" is in reexperiencing "tout le tableau fait d'impressions" (note that the artistic metaphor is already present in the narrator's understanding of experience in general) (186). The ensuing description of the elements of which this "tableau" is made shows the variations and shades of ordinary cognition: "cette infaillible proportion du lumière et d'ombre, de relief et d'omission, de souvenir et d'oubli" (186). It is not only light but shadow, not only memory but forgetting. This real texture of lived life is not known or not understood by "la mémoire ou l'observation conscientes" (186). In *Sodome et Gomorrhe* the narrator notes that mastering something completely is not the same thing as understanding it. Just as an insomniac is more likely to have a revelation about sleep than someone has always slept easily, "[u]ne mémoire sans défaillance n'est pas un très puissant excitateur à étudier les phénomènes de mémoire" (52). There is not, here, a binary relationship between states of cognition or states of being, but rather a series of complex interactions between the cognitive and the external world.

Voluntary and involuntary memory, finally, serve less as absolute distinctions and more as a meditation on the variants of sensual experience. Our tendency to rely on voluntary memory to understand and explain our lives conceals the many inconsistencies in both the material world itself and in our interactions with it. Russell T. Hurlburt, a psychology professor who works on inner experience, finds our everyday use of the term "experience" to be too wide-reaching and inexact. He instead distinguishes what he calls "pristine experience" from "broad experience." Pristine experience is "something actually directly before the footlights of consciousness at some moment" (54). Broad experience is a retrospective summary of a given time period. Hurlburt explains the distinction using the example of someone who has vacationed in Amsterdam and is describing their trip to an acquaintance back home. While their pristine experience of the city included vast quantities of positive and negative sense data and cognitive processes, the description they give will clarify and organize certain parts of their memory and privilege things that might be interesting to their interlocutor (56). This description is what gets consciously stored as broad experience and takes the place of the much messier and fluctuating pristine experience of the trip itself.

Voluntary memory corresponds nicely to the concept of broad experience, and pristine experience helps us understand the process that allows involuntary memory. As Hulbert takes great pains to explain, we are not necessarily conscious, retrospectively, of our pristine experience. Our sense of our broad experience, looking back, does not necessarily reflect much at all of our pristine experience. Applied to Proustian memory, this dynamic of forgetting (or more properly, never consciously incorporating) our pristine experience is what enables involuntary memory to occur. The adult narrator, in front of his madeleine, is not having a broad intellectual recollection of having tea with his aunt, he is plunged into a complex experiential

world of sensation and cognition that corresponds to an anterior moment in time. The pristine experience of tea with his aunt can be brought back whole because it has never entered the realm of broad experience at all. He has never voluntarily recollected it. Hurlburt's definition of pristine experience includes both internal processing and external sense input, describing sensory awareness as "the paying of specific attention to some sensory aspect of the external or internal world, not for its utilitarian but for its sensory sake" (117). The difference between pristine experience and broad experience is not that one is body-oriented, and one is mind-oriented. Rather, broad experience has a use value that the immediacy of pristine experience lacks. The same is true of voluntary memory and involuntary memory. We use the former to organize and explain our experience, while the latter reflects the complex and dynamic interactions that occur between external material world and our bodily processes, including cognition.

Looking at the process of memory in terms of artistic creation helps us see how these bodily processes give shape to our eventual memories, voluntary and involuntary. Evelyne Ender argues that memories are constructed in ways akin to artistic creation and insists on the physical nature of these constructions. She writes that authors such as Proust "have learned that memories are constructions, that they depend on mood and context, and above all that there is no readymade template to be found somewhere in the brain that reproduces an initial impress or trace" (5). Instead of an analogical model that postulates that the brain works like a video camera, faithfully recording the image of lived life, or even a model that admits that this recording mechanism is sometimes faulty (as in, for example, the well-documented occurrences of false memories in witnesses to crimes), Ender posits a model of memory that always includes an active relationship between things experienced and the memories made of them. There is always a process of negotiation and construction that goes into memory formation and memory

recall. Involuntary memory captures a layer of experience that voluntary memory cannot, but it does not capture the objective truth of the world.

This complex view of the process of memory formation and recall helps us understand the narrator's ideas about specifically aesthetic impressions. The narrator criticizes the duchess of Guermantes for her "parole […] méconnaissant la façon dont se forment en nous les impressions artistiques" (*Côté de Guermantes* 507). He is reacting to her claim that a certain painter's work would be worth seeing even "du haut d'une impériale de tramway sans s'arrêter" (507). The narrator fundamentally disagrees with her implication that "notre œil est dans ce cas un simple appareil enregistreur qui prend des instantanés" (507). In order to benefit from such a quick viewing, the eye would have to be able to glimpse a painting and carry it away a complete memory despite the less-than-ideal viewing conditions. But viewing a painting is not like taking a photograph, and these "impressions artistiques" are impacted by the conditions of viewing, by physical sensations, by societal norms. Leriche has demonstrated that Proust refuses a simple distinction between original and copy in reference to his interest in art reproductions. Art reproductions are often considered inferior or degraded copies of original artwork, much as memories could be considered shadowy copies of real experience. Leriche posits instead that these artistic reproductions are not simply a supplement to viewing the original, but individual experiences in their own right (167-70).

The *Recherche* demonstrates early on in *Du côté de chez Swann* the insufficiency of the copy/original model of experience. As the young narrator is too sickly to travel, his grandmother wants to give him "des photographies des monuments ou des paysages les plus beaux" to decorate his bedroom (39). After forming this plan, however, she is unable to bring herself to purchase the photographs she had planned, finding that the one-to-one relationship between the

object and its photographic copy lets "vulgarité" and "utilité" take the place of the "valeur esthétique" of the monuments or landscapes represented (39). Instead, she seeks representations that are increasingly removed from the original object, including more and more distance between the creative act and the thing it is intended to represent: "d'y introduire comme plusieurs 'épaisseurs' d'art" (40). She asks Swann for advice on which artists painted the desired objects, preferring "des photographies de la Cathédrale de Chartres par Corot, des Grandes Eaux de Saint-Cloud par Hubert Robert, du Vésuve par Turner" to photographs of the objects themselves (40). Even this "distance" from the vulgar photographic relationship does not prove satisfactory for her, and she turns to Swann again to find out if there are etchings of these paintings, especially ones that have their own specific aesthetic value, such as those that represent a painting in an earlier, less degraded state (40). As with Ender's understanding of memory, the objective faithfulness of copy to original is not the source of value; value comes from the creative, constructive relationship between the two.

This relationship of original to copy, or of experience to recollection, is always conditioned by our cognitive and physiological constraints. Leriche writes of Proust's interest in art books that "[i]n his reading of art books, Proust privileges those images that his eye can 'animate' […] by recalling memories that are not visual, but physiological. In other words, certain images strike Proust because they reactivate in him a lived corporeal experience" (172). The relationship of copy to original is not determined by technical accuracy, but rather complicated by the introduction of a third term: bodily awareness. Nathalie Aubert writes that in the *Recherche* Proust is elaborating "a concrete theory of the mind which shows the mind in a relationship of reciprocal exchange with the instruments it uses" (10). The mind is not a mere recording device; it does not somehow stand outside observing but rather is constructed as it

constructs. She argues that one of the narrator's breakthroughs in the novel is to understand through his experiences with Elstir's art and artistic philosophy that there are important commonalities between the cognitive experience of verbal and visual art. By dramatizing the process of this realization, she writes, "Proust is telling us that visual images are not instantaneous snapshots of external reality, that they have a duration" (17). This understanding in Proust anticipates modern scientific analysis of the physiology of viewing art.

In my analysis of "Chardin et Rembrandt" I argued that one of things Proust insists on is that we never have an objective gaze on the world. Our aesthetic evaluations are never impartial and thus we can learn to see the objects around us differently. Accordingly, visual art is not necessarily transparent where literature is opaque. Artistic experience, like all experience, is conditioned by the interactive processes I have been discussing. Wendy Steiner writes that "the eye can in fact focus only on relatively small portions of visible objects and must scan them in order to build a unified image. Pictorial perception is thus a matter of temporal processing, like literary perception" (36). She is careful not to collapse the pictorial and literary perception into one another and notes important differences, for example that in visual arts "the order of this perceptual sequence is not predetermined by the painting itself (at least, as far as we know)," unlike in literature, where a temporal sequencing is imposed. However, nor is there an absolute distinction between how we perceive visual and verbal art. Our tendency to assume visual processing is instantaneous is contradicted by scientific studies that show that this processing in fact occurs in small chunks, an unconscious approximation of the way one would read a book paragraph by paragraph. Memory, artistic creation, and artistic reception all work as dynamic processes, as interactions between external objects and our physical and cognitive responses and constructions. Rather than a binary between the material and a term framed as its opposite (in art,

often abstraction; in philosophy, the mind, etc.) these sets of relationships point towards a spectrum of materialities which are mutually self-constructing and move away from a realistic view of the object-world while still allowing for the real presence of material objects.

In the many forms of sensual pleasure we find in the world around us, in viewing still lifes, in eating dinner or having tea, we are always engaged in a process of constructing our experience. By highlighting this process, Proust is inviting us to consider the vast mystery of the material world as we balance between the intensity of its presence and our intuitions of its ultimate absence. Richardson's description of what he calls the neural sublime begins with an exploration of the ways in which the brain constructs "the pragmatically useful (if philosophically suspect) sense of a relatively stable object world" (2010: 19). The brain, for example, prevents us from perceiving the blind spot where the optic disk is located in the retina: in normal function it fills in this blank space so that our perception of the world is seamless (2010: 18). Richardson expands this illustration of normal cognitive function with a series of illustrations that demonstrate the unreliability of perception by presenting two equally plausible but mutually exclusive visual possibilities within the same image. Richardson's interest in illustrations such as Joseph Jastrow's duck-rabbit, where the figure either appears as a duck looking to one direction or a rabbit looking the other direction, leads him to ask the question, "Why should figures that, as Keats says, 'tease us out of thought' yield fascination rather than annoyance, pleasure rather than anxiety?" (2010: 20). The framework Richardson sets out to answer this question, his elaboration of a "neural sublime" in European and American Romanticism, can help us understand the power of Proust's use of similar figures in the *Recherche* that force us to hesitate between competing interpretations.

By exposing the work the brain does to unify our experience of the world, the neural sublime astonishes and yields pleasure by teasing the what-if: what if we could access what lies beyond our habitual conscious perception? Rather than an idea of the sublime rooted in contact with a feeling of transcendence, this idea of the sublime is rooted in the material possibilities of the brain. Richardson demonstrates this sublime through analysis of a passage from Henry David Thoreau where, descending a mountain, he marvels at the real wonder of nature: not as a symbol of or an invitation to something larger, but as a source of wonder and mystery all on its own. Richardson writes, "[t]he pleasure of such a sublime—a pleasure accompanied by a disturbing sense of loss and disorientation for the conscious subject—would have to consist in the feeling of 'contact' itself, of material (rather than spiritual) fusion with the environmental surround" (2010: 35). To reject an empirical objectivity is not to invite a transcendent sublime; it is to appreciate the wonderous immanence of the material world. Jane Bennett has written of a state of enchantment that can result from our interactions with the material world, which she defines as "a state of wonder, and one of the distinctions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement" which induces a "mood of fullness, plentitude, or liveliness, a sense of having had one's nerves or circulation or concentration powers turned up or recharged" (2001: 5). Like Proust's involuntary memory and Richardson's neural sublime, this enchantment is, if not omnipresent, at least omni-possible: "the world that I describe as enchanted is not confined to structures, entities, and events in nature: there are also literary, machinic, and electronic sites of enchantments" (2001: 11). Proust's invitations to the reader to test our imaginative capacities, to see the impossible, creates literary sites of enchantment: dining room tables, seaside views, city skies, and beloved churches that we co-construct with him as we read.

Looking at how Proust layers his textual presentation of materiality allows us to nuance our understanding of reality and art, and experience and memory, without needing to posit absolute distinctions between them. The fragmentation, expansion, and/or unfamiliarity the Proustian narrator describes and the reader experiences through him are present and possible in the material possibilities of the brain without being wholly reducible to an empirical explanation. The well-studied instability of the *Recherche*'s narrative voice itself echoes the understanding in contemporary neuroscience of the illusory nature of the self, that, in Richardson's words, is not "permanent and unified" but rather "a kind of proprioceptive illusion generated by neuronal mechanism" (2010: 35). Along these lines, Bowie writes that for the narrator "[t]he desire for knowledge of the beloved, or of art, or of the photon-stream shedding a sudden radiance on brickwork, turns unfailingly into the would-be knower's desire for knowledge of his own cognitive skills and disabilities" (115). Thus I have retained through this chapter and will retain through my dissertation as a whole a material grounding that is not an attempt to limit Proust's philosophical speculations and aesthetic demonstrations, but to explore the possibilities suggested by an interrogation of the limits and illusions of perception. Ultimately, I argue that the pleasurable difficulties of reading Proust stem from his invitation to us to test our own cognitive skills through his reformulation of the material world. My second, third, and fourth chapters explore Proust's use of specifically literary techniques to guide the *Recherche*'s reader to deconstruct our everyday experiences of space, energy, and time in order to see them anew. We will begin this exploration with one of the materials that makes sight possible: light.

# CHAPTER 2: SPACE

Contemporary American artist Mary Corse plays with light in her work, using paint and florescent bulbs to produce all-white canvases that change subtly when viewed from different angles. The Whitney Museum's 2018 exhibition of her work, "A Survey in Light," included the following description of a rather unique material Corse began using in the late twentieth century:

> While driving through Malibu one evening Corse made a serendipitous discovery that inspired her return to painting. She noticed that when light struck the highway lines in front of her, they illuminated for an instant as she moved past. Realizing that the same glass microspheres embedded in that road paint could be used to transform her white paintings into light-responsive works, Corse began covering the surfaces of her works with these tiny, retroreflective beads. In the resulting *White Light* series, begun in 1968, Corse embraced the potential for her paintings to exist in ever-changing states, to appear flat and alternately full of brushwork, depending on the perspective of the viewer and the light. ("Painting with Light")

Corse's body of work as a whole, and particularly these works with retroreflective beads, disrupts the idea that a painting can or should be seen from a single unified perspective. Her concerns in this work echo and extend the drive Impressionist painters felt to portray accidents of light and weather in their work, capturing a moment's sensation instead of an accurate representation an object or a collection of objects as such. From the revolution of plein-air painting, we move to the urbanized revelation of a driver suddenly liberated from the mundane as the white lines of the highway in front of her suggest new aesthetic possibilities. This possibility is no longer so much the attempt to capture a moment as the attempt to capture multiple perspectives in the same work, moving from the representation of an impression into that of a changing field of possibilities.

This changing field of possibilities is what Proust captures in his seascape images throughout the *Recherche*'s second volume, 1919's Prix Goncourt-winning *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (*JF*). This chapter uses these seascapes to reconsider a set of linked ideas about flatness, dimensionality, and ekphrasis within literature, to ultimately reconsider how we understand our relationship to space in general. Within Proust studies, my analysis of these seascapes reconsiders two ideas from the critical canon of writing on this volume and on the *Recherche* as a whole: the primacy of the *Port de Carquethuit* ekphrasis to the narrator's understanding of landscape, and the idea that Proust's images favor flatness over depth. On a macrolevel, these seascapes call into question the empirical reality of light and space as external features structure our reality, considering them instead as experiential, process-driven forces with which we exist in reciprocal relationship. By reading Proust's descriptions of the seaside town of Balbec alongside theories on land and landscape from nineteenth-century debates on painting to contemporary ecocriticism, it becomes clear Proust uses landscape to guide the reader towards a view of the world that is multiperspectival and constantly shifting, decentralizing the aesthetic experience as such (i.e. the experience of literally viewing artwork) in favor of an exploration of our bodily and imaginative engagement with the world around us. The reader is guided throughout the volume to construct and reconstruct, to shape and reshape, landscapes in their own mind as Proust leads us through many imaginative iterations of the Balbec sea, asking us to perform a variety of material and spatial manipulations within and across iterations. We are asked over and over again to visualize seascapes, to see them framed through various windows, to reflect them from a window into glass cabinet doors, to reverse the seascape and see interior light as water. These seascape descriptions often include long mutations and transformations, rather than discrete descriptive moments of a singular seascape image. In an analogous process

to the narrator's own, we are encouraged to see our participatory role in the aesthetic impressions we receive. All of this imaginative work of framing and reframing, visualizing and revisualizing, has the final, paradoxical effect of situating us inside of the world looking around it rather than outside the world looking in at it. Proust tests our imaginative power to create and manipulate spaces, allowing us to play with immersion in the world of the book. This imaginative immersion mimics our often-unconscious immersion in the real world of light, atmosphere, and motion, inviting us into awareness.

**Viewing Balbec**

The space of this exploration is a seaside resort in the fictional town of Balbec, where the narrator has gone on holiday with his grandmother. Their stay at Balbec gives rise to numerous passages where, with quiet awe or giddy excitement, the narrator's sense of scale, scope, direction, and elemental demarcation is confused and rearranged. The descriptions of the Balbec seascapes in *JF*'s second book, *Nom de pays: le pays* are so effective because they entwine the narrator's remarkable perceptual experiences with artistic philosophy and traditional ekphrasis through the narrator's encounters with Elstir. The narrator's perceptual experiences are neither naïve in comparison to Elstir's practiced methods of perception and representation, nor do they become sophisticated solely through the study of the artist's work. Rather, this volume builds up a back-and-forth motion between the narrator's engagement with sensual experience in the real world, and his imaginative engagement with artwork with both informing and nourishing one another. The key quality of Proust's seascapes is the use of light and water to create immersive visual effects that destabilize normal perceptual orientations and induce a sense of vertiginous wonder.

These marvelous seascapes are accessible to anyone, as we will see, but only if the observer has the right combination of curiosity and admiration. For patrons of the Balbec Hotel like the narrator and his grandmother, the dining room windows serve as a frame for the seascape outside. This frame can both highlight the beauty of the seaside scene by circumscribing the visual focus, but this framing also allows it to be taken for granted: "Pendant les longs après-midi, la mer n'était suspendue en face d'eux que comme une toile d'une couleur agréable accrochée dans le boudoir d'un riche célibataire" (306). Here, there is none of the play of dimensionality and focus on the variations of texture and color we will see below, but merely an ornamental canvas. The rather bland adjective "agréable" and the reference to the wealthy bachelor make the sea into a social status symbol of limited aesthetic power. Proust uses this limited view of the hotel guests to demonstrate the permeability of the boundary between interior and exterior, and the hotel's dining room becomes a luminous spectacle for the Balbec working class.

Once night begins to fall, "les sources électriques faisant sourdre à flots la lumière dans la grande salle à manger, celle-ci devenait comme un immense et merveilleux aquarium" (306-307). The electric lights of the hotel do not just mimic the visual impression of water, the light itself moves as if through water ("sourdre à flots"). This aquarium effect is both a lovely descriptive touch for the reader, and an ambiguously attractive scene for the diegetic observers. The latter are "la population ouvrière" of Balbec, and the passage considers in an aside what would happen if they were ever to rise up against this luminous luxury: "une grande question sociale, de savoir si la paroi de verre protégera toujours le festin des bêtes merveilleuses et si les gens obscurs qui regardent avidement dans la nuit ne viendront pas les cueillir dans leur aquarium et les manger" (307). This class distinction works with the framing device of the

window to reinforce the aesthetic strangeness of the scene for its observers; just as the narrator observes the sea from inside the hotel, the workers of Balbec observe the extraordinary animals within. However, the permeability of this glass is suggested not only by the social question Proust raises but by the transferability of qualities between the beach and the interior space of the hotel. The "vie luxueuse" of the hotel patrons is "lentement balancée dans des remous d'ors" as "poissons et mollusques étranges" would be underwater (307). Again, the description references not only the visual qualities of water, but the different quality of motion; the lives of the hotel patrons are lightly balanced in the luminous light like the bodies of sea creatures balance in the water. In the previous chapter, we saw how the dining room table at Balbec represents the omnipresent possibility of aesthetic experience in Proust, and this framed scene of the same dining room evokes the same aesthetic potentiality. This potentiality coexists with the class commentary found in this passage, again showing that in Proust's novel aesthetic experience is concurrent with other types of experience, and that it is always accessible to an interested viewer.

Here, as in other sections of the novel, aesthetic experience is highlighted and differentiated from other sorts of experience through a literal or figurative frame. Malcom Andrews writes of the three-way relationship between land, landscape, and art that underlies our conceptual understanding of 'landscape' that "in the conversion of land into landscape a perceptual process has already begun whereby that material is prepared as an appropriate subject for the painter or photographer, or simply for absorption as a gratifying aesthetic experience. The process might, therefore, be formulated as twofold: land into landscape; landscape into art" (3). Landscape is not merely the stuff out there in the world that is sometimes represented in art. Noticing and appreciating a particularly attractive piece of land is an active experience, not a passive one. In this moment of identifying a slice of land as a landscape, "[w]e are constructing a

hierarchical arrangement of the components within a simple view so that it becomes a complex mix of visual facts and imaginative construction" (Andrews 3). The aesthetic apprenticeship the narrator undertakes in *JF* increases his awareness of both parts of the twofold process Andrews described in the first passage I quoted. The narrator in this volume is becoming aware that in order to turn land into landscape, he must be in the proper disposition to do so; overwhelming physical suffering or desire can preclude the possibility of successful aesthetic perception. He is also becoming aware that he can learn to understand the transformation of landscape into art through comparison with painting, which deepens his own appreciation of landscape—and gives the reader the chance to deepen our own appreciation of the literary seascape through the contrast with the painted seascape. Throughout both parts of this process, the seascapes of Balbec are constantly transforming, land becoming landscape that the narrator is teasing into art.

A representative sample of framed seascape descriptions in this volume show the relationships between land, landscape, and art. The most extensive meditations on framing and landscape in *JF* occur at the narrator's bedroom window. As the summer advances, this bedroom window occasions multiple meditations on the distinctions between the aesthetic and ordinary, combining secular and religious aesthetic effects in "le tableau que j'y trouvais dans la fenêtre":

> D'abord il faisait grand jour, et sombre seulement s'il faisait mauvais temps ; alors, dans le verre glauque et qu'elle boursouflait de ses vagues rondes, la mer, sertie entre les montants de fer de ma croisée comme dans les plombs d'un vitrail, effilochait sur toute la profonde bordure rocheuse de la baie des triangles empennés d'une immobile écume linéamentée avec la délicatesse d'une plume ou d'un duvet dessinés par Pisanello, et fixés par cet émail blanc, inaltérable et crémeux qui figure une couche de neige dans les verreries de Gallé.
>
> Bientôt les jours diminuèrent et au moment où j'entrais dans la chambre, le ciel violet semblait stigmatisé par la figure raide, géométrique, passagère et fulgurante du soleil (pareille à la représentation de quelque signe miraculeux, de quelque apparition mystique), s'inclinait vers la mer sur la charnière de l'horizon comme un tableau religieux au-dessus du maître-autel, tandis que les parties différents du couchant, exposées dans les glaces des bibliothèques basses en acajou qui couraient le long des

> murs et que je rapportais par la pensée à la merveilleuse peinture dont elles était détachées, semblaient comme ces scènes différents que quelque maître exécuta jadis pour une confrérie sur une châsse […]. (435-436)

At the beginning of the season, the narrator sees the sea "sertie entre les montants de fer de ma croisée comme dans les plombs d'un vitrail," a description which invites the reader to frame the scene both in the secular sense of the window frame and in the religious sense of stained glass. This vertical border of the window is followed by a description of a border on the horizontal plane: the sea "effilochait sur toute la profonde bordure rocheuse de la baie des triangles empennés d'une immobile écume." The tension between the two-dimensional effect of the window frame with the three-dimensional rocky border against which the sea brushes prevents the passage from being read merely as an ekphrastic evocation of an Elstir-like seascape. The narrator and the reader are working simultaneously with two different models for this view, vertical and two-dimensional, and horizontal and three-dimensional. This description of the early-season sea ends with two medial figurations for the effects of seafoam on the rocks bordering the sea, again creating tension between two- and three-dimensionality. The foam is "linéamentée avec la délicatesse d'une plume ou d'un duvet dessinés par Pisanello" and "fixé[…] par cet émail blanc, inaltérable et crémeux qui figure une couche de neige dans les verreries de Gallé." The Pisanello drawing reference is two dimensional, emphasizing the line, and the Gallé glasswork reference is three dimensional, emphasizing materiality and texture.

As the summer progresses and the days grow shorter, the narrator sees that "le ciel violet semblait stigmatisé par la figure raide, géométrique, passagère, et fulgurante du soleil." The cluster of adjectives in the first part of this description evoke at least three types of aesthetic power. Calling the sky "stigmatisé" evokes a religious register that continues throughout this passage; the sun is "pareille à la représentation de quelque signe miraculeux, de quelque

apparition mystique" and "comme un tableau religieux au-dessus du maître autel." The adjectives "raide" and "géométrique" move out of the religious and into a sort of mathematical precision. Finally, "passagère" and "fulgurante" seem appropriate adjectives for an impressionist painting, denoting to attempt to capture what is already beginning to fade. This passage continues by evoking again the framing effects of the window, and explicitly connecting these effects to a pleasurable cognitive effort on the part of the narrator as he imaginatively reconstructs his artificially deconstructed view of the sea.

These bedroom seascapes gain in complexity as the narrator moves one step further from the actual landscape outside his window into the reflection of that landscape into the glass front of his bookshelves. The "parties différentes du couchant" are "exposées dans les glaces des bibliothèques basses en acajou qui couraient le long des murs et que je rapportais par la pensée à la merveilleuse peinture dont elles étaient détachées." Rather than look at the real landscape outside his window, the narrator takes pleasure in the several degrees of remove, using his imagination to reconstruct their original composition. Instead of privileging the reality of the natural landscape, that landscape is described as "la merveilleuse peinture" from which the miniature in his bookcase glass has been detached. This layered representation leads the narrator to ruminate on the connections between his own disposition and his appreciation of certain kinds of beauty. He identities depth of feeling as the desired outcome of aesthetic contemplation, a theory which reinforces the play with perspectival depth that is key in the *JF* seascapes. This depth of feeling is contrasted to a purely visual surface. "[B]ien souvent," he explains, these beautiful views are only "des images, j'oubliais que sous leur couleur se creusait le triste vide de la plage" (437). The beach's reality is lost by the narrator and he no longer remembers "le vent inquiet du soir que j'avais si anxieusement ressenti à mon arrivée à Balbec" (437). However, the

distinction the narrator is driving at is not between real experiences and false images, but rather between profound experience and frivolous experience. Art can be either, as can reality. Recently, the narrator has been in a state of distraction because he has been thinking of the "petite bande" of young girls he has seen on the beach, and this distraction means that he is no longer "dans des dispositions assez calmes ni assez désintéressées pour que pussent se produire en moi des impressions vraiment profondes de la beauté" (437). He is thus distinguishing between these "impressions vraiment profondes" and superficial visuality.

In addition to his general thoughts of the young girls, he finds he cannot "mettre de la profondeur derrière la couleur des choses" because of his excitement about his dinner that night at Rivebelle (437). As he prepares for this dinner, he longs to be a visually appealing surface for the approving gaze of women: he will dress himself to "tâcher paraître le plus plaisant possible aux regards féminins qui me dévisageraient dans le restaurant illuminé" (437). The vocabulary of this description highlights the superficiality of this desire; he wants to "paraître" not "être" as pleasing as possible in the well-illuminated restaurant under the appraising looks of his female audience. Bowie characterizes the Rivebelle dinner scene itself as an apprenticeship in balancing physical pleasure and aesthetic appreciation, writing that the narrator "must seek vertigo, yet seek to regulate it, drink himself silly with the sheer welter of things, yet establish a new calm and a new harmony among them" (322). The aesthetic lessons the narrator learns at Balbec are inextricably linked both to his pursuit of physical pleasure and to his experience of physical suffering. These physical demands and desires can be antithetical to his pursuit of aesthetic knowledge, as is the case with his initial difficulty adjusting to the difficulty of being in a new environment at Balbec and his pursuit of the "petite bande" dissuades him from visiting Elstir more often. It is not the case, however, that the aesthetic and the physical are always distinct.

Physical pain and pleasure (or the fear or desire thereof) are not to be avoided; proper aesthetic enjoyment requires a perceptual and emotional quest for depth that includes the physical. The young women he desires bring him out of his hotel and his illness keeps him in it, but in either case the narrator is surrounded by the ever-changing landscape of the sea. His visits to Elstir's atelier keep him away from his watchful gaze on the beach, but it is unexpectedly at that atelier he can finally connect with the girls he so desires to meet. His own bedroom, initially a site of suffering because of its unfamiliarity, becomes a playground of paintings, landscapes cut from the outside world and glimpsed from or reflected in the glass surfaces around him.

Proust's description of the landscapes the narrator sees from his bedroom gives the impression of a continuous and ever-changing spectacle, but only insofar as it is noticed, organized, and appreciated by the narrator's consciousness, a process which is informed by his interest in visual art. The narrator describes his pleasure on "les soirs où un navire absorbé et fluidifié par l'horizon apparaissait tellement de la même couleur que lui, ainsi que dans une toile impressionniste, qu'il semblait aussi de la même matière" (438). The passage that is dense with lexical references to visual art, starting with this reference to "une toile impressionniste." At another moment, "la mer n'était peinte que dans la partie passe de la fenêtre" and the clouds that filled the rest of the frame seem to be "poussés les uns contre les autres par bandes horizontales, que les carreaux avaient l'air, par une préméditation ou une spécialité de l'artiste, de présenter une 'étude de nuages'" (438). Another view of the sky is a "'harmonie en gris et rose' dans le goût de celles de Whistler" (438-39). The narrator is not only studying landscape, but studying art—or more accurately, imaginatively creating art. His descriptions invent a fictional artist who has painted the sea in the window and structured the "étude de nuage" and refer to the real artists as well, but these inventions and references only obfuscate on a surface level the real artistic

agency in this passage: the narrator's own. Paintings are one element of many that he finds in the seascapes outside of his window, one item of many from which Proust constructs his dynamic and ever-changing descriptions.

The narrator's return visit to Balbec in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* takes up this same discussion of the ever-changing field of the seascape. The narrator's temporal distance from his first visit to Balbec helps him describe more explicitly his own agential role in the construction of the landscape around him. On his return to the town, he notes that "[c]omme la première année, les mers, d'un jour à l'autre, étaient rarement les mêmes" (179). In addition to this continuous daily change, he proposes a series of shifts responsible for the new seas he finds this year at Balbec:

> Mais d'ailleurs elles ne ressemblaient guère à celles de cette première année, soit parce que maintenant c'est le printemps avec ses orages, soit parce que, même si j'étais venu à la même date que la première fois, des temps différents, plus changeants, auraient pu déconseiller cette côte à certaines mers indolentes, vaporeuses et fragiles que j'avais vues pendant des jours ardents dormir sur la plage en soulevant imperceptiblement leur sein bleuâtre d'une molle palpitation, soit surtout parce que mes yeux instruits par Elstir à retenir précisément les éléments que j'écartais volontairement jadis, contemplaient longuement ce que la première année ils ne savaient pas voir. Cette opposition qui alors me frappait tant entre les promenades agrestes que je faisais avec Mme de Villeparisis et ce voisinage fluide, inaccessible, et mythologique, de l'Océan éternel, n'existait plus pour moi. Et certains jours la mer me semblait au contraire maintenant presque rurale elle-même. (179-180)

His first explanation is the simplest, that he has arrived at a different time and thus found a different landscape: "maintenant c'est le printemps avec ses orages." He complicates this seasonal explanation with the recognition that even if he had come to Balbec on the same date both years, the weather would be different and this year's changeable skies "aurait pu déconseiller cette côte à certains mers indolentes, vaporeuses, et fragiles" that he had seen in his first year. These three adjectives present an idea of the sea which is evocative but vague, but the rest of the description is a strikingly kinetic image: these seas "que j'avais vues pendant des jours

ardents dormir sur la plage en soulevant imperceptiblement leur sein bleuâtre d'une molle palpitation." The movement this phrase describes is imperceptible and yet present in the narrator's mental image, as if he is both outside of the sea watching it indolently sleep on the beach and inside of it, feeling the gentle palpitating motion of the waves. His memory is both visual and bodily as if he himself could feel the body of the ocean.

His final explanation of the changing face of the sea is his recognition of the role his own cognitive constructions play in what he is seeing. His "yeux instruits par Elstir à retenir précisément les éléments que j'écartais volontairement jadis, contemplaient longuement ce que la première année ils ne savaient pas voir." He has learned new mental habits of viewing from Elstir, a set of techniques by which he can see the same thing in a different way. He can do this by retaining in the landscape objects he might have voluntarily ignored previously and contemplating at length parts of the image he would not have been able to previously identify at all. The aesthetic hierarchies that governed his habits of sight his first year at Balbec have collapsed; the contrast between his "promenades agrestes" with Mme de Villeparisis and the "voisinage fluide, inaccessible, et mythologique, de l'Océan éternel" that he felt so keenly during his first stay at Balbec has given away to a world where some days "la mer me semblait […] presque rurale elle-même." The narrator's changing gaze throughout his first stay in Balbec takes on a retrospective uniformity; it is now of a definitively earlier period than his current look which allows the sea to be "rurale." But at the same time, within this larger structural change—how and what he can see and contemplate—is the continuous rule of the sea's changeability by day, season, and weather. The sea functions as the nexus where we see the constant flux of our relationship with the world around us.

With this representative overview in mind, we can look more closely at the component parts of this landscape construction. We will begin, as Mary Corse does, by considering light. Kenneth Clark has traced the development of a "landscape of fact" in European landscape painting from the fifteenth century forward, which ultimately gave way to impressionism but only after several centuries. The origins of this quest for a factual representation of landscape, Clark explains, happened simultaneously in Flemish painters as an empirical "by-product of [the] perception of light" creating an objective space as if "on a transparent screen," and in Florentine painters in the development of the mathematics of perspective (43). Ultimately, "by the end of the seventeenth century the painting of light had ceased to be an act of love and had become a trick," befitting the artistic representation of the Newtonian "mechanistic universe" (65). Light plays a central role in how Proust constructs his landscapes, but instead of being a passive filtration across the landscape it plays an active affective and agential role. This is clear in descriptive passages such as this: "le soleil me désignait au loin d'un doigt souriant ces cimes bleus de la mer qui n'ont de nom sur aucune carte géographique" (298). The smiling finger of the sun invites the narrator into a landscape new to human experience and understanding. The narrator repeatedly acknowledges this transformative power of light, noting that "[l]a diversité de l'éclairage ne modifie pas moins l'orientation d'un lieu, ne dresse pas moins devant nous de nouveaux buts qu'il nous donne le désir d'attendre, que ne ferait un trajet longuement et effectivement parcouru en voyage" (298). Beyond a simple perceptual difference, lighting can create desire, and specifically here, the desire for motion, the aesthetic pleasure of the voyage.

The use of light as an active participant in the affective and aesthetic effects of a given scene is present from the novel's beginning. Roger Shattuck traces Proust's use of optical imagery through the *Recherche*, beginning with the novel's incipit: "The first objects distinct

from the *I* mentioned in *À la recherche* appear in the second sentence: Marcel's candle and his eyes. […] This strand of imagery, linking not so much things seen as particular circumstances or modes of vision, never slackens through three thousand pages of text" (6). Before looking closely at what this opening passage shows us about the use of light in Proust, it will be helpful to give a counterexample to illustrate a more classic use of light as the source of positive knowledge. In the scene following the opening passage, as the narrator recalls himself as a distraught child waiting for his mother to come kiss him before bed, light serves an epistemological function. It helps the narrator organize the household and anticipate motion. While he is waiting outside his room, hoping his mother will come to give him the bedtime kiss his father has forbidden, he knows his mother is finally coming upstairs because of the "lumière projetée" by her candle (35). This light brings him relief, which then turns to fear when, once she has come to him, he sees that "le reflet de la bougie de mon père s'élevait déjà sur le mur" (35). However, this association of light with positive knowledge is not typical of the use of light in the *Recherche*. Even in this scene, the light may correctly indicate the motions of his parents, but it provokes an incorrect emotional response as the anticipated fury of his father never manifests. Throughout the novel's opening and beyond, light is a form of visual and imaginative play. It is more like a material substance with shapeshifting qualities than a source of understanding, and it is as likely to conceal knowledge or mislead as it is to indicate the truth.

In the opening passage, the reverie of the half-sleeping narrator "empêchait [mes yeux] de se rendre compte que le bougeoir n'était plus allumé" (3). Light is doubly negated by the absence of candlelight and the sleeper's inability to have visual contact even with the darkness. Even the absence of light cannot be known for certain. Later, the narrator remarks on the experience of the invalid waiting for morning in a hotel room when their joy at seeing "une raie

de jour" appear under their door turns to suffering when they realize that they are mistaken and the light is merely someone passing by with a candle. The experience of light is concomitant with the experience of darkness, and the states of obscurity and illumination are constantly on the edge of slipping into one another. Proust gives the startling image of opening "les yeux pour fixer le kaléidoscope de l'obscurité" when briefly awakened in sleep (4). In real life, the varied, colorful patterns of the kaleidoscope are created by light pouring into the device, which seems in clear contrast to the uniform blackness of a darkened room. This inversion of the expected focuses our attention on illumination and obscurity as modes of seeing, perceptual lenses which reorganize and transform the object world. Darkness too can give textures and depths, patterns and shades. The verb "fixer," which can mean to stare intently but also to stabilize, set, or fasten, seems also in contrast with the idea of the kaleidoscope's constant motion and rearrangement. Patrick ffrench writes that "Proust's figures conflate kaleidoscopic multiplicity with speed and rotation, finitude with immobility, suggesting that the stable image of things in front of us is due to the *arrest* of a flux of moving images" (15). The play of the fixed and the mobile, like that of darkness and light, is repeated throughout Proust's images.

This strange world in between wakefulness and sleep conflates light with darkness and immobility with motion, and it displaces the visual to focus on the narrator's distorted experience of his other senses. In the same sentence that references the paradoxical kaleidoscope of obscurity, the narrator mentions two other possibilities of perceptual experiences happening in brief moments of wakefulness during otherwise deep sleep. He might hear the "craquements organiques des boiseries" or "goûter grâce à une lueur momentanée de conscience le sommeil où étaient plongés les meubles [et] la chambre" (4). The association of consciousness with a flash or a gleam might seem to return to an epistemological association of light with revelation, but what

is “revealed” to the narrator here is not the organized world but the flux of a world with stability melted away. This confusion of boundaries is pleasurable to the narrator’s half-sleeping consciousness. The sound of the wooden furniture creaking is organic, like the sound of the breath or the body shifting in rest. He can “goûter” (here, appreciate, but the verb also means to taste, another sensory evocation) not the reality of the furniture and the room around him, but the experience of them as sleeping alongside him.

While the bedroom of the incipit and the Balbec bedroom from which the narrator watches the sea are temporally and geographically distinct, the two are linked by the use of the bedroom throughout the *Recherche* as a space of aesthetic contemplation. ffrench highlights that the narrator very often both perceives and imagines the world from the confines of his bedroom. He writes that for the narrator in the incipit “[i]n this primordial state [between sleeping and waking], before any certainty in relation to time and place, consciousness is consciousness of a room, but also, strangely, consciousness *as* a room, a chamber” (8). Throughout *JF* as well, Proust uses the narrator’s room as a way to thematize and to experiment with the positioning of the viewing subject. The narrator’s room, like the space of an art museum or of a cinema, is in some respects a standardized space from which the viewing (or listening, imagining, etc.) experience can happen. The narrator’s “habitude” makes the materiality of his room feel discreet and unobtrusive, in the way that public spaces for viewing art are designed to allow you to concentrate on the aesthetic experience at hand. The modern museum favors evenly spaced paintings along an otherwise neutral wall, and the comfortable seats and darkness of the cinema allows the viewer to focus their attention as completely as possible.

However, the personal and affective resonances of the space of the bedroom in the *Recherche* make it distinct from the public spaces of art consumption. From *JF* on, Elstir’s

method of decomposed viewing becomes the explicit model by which the narrator will (and in fact has already) interact(ed) with the world around him, but the narrative moments that best demonstrate these interactions are not when the narrator views Elstir's paintings themselves. Rather, the repeated device of viewing through a window creates a diegetically real but nonetheless aestheticized space that invites us as readers to explore both the ways that texts construct imaginative space and the ways that we construct landscapes in and out of art. ffrench uses the famous optical device of the camera obscura explore how Proust is playing with space and perception in general. He writes,

> On the one hand, the novel is punctuated by recurrent scenes in which the narrator's perception and knowledge of the outside world takes place in the interior space of his room. On the other hand, the security and certainty of this knowledge is compromised by the fact that, in the room, he is not a disembodied and abstracted subject, but a physiological presence, and one whose very presence is mined internally by the intermittences of time and of consciousness. (52)

Like the narrator's room, the camera obscura is a dark place from which to view the play of light and motion, but rather than merely assert this technical correspondence, ffrench argues for the particular physiological experience of the space of the bedroom. The narrator's sick body or discomforted mind, his lapses in attention, his rhythms of sleeping and waking—all of these are built into the conceptual structure of the bedroom in Proust.

The case of the Balbec dining room demonstrates that ffrench's insights apply to cases of viewing even from spaces that are not the space of the bedroom. For ffrench, though Proust broadly adapts "the skeletal structure of the camera obscura, so to speak" he then "troubles it through the mutual complication of different senses, and through a pervasive attention to the surfaces or limits separating inside from outside" (52). The Balbec dining room is a particularly apt demonstration of both points. In the case of the dining room, this public space is obviously linked to the physiological through the consumption of food, and, as discussed above, also

contains a certain associative porousness between inside and out when the items in the dining room are contrasted with or linked to the landscape outside the large windows. The smell and taste of food is the non-visual sensory experience par excellence of the *Recherche*, and the literal and figurative permeability of the dining room is repeatedly highlighted though the visual and literal contact with the sea and sea creatures discussed in my first chapter, and, as we saw above, in the reversal of the viewing experience when the diners become the spectacle for Balbec inhabitants watching them from outside.

This physiological grounding and sensory permeability characterize the narrator's experiences of viewing, and with this basis established, we can turn our attention towards the sorts of things that he sees in the world, and that we "see" through Proust's descriptions. A short passage from *Autour de Mme Swann*, the first section of *JF*, shows the strange world of light and space in the *Recherche*. In this passage, the narrator is musing on the lesson discussed in the previous chapter that the quality of milieu and the quality of object does not matter for artistic achievement. He explains that what is important for an artist is not their social situation or intellectual gifts per say, but rather "la faculté de les transformer, de les transposer" (172). Proust uses two metaphors to explain this transformative power, one using light, and one using space. These two descriptive metaphors echo the two main themes in Proust's creation of textual landscapes: the importance of the material presence of light and the importance of a mixed horizontal and vertical perspective.

Proust begins with a lamp: "Pour faire chauffer un liquide avec une lampe électrique, il ne s'agit pas d'avoir la plus forte lampe possible, mais une dont le courant puisse cesser d'éclairer, être dérivé et donner, au lieu de la lumière, de la chaleur" (172). Applied to artistic achievement, this model of derivation argues that what is important is not the concentration of

one quality, such as the abovementioned intellectual prowess or social positioning. Rather, what is critical is the ability to move in a different direction, at an oblique angle, towards an unexpected goal. "[L]a plus forte lampe possible" is a superlative description referring to extreme specialization in what is the main goal of a lamp, to provide light, but in this case where the goal is heating liquid, the desirable lamp is one where (emphasis mine) "le courant *puisse* cesser d'éclairer […]," both the verb pouvoir and the subjunctive tense pointing to the crucial value of possibility over certainty. This multifaceted use of light prefigures the association between light and liquid in the second part of *JF*, where light becomes a key player in the transformative game the narrator performs with the sky, sea, and glass around him. Proust's second metaphor retains this focus on derivation, this time in spatial terms: "Pour se promener dans les airs, il n'est pas nécessaire d'avoir l'automobile la plus puissante, mais une automobile qui, ne continuant pas à courir à terre et coupant d'une verticale la ligne qu'elle suivait, soit capable de convertir en force ascensionnelle sa vitesse horizontal" (172). This model of horizontal force being converted to vertical force will serve as a guide for analyzing the creation of space in Proust's seascape images, which are often structured by a descriptive move from a horizontal plane to a vertical plane, or vice versa, encouraging the reader to visualize in three dimensions.

Returning to the narrator's Balbec bedroom, the following passage includes agential luminosity and perspectival play. Glimpsed through the window, the sea becomes a wild, mountainous landscape that changes in composition and location:

> [J]e retournais près de la fenêtre jeter encore un regard sur ce vaste cirque éblouissant et montagneux et sur les sommets neigeux de ses vagues en pierre d'émeraude çà et là polie et translucide, lesquelles avec une placide violence et un froncement léonin laissaient s'accomplir et dévaler l'écroulement de leurs pentes auxquelles le soleil ajoutait un sourire sans visage. Fenêtre à laquelle je devais ensuite me mettre chaque matin pour voir

> si pendant la nuit s'est rapprochée ou éloignée une chaîne désirée—ici ces collines de la mer qui avant de revenir vers nous en dansant, peuvent reculer si loin que souvent ce n'était qu'après une longue plaine sablonneuse que j'apercevais à une grande distance leurs premières ondulations, dans un lointain transparent, vaporeux et bleuâtre comme ces glaciers qu'on voit au fond des tableaux des primitifs toscans. D'autres fois c'était tout près de moi que le soleil riait sur ces flots d'un vert aussi tendre que celui que conserve aux prairies alpestres (dans les montagnes où le soleil s'étale çà et là comme un géant qui en descendrait gaiment, par bonds inégaux, les pentes) moins l'humidité du sol que la liquide mobilité de la lumière. (297-298)

Proust's sea descriptions combine unlike notions to highlight the specificity of the aesthetic pleasure brought by each iteration of the sea view. Here, it is enormous like snowy mountains, and polished and transparent like precious stone. This strange mountain range changes distance from his window daily; some mornings he sees "à une grande distance leurs premières ondulations," an effect he compares to "ces glaciers qu'on voit au fond des tableaux des primitifs toscans" highlighting both the spatial remove and the painterly echoes of the scene before him. Other days, "c'était tout près de moi que le soleil riait sur ces flots d'un vert aussi tendre que celui que conserve aux prairies alpestres […] moins l'humidité du sol que la liquide mobilité de la lumière." In this description, the sea has changed in spatial orientation to come much closer to the window. Like the "doigt souriant" above, the sea "riait," again associating light with action and joyous affect. The second part of the description plays with solidity and color by claiming that the "tendre" green of an alpine prairie is not due to the objective coloring of its vegetation but, like the green of the sea, to the liquid effect of light.

So far in the quotes I have used, the sea moves back and forth with relation to the window frame, but the viewer stays put. In the case of the last, however, this is not the case; the full quote askes the reader to visualize the landscape using a quasi-cinematic bird's eye view. The ellipsis I inserted into the last quote (between "praires alpestres" and "moins l'humidité") took the place of the parenthetical description of the sun in the mountains: "dans les montagnes

où le soleil s'étale çà et là comme un géant qui en descendrait gaiement, par bonds inégaux, les pentes." To visualize this description, the reader must move from a vertical to a horizontal plane to imagine a point of view very high above to the mountains. It is only from here that we can grasp the effect of the irregular pattern the sun makes. While holding this point of view, they are visualizing the pattern not as a static one but as one created by the tracks of a giant as he gleefully leaps down between the peaks.[13]

**Textual Landscapes Beyond Ekphrasis**

These descriptive marvels provide the reader with imaginative exercise and aesthetic pleasure within the *Recherche*, but they are also in dialogue with the long history of debate about what landscape representations should do. Two of Proust's intertextual references for the *Recherche*, art critic John Ruskin and by the painter James McNeil Whistler, represent opposite points in this debate. Proust was fascinated by Ruskin's work, producing French translations of *The Bible of Amiens* in 1896, and *Sesame and Lilies* in 1906. Whistler is one of the references Proust uses for the seascape images the narrator sees reflected in his room, as we saw above. The disaccord between the two on the proper method of landscape painting had both theoretical and practical consequences, culminating in Whistler's libel suit against Ruskin following a negative review of a painting. The distinction between their ideas hinges on a disagreement about whether landscape should be the expression of a "specific truth," in Ruskin's words (205), or if it should be the expression of an impression. Having this debate in the background will allow us to see the originality of what Proust's landscapes do, which is combine clarity and specificity with the acknowledgement and representation of changeability and impermanence. Looking at the former,

[13] This gigantesque orientation foreshadows the 'elevated' temporal position the reader is asked to consider in the description of humans as giants stretched in time at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé* (see chapter 4)

Ruskin writes in *Modern Painters* that expressing the specific truth of a landscape necessitates exactitude in the painted details. He writes, "there is no grandeur, no beauty of any kind, nothing but destruction, disorganization, and ruin, to be obtained by the violation of natural distinctions (208). His rhetorical rigor in this passage extends to the smallest details. He compares a sloppily painted rock, half granite and half slate, to a centaur, arguing that both are impossible in nature and therefore absurd. He reminds his reader that in the case of rocks and clouds, "the difficulty of observing [the distinctions between types] proves not the merit of overlooking them" (208). This is in contrast to Whistler's use of an artistic practice privileging perceptual immediacy above all else in his *Nocturnes*.

Ruskin's negative review of Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold* hinged on the idea that the "eccentricities" and "impudence" of Whistler's style blotted out the real landscape supposedly represented in favor of an incomprehensible play of colors and lines ("Cross-Examination" 834). In aiming to represent a moment's impression, Whistler's *Nocturne* distorts or destroys the referential reality of the painted subject. For Ruskin, an aesthetic theorist interested in truth, no proper moral relationship to the world can exist without an attempt at accurate representation. By contrast, in his cross-examination at the trial, Whistler flatly denies that his painting has or should have any power to convey actual knowledge about a real landscape. His outright dismissal of accuracy as an important category for aesthetic judgement shows the deep gap between his practice and Ruskin's theories. For Whistler, the question of the relationship of painting to the external world is irrelevant. In response to a question from the attorney-general clarifying whether Whistler's *Nocturne* was a view of Cremorne, Whistler responded in the negative: "If it were called a view of Cremorne, it would certainly bring about nothing but disappointment on the part of the beholders" (836). This is radically different than

Ruskin's insistence on exact observational detail even down to details viewers might have difficultly recognizing, such as granite versus slate. Whistler on the other hand not only denies the need for exactitude in detail, but indeed the need to create a painting that has any identifiable relationship at all with the location where it was painted.

During his cross-examination, Whistler articulates what his paintings are trying to do and what they are trying to represent. He gives his definition of a *Nocturne* as an "arrangement of line, form, and color first, and I make use of any incident of it which shall bring about a symmetrical result" (835). A *Nocturne* is above all an arrangement of visual information organized according to a visual logic that is aimed at representing an impression for its own sake rather than accurately portraying on object. Such a method leaves room for "incident" in composition rather than obeying a previously conceived rational organizing design. The building blocks of these paintings are pure visual information as "line, form, and color" rather than broader conceptual categories. While discussing a second painting, his *Nocturne in Blue and Silver*, Whistler explains that "the thing is intended simply as a representation of moonlight" (836). Light is no longer a device that illuminates, conceals, or throws into relief the solid objects in a painting but rather the sole referential subject Whistler claims. As in Mary Corse's work discussed in the introduction, light is not a component part or a means to an end here, but the substance of the painting itself. Returning to *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, Whistler explains that this "picture was painted not as offering the portrait of a particular place, but as an artistic impression that had been carried away" (837). As we will see below, Whistler's description of his methodology is in line with Proust's description of Elstir's painting practice. What Proust identifies as Elstir's "dénomination" permits him to represent our preconceptual "impressions véritables," and here the "véritable," the true, is only present in momentary impressions and not

conceptual knowledge (470). The close observation of the specific detail that Ruskin so highly recommends will not allow Whistler to paint moonlight or fireworks, nor will it allow Elstir to paint the ever-changing variations of sea and sky. As Darci Gardner writes in an essay on the relationship between perspectival distortions in Proust's landscapes and their connection to the narrator's misleading interpretation and presentation of events, "[i]n his narrative as in his picturing of landscapes, verisimilitude is not a priority" (139). Rather, the value of the narrator's perspective is "is not in its accuracy but its unfamiliarity […] reminding readers to relish the disorienting picture that he offers" (144). To represent the lights of Cremorne and the landscapes of Balbec, new theoretical and practical models must be created—and the genius of Proust is in both echoing these debates in the history of painting and simultaneously innovating on the representational power of the literary image.

In order to see how Proust's non-painted seascapes differ from Elstir's diegetic seascape paintings, we need to look closely at the methodology and descriptive specificity of *JF*'s long ekphrasis of the painter's *Port de Carquethuit*. In the previous chapter, we saw examples of Elstir's paintings, such as the "Miss Sacripant" painting of Odette Swann, that gain aesthetic power through vivid material presence. *Carquethuit* has a very different relationship to the material world. Jacques Rancière argues that the *Recherche* participates in what he calls "un théâtre de la défiguration," in which artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries moved away from classical notions of *beaux-arts* into new forms of artistic production, using Elstir as his primary example from the text (89). He writes, "[c]ette défiguration, Proust l'appelle dénomination, en qualifiant l'art de la sensation pure chez Elstir" and cites from *JF*: "si Dieu le père avait créé les choses en les nommant, c'est en leur ôtant leur nom, ou en leur en donnant un autre qu'Elstir les recréait" (77). Elstir's seascapes attempt to capture pure visual sensation with

its attendant distortions of the properties of objects and the relationships between them. Rather than drawing attention to the "specific truth" of that landscape gleaned from the close observation of details, as Ruskin instructs, Elstir's paintings reveal a perceptual truth drawn from close attention to experiential material. His method aims to dissolve even the most basic distinctions between objects to reveal them in their perceptual newness.

The primary example of this is the *Le Port de Carquethuit* ekphrasis. In this passage, Proust identifies the defining principle of Elstir's work as the lack of distinction between natural and artificial elements. Elstir's artistic innovation is in "n'employant pour la petite ville que des termes marines, et que des termes urbains pour la mer" (470). The painter forces himself to not take into account even the most basic of distinctions we use to organize and understand a real or painted landscape: "le peintre avait su habituer les yeux à ne pas reconnaitre de frontière fixe, de démarcation absolue, entre la terre et l'océan" (470). Our habitual differentiation between urban and natural, between land and sea, are undone in Elstir's painting. Valazza writes of the *Port de Carquethuit* ekphrasis that though Proust describes Elstir's use of "termes marines" to paint the town and "termes urbaines" to paint the sea as a metaphor, "il importe de ne pas prêter au mot 'métaphore' son sens rhétorique […] car l'opération d'Elstir n'est nullement verbale, mais bien visuelle […] de sorte qu'on parlera de *méta-figuration* plutôt que de 'métaphore'" (305). Like Rancière's notion of de-figuration, Valazza's notion of meta-figuration draws attention to the new visual strategies of Elstir's paintings.

For diegetic viewers, the power of the *Port de Carquethuit* painted hinges on its ability to mimic chance perceptual experience of disorientation in and disorganization of the object world. The narrator compares Elstir's painting to his experience of glancing out his window at certain times of day and looking out "avec joie" at "une zone bleu et fluide sans savoir si elle appartenait

à la mer ou au ciel" (460). In that moment, the visual input does not allow the narrator to immediately identify the constituent parts of the view from his windows; the sensory experience of fluid blue for an instant is undefined, unattached to an object. This initial, accidental impression can last only a moment before the narrator's intelligence reestablishes the distinctions between sea and sky, but it is Elstir's genius to be able to capture in painting these moments of referential blur. He captures accidents such the "jeux d'ombres" hinting at new relationships between elements: a shadow reflected in water takes on "la dureté et l'éclat de la pierre;" in turn the rock becomes "aussi vaporeuse que l'ombre;" light refracts off boats and water "inventant comme de nouveaux solides" (473-474). However, this method, theoretically striking as it may be, does not translate into an imaginatively powerful image when compared to the other Balbec seascapes.

Compared to the descriptions drawn from the narrator's experience, the *Porte de Carquethuit* ekphrasis is impossible to imagine in any sort of perspective; rather it is a jumble of objects which resemble other objects, solids which resemble liquids, and vertical and horizontal planes without clear distinction:

> Soit que les maisons cachassent une partie du port, un bassin de calfatage ou peut-être la mer même s'enfonçant en golfe dans les terres […] de l'autre côté de la pointe avancée où était construite la ville, les toits étaient dépassés (comme ils l'eussent été par les cheminées ou par des clochers) par des mâts, lesquels avaient l'air de faire des vaisseaux auxquels ils appartenaient, quelque chose de citadin, de construit sur terre, impression qu'augmentaient d'autres bateaux, demeurés le long de la jetée, mais en rangs si pressés que les hommes y causaient d'un bâtiment à l'autre sans qu'on pût distinguer leur séparation et l'interstice de l'eau […]. (471)

Proust's other descriptions, which we will see below, use jarring perspectival shifts but nonetheless allow for moments of clarity which are not present in this ekphrasis. The "termes marines" and the "termes urbains" that make up the constituent parts of Elstir's tableau are mixed together, as we have seen, but aside from this synthetic exchange of qualities Proust's

description is largely composed of a wealth of deictic information without any clear point of origin. We learn that "les maisons cachassent une partie de port," the ville is built on "la pointe avancée" (of what is not clear), and "les toits étaient dépassés [par des mâts]" but we learn after the sentence containing the passage cited above that "le premier plan" is of the beach (471). The perspective is not changing; rather, no perspective is ever established. This long ekphrasis, paradoxically, does not so much describe a view as elucidate a method—in contrast to the other seascapes of *JF*, which multiply viewing perspectives while retaining visual clarity.

*JF*'s seascapes more closely resemble Diderot's textual experiments in his *Salons*, that move beyond the simple description of a landscape as an artistic representation and into a landscape penetrated by the participatory consciousness of the viewer (reader). Baldwin explicitly connects Diderot's *Salons* to Proust as both share a tendency to move "between descriptions of nature as art and art as nature" (2013: 133). Diderot's interest in the question of how to render into text the experience of seeing a painting led to strikingly original techniques over his years of viewing and reviewing the salons. Paintings become the impetus for immersive imaginative explorations, and he plays with the fiction of entering them and moving around. Wilda Anderson describes his method thus: "[i]n several cases he even entered into the landscape and described it not from the position of at dominant exterior analytical eye but from the positions he successively held as he wandered from point to point. He experienced the paintings as events rather than describing them as objects" (190). The most notable example of this is 1767's so-called *Promenade Vernet*, where Diderot writes that he has left the salon in favor of a walk through the countryside, and at the end of his lengthy description of his walk he reveals that he has been discussing a set of seven Vernet landscapes the whole time. Proust, however, goes one step further and leaves the museum for good, inviting the reader to enter and explore

landscapes that are wholly literary in construction, that resemble paintings from some angles but add a depth and changeability that both resembles our real experience of the world, and appears wholly strange and marvelous.

While painting is the paradigmatic non-literary artform in *JF*, the volume where narrator meets Elstir and learns his methodology of privileging first impressions over organized understanding, the diegetic seascapes of the volume are not only or primarily painterly in execution. This is not to say that painting is a step on the narrator's artistic journey that he must overcome, but rather that his sustained engagement with Elstir's painterly imagination and the "real" landscape of Balbec which has been nourishing it helps him better triangulate his own aesthetic interests and desires outside of the realm of painting. Elstir's artistic methodology restores a preconceptual immediacy of impression that provides the overarching philosophical justification for the narrator's deconstructions and reconstructions of the elements of his Balbec stay. By overfocusing on Elstir's landscape theory and practice, though, we run the risk of missing the complexity of Proust's descriptions of the sea and the sky in *JF* and other volumes. These descriptions embed multiple perspectives, textures, and motions within explicit frames to guide the reader to construct multi-dimensional, multi-layered conceptual images. These frames are most often the literal frame of a window, which is never a totally transparent partition meant to be forgotten but rather highlighted as a constitutive part of the scene (entailing sensory deprivation, cutting or reflecting the view, serving as its own horizontal plane, etc.). Proust's landscapes play with perceptual boundaries, and especially mix two-dimensional and three-dimensional effects in such a way that invites visualization but does not attempt to create something akin to real visual input, aesthetic or otherwise. The reader can engage with these different descriptive parts or levels with more or less intensity; while a close reading can

elucidate methodically the component ‘pieces’ of the image (though it might be more accurate to say the component views of the image), but readers will likely retain a more general sense of the scene or be particularly struck by a particular feature or angle. A returning reader will likely be struck by different details, meaning that these images shift and change diegetically for the narrator (i.e. throughout the day and in different weather), perspectivally for the reader in a single sitting, and imaginatively for the reader over multiple readings.

A passage from the *Recherche*’s first volume shows both overlap with the *Port de Carquethuit* ekphrasis through of the use of light and darkness effects, referential blurring, and is distinguished from it by showing a dimensional immersion in landscape. The narrator describes how, on days when the weather was bad when he was a child, he had to stay inside and look out at “la campagne que l’obscurité et l’humidité faisaient ressembler à la mer (150). This anticipates both Elstir’s blend of land and sea in his paintings, and the “real” seascape the narrator will glimpse in many blended iterations at Balbec. The narrator then describes how “des maisons isolées, accrochées au flanc d’une colline plongée à la nuit et à l’eau, brillaient comme des petits bateaux qui ont replié leurs voiles et sont immobiles au large pour toute la nuit” (150). This description is in some ways the thematic inverse of the *Porte de Carquethuit* ekphrasis. Recall that in Elstir’s painting “les toits étaient dépassés […] par des mats lesquels avaient l'air de faire des vaisseaux auxquels ils appartenaient, quelque chose de citadin, de construit sur terre […].” In the narrator’s description of the countryside, the isolated houses seem to be boats that have stopped sailing for the night, whereas in the later ekphrasis perspectival distortion makes the boats crowded along the port appear to be constructions on land. In the first case, water and darkness make this impression possible, whereas the lack of visual depth is at the root of the

illusion in the second. The presence and absence of water and the use of optical impediments (darkness and lack of dimension) connect these two passages.

As we saw above when exploring Proust's use of light, this description of the countryside in bad weather hinges on light as a material substance instead of an epistemological guide. The darkness makes the countryside seem like the sea and creates object confusion that goes beyond appearance and into substance, with solids becoming liquids. In the *Port de Carquethuit* ekphrasis, the play of light and dark is absent, but the distorted proximity of the rows of roofs and boats have the same effect. The viewer's line of sight is blocked, and they are invited to revel in the potential conceptual mistakes that this causes rather than to try to reconstruct the actual scene. Outside of this conceptual blurring, though, the narrator's description of the countryside has one quality the *Port de Carquethuit* ekphrasis lacks. The jumbled visual information of the ekphrastic picture provides an explicit demonstration of a certain methodology of perception, which, as Milovanovic writes, is not an end to itself for the narrator but rather "un moyen, un *outil* en même temps qu'une incitation à développer sa vision dans ce sens" (24). It lacks the feeling of immersion that is present in other landscape descriptions outside of the ekphrastic mode.

This countryside passage, however, uses weather is a method of moving from the purely visual to the phenomenological by layering sense information as an essential part of the description. While the countryside is initially something outside at which the narrator is looking, the description includes atmospheric information that challenges this relationship of inside/outside. In summer, bad weather is just "une humeur passagère, superficielle, du beau temps sous-jacent et fixe," in contrast to winter's "beau temps instable et fluide" (150). These multi-layered descriptions do not present weather as a changeable element on a stable surface but

rather as complex and self-contradictory. Summer's good weather is "fixe," but occasionally covered with spells of bad weather, but in winter good weather is "instable and fluide," blending into bad weather. The references to weather, as we will see in my chapter conclusion with reference to Tim Ingold's work, move us from the realm of the seen to the realm of the felt, the space of bodily immersion in the world.

Proust's other descriptions, unlike the *Port de Carquethuit* ekphrasis, do have certain organizational features that can be, at least in part, clearly visualized. These multiperspectival seascapes in ask the reader to imagine them along several axes. On the one hand, there is the literal multiplicity of points of view in a technical sense, that is, the number of spatial orientations one can take in relation to the landscape. On the other, there is the invitation to layer our sensory impressions of these seascapes, that is to say, to look not just at the colors and forms as one might in a painting, but to focus on texture, on density, on motion and/or other sensual features. Shattuck's work on optical imagery through the *Recherche* ultimately argues that a stereoscopic vision, that is, one that is formed from multiple discrete images, is the best model for understanding Proust. In response to the passage from *TR* quoted in my introduction about the narrator using a telescope to observe general laws rather than a microscope to observe small details, Shattuck writes "[t]elescopes, yes, but bi- or multi-ocular: on this I insist over and above Proust's apt images. For *À la recherche* provides us with an image combined out of many images; a stereoscopic re-creation of the world in depth" (107). Earlier in his argument, he notes the importance of this idea of multiple images for imbuing the world with depth: "Depth, or what is called in optics penetration effect, cannot be found in a single image, a single *instantané*" (42). Proust plays constantly with the mirages of depth and flatness in his novel, as Bal, Baldwin, and ffrench discuss. Bal writes of the "écran diapré" of the *Recherche,* aruging that to understand the

visual world of the *Recherche*, the reader must engage in a "lecture plate" which is "orientée par l'image visuelle présentée comme une œuvre peinte […] elle se distingue d'une lecture esthétique qui prend les références à la peinture comme point de départ, comme énoncé plutôt que comme mode d'énonciation" (24). Painted images are not objects within the *Recherche* to view, but rather the visual world of text is itself a painted surface. Baldwin identifies "a picture plane" in the *Recherche*, which he defines as "a virtual threshold that delimits the closest virtual approach to the objects depicted on that literal surface can make to the viewer" (2013: 137). This effect flattens space in Proust by making real space more like the flat surface of a picture, blurring the line between ekphrasis proper and the description of "real" diegetic objects. ffrench uses the narrator's hidden gaze into the sadistic lesbian scene in the Vinteuil living room in *Combray* to compare the narrator's visual world to that of a screen rather than that of a real space: "the volume of the room is in this sense flattened, while the look is able to roam around it and to choose its objects of focus. It is a surface with a virtual depth, a screen rather than a stage" (109). The mobility of the cinematic screen is here preferred to the fixed image on the surface of a painting, but both intermedial resonances hinge on the lack of depth in Proust's descriptive world.

However, this body of work on the idea of flatness risks obscuring the presence of depth in Proust images, particularly in these Balbec seascapes. Proust's seascapes push the reader to extend their visualization in multiple directions. While we may start as a viewer on the other side of a window, we do not always stay there, and the way the reader must imagine these descriptions is more like looking into a glass box from the side and then from above than looking through one pane of glass in a window. In addition, just as it is through Elstir's paintings that the narrator becomes conscious of his own interactions with the landscape around him, it is through

our imaginative work with complex landscapes such as Proust's that we ourselves come to understand our own relationship to landscape and our own sense of being in space. These artistic interactions do not just teach us about art, but about the dynamic role our imagination plays in our view of the real spaces we inhabit. Framing is extremely important to the visual effects in *JF* but it is never meant to indicate a strong demarcation between the real and the aesthetic. Rather, it serves to highlight certain perceptual possibilities, creating a temporary sense of distance that jars the habitual relationships we have with the external world. The frame both defines an object for aesthetic appreciation and creates a space into which we can enter and with which we can engage.

The volume's emphasis on framing begins on the narrator's train ride to Balbec. His physical state is highlighted before the visual is evoked: he feels a contrast of balance and motion which holds him pleasantly "en équilibre" through the opposing forces of his insomnia and the movement and noise of the train. His description of his physical state evokes immersion in the sea or the sky, prefiguring the Balbec landscapes in which he will soon find himself: he is held in suspension like "quelque poisson qui dort dans la mer, promené dans son assouplissement par les courants et la vague, ou en quelque aigle étendu sur le seul appui de la tempête" (278). This physical comfort resulting from the combination of exciting and soothing forces introduces the double spectacle the narrator will have when the sun begins to rise, and in general the volume's use of paradoxical terms to stretch the reader's imaginative capacity. Here, the opposing forces that fascinate the narrator appear in alternating windows and introduce tension in two ways. There is the tension between the idea that a window frame, like a picture frame, could immobilize a piece of landscape with the fact of the landscape constantly changing through the window as the train speeds along. Then, there is the spatial and temporal contrast between the

two windows to which the narrator has access, one of which shows the continuing night and the other of which shows the beginning of the dawn:

> [D]ans le carreau de la fenêtre […] je vis des nuages échancrés dont le doux duvet était d'un rose fixé, mort, qui ne changera plus, comme celui qui teint les plumes de l'aile qui l'a assimilé ou le pastel sur lequel l'a déposé la fantaisie du peintre. Mais je sentais qu'au contraire cette couleur n'était ni inertie, ni caprice, mais nécessité et vie. Bientôt s'amoncelèrent derrière elle des réserves de lumière. Elle s'aviva, le ciel devint d'un incarnat que je tâchais, en collant mes yeux à la vitre, de mieux voir car je le sentais en rapport avec l'existence profonde de la nature, mais la ligne du chemin de fer ayant changé de direction, le train tourna, la scène matinale fut remplacée dans le cadre de la fenêtre par un village nocturne aux toits bleus de clair de lune, avec un lavoir encrassé la nacre opaline de la nuit, sous un ciel encore semé de tous ses étoiles, et je me désolais d'avoir perdu ma bande de ciel rose quand je l'aperçus de nouveau, mais rouge cette fois, dans le fenêtre d'en face qu'elle abandonna à un deuxième coude de la voie ferrée ; si bien que je passais mon temps à courir d'une fenêtre à l'autre pour rapprocher, pour rentoiler les fragments intermittents et opposites de mon beau matin écarlate et versatile et en avoir une vue totale et un tableau continu. (278-279)

The narrator first notices "des nuages échancrés dont le doux duvet était d'un rose fixé, mort, qui ne changera plus" but he immediately introduces the potential of motion into this initially immobile description: "je sentais qu'au contraire cette couleur n'était ni inertie, ni caprice, mais nécessité et vie. Bientôt s'amoncelèrent derrière elle des réserves de lumière." This is not merely the narrator's logical understanding that the morning sky will become more illuminated as the sun rises, it is a gesture towards the paradox at the heart of visual art—how time is represented in space. As we saw in chapter one, Aubert argues that for Proust images "have a duration" rather than being "snapshots of external reality" (279). ffrench draws a contrast between duration and succession in theories of movement, with Proust and Henri Bergson on the side of the former and photographers like Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge on the other. ffrench writes, "[t]he key distinction here is between a theorization of the moving image which thinks it as an animated series of static instants, and one which grasps movement as a distinct concept and object, irreducible to the abstraction of the instant" (19). Even the pink "fixé, mort" contains the

germ of its own transformation, the suggestion of "réserves de lumière" that will change its qualities and tones. Although there is not much dimensionality in this description, Proust is moving away from flatness with the deictic indicator "derrière," giving the reader the impression of depth underlying the surface, of quantities of light building up behind the soft pink of the sky.

As the train turns through the countryside, the window is filled with "un village nocturne aux toits bleus de clair de lune, avec un lavoir encrassé de la nacre opaline de la nuit, sous un ciel encore semé de toutes ses étoiles." This new image is particularly effective because it is both a temporal progression in the life of the narrator (in that it is the second of the two scenes he views) and a temporal regression as well, a moment logically anterior to the preceding pink clouds. The sky is "encore" scattered with stars, although in the previous moment it was not so decorated. This nonlinear viewing helps the narrator and the reader focus on the intensity of the visual scene and its affective correlates (the narrator notes that looking at the second scene "je me désolais d'avoir perdu ma bande de ciel rose"), an impulse that will find its theoretical description later in the volume through the description of Elstir's work. The narrator ends this scene in a state of happy motion, running back and forth between the windows to "rentoiler les fragments intermittents et opposites de mon beau matin écarlate et versatile et en avoir une vue totale et un tableau continu." His aesthetic goal is to hold these contrasting and mobile visions together, creating a synthetic and immersive whole experience.

The Balbec seascapes that follow the narrator's arrival use proximity and distance as well as framing devices to orient the reader in multiperspectival images that initially unfold from a clear standpoint and become more complex as the description grows. The below seascape draws the reader's attention to its frame, beginning with the narrator's grandmother complaining that

she does not like being cut off from the feeling and smell of the sea by the enormous dining room windows:

> [I]l parut cruel à ma grand-mère de n'en pas sentir le souffle vivifiant à cause du châssis transparent mais clos qui, comme une vitrine, nous séparait de la plage tout en nous la laissant entièrement voir et dans lequel le ciel entrait si complètement que son azur avait l'air d'être la couleur des fenêtres et ses nuages blancs, un défaut du verre. Me persuadant que j'étais 'assis sur le môle' dont parle Baudelaire, je me demandais si son 'soleil rayonnant sur la mer', ce n'était pas—bien différent du rayon du soir, simple et superficiel comme un trait doré et tremblant—celui qui en ce moment brûlait la mer comme une topaze, la faisait fermenter, devenir blonde et laiteuse comme de la bière, écumante comme du lait, tandis que par moments s'y promenaient çà et là de grandes ombres bleues que quelque dieu semblait s'amuser à déplacer, en bougeant un miroir dans le ciel. (299)

At first, these windows both mark an absolute distinction between the viewer and the object viewed and collapse the sense of depth a view of the sea would normally have. In addition to not being able to feel the sea breeze or smell the salt, the window makes the scene appear two-dimensional: the blue of the sky "avait l'air d'être la couleur des fenêtres et ses nuages blancs, un défaut du verre." This blue and white patterning on the vertical plane of the window surface gives way to a description of the surface of the sea, creating an intersecting horizontal plane as the narrator marvels at the colors and textures the sun is creating. The sun "brûlait la mer comme une topaze, la faisait fermenter, devenir blonde et laiteuse comme de la bière, écumante comme du lait." This triple texturing—the smooth glean of a precious stone, the creamy thickness of beer, the foam of milk—both suggests the narrator's wonder at the surface of the water and are linked together by a series of lose associations: the tawny color of the topaz becomes the blonde beer; the adjective "laiteuse" turns into the third element of comparison, "lait."

The second part of this description of the sun on the sea also starts out with a pattern on a surface: "par moments s'y promenaient çà et là de grandes ombres bleues." As with the "vert aussi tendre" above, these blue shadows on the tawny-blonde sunlit sea serve to highlight the

insufficiency of our habitual color descriptions. As these blue shadows are described, the reader must change perspective a third time, this as time we leave the close observation of the surface of the sea to take a bird's eye view in watching these shadows "que quelque dieu semblait s'amuser à déplacer, en bougeant un miroir dans le ciel." This god and his mirror occupy a horizontal plane parallel to but high above the plane of the sea, such that to be properly visualized the reader must imaginatively place themselves even higher to capture the interplay between the two parallel planes. This short description thus begins with restriction, in the form of the visual and sensual confinement of the window magnified by the initial description of the sky as the surface of the window itself, but then opens up to great complexity. The comparatively limited beginning of the vertical windowpane allows Proust to create the second horizontal pane of the surface of the sea, which is then fleshed out with three descriptive textures, and finally the scene is opened up fully into three dimensions in the image of the god reflecting his mirror on the surface of the sea.

The visual effects of this volume hinge on this play with framing, even in the absence of a literal window. In the following passage, a row of flowers provides the frame with which Proust plays with perspective, size, and depth. The narrator is observing "ces jeunes fleurs qui interrompaient en ce moment devant moi la ligne de flot" and "entre lesquelles teint tout le trajet de l'océan parcouru par quelque steamer" (431). The choice of nouns emphasizes largeness—ocean instead of sea, steamer instead of boat—but the rest of the passage miniaturizes these component parts. The description initially asks the reader to hold foreground and background in mind to visualize this image in the appropriate perspective: a row of normally sized flowers in the foreground and the distant but normally sized steamer in the background. The second half, however, reduces the entire scene to an Alice in Wonderland-esque play of inappropriate sizes,

setting up a race between a butterfly and the tiny glide of the ship. The steamer is "si lent à glisser sur le trait horizontal et bleu qui va d'une tige à l'autre," a description that reduces the span of the ocean to a single line connecting two flower stalks (431). A "papillon paresseux" could outrace the ship, arriving first at the "premier pétale de la fleur vers laquelle [le steamer] navigue" (431). The butterfly thus appears giant, lazily bounding from stalk to stalk while the ship struggles to reach its distant destination. Whatever the actual destination of the ship may be is irrelevant; like the butterfly, it is simply navigating towards the next flower.

The prominence of the sea in the *Recherche* diminishes when the narrator leaves Balbec at the end of *Sodome et Gomorrhe.* The novel's final scene in his bedroom both recalls and ruptures the Balbec landscapes we have seen until this point. The narrator, determined to leave Balbec with Albertine to prevent a suspected lesbian liaison, says he has never known a morning "si belle ni si douloureuse" (512). The adjectives refer both to an outside, visual judgement, and an interior emotional state. The passage that follows, however, invests the physical world with intent, blurring the line between objective and subjective input and interpretation:

> En pensant à tous les paysages indifférents qui allaient s'illuminer et qui la veille encore ne m'eussent rempli que de désir de les visiter, je ne pus retenir un sanglot quand, dans une geste d'offertoire mécaniquement accompli et qui me parut symboliser le sanglant sacrifice que j'allais avoir à faire de toute joie, chaque matin, jusqu'à la fin de ma vie, renouvellement solennellement célébré à chaque aurore de mon chagrin quotidien et du sang de ma plaie, l'œuf d'or du soleil, comme propulsé par la rupture d'équilibre qu'amènerait au moment de la coagulation un changement de densité, barbelé de flammes comme dans les tableaux, creva d'un bond le rideau derrière lequel on le sentait depuis un moment frémissant et prêt à entrer en scène et à s'élancer, et dont il effaça sous des flots de lumière la pourpre mystérieuse et figée. (512-513)

The narrator has lost all interest in the landscapes that surround him, but the light of the rising sun nonetheless penetrates his room and forces a limited but ultimately profound awareness of his immersion in the world around him. As the passage builds to the image of the dawn, a lexicon of suffering builds poetic and emotional power: "sanglot" "sanglant" "sang." The rising

sun is described on three levels: its internal material status, its artistic resonances, and its physical imposition in the narrator's room. Materially, there is the following description: "l'œuf d'or du soleil, comme propulsé par la rupture d'équilibre qu'amènerait au moment de la coagulation un changement de densité." The sun is initially seen by its shape, a golden egg, but the rest of the phrase indicates an unstable internal process that is underway, parallel to the disequilibrium of the narrator's own internal state exemplified in his sudden decision to bring Albertine to Paris with him.

In the second part of the description, the sun-egg is "barbelé de flammes comme dans les tableaux." From an object with its own materiality and interiority, the sun becomes a codified image from a painting. In the final part of the description, the sun is neither material process nor painted image, but an actor in its own right, imbued with theatrical agency: the sun "creva d'un bond le rideau derrière lequel on le sentait depuis un moment frémissant et prêt à entrer en scène et à s'élancer, et dont il effaça sous des flots de lumière la pourpre mystérieuse et figée." Two things are happening here: the binary between the viewing subject and the represented object is overturned, and the frame that has structured so many images we have seen is dissolved in a wash of light. This sequencing of the image of the rising sun from active-unconscious (physical progress) to passive-unconscious (represented imaged) to active-conscious (theatrical actor) represents the slipperiness of our interactions with the external world. The final image of the "flots de lumière" washing away the rest of the scene brings us to the paradox of light—while it is the only thing that makes it possible to see the world, it can also inhibit viewing entirely. This brings us back to Mary Corse's light paintings: going beyond the "mere" absence of visual input, her paintings even destabilize our point of view within light, showings its changing reflectiveness from different angles and doubly decentering the viewer (there is no image, but

even this lack of image is subject to perspectival change). The reader can feel similarly awash in Proust's triple description of the rising sun: the multiple visual referents (egg, barbed flames) and 'felt' state changes (coagulation) have asked us to both see and feel the object in question, and the final image ascribes agency to the light "frémissant et prêt à entrer en scène," like an eager actor waiting in the wings whose entrance will ultimately engulf the entire stage.

The collapse of the strict demarcation of a frame and the revelation of the permeability of interior and exterior, reality and art, leads us into our concluding considerations about the ways in which represented landscape can attune us to the real land around us. Tim Ingold's essay on landscape "Earth Sky Wind Weather" begins by discussing the difficulties of accurately depicting the land around us by using the example of amateur drawings of the earth and sky. In the two studies he uses as examples, children and adults were asked either to draw the earth and sky, or to choose an image from a set that most closely represents how they imagine them. They came up with various solutions to the difficulty of this task, such as drawing a line around a spherical earth to represent the sky (S22, fig. 2A) or choosing a representation of a spherical earth but surrounded by the sky we would see looking up from the earth's surface (S23, fig. 3). These imperfect solutions demonstrate, in Ingold's words, "the perspectival double-take involved in the attempt to combine the spherical earth and the sky in the same picture" (S23). Though Proust formulates them quite differently, *JF* grapples with the same perspectival issues. He frequently evokes the horizon line in the need to represent the earth and sky together. This curved line is the source of perspectival delights and distortions, the place where the two spheres of sea and sky blur and become indistinct, as in the narrator's reverie at the window before dining at Rivebelle: "Parfois l'océan emplissait presque toute ma fenêtre, surélevée qu'elle était par une bande de ciel bordée en haut seulement d'une ligne qui était du même bleu que celui de

la mer, mais qu'à cause de cela je croyais être la mer encore" (438). The visual irreconcilability of our scientific understanding of the world and our perspectival experience of it is underlined again and again in this volume.

Ingold uses these representational difficulties to move away from conceptualizing the outside world as a set of objects that could be accurately represented, cognitively or aesthetically, were we to have the right perspective. Rather, he writes of our actual experience of inhabiting the world that

> It is a world […] of formative and transformative processes. If such processes are of the essence of perception, then they are also of the essence of what is perceived. To understand how people can inhabit this world means attending to the dynamic processes of world-formation in which both perceivers and the phenomena they perceive are necessarily immersed. And to achieve this we must shift our attention from the congealed substances of the world, and the solid surfaces they present, to the media in which they take shape, and in which they may also be dissolved. (S28)

Ingold's media are wind and weather, and he argues that we are immersed in these media and not outside of them. Our engagement with these media allows us to touch and change the world around us, and we share our immersion with other things present around us. Using the examples of a painter painting a tree that is blowing in the wind and of a kite being flown, he writes "t is not, then, the tree that moves the painter, any more than it is the kite that moves the flyer. Rather, the resonant movements of the flyer and the kite in the one case, and of the painter and the tree in the other are founded in their common immersion in the currents of the medium" (S30-31). Ingold uses the term "resonance" here to mean the communicative and influential mutual actions of elements sharing a medium. The tree is not a passive participant in the painter's experience; it is active within the immersive landscape that they share and its motions impact the painter's range of aesthetic responses.

In *JF*, the medium is landscape in its spaces of transformation. Rather than land or art, the narrator inhabits the space in between where becoming is an aesthetic process. *JF* is constantly dissolving together objects and properties that should be distinct: boats become immobile as buildings or are absorbed into the horizon, the sea and sky are indistinguishable, the light which surrounds the Balbec diners bathes them like water. This blending finds its theoretical anchor in the methodology of first perceptions that the narrator learns from Elstir, but it is a leitmotif of the reader's experience of Balbec as a whole. The volume offers the same lesson in conceptual blending to the reader. The density of descriptive information presents the reader over and over again with views of the sea, usually the real sea within the narrative, but their descriptions are laced with references of specific artists, to artistic construction and arrangement, to the material conditions of framing, to purposeful light effects, to theater stages, etc. The reader is neither strolling alongside the literal sea out there in the world nor through a collection of tableaux presented as 'Views of Balbec,' rather, they are invited to imaginatively participate in the construction of these landscapes.

Some of these descriptions are likely to be remembered by a first-time reader—including the *Port de Carquethuit* ekphrasis, the euphoric train sunrise, and the changing bedroom window views—but these seascape images are so embedded in the volume that an attentive reader diving back in could pull out seemingly endless examples. As readers, we must sustain our engagement with landscape the same way the narrator sustains his, both actively nuancing our viewing powers and passively letting ourselves notice the elements around us. Landscape is constantly becoming and unbecoming; it can be an unnoticed backdrop, a secret treasure, a pedagogical tool. These immersive images take on a life of their own. To return to Andrews' terminology, there can be no land in the *Recherche* properly speaking. All land description is already art for

the reader, and the curious eye of the narrator means that even diagetically what he sees should be identified as landscape. There is no land "out there" to perceive, there is only the learned process of perception, construction, and appreciation that governs how we learn to see in the *Recherche.*

In his work on the status of the image in culture, Mitchell writes that what interests him about images is not the ambiguity of the word, but instead "the particular tendency of images to absorb and be absorbed by human subjects in processes that look suspiciously like those of living things" (2005: 2). The seascapes of *JF* and beyond possess this organic-seeming plasticity, generating multitudinous variations throughout the text and proving continuously fascinating to readers and critics. Mitchell writes of the different between an image and a picture that "[y]ou can hang a picture, but you cannot hang an image. The image seems to float without any visible means of support, a phantasmatic, virtual, or spectral appearance" (2005: 85). Proust's seascapes tease the line between image and picture, proposing "means of support" in the form of framing devices but complicating this relationship in a variety of ways. A frame can be a window frame, solid and immobile, but the landscape outside it is in continuous flux. A frame can be a chance reflection into the windows of a bookshelf, doubly removed from the original and gloriously impermanent. A frame can be improvised between blades of grass. A frame can be exceeded by an outpouring of light. In order to hang a picture, it must be supported on something real. In order to "hang" a picture in our minds, Proust gives us the solidity of a frame, but never ceases to remind us that literary images cannot be so easily contained. We can freeze them and enjoy them for a moment, but then we must give them back to the flow of the narrative which takes us on to another perspective, another dimension, or another view entirely.

Freed-Thall's concept of nuance provides another lens through which to understand these multiplying seascapes. She writes, "[u]nderstood in the simplest sense, nuance is nothing more (or less) than every day, minimal variation, such as one might see the slowly changing textures of a cloud" (66). The constant changes of time and weather and orientation all create subtle shifts between viewing instances in Proust, and, as I have argued, even within a single viewing instance, whether the narrator's diegetic viewing or the reader's imagined viewing. The sea itself is a constantly shifting terrain, and the narrator's attentiveness both to the consistent fluctuation of wave patterns as well as external influences and his own intermittently distracted disposition does not result in dramatic or total shifts. Rather, these fluctuations explore the tension between the boundlessness of possible representations of the sea with the biological and formal constraints of viewing: our visual and cognitive constraints, the frame of a work of art, the window frame, and delineation of a textual image all being examples of these constraints.

While Proust is not notably an ecological thinker, Freed-Thall recognizes that this Proustian "aesthetics of nuance implies a formalism of blurred contours and borders and a queer ecology that attunes us to the cloudy zone of contact between subject and object, and to the drift and transmutation of a subtly shifting lived environment" (67). This idea of "queer ecology" connects to several of the ideas I have been working with: Mitchell's ideas about the liveliness of images (an image ecology); the breakdown of perspective and the dissolution of a clear subject perceiving a clear object; and the inability to separate the perceiving and judging mind from the feeling and suffering body. Ingold is helpful here in theorizing these interrelations happening in the context of viewing a seascape. This viewing happens along multiple intersections: the intersection of land and sea, of course, but also the intersection of internal and external. Ingold helps us rethink our understanding of how we engage with the experience of being outdoors: "To

feel the wind is not to make external, tactile contact with our surroundings but to mingle with them. In this mingling, as we live and breathe, the wind, light, and moisture of the sky bind with the substances of the earth in the continual forging of a way through the tangle of life-lines that comprise the land" (S19). We are never separate from the things we see and hear and feel when outdoors; we are penetrating and penetrated, partaking and creating. This is particularly rich way to think about our relationship as readers to Proust's written landscapes: we are not merely receiving these images and marveling at their technical detail and imaginative flourish, but rather we are co-constructing them. Our imaginative immersion in these landscapes is a living process.

# CHAPTER 3: ENERGY

This immersion in a living landscape is on full display in Tanya Tagaq's 2018 novel *Split Tooth*. Her protagonist visits the Northern Lights, and describes her experience as a combination of light, sound, motion, and sensation:

> A small sliver of green light begins to pulsate in the sky. Cold bites my face, numbing it after a quick stab of pain. Frostbite. Exhalations are collection in a thick coating of ice on my scarf but I like it. Northern Lights are always worth the cold. Legend says that if you whistle or scream at them, they will come down and cut off your head. This is ridiculous, but I admit to running home quickly when the whole horizon is full of light and the movement of the roaring green thunder shakes my vertebrae like dice. (55)

This passage contains several themes that came up in our discussion of Proust's landscapes: the physiological conditions of viewing (here, the freezing cold), the horizon line, the materiality of light. The world described is intensely energetic: the light "pulsate[s] in the sky" and fuses with sound, becoming the "roaring green thunder" that shakes the protagonist's body. In contrast to the bodily impact and the threat of danger of Tagaq's landscape, *JF*'s seascape images were in part defined and circumscribed by the frame of the window, which had the effect of limiting certain kinds of sensual content, namely smell and sound, as the narrator's grandmother complains. This is not the case for Proust's wartime cityscapes included in *Le Temps retrouvé* (henceforth *TR*). Here, planes drench Paris with sound: "C'était l'époque où il y avait continuellement des raids de gothas, l'air grésillait perpétuellement d'une vibration vigilante et sonore d'aéroplanes français" (84). The word "vibration" combines auditory and kinetic information and, when linked to the word "vibrant" or "vibrancy," implies a particular kind of vision as well. This phrase reaffirms the ever-present nature of this felt noise: the raids happened

"continuellement," the air cracked "perpétuellement," and the vibration was "vigilante." In this repeated underlining of this constant auditory-kinetic presence, we can see it as a backdrop or accompaniment to the narrator's experience of wartime Paris. The sound and sight of planes co-constitute their perceptual input and ask the reader to extend their imaginative scene beyond the simply visual. The overall effect is to inject imaginative energy into the text, energy generated by and yet exceeding the words used to construct these vibrant images. This chapter explores how Proust uses evocations of light, sound, motion, and fragmentation to create this image-energy.

Motion, in particular, is a major component of theory about ekphrastic writing, and critics vary in their analysis of how and if motion can be conveyed in literary description.[14] Ekphrasis is traditionally viewed as a still point within a narrative flow. By halting the action of a plot unfolding through time, ekphrasis, and literary description more generally, is often construed as necessarily immobile. To give two examples: Jean Hagstrum writes of the sister arts tradition that "[t]he pictorial in a verbal medium necessarily involves the reduction of motion to stasis or something suggesting such a reduction. It need not eliminate motion entirely, but the motion allowed to remain must be viewed against the basic motionlessness of the arrangement" (xxi). That is to say, the mobility of the pictorial is reduced or eliminated when expressed in writing. If motion remains, it remains against a static background. Murray Krieger writes that ekphrasis

[14] Brosch gives the following short history of theories of narrative stillness and ekphrasis: "Accordingly, from the idea that ekphrasis is committed to representing a preexisting visual object, it followed necessarily that it is primarily descriptive and hence a static element in an otherwise dynamic narrative. Lessing's preference for poetry as a narrative art proceeded from the temporal restraint in painting established in the Renaissance that prohibited figural simultaneity and hence pictorial narrativity, on the assumption that in a picture 'we are observing a scene through the frame from a fixed vantage point at one moment in time' (Steiner 1988: 23). This convention—better known under the label of linear perspective— was naturalized by viewers in the Western world. It was Murray Krieger in particular who imported Lessing's distinction into twentieth-century theory, regarding ekphrasis as a response to pictorial stasis that creates an arrest or 'still' point in an event-driven narrative (Krieger 1992: 266). John Hollander also claimed that ekphrasis aspires to a pictorial stasis contrasting with the temporal succession of verbal art (Hollander 1995: 6)" (2018: 236).

constitutes “a miracle because a sequence of actions filled with befores and afters such as language alone can trace seems frozen into an instant’s vision” (xvii). In this view, motion is inherent in the temporal flow of language but this flow can be momentarily stilled in the special case of ekphrasis. In Hagstrum’s analysis, the assumption that visual art closely approximates real objects leads to the observation that some sort of reduction of motion necessarily occurs in the less sensual and thus less mimetically rich verbal form. In Krieger’s, language unfolding in time necessarily contains its own mobility and must be stilled to present a coherent visual impression.

It is against this background of analysis of narrative motion and pictorial stillness that Bill Brown re-reads the first and most famous example in most histories of ekphrasis: Achilles’ shield in the *Iliad*. Brown argues that in ekphrastic interpretations of this passage “ontological ambiguity has been elided on behalf of rhetorical analysis” (2). This “rhetorical analysis” distracts from the fact that this shield is neither the words that describe it nor the shield as it would ‘really’ be if it were a real object. Rather, the fictional shield has an animation that exceeds both the literary and the literal. Brown continues, “Achilles’ shield has served as the archetypal instance of ekphrastic poetry. In that service animate matter has been fettered into immobility, fixed between the pictorial and the verbal, the image and the world” (2). His counter-analysis of the famous shield outlines its specific mobility, arguing that Achilles’ shield is animate, but not with an animation with which we are familiar from lived life. Rather than moving through an action, completing it, and moving to another action, the figures on the shield, in Homer’s description, repeat the same motions: dancing, reaching towards the beloved, etc. in perpetuity. The shield is not a static object that becomes a narrative one, nor is it a moment of arrest in a forward-flowing narrative. Its figures are instead cycling endlessly through the same

actions or gestures. Following Brown, we will explore how Proust's images operate outside of the paralysis between the visual and the verbal, and how Proust constructs instead an imaginative motion outside of the forward narrative push of the novel form, and outside of "ordinary" daily motion.

Within my analysis, motion is a subcategory of energy within Proust's texts. A cluster of descriptive tactics, including the use of light, non-progressive motion, aural and kinetic sensory information, and visual fragmentation encourage the reader to visualize images as energetic rather than static, but this energy is non-mimetic. Rather, it hinges on sensations of unfamiliarity, surprise, and disorientation in the moment of viewing. These sensations are both signaled to the reader by the narrator's own reactions and brought about by their own imaginative experience. This chapter looks at the ways in which Proust's energetic images aid in developing two themes in the *Recherche*: the portrayal of World War I, which hinges around the appearance of planes over Paris, and the character development of Saint-Loup, who is repeatedly inscribed in the text as fantastically mobile. In both cases, Proust creates images with a particular vibrancy which is neither static description nor narrative motion, but which gives the reader a particularly pleasurable aesthetic effect in that this motion does not seem to resemble anything we have really seen in our own experience of fast-moving people or flying planes. Unlike my first two chapters, which looked at images with a long history in visual art, still lifes and landscapes, this chapter specifically addresses the question of how literature treats non-aesthetic sensory experience. In the case of planes, this newness is literal and technological, but the distinct manner in which Saint-Loup is portrayed shows that this newness is more a question of descriptive technique than object described. The imagistic portrayal of energy is linked to the exploration of new experience in both cases.

**Proust's Planes at the Limit of Representation**

The first significant scene of planes in the *Recherche* occurs pre-war in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, as the narrator takes a horseback ride alone to see the Verdurins (416). Proust anchors this scene in a sense of emotional, geographical, and temporal distance, preparing the reader for the irruption of a new and surprising experience. At the time of his ride, the narrator is experiencing a rare "désir d'évasion" during a period in his life when he is almost always with Albertine (416). The text couples this desire for escape with a feeling induced by the landscape of being out of time in an extreme past. The route he follows is described as "sauvage" as are the gorges he passes (416). This notion of the "sauvage" in the landscape is associated with ideas about roughness and bareness: he is surrounded by "rochers dénudés" and glimpses the sea through their "déchirures" (416). This rough-hewn landscape seems to be made up of "fragments d'un autre univers" (416). This alien terrain is quickly revealed to be one through which the narrator and the reader have imaginatively journeyed before: "le paysage montagneux et marin qu'Elstir a donné pour cadre à ces deux admirables aquarelles […] que j'avais vues chez la duchesse de Guermantes [in *Le Côte de Guermantes* 407-409]" (416-417). The narrator is so struck by this memory of Elstir's watercolors that "le souvenir replaçait les lieux où je me trouvais tellement en dehors du monde actuel que je n'aurais pas été étonné si, comme le jeune homme de l'âge antéhistorique que peint Elstir, j'avais au cours de mon promenade croisé un personnage mythologique" (417). These natural and aesthetic references work together to dislocate the narrator from specificities of place and time, detaching him from the real world and letting him drift into a sort of reverie where the scope of possibility is wider than usual.

His reveries are interrupted when

> Tout à coup mon cheval se cabra ; il avait entendu un bruit singulier, j'eus peine à le maîtriser et à ne pas être jeté à terre, puis je levai vers le point d'où semblait venir ce

> bruit mes yeux plein de larmes, et je vis à une cinquantaine de mètres au-dessus de moi, dans le soleil, entre deux grades ailes d'acier étincelant qui l'emportaient, un être dont la figure peu distincte me parut ressembler à celle d'un homme. Je fus aussi ému que pouvait l'être un Grec qui voyait pour la première fois un demi-dieu. Je pleurais aussi, car j'étais prêt à pleurer du moment que j'avais reconnu que le bruit venait d'au-dessus de ma tête—les aéroplanes étaient encore rares à cette époque—à la pensée que ce que j'allais voir pour la première fois c'était un aéroplane. Alors, comme quand on sent venir dans un journal une parole émouvante, je n'attendais que d'avoir aperçu l'avion pour fondre en larmes. Cependant l'aviateur sembla hésiter sur sa voie ; je sentais ouvertes devant lui—devant moi si l'habitude ne m'avait pas fait prisonnier—toutes les routes de l'espace, de la vie ; il poussa plus loin, plana quelques instants au-dessus de la mer, puis prenant brusquement son parti, semblant céder à quelque attraction inverse de celle de la pesanteur, comme retournant dans sa patrie, d'un léger mouvement de ses ailes d'or il piqua droit vers le ciel. (417)

Into the antediluvian painted scene the narrator has been enjoying irrupts a decidedly unnatural sound—or to be more precise, the scene responds abruptly to what is later identified as a sound. In general, this scene highlights the newness and the striking power of the narrator's first experience with a plane by breaking down the sensory information he receives into discrete chunks. He feels the physical jolt of his horse rearing and is at first occupied with the struggle of remaining seated and calming his mount before he can attend to the noise that triggered the horse's response. The narrator feels his horse's physical response and hears the plane before he sees it, and it is only several lines later in the passage that the word "aéroplane" appears, as well as the explanation for the narrator's immediate tears.

Once the narrator has calmed his horse and raised his eyes to the sky, the vision he sees is full of strong sensory impressions and perceptual and perspectival impossibilities. We have just learned that his eyes are full of tears, but this liquid screen does not seem to impede the scene he sees fifty meters above him: "dans le soleil, entre deux grandes ailes d'acier étincelant qui l'emportaient, un être dont la figure peu distincte me parut ressembler à celle d'un homme." The qualifier "peu distincte" does little to downplay the astonishing suggestion that the narrator,

looking through tears and into the sun, could make out the face of the person piloting the plane. Moreover, though he is on the ground looking up, he is apparently seeing the plane head-on. He is thus seeing the outline of a man framed by two giant steel wings and silhouetted by the sun, a metal man-bird surrounded by flame. This surreal, quasi-religious vision announces the next simile, which returns to the mythological theme introduced earlier in the reference to Elstir's watercolors: "Je fus aussi ému que pouvait l'être un Grec qui voyait pour la première fois un demi-dieu." The mythological figure he half-expected to meet has arrived, but rather than a figure from the past or a figure from a mythological time-out-of-time, he is seeing a figure from the extreme edge of the present. It is only after this comparison that we get the sentence that explains the narrator's tears and positively identifies the object he is looking at as an airplane.

The relationship of sensory experience to positive knowledge here is doubly complex. The narrator's visual confirmation that the sound he is hearing is an airplane is the last part of his identification. Having never heard an airplane, though, this sound-identification is not based on familiarity. He is not identifying a delocalized sound but rather using the spatial location of the sound to identify its origin: the moment of recognition is in the realization that "le bruit venait d'au-dessus de ma tête."[15] This passage leads us through the spatial orientation of the narrator, which changes rapidly as he is thrown on his horse and then looks straight up. The fragmentation of this sensory experience into discreet moments prefigures the stunningly bright vibrations of

[15] Here and elsewhere in Proust's descriptions of planes, sound is an essential part of their energy and vibrancy. It announces and accompanies their presence and impresses itself on characters who incorporate it into their discussions. This continuous sonic background is part of what sets these war images apart from other images in the text. Paul Fussell makes the case that sound is a key part of war poetry, using the example of Thomas Hardy. He writes, "[o]ne reason modern English poetry can be said to begin with Hardy is that he is the first to invite into poems the sound of ominous gunfire heard across the trenches" (24). Poetry is the literary form closest to sound due to its incorporation of rhythm and rhyme, but I wish to draw on this idea of "inviting in" sound in Proust. Fussell is arguing here that Hardy is modern not for having portrayed the subject of war, but for having invited into his poem the specific sound of gunfire. Proust, likewise, invites the sound of planes into the *Recherche*.

the wartime plane images included in the published text of *TR*. Here, this description of the narrator's first plane continues with an exploration of why planes are the perfect object by which to examine literary mobility. The pilot seems to hesitate a moment and the narrator feels "ouvertes devant lui—devant moi si l'habitude ne m'avait pas fait prisonnier—toutes les routes de l'espace, de la vie." This multiplication of routes and spaces helps us understand Proust's images of speed and motion: these complex images too hesitate between multiple routes, occupying the endlessly mobile space of possibility.

Just as this initial description of a plane delays its identification, planes first appear in *TR* as indecipherable visual information, leading into a discussion of visual misapprehensions and illusions. The narrator tells us that during the wartime period in Paris "[a]vant l'heure où les thés d'après-midi finissaient […] on voyait de loin de petites taches brunes qu'on eût pu prendre, dans le soir bleu, pour des moucherons, ou pour des oiseaux" (41). Unlike the above passage from *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, this description is not of a specific instance of viewing but rather of a repeated and communal type of experience, but both descriptions home in on the sensory specificity of the experience by delaying positive identification of the plane. In the earlier passage, the narrator uses sound and space to arrive at the identity of his new experience; here, Proust leads the reader to see planes by first seeing what they are not.

In this description, Proust plays with scale and material, moving from small organic objects to large metallic ones. Before planes are mentioned, the narrator compares what he is experiencing to another perceptual mistake. For the moment, all the reader knows is that something is being mistaken for birds or insects. The narrator evokes emotion, explaining "[a]insi quand on voit de très loin une montagne on pourrait croire que c'est un nuage. Mais on est ému parce qu'on sait que ce nuage est immense, à l'état solide, et résistant" (41). Here, there

is again a play with distance and material. The grammar of the sentence of the second sentence in the above quote equivocates between the (real) mountain and the (false) cloud. The cloud *is* immense, solid, and resistant rather than *appearing* or *seeming* to be, though those would be logical ways to soften the meta-figuration, to use Valazza's term, of mountain as cloud. Because Proust is working in the verbal and not the visual, he can insist on the coexistence of those two visual possibilities. This sentence is not vacillating between mountain and cloud as visual illusions like Jastrow's figure we saw in the first chapter, which is now duck, now rabbit in the viewer's perception. Rather, it is prompting the reader to hold both in mind at once by insisting grammatically that both *are* at once.

Just as Richardson draws attention to the pleasure of illusions, as we saw in chapter one, the narrator insists on the "ému" associated with the two perceptual mistakes of bird-insect/airplane and cloud/mountain, using the word twice in two short sentences. The cloud/mountain comparison is followed by the revelation of the real identity of the bird-insects: : "[a]insi étais-je ému que la tâche brune dans le ciel d'été ne fût ni un moucheron, ni un oiseau, mais un aéroplane monté par des hommes qui veillaient sur Paris" (41). Proust is thus paralleling not only the two perceptual mistakes but also their emotional outcomes, and the repeated "ainsi" ("[a]insi quand on voit de très loin"/"[a]insi étais-je ému") grammatically reinforces this parallel. Something odd emerges, however, when we examine the emotional element of this comparison more closely. The second use of "ému" in the context of realizing that the "tâche brune" is actually planes helmed by men watching over Paris suggests that this adjective be interpreted in an emotionally realistic way. The narrator's emotion is due to his realization that he is seeing men who are working vigilantly to protect Paris from its enemies. The verb "veiller" evokes benevolent protection, perhaps even the young narrator's desire for his mother to sit with him as

he falls asleep. However, the first use of "ému" in the context of the cloud/mountain invites us to consider another dimension, as it does not include any such clear emotional logic. This first "ému" is entirely linked to the impossible simultaneity of the mountain traits ("immense" "solide" "resistant") and the cloud identification ("ce nuage est"). While the affective power of the human element of planes is certainly present, it is not entirely responsible for the emotional feeling in this passage, but instead works alongside and helps heighten the specifically aesthetic plane effects. The mountain/cloud figuration insists we consider the imaginative pleasure of the textual recounting of perceptual tricks.

In the passage from *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the pilot's hesitation between competing directions seems to map multiple spatial possibilities in the sky in front of him. This sort of spatial-temporal juxtaposition is similar to what we will see in Saint-Loup's unique positionality: as image information, multiple discreet Saint-Loups exist simultaneously, while as a character within a narrative Saint-Loup follows a progression in time. Upon leaving Jupien's brothel, for example, he disappears very quickly despite the narrator's impression that he occupies multiple positions in the same moment in time (see below). Without time passing, progression is impossible, and so a spatial multiplicity exists in competition with a temporal singularity: Saint-Loup and the plane both advance in one single direction despite their dominant impression of indeterminate possibility. The imaginative impression of energy comes less from progressive motion (motion in or through the narrative) and more from motion as constant but without end goal (as in Brown's analysis of Achilles' shield). Looking at some examples drawn from the visual realm will help make this idea more concrete. In the images of Saint-Loup and of planes, their motion comes not from the extension of one form through space and time, but through the competition between two (or more) distinct, mutually exclusive but equally compelling visual

possibilities. In this way, textual energy is akin to visual illusions such as Jastrow's duck-rabbit, which engage our mental energy because we cannot see the two possible images simultaneously and yet we know the other image is there. We always see either duck or rabbit, with the other figure remaining just beyond our perceptual limits until we shift our focus slightly, and then the other figure has exclusive but uneasy priority.

The duck-rabbit is of course a relatively simple figure, reproducible enough to lend itself to the branding for a popular brand of beer. Complex aesthetic output, though, employs a scaled-up version of a similar strategy. In these more complex cases in both visual and verbal art, two possible images do not have to remain completely exclusive, but the beholder has move towards holding multiple images at once, perceptually or imaginatively. E.H. Gombrich has argued the impression of visual freshness and immediacy that impressionism pioneered does not come from a privileged access to a visual primacy unbound from the stilted stylistic conventions of older styles. Rather, impressionist painting gains its immediacy from its increased "*subject*ivity" (202). The viewer has "more to do" to make visual sense of the paint strokes (202). Gombrich uses the example of Edouard Manet's 1867 painting *Les Courses à Longchamp*, arguing that the painter "uses the very ambiguity of his flickering forms to suggest a variety of readings and to compensate thereby for the absence of movement" (217). As the viewer notices and enacts a variety of visual readings, the presence of movement, which cannot be directly represented, is nonetheless suggested. Gombrich's phrasing, however, is somewhat tentative. He does not make the claim that the viewer is actually experiencing motion while looking at the painting, but rather that the painting's formal ambiguity is a compensation for what it cannot directly represent.

What I wish to suggest, however, is a stronger formulation of the mobile sensation that can follow from the copresence of competing forms in a single image, visual or verbal.

Richardson takes issue with Gombrich's claim that we can never watch ourselves having an illusion but only become aware retrospectively that an illusion has occurred. Richardson argues to the contrary that we can catch ourselves in the moment of illusion, and that "this verging on a theoretically impossible experience, watching ourselves have an illusion, may account for part of the pleasure, part of the compulsive appeal, of such illusions" (23). Knowing that what we are experiencing is not limited to the actual representational information on the canvas or on the page before us is linked to the pleasurable experience Richardson calls the neural sublime, in which we become aware of our own perceptual limitations. Starr's work on the neuroscience of aesthetics uses painting to theorize the actual perceptual and imaginative experience of motion via a technically static medium. She uses Jackson Pollack as her example, writing

> It is, however, neither necessary to imagine the hand that made a work nor to enact a neural simulation of a body in a work in order to engage the imagery of motion. In Pollock's 1946 *Shimmering Substance* […], the yellow spiral or circle that seems to dominate the painting doesn't actually exist on the surface of the canvas: there is no yellow line, only the illusion of a yellow line, which can be constructed around the interruptions of white, blue, green, and pink pigment. The circular image is produced by the sweep of the eye as it follows an imagined curve and by the standard embroidery of vision (whereby we assume unbroken forms even where they do not exist […]), and it is strengthened by the suggestive echoes of loops throughout the canvas. The vibrancy of the painting—its 'shimmering'—comes through our own visual and imagined engagement, the sense of motion that comes from the eyes and from the filling in of the golden curve as it draws the viewer on and into the painting's perceptual and formal logic. (86)

Compare this description to Gombrich's of *Les Courses à Longchamp*. Gombrich and Starr both agree that actual motion is absent from the paintings they are description, but Starr is additionally affirming that the viewer's sense of motion is actually engaged: "[t]he vibrancy of this painting […] comes through our own visual and imagined engagement, the sense of motion that comes from the eyes and from the filling in of the golden curve." Gombrich's "ambiguity" is Starr's "suggestive echoes," but the former's compensatory function is a much more muted statement of

aesthetic power than Starr's vindication of the viewer's ability to see what is not there. Or more properly, our ability to work with the painting to produce what is not there, our mutual engagement to see impossibly together.

Motion in the text works through creating "engagement," in Starr's words, for readers of the texts. We are presented with different and compelling images of a certain object-experience. That is to say, not simply an object, but an object in motion. Many of Proust's most compelling images of motion are those that are directed by human agency but liberated in the world of the text into the space of possibility. Saint-Loup has a mobile freedom throughout the text, a velocity that allows him to move outside of the boundaries of physics. Planes exist in between the natural world and the technological world, and Proust asks the reader to visualize both options when describing them. To this undecidability is added the freedom of multiple paths and futures, which remain virtual in the world of the text and thus add an energy outside of the narrative.

This textual mobility is not and cannot be entirely separate from the narrative structure of verbal art but comes from the play between older aesthetic models and new integrations to those models, between deep structure and surface, and between visual vibrancy and verbal construction. Luc Fraisse writes of Proust's curiosity about military maneuvers that "Proust porte sur ces opérations un regard formaliste; rien ne l'intéresse autant que l'activité recréatrice consistante à en deviner les structures sous-jacentes, et dans le cours d'opérations les structures naissantes" (2018: 18). For Fraisse, Proust's portrayal of war seeks to identify the organization underlying the marches and battles, both the consistent organizational structures that govern the operations of war in general and the "structures naissantes" that are created in individual instances of war. This play of fixed and creative structures is echoed in Proust's portrayal of Saint-Loup. Saint-Loup's rapidity of motion that allows him to occupy multiple simultaneous

positions in space is undergirded by an ancient architecture of bones. At dinner with his friend early in their acquaintance, the narrator notices how "l'ossature énergique de son visage triangulaire devait être le même que celle de ses ancêtres" and "[s]ous la peau fine, la construction hardie, architecture féodale apparaissaient" (*JF* 452). The apparent contradiction between depth and solidity ("construction hardie, architecture féodale") versus surface and vitality ("la peau fine") present in the second part of the description is complicated by the first part. The trait Saint-Loup shares with his ancestors is described as "l'ossature énergique." This expression represents the union of organizational force and pure vital energy.

Because war is both a studied, structured phenomenon and an energetic, unpredictable one, it is a particularly salient basis from which to examine how literature integrates new visual possibilities. Like Proust himself, the *Recherche's* narrator wishes to learn more about war. He deeply values his conversations on the subject with Saint-Loup, so much so that once his friend has died the narrator wonders if he can find another military man to continue his instruction. During the war he is frustrated by Saint-Loup's detachment in his letters, which does not help him understand war as well as he would like. He learns only tidbits from his friend at the front: "[t]out au plus me dit-il que depuis 1914 s'étaient en réalité succédé plusieurs guerres, les enseignements de chacune influant sur la conduite de la suivante," and thus war "n'échappe pas aux lois de notre vieil Hegel. Elle est en état de perpétuel devenir" (59). These ideas of war as simultaneity in unity and as "perpetual becoming" are key features of the double nature of the portrayal of war in Proust. Like Elstir's theory of first impressions which does not entirely encompass the narrator's actual practice of aesthetic attention, as explored in my second chapter, war acts as both a structural lesson and an aesthetic practice that exceeds that lesson. This aesthetic practice is embedded in the visual descriptions of wartime Paris in the *Recherche,*

which asks the reader to hold their preexisting understanding of war as a phenomenon related to realism in art at the same time as their openness to a newly mobile aesthetic model.[16]

This practice is in part a counterreading of military landscapes and cityscapes as pleasurable aesthetic objects. These counterreadings comprise two kinds: a deliberate, detached aesthetic distancing caused by placing older aesthetic models over new and disturbing experiences, and a pure aesthetic wonder liberated from the constraints of the wartime context that engendered it. In the case of the first, Saint-Loup practices this model of distance in his wartime letters to the narrator. In these letters, "[il] notait avec goût pour moi des paysages, pendant qu'il était immobilisé à la lisière d'une forêt marécageuse, mais comme si c'avait été pour une chasse au canard. Pour me faire comprendre certaines oppositions d'ombre et de lumière qui avait été 'l'enchantement de sa matinée', il me citait certains tableaux que nous aimions l'un et l'autre" (61). Saint-Loup transforms the land in front of him into landscape, one that this controlled by a number of distancing factors. There is the connotation of class and leisure, in the reference to "une chasse au canard." There are references to art criticism, in "oppositions d'ombre et de lumière" and "certains tableaux." Finally, there is a lightness of spirit in the reference to "l'enchantement de sa matinée." These descriptions all rest uneasily on top of the narrator's curiosity about the "real" experience of war his friend must be having. For the

[16] Fraisse writes of the portayal of war in the *Recherche* that "Si la guerre incite au réalisme, même en art, le roman de la guerre tourne, sous la plume de Proust, au récit onirique" (61). Jan Mieszkowski's *Watching War* argues that the realistic portrayal of war is impossible in any medium, writing of the false dichotomy of direct representation (photos, videos, etc.) versus indirect (such as novels): "As consequential as technological change has been, it is the argument of this book that the modern perception of warfare was distinguished by a conjunction of physical devastation and elusive simulacra long before the invention of photography or film, much less television or the Internet. If we live in an era of hyperreal wars, we have been doing so for a long time, which is why verbal media that make no claim to facilitate unmediated transmissions of information have been and continue to be as central to war spectatorship as visual media, which appear to offer a more direct encounter with the exigencies of being under fire" (4).

reader, they evoke aesthetic practices without giving us any new imaginative practice in which to participate.

We get that imaginative practice, however, when the narrator meets Saint-Loup in Paris when he is on leave during the war. The ensuring description of war planes is distinct from many of the images treated in my other chapters in that the detail in this passage is much more streamlined. While Balbec's dining room table is an exercise in loving attention to light, color, and form, and while the seascapes layer dimension and texture into dioramic wonders, Proust's textual planes are largely variations on light and darkness. Recall Corse's work with light and the idea that light is not just an epistemological aide but rather an immersive, experiential material. The Paris war images inject motion into the dimensionality of light and thus they are in some respects the purest image-information in the *Recherche*. We will later explore character revelation as energetic image through Saint-Loup and then conclude with an analysis of cognitive process as an energetic image in *Du côté de chez Swann*'s unfolding teacup, but the planes over Paris are the pure materiality of image. The greater context of war is part of the structural makeup of the *Recherche*, as we will see, but it cannot narratively or affectively contain the image-pleasure the narrator feels under the new luminosity of the Paris wartime sky.

When Saint-Loup and the narrator meet in Paris, the narrator comments on the beauty of ascending planes, which inspires Saint-Loup to comment on the respective aesthetic merits of ascent versus descent:

> Et peut-être encore plus de ceux qui descendent, me dit-il. Je reconnais que c'est très beau le moment où ils montent, où ils vont *faire constellation*, et obéissant en cela à des lois tout aussi précises que celles qui réagissent les constellations car ce qui te semble un spectacle est le ralliement des escadrilles, les commandements qu'on leur donne, leur départ en chasse, etc. Mais est-ce que tu n'aimes pas mieux le moment où, définitivement assimilés aux étoiles, ils s'en détachent pour partir en chasse ou rentrer après la berloque, le moment où ils *font apocalypse*, même les étoiles ne gardant plus leur place ? (65-66)

Let us closely examine this two-part description of these planes from the specific angle of the imaginative cues given to the reader. Saint-Loup is identifying two distinct aesthetic modes of appreciation present in this experience of watching planes over Paris, and his description indicates a good deal about how visual power can work in literature.

When the narrator references the beauty of airplanes ascending in the night, Saint-Loup uses his admiration to identify the first of these two modes. Saint-Loup calls this the moment "où ils vont *faire constellation*," that is, when the ascending planes will blend in with the stars. As they rise they approach the moment of their organization into a meaningful, harmonious relationship that is pleasurable because it is analogous to the already-beautiful stars. These stars-as-planes, however, retain an element of aesthetic newness because they are charged with energetic potential and intelligently configured into the most pleasing arrangement. This energetic power is due in part to the use of the near future in the description. Saint-Loup is specifically pinpointing the source of the narrator's aesthetic pleasure as the moment when "ils **vont *faire*** *constellation*"; that is, not the arrangement of planes into a constellation, but the moment right before when they **are going to make** a constellation. This first mode is the image as a constant state of becoming, bringing pleasure to the viewer/reader by teasing the potential beauty of an ultimate fixed configuration while retaining the energy of indecision. The beauty of the ascending planes is the way in which war's visual imprint becomes an aesthetic object not by resembling other forms of beauty but in its potential to create previously unseen striking forms. As soon as the planes become visually indistinguishable from the rest of the night sky, the war image loses its aesthetic newness by matching perfectly another aesthetic category: in the moment of total incorporation into the night sky planes are only beautiful because they resemble stars.

The second mode Saint-Loup identifies, his preferred one, occurs in the moment after the planes have become "définitivement assimilés aux étoiles" and then move into their descent. In this moment of descent that Saint-Loup particularly enjoys, the visual experience of war becomes new again when the planes "s'en détachent" as if from the background of a painted picture. Saint-Loup describes this second mode as the moment when the planes "*font apocalypse*." The verb tense changes from the near future to the present, indicating that this mode represents the moment when the apocalyptic future invades the present and dissolves conventional spatiotemporal relationships. By its very nature, apocalyptic time occurs after time itself is destroyed and thus represents a permanent upheaval of the temporal flow, and here its power dislodges even the stars. In Saint-Loup's description, the lights of the planes join with the lights of the stars, and then the very distinction between the two becomes unimportant, "même les étoiles ne gardant plus leur place," a description that elides the logical knowledge Saint-Loup has that the descending lights are planes and not stars. Similarly, logically Saint-Loup knows that these descending lights are moving "pour partir en chasse ou rentrer après la berloque," but this pragmatic understanding is not enough to change the aesthetic appreciation of their image. In the initial description Saint-Loup gives of the planes moving away from their constellations, this separation of moving light from its background could have indicated that the planes are moving away from the stars and thus out of the aesthetic register and into a more prosaic one, but the apocalyptic mode he then describes ups the aesthetic ante. Saint-Loup's description of the planes that "*font apocalypse*" reverses the intuitive idea that planes in the sky are beautiful because they are like stars and instead displaces the stars themselves to make them more like planes. The conventional aestheticized image of a constellation becomes secondary to the power of the new aesthetic subject of war.

The visibility of these images is of the particular type identified in my introduction as "seeing the impossible," a mode of visualization hinging less on what can be fully imagined and more on what can be intimated and briefly glimpsed. Their vibratory energy engages the reader's imagination, but not by creating vivid mimetic visualizations. Work in cognitive literary studies dealing with reading and visualization tends to use vividness as a criterion for evaluating the descriptive power of different texts. Scarry's work on how imagined literary images are closer to perceptual experience than other sorts of imagined images describes the overlap between the literary and the perceptual with a lexicon of the vivid, the vital, and the vibrant. Perceived objects have "vitality and vivacity" (3), she mentions "the vivacity of perceptual objects" (5) as well as "mental vivacity" (12) and alludes to "[t]he vibrancy of perception" (31). Brosch explores how "vivid is fast" when it comes to clear visualization: "This surprising counterintuitive 'vivid is fast' result for mental imagery presents a very important insight into visualization. It must mean that complicated spatial or imagistic relations that necessitate a realignment of spontaneous imaginings are not productive of more intense imagery" (2017: 266). In Proust's images, their intensity is not their vivid resemblance to our real experience of sight. Rather, vibrancy is elliptically evoked at the heart of these strange, non-mimetic images.

Within Proust's text, the conditions of viewing necessitate perspectival shifts that do not correspond to viewing instances in everyday life. During a conversation with Charlus, the narrator launches into an extended mediation about the new means of viewing that the war has introduced. This new way of seeing the world has three main aspects: the physical conditions of viewing, the affective resonances of what is being seen, and the content that is actually being seen (diegetically by the narrator and imaginatively by the reader). The opening of this meditation describes Charlus' overwhelm at the scene around him in Paris:

> D'ailleurs M. de Charlus ne savait littéralement où donner la tête, et il la levait souvent avec le regret ne pas avoir une jumelle qui d'ailleurs de lui eût pas servi à grand-chose, car en plus grand nombre que d'habitude, à cause du raid de zeppelins de l'avant-veille qui avait réveillé la vigilance des pouvoirs publics, il y avait des militaires jusque dans le ciel. Les aéroplanes que j'avais vus quelques heures plus tôt faire comme des insectes des taches brunes sur le soir bleu, passaient maintenant dans la nuit qu'approfondissait encore l'extinction partielle des réverbères, comme de lumineux brûlots. (108)

Before moving into a description of the full luminosity of the sky at night, Proust contextualizes his mobile lights with a series of preparatory information for the reader. First, this mise-en-scène of Charlus' experience of viewing the new sights in wartime Paris. Balbec's framed window scenes circumscribed their images in a conventional way in order to create a stage on which Proust could play with perspective and texture. In these war images, the scene is the sky, and Proust emphasizes the viewing constraints in quite a different way. If the window represented sensory constraint, the note that Charlus "ne savait littéralement où donner la tête" invites the reader into a sensory chaos that refuses to be circumscribed or still, even temporarily. Charlus' viewing experience is itself that of motion: he raises his head often and he wishes for binoculars to artificially bring him to get closer to the handsome young soldiers he wishes to see. The scene at hand is doubly overwhelming because of its density and directionality. The solidiers are present "en plus grand nombre que d'habitude" but also "jusque dans le ciel." In an enlarged version of Saint-Loup's personal multiplication, here, the bodies of soldiers are spreading through the streets and into the sky. Even with binoculars, the narrator notes, Charlus would not be able to make clear sense of his surroundings. This description clues us into two parts of the physical conditions of viewing. While Balbec's seascapes invited the reader to imaginative orientations that reach beyond the viewing capacities of the narrator (hovering above the surface of the sea, for example) these plane scenes, beginning with the narrator's first experience with them in *Sodome et Gomorrhe,* require the characters themselves to take different positions. Additionally, these viewing experiences are less individual. The narrator is having a personal

experience of wartime Paris, but the presence of Charlus specifically and the rest of the population of Paris implicitly asks us to consider a larger audience for these images. This larger audience is the mirror of the readers, who are themselves having new imaginative experiences as they read.

In the last sentence of the above quote, the earlier image of planes as insects returns. The narrator recalls having seen the airplanes in the afternoon sky earlier, and now a double transformation is operated: the blue evening sky deepens into night, and the brown insect-like blurs become fully realized as light. The passage continues with reflections on the new conditions of viewing inspired by the wonderous new sights, and their associated feelings:

> La plus grande impression de beauté que nous faisaient éprouver ces étoiles humaines et filantes, était peut-être surtout de faire regarder le ciel, vers lequel on lève peu les yeux d'habitude. Dans ce Paris dont, en 1914, j'avais vu la beauté presque sans défense attendre la menace de l'ennemi qui se rapprochait, il y avait certes, maintenant comme alors, la splendeur antique inchangée d'une lune cruellement, mystérieusement sereine, qui versait aux monuments encore intacts l'inutile beauté de sa lumière, mais comme en 1914, et plus qu'en 1914, il y avait aussi autre chose, des lumières différentes, des feux intermittents que, soit de ces aéroplanes, soit de projecteurs de la tour Eiffel, on savait dirigés par une volonté intelligente, par une vigilance amie. (108)

The description of planes as "étoiles humaines et filantes" immediately introduces affective and mobile intensity into the description of the sky. In this sentence, we see an explicit statement of the new stage on which these images are appearing. Here, the planes themselves are not the primary beauty, but rather the inducement to pay attention to the neglected sky. We normally do not lift our eyes up, but these planes compel us to, they "faire regarder" the sky above us. Similarly, Paul Fussell associates wartime with the new habit of looking to the sky. Soldiers' morning and evening stand-to hours occurred at sunrise and sunset, encouraging them to notice the sky's beauty at these times. Fussell ties this into a greater aesthetic history of "sky-awareness," which began in Britain with the chapter "On Sky" in Ruskin's *Modern Painters*:

“Those attentive to the history of taste know that sky-awareness is a fairly late development. There is little need of it, for example, in the eighteenth century, which felt no pressing need for such emblems of infinity as sky or sea” (56). This passage in Proust, though, sets up a contrast between objects labeled as participating in “beauté” and the newness of the lights of the planes and later, the projectors on the Eiffel Tower. “Beauté” is used to describe the impression given from looking at the sky, the beauty of the city threatened by the enemy, and the beauty of the moonlight. These objects and images, though, ultimately become the background for the more engaging images and ideas associated with wartime. There is a labeled beauty in this passage that is immobile, and a mobile beauty that remains unlabeled, emerging from the murky night and from the complexity of its context to impress itself on the reader’s imagination.

In the example of the planes making us look at the sky, the implication is that the planes are incidental to the actual experience of beauty. They encourage us to look up, a new posture towards the world, but presumably what we would be struck by is the sky itself. However, that is not the imaginative scene the passage encourages. The next two uses of “beauté” are in the context of the city itself, “sans défense” against its enemies, and in the context of the “inutile” light of the moon spilling on the city’s monuments. This beauty is without protection and without purpose, lacking agency. The moon is “cruellement, mystérieusement sereine,” a description that takes the idea of the sky as beautiful and injects it with cruelty: the fact that the moon cannot or will not respond to the threat to the city on which she shines. This description is only possible because new elements have been introduced to the sky. The “splendeur antique inchangée” contrasts with the “lumières différentes, […] feux intermittents” from the planes and projectors. These new elements are in contrast with the moon in two senses: one is that their mobility, more fully explored later in the passage. The second is their agency. They are “dirigés par une volonté

intelligente, par une vigilance amie." The narrator feels this particularly strongly as it reminds him of the soldiers he met visiting Saint-Loup at Doncières, in a scene included in *Le Côté de Guermantes*. We know from Proust's manuscripts that he was concurrently drafting scenes included in *TR* such as Saint-Loup's death alongside the Doncières scene (Fraisse 2018: 10). The textual history thus confirms the tight affective knot suggested in this passage between the pleasure of knowing Paris is protected, and the narrator's pleasure in the friendship of France's soldiers. The aesthetic pleasure embedded in the other parts of these scenes is thus heightened by the mix of fear and comfort the narrator experiences viewing the beauty of Paris. The beauty he has come to know in the streets of Paris is present but lacking in vibrancy, stilling to a frightened background to a more compelling drama of visual mobility and heightened emotion.

Turning back to our planes, the passage we have been looking at continues with a sustained description of the nighttime sky:

> Après le raid de l'avant-veille, où le ciel avait été plus mouvementé que la terre, il s'était calmé comme la mer après une tempête, Mais comme la mer après une tempête, il n'avait pas encore repris son apaisement absolu. Des aéroplanes montaient encore comme des fusées rejoindre les étoiles, des projecteurs promenaient lentement, dans le ciel sectionné, comme une pâle poussière d'astres, d'errantes voies lactées. Cependant les aéroplanes venaient s'insérer au milieu des constellations et on aurait pu se croire dans un autre hémisphère en effet, en voyant ces 'étoiles nouvelles.' (108)

This description echoes previous textual images of the sea and of constellations to build up a moving picture. The first part of the description inverses the land and the sky, noting of the air raid the night before that the sky was "plus mouvementé que la terre" and comparing this sky to the sea after a storm. This inversion recalls Elstir's seascapes which, as we saw in chapter two, the artist painted "n'employant pour la petite ville que des termes marines, et que des termes urbains pour la mer" because he "avait su habituer les yeux à ne pas reconnaitre de frontière fixe, de démarcation absolue, entre la terre et l'océan" (*JF* 470). Here, Proust is also mixing his

“termes,” not comparing the sky during the air raid to the sky during a storm, but rather to the surface of the sea at storm. This has the double effect of giving an oddly dense texture to the sky and evoking a slow, continual movement: “[m]ais comme la mer après une tempête, il n’avait pas encore repris son apaisement absolu.” This comparison thus serves less to inscribe this image under the general descriptive rhetoric of Elstir, and more to evoke a new kind of textual motion. The sky becomes the new surface, or rather substance, on which and through which light moves.

The description continues with the evocation of movement by asking the reader to envision two types of luminous motion occurring simultaneously in the sky, fast and slow. These two types of motion are evoked within the same sentence, meaning that the reader must quickly imaginatively jump from one to the other. Rather than representing a logical sequence of lights speeding up, though, the slower image is described second, meaning that the more continuous movement is constructed by the reader after they have already visualized the faster movements, challenging us to hold both in our minds at once. In the case of the faster motion, airplanes rise “comme des fusées rejoindre les étoiles.” “Fusée” evokes a quick, bright flash of light, moving upwards towards the stars. The description then moves back towards the earth with the spatially lower and considerably slower image of projectors that “promenaient lentement.” In addition to the contrast of this slow stroll to the quickly rising “fusée,” the projector description evokes stars again, but this time in terms of spread or smear: “pâle poussière d’astres” “errantes voies lactées.” The flip of land and sky is then repeated in the reference to “un autre hémisphère,” where a different set of constellations is visible. The newly mobile sky, agitated like the sea after a storm, is not just another beautiful tableau the narrator contemplates. It is the opening of new visual possibilities, that distort spatial awareness through the double mobility of light.

At the end of the war, after Saint-Loup's death, the narrator sketches out some ideas about the proper representation of war in conversation with Gilberte. He makes the case that Saint-Loup had begun to see war in the following terms: "elle est humaine, se vit comme un amour ou comme une haine, pourrait être racontée comme un roman, et par conséquent […] elle n'est pas stratégique" (288). Saint-Loup's point of view moves away from the idea that war is a science and works by mechanisms that can be precisely defined and understood in objective terms. Instead, war becomes a complex human experience that is felt like love or hatred or told like a novel. As such, war can only be understood experientially, as immersive experience, and narratively, as something that combines emotion and event through story. The narrator then proposes that war be portrayed in the impressionistic manner that he has explored in Elstir's methodology and identified in certain writers such as Dostoyevsky. The narrator explains, "faudrait-il la peindre [la guerre] comme Elstir peignait la mer, par l'autre sens, et partir des illusions, des croyances qu'on rectifie peu à peu comme Dostoïevski raconterait une vie" (288). This strategy that is initially identified with respect to Elstir thus expands in range over the course of the *Recherche* to encompass how art portrays both perceptual information (as in Elstir's paintings) and human experience such as the discovery of character (Dostoyevsky) and finally, war. War expands the repertoire of images in the text, and the constant threat of apocalyptic destruction provides the unique opportunity for the narrative to step outside of time, and introduce a spectacular mobility that exceeds war's function as part of the narrative structure of the *Recherche.*

World War I is a textual object with a complex relationship to time both in and out of the *Recherche*. Fussell situates WWI as the end point of a progress-driven notion of time, writing that "the Great War was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless,

purposeful 'history' involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future" (21). The *Recherche*'s use of World War I is both temporally and affectively odd, as Valazza summarizes: "mais de nouveau c'est dans une perspective singulière que les circonstances de la guerre sont perçues dans le récit. En ce sens, l'événement qui parait le plus marquant par rapport à la temporalité de la fiction est celui de la destruction de l'église de Combray" (313). The *Recherche* as a whole is characterized by a lack of orienting dates, both within the greater flow of time and within the narrator' life. Dates, durations, ages: all are by and large absent from the narrative. In this sense, the fact that Proust incorporates both the event of World War I and the date 1913 might seem to insert Proust's fiction into a larger exterior reality. Rather than realism in terms of war, Proust's text imaginatively blends real events with fictional ones, making the "plus marquant" event the destruction of the Combray church. The emotional gravity of the war appears through fictional character's reactions to fictional destruction, undermining the tendency towards realism associated with war stories. The importance of the Combray church passages will be explored in my next chapter, but here, I wish to examine how war is portrayed outside of this confrontation between narrative and historical time. Proust's description of wartime Paris highlights again and again the new sky the war has created above the city, a sky full of motion and light.

**Saint Loup's Simultaneous Multiplicity**

The mesmerizing mobility of Proust's plane images comes from the way in which their aesthetic power derives from but ultimately exceeds the context in which the narrator and reader experience them. The narrator is drawn to them because of their association with the sky, a pre-existing aesthetic context, and because of their association with the protective soldiers that pilot them, a pre-existing narrative point. However, the images themselves have a visible intensity for

the narrator and an imaginative intensity for the reader that cannot be reduced to these situational features. Jane Bennett's work on the concept of "vibrant matter" examines "the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience" (XVI). If we allow that literary images are an example of "man-made items," this idea, alongside Mitchell's notion of the aliveness of images, will help us get at something fundamental about the images discussed in this chapter. Proust's mobile images are not merely literary copies of or variations on real visual experience, nor are they are simply descriptions of the narrator's lived visual experience. They are new forms of visibility, operating in relation to but independent of other kinds of visual experience outside of the text. Bennett sees vibrant matter as a mix of materiality and energy, writing "my goal is to theorize a materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension" (20). By analyzing the visual imprint of Saint-Loup in Proust's text, we can see the importance of this incorporation of force, energy, and intensity to matter. Saint-Loup as textual object is not a copy of a human but a man-made literary image. He is matter and energy not as harmonious reconciliation, but as dynamic tension. We learn a good number of mimetic details about Saint-Loup's appearance in the *Recherche*—he is blond, handsome, sometimes in a monocle, sometimes in a military uniform—but these details do not ask the reader's imagination to do anything beyond recall handsome blonde men we have seen in real life and dress them up. Accordingly, these are not the features critics such as Bal and Phillipe Bertier draw on for their analyses of the uniqueness of Saint-Loup within the Proustian universe of characters. What is fascinating about Saint-Loup is his permanent impermanence, the lasting impression left in our minds by his perpetual fleeing. His intensity becomes, impossibly, extension.

Proust's demonstration of image energy is in full force in his descriptions of Robert de Saint-Loup, whose surprising mobility is again and again discussed in the text. Unlike Elstir, who teaches the narrator a methodology of first impressions that leads the narrator to discover in his own manner the spatial world around him, Saint-Loup's physicality itself represents a new type of visual information for the narrator, and through him, the reader. This visual effect is achieved through a particular use of fragmentation. Generally speaking, fragmentation as a method of character portrayal is neither unique to Proust nor, in the *Recherche*, unique to the portrayal of Saint-Loup. Joseph Frank's seminal essays on spatial form in literature identify "discontinuous presentation of character" as one of the defining features of Proust's novel and of the modernist novel in general (239). This character presentation is subordinate to Frank's larger thesis that meaning in modernist novels is constructed in spatial rather than linear terms. In terms of characterization, Frank argues that in novels such as Proust's that the reader can only form an understanding of characters retrospectively, after having seen all their individual appearances in a text. Character development is not presented chronologically and progressively, but rather the reader must form an understanding of characters through the juxtaposition of disparate moments. In the "bal de têtes" scene in *TR*, the narrator himself experiences this character fragmentation. He has not watched his friends age over time but rather discovers the fact of their aging suddenly and jarringly, in contrast to his mental images of them at an earlier moment in time. In addition to this thematic fragmentation in character development, Proust uses fragmented visual images to describe certain characters, including Albertine in addition to Saint-Loup. In a particularly notable example, Proust describes time slowing as Albertine leans down to kiss the narrator and he sees before him "dix Albertines;" a collection of disparate impressions instead of the coherent and seductive whole of her face (*Le Côté de Guermantes* 354). This disorienting visual

impression corresponds to the narrator's inability to know Albertine as he longs to, as he is confronted over and over again by her evasions and lies.

The fragmentation associated with Saint-Loup is of a different, though related, type. It encompasses both individual descriptive moments, as with the example of Albertine's face, and general character presentation, as with Frank's point about Proust's characterization throughout the novel. In addition to this, though, the particular way that Saint-Loup is repeatedly visually fragmented has the end effect of creating a certain kind of mobility that is unique to his character in the text. Late in his acquaintance with Saint-Loup, the narrator muses on the contrast between his friend and Saint-Loup's uncle Charlus. While both men are changed through their lives by the internal pressure of their secret desires for men, the physical repercussions of these desires are markedly different. Proust writes of Saint-Loup that "[s]a vie ne l'avait pas épaissi, alenti, comme M. de Charlus, mais tout au contraire, opérant en lui un changement inverse, lui avait donné l'aspect désinvolte d'un officier de cavalerie" (*TR* 4). Specifically, Saint-Loup is marked by a "vélocité" (4). Thematically, of course, the idea of velocity is fitting for someone who is literally and figuratively fleeing parts of his life. However, this velocity defines the visual portrayal of Saint-Loup as well and will act as a model for the visibility of motion throughout the *Recherche*.

When the narrator first becomes acquainted with Saint-Loup at Balbec, his early impressions of the young aristocrat are immediately marked by speed and mobility. Saint-Loup "traversa rapidement l'hôtel dans toute sa largeur, semblant poursuivre son monocle qui voligeait devant lui comme un papillon. Il venait de la plage, et la mer qui remplissait jusqu'à mi-hauteur le virage du hall lui faisait un fond sur lequel il se détachait en pied" (*JF* 358). The butterfly-like monocle is mentioned again a little further on in the same passage: Saint-Loup moves

“équilibrant perpétuellement les mouvements de ses membres autour de son monocle fugitif et dansant qui semblait leur centre de gravité” (358). Proust’s description balances the parts of Saint-Loup’s body and the rhythm of his movements around his monocle, making him seem to hover and balance while being pulled from place to place by the irresistible motion of this small piece of “fugitive et dansant” metal and glass. In the first citation, the narrator follows the butterfly image of the monocle with one of Saint-Loup stepping out from a background created by the window-frame effects we saw in chapter two: “la mer qui remplissait jusqu’à mi-hauteur le vitrage du hall lui faisait un fond sur lequel il se détachait en pied.” The half-filled horizontal plane of the window is in contrast with Saint-Loup’s determined movement forward. This forward motion does not create a horizontal axis in addition to the verticality of the window, but rather the character steps out of the frame entirely. The whole of his body follows his dancing monocle out of the framed image of the sea, defying gravity as he defies mimesis.

Later in their friendship, the narrator attends the theater with Saint-Loup and, after the show, sees an astonishing sight outside:

> [J]e vis qu’un monsieur assez mal habillé avait l’air de lui parler [à Saint-Loup] d’assez près. J’en conclus que c’était un ami personnel de Robert; cependant ils semblaient se rapprocher encore l’un de l’autre ; tout à coup, comme apparaît au ciel un phénomène astral, je vis des corps ovoïdes prendre avec une rapidité vertigineuse toutes les positions qui leur permettaient de composer, devant Saint-Loup, une instable constellation. Lancés comme par une fronde ils me semblèrent être au moins au nombre de sept. Ce n’étaient pourtant que les deux poings de Saint-Loup, multipliés par leur vitesse à changer de places dans cet ensemble en apparence idéal et décoratif. (*Le Côté de Guermantes* 174)

This description is in contrast with the narrative action actually occurring, a fight between Saint-Loup and a man he claims propositioned him. We learn that the man is left in a sorry, grotesque state: “[il] parut perdre à la fois toute contenance, une mâchoire, et beaucoup de sang”(174). Despite this, the scene is described in a way that leaves a visual impression of rapidity and

harmony. Saint-Loup's fists appear like "un phénomène astral," flying even faster than the monocle he follows in the earlier description of him at Balbec. The description of his fists forming "une instable constellation" uses the same image of starts that will return in the wartime conversation about planes between the narrator and Saint-Loup we saw above. Here, we see his fists fly so fast they do not seem to be attached to him. He himself becomes the background from which his fists differentiate, as the ocean-filled window was the background he stepped out of at Balbec. In addition to speed, his fists seem to multiply "au moins au nombre de sept." This speed and multiplication create in the narrator's estimation an "ensemble en apparence idéal et décoratif." In addition to the oddity of noticing the aesthetic harmony of a bloody fistfight, the narrator's description of an ideal and decorative "ensemble" gives the impression of an identifiable pattern that could be fixed. This aesthetic model is of course at odds with the vertiginous speed of the scene. The same is true of the above reference to a constellation. Though it is here modified by the adjective "instable," the pattern of a constellation must be fixed in order for it to be identifiable. This combination of the frenzied, physically impossible speed and the patterned, pleasant appearance of Saint-Loup's fists epitomizes the animating tension in energetic images in literature. We are simultaneously invited to imagine the thrill and blur of speed, and to marvel at the pleasing patterns displayed in front of us as if the motion could be momentarily paused.

Saint-Loup's gravity-defying speed is the link between his character as a whole and his visual imprint in the text. Bal writes, "[d]e tous les personnages aimés, recherchés, mal connus et convoités qui peuplent ce roman, le personnage qui représente avec le plus de 'détails' la poétique visuelle de Proust, c'est Robert de Saint-Loup […] Robert, c'est celui qui se rend d'un lieu à l'autre sans y rester, sans y passer du temps; c'est celui qui transforme l'univers proustien

en espace pur" (15-16). His speed is such that it spatializes the Proustian textual world; his motions between spaces are so immediate that he does not seem to be moving through time at all. Bal also contrasts Saint-Loup and Albertine, another one of Proust's characters "mal connus et convoités" and who, as mentioned above, is also associated with visual fragmentation. Distinguishing between the two, she writes, "Robert, par contre, se soustrait au fixage d'une façon différente, plus active, et encore plus visuelle. Dès le début de leurs relations, la rapidité visuelle du mouvement a été comme un leitmotiv servant du trait permanent pour identifier le personnage, la caractéristique infaillible de Robert" (196). Albertine's visual fragmentation, on the other hand, is only occasional and indicates the narrator's confusion and discomfort, and her decomposition is not associated with speed. In the case of Saint-Loup, the close association between fragmentation and speed, and the consistency of these descriptive markers in his appearances in the text, make him emblematic of Proust's "poétique visuelle" for Bal. This visual presentation allows the reader to momentarily escape both the forward-moving narrative of the text and the fixity of description if description is understood as a static verbal painting. Proust evokes visual impressions for the reader but insists that these impressions contain an impossible motion.

Saint-Loup's textual speed becomes more and more tightly associated with his desire for men through the *Recherche*, as he marries Gilberte and engages in increasingly complicated subterfuge to hide his liaisons with men, but this speed is his defining characteristic from his introduction in *JF*, as we saw above. Berthier's amical ode to the character highlights again and again the associations between speed, evasion, and surprise evoked when Saint-Loup is mentioned, beginning with the name itself. Berthier argues that there is a "plasticité imaginaire" in the name Saint-Loup, which does not have a precise geographical or temporal origin (35).

Tracing this spatiotemporal mobility outwards, Berthier describes "sa manière unique d'occuper dans l'espace en si peu de temps tant de positions différentes" and translates the 'message' of this positionality as "Vous ne m'attraperez pas!" (43). In a literal sense, Saint-Loup is often fleeing within the narrative, making excuses to leave his home and Gilberte or sneaking out of Jupien's brothel hoping not to be noticed. This thematic message that Berthier identifies with his character also describes the way in which Proust plays with literary space when he writes Saint-Loup's impossible mobility. The reader is teased with the idea that Saint-Loup almost but not quite manages to be in multiple places that once, thereby envisioning something between multiple discrete images of Saint-Loup in different places at once, and one Saint-Loup who is moving so fast as to be a blur. This tension between blurry speed and distinctly visualizable self-multiplication animates Saint-Loup, as a similar static-mobile tension animates *TR*'s images of planes.

This mobility is so tightly associated with Saint-Loup that even thematic arguments about his character tend to carry the imprint of his visual qualities. Berthier sees a clear parallel between Saint-Loup's surprising appearances and his late-blooming desire for men, where Saint-Loup's unique visual patterning reveals what he wants to hide. In a particularly evocative passage, Berthier writes that Saint-Loup "parfois se laisse pressentir à Marcel par de surprenantes entre-visions, comme si une brèche ou un soupirail inattendu lui offraient brusquement accès à un dessous de cartes, un envers, pour ne pas dire une inversion" (143). This phrase itself is visually as well as thematically resonant. The verb "pressentir" itself balances between the material sensation and its intuitive corollary, i.e. sensing something not materially present in that moment. There is also the lexicon of seeing between or through, as if a new space has opened up to which the narrator has visual access: "entre-visions" "brèche" "soupirail." This

phrase ends with three references to reversal: “dessous de cartes” “envers” “inversion.” Saint-Loup’s impossible visibility is itself the underside of the textual world of the novel, his mobile aesthetic allowing the reader to access an imaginary visible world through the more uniform textual world.

The brothel scene is a particularly potent one regarding Saint-Loup’s visibility. He is both hyper-visible, bearing a unique visual signature, and invisible, with no concrete identifying signs:

> Quelque chose pourtant me frappa qui n’était pas sa figure que je ne voyais pas, ni son uniforme dissimulé dans une grande houppelande, mais la disproportion extraordinaire entre le nombre de points différents par où passa son corps et le petit nombre de secondes pendant lesquelles cette sortie, qui avait l’air de la sortie tentée par un assiégé, s’exécuta. De sorte que je pensai, si je ne le reconnus pas formellement—je ne dirai pas même à la tournure, ni à la sveltesse, ni à l’allure, ni à la vélocité de Saint-Loup—mais à l’espèce d’ubiquité qui lui était si spéciale. Le militaire capable d’occuper en si peu de temps tant de positions différentes dans l’espace avait disparu sans m’avoir aperçu dans une rue de traverse, et je restais à me demander si je devais ou non entrer dans cet hôtel dont l’apparence modeste me fit fortement douter que c’était Saint-Loup qui en était sorti. (117)

The narrator here repeats several times that both in terms of what he could concretely recognize and what he could deduce the person he sees is likely not Saint-Loup. He cannot really make out the figure “trop loin […] dans l’obscurité profonde.” He is struck by something undefinable about the figure, but cannot make out his face, and his uniform is hidden under a greatcoat. Saint-Loup’s name is mentioned twice, but it is both times in negative constructions: the narrator cannot recognize the figure “à la tournure, ni à la sveltesse, ni à l’allure, ni à la vélocité de Saint-Loup,” and the cheap look of the hotel “me fit fortement douter que c’était Saint-Loup qui en était sorti.” This description thus strips away the narrator’s ability to be certain about who he is seeing, and the reader’s ability to visualize the now-familiar character. In my first chapter, I discussed the idea that in order to best understand memory or sleep it is useless to talk to

someone who never forgets anything or falls asleep immediately. Rather, to learn about a phenomenon, you must look at its contrary, at the not-doing, or the doing-badly, rather than ideal functioning. This scene outside the brothel similarly highlights what can be seen by focusing first on what cannot be seen. It takes away all the ordinary markers of identity, both in terms of visual codes (facial recognition, distinctive dress such as military uniform) and logical ones (where a person is and how they are behaving).

Against this literally and metaphorically obscure scene, the narrator nonetheless immediately intuitively identifies Saint-Loup. He doubts this identification since he cannot confirm it with positive visual signals, nor does it make logical sense, but that does not change what he senses, to return to the idea of "pressentir" from Berthier. The uniqueness of Saint-Loup's positionality is "l'espèce d'ubiquité qui lui était si spéciale." This ubiquity is similarly described twice in three sentences: the narrator is struck by "la disproportion extraordinaire entre le nombre de points différents par où passa son corps et le petit nombre de seconds pendant lesquelles cette sortie […] s'exécuta" and describes the figure as "[l]e militaire capable d'occuper en si peu de temps tant de positions différentes dans l'espace." This paradoxical positioning of a human figure in time and space is in some ways the opposite of the image analyzed in my final chapter at the end of the *Recherche*. That image will spread the singular space a body can occupy at once backwards though time and forwards into possibility, whereas this image of Saint-Loup coming out of the brothel spreads spatial multiplicity across temporal unity. Saint-Loup's multiplicity is atemporal, whereas the novel's end, as well as some of its church images, presents a synthetic fusion of space and time. In both cases, the tension between paradoxical presentations of space and time gives these images their marvelous energy. Here, the impossibly foreshortened time dimension highlights the frenetic but nonetheless distinct spatial

multiplicity of Saint-Loup. The narrator ends up suspecting Saint-Loup must be a spy, linking his pragmatic confusion of what his aristocrat friend would be doing at a seedy hotel to a job lending itself to a visual mode of seeing what is not meant to be seen. The scene that follows plays on this notion, highlighting the narrator's access to forbidden tableaux, particularly Charlus being whipped.

By way of conclusion, we will examine the way these energetic images can express temporal effects. Proust uses descriptive energy through non-narrative mobility in order to prompt the reader to build a cognitive model of the involuntary memory in the madeleine scene in *Du côté de chez Swann*. In the middle of this image, between the teacup and madeleine and the fully realized childhood scene, the narrator's involuntary memories of Combray spread before him like Japanese paper flowers furling and untwisting out of his teacup. On my first reading of the volume and in subsequent rereadings I have been struck by how beautiful the image was even though what was being described was of an impossible complexity: the reader is asked to visualize both the intricate paper flowers themselves and the even more intricate city and surroundings of the narrator's childhood Combray rising out of a teacup. Despite this complexity, the images vibrate brightly in my mind, showing up in multiple colors and vacillating between the cup and the flowers and the houses and the fields in a pleasant back-and-forth rhythm. Beyond the individual pleasure it brings me as a reader, this description is perfectly placed between sensual immediacy and essential meaning. These paper flowers are nowhere real objects, neither in the narrative "present" of the madeleine and tea nor in the cognitively experiential "present" of the involuntary memory. They are not the sensual experience of smell and taste nor the immersive one of Combray. They are instead Proust's visual and tactile figuration of how this experience feels, presented to the reader so that they might attempt to

cognitively reconstruct this particular feeling of an involuntary memory. These paper flowers move, extend, give way to something else, and collapse back into themselves and start again.

Looking at the passage in more detail, it is in part the repeated verbs that give the sense of actions. The "petits morceaux de papier jusque-là indistincts" differentiate through a series of verbs: plunged in water they "s'étirent, se contournent, se colorant, se différencient, deviennent des fleurs, des maisons, des personnages […]" (47). The multiple verbs hint at different actions or transformations undergone by the paper pieces which the reader cannot fully visualize, arching towards form, changing colors, and finally becoming the impossible multiplicity of parts of a town. The action of the paragraph which contains this description is entirely in this mobile middle ground between teacup and town. Our efforts to visualize the paper pieces in the process of becoming makes us feel motion in this section and so we move with the unfurling papers, reaching towards something much larger and yet contained in us. The description ends with the miniaturization theme mentioned in the introduction to my first chapter: all of this, "ville et jardin," "est sorti […] de ma tasse de thé" (47). There is a rhythm of growing and shrinking established in this description: the "bol de porcelaine" of the teacup giving way to the expanding papers becoming flowers and houses which then become the flowers and houses of Combray before the passage ends by recalling the teacup where it began. It expands, contracts, and ends where it begins, opening and closing for the reader through its own mobile energy. The confrontation of two distinct temporalities in one moment necessitates this vibrant textual energy to guide the reader through the imaginative feeling of the complex cognitive process that is being described in addition to their intellectual understanding.

Towards the end of the *Recherche*, the images of planes and stars come back one final time, in a description which blends time into energetic image. In the suite of revelations known

as the “adoration perpetuelle,” before the matinée at the Guermantes where he will meet Saint-Loup’s daughter and discuss his now-dead friend with his widow Gilberte, the narrator spends some time thinking about the strange powers of dreams. His first example of dream-power is that of a rapid temporal collapse: dreams will “vous mettre une femme dans la peau, jusqu’à nous faire passionnément aimé pendant un sommeil de quelques minutes une laide, ce qui dans la vie réelle eût demandé des années d’habitude ” (*TR* 218). The time-bound operations of habit become freed of their usual demands. In a few moments only, passionate love blooms for a person it would take years to learn to love in real life. The time of the dream is compressed, and a bodily link takes the place of a slow development in time. In the narrator’s words “la puissance” of the physical experience compensates for “la durée” which is lacking (218). The narrator continues with another example of this temporal compression, here giving it a spatial structure: “[n]’avais-je pas vu souvent en une nuit, en une minute d’une nuit, des temps bien lointains, relégués à ces distances énormes où nous ne pouvons plus rien distinguer des sentiments que nous y éprouvions, fondre à tout vitesse sur vous, nous aveuglant de leur clarté (218-219). This reexperience of old feelings is described in terms of distances in space: there is a spatial-visual lexicon here including “vu” “lointains” “distance énorme” “distinguer” “vitesse” “aveuglant” and “clarté.” This sentence evokes two of the effects we have been associating with textual mobility. There is first and most concretely the evocation of speed: these distant times “fondre à tout vitesse” onto the dreamer. Secondly, there is a textual energy brought about by the surprising combination of ideas. These old feelings rushing toward us “nous aveuglant de leur clarté.” This visual description could stand in for many of the mobile effects of the text; they stun the reader with their precise visibility which defies our expectations of what texts can do. They

do not ask us to envision the motion of the real world, but rather feats of speed and light, of simultaneous presence and absence, halt and blur, that are uniquely textual creations.

After this image of dream-included blinding clarity, Proust uses the image of planes and stars to illustrate this paradoxical effect. Like the tension we felt in Saint-Loup's description of the planes as "définitivement assimilés" to the stars and nonetheless falling out of place, the following quote evokes both the visual indistinguishability of the lights and the mobile distinction of the planes from the stars. The "temps bien lointains" from the quote above blind us with their clarity "comme s'ils avaient été des avions géants au lieu des pales étoiles que nous croyions" (219). The pale stars we believe we see at a fixed distance we discover to be giant planes zooming down on us. Dreams thus collapse temporal distance via a shock, the simultaneous hit of multiple emotional states at once. Through this moment of shock, they make us feel as though we are reexperiencing these moments of our lives. However, despite this shocking power, the narrator ultimately rejects dreams and the associated image of planes as the model by which we undo the loss that time enacts. It is true that the shock of this emotional compression can be powerful "jusqu'à nous faire croire, à tort d'ailleurs, qu'ils étaient un des modes pour retrouver le Temps perdu" (218). Ultimately, a different visual-spatial model will help us understand how to "retrouver le Temps perdu": that of the church as a prototype for vising time as a fourth spatial dimension. It is through these church images that we build to an imaginative model of time as synthetic spatial simultaneity.

While the narrator and Saint-Loup are in Paris and discussing planes and stars, a brief aside about Saint-Loup ties the *Recherche*'s most spatially remarkable character to its final insights about time: "j'abordai Robert qui avait encore au front une cicatrice, plus auguste et plus mystérieuse pour moi que l'empreinte laissée sur la terre par le pied d'un géant" (65). Saint-Loup

is marked by his wartime experience, albeit temporarily, as implied by the “encore.” It is this trace of his experience within time that touches the narrator, the trace of something that has come and gone, like the footprint of a giant. On a larger level, by the nature of its textual medium a novel such as the *Recherche* can only suggest visual information, and through these traces the reader must construct their understanding of what the universe of the story could look like. My next chapter will begin with a giant, and ask what, at the end of the *Recherche*, becomes visible through this process of learning to seeing impossibly with Proust.

# CHAPTER 4: TIME

This description of Saint-Loup's scarred forehead, "plus auguste et plus mystérieuse pour moi que l'empreinte laissée sur la terre par le pied d'un géant," has a lexical resonance with the close of the *Recherche*, which describes humans "comme des géants plongés dans les années" (353). In both cases, the image of a giant is linked to a temporal extension. While literary time is often considered in terms of narrative flow and halt,[17] the image of the giant suggests a different sort of consideration: how does time function as a visualizable element of literary description? Jenny Odell writes of artist David Hockney's understanding of temporality in painting that

> Hockney valued painting because of the medium's relationship to time. According to him, an image contained the amount of time that went into making it, so that when someone looked at one of his paintings, they began to inhabit the physical, bodily time of its being painted. It's no surprise, then, that Hockney initially disdained photography. Although he sometimes used it in studies for painting, he found a snapshot's relationship to time unrealistic: 'Photography is alright if you don't mind looking at the world from the point of view of a paralyzed cyclops—for a split second,' he said. 'But that's not what it's like to live in the world, or to convey the experience of living in the world. (97)

In Hockney's view, time is not only the time taken in the process of viewing or reading. The time of artistic creation is embedded in artistic productions in a way that heightens their imaginative impact. Hockney is not saying that painting represents time by literally depicting multiple discrete moments, such as cubist practice might. Rather, the long process of painting, the repeated visits to the canvas and the repeated brushstrokes, portray an experiential truth

[17] Lessing's *Laocoon* and Joseph Frank's "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" are seminal texts on time and narration. Krieger's *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign*, Hagstrom's *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray*, and James Heffernan's *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* are some benchmark texts that treat narrative time in terms of descriptive writing and writing about visual art.

impossible to capture in the ostensibly more realistic medium of photography. This is because we ourselves are always embedded in time as well as in in space. For Hockney, painting is thus analogous to human experience as it is imbued with the time it took to create it, but photography exists artificially outside of time and reduces three-dimensional sight to two dimensions. Hockney's "paralyzed cyclops" is the opposite of Proust's giant: the immobilized cyclops cannot vary his view or perceive depth, but Proust's giant functions as a doubly powerful temporal extender. In the quote about Saint-Loup, the giant represents an impossibly ancient time, of which there can be only traces. Saint-Loup's scar is the trace of an anterior moment in his life, closer on an objective temporal scale than the mythic giant, but just as unknowable—and far more precious—for the narrator. The giant is a symbol of the unknowability of the past that nonetheless communicates with the present, leaving traces and scars. In the *Recherche*'s closing passage, the giant's outsized spatial extension indicates the possibility of directly perceiving temporal depth.

Hockey chooses a paralyzed *cyclops* in particular for his complaint about photography, because depth perception hinges on having more than one image to compare, something the one-eyed giant lacks. Depth perception does not spontaneously occur but happens over time as we learn to recognize the world has solidity and extension. The pioneering eighteenth-century cataract surgeries undertaken by William Cheselden showed that this was a learned process and not an immediate ability. One of his patients recovering from surgery described how "'all objects whatever touched his eyes, as what he felt did his skin': his vision was imbued with the sensuousness of touch" (Plunkett 391). This patient had not yet developed the understanding that objects exist extended in space and not immediately present in a two-dimensional visual field. To return to Shattuck's observations about stereoscopic vision in the *Recherche* discussed in chapter

two, his main point is that an accurate picture of a given subject can only be constructed by two or more perspectives. As he writes,

> All these figures of altitude are in reality images of an extended and deepened vision. Altitude represents the capacity to see far, to bring together and combine in the mind's eye images enormously removed from one another. The magic lantern which transforms Marcel's room in the opening pages metamorphoses at the end into the stereoscopic vision of a giant standing erect in life and thus commanding Time. (130)

Shattuck footnotes this passage with another giant, in the following quotation from a 1932 text on optics discussing the use of stereoscopic photographs during war to find enemy guns: "'In other words, the scene in the stereoscope appeared to the observer exactly as the original scene would have appeared to a giant with an interpupillary distance equal to the stereoscopic base'" (153). Proust's giants in time and this stereoscope-as-giant contrast with Hockney's paralyzed cyclops, representing the potential for a greater-than perspective: greater than a singular point of view, temporal or spatial, on a singular scene. The multiplication of perspectival points in time as in space creates depth, and the aim of this chapter is to show how the reader of the *Recherche* is trained to blend time and space, accessing an imaginative understanding of time as a fourth spatial dimension.

The novel's close combines the openness of potentiality and the density and depth of what has been experienced. Reflecting on the work he has begun, the narrator tells us:

> Aussi, si elle m'était laissé assez longtemps pour accomplir mon œuvre, ne manquerais-je pas d'abord d'y décrire les hommes, cela dût-il les faire ressembler à des êtres monstrueux, comme occupant une place si considérable, à côté de celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l'espace, une place au contraire prolongée sans mesure puisqu'ils touchent simultanément, comme des géants plongés dans les années à des époques, vécues par eux si distants, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus si placer—dans le Temps. (*TR* 353)

While the images discussed in the previous chapter are of a complexity that poses an imaginative challenge to the reader, the challenge is even greater in the case of seeing time. Seeing in a fourth

dimension is a practical problem as well as a conceptual one: we can only imagine dimensions we have already seen. Physicists can walk a reader through a conceptual exercise of what a one- or two-dimensional existence would be like, and, as we saw in the introduction with Abbott's 1884 novel *Flatland*, literature can be handy in these kinds of thought experiments. But in addition to the reader's comparative ease at imagining "Pointland," "Lineland," and "Flatland," we also saw how once the two-dimensional narrator asks his three-dimensional teacher about the four-dimensional world he believes must exist, teacher and reader are both confronted with the insufficiently of their imagination. While we can to some extent envision a world limited to two, one, or no dimensions because we have the ideas of a point and a line and a flat plane in our three-dimensional reality, we have no spatial tools with which to construct an imaginative notion of a fourth dimension. Proust proposes a literary solution to this practical and conceptual problem. He introduces four-dimensional space in *Du côté de chez Swann* in his description of the Combray church. For the young narrator, this church is "un édifice occupant, si l'on peut dire, un espace à quatre dimensions—la quatrième étant celle du temps" (60). We will see below in more detail how Proust inscribes this fourth dimension into his description of the church through his evocation of the repeated motions of the devout slowly alternating the building's structure that inscribe passing time on its materiality, and through the self-propelling image-energy that emanates from the church, opening it the ever-incomplete potentiality of the future.

As the narrator experiences his first involuntary memory, he recalls the Combray church as both the literal and figurative center of the town, as chapter one discussed: it stands "résumant la ville, la représentant, parlant d'elle et pour elle aux lointains" (*Du côté de chez Swann* 47). This idea of the church as a centering and structuring object returns throughout the novel, and church images function both as lessons in artistic production and reception, and as temporal

anchor points through the narrator's life. At each reprise, the narrator meditates on the aesthetic and affective qualities (or lack thereof) of the church at hand. In addition to these thematic considerations, these extended meditations ask the reader to mentally build churches and this repeated practice prepares us to grapple with the *Recherche*'s final image of a human life stretched into four dimensions, like a giant smeared across time and space.

In the passage below, the narrator describes his childhood visits to the Combray church on Sundays:

> Pendant que ma tante devisait ainsi avec Françoise, j'accompagnais mes parents à la messe. Que je l'aimais, que je la revois bien, notre Église ! Son vieux porche par lequel nous entrions, noir, grêlé comme une écumoire, était dévié et profondément creusé aux angles (de même que le bénitier où il nous conduisait) comme si le doux effleurement des mantes des paysannes entrant à l'église et leurs doigts timides prenant de l'eau bénite, pouvait, répété pendant des siècles, acquérir une force destructive, infléchir la pierre et l'entailler de sillons comme en trace la roue des carrioles dans la borne contra laquelle elle bute tous les jours. Ses pierres tombales, sous lesquelles la noble poussière des abbés de Combray, enterrés là, faisait au chœur comme un pavage spiritual, n'étaient plus elles-mêmes de la matière inerte et dure, car le temps les avait rendues douces et fait couler comme du miel hors des limites de leur propre équarrissure qu'ici elles avaient dépassées d'un flot blond, entraînant à la dérive une majuscule gothique en fleurs, noyant les violettes blanches du marbre ; et en deçà desquelles, ailleurs, elles s'étaient résorbées, contractant encore l'elliptique inscription latine, introduisant un caprice de plus dans la disposition de ces caractères abrégés, rapprochant deux lettres d'un mot dont les autres avaient été démesurément distendues. Ses vitraux ne chatoyaient jamais tant que les jours où le soleil se montrait peu, de sorte que fit-il gris dehors, on était sûr qu'il ferait beau dans l'église ; l'un était rempli dans toute sa grandeur par un seul personnage pareil à un Roi de jeu de cartes, qui vivait là-haut, sous un dais architectural, entre ciel et terre (et dans le reflet oblique et bleu duquel, parfois les jours de semaine, à midi, quand il n'y pas d'office—à l'un de ces rares moments où l'église aérée, plus humaine, luxueuse, avec du soleil sur son riche mobilier, avait l'air presque habitable comme le hall, de pierre sculptée et de verre peint, d'un hôte de style Moyen Âge—on voyait s'agenouiller un instant Mme Sazerat, posant sur le prie-Dieu voisin un paquet tout ficelé de petits fours qu'elle venait de prendre chez le pâtissier d'en face et qu'elle allait rapporter pour le déjeuner) ; dans un autre une montagne de neige rose, au pied de laquelle se livrait un combat, semblait avoir givré à même la verrière qu'elle boursouflait de son trouble grésil comme une vitre à laquelle il serait resté quelques flocons, mais des flocons éclaires par quelque aurore […]. (58-59)

The narrator's description begins with a rhapsodic "[q]ue je l'aimais, que je le revois bien, notre Église !" The strong affective sensations associated with the church—love and community pride ("*notre* Eglise")—bookend a specifically visual and imaginative verb—"que je le *revois* bien." His love and his sense of belonging allow him to clearly "re-see" the church of his childhood. Repetition is an important feature of this description. First, there is the literal repetition of his visits to the church with his parents indicated in the imperfect tense with which the above paragraph begins ("j'accompagnais"). There is then a descriptive of repetition as destructive power through the slow accumulation of small movements. The church is worn "comme si le doux effleurement des mantes de paysannes entrant à l'église et de leurs doigts timides prenant de l'eau bénite, pouvait, répété pendant des siècles, acquérir une force destructive." This counterintuitive equation of the soft sweeping of fabric and of timid fingers with destructive force prefigures a tension that continues through the whole of the novel, which I described in my first chapter as the tension between material power and material instability.

The narrator then moves into a description of the stone of the church itself, which continues to play with the tension between softness and power. "Ses pierres tombales," he tells us, "n'étaient plus elles-mêmes de la matière inerte et dure, car le temps les avait rendues douces et fait couler comme du miel hors des limites de leur propre équarrissure." Time, far from binding the stones of the church into a fixed pattern, has freed them from their material limitations. The adjectives "interte" and "dur" contrast with "douces" and the noun "miel," forming a chiasmus:

matière inerte et dure […] rendues douces […] comme du miel

The reader's pleasure in this description is reinforced by this structural contrast between inert stone and liquid honey, and between hardness and softness. The singularly material initial

terms—the stone is inert and hard—give way to the doubly material and gustatory secondary terms. “Douce” means both soft and sweet, and honey evokes the paradoxically liquid quality of the stone and is of course also a sweet substance itself. This description thus associatively recalls the sweetness of the narrator’s involuntary memory experience with the madeleine, and this echo between pastry and sweetness is again reinforced by the reference to Mme. Sazerat kneeling next to a packet of petits fours.

This passage invokes the relationship of an image to the surface which contains it, most famously demonstrated in the magic lantern passage where the child narrator’s bedroom walls become unfamiliar when covered with projections of scenes from a story. While that experience provoked anxiety and discomfort in the narrator,[18] these feelings are not echoed in this passage. Rather, the church seems to be the proper space for this relationship of image to surface to be explored as the church interior functions as a playground of light and color. While the magic lantern is an external apparatus that changes the narrator’s room, the church here seems to be its own image-generator; both the lantern and the walls onto which it projects: “[s]es vitres ne chatoyaient jamais tant que les jours où le soleil se montrait peu, de sorte que fit-il gris dehors, on était sûr qu’il ferait beau dans l’église.” The narrator highlights several images: “un seul personnage pareil à un Roi de jeu de cartes” suspended between sky and earth on one of the church’s windows and the aforementioned Mme Sazerat kneeling in the “reflet oblique et bleu” of the empty noontime church. The third tableau, a “montagne de neige rose” at the base of

[18] Proust writes of the young narrator’s reaction to the magic lantern, which was supposed to distract him on evenings when he was sad, that “ma tristesse n’était qu’accrue, parce que rien que le changement d’éclairage détruisait l’habitude que j’avais de ma chambre et grâce à quoi, sauf le supplice du coucher, elle m’était devenue supportable” (*Du côté de chez Swann*, 9).

which a battle is occurring[19] is described in terms of an image and the surface it occupies: the combat "semblait avoir givré à même la verrière qu'elle boursouflait de son trouble grésil." Rather than an image projected onto a surface, this image swells the surface, puffing it up. The description of a "trouble grésil," evoking hail, references repetition, as if repeated tiny hits of hail have changed the very structure of the glass, the same way repeated passes of fingers have changed the structure of the font. The source of this change to the glass, though, is not a physical action, even a very light one, but rather the imagined action of the image on the glass. The image changes the surface which contains it.

In the same passage, the narrator describes a mobile dance of colors from another piece of stained glass in the church:

> "[S]oit qu'un rayon eût brillé, soit que mon regard en bougeant eût promené à travers la verrière tour à tour éteinte et rallumée, un mouvant et précieux incendie, l'instant d'après elle avait pris l'éclat changeant d'une traîne de paon, puis elle tremblait et ondulait en une pluie flamboyante et fantastique qui dégouttait du haut de la voûte sombre et rocheuse, le long des parois humides, comme si c'était dans le nef de quelque grotte irisée de sinueuses stalactites que je suivais mes parents […]. (59)

Before this description, the narrator has been continuing to enumerate the discreet images he has seen in the church, describing a set of little rectangular windows that remind him of a deck of cards. Suddenly something changes. This change is luminous, but it is not clear what causes it. It might be a change from outside the church ("soit qu'un rayon eût brillé") or a perspectival change from the narrator's movement ("soit que mon regard en bougeant eût promené"). In both cases, the discreet images on the stained-glass windows give way to luminous cascades of color and motion. The windows are "tour à tour éteinte et rallumée, un mouvant et précieux incendie,"

[19] Note the perspectival shift necessitated by the order in which the elements of this scene are introduced: "une montagne de neige rose, au pied de laquelle se livrait un combat." The mention first of the mountain of pink snow makes it oversize in the reader's imagination. It must then be moved into the background in the second part of the description when the actual subject of the scene (a battle at the mountain's base) is revealed.

then they are “l’éclat changeant d’une traine de paon,” and finally they “tremblait et ondulait en une pluie flamboyante et fantastique.” All three of these figurations evoke light and color: “rallumée” “incendie” “éclat” “train de paon” “flamboyante.” All three as well evoke change and motion: “mouvant” “changeant” “ondulait.” In addition to these general evocations of motion, there is in the first image a flickering of light (from “éteinte” to “rallumée” and in the reference to fire), in the second an unfolding evoked by the image of a peacock’s spread-out feathers, and in the third there is the passive downward motion of rain that is also energetically vibrating (“tremblait”).

These luminous images then leave their windows entirely, and there is a complete interpenetration of space and image: the rain “dégouttait du haut de la voûte sombre et rocheuse […] comme si c’était dans le nef de quelque grotte irisée de sinueuse stalactites que je suivais mes parents.” The church’s stones are reevoked in a way that brings natural space into the constructed space of the church. The idea of the “nef” of a “grotte” creates an impossible space, one both humanly and naturally sacred, and penetrated by light. The falling light from the stained-glass windows becomes the iridescence of the sinuous stalactites. The reference to stalactites encapsulates again the theme of repetition: each tiny, ephemeral water drop that creates a stalactite is like the repeated play of light and color from the church’s windows that has given the space a self-illuminating quality. The final detail that the narrator is following his parents makes this image all the more dynamic: his experience of the scene is in flux rather than from a singular perspective.

From this rich description of the Combray church, two paths through the *Recherche*’s churches to its final image present themselves. On the first path, we trace how churches become an important part of the narrator’s artistic apprenticeship, suggesting, above all, questions about

the relationship of surface beauty to temporal depth in determining the aesthetic value of a given object. This line of questioning will lead the narrator the importance of presenting his characters as "plongés dans les années" in his own novel. This path through the novel will guide us from the Combray Church to other geographical locations, from the countryside near Balbec to Venice. The second path is more directly personal to the narrator, and hinges less on aesthetics and more on the experiential presence of the Combray church. While the first path takes us through the body of the *Recherche* as a whole, this second one unifies two far disparate moments, the young narrator's love of his church, demonstrated above, and the adult narrator's reconsideration of this church as the object of indifference and then of memorialization following its destruction in World War I. Both paths, that of artistic instruction and that of experience and memory, guide the reader to the spatialized temporality of the novel's closing words.

Proust uses a path simile to map the narrator's cognition in the wake of Albertine's death in *Albertine disparue*, to examine the different mental routes we take to arrive in the same place. It is helpful, here, to demonstrate the linked but disjointed movements through time and space that characterize the geography and temporality of the *Recherche*, which our two paths through the novel's churches will highlight:

> En effet en nous, de chaque idée comme d'un carrefour dans une forêt, partent tant de routes différentes, qu'au moment où je m'y attendais le moins je me trouvais devant un nouveau souvenir. Le titre de la mélodie de Fauré, *Le Secret*, m'avait mené au *Secret du roi* du duc de Broglie, le nom de Broglie à celui de Chaumont. Ou bien le mot de Vendredi Saint m'avait fait penser au Golgotha, le Golgotha à l'étymologie de ce mot qui, lui, paraît l'équivalent de *Calvus mons*, Chaumont. Mais par quelque chemin que je fusse arrivé à Chaumont, à ce moment j'étais frappé d'un choc si cruel que dès lors je pensais bien plus à me garer contre la douleur qu'à lui demander des souvenirs. Quelques instants après le choc, l'intelligence qui, comme le bruit du tonnerre, ne voyage pas aussi vite, m'en apportait la raison. Chaumont m'avait fait penser aux Buttes-Chaumont où

> Mme Bontemps m'avait dit qu'Andrée allait souvent avec Albertine, tandis qu'Albertine m'avait dit n'avoir jamais vu les Buttes-Chaumont. (124-125)

This "carrefour" of memory is at first glance a fairly straightforward simile—many roads leading out of a crossroads means many roads leading in, and the narrator's point is that he can arrive at the same memory via a number of cognitive routes. He gives several examples in which word association leads him back to the word Chaumont, which reminds him of the Buttes-Chaumont park and thus to the debilitating jealousy he felt at the thought of Albertine's potential sexual relationships with women such as Andrée. These linguistic roads start at different places, maybe a musical piece, maybe Good Friday, but they lead to the same memory. Examining the passage more closely, though, the cognitive experience is the narrator is describing is more than a simple associative lexical chain. At a certain moment in this associative process, the communication system—the mental 'language' in which is the narrator is communicating with himself—sharply changes. In the moment when he arrives at the word Chaumont, the chain of associative but still intellectual reasoning he has been following is abruptly broken: "à ce moment j'étais frappé d'un choc si cruel que dès lors je pensais bien plus à me garer contre la douleur qu'à lui demander des souvenirs." Rather than the moving along a smooth cognitive path from Chaumont to Buttes-Chaumont to the memory of Albertine's lie, the Chaumont step triggers an emotional explosion that the narrator is unable at first to withstand, wishing to leave the path entirely.

This pain is short lived, however, as the narrator's understanding catches up with his emotional response, explaining and soothing: "[q]uelques instants après le choc, l'intelligence qui, comme le bruit de tonnerre, ne voyage pas aussi vite, m'en apportait la raison." In this process, the narrator's mind is not advancing along a path smoothly from point to point, even if we allow that this path is crisscrossed by a vast number of other paths. Rather the path itself is not stable, and different parts of the mind are apt to move along it at different speeds. In this

case, the narrator's emotional self leaps from Chaumont to Buttes-Chaumont with the speed of lightening. Lightening is a doubly fitting attribution, implying both speed and damage. The narrator is not just surprised by the emotion he feels, it is so painful he wishes to flee it without understanding its cause. It is as if lightening has hit the path ahead of him and his first impulse is to flee into the woods without assessing what has happened. His fear of the lightening and the emotional wound it opens dissipate when the narrator understands the reason for his response, which is like thunder which is simultaneous but registered at a delay. The explanation itself serves as a salve, and the narrator can calmly walk away from the memory-path, safe from its shock effect until it surprises him again.

**Path One: The Church as Artistic Instruction**

With this understanding that our reading paths, like the narrator's mental ones, are non-linear, affective, and associative, we can begin down the first. Here, at a recently restored church in Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse, the narrator brings Albertine on a daytrip during his second visit to Balbec, in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. Their joint viewing leads to a mis-en-scène of the intermedial considerations of architecture:

> Sur son église, moitié neuve, moitié restaurée, le soleil déclinant étendait sa patine aussi belle que celle des siècles. À travers elle les grands bas-reliefs semblaient n'être vus que sous une couche fluide, moitié liquide, moitié lumineuse ; la Sainte Vierge, sainte Élisabeth, sainte Joachim, nageaient encore dans l'impalpable remous, presque à sec, à fleur d'eau ou fleur de soleil. […] « Elle ne me plaît pas, elle est restaurée » me dit-elle [Albertine] en me montrant l'église et se souvenant de ce qu'Elstir lui avait dit sur la précieuse, sur l'inimitable beauté de vieilles pierres. Albertine savait reconnaître tout de suite une restauration. On ne pouvait que s'étonner de la sûreté de goût qu'elle avait déjà en architecture, au lieu du déplorable qu'elle gardait en musique. Pas plus qu'Elstir, je n'aimais cette église, c'est sans me faire plaisir que sa façade ensoleillée était venue se poser devant mes yeux, et je n'étais descendu la regarder que pour être agréable à Albertine. Et pourtant je trouvais que le grand impressionniste était en contradiction avec lui-même ; pourquoi ce fétichisme attaché à la valeur architecturale objective, sans tenir compte de la transfiguration de l'église dans le couchant ? (402-403)

The context of this passage repeatedly highlights its theme of aesthetic consideration; before driving to Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse Albertine had been painting a church in Quetteholme (401) and in the section cut from the quote above, the narrator is commenting on Albertine's clothing and accessories (402). The passage itself draws attention to the difference between Elstir's views on painting and his views on architecture, and Albertine's taste in architecture versus her taste in music. The narrator signals to us that he does not particularly like the church he is viewing, but the opening description is a striking recollection of the fluid materiality we saw in the Combray church: "le soleil déclinant étendait sa patine aussi belle que celle des siècles. À travers elle les grands bas-reliefs semblaient n'être vus que sous une couche fluide, moitié liquide, moitié lumineuse." Of course, there is a distinction here between the materiality of two churches implied in the distinction between the effect of the sun and that of time. The liquidity and luminosity of the Balbec church seem to radiate from its stones themselves, whereas this passage keeps the emphasis on superficiality of this description: "sa patine" and "une couche" both indicating a primarily surface-level appraisal. However, this luminous patina of liquid sunlight is "aussi belle" as the transformations of time. This is a purely aesthetic judgment, lacking the affective resonances of the narrator's description of the Combray church, but it prepares the reader for the narrator's critique of Elstir's inconsistency.

As they stand in front of the church, Albertine tells the narrator that "[e]lle ne me plaît pas, elle est restaurée." The two halves of this utterance have a causal relationship: because the church is restored, I do not like it. She has learned both how to recognize and how to appraise a restored church from Elstir, who had praised "l'inimitable beauté des vieilles pierres." The certainty with which she pronounces her judgement on the Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse church both amuses the narrator by its learned contrast to Albertine's poor taste in music, and leads him

to consider the aesthetic implications of this architectural lesson she has learned so well from Elstir. Although the narrator agrees with the ultimate conclusion to which Albertine's Elstir-esque reasoning leads her, letting the reader know that "pas plus qu'Elstir, je n'aimais cette église," he nonetheless disagrees with Elstir's logic. Elstir's methodology in painting privileges the primacy of impression over any evaluation of the inherent qualities of the represented object itself. Striking impressions, be they of asparagus, Odette de Crécy in drag, or ships that look like buildings, determine what is worthy of representation, not their objective value.[20] The implications of Elstir's and Albertine's negative judgment of restored churches extends beyond intellectual exercise. Remember that this scene opened with Albertine painting a different church. This church at Quetteholme represents the preservation and extension of the deep past: "à la surface riante de la pierre affleuraient des anges qui continuaient, devant notre couple de XXe siècle, à célébrer les cérémonies du XIIIe" (401). The question of what gets represented and why is thus raised both diegetically (Albertine paints the Quetteholme church rather than the Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse church) and metareferentially (we are reading representations of both churches). Elstir evaluating churches is not the same Elstir who models aesthetic openness in *JF* but rather a figure more like the petulant young poet from "Chardin et Rembrandt," with the restored church standing in for the Chardinian kitchen. The lesson seems to be the same: why allow your a priori evaluation of an object to distract you from the ever-present possibility of beautiful accidents of mood and light? The "transfiguration de l'église dans le couchant" that the narrator sees at Marcouville-l'Orgeuilleuse is one of these beautiful accidents, like the dining room table still lifes of "Chardin et Rembrandt" and *JF*.

[20] In addition to impressionist painters, one of Proust's sources for Elstir's characters was the French art historian Émile Mâle, who studied religious art and architecture. This is perhaps in part the source of the disconnect between Elstir's thoughts on painting and those on architecture (Fraisse 1990: 19).

At this point we need to ask, if Elstir is wrong to evaluate churches differently than other sorts of aesthetic material, is there anything distinct about churches in the representational philosophy of the *Recherche*? This restored church, it seems, is serving as an intellectual exercise that ultimately reaffirms the methodology of first impressions with which the reader is already familiar. The narrator is indicating the beauty of the sun-draped façade of an otherwise unattractive church, but he is not invested in this beauty, and by proxy, it is unlikely the reader will be either. Imaginatively, this passage is not really asking the reader to do anything new. Imagining a layer of liquid light which beautifies the stones is something which the reader is well-prepared to do not only by a number of liquid and luminous effects in the novel in general (see chapter two) but by the specific application of these effects to the Combray church. Otherwise we are mostly asked to test Elstir's ideas for consistency with the narrator. It is not clear that the conclusion at which the narrator arrives—Elstir's aesthetic philosophy is inconsistent in the matter of restored churches—is of any great import to the narrator.

The restored church, in other words, has little to teach us. In too fully belonging to the present, the restored church lacks a true fourth dimension, as does the church considered only as a historical artefact. This second case occurs when the narrator visits the Balbec church, which loses the magic of the narrator's imagined version: looking at the statue of the Virgin Mary, he laments "c'était elle enfin, l'œuvre d'art immortelle et si longtemps désirée, que je trouvais métamorphosée, ainsi que l'église elle-même, en une petite vieille de pierre dont je pouvais mesurer la hauteur et compter les rides" (*JF* 284). The restored church has too little time because it has not been able to undergo the layered changes that make time truly visible. The church considered only as a historical object has the opposite problem; it is weighed down by too much time and thus not open to dynamic change. Like the paralyzed cyclops of photography with

which we began the chapter, the restored church and the merely historical church are both temporally impoverished, the former through the foreshortened past dimension and the latter through the foreshortened future dimension. Note that in neither case is the church in question necessarily uninteresting or unworthy of aesthetic representation and contemplation. We saw above that a restored church can be the site of similarly beautiful material effects as an older one. In the absence of aesthetic effects, one can learn understand the historical value of the church in question, which is what the narrator does with the Balbec church,[21] in effect becoming better "readers" if not "seers" of the church at hand. In addition, the difference between a church that is time-impoverished or time-mired and one that is fully temporally dimensional is at least in part a matter of subjective affective investment. The narrator experiences the Combray church as existing in four dimensions not because of its objective qualities but because of his own experience, literal and imaginative, with that space. Other churches, and perhaps other spaces, could have the same qualities for other people: a mix of fluctuating, fascinating aesthetic effects and an individual and communal affective grounding. It is this combination that the narrator experiences as the visible fourth dimension.

When attending to the status of architecture in the *Recherche*, it is easy to get mired in the exigencies of understanding historical specificity, and to consider architecture as a less imaginatively mobile art form than painting or prose. Here we can return to Anne Henry's comments, quoted in my first chapter, about the status of architecture in the *Recherche*. Recall that Henry argued that architectural works are style-bound in the time of their creation and thus doomed to remain inaccessible to future generations in the absence of specific training. It is true that Proust's aesthetic goals are not in line with art solely as historical preservation or

[21] See *JF* 475-477, where Elstir explains the historical and artistic value of the church to the narrator.

remembrance.[22] However, the enemy here is not the passing of time, but rather the notion of finitude. The narrator remarks, contemplating his own creation, "combien de grandes cathédrales restent inachevées!" after using an architectural metaphor for great works of literature, parts of which "ne seront sans doute jamais finies, à cause de l'ampleur même du plan de l'architecte" (338). An incomplete work, even thrust deep in the past, retains its dynamism through this lack of completion. This in fact extends the time dimension of a given work indefinitely, as an incomplete work necessarily evokes its own potential continuation. This is true even when we are ultimately reminded—and how true this is in the case of the *Recherche* itself—that it can never be finished.

The aesthetic, the affective, and the temporal layer together in Proust's most evocative church scenes, deepening both the narrator's appreciation and the reader's imaginative experience. This imagistic depth is what, as we saw in the introduction, Bergotte identifies in the "petit pan de mur jaune" he notices in the Vermeer painting *Vue de Delft*. Standing in front of the painting that will be the last thing he sees, Bergotte thinks to himself that his writing should have been more like the "petit pan de mur jaune": "[m]es derniers livres étaient trop secs, il aurait fallu passer plusieurs couches de couleur, rendre ma phrase en elle-même précieuse, comme ce petit pan de mur jaune" (*La Prisonnière* 199). The "petit pan" thus represents saturation and layered attention and weds a method of work—taking many passes—to an aesthetic outcome, here exemplified by Bergotte's emotion at this detail. Like Hockney's notion of the time

[22] In an analysis of Proust's notes and drawings in scholarly manuals of medieval art, Leriche writes that Proust was aware that "1. there is a cultural history of art and of the gaze, that renders illegible to him most works from past eras, unless he approaches them with the aid of works of erudition; 2. these works are thus neither universal nor intelligible a priori, on first viewing; 3. it is not the work of visual art that allows us to see the world; rather, on the contrary, lived and sensory experiences make us attentive to a work's most minute details, even non-symbolic ones. The work of art therefore functions as a mirror onto which the viewer's gaze is projected. According to the Proustian theory of reading, are we not our own reader?" (170).

dimension in painting, another way of expressing what is precious about the many layers of the "petit pan" is that it has a certain depth in time. Proust and Hockney thus share a notion of the materiality of the time dimension in painting in which layers of paint correspond to the time of creation. But Bergotte's revelation here is not just about painting. Rather, he understands the genius of Vermeer's work in the same moment that he realizes the failure of his own, that he did not layer his writing in the same way. The comparison and self-critique are multi-medial: Bergotte has learned something about how to write by seeing how a master painted. This principle of layers is shared by painting and literature, at least in Bergotte's mind.

Proust returns to this idea of layering in *Le Temps retrouvé.* The narrator explicitly evokes layering as he finally begins to write and realizes that

> comme des individualités (humaines ou non) sont dans un livre faites d'impressions nombreuses qui, prise de bien des jeunes filles, de bien des églises, de bien de sonates, servent à faire une seule sonate, une seule église, une seule jeune fille, ne ferais-je pas mon livre de la façon que Françoise faisait ce bœuf mode […] dont tant de morceaux de viande ajoutés et choisis enrichissaient la gelée ? (340)

It is important here not to conflate the work the narrator is producing with the work Proust has produced.[23] Though the beginning of the sentence is hypothetical ("dans un livre") the reader can hardly help but see Albertine, the Combray church, and Vinteuil's sonata as the specific examples of the of the general objects evoked, but the book the narrator is writing remains hypothetical ("ne ferais-je pas" "**would** I not make"). What is important in this passage is not the description of a specific textual object but the elaboration of an additional element in the principle of layering. The idea of a book being made as Françoise's boeuf mode is made is not just a reaffirmation of a principle of multiplicity. It is not enough to say that one uses a lot of pieces of meat to make a boeuf mode, or one uses a number of impressions of young women to

[23] See Joshua Landy's article "Proust, His Narrator, and the Importance of the Distinction."

construct an Albertine, or one makes a "petit pan de mur jaune" by layering a lot of strokes of yellow paint. This culinary comparison is both the multiplicity of elements and the individual time of creation. Putting lots of pieces of meat together in a pan on the counter will not make a dinner to impress Monseiur Norpois, and all the girls I saw in my adolescence have never led to me to create an archetypal "jeune fille en fleur" in art. In Françoise's cooking, Proust's writing, and Vermeer's painting, there are elements of individual taste and of change over time. The component parts of a composite creation must be allowed to blend and incorporate to form a cohesive object.

To consider one more church on this path through the narrator's artistic apprenticeship, the description of the narrator's trip to Venice and time at Saint-Marc basilica combines art, affect, and personal and historical temporal perspectives. In a general sense, the narrator's visit to Venice is densely layered with temporal references. He has longed to visit the city since childhood but could not on account of his health, meaning that his trip has already been anticipated in desire and imagination. In addition, when he finally does visit, the narrator is undergoing a continually changing process of grief following Albertine's death. These personal histories coupled with the age and beauty of the city itself make a rich terrain for speculation on individual and collective relationships to time. To get a sense of the complexity and importance of these speculations, we will examine Proust's description of Saint-Marc in two parts. In the first, we will foreground the narrator's sense of the edifice itself, and the descriptive overlaps between this passage and the Combray church description from the first volume. We will then turn to the affective and aesthetic associations the narrator attaches to the church, and what these associations reveal to us about art and time in general.

Like the Combray church standing in for the narrator's memories of the town as a whole, Saint-Marc comes to stand in for a certain type of Venetian scene:

> C'est le plus souvent pour Saint-Marc que je partais, et avec d'autant plus de plaisir que, comme il fallait d'abord prendre une gondole pour s'y rendre, l'église ne se représentait pas à moi comme un simple monument, mais comme le terme d'un trajet sur l'eau marine et printanière, avec laquelle Saint-Marc faisait pour moi un tout indivisible et vivant. Nous entrions ma mère et moi dans le baptistère, foulant tous deux les mosaïques de marbre et de verre du pavage, ayant devant nous les larges arcades dont le temps a légèrement infléchi les surfaces évasées et roses, ce qui donne à l'église, là où il a respecté la fraîcheur de ce coloris, l'air d'être construite dans une matière douce et malléable comme la cire de géantes alvéoles ; là au contraire il a racorni la matière et où les artistes l'ajourée et rehaussée d'or, d'être la précieuse reliure, en quelque cuir de Cordoue, du colossal évangile de Venise (*Albertine disparue* 225-226).

As with the initial description of the Combray church above, the narrator is not describing a singular viewing instance, but the temporal accretion of repeated visits forming a composite picture. The narrator's love for the church is in part due to the gondola rides he takes to get there, the "trajet sur l'eau marine et printanière" that is an inseparable part of his experience of Saint-Marc. Before he mentions Saint-Marc directly in the passage above, he describes how from his hotel room he felt "l'ombre tiède et le soleil verdâtre filaient comme sur une surface flottante et évoquaient le voisinage mobile, l'illumination, la miroitante instabilité du flot" (225). In the Combray description, the luminous images that fill the church from the stained-glass windows seem to be self-generating and form a sort of image-rain that creates the impression of a grotto filled with iridescent stalactites. In this Venice description, a similar living luminosity is provided by the water-bound nature of the city itself, which colors all of the narrator's impressions. The canals create this hall-of-mirrors effect, making a constantly changing landscape that the narrator follows to Saint-Marc.

Proust's depiction of Saint-Marc's particular materiality again echoes what we have previously seen in the Combray church. As the earlier description evoked how the church's

stones were imprinted by the continual movement of villagers through the centuries, Saint-Marc too carries the material inscription of time: "le temps a légèrement infléchi les surfaces évasées et roses." As is the case in Combray, this temporal inscription has undone the association of stone with fixity and permanence, here giving the church "l'air d'être construite dans une matière douce et malléable comme la cire des géants alvéoles." This description is doubly antithetical to our habitual associations with stone, evoking both the softness of wax and the hollowness of a honeycomb structure. The "matière douce" and the honeycomb reference recall the specificity of the Combray church where the stones have become "comme du miel."

Another parallel between Combray and Saint-Marc is the affective association with family. As a child, he goes to church with his parents, and as an adult, he visits Venice with his mother. In the Combray passage, the presence of his family is evoked but not lingered on, but the adult narrator in Venice is more reflective about the effect of the presence of others on aesthetic experience:

> Voyant que j'avais à rester longtemps devant les mosaïques qui représentent le baptême de Christ, ma mère, sentant la fraîcheur glacée qui tombait dans le baptistère, me jetait un châle sur les épaules. Quand j'étais avec Albertine à Balbec, je croyais qu'elle révélait une de ces illusions inconsistantes qui remplissent l'esprit de tant de gens qui ne pensent pas clairement, quand elle me parlait du plaisir—selon moi ne reposant sur rien—qu'elle aurait à voir telle peinture avec moi. Aujourd'hui, je suis au moins sûr que le plaisir existe sinon de voir, du moins d'avoir vu une belle chose avec une certaine personne. Une heure est venue pour où quand je me rappelle ce baptistère, devant les flots du Jourdain où Saint Jean immerge le Christ tandis que la gondole nous attendait devant la Piazzetta il ne m'est pas indifférent que dans cette fraîche pénombre, à côté de moi il y eût une femme drapée dans son deuil avec la ferveur respectueuse et enthousiaste de la femme âgée qu'on voit à Venise dans la Sainte Ursule de Carpaccio, et que cette femme aux joues rouges, aux yeux tristes, dans ses voiles noirs, et que rien ne pourra plus jamais faire sortir pour moi de ce sanctuaire doucement éclairé de Saint-Marc où je suis sûr de la retrouver parce qu'elle y a sa place réservée et immuable comme une mosaïque, ce soit ma mère. (226)

The reference to his mother placing the shawl around his shoulders draws us into the physiological fact of the narrator's often sick and suffering body, and to his relational and emotional ties to others. The earlier visual description of the "fraîcheur du coloris" is paralleled here by the "fraîcheur glacée," wedding the soft pink color of the church's interior to the temperature of the air, reminding us that the visual cannot be disconnected from the phenomenological. We then move into a discussion the affective pleasure of having a loved one physically present while viewing art. The narrator recalls his dismissive attitude toward Albertine's repeated assertations that she would like to see certain paintings with him, which has now been replaced with the conviction that "le plaisir existe sinon de voir, du moins d'avoir vu une belle chose avec une certaine personne." The experiential meaning of the joint viewing changes over time, and while it may be indifferent in the moment of its occurrence the memory becomes sweeter because it includes the other person. In the case of Saint-Marc, "[u]ne heure est venue où quand je me rappelle ce baptistère […] il ne m'est pas indifférent que […] à côté de moi il y eût une femme drapée dans son deuil […] ce soit ma mère." His memories are not just of the objects themselves but of having seen these objects with his mother, and she is thus a permanent fixture ("elle y a sa place réservée et immuable comme une mosaïque") in his memory of the church (226). It is not necessarily that he had more pleasure in the moment because she was there (though one does imagine the scarf around his shoulders helped) but he has constructed his memory around her presence, and her inclusion in that totality gives him pleasure.

After this passage about his mother, the narrator tells us that when not at Saint-Marc, the painter whose work most often occupies his time is Carpaccio.[24] This scene continues the play between layers of temporality with a sudden memory of Albertine:

> Je regardais le barbier essuyer son rasoir, le nègre portant son tonneau, les conversations des musulmans, des nobles seigneurs vénitiens en larges brocards, en damas, en toque de velours cerise, quand tout à coup je sentis au cœur comme une légère morsure. Sur le dos d'un des compagnons de la Calza, reconnaissable aux broderies d'or et de perles qui inscrivent sur leur manche ou leur collet l'emblème de la joyeuse confrérie à laquelle ils étaient affiliés, je venais de reconnaître le manteau qu'Albertine avait pour venir avec moi en voiture découverte à Versailles, le soir où j'étais loin de me douter qu'une quinzaine d'heures me séparaient à peine du moment où elle partirait de chez moi. (227)

Before this moment of surprise, Proust's discussion of Carpaccio creates a Russian doll effect where aesthetic layers are unpacked to reveal a kernel of emotional reality when "Carpaccio […] faillit un jour ranimer mon amour pour Albertine" (226). He begins his description of Carpaccio with a tissue of reference to history ("ce Pont Vecchio du XVe siècle" "la vie vénitienne de l'époque") and art ("tant de Venises de Whistler" "cette éblouissante *Légende de Joseph*"). Suddenly, he recognizes a moment from his personal history in one of the paintings, a moment akin to Roland Barthes' idea of the punctum where "tout à coup je sentis au cœur comme une légère morsure." The description is not just personal ("au cœur") but physical and painful ("morsure" albeit "légère"). He is struck because he has noticed "le manteau qu'Albertine avait pour venir avec moi en voiture découverte à Versailles" in one of the paintings. The Fortuny-made garment is another illustration of the complexity of the relationship between art and reality, containing its own individual temporality.

[24] Susan Ricci Stebbins has pointed out how the prominence of Carpaccio is an unusual feature of the *Recherche*, as he was considered a minor figure at the time but was beloved by Ruskin and Proust and thus participates in Proust's own personal intellectual history (73).

Proust describes the relationship of Carpaccio's painted garment to Albertine's real one in a characteristic sentence that combines the figurative and the literal: "[o]r c'était dans ce tableau de Carpaccio que le fils génial de Venise [Fortuny] l'avait pris [le manteau], c'est des épaules de ce compagnon de la Calza qu'il l'avait détaché pour le jeter sur celles de tant de Parisiennes" (227). This is certainly a striking description of the process of inspiration, but the emotional power of this moment for the narrator of is both a general illustration of the permeability of the real and the aesthetic, and a specific illustration of a specific kind of temporality where the present changes the past. Like the narrator's experience of involuntary memory, the coat gives him bodily access to his past: "un instant le manteau oublié m'ayant rendu pour le regarder les yeux et le cœur de celui qui allait ce soir-là partir à Versailles avec Albertine" (227). He is given the eyes and the heart of the person he was at a specific earlier moment in time, but with added knowledge, since the night he was to go to Versailles with Albertine "j'étais loin de me douter qu'une quinzaine d'heures me séparaient à peine du moment où elle partirait de chez moi." His temporal experience is doubled, and he is experiencing both a moment in the past which is gone and that moment from the perspective of what he knows now.

The Carpaccio painting thus encloses in a moment of viewing one of the major themes of *Albertine disparue*, the ways in which grief makes the narrator aware of the non-linear flow of time. By the time the reader arrives at Saint-Marc with the narrator, they have already been led through a series of imaginative experiments meant to illustrate the relationship of temporal layers within the narrator's life. In one, the narrator uses an aquatic image to describe the disjointed relationship between his intellectual and emotional states vis-à-vis Albertine's death: "[s]ans doute en moi, comme j'étais un homme, un de ces êtres amphibies qui sont simultanément plongés dans le passé et sans la réalité actuelle, il existait toujours une contradiction entre le

souvenir vivant d'Albertine et la connaissance que j'avais de sa mort" (115). The amphibian metaphor allows the narrator to describe how he is simultaneously operating with two very different cognitive models of his former love. One cognitive layer is his intellectual understanding of the fact that Albertine is dead, and the second is his bodily-emotional memory of her, which remains alive. Over the course of the novel, the latter will fade as the former becomes the habitual default, but during this process the two states are simultaneous and nonetheless distinct. This demonstrates Ender's point that "memories are constructions, that they depend on mood and context" (5). The narrator's memories of Albertine are not reducible to discreet units evenly produced by each new experience he had of her. His knowledge that Albertine is dead is a new part of his memory of her, but it does not function as a culmination or an end point. Rather it coexists with his living memories of her, until by force of repetition the memory-structure changes and the intellectual knowledge of her death becomes the base and the vivid sensation of her presence the exception.

The specific metaphor of humans as amphibian is a fitting one for doubled states of being. Amphibians not only inhabit both land and water, but they also absorb air and water through their skin, representing the permeability of these two states. They thus represent at once the simultaneity of and the distinction between states of being. Human temporal experience, similarly, deals both in absolutes—the past is gone and the future is coming—and in the endless permeability of the present in which memories of the past are continually altered and possibilities for the future continually changed. As we saw in chapter 2, Freed-Thall identifies the shore between water and land as part of what she calls Proust's "aesthetics of nuance": "a formalism of blurred contours and borders and a queer ecology that attunes us to the cloudy zone of contact between subject and object, and to the drift and transmutation of a subtly shifting lived

environment" (67). She draws attention to the importance of "minimal variation" in Proust, meaning tiny changes, just on the edge of perceptibility, such as in clouds (66). This is also the process by which time operates on memory in Proust. For the narrator, the minimal variations of his memories of Albertine eventually create new neural pathways towards a new conceptual understanding of her being dead. In the physical world, this process of minimal variation is represented by the traces in stone of the repeated steps and devotions of generations of churchgoers in Combray.

In *Le Côte de Guermantes*, the narrator explicitly reflects on the relationship between water, architecture, and time:

> Ainsi plus tard, à Venise, bien après le coucher du soleil, quand il semble qu'il fasse tout à fait nuit, j'ai vu, grâce à l'écho invisible pourtant d'une dernière note de lumière indéfiniment tenue sur les canaux comme par l'effet de quelque pédale optique, les reflets des palais déroulés comme à tout jamais en velours plus noir sur le gris crépusculaire des eaux. Un de mes rêves était la synthèse de ce que mon imagination avait souvent cherché à se représenter, pendant la veille, d'un certain paysage marin et de son passé médiéval. Dans mon sommeil je voyais une cite gothique au milieu d'une mer aux flots immobilisés comme sur un vitrail. Un bras de mer divisait en deux la ville ; l'eau verte s'étendait à mes pieds ; elle baignait sur la rive opposée une église orientale, plus des maisons qui existaient encore dans le XIVe siècle, si bien qu'aller vers elles, c'eût été remonter le cours des âges. Ce rêve où la nature avait appris l'art, où la mer était devenue gothique, ce rêve où je désirais, où je croyais aborder à l'impossible, il me semblait l'avoir déjà fait souvent. (138)

This picks up several threads of imagery and association that are repeated through the *Recherche*. In chapter one we saw how the narrator appreciated the reminder of the deep past of the sea in the form of the fish served for a meal that becomes the "polychrome cathédrale de la mer." As we just saw, *Albertine disparue* describes man as an aquatic being jointly plunged in the past and the present. This particular passage uses an anticipatory recollection of the narrator's time in Venice (which is not to occur for several volumes) to prime the reader for the coming dream description of a city in the sea. In the Venice recollection, the narrator tells that that

during his late-night walks "j'ai vu, grâce à l'écho invisible pourtant d'une dernière note de lumière indéfiniment tenue sur les canaux comme par l'effet de quelque pédale optique, les reflets des palais déroulés comme à tout jamais en velours plus noir sur le gris crépusculaire des eaux." This notion of an invisible echo of light asks the reader to see light without seeing it. Proust guides us to complete this difficult imaginative task by associating the idea of light with a different set of sensual markers. "[É]cho" and "dernière note […] tenue" reconfigure light as sound, something that can be evoked and then held like a musical note but cannot be seen. In the absence of sight, sound becomes a way to see, and here, the reverberations of sound stand in for the reverberations of luminosity. This invisible luminous echo is then used to differentiate the "velours plus noir" of the reflected buildings from the "gris crépusculaire" of the water. The idea of an echo ties into the discussion of dreaming which will follow, as dreams are an echo of reality.

This dream the narrator describes, which he has the impression that he has dreamed before, "était la synthèse de ce que mon imagination avait souvent cherché à se représenter, pendant la vielle, d'un certain paysage marin et de son passé médiéval." This dream is the literalized manifestation of the imagination's attempt simultaneously hold the experiential present of a landscape with its medieval past. Most concretely, the image of a "cité gothique au milieu d'une mer" with which the narrator's dreaming mind portrays this synthesis seems to be pulled directly from his watery sightseeing in the Venice canals. The reflections have been materialized into a literal city, but otherwise the image is similar. Like the invisible light conveyed through sound, though, Proust complicates his image instructions to the reader. He embeds descriptive contradictions in the image to create a mobile tension, similar to the tension in chapter three between planes assimilated to the image of stars and also falling away from

them. In that scene, the simultaneous demand on the reader to imagine two different scenes, an indistinguishable sky of lights and moving lights zipping away from immobile ones, created a vivid energy in the image. In this description of the sea-city of the narrator's dream, the narrator inverses the expected idea of water as surface and buildings as surface inscription implied in the connection to the reflected buildings of Venice in the canal. Here, the gothic city becomes the container and the water the thing contained: "je voyais une cite gothique au milieu d'une mer aux flots immobilisés comme sur un vitrail." Look at the relative size jumps the reader needs to mentally make to through this description: they begin with the image of a city reflected in a canal from the Venice memory, then move the city to the much larger surface of the sea, and then miniaturize the sea as immobile on a stained-glass window. In this third image of the stained-glass window, we must suddenly freeze the image of the sea, which would have likely before this point retained a certain imaginative mobility. This miniaturized, frozen sea in the stained-glass window moves away from experiential accuracy towards artistic representation. This passage thus engages the reader in a complex play of surface and reflection, container and contained, and dream and art and reality, makes this image imaginatively pleasurable in its complexity. Let us look now at what it might tell us about the relationship of art and time.

One interpretation of this dream would be that it represents the narrator's desired access to a past that is otherwise experientially unavailable. He mentions specific buildings from the past, the "église orientale" and "maisons qui existaient encore dans le XIVe siècle" and tells us that "aller vers elles, c'eût été remonter le cours des âges." The dream architecture represents a path back into the past. But the narrator's interpretation of the dream does not initially seem to have much at all to do with time: "[c]e rêve où la nature avait appris l'art, où la mer était devenue gothique, ce rêve où je désirais, où je croyais aborder à l'impossible." Here, the

reconciliation is not between the present (sea) and the past (gothic city) but between nature (sea) and art (gothic city). The gothic city is certainly very old, but this is not an essential part of the nature/art reconciliation since we already have the *JF* cathedral-fish description which does not hinge on the fish being old (for the sake of the diners, one hopes it is not). Thus, this dream could represent nature and art existing together in a marvelous synthetic dream-present, and the past of the gothic city could simply be a detail imported from the narrator's Venetian wanderings. I do not believe this to be the case, however. This dream-present is open to the past in a dynamic way, since moving towards the church and the houses is "remonter le cours des âges." The temporal relationship in this dream is configured spatially. While it is not explicit here, the text is moving us further towards seeing time as a fourth dimension. This passage combines the animation effect discussed in chapter three with the spatial play described in chapter two, and the combined effect is to have an animated image that is spatially complex. That its spatial complexity takes the form of an accessible time dimension is part of our preparation for the novel's final figure in four dimensions: a human life.

There is one issue with considering this medieval dream-city in the sea as a true four-dimensional image: it lacks real existence in time, and thus does not really exist in a four-dimensional perspective. The narrator has the impression that he has had this dream many times, but the dream-city does not properly exist along different distinct points in time for him. The city presents the coexistence of artistic present and medieval past and gestures towards spatialized time without allowing the narrator to properly experience that dimension. The time dimension is thus distorted and foreshortened, somewhat in the manner of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*'s restored church. Both combine elements of the present and elements of the past in a way that is too transparently synthetic. They lack the temporal depth that can only come from simultaneously

imaginatively holding numerous distinct images from different points in time. However, the restored church and the dream-city hold an important lesson about the relationship of present to past. My third chapter discussed the narrator's description of the opposition of ancestral traces and fresh life in Saint-Loup's face: "[s]ous la peau fine, la construction hardie, l'architecture féodale apparaissaient. Sa tête faisait penser à ces tours d'antique donjon dont les créneaux inutilisés restent visibles, mais qu'on a aménagées intérieurement en bibliothèque" (*JF* 452). The present is not only the visible layer structured by the past, but rather the two form a complex whole subject to deconstruction and reconstruction. The relationship of the present to the past is not strictly one of progression, and this non-linear relationship of expression between the two indicates time expressed as space where mobility is possible in multiple directions.

**Path Two: The Combray Church, Experience, and Memory**

Ultimately, the object the *Recherche* pushes us to see in four dimensions is not a cathedral, but rather the multidimensionality of human life. In order to correctly see a life in four dimensions, we need to access new kinds of vision, namely ones that allow for a normally impossible perspective. Joshua Landy makes the case that this is the great philosophical problem of the *Recherche*: "since the true self is hidden even from its *owner*, artistic expression is the only route to authentic introspection […] art 'alone expresses for others and *renders visible to ourselves* that life of ours which cannot effectually observe itself,' concludes Marcel" (*Philosophy as Fiction* 13). Art gives us a way out of the dilemma that we have no way to directly and effectively understand ourselves in the course of everyday life. The same problem Tiffany outlines in the case of complex scientific discoveries about the quantum world here becomes true of the most familiar of objects, our own selves. We must glimpse ourselves obliquely, the same way I have been arguing that we imaginatively glimpse the art objects and

descriptive scenes scattered throughout the *Recherche*. As a solution to this problem, Landy uses imaginative patterns as a template from which to understand individual selves. In the case of Proust's narrator, "Marcel's is fundamentally a spatial imagination," separating and classifying the periods and people in his life by the spaces in which they occurred or with which they are associated (75). His understanding of the self is thus fundamentally spatial:

> Marcel's is a genuinely three-dimensional account, accommodating both synchronic and diachronic variations. 'As there is a geometry in space, so there is a psychology in time, in which the calculations of a plane psychology would no longer be accurate,' he writes. For him, as we have seen, the Self ('le moi') is defined as the accumulation of its consecutive states ('les moi'), sedimented over time; at any given instant, we are the sum of an extremely large set of existences, many of which are entirely unknown to us, and all of which cohabit simultaneously in the mind. (110)

Proust's images of churches have prepared the reader for the idea of the self as this "accumulation of consecutive states […] sedimented over time" not just as a theoretical truth, but as an imaginative action, a thrust towards visualizing the impossible to visualize. The image of the church evokes the same multiplicity in simultaneity we need to imagine seeing our lives across time. As Diane Leonard writes, Proust's novel functions "by laying down impressions in the reader's mind […] which become layered in memory in a vertical 'fourth dimension' where they co-exist simultaneously, like the stratifications of different centuries in the Church of Combray" ("Ruskin in the 'Recherche'"). A church is multitudinous both in construction (as an assemblage of many stones) and in its use (as the site of repeated actions over many years). The idea that our own existence can be localized in both time and space, that we only occupy one space and one time at once, in fact conceals the reality: we too are constructed and assembled from a multitude of selves and across a multitude of times and spaces.

Landy and Leonard's use of superposition and stratification draw on the following passage from *Albertine disparue*: "[n]otre moi est fait de la superposition de nos états successifs.

Mais cette superposition n'est pas immuable comme la stratification d'une montagne. Perpétuellement des soulèvements font affleurer à la surface des couches anciennes" (126). This metaphor of stratified rock concretizes the idea of man as an amphibian creature stretched between two temporal states, as does the forest path metaphor we saw earlier in the chapter. Our movement from past to present is not linear, as different parts of the mind move along the forest path at different speeds, and the stratified layers of a mountain do not build neatly upwards on one another but shift continuously. But nor are these states completely random. The paths come from somewhere and move towards somewhere, and the layers come from somewhere and build to something. They are in perpetual recombination and refiguration, and new elements are always being added, but there is a building effect that is similar to what Proust explores with the church, which is both constructed according to a fixed plan and constantly changing with and in the material and imaginative impressions of the church goers.

The Combray church serves as an anchor point through which the time of the novel, and the time of the narrator's life, become visible in an uneasy tension between past and present, imagination and reality, investment and indifference, and presence and absence. The last discussions of the Combray church in the *Recherche* occur after its destruction during World War I, in passages included in *Le Temps retrouvé.* This destruction, far from erasing the church from the imaginative universe of the novel, occasions outpourings of love for the edifice. However, while the church is still standing, the adult narrator has lost much of his affective investment in the church. Compare the following description from his window at Tansonville to the initial description in *Du côté de chez Swann*:

> Je ne regardais en somme tout cela [le parc de Tansonville et la forêt de Méséglise] avec plaisir que parce que je me disais : 'C'est joli d'avoir tant de verdure dans la fenêtre de ma chambre', jusqu'au moment où dans le vaste tableau verdoyant je reconnus, peint lui

> au contraire en bleu sombre, simplement parce qu'il était plus loin, le clocher de l'église de Combray. Non pas une figuration de ce clocher, ce clocher lui-même, qui, mettant ainsi sous mes yeux la distance des lieues et des années, était venu, au milieu de la lumineuse verdure et d'un tout autre ton, si sombre qu'il paraissait presque seulement dessiné, s'inscrire dans le carreau de ma fenêtre. (3-4)

In contrast to the young narrator's deep sense of the specialness of the church, and to the tributes we will see below that follow its destruction, this description of the church from a distance is emotionally, aesthetically, and literarily flat.

Even before the Combray church is evoked, the narrator demonstrates his lack of investment in the scene before him. His pleasure at the landscape outside of his window is not a spontaneous or organic feeling, but the product of his secondary awareness that "[c]'est joli d'avoir tant de verdure dans la fenêtre de ma chambre." The marker "je me disais" implies that this is an intellectual effort to have the proper reaction to the view in front of him. But then, something changes, and the reader will likely be intrigued by the structure "jusqu'au moment où […] je reconnus," having been primed to pay attention throughout the novel to these moments of sudden recognition as hallmarks of involuntary memory. However, there is no aesthetic or emotional payoff that follows. It is unclear if this moment of recognition entails more than simple identification, i.e., if it makes the narrator realize the superficiality of his forced appreciation of the lush landscape, or if it spoils the simple pleasure of that experience. The church appears as a shadow on the lush landscape: "peint lui au contraire en bleu sombre." This descriptive detail is immediately empirically explained: it appears this way "simplement parce qu'il était plus loin." The church is a shape and a color that intrudes on the narrator's experience of the landscape around him, but its evaluation is coded as neutral.

As the description continues, we get a better sense of why the church strikes the narrator, though it continues to be experientially and imaginatively flattened. The narrator explains that he

is seeing "[n]on pas une figuration de ce clocher, ce clocher lui-même, qui, mettant ainsi sous mes yeux la distance des lieues et des années, était venu, au milieu de la lumineuse verdure et d'un tout autre ton, si sombre qu'il paraissait seulement dessiné, s'inscrire dans le carreau de ma fenêtre." The specification that he is seeing the literal bell tower and not a figuration thereof is odd, considering the novel's flexible play with the borders between art and reality. But the fact that he is seeing the bell tower itself does not seem to add anything to the narrator's response. To be sure, the detail that the bell tower evokes "sous mes yeux la distance des lieues et des *années*," does seem to invite some sort of temporal reflection. However, that reflection does not occur, leaving us to assume that this is in fact a straightforward statement that the bell tower is both far away from his window and reminds him of the past. The visual description that follows reduces the church to the figuration the narrator claims he is not seeing: "il paraissait seulement dessiné" and "était venu […] s'inscrire dans le carreau de ma fenêtre." The church is a two-dimensional drawing, and in the next sentence the narrator steps away from his window to admire a scarlet band of color appearing in a room down the hall.

Later, as he is preparing to leave Tansonville, the narrator tells us

> J'étais triste en remontant dans ma chambre de penser que je n'avais pas été une seule fois revoir l'église de Combray qui semblait m'attendre au milieu des verdures dans une fenêtre toute violacée. Je me disais : 'Tant pis, ce sera pour une autre année, si je ne meurs pas d'ici là', ne voyant pas d'autre obstacle que ma mort et n'imaginant pas celle de l'église qui me semblait devoir durer longtemps après ma mort comme elle avait duré longtemps avant ma naissance. (13)

Compared to the scene above where he gazes at the church from the window, this passage contains a stronger affective tone. There is an emotion associated with the church, and the idea that it seems to be waiting for him demonstrates his personification of the structure. Here, he is no longer just interacting with a shape in the distance. But what he does not know in this moment of sadness, and what an attentive reader will glean from the ironic description of his certitude

that the church will stand forever, is the fact that it will be destroyed during the war. In his time at Tansonville, the only obstacle he can imagine to returning to the church someday is his own death. Habit, the merciful and terrible deadener, has dulled the narrator's relationship to the church he found so magical as a child. Time is no longer the fourth dimension that fills the narrator's mind with the material and imaginative power of so long a history. Here, time is merely an indication of predictability.

The destruction of the Combray church is one of the ways in which the advent of World War I destabilizes the imaginative landscape of the novel's characters. This destruction, however, revitalizes the portrayal of this structure, inviting the characters to elegiac but energetic reimaginings in remembrance. The narrator himself learns of the destruction of Combray in a letter from Gilberte. The contrast between a macro level of military strategy and a micro level of memory turns this letter that could easily be a simple lamentation of loss into a surprisingly tender and evocative remembrance. In the following quote, I have coded the words indicating love, enjoyment, and togetherness in green, and those describing the battle in red: "*Que de fois j'ai pensé à vous, aux promenades, grâce à vous rendues délicieuses, que nous faisons ensemble dans tout ce pays aujourd'hui ravagé, alors que d'immenses combats se livraient pour la possession de tel chemin, de tel coteau que vous aimiez, où nous sommes allés si souvent ensemble!*" (63). This description begins and ends with affective intimacy, and the repeated pronouns—*vous* three times and *nous* twice—moves the emphasis away from Gilberte herself and to their shared experience of Combray. For the war, what matters is the certainty of possessing "*tel chemin* […] *tel coteau,*" but in contrast to that brute force stands the soft but ultimately triumphant repetitive power evoked in Gilberte's double imaginative ("*Que de fois j'ai pensé*") and literal ("*nous sommes allées si souvent*") relationship to the landscape.

The narrator witnesses another reimagining of the Combray church, this time by Charlus, during the war. Like Gilberte, Charlus ruminates on the destruction of the church and finds a curious power to his memories now that the actual edifice has been destroyed. Charlus reflects to the narrator, "Combray n'est qu'une toute petite ville comme il y a tant d'autres en France. Mais nos ancêtres étaient représentés en donateurs dans certains vitraux, dans d'autres étaient inscrites nos armoires. Nous y avions notre chapelle, nos tombeaux" (102). In this short description, Charlus repeats *nos* and *notre* four times. Charlus is an arch-snob, so of course there is an element of pride to his description. Combray may be a small town like any other, but it is the Guermantes' small town. However, reading this description alongside Gilberte's very personal and affective *nous* exposes another resonance of Charlus' words, that of the contradictory power of personal loss to reanimate the stories to which it would seem to have put an end. Charlus believes he should be indifferent to Combray, which is neither his primary residence nor a particularly celebrated town aesthetically or historically, but the destruction of the church makes visible for him just how imbued it was with his conception of family.

Fussell's work on World War I and memory, discussed in chapter three, treats this idea of the revalorization of a community building following its wartime destruction. Fussell examines how Flanders and Picardy each "had its symbolic piece of ruined public architecture": in Flanders, the medieval "Cloth Hall" in Ypres and in Picardy, the Basilica in Somme (41). For individuals from these regions, these community spaces of work and worship, dating back centuries, filled the necessary imaginative space of conceptualizing the public losses of the war and of representing the sense of beauty and community that must be protected. For Proust, the nostalgia Gilberte and Charlus feel is not a nation-level patriotism, but rather one with deep roots

in the community memory. This imaginative power is not determined by an external set of aesthetics or historical values, but rather by personal experience.

During his conversation with the narrator, Charlus does go on to worry about the fate of the Reims cathedral in much more exaggerated tones, demonstrating his dismissive attitude towards the objective value of the Combray church (102). Gilberte is aware that Combray has become historically important during the war, but her technical localization that "*c'est la fameuse cote 307 dont vous avez dû voir le nom revenir si souvent dans les communiqués*" stands in sharp contrast the affective outpouring of her memories of the same location (63). What is imaginatively powerful for her is "*[l]e petit chemin que vous aimiez tant, que nous appelions le raidillon aux aubépines et où vous prétendez que vous êtes tombé dans votre enfance amoureux de moi, alors que je vous assure en toute vérité que c'était moi qui étais amoureuse de vous*" (63). This little path is well-loved and given its own nickname in contradistinction to the dry label of "cote 307." These memories are not only the occasion to recall the emotions of youth, but also to correct the narrator about his misapprehension that his feelings for her were not returned. Combray's entrance into World War I does not make it precious to characters because they can suddenly see it on a macro historical level, but rather because its damage and endangerment releases their memories from their habitual constraints and lets the novel's characters experience them in all their plentitude.

We can here return to Valazza's point about the strangeness of World War I temporality in *TR*. As we saw in my third chapter, he argues that the inclusion of the war in the novel anchors its temporality in real events, and yet the most emotionally significant wartime moment is the fictional destruction of the Combray church. Edward J. Hughes compares Proust's interest in village churches to that of Maurice Barrès, quoting passages from both arguing that local

churches should be preserved at the time of the 1905 debates about the separation of church and state in France. Barrès writes in an open letter to the Minster of the Interior: “la plus modeste [église] n’est-elle pas infiniment précieuse sur place? Que m’importe que vous conserviez une église plus belle à Toulouse, si vous jetez bas l’église de mon village ?” (36). Hughes parallels this to Proust’s defense of village churches: “the sight of another provincial church, similarly misshapen, reinforces the sense of a keenly recognized and vital cultural artefact: ‘Alors je ne me suis pas demandé comme à Chartres ou à Reims avec quelle puissance y était exprimé le sentiment religieux, mais je me suis involontairement écrié: “L’Église!”’ (36). It is possible that underlying this privileged position of the Combray church in the *Recherche* could be an interest in the societal role of the provincial church in general.

To some extent the village church is a generalizable experience. Many French people of Proust’s generation and the preceding and succeeding ones would have had a childhood church that might have been beloved to them. But it is hardly a given that such a specific experience of temporality would have been shared, or even that this specific experience of temporality would have happened to Proust himself in addition to his narrator. For contemporary readers, there is a fair chance the reader has no personal equivalent to a village church. The importance of analyzing the existence of a fourth dimension in church representations in the *Recherche* is not really to teach us about the representation of churches in general, but to prepare us to work on imagining human life in fourth dimensions. It is linked to the grieving process the narrator goes through in *Albertine disparue* where the shifting intellectual and emotional layers of the self suggest a non-progressive selfhood. Proust’s creation of the Combray church as a centering device for the narrator’s childhood, and the adult narrator’s thoughts on and conversations about the Combray church as its material edifice is destroyed and it joins the imaginative world,

suggests new and more flexible temporalities. The church as image in Proust is itself an "être amphibie," as Proust suggests about human lives. This double identity is built into Proust's creation of this edifice. Fraisse notes that prior to the publication of *Du côté de chez Swann*, Proust sought advice from Émile Mâle about the accuracy of the architectural language in his description of the Combray church. However, Fraisse distinguishes Proust from authors of the nineteenth century who would seek out this knowledge before constructing their textual knowledge, whereas for Proust "vérification" only came after "invention" (1990: 19). The Combray church is anchored in the specificities of the past: it combines individual (narrator's childhood), national (village churches, World War I), and aesthetic (history of architecture) narratives that must be retrospectively brought to light in order to become legible to the reader. At the same time, due in part to the descriptive primacy of the composition process, all readers can access his churches as imaginative potentialities, forever built and rebuilt in our own consciousness as we engage with his textual world.

Here we find the place that the path away from the Combray church to other churches in other places meets the path that stays in Combray through time. These sites through space and time have served as visualization exercises as well as meditations on the links between architecture, aesthetics and temporality. They are important texts of their own right, and prepare the reader for the spatialized time they encounter at the novel's end, which I will requote here:

> Aussi, si elle m'était laissé assez longtemps pour accomplir mon œuvre, ne manquerais-je pas d'abord d'y décrire les hommes, cela dût-il les faire ressembler à des êtres monstrueux, comme occupant une place si considérable, à côté de celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l'espace, une place au contraire prolongée sans mesure puisqu'ils touchent simultanément, comme des géants plongés dans les années à des époques, vécues par eux si distants, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus si placer—dans le Temps.

In this passage, we meet the final giants of the *Recherche*. In addition to an abstract or second-level argument about the relationship between time and identity, there is a visual instruction to the reader. In order to understand how the narrator intends to describe his characters, we have to both be and see giants. Be giants, in order to have enough elevation to see what cannot be seen from our normal perspective, as we too only occupy a place "si restreinte" in space. See giants, as these "êtres monstrueux" that humans might become when we see them occupying their proper extension in time. As we have reexamined the matter, space, energy, and now time of the *Recherche*, we have seen how the reader's imaginative toolbox of visual and conceptual skills grows through engagement with the novel. All of these elements of image-making are necessary practice for the reader to have had in order to understand the theoretical and imagistic power of the image with which the *Recherche* closes. We can now look back briefly on each chapter and review this toolbox the reader has acquired by the novel's end in light of the closing lines.

In the first chapter, we looked at the relationship of art to the material world: how it draws on it for inspiration, and how it calls into question our perceptual certainty of its existence. My argument centered on the claim that the *Recherche*'s multifaceted relationship to materiality theorized many points of connection between art and reality. Proust's visible universe is a tissue woven of literary suggestion, painted precedent, and lived experience. This chapter retrospectively justifies what I am suggesting here, which is that by pushing the limits of our cognitive powers, art can suggest new and better ways of making visible lived life. Because literary visibility only exists in the collaboration between the reader's mind and the writer's words,[25] it is possible to create extraordinarily flexible imaginative images. By the end of the

[25] In a broad sense, this is true of visual art as well. It is not as though it is meaningful to suggest that a painting is made of real images even in the absence of a viewer, but it is certainly easier to point to an image "out there" in the case of a painting than in the case of a work of literature.

novel, the reader is not only combining multiple competing visual impulses but stretching these visual impulses through time. In reading this ending, I argue that the reader is offered the chance to briefly glimpse the span of their lives as a whole. For this to be true it must be true that literature can make us visualize, and that this process of literary visualization has real consequences for our conceptualization of objects in the world—including our own lives. The final reference to touch ("puisqu'ils touchent simultanément […] à des époques") gives a concrete materiality to what could be a troublingly disorienting idea. Our real interactions with the objects that make up the world around us are part of this temporal simultaneity, one that helps us anchor in the tantalizingly present details of lived life.

In the second chapter, we explored depth and dimensionality in Proust's literary spaces. The ease with which we identify the three spatial dimensions in lived life does not necessarily translate to a three-dimensional literary world, as critics working on flatness in Proust have demonstrated. This is the case with visual art as well, where giving the sensation of depth on a canvas comes from a set of conventions one must learn and practice. Dimensionality in visual art can create awe, such as we saw from Diderot and the Goncourt brothers' writings on Chardin's in chapter 1. Proust leverages the imaginative freedom of literary images to play with depth and flatness, inviting the reader to view scenes from multiple perspectives and manipulate their dimensionality. This mental play with spatial dimensionality is preparation to stretch that spatial awareness through time. Like Proust's Balbec seascapes, the final lines hinge on an immersive effect, through words and phrases such as "occupant" "plongés" "dans le Temps." This immersion indicates that time is substance through and in which we move, not reducible to order or fixed direction. Our spatial work with the Balbec seascapes has prepared us in one more way for this final image, by asking us to lift our perspective above the frame initially delineated

around certain images and to view them from a higher elevation. In *Flatland*, when the three-dimensional Sphere visits the narrator in his home in Flatland, the narrator can only perceive him in two dimensions. The Sphere must lift him out of his plane entirely in order for him to experientially grasp that there is a third dimension to the universe. We must perform a similar imaginative lift in order to occupy the giant perspective from which we can see human life stretched through time.

My third chapter deals with adding an additional element to the 'how' of imagining a human life in time, which is how to imagine it in energetic motion. Considering an object from the fourth dimension of time removes any notion of completion or fixity, as it is multi-directional in time: it is possibility as well as history. This sense of incompletion creates depth by stretching an object from the past into the potentialities of the future, but this is not a depth that is fixed the way that the depth of an object considered only in space could be. Rather, time is an experiential flow, which moves at varying speeds and along different tracks. Time in this sense is motion, both the forward-moving container of our experiences and the labyrinth-like connections and layers we contain. To get a sense of all of these moving parts that make up our cognitive relationship to time, Proust's final image is vertiginous, to remind us that we are always moving through time and across it, even when we are immobile in space. This effect in the text hinges on the adjective "plongés." Combined with a notion of the vast distance between moments and years, this adjective evokes both a submersion and the sensation of diving or falling. This image is at once a backwards movement into the past and soaring movement by which human life is seen stretched to its full size.

These final words thus should not be understood as a resolution or firm termination, but rather as an invitation to continue the imaginative process we have been practicing throughout

the *Recherche* as a whole. Our time of reading has not only been the number of pages or the number of hours (days, months, years) we have spent with Proust's massive novel, but the synthetic present of our reading as a thing in four dimensions. Our own repeated engagement with the text, like the motions of the devoted churchgoers of Combray, has involved us in the work of co-constructing a universe. The last impossible thing we see is ourselves, simultaneously inside and outside of the novel, touching its time and our own time, already moving away into the next task that calls our attention, already invited back to begin the imaginative journey of the *Recherche* all over again.

# CONCLUSION: DOMES, LABYRINTHS, LABORATORIES, PLAYGROUNDS

In his poem *Adonais*, Percy Shelley writes the following of the contrast between the complexities of life and the ultimate transcendence that comes with death: "Life, like a dome of many-colour'd glass,/Stains the white radiance of Eternity" (462-463). These words privilege eternity over life, which "stains" eternity, in order to valorize the power of death to reunite us with that "radiance." But consider the image in these lines, the play of multicolored lights over luminous white. The pleasure of this imagery conveys quite a different message to readers, inviting us to enjoy the contrast and the interplay of color and light. In Proust's novel, giving attention to the multicolored form as well as the radiant ideas gives us a richer reading experience. Stretching our cognitive capacities for visualization allows us to be more engaged readers, and to understand our relationship to the text reciprocally. Proust famously writes that readers are "les propres lecteurs d'eux-mêmes" but it is not just that the things we read enlighten us to ourselves (*TR* 338). My understanding of this constructive process of our individual engagement with the text weds individual reading response with formalist analysis: we will all build different textual universes, but the text provides us all with certain building materials. This co-constructive relationship provides a model for how we engage with the broader world around us. As new materialist and eco-critical theories ask us to reconsider subject-object dynamics, and cognitive science asks us to reconsider our understanding of consciousness, returning to artworks like Proust gives us a chance to test out our imaginative skills, to practice building impossible worlds in order to return to the one we inhabit with a new sense of awe at all that we do not know and cannot see.

This practice is open-ended and pays large dividends. Closely engaging with the visual aspects of writing makes us more attentive to visual art, not as a contrast to or a substitute for verbal art, but as another universe to imaginatively enter and explore. It helps us move past our expectation of transparency in art, by questioning the transparency of vision in general. On a larger level, this imaginative flexibility helps us pay more attention to the world around us. Though Proust's novel defamiliarizes the world, the *Recherche*'s textual universe is recognizably our own. Even as our brain's tendency towards habituation works to standardize our experience, Proust's novel makes manifest that habituation, by showing it as a multi-layered process with cracks and discontinuities. In short, it helps us be comfortable with the uncertainty of our own lives. As we move through the time of our own experience, the world changes in and around us, as personal, national, and global shifts that throw our understanding into disorder. In our lives, we are inevitably confronted with the impossible, or rather, the possible keeps unpredictably expanding. If we have practice letting our imaginations stretch, move beyond their habitual categories, and recognize that something can be the same and different simultaneously, we are better equipped to be open to these changes. We can integrate them into our imaginative understanding, not as totalities we can grasp, but as possibilities we can intimate, as mysteries we can keep exploring.

Proust encourages us to live in the space of feeling slightly unmoored, but not entirely lost or stuck. Jenny Odell uses the labyrinth as a model for the kind of attention to the world around us that is most valuable, writing "[l]abyrinths function similarly to how they appear, enabling a sort of dense infolding of attention; through two-dimensional design alone, they make it possible not to walk straight through a place, nor to stand still, but something very well in between" (7). Odell's notion of the "dense infolding of attention" indicates that what we need is

not more subjects for contemplation but more depth and time with which to contemplate what is in front of us. Our journey through the world of the *Recherche* cannot be rushed, nor can it be fully taken in on a first time through. Each path we wind through the text is different, as we ourselves are in the place of the narrator peeking out his Balbec windows each morning to see what sea will be there to greet him. And what we get is what we put in, since it is not easy to entangle ourselves in Proust's universe. It takes practice to see impossibly, but it attunes us to new visions in other places. Throughout my four chapters, I have put each theme in dialogue with writing by or about a contemporary writer or painter. These act as anchor points from which to begin each chapter—models and miniatures, multiperspectival light, luminous energy, and painted time. These are all works I read while working on my dissertation, and though they represent disparate times, geographies, and forms, they stood out to me because of the analysis of Proust I was doing. Though sustained engagement with Proust, I became a better reader and viewer of art, attentive to the ways in which authors and artists stimulated me to think in new ways. I began to see glimpses of the impossible, in other words, embedded in artistic practice around me.

Freed-Thall identifies Proust's novel as a "semiotic laboratory," writing "*In Search of Lost Time* is not only a celebration of the death-defying essence of art. It is also a semiotic laboratory that multiplies and accumulates interpretive and phenomenological possibilities" (36). Even more than a laboratory, perhaps, the *Recherche* is an imaginative playground. This is not to say that there are not serious elements to the novel—far from it. But its imagistic qualities invite the reader to step into a world that resembles our own, but, as we move through it, emerges as something engagingly defamiliarizing. The novel thematizes visual illusions and distortion, but beyond that, in some ways it *is* a visual illusion, suspending the reader between the solid world

we use for orientation and grounding, and a version of that world that has been freed from perceptual habit and broken open. The cognitive benefits of this include pleasure but go beyond that too. The world is full of things we cannot capture neatly as sight or insight. Some of these are external: Abbott's *Flatland* and Tiffany's work on poetry and physics draw attention to the unimaginable in science (dimensions beyond our own, quantum mechanics, string theory, the multiverse, black holes, the universe itself). We can additionally think of Timothy Morton's idea of the "hyperobject," which considers objects like global warming which we are not equipped to conceptualize but nonetheless are impacted by. And as I write this in 2021, every part of our daily life has undergone irreparable changes from the coronavirus pandemic. But on a smaller scale there is the difficulty of understanding our own selves: the submerged layers of the brain to which we will never have access, the way the body influences cognition and emotion, the problems of memory. A text like Proust's increases our ability to cope with the sort of world we inhabit. Rather than attempting to control what is around us, the imaginative play we engage in throughout the *Recherche* asks us to consider that we do not need to completely understand the world to enjoy the fact of being alive. We are always embedded in mystery, and Proust asks us not only to acknowledge that but to celebrate it.

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