

# Staging Perception

Theatricalities in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*



Synne Ytre Arne

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)  
University of Bergen, Norway  
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Bergen, 21<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Synne Ytre Arne

## *On Editions and Translations*

References to *À la recherche du temps perdu* are to the four-volume Pléiade edition produced under the general editorship of Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89). They are incorporated into the text using a Roman numeral to indicate the volume, followed by a page reference in Arabic numerals. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Proust's novel are taken from the six-volume Penguin edition of *In Search of Lost Time* under the general editorship of Christopher Prendergast (London: Penguin, 2003). Volume 1: *The Way by Swann's*, trans. by Lydia Davis; Volume 2: *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, trans. by James Grieve; Volume 3: *The Guermantes Way*, trans. by Mark Treharne; Volume 4: *Sodom and Gomorrah*, trans. by John Sturrock; Volume 5: *The Prisoner* and *The Fugitive*, trans. by Carol Clark and Peter Collier; Volume 6: *Finding Time Again*, trans. by Ian Patterson. The references to the translation are given in the text using Arabic numerals to indicate the volumes. References to other texts will be given in footnotes. I provide translations of all the French works cited – shorter quotes in brackets in the body of the text; longer quotes in footnotes. Where I have used a published translation of a French work, the reference is given in a footnote. All other translations of French texts are kindly provided by Julia Caterina Hartley.





# Introduction

Marcel Proust was not a playwright. This we know. But did he write *theatrical* texts? The question is not so much whether he wrote *for* the theatre, or at least was tempted to do so – for we know that he was, and that, in the early 1900s, he developed ideas for plays that were never written. As a young man, Proust was passionate about theatre, and it would not have been surprising if he, like other major French novelists before him such as Flaubert, Zola and Balzac, had made serious attempts at writing for the stage. He did not, however; or not quite.

Some might say that he did, but that the stage he wrote for is not the one we find beyond the footlights, but that of a virtual theatre – a theatre of the imagination, which we evoke in the act of reading. The question, then, is whether Proust's writing, specifically in his novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*, holds theatrical *qualities* and, if so, what the novel's *theatricalities* are made up of? To be sure, a novel may to some extent evoke or imitate the experience of a spectator in a theatre, but *how* does it do it, and, when it does, what sort of illusions does it generate that the theatre could not? A novel, not bound by the classical textual apparatus of the theatre, or by the medium's physical constraints, is evidently able to convey things that could not be shown on stage. Thus Proust, famously, conceives of the novel as that medium which enables writers to show their readers not only what another person *sees* but also, by way of this display of the other's perceptions, who this person might *be*: 'de voir l'univers avec les yeux d'un autre, de cent autres, de voir les cent univers que chacun d'eux voit, que chacun d'eux est' ['to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them can see, or can be'] (III, 762; 5, 237). To see through the eyes of another to see the universe that she or he can be – that is to say that we are looking both *with* someone and *at* someone; that the people who lend us their eyes are also part of the spectacle. We see that such a spectacle would be difficult to perform in a theatre but, as it turns out, Proust did not consider it impossible to stage in a novel. The various forms of theatricality that his verbal staging reflects and creates provide the subject matter of this dissertation.

This thesis studies Proust's staging of perception in *À la recherche* and, more exactly, explores the drama of creative perception as experienced by the novel's protagonist – being, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's terms, a 'composé d'âme et de corps' ['compound of soul and body']<sup>1</sup> fully immersed in a world that is to no small extent of his own making. Fully immersed, that is, as a body experiencing the world from its centre, and not (only) from the outside (as though perception was 'une opération de pensée qui dresserait devant l'esprit un tableau ou une représentation du monde, un monde de l'immanence et de l'idéalité' ['an operation of thought that would set up before the mind a picture or a representation of the world, a world of immanence and of ideality']<sup>2</sup>).

To take into consideration the different and ever-shifting relations that a perceiving subject and an object of perception may entertain with one another is something that thinking about perception in terms of drama not only invites us to do, but actually demands or forces us to do. And, undoubtedly, these shifts and variations were of great interest to Proust, for his novel abounds with examples of fluctuating perceptual configurations. To conceive of the body as fully immersed in the world, then, does not amount to conceiving the world as wholly or constantly present, or as present in an absolute or consistent manner, but simply entails acknowledging that the human body is made of the same stuff as the material world and, therefore, that to experience the same object in different ways is to experience the malleability of the boundary that separates subject from object and, at the same time, connects the two. In *À la recherche*, Proust provides us with a figure or a model for thinking about the shifting relations between subjects and objects of perception when his narrator, reminiscing on his first visit to the theatre, notes that 'grâce à une disposition qui est comme le symbole de toute perception, chacun se sent le centre du théâtre' ['because of the layout of the theatre, which is in a way symbolic of perception itself, each person has the impression of being at the centre'] (I, 438; 2, 20).

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), p. 58. [Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind,' trans. Carleton Dallery, in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 309.]

<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, p. 17. [Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind,' in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 294.]

In what sense can the theatre be like a ‘symbol’ of perception? The question certainly requires a composite and thorough answer, for the intertwining of theatricality and perception, implied in this quote and discussed in the chapters below, is brought into play in several different and sometimes contradictory ways throughout Proust’s novel. But one aspect of the quote is immediately striking: the theatre is like a ‘symbol’ of *all* perception, the narrator states, because of its *layout*, that is, because the way in which the space is organised invites everyone to feel like its centre. There is a vague echo heard here of the young Proust’s exclamation in a short piece written for one of the literary magazines he founded while at school, the *Revue Lilas*. The aspiring writer, seventeen years old and somewhat intoxicated by the beauty of his surroundings, places himself firmly at the centre of everything: ‘Je vis dans un sanctuaire, au milieu d’un spectacle. *Je suis le centre des choses*’ [‘I live in a sanctuary, in the midst of a spectacle. [...] *I am the centre of all things*’].<sup>3</sup> Still, this is an echo with a variation, for what the narrator of *À la recherche* observes is not that *he* is the centre of the theatre, but that *everybody* feels as though they are. Each and every body, that is, even Françoise, the housemaid, who, having been treated to a seat at the very back at a melodrama, returned home to say that hers had been the best seat in the house. The narrator’s words are free of the solipsistic undertones of the schoolboy’s exclamation – he aims to say something about his own experience, to be sure, but also, crucially, to say something, by way of a theatrical analogy, about the phenomenon of perception itself. This prompts us to ask: why a *theatre*? Is the theatre somehow more appropriate or vivid as a ‘symbol’ of perception in *À la recherche* than, say, a museum (a painting or a collection of paintings, for example) or a cinema?

In order to adequately answer the questions set forth above, we need to take into consideration that which makes the theatre different from the other arts. Similarly to art forms such as painting, photography, cinema and literature, the theatre *represents* (in the strict sense of the term, derived from Latin *repraesentare*, to represent means to *place before*, that is, to *make present*, and to make present is arguably precisely what the performing arts do). Nevertheless, the theatrical medium also greatly differs from

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<sup>3</sup> Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, vol. 229, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, edited by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 334, my emphasis.

other forms of artistic representation, since the theatre exists in what Henri Gouhier has shown to be a singularly acute relation to time and existence: ‘Dans représentation, il y a *présence et présent*: ce double rapport à l’existence et au temps constitue l’essence du théâtre’ [‘In representation [i.e. performance], there is *presence* and *present*: this dual relationship to existence and to temporality constitutes the essence of theatre’].<sup>4</sup> As Gouhier argues in his philosophical treatise on the theatre, we are obliged, in order to grasp the ‘essence’ (or the specificities) of this art form, to acknowledge the way in which it engages with various notions of presence. During a theatrical performance, Gouhier writes, the actor is not merely *present*, but also, essentially, in the *presence* of the spectators. Subsequently, due to his or her awareness of the audience’s presence, the actor becomes a spectator too:

Spectateur qui voit en face des spectateurs qui regardent. Pendant que nous regardons l’artiste, attentifs à l’individualité de son jeu, le comédien voit une masse, orchestre silencieux qui soutient son dialogue, espace ondulant et frémissant dont il perçoit l’épaisseur, présence multiple et anonyme sans laquelle son personnage manquerait d’appui. [...] L’acteur ne me voit pas, mais il voit cette salle où je figure. L’acteur ne pense pas à moi, mais il pense cet être sans visage qui doit à mon visage une parcelle de sa substance. Je ne suis pas quelqu’un pour lui; je ne suis pourtant pas rien: nous vivons l’un par l’autre.<sup>5</sup>

For Gouhier, the essence of the theatre resides in this encounter between spectatorial and performing bodies of living presence – bodies that do not always, in the strict sense, *see* one another, but that nonetheless rely on and react to each other’s presence and that *live* one through the other, *l’un par l’autre*. And, as is of pivotal importance to the present study, the experience of this encounter is one that the other arts cannot adequately imitate or produce. In the theatre, spectators and actors live for and by way of one another; that is to say, without the living presence of both in the same place at

<sup>4</sup> Henri Gouhier, *L’Essence du théâtre* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22. [‘A spectator faced with staring spectators. When we are watching the artist, attentive to the individuality of his performance, the actor sees a mass, a silent orchestra sustaining his dialogue, a rolling and quivering space of which he perceives the depth, a multiple and anonymous presence without which his character would go unsupported. [...] The actor does not see me, but he sees this hall in which I make an appearance. The actor does not think about me, but he thinks of this faceless creature that owes to my face an atom of its existence. I am not someone for him; yet I am not nothing: we live one through the other’.]

the same time, and breathing, as it were, the same air, the theatre as such does not exist. In other words, the immersion of the spectator into the world of the actor that embodies the character on stage is *real* and not an illusion, although the spectator also engages with the illusory world of the fictional character. And, while other art forms may also invite such illusory immersion, the mutually affecting and constitutive encounter between living, breathing bodies and minds is a property of the performing arts alone.

It is, therefore, the specificities of this encounter that we need to take into consideration if we wish to understand the singular role that theatrical references play in the staging of perceptual experiences in *À la recherche*. The theatre is evidently not the only art form to have influenced Proust's writing, but, as my discoveries affirm, the theatrical analogy plays a distinct and central role in enabling Proust to convey the act of perception as a dynamic encounter engaging the entire being (body *and* mind) of the perceiving subject. In the theatre, the line drawn (figuratively or literally) between stage and auditorium is not an absolute – it is a flexible boundary to be played with (and across and within). The actors may turn to the audience or turn away; they may address the spectators directly or ignore them; they may move about among the audience or invite the spectators to mount the stage, and they may initiate these and other forms of encounters in an infinite number of different ways and with different intentions. The organisation of the theatrical space (its *layout*) allows this art form to explore and play with the nature of the relationship between subject and object of perception in ways that the other arts cannot. And it would seem that it is this particularity of the medium that makes the theatre (and not a cinema or a museum) the most appropriate 'symbol' of *all* perception in *À la recherche*, for, in his novel, Proust unfalteringly draws our attention to the shifting dynamics of the relationship between subject and object of perception. When accounting for perceptual experiences, the work's narrator thus tends to give no less attention to the state of the perceiving subject than to the features of the perceived object. Or, to be more exact, these two aspects of the experience are shown to be interrelated, interdependent and subject to constant change, as becomes strikingly visible in the example below, drawn from the

protagonist's visit to the Opéra, where he has gone to see, for the second time, the fictional actress La Berma in the titular role of Racine's *Phèdre*.

Diverting his attention from the stage and to the *spectacle offert par la salle*,<sup>6</sup> Proust's protagonist contemplates the seemingly otherworldly spectacle offered by the Princesse de Guermantes's box, when the princess's cousin, Mme de Guermantes, the object of his ardent admiration, comes to view. The passage stages perception as a process during which the experiences of seeing and of being seen are completely intertwined, and during which, consequently, the roles of spectator and spectacle are in flux. This striking *mise en scène* of a brief perceptual encounter between the protagonist and Mme de Guermantes may thus be viewed as something like a model for the various theatrical constellations that we shall look into in this thesis:

Je contemplais cette apothéose momentanée avec un trouble que mélangeait de paix le sentiment d'être ignoré par des Immortels; la duchesse m'avait bien vu une fois avec son mari, mais ne devait certainement pas s'en souvenir, et je ne souffrais pas qu'elle se trouvât, par la place qu'elle occupait dans la baignoire, regarder les madrépores anonymes et collectifs du public de l'orchestre, car je sentais heureusement mon être dissous au milieu d'eux, quand, au moment où en vertu des lois de la réfraction vint sans doute se peindre dans le courant impassible des deux yeux bleus la forme confuse du protozoaire dépourvu d'existence individuelle que j'étais, je vis une clarté les illuminer: la duchesse, de déesse devenue femme et me semblant tout d'un coup mille fois plus belle, leva vers moi la main gantée de blanc qu'elle tenait appuyée sur le rebord de la loge, l'agita en signe d'amitié, mes regards se sentirent croisés par l'incandescence involontaire et les feux des yeux de la princesse, laquelle les avait fait entrer à son insu en conflagration rien qu'en les bougeant pour chercher à voir à qui sa cousine venait de dire bonjour, et celle-ci, qui m'avait reconnu, fit pleuvoir sur moi l'averse étincelante et céleste de son sourire. (II, 357-58)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In 'Proust et son expérience du théâtre', Marie Miguet-Ollagnier suggests that the author found material for the final volume's 'Bal de têtes' through observation of theatre audiences, the 'spectacle offert par la salle': 'Au début de 1920, Mme Edwards invite Proust à l'Opéra. Il est tenté, non par le spectacle mais par la salle: « Cela m'intéresse extrêmement de voir la façon dont les figures vieillissent. [...] La salle de l'Opéra serait un merveilleux centre d'observation. »' ['At the beginning of the year 1920, Mrs. Edwards invites Proust to the Opéra. He is tempted not by the performance, but by the audience: "I am most interested to see the manner in which faces grow old. [...] The Opéra hall will make a wonderful observation centre."']. Marie Miguet-Ollagnier, 'Proust et son expérience du théâtre,' in *Proust et les moyens de la connaissance*, ed. Annick Bouillaguet (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2008), p. 225.

<sup>7</sup> 'My eyes studied this momentary apotheosis with a disquiet which was partly attenuated by the feeling that I was unknown to the Immortals; the Duchesse had certainly seen me once

The protagonist, seated in the stalls, feels comfortably invisible and dissolved in the anonymous crowd of spectators and stares freely at the duchess, when, all of a sudden, she discovers him. Then he is no longer invisible, but morphs into the shape of a recognisable individual in the midst of the anonymous collective body of spectators. It is only when he realises that the duchess, the object of his attention, sees him that he comes to experience himself as a singular body, and she, moreover, becomes a human subject (*déesse devenue femme*) by way of their perceptual encounter (and by way of transforming him, in turn, into the object of her gaze). They are, then, both of them, visible and seeing, as if each of them takes shape or comes into being by being seen by the other. She is a mythological creature and an unattainable goddess, but also an amiable woman of flesh and bone. He is a ‘protozoon with no individual existence’, but also an individual being that the duchess recognizes among the spectators in the auditorium. As such, they combine (and the passage thus comes to illustrate Roland Barthes’s theory of inversion as the novel’s foremost structural principle) ‘deux identités d’un même corps’ [‘two identities of one and the same body’].<sup>8</sup>

Une permutation incessante anime, bouleverse le jeu social [...], au point que la mondanité peut se définir par une forme: le renversement (des situations, des opinions, des valeurs, des sentiments, des langages). [...] Le renversement est une loi. Tout trait est appelé à se renverser, par un mouvement de rotation implacable [...];

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with her husband but could surely have retained no memory of that, and it did not disturb me that she should find herself so placed in her box that she could gaze down at the anonymous collection of madrepores in the stalls, for I was happy to be dissolved in their midst; and then, at the moment in which, by virtue of the laws of refraction, the blurred outline of the protozoon with no individual existence which I was must have been reflected in the impassive current of her two blue eyes, I saw them light up: the Duchesse, goddess turned woman, and for that moment a thousand times more beautiful, raised in my direction the white-gloved hand which had been resting on the edge of the box and waved it as a sign of friendship; my eyes were met by the spontaneous incandescence and the flashing eyes of the Princesse, who had unwittingly set them ablaze merely by the movement of looking to see whom her cousin had just greeted, and the latter, who had recognised me, showered upon me the sparkling and celestial rain of her smile’ (3, 55).

<sup>8</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘Une idée de recherche,’ in *De Shakespeare à T.S. Eliot. Mélanges offerts à Henri Fluchère*, ed. Marie-Jeanne Durry, Robert Ellrodt, and Marie-Thérèse Jones-Davies (Paris: Didier, 1976), p. 286. [Roland Barthes, ‘An Idea of Research,’ in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 272.]



cette inversion elle-même n'a pas de sens, on ne peut l'arrêter, l'un des termes permutés n'est pas plus « vrai » que l'autre.<sup>9</sup>

In the Opéra-scene, perception is identified as an act of constant permutations, as the spectator turns into (also) a spectacle and the goddess turns out to be (also) a woman. The paragraph thus acknowledges, in the perceptual encounter, a form of reversibility that, as numerous paragraphs studied in this thesis exemplify, Proust seems to view as a quality of perception in general. As such, it serves to indicate that, as others before me have suggested, Proust's novel anticipates contemporary theories of perception, not least the field of phenomenology which, from its outset in the early twentieth century, has examined in detail the structures and conditions of perceptual experiences from a first-person point of view. Most of all, the Opéra-passage points towards the philosophical writings of Merleau-Ponty (himself an avid reader of Proust), who, in his various works on perception repeatedly returns to the idea that the perceiving body is also a perceivable body, and a body that perceives itself in the process of perception. In *L'Œil et l'esprit*, for example, a book dedicated to the practice of painting, Merleau-Ponty affirms (in, one could say, 'Proustian' terms) that the human body is always both seeing and visible: it is 'voyant-visible' ['seeing-visible'].<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Proust's thoughts on the layout of the theatre as 'symbolising' the way that the phenomenal world presents itself to the perceiving subject resonate, in fact, also with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, in which the human body is repeatedly identified as the pivot of the world (that is, as the medium through which the human subject becomes conscious of the world). The phenomenal world, the phenomenologist writes, is

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<sup>9</sup> Barthes, 'Une idée de recherche,' in *De Shakespeare à T.S. Eliot. Mélanges offerts à Henri Fluchère*, p. 287. ['An incessant permutation animates, overturns the social interplay [...], to the point where worldliness can be defined by a form: reversal (of situations, opinions, values, feelings, languages). [...] Reversal is a law. Every feature is required to reverse itself, by an implacable movement of rotation [...]; this inversion itself has no meaning, we cannot retain it, one of the permuted terms is not "truer" than the other'. Barthes, 'An Idea of Research,' in *The Rustle of Language*, pp. 274-75.]

<sup>10</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, p. 33. [Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind,' in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 300.]

un espace compté à partir de moi comme point ou degré zéro de la spatialité. Je ne le vois pas selon son enveloppe extérieure, je le vis du dedans, j'y suis englobé. Après tout, le monde est autour de moi, non devant moi.<sup>11</sup>

When Merleau-Ponty insists on the body as the centre of perception, he invites us to consider space not as an entity separate from the body, but as an extension of the corporal. To perceive is to open one's body, itself perceivable, to the world: 'Immergé dans le visible par son corps, lui-même visible, le voyant ne s'approprie pas ce qu'il voit: il l'approche seulement par le regard, il ouvre sur le monde' ['Immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the see-er does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens himself to the world'].<sup>12</sup> To say that the human being perceives the world from its midst is thus to say that 'la vision est prise ou se fait du milieu des choses, là où un visible se met à voir, devient visible pour soi et par la vision de toutes choses' ['vision happens among, or is caught in, things – in that place where something visible undertakes to see, it becomes visible for itself by virtue of the sight of things'].<sup>13</sup> And to be at the 'centre of the theatre', then – be that an actual theatre or just any phenomenal space – is to live *from its midst* a world that we contribute to bringing to expression by way of our senses and, as the protagonist's encounter with Mme de Guermantes as goddess-turned-woman exemplifies, by way of the imagination.

As critics before me have argued, Proust's take on perception is predominantly phenomenological.<sup>14</sup> Within the optics of a phenomenological view on perception,

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<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, p. 59. ['a space reckoned starting from me as the zero point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me'. Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind,' in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 309.]

<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, pp. 17-18. [Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind,' in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 294.]

<sup>13</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, pp. 19-20. [Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind,' in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 295.]

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Anne Simon's monograph *Proust ou le réel retrouvé. Le sensible et son expression dans 'À la recherche du temps perdu'* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011). The argument that Proust's novel constitutes a sort of 'phenomenology of perception' is also put forward by Nathalie Aubert in *Proust. La Traduction du sensible*, vol. 13, *Research Monographs in French Studies* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002). Another highly engaging take on Proust's phenomenological view of perception is offered by Sara Danius's chapter on Proust

perceiving is by no means synonymous with passive reception of external stimuli, but reveals itself as a dynamic and creative encounter between a perceiving subject and the world. Anne Simon, who has contributed greatly to bringing out the ways in which Proust's work resonates with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, reminds us of this when she argues that Proustian reality should not be conceived as a monadic image existing independently of the subject but, instead, as that constantly evolving and modifiable bond that ties the perceiving subject to the 'performance' that he or she not merely observes but also creates: 'La réalité proustienne n'est pas une image monadique, mais le lien même, mouvant et soumis à révision, qui unit un sujet au spectacle qu'il érige autant qu'il le contemple' ['Proustian reality is not a single monadic image, but the link itself, labile and subject to revision, which connects subjects to the performance that they create just as much as they observe'].<sup>15</sup>

It is not my intention, in this thesis, to repeat this discovery as though it were my own, nor is it my primary aim to challenge the propositions made by critics who have taken an interest in the complex field of phenomenological Proust studies. Rather, my goal is to make what I consider a crucial addition to the (phenomenological) complexity of Proust criticism, not by studying the novel's discourse on perception in and for itself, but by examining the little-researched but highly significant relations between theatricality and perception in *À la recherche*. Much like how certain phenomenologists identify perception as an act of simultaneous invention and discovery,<sup>16</sup> the Proustian subject only rarely perceives external stimuli passively. Instead, he remains actively engaged in bringing the world to expression. Often, passages concerned with the creativity involved in perception feature theatrical references. This inspires the hypothesis that, in *À la recherche*, the theatre is evoked not so much in order to characterise people or situations as to *qualify perception*. My argument is that Proust evokes the theatrical medium, theatricality and theatrical

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in *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Simon, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion of different phenomenological thinkers that leave much room for the imagination and the perceiving subject's inventiveness in their philosophies of perception (in particular Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Sartre), see Kathleen Lennon, *Imagination and the Imaginary* (Oxfordshire and New York: Routledge, 2015).

constellations as a means to convey the full complexity of perceptual experiences, including the perceiving subject's affective responses, occasional misreadings, illusions and hallucinations, which, furthermore, serve to manifest that the imagination nourishes and complicates perception in such a perennial manner that the two simply cannot be thought apart.

My ambition in this thesis is thus partly to make a critical argument that has yet to be made about the *mediation* of perceptual experiences in *À la recherche*, by showing that Proust engages with theatrical references in such a complex and cunning way that we may refer to his writing as a form of theatrical writing – or even that we may, in Proust's writings, see performed a kind of verbal *staging*. The term *theatrical references* is here intended to evoke what Irina O. Rajewsky refers to as *intermediality* 'in the narrow sense of intermedial references'<sup>17</sup> – that is to say that I identify as theatrical references those places in *À la recherche* where the text evokes or imitates elements or structures belonging to the theatre by *using its own verbal means*. The intermedial references are, in Rajewsky's view, in possession of an 'illusion-forming quality',<sup>18</sup> meaning that, since the medium they evoke is, per definition, *other* (this particularity distinguishes the intermedial references from, for example, intertextual references), what we are faced with is not an actual *use* or a genuine *reproduction* of elements or structures of another medium, but merely the generation of 'an *illusion* of another medium's specific practices'.<sup>19</sup> The references I look into in this thesis evoke the theatre both in a 'general' way, as when the narrator identifies his younger selves or other characters as spectators or actors in various situations, or when events or impressions are compared to theatrical performances, but also more specific theatrical practices and techniques, such as the 'changement à vue' (a transformation of the stage taking place with the curtain raised) commonly used in spectacular plays in nineteenth-century France, which, when they are called upon, serve to convey the protagonists' particular way of perceiving the world about them. The device that most

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<sup>17</sup> Irina O. Rajewsky, 'Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: a Literary Perspective on Intermediality,' *Intermédialités: histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques* 6 (2005): p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

efficiently creates an illusion of theatrical spectatorship in *À la recherche* is the *tableau*, which operates as a staging device in the novel.<sup>20</sup>

This thesis thus explores Proust's writing of perception partly by taking a closer look at the *tableau* – a device that Proust employs repeatedly when staging perception. The term *stage* is arguably more suited to denote what goes on in the *tableaux* than *describe*, for the *tableau* operates in *À la recherche* as a staging device enabling Proust to tell by *showing* – that is, to convey an impression as it presents itself to the senses and imagination of an inscribed (i.e. physically present) spectator. To say that the *tableau* device enables Proust to stage perception is not to say, however, that the entire novel constitutes a *tableau* or a collection of *tableaux*, and it would certainly be an overstatement, and quite frankly incorrect, to claim that Proust is consistently concerned with *showing*, and never, for instance, with description or analysis. In my thesis, I identify as *tableaux* those places in the novel where Proust's text evokes a theatrical structure, installing the protagonist as a spectator within scenes that take place in the world about him – and also, crucially, within his mind, where he, as we shall see in Chapter 2, acts as a 'spectateur intérieur' ['an inward spectator'] (III, 764; 5, 239). My use of the term 'tableau' is informed by how Denis Diderot, the first person to employ the word in its modern sense,<sup>21</sup> understood it. In other words, I do not employ the term as it is commonly used today, as a synonym for pictures, paintings or other forms of visual representation (a usage that is, nevertheless, in accordance with the word's etymological roots in the world of painting: Old French *table* denotes a picture or a picturesque description). Instead, I return to Diderot's initial use of the term in order to restore its 'theatrical' dimension. As we shall see when I expand on the *tableau* term below in this introductory chapter, the perceiving

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<sup>20</sup> In the present study, I take an interest in the staging of acts of perception, that is, in Proust's *mise en scène* of encounters between perceiving subjects and objects of perception. It would have been possible, however, to discuss the question of staging in the novel in relation to other subject matters as well, such as remembrance. Memory too is evoked by way of a theatre analogy in *À la recherche*, for instance in *Du côté de chez Swann*, when the narrator compares the sudden appearance of involuntary memories to stage sets being drawn onto the stage in a theatre (I, 47; 1, 50). I return briefly to the theatre as a figure of memory in the introduction to Chapter 3, but, on the whole, this question lies beyond the scope of my study.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Frantz, *L'Esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998), p. 10.

subject's affective and imaginative response to the object of perception resides at the core of the Proustian tableau, which typically presents us with detailed accounts of perceptual *encounters*.

Methodologically, this thesis circles in on the Proustian tableau by performing close textual analyses of a range of examples that I consider emblematic specimens of the device, and that address many different themes (domestic life, jealousy, sexuality, travel, art, etc.). When I compare these often thematically disparate paragraphs to one another, I do not primarily aim to identify a *thematic* kinship between them, but to untangle aspects of their *form*, especially with regards to the agency of the perceiving subjects installed as spectators in the tableaux. Not fettered by the linear development of the narrative in my work, I juxtapose and compare examples from different volumes of *À la recherche*, and I also occasionally include excerpts from Proust's notebooks (the *Cahiers* containing earlier drafts of what was to become *À la recherche*), as well as an occasional quote from his correspondence, essays and other published works. While this method of reading might seem somewhat associative, it proves purposeful in light of the ambition of the thesis: in my attempts to map out the role that the tableau, as the nexus of theatricality and perception, plays in the novel, I have found it useful to look into the variety of forms that it assumes throughout the text.

Since the term 'tableau', although relatively uncommon in Proust criticism, has long been a subject of critical theory, I have looked to challenge my own use of the term by exposing it to some critical perspectives. I do so in Chapter 3, where Roland Barthes's criticism of the Diderotian tableau and the representational aesthetics it inspired is discussed. The confrontation with Barthes's writings thus requires me to arrive at a more detailed definition of the literary device that I identify as the Proustian tableau. Furthermore, since one of my objectives in this thesis is to show that Proust's writing in *À la recherche* occasionally constitutes a form of theatrical writing (or *écriture théâtrale*<sup>22</sup>), I have felt the need to compare examples from the novel to other

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<sup>22</sup> In 'Théâtralisation et modèles dans quelques œuvres de jeunesse de Proust' (2006), Thanh-Vôn Ton-That argues that Proust's juvenilia reveals that the young writer, hesitating to choose his genre, also felt tempted by the theatre. Surveying a collection of Proust's early texts, Ton-That discerns the influence exercised by forms of theatrical writing ['écriture théâtrale' (p. 217; 230)] on the young author's work. I would suggest that this 'influence' is palpable also

forms of theatrical texts. I do this, in Chapter 4, by juxtaposing examples from the novel and the text ‘Scénario’ from Proust’s first published work *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (1896), which arguably resembles a theatrical manuscript more than any other text he ever published. This juxtaposition enables us to see that the theatricalisation of Proust’s novel comes to view more readily in the text’s detailed renderings of perceptual experiences and impressions than in its adoption of the theatrical mode of enunciation (dialogues). The chapter thus strengthens the hypothesis presented in Chapter 3, where a discussion of the Proustian tableau in light of the ‘side text’ (*didascalies*) of the Romantic *féerie* – a theatrical genre that Proust was greatly fond of as a child and that came to occupy a central place in his novel – leads towards the conclusion that if Proust’s *écriture théâtrale* resembles the writing found in theatrical manuscripts at all, it is the manuscripts’ side text that it brings to mind.

Explicit and implicit references to the *féerie* occur frequently in *À la recherche*, even if, judging by the lacuna in the research literature,<sup>23</sup> they often pass unnoticed. In his biography of the author, Jean-Yves Tadié evokes young Marcel’s passion for the theatre, which he ‘ressentait depuis l’enfance [...], et qu’il prête au Narrateur de la *Recherche* rêvant devant les affiches, allant écouter la Berma dans *Phèdre*’ [‘felt since childhood [...], and which he attributes to the Narrator of the *Recherche* dreaming in

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in Proust’s mature work, and when I, in this thesis, refer to his writing in *À la recherche* as a form of *écriture théâtrale*, I similarly mean to draw attention to the influence exercised on Proust by the theatre, and to how this makes itself felt in certain parts of the novel. However, as I argue above, the theatre is not only present as an *intertextual* reference in *À la recherche*, but also comes to view in intermedial references, and the influence exercised on the novel by the theatre clearly instigates other forms of ‘theatricalisation’ of Proust’s writing than that which we observe in his earlier works. I attend briefly to the theatricality of one of Proust’s juvenilia pieces in Chapter 4. For further reading, I refer to Thanh-Vôn Ton-That, ‘Théâtralisation et modèles dans quelques œuvres de jeunesse de Proust,’ in *Proust et le théâtre*, ed. Romana Goedendorp et al., Marcel Proust Aujourd’hui (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> To my knowledge, there exist only two recent studies exclusively consecrated to the bonds between the theatrical *féerie* and Proust’s novel, namely Kirsten von Hagen’s article, ‘« L’admirable féerie »: la notion de ‘féerie’ chez Marcel Proust’ (2013), and Frank Kessler’s ‘Changement à vue. Proust et la féerie’ (2016). Additionally, it is notable that both Jean-Yves Tadié and Hélène Laplace-Claverie, without entering into details, posit the influence of the genre on Proust’s work as considerable in, respectively, a biography, *Marcel Proust: biographie* (1996), and a study on the French 20th century *féerie*, *Modernes féeries. Le théâtre français du XXe siècle entre réenchantement et désenchantement* (2007).

front of theatre bills, going to listen to La Berma in *Phèdre*’].<sup>24</sup> The role that the *féerie* plays in the novel goes beyond that of illustrating a young boy’s taste for theatrical magic, however. As Hélène Laplace-Claverie points out in her study of the twentieth-century French *féerie*, the word ‘*féerie*’ occurs a total of thirteen times in the novel, at every occasion explicitly referring to an archetype from this theatrical universe.<sup>25</sup> However, the crucial fact that Laplace-Claverie (who, like Tadié, emphasises that references to the *féerie* enable Proust to reconstitute a child’s view of life) fails to note is that, with the exception of three occasions (II, 828 [3, 539]; III, 777 [5, 251]; III, 780 [5, 254]) on which the genre is referred to in dialogue by characters other than the protagonist, each of these references are in fact evoked in relation to meditations on the nature of human perception. This discovery supports my hypothesis that theatrical figures are evoked by Proust in order to qualify and convey perceptual experiences, and affirms that the investigation of the interrelations between perception and theatricality that I am about to undertake will be of great significance for our understanding of the role played by theatrical references in Proust’s novel. We might also note that each of the novel’s seven volumes (with the exception of *Albertine disparue*) contains at least one such explicit reference to this theatrical genre. In other words, the *féerie* provides Proust with means to disclose perceptual impressions experienced not only by the young protagonist but also by the older, more mature protagonist.

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<sup>24</sup> Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust: biographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 248.

<sup>25</sup> Hélène Laplace-Claverie, *Modernes féeries. Le théâtre français du XXe siècle entre réenchantement et désenchantement* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), p. 79. The references can be found on the following page numbers in the Pléiade edition of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1987-89): I, 119; II, 227, 377, 431, 828, 830; III, 142, 777, 780; IV, 499, 504, 515 [1, 122; 2, 459; 3, 74, 130; 3, 539, 541; 4, 147; 5, 251, 254; 6, 229, 235, 245]. A note on the translations is in order here since, in the English edition that provides the Proust translations in this thesis, the six different translators translate the French word *féerie* in different ways. Although, as Laplace-Claverie affirms, all these thirteen references evoke archetypes from the *theatrical* universe of the *féerie*, the word is sometimes (wrongfully) translated as ‘fairy-tale’, and other times as either ‘pantomime’ or ‘fairy-play’. In the last example, the reference to the *féerie* is omitted altogether, and Mme d’Arpajon simply aligned to a ‘character out of a play’ (6, 245). It is, not least, in order to avoid the confusion (and possible loss of meaning) that, as these examples show, might occur in the translation process that, in this thesis, I employ the French word when I mean to evoke the theatrical genre of the *féerie*.



When I turn to (among other things) the *féerie* and the concept of the *féerique* in Chapters 3-6, my textual analysis focuses largely on the trope of anthropomorphism and the figure of enchantment, and on how these figures are worked into the text by Proust in order to highlight the affective and imaginary dimensions of perception.<sup>26</sup> This methodological trajectory is motivated by the discovery that Proust repeatedly evokes references to the *féerie* and the *féerique* (and to theatre in a more general sense) in order to underline how perceiving subjects contribute creatively to bringing the world that they live in and are affected by to expression – a discovery that has led me to believe that, for Proust, theatricality is intimately related to the individual's *mode of perception*. However, such a conception of theatricality as a mode of perception is rarely encountered in the research literature on Proust, and, in order for my reader to get a clear image of what the concept amounts to in this context, I will now proceed to define and delineate the term.

### **Theatricality as a Mode of Perception**

It was Thomas Carlyle who, in 1837, coined the term 'theatricality',<sup>27</sup> but the discourse on theatricality continued to develop during the centuries following its invention, and during the twentieth century this discourse came to take on consistent features, giving it the appearance of being 'shaped by a certain interpretative logic that we can characterise as Platonic, which is predicated on a binary coupling of theatricality and anti-theatricality'.<sup>28</sup> Glen James McGillivray's comprehensive study of the term's genealogy (2004) shows us that in the anti-theatricalist discourses of the

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<sup>26</sup> Enchantment is also evoked in *À la recherche* by way of *intertextual* references, notably to the Middle Eastern folk tales compilation *One Thousand and One Nights*. These intertextual references have been subject to thorough examination in Dominique Jullien's *Proust et ses modèles: Les 'Milles et Une Nuits' et les 'Mémoires' de Saint-Simon* (Paris: José Corti, 1989). These references are also central to Claude Vallée's *La Féerie de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1958). More recently, Margaret Topping devotes considerable attention to the role played by *One Thousand and One Nights* in the novel, in *Supernatural Proust: Myth and Metaphor in 'À la recherche du temps perdu'* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the word's coinage in a political perspective, see Tracy C. Davis's chapter 'Theatricality and Civil Society' in Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds., *Theatricality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 127-55.

<sup>28</sup> Glen James McGillivray, 'Theatricality. A Critical Genealogy' (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2004), p. 11.

twentieth century, theatricality can be seen to denote inauthenticity and deception. He further argues that when the term is transposed into the realm of metaphor,

theatricality becomes a multivalent sign that is used to assert the truth value of something else. As such it carries the Platonic hostility to mimesis, a prejudice that was vigorously re-asserted within Modernist Art by Michael Fried in 1967 and, as a consequence, theatricality is equated with inauthenticity in certain artistic circles.<sup>29</sup>

Fried's argument in 'Art and Objecthood' is not so much aimed at describing theatre as an art form as it is aimed at identifying theatricality as a negative *value*. Theatricality thus turns into a metaphor for superficiality, deception and inauthenticity – qualities that, in Fried's view, should be categorically rejected in modernist art. What Fried thereby achieves is to 'discursively position theatricality in order to ontologically validate something else',<sup>30</sup> namely, his own views on modernist art. McGillivray notes that a similar binary logic is to be found in Roland Barthes's writings on theatricality, where distinctions are often made 'between "good" and "bad" theatricality'.<sup>31</sup> In Chapter 3, we shall see that this dichotomy is in fact evoked in Barthes's discourse on Proust's novel, which he describes as existing in 'une sorte de théâtralité non hystérique, purement permutative, fondée sur des permutations de places' ['a kind of non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality founded on permutations of places'].<sup>32</sup>

In keeping with this binary logic, then, there also exists within contemporary scholarship a '(pro)theatricality' movement. In fact, as Martin Puchner maintains in *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (2002), the struggle that

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<sup>29</sup> Glen James McGillivray, 'The discursive formation of theatricality as a critical concept,' *Metaphorik.de* 17 (2009): p. 103. It was in the essay 'Art and Objecthood' (1967) that Fried used the metaphor of theatricality to condemn the work of minimalist artists Donald Judd and Robert Morris, whom he deemed 'literalists'. In the essay, as in his seminal study of eighteenth-century painting and criticism, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1976), Fried employs the term to denote certain practices within the visual arts, and not (exclusively) within the theatre.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2003), p. 40. [Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York, Semiotext(e), 2006), p. 42.]

arose within modernism over the *value* of theatricality may be viewed as a legacy of Richard Wagner, whose ‘pivotal role with respect to modernism was transforming the concept of theatricality from a description of the theater as an art form – defining what happens onstage – into a value that must either be rejected or embraced’.<sup>33</sup> In Puchner’s view, Wagner can ‘be said to have polarized the cultural field of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe, and even outside Europe, around theatricality’.<sup>34</sup> The idea that the birth of modernism coincided with a reinforcement of the polarity between the theatrical and its opposites is confirmed by Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, who discuss the rehabilitation of the notion of theatricality that took place during the early twentieth century in the introduction to the edited volume *Theatricality* (2003).<sup>35</sup> As Davis and Postlewait maintain, the development that the notion underwent, towards becoming positive in denotation and connotation, served to liberate it from a long tradition of morally condemning the theatre by opposing the *theatrical*, *theatricalism* and *theatricality* with concepts of the natural, true and sincere.<sup>36</sup> When one considers this positive interpretation of the term in relation to the negative role assigned to theatricality within anti-theatricalist discourse, it becomes clear that the term is indeed caught up in a struggle of interpretations, where opposing sides employ the same term as support for radically different arguments. In other words, it would seem that Davis and Postlewait are correct in

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> ‘[The] concepts of realism and theatricality set up a binary configuration in modernism, with realism aligning itself with the idea of “artless” art and the many alternatives to realism embracing and celebrating the explicit theatrical conditions of the stage, its genres, and its traditions. Unlike the opposition between melodrama and realism in the nineteenth-century theatre, this new antinomy allowed the concept of theatricality to achieve a positive definition’. Davis and Postlewait, p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> In the introduction to *Theatricality*, Davis and Postlewait show that the notion historically, and almost invariably, has been associated with immorality: ‘the polarity between the natural (or the real) and the theatrical (or the artificial) carries a moral as well as an aesthetic judgment, with the idea of the natural serving, of course, as the positive pole in the equation. In philosophical terms, this opposition illustrates the dichotomy between appearance and reality. Thus, a series of related antinomies are in operation here: real versus false, genuine versus fake, intrinsic versus extrinsic, original versus imitative, true versus counterfeit, honest versus dishonest, sincere versus devious, accurate versus distorted, revealed versus disguised, face versus mask, serious versus playful, and essential versus artificial. All things theatrical are on the negative end of the polarity’. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

claiming that while the concept of theatricality apparently is ‘comprehensive of all meanings’, it remains ‘empty of all specific sense’.<sup>37</sup>

In this study, I do not intend to situate Proustian theatricality within the binary logic that dominated the discourse on this notion during the twentieth century. On the contrary, to the extent that I do engage with this antinomy (as in Chapter 3, where I discuss Barthes’s designation of *À la recherche* as ‘non-hysterical’ theatricality), my aim is to show that the complex role that the theatre plays in Proust’s novel cannot be fully understood in light of the binary logic opposing theatricality and anti-theatricality (or ‘hysterical’ and ‘non-hysterical’ theatricality). In fact, the complex role that theatrical references play in the novel is not adequately appreciated if we approach it by way of the dichotomy identifying the theatrical as synonymous with the deceptive and contrived and the non-theatrical with the natural and spontaneous. This is not to say that Proust does not, as critics have shown, occasionally portray his characters as ‘theatrical’ in the sense of being inauthentic or artificial.<sup>38</sup> The argument that I set forth is rather that, in *À la recherche*, there is also at play *another* concept of theatricality, one that is occasionally alluded to in explicit terms (as in the quote that introduced this study), and that also, as my analyses disclose, is found as an implicit presence in the text: a concept identifying theatricality as a *mode of perception*. In the context of this thesis, it is therefore worth taking into consideration a study that largely avoids the binary logic of avant-gardist discourse on the matter in its definition of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, theatricality in Proust has often been regarded as synonymous with role-play, and with the artificial and false appearances of several of the novel’s characters. Such is the case, for instance, when Jack Murray describes them as ‘bad actors’, claiming that ‘something like their hidden side keeps slipping by the defence of the appearances they project’. Jack Murray, *The Proustian Comedy* (York, South Carolina: French Literature Publications Company, 1980), p. 17. This Bergsonian idea of true reality hiding behind a screen of appearances is also partly advocated by Lester Mansfield, who claims that, according to the author of *À la recherche*, we create a second personality for ourselves to camouflage those parts of us that society does not wish to see: ‘Nous sommes, pour Proust, de véritables machines à faire des mensonges parce que la société nous oblige à cacher une grande partie de notre vie intérieure. Nous nous créons une deuxième personnalité pour camoufler celle que nous n’osons exhiber aux yeux du monde’ [‘We are, for Proust, veritable lie-machines because society forces us to hide a great part of our interior life. We create for ourselves a second personality in order to disguise the one that we dare not expose to the world’]. Lester Mansfield, *Le Comique de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1953), pp. 97-98.

theatricality: the sociologist Elizabeth Burns's pioneering work *Theatricality: a Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life* (1972).

In her book, Burns proposes a sociological study of the relationship between theatre and social life that focuses on how the particular conventions of each of these domains interact. I should stress, therefore, that it is not my intention to undertake a sociological reading of Proust, even though several excellent contributions, among them Livio Belloi's study of *À la recherche* in light of Erving Goffman's sociology, have convincingly shown that such an approach to the novel can be highly fruitful.<sup>39</sup> Instead, when I turn to Burns's work, it is because it provides a forceful alternative to the dichotomous struggle of interpretations outlined above, not least in the sense that she does not intend to make universal or ahistorical claims concerning the theatre or theatricality. On the contrary, all the while acknowledging that, in Western society, the 'moral value placed on spontaneity and sincerity in personal relations has produced a dichotomy between so-called 'natural' and 'theatrical' behaviour',<sup>40</sup> Burns insists that a proper understanding of the phenomenon of theatricality, both in the theatre and in social life, requires a high level of historical, social and cultural awareness. She consequently argues that the ability to distinguish between the theatrical and untheatrical is fully dependent on socialisation *in a particular social milieu, at a particular time*: 'The controlled behaviour of a group of upper-class English people at a formal function can appear to observers just as theatrical as the demonstrative behaviour of an Italian family greeting each other with kissing and hand-shaking'.<sup>41</sup>

Burns suggests that a model enabling us to acknowledge that different moments and social contexts entail varying degrees of *awareness* of theatricality should replace the binary model opposing the natural and the theatrical. In other words, it is key to her argument that while every social world is a construct, and every person thus

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<sup>39</sup> Livio Belloi, *La Scène proustienne: Proust, Goffmann et le théâtre du monde* (Paris: Nathan, 1993). Another critic who has greatly contributed to opening up a field of research on Proust and sociology is Jacques Dubois, who circles in on Proust's 'sens du social' in studies such as *Pour Albertine. Proust et le sens du social* (1997), *Les Romanciers du réel. De Balzac à Simenon* (2000), and *Le Roman de Gilberte Swann. Proust sociologue paradoxal* (2018).

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Burns, *Theatricality: a Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

always playing a part,<sup>42</sup> we are only to various degrees aware of this, and there is a wide range of different social and cultural factors conditioning us to either recognise ‘behaviour’ as ‘action’ (as *drama*) or to view it as ‘spontaneous’.<sup>43</sup> In other words, behaviour is considered theatrical ‘when it is recognised as expressing intention’,<sup>44</sup> and this intention often ‘has to be *read into* human behaviour in order to give it meaning’.<sup>45</sup> Rather than viewing certain kinds of behaviour as inherently theatrical, then, Burns suggests that behaviour is *transformed* into theatricality by the observer, who interprets or reads it as composed or contrived. This means that the recognition of theatricality is fully dependent on the observer’s perspective:

[Theatricality] is an *audience term* just as the [*theatron*] was originally a place for viewing, an audience place. Behaviour is not therefore theatrical because it is of a certain kind but because the observer recognises certain patterns and sequences which are analogous to those with which he is familiar in the theatre. It is with the contrivance and composition of these sequences that the actor in ordinary life as much as the stage actor is concerned. The spectator inside the theatre sees them as the product of dramatist, producer, and actor, while the observer in the world outside, partly involved himself, is less conscious of the processes that produce action. [...] Theatricality is not therefore a mode of behaviour or expression, but attaches to any kind of behaviour perceived and interpreted by others and described (mentally or explicitly) in theatrical terms. [...] theatricality itself is determined by a particular viewpoint, a *mode of perception*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> ‘People inhabit many social worlds, each of which is a construct, arising from a common perspective held by the members of that world. The behaviour that takes place in any of these worlds can appear theatrical to those observers who are not participants or to those newcomers who are just learning the rules. They are acutely aware of the element of composition in the management of sequences of action, which the participants may feel to be spontaneous’. Ibid., p. 13. Burns’s concept of theatricality is often regarded as a forerunner to Judith Butler’s performativity theory. The question of performativity in Proust, which remains beyond the scope of the present study, is cunningly treated in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s chapter on Proust in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), in which Sedgwick considers the representation of homosexuality in *À la recherche*. More recently, the significance of social settings and relationships for the development of identity in Proust is explored by Adeline Soldin in her doctoral thesis ‘Proustian Performance. Role-playing, Repetition, and Ritual in *À la recherche du temps perdu*’ (2014), in which she engages with perspectives drawn from performativity theory, queer and gender studies and narratology.

<sup>43</sup> Burns, pp. 13-14.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 14, my emphasis.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-13, my emphases.

Regarding theatricality as a mode of perception means that virtually anything can become a performance, if interpreted as one by those who observe, and the immediacy with which the protagonist of *À la recherche* recurs to theatrical analogies in ‘reading’ his surroundings reveals that he readily places himself in a *spectatorial relationship* to the perceived. Hence, from a methodological viewpoint, the concept of theatricality as a mode of perception will enable us to uncover aspects of the interrelations between spectatorship, theatricality and perception in Proust that have hitherto gone unnoticed. However, while few critics have attended to the theatricalising agency of the perceiving subject in Proust, new research has indeed begun the important work of unravelling and illuminating the intricate interrelations between Proust’s perceptual writing and the arts. It would thus seem that my attempt to dissect and display what theatricality may have to do with perception in Proust is both original and timely, since it inscribes itself into an on-going discussion and a growing field of research, and, although it is not my intention here (or indeed possible, taking into consideration the enormous corpus of research dedicated to Proust) to present a complete survey of these previous scholarly contributions, I will, in the next section, briefly discuss some of the accounts that inform my study in this thesis.

### **Critical Predecessors**

Critics working on Proust and theatre have often taken an interest in the contrived and artificial behaviour of Proust’s characters, and they have often regarded the evolution of theatrical form in Proust, as does Marie Louise Jefferson in one of the first critical studies devoted to the theatre in *À la recherche*, as being ‘accompanied by, and intrinsically bound up with, an expanding view of society as a social “theatre” in which human relationships are as ephemeral and feigned as those before footlights’.<sup>47</sup> I believe that this tendency reflects a widely accepted notion of theatricality as a matter of role-play and (false) appearances (a notion perhaps informed by the antitheatrical

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<sup>47</sup> Marie Louise Jefferson, ‘Proust and Theatre’ (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1963), p. 7, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

prejudice briefly discussed above<sup>48</sup>), which has obscured the fact that, for Proust, theatricality is intimately related to the manner in which we perceive. Uncovering a concept of spectatorship completely enmeshed in Proust's writing of perception, my work adds to a research field that has been steadily expanding during the last couple of decades, and that addresses the relationship between Proust's novel and the visual arts in a broad sense, that is, as a field including art forms that are primarily visual, such as painting, sculpture, photography and different forms of decorative arts, as well as artistic disciplines that engage with aspects of the visual in addition to other features, such as cinema and the performing arts. While critical interest in the text's relation to different systems of representation (including painting, photography, literature, music and, to some extent, cinema and the performing arts) has been an important part of Proust criticism from the outset, what characterises the present discussion is an increasing concern with how various art forms inform the novel, not primarily on a thematic or motivic level, but with regards to form and style and, not least, to the other arts' influence on the novel's rendering of perceptual experiences.

Much recent work attests to this tendency within contemporary criticism of viewing the novel's discourse on art as affiliated with Proust's writing of perception. For example, the edited volume *Proust and the Visual*, published in 2013, concerns itself not so much with systems of visual representation in *À la recherche* as with different modalities of the 'visual' – a phenomenological category that, in this book, is 'linked with a process of recognition that implies more than a verbal description of a purely visual experience. It encompasses the process of perception *as well* as the writer's task to express it adequately in a quest that is equated by the Narrator to a quest for "truth"<sup>49</sup>. The articles in this collection explore the question of the *image* (in a very broad sense) as articulated in and by way of Proust's writing, and offers, among other things, valuable insight into how different visual practices inform his accounts of

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<sup>48</sup> For an in-depth discussion of this prejudice, I refer to Jonas Barish's monumental study of antitheatricality *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981).

<sup>49</sup> Nathalie Aubert, ed. *Proust and the Visual*, vol. 3, Studies in Visual Culture (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 2.



perceptual experiences and processes.<sup>50</sup> Notably, in this edited volume containing essays relating the novel to the arts of painting and photography as well as the (in a ‘Proustian’ context) lesser-researched art of cinema, the theatre is addressed not as an inherent aspect of the novel but in relation to the question of adaptation, in Marion Schmid’s essay on Harold Pinter and Di Trevis’s stage adaptation of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. As I hope to show in my analyses, Proust’s views on our relationship with the ‘visual’ are also articulated by way of theatrical references operating *within* the novel – references that appear particularly well-suited to the task of formulating perceptual processes as an *encounter* between subject and object of perception.

Published in 2011, Áine Larkin’s *Proust Writing Photography: Fixing the Fugitive in ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’* meticulously dissects Proust’s uses of photography in the figurative presentation of perception and remembrance.<sup>51</sup> Although Larkin examines several passages from the novel that explicitly evoke photography, her approach is not limited to such scenes. Instead, she studies Proust’s stylistic appropriations of photography, arguing that he ‘drew on photography as an element of literary style to portray perception and memory processes’<sup>52</sup> – and, indeed, that the protagonist’s ‘perceptual contact with the world shows that Proust establishes an analogy between photographic camera and human eye’.<sup>53</sup> Larkin’s identification of

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<sup>50</sup> The noticeable critical interest in the influence exercised by the arts on Proust’s writing of perception makes itself felt in other collections of recent research contributions as well, such as the edited volumes *Proust and the Arts* (2015) and *Sensations proustiennes* (2016), in which several stimulating and often highly original essays treat this question. The mutually enriching intersections of text and image, literature and the visual arts form, moreover, the subject of Mieke Bal’s highly stimulating *Images littéraires, ou comment lire visuellement Proust* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1997). In this book, which examines the visual references in *À la recherche* with an eye for their narrative potential, Bal explores different ways in which the novel evokes the Proustian subject’s encounters with the visual.

<sup>51</sup> Áine Larkin, *Proust Writing Photography: Fixing the Fugitive in ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’* (Oxford: Legenda, 2011). Kindred observations concerning Proust’s appropriation of photographic techniques of representation in the novel’s rendering of perceptual experiences are made by Danius (2002). Suzanne Guerlac argues that Proust ‘reworks’ various figures of photography in order to present perceptual experiences, in ‘Visual Dust. On Time, Memory, and Photography in Proust,’ *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 13, no. 4 (2009). Emily Setina illustrates how Proust recurred to the photographic metaphor as a ‘tool for imagining perception, reflection, and memory’, in ‘Proust’s Darkroom,’ *Modern Language Notes* 131, no. 4 (2016): p. 1083.

<sup>52</sup> Larkin, p. 52.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

photography as a stylistic feature and perceptual analogy in *À la recherche* is important because it belies the narrator's 'overt denigration of photography'.<sup>54</sup> Her study thus crucially reminds us that we should not be misled into believing that the role that the different arts play within or alongside the novel may be determined simply by looking at the narrator's overt discourse on the matter. The theatre, for instance, is of great interest to the protagonist as a young boy who, entertaining a platonic but vivid passion for the medium, goes for daily excursions to the 'colonnes Morris' in his neighbourhood to see which plays are on in town. However, the fact that theatrical representations are in particular focus in the novel's first volumes, whereas other art forms become more present in the volumes concerned with his adult life, should not lead us to assume that the theatre operates in *À la recherche* primarily as a form of entertainment that the protagonist enjoys in his youth. On the contrary, the significance of theatre in Proust goes well beyond that of featuring as a theme or motif in the narrative, and theatricality and various dimensions of the theatrical experience are engaged *also* in passages where there is no direct mention of theatre.

The necessity of looking beyond the narrator's discourse on the arts, or to look at it in a different or unprejudiced manner, in order to comprehend the ways in which different artistic experiences are engaged in the Proustian narrative becomes further evident in light of recent research on Proust and cinema. In spite of the fact that the period over which Proust's narrative extends (from the last decades of the nineteenth century until the end of World War I) neatly coincides with the birth of cinema as a popular form of entertainment, this art form is more or less absent from Proust's fictional universe. The medium is explicitly referred to only a few times in *À la recherche*, and none of the characters ever go to the cinema. This has not, however, kept critics from excavating rich interconnections between the novel and the cinematic medium. With *Proust at the Movies*,<sup>55</sup> published in 2004, Marion Schmid and Martine Beugnet contributed to opening up the field of research on Proust and cinema. The book focuses largely on cinematic adaptations of *À la recherche*, but it also contains

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>55</sup> Martine Beugnet and Marion Schmid, *Proust at the Movies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

an insightful introductory chapter in which the two authors explore the specifically cinematic qualities of Proust's writing, pointing out, for example, that

[Proust's] *mise en scène* of moments when the Narrator indulges in contemplation and recollection, outlining the pleasures derived from the temporary sensation of plenitude offered by certain spectacles, occasionally recalls the viewing conditions of a cinema spectator.<sup>56</sup>

To the extent that the examples I examine evoke Proust's protagonist as a spectator before moving (as opposed to static) images, they will often bring to mind not only the theatre but also the cinema. In fact, many of the paragraphs that I analyse have already been subject to examination in critical studies that concentrate on the cinematic qualities of Proust's writing. For example, the famous scene at the Opéra, which I commented on above, has been shown, notably in *Proust at the Movies*, to anticipate several filmmaking techniques, such as the 'use of "travelling" or slow zooming effects (from a panoramic to a close-up shot)' and the 'techniques of blurring and superimposition used in the impressionist and surrealist film of the 1920s'.<sup>57</sup> While it is not my intention to object to these and similar findings, I do aim to yield a more complete understanding of these scenes, and to disclose how several among those spectacles that bring to mind the viewing conditions of a spectator at the cinema *also* bring to mind the posture and perceptual conditions of a spectator in a theatre.

Similarly to Larkin's work, Schmid and Beugnet's examination of Proustian *mise en scène* in light of cinematic spectatorship draws critical attention to the need for going beyond the novel's explicit references to other media if we are to fully grasp the way that *À la recherche* engages, challenges or complements other medial expressions.<sup>58</sup> In a recent contribution to research on Proust and cinema, published in 2018, Patrick French affirms the necessity of such a 'liberal' approach by taking as his starting point the structural *absence* of cinema in the novel. Based on the observation that, although the cinema is structurally absent from *À la recherche*, the text abounds

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Carrier-Lafleur's extensive and substantial monograph *L'Œil cinématographique de Proust* (2015) combines analyses of cinematic adaptations of *À la recherche* with a study of the novel's 'cinematic' qualities.

with references to ‘devices and motifs from the pre-history of cinema – photography, the magic lantern, the kinoscope, the stereoscope, the modalities of projection and of the screen’,<sup>59</sup> French presents the intriguing hypothesis that Proust’s novel enters into

a ‘functional competition’ with the cinema, which it pursues through a dismantling of the constitutive elements of the cinematographic *dispositif* [apparatus], a regression to earlier forms, and a re-imagining of cinematic experience; the *Recherche* offers an account of a virtual cinema, different from the actualized cinema as we know it.<sup>60</sup>

This approach to the novel’s relation with cinema bears some resemblance to my own study of the novel’s theatricality, in the sense that the form of theatre that, in my view, Proust writes into being admittedly also differs from the actualised theatre as we know it, or, indeed, as he knew it. To suggest, for example, as I do here, that Proust’s writing is at times *theatrical* is not to say that I am interested in, say, his appropriation and use of dialogues (as the mode of enunciation most intuitively associated with the theatre), or that I aim to identify a closeness between the structure of *À la recherche* and that of a theatrical manuscript.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, while the theatricality that I find in Proust is one that often brings to mind the perceptual conditions of a spectator in a theatre, and one that comes into being through the text’s evocation of elements constitutive of the theatrical experience, such as stage machinery or the actor-spectator reciprocity that I discussed briefly above, it is not my intention to claim that the text is theatrical only to the extent that it ‘resembles’ actual theatre. On the contrary, when I speak of theatricality in relation to *À la recherche*, it is a specifically narrative form of theatricality that I mean

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<sup>59</sup> Patrick French, *Thinking Cinema with Proust*, vol. 7, Moving Image (Oxford: Legenda, 2018), p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Critics have been known to make such attempts at breaking down passages from *À la recherche* into structural entities corresponding to those of a theatrical manuscript. In an article published in 1985, ‘Le théâtre de Guermantes’, for example, Jane Alison Hale studies a dinner party at the Duke and Duchess of Guermantes’ in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, and divides the *soirée* into different parts, corresponding to the elements of a theatrical text: a prologue, three acts, and an epilogue. See Jane Alison Hale, ‘Le théâtre de Guermantes,’ *Modern Language Studies* 15, no. 4 (1985). Hale’s project in this article corresponds largely to Lester Mansfield’s attempt, in *Le Comique de Marcel Proust*, to exemplify the theatrical qualities of Proust’s style of writing by transforming parts of a dinner party at Mme Verdurin’s in *Un Amour de Swann* into a manuscript, complete with dialogues and stage directions. See Mansfield, pp. 81-87.

to evoke; one that exploits the possibilities and limitations of the first-person narrative, and that is not characterised by a structural resemblance to the theatre.

It should be stressed, then, that Proust's *écriture théâtrale*, which is defined by the specificities of the novelistic genre, is able to produce different sorts of illusions than the theatre, and that it abides by other conventions: what comes to view in Proust's theatrical writings is not (only) such things that human actors on a stage can embody, but often veritable spectacles of interiority. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the protagonist may, for instance, split in two, and observe himself in the act of listening to music, or another person's interiority may transform into an 'interior theatre' from which the spectator is excluded. Consequently, one may say that the novel's evocation of theatre entails a 're-imagining' of what may and may not be shown on stage. And therefore, Proustian theatricality evokes not only actualised theatre but also critical concepts such as Evlyn Gould's 'virtual theater'<sup>62</sup> – a term intended to describe a 'genre' of texts that, although they are not written for the stage, incite, by way of each reader's mental 'restaging' of the text during the act of reading, the constitution of an 'imaginary' or 'virtual' theatre – or Martin Puchner's 'modernist closet drama'.<sup>63</sup> Puchner's approach, although influenced by Gould's work, also differs from the latter in that modernist closet drama, in Puchner's view, 'seeks to interrupt and break apart any possibility for either an actual or an imaginary stage'.<sup>64</sup> The implicit and explicit 'stage directions' of modernist closet drama conjure, he argues, 'a mimetic theatrical stage only in order to disassemble it entirely'.<sup>65</sup>

Modernist closet drama's extensive use of stage directions as means to reinvent dramatic form is perhaps the feature that most evidently relates this genre to Proust's project,<sup>66</sup> for Proustian theatricality relies less on the narrative's adoption of dialogue than on its renegotiation of what we, following Roman Ingarden, often (and perhaps a bit unjustly, since the term implies that this text is inferior to the so-called 'main text')

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<sup>62</sup> For a detailed introduction to the 'genre' of 'virtual theater', I refer to Evlyn Gould, *Virtual Theater from Diderot to Mallarmé* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989).

<sup>63</sup> See, in particular, Part II ('The Modernist Closet Drama'), pp. 59-116, in Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama*.

<sup>64</sup> Puchner, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of modernist closet drama's use of stage directions as means to reinvent dramatic form, see Puchner, *Stage Fright*, pp. 66-67.

call the ‘side text’ (that is, those sections of a manuscript that contain, for instance, stage directions provided by the dramatist with regards to the production of the play).<sup>67</sup> To be exact, I argue that Proust’s *écriture théâtrale* evokes a rather precise form of ‘side text’, namely the *didascalies* of the Romantic *féerie* which, as we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, constitute a (post-performance) synthesis of the *mise en scène* as perceived by the spectators.

In my analysis of the Proustian *mise en scène*, I build on the important work done by Annick Bouillaguet who, in a text published in 2002, ‘Proust et la mise en scène’, draws attention to the *theatricalisation* of *À la recherche*.<sup>68</sup> For Bouillaguet, it is clear that ‘la théâtralité chez Proust existe indépendamment de la présence effective du théâtre dans son roman’ [‘for Proust, theatricality exists independently from the actual presence of theatre in his novel’],<sup>69</sup> and her essay pinpoints several ways in which Proust’s style of writing may be said to be theatrical.<sup>70</sup> She particularly emphasises the discursive theatricality of the novel, maintaining that its dialogues are not ‘simples dialogues de roman’. Indeed, Proust’s technique is almost cinematic:

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<sup>67</sup> It was in his most influential work, first published in German, in 1937, with the title *Das literarische Kunstwerk. Eine Untersuchung aus dem Grenzgebiet der Ontologie, Logik und Literaturwissenschaft*, and later translated into English as *The Literary Work of Art*, that Ingarden, in discussing the written dramatic text, used the term ‘side text’. See Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: an Investigation on Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 208-10.

<sup>68</sup> Annick Bouillaguet, ‘Proust et la mise en scène,’ in *La Tentation théâtrale des romanciers*, ed. Philippe Chardin (Paris: Sedes, 2002), p. 89.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>70</sup> The editors of the *Proust et le théâtre* (2006), a special issue of *Marcel Proust Aujourd’hui* dedicated to theatre in Proust, also suggest that the influence that the theatre has had on the structure and style of Proust’s writing may amount to a *theatricalisation* of the narration. See the introduction (‘Entrée en scène’) in Romana Goedendorp et al., eds., *Proust et le théâtre*, Marcel Proust Aujourd’hui, vol. 4 (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2006), pp. 7-8. The diverse essays in this collection constitute a rich and stimulating, though not exhaustive, introduction to the question of theatre in and in relation to Proust’s *œuvre*. The variety of themes addressed by these essays gives us some clues as to the versatile role played by theatre in Proust’s novel, and confirms that theatre intervenes on many different levels in *À la recherche*: in addition to being a recurrent theme and motif, it also holds a more ‘functional’ role, in the sense that Proust, in his writing, makes use of ‘theatrical’ techniques. Furthermore, the theatrical genre is evidently one of the author’s preferred sources providing metaphors for describing people, things and situations, and the abundance of references to actual plays and playwrights creates an impression of an on-going intertextual and intermedial dialogue happening in the text.

Ce sont des conversations croisées, à plusieurs interlocuteurs, dans lesquelles certaines répliques prennent, pour le lecteur, la forme d'une réponse différée. [...] La technique est très moderne, quasiment cinématographique: le lecteur entend des conversations simultanées et doit, parfois, apparier lui-même les répliques.<sup>71</sup>

Bouillaguet further highlights the theatricality of Proust's personages, maintaining that 'la conception proustienne du personnage est bien celle d'un homme de théâtre' ['the Proustian conception of character is indeed that of a man of theatre'].<sup>72</sup> This, she claims, reveals itself in the theatrical metaphors and references that the narrator makes use of when describing people, in the poses his characters strike, and in the roles, often marked by artificiality and pretence, they play *vis-à-vis* each other. Bouillaguet also insists that Proust excels in staging the interaction of groups of people.<sup>73</sup> In my view, Proust puts his staging skills to use in rendering not only social interaction but also perceptual experiences and impressions. As mentioned above, I argue that Proust makes use of the tableau device as a means to stage perception, and it is thus my conviction that by studying the constitution of the Proustian tableau, we attain a richer and more accurate understanding of the theatricality and spectatorial aesthetics of *À la recherche*. Bouillaguet herself, although she does not consider the tableau as a means to stage *perception*, affirms that the alternation of dramatic scenes and tableau scenes ('scènes-tableaux') contributes to structuring the novel,<sup>74</sup> and this arguably calls for further research into the theatrical nature of the Proustian tableau.

Livio Belloï reads *À la recherche* in light of the sociologist Erving Goffman's theory of theatrical patterns as inherent in, and governing, human interaction in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, first published in 1956. In this seminal study, Goffman describes social interaction between individuals by way of theatrical metaphors and analogies – much in the same way, Belloï argues, as Proust does in his novel. In *La Scène proustienne: Proust, Goffman et le théâtre du monde*, published in

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<sup>71</sup> Bouillaguet, 'Proust et la mise en scène,' p. 92. ['These are interwoven conversations with several interlocutors, in which certain lines take, for the reader, the form of a differed reply. [...] This technique is very modern, almost cinematographic: the reader hears simultaneous conversations and sometimes has to make the effort to connect the lines'.]

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90.

1997, Belloï uncovers an overflowing of theatrical metaphors in passages dedicated to social interrelations in *À la recherche*, and traces the narrator's sociological apprenticeship from his first encounter with the world as a stage in Combray to the point where the adult 'Narrateur-sociologue' has fully developed his own theory of the *mise en scène* of everyday life. The book's particular strength is the overarching argument it presents concerning the global theatricalisation of the novel's social scene, which, as Belloï demonstrates, is organised into different 'équipes'<sup>75</sup> (squads or crews) obeying the same structural dynamics, regardless of which social (upper, middle or lower) class the members belong to. Belloï makes a strong case for the idea that, in the fictional universe of *À la recherche* (with the exception of the protagonist's family sphere), and almost regardless of whether the characters know that someone is watching them (in theatrical terms: regardless of whether they are *onstage* or *backstage*<sup>76</sup>), there is no 'authenticity' to be found, but 'seules des *représentations*, réussies ou ratées' ['only *performances*, either successful or botched'].<sup>77</sup>

Belloï's book constitutes an important reference for the study of theatricality in *À la recherche*. However, his work does not provide us with much insight with regards to the theatricalising agency of the perceiving subject in Proust. As I have already suggested, with reference to Burns's concept of theatricality, the (perhaps) principal reason why the Proustian universe is so wholly *theatricalised* is that the perceiving subject reads this universe in theatrical terms. While I believe this view on theatricality as a mode of perception has not been sufficiently recognised in the research literature, there are some exceptions that approximate such recognition, including, most notably, Volker Roloff's short but instructive article 'Sur l'esthétique du voyeur dans la *Recherche*. Curiosité et spectacle du désir', in which he discusses the role of the

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<sup>75</sup> See chapters 2 ('Jeux et enjeux de l'esprit: esquisse d'une théorie de l'équipe') and 3 ('Les directeurs de représentation dans la *Recherche*') in Belloï, pp. 25-63.

<sup>76</sup> Belloï dedicates to the figure of the 'voyeur' the entire third chapter of his book (pp. 77-96), in which he demonstrates that the 'backstage'-world that the Proustian 'voyeur' discovers is also a 'representation': that when the hidden spectator of *À la recherche* spies on others, what he discovers is 'une coulisse qui est elle-même représentation' ['a theatre wing which is itself a performance']. Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 140.



hidden observer in the novel's 'scènes de curiosité' ['scenes of curiosity'].<sup>78</sup> In this article, Roloff affirms that theatricality in Proust may be viewed as the mode of perception that makes our attitude towards our surroundings aestheticising, and his work thereby makes an especially clear argument in favour of considering the question of theatricality in Proust in relation to the workings of the perceiving mind:

[...] il s'agit chez Proust du théâtre et du cinéma dans la tête de l'observateur, et ainsi, de l'interaction entre la curiosité et le spectacle de la lecture, de la théâtralité en tant que mode de perception et notamment de la différence entre le jeu de rôle social et esthétique.<sup>79</sup>

By insisting that it is the perspective adopted by the perceiving subject that determines whether a situation appears theatrical or not, Roloff's study draws attention to the need for a critical discussion regarding the criteria for defining theatricality: 'il dépend de la perspective adoptée afin de savoir si une situation semble théâtrale ou non, de sorte que la théâtralité, en fait, doit être saisie en tant que catégorie esthétique de réception' ['whether a scene seems theatrical or not depends entirely on the perspective that is adopted: theatricality must thus be grasped as a category of aesthetic reception'].<sup>80</sup> My study aims to refuel this discussion, and also to enlarge its scope, not only by looking beyond the 'voyeur's theatre' (though certain scenes of voyeurism will be examined in Chapter 1) but also by asking a question that Roloff does not ask: which aspects of the

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<sup>78</sup> Volker Roloff, 'Sur l'esthétique du voyeur dans la *Recherche*. Curiosité et spectacle du désir,' in *Marcel Proust 2: nouvelles directions de la recherche proustienne 1*, La Revue des lettres modernes (Paris and Caen: Minard, 2000), p. 274. 'Scenes of curiosity' designate, for Roloff, scenes that show the protagonist in the act of observing the sexual interaction of others, but which he nonetheless refrains from designating as *voyeuristic* scenes, since '[la] curiosité, le désir de voir (*Schau-Lust*) selon Proust, a une dimension intermédiaire et esthétique de réception qui se soustrait des catégories de la psychanalyse' ['for Proust, curiosity, the desire to see (*Schau-Lust*), has a dimension that is intermedial and that pertains to reception aesthetics, and this dimension escapes the categorisations of psychoanalysis']. *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284. ['[...] for Proust, theatre and cinema exist in the mind of the observer, and thus it is a matter of the interaction between the curiosity and the spectacle of reading, theatricality as a mode of perception, and notably the difference between the performance of one's social role and one's aesthetic role'.]

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 284-85.

theatrical experience does Proust engage with when he stages perception? And *how* does the novel evoke these aspects?

The answers that my study provides to these questions will enable us to see that we should, *pace* Roloff, distinguish between the *theatre* and the *cinema* ‘in the mind of the observer’, for Proustian theatricality is founded upon a structure fundamental to the constitution of the *theatrical* experience in particular: namely, the *audience-performer reciprocity* enabling mutual stimulation and ‘energy exchange’ between spectators and actors. It is no wonder that this aspect of the novel’s appropriation of the theatrical experience has been lost on Proust scholars, for, according to Nicolas Ridout, even theatre theorists generally ignore it.<sup>81</sup> If we are to understand Proust’s evocation of the theatre as something like a ‘symbol’ of perception, however, we are obliged to take this aspect of the theatrical experience into consideration, for it is, as Gouhier was cited saying above, this mutually affecting encounter between bodies of living presence that makes up the ‘essence’ of the theatre as an art form.

In the present study, I view the Proustian protagonist primarily as a *spectator*. Pedro Kadivar’s thoughts on spectatorship in *Marcel Proust ou Esthétique de l’entre-deux. Poétique de la représentation dans ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’* (2004) are thus particularly valuable for me. In his monograph, Kadivar uncovers in the novel’s discourse on representation in relation to visual arts, plastic arts and theatre a veritable ‘poetics of representation’.<sup>82</sup> He begins by examining the representation of the real, highlighting the fact that Proust’s narrator frequently defines himself as a spectator to the world as spectacle. Although the narrator refrains from wholly identifying reality as a theatrical representation, the analogy continuously hovers, Kadivar maintains,

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<sup>81</sup> I refer to Nicholas Ridout’s ‘Welcome to the Vibratorium’, an essay to which I return in Chapter 2, for a discussion of the possible reasons why this audience-performer reciprocity ‘generally escapes the attention of theorists of theater’. ‘Welcome to the Vibratorium,’ *The Senses and Society* 3, no. 2 (2008): p. 223.

<sup>82</sup> Kadivar does not employ the word ‘representation’ in the sense of *reproduction* or *re-presentation* (as to denote something that is presented a ‘second time’), but to describe that relation (*rapport*) by way of which world becomes *present* to us. His approach to the question of representation is influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. Pedro Kadivar, *Marcel Proust ou Esthétique de l’entre-deux. Poétique de la représentation dans ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004), p. 17.

over the relation that he entertains with the real.<sup>83</sup> *Marcel Proust ou Esthétique de l'entre-deux* thus sheds an interesting light on the subject-object relations in the novel. By drawing attention to the fact that the novel's descriptive passages unfailingly focalise the subjective gaze as much as the object of this gaze, Kadivar shows us that it is nearly impossible to extract a clear image of the object from the description, 'car celle-ci ne nous donne pas une image unique, complète et cohérente de son objet mais nous confronte surtout au narrateur en train d'explorer l'objet' ['because it does not give us a unique, complete and coherent image of its object, but rather confronts us with the narrator who is exploring the object'].<sup>84</sup> I return to this particularity of the subject-object relationship on several occasions during the thesis, as my analyses thematise Proust's tendency to turn, in Kadivar's terms, the perceiving subject and this subject's gaze,<sup>85</sup> or, as I would put it, the *perceptual encounter*, into an object of perception, much as Angelika Corbineau-Hoffman implies in her study of the aesthetics of objects in *À la recherche*: 'This effective representation of the event of the *I* indicates that the aim of the description is not so much the objective introduction to the object as the explanation of an interaction between subject and object'.<sup>86</sup>

In his monograph, Kadivar identifies Proust's narrator as a privileged spectator at the 'centre of the theatre'<sup>87</sup> – an image drawn, as we remember from above, from *À la recherche*. For Kadivar, this image evokes the architecture of the Italianate theatre

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>85</sup> 'Cette manière de commenter le réel en regardant le regard qui le fait voir fonde la perception proustienne des choses: un mode de perception où le sujet se regarde lui-même regardant l'objet du regard, ce qui opère aussi le renversement de la dichotomie objet-sujet dont nous avons parlé précédemment, là où le regard du sujet et le sujet lui-même deviennent objet de perception' ['This way of commenting on the real by looking at the gaze that constructs it is the founding principle of Proust's perception of things: a mode of perception in which the subject looks at itself looking at the object of its gaze, which also results in the inversion of the object-subject dichotomy of which we spoke above; there where the gaze of the subject and the subject itself become objects of perception']. Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>86</sup> Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann, *Beschreibung als Verfahren: Die Ästhetik des Objekts im Werk Marcel Prousts* (Stuttgart: J.-B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980), p. 59. The translation is based on Kadivar's translation of Corbineau-Hoffman, in Kadivar, pp. 69-70.

<sup>87</sup> 'Se sentir le centre du théâtre signifie se sentir seul et comme l'unique point qui vise la scène, l'unique regard qui contemple la représentation, se sentir l'*œil du prince* où l'on soit dans la salle' ['To feel like the centre of the theatre means to feel alone, as if one were the only point aimed at by the stage, the only gaze observing the performance, to feel like the eye of the prince wherever one sits in the auditorium']. Kadivar, p. 263.

and the concept of ‘the eye of the prince’ (*l’œil du prince*),<sup>88</sup> which designates the point in the auditorium that gives the best view of the stage (a point often used by stage designers in order to calculate the perspective angles of the stage decoration):

S’il est spectateur du réel, le narrateur demeure un spectateur privilégié par le point de vue qu’il peut adopter grâce à la place qui lui est accordée au sein de l’immense observatoire qu’est la *Recherche*. Il est *l’œil du prince*, le point à partir duquel se construisait le théâtre à l’italienne dans son architecture intérieure, l’endroit duquel s’y organisait la perspective de la scène.<sup>89</sup>

As implied by his designation of *À la recherche* as an immense *observatory*, Kadivar’s interpretation of the novel is characterised by an ‘ocularcentric’ bias, which, to some extent, is justified by the novel’s own ‘ocularcentrism’.<sup>90</sup> This bias is palpable not only in the chapters dedicated to the representation of visual arts but also in his analysis of theatrical representation in Proust, during which he repeatedly refers to the privileging of the visual inherent in the etymological origin of the word ‘theatre’: ‘le mot *theatron* en grec signifie bien *le lieu d’où l’on regarde*’ [‘the word *theatron* in Greek indeed means *the place where you look from*’].<sup>91</sup>

*Theatron*, however, is not merely *the place from where one watches*. Instead, the term could preferably, as Eleni Papalexiou has it, be interpreted in a dual sense, as

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<sup>88</sup> For Kadivar, the use of ‘the eye of the prince’ as metaphor for the narrator does not imply that he is in possession of one single point of view throughout the novel. On the contrary, in *À la recherche*, ‘the eye of the prince’ harbours a multitude of different, interchanging and often contradictory, perspectives. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57. [‘If he is a spectator of the real, the narrator remains a privileged spectator in terms of the point of view that he is able to adopt thanks to the place that he is accorded within the immense observatory that is the *Recherche*. He is *the eye of the prince*, the starting point for the construction of the Italianate theatre’s internal architecture, the point in relation to which the perspective of the stage was organised’.]

<sup>90</sup> Numerous studies examine Proust’s preoccupation with all things visual, in ways that seem to confirm Roger Shattuck’s claim that ‘it is principally through the science and the art of *optics* that he beholds and depicts the world’. Roger Shattuck, *Proust’s Binoculars: a Study of Memory, Time, and Recognition in ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’* (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 6. Others again have aimed to modify this impression of visual hegemony, such as Martin Jay, who reminds us that ‘what is sometimes not fully appreciated is the extent to which [Proust] incorporated [in his novel] many of the doubts and uncertainties about ocularcentrism [...] emerging in the Modernist era’. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 182.

<sup>91</sup> Kadivar, p. 225. The definition is repeated on p. 263.

signifying ‘the place where someone both watches and is being watched’.<sup>92</sup> This latter definition is, to my understanding, more in line with the role played by theatre in *À la recherche*, where theatrical spectatorship is frequently aligned with being the object of another’s perception – and, as should be stressed, not only with being seen, but also heard, and even *felt* (physically and imaginatively) by the other. Contrary to Kadivar, therefore, I do not interpret the figure of being at the centre of the theatre in light of the concept of the *œil du prince*, but, as I believe Proust intended it, as a figure or model for thinking about perception in terms of a mutually affecting encounter between spectatorial and performing bodies of living presence. It follows from this that I stress the distinction (that Kadivar avoids drawing<sup>93</sup>) between the novel’s narrator and its protagonist. To my understanding, this distinction is crucial for understanding why Proust posits the theatre as a ‘symbol’ of perception, for, while ‘the eye of the prince’ may be a suitable metaphor for the narrator’s ‘conceptual’ point of view,<sup>94</sup> it is not as suitable for the ‘perceptual’ point of view of the protagonist, for which the experience of being at the ‘centre of the theatre’ encompasses far more than the experience of

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<sup>92</sup> Eleni Papalexiou, ‘The Dramaturgies of the Gaze: Strategies of Vision and Optical Revelations in the Theatre of Romeo Castellucci and Societas Raffaello Sanzio,’ in *Theatre as Voyeurism: the Pleasures of Watching*, ed. George Rodosthenous (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 50.

<sup>93</sup> Kadivar, pp. 24-26.

<sup>94</sup> In his analysis of the above-mentioned sequence from the Opéra as a ‘spectacle dans le spectacle’ influenced by Baroque painting, in ‘Le théâtre dans le théâtre ou la scène de la baignoire’ (2006), Nell de Hullu-van Doeselaar maintains that Proust’s narrator is ‘d’abord un spectateur, intérieur ou extérieur, devant la scène de la vie: la Nature, le monde bourgeois et mondain, la scène amoureuse et artistique; scènes qu’il évoque en y jouant avec les ombres et la lumière, les couleurs, les lignes, les formes et les perspectives’ [‘before all a spectator, internal or external, before the scene of life: Nature, the bourgeoisie and high society, the lovers’ scene and the artistic scene; scenes which he evokes by playing with the shadows and the lights, the colours, the lines, the shapes and the perspectives’] (p. 73). Doeselaar, then, identifies the narrator’s point of view with theatrical spectatorship, and yet, one may object that it is not so much a *theatricalising* disposition that he uncovers as a *visualising* one. As the quote above implies, Doeselaar takes particular interest in how techniques borrowed from the art of painting (such as the chiaroscuro) function as constitutive elements in the narrator’s account of perceptual experiences and, accordingly, it is above all the influence exercised on Proust by the Baroque painters (and, especially, Rembrandt) that his analysis serves to bring out. See Nell de Hullu-van Doeselaar, ‘Le théâtre dans le théâtre ou la scène de la baignoire,’ in *Proust et le théâtre*, ed. Romana Goedendorp et al., Marcel Proust Aujourd’hui (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2006).

being an *optical* centre or a privileged point of view.<sup>95</sup> Proust's protagonist is not a disembodied 'gaze', but a perceiving and perceivable *body among bodies*, and the experience of being not only a subject but also an object of perception defines, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, his existence and evolution. To be sure, the distinction between narrator and protagonist in a first-person narrative can never be airtight. However, I will (for the most part) leave questions concerning the narrator's agency aside. And, in order to avoid confusion regarding the object of my study, I will consistently refer to the novel's perceiving subject as the *protagonist*.

### The Proustian Tableau

Although, to my knowledge, my study is the first to examine the Proustian tableau in light of Diderot's tableau concept, the term *tableau* is not new to Proust criticism. Most notably, Georges Poulet, in his seminal study of Proustian space, invites us to consider the structure of *À la recherche* as consisting of a series of detached, juxtaposed tableaux ('une série de tableaux isolés et juxtaposés'<sup>96</sup>). Poulet envisions the novel's fictional universe as a conglomerate of fragments that nonetheless form a structured and coherent whole, for, in his view, these fragments are ultimately brought together by a central consciousness functioning as their principal unifier.<sup>97</sup> The

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<sup>95</sup> In 'Discourse: Nonnarrated Stories', Seymour Chatman argues that the point of view of a retrospectively gazing narrator (such as the narrator of *À la recherche*) is 'conceptual', and not 'perceptual': 'Can this kind of point of view be called "perceptual"? The word sounds strange, and for good reason. It makes sense to say that the character is literally perceiving something within the world of the work ("homodiegetically," as Genette would say). But what the narrator reports from his perspective is almost always outside the story (heterodiegetic), even if only retrospective, that is, temporally distant. Typically, he is looking back at his own earlier perception-as-a-character. But that looking-back is a conception, no longer a perception'. Seymour Chatman, 'Discourse: Nonnarrated Stories,' in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, ed. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 146.

<sup>96</sup> Georges Poulet, *L'Espace proustien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 132.

<sup>97</sup> 'Lorsque le roman proustien se termine, quand la conscience qui n'a cessé d'en enregistrer les événements, se trouve en mesure de jeter sur eux un regard final, rétrospectif et elucidateur, alors la multiplicité discontinue des épisodes, pareille jusqu'à ce moment à une série de tableaux isolés et juxtaposés, se trouve faire place dans l'esprit de celui qui en embrasse l'ensemble, à une pluralité cohérente d'images qui se réfèrent les unes aux autres, s'éclairent mutuellement, et, pour tout dire, *se composent*. On ne peut donc conclure autrement qu'en constatant que le roman proustien *fin*it par démontrer sa cohérence interne'. Ibid. ['At the moment the Proustian novel is ended, when the consciousness, which has not

tableaux' relations to each other thus come to resemble that of *predellas*, the decorated panels at the base of an altarpiece, so that 'ce qui apparaît n'est plus un assemblage d'épisodes disparates, mais un ensemble, où, au-dessus des prédelles isolées, se discerne une châsse ou un retable' ['what appears is no longer an assemblage of disparate episodes, but an altogether, in which, above the isolated predellas, a reliquary is discerned, or a reredos'].<sup>98</sup> Poulet borrows this image, which he views as the perfect metaphor for *À la recherche*, from the narrator's description of his bedroom at Balbec, where the glass panels of the lower bookshelves that run along the walls reflect and 'exhibit' different parts of the evening sky outside, which is made violet by the sun that sets (II, 160-61; 2, 383-84).

Poulet, then, identifies the Proustian tableau primarily as a visual *image*, and, subsequently, *À la recherche* as a series of images ('une série d'images'<sup>99</sup>) or a gallery filled with pictures ('une galerie pleine de tableaux'<sup>100</sup>). Consequently, the novel's tableaux retain, in his conception of them, a quality of flatness, stability and fixity, like paintings hung on a wall in a museum. This view of the tableaux as a collection of flat images or paintings reappears in a more recent study, Andrée Laganière's thesis on interior spaces in Proust and Vermeer.<sup>101</sup> In her thesis, Laganière argues that the tableau operates in *À la recherche* as a means to fix the evanescent and arrest the mobile, that is to say, more concretely, that Proust makes use of the tableau in order to frame and thus gain access to otherwise shapeless and lost fragments of the past:

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ceased to register within all the happenings, is found at the point of throwing upon them a final retrospective and elucidating gaze, then the discontinuous multiplicity of episodes, identical until this moment to a series of isolated and juxtaposed pictures, is found to make room in the mind of him who embraces everything within it, for a coherent reality of images that relate themselves the ones to the others, are mutually lighted up, and, so to speak, *compose themselves*. One cannot, then, conclude otherwise than in declaring that the Proustian novel *ends* by demonstrating its internal coherence'. Georges Poulet, *Proustian Space*, trans. Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 103-04.]

<sup>98</sup> Poulet, *L'Espace proustien*, p. 133. [Poulet, *Proustian Space*, p. 104.]

<sup>99</sup> Poulet, *L'Espace proustien*, p. 117.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>101</sup> Andrée Laganière, 'Les espaces intérieurs de Proust et Vermeer' (PhD diss., Université de Montréal, 2001), ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

L'imaginaire évoque des bribes du passé, les illustre sitôt énoncées et les contemple avec la même fascination qu'une vérité incontestablement retrouvée. L'écriture, dans l'espoir de les ressusciter intactes, de leur insuffler vie et relief, sang, parfum et couleur, les réinvente et les encadre sous forme de tableaux, pour que plus jamais elles ne s'échappent, pour que le mobile s'arrête et que l'évanescent se fixe.<sup>102</sup>

In Laganière's view, *À la recherche* envisions 'le réel sous forme de surface encadrée ou reflétée sur une vitre, tout en évoquant la présence d'un spectateur à la fois privilégié, désincarné et séparé de la scène' ['reality as a surface that is either framed or reflected on a glass pane, while at the same time evoking the presence of a spectator that is simultaneously privileged, disincarnated and separate from the scene'].<sup>103</sup> Her arguments, strongly influenced by Poulet, highlight the significance of the tableau for the mediation of (past) perceptual experiences in Proust (the tableau, as we read above, enables the author to resuscitate and frame, and thus give shape and life to the past). But her arguments also expose the striking omission of the embodied spectator both in her own and in Poulet's conception of the tableau. For, while, according to both, each tableau evokes and reflects the figure of a spectator, the spectator they imagine is not an inscribed, bodily presence, but an omnipresent, disembodied gaze. This is indeed a striking omission, since inscribed (that is, physically present) spectators are a constant presence in Proust's tableaux. Virtually always, the scenes that come to view in the tableaux are mediated not only through the disembodied gaze of the narrator but also by way of the senses and imagination of spectators faced with a reality that they simultaneously discover and create. And, while the distance between the perceiving subject and the object of perception is subject to variation, the subject-object relation as such is an absolute. In every tableau, there is a perceiving subject present – there is *someone* there who perceives, imagines and reacts to *something*. And, significantly, as becomes visible in several of the examples analysed in this thesis, this spectatorial figure is not that of an always-identical and recognisable narrator, but that of a

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 63. ['Imagination evokes snatches of the past, illustrates them as soon as they are formulated and gazes at them with the same fascination as for a truth that has been indisputably found again. Writing, in the hope of resuscitating them undamaged, and breathing into them life and depth, blood, perfume and colour, reinvents these snatches and frames them like paintings [*tableaux*], so that they can never escape, so that that which moves stops and that which is evanescent becomes fixed'.]

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



dynamic protagonist often transformed in the encounter with the spectacle. The constantly evolving nature of the novel's subject-object relations is precisely what we risk ignoring if we regard the tableau merely as a framed and fixed image separate from the disembodied spectatorial gaze.

Consequently, although Poulet's thesis is valuable to me, I define the tableau differently than he does, since I am interested, above all, in the *perceptual* encounter between spectatorial and performing bodies (the latter not necessarily *human* bodies, but also material objects) that take place *within* the tableau, experienced by the work's protagonists, and not in the relationship that the tableaux entertain with one another, or with the disembodied gaze of the narrator, or what Poulet regards as the work's *central consciousness*.<sup>104</sup> In drawing attention to the internal relations of the tableau, I do not mean to imply that the 'external' relations provide a less fruitful object of study, however. It would certainly also be possible to ask questions regarding spectatorship in *À la recherche* by looking at those relations. In fact, the tableau concept itself, from its outset in the eighteenth century, invites us to consider several spectatorial levels at once, for, when he writes about theatre, Diderot consistently engages a composite spectatorial notion, which he extends to encompass not only the actual spectator in the auditorium but also the playwright, as well as, crucial for this study, the characters on stage. In Diderot's view, playwrights are a form of 'spectators' in the theatres of their own minds, and the dramatic text is that which enables the 'spectator-playwright' to communicate the spectacles of the mind to the actors, and, ultimately, by way of the actors, to the spectators.<sup>105</sup> This means that 'dramatists need to position *themselves*

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<sup>104</sup> Poulet's interpretation must be viewed in relation to his overall project as critic of finding in literary works the expression of a central consciousness, or what he elsewhere refers to as the work's *Cogito*. For further reading on this subject, I refer to Georges Poulet, 'Phenomenology of Reading,' *New Literary History* 1, no. 1 (October 1969).

<sup>105</sup> The most efficient way to convey these interior spectacles to others is, in Diderot's view, to write *mimes*: '[...] quand j'écris la pantomime, c'est comme si je m'adressais en ces mots au comédien: C'est ainsi que je déclame, voilà les choses comme elles se passaient dans mon imagination, lorsque je composais'. Denis Diderot, 'De la poésie dramatique,' in *Diderot's Writings on the Theatre*, ed. F.C. Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 202. '[...] when I write down the stage directions, it is as if I were saying to the actors, "This is the way I say the lines; these are the things I saw in my imagination as I was writing"'. Denis Diderot, 'From "Discourse on Dramatic Poetry",' trans. Barbara Kerslake, in *Sources of Dramatic Theory: 2: Voltaire to Hugo*, ed. Michael J. Sidnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 68.] The way Diderot saw it, the right gesture could express far

imaginatively as spectators and write from this perspective, rather than from that of an orator addressing a public through the characters'.<sup>106</sup> In other words, while Diderot often encourages both actors and dramatists to ignore the audience,<sup>107</sup> the figure of the spectator is actually implicitly present whenever he describes the playwright's agency.

This, then, serves to show that it would indeed be possible to study spectatorial aspects of the tableau by examining its 'external' relations. For the purpose of the present study of Proust's *mise en scène* of *perception*, however, it is more important that Diderot also proposed to view the actors on stage as spectators of one another. As Tili Boon-Cuillé reminds us, the distinction that Diderot, at the beginning of his first treatise on the theatre, *Entretiens sur le fils naturel*, draws 'between "celui qui agit et celui qui regarde"' (the one who acts and the one who watches) serves not only to differentiate the figures within the tableau from those outside the tableau but also to differentiate the figures within the tableau from one another'.<sup>108</sup> The figure of the spectator, then, is present both offstage and onstage in Diderot's theatre, and it is the figure of the 'onstage-spectator' that corresponds to the spectatorial figure of the Proustian tableau: although we (most often) see Proust's fictional universe from the viewpoint of the protagonist, this 'spectator-protagonist' is also an actor on the 'stage'

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more efficiently than words the contents of the human soul, and, therefore, dramatists should insert into their manuscripts descriptive passages explaining the movements and gestures of the characters such as they had imagined them while writing: 'La pantomime est le tableau qui existait dans l'imagination du poète, lorsqu'il écrivait; et qu'il voudrait que la scène montrât à chaque instant lorsque on le joue'. Diderot, 'De la poésie dramatique,' in *Diderot's Writings on the Theatre*, p. 201. ['Stage directions reveal the picture that existed in the dramatist's mind as he was writing, and that he would like to see reproduced on stage throughout the performance'. Diderot, 'From "Discourse on Dramatic Poetry",' in *Sources of Dramatic Theory: 2: Voltaire to Hugo*, p. 68.] For Diderot, then, writing *mime* equalled writing *tableaux*, and the tableaux served, above all, the purpose of transposing the spectacles of the mind into the text.

<sup>106</sup> Romira M. Worvill, 'From Prose Peinture to Dramatic Tableau: Diderot, Fénelon and the Emergence of the Pictorial Aesthetic in France,' *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 39, no. 1 (2010): p. 152.

<sup>107</sup> 'Soit donc que vous composiez, soit que vous jouiez, ne pensez non plus au spectateur que s'il n'existait pas'. Diderot, 'De la poésie dramatique,' in *Diderot's Writings on the Theatre*, p. 157. ['Whether you are a playwright or an actor, take no more thought for the spectator than if he did not exist'. Diderot, 'From "Discourse on Dramatic Poetry",' in *Sources of Dramatic Theory: 2: Voltaire to Hugo*, p. 65.] I will return to this aspect of Diderot's theatrical aesthetics, often referred to as the concept of the 'fourth wall', in Chapter 3.

<sup>108</sup> Tili Boon Cuillé, *Narrative Interludes: Musical Tableaux in Eighteenth-Century French Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 16.

of the novel, like we saw in the example from the Opéra, where the protagonist is both a spectator and the object of Mme de Guermantes's gaze – and of ours. As Mario Lavagetto observes: 'Le spectacle auquel nous assistons n'est pas le même auquel *Je* assiste, car *Je* fait aussi partie de notre scène' ['The performance that we are attending is not the same performance attended by *Je*, since *Je* is also part of our scene'].<sup>109</sup> What I here propose to conceive as the Proustian tableau, then, does not correspond to the 'performance' that the protagonist (or, in cases where the viewpoint is transferred to another of the novel's characters, one of these proxies) perceives, but to the one that the reader perceives, and which includes both the perceiving subject and the object of perception. Accordingly, when I called for the restoration of the tableau's 'theatrical' dimension earlier in this introductory chapter, it was the Diderotian tableau's staging of the interaction of actors on stage as an encounter of spectatorial and performing bodies that I meant to evoke, since this is the dimension that we risk losing sight of, if we consider the tableau, like Poulet and Laganière, as a flat, visual image.

Central to Diderot's original conception of the tableau is the emphasis put on the spectator's reactions to what he or she perceives. Nevertheless, scholars often ignore this aspect of the term, perhaps as a consequence of the reference to the, by definition, static art of painting in his first definition of the tableau<sup>110</sup> – a reference which has led to a certain amount of confusion concerning the nature of the tableau.

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<sup>109</sup> Mario Lavagetto, *Chambre 43. Un lapsus de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Belin, 1996), p. 75.

<sup>110</sup> It is in *Entretiens*, published in 1757 as an accompaniment to the play *Le Fils naturel*, that we find Diderot's first, and very brief, definition of the tableau. The text consists of a dialogue between the philosopher, Moi, and a character named Dorval. When Dorval says that he prefers the tableau to the *coup de théâtre*, the philosopher asks him to explain why. Unable to precisely define the terms, Dorval provides two examples of opposite nature, from which the philosopher extracts the following conclusion: 'J'entends. Un incident imprévu qui se passe en action, et qui change subitement l'état des personnages, est un coup de théâtre. Une disposition de ces personnages sur la scène, si naturelle et si vraie, que, rendue fidèlement par un peintre, elle me plairait sur la toile, est un tableau.' Diderot, 'Entretiens sur le Fils naturel,' in *Diderot's Writings on the Theatre*, p. 29. ['I understand. An unforeseen incident that transpires in the action and that suddenly changes the situation of the characters is a coup de théâtre. A disposition of these characters on the stage so natural and true that, if faithfully rendered by a painter, it would please me on the canvas, is a tableau.' Translated into English in Cuillé, p. 8.] Diderot's definition of the tableau as an arrangement of the characters in such a natural manner that it would have been pleasing on a canvas implies that the tableau's primary task is to *show* the spectator something, and not to affect the play's progression and plot.

As Cuillé shows in her book on musical tableaux in narrative, scholars have often interpreted Diderot's call for tableaux in the theatre as a desire to create a static form of drama, in which the spectators would be presented with a succession of 'frozen' scenes, as in a picture gallery.<sup>111</sup> However, this interpretation, as Cuillé argues with reference to Dorval's description of the tableau of maternal love in *Entretiens*,<sup>112</sup> is 'completely at odds with Diderot's own characterisation of the tableau. Dorval's call for tableaux over coups de théâtre locates the drama not in the action unfolding before the spectator's eyes but in the characters' (and by extension, the spectators') *reaction* to a central event'.<sup>113</sup> This, then, is precisely why I argue that the Proustian tableau possesses a close kinship with the Diderotian one – a kinship that is not sufficiently accounted for by previous critical conceptions of the tableau in Proust. Like Diderot, Proust draws the reader's attention *from* the object of perception and *towards* the perceiving subject's emotional and imaginative response to the perceived. It is because Proust, implicitly or explicitly, identifies his protagonists as *spectators* of the world about them that we are led to identify certain sequences as tableaux, but the *drama* of perception that we are invited to witness in these parts of the text is often completely devoid of properly dramatic content, for, since the Proustian tableau locates the drama in the subjectively tinted *how* of perception (that is, in the *manner* in which something is perceived), the spectacle can just as well be a situation where nothing really happens or an ordinary object that could easily have been overlooked. The tableau's spectacular

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<sup>111</sup> Cuillé, p. 12. Modern dictionaries of literary terms tend to reproduce this initial definition, with small variations. See, for instance, the definition of 'tableau' in Chris Baldick, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2008): 'A "picture" formed by living persons caught in static attitudes [...] In a story or poem, a description of some group of people in more or less static postures is sometimes called a tableau'.

<sup>112</sup> 'Quoi donc, pourrait-il y avoir rien de trop véhément dans l'action d'une mère dont on immole la fille? Qu'elle coure sur la scène comme une femme furieuse ou troublée; qu'elle remplisse de cris son palais; que le désordre ait passé jusque dans ses vêtements, ces choses conviennent à son désespoir [...]. La véritable dignité, celle qui me frappe, qui me renverse, c'est le tableau de l'amour maternel dans toute sa vérité'. Diderot, 'Entretiens sur le Fils naturel,' in *Diderot's Writings on the Theatre*, p. 31. ['What! Could there be anything too vehement in the action of a mother whose daughter is to be immolated? Let her race across the stage like an enraged or troubled woman, let her fill the palace with her cries, let her disarray be visible in her clothing, these things suit her despair. [...] True dignity, that which strikes me, which bowls me over, is to be found in the tableau of maternal love in all its truth'. Translated in Cuillé, p. 13.]

<sup>113</sup> Cuillé, p. 12.

qualities thus rely on the spectator's sensory, imaginative and affective response, from which the spectacle cannot be separated.

## Chapter Overview

As I hope to have made clear by now, my research into Proustian theatricalities in this thesis follows distinct yet interrelated paths: while I mean to show that, in Proust's fictional universe, theatricality may be conceived as a mode of perception, I also intend to study the different forms of *theatricalisation* of Proust's (perceptual) writing that we may address in terms of staging, tableaux, theatrical references or theatrical writing (*écriture théâtrale*). Often, these different theatricalities overlap: in a single example, we may observe, for instance, both that perception is *staged* (that the act of perception is subject to *mise en scène* in the narrative) *and* that what is rendered in the text are the workings of a *staging* perception that theatricalises its object by turning it, assisted by the imagination and the emotions, into a theatrical spectacle. I have divided my dissertation into six chapters, each addressing different aspects of the interplay of theatricality and perception in *À la recherche*.

In Chapter 1, I examine the concept of theatrical spectatorship in *À la recherche* in relation to the figure of the invisible spectator, the *voyeur*. Asking what the voyeur's spectatorship may have to tell us about Proust's views on perception, my analysis of a series of voyeuristic scenes addresses the novel's frequent association of voyeurism and theatricality, aiming to uncover the circumstances that lead the voyeurs to interpret what they perceive in theatrical terms, as in the renowned Montjouvain-episode, where the women the protagonist observes are compared to actors in a melodrama. In this episode, as in the other examples analysed in this chapter, the spectator's point of view (constituted not only by *what* he sees and *from where*, but also by *how* he perceives) conditions him to read the scene that presents itself to him as a staged performance. The significance of the voyeur's viewpoint is, moreover, figuratively expressed in the text by way of peepholes, windows and doors that mediate and restrict the spectator's access to the spectacle, while also evoking the layout of a theatre. For this and other reasons which I will discuss, the figure of the voyeur provides a paradigmatic example of what I refer to as the *staging perception* in Proust.

In Chapter 2, I direct my attention towards the novel's mediation of three types of experiences that alter the protagonist's perception of his surroundings: travel, love and the encounter with an artwork. Emphasising the 'vibratory' and mutually affective relationship between subject and object of perception expressed in these paragraphs, I show that the spectator-performer reciprocity fundamental to the theatrical experience is evoked by Proust's inscription of the perceiving subject into the staged perceptual experience as both spectator *and* performer. Asking how the Proustian 'maxim' that every impression comes in two parts ('toute impression est double') affects the novel's staging of perception, the chapter discusses, among other things, the figure of the 'inward spectator' (the 'spectateur intérieur') and the 'illusory' nature of Proustian 'reality' in light of perspectives provided by contemporary theatre theory as well as Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

In Chapter 3, I take Roland Barthes's description of *À la recherche* as an *œuvre-maquette* (a work that stages its own fabrication), and his suggestion, in a 1972 round-table discussion on Proust, that *À la recherche* may be viewed as a novel existing only in a 'non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality', as my starting points. Barthes's perspectives challenge my understanding of the Proustian tableau, since the Diderotian tableau, which I view as a precursor to Proust's *mise en scène*, according to Barthes represents a form of theatricality radically opposed to 'non-hysterical theatricality': a *hysterical* theatricality that attempts to hide its own artifice. Barthes's criticism implies that it would be *paradoxical* to say that Proust writes tableaux while at the same time arguing that his novel constitutes non-hysterical theatricality. The chapter addresses these concerns, and asks whether (and *how*) *À la recherche* might be both 'hysterical' and 'non-hysterical' (thus entertaining both illusion and awareness). In conclusion, the chapter attends to this question by turning to a genre that not only occupies a central role in the repertoire of theatrical references in the novel but also, notably, shows us that there is no absolute divergence between the act of creating illusions and the act of revealing the machinery enabling these illusions: the theatrical *féerie*.

Expanding on the idea presented in conclusion to Chapter 3, that the Proustian tableau (similarly to the didascalie of the Romantic *féerie*) constitutes a 'synthesis' of the elements that constitute the theatrical illusion *as it is perceived by the spectator*,

my analysis in Chapter 4 affirms that the theatricality of *À la recherche* depends more on Proust's careful renderings of perceptual impressions from a 'spectatorial' point of view than on his masterful staging of dialogues, which other critics have emphasised. Contrasting Proust's *mise en scène* of the material world in *À la recherche* with that of 'Scénario', one of his earliest attempts at theatrical writing, the chapter traces the historical evolution of Proust's dramatisation of encounters with the inanimate, which, in the novel, becomes more of a *phenomenological* drama than in the juvenilia, as the protagonist's perception of the object world turns into subject matter.

Chapter 5 continues the exploration of the novel's staging of the inanimate, as we venture into the novel's enchanted interiors. My focus in this chapter is on Proust's use of the figure of enchantment to qualify the perception of interiors, and on what Kathleen Lennon calls the 'affective texture'<sup>114</sup> that the workings of the imagination, together with our emotions and desires, give to the world that we live in and create for ourselves. Examining how figures of enchantment are engaged in the rendering of two interiors qualified as *féerique* (the Swann family's home in Paris and the Hôtel de Flandre in Doncières), I argue that, in *À la recherche*, enchantment operates neither as something imposed onto the world by the perceiving subject, nor as something simply discovered there, but as something that emerges from our interaction with the world. Drawing a line from the novel to two essays, one on Chardin's still lifes and one on reading, written in, respectively, 1895 and 1906, I am able to show that Proust's *mise en scène* of the encounter with an enchanting everyday in *À la recherche* re-actualises ideas concerning the 'life' of the inanimate which he had begun to develop long before the conception of his novel – ideas which may, in fact, be said to have brought him to acknowledge reversibility as a quality of perception in general, and thus to posit the theatre as the most appropriate 'symbol' of perception.

The final chapter of my thesis develops the thoughts concerning reversibility in perception conceived in Chapter 5, as I study the Proustian protagonist's experience of becoming a spectacle for others (and thus for himself) in the novel's 'final act': the *matinée* at the Princesse de Guermantes, also known as the 'Bal de Têtes'. In this chapter, I take a slightly different methodological approach than in the previous ones,

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<sup>114</sup> Lennon, p. 3.

as I turn to the two first drafts for what was to become the ‘Bal de Têtes’, written at an early stage in Proust’s preparations for *À la recherche*, in 1910 and 1911, to see how his use of references to the universe of the féerie evolves from the drafts to the final version. While the féerie’s influence on the matinée is visible also in the published version, these two drafts, in which the references to the féerie are numerous and more explicit than in the final version, reveal the significance that this theatrical model had for Proust when he crafted the conclusion to his novel, and help us see why, at the very end of the novel, the féerie is finally granted the leading role, as a symbolic figure for life itself – that is, for our *perception* of life.



# 1 The Voyeur's Theatre

[...] c'est à la lumière de la rampe des théâtres du boulevard plutôt que sous la lampe d'une maison de campagne véritable qu'on peut voir une fille faire cracher une amie sur le portrait d'un père qui n'a vécu que pour elle. (I, 161)<sup>115</sup>

Shortly after the sun has set, Proust's protagonist wakes up from a nap among some bushes on a small hill overlooking the Vinteuil family's house at Montjouvain. From his hiding place, he has a direct view into the second-floor drawing room of the house, where he observes Mlle Vinteuil and her friend in the act of profaning – by preparing to spit on it – a photograph of her late father. The women are unaware that someone is watching them, and yet, their behaviour strikes him as composed and rehearsed, as though they were repeating some already established ritual. There is something almost unreal about it that reminds him of the theatre. Surely, it is not in the lamplight of a country house that one would expect to see people behave like these women do, but rather behind the footlights [*à la lumière de la rampe des théâtres du boulevard*']. The protagonist thus decides that what he sees unfold before him must be a form of sadism, since *'il n'y a guère que le sadisme qui donne un fondement dans la vie à l'esthétique du mélodrame'* [*'almost nothing else but sadism provides a basis in real life for the aesthetics of melodrama'*] (I, 161; I, 164, my emphasis). However, if Mlle Vinteuil is a sadist, she is not so in the sense of being actually evil, but in the sense of being an *artist* of evil, *'l'artiste du mal'* (I, 162), for, as in the theatre, her sadism produces merely an *appearance* of evil, *'une apparence du mal'* (I, 161). Accordingly, while she believes herself to be evil, this is not really the case, and, therefore, as Antoine Compagnon affirms, there is something ambiguous about this passage: Proust seems to distinguish between Mlle Vinteuil's sadism and other more authentic forms of sadism, which she fails to imitate.<sup>116</sup> Her form of sadism, then, is merely a form of theatre that, ironically, the actress herself is unaware that she is performing (badly). In other words,

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<sup>115</sup> '[...] it is behind the footlights of a popular theatre rather than in the lamplight of an actual country house that one expects to see a girl encouraging her friend to spit on the portrait of a father who lived only for her' (I, 164).

<sup>116</sup> Antoine Compagnon, *Proust entre deux siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), pp. 173-74.

this ‘illusion of evil’ is not her conscious creation, but that of the individual who is hiding in the bushes, and who interprets the other’s behaviour in terms of theatre. It is he who recognises and thus engenders the theatrical illusion, and who thereby identifies himself as a spectator:

[...] le sadisme est une illusion engendrée chez le spectateur par l’observation de la cruauté, il correspond au point de vue du tiers, du voyeur justement, tandis que la cruauté elle-même demeure toujours aveugle sur sa vérité. Le mal comme tel, ou plutôt la méchanceté, n’est jamais qu’une *illusion théâtrale* dans la *Recherche du temps perdu*.<sup>117</sup>

Compagnon’s commentary on the Montjouvain scene makes an important point regarding the nature of sadism and cruelty in *À la recherche*. In Proust’s novel, evil, like sadism, is but an illusion engendered by the one who observes. As such, since evil is constituted in the encounter between a spectator and a spectacle, it can be viewed as a *theatrical illusion*. A similar point could be made, however, with regards to a wide range of other situations that we shall explore in the course of this chapter (and in the whole thesis), for in *À la recherche*, the object of (voyeuristic) perception (almost regardless of *what* or *who* it is) is almost always part of an imaginary scene fabricated by the theatricalising imagination of the spectator. In fact, throughout *À la recherche*, Proust employs the theatrical analogy liberally as a means to highlight the imaginative and creative dimension of perception. In other words, the protagonist’s apprehension of the scene he witnesses at Montjouvain as a theatrical illusion serves to disclose an intertwining of perception and imagination that Proust appears to view as necessarily involved in every act of perception. The scene, then, may be viewed as a paradigmatic example of how Proust’s novel *stages* the workings of a *staging* perception. This hypothesis is the starting point for the present chapter.

This chapter explores Proust’s appropriation of the tableau device as a means to mediate subjective experiences by analysing some examples in which the protagonists

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 172-73, my emphasis. [‘[...] sadism is an illusion brought about for the spectator by the observation of cruelty. It corresponds to the point of view of the third party, the peeping Tom, whereas cruelty itself always remains blind to its truth. Evil in itself, or rather spitefulness, is nothing but a *theatrical illusion* in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.’]

act as invisible spectators (voyeurs) of a world constructed in the act of perception and by way of theatricalisation. Proust drew on the theatre as a model for staging, among other things, ‘voyeuristic’ experiences in which the people that the protagonists observe are unaware that someone is watching them (that they have a spectator), and the tableau – which requires the author to position himself imaginatively in the position of a spectator and to write from this perspective – lends itself admirably to this task, due to its setting up of a distance between spectator and spectacle and its focus on the spectator’s *reactions* to the perceived as well as on the object of perception itself. Sometimes, the feeling of being, as it were, *on the margin of events* is figuratively represented in the text by way of windows or doors that delineate and restrict the perceiving subject’s access to the object of perception. In such tableaux, the window or door openings come to evoke the proscenium opening in a theatre, not only because the way in which they frame the perceived brings to mind the way that the wall separating the stage from the auditorium frames the theatrical performance, but also because these tableaux typically present us with a protagonist who identifies and interprets what he perceives as theatrical. While the perceiving subjects, for the most part, remain passive and physically immobile in these tableaux (like spectators or ‘part-less actors’, they typically stay still in one place), they are by no means inactive. In fact, it would seem that they compensate for their lack of actual interaction with the observed by engaging imaginatively with it and by *theatricalising* what they perceive. As the episode from Montjouvain, to which we shall return in due course, exemplifies, it is often the encounter with the unfamiliar that leads Proust’s protagonists to read their surroundings as theatrical, and the theatrical analogy seems frequently to translate experiences of the world as foreign or slightly unreal.

Clearly, the theatrical situation is one that typically ‘licenses voyeurism’.<sup>118</sup> The concept of the fourth wall, which requires actors to perform as though they were unaware of being watched, and which invites the audience to indulge the idea of being invisible witnesses to the lives of others, contributes strongly to creating this effect. As Patrice Pavis asserts, the theatre may be considered ‘an institutionalised space for

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<sup>118</sup> Robert Leach quoted in George Rodosthenous, ed. *Theatre as Voyeurism: the Pleasures of Watching* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 8.

voyeurism'.<sup>119</sup> In other words, the (Italianate<sup>120</sup>) theatre seems almost inevitably to transform spectators into voyeurs, since, as Roland Barthes writes in an essay on Japanese puppet theatre (an essay to which I shall return in Chapter 3), 'tout s'y passe dans un intérieur subrepticement ouvert, surpris, épié, savouré par un spectateur tapi dans l'ombre' ['everything happens there in an interior surreptitiously opened, surprised, espied, savoured by a hidden spectator'].<sup>121</sup> As an anonymous part of the crowd in a darkened auditorium, the spectator in the Italianate theatre can give in to the pleasure of watching others, and does so in an unguarded manner that would be, for the most part, inconceivable in the world outside this institution.<sup>122</sup>

Proust's protagonist often spies on others without being caught in the act. In the analyses of this chapter, we shall look into his secret scrutiny of aunt Léonie in Combray (I, 108; 1, 110-11); Mlle Vinteuil and her friend at Montjouvain (I, 157-62;

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Theatrical performances in *fin de siècle* Paris were by no means limited to the major theatre institutions but also took place in private homes, as part of the entertainment given in *salons* and the like. In *À la recherche*, Proust brings us along to each of these different kinds of venues, from the young protagonist's first encounters with the theatre, when he goes to see La Berma in the titular role of Jean Racine's *Phèdre*; to the experimental theatre where he accompanies Robert de Saint-Loup to see the latter's girlfriend, Rachel, perform; and, finally, to the very same Rachel's performance in a private home, at the Princesse de Guermantes's, during the matinée that concludes the novel. Theatre, then, is not bound to one particular type of space in *À la recherche* (no more than the concept of theatricality is merely evoked in relation to theatrical performances). However, in the quote that introduced this thesis, the narrator does seem to have a concrete physical structure in mind, and it is likely that the building that he refers to is that of an unnamed boulevard theatre somewhere in Paris. While he does not specify the name of the theatre that harbours his first theatrical experience, he does mention that years have gone since La Berma – the star of the matinée – abandoned the 'grandes scènes' ['the classical stage'] and migrated to a 'théâtre de boulevard dont elle était l'étoile' ['more popular theatre of which she was now the star and mainstay'] (I, 433; 2, 15, translation modified by me). From the sporadic descriptions he gives, we could concur that the layout of this theatre more or less conforms to the Italianate theatre house architecture, with a deep stage permitting perspectival illusions, a permanent proscenium arch enabling changeable scenery, and containing a curtain that is opened and closed between acts.

<sup>121</sup> Roland Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, ed. Eric Marty (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999), p. 789. [Roland Barthes, 'The Dolls of Bunraku,' trans. David Savran, *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 6, no. 4 (1976): p. 45.]

<sup>122</sup> For a detailed overview of recent theoretical contributions addressing the relationship between spectatorship and voyeurism, see the introductory chapter to *Theatre as Voyeurism: the Pleasures of Watching*, in which editor George Rodosthenous proposes to view theatre as a 'voyeuristic exchange between the performer and the audience, where the performer (the object of the audience's gaze) and the audience (the voyeur of this exchange) are placed in a legalized and safe environment for that interaction'. Rodosthenous, p. 3.

1, 160-66); the inhabitants of Doncières (II, 395-96; 3, 93-94); and Charlus at Jupien's brothel in Paris (IV, 394; 6, 123). All four passages instate the protagonist in a spectatorial position that brings to mind the figure of the voyeur, since the observer remains hidden from view. In two of them, the scenes acquire a certain voyeuristic quality also from the fact that what he observes are spectacles of desire. Nevertheless, the protagonist of *À la recherche* is far from our stereotypical Peeping Tom, for it is not intentionally, but always – or so he claims – by coincidence that he stumbles upon these private moments. Moreover, the situations he observes are often simple everyday scenes, completely devoid of sexual content, and the pleasure of watching is rarely explicitly associated with sexual desire, even though the narrator occasionally connects the two (the paradigmatic examples would be the situations in which the protagonist watches 'la prisonnière', Albertine, as she sleeps (III, 578-82; 5, 59-63)).

In other words, while, as the Albertine-examples illustrate, Proust certainly had an eye for the erotic aspects of voyeurism, and also for the moral dubiousness of the act, such aspects are rarely of primary interest when the protagonist becomes a voyeur. The pleasure he experiences is above all, it seems, related to the pleasure of gaining (perceptual) access to something previously unknown, through 'forbidden visual imagery'.<sup>123</sup> We may say, accordingly, that the relative invisibility and covertness that often characterises the spectatorial position of the Proustian protagonist adds a certain voyeuristic quality to it, but also that Proust's approach to the phenomenon of the 'hidden spectator' is radically different from the typical, psychoanalytical take on voyeurism. For, while Freud's *Schaulust* and the concept of scopophilia are primarily focused on the act of looking for libidinous purposes, Proust's interest in the voyeur lies elsewhere. As we saw in the Introduction to this thesis, Volker Roloff stresses this point in his essay on the novel's 'scènes de curiosité' (scenes that show the protagonist observing the sexual interaction of others). Certain aspects of Roloff's work have been very useful to me in my work on this chapter, but, crucially, contrary to his study, my exploration of the Proustian 'voyeur' is not limited to scenes that depict '« jeux et spectacles » du désir' [“shows and games” of desire’].<sup>124</sup> I believe that, in order to

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Roloff, p. 273.

comprehend the role that the hidden spectator plays in *À la recherche*, we are obliged to include in our analyses examples that cover a wide range of different perceptual experiences, and not merely the observation of erotic scenes. In my view, Proust's project is much more radical than an investigation of voyeurism as such would have been, for when Proust installs his protagonist as a spectator behind an imaginary 'fourth wall', his aim is not, it seems, to uncover the workings and specificities of a particular form of spectatorship (such as voyeurism), but rather to address the concept of perception in itself. This is also what Roloff implies when he maintains that 'les scènes de voyeurisme de la *Recherche* appartiennent [...] aux situations clés qui montrent le fonctionnement de la perception générale *et* esthétique et qui reflètent l'interaction intermédiaire et la différence entre les divers sens et médias lors de la perception' ['the scenes of voyeurism in the *Recherche* belong [...] with the key situations which demonstrate how general *and* aesthetic perception function and which reflect the intermedial interaction, as well as the perceptual difference between the various senses and media'].<sup>125</sup> This chapter, then, aims, among other things, to emphasise precisely what the voyeur's spectatorship may tell us about Proust's views on perception (in both 'general' and aesthetic terms).

The peculiar role that the figure of the voyeur plays in Proust's universe will be explored through a range of different examples in the present chapter. It should be noted, however, that the relationship that the voyeur (the invisible spectator) entertains with the perceived is only one extreme in a series of spectatorial encounters staged in the novel, for, certainly, in *À la recherche*, being a spectator does not always entail being a detached and anonymous observer. Often, the spectator is highly visible and placed, as it were, centre stage. In these cases, which illustrate the significance of the act of perception in Proust's novel, the spectator and actor frequently become so tightly woven and mixed up with one another that it is difficult to discern between the subject and object of perception. The character that most pronouncedly incarnates the figure of the actor and that of the visible spectator melted together into one organism is the Baron de Charlus. The characteristic ambiguity of this personage is established already during his first appearance in the novel, in *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en*

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

*fleurs*, when the protagonist discovers a stranger (the Baron) spying on him in front of the hotel in Balbec. During their first encounter, it is with intrinsic stage awareness that the Baron performs before the protagonist a little pantomime of obvious interest and apparent disdain – a pantomime in which the roles of spectator and actor are in a state of flux. Charlus and the protagonist thus both act as observers and as objects of observation:

Le lendemain matin du jour où Robert m'avait ainsi parlé de son oncle tout en l'attendant, vainement du reste, comme je passais seul devant le casino en rentrant à l'hôtel, j'eus la sensation d'être regardé par quelqu'un qui n'était pas loin de moi. Je tournai la tête et j'aperçus un homme d'une quarantaine d'années, très grand et assez gros, avec des moustaches très noires, et qui, tout en frappant nerveusement son pantalon avec une badine, fixait sur moi des yeux dilatés par l'attention. [...] [Il] tira deux ou trois fois sa montre, abaissa sur ses yeux un canotier de paille noire dont il prolongea le rebord avec sa main mise en visière comme pour voir si quelqu'un n'arrivait pas, fit le geste de mécontentement par lequel on croit faire voir qu'on a assez d'attendre, mais qu'on ne fait jamais quand on attend réellement, puis rejetant en arrière son chapeau et laissant voir une brosse coupée ras qui admettait cependant de chaque côté d'assez longues ailes de pigeon ondulées, il exhala le souffle bruyant des personnes qui ont non pas trop chaud mais le désir de montrer qu'elles ont trop chaud. (II, 110-11)<sup>126</sup>

Few of the novel's characters are as overtly theatrical as Charlus, and the theatricality of his behaviour is precisely the subject of this scene, in which what the spectator (the protagonist) conceives is not so much the intentions (the layers of hidden meaning) that motivate the stranger's every move, as the artificial and contrived nature of his behaviour. Faced with the ambiguous signs omitted by the stranger's gestures, the

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<sup>126</sup> 'On the morning following the day when Robert told me these things about this expected uncle, who had eventually failed to materialize, I was walking back to the hotel when, right in front of the Casino, I had a sudden feeling of being looked at by someone at quite close quarters. I glanced round and saw a very tall, rather stout man of about forty, with a jet black moustache, who stood there nervously flicking a cane against the leg of his trousers and staring at me with eyes dilated by the strain of attention. [...] [He] looked a couple of times at his fob-watch; he pulled his black straw hat lower on his brow and held his hand to the rim of it like a visor, as though looking out for someone he was expecting; he made the gesture of irritation meant to suggest one has had enough of waiting about, but which one never makes when one has really been waiting; then, pushing back his hat to reveal close-cropped hair with rather long, waved side-wings, he breathed out noisily as people do, not when they are too hot, but when they wish it to be thought they are too hot' (2, 332).

protagonist attempts to interpret them as best he can. The stranger thus becomes an actor in the young man's imagination: 'J'eus l'idée d'un escroc d'hôtel [...] la singularité de son expression me le faisait prendre tantôt pour un voleur et tantôt pour un aliéné' ['It crossed my mind that he might be a hotel-thief [...]. It was the strangeness of his expression which made me think he must be a thief, if not a madman'] (II, 111; 2, 333). It is the restless eyes of this 'visage, auquel une légère couche de poudre donnait un peu l'aspect d'un visage de théâtre' ['face, to which a faint dusting of powder gave something theatrical'] (II, 120; 2, 341) that distinguishes the Baron from others, and he seems highly aware that his insistent glances not only serve his own curiosity but also tend to awaken the curiosity of the people who find themselves the objects of his gaze. During their first encounter, this particularly penetrating gaze, 'hardie, prudente, rapide et profonde' ['daring, cautious, swift and searching'] (II, 111; 2, 332), is granted almost physical properties, for, as though the Baron's eyes were capable of tangibly touching him, the protagonist *feels* that someone watches him *before* he actually discovers the Baron ('j'eus la sensation d'être regardé par quelqu'un qui n'était pas loin de moi' ['I had a sudden feeling of being looked at by someone at quite close quarters']). Regardless of the Baron's theatrical appearance, then, when the protagonist repeatedly finds himself the object of the other's scrutinising gaze, it is he who, somewhat disturbed, has the feeling of being transported to a theatrical stage. As such, during their second encounter, he turns into a spectacle before the eyes of the Baron, who, concealed behind the bodies of his aunt and the protagonist's grandmother, enjoys the privilege of unrestrained observation, as though he had been comfortably seated 'au fond d'une loge' ['in a theatre-box'] (II, 119; 2, 341).

### **1.1 The Actress in Bed: Constituting the Theatrical Subject**

Every theatre has its leading star. In the young narrator's Paris, the actress La Berma is the undeniable *étoile*, and he struggles hard to obtain permission to go and see her perform in Racine's *Phèdre*. During his childhood vacations in Combray, on the other hand, no tickets or parental authorisation is required, for the leading star of Combray's provincial theatre, the protagonist's aunt Léonie, resides in the same house as him. In



this section, I shall examine the constitution of the theatrical subject in *À la recherche* by analysing the way in which Proust establishes his aunt as a theatrical character. Léonie's tireless self-staging reveals her profound and constant stage awareness. This begs the question of how the idea of being the object of a spectatorial gaze affects an individual's perception of her- or himself. Ever the actress in her own private theatre, Léonie is always attentive to how others perceive her and she constantly adjusts her behaviour in accordance with an imaginary spectatorial gaze. As such, she lives perpetually on the surface of herself (engaging with others being something that, in Proust's terms, obliges a person to do just that: 'Quand [Albertine] dormait, je n'avais plus à parler, je savais que je n'étais plus regardé par elle, je n'avais plus besoin de vivre à la surface de moi-même' ['When [Albertine] was asleep, I did not have to speak any more, I knew that she could not see me, I did not have to live on the surface of myself'] (III, 578; 5, 60)). However, when Proust, as we shall see in this section, confronts aunt and nephew as performer and voyeuristic spectator in an emblematic tableau, Léonie's speechlessness and terrified facial expression absorbs the protagonist's attention in a powerful way that reminds us that the body often expresses more than what we intend it to, and that it is not only through conscious efforts of self-staging that individuals may become spectacles for others.

Aunt Léonie occupies two adjoining chambers in the family's home in Combray. The doorway connecting these two rooms enables the young protagonist to watch or listen to Léonie talking to herself, when she is unaware that someone is in the neighbouring room. The thing that these moments of eavesdropping most blatantly reveal, however, is that, even when Léonie is alone, she remains completely fixated on upholding her social persona. In other words, since the presence of an actual audience is not a necessary part of her performance, she comes to represent a form of *internalised* theatricality.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> In relation to this, it should be noted that, in *La Scène proustienne*, Livio Belloi argues that what the different voyeuristic episodes of *À la recherche* uncover is that the private world (the backstage) is often equally theatrical as the social world. His analysis serves to show that typically, and similarly to what we observe in this example from Combray, the 'Narrateur-sociologue, plongé par le romancier dans une situation de co-présence occultée (comme derrière un paravent), découvre une coulisse *qui est elle-même représentation*, comme en attestent les multiples allusions, références ou métaphores théâtrales qui systématisent les

Dans la chambre voisine, j’entendais ma tante qui causait toute seule à mi-voix. Elle ne parlait jamais qu’assez bas parce qu’elle croyait avoir dans la tête quelque chose de cassé et de flottant qu’elle eût déplacé en parlant trop fort, mais elle restait jamais longtemps, même seule, sans dire quelque chose, parce qu’elle croyait que c’était salubre pour sa gorge et qu’en empêchant le sang de s’y arrêter, cela rendrait moins fréquents les étouffements et les angoisses dont elle souffrait; puis, dans l’inertie absolue où elle vivait, elle prêtait à ses moindres sensations une importance extraordinaire; elle les douait d’une motilité qui lui rendait difficile de les garder pour elle, et à défaut de confident à qui les communiquer, elle se les annonçait à elle-même, en un perpétuel monologue qui était sa seule forme d’activité. Malheureusement, ayant pris l’habitude de penser tout haut, elle ne faisait pas toujours attention à ce qu’il n’y eût personne dans la chambre voisine, et *je l’entendais souvent se dire à elle-même: « Il faut que je me rappelle bien que je n’ai pas dormi »*. (I, 50, my emphasis)<sup>128</sup>

The perpetual ‘monologue’ – this is Proust’s term – that Léonie incessantly performs relates in minute detail the story of her sufferings, worries and sensations. To her, this performance is an act of vital necessity, for she is convinced that talking is beneficial to her fragile health and the only way to control the fits of breathlessness and spasms that she suffers from. In this respect, she resembles Scheherazade, the heroine of *One Thousand and One Nights*, who tells stories to stay alive, and whose characters and plots have found their way into the imagery (and imaginary) of our civilisation and

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divers épisodes de « voyeurisme » au sein du récit proustien. C’est dire combien, dans la *Recherche*, la ritualisation gagne également le mode de la coulisse’ [‘sociologist-Narrator, placed by the novelist into a situation of occulted co-presence (as behind a screen), discovers a theatre wing which is itself a performance, as is demonstrated by the numerous theatrical allusions, references and metaphors which organize the different episodes of “voyeurism” in the Proustian narrative. This shows to what extent ritualisation also affects the backstage area’]. Belloï, p. 95.

<sup>128</sup> ‘In the next room, I would hear my aunt talking all alone in an undertone. She always talked rather softly because she thought there was something broken and floating in her head that she would have displaced by speaking too loudly, but she never remained for long, even alone, without saying something, because she believed it was beneficial to her throat and that if she prevented the blood from stopping there, she would reduce the frequency of the fits of breathlessness and the spasms from which she suffered; besides, in the absolute inertia in which she lived, she attributed to the least of her sensations an extraordinary importance; she endowed them with a motility that made it difficult for her to keep them to herself, and lacking a confidant to whom she could communicate them, she announced them to herself, in a perpetual monologue that was her only form of activity. Unfortunately, having acquired the habit of thinking out loud, she did not always take care to see that there was no one in the next room, and *I often heard her saying to herself: “I must be sure to remember that I did not sleep”*’ (I, 53, my emphasis).

onto the plates used for dining in the family house in Combray. There is, for Léonie, something reassuring about this continuing monologue. It is somewhat paradoxical, then, that one of its recurring themes should be her own imminent death: ‘Ma tante pouvait lui dire vingt fois en une minute: « C’est la fin, ma pauvre Eulalie »’ [‘My aunt might say to her twenty times in a minute: “This is the end, my poor Eulalie”’] (I, 69; 1, 72). This paradox seems, in fact, to constitute the very core of Léonie’s existence, for while she never ceases to underline her own weakness (‘« Je suis bien bas, bien bas, c’est la fin, mes pauvres amis »’ [“I’m very low, very low, this is the end, my poor friends”’] (I, 69; 1, 72)), and while she detests those manifesting doubts as to the graveness of her disease, she professes an equal dislike for the opposite extreme: ‘des personnes qui avaient l’air de croire qu’elle était plus gravement malade qu’elle ne pensait, qu’elle était aussi gravement malade qu’elle le disait’ [‘people who seemed to believe she was more seriously ill than she thought, that she was as seriously ill as she said she was’] (I, 68; 1, 72).

The lack of correspondence between what Léonie says out loud and what she supposedly believes to be true is essential for our understanding of this personage. It draws our attention towards an aspect of her that the narrator does not fail to make explicit; namely, that she is above all an *actress*, that is, a creator and performer of fictions and imaginary incidents invented and acted out through what the narrator, with an allusion to Alfred Musset’s *Un spectacle dans un fauteuil*, calls a ‘« spectacle dans un lit »’ [“theatre in bed”] (I, 116; 1, 118). During these incidents of ‘theatre in bed’, Léonie’s perpetual monologue turns into a peculiar form of imaginary *dialogue*, as she fervently acts out (sometimes only with herself as audience) the storylines she has invented. The form that these ‘dialogues’ take is unmistakably theatrical. While performing an imaginary scene in which her servant Françoise is caught stealing from her, Léonie refrains from paraphrasing, and instead gives voice to her imaginary personages (in this case herself and Françoise), rendering their utterances as direct speech:

Elle se plaisait à supposer tout d’un coup que Françoise la volait, qu’elle recourait à la ruse pour s’en assurer, la prenait sur le fait; habituée, quand elle faisait seule des parties de cartes, à jouer à la fois son jeu et le jeu de son adversaire, elle se prononçait

à elle-même les excuses embarrassées de Françoise et y répondait avec tant de feu et d'indignation que l'un de nous, entrant à ces moments-là, la trouvait en nage, les yeux étincelants, ses faux cheveux déplacés laissant voir son front chauve. (I, 115)<sup>129</sup>

It is interesting to note how the description of Léonie's forehead showing underneath her wig, revealing simultaneously her baldness and the falseness of her hair, reinforces the image that the narrator draws of her as an actress, or even an imposter, suggesting that her entire appearance might be a sort of disguise. This suspicion arises not only from the artificiality of her hair but also from the fact that Léonie is consequently portrayed as someone pretending to be something she is not – she is an 'insomniac' but gets enough sleep, she is 'mortally ill' but not all that sick, she is 'exhausted' but not really tired, and so forth. Léonie seems to consider her own bedchamber in terms of a small stage, for whenever there is someone in there with her, she keeps up the pretence. It is only when she is alone, that is, when the *curé* finally leaves her room or when she forgets that there may be someone in the neighbouring chamber that she allows herself temporarily to fall out of character. But crucially, even when she does, the thought of the role she has conceived for herself continues to occupy her, and we may therefore say that she continues to perceive herself as an object for a (potential) spectatorial gaze: « Il faut que je me rappelle bien que je n'ai pas dormi » [“I must be sure to remember that I did not sleep”]. This spectatorial awareness is an essential component in the constitution of Proust's theatrical subjects, which, notably, are found not only in theatres and public spaces but also, as is exemplified through Léonie, in the domestic sphere.

Léonie's rooms, then, are by no means the only private spaces depicted as theatres in the novel. Mme de Villeparisis's home (the first aristocratic household that the protagonist visits), for instance, is identified as a theatrical space in several ways, not least because hostess and guests find themselves in a state of constant posing and

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<sup>129</sup> 'She enjoyed suddenly pretending that Françoise was stealing from her, that she herself had been cunning enough to make sure of it, that she had caught her in the act; being in the habit, when she played cards alone, of playing both her own hand and the hand of her opponent, she would utter out loud to herself Françoise's embarrassed excuses and would answer them with so much fire and indignation that if one of us entered at that moment, we found her bathed in perspiration, her eyes sparkling, her false hair dislodged and showing her bald forehead' (I, 118).

acting, which implies that the Marquise's drawing room is seen as a stage set offering a background for their social self-staging, and also due to the manner in which Proust makes use of the door as a staging device.<sup>130</sup> In fact, the entire *matinée* at Mme de Villeparisis's is structured around the entrances and exits of the Marquise's guests, and the door into her drawing room comes to function much as it does in a play, that is, as a passageway between stage and backstage, through which the entrances or exits of the characters typically mark the beginning of a new scene. We see this exemplified, for instance, when the Marquise's (not so) secret lover Monsieur de Norpois enters the room. In this scene, Norpois, who is not aware that his mistress's guests already know that he is in the house, improvises a mime of make-believe:

Le maître d'hôtel n'avait pas dû exécuter d'une façon complète la commission dont il venait d'être chargé pour M. de Norpois. Car celui-ci, pour faire croire qu'il arrivait du dehors et n'avait pas encore vu la maîtresse de la maison, prit au hasard un chapeau dans l'antichambre et vint baiser cérémonieusement la main de Mme de Villeparisis, en lui demandant de ses nouvelles avec le même intérêt qu'on manifeste après une longue absence. Il ignorait que la marquise avait préalablement ôté toute vraisemblance à cette comédie, à laquelle elle coupa court d'ailleurs en emmenant M. de Norpois et Bloch dans un salon voisin. (II, 518)<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> In the preface to the transcribed version of *Cahier 44*, which Proust edited during the spring of 1912, and which was recently published as part of a major on-going transcription project led by Nathalie Mauriac Dyer, with the aim of publishing transcribed versions of all 75 of Proust's notebooks preserved at the French National Library, Francine Goujon points out that the central role that theatrical references occupy in the 1912 version gives the *matinée* a new direction and a more dynamic character than earlier versions. Goujon highlights both the way that the door comes into play and also the notably theatrical quality of the dialogues: 'L'expansion des dialogues s'accompagne d'une suppression des commentaires et des retours en arrière [...]. Les entrées et les sorties, au sens théâtral du terme, sont très travaillées, et ce trait s'amplifiera dans les versions suivantes' ['The expansion of dialogues works alongside a removal of commentary and flashbacks [...]. The entrances and exits, in the theatrical sense of the word, are finely wrought, and this feature will grow in the subsequent versions']. Francine Goujon, Yuji Murakami, and Eri Wada, eds., *Cahier 44. Volume II, Cahiers 1 à 75 de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Paris: BnF, Brepols, 2015), p. xxviii.

<sup>131</sup> 'The butler cannot have carried out the orders he had been given about M. de Norpois correctly. For the diplomat, to give the impression that he had just come in from the street and had not yet seen his hostess, had picked up the first hat he saw in the vestibule and came up to kiss Mme de Villeparisis's hand with much ado, enquiring after her health as attentively as people do after a long separation. He had no idea that the Marquise had completely undermined the plausibility of this charade prior to his appearance, and she now put an end to it by leading M. de Norpois and Bloch into an adjoining room' (3, 218).

By describing Norpois's behaviour as a 'comédie' and by drawing attention to the way he prepares his entrance while still outside (in order to convince the other guests that he has just arrived, he borrows a hat that he finds lying in the antechamber, and that he makes use of as a stage prop in his subsequent performance), Proust invites us to view the scene as a theatrical performance and to consider Madame de Villeparisis's drawing room as the 'stage' and the rooms adjoining the drawing room as the 'backstage'. The door into the Marquise's drawing room thus attains the threshold function that doors typically hold in the theatre. The use of dramatic vocabulary to describe Norpois's arrival suggests that it is Proust's intention to make us conceive the scene as an example of theatrical writing. And, fully in line with this establishment of the Marquise's drawing room as a stage, it is she, the *metteur en scène* of the matinée, who puts an end to the performance by leading the main actor along with Bloch into a neighbouring room, gently escorting her lover back into the backstage area.

Mme de Villeparisis is not only a prominent stage director, however. She is also a skilled actress, as becomes apparent when she puts up a veritable performance in order to make one of her guests, Bloch, who has irritated the archivist and several others of her visitors, understand that he is no longer welcome:

Elle voulut donc signaler à Bloch qu'il eût à ne pas revenir et *elle trouva tout naturellement dans son répertoire mondain la scène par laquelle une grande dame met quelqu'un à la porte de chez elle*, scène qui ne comporte nullement le doigt levé et les yeux flambants que l'on se figure. Comme Bloch s'approchait d'elle pour dire au revoir, enfoncée dans son grand fauteuil, elle parut à demi tirée d'une vague somnolence. Ses regards noyés n'eurent que la lueur faible et charmante d'une perle. Les adieux de Bloch, dépliant à peine dans la figure de la marquise un languissant sourire, ne lui arrachèrent pas une parole, et elle ne lui tendit pas la main [...]. « Je crois qu'elle dort », dit Bloch à l'archiviste qui, se sentant soutenu par la marquise, prit un air indigné. « Adieu, madame » cria-t-il.

La marquise fit le léger mouvement de lèvres d'une mourante qui voudrait ouvrir la bouche, mais dont le regard ne reconnaît plus. Puis elle se tourna, débordante d'une vie retrouvée, vers le marquis d'Argencourt tandis que Bloch s'éloignait, persuadé qu'elle était « ramollie ». (II, 545, my emphasis)<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> 'So she decided to make it clear to Bloch that he need not come to the house again and *had no difficulty in selecting from her social repertory the scene in which the great lady shows someone the door*, a scene that in no way involves the raised finger and the blazing eyes people imagine. As Bloch came up to her to take his leave, sunk deep in her large armchair,

Bloch's exit is one of the best examples of cruel social comedy in *À la recherche*. It is Mme de Villeparisis who intentionally turns her drawing room into a stage and puts on a play for the satisfaction of her guests. The role she plays is familiar to most of them, as part of her 'social repertoire'. And if someone among her guests (her 'audience') should have failed to realise that she is only pretending and not actually, as Bloch appears to believe, 'going soft', she makes sure that they understand by concluding her performance with a lively 'aside' directed at the Marquis d'Argencourt, while Bloch leaves the room. This manoeuvre provides her performance with an almost Moliéresque air, stylistically matching the sarcastic asides of, for instance, Dorine in *Tartuffe* or Alceste in *Le Misanthrope*. Just as these characters act in two 'plays' at once (interacting, that is, both with the other performers on stage and, by means of the aside, with the audience), Mme de Villeparisis juggles two roles simultaneously.

Another aspect that invites us to regard this passage as an example of theatrical writing is the way in which it brings to mind the constitutive role of the spectators in the theatre. The interaction between Bloch and Mme de Villeparisis is clearly affected by the presence of the other guests, that is, their 'audience'. For instance, the fact that he is surrounded by a circle of onlookers provokes the baffled Bloch to take hold of the Marquise's hand, and it is the Marquise's concern for the anti-Dreyfus clan she belongs to that prompts her to perform her little scene in the first place.<sup>133</sup> Similarly,

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she seemed only half-awakened from a vague drowsiness. Her misted eyes had the faint and charming gleam of pearls. Bloch's farewells drew the merest hint of a languid smile from the wrinkles of the Marquise's face, but no word, and she did not offer him her hand. [...] "I think she's asleep," said Bloch to the archivist, who, feeling that he had the support of the Marquise, adopted an indignant attitude. "Good-bye, Madame," Bloch shouted. The Marquise moved her lips slightly like a dying woman who wants to open her mouth but whose eyes show no sign of recognition. Then she turned, brimming with renewed vitality, to the Marquis d'Argencourt, while Bloch left the room, convinced that she must be "soft" in the head' (3, 245, my emphasis).

<sup>133</sup> 'Cette scène mit Bloch au comble de l'étonnement, mais comme un cercle de personnes en était témoin alentour, il ne pensa pas qu'elle pût se prolonger sans inconvénient pour lui et, pour forcer la marquise, la main qu'on ne venait pas lui prendre, de lui-même il la tendit. Mme de Villeparisis fut choquée. Mais sans doute, tout en tenant à donner une satisfaction immédiate à l'archiviste et au clan antidreyfusard, voulait-elle pourtant ménager l'avenir, elle se contenta d'abaisser les paupières et de fermer à demi les yeux' ['The scene left Bloch utterly astonished, but since he was surrounded by a circle of onlookers he saw no way of prolonging it without embarrassment to himself, so, to force the Marquise, he thrust out the

we see that the performance itself affects the spectators, when the archivist, convinced by way of the little scene that the Marquise agrees with his views, adopts an indignant attitude towards Bloch, who turns to him for sympathy (‘« Je crois qu’elle dort », dit Bloch à l’archiviste qui, se sentant soutenu par la marquise, prit un air indigné’ [“I think she’s asleep,” said Bloch to the archivist, who, feeling that he had the support of the Marquise, adopted an indignant attitude’]).

These few examples from Mme de Villeparisis’s home serve to show that Proust’s establishment of Léonie as an actress in her own domestic theatre could be viewed as a prototype for the constitution of an individual as a theatrical subject in *À la recherche*. All over the novel, in public spaces, such as theatres, but also in private ones, such as Léonie’s bedrooms, and in more private-public places, such as drawing rooms, individuals turn into actors when they perceive themselves as objects for a spectatorial gaze. Monsieur de Norpois and Mme de Villeparisis’s behaviour confirms what the figure of Léonie suggests: that different forms of self-staging, that is, of turning one’s self into an object for another’s gaze, are essential parts of the social interaction that takes place in Proust’s universe. Léonie, then, is merely a first example (or a model) of a theatrical structure that will be confirmed throughout the narrative. Mme de Villeparisis’s ‘spectacle dans un fauteuil’, however, also evokes Léonie in a more concrete way, since the expulsion of Bloch from the Marquise’s salon is not the first example of a ‘scène par laquelle une grande dame met quelqu’un à la porte de chez elle’ [‘scene in which the great lady shows someone the door’] that we encounter in the novel. This kind of scene, which may be viewed as an example of something like a Proustian, theatrical ‘sub-genre’, is namely also a part of Léonie’s social repertoire. In much the same way as Mme de Villeparisis, Léonie prefers feigning complete exhaustion rather than telling her guests to leave:

Mais quand le curé était venu aussi et que sa visite interminable avait épuisé les forces de ma tante, François sortait de la chambre derrière Eulalie et disait:

« Madame Octave, je vous laisse reposer, vous avez l’air beaucoup fatiguée. »

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hand which she had refused to shake. Mme de Villeparisis was shocked. But doubtless, while she was still concerned to humour the archivist and the anti-Dreyfus clan, she also wished to think to the future, so she merely let her eyelids droop over her half-closed eyes’] (II, 545; 3, 245).



Et ma tante ne répondait même pas, exhalant un soupir qui semblait devoir être le dernier, les yeux clos, comme morte. Mais à peine Françoise était-elle descendue que quatre coups donnés avec la plus grande violence, retentissaient dans la maison et ma tante, dressée sur son lit criait:

« Est-ce qu'Eulalie est déjà partie ? [...] Courez vite après elle ! ». (I, 107)<sup>134</sup>

Combined with the narrator's classifications of Léonie's behaviour in theatrical terms, as 'spectacle', 'monologue' and 'pièces', the two adjoining rooms of her apartment come to evoke the structure of a theatre building, with the bedroom functioning as the stage, the other room as the auditorium, and the door opening as a form of proscenium arch, framing and limiting the spectator's perception of the 'stage'. It is not only Léonie's conscious self-staging, then, that serves to constitute her as a 'spectacle'. In fact, the passages devoted to this character also provide us with one of the novel's earliest examples of how Proust transforms the world into a spectacle by way of tableaux, that is, by writing forth a spectacle from the perspective of the protagonist instated as a spectator of the perceived. The quote that follows, in which the door opening connecting the two chambers frames the scene taking place in Léonie's bedroom, while the protagonist, standing in front of this 'frame' turns into a spectator, serves to exemplify the basic theatrical 'structure' (a structure that, of course, can and will be revised and problematised) of the Proustian tableau, which organises the world along an axis connecting viewer and viewed, audience and actor. We may notice that, in contrast to Bloch's exit scene, Proust here remains true to the limited viewpoint of the protagonist and focuses only on the way he reacts to and reads the scene. The reach of his senses determines his access to the spectacle: he can see and hear his aunt and interpret her body language, but he does not have access to her interiority (in the manner of an omniscient narrator, for example). The way that the paragraph establishes a relation of distance and energetic connection between beholder and

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<sup>134</sup> 'But when the curé had come as well and his interminable visit had exhausted my aunt's strength, Françoise would leave the bedroom behind Eulalie and say: – Madame Octave, I will let you rest, you look very tired. And my aunt would not even answer, breathing a sigh that must, it seemed, be the last, her eyes closed, as though dead. But scarcely had Françoise gone down, than four peals dealt with the greatest violence would echo through the house, and my aunt, upright on her bed, would cry out: – Has Eulalie gone yet? [...] Quick, run after her!' (1, 110).

beheld, presenting us with a spectator instantly mesmerised by gestures and facial expressions of the performer, leads us to recognise it as a tableau:

J'entrai dans la première pièce et, par la porte ouverte, vis ma tante, couchée sur le côté, qui dormait; je l'entendis ronfler légèrement. J'allais m'en aller doucement mais sans doute le bruit que j'avais fait était intervenu dans son sommeil et en avait « changé la vitesse », comme on dit pour les automobiles, car la musique du ronflement s'interrompit une seconde et reprit un ton plus bas, puis *elle s'éveilla et tourna à demi son visage que je pus voir alors; il exprimait une sorte de terreur; elle venait évidemment d'avoir un rêve affreux; elle ne pouvait me voir de la façon dont elle était placée, et je restais là ne sachant si je devais m'avancer ou me retirer*; mais déjà elle semblait revenue au sentiment de la réalité et avait reconnu le mensonge des visions qui l'avaient effrayée; un sourire de joie, de pieuse reconnaissance envers Dieu qui permet que la vie soit moins cruelle que les rêves, éclaira faiblement son visage, [...] elle se rendormit, tranquilisée, et je sortais à pas de loup de la chambre sans qu'elle ni personne eût jamais appris ce que j'avais entendu. (I, 108, my emphasis)<sup>135</sup>

Standing on the other side of the threshold, placed so that Léonie *cannot see him*, the young protagonist is allowed a privileged glimpse of a profoundly private moment. To say that this tableau shows us something profoundly private is to acknowledge the fact that what it shows is a rare moment in which Léonie is *not* self-conscious. The fact that what he sees captures the attention of the spectator (her nephew), and makes him unable to decide whether he should enter or leave, is, one could imagine, a result of her being temporarily and completely absorbed by the 'visions' she sees before her mental eye. For a brief moment, Léonie does not live on the surface of herself, and she is ostensibly, although temporarily, free from awareness of the spectatorial gaze.

In his seminal study *Absorption and Theatricality*, Michael Fried extracts from

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<sup>135</sup> 'I went into the first room, and through the open door saw my aunt lying on her side sleeping; I heard her snoring lightly. I was going to go away quietly, but the noise I had made had probably interfered with her sleep and made it "shift gears", as they say about cars, because the music of her snoring broke off for a second and resumed on a lower note, then *she woke up and half turned her face, which I could now see; it expressed a sort of terror; she had obviously just had a horrible dream; she could not see me the way she was positioned, and I stayed there not knowing if I should go in to her or leave*; but already she seemed to have returned to a sense of reality and had recognised the falsity of the visions that had frightened her; a smile of joy, of pious gratitude to God who permits life to be less cruel than dreams, weakly illuminated her face, [...] she fell asleep, soothed, and I crept out of the room without her or anyone else ever finding out what I had heard' (I, 110-11, my emphasis).

Diderot's theory of the tableau the latter's aesthetics of 'absorption'. Absorption, as Fried defines it, is the 'state or condition of rapt attention, of being completely occupied or engrossed or [...] absorbed in what he or she is doing, hearing, thinking, feeling'.<sup>136</sup> As Fried maintains, it is the apparent lack of self-awareness and artifice in the characters (be that of a play or a painting) that secures the spectator's emotional and imaginative engagement with the tableau. In other words, the tableau's affective power on the spectator paradoxically depends on the negation of this very same spectator's presence. This scene from the novel shows us that Proust also experiments with the effects that the negation of the spectator's presence before the spectacle can have in his tableaux, although, as we shall see, absorption is only one among several ways to secure the spectator's affective and imaginative engagement in *À la recherche*.

By emphasising the importance of this momentary absorption, my interpretation of this paragraph thus differs from that of Livio Belloï, one of the few critics who have taken an interest in it, and who also reads it as a voyeuristic composition. In *La Scène proustienne*, Belloï argues that it provides the first example in the novel of one of the narrative's recurring themes, the 'thématique du Narrateur-voyeur' ['the theme of the Narrator as voyeur'].<sup>137</sup> In his analysis, the scene illustrates how the 'Narrateur-sociologue' must proceed in order to do his analytical work – the idea being that, since everyone adjusts their behaviour when they know that they are being watched, it is only when they are ignorant of this that we can observe their natural ways and manners. From Belloï's point of view, then, it seems that what this passage reveals is above all the discrepancy between what Léonie says and what she actually does, when the aunt, in spite of her insistence that she does not sleep, 'est néanmoins surprise en plein sommeil par le Narrateur-voyeur' ['is nonetheless caught sleeping by the Narrator-voyeur'].<sup>138</sup> In my view, however, this is not (all of) what is at stake in this tableau. In fact, one could argue that the fact that Léonie does sleep simply cannot be what the scene reveals, since this is no secret at all. For, while her inability to sleep is a *fiction* that her family has decided to respect, it is not therefore said that they believe in

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<sup>136</sup> Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>137</sup> Belloï, p. 83.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

it:

[...] ne jamais dormir était sa grande *prétention* dont notre langage à tous gardait le respect et la trace: le matin Françoise ne venait pas « l'éveiller », mais « entrait » chez elle; quand ma tante voulait faire un somme dans la journée, on disait qu'elle voulait « réfléchir » ou « reposer ». (I, 50, my emphasis)<sup>139</sup>

It seems, then, that it is not (only) the fact that he catches her doing precisely what she ferociously claims to be incapable of that is important in this paragraph, but (also) that, by a remarkably lucky coincidence, he comes upon her just as she awakens from a nightmare, and so is able to witness the effect that the spectacle of her unconscious exercises on her. It is a token of Proust's dark humour that Léonie's worst nightmare turns out to be the return of her late husband, whom she fears would have been capable of demanding that she should go for a walk every day:

[...] avec cette habitude qu'elle avait prise de se parler à mi-voix à elle-même quand elle se croyait seule, elle murmura: « Dieu soit loué! nous n'avons comme tracas que la fille de cuisine qui accouche. Voilà-t-il pas que je rêvais que mon pauvre Octave était ressuscité et qu'il voulait me faire faire une promenade tous les jours! » (I, 108)<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, while the words that she murmurs add a humouristic touch to the scene, the momentary *ceasing* of her perpetual monologue rather adds gravity. At the moment of waking, Léonie is speechless, and yet her body, in this moment, expresses more than her words do ('elle s'éveilla et tourna à demi son visage que je pus voir alors; il exprimait une sorte de terreur' ['she woke up and half turned her face, which I could now see; it expressed a sort of terror']). It is this moment, before she has uttered a word, that holds the most tension, and that makes the protagonist freeze ('elle ne

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<sup>139</sup> '[...] never sleeping was her great *claim*, and the language we all used deferred to it and was marked by it: in the morning Françoise did not come to "wake" her, but "entered" her room; when my aunt wanted to take a nap during the day, we said she wanted to "reflect" or "rest"' (I, 53-54, my emphasis).

<sup>140</sup> '[...] with the habit she had formed of talking to herself half-aloud when she thought she was alone, she murmured: "God be praised! Our only worry is the kitchen-maid, who is having a baby. And here I've gone and dreamed that my poor Octave had come back to life and was trying to make me go for a walk every day!"' (I, 111).

pouvait me voir de la façon dont elle était placée, et je restais là ne sachant si je devais m'avancer ou me retirer' ['she could not see me the way she was positioned, and I stayed there not knowing if I should go in to her or leave']). There is something unguarded about Léonie in that instant, not only because she does not know that her nephew is there but also because she seems to have lost her hold on what is real and what is not. The confusion lasts only for a moment, but this moment is tense and it clearly terrifies her.

It seems improbable that the dream that Léonie, instantly falling back into the habit of talking to herself, reports having had (her dead husband come back to demand she go for a walk every day) should evoke the kind of terror that her face expresses, and perhaps it is not the dream as such that is responsible, but rather the experience of being 'in-between' – between sleeping and awakening, dream and reality, conscious and unconscious. Her nephew, who has no access to her mind, can only interpret what he sees to the best of his abilities ('elle venait *évidemment* d'avoir un rêve affreux, [...] elle *semblait* revenue au sentiment de la réalité' ['she had *obviously* just had a horrible dream, [...] she *seemed* to have returned to a sense of reality']). But what was it, in fact, that he had heard and understood ('entendu') while observing Léonie on the threshold of her room, and that, afterwards, had kept to himself ('je sortais à pas de loup de la chambre sans qu'elle ni personne eût jamais appris ce que j'avais entendu' ['I crept out of the room without her or anyone else ever finding out what I had heard'])? The narrator does not say, but the careful mise en scène of this brief moment of voyeuristic spectatorship implies that it is significant, and this impression is confirmed when, about fifty pages into the novel's fifth volume *La Prisonnière* (while telling the story of his cohabitation with Albertine) the narrator acknowledges the profundity of the relationship he entertains with his aunt. This implies that what he learned about Léonie that day in Combray has had an impact also on his conception of himself. For who does he see through the open door? He sees a tyrant, a woman who manipulates an entire household by means of an imaginary malady, and who does this, it would seem, for no other reason than that she cannot stand the thought of leaving her comfortable chambers and the bed from which 'elle avait la rue sous les yeux et y lisait du matin au soir, pour se désennuyer, à la façon des princes persans, la chronique

quotidienne mais immémoriale de Combray, qu'elle commentait ensuite avec Françoise' ['she had the street there before her eyes and on it from morning to night, to divert her melancholy, like the Persian princes, would read the daily but immemorial chronicle of Combray, which she would afterwards commentate with Françoise'] (I, 51; 1, 55). And whom does this tyrant resemble? The martyr who stays in bed all day, refusing to leave the house on the grounds of some imaginary malady is clearly a reflection of the protagonist himself: 'Je lui disais que le médecin m'ordonnait de rester couché. Ce n'était pas vrai' ['I told her that the doctor said I had to stay in bed. That was not true'] (III, 534; 5, 17). He, too, prefers to stay at home and experience 'the Gospel for the day' from his own comfortable bed.<sup>141</sup> And, eventually, he comes to see the similarities between himself and his aunt quite clearly:

Or, bien que chaque jour j'en trouvasse la cause dans un malaise particulier, ce qui me faisait si souvent rester couché, c'était un être, non pas Albertine, non pas un être que j'aimais, mais un être plus puissant sur moi qu'un être aimé, c'était, transmigree en moi, despotique au point de faire taire parfois mes soupçons jaloux, ou du moins d'aller vérifier s'ils étaient fondés ou non, c'était ma tante Léonie. (III, 586)<sup>142</sup>

Eventually, the protagonist realises that the face he saw in Combray was a reflection, somehow, of his own. The tableau may therefore be viewed as a sort of mirror whose reflection becomes visible only gradually, as the narrative evolves. In other words, the

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<sup>141</sup> 'Si je n'étais pas allé accompagner Albertine dans sa longue course, mon esprit n'en vagabonderait que davantage et pour avoir refusé de goûter avec mes sens cette matinée-là, je jouissais en imagination de toutes les matinées pareilles, passées ou possibles, plus exactement d'un certain type de matinées dont toutes celles du même genre n'étaient que l'intermittente apparition et que j'avais vite reconnu; car l'air vif tournait de lui-même les pages qu'il fallait, et je trouvais tout indiqué devant moi, pour que je pusse le suivre de mon lit, l'évangile du jour' ['I had not gone with Albertine on her long drive, but my mind would only travel the further and, having refused to experience with my senses that particular morning, I could enjoy in imagination every morning of the same kind, past and future, or, more exactly, a certain type of morning of which all mornings of the same were a fleeting apparition and which I had quickly recognized; for the sharp air itself turned up the right pages and set before me, so that I could follow it from my bed, the Gospel for the day'] (III, 535; 5, 19).

<sup>142</sup> 'Now, even though I found the explanation in some different ailment each day, what made me so often spend the whole day in bed was another being, not Albertine, not a being I loved but one with more power over me than any I did love; it was a soul transmigrated into me, despot enough to reduce my jealous suspicions to silence, or at any rate to stop me going to find out whether they were true or not: it was Aunt Léonie' (5, 68).

tableau is significant not only because of what it reveals about Léonie but also because of how it affects the spectator, and because of the kinship that it, eventually, enables him to see. The revelation comes slowly, to be sure, but inevitably, for, as Jean-Yves Tadié affirms, there is no ‘pure spectacle’ in *À la recherche*. In this novel, the act of looking at something or someone is never without consequence, and the spectacle always ends up transforming the spectator: ‘En fait, il n’y a pas, dans la *Recherche*, de pur spectacle [...], l’observateur est tôt ou tard modifié par ce qu’il voit’ [‘In reality there is no pure spectacle in the *Recherche* [...], the observer is sooner or later changed by what he sees’].<sup>143</sup>

It is not, however, only the spectator that risks modification. In *À la recherche*, the act of staging one’s self in different situations is a recurring motif for which aunt Léonie’s self-imitation is the prototype. Her personage exemplifies how pretending to be something you are not involves a risk of becoming what you feign to be. By pretending to be mortally ill, Léonie’s health is in fact declining. Serge Doubrovsky has taken an interest in this phenomenon, claiming that by adopting behaviour typical of the malady that she pretends to suffer from, Léonie ends up inflicting upon herself the actual symptoms of this disease:

Pour vivre dans l’imaginaire, il faut se faire *malade imaginaire*. C’est-à-dire imaginer une maladie. Dormant bien, digérant bien, tante Léonie invente son insomnie et sa pepsine. Robuste, elle ne pourra plus bouger. [...] La fiction est ici faux-semblant. Il faut que la *fiction soit vraie*. Pour cela, il faut que la maladie imaginaire soit réelle. Tante Léonie adopte donc des conduites réelles: ne plus sortir, ne plus descendre, s’aliter. Cette ankylose généralisée finit par lui donner de vrais malaises.<sup>144</sup>

When suggesting that it is by acting *as though* she was ill – by never going out and always staying in her room and in her bed – that Léonie ends up being *actually* ill,

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<sup>143</sup> Jean-Yves Tadié, *Proust et le roman: essai sur les formes et techniques du roman dans ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), p. 376.

<sup>144</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, *La Place de la madeleine: écriture et fantasme chez Proust* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1974), p. 83. [‘In order to live within one’s imagination, one must become an *Imaginary Invalid*. That is to say imagine an illness. With regular sleep and digestion, aunt Léonie invents her insomnia and her pepsin. Robust, she will no longer be able to move. [...] The fiction is here a pretence. The fiction must become *true*. In order for that to happen, the imaginary illness must be real. Aunt Léonie therefore adopts real behaviours: staying in, staying upstairs, staying in bed. This general immobility ends up really making her feel sick’.]

Doubrovsky emphasises the importance of the body in the process of transforming a fiction into something real. And, we may add, Léonie's gradual demise also exemplifies the constitutive power of the spectatorial gaze – even when this gaze is not primarily localised outside of the actor, but rather, as in Léonie's case, within. What could have remained a malady of the imagination, an imaginary malady, becomes actual bodily discomfort through her physical enactment of the symptoms. It should be noted that, paradoxically, the use of the body is in this case equal to a non-use of the body, since it is by *not* moving and by staying put in the stiff pose of a bedridden patient that Léonie performs the role of a mortally ill woman. It is the stiffening of the body, the ankylosis, which in the end transforms her psychic state into somatic symptoms. This non-use of the body is none the less a physical performance, and one that we might conceive of as giving materiality and reality to something immaterial and imaginary, much in the same way as Léonie conceives of her verbal utterances as giving materiality and reality to her fantasies.<sup>145</sup> Léonie's fictional disease becomes a reality, then, as the result of a persistent *mise en scène* of her own body as a sick body, securely contained within the walls of her bedroom. While her near complete withdrawal from society is voluntary, the very act of self-staging seems to indicate that Léonie does not really crave full isolation. Rather, the stage awareness that characterises her behaviour ('quand il lui arrivait de s'oublier en causant jusqu'à dire: « ce qui m'a réveillé » ou « j'ai rêvé que », elle rougissait et se reprenait au plus vite' ['when she happened to forget herself, while chatting, so far as to say: "what woke me up" or "I dreamed that", she would blush and correct herself instantly'] (I, 50; 1, 54)) shows us that she constantly keeps the reactions, as well as the perceptive and interpretative agency of her 'audience', in mind. In her mind, then, she is never completely alone. This spectatorial awareness is what, ultimately, leads to her demise. Léonie performs her role so well that ultimately she dies from it (I, 151; 1, 153-54).

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<sup>145</sup> 'Françoise entendit peut-être parfois de la chambre voisine de mordants sarcasmes qui s'adressaient à elle et dont l'invention n'eut pas soulagé suffisamment ma tante s'ils étaient restés à l'état purement immatériel, et si en les murmurant à mi-voix elle ne leur eût donné plus de réalité' ['Françoise would perhaps sometimes hear from the next room mordant pieces of sarcasm that were addressed to her, the invention of which would not have relieved my aunt sufficiently if they had remained in a purely immaterial state and if by murmuring them half-aloud she had not given them more reality'] (I, 115-16; 1, 118).



Clearly, then, it is not merely the observer but also the performer that, *tôt ou tard*, suffers the consequences of the spectacle.

In this section, we have seen that, in *À la recherche*, a theatrical subject is constituted when an individual recognises herself or himself as an object of perception. We have seen that the constant stage awareness of the protagonist's aunt Léonie procures an emblematic example of the self-staging that is an essential part of social interaction in Proust's universe, but also that her case seemingly is an extreme one, since she continues to perceive herself as an object for a (potential) spectatorial gaze even when she is alone. In this, however, she is not alone. In fact, as we shall see in the following sections of Chapter 1, the idea of being the object of a spectatorial gaze is a veritable desire and driving force for several among the novel's characters. In the analysis below, we will turn to a scene in which this desire becomes particularly palpable, when the protagonist discovers Mlle Vinteuil and her friend engaged in a ritualistic profanation of the portrait of the former's late father. In this analysis, as in the present one, we shall see that it is not only the characters' self-staging but also the tableau that imbues the text with theatricality, since this device allows Proust to mediate the spectacle by way of the (aestheticising) perspective of the spectator-protagonist. In the next section, then, we will examine the theatrical references that abound in the Montjouvain scene with an eye for what they reveal about the role played by the imagination in the human subject's experience of the world.

## **1.2 Imagining Theatre in Montjouvain**

The tableau depicting aunt Léonie waking from a nightmare prepares the ground for another scene associated with sleep and awakening that occurs shortly after. This time, it is the protagonist that wakes up slightly bewildered. Having fallen asleep among some bushes on the small hill overlooking the Vinteuil family's house at Montjouvain (the same hill from which, years before, he had observed the late M. Vinteuil and his own parents socialising in the composer's drawing-room), he wakes up only after the sun has gone down and finds himself with a direct view into the same room:

Il faisait presque nuit quand je m'éveillai, je voulus me lever, mais je vis Mlle Vinteuil [...] en face de moi, à quelques centimètres de moi, dans cette chambre où son père avait reçu le mien et dont elle avait fait son petit salon à elle. La fenêtre était entrouverte, la lampe était allumée, je voyais tous ses mouvements sans qu'elle me vît, mais en m'allant j'aurais fait craquer les buissons, elle m'aurait entendu et elle aurait pu croire que je m'étais caché là pour l'épier. (I, 157)<sup>146</sup>

The scene begins with the protagonist making the startling discovery that the young mistress of the house, the late composer's daughter, is only a *few centimetres* away. What is particularly striking about this somewhat unlikely statement is not that it must almost certainly be wrong (it seems unlikely that she should not discover him if he were in fact so close), but that, even before the scene – which he will describe in explicit theatrical terms – has begun to unfold, it comes to bear the unmistakable mark of a theatrical illusion. His impression that Mlle Vinteuil is literally within arm's reach inevitably brings to mind Françoise, the housemaid, who, having been seated at the very back of the theatre during a melodrama, returned home intimidated by the proximity of the stage: 'elle avait assuré en rentrant que sa place était la meilleure qu'on pût avoir, et au lieu de se trouver trop loin, s'était sentie intimidée par la proximité mystérieuse et vivante du rideau' ['[she] had told us hers had been the best seat in the house and that, instead of feeling remote from the stage, she had been intimidated by the proximity of the curtain, which had seemed a mysterious living thing'] (I, 438; 2, 20). The theatre, then, can do just that: create an illusion of proximity where there is distance, and make every spectator feel like Françoise did that day, as though they are at the very *centre* of the theatre.

The opening thus serves to associate the protagonist's posture in this paragraph with that of a spectator in a theatre. It also brings to mind the figure of a voyeur ('je voyais tous ses mouvements sans qu'elle me vît' ['I could see her every movement without her seeing me']), even though the narrator makes sure to point out that his younger self is caught completely unawares by the spectacle that ensues in the lighted

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<sup>146</sup> 'It was almost night when I awoke, I wanted to stand up, but I saw Mlle Vinteuil [...] opposite me, a few centimetres from me, in the room in which her father had entertained mine and which she had made into her little drawing-room. The window was half open, the lamp was lit, I could see her every movement without her seeing me, but if I had gone away I would have made rustling sounds among the bushes, she would have heard me and she might have thought I had hidden there to spy on her' (I, 160).

interior of the house. Much in the same way as in Combray, it is as if the situation simply obliges him to stay put ('en m'allant j'aurais fait craquer les buissons, elle m'aurait entendu et elle aurait pu croire que je m'étais caché là pour l'épier' ['if I had gone away I would have made rustling sounds among the bushes, she would have heard me and she might have thought I had hidden there to spy on her']), as if his reason for not leaving is a fear of attracting Mlle Vinteuil's attention and giving her the (wrongful) impression that he did indeed intend to spy. This, however, was not how Proust initially meant for it to be. In the first draft of this episode, which we find in *Cahier 14*, one of the notebooks known as the *Cahiers Combray* and edited in 1910 (I, 1073-77), the character who lies hiding in the bushes has every intention of spying and goes to great lengths to do this without anyone suspecting anything. In this first version, the spectator in hiding is not, however, the protagonist, but his cousin who goes to see with his own eyes if the rumours he has heard about Mlle Vinteuil (then Mlle Vington) and her friend are true:

Il fit comme s'il allait prendre le train, ferma tout chez lui, et revint le soir et se cacha au pied même du salon où Mlle Vington restait le soir avec son amie. Mlle Vington était sur les genoux de son amie, la main passée autour de son cou. Son amie tenait une photographie de M. Vington. La lampe les éclairait en plein. (I, 798)<sup>147</sup>

There is a voyeur missing from the 'mature' episode, then. He was there, and now he is not. Why is that? Possibly, he is missing because, sometime during the years between the production of the first *Combray* drafts in 1910 and the publication of the novel in 1913, Proust's focus simply shifted – from what provoked this scene (the voyeur's intentions) to what it might provoke (the impact that the voyeur's discoveries might have on him). In the published version, this is clearly what interests the author more. This is how he introduces the scene:

C'est peut-être d'une impression ressentie aussi auprès de Montjouvain, quelques années plus tard, impression restée obscure alors, qu'est sortie, bien après, l'idée que

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<sup>147</sup> 'He acted as though he were going to catch the train, locked up his home, and returned in the evening to hide at the end of the salon in which Mlle Vington spent the evenings with her friend. Mlle Vington was in her friend's lap, with her hand around her neck. Her friend was holding a photograph of M. Vington. The lamp lit them up fully'.

je me suis faite du sadisme. On verra plus tard que, pour de tout autres raisons, le souvenir de cette impression devait jouer un rôle important dans ma vie. (I, 157)<sup>148</sup>

The narrator designates the scene as an *impression ressentie*, and thereby accentuates the protagonist's sensory and emotional *reactions* to what he observes rather than the nature of the observed. The designation thus seems to announce that the significance of this scene resides in the imprint that it has left on the observer. Its function is clearly not to contribute to the linear progression of the narrative as such, not only because its impact will be felt only much later, but also because its status in the surrounding narrative is that of a brief interlude, or, more accurately, a prolepsis, a flash-forward in time, since, whereas the majority of *Combray* relates the narrator's early childhood memories, this paragraph presents us with something that happened *some years later*. Crucially, the impression is described, in optical terms, as 'obscure' at the time, and it is not until it returns to him by way of memory in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* that he is able to grasp its noxious impact on him.<sup>149</sup> The scene, then, stages a determining moment, but though the impact is felt instantly, its meaning remains obscure. The use of optical vocabulary in both the initial scene and upon its return (*impression, obscure, image*) serves to evoke the art of photography, but the analogy that dominates in the passage is that of theatre, not least due to the way that the passage establishes its mode of spectating as a properly theatrical experience – that is, not merely as a visual but also as an *embodied* experience that gives the spectator the impression of being physically *there*, a few centimetres from the actor, at the very *centre* of the theatre. The passage may therefore be viewed as an emblematic example of how Proust *stages* perceptual experiences in accordance with a theatrical model, by instating his protagonists as

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<sup>148</sup> 'It was perhaps from an impression I received, also near Montjouvain, a few years later, an impression that remained obscure to me at the time, that there emerged, well after, the idea which I formed of sadism. As will be seen later, for quite other reasons the memory of this impression was to play an important part in my life' (I, 159-60).

<sup>149</sup> It is when Albertine, who the protagonist has decided to break up with, unexpectedly reveals that she used to be close with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend that he recalls what he saw at Montjouvain: 'une image s'agitait dans mon cœur, une image tenue en réserve pendant tant d'années que, même si j'avais pu deviner en l'emmagasinant jadis qu'elle avait un pouvoir nocif, j'eusse cru qu'à la longue elle l'avait entièrement perdu' ['a picture came to life in my heart, a picture held in reserve during so many years that, even had I been able to guess, when long ago storing it away, that it had the power to do harm, I would have supposed that in the course of time it had lost it entirely'] (III, 499; 4, 507).

spectators to the world about them. Crucially, however, as the scene from Montjouvain confirms, the Proustian spectator not only passively perceives what presents itself to her or him, but remains actively engaged, by way of the imagination, in the constitution of the world as spectacle. The passage thus comes to illustrate that, in *À la recherche*, theatricality is above all a mode of perception.

When the protagonist wakes up, it is as if the world around him has transformed itself into a sort of theatre: the small hill where he lays has gone dark, much like the auditorium in a theatre once the lights are dimmed. And on the far end of the partly open window, which brings to mind a proscenium arch with the curtains removed, a lamp has been lighted, assuring the visibility of the drawing room – that is, the stage upon which a veritable spectacle of cruelty ensues: the orphaned Mlle Vinteuil and her friend's desecration of the portrait of her father. The profanation scene that takes place between the two women who, in a second draft from the same notebook, *Cahier 14*, are referred to as 'les deux actrices [qui] ignorent qu'elles ont un spectateur' ['two actresses who are not aware that they have a spectator'] (I, 805), is subject to evident theatricalisation. The impression of theatricality stems not only from the spectatorial positioning of the protagonist but also from the narrator's descriptions of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, whose every move and utterance seems to be marked by artificiality and pretence. The protagonist's feeling of being faced with something contrived and factitious is fostered not least by what he observes prior to the infamous friend's arrival. With movements paralleling those of her father preparing for a visit from the protagonist's parents a few years earlier (I, 111-12; 1, 114), Mlle Vinteuil carefully 'sets the scene' by strategically placing the portrait of her father on a little table next to her on the sofa. This placement of the portrait just beside her serves as a first indication of her desire to be the object of a spectatorial gaze, and provides the scene with a figurative expression of her experience of being simultaneously a (theatrical) object and subject:

Au fond du salon de Mlle Vinteuil, sur la cheminée était posé un petit portrait de son père que vivement elle alla chercher au moment où retentit le roulement d'une voiture qui venait de la route, puis elle se jeta sur un canapé, et tira près d'elle une petite table

*sur laquelle elle plaça le portrait, comme M. Vinteuil autrefois avait mis à côté de lui le morceau qu'il avait le désir de jouer à mes parents. (I, 158, my emphasis)*<sup>150</sup>

Mlle Vinteuil's hasty preparation of the room prior to her friend's arrival makes the protagonist acutely aware of the element of composition in her behaviour, and this may be viewed as one of the reasons why he, in the remainder of the episode, insists on interpreting, as Elizabeth Burns puts it, her behaviour as 'action' rather than as 'spontaneous'.<sup>151</sup> As we remember from the thesis's introduction, Burns claims that behaviour 'is not theatrical because it is of a certain kind but because the observer recognises certain patterns and sequences which are analogous to those with which he is familiar in the theatre'.<sup>152</sup> In Montjouvain, then, the mode of perception that the protagonist adopts is clearly a theatricalising one, for he finds an element of drama in everything he sees in the drawing room. The descriptions of Mlle Vinteuil's gestures, for example, serve to bring to mind those of an actor on stage, for she is shown to be distinctly and constantly aware of her own body as an emitter of signs:

Mlle Vinteuil l'accueillit sans se lever, ses deux mains derrière la tête et se recula sur le bord opposé du sofa *comme pour lui faire une place*. Mais aussitôt elle sentit qu'elle semblait ainsi lui imposer une attitude qui lui était peut-être importune. Elle pensa que son amie aimerait peut-être mieux être loin d'elle sur une chaise, elle se trouva indiscreète, la délicatesse de son cœur s'en alarma; reprenant toute la place sur le sofa *elle ferma les yeux et se mit à bâiller pour indiquer que l'envie de dormir était la seule raison pour laquelle elle s'était ainsi étendue*. [...] Bientôt elle se leva, *feignit de vouloir fermer les volets et de n'y pas réussir*. (I, 158-59, my emphases)<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> 'At the back of Mlle Vinteuil's drawing-room, on the mantelpiece, stood a small portrait of her father which she quickly went to get at the moment when the rattle of a carriage could be heard from the road outside, then she threw herself down on a couch, *drew a little table close to her and set the portrait on it*, just as M. Vinteuil had once placed beside him the piece that he wanted to play for my parents' (I, 161, my emphasis).

<sup>151</sup> Burns, pp. 13-14.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>153</sup> 'Mlle Vinteuil greeted her without standing up, both hands behind her head, and moved to the end of the sofa *as though to make room for her*. But immediately she felt that by doing this she seemed to be forcing her friend into a position that might be annoying to her. She thought her friend might prefer to be some distance away from her on a chair, she thought she had been indiscreet, her tactful heart grew alarmed; moving so that she now occupied all the space on the sofa again *she closed her eyes and began yawning to imply that she had only stretched out like that because she was sleepy*. [...] Soon she stood up and *pretended to be trying to close the shutters without success*' (I, 161, my emphases).

The passage provides an amusing example of Proust's acute attentiveness with regards to the language of the body, that is, of his talent for writing *mime*. The (possible) psychological motivations for Mlle Vinteuil's subtle movements are perceptively and finely presented to the reader. There seems to be a covert intention to her every move, and, likewise, to every word that the two women exchange:

« Oh! ce portrait de mon père qui nous regarde, je ne sais pas qui a pu le mettre là, j'ai pourtant dit vingt fois que ce n'était pas sa place. »

Je me souvins que c'étaient les mots que M. Vinteuil avait dits à mon père à propos du morceau de musique. Ce portrait leur servait sans doute habituellement pour des profanations rituelles, car son amie lui répondit par ces paroles qui devaient faire partie de ses réponses liturgiques:

« Mais laisse-le donc où il est, il n'est plus là pour nous embêter. Crois-tu qu'il pleurnicherait, qu'il voudrait te mettre ton manteau, s'il te voyait là, la fenêtre ouverte, le vilain singe. » (I, 160)<sup>154</sup>

As before, it is the memory of what he saw her father do some years earlier that conditions the protagonist to interpret her words (and her friend's response) as premeditated and as taking part in some already rehearsed ritual. Repetition, then, is recognised as a sign of composition and leads him to identify her acts as theatrical.

It would seem that, in this episode, the point of view is subject to constant shifts all along, enabling the narrator to occasionally enter, as it were, Mlle Vinteuil's mind and to reveal her intentions for doing as she does. When her friend enters, for example, the text first describes her gestures as seen from the external viewpoint of the protagonist who does not have access to her mind and therefore interprets what he sees (*'comme pour lui faire une place'* [*as though to make room for her'*]), whereas the following sentences are focalised through Mlle Vinteuil and seem to reveal her true

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<sup>154</sup> « – Oh! That picture of my father is looking at us. I don't know who could have put it there. I've told them a dozen times that it doesn't belong there. I remembered that these were the same words M. Vinteuil had spoken to my father in connection with the piece of music. They were probably in the habit of using the portrait for ritual profanations, because her friend answered her in words which must have been part of her liturgical response: – Oh, leave him where he is. He's not here to bother us anymore. Just think how he would start whining and try to make you put your coat on if he could see you there with the window open, the ugly old monkey' (I, 163).

intentions ('elle sentit' ['she felt']; 'elle pensa' ['she thought']; 'elle se trouva' ['she thought she had been']). At the same time, Mlle Vinteuil is instated in a spectatorial position *vis-à-vis* her friend, whose body language she must interpret since she cannot know with certainty what the other really feels ('Elle pensa que son amie *aimerait peut-être* mieux être loin d'elle' ['She thought her friend *might prefer* to be some distance away from her']). Then, the point of view is reinstated within the protagonist, who, once more, reads what he sees in light of the first scene he observed at Montjouvain: 'je reconnaissais les gestes obséquieux et réticents, les brusques scrupules de son père' ['I recognized her father's obsequious and reticent gestures, his sudden qualms'] (I, 158-59; 1, 161). As, notably, Gérard Genette has shown, this constant vacillation between different viewpoints (with frequent shifts from the limited viewpoint of the protagonist to the sometimes omniscient narrator) is common in *À la recherche*, a novel related by way of 'une narration « à la première personne » et cependant parfois omnisciente' ['a "first-person" narrating that is nevertheless occasionally omniscient'].<sup>155</sup> In *Discours du récit*, Genette interprets the Montjouvain-scene in light of this idea of two competing codes that co-exist: 'Tout se passe ici comme si le témoin ne pouvait ni tout voir ni tout entendre, mais devinait en revanche toutes les pensées. Mais la vérité est bien évidemment qu'il y a là deux codes concurrents, fonctionnant sur deux plans de réalité qui s'opposent sans se rencontrer' ['as if the witness could neither see all nor hear all, and nevertheless divined all the thoughts. But the truth quite obviously is that two concurrent codes are functioning here on two planes of reality which oppose each other without colliding'].<sup>156</sup>

In response to this reading, I would like to suggest that another interpretation that the text invites us to consider is that the viewpoint does not actually shift, but rather remains at all times situated within the hidden spectator (Genette's *témoin*), who, provoked by what he perceives to interpret it as theatre, does not exactly *divine* their thoughts, but, more exactly, *invents* them. When we read the episode in this way,

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<sup>155</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), p. 259. [Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 252.]

<sup>156</sup> Genette, *Figures III*, pp. 222-23. [Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, p. 209.]



we see that it does, in fact, tell us something rather crucial about perception, that is, about the *limits* of perception, and, moreover, about the active role that the *imagination* plays (or can play) in the act of perception. And, again in response to Genette, it seems also important to note that the two competing narrative codes that he identifies in the text correspond to a major point of divergence between the theatre and the novel. Whereas the omniscient narrator is a specifically novelistic device, with no actual counterpart in the theatrical medium, the protagonist's limited sensory access to the scene (his *staged* and *staging* perception) rather brings to mind the theatre, and, specifically, the way that the theatre exploits the possibilities and limitations of human perception. The act of setting the scene in the (Italianate) theatre is, after all, precisely a matter of calculating what the spectators in the auditorium may or may not perceive, and of exploiting this knowledge in order to create the desired illusions and effects on the audience's senses and imagination. The tableau, which instates the protagonist as a spectator of her or his surroundings, and mediates the fictional universe from the spectator's perceptual point of view and by way of the latter's imagination, manifests precisely the workings of human perception that the omniscient narrator, due to this device's lack of restraints, its ability to enter everywhere and uncover even the human interior, may ignore. Hence, the device of the omniscient narrator is presumably less useful than the tableau device for a novelist wanting to address perception. That is to say that the omniscient narrator can certainly *tell* us a lot about perception, but not *show* us how it works. This, however, is precisely what both the theatre and the (novelistic) tableau, which *stage* perception, can do.

Ultimately, however, the things that most efficiently imbue this scene with an air of theatricality are the portrait of Mlle Vinteuil's father and the *window* – the latter not only because it becomes the medium that enables the protagonist's observation *en cachette* but also because it, much like the portrait, plays a crucial role in the women's interaction. For the window actually functions as a medium for them as well – as a mediator, that is, of an imaginary gaze that turns out to be the prerequisite for their experience of pleasure. Accordingly, when Mlle Vinteuil (seemingly) pretends to want to close the window, her friend does not hesitate to interrupt her and to say exactly the thing she 'knows' that the other desires to hear:

« Oui, c'est probable qu'on nous regarde à cette heure-ci, dans cette campagne fréquentée, dit ironiquement son amie. Et puis quoi? » ajouta-t-elle (en croyant devoir accompagner d'un clignement d'yeux malicieux et tendre, ces mots qu'elle récita par bonté, *comme un texte qu'elle savait être agréable à Mlle Vinteuil*, d'un ton qu'elle s'efforçait de rendre cynique) « quand même on nous verrait ce n'en est que meilleur. » (I, 159, my emphasis)<sup>157</sup>

As a spectator in a theatre, the protagonist reads the words of Mlle Vinteuil's friend as a 'text', that is, as a part of a script already created and agreed upon before the act. He does not see, then, that it is in fact he who will transform this utterance into a 'text', when, as we shall see further below, he allows these words to play a leading role in his imaginary recreations of the scene.<sup>158</sup> Regardless, the idea of being watched seems to be something of an obsession for Mlle Vinteuil and her friend (as we saw that it was for Léonie as well). As Elisabeth Ladenson affirms in her study of the representation of homosexuality in Proust, 'when the hero creates a clandestine theater for himself, he finds the stage occupied by *actors in search of an audience*'.<sup>159</sup> In other words, while they presumably are unaware of the protagonist's presence, the two actresses in the drawing room evidently take pleasure in the *idea* that an imaginary spectator may observe their illicit acts. As in the theatre, a medium that relies on the encounter between spectatorial and performing bodies of living presence, the (possible) presence of an audience is clearly a constitutive element in Mlle Vinteuil and her friend's interaction as well: they enjoy perceiving themselves as the objects of a spectatorial gaze. It is therefore highly significant that it is a *portrait* of the late composer that

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<sup>157</sup> '– Yes, I'm sure people are watching us at this hour, in this densely populated countryside, her friend said ironically. And what if they are? she added (thinking she had to give a mischievous, tender wink as she uttered these words, which she recited good-naturedly *like a text she knew Mlle Vinteuil liked*, in a tone that she tried to make cynical), "if someone saw us, so much the better"' (I, 162, my emphasis).

<sup>158</sup> 'The spectator inside the theatre sees [theatrical sequences] as the product of dramatist, producer, and actor, while the observer in the world outside, *partly involved himself*, is less conscious of the processes that produce action. He guesses not only at motives and intentions but also at sources and degrees of power and at what really constitutes accident. He is aware of a process which forms action into coherent and consequential sequences although he cannot always distinguish the forces that are in control'. Burns, p. 13, my emphasis.

<sup>159</sup> Elisabeth Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 66, my emphasis.

serves as a fetish-object in their erotic game, since this figurative representation of his face (and gaze) visualises his presence as that of a *spectator*. Another object, such as a piece of music written by the composer, could perhaps have been equally suitable for evoking the phantom of Mlle Vinteuil's father, but it would not have served them just as well. It is essential that 'ce portrait de mon père [...] nous regarde', that is, that the phantom is *looking at them* while they rebel against what he stood for.

Clearly, then, the protagonist, who observes these women through the window without them being aware that he is doing so, is not only a spectator but also an actor in the spectacle he perceives. He turns out to incorporate a presence that is, in fact, already *there*, present as an intrinsic part of their interaction. According to Ladenson, since their pleasure includes the possibility of being watched, this 'scene of voyeurism [...] thus violates the very structure of voyeurism itself, which depends on an unsuspecting object'.<sup>160</sup> While her point may be valid in relation to a traditional, Freudian notion of voyeurism, it is not necessarily so with regards to the particular form of voyeurism that we find at play in *À la recherche*. When, as several examples we have examined already demonstrate, Proust associates voyeurism with a form of theatrical spectatorship, he seems rather to engage with a notion of voyeurism similar to the one evoked in George Rodosthenous's edited volume *Theatre as Voyeurism*. As Rodosthenous asserts in the book's introduction, the 'theatre is a legal place to exercise voyeurism'.<sup>161</sup> In other words, within the theatrical model of spectatorship, the voyeur's perceptual trespassing is implicitly sanctioned, and this does not destroy the pleasure of the experience, but rather redefines it as an intersubjective exchange of pleasure between spectator ('voyeur') and performer ('exhibitionist'). Accordingly, we could say that when Proust writes forth a space that legitimises voyeurism, he creates something like a *theatre* within the novel.

In this *theatre-within-the-novel*, the pleasure of watching is not necessarily lessened by the fact that the curtains are drawn *before* anything overtly sexual occurs. As Rodosthenous maintains, the theatrical 'voyeur seeks no active engagement with

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>161</sup> Rodosthenous, p. 16.

the performer, only with the spectacle',<sup>162</sup> and, as becomes clear in the subsequent volumes of *À la recherche*, the Montjouvain-voyeur's engagement with the spectacle that he perceives that evening does not end when Mlle Vinteuil closes the shutters, but continues to evolve in his imagination. As Arnold Aronson reminds us, the most profound technological and scenographic development in the history of theatre occurred with the arrival of the *door*, which entered Greek theatre around 460 BC, since only after the door was introduced on the theatrical stage did *illusion* come into play.<sup>163</sup> Or, to put it another way, only then did the theatre become a space that allowed for perception (in the simple sense of perceiving a real presence) to transcend into imagination (again, in the most simple, rudimentary sense of perceiving something which is not based on a real presence). The possibility for action to take place behind closed doors, and for things and people to be seen through or hidden behind doors, thus enabled the theatre to stimulate the spectators' imagination in a previously unknown way. A similar point could arguably be made in relation to the role that the window shutters play in this passage. By closing the shutters on the spectator, the actresses do not only take 'charge of the curtain in their own drama',<sup>164</sup> but they also (by leaving it to him to imagine what happens next) give up any control they ever had over this drama, which continues to live and develop in the imagination of the spectator-voyeur, who will be haunted by what he saw (and did not see) for many years to come.

It takes years, though, before the protagonist comes to realise what the spectacle that he observed in Mlle Vinteuil's window really did to him. Ultimately, nevertheless, *tôt ou tard*, the spectator is changed by what he has perceived. Mario Lavagetto sums

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> 'We actually know, more or less, when a door was first used on the Greek stage. It was around 460 BC. We know this because Aeschylus' trilogy, *The Oresteia*, dates from 458 and is so radically different from what came before it that it is clear that something must have occurred to modify the tragic form. That monumental occurrence was the door. None of the extant plays prior to the *Oresteia* – *The Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *The Suppliants*, *Prometheus Bound* – requires a door or any sort of scenic structure. *Prometheus Bound*, for instance, takes place on a rocky mountaintop, *The Suppliants* in an open field. All available evidence suggests that most of the pre-Oresteian drama was "doorless". Arnold Aronson, 'Their Exits and Their Entrances: Getting a Handle on Doors,' *New Theatre Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2004): p. 333.

<sup>164</sup> Ladenson, p. 66.

it up well: in *À la recherche*, he writes, it is as though ‘[tout ce qui] est connu à travers l’œil apparemment immunisé de l’observateur, se transforme en signe du destin: voir signifie se condamner à revivre, à éprouver à la première personne. La faute du témoin est punie par sa métamorphose en protagoniste’ [‘[all that] is learnt through the observer’s apparently immune eye is transformed into a sign of destiny: seeing means condemning oneself to relive, to experience in the first person. The witness’s fault is punished by his metamorphosis into protagonist’].<sup>165</sup> And several years after observing Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, the protagonist does relive the ‘melodrama’ in his mind, in what could be considered, as Lavagetto puts it, ‘un véritable *replay*, avec changement d’acteurs’ [‘a veritable replay, with a change of cast’].<sup>166</sup> Staring out from the window of his hotel room in Balbec, the view that presents itself to his senses seems unreal, the spectacle of sunrise but a veil superposed onto what that he sees behind it: the drawing room at Montjouvain, in which Mlle Vinteuil performs the same scene as before, except that this time the protagonist’s lover Albertine has replaced Mlle Vinteuil’s infamous friend:

Mais derrière la plage de Balbec, la mer, le lever du soleil, que maman me montrait, je voyais, avec des mouvements de désespoir qui ne lui échappaient pas, la chambre de Montjouvain où Albertine, rose, pelotonnée comme une grosse chatte, le nez mutin, avait pris la place de l’amie de Mlle Vinteuil et disait avec des éclats de son rire voluptueux: « Hé bien! *si on nous voit, ce n’en sera que meilleur*. Moi! Je n’oserai pas cracher sur ce vieux singe? ». C’est cette scène que je voyais derrière celle qui s’étendait dans la fenêtre et qui n’était sur l’autre qu’un voile morne, superposé comme un reflet. (III, 513-14, my emphasis)<sup>167</sup>

The passage acquires the status of a tableau, with the protagonist situated as a spectator before a window that frames a scene within, or, more exactly, two scenes,

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<sup>165</sup> Lavagetto, p. 79.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>167</sup> ‘But behind the beach of Balbec, the sea, and the sunrise, to which Mama was pointing, I could see, in a fit of despair that did not escape her, the room in Montjouvain where Albertine, pink, curled up in a ball like a big cat, with her mischievous nose, had taken the place of Mlle Vinteuil’s friend and was saying, to peals of voluptuous laughter: “Oh well, *if we’re seen, that’ll only make it better*. Me, I wouldn’t dare spit on that old ape?” This was the scene I could see behind that spread out in the window, which was nothing more than a mournful veil, superimposed on the other like a reflection’ (4, 521, my emphasis).

the one that is perceived by the senses only a transparent and dreary layer over the one behind it. The actors of this scene are not, however, as in the original Montjouvain episode, physically there and present before him, but completely imaginary – what he sees is a fantasy scene made up of a combination of a memory and something that his imagination has fabricated. He perceives it as though at a distance, as a scene mediated by the window frame, although it only exists in his mind. From a psychological point of view, then, it could be described as a hallucination. At a first glance, the difference between this scene and the one perceived at Montjouvain thus appears to be crucial. As Lavagetto perceptively points out:

*Je est rivé à son rôle de spectateur immobile, ignoré. Toutefois, la scène, si elle a maintenant perdu de son objectivité, est aussi plus cruelle: comme dans un rêve, les personnages font partie de l'univers du rêveur, Mlle Vinteuil et Albertine en sont « des objets internes ».*<sup>168</sup>

The question, however, is whether the first scene, perceived by the senses, really was much more objective than the latter, purely imaginary one. This hallucination is also a phenomenological experience. We see this in the way the narrator stages it as a perceptual experience, by very clearly situating the imaginary scene in space and at a distance from him, with the view of the beach, ocean and sunrise interposed between him and it ('derrière la plage de Balbec, la mer, le lever du soleil [...] je voyais' ['behind the beach of Balbec, the sea, and the sunrise, [...] I could see']) and by describing his own reactions to this imagined scene. The scene may be a hallucination, then, but he still experiences it as more real than the landscape that his eyes actually perceive and that still seems, somehow, *unreal*: 'elle-même, en effet, presque irréal, comme une vue peinte' ['itself indeed almost unreal, like a painted view'] (III, 514; 4, 521). This is certainly not to say that the subject-object relation is identical in the hallucinated scene (perceived through the imagination) and in Montjouvain (where the spectacle presents itself to his senses), but simply that Proust does not draw a sharp

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<sup>168</sup> Lavagetto, p. 78, my emphases. ['I is tethered to his role as an immobile spectator who remains ignored. However, the scene, having *lost its objectivity*, is also made more cruel: as if in a dream, the characters are part of the dreamer's universe, *Mlle Vinteuil and Albertine are its "internal objects"*.]

line of demarcation between the perceived scene and the imagined one (that is, between perception and imagination), and that he rather demands us to consider the complex entanglement of these two faculties.

What we have begun to see the contours of through the present analysis, then, is an aspect of Proust's view on perception that we will look at from different angles throughout the thesis: that what we perceive is always, although to varying degrees, 'des objets internes'. This idea anticipates later developments in phenomenology concerning the relationship between perception and imagination. In *L'Imaginaire*, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre provides a phenomenological account of the imaginative experience. In this early work, Sartre suggests that perception and imagination are not radically opposed – that they play reciprocal roles in the constitution of both a realising and imaging consciousness. For Sartre, consciousness is a mixed state of perceiving and imagining: 'Il ne saurait y avoir de conscience réalisante sans conscience imageante et réciproquement' ['There could be no realizing consciousness without imaging consciousness, and vice versa'].<sup>169</sup> In Sartre's view, the imagination is thus not only a creative power enabling the subject to recall or produce absent objects (as we see in the tableau from Balbec, about which we could perhaps say, in Sartrean terms, that it shows us consciousness aiming at imaginary objects *as though* they were objects of perception), but also part of that which enables a subject to apprehend real objects at all (as we see at Montjouvain, where the spectator apprehends the acts that he sees unfold before him by aid of the imagination and transforms it into a theatrical illusion). Central to Sartre's theory of the imagination is his conception of the imagination as the means by which consciousness relates to real objects by 'irrealising' them.<sup>170</sup> In the conclusion to his book, he exemplifies what he

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<sup>169</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Imaginaire. Psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 238-39. [Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: a Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, ed. Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, trans. Jonathan Webber (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 188.]

<sup>170</sup> In the preliminary remarks to *L'Imaginaire*, Sartre writes: 'Cet ouvrage a pour but de décrire la grande fonction « irrealisante » de la conscience ou « imagination » et son corrélatif noématique, l'imaginaire'. Sartre, *L'Imaginaire. Psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination*, p. 11. ['This work aims to describe the great "irrealizing" function of consciousness, or "imagination", and its noematic correlate, the imaginary'. Sartre, *The Imaginary: a Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, p. 3.]

means by this through a discussion of our appreciation of works of art, and, as it turns out, the encounter with art provides an excellent example of the irrealisation that characterises the way that the imaging consciousness relates to real objects. Crucially, for Sartre, it is not the material aspect of the artwork that constitutes the object of our aesthetic appreciation. Rather, the aesthetic object is an irreality that appears only at the moment when consciousness constitutes itself as imaging. For example, in the theatre, the aesthetic object is not what Sartre calls the *analogon* (such as the body, feelings and gestures of the actor playing Phaedra), but the ‘irreal’ object or image that the spectator encounters (that is, the imaginary person Phaedra, her feelings and conduct).<sup>171</sup> The appreciation of the aesthetic object requires the spectator to take an imaging attitude to the real: ‘l’objet esthétique est constitué et appréhendé par une conscience imageante qui le pose comme irréel’ [‘the aesthetic object is constituted and apprehended by an imaging consciousness that posits it as irreal’].<sup>172</sup> Sartre thus employs the theatrical experience (along with other experiences of other art forms) as a means of disclosing the element of imaginative, creative agency that he views as involved in every act of perception. He does not imply that we perceive *differently* when we are faced with works of art. Instead, he employs an analysis of our phenomenological experience of art objects to reveal the necessary relationship between perception and imagination in our experience of all objects in the world, and it is precisely this phenomenological relationship that is explored by Proust in several episodes (such as the one that takes place in Montjouvain) where a theatrical analogy serves to underline the creative and ‘irrealising’ (aestheticising) dimension of the protagonist’s perception.

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<sup>171</sup> ‘Il va de soi que le romancier, le poète, le dramaturge constituent à travers des analoges verbaux un objet irréel; il va de soi aussi, que l’acteur qui joue Hamlet se sert de lui-même, de son corps tout entier comme analogon de ce personnage imaginaire’. Sartre, *L’Imaginaire. Psychologie phénoménologique de l’imagination*, p. 242. [‘It goes without saying that the novelist, the poet, the dramatist constitute irreal objects through verbal analogons; it also goes without saying that actor who plays Hamlet makes himself, his whole body, serve as an analogon for that imaginary person’]. Sartre, *The Imaginary: a Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, p. 191.]

<sup>172</sup> Sartre, *L’Imaginaire. Psychologie phénoménologique de l’imagination*, p. 242. [Sartre, *The Imaginary: a Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, p. 191.]



### 1.3 The Voyeur as Artist

There is another voyeur missing from the novel. He was last observed in Doncières before escaping into a dark street. This strange and foreign creature puzzled the town's inhabitants. Perhaps their reactions resembled those of the protagonist when he catches an unknown man spying on him in Balbec: 'J'eus l'idée d'un escroc d'hôtel [...] la singularité de son expression me le faisait prendre tantôt pour un voleur et tantôt pour un aliéné ['It crossed my mind that he might be a hotel-thief [...]. It was the strangeness of his expression which made me think he must be a thief, if not a madman'] (II, 111; 2, 333). When he sees that the passers-by notice him, the stranger flees the scene: 'Puis voyant que les passants remarquaient avec défiance cet étranger qui restait là immobile et les yeux levés à espionner dans l'ombre, j'enfilais la première rue qui était devant moi, pauvre et vulgaire celle-là' ['Then, seeing that the passers-by were noticing with suspicion this stranger who stood there motionless with his eyes looking up to spy from the shadows, I slipped into the first street in front of me – this one was poor and vulgar'] (II, 1131).

*Le Côté de Guermantes I* was published in 1920, but a majority of the elements that constitute the protagonist's visit to the fictional garrison town of Doncières were conceived at least a decade earlier, in 1910, when Proust undertook a major revision of what is now known as the *Cahiers Guermantes* (notebooks 39-43). In the notebooks, as in the novel, the narrator relates an evening walk through town, but there are some remarkable differences between the draft and the published text: firstly, the spectator is no longer visible for the passers-by in the final version, and, secondly, his agency is no longer explicitly defined as *spying*. This shift deserves our attention since it serves to strengthen the hypothesis presented in Chapter 1.2: that, sometime during the years between the conception and the publication of *À la recherche*, Proust's interest in the figure of the voyeur shifted. In the final version of *Le Côté de Guermantes I*, for example, while Proust continues to stage his protagonist as an invisible observer and to use this posture actively as an enabler in the narrative, it seems to be less urgent for him to identify this observer specifically as a voyeur with *intentions* to spy. Instead, it seems to be above all the spectatorial potential inherent in the figure that interests him. The reason, then, for Proust's omission of the explicit allusions to spying in

Montjouvain and Doncières is perhaps simply that they would have been off the mark, in the sense that they would have diverted the reader's focus from what is really the subject of these episodes, that is, not *why* (is the voyeur spying), but *what* and *how* (does the voyeur see).

I suggested earlier that in Montjouvain voyeurism is identified as a form of theatrical spectatorship, and I examined the association of theatricality and voyeurism with an eye for what this could tell us about Proust's views on perception, and, more specifically, on the role that the imagination plays in the act of perception. We observed that the theatrical references that imbue this episode disclose a close entanglement of imagination and the senses in perception. In Montjouvain as elsewhere, perception is conceived as a form of creative agency, and the voyeur's limited access to what he is able to witness is compensated for by his invention of the two young women's thoughts and reasons for behaving as they do. When we interpret the spectacle not only as a result of the women's conscious self-staging but also as a result of the voyeur's theatricalising attitude, this leads us to identify the voyeur as something like an artist who transforms what he perceives into an artistic representation of reality (a 'spectacle'). In other words, this interpretation requires us to acknowledge the spectator as an agent in the tableau, and not merely as someone who passively receives impressions. In this section, I will examine the scenes that the voyeur in Doncières observes as *mises en scène* of his perceptual 'artistry'.

There is an air of the supernatural in the everyday scenes of which the protagonist catches glimpses in the windows he passes by during his walk through Doncières. The clock has struck seven, and he is on his way to meet Robert de Saint-Loup for dinner at the hotel where the latter is lodging. It is a dark night, and he enjoys his walk through the unlit and unknown streets of the town. Momentarily arrested before illuminated windows, observing the people inside from outside in the dark, the protagonist retains a strong impression of exclusion, of being only a witness to a world in which he does not belong. The windows thus serve to mediate the various scenes that unfold before him, but they do not enable access to these spaces, nor actual interaction with their inhabitants. Rather, the windows operate as devices for cutting

out and framing the scenes that present themselves to him, enabling him to concentrate his attention on a clearly delimited fraction of the world:

La vie que menaient les habitants de ce monde inconnu me semblait devoir être merveilleuse, et souvent les vitres éclairées de quelque demeure me retenaient longtemps immobile dans la nuit en mettant sous mes yeux les scènes véridiques et mystérieuses d'existences où je ne pénétrais pas. Ici le génie du feu me montrait en un tableau empourpré la taverne d'un marchand de marrons où deux sous-officiers, leurs ceinturons posés sur des chaises, jouaient aux cartes sans se douter qu'un magicien les faisait surgir de la nuit, comme dans une apparition de théâtre, et les évoquait tels qu'ils étaient effectivement à cette minute même, aux yeux d'un passant arrêté qu'ils ne pouvaient voir. (II, 395)<sup>173</sup>

The two officers playing cards that come to view in one of the windows in Doncières are like a stage apparition in a theatre. In other words, they give the impression of being not even fictional characters on a stage, but a mere ephemeral and immaterial presence crafted by stage machinery. A presence, nonetheless, for the very notion of *apparition* presupposes the presence of a subject that perceives a visual manifestation, since an apparition is, by definition, *something that becomes visible for someone*, as Pedro Kadivar explains in *Marcel Proust ou Esthétique de l'entre-deux*: 'La notion d'apparition postule l'existence d'un sujet car elle suppose un *apparaître-à-quelqu'un*, à un point de vue, et par là inclut l'hypothèse d'une subjectivité' ['The concept of apparition stakes a claim for the existence of a subject since it presupposes an *appearing-to-someone*, a point of view, and thereby includes the hypothesis of a subjectivity'].<sup>174</sup> In other words, the comparison of these two men with a stage apparition implies that their fleeting existence is completely dependent on the physical presence (in that very moment and space) of a spectator, and underscores the fact that they appear, notably, 'tels qu'ils étaient effectivement à cette minute même, aux yeux

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<sup>173</sup> 'The life led by the inhabitants of this unfamiliar world must be something wondrous, it seemed to me, and often the lighted windows of a building would keep me standing for a long time in the dark, motionless, laying before my eyes the genuine and mysterious scenes of lives I might not enter. Here the genie of fire showed me in a crimson tableau the booth of a chestnut-seller where a pair of non-commissioned officers, their belts abandoned on chairs, were playing cards, without suspecting that they had been conjured out of the darkness by a magician, like a stage apparition, and presented as they actually were at that very moment to the eyes of a stopping passer-by who was invisible to them' (3, 93).

<sup>174</sup> Kadivar, p. 79.

d'un passant arrêté qu'ils ne pouvaient voir' ['as they actually were at that very moment to the eyes of a stopping passer-by who was invisible to them']. This apparition cannot, then, be separated from the subjective (temporally and spatially limited) presence that calls it forth (that *evokes* it).

In nineteenth-century theatre and well before that, different optical projectors, such as the magic lantern and the camera obscura, were employed to create the effect of spectral presences onstage.<sup>175</sup> In this paragraph, it is a 'génie du feu' (a magic spirit in possession of supernatural powers that is believed to serve whoever summons it, and, in this case, presumably a metaphor for a candle or a lamp) that projects light into the room so that it becomes visible from the outside.<sup>176</sup> Crucially, however, it is not the light source alone that calls forth the stage apparition, for the magic spirit cooperates with a *magician* – presumably none other than the protagonist himself. It is wizard and spirit, then, physical light source and human imagination, that work together to evoke the effect of a theatrical apparition in this *tableau empourpré*, and that, consequently, bring to mind the projections of the magic lantern, which, as is well known, plays a crucial role in Proust's *À la recherche*. The magic lantern is particularly central in the novel's *ouverture*, when, 'à l'instar des premiers architectes et maîtres verriers de l'âge gothique' ['after the fashion of the first architects and master glaziers of the Gothic age'] (I, 9; 1, 13), it replaces the opacity of the walls in the young protagonist's bedroom in Combray with multicoloured apparitions illustrating the story of Golo and Geneviève de Brabant read aloud by his great-aunt. However, it is another passage in the novel that most clearly echoes the Doncières-tableau, namely the passage in which the narrator curiously compares the fictional painter Elstir's head to a magic lantern, while his paintings are compared to the luminous images projected by the lamp:

[...] de nouveau comme à Balbec j'avais devant moi *les fragments de ce monde aux couleurs inconnues qui n'était que la projection de la manière de voir particulière à ce grand peintre* et que ne traduisaient nullement ses paroles. Les parties du mur

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<sup>175</sup> Larkin, p. 120.

<sup>176</sup> The 'génie du feu' has a long history in French theatre. In Beaumarchais's first opera *Tarare* (1787), for example, the fire spirit plays one of the leading roles. This spirit could also be seen on stage in *féeries*, such as in the pantomime-féerie *L'Eau et le feu*, performed at the former Théâtre des Funambules in Paris in 1838.

couvertes de peintures de lui, toutes homogènes les unes aux autres, étaient *comme les images lumineuses d'une lanterne magique laquelle eût été, dans le cas présent, la tête de l'artiste* [...]. (II, 712, my emphases)<sup>177</sup>

The illuminated windows in Doncières seem to constitute, in much the same way as Elstir's paintings, projected fragments of an artist's *particular way of seeing* – the 'artist', in this case, being none other than the spectator-protagonist, whose imagination aestheticises these fragments of an unknown reality by positing them as *irreal*, by transforming what he sees into an artistic representation of reality. These spaces have something otherworldly about them, and the fact that the observer sees something *other* than what is actually there is precisely what the narrator underlines:

Dans un petit magasin de bric-à-brac, une bougie à demi-consumée, en projetant sa lueur rouge sur une gravure, la transformait en sanguine, pendant que, luttant contre l'ombre, la clarté de la grosse lampe basanait un morceau de cuir, niellait un poignard de paillettes étincelantes, sur des tableaux qui n'étaient que de mauvaises copies déposait une dorure précieuse comme la patine du passé ou le vernis d'un maître, et faisait enfin de ce taudis où il n'y avait que du toc et des croûtes, un inestimable Rembrandt. Parfois je levais les yeux jusqu'à quelque vaste appartement ancien dont les volets n'étaient pas fermés et où des hommes et des femmes amphibies, se réadaptant chaque soir à vivre dans un autre élément que le jour, nageaient lentement dans la grasse liqueur qui, à la tombée de la nuit, sourd incessamment du réservoir des lampes pour remplir les chambres jusqu'au bord de leurs parois de pierre et de verre, et au sein de laquelle ils propageaient, en déplaçant leurs corps, des remous onctueux et dorés. (II, 395-96)<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> '[...] once again, as in Balbec, I had before me *fragments of that world of strange new colours, the projection of the great painter's particular vision*, which his speech in no way conveyed. The parts of the walls that were covered by his paintings, each of them part of a homogenous whole, were *like the luminous images of a magic lantern which, in this instance, was the mind of the artist*' (3, 417, my emphases).

<sup>178</sup> 'In a little junk shop, a half-spent candle projected its red glow on to an engraving and turned it to the colour of blood, while the light cast by a big lamp, struggling with the darkness, bronzed a fragment of leather, niello-ed a dagger with glittering spangles, spread a sheen of precious gold like the patina of the past or the varnish of a master over pictures which were only bad copies, and turned this whole hovel, in which there was nothing but cheap imitations and cast-off rubbish, into a marvellous Rembrandt painting. Occasionally I looked up towards some vast old apartment with its shutters still open and where amphibious men and women, adapting themselves each evening to living in an element different from their daytime one, swam about slowly in the dense liquid which at nightfall rises incessantly from the wells of lamps and fills the rooms to the brink of their walls of stone and glass, and as they moved about in it, their bodies sent forth unctuous golden ripples' (3, 93-94).

When the light cast by a big lamp spreads sheens of gold over pictures that are only bad copies, this action provides these cheap imitations with the allure of ‘the patina of the past or the varnish of a master’. But what these images actually expose is the *opposite* of patina: this would-be Rembrandt is pure artifice and meant to be conceived as such, for only when we grasp the vast disparity between *what* he sees and *how* he perceives it do we fully acknowledge what an excellent illustration of the creative agency of the imagination in perception is provided by the evening walk through Doncières. In both of the windows that the protagonist observes, we see the world not as it ‘really’ is, but as it appears to his imagination: the booth of a chestnut-seller turned into a crimson tableau; a little junk-shop converted into a marvellous Rembrandt painting; and some vast old apartment transformed into an aquarium exhibiting amphibious men and women. The life fragments that come to view in the windows are above all, it seems, important as material to be aestheticised and present us with glimpses into an imaginary world born from the creative agency of the perceiving individual. We could, then, consider these apparitions as expressions of a fundamentally phenomenological reality. In other words, the aesthetic transformation of that which comes into view in the windows in Doncières could be said to express one subject’s perceptual experience of reality. We may thus say that what these windows first and foremost present is a *mise en scène* of the creative gaze that is directed at them, and, accordingly, that this gaze is the actual (though implicit) subject-matter in what appears to be a description of a junk-shop, the booth of a chestnut-seller and an old apartment. As Kadivar affirms with regards to the role of description in Proust: ‘Le regard du narrateur proustien est un regard qui se regarde lui-même en regardant un objet’ [‘The gaze of the Proustian narrator is a gaze that gazes at itself gazing at an object’].<sup>179</sup> Due to this mirroring effect, the window spectacles in Doncières may be said to reflect and mediate an individual experience of reality and they may be viewed as spaces for exploring the active role of the imagination in the act of perception.

In conclusion, then, we have seen that when we consider the window spectacles as projected fragments of the voyeur’s particular way of seeing, the voyeur comes to

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<sup>179</sup> Kadivar, p. 71.

resemble the figure of an artist *à la* Elstir – that is, to borrow Vincent Descombes words, an artist capable of presenting us with purely *phenomenological* objects, objects ‘dont tout l’esse tient dans le *percipi*’ [‘whose entire *esse* pertains to the *percipi*’].<sup>180</sup> Elstir is able to express through his artworks the world *as he sees it*, and, consequently, what we discover in his paintings is not so much the objects of his gaze as the painter’s gaze itself in the process of exploring these objects. The creative act of looking at things is also the subject matter of the voyeuristic tableau from Doncières. In the next section, we shall explore what happens when the voyeur is lured out from his place of hiding and becomes the object of the performer’s perception.

#### 1.4 Mirrors and Magic in Maineville

After having kept him waiting for several hours in a sumptuous ‘Persian’ salon from which he could see nothing, Mlle Noémie finally leads M. de Charlus towards a door that is slightly ajar. The Baron has followed Morel to a house of prostitution in Maineville, without the latter being aware, for he suspects that the young violinist might be cheating on him, and he wants to know who the seducer is. The surprising vision that reveals itself to him through the gap in the door horrifies the Baron:

Enfin le baron put voir par l’ouverture de la porte et aussi dans les glaces. Mais une terreur mortelle le força de s’appuyer au mur. C’était bien Morel qu’il avait devant lui, mais comme si les mystères païens et les enchantements existaient encore, c’était plutôt l’ombre de Morel, Morel embaumé, pas même Morel ressuscité comme Lazare, une apparition de Morel, un fantôme de Morel, Morel revenant ou évoqué dans cette chambre (où partout les murs et les divans répétaient des emblèmes de sorcellerie), qui était à quelques mètres de lui, de profil. Morel avait, comme après la mort, perdu toute couleur; entre ces femmes avec lesquelles il semblait qu’il eût dû s’ébattre joyeusement, livide, il restait figé dans une immobilité artificielle; pour boire la coupe de champagne qui était devant lui, son bras sans force essayait lentement de se tendre et retombait. (III, 466-67)<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Vincent Descombes, *Proust. Philosophie du roman* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), p. 280.

<sup>181</sup> ‘Finally, the Baron was able to see through the gap in the door, as well as in the mirrors. But a mortal terror forced him to lean against the wall. It was indeed Morel that he had before him but, as though the pagan mysteries and enchantments still existed, it was the shade of Morel rather, Morel embalmed, not even Morel resuscitated like Lazarus, an apparition of Morel, a spectral Morel, Morel revenant or conjured up in this room (where the walls and

The scene that reveals itself through the open door in *Maineville* is like a fragment of an enchanted world or a glimpse of life after death: Morel, supposedly out to amuse himself, remains as if frozen. Like a ghost or a corpse, he is drained of colour. In reality, Morel is transfixed, ‘paralysé par la stupeur’ [‘paralysed by stupefaction’] (III, 467; 4, 474) and trembling because of what he sees in the mirrors that cover the walls of the room: ‘si M. de Charlus le voyait mal, lui, terrorisé, sans paroles, n’osant pas prendre son verre de peur de la laisser tomber, voyait en plein le baron’ [‘if M. de Charlus could see him only with difficulty, he, terror-stricken, incapable of speech, not daring to pick up his glass for fear of dropping it, had a clear view of the Baron’] (III, 467; 4, 474). It takes only a moment before the Baron realises that his treacherous lover has been warned that someone has paid money to get to see him, and that the cheating violinist probably knows that he is there. But this realisation is not the passage’s (only) subject. Instead, the text brings to view that brief ‘instant d’hésitation’ [‘moment’s hesitation’] (III, 467; 4, 474) *before* Charlus knows. As such, due to the way that the text prolongs that brief moment in order to highlight Charlus’s immediate reactions to what he visually perceives, it may be considered a *tableau*. It might even be viewed as an emblematic specimen of the Proustian *tableau*, for the text is exemplary in the way that it brings out what must be a core principle in Proustian perception, namely that nothing is ever perceived in its ‘pure’ state, but always modified by the spectator’s interiority: ‘un fait objectif, une image, est différent selon l’état intérieur avec lequel on l’aborde’ [‘an objective fact or an image is different according to the state of mind in which one approaches it’] (IV, 99; 5, 484).

Charlus initially perceives the vision that reveals itself to him as a supernatural apparition. It appears to him as though the violinist is put under some spell (‘comme si les mystères païens et les enchantements existaient encore’ [‘as though the pagan mysteries and enchantments still existed’]). Undoubtedly, his impression is affected by

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divans everywhere repeated emblems of sorcery), who was a few metres away from him, in profile. Morel was, as after death, drained of colour; between the women, with whom it seemed he should have been disporting himself joyously, livid, he remained frozen in an artificial immobility; in order to drink the goblet of champagne that stood in front of him, his lifeless arm tried slowly to reach out and fell back’ (4, 473).



what he sees in this room, where the walls are covered with emblems of sorcery ('partout les murs et les divans répétaient des emblèmes de sorcellerie' ['the walls and divans everywhere repeated emblems of sorcery']). But if for a moment the Baron is willing to believe in a world where magic still exists, this is also because he is in some way predisposed to do so. For hours on end, he has been kept waiting, together with Jupien, in a Persian salon presumably designed with the purpose of bringing to mind the universe of folk tales in the vein of *One Thousand and One Nights*. While they are waiting, Mlle Noémie assures them, 'comme dans un conte, que pour leur faire passer le temps elle allait leur envoyer « une petite dame intelligente »' ['like in a folk-tale, that to help them pass the time, she would send them in "an intelligent little lady"'] (III, 466; 4, 472, my emphasis). And similarly to how the laws of time are breached in folk-tales, in this room, five minutes may last an hour: 'Ces cinq minutes durèrent une heure' ['These five minutes lasted for an hour'] (III, 466; 4, 473). One could imagine, then, that even before the 'fantôme de Morel' appears before him, Charlus is in an enchanted state of mind. He is also in a state of emotional turmoil, caused both by the experience of being in an unknown place ('M. de Charlus, qui avait peu l'habitude de ce genre de lieux, [...] était effrayé comme un provincial qui a à traverser les boulevards' ['M. de Charlus, who had little experience of places of this sort, [...] was as terrified as a provincial having to cross the boulevards'] (III, 465; 4, 471-72)) and by the suspicion that Morel might be cheating on him – a suspicion that causes an anxiety that is simultaneously 'disturbing' and 'enriching' for his mind:

On ne peut comprendre à quel point cette inquiétude agitait, et par là même avait momentanément enrichi, l'esprit de M. de Charlus. L'amour cause ainsi de véritables soulèvements géologiques de la pensée. Dans celle de M. de Charlus qui, il y a quelques jours, ressemblait à une plaine si uniforme qu'au plus loin il n'aurait pu apercevoir une idée au ras du sol, s'étaient brusquement dressées, dures comme la pierre, un massif de montagnes, mais de montagnes aussi sculptées que si quelque statuaire au lieu d'emporter le marbre l'avait ciselé sur place et où se tordaient, en groupes géants et titaniques, la Fureur, la Jalousie, la Curiosité, l'Envie, la Haine, la Souffrance, l'Orgueil, l'Épouvante et l'Amour. (III, 464-65)<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> 'It is hard to credit the extent to which his anxiety had disturbed, and by the same token had even momentarily enriched, M. de Charlus's mind. Love causes these veritable geological upheavals in our thoughts. In those of M. de Charlus, which, a few days before, had

Crucially, then, the powerful impression that the scene he observes in Maineville has on the Baron is a consequence of his agitated state of mind, for the emotional turmoil and the unfamiliar surroundings contribute in different ways to the veritable ‘soulèvements géologiques’ [‘geological upheavals’] of his thoughts that are the very prerequisites for his susceptibility not only to the strangeness of the vision itself but also to the true nature of this vision – its ‘truth’ paradoxically residing in its artificiality.<sup>183</sup> The situation is completely artificial, in fact: it is *mise en scène* solely for Charlus’s benefit, and this is precisely what he – even in the moment of confused hesitation that the perceptual impression provokes, and thus before he becomes consciously aware of it – understands: ‘entre ces femmes avec lesquelles il semblait qu’il eût dû s’ébattre joyusement, livide, [Morel] restait figé dans une *immobilité artificielle*’ [‘between the women, with whom it seemed he should have been disporting himself joyously, livid, he remained frozen in an *artificial immobility*’]. We may therefore say that the literary device of the *tableau*, by freezing and prolonging a brief moment in time (as we remember from the introduction to this thesis, the *tableau* can be viewed as a means for fixing the evanescent), formally reflects the scene that unfolds before the Baron’s gaze: the *tableau* arrests a spectacle in which the main performer is already completely immobile, as though the spectator’s gaze actually possessed the power to immobilise and thus visually dominate the performer.

The Baron is not, however, the only spectator in the *tableau* above, because, due to the peculiar placement of Morel, the latter (who, for his part, is viewed in profile by

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resembled a plain so smooth that, away into the distance, he would not have been able to spot an idea lying on the surface, there had abruptly arisen, hard as stone, a mountain massif, but of mountains so sculpted it was as if some statuary, instead of carrying the marble away, had carved it where it lay, and where there writhed, in giant, titanic groups, Fury, Jealousy, Curiosity, Envy, Hatred, Suffering, Pride, Terror and Love’ (4, 471).

<sup>183</sup> ‘M. de Charlus n’eut qu’un instant d’hésitation, il comprit *la vérité* et que, soit maladresse de Jupien quand il était allé s’entendre, soit puissance expansive des secrets confiés qui fait qu’on ne les garde jamais, soit caractère indiscret de ces femmes, soit crainte de la police, on avait prévenu Morel que deux messieurs avaient payé fort cher pour le voir’ [‘M. de Charlus knew only a moment’s hesitation before grasping *the truth*, that, whether it was Jupien’s gaucheness when going to make the arrangements, or the potentiality of secrets to expand once confided, which means that they are never kept, or the indiscreet natures of the women, or fear of the police, Morel had been warned that two gentlemen had paid a lot of money in order to watch him’] (III, 467; 4, 474, my emphasis).

Charlus) ‘voyait en plein le baron’ [‘had a clear view of the Baron’]. Presumably, the mirrors that cover the walls somehow enable Morel to see without being seen, and, accordingly, Charlus, the paying spectator (‘le baron demanda à Jupien s’il se chargerait d’acheter la patronne de l’établissement et d’obtenir qu’on les cachât, lui et Jupien, pour assister à la scène’ [‘the Baron asked Jupien if he would undertake to bribe the madam of the establishment and arrange that Jupien and he be hidden in order to witness the scene’] (III, 464; 4, 471, my emphases)), is also made the object of another person’s gaze. The door opening thus becomes a reversible frame, which mediates two scenes at once. Once again, then, although unwittingly this time (as opposed to our first sight of him in Balbec), the character of Charlus comes to represent simultaneously both the figure of the actor and that of the spectator, that is to say that, as in Balbec, he is both the subject and the object of perception. The tableau seen from the perspective of Charlus as the perceiving subject serves to illustrate how the spectator’s emotional state affects a scene. Conversely, when we approach the tableau from Morel’s perspective, it becomes an illustration of how, as we saw in Chapter 1.1, an act of observation always ends up affecting the observer in one way or another. The short epilogue to the scene demonstrates this brilliantly.

After being made to leave in an abrupt manner so that Charlus does not discover him, Morel’s seducer, the Prince de Guermantes, begs the violinist to visit him in a small villa that he rents. Morel, still unaware of the prince’s identity, obliges this request, and goes to see him the following night: ‘Morel, retournant la tête à toute minute, tremblant d’être suivi et épié par M. de Charlus, avait fini n’ayant remarqué aucun passant suspect, par entrer dans la villa’ [‘Morel, looking behind him the whole time, fearful of being followed and spied on by M. de Charlus, had finally, not having observed any suspicious passers-by, entered the villa’] (III, 467; 4, 474). The description of Morel’s anxiousness as he approaches the prince’s villa is in itself an excellent illustration of the power of the spectacle. Morel, now unable to shake the fear of being followed by and spied on by Charlus, seems to have developed a form of paranoia. The Baron’s gaze is thus implicitly present in this scene as well, in the sense of Morel having, as it were, internalised it. The remainder of the scene provides yet another of the novel’s dark comical highlights, when Morel, waiting for the prince in

the drawing room that the latter has decorated with family photographs, casts a glance towards the mirror. In a movement echoing Charlus's stupefaction the night before, Morel is instantly petrified, for what he sees on the mantelpiece strikes him as a hallucination:

Mais quand Morel se trouva seul et voulut regarder dans la glace si sa mèche n'était pas dérangée, ce fut comme une hallucination. Sur la cheminée, les photographies, reconnaissables pour le violoniste, car il les avait vues chez M. de Charlus, de la princesse de Guermantes, de la duchesse de Luxembourg, de Mme de Villeparisis, le pétrifièrent d'abord d'effroi. Au même moment il aperçut celle de M. de Charlus, laquelle était un peu en retrait. Le baron semblait immobiliser sur Morel un regard étrange et fixe. Fou de terreur, Morel, revenant de sa stupeur première, ne doutant pas que ce ne fût un guet-apens où M. de Charlus l'avait fait tomber pour éprouver s'il était fidèle, dégringola quatre à quatre les quelques marches de la villa, se mit à courir à toutes jambes sur la route et quand le prince de Guermantes [...] entra dans son salon, il n'y trouva plus personne. (III, 468)<sup>184</sup>

This new tableau provides a playful variation of the one from the night before. Once again, Morel turns to a mirror only to find the Baron's 'reflection'. If the family mementos that fill the prince's drawing room are as familiar to Morel as the emblems of sorcery were foreign to Charlus, the effect that they have on the beholder is equally unnerving. Unable to believe his own eyes, Morel has the impression of hallucinating. In other words, with a reaction that echoes the Baron's, Morel too believes that what he sees is unreal, that is, that he perceives something that is not really there – it is as though, just like Charlus the night before, he is momentarily transposed into a world where 'the pagan mysteries and enchantments still existed'.

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<sup>184</sup> 'But once Morel found himself alone and wanted to look in the mirror, to see whether his lock of hair might have been disarranged, it was like a hallucination. On the mantelpiece, the photographs, recognizable to the violinist, he having seen them at M. de Charlus's, of the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duchess of Luxembourg and Mme de Villeparisis, petrified him at first with fright. At the same moment, he caught sight of that of M. de Charlus, which stood a little further back. The Baron seemed to have immobilized Morel with a strange, fixed stare. Wild with terror, Morel, recovering from his initial stupefaction, and not doubting that this was an ambush into which M. de Charlus had led him as a test of his fidelity, tumbled down the villa's few steps four at a time, and began running as fast as his legs would carry him along the road, so that when the Prince de Guermantes [...] entered the drawing-room, he found no one there any longer' (4, 474-75).

But then, in the very same moment as the photographs trick him into believing that he is hallucinating, the Baron's gaze pulls him back to reality. Charlus's portrait, which stands a little further back than the others (the text thus installs the portrait in the exact position that its model prefers, that is, partly concealed behind other bodies and able to enjoy the spectator's privilege of unrestrained observation, as from the depths of a theatre-box), stares at the young violinist: 'Le baron semblait immobiliser sur Morel un regard étrange et fixe' ['The Baron seemed to have immobilized Morel with a strange, fixed stare']. Again, then, the scene is marked by stasis, but, whereas in the brothel scene, immobilisation was understood as something that was done to Morel by or with the gaze that he encountered, this time, the gaze itself is also described as steady and still ('fixe'). As Áine Larkin points out, the photographic representation of the Baron's impassive and direct gaze is actually more successful in thwarting Morel's infidelity than his physical presence in the brothel scene, for only after the encounter with the photograph does Morel renounce cheating on his lover: 'Thus the baron as voyeur-through-the-photograph proves more successful as a means to control – that is, inhibit – Morel's sexual behaviour than his actual presence in the Maineville brothel'.<sup>185</sup> We may say, then, that in this scene the object (the photograph) is granted a form of subjective agency by being imaginatively 'brought alive' by the perceiving subject, who in turn becomes a theatrical subject (or an actor) when, just as we have seen to be the case in the previous analyses of this chapter, he comes to perceive himself as the object of a voyeuristic gaze, and as being forced to play a part in an ambush ('guet-apens') carefully staged by his jealous lover.

In the prince's villa, when the Baron's gaze manifests itself in the form of a photographic representation, the tableau turns into an exact *mise en scène* of Morel's worst fears. It is a miniature replica of the situation that he imagined on his way towards the prince's home: that, somewhere behind the bodies of the other passers-by, Charlus could be hiding and spying on him. This situation, by way of the gaze that the portrait mediates, then goes from being purely hypothetical to being a *fact* for Morel, when, just as rapidly as it did for Charlus, the 'truth' reveals itself to him: he instantly understands that he has been the victim of an ambush orchestrated by Charlus with the

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<sup>185</sup> Larkin, p. 181.

purpose of testing his fidelity. The inaccuracy of this ‘truth’ is irrelevant to Morel, and to the outcome of the situation. The violinist virtually flees the house and makes sure to avoid the prince in the future: ‘Buté dans ses soupçons, Morel ne les dissipa jamais, et même à Paris la vue du prince de Guermantes suffisait à le mettre en fuite. Par où M. de Charlus fut protégé d’une infidélité qui le désespérait, et vengé sans l’avoir jamais imaginé, ni surtout comment’ [‘Immovable in his suspicions, Morel never dispelled them, and even in Paris the sight of the Prince de Guermantes was enough to cause him to turn tail. Whereby M. de Charlus was protected against an infidelity that made him despair, and avenged, without ever having imagined it, or above all in what way’] (III, 468; 4, 475).

The short anecdote concerned with Charlus and Morel’s adventures in Maineville provides several interesting examples of how Proust’s narrative engages with the concept of the *gaze*. Essentially, the two tableaux capture, through the staging of Morel’s reactions to what he perceives (in the first tableau, a remarkable immobility, and, in the second one, a static petrification followed by a wild escape), the disciplinary power of the gaze. In the first tableau, Morel is veritably the object of Charlus’s gaze, while, in the second one, he wrongfully believes that he is. In both cases, however, he is convinced that Charlus is in fact watching him, and he behaves accordingly – as an actor highly aware of the (visible or invisible) spectator’s presence and thus not daring to go through with his plans of infidelity. As such, the scene could be considered a *mise en abyme* of a theme that Proust goes on to explore in detail in *La Prisonnière* with regards to the protagonist and Albertine’s relationship, namely, how, in alliances where a ‘well-to-do’ person is in love with someone socially inferior to them, jealousy might lead the one who is in love to make the beloved feel as if she or he is a prisoner and subject to constant surveillance. This phenomenon, which Morel (who is indeed socially inferior to Charlus in the sense of being economically dependent on him) has just become familiar with, bears a close affinity to the surveillance technique for which Jeremy Bentham’s plans for the Panopticon remains the paradigmatic architectural symbol – a prison constructed upon a principle of constant visibility. As Bentham insists, if the inmates are unable to tell whether they are being watched or not, they will come to behave as though they are being watched

at all times, or, as I would put it, they will behave as *actors*.<sup>186</sup> Proust was presumably well aware that his treatment of the subject bore a strong resemblance to Bentham's ideas, for, in *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, Charles Swann's words clearly allude to the Panopticon, when he warns the young protagonist in 'prophetic' terms of the dangers related to loving 'beneath one's rank':

[Swann] compléta sa pensée en ces mots qui devaient plus tard prendre dans mon souvenir la valeur d'un avertissement prophétique et duquel je ne sus pas tenir compte. « Cependant le danger de ce genre d'amours est que la sujétion de la femme calme un moment la jalousie de l'homme mais la rend aussi plus exigeante. *Il arrive à faire vivre sa maîtresse comme ces prisonniers qui sont jour et nuit éclairés pour être mieux gardés.* Et cela finit généralement par des drames. » (I, 553, my emphasis)<sup>187</sup>

The Maineville-tableaux stage the terrifying power inherent in spectatorship: they demonstrate how the fear of being constantly under surveillance disciplines and terrorises the individual. For Morel, as for Albertine, the experience of being the object of someone's affection turns into a horrifying experience of being constantly 'onstage'. In other words, when Swann warns the protagonist that such relationships tend to end with *drama*, he is correct in a very literal sense.

But being the object of a voyeur's gaze can also, of course, be a phantasm, as for Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, and when we compare the Montjouvain scene with the tableaux from Maineville, we see that Proust is highly sensitive to the various ways in which spectators and performers may relate to one another. In Maineville, as we

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<sup>186</sup> Such an interpretation of the status of Bentham's prisoners is apparently sanctioned by Michel Foucault's commentaries on the Panopticon in *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, in which he describes the prison's cells as small theatres in which the prisoners are kept as constantly visible actors: 'Autant de cages, autant de petits théâtres, où chaque acteur est seul parfaitement individualisé et constamment visible'. *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 202. ['They are like so many cages, so many little theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible'. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p. 200.]

<sup>187</sup> '[Swann] rounded off his idea in words which I later came to remember as a prophecy, a warning which I would be unable to heed: "But the danger of such liaisons is that, though the subjection of the woman may briefly allay the jealousy of the man, it eventually makes it even more demanding. *He reaches the point of treating his mistress like one of those prisoners who are so closely guarded that the light in their cell is never turned off.* The sort of thing that usually ends in alarms and excursions"' (2, 139, my emphasis).

have seen, the presence of a spectatorial gaze has quite the opposite effect to the one it has in Montjouvain. Whereas the two women in Mlle Vinteuil's drawing room welcome the idea of a spectator, and experience this possibility as exciting ('« quand même on nous verrait ce n'en est que meilleur »' ["if someone saw us, so much the better"]), the discovery of Charlus has a paralysing, almost mortal effect on Morel. Their different reactions correspond to a crucial difference between the two scenes, since, in the first case, the actresses are thrilled by the *idea* of a spectator, whereas, in the latter case, Morel is faced with the presence of an *actual* spectator. Certainly, Proust was not blind to this difference or to the dramatic potential inherent in each of these constellations. As we have seen, Proust constructs the Montjouvain scene as a veritable *theatre-within-the-novel*, and, before he began writing *À la recherche*, he conceived an idea for a play that would address precisely the difference between the phantasm of the spectatorial gaze and its potentially fatal reality. In a letter to Reynaldo Hahn in 1906, Proust summarises the intrigue of this play, which he plans to develop in collaboration with René Peter.<sup>188</sup> The play tells the story of a husband and wife who seem to be happy and to adore one another. The husband, however, although much in love with his wife, is also a sadist who, while cheating on his wife, verbally vilifies her and forces his partners in adultery to do the same. One day, while he is

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<sup>188</sup> 'Un ménage s'adore, affection immense, sainte, pure (bien entendu pas chaste) du mari pour sa femme. Mais cet homme est sadique et en dehors de l'amour pour sa femme a des liaisons avec des putains où il trouve plaisir à salir ses propres bons sentiments. Et finalement le sadique ayant toujours besoin de plus fort il en arrive à salir sa femme en parlant à ces putains, à s'en faire dire du mal et à en dire (il est écoeuré cinq minutes après). Pendant qu'il parle ainsi une fois, sa femme entre dans la pièce sans qu'il l'entende, elle ne peut en croire ses oreilles et ses yeux, tombe. Puis elle quitte son mari. Il la supplie, rien n'y fait. Les putains veulent revenir mais le sadisme lui serait trop douloureux maintenant, et après une dernière tentative pour reconquérir sa femme qui ne lui répond même pas, il se tue' ['A couple adore each other, the husband's affection for his wife is immense, holy, pure (though of course not chaste). But this man is sadistic and alongside his love for his wife, he also has relationships with whores, in which he finds pleasure in tarnishing his own warm feelings. Finally, the sadist, always in need of something more, comes to tarnish his wife by talking about her to these whores, by having them speak badly of her and by speaking badly of her himself – five minutes later, he is nauseated by it. One day while he is speaking of her in this way, his wife enters the room without him hearing her. She cannot believe her ears and her eyes; she faints. She then leaves her husband. He begs her, but there is nothing to be done. The whores want to come back, but the sadism would be too painful for him at this stage, and, after one last attempt at winning back his wife, whom does not even reply, he kills himself']. Marcel Proust, *Correspondance*, ed. Philip Kolb, vol. VI (Paris: Plon, 1980), p. 216.



satisfying these desires, his wife enters the room and is shocked by what she hears and sees. The wife leaves her husband, and he, utterly disgusted by his own acts, and after attempting (and failing) to win her back, kills himself. Even though the play was never finished, critics have regarded the project as an *avant-scène* of the Montjouvain scene in *À la recherche*, which also addresses the question of sadism.<sup>189</sup> Nevertheless, while there are undeniable similarities between Mlle Vinteuil's desecration of the memory of her loving father and the sadistic husband's invocation of his absent wife (their cruelty is in both cases directed towards an absent victim that they feel the need to evoke), the play would arguably have asked a rather difficult question that is not touched upon in Montjouvain: what happens to the 'artist of evil' when the spectator is no longer a pure phantasm, but physically there? This, then, is a question that resonates more with other parts of the novel, and, not least, with the story of this other character with 'irresistible sadistic impulses', Charlie Morel.<sup>190</sup>

Lavagetto seems to suggest that we could read Proust's sketch for this play on sadism as a sort of *avant-scène* for the scene in the brothel in Maineville; he highlights the thematic kinship between the two scenes, which, as he reads them, both address the 'thème de la surprise paralysante, de l'homme transpercé par un regard inattendu' ['theme of the paralysing surprise, of the man cut through by an unexpected gaze'].<sup>191</sup> Lavagetto also suggests that we may consider the sadistic husband's verbal evocation of his wife as a means for him to oblige her to be present in effigy, to see and hear everything. In my view, this is another token of the similarities between Mlle Vinteuil's and the sadistic husband's desires, but it also begs the question of whether Morel also somehow evokes his absent lover when cheating. Is Morel driven by a

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<sup>189</sup> Bouillaguet, in *La Tentation théâtrale des romanciers*, p. 86.

<sup>190</sup> Morel, notably, is an extraordinarily complex character. While the scenes from Maineville depict him as something of a victim of Charlus's jealousy, it is just as frequently Morel that mistreats Charlus, neglecting and ridiculing him (III, 447-48; 4, 454-55). Morel's sadistic impulses are evident, not least, in an episode in *Sodome et Gomorrhe II*, when he reveals to the baron his plans to seduce a young virgin and then abandon her the same night (III, 396-97; 4, 402-03). As Leo Bersani puts it, 'in Morel, the desire for money, cynicism, irresistible sadistic impulses, artistic and moral principles all live together in a chaotic, disconnected way that makes the narrator think of his personality as "a sheet of paper that has been folded so often in every direction that it is impossible to straighten it out"'. Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust: Fictions of Life and of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 56.

<sup>191</sup> Lavagetto, p. 110.

sadistic impulse to conjure up an image of the Baron while being unfaithful to him? The fact that he plans to cheat on Charlus with his cousin (although, allegedly, he is unaware that the two are related) invites us to consider this possibility. As we have seen, family resemblance becomes an implicit motif in the epilogue to the brothel scene, when Morel discovers the Prince de Guermantes's collection of family portraits on the mantelpiece. We are thus led to wonder whether a family resemblance between the prince and his cousin is what makes the sadistically-inclined Morel accept the prince's offer to spend the night with him in Maineville. The narrator does not explicitly suggest that it is so when relating this episode, but another brothel scene that occurs towards the end of the novel seems to hint at this, when the sadomasochistic dynamics governing Morel and Charlus's relation are evoked in a performance staged and acted out by the Baron. In this scene, two young men that bear a strange resemblance to Morel play the part of the sadist humiliating and inflicting pain upon the victim Charlus: 'ces deux jeunes gens, dont l'un était un garçon bijoutier et l'autre un employé d'hôtel, étaient des vagues succédanés de Morel' ['these young men, one of whom was a jeweller's assistant and the other a hotel employee, were in some vague way substitutes for Morel'] (IV, 396-97; 6, 126). These Morel-look-alikes are, then, mere substitutes for Charlus's former lover, who is curiously *mise en scène* as a sadist *in absentia*.

In this analysis of two voyeuristic scenes taking place in Maineville, we have begun to explore what we may call the structural reciprocity of the Proustian tableau. I have examined how these two episodes play with mirrors and reflections, and I have shown that, in both cases, the roles of subject and object are mixed up and confused with one another: in the first tableau, for example, Charlus, the paying spectator, becomes the object of Morel's perception, while Morel, the 'spectacle' that Charlus has paid to see, is granted spectatorial agency by way of the mirrors that fill the room. What both of them are allowed to perceive, then, although indirectly, is another person covertly observing them in the very moment that this person discovers that the person he is spying on is also spying on him. As a result, the tableau's spectator-actor relation becomes fully reversible and it is thus not possible to decide in a definitive manner which of the two is the subject and which is the object of perception. Proust's voyeur,

whose gaze, as we have observed in the three previous analyses of this chapter, was already implicitly a part of the spectacle (either because the figure of a spectator plays an implicit part of the performer's desire to be watched or because the spectacle in itself is an expression of the voyeur's *particular way of seeing*), is consequently placed centre stage: the voyeur is thus not only a spectator and perceiving subject but also an object of perception.

In the second of the two scenes from *Maineville*, the figure of the voyeur becomes an object in a very literal way, when Morel imaginatively invests the photograph of Charlus with life, transforming the inanimate object into a voyeuristic spectator caught, as Charlus in the first scene, in the act of spying. When the voyeur goes from being a hypothetical and desired presence (as in *Montjouvain*) to being an actual fact, this changes, as the analysis of this section has shown, the dynamics that govern the tableau's spectator-performer relation. In the *Maineville*-tableaux, Morel experiences the figure of the voyeur as a disciplining and terrifying presence. The tableaux may thus be said to stage the terrorising potential inherent in spectatorship. In the final analysis of this chapter, I will argue that, in Jupien's brothel (constructed to accommodate the phantasm of constant visibility), Charlus, on the contrary, entertains and enacts a fantasy of being punished by, and before the eyes of, a spectator.

### **1.5 Charlus's Exhibitionistic Desires**

In *À la recherche*, the presence of a voyeuristic spectator can be, as we have seen, a phantasm, a terror, and occasionally a matter of conscious choice. When it is a matter of choice, the act of observation can be a veritable source of pleasure both for the voyeur and for the individual who is observed. The ability to accommodate this aspect of people's desires is paramount to the role that the establishment of the brothel occupies in the novel. Unfailingly, the Proustian brothel is depicted as a space in which paying customers are invited to become active participants in a form of sexual theatre, that is, as a sort of playhouse where customers may have their erotic fantasies *mises en scène*. The brothel in *Maineville*, for example, a palace in which every room is decorated like a stage where each element contributes to the creation of some illusory exotic world ('*la chambre espagnole*' ['the Spanish room'] (III, 465; 4, 472);

‘le salon persan’ [‘the Persian saloon’] (III, 465; 4, 472); the room in which the Baron finds Morel, ‘où partout les murs et les divans répétaient des emblèmes de sorcellerie’ [‘where the walls and divans everywhere repeated emblems of sorcery’]), provides a wide range of settings apt for precisely such immersive theatrical experiences. And in *Le Temps retrouvé*, the male brothel that Charlus owns is filled with different sorts of optical implements, such as ox-eye windows and fanlights enabling clients to be watched by others or to see without being seen. The brothel’s layout thereby contributes to associating sexuality with *theatricality* by inviting intimate encounters to take place in rooms that can be transformed into small ‘theatres’ in order to accommodate the guests’ desires. This brothel provides the stage for the protagonist’s final voyeuristic adventure, which takes place during the First World War.

Nearly the entire episode from the brothel in Paris, where Charlus’s companion, Jupien, is in charge, is seen through the eyes of the protagonist who spies, first, through an open door at the top of a staircase (IV, 390; 6, 119), then, through an ox-eye window in the wall of Room 14b (IV, 394; 6, 123), and, finally, by way of a fanlight through which Jupien invites him to observe the ignorant Charlus (IV, 402; 6, 132). Ironically, then, while the protagonist is mistaken when he, as he approaches the establishment, wonders if it might be a meeting-place for spies (‘Cet hôtel servait-il de lieu de rendez-vous à des espions?’ [‘Was this hotel being used as a meeting-place for spies?’] (IV, 389; 6, 119)), the act of spying is precisely what occupies him during his visit, and the building certainly invites him to indulge his voyeuristic predilection.

The protagonist’s visit to Jupien’s brothel is centred on a spectacle that he perceives through a round side-window in the wall of Room 14b. Having entered the hotel on the lookout for something to quench his thirst (or perhaps his curiosity), he is taken up to Room 43, but he leaves the room once he has finished his cassis. Fuelled by curiosity, he follows the stairs to the top floor, where the sound of stifled moans draws him towards a room set apart from the others at the end of a corridor. With his ear to the door, he hears a voice begging for mercy and the sound of a whip, which, he says, is ‘probablement aiguisé de clous car il fut suivi de cris de douleur’ [‘probably one with nails to give it extra sharpness, for it was followed by cries of pain’] (IV, 394; 6, 123):

Alors je m'aperçus qu'il y avait dans cette chambre un œil-de-bœuf latéral dont on avait oublié de tirer le rideau; cheminant à pas de loup dans l'ombre, je me glissai jusqu'à cet œil-de-bœuf, et là, enchaîné sur un lit comme Prométhée sur son rocher, recevant les coups d'un martinet en effet planté de clous que lui infligeait Maurice, je vis, déjà tout en sang, et couvert d'ecchymoses qui prouvaient que le supplice n'avait pas lieu pour la première fois, je vis devant moi M. de Charlus. (IV, 394)<sup>192</sup>

The paragraph instates the protagonist in the familiar posture of the hidden spectator (who moves quietly, *à pas de loup*, so that nobody will notice him), presented with a scene perceived first aurally and then visually through the side-window, the curtain of which someone (conveniently) has forgotten to draw. What he sees through this window is a dramatic display of violence in which Charlus, tied to a bed, is severely beaten with a whip studded with nails. It is Maurice, a young man working for Jupien, who delivers the blows. The protagonist realises that the flogging must be part of some regular ritual, for bruises that reveal that this is not the first time cover the Baron's back. When Jupien enters the room, the flogging abruptly ends, as though a director had called 'cut'. With Maurice waiting outside (in the wings), the Baron and Jupien discuss his performance ('pas assez brutal' ['not rough enough'] (IV, 396; 6, 125)), and then decide to replace him with another man ('le tueur de bœufs' ['the ox-killer'] (IV, 396; 6, 125)). The ease with which the flagellation is interrupted, and Maurice replaced, leaves the protagonist no choice but to identify it as a staged performance. The victim was not in real danger, though he begged for mercy, and the torturer had no real power, though the pain inflicted was real enough. The Baron, then, turns out to be the lead actor and stage director of a theatricalised ritual, that is, of his own private spectacle of sadomasochism.

The ritualistic theatricality of the brothel scene emphasises the parallel between it and the ritualistic profanation scene that the protagonist witnesses in Montjouvain. Here, as in Montjouvain, the spectacle requires the use of veritable stage props, such

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<sup>192</sup> 'Then I noticed that the room had a small round side-window and that somebody had forgotten to draw the curtain behind it; advancing stealthily through the darkness, I slid up to the window and there, chained to a bed like Prometheus to his rock, receiving the blows which Maurice was delivering with a whip which was indeed studded with nails, I saw, already running with blood, and covered in bruises which proved that the flogging was not happening for the first time, there, right in front of me, I saw M. de Charlus' (6, 123).

as the chains that tie Charlus to the bed and that form part of a whole arsenal of ‘accessoires féroces qu’on avait la plus grande peine à se procurer même en s’adressant à des matelots – car ils servaient à infliger des supplices dont l’usage est aboli même là où la discipline est la plus rigoureuse, à bord des navires’ [‘ferocious props which, even from sailors, were extremely difficult to obtain – they having been used for the infliction of punishments which have been abolished everywhere, even where discipline is at its most rigorous, on board ships’] (IV, 419; 6, 148). The actors, moreover, appear to act and speak according to an already agreed-upon script and storyline. Much in the same way as Mlle Vinteuil’s friend, Maurice speaks harshly to Charlus in order to satisfy the latter’s desires (the Baron, however, is not satisfied with Maurice’s performance, and complains to Jupien while the young man waits outside: ‘« Je ne voulais pas parler devant ce petit, qui est très gentil et fait de son mieux. Mais je ne le trouve pas assez brutal. Sa figure me plaît, mais il m’appelle crapule comme si c’était une leçon apprise. – Oh! non, personne ne lui a rien dit », répondit Jupien sans s’apercevoir de l’invraisemblance de cette assertion’ [“I did not want to say anything in front of that boy, who is very nice and who does the best he can. But he is not rough enough. I like his face, but when he calls me a piece of filth, it’s as if he were just reciting a lesson. – Oh no, nobody has said a word to him,” replied Jupien, not seeing the improbability of this assertion’] (IV, 396; 6, 125)).

At a structural level also, the two scenes are much alike. Both are structured as tableaux in accordance with a theatrical model placing the protagonist as a spectator in the dark before a mediating window that separates him from the performers and that limits his visual access to the stage. There are, however, also significant differences between them, not least with regards to how they engage the figure of the spectator. Whereas in Montjouvain, the idea of being seen is part of the pleasure for the performers (so that the invisible spectator actually plays an implicit part in the young women’s private *mise en scène*), the spectator’s presence does not immediately seem to be a crucial component in the brothel scene. Several critics have noted this dissimilarity. Ladenson reads it as a symptomatic expression of the contrast between male and female homosexuality in Proust, arguing that ‘the exhibitionism shown to be a standard feature of Gomorrhean sexuality does not appear in the novel’s repertoire of

Sodomite perversions'.<sup>193</sup> Kadivar makes a similar claim in his reading of the scene, which he interprets as an example of *intertheatricality*, that is, as a spectacle *mise en scène* by a group of homosexual performers and only for their own pleasure, as during a rehearsal in a closed room. Kadivar's interpretation of the scene thus draws out an interesting form of 'théâtralité sans spectateur' ['theatricality without a spectator'],<sup>194</sup> which implies that, here, as opposed to the Montjouvain scene, the protagonist's voyeurism is in fact an unwelcome form of visual trespassing: he discovers something that he is not meant to see.

Ladenson and Kadivar's readings are enlightening in so far as they reveal the great variety of theatrical constellations in *À la recherche*, and their discussions of the brothel scene as theatre without need of an audience are insightful and point towards a form of internalised theatricality considered in relation to Léonie earlier in Chapter 1. In my view, however, while the intriguing concept of 'theatricality without a spectator' resonates well with certain parts of *À la recherche*, it nevertheless does not resonate much with what goes on in the brothel scene. For instance, this interpretation does not sufficiently account for the fact that the entire brothel is constructed in order to accommodate the voyeuristic gaze, and that it is, presumably, the Baron himself (the actor 'not in search of an audience') who requires these installations (such as the fanlight Jupien has invented so that the baron can see and hear without being seen). Moreover, the episode repeatedly situates the protagonist as a spectator able to see without being seen, and while the ox-eye window – whose shape elegantly reflects the human eye – connecting 14b and the hallway certainly reflects the clandestine spectator's desire to watch, it presumably also reflects the exhibitionistic desire of the individuals inside. The protagonist finds the ox-eye window open and deduces that someone has 'forgotten' to draw the curtains, but this, after all, is simply his interpretation, and not necessarily the case.

Finally, the element that, in my view, most strongly indicates that Charlus's performance has everything to do with a desire to be watched is the fact that Charlus (like Mlle Vinteuil, and the sadistic husband in Proust's idea for a play and, perhaps,

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<sup>193</sup> Ladenson, p. 67.

<sup>194</sup> Kadivar, p. 288.

also Morel) does invoke a very specific spectatorial gaze during his performance. The physical resemblance that the men who mistreat him bear to Morel strongly implies that their ability to embody the (spectral) presence of the violinist's gaze is as crucial to Charlus's pleasure as is the portrait of her late father's to Mlle Vinteuil (although, to be fair, the narrator does suggest that the torturers' resemblance to Morel could be due merely to the fact that they, like Morel, represent Charlus's habitual type). Indeed, in Montjouvain, it is the absent victim that is conjured up, whereas in the brothel in Paris, it is the absent torturer. But in both cases, these rituals seem to acquire their specifically theatrical qualities largely through the performers' invocation of such spectatorial presences, and these invocations are crucial elements in the constitution of Charlus and Mlle Vinteuil as theatrical subjects. An urge to stage themselves in the act of inflicting or suffering pain drives both of them, and they both entertain the fantasy of being 'watched' by their victim or torturer in the act. The fact that they act out their fantasies before windows with the curtains drawn back invites us to consider the figure of the protagonist-voyeur in these tableaux as embodying a spectatorial presence that is already an intrinsic part of the actor's consciousness. Besides, we may also say that, while, in Montjouvain, the voyeur finds the stage of his 'clandestine theatre' occupied by actors in search of an audience, the exhibitionist of Jupien's brothel finds the auditorium of *his* theatre occupied by a spectator in search of actors. In fact, during the entire brothel scene we accompany a protagonist in search of imaginary scenes, a protagonist driven by a desire to see fictions *mise en scène*. And, for that purpose, the brothel is perfectly suited, for it is, as he is quick to realise, nothing but a theatre, in which none of the madness that one is brought to witness is real, but simply *staged*: '« En attendant, dis-je à Jupien, cette maison est tout autre chose, plus qu'une maison de fous, puisque la folie des aliénés qui y habitent est *mise en scène*, reconstituée, visible [...] »' [“But meanwhile, I said to Jupien, this house is something else entirely, it is worse than a madhouse, because here the madness of the inmates is *staged*, it is played out, it is all on display [...]”] (IV, 411; 6, 140, my emphasis).

Already before he enters the establishment, the protagonist's mind is 'haunted' by fiction, that is, by the image of the Orient in *One Thousand and One Nights*: 'et me perdant peu à peu dans le lacs de ces rues noires, je pensais au calife Haroun Al



Raschid en quête d'aventures dans les quartiers perdus de Bagdad' ['as I plunged deeper into the maze of these dark streets, I thought of the Caliph Harun-al-Rashid seeking for adventure in the hidden quarters of Baghdad'] (IV, 388; 6, 118). In calling attention to how the protagonist, like the caliph (a literary character, but also a historical person), walks through the streets of wartime Paris in search of adventures, Proust emphasises the imaging attitude that dominates the voyeur's spectatorship. Much as the caliph's nocturnal wanderings have been made subject to fictionalisation in various works of literature (such as *One Thousand and One Nights*), the Proustian voyeur 'fictionalises' the fragments of reality that come to view through windows, peepholes and doors kept ajar by perceiving them as stage apparitions and theatrical spectacles. In fact, the Proustian voyeur is not in search of reality as such, but of 'entertainment': fiction and theatre, aesthetically pleasing scenes and images. Accordingly, when he hears someone begging for mercy in Jupien's brothel, he instinctively interprets the sound in light of fairy-tales he has read. What he expects to see through the *œil-de-bœuf* is not reality, but a *spectacle*, and this is precisely what he discovers – that is, a fairy-tale *staged* ('réalisé') before him:

« [...] J'avais cru comme le calife des *Mille et Une Nuits* arriver à point au secours d'un homme qu'on frappait, et c'est un autre conte des *Mille et Une Nuits* que j'ai vu réalisé devant moi, celui où une femme, transformée en chienne, se fait frapper volontairement pour retrouver sa forme première. » (IV, 411)<sup>195</sup>

When he discovers Charlus through the *œil-de-bœuf*, the protagonist needs to adjust his conception of the situation. That does not mean, however, that he was 'blind' to the situation before. Rather, approaching the room where he hears someone moaning, he already 'sees' the scene clearly – that is, he sees it as it plays out in the theatre of his mind. Hence, even before it turns out to be a spectacle orchestrated by the Baron, the scene has been subject to fictionalisation in the protagonist's imagination. The visual revelation of Charlus tied to a bed in 14b simply requires him to replace one mental

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<sup>195</sup> “[...] I thought at first that, like the Caliph in the *Arabian Nights*, I had arrived just in time to rescue a man who was being beaten, and then I found a quite different tale from the *Arabian Nights* being enacted in front of me, the one where a woman who has been changed into a dog deliberately lets herself be beaten in order to regain her original shape.” (6, 140).

scene with another ('c'est un autre conte des *Mille et Une Nuits* que j'ai vu réalisé devant moi' ['I found a quite different tale from the *Arabian Nights* being enacted in front of me']). This mental transition from one scene to another serves as a reminder that Proust's interest in the bonds between theatricality and perception is motivated by a profound interest in the dramatising disposition of the mind (that of the actor and that of the spectator), and, accordingly, in theatricality as a *mode of perception*.

As this final analysis has shown, when Proust's protagonist stumbles upon Charlus being tortured by Maurice in Jupien's brothel, he instantly identifies the 'folie' that he witnesses as being 'mise en scène', that is, as a *performance* staged by, and for the pleasure of, Charlus himself. Several factors could be said to lead him towards that conclusion: the bruises that cover the Baron's back reveal that the flogging happens regularly; during the conversation that ensues between Charlus and Jupien, it becomes clear that Maurice only performs (badly and 'comme si c'était une leçon apprise') a role that the Baron has conceived for him; and, besides, Maurice's family resemblance with the Baron's former lover strongly implies that he is in fact merely what Sartre calls an *analogon* for the 'irreal' object whose presence is actually desired by Charlus: Morel. The fact that Maurice is merely, like an actor in a theatre, lending his body to the spectacle so as to evoke an imaginary person, is confirmed by the ease with which Charlus and Jupien decide to replace him with another man. It is, then, because these and other circumstances remind him of the theatre that the voyeur interprets what he sees as a staged performance. As such, the scene reveals to us not only that Charlus, like Léonie and Mlle Vinteuil, conducts self-staging and thus constitutes an exemplary theatrical subject, but also that the voyeur, Proust's protagonist, is intimately acquainted with theatre, to such an extent that theatrical references are present and immediately available to him when he attempts to make sense of what he perceives.

The reason why we may say that Proust's protagonist's acquaintance with the theatre must be *intimate* is that we have witnessed him employ a theatrical analogy as a means to interpret behaviour and situations throughout the examples analysed in this chapter, and thus throughout the entire novel – from Léonie's 'bedroom theatre' in *Du côté de chez Swann* to Charlus's 'brothel theatre' in *Le Temps retrouvé*. To say that, in *À la recherche*, theatricality is a mode of perception is to acknowledge that it is (be she

or he visible or invisible) the perceiving subject's viewpoint that determines whether the perceived object or situation is defined as theatrical or not. In the examples I have analysed in this chapter, the significance of the spectator's viewpoint is figuratively expressed in the text by windows, peepholes and doors that delineate and restrict the perceiving individual's access to the perceived, and that bring to mind the way that the proscenium arch in a theatre frames the stage and defines the audience's access to the spectacle. The presence of such 'prosceniums' or 'fourth walls' in the text serves to naturalise the voyeurs' reading of what they witness in terms of theatre, since the fact that their perception is framed by such mediating devices, which evoke the theatre, could be viewed as one of the reasons why they perceive certain scenes and images as theatrical apparitions or spectacles of different sorts. Arguably, the very structure of the voyeurs' perceptual situation (the voyeurs instated as live 'spectators' at a distance from, but in the immediate presence of, live 'performers' who, although they desire and depend on the spectatorial presence, behave as though there was no one there) is analogous with what they are familiar with in the theatre, and this structural similarity affects their way of perceiving. This is not to say, however, that this structure is the only (or the most defining) element that leads Proust's (hidden) spectators to interpret what they perceive in terms of theatre, since, clearly, to say that her or his *viewpoint* determines whether she or he perceives something as theatrical or not is not only to say that the spectator's *physical* placement is of the essence. A viewpoint, as Proust was well aware, is not only a matter of *what* one perceives and *from where*, but also, and perhaps primarily, a matter of *how* one perceives, and this *how* is often defined more by the subject's interiority (emotions and imagination) than by external circumstances. This is also what the analyses of Chapter 1 have shown: that the voyeur's way of apprehending reality is always by way of the imagination.

Accordingly, the principle answer to the question that I asked at the beginning of this chapter, concerning what the Proustian voyeur's spectatorship might have to tell us about Proust's views on perception, must be this: that the object of perception is always, although to varying degrees, a product of the perceiving subject's imagination. This does not imply that the world that this subject discovers is pure fiction or make-believe, but simply that, in *À la recherche*, the perceiving subject is not able to access

a supposedly neutral world (or what we may call a world in a ‘primordial’ state, that is, ‘prior’ to the imagination having cast its ‘veil’ of significance over it). To put it bluntly, it means that imagining is a significant and intrinsic part of perceiving.

In Chapter 1, I have argued that Proust’s association of the figure of the voyeur with the theatre indicates that his interest in this figure is first and foremost related to the spectatorial potential of the voyeur’s position. It is above all the theatricalising agency of the voyeur’s imagination that I have wanted to pursue in this chapter, and the examples analysed have shown that, crucially, the Proustian voyeur does not only (or primarily) *uncover* a hidden reality but also *constructs* an imaginary reality. Moreover, to say that Proustian voyeurism is consistently associated with *theatricality* is to acknowledge that the voyeur’s agency (most often) corresponds to an ardent desire to be watched in his ‘victims’. If voyeurism demands an unsuspecting victim, then voyeurism in *À la recherche* must be something quite different, since the world that these voyeurs discover is a world in which people wish to be observed, and in which they tend to imagine and to act in accordance with the (potential) presence of a spectatorial gaze – regardless of whether there is a spectator present or not. This is what enables us to say that Proustian subjects are profoundly theatrical subjects that act and perceive themselves as (reciprocally) audience and performers: meaning that when they *act*, they imagine a spectator observing them, and that when they *observe*, they imagine that the individuals they observe are actors. In other words, the Proustian imagination is infiltrated by a structural audience-performer reciprocity (which, admittedly, is vividly ‘symbolised’ by the layout of a theatre) that leads the novel’s characters to interpret the world they live in as a form of theatre. In the next chapter, we shall see that, in *À la recherche*, this structural reciprocity actually extends to all perceptual impressions, which, much like a theatrical performance, are viewed as being constituted in the encounter between performing and spectatorial bodies.

## 2 Inner Spectacles or ‘toute impression est double’

The second time the protagonist of *À la recherche* goes to the theatre, he goes to see the same actress (La Berma) play the same part (Phèdre) in the same play (*Phèdre*) as during his first visit, and his impression is also the same: ‘Mon impression, à vrai dire, plus agréable que celle d’autrefois, n’était pas différente’ [‘My impression, to tell the truth, though more agreeable than before, was not really different’] (II, 348; 3, 46). And yet, he *experiences* La Berma’s performance in a radically different way from before. What has changed, then, is not so much the object of perception as the spectator’s attitude:

Je n’aurais plus souhaité comme autrefois de pouvoir immobiliser les attitudes de la Berma, le bel effet de couleur qu’elle donnait un instant seulement dans un éclairage aussitôt évanoui et qui ne se reproduisait pas, ni lui faire redire cent fois un vers. Je comprenais que mon désir d’autrefois était plus exigeant que la volonté du poète, de la tragédienne, du grand artiste décorateur qu’était son metteur en scène, et que ce charme répandu au vol sur un vers, ces gestes instables perpétuellement transformés, ces tableaux successifs, c’était le résultat fugitif, le but momentané, le mobile chef-d’œuvre que l’art théâtral se proposait et que détruirait en voulant le fixer l’attention d’un auditeur trop épris. (II, 351-52)<sup>196</sup>

The spectator’s change in attitude is crucial, for it allows him to perceive something to which he was formerly blind: the *individual impression* that La Berma’s performance evokes in him (II, 349; 3, 47), an impression that induces in him a feeling of being confronted with something unknown, something for which he possesses no intellectual equivalent. We may say that what the protagonist has acquired before his second encounter with La Berma as Phèdre is the key to appreciating the art of theatre. It

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<sup>196</sup> ‘I would not have wanted, as I once did, to be able to retain a fixed image of the poses adopted by La Berma, or of the fine sense of colour she presented for a mere second in a lighting effect that immediately faded never to reappear, nor to have her repeat the same line over and over again. I realized that my former desire had been more exacting than the requirements of the poet, the actress and the great decorative artist who had staged the production, and that the magic surrounding a line as it was delivered, the shifting gestures perpetually transformed into others, the successive tableaux, were the fleeting result, the momentary objective, the mobile masterpiece which the art of the theatre meant itself to be and which the attentiveness of an over-captivated spectator would destroy by trying to hold it in a fixed image’ (3, 49).

would seem, in fact, that he has learned, as Kadivar puts it, ‘un voir autre que celui d’images fixes et une écoute autre que celle muette lors de la lecture’ [‘a sight other than that of fixed images and a hearing other than the silent one of reading’].<sup>197</sup> What defines this new way of hearing and seeing is above all an increased capacity for appreciating the fluid transformations of the spectacle. Whereas, the first time he saw La Berma, he desired to retain fixed images of the poses adopted by the actress, so as to be able to study them in depth, this time he realises that the movement and constant succession of new tableaux is precisely what constitutes the charm of this mobile masterpiece.

The theatre, as Kadivar insists, requires Proust’s protagonist to see and to hear in ways different from those he has grown used to, that is, in ways that are more adapted to the nature of the *vision scénique*.<sup>198</sup> Kadivar’s work provides crucial insights into the poetics of representation in *À la recherche*, not least with regards to the role played by references to poetry, painting and the plastic arts in the novel’s representation of what he deems ‘deux dimensions fondamentales du théâtre en général: la parole et le regard (le mot *theatron* en grec signifie bien *le lieu d’où l’on regarde*)’ [‘two fundamental dimensions of theatre in general: the spoken word and the gaze (the word *theatron* in Greek indeed means *the place where you look from*)’].<sup>199</sup> Clearly, however, there is more to be said about the question of theatrical spectatorship and perception in *À la recherche* than can be discerned by looking only into Proust’s discourse on the medium’s visual and aural dimensions, for, just as there is more to the experience of theatre than can be seen and heard on stage, his conception of the theatre and the theatrical (in and outside of theatres) contains far more than thoughts on *image* and *parole*. In other words, Proust relates to the theatre not only as representation (as a perceivable object presented to a perceiving subject) but also as a space in which the opposition between subject and object is, so to speak, overcome. In fact, if we are to make sense of the novel’s identification of the theatre as

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<sup>197</sup> Pedro Kadivar, ‘Voir la Berma,’ in *Proust et le théâtre*, ed. Romana Goedendorp et al., Marcel Proust Aujourd’hui (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>199</sup> Kadivar, *Marcel Proust ou Esthétique de l’entre-deux. Poétique de la représentation dans ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’*, p. 225.

something like a symbol of perception, I believe we must take into consideration Proust's evidently acute awareness of the fact that the theatre is not merely a *theatron* ('viewing place') and of the fact that there are other dimensions (equally fundamental to the constitution of this art form) of the perceptual experience of theatre that cannot be appreciated simply by taking the visual and aural aspects of the performance into account.

These dimensions are not (only) related, then, to the apprehension of word and image, but to the theatre as a space for bodily, affective contact and communication, for 'energy exchange' between stage and auditorium,<sup>200</sup> and to the theatre as a space where spectators and actors adapt their bodies to a social relation (where they *become something for one another*), that is, a space where we 'heighten our sensitivity to our mutual becoming-for-others'.<sup>201</sup> One such dimension is the *transcendent* dimension that Nicolas Ridout has identified as a central component in Proust's discourse on the theatre. In 'Welcome to the Vibratorium',<sup>202</sup> an article concerned with the transmission of affect in the theatre, Ridout takes a brief excursion into Proust's world that results in a valuable observation concerning theatre in *À la recherche*. In his article, Ridout suggests that the theatre may be conceived as a Vibratorium. The Vibratorium, then, is 'the theater auditorium in those moments when signification and representation have yet to establish their sway; it is where the vibrations get right into you, before you start making sense of them'.<sup>203</sup> Fascinatingly, this idea of the theatre as a Vibratorium has its seed in an episode from *À la recherche*. The paragraph is taken from the protagonist's first visit to the theatre, and Ridout points out that the vibratory and energetic encounter between stage and auditorium is completely fundamental to the protagonist's experience. The aspect that Ridout takes particular interest in, and which I would like to dwell on for a moment as well, is the palpable emotional effect that the applause has on the young boy. Towards the end of the performance – which has been

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<sup>200</sup> The concept of 'energy exchange' may be viewed as a key constitutive element in the theatre, as theatre theorist Gay McAuley insists: 'In the theatre, due to the live presence of both spectators and performers, the energy circulates from performer to spectator and back again, from spectator to performer and back again'. McAuley, as quoted in Ridout, p. 224.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

largely a disappointment for him – the audience breaks into applause, and this spontaneous outbreak of approval radically transforms his view of La Berma's acting. It is, according to the narrator, as if the applause somehow 'makes' her performance:

Enfin éclata mon premier sentiment d'admiration: il fut provoqué par les applaudissements frénétiques des spectateurs. J'y mêlai les miens en tâchant de les prolonger, afin que, par reconnaissance, la Berma se surpassant, je fusse certain de l'avoir entendue dans un de ses meilleurs jours. Ce qui est du reste curieux, c'est que le moment où se déchaîna cet enthousiasme du public fut, je l'ai su depuis, celui où la Berma a une de ses plus belles trouvailles. Il semble que certaines réalités transcendantes émettent autour d'elles des rayons auxquels la foule est sensible. [...] On découvre un trait génial du jeu de la Berma huit jours après l'avoir entendue, par la critique, ou sur le coup par les acclamations du parterre. (I, 441-42)<sup>204</sup>

The idea expressed here is, in short, that certain great happenings give off a sort of radiation that the crowd pick up on and react to, instinctively and without use of the intellect. This immediate communal responsiveness is not, according to the narrative, something that only happens in the theatre, but a phenomenon that may occur in relation to all sorts of major events.<sup>205</sup> The theatrical experience thereby turns out to

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<sup>204</sup> 'At length I felt a first surge of admiration within me – it was brought on by a sudden outburst of frantic clapping from the other members of the audience. I clapped and clapped too, keeping on as long as possible, in the hope that La Berma might excel herself out of gratitude, and I could then be certain of having seen her on one of her best days. The remarkable thing is that the moment when that storm of applause broke out was, as I later learned, one of those when her acting was at its most inspired. Certain transcendent realities seem to give off a sort of radiation which the crowd can pick up. [...] A touch of genius in the acting of La Berma is revealed to us by the reviews a week after we have seen her on stage, or by the cheers from the back stalls' (2, 23-24).

<sup>205</sup> In the passage in question, Proust compares what happens in the auditorium to how the crowd thrills with excitement during wars, when the effect of a defeat or a victory is felt before it is known, as though the event were surrounded by an 'aura' that is perceivable from hundreds of miles away: 'Il semble que certaines réalités transcendantes émettent autour d'elles des rayons auxquels la foule est sensible. C'est ainsi que, par exemple, quand un évènement se produit, quand à la frontière une armée est en danger, ou battue, ou victorieuse, les nouvelles assez obscures qu'on reçoit et d'où l'homme cultivé ne sait pas tirer grand-chose, excitent dans la foule une émotion qui le surprend et dans laquelle, une fois que les experts l'ont mis au courant de la véritable situation militaire, il reconnaît la perception par le peuple de cette « aura » qui entoure les grands évènements et qui peut être visible à des centaines de kilomètres. On apprend la victoire, ou après coup quand la guerre est finie, ou tout de suite par la joie du concierge' ['Certain transcendent realities seem to give off a sort of radiation which the crowd can pick up. From the unclear reports of certain great events, such as a danger threatening an army on a national frontier, a defeat or a great victory, the educated



illustrate or exemplify an instinctive or intuitive and pre-reflective form of perception: a form of vibratory transmission of affect between bodies.

What is particularly interesting about the audience-performer reciprocity described by Proust in this passage is that, in spite of his growing admiration for La Berma, the spectator still doubts whether her acting has really improved. In fact, her brilliant performance seems to be, rather, a result of the crowd's reactions: 'au fur et à mesure que j'applaudissais, il me semblait que la Berma avait mieux joué' ['the longer I went on clapping, the better La Berma's acting seemed to have become'] (I, 442; 2, 24). It would thus seem that La Berma's acting is only apparently the cause of the spectators' admiration, for, as it turns out, the 'radiation' supposedly emitted by it is in all likelihood merely the echo of the crowd's applause. Her brilliance is a projection, dependant on the intersubjective encounter between performer and audience. The fact that the reality he experiences is *imaginary* does not, however, mean that it is *unreal*. For, as Ridout points out, since

'good acting' is a social performance that is unusually dependent upon the perception of its observers (it cannot, indeed, be measured by any other criteria than their judgement), the possibility that Berma's performance is the projection of its audience's imagination in no way detracts from the reality of its effect. In short, if the audience experiences a good performance, then a good performance has been performed.<sup>206</sup>

It is thus clear that, in the theatre, it is not merely the spectacle that affects the audience, but that the spectator's reactions to what is happening on stage are also part of the constitution of both the play and its reception. This is part of the reason why, the second time the protagonist goes to see the same woman perform the same role in the same play, he experiences it in a completely different way. The theatrical medium depends on an audience-performer reciprocity and on the continuous energy exchange between stage and auditorium, and this particularity strongly contributes to making the

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man may be unable to make much sense, but the crowd thrills with an excitement which surprises him and which, once he has been authoritatively informed of the military situation, he recognizes as their perception of that "aura" surrounding events of great moment and visible from hundreds of miles away. We learn of a victory either after the war is over or at once from the janitor's jubilation'] (I, 442; 2, 24).

<sup>206</sup> Ridout, p. 223.

theatre an apt symbol of perception in *À la recherche*, since it serves to illustrate how, as Proust's narrator asserts, *every* impression (and not only those experienced in the theatre) is constituted in the encounter between the subject and object of perception. In other words, every impression comes in two parts, half of it contained in the perceived object and half of it extending into the interiority of the one who perceives:

Dans les moments mêmes où nous sommes les spectateurs les plus désintéressés de la nature, de la société, de l'amour, de l'art lui-même, *comme toute impression est double, à demi engagée dans l'objet, prolongée en nous-mêmes par une autre moitié que seul nous pourrions connaître*, nous nous empressons de négliger celle-là, c'est-à-dire la seule à laquelle nous devrions nous attacher, et nous ne tenons compte que de l'autre moitié qui, ne pouvant pas être approfondie parce qu'elle est extérieure, ne sera cause pour nous d'aucune fatigue. (IV, 470, my emphasis)<sup>207</sup>

It seems that, according to Proust, when we are faced with the exterior world, we are also faced with a reflection or an echo of our selves. And, likewise, that what we call our *interior space* is also an echo chamber in which the exterior world resonates, much like Merleau-Ponty implies when he writes, with reference to the painter Cézanne: '[...] « la nature est à l'intérieur », dit Cézanne. Qualité, lumière, couleur, profondeur, qui sont là-bas devant nous, n'y sont que parce qu'elles éveillent un écho dans notre corps, parce qu'il leur fait accueil' ["Nature is on the inside," says Cézanne. Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them'].<sup>208</sup> Proust, then, appears to share with Cézanne (and with Merleau-Ponty) what we may call a phenomenological conviction that the object of perception exists not only outside the body but also inside it, or, to put it differently, that there is no absolute antinomy between self and world, or body and things, since 'subject' and 'object' overlap in the sense that they are

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<sup>207</sup> 'Even at the moments when we are the most disinterested onlookers of nature, or society, or love, or art itself, *since every impression comes in two parts, half of it contained within the object and the other half, which we alone will understand, extending into us*, we are quick to disregard this latter half, which ought to be the sole object of our attention, and to take notice only of the first, which, being external and therefore impossible to study in any depth, will not impose any strain on us' (6, 200, my emphasis).

<sup>208</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, p. 22. [Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind,' in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 296.]

‘chiasmatically’ associated.<sup>209</sup> Kadivar reminds us that Cézanne’s words echo another of Proust’s phrases as well (‘Il n’est pas une heure de ma vie qui n’eût servi à m’apprendre que seule la perception plutôt grossière et erronée place tout dans l’objet quand tout au contraire est dans l’esprit’ [‘There is no moment in my life which would not have served to teach me that only coarse and inaccurate perception places everything in the object when the opposite is true: everything is in the mind’] (IV, 493; 6, 223)), and stresses that when Proust writes that everything is in the mind, he does not intend to eradicate the object (the *dehors*), as though to define reality as a relation between subject and space could only be done at the cost of everything exterior to the subject (the *dedans*). Nevertheless, Kadivar notes, this definition of reality does have (as we saw on several occasions in Chapter 1) some consequences for the subject’s *modalities of perception*: ‘Si de l’objet tout est dans l’esprit, alors ce qu’on peut considérer comme corrélatifs de l’esprit, l’imaginaire, le rêve et le fantasme, sont les pendants décisifs de la perception de la réalité, car celle-ci n’est pas le fait extérieur mais son *assimilation*, ou encore sa *représentation*’ [‘If everything about the object is in the mind, then what we can consider as correlatives of the mind – imagination, dream and fantasy – are the decisive attributes of the perception of reality, since this perception is not an external fact but its *assimilation*, or rather its *representation*’].<sup>210</sup>

Our impressions, then, stem partly from the external world and partly from inside ourselves, and it is precisely that interior part of the impression that the artist should strive to express in order to convey those profoundly individual realities that ordinarily remain the eternal secret of each individual, and that ‘sans l’art nous ne connaissons jamais’ [‘without art we should never know’] (III, 762; 5, 236).<sup>211</sup> In my

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<sup>209</sup> Merleau-Ponty continues to reflect on the intertwining of *dedans* and *dehors* in the chapter ‘L’Entrelacs – Le Chiasme’ in the posthumously published *Le Visible et l’invisible* (1964). The *chiasm* is the image that Merleau-Ponty makes use of to describe, among other things, the human body (in opposition to the traditional dualistic understanding of subject and object, self and things, body and mind, as opposites and as separate entities) as an intertwining or overlapping of subjective experience and objective existence.

<sup>210</sup> Kadivar, *Marcel Proust ou Esthétique de l’entre-deux. Poétique de la représentation dans ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’*, p. 12.

<sup>211</sup> ‘Par l’art seulement nous pouvons sortir de nous, savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers qui n’est pas le même que le nôtre et dont les paysages nous seraient restés aussi inconnus que ceux qu’il peut y avoir dans la lune’ [‘It is only through art that we can escape from ourselves and know how another person sees a universe which is not the same as our own and whose

view, the tableau, the practice of *mise en scène* and theatricalising are means by which Proust attempts to convey ‘cet ineffable qui différencie qualitativement ce que chacun a senti’ [‘this inexpressible thing which reveals the qualitative difference between what each of us has felt’] (III, 762; 5, 236). In the tableaux, the act of describing the perceived object is often abandoned in favour of a staging of *how* the protagonist perceives it and of what happens within him during the perceptual encounter. In other words, the protagonist is not only the subject but also the object of these tableaux.

In this chapter, I study the mediation of perceptual experiences in *À la recherche* with an eye for how impressions are, in Ridout’s terms, ‘experienced in the tremors of the spectatorial body’.<sup>212</sup> In other words, while, in the previous chapter, I focused on the voyeur’s theatricalising agency and on his transformation of what he witnessed into spectacles as something done principally through the imagination, my focus here is on the contact and mutual transmission of affect between subject and object of perception, as I ask how Proust uses the encounter of spectatorial and performing bodies in order to mediate perception. I begin by studying how this issue plays out in two different types of experience that share a common ability to awaken a sense of separateness and an acute desire for contact (the disruption of habit and the feeling of love), before turning, in conclusion, to one of the novel’s most intriguing answers to the question of how a literary work may stage perceptual experiences.

## 2.1 Making the Inner Violin Sing: On Disruptions of Habit

The protagonist’s second encounter with La Berma as Phèdre gives rise to another example of the transcendent or ‘vibratory’ dimension of the theatrical experience, when the narrator describes the impression caused by La Berma’s performance in terms of high-pitched sounds, that is, sounds that make the air oscillate in a very rapid way (to hear is, in a strict sense, to feel vibrations):

[...] notre esprit attentif a devant lui l’insistance d’une forme dont il ne possède pas d’équivalent intellectuel, dont il lui faut dégager l’inconnu. Il entend un son aigu, une

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landscapes would otherwise have remained as unknown as any there may be on the moon’] (IV, 474; 6, 204).

<sup>212</sup> Ridout, p. 224.

intonation bizarrement interrogative. Il se demande: « Est-ce beau? Ce que j'éprouve, est-ce de l'admiration? Est-ce cela, la richesse de coloris, la noblesse, la puissance? » et ce qui lui répond de nouveau, c'est une voix aiguë, c'est un ton curieusement questionneur, c'est l'impression despotique causée pas un être qu'on ne connaît pas, toute matérielle, et dans laquelle aucun espace vide n'est laissé pour la « largeur de l'interprétation ». (II, 349)<sup>213</sup>

The high-pitched sounds that Proust's spectator hears do not, in the obvious sense, stem from the spectacle. They are not physical properties of an object, like sounds stemming from a violin in the orchestra pit. They are subjective and imaginary perceptions: sounds that he only hears inside himself, but that nevertheless originate from the spectacle, or, more precisely, from his *encounter* with the spectacle, and that, as such, exemplify that dual nature of the impression that Proust takes a vivid interest in. The fact that Proust here views the theatrical experience as constituted, borrowing Ridout's words, 'by a movement between [actors and spectators], a back and forth in which back and forth are not fully differentiated from one another'<sup>214</sup> is confirmed, it seems, by the description of it as a form of mutual questioning: Proust's protagonist is unsure of how he should judge La Berma's performance, and his interrogative attitude is actually returned by the spectacle in the form of these high-pitched sounds, qualified by 'une intonation bizarrement interrogative' ['an oddly questioning intonation'] and 'un ton curieusement questionneur' ['an oddly questioning tone']. It is as though the interrogation is not only something that the protagonist *does* but also something that is *done to him*, and it is thus symptomatic that he cannot quite decide whether the impression that strikes him stems from the object ('Est-ce beau?' ['Is that good?']) or from inside himself ('Ce que j'éprouve, est-ce de l'admiration?' ['Is it admiration I am feeling?']). As if his interiority was an instrument to be played, it is his experience of being attentively in the presence of something unknown that gives rise to these internal

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<sup>213</sup> '[...] our critical mind is confronted in fact with the nagging presence of a form for which it possesses no intellectual equivalent, the unknown part of which it needs to extricate. It hears a high-pitched sound, an oddly questioning intonation. It asks: "Is that good? Is it admiration I am feeling? Is this what is meant by richness of colour, nobility, power?" And what answers back is a high-pitched voice, an oddly questioning tone, the despotic impression, wholly material, caused by a person we do not know, in which no scope is left for "breadth of interpretation"' (3, 46-47).

<sup>214</sup> Ridout, pp. 224-25.

sounds.<sup>215</sup> The image of interiority as an instrument is, in fact, one that Proust evokes explicitly in *La Prisonnière*, when he describes how a disruption of habit makes the ‘violon intérieur’ sing:

Certains beaux jours, il faisait si froid, on était en si large communication avec la rue qu’il semblait qu’on eût disjoint les murs de la maison, et chaque fois que passait le tramway, son timbre résonnait comme eût fait un couteau d’argent frappant une maison de verre. Mais c’était surtout en moi que j’entendais avec ivresse un son nouveau rendu par le violon intérieur. Ses cordes sont serrées ou détendues par de simples différences de la température, de la lumière extérieures. En notre être, instrument que l’uniformité de l’habitude a rendu silencieux, le chant naît de ces écarts, de ces variations, source de toute musique: le temps qu’il fait certains jours nous fait aussitôt passer d’une note à une autre. (III, 535)<sup>216</sup>

The image of the inner violin, whose strings are tightened and slackened according to changes in the external world, provides a striking metaphor for the relationship between the perceiving subject and its surroundings. Habit silences the inner violin, but a temporary intermission of habit is sufficient to make the strings vibrate anew (‘En notre être, instrument que l’uniformité de l’habitude a rendu silencieux, le chant naît de ces écarts, de ces variations, source de toute musique’ [‘Within our being, that instrument which the uniformity of habit has reduced to silence, melody springs from these changes, these variations, which are the source of all music’]). When a disruption of habit occurs, for instance due to a change in light or temperature, the

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<sup>215</sup> The idea that the only matters that strike our sensibility, and that we take cognisance of, are those that are new and unfamiliar is a recurring one in *À la recherche*. In *Albertine disparue*, we read that ‘nous ne connaissons vraiment que ce qui est nouveau, *ce qui introduit brusquement dans notre sensibilité un changement de ton qui nous frappe*, ce à quoi l’habitude n’a pas encore substitué ses pâles fac-similés’ [‘we only really take cognisance of something which is new, *something which abruptly introduces a change of tone that strikes our sensibility*, something that habit has not yet replaced with its pale replicas’] (IV, 110; 5, 495, my emphasis).

<sup>216</sup> ‘On certain fine days it was so cold, one was in such extensive communication with the street outside, that it was as if the walls of the house had been wrenched apart, and each time the tram passed, its note sounded out as if a silver knife were striking a house made of glass. But it was above all inside myself that I heard with delight a new sound struck from the inner violin. Its strings are tightened or slackened by simple variations in temperature, in exterior light. Within our being, that instrument which the uniformity of habit has reduced to silence, melody springs from these changes, these variations, which are the source of all music: the weather on particular days makes us move immediately from one note to another’ (5, 18).

walls separating inside from outside are ‘wrenched apart’, enabling communication (‘on était en si large communication avec la rue qu’il semblait qu’on eût disjoint les murs de la maison’ [‘one was in such extensive communication with the street outside, that it was as if the walls of the house had been wrenched apart’]): between inside and outside, interiors and exteriors, subject and object. Crucially, the relationship established is one of *mutual* influence. The outer world provokes a change in the subject, and these inner changes bring the world alive again: ‘Seules ces modifications internes, bien que venues du dehors, renouvelait pour moi le monde extérieur’ [‘Only these inner changes (though they came from outside) brought the outer world alive again for me’] (III, 535; 5, 18). Much like in the Vibratorium, then, the stimulation is reciprocal, and spectator and spectacle are united as by a string that enables energy to circulate back and forth between them and that makes it difficult to keep the two apart. The theatrical analogy is apt here, since Proust’s narrator describes the state he is in when habit is broken as an intensely pleasurable experience of being vibrantly present in the present: ‘Frémissant tout entier autour de la corde vibrante, j’aurais sacrifié ma terne vie d’autrefois et ma vie à venir, passées à la gomme à effacer de l’habitude, pour cet état si particulier’ [‘With my whole being trembling around the vibrating string, I would have given my dreary past life and all my life to come, both rubbed flat by the eraser of habit, to prolong this peculiar state’] (III, 535; 5, 18).

Throughout *À la recherche*, habit and attentiveness operate as competing forces initiating radically different modes of perception, as Proust juxtaposes the (often) anaesthetising effects of habit with states of being attentively present in the present. In perhaps the most poignant formulation of these significant differences (an episode to which I will return in Chapter 4), he writes: ‘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’ [‘As our attentiveness furnishes a room, so habit unfurnishes it, making space in it for us’] (II, 27; 2, 245). The phrase elegantly pinpoints the crucial distinction between these modes of perception: while the effect of attentiveness is that of increasing our awareness of the space that separates us from the objects that surround us, habit somehow eradicates this spatial distance by performing a merging of exteriors and psychological interiors, favouring the impression that the exterior world is part of our bodies and an extension

of our selves. Habit, then, is characterised above all by its ability to eliminate the subject's awareness of spatial separateness by enabling the subjective interior to 'annex' space. When this happens, the surrounding objects are no longer perceivable by way of the senses, since the human body has, as it were, incorporated them: 'les objets de ma chambre de Paris ne gênaient pas plus [mes regards] que ne faisaient mes propres prunelles, car ils n'étaient plus que des annexes de mes organes, un agrandissement de moi-même' ['my glances, in Paris, were as unhindered by the things in my room as by my eyes themselves, these things being nothing but accessories of my own organs, extensions of myself'] (II, 27; 2, 246, translation modified by me). In opposition to this, attentiveness furnishes a room and fills it with objects. As such, the attentive mode of perception is intrinsically linked to the realisation that objects are located in external space and thus at a distance from us, meaning that, somewhat paradoxically, it is when we become aware of the *distance* between the world and us that we experience the world as *present*. Thus, when we consider perception attentively, we see that distance and proximity are not, in fact, opposites, but rather – as Merleau-Ponty writes in the work he was preparing when he died, the posthumously published *Le Visible et l'invisible* – synonyms:

[...] cette distance n'est pas le contraire de cette proximité, elle est profondément accordée avec elle, elle en est synonyme. C'est que l'épaisseur de chair entre le voyant et la chose est constitutive de sa visibilité à elle comme de sa corporéité à lui; ce n'est pas un obstacle entre lui et elle, c'est leur moyen de communication.<sup>217</sup>

What Merleau-Ponty thus articulates is an insight that Proust had already conveyed (*staged*, in fact) in his novel: that the spatial distance between subject and object is precisely what enables contact and communication between the two. I believe that it is important to keep this aspect of Proust's views on perception in mind when one

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<sup>217</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 178. ['[...] this distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it, it is synonymous with it. It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication'. Merleau-Ponty, 'The Intertwining - The Chiasm,' trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 252.]



considers the theatre's suitability as a 'symbol' of perception in *À la recherche*. The reason why it is important is that it strongly indicates that when Proust evokes the theatre in his discourse on perception, he does not intend to use the theatre's layout (and the distance between subject and object that it serves to manifest) as a metaphor for a radically oppositional relationship between the perceiving subject and the object of perception, but as a metaphor for the intertwining, and thus the *proximity* (or the shared 'flesh'), of subject and object.

The juxtaposition of habit and attentiveness seems further to be of the utmost importance for the constitution of the Proustian tableau, since the tableau's instalment of the protagonist as an attentive spectator of the object of perception serves to manifest precisely the 'contact-inducing' distance between the two. In Chapter 1, we saw how this distance was figuratively expressed in the text through the confinement of the spectacle within different sorts of frames (windows, peepholes and door openings) that served both to separate the spectacle from the spectator and to enable contact between them. This, then, begs the question of whether, in *À la recherche*, it is the experience of separateness that transforms the object into a spectacle and the world into a tableau theatre. Or, to put it differently, whether Proust resorts to the tableau in order to express such experiences – characterised by increased attentiveness and awareness concerning the palpable distance between spectatorial and performing bodies, and by the suspension of the protagonist's habitual ways of relating to the world. I would like to briefly consider this question in light of a passage from *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, which I view as an emblematic tableau.

Early in the morning during a train journey to Balbec, the train stops at a little station between two mountains, in a 'vallée à qui ces hauteurs cachaient le reste du monde' ['valley, hidden from the rest of the world by the surrounding heights'] (II, 16; 2, 234), and the protagonist sees a young peasant girl selling coffee, whose unusual type of beauty makes a powerful impression on him. Already in the initial description of the place, it transpires that Proust associates the train station with the theatre (this association becomes, as we see below, explicit in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*). The two mountains isolating the valley from 'the rest of the world' bring to mind a world, as it were, in miniature – a world within a world – and a theatrical stage, since the

mountains circumscribe the valley in much the same way as the architecture of the stage defines the limits of the theatrical universe during a play. More importantly, however, and regardless of the exterior qualities of the place, the protagonist perceives the train station as a sort of theatre because it is a place previously unknown to him. It seems that it is because he travels through a foreign landscape (one that he is not used to and which thus demands his full attention) that his perception becomes theatricalising. This interpretation is confirmed when, some twelve hundred pages later, the narrator again ponders the charm of train travel by way of a theatrical analogy. Speaking of his love for the 'féeriques voyages en chemin de fer' ['fantastic journeys by train'], he observes that the train brings the traveller 'féeriquement dans une ville que nous voyions d'abord dans l'ensemble que résume son nom, et avec les illusions du spectateur dans la salle' ['in this fantastic way into a town that we saw first of all as the whole encapsulated in its name, and with the illusions of a spectator in a theatre'] (III, 394; 4, 400) (in contrast, car travel is compared with entering the theatre from backstage, that is, in a way that destroys the spectatorial illusion: 'l'automobile [...] nous faisait entrer dans la coulisse des rues' ['the motor-car [...] made us go backstage into the streets'] (III, 394; 4, 400)). The impression that it is a specifically *theatrical* experience (and not, say, that of a spectator in a cinema) that Proust means to evoke when the narrator refers to the train traveller as a spectator in the passage above is created not only through the evocation of the theatre building's layout in the juxtaposition of auditorium ('salle') and backstage ('coulisses') but also through his description of train journeys as 'féeriques' – an adjective that clearly alludes to the theatrical genre of the *féerie*. We shall return to this genre and the central role that it plays in *À la recherche* in Chapters 3-6. At this stage, however, we shall simply note that the analogy established between train travel and the theatre implies that the individual charm of a place is largely an illusion engendered by the spectator – an illusion that thus reveals more about the viewpoint of the traveller than about the place itself. This theatrical illusion corresponds, then, predominantly to a particular mode of perception, and not so much to the object of perception. The protagonist's reflections on the encounter with the peasant girl in the paragraphs below exemplify this.

The scene establishes the protagonist firmly as a spectator on his side of the train window, and allows the milkmaid, the veritable *étoile* of the train station theatre, to be perceived as through a stained-glass window. It is remarkable that, although the narrator emphasises the effect of this young woman's beauty, he says virtually nothing about how she actually looks, rather describing her face as an aesthetic object, as a spectacle of colours and light. The individual charm of this face seems to rely less on its own characteristics than on its ability to reflect the sunrise and the landscape that surrounds it: 'Si un être peut être le produit d'un sol dont on goûte en lui le charme particulier [...] ce devait être la grande fille que je vis sortir de cette maison et, sur le sentier qu'illuminait obliquement le soleil levant, venir vers la gare en portant une jarre de lait' ['If a person can be the epitome of a place, conveying the charm and tang of its special savour, then this was demonstrated [...] by the tall girl whom I saw come out of the keeper's house and start walking towards the station, along a footpath lit by the slanting rays of the sunrise, carrying a crock of milk'] (II, 16; 2, 234). We recognise the paragraph as a tableau due to the way that the sight of this young woman's beauty absorbs (although not so completely that there is no room for consciousness) the protagonist's attention, making it impossible for him to look away:

Je lui fis signe qu'elle vînt me donner du café au lait. J'avais besoin d'être remarqué d'elle. Elle ne me vit pas, je l'appelai. Au-dessus de son corps très grand, le teint de sa figure était si doré et si rose qu'elle avait l'air d'être vue à travers un vitrail illuminé. Elle revint sur ses pas, je ne pouvais détacher mes yeux de son visage de plus en plus large, pareil à un soleil qu'on pourrait fixer et qui s'approcherait jusqu'à venir tout près de vous, se laissant regarder de près, vous éblouissant d'or et de rouge. Elle posa sur moi son regard perçant, mais comme les employés fermaient les portières, le train se mit en marche; je la vis quitter la gare et reprendre le sentier, il faisait grand jour maintenant: je m'éloignais de l'aurore. (II, 17-18)<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> 'I beckoned to her to bring me the coffee and milk. I needed her to notice me. She did not notice me, so I hailed her. Her tall person was topped by a face with a complexion so golden pink that I seemed to be seeing her through the radiance of a stained-glass window. She turned and walked back towards me: I could not look away from her face, which, as it neared and grew larger, was like a sun that did not dazzle the stare, no matter how close it came, which you could look straight at as it deluged you with its blaze of glorious golds and reds. Her eye, which had a piercing gaze, met mine; but just then, as the guard and station-master were shutting the doors, the train started to move. In broad daylight now, I watched as she walked away from the station and along her footpath: I was travelling away from the dawn' (2, 236).

The narrator's observation that the young girl is seen as through the radiance of a stained-glass window ('vitrail illuminé') serves to aestheticise the impression and to bring out the pictorial, or even cinematic, qualities of the tableau. The description of her face as a sort of screen reflecting the colours of the morning sky reinforces this impression ('Empourpré des reflets du matin, son visage était plus rose que le ciel' ['Glowing in the glory of the morning, her face was pinker than the sky'] (II, 16; 2, 234)). Sara Danius highlights the cinematic aspect of the train ride when she reads the railway compartment as a 'projector apparatus': 'Naturalizing the deliciously fragmented representation of the narrator's visual activity, the window frames permit the spectacle to come into being. In short, the train emerges as a framing device on wheels'.<sup>219</sup> Danius further argues that when the young woman's face is described as becoming *larger*, rather than simply coming *nearer*, Proust's text evokes the cinematic medium's ability to zoom in on objects: 'It is as though we were watching a film in which the heroine's head approaches the camera and eventually fills the screen'.<sup>220</sup> The cinematic terms of Danius's interpretation are apt, both insofar as they capture this curious zoom effect and since they enable her to address how the train ride episode's play with projections of light and colour and visual framing in motion anticipates the cinematic experience. The spectator's movement through a landscape at high speed is arguably something that the theatrical metaphor does not as readily capture. Nevertheless, I do not think that these cinematic terms account sufficiently for the particular state of attentiveness that conditions the protagonist to perceive the encounter with the peasant girl as a (in my view) *theatrical* experience of mutual *becoming-for-others*.

It is tempting to suggest that we are immediately prevented from conceiving the passage simply as a projected image by the apparent exchange of gazes between the protagonists ('Elle posa sur moi son regard perçant' ['Her eye, which had a piercing gaze, met mine']), since this seems to imply that they do, in fact, exist in the same space at the same time. Still, to be sure, it is not clear if she actually sees him, for

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<sup>219</sup> Danius, p. 113.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

although he briefly has the impression of being pierced by her brilliant gaze, the two worlds never actually intersect. And, besides, the impression that someone is looking straight at you (even if they are not) could also be created by the projected image in a cinema. It is not, however, irrelevant for my study of the novel's theatricality that the protagonist has the impression that the girl (the spectacle) rests her gaze on him, since this endows her with a certain spectatorial agency that is in fact followed by the transformation of the protagonist (the spectator) into a 'performer'. As we read below, the encounter with the girl on the train station '*m'introduisait comme acteur dans un univers inconnu et infiniment plus intéressant*' ['gave me a part to act in an unknown and infinitely more interesting world'] (II, 18; 2, 236, my emphasis). And since, as we remember from Chapter 1, the individual's recognition of herself or himself as an object of perception is essential to the constitution of Proust's theatrical subjects, his new role as an *actor* arguably depends precisely on his feeling of being the object of her gaze and attention. As in the theatre, the actor and the spectator of this tableau are constituted by way of a reciprocal *becoming-for-others*; they live, in Gouhier's formulation (which we have already had occasion to cite in the Introduction), *l'un par l'autre*. They are, then, both of them, subject *and* object in this encounter, which becomes immensely exciting and attractive to him because it introduces him to a world that is completely different from the one he knows:

C'est d'ordinaire avec notre être réduit au minimum que nous vivons; la plupart de nos facultés restent endormies, parce qu'elles se reposent sur l'habitude qui sait ce qu'il y a à faire et n'a pas besoin d'elles. Mais par ce matin de voyage l'interruption de la routine de mon existence, le changement de lieu et d'heure avaient rendu leur présence indispensable. Mon habitude qui était sédentaire et n'était pas matinale, faisait défaut, et toutes mes facultés étaient accourues pour la remplacer, rivalisant entre elles de zèle – s'élevant toutes, comme des vagues, à un même niveau inaccoutumé – de la plus basse à la plus noble, de la respiration, de l'appétit, et de la circulation sanguine à la sensibilité et à l'imagination. [...] Ce n'est pas seulement que cet état fût agréable. *C'est surtout que (comme la tension plus grande d'une corde ou la vibration plus rapide d'un nerf produit une sonorité ou une couleur différente) il donnait une autre tonalité à ce que je voyais*, il m'introduisait comme acteur dans un univers inconnu et infiniment plus intéressant; cette belle fille que j'apercevais encore, tandis que le train accélérât sa marche, *c'était comme une partie d'une vie autre que celle que je connaissais, séparée d'elle par un liséré*, et où les sensations qu'éveillaient les objets

n'étaient plus les mêmes, et d'où sortir maintenant eût été comme mourir à moi-même.  
(II, 17-18, my emphases)<sup>221</sup>

The momentary suspension of habit allows the protagonist's perceptual and imaginative faculties to 'enter the stage', eagerly competing and outdoing one another, and drastically increasing his attentiveness with regard to the world about him. It is this state of increased attentiveness, and his feeling of being fully immersed (with his 'entire self') in this life previously foreign to him, that incites him to theatricalise the vision: 'Je faisais bénéficier la marchande de lait de ce que c'était mon être complet, apte à goûter de vives jouissances, qui était en face d'elle' ['I invested the milk-maid with advantages which came from the fact that it was my entire self, ready to gorge on life's sweetest delights, that confronted her'] (II, 17; 2, 235). The girl is like the epitome of something *other*, presenting him with a vision of beauty that is radically different from anything he has previously seen. Hence, partly due to the disruption of habit and partly because her beauty is so 'étrangère aux modèles de beauté que dessinait ma pensée quand je me trouvais seul' ['utterly different from the patterns of beauty devised by my mind in isolation'] (II, 17; 2, 235), the encounter supplies him with a pleasurable and intense experience of being alive and attentively present *in the present*. The combination of these favourable conditions is presumably also why the encounter changes the tone ('tonalité') of what he perceives – a tone that, as we read in the quote above, although it is provoked by an external impression, is produced by the resounding of an internal vibration (as if, then, his interiority were an instrument to be

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<sup>221</sup> 'We commonly live with a self reduced to its bare minimum; most of our faculties lie dormant, relying on habit; and habit knows how to manage without them. But, on that morning, their presence had once more become essential, so as to cope with travel, departure from life's daily round, a change of place, the unwonted time of day. My habit, which was sedentary and unused to morning hours, was found wanting; and all my faculties had come flooding back to stand in for it, outdoing themselves, vying with each other, rising to the same unusual occasion, the basest of them and the noblest, from mere breathing and appetite, even the circulation of the blood, to sensitivity and imagination. [...] It was not just that this feeling was pleasant. *It was especially because (as the tightening of a string or the more rapid vibration of a nerve produces a different note or colour) it gave a sharper tone to what I saw, gave me a part to act in an unknown and infinitely more interesting world; and for as long as the gathering speed of the train allowed me to see the beautiful milk-girl, she was like a part of some other life, separated from the one I knew by a narrow borderline, another life in which the feelings transmitted to me by things were not the usual ones, and the leaving of which felt like a sort of inner death*' (2, 235-36, my emphases).

played): ‘C’est surtout que (comme la tension plus grande d’une corde ou la vibration plus rapide d’un nerf produit une sonorité ou une couleur différente) il donnait une autre tonalité à ce que je voyais’ [‘It was especially because (as the tightening of a string or the more rapid vibration of a nerve produces a different note or colour) it gave a sharper tone to what I saw’].

Clearly, then, this encounter makes the ‘inner violin’ sing, and the effect it has on him leads him to identify both what he sees and his own role in terms of a spectacle. The girl thus becomes the object (as well as the subject) in a tableau firmly cut out from the rest of the world (‘comme une partie d’une vie autre que celle que je connaissais, séparée d’elle par un liséré’ [‘like a part of some other life, separated from the one I knew by a narrow borderline’]), and he becomes the tableau’s spectator *and* actor. The impression that the two subjects of this tableau are constituted by way of one another (that subjects, as suggested by Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh, are constituted, not in *opposition* to, but in *relation* to the other) is confirmed when the narrator concludes the paragraph by insisting that, for the protagonist, to leave this ‘part of some other life’ is like a sort of inner death (‘comme mourir à moi-même’). This ‘death’, then, is not an actual death, but the death of that particular subjectivity that only exists by way of this relation.

The spatial separation between himself and the girl evokes in the protagonist an ardent desire to overcome the distance between them, but the only way to achieve this would be through habit, which would erase the distance, but also the particularly attentive state he is in, and this would mean that what he desired initially would be lost to him. The tableau, in that it manifests the distance between subject and object of perception, lends itself admirably to the rendering of the particular form of attentiveness evoked by this encounter. The tableau gives form to the protagonist’s feeling of excitement by upholding the distance that he intensely wishes to overcome. He felt, the narrator observes, a *need* to be noticed by her, to be the object of her perception (‘J’avais besoin d’être remarqué d’elle’ [‘I needed her to notice me’]), and the tension created by his excitement actually changes the aspect of what he sees. It is impossible to say, in fact, whether the girl causes the excitement, or whether it is, on the contrary, his excitement that makes her so attractive. The passage thus constitutes a

particularly brilliant example of the double nature of every impression, and the causal relations remain, at any rate, irrelevant. The desire that the peasant girl evokes is, above all, ‘le désir moral de ne pas laisser cet état d’excitation périr entièrement, de ne pas être séparé à jamais de l’être qui y avait, même à son insu, participé’ [‘the longing to retain something of that excitement, not to let it die, not to be severed for ever from the one who, though she was unaware of this, had been part of it’] (II, 18; 2, 236). In other words, it is the state of excitement that is the subject of the tableau, and it is this particular mode of attentiveness that is responsible for transforming the protagonist into a person who is different from the one he was before the encounter, giving him, as it were, a new role to play. Through his *mise en scène* of this perceptual impression, Proust shows that its significance is not encapsulated solely in the girl as the object of the protagonist’s gaze, but that it pertains to the very act of perception, and to the way that both ‘atmospheric’ conditions and his constitution in that moment of time pushes the protagonist to interpret what he perceives as a spectacle.

Travel, which entails change and encounters with the unfamiliar, as well as inevitable disruptions of habit, serves to renew the world around us, and to awaken the slumbering senses and interior of the traveller. Somewhat paradoxically, the act of travelling makes the world’s presence felt precisely because it reminds us of the distance that separates us from our surroundings. Hence, as we have seen in this analysis, travelling has the capacity to transform the world into a *theatre* for the perceiving mind, and the traveller into a spectator and actor in that theatre. This experience of the world as a theatre perceived ‘avec les illusions du spectateur dans la salle’, does not, however, absolutely require us to board a train and leave home. It suffices to open one’s heart and to love; for love, as Proust writes, ‘c’est l’espace et le temps rendus sensible au cœur’ [‘is space and time made apprehensible to the heart’] (III, 887; 5, 356). In the next section, I will explore what we may call a ‘theatrical’ aspect of the complex question of love in *À la recherche*: how loving someone, in Proust’s terms, transforms the lover into a spectator thrown out of the beloved’s ‘inner theatre’ and haunted by terrifying spectacles.



## 2.2 Loving Albertine: On the Excluded Spectator

In *La Prisonnière*, the protagonist keeps Albertine, the young woman that obsesses him, as a prisoner in his apartment, which he only lets her leave in the company of friends that report back to him on their whereabouts during the day. This gives him an illusion of control, which, nevertheless, quickly fades whenever he is reminded that he does not, in fact, possess what lives inside her: her thoughts, memories and secret desires. The inner life of Albertine is both what feeds his desire ('On n'aime que ce en quoi on poursuit quelque chose d'inaccessible, on n'aime que ce qu'on ne possède pas' ['There must be something inaccessible in what we love, something to pursue; we love only what we do not possess'] (III, 885-86; 5, 255)) and what causes him to suffer ('Combien je souffrais de cette position où nous a réduits l'oubli de la nature qui, en instituant la division des corps, n'a pas songé à rendre possible l'interprétation des âmes!' ['How I suffered from the position in which careless Nature placed us, when it instituted the separation of bodies from each other, and forgot to provide for the interpenetration of souls!'] (III, 888; 5, 357)). When he looks at her, it is as if the visions that fill her mind, the *spectacles intérieurs*, are visible as reflections of light in her eyes, but the inner visions that cause her eyes to shimmer remain inaccessible to him, as though, as Thomas Carrier-Lafleur suggests, the *image* (Carrier-Lafleur reads the passage below in light of the cinematic medium and interprets Albertine's eyes as screens offering a spectacle of refracted light) of the young girl blinds him.<sup>222</sup> The confrontation with Albertine's secret life transforms the protagonist, as I will argue in this chapter, into a spectator *in his own mind* of terrifying (either because they are inaccessible or because they are foreign and imposed on him from the outside) scenes and images, thus revealing the painful 'theatrical' aspect of loving someone:

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<sup>222</sup> 'Albertine est alors comme une invention instrumentale qui dépasse son créateur, qui se joue de lui. L'image de la jeune fille est parfois trop éblouissante pour le héros-narrateur; il reste aveuglé par ses visions, en attendant de pouvoir rétablir des connexions entre le sujet et l'objet' ['Albertine is thus to be understood as an instrumental invention that overtakes its creator, double-crossing him. The image of the young woman is sometimes too dazzling for the hero-narrator. He remains blinded by his visions, as he waits to be able to re-establish the connections between subject and object']. Carrier-Lafleur, p. 339. I refer to Carrier-Lafleur's chapter 'La lanterne et Albertine' for an exploration of the cinematic qualities of the passage in question, as well as in relation to the figure of Albertine more globally. *Ibid.*, pp. 329-41.

Dans ses yeux [les yeux d'Albertine] je voyais passant, tantôt l'espérance, tantôt le souvenir, peut-être le regret, de joies que je ne devinais pas, auxquelles dans ce cas elle préférerait renoncer plutôt que de me les dire, et que, n'en saisissant que cette lueur dans ses prunelles, je n'apercevais pas davantage que le spectateur qu'on n'a pas laissé entrer dans la salle et qui, collé au carreau vitré de la porte, ne peut rien apercevoir de ce qui se passe sur la scène. [...] Pendant ces heures, quelquefois je voyais flotter sur elle, dans ses regards, dans sa moue, dans son sourire, le reflet de ces spectacles intérieurs dont la contemplation la faisait ces soirs-là dissemblable, éloignée de moi à qui ils étaient refusés. (III, 886)<sup>223</sup>

In speaking of love, Proust's narrator again evokes the layout of a theatre as a symbol of perception – or, rather, as a symbol of that which cannot readily be perceived: the subjective interior. Once more, the narrator identifies his younger self as a spectator before a frame ('collé au carreau vitré de la porte' ['glued to the glass panel in the door']), but the experiences transformed into spectacles within this frame remain invisible to him. He cannot see the inside of Albertine's mind, and the theatrical analogy provides him with the means to figuratively express the pain he feels at not being in full possession of her. In her smile, in her facial expressions or in her eyes, he perceives the presence of something hidden, a memory or a desire, but these refractions of light remain impossible to decipher, and the doors to the theatre of Albertine's mind remain locked. When he is thus reminded of the presence of the inner world that fills the mind of the person next to him, he is at the same time reminded of the insurmountable distance that keeps them apart, and he feels her to be distant and detached. The theatrical analogy establishing the mind as a sort of interior theatre serves to describe not only Albertine's interior, however, but also that of the protagonist, who experiences great pain at having his own interiority filled with the immaterial presences of people and places that have some connection, however remote, with her:

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<sup>223</sup> 'I could see passing through her eyes [Albertine's eyes] first hope for, then the memory of, perhaps regret for joys that I could not guess at, joys which she preferred to renounce rather than tell me of them, and of which, seeing only their light reflected in her pupils, I could perceive no more than the late-comer who has not been allowed to enter the theatre and who, his eye glued to the glass panel in the door, can see nothing of what is happening on stage. [...] During these hours, I would sometimes see floating around her, in her look, in a passing facial expression, in her smile, the reflection of these inner visions: dwelling on them made her indifferent on those evenings, distant from me as she would not share them' (5, 355).

Que de gens, que de lieux (même qui ne la concernaient pas directement, de vagues lieux de plaisir où elle avait pu en goûter, les lieux où il y a beaucoup de monde, où on est frôlé) Albertine – comme une personne qui, faisant passer sa suite, toute une société, au contrôle devant elle, la fait entrer au théâtre – du seuil de mon imagination ou de mon souvenir, où je ne me souciais pas d’eux, avait introduits dans mon cœur! Maintenant, la connaissance que j’avais d’eux était interne, immédiate, spasmodique, douloureuse. L’amour, c’est l’espace et le temps rendus sensible au cœur. (III, 887)<sup>224</sup>

As though *his* interiority, this time, were a theatre, the narrator describes the experience of loving Albertine as one of being colonised and filled to the brim with scenes and images that are imposed on him from the outside. In the theatre of his mind, the inner visions feature not only her but also every place she has or may have visited, and every person she has or may have met. To love, for Proust’s protagonist, is to be haunted by these immaterial presences, to crave the possession of all the spaces and moments that she has known. As Anne Carson perceptively notes in paragraph 46 of *The Albertine Workout*, a prose poem that is also a creative and wonderfully playful contribution to the critical commentary on *À la recherche*: ‘The jealous lover cannot rest until he is able to touch all the points in space and time ever occupied by the beloved’.<sup>225</sup> This love, then, is heartache in a literal way, that is, painful and intimate confrontations with inner visions that agitate the lover’s body like violent muscular contractions, and that do not let him rest. The theatrical analogy enables Proust to convey the pains of love by way of its effect on the lover’s mind and on his body, which finds itself drawn into the act of imagining and turns into a *spectatorial* body faced with the hallucinated presence of past moments and places that have some affinity with the beloved. These hallucinations pain him as though they were also part

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<sup>224</sup> ‘How many different people, how many places (even places not involving her directly, vague places of entertainment where she might have tasted some pleasure, places where crowds of people go, where they brush against one) Albertine – like someone who, ushering a whole group of people, all her friends, past the ticket-desk in front of her, gets them all into the theatre – had ushered in from the fringes of my imagination and my memory, where I was taking no notice of them, and installed in my heart! Now my knowledge of them was an internal thing, immediate, spasmodic, painful. Love is space and time made apprehensible to the heart’ (5, 356).

<sup>225</sup> Anne Carson, *The Albertine Workout* (New York: New Directions, 2014), p. 16.

of the phenomenal world, and the power they exercise over him does not diminish when Albertine dies.

In the aftermath of Albertine's death, the protagonist, struck by jealousy and grief, searches obsessively for details concerning the life she led when she was not with him. He sends Aimé to Balbec to enquire on his behalf. After a while, he receives a letter that confirms his suspicions with regards to her sexuality. A bathhouse girl has told Aimé that Albertine used to come to the bathhouse to shower. During her visits, Albertine was often accompanied by *'une grande femme plus âgée qu'elle, toujours habillée en gris, et que la doucheuse sans savoir son nom connaissait pour l'avoir vue souvent rechercher des jeunes filles'* [*'a tall woman older than herself, dressed always in grey, and whom the bath-house girl without knowing her name knew of as a result of often having seen her on the look-out for girls'*] (IV, 97; 5, 481). Aimé's words elicit vivid images in the protagonist's mind, but neither these words nor the images they evoke suffice to explain the pain he feels at reading the letter. The pain resides in a space between word and image, object and mind, or rather, in the dynamic exchange of affect between the two. The images elicited by Aimé's letter cause the protagonist to suffer when he reads it, since they are so wholly unexpected: *'Je me disais: « Elle aime peut-être les femmes », comme on se dit: « Je peux mourir ce soir »; on se le dit, mais on ne le croit pas, on fait des projets pour le lendemain'* [*'I thought, "Perhaps she does love women," as one thinks, "I might die during the night"; we say the words to ourselves, but we do not believe them, we make plans for the morrow'*] (IV, 96; 5, 480). The narrator explains that he felt,

devant les images, insignifiantes pour d'autres, que m'évoquait la lettre d'Aimé, une souffrance inattendue, la plus cruelle que j'eusse ressentie encore, et qui formait avec ces images, avec l'image, hélas! d'Albertine elle-même, une sorte de précipité comme on dit en chimie, où tout était indivisible et dont le texte de la lettre d'Aimé, que j'en sépare d'une façon toute conventionnelle, ne peut donner aucunement l'idée, puisque chacun des mots qui la composent était aussitôt transformé, coloré à jamais par la souffrance qu'il venait d'exciter. (IV, 96)<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> 'faced with the images elicited by Aimé's letter, which others would have found insignificant, [...] an unexpected suffering, the most cruel that I had yet experienced and which, alas, formed with these images, with the image of Albertine herself, into a sort of precipitate, as one says in chemistry, where everything was indivisible and of which the text

Clearly, then, this act of reading affects not only the emotions but also the body of the reader. But there is more to it than that, since not only the reader but also the *words* are affected, transformed and coloured in this encounter. And, likewise, the images that the words produce are also altered by his pain, and metamorphose into a fragment of another world:

Mais aussitôt, la douleur avait réagi sur elles [ces images]; [...] ma souffrance les avait immédiatement altérées *en leur matière même*, je ne les voyais pas dans la lumière qui éclaire les spectacles de la terre, c'était *le fragment d'un autre monde*, d'une planète inconnue et maudite, une vue de l'Enfer. (IV, 99, my emphases)<sup>227</sup>

The phenomenological nature of reading, and the reciprocally-affecting relation between subject and object of perception, is striking in the paragraphs dedicated to the reading of Aimé's letter, which is staged as an encounter between bodies that react to one another and produce a sort of chemical precipitate: an inner vision no less frightening than the 'spectacles intérieurs' that the protagonist saw reflected in Albertine's eyes: 'Enfin je voyais devant moi, dans cette arrivée d'Albertine à la douche par la petite rue avec la dame en gris un fragment de ce passé qui ne me semblait pas moins mystérieux, moins effroyable que je ne le redoutais quand je l'imaginai enfermé dans le souvenir, dans le regard d'Albertine' ['At last, in Albertine walking with the lady in grey down the little street that led to the bath-house, I saw before my eyes a fragment of that past which seemed to me no less mysterious and terrifying than I had feared when I imagined it enclosed within Albertine's eyes and within her memories'] (IV, 98; 5, 483). Proust's paragraph is structured as a tableau and in accordance with a theatrical structure that instates the protagonist as a spectator before the hallucinated presence of a spectacle (an imaginary scene from

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of Aimé's letter, which I have laid out in a purely conventional fashion, can give no idea, since each of the words that composed it was immediately transformed and coloured for ever by the suffering that it had just induced' (5, 481).

<sup>227</sup> 'But these images had immediately been affected by my pain; [...] my suffering had immediately eaten *into their very substance*, I no longer saw them in the light which illuminates earthly visions, it was *a fragment of another world*, an unknown planet of the damned, a vision of Hell' (5, 484, my emphases).

Albertine's past). It is his mind that has fabricated this imaginary scene, and yet the uneasiness that it provokes in him reveals that the relation between his mind and this 'spectacle intérieur' is problematic in a way that requires us to consider what the passage tells us about the theatrical dimension of reading.

The association of reading with a form of spectatorial agency is commonplace in *À la recherche*.<sup>228</sup> In a famous passage about reading at the very beginning of the novel, the narrator professes a deep fascination for reading's ability to provoke multi-sensory hallucinations. The narrator, remembering long afternoons of reading in the garden of his childhood home in Combray, describes how, while reading, his consciousness would unfold '[un] espèce d'écran diapré d'états différents' ['a sort of screen dappled with different states of mind'] (I, 83; 1, 86), which ranged from the completely exterior vision he had before his eyes in the garden where he sat reading, to the wholly inner visions created by his imagination. Sometimes, he maintains, the effect that reading had on him was so strong that it obstructed his senses: 'l'intérêt de la lecture, magique comme un profond sommeil, avait donné le change à mes oreilles hallucinées et effacé la cloche d'or sur la surface azurée du silence' ['the interest of the reading, as magical as a deep sleep, had deceived my hallucinated ears and erased the golden bell from the azure surface of the silence'] (I, 87; 1, 89). In Proust's view, then, it seems that reading is not merely an interior adventure, but a practice engaging both the mind and the senses of the reader. Aimé's letters, however, provide reading experiences as tormenting as the afternoons of reading in Combray were pleasurable: 'Je souffrais jusqu'au fond de moi-même, jusque dans mon corps, dans mon cœur' ['I suffered in the very depths of my being, in my body as well as my heart'] (IV, 107; 5, 492). The suffering that these letters induce is due not least to the fact that the images they evoke are not (only) the products of his own imagination, but images imposed on him from the outside: 'c'est du dehors, sans que je fusse prévenu, sans que je pusse moi-même élaborer les images, c'est de la lettre d'Aimé que m'étaient venues ces images d'Albertine arrivant à la douche et préparant son pourboire' ['it was from outside, without warning, without being able to elaborate the images myself, it was

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<sup>228</sup> A particularly insightful exploration of the complex and diverse reading experiences in *À la recherche* is provided by Adam Watt's *Reading in Proust's 'À la recherche': 'le délire de la lecture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

from Aimé's letter that I had received these images of Albertine going into the showers and preparing her tip'] (IV, 99; 5, 483). In the description of this latter reading experience, the narrator identifies reading as the experience of being invaded by images foreign to himself. Similarly to the reader in Poulet's essay on the phenomenology of reading, the protagonist becomes, in these paragraphs, something like *prey* to what he reads. In Poulet's words, the reader's thoughts are *invaded* by those of another:

Because of the strange invasion of my person by the thoughts of another, I am a self who is granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to him. I am the subject of thoughts other than my own. My consciousness behaves as though it were the consciousness of another. [...] Whatever I think is part of *my* mental world. And yet here I am thinking a thought which manifestly belongs to another mental world, which is being thought in me just as though I did not exist. Already the notion is inconceivable and seems even more so if I reflect that, since every thought must have a subject to think it, this *thought* which is alien to me and yet in me, must also have in me a *subject* which is alien to me. It all happens, then, as though reading were the act by which a thought managed to bestow itself within me with a subject not myself.<sup>229</sup>

Poulet's curious image of the reader's mind as annexed by another subject, come to share the reader's consciousness for a while, helps to explain, perhaps, how Proust's protagonist can feel both that the images that have invaded him are something alien, something that is not his own, and, at the same time, that he is intimately related to these images, which affect his body and his heart in an immediate way. They are part of *his* mental world, but, at the same time, they are foreign, and they transform him into a spectator *in his own mind* of terrifying spectacles from another mental world.

Aimé's letters, then, are not mere objects among other objects residing in the external world, and we are not able to grasp the anguish they cause simply by looking at them or reading them. Rather, these letters, which Proust's narrator quotes to us in full, are only able to convey this anguish when we see them through the prism of the suffering they induce in him, that is, when we see not only *what* he read but also *how* he perceived what he read. And this *how* of perception (which is exactly that aspect of the perceptual experience that is best 'symbolised' by the theatre, since it can only be

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<sup>229</sup> Poulet, 'Phenomenology of Reading,' p. 56.

mediated by way of an inscribed perceiving subject) is precisely what the tableau, by staging the subject's encounter with the perceived object, enables Proust to convey.

One day, perhaps a year or two before her death, the protagonist beholds Albertine dancing with her friend, Andrée, at a casino in Incarville. When he hears her laughter, the sound pleases him:

Et ce rire évoquait aussitôt les roses carnations, les parois parfumées contre lesquelles il semblait qu'il vînt de se frotter et dont, âcre, sensuel et révélateur comme une odeur de géranium, il semblait transporter avec lui quelques particules presque pondérables, irritantes et secrètes. (III, 191)<sup>230</sup>

The initial description of Albertine's laughter relates an intimate experience, as sound turns into an intrusive odour, both sensual and irritating. Notably, this peculiarly intimate odour-sound is conceived as *revelatory*. For a brief moment, it is as though he occupies that privileged position of the invisible spectator before a spectacle promising to reveal its innermost secrets to him. Then, a doctor by the name of Cottard, standing right beside him, points out that the women's breasts are touching, and that females, moreover, are known to draw most of their sexual pleasure by way of their breasts – these women, then, 'sont certainement au comble de la jouissance' ['[are] certainly at the height of arousal'] (III, 191; 4, 197). It matters neither that Cottard is almost blind, nor that his theory of female sexuality is somewhat off the mark: the doctor's words work like poison and cause a pain that serves to alter the protagonist's perceptions. When Albertine laughs again, the exact same sound is experienced very differently:

Andrée dit à ce moment un mot à Albertine et celle-ci rit du même rire pénétrant et profond que j'avais entendu tout à l'heure. Mais le trouble qu'il m'apporta cette fois ne me fut plus que cruel; Albertine avait l'air d'y montrer, de faire constater à Andrée quelque frémissement voluptueux et secret. Il sonnait comme les premiers ou les derniers accords d'une fête inconnue. (III, 191)<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> 'And that laugh at once summoned up the pink carnations, the perfumed walls against which it seemed to have just brushed and from which, pungent, sensual and revealing as the scent of geraniums, it seemed to be transporting with it a few almost ponderable, irritant and secret particles' (4, 197).

<sup>231</sup> 'At that moment, Andrée said something to Albertine and the latter laughed, with that same deep, penetrating laugh I had heard just before. But the disturbance it brought me this time was more than simply cruel; Albertine seemed to be demonstrating, to be making Andrée



The second time around, the sound of Albertine's laughter has changed. That is to say that it has changed *inside him*. The sound is identical to the one heard before ('celle-ci rit du même rire'), but because his attitude has changed, the impression changes too. Where there was a pleasurable and inviting odour of flowers, there is now an echo of a celebration to which he is not invited. A tangible distance between subject and object of perception thus manifests itself – a distance that increases the protagonist's attentiveness with regards to the fact that he is in the presence of an individual unknowable and radically separate from himself. Whereas, initially, he experienced the sound of her laughter as an intrusive and intimate odour, the second time around, it has returned to its aural state. Parallel to losing its synaesthetic potential, her laughter also loses its seductive allure, since it no longer seems to invite the protagonist to discover its secrets, but instead serves to remind him of his exclusion and to provoke in him an experience of being an outsider. He now conceives her laughter as a manifestation of some secret agreement between the two young women. This change in the spectator's disposition ostensibly affects the performers as well, for, just as Cottard draws the protagonist's attention to the intimate way in which the women's bodies touch, Albertine and Andrée withdraw from one another: 'Je ne sais si elles entendirent ou devinèrent la réflexion de Cottard, mais elles se détachèrent légèrement l'une de l'autre tout en continuant à valser' ['I do not know whether they heard or guessed at Cottard's observation, but they drew slightly apart while continuing to waltz'] (III, 191; 4, 197).

The change that Albertine's laughter undergoes in this paragraph serves as a reminder that every impression is 'double' in a dual sense: it illustrates, as we have seen, that every impression has two parts, that it resides partly within and partly outside the subject, but also that, as Barthes was cited saying in the Introduction, everything in Proust's novel is subject to constant permutations, and destined to repeat itself in an inverted form ('Tout trait est appelé à se renverser, par un mouvement de rotation implacable' ['Every feature is required to reverse itself, by an implacable

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acknowledge, some secret and voluptuous tremor. It had the ring of the first or last chords of some unknown celebration' (4, 197).

movement of rotation’]<sup>232</sup>). Similarly to La Berma’s acting, Albertine’s laughter is both the one and the other, inviting and excluding – the second impression is not truer than the first, it simply presents him with a new and different illusion. As such, these impressions serve as a reminder that the world in which the Proustian subject lives is perceived as a theatre in which the spectacles’ tone and signification are subject to constant shifts in accordance with changes inside the spectator and in the spectator’s *particular way of seeing*.

We may say, then, that the complete and sudden transformation of Albertine’s laughter illustrates the constitutive quality of the subject’s mode of perception, but that it also shows us a subject constituted in the encounter with a perceived object. For when the protagonist is forced to revise his conception of Albertine, this causes him to change as well: ‘À partir du jour où Cottard fut entré avec moi dans le petit casino d’Incarville, sans partager l’opinion qu’il avait émise, Albertine ne me sembla plus la même; sa vue me causait de la colère. *Moi-même j’avais changé tout autant qu’elle me semblait autre*’ [‘From the day when Cottard had gone with me into the little Incarville casino, without sharing the opinion he had given voice to, I no longer saw Albertine in the same light; the sight of her produced anger in me. *I had myself changed so much that she seemed other*’] (III, 198; 4, 204, my emphasis). The example thus turns out to illustrate, perhaps above all, that the encounter between spectator and spectacle in Proust is not only mutually affecting but also mutually *constitutive*, since not only the object but also the subject is, as it were, ‘constituted’ in the encounter. As such, the scene exemplifies how the tableau’s theatrical structure enables Proust (not least due to the way that it allows him to play with the different ways in which the subject and object of perception may relate to one another) to *stage* the constitutive and reciprocal relationship between the two. The casino episode juxtaposes, in fact, *two* tableaux; that is, two examples of how the protagonist reacts to one sound, Albertine’s laughter, which (since the quality of this sound changes according to his reactions) must be considered (as all Proustian objects, for that matter) a properly *subjectivised* object.

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<sup>232</sup> Barthes, ‘Une idée de recherche,’ in *De Shakespeare à T.S. Eliot. Mélanges offerts à Henri Fluchère*, p. 286. [Barthes, ‘An Idea of Research,’ in *The Rustle of Language*, p. 275.]

In light of what the present analysis has revealed about the novel's theatricality (by which I mean to evoke, here, the novel's staging of a perceived object in different states, but always in the presence of a perceiving subject, and, as it were, 'signed' by this individual), we may say that the phenomenal objects of *À la recherche* are always, in one way or another, spectacles presenting themselves to a human being. They are, we may say, never presented 'telles qu'elles sont', for the simple reason that such an 'objectivised' object would not, in Proust's view, be true to 'life':

Notre tort est de présenter les choses telles qu'elles sont, les noms tels qu'ils sont écrits, les gens tels que la photographie et la psychologie donnent d'eux une notion immobile. Mais en réalité ce n'est pas du tout cela que nous percevons d'habitude. *Nous voyons, nous entendons, nous concevons le monde tout de travers*. Nous répétons un nom tel que nous l'avons entendu jusqu'à ce que l'expérience ait rectifié notre erreur, ce qui n'arrive pas toujours. Tout le monde à Combray parla pendant vingt-cinq ans à Françoise de Mme Sazerat et Françoise continua à dire Mme Sazerin [...] parce qu'en réalité elle continua toujours d'entendre Sazerin. Cette perpétuelle erreur qui est précisément la « vie », ne donne pas ses mille formes seulement à l'univers visible et à l'univers audible, mais à l'univers social, à l'univers sentimental, à l'univers historique, etc. (IV, 153-54, my emphasis)<sup>233</sup>

Our perception of reality is always, in fact, somewhat askew. We perceive the world 'tout de travers', that is to say, we mostly get it all wrong. But an artwork aiming to convey any veritable knowledge about *how* a human being perceives the world has to accentuate precisely this unavoidable misapprehension, for this 'perpétuelle erreur [...] est précisément la « vie »' ['perpetual error [...] is nothing but "life" itself']. This perpetual error, moreover, manifests itself not only in the subject's perception of the visual and the audible universe but affects also the social, sentimental and historical dimensions of life. In other words, sensory errors, such as Françoise's confusion with

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<sup>233</sup> 'Our error stems from believing that things habitually appear to us as they are in reality, names as they are written, people as the static concepts presented by photography and psychology. But in fact reality is not at all what we usually perceive. *We see, hear and conceive the world inside out and back to front*. We repeat a name as we first heard it, until experience rectifies the error – but this does not always happen. Everyone in Combray spoke to Françoise of Mme Sazerat, and yet Françoise continued to call her Mme Sazerin [...] because in fact she still continued to hear it as "Sazerin". This perpetual error, which is nothing but "life" itself, does not invest with its thousand forms the visible and audible universes alone, but also the social, sentimental, historical and other universes, too' (5, 538, my emphasis).

regards to Mme Sazerat's name or the protagonist's misinterpretation of the sounds he hears in Jupien's brothel, have a symbolic value that extends well beyond the specific situations in which they occur. They manifest what, for Proust, must be a fundamental truth about perception, namely that what we perceive is often mere illusions, hallucinations, errors and incoherences, but also that these 'errors' are precisely what, for each individual, constitutes 'life'.

In this section, we have seen that Proust identifies the experience of love partly as a 'theatrical' experience, in the sense that it confronts the protagonist, as a spectator in the theatre of his own mind, with scenes and images from Albertine's life elsewhere. To love is, it seems, to experience one's heart and mind as a theatre invaded by another subject, and to feel oneself intimately connected to, and physically affected by, visions that stem from this other mental world. Typically, the scenes that Proust's protagonist imagines, both in the presence of Albertine and in her absence, are spectacles in which he does not play any active part, or from which he is entirely absent. Despite the fact that it is the protagonist's active imagination that brings forth these mental scenes, the narrator depicts his younger self as a passive spectator, prey to the terrifying scenes he is forced to witness and is unable to affect. The theatrical quality of the perceptual impressions in Proust becomes particularly noticeable when the narrator, in the example we shall study in the final analysis of this chapter, transforms the impression of listening to music into a spectatorial experience. This scene thus offers a paradigmatic example of the theatricalising disposition of the perceiving mind in *À la recherche*.

### **2.3 The Spectator Within**

Every impression comes in two parts, and it is – on this Proust insists – the personal root of our impression that we should study in depth. Regardless of the nature of the object we study, be it nature, society, love, or art, we are required, in order to comprehend the impression, to engage in hard introspective investigations. And, as we have seen in the examples examined in this chapter, this occasionally entails becoming a spectator to and in one's own mind. Proust's reflections on introspection as a way to comprehend what actually happens when we perceive something become particularly

articulate in the novel's discourse on art, as when the narrator, in speaking of his first encounter with Vinteuil's septet, describes himself in the act of listening to this musical piece as a 'spectateur intérieur':

Puis elles [les phrases musicales] s'éloignèrent, sauf une que je vis repasser jusqu'à cinq et six fois, sans que je pusse apercevoir son visage, mais si caressante, si différente – comme sans doute la petite phrase de la sonate pour Swann – de ce qu'aucune femme n'avait jamais fait désirer, que cette phrase-là qui m'offrait d'une voix si douce un bonheur qu'il eût vraiment valu la peine d'obtenir, c'est peut-être – cette créature invisible dont je ne connaissais pas le langage et que je comprenais si bien – la seule Inconnue qu'il m'ait jamais été donné de rencontrer. Puis cette phrase se défit, se transforma, comme faisait la petite phrase de la sonate, et devint le mystérieux appel du début. Une phrase d'un caractère douloureux s'opposa à lui, mais si profonde, si vague, si interne, presque si organique et viscérale qu'on ne savait pas, à chacune de ses reprises, si c'était celle d'un thème ou d'une névralgie. Bientôt les deux motifs luttèrent ensemble dans un corps à corps où parfois l'un disparaissait entièrement, où ensuite on n'apercevait plus qu'un morceau de l'autre. Corps à corps d'énergies seulement, à vrai dire; car si ces êtres s'affrontaient, c'était débarrassés de leur corps physique, de leur apparence, de leur nom, et trouvant chez moi un spectateur intérieur – insoucieux lui aussi des noms et du particulier – pour s'intéresser à leur combat immatériel et dynamique et en suivre avec passion les péripéties sonores. (III, 764)<sup>234</sup>

When he listens to Vinteuil's septet, a musical piece previously unknown to him, the protagonist transforms into a spectator, or, rather, into *two* spectators: 'moi' and 'lui'

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<sup>234</sup> 'Then the phrases faded away, except one which I saw pass by again up to five or six times, not letting me see her face, but so tender, so different – as the little phrase from the sonata no doubt was for Swann – from anything that any woman had yet led me to desire, that that phrase, offering me in such a gentle voice a kind of happiness which would have truly been worth attaining – that invisible creature whose language I could not understand and yet whom I understood so well – was perhaps the only Unknown Woman it has ever been granted to me to meet. Then that phrase dissolved, changed its shape, like the little phrase in the sonata, and turned into the mysterious call of the beginning of the piece. A phrase of sorrowful character came to counter it, but it was so deep, so formless, so inward, so almost organic and visceral that each time it reappeared one was not sure if what was recurring was a theme or a nerve-pain. Soon the two motifs vied for supremacy in a struggle in which sometimes one disappeared entirely, and then one saw only a small part of the other. It was a wrestling-match of pure energies, however, for if these beings struggled against each other, it was without the encumbrance of their bodies, their outward appearances, their names, and they found in me an inward spectator – equally indifferent to names and individual character – ready to involve himself in their immaterial, dynamic combat and to follow with passion its vicissitudes of sound' (5, 238-39).

(me and him). The paragraph presents the concept of the ‘spectateur intérieur’ through a fascinating *mise en scène* that seems to disclose the essence of Proustian perception: it stages the protagonist as a spectator engaged in a process of simultaneous discovery and invention. As he listens to a piece of music, he transforms it into a spectacle.

The two motifs that struggle for supremacy in Vinteuil’s septet are complete opposites: the first, a veritable ‘Inconnu’, something completely unknown, invisible and exterior, and the latter something entirely internal, so almost organic and visceral ‘qu’on ne savait pas, à chacune de ses reprises, si c’était celle d’un thème ou d’une névralgie’ [‘that each time it reappeared one was not sure if what was recurring was a theme or a nerve-pain’]. Is it a theme or neuralgia? Proust must have recognised the brilliance of his own comparison, for it occurs (intentionally or by accident) twice in the novel, and first in reference to Wagner’s œuvre.<sup>235</sup> But what does it mean, in fact? Is the internal, organic and visceral meant to characterise the musical works? Is he implying that the motifs behave like nerve pain, as some involuntary, spasmodic expression of the artist’s interiority? Or do the words describe the effect that the music has on the protagonist? Is he, like Mme Verdurin, whose forehead, under the influence of the ‘innombrables névralgies que la musique de Bach, de Wagner, de Vinteuil, de Debussy, lui avaient occasionnées [...] avait pris des proportions énormes’ [‘countless attacks of neuralgia, brought on by the music of Bach, Wagner, Vinteuil and Debussy, [...] had assumed vast proportions, like limbs finally deformed by rheumatism’] (III, 298; 4, 303), a *victim* of musically-induced nerve pain? And, if the term is meant to characterise the artworks, is there neuralgia also in Proust’s novel? And, if so, does the *mise en scène* of the protagonist’s encounter with Vinteuil’s œuvre indicate a way for us to read *À la recherche*?

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<sup>235</sup> ‘Je me rendais compte de tout ce qu’a de réel l’œuvre de Wagner, en revoyant ces thèmes insistants et fugaces qui visitent un acte, ne s’éloignent que pour revenir, et parfois lointains, assoupis, presque détachés, sont à d’autres moments, tout en restant vagues, si pressants et si proches, si internes, si organiques, si viscéraux qu’on dirait la reprise moins d’un motif que d’une névralgie’ [‘I realised how intensely realistic Wagner’s work is, as I recalled those insistent, fleeting themes which appear in one act, fade away only to return and, sometimes distant, muted, almost detached, are at other times, while still vague, so immediate, so pressing, so internal, organic, visceral that their return seems not so much that of a motif as of a nerve pain’] (III, 665; 5, 142).

Vinteuil, as the paragraph above implies, has presumably been able to do the same as Wagner, that is, to find the means to convey something that cannot readily be uttered: ‘cette essence qualitative des sensations d’un autre’ [‘the qualitative essence of another’s sensations’] (III, 665; 5, 143). And the protagonist is, it seems, able to perceive this ‘qualitative essence’ by staging himself as a spectator (within his own mind, but also, somehow, *within* the music) of the dynamic combat between the motifs of the septet – a combat that is, essentially, a wrestling-match between ‘pure energies’.

Considering that the paragraph describes the act of listening to music, it says remarkably little about how it all sounds. In fact, it seems as though the act of describing *what* the protagonist hears is abandoned on behalf of a staging of *how* he perceives it and of what happens within him when he listens. In other words, it is, in a strange way, *he* that becomes the object of perception in this paragraph, in which he acts as both spectator and spectacle, *moi* and *lui*, as both subject and object, or rather, as a *voyant-visible*, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms: ‘un être à deux feuillets, d’un côté chose parmi les choses et, par ailleurs, celui qui les voit et les touche’ [‘a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them’].<sup>236</sup> His perception of Vinteuil’s septet, then, is ‘doubled’ by another perception: himself seen from the outside in the act of listening to Vinteuil.

The subject of the paragraph is not so much music, then, as the staging (of) perception. However, at a first glance, it could perhaps only with some difficulty be regarded a paradigmatic example of the workings of perception, since it concerns not an ordinary situation, but a rare encounter with great art. Undoubtedly, the narrator describes an exceptional experience and something out of the ordinary. And yet, the unusualness of this experience presumably does not *alter* the way that he perceives, although it increases both his susceptibility to external impulses and, moreover, his awareness to the vicissitudes of sound and to the very process of perception, figuratively expressed as an encounter with pure energies. We might suggest, then, that the paragraph discloses the spectatorial qualities always at work in perception, but not always conceived as such. In which case, the encounter with an artwork, and, in

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<sup>236</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, p. 180, my emphasis. [Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Intertwining - The Chiasm,’ in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 254, my emphasis.]

this case, an *unfamiliar* artwork (as we have seen on several occasions already, the encounter with something unfamiliar often leads the protagonist to interpret what he perceives in theatrical terms), is identified as a factor intensifying the subject's attentiveness with regards to the theatricality of perception. The paragraph thereby attains an emblematic quality, as a form of metatext in which the novel ponders the perception of art. The figure of the 'spectateur intérieur', then, could be viewed as a sort of model reader, a model whose aesthetic experience mirrors our own encounter with *À la recherche*.

In order to uncover the 'qualitative essence' of sensations in *À la recherche*, the reader of Proust's work may proceed in ways not unlike those of the 'spectateur intérieur'. The act of paying close attention to the work's 'péripiétés sonores' ['vicissitudes of sound'], that is, of cultivating sensitivity for the musicality of language, is in fact crucial if we wish to understand another person's experience of life, as Diderot reminds us in the acclaimed 'Promenade Vernet', in which he discusses, among other things, the possibilities for verbally conveying subjective experiences. In the 'Promenade', Diderot goes about exploring Claude-Joseph Vernet's landscape paintings by describing an imaginary entry into, and a walk through, the painted landscapes. Diderot's staging of himself as a beholder present *within* the painting – that is, as a 'spectateur intérieur' – is motivated by his desire to find the proper means to express individual perception. The problem, as Diderot articulates it in the 'Promenade', is that verbal language is not rich enough to convey the full variety of what is felt by each individual. Diderot is quite unambiguous in his views on the inadequacy of words, and the Abbé, the fictional interlocutor accompanying him on his wanderings within Vernet's landscapes, summarises his views in the following manner: 'à votre avis, les deux parleurs qui ont dit la même chose dans les mêmes mots; les deux poètes qui ont fait les deux mêmes vers sur un même sujet, n'ont eu aucune sensation commune; et si la langue avait été assez féconde pour répondre à toute la variété de leurs sensations, ils se seraient exprimés tout diversement' ['In your view, the two speakers who've said the same thing in the same words, and the two poets who've composed identical verses treating the same subject have not had the same feelings; and if language were sufficiently rich to answer to the full variety of



their feelings, they'd have expressed themselves very differently'].<sup>237</sup> Faced with the paucity of words, then, Diderot presents the *musicality* of language as that which enables the subject to speak as he feels, as 'himself and none other than himself':

C'est cette variété d'accents que vous avez très bien remarquée qui supplée à la disette des mots et qui détruit les identités si fréquentes d'effets produits par les mêmes causes. La quantité des mots est bornée. Celle des accents est infinie. C'est ainsi que chacun a sa langue propre, individuelle, et parle comme il sent, est froid, ou chaud, rapide ou tranquille, est lui et n'est que lui, tandis qu'à l'idée et à l'expression il paraît ressembler à un autre... J'ai, dit l'abbé, souvent été frappé de la disparate de la chose et du ton... Et moi aussi. Quoique cette langue d'accent soit infinie, elle s'entend. C'est la langue de nature. C'est le modèle du musicien. C'est la source vraie du grand symphoniste.<sup>238</sup>

In the 'Promenade', Diderot undertakes a verbal *mise en scène* of how the encounter with Vernet's paintings affected him. While this verbal staging does not enable him to fully reproduce the desirable 'language of accents', it arguably brings him closer to communicating his experience, since it allows the reader to imagine how these various sensations affected his body and mind. When the *Salon* turns into a *tableau theatre* in which aesthetic experiences are staged, Diderot's text invites the reader to reconstruct the art critic's perceptions in the theatre of his or her mind, and thus to follow the vicissitudes of another's sensory impressions from within his or her self, as a veritable 'spectateur intérieur'. This is arguably also what *À la recherche* invites us to do when Proust stages his protagonist in the act of listening to Vinteuil's septet as a spectator to

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<sup>237</sup> Denis Diderot, *Salon de 1767; Salon de 1769*, ed. Else Marie Bukdahl, Michel Delon, and Annette Lorenceau, vol. XVI, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Hermann, 1990), p. 220. [Denis Diderot, *Diderot on Art: 2: The Salon of 1767*, ed. and trans. John Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 117.]

<sup>238</sup> Diderot, *Salon de 1767; Salon de 1769*, p. 220. ['It's this variety of accents, which you've so clearly noticed, that compensates for the paucity of words and destroys the identity of effects so frequently produced by the same causes. The number of words is limited, while that of accents is infinite; this is why each of us has his own individual language, and speaks as he feels, is detached or ardent, agitated or placid; is himself and none other than himself, although at the level of idea and verbal expression he appears to resemble another. – I've often been struck, said the Abbé, by the inconsistency of matter and of tonal expression. – So have I; although this language of accents is infinite, we still manage to understand it. It's the language of nature, it's the musician's model, it's the real source of the great symphonist'. Diderot, *Diderot on Art: 2: The Salon of 1767*, p. 117.]

a tableau in which he himself is instated as a spectator within the musical piece. Like Diderot's beholder, Proust's protagonist is at one and the same time outside and within the artwork, a spectator *to* and a spectator *in* the perceptual drama.

In this chapter, I have, in light of three types of experiences (travel, love and the act of listening to music), explored Proust's staging of the encounter between spectatorial and performing bodies as a means to mediate perception. We have observed that Proust, by inscribing the perceiving subject into the spectacle (as a spectator, or as both spectator *and* actor), reveals the significance, in the constitution of every perceptual impression, of the 'vibratory' and mutually affective relationship between subject and object of perception. 'Toute impression est double', Proust writes, while insisting that the subjective part of the impression, the one that extends into the interiority of the perceiving subject, deserves the scrutinising attention of artists, since they alone, by way of studious introspective analysis, are able to perform that miracle, which without the existence of art would be unthinkable, of allowing others to see the world as they see it. In other words, he voices a call for artists to emphasise the subjectively tinted *how* of perception rather than the *what*. In *À la recherche*, as we have seen, Proust remains true to his own principle and turns his attentive gaze towards the intimate experience of things, attempting, that is, to convey *how* the world is experienced from within the body and mind of the perceiving subject. In doing this, he is faithful to the elegant image he draws in one of his notebooks, *Cahier 29*, in which he maintains that, as human beings, we remain so completely anchored in our minds and bodies that we can only ever reach for what lies outside ourselves like a person who observes nature from her or his living room, through the window opening:

Nous sommes des êtres qui n'allons vers le dehors qu'en partant du dedans de nous-mêmes et qui quand nous allons vers le dehors restons tout de même en nous [...]. Ainsi nous habitons toujours dans notre pensée et nous ne voyons le dehors que du dedans, comme un homme qui ne pourrait voir la nature que de son salon, les fenêtres ouvertes. (I, 752)<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> 'We are creatures that are only able to go outwards by starting from within ourselves, and when we do go outwards, we still remain inside ourselves [...]. Thus, we always live inside our own thoughts and we can only see what is outside from the inside, like a man who could only see nature through the open windows of his living room'.

Through the analysis conducted in this chapter, I have aimed to show that the theatre, and more exactly, the reciprocally constitutive relation between actors and audience, is a highly significant reference in Proust's mise en scène of the protagonist's *particular way of seeing*. It is, it seems, in order to emphasise the mediated character of his novelistic universe (the theatrical analogy underlines the fact that all is perceived 'tout de travers') that Proust identifies his protagonist as a spectator within his own mind or to what he witnesses in the world about him, but it is also in order to evoke the mutual *becoming-for-others* and the reciprocal transmission of affect between subject and object of perception, which the audience-performer relation in a theatre serves to 'symbolise' and manifest. Accordingly, when Proust's narrator identifies or alludes to the perceptual impression as a theatrical illusion, this presumably does not mean that the impression is in any way contrived and false, but simply that it corresponds to the protagonist's individual viewpoint, and to his constitution, in the act of perception. The fact that the Proustian spectator is, as it were, constituted in the act of perception is something we should bear in mind in the next chapter's critical discussion of the tableau device.

In light of this chapter, then, we may say that the staging of perception in *À la recherche* is a way for Proust to highlight the illusory nature of 'reality'; but, crucially, as I shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter, while theatricality serves Proust as a means to reveal 'reality' as an illusion, this does not imply that the novel identifies the theatrical as something *untrue*. On the contrary, the theatrical illusions often provide the most authentic expressions of life such as it is experienced by the novel's protagonists, of this 'perpétuelle erreur qui est précisément la « vie »'. At its very core, Proustian theatricality is characterised by precisely such a (seemingly) paradoxical flickering of illusion and awareness. In the next chapter, I shall examine what this apparent paradox implies for the constitution of the Proustian tableau.

### 3 Entr'acte: Exposing the Machinery

The paragraph concluding the madeleine episode in *Du côté de chez Swann*, the first volume of *À la recherche*, is undoubtedly one of French literature's most famous and most thoroughly analysed passages. The description of the Japanese game in which small pieces of paper find shape and colour when steeped in water has become an iconic image for the workings of involuntary memory. This is not, however, the only illustration of involuntary memory offered in this paragraph. In the first sentence, it is as a theatrical stage set that the town of Combray is said to emerge:

Et dès que j'eus reconnu le goût du morceau de madeleine trempé dans le tilleul que me donnait ma tante (quoique je ne susse pas encore et dusse remettre à bien plus tard de découvrir pourquoi ce souvenir me rendait si heureux), aussitôt la vieille maison grise sur la rue, où était sa chambre, vint *comme un décor de théâtre* s'appliquer au petit pavillon, donnant sur le jardin, qu'on avait construit pour mes parents sur ses derrières (ce pan tronqué que seul j'avais revu jusque-là); et avec la maison, la ville, depuis le matin jusqu'au soir et par tous les temps, la Place où on m'envoyait avant déjeuner, les rues où j'allais faire des courses, les chemins qu'on prenait si le temps était beau. (I, 47, my emphasis)<sup>240</sup>

The small town appearing before the protagonist's eyes as drawn onto a theatrical stage is a compelling image of remembrance, not least because it illustrates how, according to Proust, the search for lost time can never be completely disconnected from a spatial re-creation of the past. Memory, it appears, somehow functions like a theatre, staging aesthetic reconfigurations of bygone moments and places. This means that the person who remembers is never merely rediscovering the past, but also, to a certain extent, reinventing it: 'lui [l'esprit], le chercheur, est tout ensemble le pays obscur où il doit chercher et où tout son bagage ne lui sera de rien. Chercher? Pas seulement: créer. Il est en face de quelque chose qui n'est pas encore et que seul lui

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<sup>240</sup> 'And as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine dipped in lime-blossom tea that my aunt used to give me (though I did not yet know and had to put off to much later discovering why this memory made me so happy), immediately the old grey house on the street, where her bedroom was, came *like a stage-set* to attach itself to the little wing opening on to the garden that had been built for my parents behind it (that truncated section which was all I had seen before then); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square, where they sent me before lunch, the streets where I went to do errands, the paths we took if the weather was fine' (I, 50, my emphasis).

peut réaliser, puis faire entrer dans sa lumière' ['it [my mind], the seeker, is also the obscure country where it must seek and where all its baggage will be nothing to it. Seek? Not only that: create. It is face to face with something that does not yet exist and that only it can accomplish, then bring into its light'] (I, 45; 1, 48). In Proust's (involuntary) memory theatre, the person who remembers figures as a sort of light projector (a human magic lantern) faced with stage sets that are partially a rediscovery and partially a re-creation of past impressions and experiences, but, crucially, these stage sets are not of the same kind as 'cette sorte de pan lumineux, découpé au milieu d'indistinctes ténèbres' ['this sort of luminous panel, cut out from among indistinct panels'] (I, 43; 1, 46) that voluntary memory projects (a sort of static image isolated from everything around it). Instead, these scenes have *form* and *substance* (I, 47; 1, 50); that is to say that they are not mere visual projections, but a whole world sprung back to life again, into the midst of which the individual who remembers is plunged, and thereby introduced anew to lost sounds, odours and atmospheres from the past.

But memory, of course, only functions as a theatre because perception does too. As several examples studied in the first two chapters of the thesis have shown, in *À la recherche*, perception is *staged*, that is to say that it is subject to a *mise en scène* within the novel. But Proustian perception is also, as we have observed, a *staging* perception, which theatricalises the object it perceives, by turning it, with the assistance of the imagination, into a spectacle. Like the process of remembrance – and on this Proust insists – the act of perceiving is partly about discovering an external reality and partly about creating something in our minds, and therefore, as we have seen, 'toute impression est double'. Thus the scenes that come to view in Combray, Montjouvain or Doncières cannot be separated from the perceiving subject or from the act of perception that constitutes them, no more than the spectacles in Maineville, in Jupien's brothel or in the casino in Incarville can. And by always keeping the spectator 'in the picture' – both explicitly, by inscribing the perceiving subject (visible or hidden) into every tableau, and implicitly, by insisting that we see, hear and conceive everything 'tout de travers' – Proust makes the act of giving form a subject of his novel. He turns *form into matter*. In *À la recherche*, in other words, every act of perception is a form of *action*, a form of work that gives shape (malleable and

modifiable, not rigid and final) to reality, and every tableau is an opportunity for the author to direct a sort of magnifying attention to the perceiving subject's theatricalising agency.

This chapter explores the Proustian tableau's staging of the spectator in an act of simultaneous discovery and creation in light of Roland Barthes's tableau criticism in the article 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein' (1974), and in relation to Barthes's view on *À la recherche* as a work that stages its own fabrication, an 'œuvre-maquette', as well as, finally, in relation to Barthes's suggestion, in a 1972 round-table discussion on Proust, that *À la recherche* may be viewed as a novel possessing only a non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality. My aim here is to obtain a more detailed definition of the literary device that I refer to as the Proustian tableau by exposing the concept to some critical perspectives. Basically, if Barthes is correct in claiming that the theatricality of Proust's novel is what he calls *non-hysterical* theatricality (a form of theatricality that reveals its own artifice and that, as he sees it, stands in direct opposition to Western theatre), then it seems contradictory to say that this theatricality manifests itself in *À la recherche* by way of tableaux, given that the tableau, as conceived by Diderot (again, according to Barthes), represents a form of theatricality radically opposed to the non-hysterical: a *hysterical* theatricality that attempts to hide its own artifice. What Barthes's criticism of Western theatricality implies, in fact, is that it would be *paradoxical* to say that Proust writes tableaux (tableaux being the epitome of Western theatre post-Diderot) while at the same time arguing that his novel's theatricality is of the non-hysterical kind. How, then (if at all), can *À la recherche* be both? That is, how can this novel be, as I see it, a 'tableau theatre' and *also* possess, as Barthes sees it, a 'non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality'? The present chapter's discussion of this problem will lead us towards a theatrical genre that occupies a particularly central role in the repertoire of theatrical references in Proust's novel and that, notably, makes a convincing case for claiming that awareness (as manifested in the theatre's revelation of the artifice) and illusion (represented by the theatre's concealment of the artifice) are not opposites but merely the obverse and the reverse of the same thing.

### 3.1 The ‘œuvre-maquette’: A Novel Staging Its Own Production

In his last lecture series at the Collège du France, *La Préparation du roman I et II*, Barthes suggests that *À la recherche* may be viewed as an ‘œuvre-maquette’ par excellence, and defines the concept in the following terms:

Dans l’ordre de la littérature, du texte, il arrive que l’œuvre elle-même, le produit qui est sacré et consacré comme *œuvre*, soit ouvertement donnée comme *une simulation d’elle-même*: il s’agit des œuvres qui mettent en scène leur propre fabrication. [...] L’œuvre-maquette se présente comme sa propre expérimentation; elle met en scène une production, ou en tout cas un dispositif pour produire effectivement (et non seulement la velléité de produire).<sup>241</sup>

When identifying Proust’s novel as an exemplary œuvre-maquette, Barthes draws attention to the way that *À la recherche* stages its own production, highlighting the novel’s exposure of its own ‘machinery’ or of the ‘work’ required for it to come into being as art. In other words, he accentuates its metafictional dimension. A *maquette* is a preliminary miniature model of a larger design, a device often employed by architects and sculptors in preparation for the actual construction work, or by those who design stage scenery. The word derives from the Italian *macchietta*, meaning a little sketch or a small spot. When we consider the maquette as a model contained in and reflecting a larger whole, we see that it resembles *mise en abyme* – a depiction or miniature replication contained within the artwork or object that the depiction refers to. The expression *mise en abyme* derives from heraldry, and its implicit reference to the visual arts (the *abyme* is the small depiction of the escutcheon at its centre)

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<sup>241</sup> Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du roman I et II: notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France 1978-1979 et 1979-1980*, ed. Nathalie Léger (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003), p. 232. [‘In the order of literature, of the text, the work itself, the product that gets sacralized and consecrated as the *work* can sometimes be explicitly presented as a *simulation of itself*: works that stage their own fabrication. [...] The work-as-maquette presents itself as its own experimentation; it stages a production, or at any rate a strategy to facilitate actual production (rather than just the vague compulsion to produce)’. Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: lecture courses and seminars at the Collège de France, 1978-1979 and 1979-1980*, ed. Nathalie Léger, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 169-70.]

indicates that we are dealing with what Barthes calls a flat, static relationship.<sup>242</sup> Thus, if I have understood him correctly, Barthes conceives of *mise en abyme* as a static depiction of a ‘frame work’, whereas the maquette concerns the work’s *production*: ‘Il y a instabilité, glissement instable entre l’*abyme* et la maquette – l’enjeu étant la production (l’action)’ [‘There’s an instability, an unstable slippage between the *mise-en-abyme* and the *maquette* – the issue being production (action)’].<sup>243</sup> The maquette is to be understood, then, not as a static *depiction* of a work of art, but as a *mise en scène* of the actions required for its production. It is an exposition not of the artwork as such, but of the *work* of the art.

In my view, the Proustian tableau, with its *mise en scène* of the spectator in an act of simultaneous discovery and creation that is common to memory, perception and, as we saw in Chapter 2.2, *reading*, constitutes an exemplary maquette. When the novel’s tableaux expose the productive relationship between the spectator and the spectacle, they simultaneously disclose the ‘machinery’ necessary for the production of *À la recherche* as a work of art, since the Proustian spectator’s reading of her or his surroundings serves to evoke the productive relationship between reader and book. The novel’s production, then, is not only the author’s undertaking but also something that takes place in the dynamic encounter between reader and text. In other words, the reader (like the tableau’s spectator) is not a passive receiver of something already there, already present, but an agent operating the machinery of the text and contributing to the constitution of the literary work that he or she is in the process of reading.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Barthes, *La Préparation du roman I et II: notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France 1978-1979 et 1979-1980*, p. 232. [Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: lecture courses and seminars at the Collège de France, 1978-1979 and 1979-1980*, p. 169.]

<sup>243</sup> Barthes, *La Préparation du roman I et II: notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France 1978-1979 et 1979-1980*, p. 233. [Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: lecture courses and seminars at the Collège de France, 1978-1979 and 1979-1980*, p. 170.]

<sup>244</sup> My view here does to some extent correspond to Genette’s view on the relation that *À la recherche* entertains with its readers: ‘Chacun d’eux se sait le narrataire virtuel, et combien anxieusement attendu, de ce récit tournoyant qui, plus qu’aucun autre sans doute, a besoin pour exister dans sa vérité propre d’échapper à la clôture du « message final » et de l’achèvement narratif pour reprendre sans fin le mouvement circulaire qui toujours le renvoie de l’œuvre à la vocation qu’elle « raconte » et de la vocation à l’œuvre qu’elle suscite, et ainsi sans trêve. [...] Tel est le statut vertigineux du narrataire proustien: invité, non comme Nathanaël à « jeter ce livre », mais à le réécrire, totalement infidèle et miraculeusement exact,



Returning to the quote that introduced this thesis in light of the analysis thus far, a question demands our attention: if Proust's tableau aesthetics establishes perception as an act of simultaneous discovery and creation, is the best symbol of perception *selon* Proust really the Italianate theatre (as I argued in the introduction to Chapter 1, the architectural structure that the narrator refers to in this quotation is, presumably, that of the Italianate theatre)? The immediate response to this question would be 'yes'. When we take into consideration the architectural interior of the Italianate theatre – as we remember, the narrator merely posits the *layout* of the theatre as something like a symbol of perception – the analogy appears highly suitable. The Italianate theatre's division into two separate but adjoining spaces that manifest a distance and at the same time enable sensory mediation and reciprocal (energetic) contact between stage and auditorium, decidedly procures an apt symbol for Proust's concept of perception such as we have seen it unfold thus far. The theatre's structure, we may say, is like a physical manifestation of those two parts (interior and exterior, subject and object, *dehors* and *dedans*) of which every sensory impression consists, according to Proust. However, the designation 'Italianate theatre' does not merely denote an architectural structure. In fact, the Italianate stage, which originated in the Renaissance period, has gradually become such an emblematic symbol of occidental theatre that it is often referred to simply as the 'Western' or the 'modern' theatrical stage. And, ever since the advent of theatrical realism in the late nineteenth century, this theatre has come to be closely associated with the dramatic conventions of the realist tradition – a tradition still significantly present in contemporary theatre and a tradition that, as we shall see below, is strongly influenced by Diderot's tableau aesthetics. The question, then, is under which circumstances the Italianate theatre (that is, not the theatre's layout, but

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[...] le véritable auteur du récit n'est pas seulement celui qui le raconte, mais aussi, et parfois bien davantage, celui qui l'écoute'. Genette, *Figures III*, pp. 266-67. ['Every one of them knows himself to be the implied – and anxiously awaited – narratee of this swirling narrative that, in order to exist in its own truth, undoubtedly needs, more than any other narrative does, to escape the closure of the "final message" and narrative completion, to resume endlessly the circular movement from the work to the vocation it "tells" and from the vocation back to the work it gives rise to, and so on unceasingly. [...] Such is the vertiginous status of the Proustian narratee: invited not, like Nathanaël, to "throw this book away", but to rewrite it, being totally unfaithful and wonderfully exact, [...] the real author of the narrative is not only he who tells it, but also, and at times even more, he who hears it'. Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, pp. 261-62.]

the theatrical conventions associated with this theatre) may be considered ‘symbolic’ of perception in a maquette-work such as *À la recherche*? The reason why I raise this question is that Barthes, in his criticism of this theatrical tradition, argues that this is a theatre that reduces its spectator to a form of ‘fetishism’ that appears to be at odds with what we have discovered about Proustian spectatorship thus far. It could be argued, as Barthes does, that the conventions that he criticises in Western theatre originated (within the French context) with Diderot, and that the Diderotian tableau is the paradigmatic representation of these conventions. I do not, however, think that this makes it impossible to argue either that Proust writes tableaux in *À la recherche* or that the Proustian tableau is influenced by Diderot, but, admittedly, it does require us to draw a careful distinction between the role of the spectator in the latter’s tableau and of the spectator in the Proustian one. This is precisely what I will attempt to do in the next section of this chapter.

### 3.2 *À la recherche* and the Non-Hysterical, Purely Permutative Theatricality

In a 1972 round-table discussion on Proust, Barthes suggests that the Proustian novel may be conceived as a Book (in the Mallarméan sense<sup>245</sup>) that only exists in ‘une sorte

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<sup>245</sup> In his opening remarks during the discussion, Barthes suggests that *À la recherche* may be viewed as a veritable ‘incarnation’ of Stéphane Mallarmé’s unachieved project, *Le Livre*, a book that was never published nor, in fact, ever written, and of which little is known other than Mallarmé’s thoughts on its *form*: the idea was to leave the Book unbound, and that each reading would be a kind of performance during which the flexible structure of the Book would change (the order in which the pages were read would, as Mallarmé imagined it, vary with every new reading). See Jacques Scherer, *Le ‘Livre’ de Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 56-61. In response to a question from an auditor asking Barthes to clarify the connection between Proust’s novel and Mallarmé’s *Le Livre*, he states: ‘C’est un projet de rapprochement, une métaphore, si vous voulez. Le Livre mallarméen est un espace de permutation entre un texte qui est lu et les spectateurs qui changent de place à chaque instant. Je suggérerais simplement que le livre proustien, l’espace de lecture de ce livre proustien, tout au long de l’histoire, serait peut-être ce Livre mallarméen, ce livre qui n’existe que dans une sorte de théâtralité non hystérique, purement permutative, fondée sur des permutations de places; c’est tout ce que je voulais dire’. Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens 1975-1995*, p. 40. [‘It is a projected connection; a metaphor, if you will. Mallarmé’s Book is a space for permutation between a text that is read and the spectators who change places at each moment. I would simply suggest that Proust’s book, the space of reading of this Proustian book, throughout the story, might be this Mallarméan Book, this book that only exists in a kind of non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality founded on permutations of places.

de théâtralité non hystérique, purement permutative, fondée sur des permutations de places’ [‘a kind of non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality founded on permutations of places’].<sup>246</sup> The quote has several interesting implications, the majority of which I will regretfully not touch upon in this thesis. In light of this thesis’s subject, however, it seems highly relevant to address Barthes’s somewhat odd designation, by way of this Mallarméan analogy, of Proust’s text as one existing in a sort of non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality. As we have seen on a couple of occasions already, when Barthes elsewhere speaks of permutation in relation to Proust, he connects permutation to the inverting movement that he regards as the foremost structural principle in *À la recherche*. In mathematics, permutation relates to the act of arranging or rearranging the elements of a sequence or order, and, so, it could be that when Barthes speaks of the novel’s purely permutative theatricality, he has in mind the possibility for ‘reordering’ the sections of *À la recherche*, and that he means to evoke the novel as a loose or flexible structure that the reader can operate freely, jumping back and forth in the text, and in between volumes (thus implying that reading may be viewed as a sort of performance, as Mallarmé envisioned it in preparing *Le Livre*). But what does he mean by *non-hysterical*? How is theatricality hysterical? How can it be non-hysterical? And what is the relationship between the Italianate stage and this non-hysterical theatricality? Barthes’s commentary on Japanese puppet theatre (Bunraku) in *L’Empire des signes* (1970) shows us that he viewed this Eastern ‘theatre without hysteria’ as more or less the complete opposite of Western theatre. I will briefly consider Barthes’s comments on this matter, for the contrast that he postulates when comparing Eastern and Western theatre brings out an interesting paradox in the Proustian tableau.

In *L’Empire des signes*, Barthes compares Western theatre to Japanese puppet theatre, maintaining that, in Bunraku, ‘les sources du théâtre sont exposées dans leur vide. Ce qui est expulsé de la scène, c’est l’hystérie, c’est-à-dire le théâtre lui-même; et ce qui est mis à la place, c’est l’action nécessaire à la production du spectacle: le

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That is all I wanted to say’. Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, p. 42.]

<sup>246</sup> Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens 1975-1995*, p. 40. [Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, p. 42.]

travail se substitue à l'intériorité' ['the sources of the theatre are exposed in their emptiness. What is expelled from the stage is the hysteria, that is, the theatre itself, and what is put in its place is the action necessary for the production of the spectacle: the work substituted for interiority'].<sup>247</sup> Hysteria, says Barthes, is *theatre itself*; if so, the hysterical is to a certain extent synonymous with the theatrical. As Georges Didi-Huberman explains, hysteria, for Barthes, is what plunges the gaze (of the spectator, beholder or reader) 'dans une *profondeur* morbide, une *profondeur* de *symptômes*: secrets et sécrétions, la douleur psychique et les larmes, par exemple' ['in a morbid *depth*, a depth made of *symptoms*: secrets and secretions, psychological pain and tears, for example'].<sup>248</sup> The hysterical, then, is what presumably lies 'within', it is the 'interiority' or the 'soul' that is supposed to *animate* the actor, the 'depth' which the actor's gestures and words allegedly *reveal* to us. And yet, there must exist other sorts of theatricality, since the hysterical can be expelled from the stage without this meaning the end of all theatrical performances. In other words, hysteria cannot be the essence of *all* theatre. One of these other kinds of theatricality – which, in *L'Empire des signes*, Barthes describes (in terms that, as we cannot help but notice, are nearly identical with those used to describe the *œuvre-maquette*) as fundamentally linked to the *action necessary for the production of the spectacle* and to the *work* of art – would be, it appears, precisely that non-hysterical theatricality that he finds in Proust's novel.

Oriental theatre does not aim to create illusions, Barthes writes. Indeed, this theatrical tradition aims rather to expose the operations undertaken in order to create the spectacle. In Bunraku, the text is pronounced by narrators and musicians situated on the side of the stage, while the dolls, each between one and two meters in height, are operated by three visible men: a master controls the top of the doll and its right arm, one man moves the left arm and hand, and a third one, crawling about, supports the body and makes it walk. Although these three are visible to the audience at all times, they are also completely impassive. Their role is not to convey emotions, but to physically operate the dolls, and they remain unmoved by what the voice-conveyors

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<sup>247</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, p. 790. [Barthes, 'The Dolls of Bunraku,' p. 45.]

<sup>248</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Peuples en larmes, peuples en armes*, vol. 6, *L'Œil de l'histoire* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2016), p. 105.

and the dolls express. The gesture that the audience beholds is thus triple: paired with the emotive gesture of the marionette are the purely transitive actions of the manipulators, and in addition to this comes the vocal gesture of speech (this one also completely detached from the others because the voice does not give the impression of belonging to the characters, but remains on the side of the play, both figuratively and literally, since the reciters occupy a platform beside the stage). The Bunraku dolls are therefore conceived neither as *one* organic unity nor as a means to express interiority. For while the occidental marionette appears to be a rigid part of the body of the actor that controls it (an inanimate object ‘animated’ by the human to which it ‘belongs’), Bunraku fundamentally alters ‘le lien moteur qui va du personnage à l’acteur et qui est toujours conçu, chez nous, comme la voie expressive d’une intériorité’ [‘that motor link which connects the character to the actor and which we always conceive as the path of expression of an interiority’].<sup>249</sup> Because of this simultaneous exposure to ‘l’art et le travail’ [‘the art and the work’],<sup>250</sup> the Bunraku audience’s reading of the spectacle necessarily differs from the mode of reading instigated by the Italianate theatre: a distancing effect similar to Brecht’s *Verfremdung* comes to substitute the seductions of illusion. Due to the plurality of different codes and modes of expression in these plays, they interestingly resemble the modern text, the one that Barthes in *S/Z* (1970) calls the ‘texte scriptible’ (the ‘writerly text’).<sup>251</sup>

It follows from this that if Bunraku theatre resembles the modern text, then our way of reading modern texts (such as *À la recherche*) most likely resembles the way in which the Bunraku audience relates to the plays, and, presumably, that our reading

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<sup>249</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, p. 789. [Barthes, ‘The Dolls of Bunraku,’ p. 45.]

<sup>250</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, p. 786. [Barthes, ‘The Dolls of Bunraku,’ p. 46.]

<sup>251</sup> ‘Comme dans le texte moderne, le tressage des codes, des références, des constats détachés, des gestes anthologiques, multiple la ligne écrite, non par la vertu de quelque appel métaphysique, mais par le jeu d’une combinatoire qui s’ouvre dans l’espace entier du théâtre: ce qui est commencé par l’un est continué par l’autre, sans repos’. Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, p. 786. [‘As in the modern text, the interweaving of codes, of references, of separate declarations, of anthological gestures, multiplies the written line, not by virtue of some metaphysical call but by the play of a *combinatoire* which opens into the whole theatre space: that which is begun by the one is continued by the other, ceaselessly’. Barthes, ‘The Dolls of Bunraku,’ p. 47.]

methods will have less in common with those of the spectators in Western theatre. In his book, Barthes deems the Italianate theatre a space of falsehood:

Prenez le théâtre occidental des derniers siècles; sa fonction est essentiellement de manifester ce qui est réputé secret (les « sentiments », les « situations », les « conflits »), tout en cachant l'artifice même de la manifestation (la machinerie, la peinture, le fard, les sources de lumière). La scène à l'italienne est l'espace de ce mensonge: tout s'y passe dans un intérieur subrepticement ouvert, surpris, savouré par un spectateur tapi dans l'ombre.<sup>252</sup>

The main problem with the Western tradition, Barthes claims, is its attempt to trick the spectators into believing that they are the invisible witnesses to a disclosure of some secret. Thus the aim of the Italianate stage, as he understands it, is to make the audience forget the artificiality of that which is put before their eyes, and to create an illusion of exposed reality. As previously noted, it could be argued that the theatrical conventions that Barthes criticises in Western theatre stem from Diderot. Diderot's call for tableaux in the theatre incited a reform in French theatrical aesthetics that reached its apogee with the advent of realist and naturalist theatre towards the end of the nineteenth century, and several concepts key to this period's renewal of the art of staging can be traced back to the eighteenth century and to Diderot. By far the most influential of Diderot's ideas concerning the art of theatre was his call for a less theatrical stage presentation (an idea closely related to his call for tableaux and thus to what Barthes deems the *hysteria* of Western theatre),<sup>253</sup> the most canonical expression of which is found in *De la poésie dramatique*, where he suggests that actors should imagine a great wall separating the stage from the auditorium: 'Imaginez, sur le bord du théâtre, un grand mur qui vous sépare du parterre; jouez comme si la toile ne se levait pas' ['Imagine, at the edge of the stage, a great wall separating you from the

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<sup>252</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, p. 789. ['Take the occidental theatre of the last centuries: its function has been essentially to make manifest that which is reputedly secret (the "sentiments," the "situations," the "conflicts") while hiding the very artifice of the representation (machinery, scene painting, make-up, lighting). The Italianate stage is the space of this falsehood: everything happens there in an interior surreptitiously opened, surprised, espied, savoured by a hidden spectator'. Barthes, 'The Dolls of Bunraku,' p. 45.]

<sup>253</sup> Fried shows that Diderot, when he writes on painting, expresses his distaste for the theatre 'as he knew it' by using 'the term *le théâtral*, the theatrical, implying consciousness of being beheld, as synonymous with falseness'. Fried, p. 100.

audience. Act as if the curtain did not go up’].<sup>254</sup> This influential convention was later coined the concept of the ‘fourth wall’ by playwright and critic Jean Jullien, who, in *Le Théâtre vivant*, suggests that the proscenium opening should be considered ‘un quatrième mur transparent pour le public, opaque pour le comédien’ [‘a fourth wall that is transparent for the audience, opaque for the actor’].<sup>255</sup>

For Diderot, the fourth wall was intended to enhance the verisimilitude of the play, reminding the actor to ignore the spectators and, as put by Jullien well over a century later, ‘jouer comme s’il était chez lui’ [‘perform as if he were at home’].<sup>256</sup> Encouraging the actors to feign ignorance of the audience did not mean that these were regarded as unimportant, however. Rather, as Fried affirms, it is fundamental to Diderot’s art theories that when the artwork denies the beholder’s presence, the aim is, paradoxically, to *sustain* his attention.<sup>257</sup> Frantz coins the phenomenon the ‘« paradoxe du spectateur »: il faut l’ignorer pour le toucher’ [“paradox of the spectator”: you must ignore them in order to move them’].<sup>258</sup> In order to sustain the spectator’s attention, then, Diderot claimed that stage action had to give the impression of being *real*. This meant that actors had to abandon the declamatory and theatrical acting style of the neoclassical theatre – a style that implicitly acknowledged the presence of the spectators, since the actors, facing the audience, declaimed their lines directly to them. But it also meant that the audience was banned from the stage in a more concrete manner. In the mid-eighteenth century, spectators of distinction were still seated on stage in several French theatres,<sup>259</sup> leaving little room for the actors and for scenery. Diderot insisted they be removed from the stage, and so they were, towards the end of the 1750s.<sup>260</sup> The act of placing all the spectators in front of the stage offered to the

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<sup>254</sup> Diderot, ‘De la poésie dramatique,’ in *Diderot’s Writings on the Theatre*, p. 157. [Diderot, ‘From “Discourse on Dramatic Poetry”’, in *Sources of Dramatic Theory: 2: Voltaire to Hugo*, p. 65.]

<sup>255</sup> Jean Jullien, *Le Théâtre vivant: essai théorique et pratique* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1892), p. 11.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> Fried, p. 108.

<sup>258</sup> Frantz, p. 61.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>260</sup> Denis Diderot, *Diderot’s Writings on the Theatre*, ed. F.C. Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 213. Diderot was certainly not the only one to speak out against this custom, which was subject to much debate in France at the time. Frantz explains that it

theatre something that had hitherto been out of reach: a frame.<sup>261</sup> In this new theatre, the proscenium arch, taking its cue from the picture frames of the visual arts, would function as a window opening onto the universe of the play, reassembling the objects on stage and clearly marking the outline of what the audience sees. Hence, the stage was set for the advent of theatre as an art form which, as Barthes writes in ‘Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein’, ‘calcule la place *regardée* des choses’ [‘calculates the place of things *as they are observed*’],<sup>262</sup> and thus for the advent of tableau aesthetics.

For Barthes, as I have already suggested, the tableau device manifests precisely that which is most problematic about Western theatre. In ‘Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein’, Barthes defines the tableau (in theatre, in cinema and in what he regards as traditional literature) as an ‘Organon de la Représentation’ [‘Organon of Representation’]: ‘cet Organon aura pour double fondement la souveraineté du découpage et l’unité du sujet qui découpe’ [‘[this Organon] will have as its dual foundation the sovereignty of the act of cutting out (*découpage*) and the unity of the subject of that action’].<sup>263</sup> Barthes’s issue with Diderot’s tableau (and the representational aesthetics it has inspired) stems not only from the fact that it seems to immobilise the reality that it cuts out and frames but also from the fact that it ‘arrests’ the gaze of the spectator, thereby reducing the latter to a *fetishist* subject: ‘Au théâtre, au cinéma, dans la littérature traditionnelle, les choses sont toujours vues *de quelque part*, c’est le fondement géométrique de la représentation: il faut un sujet fétichiste pour découper ce tableau’ [‘In the theatre, in the cinema, in traditional literature, things are always seen *from somewhere*. Here we have the geometrical foundation of representation: a fetishist subject is required to cut out the tableau’].<sup>264</sup> Didi-Huberman affirms that, in Barthes’s perspective, ‘le cadre de la représentation enferme le regard dans un ordre préexistant [...], et le contraint donc à

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was not until 1759 that on-stage seating was in fact removed. This happened after the renowned actor Henri Lekain, on the 20<sup>th</sup> January that year, addressed the authorities with a ‘Mémoire qui tend à prouver la nécessité de supprimer les banquettes de dessus le théâtre de la Comédie-Française, en séparant ainsi les Acteurs des Spectateurs’.

<sup>261</sup> Frantz, p. 43.

<sup>262</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, p. 1591. [Roland Barthes, ‘Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,’ trans. Stephen Heath, *Screen* 15, no. 2 (1974): p. 33.]

<sup>263</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, p. 1591. [Barthes, ‘Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,’ p. 33.]

<sup>264</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, p. 1595. [Barthes, ‘Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,’ p. 38.]



un *fétichisme* qui est *arrêt sur l'image*, arrêt du sens dans l'image, arrêt de mort de sa libre inventivité' ['the setting of the performance confines the gaze within a pre-existing order [...], and forces it into a *fetishism* which is a *freeze frame*, freezing the meaning of the image, and is a death knell to the gaze's roving inventiveness'].<sup>265</sup> Diderot's tableau seems somehow to 'capture' the spectatorial gaze and to reduce it to a stable and unified subject, a fetishist subject who relates to the spectacle as though the spectacle is 'hysterical', that is, as though it is possible to uncover, beneath the visible, what is *not* there, the hidden meaning of it all. It would thus seem that, for Barthes, the spectator, beholder or reader of the tableau is as constrained as the reader of the 'purely permutative' novel was free. Hence, the question, suggested in this chapter's introduction, remains: how can Proust's novel be a 'tableau theatre' and *also* exist in a 'non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality'? The question is highly pertinent, for, if we abide by Barthes's definition, we are obliged to admit that the tableau is the complete opposite of the non-hysterical and permutative, in other words, that it is a *hysterical, fetish-object*.

The answer, then, must be that the Proustian tableau differs from Barthes's definition: that this tableau is something other than the 'Organon of Representation' that Barthes finds in the works of Diderot, Brecht and Eisenstein, and, consequently, that the spectator of the Proustian tableau is not 'captured' by the spectacle and 'reduced' to a stable, unified subject in the same way as the spectator of the Diderotian tableau. This is partly, of course, because Proust's tableaux never try to hide their 'artifice' and never allow us to remain for too long under the delusion of uncovering a hidden truth, but rather remind us that what we are presented with is a subjective interpretation of reality: a reality that is not only discovered but also created by the spectator. But it is not only because the Proustian tableau is a maquette staging its own production that it escapes Barthes's criticism, for the same may be said about, for example, the Brechtian or the Eisensteinian tableau. Their tableaux, too, as Barthes insists, manifest the 'machinery' of their own production:

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<sup>265</sup> Didi-Huberman, pp. 104-05.

La scène épique de Brecht, le plan eisensteinien sont des tableaux; ce sont des *scènes mises* (comme on dit: *la table est mise*), qui répondent parfaitement à l'unité dramatique dont Diderot a donné la théorie: très découpées [...], exhaussant un sens, mais manifestant la production de ce sens, accomplissant la coïncidence du découpage visuel et du découpage idéal.<sup>266</sup>

The exposure of the actions necessary for the production of the spectacle is in fact crucial for an artist such as Brecht, since he requires the spectator to adopt a critical attitude *vis-à-vis* his epic scenes. Brecht aims for a distancing effect and does not wish to seduce the spectator. Nevertheless, his tableaux still reduce the spectator to a fetishist subject, since what his epic scenes manifest is always the same thing: the Law of the Party ('c'est en fin de compte la Loi du Parti qui découpe la scène épique [...], c'est cette Loi qui regarde, cadre, centre, énonce' ['in the long run, it is the Law of the Party which cuts out the epic scene [...]; it is this Law which looks, frames, focuses, enunciates']<sup>267</sup>). Accordingly, if the Proustian tableau differs from the 'Organon of Representation', this must be because the subject that looks, frames, focuses and enunciates in this tableau is *not* always the same, is *never*, in fact, the same. Certainly, the object in Proust's tableau also reflects the gaze that is directed at it (the gaze that is responsible for 'cutting out' the view), but this gaze is not stable; it is not a gaze that exists prior to the encounter with the object, and that will continue to exist in the same form afterwards. Rather, as we have seen in several examples studied in the previous chapters of the thesis, the Proustian subject is conditioned by and constituted in the encounter with the spectacle (when Cottard confronts the protagonist with the possibility of Albertine's lesbianism, for example, this transforms not only his perception of her but also of himself). In other words, the 'machinery' that produces the spectacle, and that is exposed in the Proustian tableau, is not fixed, but constantly evolving.

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<sup>266</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, p. 1592. ['The epic scene in Brecht, the shot in Eisenstein are so many tableaux: they are scenes which are *laid out* (in the sense in which one says *the table is laid*), which answer perfectly to that dramatic unity theorised by Diderot: firmly cut out [...], erecting a meaning but manifesting the production of that meaning, they accomplish the coincidence of the visual and the ideal *découpages*'. Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' p. 34.]

<sup>267</sup> Barthes, *Œuvres complètes. Tome II (1966-1973)*, pp. 1595-96. [Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' p. 38.]

It is not certain, however, that this makes the Italianate theatre (that is, the Western theatrical tradition following Diderot) a less-suitable symbol of perception in Proust. For within this theatrical tradition too, as in Japanese puppet theatre, we find examples of genres and practices that combine the creation of tableaux with a disclosure of their artifice, such as the genre that Proust was greatly fond of as a child, and that came to occupy a central place in his novel: the now largely forgotten genre of the theatrical *féerie*. As a way to conclude this chapter, we shall look at a particularly striking example that shows the genre's influence on Proust's staging of perception. This example will serve to show that, for Proust, the category of Western theatre encompasses a larger variety of dramatic conventions than Barthes allows for in *L'Empire des signes*. For Proust, as this example shows, there is no absolute divergence between the act of creating illusions and the act of revealing the machinery enabling these illusions. On the contrary, as we have now established, the exposure of the art and the work at the same time resides at the very core of the Proustian *mise en scène* of perception and also, as we shall see, at the very core of the theatrical *féerie*.

### 3.3 *Enfant de la féerie: On the Féerie as a 'Precursor' of the Proustian Tableau*

The *féerie* is a recurring presence throughout *À la recherche*, up until, and including, the novel's final act, the 'Bal de Têtes'. The many references to subjects, motifs, techniques, archetypal characters and situations characteristic of the *féerie* in the novel implies that the *féerie* was of particular importance for Proust's conception of his literary universe. So much so, in fact, that in her study of French twentieth-century theatre, Hélène Laplace-Claverie labels Proust (along with a few other French authors born in the last half of the nineteenth century) a *descendant* of the *féerie*:

C Claudel, Proust, Colette, Roussel, Apollinaire, Giraudoux, Cocteau, Céline, Aragon, Tardieu, Sartre – nés entre 1868 et 1905 – sont tous à des titres divers des enfants de la féerie. Tous l'évoquent, la critiquent ou s'en inspirent. Tous voient leur écriture marquée par des réminiscences de ce genre désormais introuvable.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Laplace-Claverie, p. 78. ['Claudel, Proust, Colette, Roussel, Apollinaire, Giraudoux, Cocteau, Céline, Aragon, Tardieu, Sartre – born between 1868 and 1905 – are all children of the *féerie* in different ways. They all evoke it, criticise it or draw inspiration from it. All of

In the paragraph that follows, in which we catch a glimpse of Odette Swann's drawing room as seen through the eyes of the Princesse d'Épinoy, Proust compares the situation that reveals itself before the eyes of the princess to a technique commonly employed in the féerie, the *changement à vue* – a sudden transformation of the stage taking place with the curtain raised and thus exposing the theatrical machinery to the eyes of the audience. The reference to this technique draws attention to the theatricalising agency of the princess, who interprets what she sees in terms of drama. Moreover, when Proust's simile is tracked to its source, it reveals its full significance as a metaphor for the 'machinery' of *À la recherche*:

Mme d'Épinoy, à l'occasion d'un versement qu'elle désirait pour la « Patrie française », ayant eu à aller [...] voir [Mme Swann], comme elle serait entrée chez sa mercière, convaincue d'ailleurs qu'elle ne trouverait que des visages, non pas même méprisés mais inconnus, resta clouée sur la place quand la porte s'ouvrit, non sur le salon qu'elle supposait mais sur une salle magique où, comme grâce à un changement à vue dans une féerie, elle reconnut dans des figurantes éblouissantes, à demi étendues sur des divans, assises sur des fauteuils, appelant la maîtresse de maison par son petit nom, les altesses, les duchesses qu'elle-même, la princesse d'Épinoy, avait grand-peine à attirer chez elle, et auxquelles en ce moment, sous les yeux bienveillants d'Odette, le marquis du Lau, le comte Louis de Turenne, le prince Borghèse, le duc d'Estrées, portant l'orangeade et les petits fours, servaient de panetiers et d'échansons. La princesse d'Épinoy, comme elle mettait, sans s'en rendre compte, la qualité mondaine à l'intérieur des êtres, fût obligée de désincarner Mme Swann et de la réincarner en une femme élégante. (III, 142)<sup>269</sup>

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them bear the traces in their writing of this genre which today can no longer be found anywhere'.]

<sup>269</sup> 'Mme d'Épinoy, looking at the time for a contribution to the "Patrie française", having had to go and call on her [Mme Swann], as if she were going into her haberdasher's, convinced moreover she would find only faces not despised even but unknown, remained as if transfixed when the door opened, not on the drawing-room she had imagined, but on a magic chamber in which, as if thanks to a full-view transformation in a fairy-play, she recognized in the dazzling female extras, half reclining on divans or sitting on armchairs, addressing their hostess by her first name, the Highnesses and duchesses that she, the Princesse d'Épinoy, had the greatest difficulty in luring to her own house, and to whom, at that moment, beneath the benevolent gaze of Odette, the Marquis du Lau, the Comte Louis de Turenne, the Prince Borghese and the Duc d'Estrées were acting as pantlers and as cup-bearers, carrying the orangeade and the petits-fours. Since, without her being aware of it, the Princesse d'Épinoy saw people's place in society as internal to them, she was obliged to disincarnate Mme Swann and reincarnate her in a fashionable woman' (4, 147-48, translation modified by me).

When the doors open onto Odette's salon, Mme d'Épinoy, utterly surprised by what she sees, does not enter, but remains outside as though transfixed and unable to move. A tableau evoking the layout of a theatre is thus established, the open doors acting as a proscenium opening with the curtains drawn back. The Épinoy tableau exemplifies the technique that we have seen to be very common in the novel, of allowing architectural structures to function as representational devices and to procure natural frames for the description. As is typical for Proust's tableaux, the emphasis is on how that which is perceived affects the spectator, which, in this case, is not one of the narrator's younger, intradiegetical selves, but Mme d'Épinoy, who, on her side of the threshold, acts as a mesmerised spectator of what she perceives as a fairy-play being performed before her. Odette's drawing room functions as the stage, a 'salle magique' where the world the princess habitually sees is turned upside down. In this magical place, people who Mme d'Épinoy is well acquainted with appear in roles apparently much below their social rank: nobility of all sorts are metamorphosed into dazzling, seated extras, while princes and dukes move about in the room and perform a choreography transforming them into pantlers and cup-bearers serving orangeade and petit-fours to the ladies. The female guests address their hostess by her first name, thus revealing a degree of intimacy that is, as Proust implies, perhaps greater than Mme d'Épinoy would ever have dreamed of achieving, and this clearly contributes to the spectacle's appearing to her as an almost supernatural scene. As for Odette herself, she appears like a fairy queen, benevolently overseeing the *mise en scène*. The real stage director is not Odette, however, but Mme d'Épinoy, who interchanges, by way of her imagination, the scene she had expected to see with the one that presents itself to her senses, which, real as it is, appears to her like a theatrical illusion.

The scene from Odette's drawing room provides a brilliant example of the fact that, as the narrator puts it, seeing is not only a sensory but also an intellectual act:

Même l'acte si simple que nous appelons « voir une personne que nous connaissons » est en partie un acte intellectuel. Nous remplissons l'apparence physique de l'être que

nous voyons de toutes les notions que nous avons sur lui, et dans l'aspect total que nous nous représentons, ces notions ont certainement la plus grande part. (I, 19)<sup>270</sup>

It follows from this that our abstract notions of other people have the capacity to obstruct our ability to hear and see in their presence, so that, with time, 'l'idée qu'on s'est faite longtemps d'une personne bouche les yeux et les oreilles' ['one's long-standing mental image of others deprives one of sight and hearing in their presence'] (I, 425; 2, 7). Here, however, Mme d'Épinoy is taken by surprise, and, because of this, her intellect has not had the time to prepare the *bouchons* apt for 'blocking' her senses. If the scene that unfolds before her eyes strikes her as a theatrical illusion, this is above all because the constellation of people that she stumbles upon is previously unknown to her. The scene that presents itself to her exposed senses is *otherworldly*, in the sense that it has no place cut out for it in the world as she knows it. The princess's reaction is to attempt to bridge the gap between the realm of the familiar and that of the unknown by performing, in her mind, a mental metamorphosis of her notions of Odette's world: '[elle] fût obligée de désincarner Mme Swann et de la réincarner en une femme élégante' ['she was obliged to disincarnate Mme Swann and reincarnate her in a fashionable woman']. This serves to show the malleability of the 'Law' that governs the Proustian tableau. The princess's prejudices define what she sees and how she sees it, but through the encounter with the spectacle, they evolve. After this, Mme d'Épinoy's view on Odette changes, and presumably also her understanding of the role that she herself plays among the people gathered in this drawing room.

In the brief moment staged in the tableau, however, and during the time required for her to change her conceptions, the princess perceives this otherwise ordinary scene as something magical: as though she were witnessing, Proust writes, a full-view transformation in a *féerie*, she recognises both a group of familiar faces *and* the unfamiliar roles they play in this new setting. It is the lack of concordance between what she sees and what she expected to see that disables her habitual mode of perception, making her experience the world as theatre. And it is that brief moment,

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<sup>270</sup> 'Even the very simple act that we call "seeing a person we know" is in part an intellectual act. We fill the physical appearance of the individual we see with all the notions we have about him, and in the total picture that we form for ourselves, these notions certainly have the greater part' (1, 22).

the interval – in French, the word *intervalle* denotes, *entre autres*, the entr’acte, the interval between two acts of a play – in which her senses are not yet ‘blocked’ by way of the intellect, that is the tableau’s subject.

Full-view transformations, in which the scene would change as if by magic before the eyes of the spectators, were an important stylistic component in the *féerie*. In « *Mes souvenirs* » sur le *Théâtre-Libre*, André Antoine, Proust’s contemporary and the man often heralded as the ‘father’ of modern *mise en scène* in France, writes about the effect that the *changements à vue* had on him when, as a child, a neighbour who worked at the theatre took him to see the *féerie* *La Chatte blanche*, and placed him with the prompter, as close to the stage as he could possibly get:

À cette époque, la *féerie* était encore vivante, parée de ses séductions enfantines; toute la soirée, je vis se dérouler les magnificences des trucs et des changements à vue; sous mes yeux, au ras du plancher de la scène, les trappes silencieusement entr’ouvertes [*sic*] me laissaient apercevoir les machinistes tirant de petits anneaux accrochés aux talons des artistes pour des métamorphoses stupéfiantes. Cette initiation, par l’envers du théâtre, ne détruisit pas mes illusions, au contraire, elle a probablement éveillé chez moi un goût passionné de la *mise en scène*.<sup>271</sup>

Antoine’s thoughts on how the full-view transformations affected him as a child reveal an important aspect of the role that this theatrical technique played in the *féerie*: the *changement à vue* did not destroy the illusion, Antoine writes, but it instructed him, as a child, in the rudiments of theatrical magic by revealing the machinery of the *féerie* to him. In this genre, then (as in, we may say, Proust’s novel), there is at play a sort of flickering of awareness and illusion, and the full-view transformation is one of the ways in which the *féerie* openly acknowledges its artifice. Due to its exposure of the theatrical machinery and the actions necessary for the production of the spectacle, the *féerie* in fact turns out to be a paradigmatic example of what Barthes calls the *œuvre-*

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<sup>271</sup> André Antoine, « *Mes souvenirs* » sur le *Théâtre-Libre* (Paris: Arthème Fayard & Cie, 1921), p. 9. [‘At this time, the *féerie* was still alive and well, adorned with childish seductions. During that entire evening, I saw unfold the magnificence of tricks and full-view transformations; under my eyes, the silent trapdoors on the stage floor were ajar and I could glimpse the stage hands pulling little rings attached to the heels of the artists for stupefying transfigurations. This initiation, through an inversion of theatre, did not destroy my illusions; on the contrary, it probably awoke in me a passionate taste for theatre production’.]

maquette. So if Proust really is an ‘enfant de la féerie’, as Laplace-Claverie claims, it is tempting to suggest that this must be, above all, because his novel, like the féerie, openly acknowledges its artifice and stages its own fabrication.

The féerie, then, challenges the contrast that Barthes posits in *L’Empire des signes* between Western and Eastern theatre as, respectively, hiding and exposing their artifice. It is interesting that this genre, which ostensibly has little in common with the realist tradition inspired by Diderot’s call for verisimilitude on stage, also took its cue from the reform of French *écriture théâtrale* that Diderot incited. In her pioneering study of the Romantic féerie, Roxane Martin maintains that the féerie’s historical development was greatly influenced by Diderot’s theories. In fact, the latter’s recommendation that dramatists should take into consideration the visual aspects of the stage not only prepared the ground for the advent of theatrical realism but also for spectacular genres such as the féerie:

La particularité de l’écriture théâtrale, à partir de Diderot, réside dans la superposition qu’elle propose entre les éléments du littéraire et ceux du spectaculaire. Il existe bel et bien, depuis la deuxième moitié du XVIIIe siècle, une nouvelle forme d’écriture qui ne se mesure plus à l’aune des figures de rhétorique. L’alternance entre les formes dialogique et descriptive – c’est-à-dire entre les modes dramatique et narratif si l’on se réfère à la taxinomie aristotélicienne des genres – qu’utilisent désormais les auteurs montre combien l’écriture sort définitivement du cadre des conventions classiques.<sup>272</sup>

Tracing the historical development of the féerie from 1791 to 1864, Martin shows that, after the July Revolution in 1830,<sup>273</sup> the tableau gradually turned into a purely structural unity, liberated from the moral and pedagogical dimension that Diderot had imposed on it. In the féerie (which proceeds by successive tableaux), as in other genres

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<sup>272</sup> Roxane Martin, *La Féerie romantique sur les scènes parisiennes (1791-1864)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), p. 250. [‘The distinctive feature of theatrical writing [*écriture théâtrale*], since Diderot, has resided in its superposition of literary elements and spectacular elements. There exists indeed, since the second half of the eighteenth century, a new form of writing that is not measured through the gauge of rhetorical figures. The alternation between the dialogic and the descriptive – that is to say, between the dramatic mode and the narrative mode, if we refer to the Aristotelian taxonomy of genres – that is now used by authors demonstrates the extent to which writing has completely left the frame of classical conventions’.]

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.



that, in the wake of 1830, came to privilege the scenic and visual aspects of the play, the ordering of the performance in tableaux instigated a new sort of theatrical writing, one that was focused more on the ‘spectacular’ aspects of the play than on its storyline. This allowed for ‘la mise en place d’une écriture purement « spectaculaire » qui n’est plus assujettie au développement de l’action. Chaque tableau dispose d’une autonomie maximale; construit autour d’une action particulière, le tableau s’édifie comme une microstructure à l’intérieur de la pièce’ [‘the putting into place of a writing that is purely “spectacular” and no longer under the yoke of plot development. Each tableau has complete autonomy; it is built around a particular action, and the tableau is erected like a microstructure within the play’].<sup>274</sup> This new form of *écriture théâtrale* greatly contributed to challenging the traditional understanding of the textual and the scenic as opposites.<sup>275</sup> Martin shows that several authors, and notably Flaubert, pushed the boundaries between theatre and novel through their experiments with the *féerie*, often developing the explanatory ‘side text’ in the manuscripts, the didascalies, to such an extent that they evoked the procedures of narrative texts.<sup>276</sup>

The French *féerie* became immensely popular in the early 1800s, and gradually fell out of popularity towards the end of the century. In other words, the heyday of this genre took place before the advent of modern *mise en scène* in France, and the scripts therefore do not, as is the custom today, include explanatory side text aimed at the stage director (the profession had yet to be invented). Instead, the side text in these scripts (which, as a general rule, were published *after* the performances) presented a synthesis of the different elements of the performance (music, decoration, dramaturgy) such as they had been developed through a collective effort of staging.<sup>277</sup> Accordingly,

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<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>275</sup> ‘La production dramatique du XIXe siècle, en modifiant la nature profonde du texte de théâtre, pose ainsi des questions majeures aux théoriciens, à commencer par celles qui touchent la séparation entre théâtre et roman, entre scénique et textuel’ [‘Nineteenth-century theatre productions, having altered the profound nature of theatre writing, thus pose major questions for theoreticians, starting with the separation between the theatre and the novel or the stage-based and the text-based’]. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>277</sup> ‘Le texte féerique tel qu’il apparaît dans sa version imprimée semble se faire lieu de synthèse d’une écriture collective qui prend en charge autant le travail du dramaturge que celui du compositeur et du décorateur’ [‘The script of the *féerie* as it appears in its printed

by way of publication, the *féerie* became a literary as well as a scenic art form, which initiated a new practice of writing: an *écriture théâtrale* constituted as a synthesis of the *mise en scène*. This development is not surprising since, even though all *féeries* were created on the basis of a text, the decorator, the props person and the scene shifter were, as Laplace-Claverie affirms, generally viewed as the ‘véritables auteurs d’une féerie’ [‘true and proper *féerie* authors’].<sup>278</sup> The scripts accordingly illustrated the compositeness and, as Laplace-Claverie puts it, *modernity* of this genre, which, in sharp contrast to the neoclassical tradition that had dominated the French stage since the 1600s, accorded greater importance to choreography, pantomime, music and decoration than to the written dialogue: ‘Phénomène très moderne, l’écriture théâtrale prévaut contre l’écriture littéraire’ [‘A very modern phenomenon: theatrical writing prevails over literary writing’].<sup>279</sup>

The *féerie* incarnates a combination of different artistic practices, and the side text in the manuscripts renders the collaboration of movement, visual impressions and sound in the constitution and composition of the play. This means that the *féerie* may be viewed as a prototype of a certain kind of intermediality and, moreover, that its didascalies may be viewed as ‘precursors’ of Proust’s *mise en scène* and of the Proustian tableau; which, similarly to the didascalie, as we have seen, may be viewed as a synthesis of a *mise en scène* – even if, in the latter case, it is the perceiving subject’s senses and imagination that are responsible for the contrivance and composition of the spectacle, and not decorators, props persons and scene shifters. There is a kinship, then, between Proust’s tableau and the didascalie of the *féerie*. Both convey a complex collaboration of movement and sensory impressions seen from a spectatorial point of view, and it could be argued that the most prominent feature of both is the privileging of the spectacular, seeing as the emphasis in both types of writing is on the effect of the spectacle on the spectator.<sup>280</sup>

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version seems to be a place of synthesis for a collective writing which covers in equal measure the ambit of the playwright, of the composer and of the set-designer’]. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>278</sup> Laplace-Claverie, p. 37.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>280</sup> ‘Si toute *féerie* repose sur un texte rédigé, ce dernier fonctionne comme un livret destiné à justifier l’emploi de trucs, clous, changements à vue, métamorphoses, animations d’objets, travestissements et autres procédés susceptibles de donner à voir des événements insolites

The way that the world transforms into a theatrical stage set before the eyes of the bewildered Mme d'Épinoy serves to remind us, furthermore, that the concept of spectatorship in *À la recherche* is intricately connected with the aesthetic ideals of one of the major fictional artists of the novel, the Impressionist painter, Elstir, who never attempts to paint 'les choses telles qu'il savait qu'elles étaient, mais selon ces illusions optiques dont notre vision première est faite' ['things as he knew them to be, but in accordance with the optical illusions that our first sight of things is made of'] (II, 194; 2, 418). The theatricalising dimension of perception in Proust is brought to the fore when intellectual preconceptions and habitual ways of perceiving are made temporarily inoperative; that is, when perception is freed from the intellectual notion that is 'étrangère à nos impressions véritables et qui nous force à éliminer d'elles tout ce qui ne se rapporte pas à cette notion' ['foreign to our genuine impressions of them, and which forces us to eliminate from them whatever does not correspond to that view'] (II, 191; 2, 415). Even if Mme d'Épinoy can hardly be said to represent the figure of an artist (far from being aware that it is she who transforms Odette's drawing room into a theatre, she believes that what comes to view before her eyes is the *truth* about Odette's world), the tableau still draws attention to the creativity always at play in the act of perception. And, in a novel that repeatedly posits, as Danius argues, the task of the artist as that of rendering what he or she sees, and not what he or she knows,<sup>281</sup> Mme d'Épinoy's mistaking of Odette's drawing room for a theatre undeniably possesses some kinship with the continuous challenging of habitual modes of perception that lies at the very core of Proustian spectatorial aesthetics. Danius convincingly identifies the effort to 'render perceptual activities that are uninhibited by intellectual preconceptions'<sup>282</sup> as the veritable epitome of Proust's aesthetic pursuits, and insists that the representation of visual technology in *À la recherche* becomes 'a primary means of thematizing and exploring the disjunction between knowledge and

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échappant à toute rationalité' ['If every féerie relies on a written text, the latter functions more as a libretto destined to justify the use of tricks, strings, set changes, metamorphoses, animated objects, disguises and other techniques leading to unusual phenomena that cannot be rationally explained']. Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>281</sup> See 'The Education of the Senses. *Remembrance of Things Past* and the Modernist Rhetoric of Motion', in Danius, pp. 91-146.

<sup>282</sup> Danius, p. 95.

vision'.<sup>283</sup> A similar function could arguably be accorded the intermedial references to the *féerie*, which turn out to be equally well suited to drawing our attention to the *entr'acte*, that is, to the gap and interval between what we expect to see and what we actually perceive.

In this chapter, we have seen that the contrast that Barthes postulates when he opposes 'Oriental' and 'Western' theatre brings out an interesting paradox in the constitution of the Proustian tableau. The paradox is that, while the Proustian tableau does seem to offer a *mise en scène* of interiority (in the sense that it reveals something about the subjective interior by inviting us to discover one individual's experience of life, that is, the 'illusion' by which reality presents itself to her or him), the tableau does not therefore merely constitute what Barthes calls *hysterical* theatricality – even though such apparent revelations of 'interiority', of what lies 'within', are precisely what, to him, represent the core of hysterical theatre. There are, as I have argued in this chapter, several reasons why the Proustian tableau's staging of interiority also represents a *non-hysterical* form of theatricality: firstly, these tableaux draw the readers' attention towards their own 'machinery', in the sense that they never attempt to hide the 'artifice' of the spectacles they present. In reading Proust's tableaux, we never doubt that what we read is a subjective interpretation of reality. We know that it is and that it must be, given Proust's insistence that every impression is double, partly contained in the perceived object and partly extending into the interiority of the one who perceives. Whenever Proust writes perception, then, we know that the world he presents is conceived in order to correspond to a perceiving individual's *particular way of seeing*. When I say that the text draws our attention towards the 'artifice' of the spectacle, or its 'machinery', I mean to highlight the way that Proust's writing takes careful notice of the circumstances (a disruption of habit, a surprising encounter, emotional turmoil, and so forth) that cause the subject to perceive this or that impression as a theatrical spectacle. Equally important for our definition of the Proustian tableau as a form of non-hysterical theatricality, however, is the fact that the perceiving subject that discovers and creates the spectacle, and that figures as the tableau's spectator, is shown to be just as conditioned and modifiable as the spectacle.

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<sup>283</sup> Danius, p. 106.

In other words, the tableau may be said to express subjective interiority, but only on the condition that we consider this to be an unstable, dynamic interiority. Accordingly, Proustian theatricality, such as it comes to view in the tableaux of *À la recherche*, must be both hysterical *and* non-hysterical, or neither.

In the final part of this chapter, I ventured into a domain in which we will remain for large parts of the three final chapters of this thesis, the domain of the *féerie* – a theatrical genre that, as I have begun to show, occupies a particularly central place among the novel's intermedial references. Here, we examined a tableau in which the narrator makes use of a reference to the *féerie* as a means to convey the momentary bewilderment and surprise experienced when habitual and intellectual preconceptions are temporarily disabled: when, taken by surprise by what she observes in Mme Swann's drawing room, the world reveals itself to Mme d'Épinoy as being different from expected. In more general terms, my argument here has been that there is a sort of kinship between Proust's tableau and the side text, the didascalies, of this theatrical genre. This kinship interests me as an opportunity to consider and discuss the particular nature of Proust's theatrical writing. In the thesis's introduction, I suggested that the theatricality of Proust's novel comes to view not so much in the rendering of dialogues (generally regarded as the foremost theatrical mode of enunciation) as in the writing of perception and in its tableaux. This chapter has enabled me to expand on this hypothesis by showing that if Proust's writing of perception is a sort of *écriture théâtrale*, or a writing 'resembling' the one found in theatrical manuscripts, it is these manuscripts' stage directions or side text that it brings to mind. More specifically, I maintain that it resembles, not just any type of side text, but, concretely, the didascalies of the Romantic *féerie*. The reason why I insist on this specific kinship is not only the fact that there is a thematic kinship between *À la recherche* and the *féerie*, in the sense that they share a fascination for the supernatural and for enchantment (even though this thematic kinship does come to view in various ways, and not least, as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, when Proust stages the perception of the material world). Rather, what is more important to the argument of this chapter is the 'structural' similarity between the two: the fact that both types of writing convey perception from the point of view of a spectator (in a theatre).

As Roxane Martin reminds us, the reason why the side text of the Romantic *féerie* was written (post-performance) as a form of synthesis of the spectacle seen from the spectator's perspective (and not, as would have been something quite different, as pre-performance instructions to stage directors, actors, decorators, scene shifters or props people) was that, at the time, the profession of the stage director had yet to be invented. In other words, the 'voice' of these didascalies is not that of a stage director, but that of a spectator (representing, as it were, the collective body of spectators in the auditorium) describing what she or he perceives: a voice offering a verbal account of, as Proust was quoted saying in Chapter 2, the 'illusions du spectateur dans la salle' ['the illusions of a spectator in a theatre'] (III, 394; 4, 400). It could, consequently, be argued that this specific form of *écriture théâtrale* is closely related to the *writing of perception* that Proust undertakes in *À la recherche*, which, as we have seen through the examples analysed in the three first chapters of the present study, repeatedly evokes the layout of the theatre as a 'symbol', structure or model. However, the *écriture didascalique* of *À la recherche* did not spring fully formed from the mature novelist's pen, and in the next chapter, we shall turn our gaze towards an early example of Proustian theatrical writing, found in his first published work *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, which suggests that the theatricality of his novel is the result of a process of stylistic experimentation that started early in the 1890s.

## 4 Staging the Props: Bringing Objects Alive

Proust never published any dramatic texts, but his letters to Reynaldo Hahn indicate that he did develop ideas for at least two plays during the early 1900s. While none of Proust's early attempts at theatrical writing resulted in actual plays, it is interesting to note that several themes and motifs that would be included in *À la recherche* were first conceived or projected as scenarios. In Chapter 1.4, we saw that, in 1906, Proust wrote to Hahn about his plans to write a play on sadism in collaboration with René Peter, and in another letter to Hahn dated the same year, Proust claims to have created a *féerie*. The script for this 'féerie [...] indiciblement belle avec d'horribles vulgarités' ['unfathomably beautiful féerie, full of awful vulgarity']<sup>284</sup> has never been found, and Bouillaguet points out that Proust's humorous tone suggests that he may be joking when he refers to this alleged script.<sup>285</sup> There exists, however, some evidence of his experiments with theatrical writing. In or just following the year of 1906,<sup>286</sup> using his own translation of John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, published that same year, as a notebook, Proust wrote a brief sketch. Although he left the sketch unedited, Proust would further explore its theme (the impossibility of loving the one by whom one is loved) in *Un amour de Swann* and *La Prisonnière*. The two protagonists of this sketch carry the same names as those of a dialogue – this one also left unpublished – he had written six years earlier, in 1900: Henri and Françoise.<sup>287</sup> Other examples of theatrical writing are found in his first-published work *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, a collection in which several texts are marked by the author's enthusiasm for the theatre. In this book, we find one piece of writing in the form of a dialogue, 'Scénario', which arguably resembles a theatrical manuscript more than any other text Proust ever published, and which is one of the examples I will examine in this chapter.

It cannot be concluded with certainty as to why Proust, in contrast to the major novelists of the nineteenth century, such as Balzac, Flaubert and Zola, never made a

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<sup>284</sup> Proust, *Correspondance*, p. 282.

<sup>285</sup> Bouillaguet, 'Proust et la mise en scène,' p. 87.

<sup>286</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre propose this date of publication in Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 901. The dialogue, dedicated to Robert de Flers, is reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 431-35. Proust further develops on the theme of this short dialogue (loving someone who does not love one back) in *À la recherche*.

serious attempt at writing for the theatre, but Tadié is perhaps right in supposing that Proust found the dialogue form dissatisfactory: ‘[Proust] incarne dans son œuvre les acteurs, le goût du spectacle, les citations de Racine; mais il cherche trop ce qu’il y a *sous le dialogue* pour se contenter du dialogue de scène’ [‘Proust in his work embodies actors, a taste for the theatre, quotations from Racine; but he is too busy searching for what lies *beneath the dialogue* to be satisfied with theatre dialogue alone’].<sup>288</sup> In light of this, it is interesting to note that it is often precisely when he aims to bring out that which is *sous le dialogue* (that is, feelings and fantasies, but also different modes of attention and perception) that Proust’s writing appears most influenced by his taste for the theatrical, for he frequently recurs to the practice of *mise en scène* on such occasions. What this results in is, among other things, the phenomenon that we shall examine in this chapter: the creation of theatrical spaces in which the physical objects (the ‘props’) act as though they were alive.

The examples we shall study in this chapter are passages in which the protagonists’ emotions somehow impregnate the world around them. In other words, they show us how Proust, in both ‘Scénario’ and *À la recherche*, allows subjective interiority to *materialise* in space. They may be considered, then, as veritable *mis en scène* of interiority enabled by the trope of anthropomorphism, which allows Proust to animate the inanimate and to link the protagonist’s psyche to the objects around him. This does not mean, however, that the anthropomorphised objects of *À la recherche* exist in a purely instrumental relationship to the human subject’s body and mind (like they seem to do in ‘Scénario’), or as mere surfaces on which the protagonist projects his interiority with ease. On the contrary, in the novel, people and things co-exist in a complex and often complicated relationship, and objects manifest themselves as bodies *among* which the human subject lives, as presences whose physicality is intensely felt, in a way that ultimately serves as a reminder that the human body is both subject and object, that it is a ‘chose parmi les choses’ [‘thing among things’].<sup>289</sup> In fact, in the examples studied here and elsewhere in the novel, the phenomenological complexity of relating to objects is, it seems, precisely what motivates Proust’s

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<sup>288</sup> Tadié, *Marcel Proust: biographie*, p. 115, my emphasis.

<sup>289</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, p. 181. [Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Intertwining - The Chiasm,’ in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 255.]



practice of *mise en scène* when he writes about the material world. Indeed, as we have seen, the theatrical structure engaged in the novel's staging of perception efficiently discloses the experience of 'breathing the same air' as the object of perception – regardless of whether this object is animate or inanimate. In other words, as we shall see in this chapter and the next, the *mise en scène* of the material world in *À la recherche* is characterised by a form of intertwining of subject and object that clearly anticipates Merleau-Ponty's views on the human body as a *chiasm* (a 'crossing-over' of subjective experience and objective existence).

It is, in fact, extremely helpful to bear in mind this phenomenological understanding of the body when we explore the way that the subject-object relation is staged in these examples, since it serves to bring out the differences between the early and the late text's *mise en scène* of objects. In *Le Visible et l'invisible*, Merleau-Ponty insists that, in the act of perception, the perceiving subject's body does not have the visible *before* itself as objects, but *about* it: 's'il touche et voit, ce n'est pas qu'il ait les visibles devant lui comme objets: ils sont autour de lui, ils entrent même dans son enceinte, ils sont en lui, ils tapissent du dehors et du dedans ses regards et ses mains' ['if it touches and sees, this is not because it would have the visibles before itself as objects: they are about it, they even enter into its enclosure, they are within it, they line its looks and its hands inside and outside'].<sup>290</sup> As we have seen on several occasions already, Merleau-Ponty's project often coincides with aspects of the Proustian universe, and this is no exception: the contrast between the two modes of perception that Merleau-Ponty contrasts in this paragraph (on the one hand, relating to objects as something that the perceiving body has before itself ('devant lui') and, on the other hand, as something that exists about it ('autour de lui') and in it ('en lui')) actually coincides with the different ways in which the protagonists of the examples we shall study in this chapter relate to objects. Whereas the objects of 'Scénario' are like mirrors reflecting the protagonist's feelings, the objects in the scenes from the novel (one of which takes place in a hotel room in the fictional seaside resort of Balbec and the other in Françoise's kitchen in Combray) are experienced as existing both around

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<sup>290</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, p. 181. [Merleau-Ponty, 'The Intertwining - The Chiasm,' in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 254.]

and within the subject, and their somehow intrusive presence forces the protagonist to pay attention to his experience of them and their effect on him. What this entails is that, while in both the juvenilia and in the novel Proust dramatises the interaction of anthropomorphised objects and humans as a means to exteriorise subjective interiority, in *À la recherche*, this dramatisation also serves to illustrate the protagonist's susceptibility to the influence exercised by the material world. The two examples from the novel that I analyse in this chapter will offer further insight into the type of theatrical writing that, in the conclusion to Chapter 3, I referred to as Proust's *écriture didascalique*.

#### 4.1 Objects as Mirrors in 'Scénario'

Young Proust's fascination for things theatrical is particularly noticeable in the part of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* that goes by the name of 'Fragments de comédie italienne', in which we find the dialogue 'Scénario'. The way that this fragment intermingles dialogue and side text suggests that the theatricality of *À la recherche* results from a process of stylistic experimentation beginning as early as the late nineteenth century. This early text explores the possibilities for exteriorising (by way of dramatisation) subjective interiority in a way that seems to anticipate (although it also differs from) the theatricality of the mature novel.

'Scénario' consists of a conversation between a man, Honoré, his cravat, his pen, his books and his clock, the flowers filling his bedroom and a good fairy. In other words, this early work bears witness to the *féerie*'s influence on the young writer, for the characters constitute precisely such an unlikely conglomerate of strange and supernatural creatures as one would expect to find on stage in a *féerie*. As is the case with the fragments of theatrical writing that he will produce ten years later, in 1906, this text announces a theme that Proust will go on to explore in painful detail in *À la recherche*: the necessity for the lover to feign indifference if he is to keep his beloved. In the novel, the protagonist will repeatedly put on such comedies of indifference in order to prolong his romantic relations. But in 'Scénario', Honoré fails completely in his attempt to follow the good fairy's advice, and consequently loses the one he loves.

Proust's scenario is short and, if he did intend it for the stage, the text that we have in hand must be reckoned merely a sketch or an outline for a play. Except for one final, dramatic gesture towards the end, when Honoré fatally throws himself at his beloved while expressing his love for her, there is little action in the text. That does not mean, however, that Marie-Louise Jefferson is right in claiming that 'the dramatic value of this scenario, as can be seen by the cast of "characters", is *practically nil*'.<sup>291</sup> Jefferson, who argues that the text must be meant for the reader alone, and not for the spectator, makes this claim partly based on the cast of characters, which she finds inappropriate for the stage. In making this judgement, Jefferson does not take into account that Proust, who was well-versed in the world of theatrical magic, was most likely accustomed to seeing improbable characters on stage in the *féeries* that he went to see in his youth.<sup>292</sup> Regardless of whether we consider 'Scénario' as intended for the stage or not, however, the text provides us with an actual attempt at theatrical writing, and it demonstrates that, even at this early stage in his writing career, Proust was already experimenting with anthropomorphism as a means to mediate the emotional state of a character. In the passage quoted below, this experimentation is exemplified in the way that the gestures and emotional expressions of the clock, flowers, pen, paper and books serve to insinuate the feverishness and anxiety that Honoré refuses to admit or acknowledge until his final, desperate action reveals it:

LA BONNE FÉE. – Songe à m'obéir et que l'éternité de ton amour en dépend.

La pendule bat fiévreusement, les parfums des roses s'inquiètent et les orchidées tourmentées se penchent anxieusement vers Honoré; une a l'air méchant. Sa plume inerte le considère avec la tristesse de ne pouvoir bouger. Les livres n'interrompent point leur grave murmure. Tout lui dit: Obéis à la fée et songe que l'éternité de ton amour en dépend...

HONORÉ, *sans hésiter*. – Mais j'obéirai, comment pouvez-vous douter de moi?

La bien-aimée entre; les roses, les orchidées, les cheveux de Vénus, la plume et le papier, la pendule de Saxe, Honoré haletant vibrent comme une harmonie d'elle.

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<sup>291</sup> Jefferson, p. 10, my emphasis.

<sup>292</sup> It is probable that Proust went to see at least two *féeries* in his youth, for in 'Impressions de théâtre', written in 1888, he mentions two plays that were on the repertoire that year: *Cendrillon* at Théâtre du Châtelet and *Pieds de mouton* at Éden-Théâtre. See Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, pp. 334-35.

Honoré se précipite sur sa bouche en s'écriant: « Je t'aime!... »<sup>293</sup>

The tension and trepidation of the objects in the room disclose to the reader – and the potential spectator – the state of emotional turbulence that Honoré is in and that will make it impossible for him to follow the good fairy's advice, even though he strongly professes a will to do so: 'HONORÉ, *sautant de joie*. – Ma bonne fée, je t'adore et je t'obéirai' ['HONORÉ (jumping for joy): My good fairy, I adore you and I will obey you!'].<sup>294</sup> The objects thus function as *mirrors*, not merely for the emotions that Honoré is consciously experiencing (he knows that he is sad, and why he is sad, and this is the subject of their conversation) but also for his unconscious feelings. Fittingly, the text actually opens with a scenic direction indicating that Honoré gets up to take a look in a mirror: 'Honoré est assis dans sa chambre. Il se lève et se regarde dans la glace' ['Honoré is sitting in his bedroom. He rises and looks at himself in the mirror'].<sup>295</sup> The very act that opens the text thus seems to announce the paramount importance that the act of mirroring will come to play: Honoré's initial glance into the mirror shows him an actual reflection of himself, and, in the remainder of the text, the other objects (with the curious exception of one flower which, curiously, has an 'air méchant') will adopt similar mirroring functions, as their gestures and movements (the feverish ticking of the clock, the anxious twists and turns of the orchids, the quivering of all the objects as the beloved enters the room) reflect Honoré's emotions.

Proust's *mise en scène* brings the objects alive so that they may express and mirror human emotions. By way of dramatisation, he is able to visualise even those aspects of his interiority of which Honoré is unaware, but which the final, passionate

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<sup>293</sup> Marcel Proust, *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 95. ['THE GOOD FAIRY: Remember to obey me: the eternity of your love depends on it. *The clock ticks feverishly, the perfume of the roses grows disquieted, and the orchids twist and turn towards Honoré in anxious torment; one of them has a malicious expression. His inert pen considers him, filled with sadness at not being able to move. The books do not cease from their grave murmuring. Everything tells him, "Obey the fairy and remember that the eternity of your love depends on doing so..."*'] HONORÉ (without hesitating): Of course I will obey! How can you doubt me? *The beloved enters; the roses, the orchids, the maidenhair ferns, the pen and paper, the Dresden clock, and a breathless Honoré all quiver as if vibrating in harmony with her. Honoré flings himself onto her mouth, crying: I love you!...*'. Marcel Proust, *Pleasures and Days*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2004), p. 51.]

<sup>294</sup> Proust, *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, p. 95. [Proust, p. 51.]

<sup>295</sup> Proust, *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, p. 93. [Proust, p. 49.]

act – a sign, we may say, of his unconscious impulses – comes to manifest in the end. Consequently, the relation between subject and objects in this piece of writing appears both direct and relatively unproblematic. The objects serve to express the subject's interiority, which is conveyed through, or perhaps rather projected onto, them in a relatively straightforward way. By the time *À la recherche* is published, however, we see that this relationship has undergone a radical change: a palpable *distance* has instated itself between human being and inanimate object, and the material world is repeatedly shown to 'turn away' from the subject.<sup>296</sup> What has happened is, as Thomas Baldwin points out, that 'Proust has begun to talk *about* an experience of objects – to make modes of attention the object of his attention'.<sup>297</sup> What this entails, in terms of theatricality, is that, in the novel, the objects no longer function as mere mirrors or as surfaces upon which the subject projects his feelings, but that they instead turn into veritable protagonists in a *drama of perception* – that is, as is the case in the example that we shall turn our attention towards presently, a drama whose *subject* is perception.

#### 4.2 Objects as Actors in *À la recherche*

An excellent example of how anthropomorphism works as a vehicle for theatricalising the protagonist's perception of objects is found in the paragraphs dedicated to his first encounter with his new bedroom at the Grand-Hôtel in Balbec:

J'étais brisé par la fatigue, j'avais la fièvre, je me serais bien couché, mais je n'avais rien de ce qu'il eût fallu pour cela. J'aurais voulu au moins m'étendre un instant sur le

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<sup>296</sup> For a thorough examination of the way that Proust's treatment of objects changes in the course of his œuvre, see Thomas Baldwin, *The Material Object in the Work of Marcel Proust* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005). In his study, Baldwin traces the development of this treatment from *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, through *Jean Santeuil*, and to *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Carefully bringing to light the growing complexity in the depiction of objects throughout Proust's œuvre, Baldwin shows that the unproblematic relationship between matter and consciousness in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* evaporates as we reach the mature works, where, increasingly, 'the narrator's sense of alienation from objects' and a 'splitting apart of the "matière" of objects and consciousness' become important. Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 61. Interestingly, in light of this chapter's focus on the *mise en scène* of objects, Baldwin argues that, as we approach the publication of *À la recherche*, Proust 'was beginning to view his experience of objects in terms of a philosophical (phenomenological) drama'. Ibid., p. 78. To some extent, the consequences of this 'phenomenological' drama for Proust's theatrical writing are precisely what I am examining in this chapter.

lit, mais à quoi bon puisque je n'aurais pu y faire trouver de repos à cet ensemble de sensations qui est pour chacun de nous son corps conscient, sinon son corps matériel, et puisque *les objets inconnus qui l'encerclaient*, en le forçant à mettre ses perceptions sur le pied permanent d'une défensive vigilante, auraient maintenu mes regards, mon ouïe, tous mes sens, dans une position aussi réduite et inconmode (même si j'avais allongé mes jambes) que celle du cardinal La Balue dans la cage où il ne pouvait ni se tenir debout ni s'asseoir. 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. De la place, il n'y en avait pas pour moi dans ma chambre de Balbec (mienne de nom seulement), elle était pleine de choses qui ne me connaissaient pas, me rendirent le coup d'œil méfiant que je leur jetai et sans tenir aucun compte de mon existence, témoignèrent que je dérangeais le train-train de la leur. (II, 27, my emphasis)<sup>298</sup>

The protagonist's encounter with the objects in the hotel room in Balbec is tinted by a mutual feeling of disaffection, which illustrates how troublesome and unsettling new bedrooms are for him. When he first enters the room, his anxious attitude is disclosed by way of a *mise en scène* in which the objects in the room return his own trepidation. The narrator situates his younger self as a spectator to a spectacle in which he is fully immersed, that is, in the *midst* of the surroundings that his perception theatricalises (his body is the nave at the very centre of 'les objets inconnus qui l'encerclaient' ['the unknown objects which surrounded it']). The walls of the room procure a frame for the tableau, evoked by way of an allusion (which efficiently discloses his sense of claustrophobia) to the iron cage in which the 15<sup>th</sup>-century French cardinal Jean Balue allegedly was kept imprisoned for years.

In contrast to what we observed in 'Scénario', the relation between space and subject in this tableau is clearly tense. It seems that the protagonist's emotional turmoil

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<sup>298</sup> 'Feeling exhausted and with a touch of fever, I would have been glad to go to bed; but all my bedtime things were missing. I would have liked at least to lie down for a moment on the bed: but that would have done me no good, since I would have been incapable of granting any rest to that bundle of sensations that the waking body, even the material body, is for each of us, and also because *the unknown objects which surrounded it*, by forcing us to keep its perceptions in a permanent state of defensive alertness, would have held my eyes and ears, all my senses, in a posture as cramped and uncomfortable, even if I had stretched out my legs, as the one Louis XI inflicted on Cardinal La Balue by having him locked in a cage which made it impossible either to sit or stand. As our attentiveness furnishes a room, so habit unfurnishes it, making space in it for us. In that room of mine at Balbec, "mine" in name only, there was no space for me: it was crammed with things which did not know me, which glared my distrust of them back at me, noting my existence only to the extent of letting me know they resented me for disturbing theirs' (2, 245, my emphasis).

has impregnated all the objects in the room, to the extent that their physical presence – strongly felt and demanding the vigilant attention of all his senses – would have made it impossible for him to relax, had he tried to do so. The sceptical gaze emanating from the objects is like a reflection of his own gaze, which the things literally *return* to him (the room is ‘pleine de choses qui ne me connaissaient pas, *me rendirent le coup d’œil méfiant que je leur jetai*’ [‘crammed with things which did not know me, *which glared my distrust of them back at me*’]). As in ‘Scenario’, the room’s ability to mirror his feelings is figuratively represented by the presence of a (in this case large) number of reflective surfaces: ‘J’étais tourmenté par la présence de petites bibliothèques à vitrines, qui couraient le long des murs, mais surtout par une grande glace à pieds, arrêtée en travers de la pièce et avant le départ de laquelle je sentais qu’il n’y aurait pas pour moi de détente possible’ [‘I was tormented by the presence of low glass-fronted bookcases which ran all round the walls, and especially by a tall cheval-glass which stood athwart a corner of the room and which I knew would have to be taken away if I was ever to enjoy any possibility of calm’] (II, 27; 2, 245-46). In light of this, it is interesting to note that the protagonist is unable to relax in the presence of the full-length mirror – whose epithet, ‘à pieds’ (literally, a mirror with *feet*), seems to endow it with a somewhat uncannily human-like posture – since this implies that its *reflection* (the reflection of himself *in* the object) frightens him. Is the reason for his distress that the image of himself in the mirror requires him to recognise himself not only as a subject but also as an *object* of perception? At any rate, it does require him to acknowledge that, similarly to the things that fill the bedroom, he too has an objective existence, that he too is *visible* (not only to himself but also from elsewhere): ‘que, comme l’ont dit beaucoup de peintres, *je me sens regardé par les choses*’ [‘that, as many painters have said, *I feel myself looked at by the things*’].<sup>299</sup>

Precisely why this confrontation with his own visibility is so frightening to him is not spelled out in the passage in question, but the terror it holds seems quite clearly to point forward towards a revelation that is yet to come (and that we will return to in the final chapter of the thesis), namely the unpleasant revelation that follows when the

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<sup>299</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, p. 183, my emphasis. [Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Intertwining - The Chiasm,’ in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 256, my emphasis.]

aged protagonist, during the *matinée* at the Princesse de Guermantes's, is forced to *see himself* reflected in the eyes of the people around him, 'comme dans la première glace véridique que j'eusse rencontrée' ['as though in the first truthful glass I had ever encountered'] (IV, 508; 6, 238). Mirrors, in Proust, are potent stuff. And, yet, in spite of the considerable number of mirrors in the room, it would be imprecise to say that what is staged in this *tableau* is a direct *reflection* of the protagonist and his emotions, for the sentiments that emanate from the objects in this room are not completely identical with his. While he feels anxious, for instance, the objects seem above all irritated that his presence should disturb their habitual 'train-train'. In other words, contrary to what we observed in 'Scénario', where every object was attentively aware of Honoré and spoke only to and about him, these objects give the distinct impression of having a life of their own and of agreeing with one another that the protagonist is a disturbing and irritating intrusion. The encounter thus creates an extreme sense of alienation in the protagonist, who feels excluded and does not understand the 'language' in which the objects communicate with one another:

La pendule – alors qu'à la maison je n'entendais la mienne que quelque secondes par semaine, seulement quand je sortais d'une profonde méditation – continua sans s'interrompre un instant à tenir dans une langue inconnue des propos qui devaient être désobligeants pour moi, car les grand rideaux violets l'écoutaient sans répondre mais dans une attitude analogue à celle des gens qui haussent les épaules pour montrer que la vue d'un tiers les irrite. (II, 27)<sup>300</sup>

It is through a cunning, Flaubert-like use of verbs that Proust brings the hotel room alive and turns inanimate objects into actors in this episode. In the well-known essay 'À propos du « style » de Flaubert' (1920), Proust notes that, in Flaubert's texts, things 'ont autant de vie que les hommes' ['have as much life in them as mankind'].<sup>301</sup> Things can often be veritable protagonists in Flaubert's novels, he writes, all the while

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<sup>300</sup> 'Without let-up, in some unfamiliar tongue, the clock, which at home I would never have heard for more than a few seconds a week, on surfacing from a long reverie, went on making comments about me, which must have sounded offensive to the tall violet curtains, for they stood there without a word in a listening posture, looking like the sort of people who will shrug their shoulders to show they are irked by the mere sight of someone' (2, 245).

<sup>301</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 588.



observing that ‘cette activité des choses, des bêtes, puisqu’elles sont le sujet des phrases (au lieu que ce sujet soit des hommes), oblige à une grande variété de verbes’ [‘this activity of objects, of animals, since these are the subjects of sentences (as opposed to there being a human subject), leads to a great variety in verbs’].<sup>302</sup> In *Balbec*, similarly to what he observed in Flaubert’s texts, it is precisely by instating objects as the subjects of his sentences that Proust animates the hotel room. The clock and the curtains are invested with human traits through the use of verbs endowing them with the ability to listen and speak (although in a foreign language and only to one another), and the curtains are ‘humanised’ through a simile comparing their attitude to that of people who shrug their shoulders to manifest annoyance. If the episode constitutes a form of *écriture théâtrale*, then, it is by virtue not of the dialogue but of the side text it evokes, the didascalies, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, may be viewed as precursors to the Proustian tableau and Proust’s *mise en scène*.

It is also the theatricalisation of the room (the transformation of the inanimate objects into virtual protagonists) that enables Proust to write forth the protagonist’s perceptual experience as a veritable (phenomenological) drama of perception, that is, as an encounter between spectatorial and performing bodies of (living) presence. The relation between protagonist and objects in *Balbec* makes for a complex and highly ambiguous spatial experience. As we saw in Chapter 2.1, the fact that the room is unfamiliar increases his attentiveness and forces him to relate to the objects not as annexes to his own body, but as independent existences. In *Balbec*, however, his lack of familiarity with his surroundings agitates his senses and imagination not in the pleasurable way described in the passage devoted to the milkmaid and the train ride, but by forcing him to remain in a permanent state of defensive alertness (‘sur le pied permanent d’une défensive vigilante’). Thus, while, on the one hand, he feels as though these unfamiliar objects ignore him, on the other hand, their presence is felt as an aggressive intrusiveness:

Je levais à tout moment mes regards [...] vers le plafond surélevé de ce belvédère situé au sommet de l’hôtel et que ma grand-mère avait choisi pour moi; et, jusque dans cette

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<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 589.

région plus intime que celle où nous voyons et où nous entendons, dans cette région où nous éprouvons la qualité des odeurs, c'était *presque à l'intérieur de mon moi* que celle du vetiver venait pousser dans mes derniers retranchements son offensive, à laquelle j'opposais non sans fatigue la riposte inutile et incessante d'un reniflement alarmé. (II, 27-28, my emphasis)<sup>303</sup>

The Balbec-tableau stages the protagonist's perception of the hotel room upon his first arrival in the seaside resort. His experience of the objects encountered in this unknown room as hostile serves as an example of his imagination's dramatisation of the space, and the way in which his imagination brings the room, and the objects in it, 'alive'. As such, the trope of anthropomorphism can be said to enable Proust, in Balbec as in 'Scénario', to exteriorise subjective interiority. But, as we have seen, a radical change in the subject-object relationship has occurred between the publication of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* and *À la recherche*, and whereas, in the earlier piece, human and things exist in harmony and understand one another, the relationship is far more troublesome in the novel, where the objects appear to reject the human intruder. The objects thus go from being mere reflective surfaces (mirrors) to being virtual protagonists (actors), whose physical presence is felt to such a degree that it evokes a sense of claustrophobia in the human subject.

This is one way in which Proust's mature theatrical writing differs from his previous attempt. It is not, however, the only way. In fact, we may say that the protagonist's susceptibility to the 'influence' exercised by the material world in Balbec is a token of his 'adaptability': it is because he is a dynamic character that he is capable of being affected by external impulses (whereas Honoré is incapable of listening to the fairy's advice). This is also the reason why the Balbec tableau, although it may be viewed as a *mise en scène* of the protagonist's inner struggles, is not an example of what Barthes would call hysterical theatricality. Certainly, these anthropomorphised objects are animated by interiority in the sense that they serve to

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<sup>303</sup> 'Constantly glancing or staring upwards [...], I looked at the vast height of the ceiling in this belvedere stuck on the very top of the hotel, which my grandmother had selected for me; and in that part of me which is more private than those used for seeing and hearing, that part where one is aware of shades of smell, *almost inside the self*, an assault of vetiver threw me back on my deepest defences as I tried to repel it, in my tiredness, with a pointless, repeated and apprehensive sniffing' (2, 246, my emphasis).

disclose the protagonist's impression of the room as he first entered it, but they are not 'symptoms' of his interiority in the sense that they reveal the 'soul' of Proust's protagonist, but merely in the sense that they show us where he was, emotionally and imaginatively, in that very moment and space.

In fact, the (again, abiding by Barthes's terminology) non-hysterical quality of Proust's *mise en scène* becomes particularly evident in Balbec, due to the many permutations that the hotel room undergoes. Initially, as we have seen, the protagonist experiences it as a claustrophobic, sequestering space in which he feels surrounded by enemies: 'N'ayant plus d'univers, plus de chambre, plus de corps que menacé pas les ennemis qui m'entouraient, qu'envahi jusque dans les os par la fièvre, j'étais seul, j'avais envie de mourir' ['Deprived of my universe, evicted from my room, with my very tenancy of my body jeopardized by the enemies about me, infiltrated to the bone by fever, I was alone and wished I could die'] (II, 28; 2, 246). Eventually, however, the room becomes a source of joy, or what the narrator refers to as a 'cuve des beaux jours' ['reservoir of sunny days'] (II, 278; 2, 502). Then, when he discovers the evening picture-displays created by the reflection of the sunset on the glass-doors of the bookcases round the room (II, 160-61; 2, 383-84), it transforms into a source of purely aesthetic pleasure. And, in the end, he grows so used to it that he no longer sees it – until, one day, his love for Albertine makes the room appear valuable and beautiful again: 'À la place d'un lieu de transition où je passais un instant avant de m'évader vers la plage ou vers Rivebelle, ma chambre me redevenait réelle et chère, se renouvelait car j'en regardais et en appréciais chaque meuble avec les yeux d'Albertine' ['Instead of being a mere place of transit, where I spent a moment or two before making my escape to the beach or over to Rivebelle, my room had once more become real and dear to me, had been renewed, because I could see and appreciate all its contents through the eyes of Albertine'] (II, 278-79; 2, 502). This final transformation is interesting in several ways, firstly, because it illustrates the loving gaze's constitutive power and how feelings of love may change our perception of things (the passage thus identifies the 'point de vue égoïste qui est celui de l'amour' ['selfish viewpoint which is that of love'] (II, 278; 2, 502) as the 'machinery' producing the illusion of a beautiful room), and, secondly, for what it implies about the

gaze that discovers and creates the room. The narrator says that he saw the room *with Albertine's eyes*. Even the gaze, then, can be 'another', wear a mask, or play a part; in short, can be a fiction.

The Proustian tableau, with its incessant permutations, may serve to exteriorise subjective interiority, to be sure, but this interiority is not that of a fetishist subject, but of an evolving, dynamic one. In other words, the perceiving subject that discovers and creates, frames and theatricalises the spectacle of the tableau is a Proustian subject *par excellence*: a modifiable machinery that exposes itself in the act. In the final analysis of this chapter, I will look into a tableau from *À la recherche*, which, according to Kirsten von Hagen, with its detailed descriptions of Françoise at work in the kitchen, reads like a didascalie from a féerie ('se lit comme la didascalie d'une féerie'<sup>304</sup>) – a tableau that provides one of the novel's most explicit references to this theatrical genre. The playful interaction of subject and objects in this passage provides a contrast to the way that the material world turns away from the human being in Balbec. It also suggests, moreover, (something that I shall discuss in further detail in Chapter 5) that the mature novelist's theatrical writing remains influenced by the younger writer's Romantic desires of achieving a form of communication with inanimate things. Subsequently, it confirms that, to Proust, the *drama* of relating to objects may also entail a rather pleasurable form of intrusion.

### 4.3 Objects and the Poetry of the Everyday

In the paragraph below, Françoise prepares dinner for the protagonist's family in his aunt Léonie's home in Combray. The paragraph aligns Françoise, 'commandant aux forces de la nature devenues ses aides' ['commanding the forces of nature, which were now her assistants'] (I, 119; 1, 122), with the giants who get hired as cooks in the féeries, while the kitchen utensils, the coal, the steam and the fire act as the gigantic Françoise's little helpers, assisting her as she effectuates a whole range of culinary metamorphoses. The passage provides another example of how a reference to the

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<sup>304</sup> Kirsten von Hagen, '« L'admirable féerie »: la notion de 'féerie' chez Marcel Proust,' in *La Féerie autour de 1900 – une figure de la modernité?*, ed. Jörg Dünne and Gesine Hindemith, Lendemains (2013), p. 33.

féerie allows Proust to qualify a certain mode of perception (in this case, that of the protagonist as a child fascinated by the sensory and aesthetic delights of the everyday):

À cette heure où je descendais apprendre le menu, le dîner était déjà commencé, et Françoise, commandant aux forces de la nature devenues ses aides, comme dans les féeries où les géants se font engager comme cuisiniers, frappait la houille, donnait à la vapeur des pommes de terre à étuver et faisait finir à point par le feu les chefs-d'œuvre culinaires d'abord préparés dans des récipients de céramistes qui allaient des grandes cuves, marmites, chaudrons et poissonnères, aux terrines pour le gibier, moules à pâtisserie, et petits pots de crème en passant par une collection complète de casseroles de toutes dimensions. (I, 119)<sup>305</sup>

Why is it, then, that this passage reads like a didascalie from a féerie? Unfortunately, von Hagen does not specify how and why this should be the case, and, consequently, her intriguing suggestion that this paragraph resembles the side text in a féerie remains underdeveloped. It is not clear what she intends with it – whether she considers Proust's writing as a sort of *écriture didascalique* merely at this point in the novel, or whether she sees it as a feature of his style in general. While the narrator's explicit comparisons of Françoise and the kitchen utensils with characters in a féerie makes it tempting to simply agree with her observation, it strikes me as unfortunate that Hagen misses out on this opportunity to pinpoint what she views as the theatrical features of Proust's style. This does not mean, however, that I consider her claim to be incorrect. On the contrary, it strikes me as quite to the point, perhaps even more so than von Hagen is aware of herself, since, as becomes further evident in the second half of the passage, which I will quote below, this passage does exactly what the didascalies of the Romantic féerie were supposed to do, as we saw in Chapter 3: it procures a 'synthesis' of the different elements that constitute the theatrical illusion *as it is perceived by the spectator*. This is also what enables us to consider the scene a tableau,

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<sup>305</sup> 'At the hour when I usually went downstairs to find out what the menu was, dinner would already have been started, and Françoise, commanding the forces of nature, which were now her assistants, as in fairy plays where giants hire themselves out as cooks, would strike the coal, entrust the steam with some potatoes to cook and make the fire finish to perfection the culinary masterpieces first prepared in potters' vessels that ranged from great vats, casseroles, cauldrons and fishkettles to terrines for game, moulds for pastry and little jugs for cream, and included a complete collection of pans of every shape and size' (1, 122).

since its theatrical quality and its enchanting effect so evidently depend on the perceiving subject's presence and identification of what he perceives as theatricality: the magic of Françoise's otherwise prosaic chores is only visible to us if we see the kitchen as through the eyes of the child, that is, by way of his point of view and *particular way of seeing*. The comparison of these domestic chores to those of characters in a *féerie*, a typical form of entertainment for children in *fin de siècle* Paris, seems to confirm that the child's imagination is responsible for turning this perceptual impression into a theatrical illusion. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest, as von Hagen does, that the scene can be read as an allegory of literary creation:

[...] le passage se lit comme une réflexion autoréférentielle. Ainsi, tout art revêt aussi un aspect quotidien, banal, profane. Il n'y a pas de vérité dans l'art, c'est une esthétique du spectateur qui domine. Sous les yeux du spectateur la scène se transforme en art, révèle son côté poétique. Le passage se lit alors comme une allégorie de la création littéraire.<sup>306</sup>

Referring to previous interpretations of this passage as a metaphor for the poeticising agency of the narrator,<sup>307</sup> von Hagen insists that what we observe in this example from *À la recherche* is a transformation of a trivial and everyday reality into a poetic reality: 'il s'agit donc d'une poétisation du réel' ['this is thus a poetisation of the real'].<sup>308</sup> Such an interpretation of Françoise's art of cooking as a metaphor for literary creation, or, as von Hagen ultimately suggests, of the entire paragraph as an *allegory* for literary creation, is both intriguing and, in all likelihood, justifiable. After all, as Malcolm Bowie reminds us, 'the great novel teems with allegories of itself, contains within itself a shimmering population of homunculus novels, each claiming to speak for the gigantic whole'.<sup>309</sup> Besides, von Hagen's interpretation of this example as an allegory of literary creation corresponds well with this thesis's view of the Proustian tableau as

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<sup>306</sup> Hagen, p. 35. ['[...] the passage reads like a self-referential observation. Thus, all art also carries an aspect that is everyday, mundane, profane. There is no truth in art; it is a spectator's aesthetic that prevails. Under the eyes of the spectator, the scene is transformed into art, reveals its poetic side. The passage thus reads like an allegory for literary creation'.]

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>309</sup> Malcolm Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 118.

an exemplary maquette (a *mise en scène* of the literary text's machinery or fabrication). However, our reading of such passages as self-referential (metaphorical or allegorical) expositions of the process of literary creation should not prevent us from acknowledging that Proust is equally interested in the observed scene *in and of itself*. Allegorical readings risk obscuring the fact that Proust's interest in Françoise's domestic activities goes beyond regarding them simply as metaphorical vehicles for referring to his own agency as a writer. When the protagonist perceives and imagines Françoise's cunning mastery of kitchen utensils and her culinary creations as a spectacle, it is perhaps above all the *inherently* aesthetic dimension of the everyday that comes to view. This is in fact implied in von Hagen's own wording above, when she writes that, before the eyes of the spectator, 'la scène se transforme en art, *révèle* son côté poétique' ['the scene is transformed into art, *reveals* its poetic side']. If the spectator not only *transforms* (an act of creation) the scene but also *reveals* (an act of discovery) its poetic aspect, this must be because the poetry is already there, present in the everyday scene. In my view, therefore, there is a lot more going on in this scene than von Hagen's reading of it as an allegory of literary creation allows for, and I would insist that the scene is notable not only for the way that the spectator's imagination affects and transforms the everyday into art but also for the way that the everyday stimulates the spectator's imagination and, consequently, his manner of perceiving. In making this point, I mean to draw attention to the mutual exchange of affect between spectator and spectacle that we have already seen to be a crucial element in Proust's *écriture théâtrale*, and that, as we will discover in more detail in Chapter 5, is an important ingredient in his *mise en scène* of domestic interiors as *enchanted* (and *enchanted*) interiors.

This latter interpretation of the paragraph, which accentuates the poetic aspects that the observed scene possesses in itself, seems to be confirmed, actually, by the fact that Proust, throughout the novel, repeatedly compares Françoise's domestic chores with artistic activities, thus elevating a supposedly inferior form of creative expression (cooking, for example, is usually considered a case of artisanal rather than artistic skills) to the seemingly superior level of the canonical arts. In the example above, the dishes that Françoise prepares are described as veritable 'chefs-d'œuvre culinaires',

whereas, elsewhere, the narrator somewhat humorously compares her at work in the kitchen (preparing ‘son œuvre’ with ‘la brûlante certitude des grands créateurs’ [‘the burning certainty of the great creators’] (I, 437; 2, 19)) to Michelangelo at work on a sculpture. And most notably, as Julia Caterina Hartley argues in her study of female creativity in Proust, the author actually ‘flattens out hierarchizations between forms of creative expression’<sup>310</sup> in *Le Temps retrouvé*, when he reverses the simile of Françoise as an artist by letting the narrator compare his own future work of art to, first, her stitching together of a dress (IV, 610; 6, 343), and, shortly after, to her culinary creations: ‘ne ferais-je pas mon livre de la façon que Françoise faisait ce bœuf mode, apprécié par M. de Norpois, et dont tant de morceaux de viande ajoutés et choisis enrichissaient la gelée?’ [‘should I not make my book in the same way as Françoise made her braised beef in aspic, which M. de Norpois had so much liked, in which the jelly was enriched by so many carefully selected extra pieces of meat?’] (IV, 612; 6, 344). While such comparisons certainly invite us to consider Françoise’s chores as metaphors for the work of the writer, they also serve to remind us of their inherently aesthetic dimensions. Proust’s fascination for the poetry of the everyday (a fascination that was widespread among nineteenth-century authors such as Hugo, Flaubert and Baudelaire) is more or less explicitly expressed in various parts of the novel, and, as the passage from Françoise’s kitchen illustrates, the *féerie* lends itself admirably to the task of illustrating this fascination, since the genre’s *mise en scène* of the supernatural often proceeds by giving life and human qualities to ordinary objects, such as furniture, kitchen utensils and vegetables.

The poetry of the everyday is not, however, only a motif in his novel but also a subject that Proust addressed in his art criticism, and notably in an essay on the painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, whose still lifes Proust greatly admired. In an essay on Chardin written in 1895, Proust takes an interest in the ability of the artist’s still lifes to teach the beholder to see various forms of life, still and animated, that she or he is perhaps unable to grasp intellectually and that remain ‘obscure’ to the mind. These forms of life thus become visible and, more generally, *perceivable* (for the eye, Proust

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<sup>310</sup> Julia Caterina Hartley, ‘Is Odette an Artist?: Approaching Female Creativity in Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*,’ *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 70, no. 3 (2016): p. 351.



writes, ‘aime à jouer avec les autres sens’<sup>311</sup>) for the trained eye. The still life genre seems, in fact, to invite Proust to consider the human subject as what Norman Bryson calls a ‘bodily, material entity on a par with anything else in the material field’,<sup>312</sup> and it could be argued that the genre’s influence is discernable in passages where objects and spaces assume something akin to human consciousness, and, conversely, where the narrator aligns himself and others with inanimate things or animals.<sup>313</sup> Proust’s essay on Chardin, who is to become a paradigmatic figure for art’s instructive potential in his writings, conveys his views on art’s ability to teach the subject to appreciate the beauty, mystery and life in and of all things. The essay provides a veritable celebration of still life’s stimulation of the imagination and of the creative imagination’s ability to bring out the mystery in seemingly banal spaces and objects.

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<sup>311</sup> ‘L’œil qui aime à jouer avec les autres sens et à reconstituer à l’aide de quelques couleurs, plus que tout un passé, tout un avenir, sent déjà la fraîcheur des huîtres qui vont mouiller les pattes du chat et on entend déjà, au moment où l’entassement précaire de [ces] nacres fragiles fléchira sous le poids du chat, le petit cri de leur fêlure et le tonnerre de leur chute’. Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 376. [‘An eye practised in trafficking with the other senses, and in reconstituting by means of a few strokes of colour not merely a whole past, but a whole future, can already feel the freshness of the oysters that will dabble the cat’s paws, and hear their tiny splintering exclamations and the thunder of their fall, as the precarious heap of frail splintered shells gives way under the cat’s weight’. Marcel Proust, *Marcel Proust on Art and Literature: 1896-1919*, trans. Sylvia Townsend Warner (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1997), p. 328.]

<sup>312</sup> Norman Bryson, ‘Chardin and the Text of Still Life,’ *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989): p. 229.

<sup>313</sup> Examples of the latter are often found in passages concerning sleeping or dreaming. In *La Prisonnière*, for instance, the descriptions of the sleeping Albertine – who, it should be recalled, in the opening of this volume, is compared to a domestic animal entering every door it finds open – provide us with a long list of striking examples of Proust’s effacing of the clear boundaries between the animate and inanimate: ‘Étendue de la tête aux pieds sur mon lit, dans une attitude d’un naturel qu’on n’aurait pas pu inventer, je lui trouvais l’air d’une longue tige en fleur qu’on aurait disposée là; [...] comme si en dormant elle était devenue une plante [...]. En fermant les yeux, en perdant la conscience, Albertine avait dépouillé, l’un après l’autre, ses différents caractères d’humanité qui m’avaient déçu depuis le jour où j’avais fait sa connaissance. Elle n’était plus animée que de la vie inconsciente des végétaux, des arbres [...]’ [‘Lying at full length on my bed, in a pose so natural that it could never have been adopted deliberately, she seemed to me like a long, flowering stem that had been laid there; [...] as if in her sleep she had turned into a plant. [...] By closing her eyes, by losing consciousness, Albertine had put off, one by one, the various marks of humanity which had so disappointed me in her, from the day that we first met. She was animated only by the unconscious life of plants, of trees [...]’] (III, 578-79; 5, 59-60).

For someone who spends a few days *listening* – Proust’s choice of word identifies a synaesthetic potential in the experience of art – to Chardin’s paintings, still life will inevitably come alive: ‘La nature morte deviendra surtout la nature vivante [...]; la vie de tous les jours vous charmera, si pendant quelques jours vous avez écouté sa peinture comme un enseignement’ [‘Still life will become eminently alive [...]; daily life will be full of charm for you if for a matter of days you have listened to his art as to a lesson’].<sup>314</sup> The transformation of the prosaic activity of cooking into a theatrical illusion in the tableau above could arguably be inspired, then, not only by the féerie but also by still life, since Proust finds the metamorphosis of the everyday to be at the heart of both art forms. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed in the paragraph’s final section, when Proust turns his attention to the asparagus lying on the kitchen counter. As, notably, J. M. Cocking has argued, these asparagus, which do not resemble ordinary vegetables but transform themselves into objects of art, serve to evoke two masterpieces of Impressionist art: Édouard Manet’s *La Botte d’Asperges* (1880) and *L’Asperge* (1880).<sup>315</sup> The implicit reference to this widely influential painter in the second half of Proust’s paragraph (which I will quote below) makes it plausible that he was inspired by the still life genre’s insistence on the need to look at the otherwise overlooked when he describes Françoise’s culinary artistry as a theatrical performance. It seems, in fact, that Proust is aiming, in all his references to Françoise’s cooking, to bring out the theatrical element inherent in the preparation and eating of a meal. The *bœuf mode*, for instance, is nothing short of a culinary spectacle presented before an audience prepared to digest her creation.<sup>316</sup> Arguably, this speaks of the profound

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<sup>314</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 374. [Proust, *Marcel Proust on Art and Literature: 1896-1919*, p. 326. Translation modified by me.]

<sup>315</sup> J. M. Cocking, *Proust. Collected Essays on the Writer and his Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 135-38.

<sup>316</sup> ‘Et depuis la veille, Françoise, heureuse de s’adonner à cet art de la cuisine pour lequel elle avait certainement un don, stimulée, d’ailleurs, par l’annonce d’un convive nouveau, et sachant qu’elle aurait à composer, selon des méthodes sues d’elle seule, du bœuf à la gelée, vivait dans l’effervescence de la création; comme elle attachait une importance extrême à la qualité intrinsèque des matériaux qui devaient entrer dans la fabrication de son œuvre, elle allait elle-même aux Halles se faire donner les plus beaux carrés de romsteck, de jarret de bœuf, de pied de veau, comme Michel-Ange passant huit mois dans les montagnes de Carrare à choisir les blocs de marbre les plus parfaits pour le monument de Jules II’ [‘Since the day

influence of still life on Proust's work, since, as Bryson puts it, 'even in solitude, eating brings with it a minimum of display, of theatre, and it is in this theatre that all of still life is staged'.<sup>317</sup>

It is not, however, merely Françoise's cooking that invites the use of theatrical similes. In the second part of the passage, the asparagus laid out on the kitchen counter give the impression of being not vegetables, but, rather peculiarly, creatures that have *metamorphosed* themselves into vegetables. At night time, these actors in disguise continue their performance when they amuse themselves 'dans leurs farces poétiques et grossières comme une féerie de Shakespeare', by changing the protagonist's chamber pot into a jar of perfume:

Je m'arrêtais à voir sur la table, où la fille de cuisine venait de les écosser, les petits pois alignés et nombrés comme des billes vertes dans un jeu; mais mon ravissement était devant les asperges, trempées d'outre-mer et de rose et dont l'épi, finement pignoché de mauve et d'azur, se dégrade insensiblement jusqu'au pied – encore souillé pourtant du sol de leur plant – par des irisations qui ne sont pas de la terre. Il me semblait que ces nuances célestes trahissaient les délicieuses créatures qui s'étaient amusées à se métamorphoser en légumes et qui, à travers le déguisement de leur chair comestible et ferme, laissaient apercevoir en ces couleurs naissantes d'aurore, en ces ébauches d'arc-en-ciel, en cette extinction de soirs bleus, cette essence précieuse que je reconnaissais encore quand, toute la nuit qui suivait un dîner où j'en avais mangé, elles jouaient, dans leurs farces poétiques et grossières comme une féerie de Shakespeare, à changer mon pot de chambre en un vase de parfum. (I, 119)<sup>318</sup>

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before, Françoise, glad to be practising the cook's art for which she had a definite gift, inspired by the coming of a new guest, and knowing she was required to compose, in accordance with methods known only to herself, a dish of beef in aspic, had been living in a flurry of artistic creativity. Like Michelangelo spending eight months in the mountains of Carrara, selecting the most perfect blocks of marble for the tomb of Pope Julius II, Françoise, who attached extreme importance to the inherent quality of the materials of which her masterpieces were to be wrought, had been down to Les Halles in person more than once to choose the finest slabs of rump steak, the best shin of beef and calf's foot'] (I, 437; 2, 19).

<sup>317</sup> Bryson, p. 238.

<sup>318</sup> 'I would stop by the table, where the kitchen-maid had just shelled them, to see the peas lined up and tallied like green marbles in a game; but what delighted me were the asparagus, steeped in ultramarine and pink, whose tips, delicately painted with little strokes of mauve and azure, shade off imperceptibly down to their feet – still soiled though they are from the dirt of their garden-bed – with an iridescence that is not of this earth. It seemed to me that these celestial hues revealed the delicious creatures who had merrily metamorphosed themselves into vegetables and who, through the disguise of their firm, edible flesh, disclosed in these early tints of dawn, in these beginnings of rainbows, in this extinction of blue evenings, the precious essence that I recognized again when, all night long following a dinner

The association of the poetic and the trivial is perhaps the most striking feature of this passage, which evokes a whole range of intertextual and intermedial references. In addition to the direct allusion to Shakespeare's fairy plays, the anthropomorphic metamorphosis of the vegetables implicitly evokes, as Laplace-Claverie points out,<sup>319</sup> some of the truly classical féeries in French theatre history, such as Jacques Offenbach and Victorien Sardou's *opéra-bouffe-féerie Roi Carotte* (1872) or the Cogniard brothers' *vaudeville-féerie La Biche au bois* (1845). These allusions to the féerie allow the narrator to convey the wonder with which he perceived even the most humdrum aspects of his surroundings as a child. Also in this part of the paragraph, Proust's tableau may be conceived as a form of *écriture didascalique* in the sense that it renders the complex collaboration of sensory impressions and their effect on the protagonist-as-spectator. For instance, the boy conceives of the asparagus, still covered in soil, as celestial creatures, due to the lustrous rainbow-like play of colour on their skin. And when the peculiar smell of these vegetables rises from his chamber pot at night, it is the odour that metamorphoses this common object into one with poetic qualities, as the night pot turns into a perfume bottle, a 'vase de parfum'. To the motifs of food and cooking, we must therefore add that of excretion – a motif that is particularly interesting because Proust puts it in direct relation to the workings of the imagination. The spectacle imagined in this tableau is, in fact, created on the basis of a by-product secreted by the protagonist's own body: in the tableau, an external object (the asparagus) is absorbed by his body and transforms something inside him (the quality of his urine). This 'metamorphosis' then leads to this bodily by-product giving off a peculiar odour – an odour that his imagination in turn 'metamorphoses' into a féérique spectacle. As we have seen exemplified throughout this thesis, the physical presence of an inscribed spectator that partly discovers and partly creates the spectacle is a constitutive feature of the Proustian tableau. This passage can therefore be viewed as a Proustian tableau *par excellence*, since it exemplifies with admirable clarity how the imaginary scene stands in immediate relation to the body of its creator.

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at which I had eaten them, they played, in farces as crude and poetic as a fairy play by Shakespeare, at changing my chamber pot into a jar of perfume' (1, 122).

<sup>319</sup> Laplace-Claverie, p. 80.

In this chapter, we have examined some differences between Proust's *mise en scène* of the material world in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* and *À la recherche*. We have seen that Proust's treatment of inanimate objects changes in the period between publication of the two works: in 'Scénario', they function as mere mirrors reflecting the protagonist's interiority in a relatively unproblematic way; whereas, in *À la recherche*, they become virtual protagonists with a will of their own, which demand the protagonist's attention and perceivably affect his senses and imagination. This difference is important for this thesis's exploration of theatricality in Proust because it reveals an evolution in Proust's theatrical writing. Whereas the first text, dominated by dialogue, ostensibly resembles a dramatic text more than the novel does, Proust's rendering of the object world does not grow less theatrical with time, although he makes less use of the theatrical mode of enunciation (dialogue). On the contrary, as a novelist, his approach to the object world remains theatricalising, but in a different way than before, since, in *À la recherche*, it is above all the non-dialogic passages of dramatic texts that Proust's *écriture théâtrale* evokes, and, more exactly, as I argued in Chapter 3, the didascalies of the *féerie*, which are not, properly speaking, stage directions aimed at directors, actors, decorators and other stage workers, but passages that present a (post-performance) synthesis of the spectacle *as the audience perceived it*. The historical transformation of Proust's theatrical writing may in fact be said both to correspond and to contribute to the impression that theatricality in *À la recherche* is above all a mode of perception.

I have suggested that we consider the didascalie of the *féerie* as a 'precursor' to the Proustian tableau, much because both types of writing so evidently privilege the 'spectacular' (the spectator's point of view and the play's effect on the spectator). As we remember from the Introduction, a crucial element in Diderot's call for tableaux in the theatre was his suggestion that dramatists should write *mime* (that they should insert into the manuscripts detailed descriptions of the characters' movements and gestures). These written mimes – which required dramatists to *position themselves imaginatively as spectators* and write from that position – may be viewed as the seed from which the dramatic 'side text' (or stage directions) sprung. In other words, the non-dialogic components of the scripts were initially conceived by Diderot as the

dramatist's written account of her or his *imaginary perceptions*,<sup>320</sup> and, in fact, this dramatic concept of *writing perception* may be said to have originated with the novel, since, as Diderot points out in *De la poésie dramatique*, the technique of writing mime was widely used in the novel long before it become customary in the theatre. Accordingly, one of the principal differences between novel and drama, in his view, is that 'le roman suit le geste et la pantomime dans tous leurs détails; [...] au lieu que le poète dramatique n'en jette qu'un mot en passant' ['the novel describes gesture and mime in every detail [...] whereas the dramaturge makes only a passing reference to them'].<sup>321</sup> It would seem, then, that Diderot recognised a form of theatricality in the novel that did not rely on the narrative's adoption of the theatrical mode of enunciation, but that rather was a feature proper to the narrator's agency, and of the latter's detailed descriptions of movements and impressions – that is, of the perceptual dimension of the novelistic universe. And, similarly to how Diderot's written mimes may be said to have a narrative origin, these pantomimic aesthetics, when transposed back into the novel, may, as Agathe Novak-Lechevalier argues, be said to have induced a novelistic form of theatricality conceived as a form of *mise en scène*:

Ce n'est plus le dialogue seul qui fonde la théâtralité romanesque: c'est son accompagnement narratif conçu comme une *mise en scène* qui souligne la parole et construit, grâce à la description pantomimique, des systèmes de signes parallèles, voire concurrents.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> We remember from the introduction that, in *De la poésie dramatique*, Diderot describes the written mimes in that manner: 'La pantomime est le tableau qui existait dans l'imagination du poète, lorsqu'il écrivait; et qu'il voudrait que la scène montrât à chaque instant lorsque on le joue'. Diderot, 'De la poésie dramatique,' in *Diderot's Writings on the Theatre*, p. 201. ['Stage directions reveal the picture that existed in the dramatist's mind as he was writing, and that he would like to see reproduced on stage throughout the performance'. Diderot, 'From "Discourse on Dramatic Poetry"', in *Sources of Dramatic Theory: 2: Voltaire to Hugo*, p. 68.]

<sup>321</sup> Diderot, 'De la poésie dramatique,' in *Diderot's Writings on the Theatre*, p. 201. [Translated in Cuillé, p. 98.]

<sup>322</sup> Agathe Novak-Lechevalier, 'Roman et drame chez Diderot. Une élaboration en miroir,' in *Jeux d'influences. Théâtre et roman de la Renaissance aux Lumières*, ed. Véronique Lochert and Clotilde Thouret (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2010), p. 70. ['It is no longer dialogue alone that lays the foundation for theatricality in the novel: it is the accompanying narration, conceived as stage directions, which highlights the spoken word and constructs, through pantomime-like description, a system of parallel – not to say competing – signs'.]

Clearly, then, the notion of staging or *mise en scène* in the novel has a complex origin, and what this brief historical detour is intended to underline here is the liminal status of the *didascalie* (or the non-dialogic passages of a dramatic text), whose background reveals its close kinship with narrative fiction, and thus the generic affinity between novel and drama. Although the generic relations between play and novel will not be subject to much discussion here, I do believe that it is important to keep this affinity in mind when we study the theatricality of a narrative text such as *À la recherche*, since this awareness keeps us from placing too much weight on the dialogue. While, as critics have pointed out, Proust certainly reveals his skills as ‘*metteur en scène*’ in his masterful renderings of dialogue, it is clear that theatricality, for him, encompasses far more than mere ‘*dialogue de scène*’; and if we are to comprehend the role that theatre plays in narratives such as *À la recherche*, we should probably, like Diderot, focus more on the careful and detailed attention with which novelists render movements and impressions. It is the text’s ability to disclose the world as it is lived and experienced by the characters that observe and participate in it – that is, the text’s staging of the *drama of perception* – that should be the measure of its theatricality.

As for *À la recherche*, we may say, in conclusion, that the rendering of the inanimate becomes more of a *phenomenological* drama here than in the juvenilia, since the protagonist’s perception of the object world becomes subject matter in the later text. In this chapter, we have observed that the subject-object relation in the novel grows more tense than in ‘*Scénario*’, and that it becomes marked by distance and rejection. However, we have also seen that the tension that marks the Balbec scene does not tell the whole (or the only) truth about the staging of the inanimate in *À la recherche*. There are other parts of the novel in which the perceiving subject is far more enchanted than troubled by the felt presence of objects. In such parts, exemplified here by the tableau from Françoise’s kitchen, the young Proust’s fascination for the life of the non-human – or what he, in the preface to his translation of Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies*, called the ‘non-moi’ (meaning forms of life that the preface’s narrator believes to be fundamentally other than his own)<sup>323</sup> – is present in a

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<sup>323</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 167.

far more playful way than in Balbec. In the next chapter, it is the enchanted subject's perception that will be in focus, as we enter the novel's féérique domains.



## 5 Enchanted Interiors: Friendship between People and Things

There is magic in Proust's domestic interiors, or a form of enchantment. The magic stems largely from the way that their inhabitants live intimately with objects, as though there were friendship there, or the possibility of contact with a life-form other than the human. To live in or visit these interiors is to give in to fantasy, to feel the imagination stirred by the ordinary and the ordinary touched by the imagination. The previous chapter posited the anthropomorphising of objects as a crucial element in Proust's *écriture théâtrale* and in the way the protagonist theatricalises perceptual transformations of his surroundings. The present chapter extends the discussion begun in Chapter 4 by addressing that peculiar impression of enchantment that stems from the *mise en scène* of objects as living, conscious creatures. Certainly, objects are not in possession of any actual supernatural power, and yet they are able to enchant us – when we let them. What, in Proust, provides objects with the power to enchant?

The pleasure of giving in to fantasy and of reconstructing the universe by way of the imagination is a youthful pleasure, and if the enchantment in which we do not really believe is to act upon us *as though we believed*, we need to keep our childish spirit alive. That childish spirit seems to be, however, exactly what is lost to the protagonist of *À la recherche* as he directs his steps towards the Prince de Guermantes's new palace in the Avenue du Bois, where he is to attend a *matinée* that will reunite him with people he knew in the past, and that will constitute the novel's final act. Long gone is the 'âge des croyances', when he was willing to believe in the Guermantes family as supernatural, inaccessible creatures:

Au temps où je croyais, même si je savais le contraire, que les Guermantes habitaient tel palais en vertu d'un droit héréditaire, pénétrer dans le palais du sorcier ou de la fée, faire s'ouvrir devant moi les portes qui ne cèdent pas tant qu'on n'a pas prononcé la formule magique, me semblait aussi malaisé que d'obtenir un entretien du sorcier ou de la fée eux-mêmes. [...] Naturellement les choses n'ont pas en elles-mêmes de pouvoir, et puisque c'est nous qui le leur conférons, quelque jeune collégien bourgeois devait en ce moment avoir devant l'hôtel de l'avenue du Bois les mêmes sentiments que moi jadis devant l'ancien hôtel du prince de Guermantes. C'est qu'il était encore à l'âge des croyances, mais je l'avais dépassé, et j'avais perdu ce privilège, comme

après la première jeunesse on perd le pouvoir qu'ont les enfants de dissocier en fractions digérables le lait qu'ils ingèrent. (IV, 436)<sup>324</sup>

There are no more fairies in Proust's post-war Paris, even if Mme Verdurin's enduring power to reinvent herself and to rise in the social hierarchy (in the final *matinée*, an impressive metamorphosis crowns her *œuvre* when she reappears as the new *Princesse de Guermantes*) does remind us that she was at one occasion described as a 'véritable fée' ['veritable fairy'] (III, 140; 4, 146). Though the only character to earn the distinction of *veritable* fairy, Mme Verdurin is by no means the only one of her sort in *À la recherche*, where the word 'fée' is typically used to designate individuals of high society (or their names), to whom the protagonist, as a young social climber, is attracted, and whose ability to stimulate his imagination relates not least to their belonging to a milieu that he does not yet know but would like to be a part of. The possibility of moving rapidly up the social ladder is at the heart of many fairy-tale narratives, and, significantly, as Margaret Topping has shown, such myths are implicitly evoked in the novel when several fairy figures (Mme de Guermantes, Mme de Villeparisis, and Robert de Saint-Loup) help the protagonist transcend social boundaries.<sup>325</sup> The gradual disappearance of fairies from the narrative coincides with the protagonist's growing sense of disillusionment, as he comes to realise that his vision of high society as a fantastical and inaccessible milieu is little more than a product of his imagination.<sup>326</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that the princely couple's new

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<sup>324</sup> 'At the time when I believed, even though I knew that the contrary was true, that the Guermantes inhabited such a palace by an hereditary right, to penetrate into the palace of the wizard or the fairy, for the gates which open only when one utters the magic word to open before me, seemed to me as difficult a task as to obtain an interview with the wizard and the fairy themselves. [...] Of course, things have no potency in themselves, and since it is we who confer it upon them, some young middle-class schoolboy was probably at that very moment experiencing the same thoughts outside the mansion in the Avenue du Bois as I had once felt outside the Prince de Guermantes's old *hôtel*. He, however, would still be young enough to have these beliefs, but I had passed that age, and lost that privilege, as after early infancy one loses the power that babies have to divide the milk they ingest into digestible quantities' (6, 165-66).

<sup>325</sup> Topping, pp. 60-61. In my thesis, I will only touch briefly on the fairy figure (a central personage not only in the theatrical *féerie* but also in the world of fairy-tales), which is subject to a thorough treatment in Topping's book.

<sup>326</sup> The disappearance of the fairies in Proust's novel coincides with the gradual disappearance of this figure in French literature and theatre from the *fin de siècle* onwards, where, as

home should be unable to evoke the enchantment that such a place would have in the past, before his illusions were destroyed. Not that the old palace would have been in possession of any more mysterious power than this one – things, after all, ‘n’ont pas en elles-mêmes de pouvoir’ [‘have no potency in themselves’] – but he would have been able to confer some upon it, had he not lost that *privilege* (the choice of word implies that he does grieve this loss) of youthful belief; for, although things hold no enchanting power in themselves, they may still be *perceived* as enchanting.

We shall return to the *matinée* at the Guermantes’s new home in the next and final chapter of this thesis; in the present chapter, my focus is on Proust’s use of the figure of enchantment in qualifying perception, and, more concretely, the perception of interiors. In fact, the protagonist’s gradual development towards disillusionment does not undermine his earlier experiences of the world as enchanted; nor does it prevent him from being enchanted once more, in the novel’s final act – for, in *À la recherche*, the figure of enchantment is not employed as a means to characterise the world as enchanted in a ‘supernatural’ sense (as though objects and spaces were, in fact, conscious and alive), but in order to qualify a state of mind both *affected by* and *affecting* our perceptual encounters with the phenomenal world. In order to comprehend the *sense* of enchantment as it occurs in Proust’s novel, we must therefore approach the object from the point of view of the enchanted individual, and acknowledge what Kathleen Lennon calls the *affective texture* that the workings of the imagination give to the perceived world – we must acknowledge, in other words, that it is the imagination together with our feelings, emotions and desires that create ‘the affectively laden patterns which constitute our sense of the world, others and ourselves’.<sup>327</sup>

In this chapter, we shall examine Proust’s recourse to the realm of the magical and the *féérique* as means by which he conveys the protagonist’s state of enchantment in encounters with two interiors: the Swann family’s home in Paris and the Hôtel de Flandre in Doncières. In these spaces, Proust makes ample use of anthropomorphism

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Laplace-Claverie demonstrates, the disbelief in fairies – and even the ‘death of the fairies’ – is a recurring *topos*. See the chapter ‘« Une fée! Ce n’est pas possible! Il n’y a plus de fées »’ in Laplace-Claverie, pp. 131-58.

<sup>327</sup> Lennon, p. 3.

in order to create the impression that the material objects are alive and reside alongside the human inhabitants. As the analyses of the previous chapters have shown, the fact that Proust regards the imagination as playing a significant role in defining how the perceiving subject apprehends the world becomes particularly clear in his *mise en scène* of interiors, as though the humility of ordinary objects allows more room for the creative imagination to express itself. Herein, then, lies the extraordinary potential for an artist wanting to emphasise the creative dimension of perception, of engaging with the inanimate. Nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter 4, *À la recherche* does not posit the object world as a mere surface upon which the subjective interior is allowed to project itself, and a Romantic fascination for the influence exercised by the material world on the spiritual is palpably present in the examples we shall examine in the present chapter as well. Studying how the figure of enchantment is engaged in the rendering of the two interiors explored here, I aim to show that, for Proust, the imaginary is not something that we impose onto the world that we perceive, but something that emerges from our interaction with it.

Four times in *À la recherche*, the narrator refers to people's residences as being *féerique*. In *Le Côté de Guermantes*, Mme de Guermantes's apartment and every other space in which she sojourns are qualified as 'féeriques' ['magical'] (II, 335; 3, 33) places, and the Hôtel de Flandre in Doncières is characterised as a 'féerique domaine' ['enchanted domain'] (II, 383; 3, 81), while, in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, when his fascination for Mme de Guermantes has cooled down, the narrator continues to speak of the homes of other women he idolises ('fairies', he calls them) as 'féeriques hôtels':

[Je] continuai, à défaut de Mme de Guermantes qui ne parlait plus à mon imagination, à voir d'autres fées et leurs demeures, aussi inséparables d'elles que, du mollusque qui la fabrique et s'en abrite, la valve de nacre ou d'émail ou la tourelle à créneaux de son coquillage [...]. Avant la dame il fallait aborder le féerique hôtel. (III, 138)<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> '[I] continued, failing Mme de Guermantes, who no longer spoke to my imagination, to see other fairies and their dwellings, no more separable from them than the mother-of-pearl or enamel valve, or the crenellated turret of its shell, from the mollusc that manufactured it and finds shelter there. [...] Before the lady herself the fairy *hôtel* had to be approached' (4, 143-44).

The image of the fairies' homes as a sort of shell protecting them from their surroundings, much like the valve encasing the mollusc that manufactured it, serves the double purpose of underlining the difficulty of approaching these women, while at the same time, curiously, implying that the creatures residing in them have somehow fabricated these *féerique* abodes. Through their association with the fairy figure, these dwellings also evoke the world of fairy-tales, as well as the privilege of youthful belief that nourishes the protagonist's imagination when he is still in the 'âge des croyances'. The association of these households with the realm of the *féerique* thus serves as a powerful declaration of the transformative power of the imagination. Interestingly, the occurrence of the adjective 'féerique' becomes ostensibly less frequent as we advance towards the end of the novel. In the final three volumes, we encounter it only once, when the narrator describes Albertine's sleep in the following terms: 'J'écoutais cette murmurante émanation mystérieuse, douce comme un zéphir marin, féerique comme ce clair de lune, qu'était son sommeil' ['I listened to that mysterious, murmuring emanation, gentle as a soft breeze over the sea, fairylike as the moonlight: the sound of her sleep'] (III, 578; 5, 60). This fall in frequency indicates that the notion of the *féerique* is closely related to the young protagonist's fabrication of illusions. This is not, however, all there is to it, and, as we shall see in this chapter and the next, Proust also associates the *féerique* (and the theatrical genre of the *féerie*, which the notion evokes) with the work of an enchanting power working side by side and in collaboration with the subjective imagination: the Enchanter called Time.<sup>329</sup>

As we have seen throughout the chapters of the thesis, to think of perception in terms of theatre, theatricality or theatricalisation requires us to acknowledge both that the imagination is part of all perception and, moreover, that the way we perceive the world is tightly interwoven with the lives we lead. In terms of the examples we shall study in this chapter, this entails, for instance, that the protagonist's infatuation with Gilberte and her parents affects his perception of their family home; that his fascination (inherited from his grandmother) for obsolete things affects his perception of the Hôtel de Flandre; and so forth. As the first of the examples examined here

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<sup>329</sup> In line with Proust's occasional capitalisation of the word Time in the 'Bal de Têtes' of the novel's final volume, I will spell time with a capital T, here and in Chapter 6, whenever I mean to address Time as an agent.

shows with utmost clarity, enchantment is a state in which our access to the perceptual world is dominated by feelings and desires. The considerable influence exercised by the imagination and the emotions in the encounter with the enchanted (and enchanting) world does not imply that this world is purely mental or that it is pure make-believe, but draws our attention to the fact that the imagination informs and animates the world we perceive. The enchantment of the novel's 'enchanted' interiors should therefore be understood neither as something that is merely imposed on them by the perceiving subject (as though the world only provided a 'neutral' or blank slate upon which his inner states could project themselves) nor as something that he simply discovers there (as though these interiors were in fact enchanted in a supernatural sense), but, instead, as a particular 'mood' that stems from the creative encounter between subject and surroundings. Enchantment, then, is conceived as a state of mind fully dependant on the exchange of mutually-stimulating impulses between subject and object and, accordingly, as something that comes into being through the perceiving subject's *interrelations* with the objects of perception.

### **5.1 Imagining and Perceiving an Enchanted Dwelling**

The first time Proust's narrator evokes a 'domaine féérique' ['enchanted domain'] (I, 499; 2, 83) is in referring to the home of Charles and Odette Swann and their daughter (his friend and the object of his ardent infatuation, Gilberte) in *Autour de Mme Swann*. The narrator repeatedly underlines the enchanting and mysterious atmosphere of this 'royaume [...] où Swann et sa femme menaient leur vie surnaturelle' ['realm [...] in which Swann and his wife had their supernatural being'] (I, 499; 2, 83). It is described as a 'chapelle mystérieuse' ['mysterious sanctum'] (I, 517; 2, 102), as a 'demeure enchantée' ['enchanted dwelling'] (I, 501; 2, 85), and, notably, as a féérique domain. While the adjective 'féérique' can be used simply to designate that which is picturesque or extraordinarily beautiful – as when the priest in the parish of Combray speaks of the impressive view from the church tower ('Il faut avouer du reste qu'on jouit de là d'un coup d'œil féérique' ['It really must be admitted, though, that from that spot the scene is magical'] (I, 104-05; 1, 107)) or when a leaflet presenting the Grand Hôtel in Balbec invokes 'le « coup d'œil féérique des jardins du Casino »'

[“the entrancing view from the gardens of the Casino”] (II, 25; 2, 243)<sup>330</sup> – the cluster of descriptions evoking the mysterious and magical in the passages concerned with the Swanns’ home strongly suggests that, here, the adjective is intended to identify the apartment as *féérique* in an almost supernatural sense. But regardless of whether the adjective connotes an enchanting atmosphere or a beautiful aspect (the *coup d’œil*) of a place, its use consistently relates to *perception*, and, more exactly, to perceptual impressions that seem to extend a call to the body of the perceiving subject, that is, to invite or even require an affective response of this body. To be *enchanted*, then, is to be affected by something and thus to respond bodily to it, or else to grant something the ability to affect *by* responding bodily to it.

In the interior provided by the Swann family’s home in Paris, Proust stages the fertile interaction of imaginative creativity and sensory perception. This is a space in which what the narrator refers to as ‘l’appartement idéal que mon imagination avait engendré’ [‘the ideal place which my imagination had created’] (I, 528; 2, 114) (that is, before he came to know the Swanns) comes to impregnate and amalgamate with the actual rooms as he explores them from within. That is not to say that the apartment he encounters when he finally gets to visit the Swanns is a pure fantasy construct, but that it is a space offering a *mise en scène* of how the imaginary informs and even *animates* our perceptual experiences. The Swann family’s apartment is a place that the protagonist has dreamt of and desired long before he is allowed in, and when he is finally invited to visit, the encounter with this place has a palpable emotional impact on him: it does, in fact, enchant him. As such, we may characterise the enchanted interior of the Swann house as what Kathleen Lennon calls ‘an *imaginary world*; not in the sense of a world of illusions or projected fantasies, but a world in which the imagination is at work, creating/disclosing forms, expressive of possibilities for living affectively and effectively within it’.<sup>331</sup> What this entails for my reading of the figure of enchantment in the passages consecrated to the Swanns is that I interpret this figure

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<sup>330</sup> Even if it were argued that the adjective in these cases is used only to indicate the beauty of these places, it cannot be entirely coincidental, as Frank Kessler points out, that we find ourselves in Balbec and Combray, ‘mondes d’enfance et donc de la féerie’ [‘childhood worlds and thus féerie worlds’]. Kessler, p. 139.

<sup>331</sup> Lennon, p. 11, my emphasis.

(that co-exists here with references to the theatre which, as elsewhere, serve to emphasise the creative dimension of perception) as a means by which the text conveys the affective dimension of perception. In other words, I read the figure of enchantment as translating the perceiving subject's *responses* to the world as he experiences it, all the while acknowledging that the world to which he responds is (partially) his own imaginary creation.

When the young protagonist, in *Autour de Mme Swann*, is finally invited to visit Gilberte and her parents in 'cet appartement qui était pour le temps quotidien de leur vie ce que le corps est pour l'âme, et qui devait en exprimer la singularité' ['that house which, by being to the daily tissue of their existence in time what the body is to the soul, was bound to express the unique quality of their life'] (I, 530; 2, 115), he is overwhelmed. Entering into this 'domaine féérique qui contre toute attente avait ouvert devant moi ses avenues jusque-là fermées' ['enchanted domain which had just given me the freedom of its hitherto forbidden avenues'] (I, 499; 2, 83), the boy shivers from excitement, and seems to lose any concept of time, and along with that, any awareness of the world outside of this sanctuary:

[...] j'entendais s'échapper de l'antichambre un murmure de voix qui, dans l'émotion que me causait la cérémonie imposante à laquelle j'allais assister, rompait brusquement bien avant que j'atteignisse le palier, les liens qui me rattachaient encore à la vie antérieure et m'ôtait jusqu'au souvenir d'avoir à retirer mon foulard une fois que je serais au chaud et de regarder l'heure pour ne pas rentrer en retard. (I, 496)<sup>332</sup>

Deprived of both memory and cognitive abilities – 'dépouillé de ma pensée et de ma mémoire, n'étant plus que le jouet des plus vils réflexes' ['divested already of memory and the power of thought, reduced to a creature of the crudest reflexes'] (I, 497; 2, 81) – the protagonist obeys his impulses, and forgets all about context and consequence, past and future:

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<sup>332</sup> [...] I could hear the murmur of voices from the ante-room; and this, combined with the emotional disturbance created by the awe-inspiring ceremony which was about to be enacted before me, suddenly severed the links that joined me to my former life and, long before I reached the Swanns' floor, deprived me of the ability to remember to take off my scarf as soon as I was indoors in the warmth, and to keep an eye on the time so as not to be late home' (2, 79-80).



Elle me demandait même l'heure à laquelle mes parents dînaient, comme si je l'avais encore sue, comme si le trouble qui me dominait avait laissé persister la sensation de l'inappétence ou de la faim, la notion du dîner ou l'image de la famille, dans ma mémoire vide et mon estomac paralysé. Malheureusement cette paralysie n'était que momentanée. Les gâteaux que je prenais sans m'en apercevoir, il viendrait un moment où il faudrait les digérer. Mais il était encore lointain. En attendant, Gilberte me faisait « mon thé ». J'en buvais *indéfiniment, alors qu'une seule tasse m'empêchait de dormir pour vingt-quatre heures*. (I, 497-98, my emphasis)<sup>333</sup>

Mais savais-je seulement quand j'étais chez les Swann que c'était du thé que je buvais? L'eussé-je su que j'en eusse pris tout de même, *car en admettant que j'eusse recouvré un instant le discernement du présent, cela ne m'eût pas rendu le souvenir du passé et la prévision de l'avenir*. Mon imagination n'était pas capable d'aller jusqu'au temps lointain où je pourrais avoir l'idée de me coucher et le besoin de sommeil. (I, 498, my emphasis)<sup>334</sup>

The young boy's reactions to finally being invited into the dwelling of which he has dreamt for quite some time give a clear indication of the emotional turbulence he finds himself in when he is at last allowed near the family that he has idolised ever since his childhood summers in Combray: the Swanns. His mental and physiological reactions (the emptying of his mind and memory and the paralysation of his senses) may be said both to illustrate the place's ability to enchant *and* to lend credence to its ability to enchant. To put it bluntly, it is his enchanted responses that constitute this interior *as an enchanted interior*. As such, the protagonist's response to the apartment that houses Gilberte Swann and her parents, and reciprocally, this apartment's impact on him

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<sup>333</sup> 'She even asked me what time my parents dined, as though I knew something about it, as though the emotional upset from which I was suffering could enable any sensation such as lack of appetite or hunger, any notion of dinner or family, to survive in my vacant memory and paralysed stomach. Unfortunately this paralysis was only temporary; and there would come a time when cakes which I consumed without noticing them would have to be digested. But that moment was still in the future; and in the present, Gilberte made "my tea". I drank huge quantities of it, *although normally a single cup of tea would keep me awake for twenty-four hours*' (2, 81, my emphasis).

<sup>334</sup> 'But while I was at the Swanns' I would have been unable to say whether or not it was really tea I was drinking. And even if I had known, I would have gone on drinking it; *for even if I had been restored momentarily to proper awareness of the present, this would not have given me back the ability to remember the past or foresee the future*. My imagination was incapable of stretching to the remote moment when I might feel tired or think of going to bed' (2, 82, my emphasis).

serve to illustrate the ‘constitutive interrelation between the imagined shape of the world and the shape of our response to it’.<sup>335</sup> It is this interrelation that forms the basis for what Lennon calls the *affective texture* of the world we perceive: ‘The imaginary shape the world takes for us is [...] constitutively tied up with ways of responding to and acting in relation to it’.<sup>336</sup> In this sense, then, it is he who creates the enchanted dwelling that he perceives – not in the sense that he projects a fantasy of enchantment onto the space, but in the sense that the *quality* of enchantment that he experiences this apartment to be in possession of is there ‘before him’ simply because, as we saw in Chapter 2, it awakens an ‘echo’ in him that his body welcomes (‘Qualité, lumière, couleur, profondeur, qui sont là-bas devant nous, n’y sont que parce qu’elles éveillent un écho dans notre corps, parce qu’il leur fait accueil’ [‘Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them’]).

To say that this house represents an imaginary world, then, is not to say that it is pure illusion or a fantasy construct, but that the perceiving subject’s imagination is involved in giving form to and animating the reality that he encounters there. To say that the Swann house is a space animated by the imagination is thus to align it with other ‘imaginary worlds’ that we have examined in this thesis, such as Mme Swann’s drawing room, which the bewildered Mme d’Épinoy perceives as a ‘salle magique’, or the hotel room in Balbec, which the protagonist experiences as a hostile room, or the illuminated apartment that the voyeur in Doncières perceives as a ‘tableau empourpré’. The list could go on, for encounters between a perceiving subject and an object partly discovered and partly invented by the subject is, as we have seen throughout the thesis, the very structure upon which Proust stages his tableaux. It is thus tempting, not least because this enchanted dwelling is a space in which the perceiving subject’s modes of attention and his reactions to the perceived become subject matter, to suggest that the Swann house also constitutes the ‘spectacle’ of a tableau. The way that the Swann house is introduced into the narrative does, in fact, invite such a reading. For although this ‘spectacle’ is not framed in the same clear way as those we studied in Chapter 1

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<sup>335</sup> Lennon, p. 62.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

(by way of windows, doors or peepholes), the episodes that take place in the house do happen within the boundaries of a ‘frame’ – a frame constituted, that is, by the house’s façade. This ‘frame’ comes to view when the narrator introduces the place by way of a tableau that displays the interplay of interior and exterior and the breaching of spatial limitations: suddenly, the individual who used to stand outside finds himself on the inside, within the boundaries of the house’s façade – literally a *façade*, derived from Vulgar Latin’s *facia*, meaning ‘face’, the outside of this building evokes the gaze of the family living within it – looking out:

Les fenêtres qui du dehors interposaient entre moi et les trésors qui ne m’étaient pas destinés un regard brillant, distant et superficiel qui me semblait le regard même des Swann, il m’arriva, quand à la belle saison j’avais passé tout un après-midi avec Gilberte dans sa chambre, de les ouvrir moi-même pour laisser entrer un peu d’air et même de m’y pencher à côté d’elle, si c’était le jour de réception de sa mère, pour voir arriver les visites qui souvent, levant la tête en descendant de voiture, me faisaient bonjour de la main, me prenant pour quelque neveu de la maîtresse de maison.  
(I, 494)<sup>337</sup>

Proust’s tableau cleverly includes the protagonist in the place of the spectacle, while the guests that come to visit Mme Swann act as his substitutes in the position of the spectator, which is the position that the Proustian protagonist ordinarily occupies. No longer merely the gaze that beholds, but also the object of the gaze, the narrator places his younger self firmly within the boundaries of the frame. Proust has thus efficiently established a scenario in which the ‘spectator’ has entered the ‘stage’ and looks out at the ‘auditorium’. When the Swanns’ enchanted dwelling is regarded as an imaginary world explored from within, it vividly brings to mind Diderot’s ‘Promenade Vernet’, and the way that, as we saw in Chapter 2, the movement *into* the work of art enables Diderot to describe the effect that Vernet’s paintings have on the being (body and

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<sup>337</sup> ‘Soon, when I had spent a whole summer afternoon in Gilberte’s room, it fell to me to open the very windows which, from the outside, had once interposed between me and treasures not meant for me a gleaming, haughty and superficial glance, which had seemed like the gaze of the Swanns themselves; yet now I was the one to let some fresh air in or even, if it was her mother’s at-home day, to lean out alongside Gilberte and see the ladies as they arrived, stepping out of a carriage and sometimes glancing up to wave to me, as though thinking I was a nephew of their hostess’ (2, 78).

mind) of the beholder. We remember that Diderot considered the rhetorical placement of the beholder ‘within the frame’ of the artwork as the procedure most apt for conveying his admiration. Indeed, Vernet’s mastery is not, Diderot seems to conclude, something that can be explained or analytically defended, but something that can only be conveyed by ‘showing’ the reader how the aesthetic impressions affected his body; how they forced his arms and eyes to raise towards the heavens and made his body tremble to the roots of his hair – in short, by *staging* the physical and affective consequences of the state of enchantment he is in.<sup>338</sup> We may say, then, that Diderot’s ‘method’ – the *mise en scène* of the beholder’s interaction with the artwork – has its equivalent in *Autour de Mme Swann*, when the young protagonist visiting this abode becomes, like Diderot in the ‘Promenade Vernet’, a spectator entering the stage in order to explore the partly self-made spectacle *from within*. In a similar manner to how the ‘Promenade Vernet’ stages the encounter between an aesthetic object and its creative beholder, this dwelling may be regarded as a stage offering a view of the encounter between a perceiving subject and a product of his creative perception.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> ‘O Nature, que tu es grande! O Nature, que tu es imposante, majestueuse et belle! c’est tout ce que je disais au fond de mon âme. Mais comment pourrais-je vous rendre la variété des sensations délicieuses dont ces mots répétés en cent manières diverses étaient accompagnés. On les aurait sans doute toutes lues sur mon visage. On les aurait distinguées aux accents de ma voix, tantôt faibles, tantôt véhéments, tantôt coupés, tantôt continus. Quelquefois mes yeux et mes bras s’élevaient vers le ciel; quelquefois ils retombaient à mes côtés, comme entraînés de lassitude. Je crois que je versai quelques larmes. Vous, mon ami, qui connaissez si bien l’enthousiasme et son ivresse, dites-moi quelle est la main qui s’était placée sur mon cœur, qui le serrait, qui le rendait alternativement à son ressort et suscitait dans tout mon corps ce frémissement qui se fait sentir particulièrement à la racine des cheveux qui semblent alors s’animer et se mouvoir’. Diderot, *Salon de 1767; Salon de 1769*, pp. 211-12. [‘Oh nature, how grand you are! Oh nature, how imposing, majestic, and beautiful you are! Such were the words that emerged from the depths of my soul, but how could I convey to you the variety of delicious sensations that accompanied these words as I repeated them over and over to myself? Doubtless they would have been legible on my face, they would have been discernable in the accents of my voice, alternately weak, vehement, hesitant, and continuous. Sometimes my eyes and arms rose towards the heavens, only to fall back against my side as if driven there by lassitude. I believe I shed a few tears. You, my friend, who are so well acquainted with enthusiasm and its intoxicating effects, tell me whose hand it was that took hold of my heart, alternately squeezing and releasing it, unleashing the trembling throughout my entire body that was particularly strong in the roots of my hair, which seemed to become animate and move’. Diderot, *Diderot on Art: 2: The Salon of 1767*, p. 111.]

<sup>339</sup> The ‘aesthetic objects’ of Diderot’s *Salons* are, of course, also imaginary constructs, seeing as, in spite of there existing visual referents, Diderot’s accounts are not verbal equivalents of

Throughout *Autour de Mme Swann*, references to the realm of theatre serve to emphasise the creative dimension of perception, as the apartment and the people who work and reside in it are associated with the theatrical medium in ways that identify this space as a sort of theatre in which the spectator finds himself immersed in the dramatic action, and which also implies that he experiences his perception of this space in terms of drama – that is, as an encounter between spectatorial and performing bodies of living presence (the extent to which these perceptual relations are experienced in terms of drama is confirmed by how, as we shall see below, even inanimate objects are granted a form of independent will and agency in his encounters with them). The household servants are compared to figurants in a play and the protagonist awaits the entrance of his hostess, Odette, as if he was awaiting the entrance of a queen onto a theatrical stage (I, 518; 2, 103). Charles Swann is implicitly cast in the role of the magician, Klingsor, from Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal*, when the young boy awaits the arrival of his hosts, sitting by himself in a state of emotional turbulence in a room whose féérique atmosphere is established by way of a fire seemingly in possession of transmuting powers: ‘Et, certes, j’eusse été moins troublé dans un antre magique que dans ce petit salon d’attente où le feu me semblait procéder à des transmutations, comme dans le laboratoire de Klingsor’ [‘I would have been in less trepidation in an enchanter’s cavern than in this little ante-room with its fire, which might, I felt, have been working Klingsor’s magic transmutations’] (I, 518; 2, 102-03). As for Gilberte, she is compared to Mélusine, the fresh water fairy, which was a source of inspiration for Maurice Maeterlinck’s heroine, Mélisande, from *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a play that Proust greatly admired.<sup>340</sup> The theatrical references

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these artworks, but a *remediation* of them – a remediation that dematerialises them, and that, since the models for the verbal tableaux are absent, actually supplement and replace the works themselves. As Diderot was well aware, his ekphrastic descriptions actually became the artworks for his readers, and the landscape we encounter in the ‘Promenade Vernet’, for example, is, as Gillian B. Pierce asserts, a ‘museum of the mind and not a material space’. *Scapeland: Writing the Landscape from Diderot’s ‘Salons’ to the Postmodern Museum* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>340</sup> Proust knew Maeterlinck’s work very well, and, as Mary Ann Brady Swartz shows in her doctoral thesis ‘Proust and Maeterlinck’ (1972), Maeterlinck appears to have inspired several of the fairy-tale elements in Proust’s novel. Maeterlinck’s play is clearly influenced by fairy-tales, and the links to the myth of Melusine are established through the many references to *water*. The play was first performed at the Théâtre Bouffes-Parisien in May 1893, under the

thus serve to reinforce the impression of the family's abode as an enchanted universe, since the plays that are evoked are plays that take place in universes of magic and enchantment. As far as the actual interiors are concerned, they are explicitly associated with the theatre when Proust allows the doors and walls to act as the wings of a stage set through which the actors make their entrances and exits:

Je m'étais assis, mais me levais précipitamment en entendant ouvrir la porte; ce n'était qu'un second valet de pied, puis un troisième, et le mince résultat auquel aboutissaient leurs allées et venues inutilement émouvantes était de remettre un peu de charbon dans le feu ou d'eau dans les vases. [...] L'arrivée de Mme Swann, préparée par tant de majestueuses entrées, me paraissait devoir être quelque chose d'immense. [...] après ces valets de pied en livrée, pareils aux figurants dont le cortège, au théâtre, prépare, et par là même diminue l'apparition finale de la reine, Mme Swann entrant furtivement en petit paletot de loutre, sa violette baissée sur un nez rouge par le froid, ne tenait pas les promesses prodiguées dans l'attente à mon imagination. (I, 518-19)<sup>341</sup>

Even the spaces that the protagonist is not allowed into are evoked in theatrical terms, when he, unable to leave the drawing room and follow Gilberte when she goes to the linen room, feels like 'l'amoureux d'une actrice qui n'a que son fauteuil à l'orchestre et rêve avec inquiétude de ce qui se passe dans les coulisses, au foyer des artistes' ['an actress's lover who has his seat in the stalls, but can only imagine the disquieting things that may be happening in the wings or the green-room'] (I, 519; 2, 104). In spite of all the references to theatre, however, there are few truly dramatic episodes taking place in this house, where the hours are filled with domestic activities, such as eating,

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direction of Aurélien Lugné-Poe, and its symbolic aesthetics profoundly challenged the naturalistic style that dominated the French theatrical stage at that time. Swartz writes extensively on Proust's admiration for *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which he had come to know very well by repeatedly listening to Debussy's adaptation of it, premiering at the Opéra-Comique in Paris in April 1902, through the theatrophone he had had installed in his apartment.

<sup>341</sup> 'Having sat down, I jumped up each time I heard the door open – but it was just a second footman, then a third; and the only outcome of these pointlessly thrilling toings and froings was a few coals added to the fire or a drop of water to the vases. [...] I was sure that the arrival of Mme Swann, foreshadowed by so many majestic entrances, would have to be a stupendous event. [...] after all these liveried footmen, whose comings and goings were like those of extras on the stage preparing the climatic coming of the Queen, but thereby making it something of an anticlimax, when Mme Swann did slip in, wearing her short otter-skin coat, her veil lowered over her nose which glowed from the cold outside, she broke all the promises that the wait had made to my imagination' (2, 102-03).

drinking, playing the piano, and conversing. For the protagonist, the Swann house is also a place where he does a whole lot of waiting – waiting for Gilberte to return from the linen room; waiting for Mme Swann’s entrance; waiting for lunch to be served. The lack of action enables him to focus on the objects around him, which always come to view imbued with affectively-laden significance by his imagination, and as clearly marked by his emotions and desires. As such, the staircase leading up to the apartment, for instance,

me semblait quelque chose de tellement prestigieux que je dis à mes parents que c’était un escalier ancien rapporté de très loin par M. Swann. Mon amour de la vérité était si grand que je n’aurais pas hésité à leur donner ce renseignement même si j’avais su qu’il était faux, car seul il pouvait leur permettre d’avoir pour la dignité de l’escalier des Swann le même respect que moi. (I, 496)<sup>342</sup>

The young boy’s statement is immediately declared to be incorrect by his father, who is well-acquainted with the type of building that the Swanns occupy and who knows that their house is merely one out of several identical buildings recently constructed by Jean-Baptiste Berlier. And, yet, even though his claim about the origin of the staircase is obviously false, it remains in accordance with the protagonist’s ardent ‘amour de la vérité’, since he believes that it is only by serving this particular lie that he will be able to inspire in his parents the right amount of admiration. The truthfulness of the claim does not, then, depend on the qualities that this staircase may be said to possess in a supposedly neutral state (a state that, at any rate, the Proustian subject, who perceives the world by way of the imagination, would have no access to), but on its ability to reflect how the world appears to him, that is, to reflect the *affective texture* of this world, wholly infiltrated by vague apprehensions of the glory of all things Swann. In other words, as we observed in Chapter 2, we are required, in order to grasp the true significance of this impression, to transform ourselves into ‘spectateurs intérieurs’ in

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<sup>342</sup> ‘impressed me as a thing of such magnificence that I told my parents it was a genuine antique staircase, acquired by M. Swann and brought there by him from somewhere very far away. My respect for the truth was so great that, even if I had known this information to be untrue, I would still have said the same thing, for this was the only way to have my family share the esteem inspired in me by the dignity of the Swanns’ staircase’ (2, 80).

the theatre of the protagonist's mind, so that we may perceive not only *what* but also, and above all, *how* he perceived it.

The Swann house is a place in which every object appears to be affectively laden with significance by the perceiving subject's imagination, but this does not mean, as we saw above, that this imaginary world is pure illusion. On the contrary, this enchanted interior also presents the protagonist as a being endowed with a particular sensibility and as able to enter into direct and intimate contact with his surroundings. Thus, when the narrator recalls the time he spent in the apartment, he remembers how, entering their home, Odette's perfume welcomed him as he mounted the flight of stairs, and how, walking through the corridors leading to her chambers, he felt like he was moving through a 'sentier sinueux d'un couloir tout embaumé à distance des essences précieuses qui exhalaient sans cesse du cabinet de toilette leurs effluves odoriférants' ['winding corridor that was remotely perfumed by the precious essences wafting the constant current of their sweet scents all the way from her dressing-room'] (I, 501; 2, 85). And stronger still than the mother's perfume is the odour of the slightly tormenting charm emanating from Gilberte's life: 'le charme particulier et douloureux qui émanait de la vie de Gilberte' ['the specific and forlorn flavour of the life led by Gilberte'] (I, 494; 2, 78). Even the most ordinary objects seem to possess some enchanting potential, in fact, like the seemingly reluctant armchair, 'délicieux, hostile et scandalisé' ['delightful, hostile and scandalized'] (I, 529; 2, 114), that Gilberte offers to the *pariah* that he used to be. The trope of anthropomorphism here serves the double purpose of investing the armchair with life and an apparent will of its own, while at the same time letting the object reflect the protagonist's feeling of being an intruder. The description of a simple gesture – the hostess offering her guest an armchair that gives the impression of being delightful, hostile and scandalised – shows, with utmost clarity, the protagonist's ability to bring his surroundings playfully and magically alive by way of his imagination.<sup>343</sup> And, seeing as the objects in the

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<sup>343</sup> Other objects serve a similar purpose, like the little footstool that Gilberte's mother moves towards him, and which gives off that same 'hostilité que m'avaient témoignée ses parents et que ce petit meuble semblait avoir si bien sue et partagée, que je ne me sentais pas digne et que je me trouvais un peu lâche d'imposer mes pieds à son capitonnage sans défense' ['suspicion with which her parents had viewed me, and which this little footstool had



room, similarly to what we observed in Balbec, are granted a form of expressive agency by way of the perceiving subject's imagination, it is notable that the narrator, just like in Balbec, comments on the 'multitude des miroirs' ['multitude of mirrors'] (I, 501; 2, 85) in the apartment.

The enchanting effect that the Swann house has on the protagonist could thus be said to stem from him, somehow, but not in the sense of these objects simply *reflecting* his emotions (no more than in the hotel room in Balbec), for while the space itself is new to him, the objects he encounters in it have occupied his mind for years – that is, ever since he first saw Gilberte at Tansonville as a child. To say that these objects 'mirror' the protagonist's interiority, then, would not capture the essence of what goes on in the Swann house, in which the 'mirroring' is not born out of the moment as such, but created over time:

Car ce n'était pas la beauté intrinsèque des choses qui me rendait miraculeux d'être dans le cabinet de Swann, c'était l'adhérence à ces choses – qui eussent pu être les plus laides du monde – du sentiment particulier, triste et voluptueux que j'y localisais depuis tant d'années et qui l'imprégnait encore. (I, 501)<sup>344</sup>

While the English translation, quoted in the footnote below, speaks of redolence and not impregnation, Proust's use of the verb 'imprégner' is notable, since the word implies that, rather than simply mirroring the protagonist's emotions (as though the objects were mere reflective surfaces or screens onto which his interiority could project itself), the objects have somehow merged into a single body with his emotions. It is as though the house *embodies* or *contains* his interiority, as though his more or less conscious feelings and ideas – be they thrilling and indefinable – have impregnated and, as put below, *amalgamated* with the rooms:

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apparently known of and shared so vehemently that I now felt unworthy and a little cowardly in placing my feet on its defenceless upholstery'] (I, 530; 2, 116).

<sup>344</sup> 'It was not the intrinsic beauty of these things which made it miraculous for me to be in Swann's study; it was that, adhering to the things (which could have been the ugliest imaginable), there was the special, sad, thrilling emotion which I had invested in this place for so many years, and of which it was still redolent' (2, 85).

Toutes les idées que je m'étais faites des heures [...] que passaient les Swann dans cet appartement [...], toutes ces idées étaient réparties, amalgamées – partout également troublantes et indéfinissables – dans la place des meubles, dans l'épaisseur des tapis, dans l'orientation des fenêtres, dans le service des domestiques. (I, 530)<sup>345</sup>

It is significant that Proust employs precisely these two verbs, since both impregnation and amalgamation imply movements that are intrusive beyond that of superposition. Rather than simply being projected onto the material world, the spiritual world has seemingly fused with the inanimate surroundings. *Imprégner*, from Latin *impregnare*, implies a permeation or even fertilisation of one substance by another. Likewise, *amalgamer* implies a fusion or union of different elements into a single body. What the text thus comes to illustrate is the way that the imagination is at work in our perception of the real, just as it is when we dream or fantasise. The enchanted interior of the Swann house is neither, then, pure fiction, like the apartment his imagination had engendered *before* he was allowed to visit the Swanns, nor a place that forces the apartment he had imagined to evaporate. Rather, the image he had already constructed in his imagination continues to be a part of his perception of the actual apartment, both during the perceptual encounter *and* afterwards, in his memory:

Ce charme singulier dans lequel j'avais pendant si longtemps supposé que baignait la vie des Swann, je ne l'avais pas entièrement chassé de leur maison en y pénétrant; je l'avais fait reculer, dompté qu'il était par cet étranger, ce paria que j'avais été et à qui Mlle Swann avançait maintenant gracieusement pour qu'il y prît place, un fauteuil délicieux, hostile et scandalisé; mais tout autour de moi, ce charme, dans mon souvenir, je le perçois encore. (I, 529)<sup>346</sup>

Accordingly, when the narrator gazes retrospectively into his past, he observes that his mental notions and the physical objects in the house have merged so that, in his

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<sup>345</sup> 'All the fancies I had formed about the hours spent by the Swanns [...] in that house [...] were shared by whatever I saw, absorbed into [*amalgamées*] the positioning of the furniture, the thickness of the carpets, the outlook from the windows, the attention of the servants, equally thrilling and indefinable in them all' (2, 115).

<sup>346</sup> 'By entering their house, I had not completely banished from it the strange, fascinating element in which I had for such a long time imagined the Swanns having their being; I had tamed it a little, I had made it retreat in the face of the outsider I had been, the outcast to whom Mlle Swann now graciously offered a delightful, hostile and scandalized armchair; and that charm, through memory, I can still feel close to me' (2, 114).

memory, due to the coalescence of the spiritual and the material world, and in spite of its disparities, the Swann family's drawing room appears like a unified whole:

Toujours est-il que chaque fois que je pense à ce salon que Swann [...] trouvait si disparate [...], il a au contraire dans mon souvenir, ce salon composite, une cohésion, une unité, un charme individuel que n'ont jamais même les ensembles les plus intacts que le passé nous ait légués, ni les plus vivants où se marque l'empreinte d'une personne: car nous seuls pouvons, par la croyance qu'elles ont une existence à elles, donner à certaines choses que nous voyons une âme qu'elles gardent ensuite et qu'elles développent en nous. (I, 529-30)<sup>347</sup>

It is only we who may, by believing that things (be they a playful bunch of asparagus, a scandalised footstool, or a hostile clock) have an existence of their own, supply these objects with a 'soul' which lives in them, and which they then develop in us. Clearly, then, the imaginary shape of the world in which we are immersed is both *encountered* and *created*. The thoughts of these interiors elicit a certain response in the subject, but, at the same time, it is actually his response that enables them to have the impact they have on him. The movement the narrator describes is an echoing one, a movement of mutual affect, with a clear parallel to the phenomenological descriptions of modes of apprehending the world that we have engaged in this thesis: subjective experience and objective existence overlap – they are chiasmatically intertwined.

Thus, if the atmosphere of Gilberte's home remains enchanting for the mature narrator, this has to do with the creative agency of his memory, and with the way that the *âme personnelle* he invested the place with in his youth has continued to develop inside him. Clearly, then, it is neither Swann-as-Klingsor, nor the young protagonist who perform the most impressive 'magic' transmutations in this enchanted dwelling, but rather the narrator, who, through what is perhaps an implicit reference to the

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<sup>347</sup> '[Nowadays] when I remember that drawing-room which Swann [...] saw as such a jumble of styles [...], I see its disparities in retrospect as forming a homogenous, unified whole, as giving it an individual charm; and these are features one can never see in even the most coherent and uniform compilations left to us from the past, or in those most vividly marked by the imprint of a single person, for it is only ever we ourselves, through our belief that things seen have an existence of their own, who can impart to some of them a soul which lives in them, and which they then develop in us' (2, 115).

enchanted island of *The Tempest*, identifies himself as something of a Prospero.<sup>348</sup> Much like Prospero machinates the magic that happens on Shakespeare's enchanted island, it seems to be the narrator who, by way of the *âme personnelle* that he partly imposed on the place and partly discovered there in his youth, brings the rooms at the Swanns' magically alive again. Thus, when we see the room through his retrospective gaze, the little footstool covered in silk, as well as the Rubens hanging above the mantelpiece and Swann's lace-up boots and Inverness cape, appear as if *one* with the afternoon light, while the sun streaming in from the windows make the bluish sofas and hazy tapestries rise like enchanted islands:

[...] une âme personnelle le reliait [le tabouret] secrètement à la lumière de deux heures de l'après-midi, différente de ce qu'elle était partout ailleurs dans le golfe où elle faisait jouer à nos pieds ses flots d'or parmi lesquels les canapés bleuâtres et les vaporeuses tapisseries émergeaient comme les îles enchantées. (I, 530)<sup>349</sup>

In this paragraph, the narrator's memory image of the Swanns' drawing room is subject to an 'alchemical' transmutation where the golden light makes the objects in the room emerge as enchanted islands. This reminds us, as the link drawn from the act of remembrance to the 'flots d'or' with transformative powers so aptly implies, that, in Proust's view, memory is never only *recollection* but always also *invention* – an act of creation. We may say, therefore, that the narrator, who 'magically' invigorates the spaces he recalls, resembles Prospero.

He also, however, resembles Chardin, for the association of light with creativity occurs several times in Proust's essay on the painter. In this essay, which we began to explore in Chapter 4, Proust claims that Chardin's art makes the beauty and pleasure procured by the overlooked world of the commonplace and humble conceivable for us. The visual language of these still lifes functions as a veritable light source – Proust

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<sup>348</sup> In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, has been stranded for twelve years on a deserted isle with his daughter Miranda, after his jealous brother, Antonio, removed him from the throne and set him adrift at sea. While stranded on the island, Prospero has learned magic (which he refers to as his 'art') through the reading of books.

<sup>349</sup> '[...] a personal soul made it [the footstool] secretly one with the light of two o'clock in the afternoon, light which was unique to this bay, as it dappled our feet with its golden waves and lapped about the enchanted islands of the bluish sofas and hazy tapestries' (2, 116).

describes it as ‘brillant’ (shining or bright). Significantly, the analogy linking Chardin to the light is repeated shortly after, when Proust states that in spaces where one used to see only the reflection of one’s own boredom (‘le reflet de votre ennui’,<sup>350</sup>), Chardin ‘entre comme la lumière, donnant à chaque chose sa couleur, évoquant de la nuit éternelle où ils étaient ensevelis tous les êtres de la nature morte ou animée, avec la signification de sa forme si brillante pour le regard, si obscure pour l’esprit’ [‘enters like light, giving its colour to everything, conjuring up from the eternal night where they lay entombed all nature’s creatures, animate or inanimate, together with the meaning of her design, so brilliant to the eye, so dark to the understanding’].<sup>351</sup> The contrasting of the uneducated eye’s tendency to see no more than its own reflection with Chardin’s ability to uncover life forms that have been buried (‘ensevelis’) by the ‘nuit éternelle’, the eternal night,<sup>352</sup> is striking. Proust employs these visual metaphors of light and reflection in order to contrast the limited experience of the person who sees only his own mirror image with the richness that reveals itself to the artist, as a paradigmatic example of someone able to see something *other*. By putting the ordinary and commonplace on display, Chardin acknowledges the spectatorial dimension of our everyday surroundings. His still lifes thus bring to view that ‘minimum of display, of theatre’ in our households, which Bryson evoked in Chapter 4. Bryson’s argument

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<sup>350</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 374. [Proust, *Marcel Proust on Art and Literature: 1896-1919*, p. 326.]

<sup>351</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 374, my emphasis. [Proust, *Marcel Proust on Art and Literature: 1896-1919*, p. 326, my emphasis. Translation modified by me.]

<sup>352</sup> The metaphor of the ‘eternal night’ is interesting for the way that it points towards a very concrete feature of Chardin’s still lifes, namely the dark, blurry and undetailed background that reappears in most of his works, and that is a common trait in the genre in general. The obscurity of the interior spaces that surround the things depicted in the still lifes is of paramount importance, since the separation of these often-overlooked objects from their habitual surroundings helps draw our attention to them. It could be argued that Proust, in his *mise en scène* of interior spaces, makes use of a similar technique when he omits general description of the rooms and objects in them, focusing solely on the objects that stand in direct and close relation to the body of the protagonist. According to Bryson, who describes still life as an anti-Albertian genre in which illusions of perspective are abandoned, the genre’s ‘disinclination to portray the world beyond the far end of the table’ is a necessity ‘if still life is to create its principal spatial value: nearness’. Omitting the vistas, arcades and horizons of Renaissance perspectivism, still life then, Bryson writes, ‘proposes a much closer space, centered on the body’. Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), p. 71.

sprung out of a reflection on the themes of food and eating, but, certainly, the point he makes about the element of display in domestic spaces is valid beyond the culinary domain. His argument seems to be that there is a theatrical dimension to the domestic sphere in general, in that every form of display in our households evokes the presence (actual or implicit) of a spectatorial gaze, even when we are alone: ‘There is at least one extra person: the viewer. Even when no one else registers his or her presence, the viewer is always in someone’s domestic space, and belongs in the household’.<sup>353</sup> In the next section of this chapter, we shall see that, in *Autour de Mme Swann*, Odette Swann is depicted as something like a Chardinesque ‘light source’, whose interrelations with flowers serve to bring to view the secret existence and life of these non-human creatures. The intimacy between Odette and her flowers comes to view through flower arrangements seemingly not prepared for her visitors, but simply attesting to a special kind of friendship between human being and flowers.

## 5.2 Odette’s Winter Garden: Living Together With Flowers

In the essay on Chardin, Proust portrays the relationship between people and objects as one of mutual influence and responsiveness. In Chardin’s still lifes, in the rooms that provide settings for people’s day-to-day existence and ‘sanctuaries’ of their pasts, the author finds people and objects that live together as friends:

Vous avez vu les objets et fruits vivants comme des personnes, et la figure des personnes, d’une peau, d’un duvet, d’une couleur curieuse à considérer comme des fruits. Chardin va plus loin encore en réunissant objets et personnes dans ces chambres qui sont plus qu’un objet et peut-être aussi qu’une personne, qui sont le lieu de leur vie, la loi de leurs affinités ou de leurs contrastes, le parfum flottant et contenu de leur charme, confident silencieux et pourtant indiscret de leur âme, le sanctuaire de leur passé. Comme entre êtres et choses qui vivent depuis longtemps ensemble avec simplicité, ayant besoin les uns des autres, goûtant aussi des plaisirs obscurs à se trouver les uns avec les autres, tout ici est amitié.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Bryson, ‘Chardin and the Text of Still Life,’ p. 238.

<sup>354</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 379. [‘You have seen objects and fruits having a life, like people, and the skin of people’s faces having a bloom, a significance of colour, like fruit. Chardin goes yet further by combining things and people in those rooms which are more than a thing and perhaps even more than a person, rooms which are the scene of their joint lives, the law of their affinities or

Proust's essay on Chardin highlights the importance of the artist's gaze in bringing out the beauty of our domestic surroundings. Chardin's still lifes display an aesthetic dimension of the everyday that is neither fully his own creation nor solely a quality of the objects depicted, but rather something that comes to view in the encounter between subject and object. The significance of this encounter is reflected in the subject matter of Chardin's still lifes, which, as Proust points out, tend to be precisely the mutual dependence and co-existence of people and things. Ultimately, his observations lead Proust to describe the motifs of Chardin's works in terms of a veritable friendship or even *marriage* between

les couleurs du devant de feu et les couleurs de la pelote et de l'écheveau de laine, – entre le corps penché, les mains heureuses de la femme qui prépare la table, la nappe antique et les assiettes encore intactes dont depuis tant d'années elle sent la fermeté douce résister toujours à la même place entre ses mains soigneuses, – entre cette nappe et la lumière qui lui donne, en souvenir de ses visites de chaque jour, la douceur de crème ou d'une toile de Flandres, – entre la lumière et toute cette chambre qu'elle caresse, où elle s'endort, où tantôt elle se promène lentement, tantôt elle entre gaiement à l'improviste, si tendrement depuis tant d'années, – entre la chaleur et les étoffes, – entre les êtres et les choses, – entre le passé et la vie, – entre le clair et l'obscur.<sup>355</sup>

In *Autour de Mme Swann*, the character that above all incarnates this spirit of friendship or marriage between people and things is Odette Swann. During the novel's

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contrarities, the pervasive secreted scent of their charm, the confidant, mute yet a blabber, of their soul, the shrine of their past. As befits people and things who have lived quietly together for a long time, either needing the other, and finding as well an obscure pleasure in each other's company, everything in such a room breathes friendship'. Proust, *Marcel Proust on Art and Literature: 1896-1919*, p. 332.]

<sup>355</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 380. ['the colours of the hearthrug and those of the tuffet and the skein of wool, between the stooping body, the happy hands, of the woman who is laying the table and the old tablecloth and the still unchipped plates, whose gentle tenacity she has felt for so many years always holding its own in her careful grasp, between the tablecloth and the sunlight which as a keepsake of their daily encounters has given it the smoothness of cream or of a linen lawn, between the sunlight and the whole of this room that it fondles, where it falls asleep, where now it loiters, now frisks into when least expected – exists with all with the tenderness of years between warmth and materials, between beings and things, between past and present, between light and shade'. Proust, *Marcel Proust on Art and Literature: 1896-1919*, p. 333.]

last fifty pages or so, largely situated in her winter garden, Odette, the former cocotte who insists that she could not live surrounded by ‘hostile things’,<sup>356</sup> practices an intimate way of living together with objects that brings to mind the peculiar friendships between people and things that Proust evokes in the essay on Chardin. From the way that Odette dresses, for example, it becomes clear that she considers the textiles, ‘non pas comme décoratives à la façon d’un cadre, mais comme nécessaires de la même manière que le « tub » et le « footing », pour contenter les exigences de sa physionomie et les raffinements de son hygiène’ [‘not just as decorative in the sense of being a setting for her, but as necessary in the same way as her daily “tub” or her “constitutional”, satisfying both the demands of her looks and the finer requirements of the healthful life’] (I, 605; 2, 192, translation modified by me). And when the protagonist observes her out walking in the Bois de Boulogne, he notices that her purple parasol receives, from her happy eyes, a ‘regard heureux et si doux que quand il ne s’attachait plus à ses amis mais à un objet inanimé, il avait l’air de sourire encore’ [‘glance which, though directed not at her friends but at an inanimate object, brimmed with so much gentle good-will that it still seemed to be a smile’] (I, 625; 2, 212-13), while she seemingly allows the light bows on her bodice and skirt to drift ‘légèrement devant elle comme des créatures dont elle n’ignorait pas la présence et à qui elle permettait avec indulgence de se livrer à leurs jeux, selon leur rythme propre, pourvu qu’ils suivissent sa marche’ [‘slightly in front of her, like pets whose presence she was aware of but whose caprices she indulged, leaving them to their own devices as long as they stayed close to her’] (I, 625; 2, 212). It is notable that, while, in the essay on Chardin, written in the mid-1890s, Proust envisaged the spiritual and material worlds of the artist’s still lifes as equals, in *À la recherche*, the human subject dominates: Odette acknowledges and indulges the individual rhythms of the objects she carries with her – granted they follow her lead, like the entourage of courtiers accompanying her on her walk, ‘leur noire ou grise agglomération obéissante, exécutant les mouvements presque mécaniques d’un cadre inerte autour d’Odette’ [‘the blacks and

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<sup>356</sup> « Oui, je l’aime assez, je m’y tiens beaucoup; je ne pourrais pas vivre au milieu des choses hostiles et pompiers; c’est ici que je travaille » [“Yes, I’m quite fond of it, I’m in here lot. I couldn’t live among unfriendly things, you see, ugly-pretentious sort of things. This is where I work”] (I, 605; 2, 192).



greys of this disciplined formation executed their almost mechanical movements, lending an inert frame to Odette'] (I, 625; 2, 212). At no point does one feel the need to question whether Odette is in charge of the spectacle of which she is the centrepiece, and the narrator confirms that she wanders about, smiling and satisfied, 'ayant l'air d'assurance et de calme du créateur qui a accompli son œuvre et ne se soucie plus du reste' ['with all the poise and confidence of a creator who beholds everything that he has made and sees it is very good'] (I, 625; 2, 212).

My focus in this analysis is on Odette's creativity such as it expresses itself through the flowers in her winter garden. I argue that Proust stages Odette's winter garden as a spectacle perceived by an enchanted (and *enchanting*, that is, possessing the power to enchant) spectator, but also that, similarly to what we observed in relation to Françoise's kitchen in Chapter 4, the spectacle provided by this domestic interior not only reflects the creative gaze of the spectator but functions also as a display of the inherently aesthetic dimension of these domestic surroundings. In other words, Proust's rendering of Odette's flowers as living creatures is significant in more than one way: firstly, it serves to illustrate what I, in the first analysis of this chapter, referred to as the *affective texture* that these interiors have for the perceiving subject, meaning that the 'shape' or 'forms' by which this world presents itself are constituted by way of the perceiving subject's emotional and imaginative responses to it. But, as the present analysis will show, Odette's flowers also come to represent what we may refer to as the 'life' of the non-human – a form of life that Odette (who thus reveals her kinship with Chardin) is able to bring to our attention through her creative arrangements of these flowers.

Julia Caterina Hartley has made the compelling argument that 'the passages concerned with Odette's *toilettes* should be considered as integral parts of the novel's exploration of the nature of art'.<sup>357</sup> Considering Odette's acts of self-fashioning, as described towards the end of *Autour de Mme Swann*, in dialogue with Baudelaire's essay on the painter Constantin Guys, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', Hartley argues that Odette's transformation into 'an artefact of her own design' can be read as Proust's response to 'Baudelaire's suggestion that female adornment is an aesthetic

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<sup>357</sup> Hartley, p. 348.

endeavour'.<sup>358</sup> While Hartley convincingly demonstrates the aesthetic value of Odette's *toilettes*, she seems less willing to consider the way that Odette furnishes and decorates her rooms as an example of aesthetic pursuit, and she interprets the decorative elements of Odette's interiors as 'choices of interior design rather than symptoms of her creativity'.<sup>359</sup> In this analysis, I would like to suggest that it is not only in the way that she dresses but also through her interiors that Odette exhibits her creativity and thus turns out to be, as Pierre-Louis Rey puts it, more of an artist than she herself is perhaps aware.<sup>360</sup> The many stylistic transformations that Odette's salon goes through throughout the novel are guided by the evolving fashions of her time, and, as Rey points out, they are enmeshed in a parallel evolution within the domain of the fine arts: 'ainsi le japonisme a-t-il influencé une génération de peintres avant de céder la place à d'autres influences; les fleurs qui décorent les salons inspirent aussi des artistes décadents, et le mauve, favorisé par Odette, compte parmi les nuances préférées des impressionnistes' ['*japonisme* thus influenced a generation of painters, before being replaced by other influences; the flowers decorating living rooms also inspire decadent artists, and purple, Odette's favourite colour, is one of the Impressionists' favourite shades'].<sup>361</sup> The 'pêle-mêle d'atelier' ['Bohemian bumble'] and 'désordre artiste'<sup>362</sup> ['artistic disarray'] (I, 604; 2, 191) of Odette's salon could, in

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>360</sup> 'Dégageant une forme pure de la confusion des motifs anciens, Odette, sans le savoir, est une artiste' ['Extracting a pure form from the confusion of the old patterns, Odette, without knowing it, is an artist']. Pierre-Louis Rey, '« À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs »: Notice,' in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 1323.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> In *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust*, Janell Watson considers the use of words such as 'art' and 'artistique' to describe eclectic interiors in *fin de siècle* France, pointing out that when employed with regards to the feminised interior in literature from this period, 'the descriptor "artistique" tends to be accompanied by qualifications, contestation, and irony' (p. 72). In Watson's view, the use of the vocabulary of art to describe eclectic interiors is part of a conceptualisation of the eclectic interior undertaken by literary and commercial writers alike, starting as early as the 1840s. The public's growing interest in the decorative arts manifests itself in literary descriptions of interiors, but also in commercial writings, such as decorators' catalogues and how-to manuals. In her study, she demonstrates how the 'rights' to words such as 'artiste' and 'artistique' were disputed during the last half of the nineteenth century, as these words were 'so often appropriated undeservingly in the eyes of those who [claimed] membership among the cultural elite' (p. 60). See the chapter 'The fashionable artistic interior', in Janell Watson, *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to*

other words, be regarded as reflecting the alternating trends governing the world of fine arts. In my view, however, it is not only by decorating her interiors in accordance with fluctuating trends that Odette professes a profound aesthetic sensibility. In the way she lives intimately together with flowers, she exhibits an individual and disinterested sense of beauty, in the light of which it is difficult not to consider her salon as an artistically-encoded interior. As it turns out, Proust's *mise en scène* of Odette's winter garden in *Autour de Mme Swann* reveals the former courtesan to be herself skilled in the art of staging, as she creates and displays decorative flower arrangements that may be viewed as aesthetic materialisations of *time*.

From the very outset of the passages concerned with the winter garden, its intrinsically poetic character is confirmed by the fact that such rooms, according to the narrator, 'ne se voit plus que dans les héliogravures des livres d'étrennes de P.-J. Stahl' ['can be seen now only in the photogravure illustrations of P.-J. Stahl's giftbooks'] (I, 582; 2, 168). Allegedly a phantom from the past, the winter garden such as Proust's narrator conceives it no longer exists, except in memory and in art. Quite unequivocally, the phenomenon of the winter garden is firmly placed within the world of childhood and fiction, when the narrator thus compares it to the gifts that were typically offered to French children on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January every year – the *étrennes*.<sup>363</sup> He accordingly associates these indoor gardens with 'ces serres minuscules et portatives posées au matin du 1<sup>er</sup> janvier sous la lampe allumée – les enfants n'ayant pas eu la patience d'attendre qu'il fit jour – parmi les autres cadeaux du jour de l'An' ['the tiny portable greenhouses sitting in the lamplight on the morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> of January (the children having been too impatient to wait for daybreak) among the other New Year's Day presents'] (I, 582; 2, 169), and with illustrations in children's books:

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*Proust: the Collection and Consumption of Curiosities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 57-82.

<sup>363</sup> The expression 'livres d'étrennes' was commonly employed in France from the mid-nineteenth century until after the First World War. Several publishing houses customised these books especially for children, with beautifully decorated covers, in carton or thick paper and with illustrations alongside the text. During the last half of the nineteenth century, Pierre-Jules Hetzel, also known as P.-J. Stahl, authored and edited several such 'livres d'étrennes', and among them his own series of popular children's books about Mademoiselle Lili.

[...] plus encore qu'à ces serres-là elles-mêmes, ces jardins d'hiver ressemblaient à celle qu'on voyait tout auprès d'elles, figurée dans un beau livre, autre cadeau du jour de l'An, et qui, bien qu'elle fût donnée non aux enfants, mais à Mlle Lili, l'héroïne de l'ouvrage, les enchantait à tel point que, devenus maintenant presque vieillards, ils se demandent si dans ces années fortunées l'hiver n'était pas la plus belle des saisons. (I, 582-83)<sup>364</sup>

These initial descriptions of the winter garden confirm that we are still within the universe of the *féerique* – a universe that, like the theatrical *féerie*, owes its enchanting powers largely to the way that it enables both old and young to experience or recall the amazement and wonder of childhood. The association of Odette's winter garden with such childhood pleasures and, more precisely, with the child's perception of the world as metaphor for a non-habitual mode of perception, is confirmed as the passage morphs into an exemplary Proustian *tableau*. The paragraph below stages the winter garden such as it is perceived by an anonymous passer-by, apparently enchanted by the atmosphere inside precisely because the illuminated windows bring to mind the panes of children's glasshouses:

Enfin au fond de ce jardin d'hiver, à travers les arborescences d'espèces variées qui de la rue faisaient ressembler la fenêtre éclairée au vitrage de ces serres d'enfants, dessinées ou réelles, le passant, se hissant sur ses pointes, apercevait généralement un homme en redingote, un gardénia ou un œillet à la boutonnière, debout devant une femme assise, tous deux vagues, comme deux intailles dans une topaze, au fond de l'atmosphère du salon, ambrée par le samovar – importation récente alors – de vapeurs qui s'en échappent peut-être encore aujourd'hui, mais qu'à cause de l'habitude personne ne voit plus. (I, 583)<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> [...] or, rather, instead of resembling these actual diminutive greenhouses, the winter garden looked more like the one you could see right beside them in a lovely book, another of the New Year's day presents, and which despite not being for the children but for Mademoiselle Lili, the heroine of the story, delighted them so much that, though they are now almost in their old age, they wonder whether in those dear days winter was not the best of seasons' (2, 169).

<sup>365</sup> 'The passer-by who stood on tip-toe might well see in the depths of this winter garden, through the branching foliage of the various species, which made the lamplit windows look like the panes of children's glass-houses, real or drawn, a gentleman in a frock-coat, with a gardenia or a carnation in his buttonhole, standing in front of a lady who was sitting, neither of them very clear, as though intaglioed in topaz, amid the drawing-room atmosphere, hazily ambered by the fumes from the samovar, a recent importation of that period, fumes which may still be given off nowadays but which, because of habit, nobody ever sees' (2, 169).

With the invention of this passer-by, temporarily replacing the protagonist in the position of the spectator, who stands outside lamplit windows that evoke the childhood memory of glasshouses while gazing in on a lady and her courtier, Proust elegantly reminds us that the Swann house constitutes a tableau – and its enchanted interiors a spectacle inviting the creative spectator to explore the imaginary world from within. The simile comparing the people that the passer-by observes with intaglios in topaz, figures engraved in stone, serves as an indication that, in this tableau, time has stood still: we are presented with a poetic, immobilised spectacle of the past. The anonymising of the passer-by and the people he observes contributes to emphasising the aesthetic quality of this spectacle, in which the fumes of the samovar, like a gauze veil placed across a theatrical stage, create an otherworldly effect – otherworldly not merely for the way that the vapour blurs the spectator’s vision, but also because, at the point in time when the narrator tells his story, and because of habit, these fumes, which may still be given off, are no longer seen.

Intriguingly, the tableau enables a form of interplay between subject and object, interior and exterior, for Proust has been sure to include a clever detail, providing the gentleman inside with a carnation flower in his buttonhole, which indicates that the spectator standing outside the window might in turn be an object of perception for the performers. Proust repeatedly resorts to the carnation flower primarily for its ability to connote, through appearance and etymology, the human eye. The French name for the flower, *œillet*, is derived from Middle French, *œil*, in combination with the affix *-et*, a diminutive most often used grammatically to indicate small size. In other words, the word *œillet* connotes the idea of a small eye, or, more generally, the idea of a small hole. The presence of such a flower in the tableau thus suggests – and we shall see in Chapter 5.3 that Proust repeats this suggestion in an even more explicit way in the féérique domain of the Hôtel de Flandre – that the spectacle returns the spectator’s gaze. Moreover, the spatial limitations of the tableau’s frame are efficiently breached when another anonymous character, in a movement that again evokes Diderot’s ‘Promenade Vernet’, enters the winter garden without making a sound and without the hostess being alerted to the visitor’s presence. Interestingly, this time around, the spectator is implicitly identified as the reader (or readers) of the novel, when the

narrator addresses the intruder as ‘vous’, all the while underlining the poetic quality of the scene by pointing out that the scene makes Odette appear as – precisely what she is – a heroine of a novel:

À cause de cet étouffement des sons par les tapis et de sa retraite dans des enfoncements, la maîtresse de la maison, n’étant pas avertie de votre entrée comme aujourd’hui, continuait à lire pendant que vous étiez déjà presque devant elle, ce qui ajoutait encore à cette impression de romanesque, à ce charme d’une sorte de secret surpris, que nous retrouvons aujourd’hui dans le souvenir de ces robes déjà démodées alors, que Mme Swann était peut-être la seule à ne pas avoir encore abandonnées et qui nous donnent l’idée que la femme qui les portait devait être une héroïne de roman parce que nous, pour la plupart, ne les avons guère vues que dans certains romans d’Henry Gréville. (I, 585)<sup>366</sup>

The particular charm of the winter garden, that is, its ability to enchant the visitor, is seemingly caused by the distance that instates itself between subject and object of perception, when the latter continues to read her book, unaware that someone is observing her. As a consequence of the hostess’s ignorance, a spectatorial relation establishes itself between her and the visitor, and this relation imbues the scene with a certain romantic quality. While the initial descriptions of Odette’s winter garden focus on the impressions of the spectator (or the reader) as incorporated in a random passer-by or an anonymous visitor, the passages subsequently develop into an account of Odette’s creative agency as the narrator turns to her way of handling flowers:

Une grande cocotte, comme elle avait été, vit beaucoup pour ses amants, c’est-à-dire chez elle, ce qui peut la conduire à vivre pour elle. [...] D’autres femmes montrent leurs bijoux, elle, elle vit dans l’intimité de ses perles. Ce genre d’existence impose l’obligation, et finit par donner le goût, d’un luxe secret, c’est-à-dire bien près d’être désintéressé. Mme Swann l’étendait aux fleurs. Il y avait toujours près de son fauteuil une immense coupe de cristal remplie entièrement de violettes de Parme ou de marguerites effeuillées dans l’eau, et qui semblait témoigner aux yeux de l’arrivant de

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<sup>366</sup> ‘As the carpets muffled all sounds and as she often sat secluded in an alcove, one’s hostess, not having been told of one’s arrival as she would be these days, might be still deep in her book as one stood before her; and this enhanced the impression of a romantic moment, the charm of having uncovered a secret, brought back to us nowadays by the memory of those dresses which, though already out of date then, were still worn by Mme Swann alone, perhaps, and which to our minds suggest that their wearer must be the heroine of a novel, since most of us have only ever glimpsed them in the romances of Henry Gréville’ (2, 171).

quelque occupation préférée et interrompue, comme eût été la tasse de thé que Mme Swann eût bue seule, pour son plaisir; d'une occupation plus intime même et plus mystérieuse, si bien qu'on avait envie de s'excuser en voyant les fleurs étalées là, comme on l'eût fait de regarder le titre du volume encore ouvert qui eût révélé la lecture récente, donc peut-être la pensée actuelle d'Odette. *Et plus que le livre, les fleurs vivaient*; on était gêné si on entraît faire une visite à Mme Swann de s'apercevoir qu'elle n'était pas seule, ou si on rentrait avec elle de ne pas trouver le salon vide, tant y tenaient une place énigmatique et se rapportant à des heures de la vie de la maîtresse de maison qu'on ne connaissait pas, *ces fleurs qui n'avaient pas été préparées pour les visiteurs d'Odette mais comme oubliées là par elle, avaient eu et auraient encore avec elle des entretiens particuliers qu'on avait peur de déranger et dont on essayait en vain de lire le secret*, en fixant des yeux la couleur délavée, liquide, mauve et dissolue des violettes de Parme. (I, 583-84, my emphases)<sup>367</sup>

The narrator's designation of Odette's taste for flowers as one of *disinterest* (or, at any rate, 'bien près d'être désintéressé') is remarkable. As Janell Watson maintains, nineteenth-century literature tended to associate household ornaments and decorative objects (bibelots) with the 'sexualised interiors' of actresses and courtesans.<sup>368</sup> As indicated by Watson's description of Odette's home in *Un amour de Swann* (the part of the novel that accounts for the earlier days of Swann and Odette's story), Proust appears to have obeyed the pattern established in nineteenth-century literature in his

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<sup>367</sup> 'The life of a high-class courtesan, such as she had been, being much taken up by her lovers, is largely spent at home; and this can lead such a woman to live for herself. [...] Other women show off their jewels; she shares her private life with her pearls. It is a type of life which demands, and eventually gives a taste for, the enjoyment of secret luxury, that is, a life which is almost one of disinterest. This taste Mme Swann extended to flowers. Near her armchair there always stood an immense crystal bowl filled to the brim with Parma violets or the plucked petals of marguerites in water, which to the eyes of someone arriving in the room made it seem as though she had been disturbed in a favourite pastime, such as quietly enjoying the private pleasure of a cup of tea; but the spread flowers made it seem a more private pastime even than that, a mysterious one, and seemed to hint that one should apologize for an indiscretion, as one might on inadvertently glimpsing the title of a book lying open and divulging the secret of what she had just read, or perhaps even the thought in her mind at that very moment. *But the flowers were more alive than a book*: so notable and enigmatic was their presence that one felt embarrassed, if one came to visit Mme Swann, to find she was not alone, or if one came home with her, to find the drawing-room already occupied. They suggested long hours of her life that one knew nothing of, *not seeming to have been set out in expectation of visitors, but looking as though just left there by her, after sharing intimate moments with her which would come again soon, secret moments which one was loth to disturb, but which one yearned to be privy to*, as one gazed at the wanton mauves, moist and faded, of her Parma violets' (2, 169-70, my emphases).

<sup>368</sup> Watson, p. 72.

depictions of the ‘seductive decor’ of her apartment: ‘[Odette] lives in a heavily draped harem-like apartment obviously designed for scenes of seduction, filled with exotic Oriental bibelots and large plants’.<sup>369</sup> The young Odette furnishes her home with the purpose of seduction in mind, and she is identified, as Watson points out, as someone who puts more weight on the ‘vocabulary of disinterestedness’ than on the actual ‘practice of disinterestedness’.<sup>370</sup> The mature Odette, however, is a more complex figure (and one that remains beyond the scope of Watson’s study), possessing a more sophisticated understanding of beauty and the aesthetically pleasing. It is, interestingly, her past as a courtesan that prepares the ground for her subsequent aesthetic ‘trajectory’. This is explicitly asserted by the narrator in the quote above, when he states that the courtesan, since she spends so much time in her own home and entertains such an intimate relation with the objects in her surroundings, may come to develop an especially sophisticated taste (‘Ce genre d’existence impose l’obligation, et finit par donner le goût, d’un luxe secret, c’est-à-dire bien près d’être désintéressé’ [‘It is a type of life which demands, and eventually gives a taste for, the enjoyment of secret luxury, that is, a life which is almost one of disinterest’]).

As it turns out, then, Odette’s past as a courtesan and her experience in the art of seduction have conditioned her to develop a close-to-disinterested sense of beauty. And, moreover, it has taught her how to live ‘pour elle’, that is, not only *for herself* but also in intimate interrelation with her domestic surroundings. The friendly relation that Odette entertains with her clothes finds a parallel in the way that she engages with the flowers in her winter garden. In fact, the flowers that she surrounds herself with are not mere decorative elements on display, but give the appearance of being living creatures that keep her company, friends with whom she shares a mysterious intimacy. Certainly, the ‘mystérieuse poésie’ [‘mysterious poetry’] (I, 585; 2, 171) of Odette’s world is also partly the protagonist’s creation, as his emotional disposition after the loss of Gilberte’s affection has made him particularly responsive to the atmosphere in the winter garden and to the ephemeral life of the flowers that reside in it.<sup>371</sup> But the

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>371</sup> ‘Mon admiration pour eux [les chrysanthèmes] – quand j’allais faire à Mme Swann une de ces tristes visites où, lui ayant de par mon chagrin, retrouvé toute sa mystérieuse poésie de



impression that the flowers give of being alive is not only a fantasy cultivated by the protagonist but also quite true, for flowers are, as Proust writes, a ‘décoration [...] vivante et qui ne durerait que quelques jours’ [‘decoration [...] gifted with life, though lasting only a few days’] (I, 585; 2, 172). Odette’s creativity resides primarily in the fact that she, like Chardin, is able to conceive, display and thus shed light on the secret life of flowers. It would seem, in fact, that Proust, through the character of Odette, continues to play with the idea that he first addressed in the Chardin essay, of people and their environments as mutually constitutive: the flowers in Odette’s winter garden acquire a sort of human character through their intimate connection with her, while she ends up developing aesthetic sensibility through her interaction with them.

Between the lines in the descriptions of Odette’s winter garden, then, we read a story not only about the gradual transformation of her surroundings but also about the development of her own creativity. Starting out a courtesan, she ends up as something like a Chardinesque ‘artist’ with a profound understanding for the life of her material: the flowers with which she decorates her home. As it turns out, in handling her flowers, Odette is guided by an individual taste and an independent sense of the aesthetically pleasing, and these are factors that enable us to read her winter garden as an aesthetically-encoded interior. Mme Verdurin, the paradigmatic salon hostess who occasionally turns into an ordinary guest within the walls of Odette’s drawing room, draws attention (though perhaps unintentionally) to the individual assuredness guiding Odette’s decorating style when she criticises her flower arrangements: ‘« Vous ne savez pas arranger les chrysanthèmes », disait-elle en s’en allant, tandis que Mme Swann se levait pour la reconduire. « Ce sont des fleurs japonaises, il faut les disposer

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mère de cette Gilberte à qui elle dirait le lendemain: « Ton ami m’a fait une visite » – venait sans doute de ce que, rose pâle comme la soie Louis XV de ses fauteuils, blanc de neige comme sa robe de chambre en crêpe de Chine, ou d’un rouge métallique comme son samovar, ils superposaient à celle du salon une décoration supplémentaire, d’un coloris aussi riche, aussi raffiné, mais vivante et qui ne durerait que quelques jours’ [‘No doubt my liking for them [the chrysanthemums] – during those sad visits I made to her, when my sorrow had given her back all the mysterious poetry of being the mother of Gilberte, to whom she would say after I had left, “Your young man’s been to see me” – came from the fact that their pale pink matched the Louis XV silk of her armchairs, their snowy white her crêpe de Chine tea-gown, their burnished red her samovar, and that the decoration of the drawing-room was enhanced by this extra colour scheme, which was quite as rich in its range, just as refined, gifted with life, though lasting only a few days’] (I, 585; 2, 171-72).

comme font les Japonais. »’ [“You’re not very good at arranging chrysanthemums, are you?” she added on the way out, as Mme Swann was moving towards the door with her. “These are Japanese flowers, you know. They should be arranged as the Japanese do them.”] (I, 592; 2, 178). As Mme Verdurin fails to realise, however, it is precisely Odette’s lack of respect for customs and traditions that enables her individual creativity to come to view.

Odette both appreciates and understands the flowers she lives with, and is able to create magnificent, aesthetic effects by way of these living creatures. As the lady of Tansonville, the Swann family’s countryside property in Combray, she is well aware ‘qu’avril, même glacé, n’est pas dépourvu de fleurs, que l’hiver, le printemps, l’été, ne sont pas séparés par des cloisons aussi hermétiques que tend à le croire le boulevardier qui jusqu’aux premières chaleurs s’imagine le monde comme renfermant seulement des maisons nues sous la pluie’ [‘that even the iciest April is never without its flowers, and that winter, springtime and summer are not as hermetically partitioned from one another as may be supposed by the man-about-town who, until the first warm weather arrives, cannot imagine the world containing anything other than bare housefronts dripping rain’] (I, 623; 2, 210-11). In her flowery decorations, Odette is not, it seems, bound by the changing of the seasons, for she is able to establish an artificial springtime inside, long before the ice has melted outside. The time of day possesses no more power over her creations, and long after the sun has set, her visitors can still witness the afterglow of the sunbeams inside, ‘prolongés, transposés dans la palette enflammée des fleurs’ [‘taken up again and transposed into the blushing palette of the blooms’] (I, 585; 2, 172). The colours of Odette’s chrysanthemums – whose beauty, says Mme de Cottard, surpasses everyone else’s – bring to mind ‘des feux arrachés par un grand coloriste à l’instabilité de l’atmosphère et du soleil, afin qu’il vinsent orner une demeure humaine’ [‘a master of colour which has snatched their fleeting incandescence from the sunlit evening air so as to brighten a human place’] (I, 585-86; 2, 172, translation modified by me). The narrator’s designation of Odette as the sun of her little universe – ‘le petit monde dont elle était le soleil’ [‘the little world which revolved about her Sun’] (I, 605; 2, 192) – acquires an additional dimension in light of these quotations. Not only the social centre of her steadily-growing circle of friends

but also the creator of aesthetic effects that evoke daylight in the evening and spring in wintertime, she truly *is* the sun of her salon, in the sense of being an ‘artist’ that, like Chardin and like the narrator, ‘enters like light’.

No more than her flowers does Odette herself obey the laws that govern time, and her husband complains that she is a notorious latecomer: ‘« Que voulez vous, ma pauvre femme n’a jamais pu savoir ce que c’est que l’heure. Une heure moins dix. Tous les jours c’est plus tard. Et vous allez voir, elle arrivera sans se presser en croyant qu’elle est en avance. »’ [“Ah, that wife of mine, you know, she’s never been very good at knowing what time it is. Ten to one already. Getting later every day. You mark my words – she’ll come drifting in here, thinking she’s got plenty of time to spare.”] (I, 518; 2, 103). Odette seems to choose, more or less consciously, to revolt against time’s constraints, as is implied towards the end of *Autour de Mme Swann*, when she arrives for her daily stroll in the avenue du Bois, ‘tardive, alentie et luxuriante comme la plus belle fleur et qui ne s’ouvrirait qu’à midi’ [‘as late, languid and luxuriant as the most beautiful flower that never opens until noon’] (I, 625; 2, 212). Or when, in order to make her guests stay longer, she claims that the clock in her winter garden cannot be trusted: ‘Même avec Mme Cottard, et quoique l’heure fût avancée, Mme Swann se faisait caressante pour dire: « Mais non, il n’est pas tard, ne regardez pas la pendule, ce n’est pas l’heure, elle ne va pas; qu’est-ce que vous pouvez avoir de si pressé à faire? »’ [‘Even with Mme Cottard, and though time was getting on, Mme Swann would put on her most cajoling voice: “No, no, it’s not late! You mustn’t pay any attention to that clock, that’s not the right time, it’s stopped. You can’t be in that much of a hurry, surely?”’] (I, 586; 2, 172). Fascinatingly, this revolt against the constraints of time is a defining trait in Odette, who, contrary to everyone else, appears completely unaffected by the passage of time when, as we shall see in Chapter 6, a large part of the novel’s characters reunite for a last matinée at the Princesse de Guermantes’s. In this final act, Odette is so completely unchanged from how she looked in her youth that she gives the impression of being scarcely alive (IV, 528; 6, 258). Nevertheless, the timeless quality of eternal youth that she incarnates in the novel’s final tableau is established already in *Autour de Mme Swann*, when the narrator points out that, arrived mid-way through life, Odette seems finally to have

discovered, or invented, her own physiognomy: ‘arrivée au milieu de la vie, Odette s’était enfin découvert, ou inventé, une physionomie personnelle, un « caractère » immuable, un « genre de beauté », et sur ses traits découpus [...] avait appliqué ce type fixe, comme une jeunesse immortelle’ [‘Odette had now reached the middle years of life, where she found in herself, or invented for herself, a personal style of face, full of fixed character, a recognized pattern of beauty; and on her formerly undesigned features [...] she now wore this immutable model of eternal youth’] (I, 606; 2, 193).

Odette’s refusal to obey the ‘laws’ of clock-time and seasonal changes is extended to her *toilettes*, when the narrator notes that, mid-winter, she dressed in outfits that, later on, one would consider as more appropriate for warmer weather:

Les jours où Mme Swann n’était pas sortie du tout, on la trouvait dans une robe de chambre de crêpe de Chine, blanche comme une première neige, parfois aussi dans un de ces longs tuyautages de mousseline de soie, qui ne semblent qu’une jonchée de pétales roses ou blancs et qu’on trouverait aujourd’hui peu appropriés à l’hiver, et bien à tort. Car ces étoffes légères et ces couleurs tendres donnaient à la femme – dans la grande chaleur des salons d’alors fermés de portières et desquels ce que les romanciers mondains de l’époque trouvaient à dire de plus élégant, c’est qu’ils étaient « douillettement capitonnés » – le même air frileux qu’aux roses qui pouvaient y rester à côté d’elle, malgré l’hiver, dans l’incarnat de leur nudité, comme au printemps. (I, 584-85)<sup>372</sup>

Flowers and woman alike, then, seemingly brave the winter and give the impression that spring has already arrived. The narrator’s observation that the garments in fluted chiffon make Odette look as though she is wearing nothing but flower petals (‘qui ne semblent qu’une jonchée de pétales roses ou blancs’) provides a striking example of the intimate relation between the animate and the inanimate in Odette’s world. The imagery identifying her as a sort of flower is recurrent in this final section of *Autour*

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<sup>372</sup> ‘On days when she had not been out, one found oneself in the presence of a Mme Swann sitting in a tea-gown of crêpe de Chine, as white as newly fallen snow, with which she sometimes wore one of those long garments in fluted chiffon, which made her look as though she was wearing nothing but a sprinkle of pink or white petals and which people nowadays would think, wrongly, was quite inappropriate for the winter. In drawing-rooms of that period, draped with door-curtains and over-heated, for which the fashionable novelists of the time could find no smarter epithet than “cosily upholstered”, these flimsy clothes in their soft shades made women look as though they must feel as cold as the roses that stood beside them, braving the winter in their flesh-tinted nakedness, as though it was already spring’ (2, 171).

*de Mme Swann*. It is also an essential ingredient in the poetic tableau that concludes this novel and in which Odette arrives in the Bois de Boulogne like a beautiful flower that only opens at noon:

[...] Mme Swann apparaissait, épanouissant autour d'elle une toilette toujours différente mais que je me rappelle surtout mauve; puis elle hissait et déployait sur un long pédoncule, au moment de sa plus complète irradiation, le pavillon de soie d'une large ombrelle de la même nuance que l'effeuillage des pétales de sa robe. Toute une suite l'environnait [...] et la faisait surgir, frêle, sans crainte, dans la nudité de ses tendres couleurs, comme l'apparition d'un être d'une espèce différente, d'une race inconnue, et d'une puissance presque guerrière, grâce à quoi elle compensait à elle seule sa multiple escorte. (I, 625)<sup>373</sup>

The passage fascinatingly describes Mme Swann with a vocabulary elsewhere applied to flowers – her sunshade is a ‘pedicle’, her skirt is like ‘petals’, her colours evoke a similar impression of ‘fragility’ and ‘nudity’ as the roses standing beside her in her drawing room, and the association of the woman with the colour mauve links her to the *violettes de Parme* with which she decorates her home. And, yet, Odette is not identified as a flower, but ‘comme l'apparition d'un être d'une espèce différente’ [‘as though she was a creature of a different species’], as the visual revelation of something unknown and mysterious, but also, as we saw above, as a *creator* displaying ‘l'air d'assurance et de calme du créateur qui a accomplie son œuvre et ne se soucie plus du reste’ [‘the poise and confidence of a creator who beholds everything that he has made and sees it is very good’] (I, 625; 2, 212). ‘Artist’ and ‘apparition’, then, Odette materialises both the ‘art’ and the ‘work’ at the same time – in the final tableau, but also at home in her winter garden, the poetic universe that she has created for herself and that is governed not by external laws of time but by her will.

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<sup>373</sup> ‘[...] Mme Swann would make her entrance [...] in outfits which gave her a bloom of radiance, and which, though they were always different, I remember as mainly mauve. The bright moment of her flowering was complete when, on an elongated stretch of stem, she unfurled the silky vexillum of a broad sunshade blending with the full-blown shimmer of her frock. She was accompanied by a whole retinue: [...] [they] made her stand out, fragile and fearless, in the nudity of her gentle colours, as though she was a creature of a different species or of some mysterious descent, with a suggestion of something warlike about her, all of which enabled her single person to counter-balance her numerous escort’ (2, 212).

The way in which Odette's creations place her, as it were, *above* the rhythm of the seasons and the clock is a central feature of Proust's *mise en scène*, and a feature which appears to link Odette's character to the novel's overall vision of the nature of art, since it allows for a sort of transcendence of time (towards the end of *À la recherche*, the work's protagonist realises that the only way to achieve 'transcendence' of time is to create a work of art<sup>374</sup>). The way that Odette's interiors challenge the condition set by the seasons and the time of day shows her as possessing, as an artist, some mastery over it. But we could also say that her creations do not so much *transcend* time as they *embody* it. For, while the end of *À la recherche* posits Odette as seemingly untouched by the workings of time, or as possessing some sort of eternal youth, time as such resides at the very centre of her creations. Decorating her home with flowers that prolong that futile moment just after sunset, when day turns into night, and surrounding herself with flowers that announce the arrival of springtime before winter has released its grip, what Odette's creative agency brings to view are the very moments of transition: those moments of transformation or metamorphosis from one state to another that rhythm the evolution of every year and every day. Her creativity is thus linked to the seasons and the time of day by a bond that is both 'nécessaire' and 'unique':

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<sup>374</sup> In *Supernatural Proust*, Topping argues that when the protagonist, in *Le Temps retrouvé*, finally realises that transcendence of time can only be achieved 'in a permanent and productive way in the creation of his own work of art' (p. 70), the figure of enchantment is employed as a simile by the narrator to evoke the sudden and unforeseen nature of the revelation, and not to imply that the protagonist is, in this situation, a 'victim' of enchantment. In other words, the way that the association of fairy-tale imagery and the discourse on art evolves throughout the narrative reflects, in her view, the development of the protagonist's aesthetic apprenticeship: 'The triggers for this revelation are the involuntary memories of the final volume of the novel. In describing the first of these – the uneven paving-stone – Proust reintroduces, but inverts, the images of enchantment which marked his earlier mystification before the work of art. [...] As if to highlight his freedom from his earlier perception, Proust stresses that this revelation occurs "*comme par enchantement*" (my italics), not "*par enchantement*", that is, through simile rather than metaphor'. Topping, p. 70. In Chapter 6, I maintain that this gradual disenchantment (which may indeed be said, as Topping points out, to be reflected by changes in the narrator's use of references to enchantment) is paralleled by an increasingly *theatricalising* attitude in the protagonist *vis-à-vis* his surroundings. As I argue in Chapter 6, this development from enchantment towards theatre, and from metaphor towards simile, also reflects a historical development in Proust's conception of his novel (which I trace by comparing his notebooks to the published version of the final *matinée*).

D'autant plus que déjà persuadé qu'en vertu de la liturgie et des rites dans lesquels Mme Swann était profondément versée, sa toilette était unie à la saison et à l'heure par un lien nécessaire, unique, les fleurs de son flexible chapeau de paille, les petits rubans de sa robe me semblaient naître du mois de mai plus naturellement encore que les fleurs des jardins et des bois; et pour connaître le trouble nouveau de la saison, je ne levais pas les yeux plus haut que son ombrelle, ouverte et tendue comme un autre ciel plus proche, clément, mobile et bleu. (I, 626)<sup>375</sup>

It would seem, then, that Odette's creations, *toilettes* and interiors alike, embody time itself. What she creates – consciously or not – are images of life and timeless embodiments of the workings of time. Unsurprisingly, then, the 'boules de neige' in her drawing room – which, the narrator admits, 'n'avaient peut-être dans la pensée de la maîtresse de la maison d'autre but que de faire, sur les conseils de Bergotte, « symphonie en blanc majeur » avec son ameublement et sa toilette' ['may have had no other purpose than to join with my hostess's furniture and her own outfit in making the "Symphony in White Major" that Bergotte liked to talk of'] (I, 624; 2, 211) – awaken in him the memory of 'Karfreitagszauber' from Wagner's *Parsifal*. This is unsurprising, because, as it turns out, the narrator associates this part of Wagner's work not only with the Christian miracle of resurrection but also with the 'miracle naturel' constituted by the resurrection of spring, and thus, notably, the changing of the seasons.<sup>376</sup> Ultimately, then, a poetic apprehension of the circle of life – a motif

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<sup>375</sup> '[Especially] since (in my conviction that, in accordance with her pious expertise in the rites and liturgy of such things, Mme Swann's way of dressing were linked to the season and the time of day by a bond that was necessary and unique) the flowers on her soft straw hat and the little bows on her frock seemed a more natural product of May than any flowers cultivated in beds or growing wild in the woods; and to witness the thrilling onset of the new season, I needed to lift my eyes no higher than Mme Swann's sunshade, opened now and stretched above me like a nearer, more temperate sky, full of its constantly changing blue' (2, 213).

<sup>376</sup> 'Il me suffisait pour avoir la nostalgie de la campagne, qu'à côté des névés du manchon que tenait Mme Swann, les boules de neige [...] me rappelassent que l'Enchantement du Vendredi Saint figure un miracle naturel auquel on pourrait assister tous les ans si l'on était plus sage, et aidées du parfum acide et capiteux de corolles d'autres espèces dont j'ignorais les noms et qui m'avait fait rester tant de fois en arrêt dans mes promenades de Combray, rendissent le salon de Mme Swann aussi virginal, aussi candidement fleuri sans aucune feuille, aussi surchargé d'odeurs authentiques, que le petit raidillon de Tansonville' ['Apart from the snows of Mme Swann's muff, all that was required to set me yearning for the countryside was that the snowballs of the Guelder roses [...] should remind me that the Good Friday Spell represents a natural miracle, which we could witness every year, had we but the good sense to do so, and that these white flowers, along with the heady acid perfume of

which Proust, as we will see in Chapter 6, finds to be best illustrated by the *féerie* – resides at the centre of the Swanns’ *féerique* domain, an enchanted dwelling which provides a stage for reflections not merely on the creative imagination of a young boy or a mature narrator but, more generally, on the creation of art and, more specifically, on the relationship between artistic creation and the workings of time.

In the present analysis, I have aimed to show how the figure of enchantment is associated with the perception of domestic interiors in the *féerique* domain constituted by the Swanns’ apartment and, more exactly, Odette’s winter garden, which is granted a spectatorial dimension through Proust’s evocation of its ability to enchant the visitor. In my view, this evocation brings to mind young Proust’s fascination for Chardin and still life painting, and I have suggested that the friendship between people and things that Chardin’s still lifes display may have been a source of inspiration for Proust in his conception of the ‘jardin d’hiver’ and Odette’s co-existence with her flowers.

I have argued that when Proust engages the figure of enchantment in his *mise en scène* of the perception of these interiors, his goal is not that we should consider them as make-believe or fiction (or, for that matter, as genuinely supernatural spaces), but that we should comprehend the crucial role that the imagination plays in the perception of such ‘enchanted’ dwellings. What this considerable involvement of the imagination in perception primarily entails, in the Swann house and elsewhere in the Proustian universe, is not that the protagonist comes to perceive something ‘other’ than what is ‘really’ there – as, say, when he perceives an asparagus as a supernatural creature. As we have seen, the imagination is also considerably involved in his perception of the asparagus *as an asparagus*, that is, when he directs his attentive perception towards the multiplicity of sensations offered by the asparagus itself. The imagination, then, is precisely what enables him to detect, for example, all the nuances in the asparagus’s colour. In my analysis of Odette’s winter garden, this is illustrated by the text’s display of the protagonist’s openness to the enchanting powers of flowers as the mode of apprehension necessary for him to perceive the *life* of flowers, and not,

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blooms of other species, the names of which were unknown to me, but which had often made me pause on my walks about Combray, should give to Mme Swann’s drawing-room an air that was as virginal, as candid, as blossomy without leaves, as thick with genuine smells, as the steep little path leading up to Tansonville’] (I, 624; 2, 211).



then, ‘life’ in a *supernatural* sense, but in the very real sense constituted by their organic existence, and by the way that flowers incarnate and represent the changing of the seasons and the rhythm of the day. In the final section of this chapter, I examine another of the novel’s enchanted interiors, the Hôtel de Flandre, as a stage upon which a thrilling encounter between human being and the inanimate allows the protagonist to enter into a form of contact with ‘phantoms’ from the past.

### 5.3 The Hôtel de Flandre: Encountering the ‘non-moi’

In *À la recherche*, the perceiving subject’s experience of *distance* between himself and material things is most acute when the *presence* of these things is most strongly felt – that is, when they are still unfamiliar and not yet ‘annexed’ by the human body. This we have seen exemplified in several ways throughout the thesis. In Balbec, for example, the protagonist’s encounter with the objects in his hotel room is tinted by a mutual feeling of disaffection, similarly to how the protagonist, although delighted to be invited into the Swann house, feels like an intruder. This underscores the troublesome relationship between the protagonist and those objects that he has not yet made ‘his own’. The encounter with unknown spaces can be unsettling for him, and, like Golo, projected by a magic lantern onto the walls in his bedroom in Combray,<sup>377</sup> he typically works to fill new rooms with his own being, or to incorporate them into his own body and enlarge the imaginary organism that he refers to as ‘mon moi’<sup>378</sup> – even though such an annexation of interior spaces can have a sterilising effect (since

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<sup>377</sup> In *Du côté de chez Swann*, the magic lantern replaces the opacity of the walls in the young protagonist’s bedroom with multicoloured apparitions illustrating the story of Golo and Geneviève de Brabant read aloud by his great-aunt: ‘Le corps de Golo lui-même, d’une essence aussi surnaturelle que celui de sa monture, s’arrangeait de tout obstacle matériel, de tout objet gênant qu’il rencontrait en le prenant comme ossature et en se le rendant intérieur’ [‘The body of Golo himself, in its essence as supernatural as that of his mount, accommodated every material obstacle, every bothersome object that he encountered by taking it as his skeleton and absorbing it into himself’] (I, 10; 1, 13-14).

<sup>378</sup> Both in Balbec and in Combray, the narrator refers to familiar bedrooms as filled by ‘mon moi’: ‘Mais je ne peux dire quel malaise me causait pourtant cette intrusion du mystère et de la beauté dans une chambre que j’avais fini par remplir de mon moi au point de ne pas faire plus attention à elle qu’à lui-même’ [‘But I cannot express the uneasiness caused in me by this intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room I had at last filled with my self to the point of paying no more attention to the room than to that self’] (I, 10; 1, 14).

habit, as we saw in Chapter 2.1, enables us to live with most of our sensory and imaginative faculties in a dormant state). As Jean-Pierre Richard maintains, in *À la recherche*, habit can be just as threatening as the encounter with the unknown, since it abolishes our *feeling* for the objects around us:

Au danger d'*aventure*, de perdition par l'inconnu, risqué dans le dehors, ce qui se substitue et qui menace ici c'est le danger d'*habitude*, suprêmement maléfique pour Proust parce qu'il engourdit la puissance même de sentir, et qu'il finit par effacer tout contact un peu aigu, un peu voluptueux avec les choses. L'habitude: confort, puis mort de la sensation.<sup>379</sup>

We may say, then, that there is an ambiguous feeling inherent in 'mon moi'. Spending time in rooms cleared by the housekeeper called Habit<sup>380</sup> is comfortable. Comforting, even, but also somewhat dangerous, since it puts our sense or feel for our surroundings in peril. And as the episode with the milkmaid, studied in Chapter 2, illustrates, it is by no means always unpleasant to encounter the unknown. The protagonist's sense of unease arises above all when the unfamiliar is not a temporary stop on the way towards something else, but the journey's endpoint, the 'harbour' and lodging for the night. Bedrooms, then, are particularly critical for his emotional wellbeing. And it seems impossible for him to detach any new bedroom from the expectation of sadness:

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<sup>379</sup> Jean-Pierre Richard, 'Proust et la demeure,' *Littérature* 164, no. 4 (2011): p. 88. ['The danger of *adventure*, of perdition through the unknown, which one runs the risk of outside, is replaced here by the menacing danger of *habit*, supremely maleficent for Proust because it numbs the very ability to feel, and it ends by erasing all sharp or pleasurable contact with things. Habit: comfort followed by the death of sensation'.]

<sup>380</sup> Proust repeatedly evokes habit as a sort of housekeeper, clearing rooms so as to make them habitable for us, as here, in *Du côté de chez Swann*: 'L'habitude! aménageuse habile mais bien lente et qui commence par laisser souffrir notre esprit pendant des semaines dans une installation provisoire; mais que malgré tout il est bien heureux de trouver, car sans l'habitude et réduit à ses seuls moyens il serait impuissant à nous rendre un logis habitable' ['Habit! – that skilful but very slow housekeeper who begins by letting our mind suffer for weeks in a temporary arrangement; but whom we are nevertheless very happy to find, for without habit and reduced to no more than its own resources, our mind would be powerless to make a lodging habitable'] (I, 8; 1, 12). In *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, in a paragraph that we have had the occasion to discuss in Chapters 2 and 4, Proust writes: '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' ['As our attentiveness furnishes a room, so habit unfurnishes it, making space in it for us'] (II, 27; 2, 245). And, as we shall see in the present chapter, in *Le Côte de Guermantes* he refers to habit as 'cette servante moins sensible' ['this less mindful servant'] (II, 381; 3, 79).

Elle [la tristesse] était comme un arôme irrespirable que depuis ma naissance exhalait pour moi toute chambre nouvelle, c'est-à-dire toute chambre: dans celle que j'habitais d'ordinaire, je n'étais pas présent, ma pensée restait ailleurs et à sa place envoyait seulement l'Habitude. Mais je ne pouvais charger cette servante moins sensible de s'occuper de mes affaires dans un pays nouveau, où je la précédais, où j'arrivais seul, où il me fallait faire entrer en contact avec les choses ce « moi » que je ne retrouvais qu'à des années d'intervalles, mais toujours le même, n'ayant pas grandi depuis Combray, depuis ma première arrivée à Balbec, pleurant, sans pouvoir être consolé, sur le coin d'une malle défaire. (II, 381)<sup>381</sup>

In *Le Côté de Guermantes*, the protagonist visits the garrison town of Doncières, where his friend Saint-Loup is stationed. He is thus forced to spend the night in an unknown hotel in which he is certain that he will find little more than sadness and unease. But the encounter with the Hôtel de Flandre, a small eighteenth-century palace covered in tapestry and ornaments, proves him wrong. Surprisingly, there reigns, in this féérique domain, an atmosphere of instant and inviting friendliness. Consequently, and in spite of being wholly unknown, the hotel does not induce in the protagonist the sense of unease that new lodgings usually provoke in him. There are, accordingly, good grounds for claiming, as does Edward Hughes, that the trip to Doncières marks a visible change in the protagonist's manner of relating to the world of phenomena about him.<sup>382</sup> But what motivates this change? Is the friendly atmosphere in this abode related to matters concerning the space itself? Is it related to contextual elements, or to a change in the protagonist? Hughes seems to opt for a combination of the latter two possibilities. According to his analysis, it is the vitality of Saint-Loup's military milieu that affects the protagonist's perception of his living quarters, so that he comes to

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<sup>381</sup> 'The sadness was like an unbreathable aroma which every unfamiliar bedroom, that is to say every bedroom, had exhaled for me for as long as I could remember: in my usual bedroom I was not really there, my mind stayed behind somewhere else and sent mere Habit to take its place. But I could not expect this less mindful servant to look after my needs in a new place, where I had arrived in advance of him, alone, and where I had to face the world with that "self" which I encountered only after years of absence, but which was always the same, the self that had never grown up since Combray, since my first arrival at Balbec, weeping inconsolably as it sat on the corner of an unpacked trunk' (3, 78-79).

<sup>382</sup> In *Marcel Proust: a Study in the Quality of Awareness*, Hughes describes the journey to Doncières as accompanied by a 'radical change of atmosphere' and a 'transformation in the quality of awareness'. Edward J. Hughes, *Marcel Proust: a Study in the Quality of Awareness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 120-21.

experience the surfaces of the objects in the hotel as having assumed a ‘fuller convex dimension’.<sup>383</sup> We observe this to be the case in the following excerpt from the novel:

Je gardais, dans mon logis, la même plénitude de sensation que j’avais eue dehors. Elle bombait de telle façon l’apparence de surfaces qui nous semblent si souvent plates et vides, la flamme jaune du feu, le papier gros bleu du ciel sur lequel le soir avait brouillonné, comme un collégien, les tire-bouchons d’un crayonnage rose, le tapis à dessin singulier de la table ronde sur laquelle une rame de papier écolier et un encrier m’attendaient avec un roman de Bergotte, que, depuis, ces choses ont continué à me sembler *riches de toute une sorte particulière d’existence* qu’il me semble que je saurais extraire d’elles s’il m’était donné de les retrouver. (II, 394, my emphasis)<sup>384</sup>

In his analysis of the visit to Doncières, Hughes remains predominantly occupied with the protagonist’s interaction with Saint-Loup and his military friends, and his focus is, above all, on how this interaction enables the protagonist to escape his individual consciousness by being subsumed by a collective body consisting of other human beings. He argues that ‘the Narrator sees the effacement of the individual self, now subsumed into a pleasant collective existence’<sup>385</sup> in the military troops’ unquestioning compliance with orders. To the extent that Hughes takes the descriptions of the hotel into consideration, he interprets the swelling and increasing convexity of its interior surfaces as resulting from the protagonist’s interaction with Saint-Loup’s contagiously vital milieu. These spaces thus come to mirror the protagonist’s newfound ‘sense of fullness’, considered as an emotion stemming from the encounter with the soldiers, and not with the space in itself. In this sense, the focus of Hughes’s analysis of the stay in Doncières is clearly on the protagonist’s interaction with the human inhabitants of the garrison town, and not on his encounter with the rooms and objects in the hotel, in spite of this assembly of rooms being judged by the narrator, as we shall see, as being

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>384</sup> ‘Inside my hotel, I retained the same fullness of sensation I had experienced out of doors. It gave such a full and rounded appearance to the surface of things that normally seem flat and lifeless – the yellow flame of the fire, the crude blue paper of the sky on which the evening light, like a schoolboy, had scrawled wiggly pink chalk-marks, the oddly-patterned cloth of the round table where a ream of essay paper and an inkpot awaited me in company with one of Bergotte’s novels – that ever since that moment, these things have continued to seem *laden with a particularly rich form of existence* which I feel I could extract from them if I were given the chance to set eyes upon them again’ (3, 92, my emphasis).

<sup>385</sup> Hughes, p. 119.

‘aussi réelles qu’une colonie de personnes’ [‘as real as a colony of people’] (II, 382; 3, 79). This latter aspect should not be overlooked, however, for, as we shall see in this chapter, Proust goes a long way in establishing the Hôtel de Flandre as a location that will harbour a thrilling encounter between human being and the material world.

Thomas Baldwin, for his part, places more emphasis on this encounter between person and things in his analysis of the passage and argues that when the objects in the hotel swell, their surfaces increase into the form of a lens (of an eye), as though they endeavoured to return the gaze of the eye that beholds them: ‘Eye and object come closer together in two connected senses: the flat surface-become-lens-become-eye looks back into the narrator’s eye as the former expands in the effort to touch the latter’.<sup>386</sup> This interpretation of the swollen objects in the hotel as invested with the capacity to gaze back at the beholder suggests that the hotel will serve as stage for a ‘touching’ encounter between human being and things. I aim to show in what follows that there are qualities proper to this historic dwelling that could serve to explain the protagonist’s increased attentiveness towards the objects that surround him, and that enable him to establish a form of contact with the *life* of the inanimate.

In the Hôtel de Flandre, the protagonist experiences material things as laden with, as we read in the quote above, a particularly rich form of *existence* (‘ces choses ont continué à me sembler riches de toute une sorte particulière d’existence’). What does the narrator mean by that? What sort of existence does he claim that these objects possess? It is, as we read, ‘une vie il est vrai silencieuse, mais qu’on était obligé de rencontrer, d’éviter, d’accueillir, quand on rentrait’ [‘a silent life, it is true, but which you were obliged to encounter, to avoid, to greet when you returned’] (II, 382; 3, 79, translation modified by me). In the present analysis, I study the protagonist’s perception of the rooms and objects in the hotel with an eye for the novel’s staging of the encounter with the inanimate. I maintain that the Hôtel de Flandre may well be considered, like the Swann house, an ‘imaginary world’ in accordance with Lennon’s definition of it: a world in which everything attains its particular form by way of the imagination of the subject that resides alongside or within it; a world that is characterised, then, by the perceiving subject’s experience of it. To qualify the

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<sup>386</sup> Baldwin, pp. 153-54.

féerique domain of Doncières as such an imaginary world is to stress that, here as elsewhere, Proust does not employ the figure of enchantment with the purpose of identifying the hotel as enchanted in a supernatural sense (as though the objects in it were, in fact, magically alive), but with the purpose of conveying the very real *sense* of enchantment that arises out of the perceiving subject's interrelations with the objects of perception. However, whereas in Gilberte Swann's home, it was above all the young protagonist's fascination for all things related to Gilberte's family that conferred upon their abode (desired for years before he was allowed to visit) certain enchanting powers, the interiors of the Hôtel de Flandre are enchanted and enchanting for other reasons – reasons that, as we shall see, have to do with the passing of time and with how history has engraved itself into this old palace. In this sense, the stay in Doncières also points forward in time, towards the 'final act' of *À la recherche*, which we shall examine in the next and final chapter of the thesis, and, more exactly, towards the way that the workings of time have manifested themselves in the guests gathered for the *matinée* at the Princesse de Guermantes's. In fact, the interiors of the Hôtel de Flandre are related to this *matinée* in the sense that they offer a stage for an encounter with an enchanting power that returns in this final act: Time.

While Hughes's analysis sheds light only to a limited degree on the encounter between the protagonist and the inanimate world that takes place during the stay at the Hôtel de Flandre in *À la recherche*, this theme is one that he takes great interest in during those parts of his study focused on Proust's previous works. With regard to Proust's early writings, Hughes argues that the possibility of entering into contact with the material world was something that fascinated the young author greatly, and that makes its mark on *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, but also on his first attempt at writing a novel, the incomplete and posthumously-published *Jean Santeuil*, as well as on various critical essays. In the preface to his translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, often referred to as 'Journées de lecture' and considered to be more of an essay on reading than a veritable preface to Ruskin's text, Proust discusses the relationship between people and objects at some length. As Hughes maintains, the similarities between the notions contained in this preface with those of the essay on Chardin

suggests a link between these two works.<sup>387</sup> And the two texts' interest in the possibility for human consciousness to 'merge with the material world' can be viewed as precursors to what Hughes identifies as a desire to 'retreat from consciousness' also found in *À la recherche*, and, notably, in the descriptions of the protagonist's desire to coalesce with objects in his sleep:

There is the deliberation on Chardin's 'mariage entre les êtres et les choses'; the writer's desire to penetrate 'au sein du non-moi' in the *Sésame* preface; and the Narrator's will to coalesce with the inanimate objects that surround him as he sleeps. Each of these particular emphases confirms the move towards a more monistic view of life, whereby individual consciousness tends to merge with the material world. The old dualities of the 'moi' and the universe, internal and external, animate and inanimate, are broken down.<sup>388</sup>

While I fully agree with Hughes that certain ideas concerning the relationship between animate and inanimate developed in the essays on Chardin and on reading are a continued presence in *À la recherche*, I do not necessarily think that these ideas are all related to what Hughes calls a 'move towards a more monistic view of life'. In fact, whereas monism represents a belief in the oneness and indivisibility of all that exists (the belief that there are no fundamental divisions between, for example, matter and mind or 'me' and the world around 'me'), the Chardin essay's thoughts on 'friendship' between people and things that we looked into in Chapter 5.2, and the concept of the 'non-moi', which I will address below, might also be said to announce a different (non-dualist) movement: namely, the reversibility implied by Merleau-Ponty's notions of 'chiasm' and 'flesh', which we have seen to correspond with Proust's work in various ways. To my understanding, the expressed will to achieve contact with the 'non-moi', or to cultivate intimate relationships with objects, does not necessarily translate a desire to *coalesce*, or to be as *one*, with the inanimate, but may instead be understood as a desire to get close to material objects while at the same time upholding one's distance from them (and thus a *feel* for their *otherness*). As has been repeatedly

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<sup>387</sup> 'The centrality of the material world in the still-life paintings, together with the increasingly obscure role of the thinking mind, are precursors of the notions contained in the preface to Ruskin'. Hughes, p. 49.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

illustrated by the examples examined in this thesis, in Proust the world's presence is often most acutely felt when we become aware of the distance that divides it from us. In other words, distance and presence are not identified as opposites, but as *synonyms*, and it would not be contradictory, in light of Proust's (phenomenological) worldview, to claim that the novel upholds the distance between subject and object while at the same time connecting the two. Hence, it is not necessarily (or, at any rate, not only) when the novel evokes a 'monistic' desire to collapse the distance between 'moi' and the universe that it resonates with the ideas presented in Proust's early writings, but rather when the protagonist, as in Doncières, enters into *contact* with his surroundings.

In that regard, I would like to suggest that there are elements in Proust's preface to his Ruskin translation that invite us to consider the essay as a precursor to the passages concerned with the protagonist's stay in Doncières in *À la recherche*. Adam Watt acknowledges this connection when he suggests that it is possible to consider the preface 'as a seed from which Proust's novel grew, for it contains in embryonic form many of what would become memorable scenes in *À la recherche*: the observation of familial mores, *becoming acquainted with sleeping quarters*, reading inside, reading outside in open air, being gripped by certain texts to the point of obsession, and so on'.<sup>389</sup> In what follows, I wish to build on this observation by juxtaposing and studying at some length Proust's treatments of sleeping quarters in these two texts. In my view, this intertextual relationship sheds valuable light on this passage from the novel, and I maintain that the Hôtel de Flandre, viewed as a space not yet familiar and incorporated by 'mon moi', enables the protagonist to enter into a form of contact with what Proust, in the Ruskin preface, called the 'non-moi':

Pour moi, je ne me sens vivre et penser que dans une chambre où tout est la création et le langage de vies profondément différentes de la mienne, d'un goût opposé au mien, où je ne retrouve rien de ma pensée consciente, où mon imagination s'exalte en se sentant plongée au sein du *non-moi*.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Watt, p. 3, my emphasis.

<sup>390</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 167, my emphasis. I expand on the notion of the 'non-moi' below. ['For myself, I only feel myself live and think in a room where everything is the creation and the language of lives profoundly different from my own, of a taste the opposite of mine, where I can rediscover nothing of my conscious thought, where my imagination is exhilarated by feeling



Approaching his new living quarters in Doncières, the protagonist is certain that he will only find sadness in the Hôtel de Flandre: '[la tristesse] était comme un arôme irrespirable que depuis ma naissance exhalait pour moi toute chambre nouvelle, c'est-à-dire toute chambre' ['sadness was like an unbreathable aroma which every unfamiliar bedroom, that is to say every bedroom, had exhaled for me for as long as I could remember'] (II, 381; 3, 78). His expectations clearly echo the terror he felt as a child in Combray, where the aroma which had absorbed his feeling of sadness was the smell of vetiver *exhaled* by the staircase ('Cet escalier détesté où je m'engageais toujours si tristement, exhalait une odeur de vernis qui avait en quelque sorte absorbé, fixé, cette sorte particulière de chagrin que je ressentais chaque soir' ['That detested staircase which I always entered with such gloom exhaled an odour of varnish that had in some sense absorbed, fixated, the particular sort of sorrow I felt every evening'] (I, 27; 1, 31)) – an intrusive smell that, as we saw in Chapter 4, he encounters once more in the hotel room in Balbec (II, 27-28; 2, 246). In Combray, as in Balbec, the fear of being alone greatly contributes to the anxiety-inducing effect of the rooms. Once inside the Hôtel de Flandre however, the protagonist, contrary to his expectations, realises that he has been wrong to worry, for, to his great surprise, he is not alone: 'Or, je m'étais trompé. Je n'eus pas le temps d'être triste, car je ne fus pas un instant seul' ['But as it happened, I was wrong. I had no time to be miserable because I was never alone'] (II, 381; 3, 79). What makes the question of solitude an extremely interesting one in the case of the Hôtel de Flandre is that loneliness is not avoided through the presence of other people (the fact that there are presently no other guests staying at the hotel is one of the reasons why Saint-Loup advises his hypersensitive friend to stay there). In fact, the idea that there may be other guests or even staff present at the hotel is only vaguely alluded to, as when the narrator points out that he could exit and enter the hotel *without being seen* by using a private staircase: 'Si je voulais sortir ou rentrer sans prendre l'ascenseur ni être vu dans le grand escalier, un plus petit, privé, qui ne servait plus, me tendait ses marches' ['If I wished to go out or come in without taking

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itself plunged into the heart of the *non-self*. Marcel Proust, *Days of Reading*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 58, my emphasis.]

the lift or being seen on the main staircase, a smaller private staircase, no longer in use, offered me its steps’] (II, 382; 3, 79-80). The paragraph actually excludes other human agencies, grammatically speaking, through the passive use of verbs,<sup>391</sup> and at the same time treats an object (the little staircase) as the subject of the phrase. It is both noticeable and also symptomatic for these passages from *Doncières* that rather than saying that no one uses these stairs any longer, Proust writes that *it* – the little staircase – no longer serves (*ne plus servir*); and also that, in line with this fascination for the ‘agency’ of the object, it is consequently not the human subject who makes use of the stairs, but the staircase that actively *offers* its steps to him (*tendre ses marches*). Within this féérique domain, then (féérique, it seems, not least due to the enchanting ‘life’ of the objects that it contains), it is not the presence of other people that prevents the protagonist’s feeling of loneliness, but the aliveness of the rooms and objects that surround him – an aliveness that Proust creates by way of a cunning use of verbs that allow him to turn objects into virtual protagonists. Accordingly, in the enchanted hotel in *Doncières*, the surplus of luxury that no longer serves any visible purpose has acquired, it seems, a sort of life of its own:

C’est qu’il restait du palais ancien un excédent de luxe, inutilisable dans un hôtel moderne, et qui, détaché de toute affectation pratique, avait pris dans son désœuvrement une sorte de vie: couloirs revenant sur leurs pas, dont on croisait à tous moments les allées et venues sans but, vestibules longs comme des corridors et ornés comme des salons, qui avaient plutôt l’air d’habiter là que de faire partie de l’habitation, qu’on n’avait pu faire entrer dans aucun appartement, mais qui rôdaient autour de mien et vinrent tout de suite m’offrir leur compagnie. (II, 381)<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> The point of view of the phrase is not with the one (or the ones) who may potentially see the protagonist, but with the protagonist himself, as the one who avoids being seen (*être vu*). He is the subject of the passive construction.

<sup>392</sup> ‘The fact was that there remained of the old palace a surplus of luxurious features that were inappropriate to a modern hotel and, released from any practical use, their very uselessness had acquired a sort of life: passages winding back on themselves and which one was constantly crossing in their aimless wanderings, lobbies as long as corridors and as ornate as drawing-rooms, which gave the impression not so much of forming part of the dwelling but of simply living there, which could not be induced to enter any of the rooms but which roamed about outside my own and came at once to offer me their company’ (3, 79, translation modified by me).

Proust's turn of phrase presents a useful clue as to where the lifelikeness of the spaces and objects in the Hôtel de Flandre stems from. There exists, in this hotel, a surplus of luxurious features, which 'détaché de toute affectation pratique, avait pris *dans son désœuvrement* une sorte de vie'. It is precisely because they no longer serve any visible purpose that these objects have come alive. Released from any practical use, they appear to have *chosen* to stay on in the hotel out of free will. It is hard not to hear, in the narrator's fascination for such old, useless things, the echo of his grandmother's voice and taste. In *Combray*, he elaborates at length on her preference for ancient objects, which requires her to embark upon a notorious search for out-dated things – 'comme si leur longue désuétude ayant effacé leur caractère d'utilité, ils paraissaient plutôt disposés pour nous raconter la vie des hommes d'autrefois que pour servir aux besoins de la nôtre' ['as though, now that long desuetude had effaced their character of usefulness, they would appear more disposed to tell us about the life of people of other times than to serve the needs of our own life'] (I, 39; 1, 42-43). It is due to this peculiarity of her taste that she buys her grandson George Sand's novels for his birthday, since she believes them, like old things, to exercise 'sur l'esprit une heureuse influence en lui donnant la nostalgie d'impossibles voyages dans le temps' ['such a happy influence on the mind by filling it with longing for impossible voyages through time'] (I, 41; 1, 44). As Watt writes, it is 'tempting to see in this image the essential goals of *À la recherche* in summary form', when, retrospectively, one recognizes 'that Proust's novel asserts the *possibility* through art of such journeys through time and affirms the positive, heuristic role of literature'.<sup>393</sup>

The possibility for 'time travel', or for getting in touch with the past in the present, seems to be an inherent element, then, in the novel's discourse on obsolete things, and it is this idea that permeates the passage quoted above, regarding the purposeless and old-fashioned objects in the Hôtel de Flandre. This idea seems, moreover, to add some complexity to the thoughts concerning the *enchancing* (in the sense of being stimulating for the imagination) dimension of the domestic sphere that we have seen at play in the Swann house, for example, and in Françoise's kitchen in Combray – thoughts that Proust first developed in essays such as the one on Chardin

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<sup>393</sup> Watt, p. 21.

and in his preface to the Ruskin translation. In fact, this idea complements the argument concerning the enchantment of the everyday that we have extracted from the examples studied thus far in this chapter, in that it suggests that an important part of the enchanting powers of objects relates specifically to their ability to confront the perceiving subject with the workings of *time*. I will now turn to the preface, in order to show where the idea stems from and what it implies.

In the Ruskin preface, Proust contrasts his own view on the value of objects with William Morris's aesthetics, which he views as based on a utilitarian conception of the material world.<sup>394</sup> Proust's rejection of Morris's aesthetics provides him with a starting point for reflecting – in terms that are ostensibly similar to the turns of phrase that he will later use, as we saw above, to describe the Hôtel de Flandre – on how he as a child experienced the particularly stimulating presence of non-utilitarian objects:

[...] toutes ces choses qui non seulement ne pouvaient répondre à aucun de mes besoins, mais apportaient même une entrave, d'ailleurs légère, à leur satisfaction, qui évidemment n'avaient jamais été mises là pour l'utilité de quelqu'un, peuplaient ma chambre de pensées en quelque sorte personnelles, *avec cet air d'avoir choisi de vivre là et de s'y plaire* qu'ont souvent, dans une clairière, les arbres, et, au bord des chemins ou sur les vieux murs, les fleurs.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> 'Les théories de William Morris [...] édictent qu'une chambre n'est belle qu'à la condition de contenir seulement des choses qui nous soient utiles et que toute chose utile, fût-ce un simple clou, soit non pas dissimulée, mais apparent. [...] À la juger d'après les principes de cette esthétique, ma chambre n'était nullement belle, car elle était pleine de choses qui ne pouvaient servir à rien et qui dissimulaient pudiquement, jusqu'à en rendre l'usage extrêmement difficile, celles qui servaient à quelque chose. Mais c'est justement de ces choses qui n'étaient pas là pour ma commodité, mais semblaient y être venues pour leur plaisir, que ma chambre tirait pour moi sa beauté'. Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 164. ['The theories of William Morris [...] decree that a bedroom is beautiful solely on condition that it contain only objects that are useful to us and that any useful object, be it a simple nail, should be not concealed but showing. [...] Judged by the principles of which aesthetic, my own bedroom was in no way beautiful, for it was full of objects that could serve no purpose and which modestly concealed, to the extent of making it extremely hard to use them, those which did serve a purpose. But for me it was from these very objects which were not there for my convenience, but seemed to have come for their own pleasure, that my bedroom derived its beauty'. Proust, pp. 54-55.]

<sup>395</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, pp. 165-66, my emphasis. ['[...] all these objects which not only could not answer to any of my needs but which actually placed an obstacle, albeit slight, in the way of their satisfaction, and which had obviously never been put there to be useful to anyone, peopled my bedroom with thoughts that were somehow personal, *with that air of predilection of having*

Useless objects, because they do not serve any evident purpose, give the impression of having freely chosen to live in a house. They have, as Proust the essayist puts it, ‘cet air d’avoir choisi de vivre là et de s’y plaire’ [‘that air of predilection of having chosen to live and enjoy themselves there’], or, according to Proust the novelist, ‘plutôt l’air d’habiter là que de faire partie de l’habitation’ [‘gave the impression not so much of forming part of the dwelling but of simply living there’]. Their presence brings to mind that of another person also living on the premises, as is the case for the engraving of Prince Eugène that hung on the wall in the bedroom in the house where the narrator of the preface spent his summers, and which he came to consider, he states, ‘comme une personne, comme un habitant permanent de la chambre que je ne faisais que partager avec lui et où je le retrouvais tous les ans, toujours pareil à lui-même’ [‘as a person, as a permanent inhabitant of the room which I merely shared with him and where every year I rediscovered him, forever the same’].<sup>396</sup> Interestingly, these objects are said to fill the room with ‘pensées en quelque sorte personnelles’, and the ‘thoughts’ which he finds contained in the smell of an unventilated room, the shape of the fire-dog, or the pattern of the curtains, appear more stimulating – both for the body and the mind – the more foreign they are to his own. Their ability to stimulate or *enchant* seems, moreover, to increase the more old-fashioned the rooms and objects are:

Pour moi, je ne me sens vivre et penser que dans une chambre où tout est la création et le langage de vies profondément différentes de la mienne, d’un goût opposé au mien, où je ne retrouve rien de ma pensée consciente, où *mon imagination s’exalte en se sentant plongée au sein du non-moi*; je ne me sens heureux qu’en mettant le pied – avenue de la Gare, sur le port ou place de l’Église – dans un de ces hôtels de province aux longs corridors froids où le vent du dehors lutte avec succès contre les efforts du calorifère, où la carte de géographie détaillée de l’arrondissement est encore le seul ornement des murs, où chaque bruit ne sert qu’à faire apparaître le silence en le déplaçant, où les chambres gardent un parfum de renfermé que le grand air vient laver, mais s’efface pas, et que les narines aspirent cent fois *pour l’apporter à l’imagination*,

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*chosen to live and enjoy themselves there* which trees often have in a clearing, or flowers by the roadside or on old walls’. Proust, pp. 56-57, my emphasis.]

<sup>396</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 166. [Proust, p. 58.]

*qui s'en enchante*, qui le fait poser comme un modèle pour essayer de le recréer en elle avec tout ce qu'il contient de pensées et de souvenirs.<sup>397</sup>

This is enlightening reading, in that it offers an account of how, in Proust's view, the imagination is exalted and enchanted in the encounter with a house filled with history and obsolete things. Similarly, the act of reading, as Proust points out towards the end of his essay, functions as an 'incitatrice dont les clefs magiques nous ouvrent au fond de nous-même la porte des demeures où nous n'aurions pas su pénétrer' ['instigator whose magic keys have opened the door to those dwelling places deep within us that we would not have known how to enter'].<sup>398</sup> For Proust, reading is in fact a sort of friendship. In the Ruskin preface, he addresses 'cette amitié pure et calme qu'est la lecture' in the following terms:

L'atmosphère de cette pure amitié est le silence, plus pur que la parole. Car nous parlons pour les autres, mais nous nous taisons pour nous-mêmes. Aussi le silence ne porte pas, comme la parole, la trace de nos défauts, de nos grimaces. Il est pur, il est vraiment une atmosphère.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 167, my emphases. ['For myself, I only feel myself live and think in a room where everything is the creation and the language of lives profoundly different from my own, of a taste the opposite of mine, where I can rediscover nothing of my conscious thought, *where my imagination is exhilarated by feeling itself plunged into the heart of the non-self*. I only feel happy when I set foot – in the Avenue de la Gare, overlooking the harbour, or in the Place de l'Eglise – in one of those provincial hotels with long cold corridors where the wind from outside is winning the battle against the efforts of the central heating, where the detailed map of the locality is still the only decoration on the walls, where each sound serves only to make the silence apparent by displacing it, where the bedrooms preserve a musty aroma which the fresh air washes away but cannot erase, and that the nostrils breathe in a hundred times *to carry it to the imagination*, which is enchanted by it and makes it pose as a model to try and recreate it within itself with all it contains by way of thoughts and memories'. Proust, pp. 58-59, my emphases.]

<sup>398</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 180. [Proust, p. 74.]

<sup>399</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 187. ['The atmosphere of this pure form of friendship is silence, which is purer than speech. Because we speak for others, but remain silent for ourselves. So silence, unlike speech, does not bear the trace of our faults or affectations. It is pure, it is genuinely an atmosphere'. Proust, pp. 81-82.]

Proust conceives the act of reading as a form of friendship, and as a solitary, silent pleasure that is stimulating for the creative imagination. The particularity of this form of friendship, which makes it distinct from every other kind, is that it allows us to turn our gaze inwards. In reading, we are freed from the obligation to remain at the surface of our selves, which is a requirement of every other friendship ('dès que j'étais avec quelqu'un, dès que je parlais à un ami, mon esprit faisait volte-face, c'était vers cet interlocuteur et non vers moi-même qu'il dirigeait ses pensées' ['I only had to be in the presence of someone else, talking with a friend for instance, for my mind to face the wrong way, occupying itself with thoughts directed towards the other person rather than towards myself'] (II, 95; 2, 315)). While reading, we are instead led downwards, towards the depth of our selves, which is the place that we need to aim for, if we want to make art.<sup>400</sup> It is here, then, in the interior spaces at the 'depth' of our selves that only may be opened by the 'magic keys' of reading, that the imagination is enchanted. The atmosphere of reading, understood as a retreat from social obligations and a venturing into a secluded realm of solitude and enchantment, favourable to artistic creation, thus turns out to bear a striking resemblance to the atmosphere of silent friendship that, as we shall see in more detail below, reigns in the Hôtel de Flandre; and this invites us, in my view, to consider the friendship that the protagonist finds in this hotel as a token of its ability to enchant his psychological interiors. Enchantment, then, works both ways: his imagination enchants the hotel, but the hotel also enchants his imagination, and we may say that it owes its power to enchant primarily to the old and useless objects that fill it, and that, like a good book, invite him to travel backwards in time and discover the past lives of others.

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<sup>400</sup> 'La conversation même qui est le mode d'expression de l'amitié est une divagation superficielle, qui ne nous donne rien d'acquérir. Nous pouvons causer pendant toute une vie sans rien dire que répéter indéfiniment le vide d'une minute, tandis que la marche de la pensée dans le travail solitaire de la création artistique se fait dans le sens de la profondeur, la seule direction qui ne nous soit pas fermée, où nous puissions progresser, avec plus de peine il est vrai, pour un résultat de vérité' ['Even conversation, which is friendship's mode of expression, is a superficial digression, through which we can make no acquisition. We may converse our whole life away, without speaking anything other than the interminable repetitions that fill the vacant minute; but the steps of thought which we take during the lonely work of artistic creation all lead us downwards, deeper into ourselves, the only direction which is not closed to us, the only direction in which we can advance, albeit with much greater travail, towards an outcome of truth'] (II, 260; 2, 483-84).

This aspect of the Hôtel de Flandre's ability to enchant becomes clearer in light of the Ruskin preface, for, to the narrating voice of this piece, there is evidently something highly intriguing about historic surroundings and old rooms where every sensory impression invites the present-day visitor to breathe in the atmosphere of past times – similarly, again, to how the reading of old classics such as Shakespeare and Dante creates ‘l'impression de contempler, inséré dans l'heure actuelle, un peu de passé’ [‘the impression of contemplating something of the past, inserted into the present’].<sup>401</sup> Virtually every aspect of the old provincial hotel imagined in the preface carries with it some palpable proof of history: the walls' inability to keep the wind from entering; the old-fashioned decoration on the walls; the sounds whose resonance brings out the silence; and the musty smell of old bedrooms. It is precisely the possibility for getting in touch with history, with lived life, and with time, frankly, that is so intriguing for the preface's narrator. The attraction that this existence exercises on him is so physically stimulating that it borders on a sexually-arousing fantasy:

[...] le soir, quand on ouvre la porte de sa chambre, on a le sentiment de violer toute la vie qui y est restée éparse [...]; alors, cette vie secrète, on a le sentiment de l'enfermer avec soi quand on va, tout tremblant, tirer le verrou; de la pousser devant soi dans le lit et de coucher enfin avec elle dans les grands draps blancs qui vous montent par-dessus la figure.<sup>402</sup>

In the way that this passage dramatises our perception of the past by staging it as an encounter with lost time, as incarnated in the figure of a woman, it identifies the past as something palpable, as something that we may not only ponder but also touch, and it brings to mind Claude Vallée's poignant remark on the rendering of time in Proust: ‘Mainte philosophe a parlé du Temps. Proust, plus artiste, en a fait. Il ne définit pas le Temps, disais-je. Il nous le fait voir et toucher’ [‘Many a philosopher has spoken of

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<sup>401</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 194. [Proust, p. 88.]

<sup>402</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, pp. 167-68. [‘[...] in the evenings, when you open the door of your bedroom, you feel you are violating all the life that remains dispersed there [...]; then you have the sense of locking this secret life in with you, as you go, trembling all over, to bolt the door; of driving it ahead of you into the bed and at last of lying down with it in the great white sheets which come up above your face’. Proust, p. 59.]



Time. Proust, who is more of an artist, made it. He does not define Time. He makes us feel it and touch it’].<sup>403</sup> Vallée’s words seem to suggest that, in Proust’s novel, time is *mise en scène* and presented to our senses in a particularly vivid way. I hope to show, in the remainder of this chapter and the next, that this is precisely the case.

We shall now return to Doncières, where, in light of the above excerpts from the preface, it is easier to see why the encounter with the Hôtel de Flandre is so radically different from the protagonist’s first encounter with the hotel in Balbec. It seems, in fact, that the modernity of the latter – the very reason why his parents agree to send their son to Balbec – is the root of the problem. In Balbec, the protagonist has too much empty room to fill with his ‘moi’,<sup>404</sup> whereas, in Doncières, the rooms are already filled to the brim with the ‘*âme des autres*’. And the encounter with these traces of history and time, thoughts and memories different from his own is merely stimulating for his imagination, which it enchants – in the Hôtel de Flandre as in the provincial hotel of the preface. Within the walls of this *féérique* domain, then, we are faced with the creations of an artist whose craftsmanship was evoked by Odette’s exploitation of the ephemeral life of flowers in her artistic displays, but whose powers are far greater than hers – the ‘artist’ called Time. The association of the figure of enchantment with time is thus not new to the novel when it occurs in Doncières, but in the Hôtel de Flandre, time’s manifestation does not rely on the creative agency of one individual, but on the way that material spaces and objects preserve signs of decay – in a manner similar to how, in Combray, the old church is visibly traced by the centuries passed since its construction.

The rooms and corridors of the Hôtel de Flandre cannot justifiably be regarded as simple containers for human lives, the narrator insists, for rather than encasing the life of humans, they seem themselves to possess certain human qualities: a friendliness or a polite presence that is unimposing and silently accommodating. The rooms in the hotel create an impression of neighbourliness, of being ‘*sorte de voisins oisifs mais*

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<sup>403</sup> Vallée, p. 74.

<sup>404</sup> Baldwin suggests something similar in his analysis of the Balbec section: ‘It is the sheer height of the “*plafond surélevé de ce belvédère situé au sommet de l’hôtel*” (II 27) in Balbec that prevents the narrator of the later work from filling it with himself. It seems as if he does not have enough air to inflate himself (make his body convex) to a size that would be sufficient to create the desired contiguity of body or surface’. Baldwin, pp. 159-60.

non bruyants, de fantômes subalternes du passé à qui on avait concédé de demeurer sans bruit à la porte des chambres qu'on louait, et qui chaque fois que je les trouvais sur mon chemin se montraient pour moi d'une prévenance silencieuse' ['neighbours if you like, idle but never noisy, subservient ghosts of the past who had been allowed to stay quietly by the doors of the rooms let to guests, and who behaved towards me with silent deference whenever I came across them'] (II, 381; 3, 79). Much like in Balbec and in the Swann house, the protagonist perceives his surroundings as possessing a sort of life. This time, however, the objects are not sceptical of his presence, but attentive and caring: 'une cheminée de marbre ornée de cuivres ciselés [...] me faisait du feu, et un petit fauteuil bas sur pieds m'aida à me chauffer aussi confortablement que si j'eusse été assis sur le tapis' ['a marble fireplace with ornamental brass chasing [...] provided me with a fire, and a small low armchair helped me to warm myself as comfortably as if I had been sitting on hearthrug'] (II, 382; 3, 80). His designation of the rooms as his 'neighbours' indicates that, although he deems these ghosts from the past subservient, drawing attention to the deference in their behaviour towards him, he also acknowledges their equal right to live on the premises: like him, they are inhabitants of the hotel. It is, then, as if there exists a mutual respectful agreement between himself and the spaces about him, enabling him to enter 'non en conflit mais en contact avec elles' ['not into conflict but into contact with them'] (II, 388; 3, 86). The vocabulary reveals that the imaginary world of the Hôtel de Flandre is a world in which the protagonist is fully immersed, body and mind, a world that he *encounters* and that requires him to respond – that is, to make *contact*.

It would seem that in the Hôtel de Flandre, as elsewhere in Proust's novel, the perceiving subject's attentiveness is clearly increased by the fact that the place is unfamiliar to him and thus demanding of his full attention. And yet, *habit* as such is not wholly absent from the premises. The peculiar role played by habit in the hotel is, to my knowledge, unprecedented in the novel, and deserves some attention:

Je reçus cette dispense d'effort que nous accordent seules les choses dont nous avons un long usage, quand je posai mes pieds pour la première fois sur ces marches, familières avant d'être connues, comme si elles possédaient, peut-être déposée, incorporée en elles par les maîtres d'autrefois qu'elles accueillent chaque jour, la

douceur anticipée d'habitudes que je n'avais pas contractées encore et qui même ne pourraient que s'affaiblir quand elles seraient devenues miennes.  
(II, 382, my emphases)<sup>405</sup>

The protagonist's encounter with a little staircase offers a fascinatingly paradoxical view on habit. Habit, which he expects to have to do without at his arrival at the hotel, is in fact already present, but in a previously-unknown form. It is not his own habitual manners that have domesticated the space about him, but those of past guests and employees at the hotel: it is as though the habitual movements of those who have made use of it before him are incorporated into the stairs, engraved into the material, so that the first time he mounts this staircase, he experiences the same absence of effort as is accorded by things with which we are familiar. The architectural structure of the staircase thus turns out to be notable, not foremost for its role in enabling transition between spaces, but for the way in which the imprint of the human body is registered onto it in a lasting manner. The way in which the stairs are worn down and marked through repeated use thus serves to make them, as he (paradoxically) puts it, familiar *before* being known. Familiar, then, not in the sense that he himself has acquired the habit of walking those stairs, but in that the visible traces of other people's habits present him with a prospective view of what is to come, were he himself to make repeated use of the same passage. And yet – similarly to what we observed in the passage from Odette's winter garden, where the fumes from the samovar rise like phantoms from the past which, because of habit, nobody ever sees – it is precisely on the condition that this prospective view remains a projection of something that has not yet occurred that the protagonist might experience this sensual pleasure, usually not conceivable for him, of ascending or descending a staircase. Habit, after all, is one of the most efficient anaesthetisers there is, and, when allowed to work its magic, it is capable of virtually eradicating the distance between our surroundings and ourselves so that the interiors become extensions of ourselves and no longer conceivable to the

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<sup>405</sup> 'I was exempted from effort, an exemption usually granted to us only by the things with which long use has made us familiar, the first time I set my feet on those steps, *familiar before I even knew them*, as if they possessed something which had possibly been *left and incorporated in them by former masters* whom they used to welcome every day, the prospective charm of habits I had not yet contracted and which could only pale once they had become my own' (3, 80, my emphases).

senses. But in the hotel in Doncières, it is the other way around. Whereas habit ordinarily functions as an anaesthetiser in Proust's novel, in this particular case, the physical structure carrying the visible traces of the workings of habit is able to evoke in the protagonist a 'sensualité particulière' ['special sensuous pleasure'] (II, 382; 3, 80), turning his encounter with the staircase into a 'constante volupté' ['constant source of pleasure'] (II, 382; 3, 80).

Ascending or descending a staircase does, of course, make for something of a kinaesthetic experience since it stimulates both our visual and tactile perception, as our feet touch the stairs, our hands grasp the railing, and we look either down to decide where to place our feet or up to see where we are heading. And, interestingly, the kinaesthetic dimension of relating to such a supposedly commonplace object is, here, somehow afforded aesthetic qualities, when the narrator compares his own perception of its perfect combination of steps to those offered by visual, olfactory and gustative sensations: 'il semblait exister dans leur gradation une proportion parfaite du genre de celles qui dans les couleurs, dans les parfums, dans les saveurs, viennent souvent émouvoir en nous une sensualité particulière' ['their gradation seemed perfectly proportioned and similar in kind to that which in colours, scents and tastes often arouses a special sensuous pleasure'] (II, 382; 3, 80). The acute sensual attentiveness evoked in the protagonist through the encounter with the private staircase is not merely bound to this concrete physical structure, however, but characterises his perception of this féérique domain in general. In his descriptions of the hotel, the synaesthetic potential of sensory impressions is repeatedly underlined. Visual impressions, for instance, are not only seen, but tasted ('les portes [...] faisaient [...] goûter à mon regard le plaisir de l'étendue après celui de la concentration' ['the doors [...] allowed my eyes to taste the pleasures of extension after those of concentration'] (II, 383; 3, 80)) or even heard ('Arrivé au bout, son mur plein où ne s'ouvrit aucune porte me dit naïvement: « Maintenant il faut revenir, mais tu vois, tu es chez toi »' ['When I came to the end, the bare wall in which no door opened said to me simply: "Now you must go back, but you know, you are at home here"'] (II, 383; 3, 81)). In a similar manner, the windows overlooking the countryside tell him that they will keep a sleepless vigil, and that, without risk of disturbing anyone, he is welcome to join them at any time

during the night. In the same sequence, the tactile impression offered by the soft carpet in the hallway is also given a voice, when the carpet assures him that if he is unable to sleep that night, he is more than welcome to come in on his bare feet.

It is, in fact, striking to what extent the Hôtel de Flandre is filled with highly malleable materials, such as ‘une cheminée de marbre ornée de cuivres ciselés’ [‘a marble fireplace with ornamental brass chasing’] (II, 382; 3, 80) and a ‘tapis moelleux’ [‘soft carpet’] (II, 383; 3, 81). In contrast, the modern hotel in Balbec contains a ‘escalier monumental qui *imitait le marbre*’ [‘monumental staircase in *imitation marble*’] (II, 23; 2, 241, my emphasis). The very choice of materials seems to invite the lodgers to leave their mark on the premises. If the hotel is a historical site, then, ‘assez « vieille demeure historique »’ [“‘Old-historic-dwelling” sort of place’] (II, 371; 3, 68) as Saint-Loup wills it, this is therefore not merely because it is an old hotel, but because it is a place that invites Time to install itself wherever it can, to materialise itself in the various imprints of human bodies. This is one of the reasons why we may say that the passages devoted to the Hôtel de Flandre point towards the novel’s finale, and the final matinée’s display of human bodies visibly marked by time.

We may say, then, that the interior spaces of the hotel in Doncières function as sites in which the past comes to be felt in the present. Fascinatingly, this sense of a rendezvous between present and past, space and human being can be found in more or less all the passages from the hotel, and above all in the many references to the eye and the gaze. One of the most striking examples of this occurs during a walk through the rooms at the hotel at night. The protagonist has left his own bedroom in order to explore his enchanted dwelling before going to bed and, suddenly, stumbles upon a portrait hanging on a wall. The experience of a mutual encounter between present and past, and between object and subject, is palpable in the short ekphrasis presented by Proust: ‘dans un cadre ancien le fantôme d’une dame d’autrefois aux cheveux poudrés mêlés de fleurs bleues et tenant à la main un bouquet d’œillets’ [‘in an old frame, the ghost of a lady of long ago with powdered hair threaded with blue flowers, holding a bunch of pinks’] (II, 383; 3, 81). The phantom in the picture frame holds a bunch of carnations in her hands. The reference to the carnation flowers or ‘pinks’ (‘un bouquet d’œillets’), whose etymological origin I discussed in relation to Odette’s winter

garden, is interesting for several reasons, not least for its symbolic connotations. Pink carnations, for example, have a special signification within Christianity. According to legend, Virgin Mary cried when seeing her son crucified, and when her tears hit the ground they turned into pink carnations. The flowers have therefore come to symbolise the eternal love of a mother for her child, a theme dear to Proust, and a theme that is also tightly linked to the question of being alone, or, rather, to the young protagonist's refusal to be so. In some ways, the insistence that he is surrounded by phantoms such as the lady in the portrait could certainly be read as a symptom of his fear of abandonment and loneliness.

Furthermore, as we remember from the previous analysis, the term 'œillet' connotes the idea of a small eye. The presence of these flowers in the portrait of the lady thus invites us to interpret the protagonist's encounter with this piece of art as a kind of *mise en abyme* of his experience at the hotel: not only is the entire palace filled to the brim with precisely such phantoms from the past, but, since the decorative flowers that the lady holds in her hands evoke eyes, it is as though the portrait is not only the object of his gaze but also a subject gazing back at him, similar to several other objects in the hotel. Behind a hanging curtain in one of the long galleries, for example, he stumbles upon a little closet giving him a frightful stare from its round window: 'Et derrière une tenture je surpris seulement un petit cabinet qui, arrêté par la muraille et ne pouvant se sauver, s'était caché là, tout penaud, et *me regardait* avec effroi de son œil-de-bœuf rendu bleu par la clair de lune' ['And behind a hanging curtain I discovered nothing more than a small closet whose escape had been blocked by the outer wall, hiding there rather sheepishly, *staring at me* in fright from its little round window, turned blue by the moonlight'] (II, 383; 3, 81, my emphasis). By designating the small window of the little closet as an oculus, or a 'œil-de-bœuf' (literally 'the ox's eye'), Proust emphasises the connection between windows and eyes, which we have seen to be recurring in his novel. This particular window type lends itself admirably to the playful anthropomorphising that the novelist practices in the Hôtel de Flandre, since it is named according to its resemblance with the physical

body, its round shape evoking the idea of an eye.<sup>406</sup> No explanation is given as to why the little closet, transformed by Proust's anthropomorphising language into a living creature, should be frightened and wanting to hide or escape, but by accentuating its emotional response to the encounter with the human subject, the passage interestingly obeys by the theatrical structure manifested in the tableau device. The passage could even be said to constitute an emblematic tableau, due to the way that it privileges the spectator's emotional reactions ('avec effroi') to the spectacle (the *how* of perception). Certainly, this interpretation requires us, somewhat unconventionally, to consider the little closet as the tableau's perceiving subject, and the protagonist as the object of perception, but this unconventional reading is precisely the one that the novel invites when the narrator states that the closet *looked at him* ('me regardait'). The text thus presents us with a subject (the protagonist) who perceives an object (the closet) who is also a subject looking back at him and reacting emotionally to his presence.

In other words, we may say that the mutually affecting subject-object relation that the protagonist here imagines confronts him not so much with an object as with *himself* as an object for another's gaze. The emphasis placed on eyes and on the reciprocal exchange of gazes between human being and things in the Hôtel de Flandre thus indicates that this is a space in which the protagonist is confronted not only with the 'life' of objects but also, somehow, with *himself* – that is, with himself as seen by (or by way of) these objects. As such, *À la recherche* somehow stages that reciprocity necessarily involved in the act of looking that Merleau-Ponty will later formulate as follows: 'Dès que je vois, il faut [...] que la vision soit doublée d'une vision complémentaire ou d'une autre vision: *moi-même vu du dehors, tel qu'un autre me verrait*, installé au milieu du visible, en train de le considérer d'un certain lieu' ['As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision [...] be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as *another would see*

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<sup>406</sup> The oculus is not, for that matter, the only window in the hotel with human qualities. Such is the case for the windows overlooking the countryside at the end of the gallery, for example: 'les fenêtres sans volets qui regardaient la campagne m'assuraient qu'elles passeraient une nuit blanche et qu'en venant à l'heure que je voudrais je n'avais à craindre de réveiller personne' ['the unshuttered windows looking out over the countryside assured me that they would spend a night without sleep and that, at whatever hour I wished to come, I need not be afraid of waking anyone'] (II, 383; 3, 81).

*me*, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot’].<sup>407</sup> Accordingly, we may say that the enchanted interiors of the Hôtel de Flandre identify the encounter with the ‘non-moi’ as necessarily *also* involving an encounter with the ‘moi’. Not an encounter, that is, with the ‘mon moi’ that we have seen to be Proust’s notion for the subject’s desire to annex and fill everything with one’s self, to the point of erasing the distance between subject and surroundings, and thus losing one’s sense of the world as something *other*, but an encounter with the ‘moi’ *as other*, that is, ‘moi’ as *seen by another*: ‘moi-même vue du dehors, tel qu’un autre me verrait’ [‘myself seen from without, such as another would see me’]. This, then, seems to be precisely what it means, for philosopher and novelist alike, to be installed in the midst of the visible (to use Merleau-Ponty’s words) or, as Proust has it, at the centre of the theatre: to experience the ‘moi’ as perceiving *and* perceived, subject *and* object, spectator *and* spectacle.

The present analysis has shown the Hôtel de Flandre as harbouring several encounters that are thrilling for Proust’s protagonist. It is a space in which the objects give the impression of being silently accommodating ‘neighbours’ and ‘friends’ for the human being who visits. We have seen that the hotel derives much of its enchanting potential from the past, and, more exactly, from the way that the past has engraved itself into its malleable surfaces. The hotel in Doncières introduces the protagonist to a form of life that we may call, as did Proust in ‘Journées de lecture’, the ‘non-moi’: that is to say that it introduces him to life forms foreign from his own, by way of things that are old-fashioned, obsolete, and that excite his imagination. The tightly woven intertextual relationship between this part of the novel and ‘Journées de lecture’ – a text whose subject is the act of reading – shows us that the friendly atmosphere that reigns in the hotel bears a striking resemblance to the atmosphere of reading, as Proust describes it in the preface, and it is thus tempting to suggest that the *féerique domaine* of the Hôtel de Flandre could be read as something of an allegory of reading. Similarly to good books, the hotel exalts and enchants the protagonist’s imagination, and invites him along on a journey through time and space, a journey enabling him to get in touch

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<sup>407</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, p. 177, my emphasis. [Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Intertwining - The Chiasm,’ in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, p. 252, my emphasis.]



with the past and the absent in the present. Most importantly, it allows him to enjoy his solitude without feeling abandoned or alone. Like books, the things residing in this enchanted interior are friends that keep him company, and that stimulate his imagination in a profound and pleasurable way.

My aim in this chapter has been to discern what the notion of the *féerique* (or enchantment) entails when Proust evokes it in relation to (domestic) interiors. I took an interest in this notion and in these interiors because they provide excellent examples of how the perceiving subject in *À la recherche* contributes to bringing the world to expression – that is, how the one who perceives contributes to the creation of the world that he or she perceives. Their ability to bring to view the creative aspect of perception is due not least to the fact that these *féerique* domains are places where the interrelations between human and non-human are granted a privileged place, since the humility of the ordinary objects represented here leaves much room for the imagination to express itself. The narrator's insistence that things in themselves possess no genuine power makes it a matter of paramount importance to ask how, then, they may still be able to enchant. We have discovered that the answer the narrator provides in the passage that introduced this chapter (that the experience of things as enchanting depends on the perceiving subject being in 'l'âge des croyances') only to a certain extent serves to explain the enchantment of which the object world is capable. Certainly, the child's imagination has the ability to transform the reality that it perceives, and this may to a certain extent serve to explain why the Swann house, for instance, is perceived as such a magical place. But, as we have seen throughout this chapter, the enchanting power of the interiors studied here is not so much an illusion created by the child's imagination as it is related to that 'life' or 'existence' of the non-human that our interaction with objects allows us to discover if we remain attentive and open to it. The imagination, then, does not *create* this 'life' (the organic life of flowers, for example, or the traces of the past encountered in a wore-down staircase), but it is what enables us to perceive otherwise overlooked forms of existence. In other words, the imagination is crucial for the protagonist's ability to perceive the enchantment of these interiors, not in the sense that it reveals to him a form of 'magic' that is not 'really' there, but in the sense that it enables him to detect

the full complexity of what *is* there, although we are not always able to apprehend it. This is the reason why I argue in this chapter that Proust does not employ the figure of enchantment predominantly with the purpose of characterising these interiors as enchanted or enchanting in a supernatural sense (as if the objects were in fact in possession of consciousness and perceptual abilities), but in order to convey the very real *sense* and *state* of enchantment that stem from the perceiving subject's interrelations with the inanimate. This aspect of the enchanted interiors is what leads me to suggest that these are spaces in which Proust continues to reflect on the 'life' of the inanimate in terms that bring to mind some of the essays he wrote in the decades prior to the conception of his major novel.

Ultimately, however, the novel's enchanted interiors are spaces in which the perceiving subject encounters himself, and does so as a *perceivable* subject. Whenever flowers, portraits, closets, armchairs and footstools are granted the ability to look back at or otherwise react to the presence of the human subject, this serves to show that, for Proust, reversibility is a quality of perception in general. The fact that not only other human subjects but also material objects 'return' the attentive gaze that is directed at them shows us that every act of perception always involves subject-object reciprocity and that this reciprocity does not depend on the actual presence of another perceiving subject. In *À la recherche*, to perceive is always, and regardless of whether other people are present, to perceive one's self as perceivable for others, and this is precisely why the novel posits the *theatre* as the most appropriate 'symbol' of *all* perception, since the theatre manifests this encounter between spectatorial and performing bodies of living presence, in which the experience of perceiving and being perceived are mutually dependent and completely intertwined.

## 6 The Final Act: *Je* is the Spectacle

While discussing what he calls the ‘décomposition, ou recomposition, du monde en spectacles’ [‘decomposition, or recomposition, of the world as spectacles’]<sup>408</sup> in Proust’s *À la recherche*, Jean-Yves Tadié cites a paragraph from the final volume’s matinée at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, and notes, with regards to this final scene, that it constitutes

le triomphe du spectacle, où convergent tous les personnages sous un seul regard: « J’avais l’impression de regarder derrière le vitrage instructif d’un muséum d’histoire naturelle ce que peut-être devenu l’insecte le plus rapide, le plus sûr en ses traits »... et l’observateur se transforme en spectacle, puisqu’en voyant comment les jeunes gens le traitent le narrateur découvre avoir vieilli.<sup>409</sup>

Tadié subsequently turns his attention towards other ‘scènes-spectacles’ and ‘scènes dramatiques’ in the novel. He does not analyse the matinée in detail, and he does not provide further explanations as to why, in his view, this scene constitutes ‘le triomphe du spectacle’. His brief statement does, however, provide several important clues as to what it is that, in his view, makes this episode a particularly successful ‘spectacle’: all the characters are, as it were, gathered and framed by one single gaze; the observer also transforms into a spectacle; and the encounter with the observed ultimately leads the observer to change his conception of himself, as he realises, by way of the others’ behaviour towards him, that he, like them, has aged. Tadié thus seems to find in the matinée several elements that correspond to those that I, throughout the chapters of this thesis, have identified as constitutive of the Proustian tableau and for the novel’s theatricality. His reading consequently permits us to conclude that *À la recherche* ends with a particularly striking display of the theatricalities that, as my research has shown, play such an important role in this narrative.

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<sup>408</sup> Tadié, *Proust et le roman: essai sur les formes et techniques du roman dans ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’*, p. 373.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 374-75. [‘the triumph of the spectacle, where characters converge under one single gaze: “I had the impression of looking through the educational glass case of a natural history museum to see what has happened to the insect that is the fastest, the most certain of its features”... and the observer turns into a spectacle, since by seeing how young people treat him, the narrator discovers that he has grown old’.]

Proust's staging of the novel's final and decisive revelation (the revelation of time materialised in the bodies of the guests at the *matinée*) as a theatrical spectacle arguably also constitutes an argument for taking the narrator's identification of the theatre as a 'symbol' of perception *au pied de la lettre*, for the episode confirms that, for Proust, to perceive is inevitably also to be affected by what one perceives. In his novel, as we have seen, the perceiving subject is implicated in the act of perception much in the same way as a spectator in a theatre is implicated in the performance: that is to say, among other things, that she or he experiences the *presence* of the perceived object (in the same space at the same time and breathing, as it were, the same air) as an invitation (or perhaps an obligation) to engage in a mutually affective and reciprocally constitutive *becoming-for-others*. This reciprocity, common to theatre and perception, is, as we shall see below, brilliantly exemplified by the novel's final episode. The *matinée* is notable for its grandeur and for the gravity of the revelation that results from the spectator's encounter with the spectacle, but the reversibility that manifests itself here is one that we have recognised to be a *general* characteristic of perception in *À la recherche*, and we may thus say (without thereby attempting to downplay the fact that we are dealing here with a myriad of different audience-performer constellations) that the novel's spectator is always, to some extent and in one way or another, *also* a spectacle – if only because he or she remains constantly aware of the possibility of becoming an object of perception for another.

That being said, the novel's final act does provide a remarkable addition to the complex of theatrical constellations that we have studied in this thesis, and the impact that the realisation of his own 'visibility' has on Proust's protagonist is forceful and unprecedented in the narrative. This impact is, as I will demonstrate shortly, presented to us by way of a theatrical analogy, and, more exactly, by way of a reference to the *féerie*. This reference constitutes only one among several different analogies serving to express or illustrate the perception of time in this episode, but it is a crucial and, in my view, particularly potent one, since it explicitly engages that theatrical structure which, in Proustian terms, 'symbolises' *all* of perception. It is no coincidence, then, that this image, and the theatrical genre that it evokes, is found to be intricately imbricated into the texture of the *matinée*, both in its published form, and *also*, as we shall see in this

analysis, in the draft versions of the scene. In this chapter, I will examine the role that the theatre and, in particular, the *féerie* play in this ‘trionphe du spectacle’ by tracing the evolution of the episode’s intertwining of references to enchantment and theatricality in its staging of perception.

Once the protagonist enters the drawing room at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, a ‘coup de théâtre’ [‘a dramatic turn of events’] (IV, 499; 6, 229) occurs, creating in him the impression of being suddenly transposed to a ‘bal costumé’ [‘fancy-dress ball’] (IV, 501; 6, 232) where all the other guests are in disguise. As we remember from this thesis’s introduction, Diderot defined the ‘coup de théâtre’ as a sudden turn of events or an unforeseen incident that immediately affects the action and changes the situation of the characters. In *À la recherche*, it is not an event or a dramatic incident that constitutes the ‘coup de théâtre’, but a perceptual impression that will have major impact on the protagonist. What reveals itself to him during this *matinée* is time, and, more concretely, ‘cette action destructrice du Temps’ [‘this destructive action of Time’] (IV, 508; 6, 239), which is that of *ageing* – the other guests’ ageing and his own. He thus discovers time as an *embodied* substance, incorporated in the human body. Somewhat paradoxically, he makes this discovery just after having decided to attempt, by way of art, to grasp a reality situated somewhere *outside* of time: ‘au moment même où je voulais entreprendre de rendre claires, d’intellectualiser dans une œuvre d’art, des réalités extra-temporelles’ [‘at the very moment when I wanted to begin to clarify, to intellectualize within a work of art, realities whose nature was extra-temporal’] (IV, 508-09; 6, 239). Ultimately, however, his exposure to time during this *matinée* obliges him to change the course of his literary project, and he decides to make room in his *œuvre* not only for the impressions ‘qui sont en dehors du temps’ [‘which exist outside time’] (IV, 510; 6, 240) but also for ‘celles qui se rapportent au temps, au temps dans lequel baignent et changent les hommes, les sociétés, les nations’ [‘those which related to time, time, in which men, societies and nations are immersed and in which they change’] (IV, 510; 6, 240-41). Since ‘les heures du passé’ [‘every hour of the past’] (IV, 624; 6, 356) are only visible to the extent that they are contained in some material substance (be that the human body, a space or an object), it follows that time cannot be grasped *intellectually*, but that it

must be *perceived*, somehow. Hence, a work of art aiming to illustrate such a notion of ‘temps incorporé’ [‘embodied time’] (IV, 623; 6, 356) seems to require, in fact, the technique of *mise en scène*. For time – on this, Proust is very clear – cannot be shown simply by presenting an image from the past. If time is to become perceivable, we need to approach it, as through ‘une vue optique, mais une vue optique des années’ [‘an optical viewer, but giving an optical view of years’] (IV, 504; 6, 234), not as though we were faced with the image of one moment in time but by a whole range of successive (memory) images, which connect the present and the past and which illustrate how time distorts and changes everything. An artist wanting to express time must therefore develop the means to grasp and to show not only the result of change but also the very act of change: the *metamorphosis*.

For Proust, as I will argue in this chapter, the staging of his protagonist’s perception of time is clearly influenced by a genre in which the act of metamorphosis and the visibility of change reside at the very core (a genre that, it should be added, never refrained from staging the monstrous and the gigantesque<sup>410</sup>), namely the *féerie*.

The *féerie*’s influence on the *matinée*, known as the ‘Bal de Têtes’, is evident enough from reading the scene such as Proust left it, in the novel’s posthumously-published though not fully-revised final volume *Le Temps retrouvé*. However, in order to show just how important this theatrical model was for Proust as he fabricated the conclusion of his novel (and developed his vision of time), I will include in my analysis the two first drafts for what was to become the ‘Bal de Têtes’, written at an early stage in Proust’s preparations for *À la recherche*, during 1910 and 1911. These two manuscripts, in which the references to the *féerie* are numerous and more explicit

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<sup>410</sup> ‘Aussi, si elle m’était laissée 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 distantes, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer – dans le Temps’ [‘Therefore, if enough time was left to me to complete my work, my first concern would be to describe the people in it, even at the risk of making them seem colossal and unnatural creatures, as occupying a place far larger than the very limited one reserved for them in space, a place in fact almost infinitely extended, since they are in simultaneous contact, like giants immersed in the years, with such distant periods of their lives, between which so many days have taken up their place – in Time’] (IV, 625; 6, 358).

than in the final version, will help us see why, at the very end of the novel, the *féerie* – a constant supporting presence throughout the narrative, sometimes through explicit references and at other times through allusions to the universe of the *féerique* – is finally granted the leading role, as a symbolic figure for life itself. The metamorphosis, an archetypal *féerique* act, is a recurrent figure during the *matinée*, and this figure turns into something of an analogue for the perception of time, when the narrator ultimately compares our perception of human bodies as immersed in and changing through time to the gradual transformation of a character on stage in a *féerie*:

Alors la vie nous apparaît comme la *féerie* où on voit d'acte en acte le bébé devenir adolescent, homme mûr et se courber vers la tombe. Et comme c'est par des changements perpétuels qu'on sent que ces êtres prélevés à des distances assez grandes sont si différents, on sent qu'on a suivi la même loi que ces créatures qui se sont tellement transformées qu'elles ne ressemblent plus, sans avoir cessé d'être, justement parce qu'elles n'ont pas cessé d'être, à ce que nous avons vu d'elles jadis. (IV, 504-05)<sup>411</sup>

I will return to the question of reversibility as it plays out in this quote ('on sent qu'on a suivi la même loi que ces créatures' ['one feels that one has followed the same law as these creatures']) towards the end of the chapter, but I will begin by attending to the quote's identification of the *féerie* as a genre that stages *change*. The *féerie* seems to be, in Proust's view, a particularly suitable 'symbol' of perception precisely due to its staging of processes of change. In the present study, we have already examined some explicit analogies drawn in the novel between the *féerie*'s anthropomorphisation of objects, its metamorphoses, its *changements à vue*, and the Proustian protagonists' perceptual experiences. In the paragraph above, it is the way that the *féerie* would stage a character's whole lifespan (from the cradle to the grave) over the course of the successive parts of a play that serves as a figure for life, and, more concretely, as a

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<sup>411</sup> 'Thus life begins to seem like a pantomime [*féerie*] in which, from act to act, we watch a baby becoming an adolescent, then a grown man, then old and bent as he approaches the grave. And as one feels that it is by a permanent process of change that these individuals, encountered only at fairly long intervals, have become so different, one feels that one has followed the same law as these creatures, who are now so transformed that, although they have not ceased to exist, indeed precisely because they have not ceased to exist, they no longer resemble the appearance they presented to us in the past' (6, 235).

figure for our perception of human life as it evolves in and over time. The example serves to illustrate the insight that the protagonist attains during the *matinée*: that our ability to perceive the perpetual processes of change depends on our being exposed to impressions, not in a continuous manner, but at certain intervals. For example, we do not notice the transformations of the people that we meet every day, since the changes occur too slowly and gradually for us to take notice, and it is only when we see two ‘different’ faces and reunite these two contradictory impressions under one single ‘heading’ (as belonging to one single person), that we realise that time has passed. This, then, is why it is so important for the conclusion of *À la recherche* that the novel’s protagonist has been absent from the social world in which he lives for some time before entering the drawing room at the Princesse de Guermantes’s.

The plot for this final *matinée* is the following: after several years of absence, the protagonist returns to Paris to find his friends and acquaintances (all gathered in the princely couple of Guermantes’s home) aged and disfigured. At first, he does not understand the reason for their changed appearances, and before realising that they have simply gotten older, he believes they must be in disguise, wearing wigs, masks or makeup. Only gradually does he understand that time is responsible for their transmutations. In Proust’s notes for the ‘Bal de Têtes’, published together with the first drafts of the episode in a critical edition from 1982, a ‘*formule excellente*’ reveals that the author invented the protagonist’s long absence from Paris precisely for the purpose of the revelation due at his return:

Quand je compare le vieillissement à un bal costumé la *formule* excellente sera: Pour le solitaire qui retourne dans le Monde les gens sont « en têtes » ils vous « intriguent ». On se dit est-ce que je les connais, on hésite entre plusieurs noms, en effet selon l’expression courante ils ont changé. Et c’est ainsi que toute fête mondaine où on va quand on a passé un long temps loin du monde est forcément, – *matinées en têtes* – bal plus ou moins masqué – une fête travestie.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Marcel Proust, *Matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes: cahiers du ‘Temps retrouvé’* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 356. [‘When I compare old age to a fancy-dress ball the excellent *formula* will be: for the solitary person who returns into Society, people will be “masked” and “intrigue” you. You ask yourself do I know them, hesitate between several names, and indeed, as the expression goes, they have changed. And that is how every social gathering that one attends after having spent a long time away from high society, has to be – a masked *matinée* – a more or less fancy-dress ball – a costume party’.]



The formula is repeated in a revised version in the published novel (IV, 502; 6, 232), in which Proust's narrator spells out the painful truths revealed to him as he walks into the drawing room: any party bringing together people one knew in the past, will inevitably produce the same effect as a masked ball, but the difficulties one has with recognising the other guests (as well as with being recognised oneself) is not a matter deserving celebration, for these intriguing transformations are not voluntary, and the masks and disguises cannot be removed when the party is over. Hence, there reigns a palpable melancholy over this *matinée*, where a woman that the protagonist knew when she was young, now 'blanche et tassée en petite vieille maléfique, semblait indiquer qu'il est nécessaire que, dans le divertissement final d'une pièce, les êtres fussent travestis à ne pas les reconnaître' ['white and compacted into the form of a baleful little old woman, seemed to suggest that, in a theatrical finale, individuals need to be so disguised as to be unrecognizable'] (IV, 505; 6, 235). The quote seems, in a curiously self-reflective manner, to identify the purpose of the novel's final act with that of the final act in a play. Shortly after, when the protagonist encounters another previously familiar face, it becomes clearer which theatrical genre he meant to evoke: Mme d'Arpajon's new appearance is, in fact, 'si différent de celui que j'avais connu à la marquise qu'on eût dit qu'elle était un être condamné, comme un personnage de féerie, à apparaître d'abord en jeune fille, puis en épaisse matrone, et qui reviendrait sans doute bientôt en vieille branlante et courbée' ['so different from the Marquise I had known that one might have taken her for a damned soul, a character out of a fairy-play, appearing first as a young girl, then as a sturdy matron, and soon no doubt to return as a bent and doddering old woman'] (IV, 515; 6, 245, translation modified by me). These metamorphoses, however, which enchant and entertain the spectators in a *féerie*, serve an entirely different purpose in the novel, where the metamorphosed body comes to express the inevitable and merciless workings of time.

Already at an early stage in his preparations for the novel, Proust had the idea of allowing his narrative to culminate in a grand reunion of the personages during a reception at the *Guermantes*. In fact, Proust foresaw the novel's conclusion already while writing its opening. When he wrote the first draft for the *matinée* (at the time, a

*soirée*<sup>413</sup>) sometime during 1910, this marked a radical transformation of his work thus far. Up until then, Proust had imagined the end of his project (which he originally conceived as a sort of narrative essay on the literary critic Sainte-Beuve) as taking the form of a conversation with his mother on matters of aesthetic, critical and literary interest. But, as Marion Schmid points out, the invention of the ‘Bal de Têtes’ ‘reversed the overall plot structure [as] Proust decided to transfer notes on aesthetics to the fourth part and reserved the last part for the reappearance of the aged characters’.<sup>414</sup> The opening lines of the very first version (found in *Cahier 51*) of the ‘Bal de Têtes’ read as follows:

Il y a quelques années après être resté longtemps absent de Paris, je trouvai comme je venais de revenir une invitation du Prince et de la Princesse de Guermantes pour une soirée. Je n’avais revu personne depuis bien longtemps. Cela me sembla une occasion facile de trouver réunis beaucoup de gens que je mettrais beaucoup de temps à aller voir séparément. J’entrai au milieu des files de voitures comme autrefois dans le « vrai palais de contes de fées ». La nombreuse valetaille de l’Enchanteur et de la Fée s’empressait dans de beaux costumes de féerie. On m’annonça. La Princesse trop habillée ayant toujours l’air de dire « le Prince et moi nous recevons ce soir la bonne ville », causait dans un petit groupe, non loin du Prince à qui on s’étonnait de ne pas voir le costume du Prince Fridolin et qui cherchait à dissiper par une rondeur excessive l’imaginaire timidité générale.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> In Gallimard’s critical edition of the manuscripts, Bonnet and Brun show that a piece of paper attached to one of Proust’s notebooks (*Cahier 57*) suggests that this change is motivated by Proust’s desire to let involuntary memory play a pivotal role in the chapter: ‘Il faudra que je soie [*sic*] sorti *par exception le jour* pour aller à cette matinée ce qui expliquera peut-être *la vivacité* de mes sentiments et le retrouvage du *Temps*’ [‘I will have to be out, *exceptionally*, in the daytime in order to attend this matinée, which might explain *the liveliness* of my sensations and the re-finding of Time’]. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>414</sup> Marion Schmid, *Processes of Literary Creation: Flaubert and Proust* (Oxford: Legenda, 1998), p. 177.

<sup>415</sup> Proust, *Matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes: cahiers du ‘Temps retrouvé’*, p. 31. [‘A few years ago, after having been away from Paris for a long time, I found upon my return an invitation to a soirée from the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes. I had not seen everyone for a very long time. It seemed a convenient occasion to find gathered in one same place a number of people whom it would have taken me a lot of time to go visit individually. I entered among the queues of carriages, as I once did, into the “true palace of fairy-tales”. The Enchanter and the Fairy’s vast cohort of valets was attending to everything wearing the magnificent costumes of a féerie. I was announced. The Princess, who was overdressed and still looked like she was saying “the Prince and I tonight are hosting the well-to-do”, was chatting in a small group, not far from the Prince, whom people were surprised not to see

The draft opens with an abundance of references to theatricality, fairy-tales and the *féerie*. The first one of these, the description of the palace as a (in quotation marks) ‘« vrai palais de contes de fées »’ [“true palace of fairy-tales”] requires some explanation. The *matinée* in the final volume is not the protagonist’s first visit to see the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes. In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, he is, to his great surprise, invited to a *soirée* at their home on the rue de Varenne. In order to find the source for the quotation above, we must look to the drafts for this first visit to the princely residence. We find it in *Cahier 7*, one of the notebooks written for the purpose of the ‘Contre Sainte-Beuve’ project, which, according to Antoine Compagnon, dates from 1909.<sup>416</sup> It is the protagonist’s father, passing by the *hôtel* every day, who describes the place (located, in the draft, in the rue de Solférino) as something from a fairy-tale: ‘Mon père qui passait tous les jours devant leur hôtel rue de Solférino disait: « C’est un palais, un palais de conte de fées. » De sorte que cela s’était amalgamé pour moi avec les féeries incluses dans le nom de Guermantes’ [‘My father, who would walk past their residence on the rue de Solférino on a daily basis, would say: “It’s a palace, a fairy-tale palace.” So that in my imagination it had become amalgamated with the féeries already included under the name of Guermantes’] (III, 919-20). In the first version of what is to become the ‘Bal de Têtes’, and thus the ‘final act’ of *À la recherche*, the designation of the Guermantes *hôtel* as a fairy-tale palace implies that the protagonist is only partly aware of his idolatry of high society as based on mere illusions. His identification of the prince and princess as an enchanter and a fairy – both of which are archetypes in the *féerie* as well as in the world of fairy-tale – could be read as a sign that his view on them is still affected by the illusions that shaped his conception of them when he was younger. The description of the domestic staff as ‘la nombreuse valetaille de l’Enchanter et de la Fée [qui] s’empressait dans de beaux costumes de féerie’ [‘the Enchanter and the Fairy’s vast cohort of valets [which] was attending to everything wearing the magnificent costumes of a féerie’] (a

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wearing the costume of Prince Fridolin and whose excessive portliness was trying to compensate for an imaginary widespread shyness’.]

<sup>416</sup> Antoine Compagnon, ‘« Sodome et Gomorrhe »: Notice,’ in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), pp. 1202-04.

statement which unequivocally evokes the theatrical genre, since Proust writes ‘féeerie’ and not ‘conte de fées’) strengthens this impression: the staffers are not described as wearing clothes that *resemble* something worn on stage, but as *actually* wearing the magnificent costumes of a féeerie.<sup>417</sup> To a certain extent, then, the first draft of what is to become the novel’s final scene opens by depicting the Guermantes palace as a theatrical universe, and also as a universe in possession of much of the same mystery as in the drafts for his first visit. The palace still appears (as Proust puts it in *Cahier 7*) as the enchanting ‘hôtel de conte de fées s’ouvrant de lui-même devant moi, moi étant invité à me mêler aux êtres de légende’ [‘fairy-tale residence opening itself, ready for me to step in – me being invited to mingle with the creatures of legend’] (III, 920).

As Frank Kessler points out with regard to the recurrent evocation of the féeerie in *À la recherche*, the fact that Proust refers to this theatrical genre (and not simply to fairy-tales) indicates that he meant for his readers to conceive his fictional universe as a specifically *theatrical* universe, that is to say, as a construction or a

univers régi par des apparences construites de toutes pièces à l’aide d’une machinerie invisible, la grande machine des décors féeériques. Par là, l’écrivain introduit une tension au sein des images qu’il crée, entre une apparence de réalité et une réalité derrière cette apparence qui, en même temps, révèle la fragilité de cette apparence.<sup>418</sup>

While I believe that Kessler is right in supposing that Proust intends for us to conceive of his fictional universe as a theatrical one, when, in describing this universe, he alludes to the féeerie, I do not agree that these theatrical references invite us to regard the fictional world thus evoked as one of mere ‘appearances’ superposed onto ‘reality’.<sup>419</sup> What these references achieve, in my understanding, is a focusing of our

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<sup>417</sup> Proust often describes the appearances of the domestics in theatrical terms. Belloï has written extensively on the *mise en scène* of domestic staff in *La Scène proustienne*.

<sup>418</sup> Kessler, p. 146. [‘universe maintained by appearances built entirely through the help of an invisible machinery, the great machine of féeerie sets. The writer thus introduces a tension at the heart of the images that he creates, between an appearance of reality and a reality behind this appearance, which also reveals the fragility of this appearance’.]

<sup>419</sup> Kessler’s main argument in the article is that the motifs of the fairy and the féeerie are put to use by Proust in order to reveal ‘le jeu complexe des apparences qui caractérise l’univers social qu’explore le narrateur dans toutes ses facettes tout au long du roman’ [‘the complex interplay of appearances which characterises the social sphere explored by the narrator in all its facets throughout the novel’]. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

attention upon the theatricalising disposition of the subjective imagination that is at work in perception. For example, when Proust's narrator, in the passage that Kessler comments on in the quote above, evokes Françoise's cooking by comparing her to a giant in a *féerie*, it is above all, as we saw in Chapter 4, the child's enchantment while observing her that the theatrical reference translates. And, assuredly, such references may also be said to reveal the inherently poetic dimension of the everyday. But to say that the everyday life thus evoked is but an appearance or an illusion 'covering up' a supposedly more *real* everyday 'behind' the theatrical illusion ('*derrière* cette apparence') is, I believe, to misinterpret these references. It is, as we have seen throughout the thesis, the spectator's mode of perception that they highlight. Therefore, although Kessler is certainly right when he maintains that Proust introduces a form of 'tension' in the images that he evokes by way of references to the theatrical medium (in Françoise's kitchen as well as in other paragraphs that engage with the *féerie* – or with other theatrical genres, for that matter), this tension is not, I believe, only related to the interplay of different layers of 'reality' and 'appearance' *within* the spectacle, but also to the relationship between the perceiving subject and the spectacle that he discovers and creates. For example, as we shall see in the paragraph below, the same kind of imagery can give a different quality to a scene depending on whether it is employed as a metaphor or as a simile, and this qualitative difference reveals something about the spectator's attitude to the beheld (for example, whether he adopts a sceptical attitude towards what he observes, or whether he is simply mesmerised by it). Certainly, one could say that Proust's use of imagery borrowed from the *féerie* – especially when the genre is evoked as a medium, that is to say, with emphasis on its material dimension – has a critical potential to it, since it draws our attention to (and thereby confirms the novel's status as an *œuvre-maquette*) both the spectacle and the 'machinery' necessary for the creation of the spectacle. But in *À la recherche*, as my research has shown, the theatrical 'machinery' consists principally of the perceiving subject's senses and imagination. And this perceptual machinery is, as I have argued, a changeable and dynamic one. This becomes evident not least in the draft versions of the *matinée*, in which we find, alongside the child-like gaze still mesmerised by the

‘féeries’ contained in the Guermantes name, a more mature (in the sense of being more analytical and critical) gaze.

In the second version of the ‘Bal de Têtes’, written in 1911,<sup>420</sup> the analytical aspect of the protagonist’s gaze is even more accentuated than in the first version. We see here that the references to the féerie are employed in a slightly different manner. The metaphors of fairy and enchanter are no longer used to designate the prince and princess, who accordingly lose some of their supernatural aura. Instead, the way they receive their guests – in other words, their behaviour – leads the narrator to compare them to *theatrical* characters: a king and queen in a féerie. The transition from metaphor to simile reveals that the protagonist has distanced himself from the illusions of his youth, since, whereas the metaphorical structure equates the two terms in the comparison (the princely couple and the Enchanter and Fairy-figures), the simile states the comparison outright: the princely couple are no longer *identified* as mythical creatures, but *compared* to actors (‘*comme un roi et une reine de féerie*’), even if their outward appearance still contributes to creating an ‘air’ of mystery about them:

[...] faisant le tour par la galerie qui aboutissait au grand salon je [me] rappelais le jour où [dans] ce palais de conte de fées, M. et Mme de Guermantes recevaient *comme un roi et une reine de féerie*. J’entrai. Debout le Prince et la Princesse avaient bien encore *le même air* d’un Roi et d’une Reine de féerie et ce Prince cherchant encore par sa bonhomie volubile à dissiper la timidité imaginaire de ses invités, on eût aimé [lui] voir le costume du prince Fridolin.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> When Proust writes the second version of the *Matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes*, in 1910-11, this part of the novel is greatly expanded, and divided into two separate entities (the ‘Bal de Têtes’ is thus preceded by a section called ‘L’Adoration perpétuelle’), as in the published version of *Le Temps retrouvé*. The manuscripts for this second version of the *matinée* are established on the basis of *Cahier 57* (‘Bal de Têtes’) and *Cahier 58* (‘L’Adoration perpétuelle’), which Brun and Bonnet date to 1910, for *Cahier 58*, and 1911, for *Cahier 57*. See the introductory chapter in Proust, *Matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes: cahiers du ‘Temps retrouvé’*, pp. 83-111.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188-89, my emphases. [‘[...] walking around via the gallery which opened on to the grand salon, I remembered the day when, in this fairy-tale palace, M. and Mme de Guermantes received *like* a king and queen in a féerie. I entered. Even when standing, the Prince and Princesse had *the same look* as a King and Queen in a féerie and one would have wanted to see this Prince, trying as he was through his jocular verbosity to dispel the imagined shyness of his guests, wearing the costume of prince Fridolin’.]

We find a similar development in the revisions of the drafts for the first reception at the Guermantes'. Whereas he initially employed metaphors pertaining to the realm of the supernatural, Proust eventually comes to rely more on imagery evoking the theatre as medium, and we may thus say that the narrating voice reveals a higher degree of awareness with regard to the interplay of imaginary and perceptual impressions. Accordingly, the following excerpt from *Cahier 43*, the last notebook in a series that Compagnon dates to 1910-11,<sup>422</sup> and in which we find an amplified version of the soirée at the Princesse de Guermantes's from *Cahier 7*, is narrated by a voice that is clearly much more distanced from the illusions of his childhood than the voice that introduced us to the palace in the rue de Solférino as a 'palais de conte de fées'. In the way that the text insists on the theatricality of gestures, facial and verbal expressions, it shows clear signs of the perceiving subject's gradual disillusionment with society:

Si elle [la Princesse] avait l'air un peu d'une reine de théâtre, il [le Prince] avait lui l'air d'un roi de féerie, ou d'opérette. Le défaut de costume, la satisfaction peinte sur son visage Louis XIII et qui en contournait suavement les joues un peu pleines, l'orgueil naïf souriant dans les yeux à fleur de tête, la bonhomie paternelle de l'accueil qui semblait vouloir mettre à l'aise les nobles ou francs-bourgeois de sa bonne ville dont il recevait ce soir-là le ban et l'arrière-ban, le geste dont il accompagnait ces mots: « Charmé, la princesse sera charmée » identiques pour chaque personne, tout concourait à faire de lui et de la princesse comme un couple de souverains factices sur la réception desquels le rideau de théâtre vient de se lever. (III, 963)<sup>423</sup>

The palace appears now unequivocally like a theatrical stage on which the curtain ('rideau de théâtre') has just been raised. The expression 'rideau de théâtre' is highly pertinent in this paragraph, which, by describing the princely couple's gestures and

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<sup>422</sup> Compagnon, « « Sodome et Gomorre »: Notice, » in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, p. 1205.

<sup>423</sup> 'If she [the Princesse] looked a little like a queen from a theatre production, he [the Prince] looked like a king from a féerie, or an operetta. The errors in the costume, the satisfaction painted on his Louis-XIII face running gently around his cheeks – which were on the full side, the naive smile of pride in his goggling eyes, the avuncular jocularity of his welcome, which seemed aimed at putting at ease the noblemen and tradesmen of his good town, of whom he received on that evening the highest and the lowest, the gesture with which he accompanied the words: "Charmed, the princess will be charmed", which were identical for each and every person, everything contributed to turning him and the princess into one of those pairs of fake sovereigns on whose reception the curtain rises'.

words in terms of playacting, informs us that the protagonist perceives their behaviour as artificial. By drawing attention to the prince's ceaseless repetition of his words of greeting, identical for every guest and accompanied by the same, studied gesture, the text shows us that his behaviour is interpreted by the spectator as a properly theatrical act – meaning, in this context, that he seems to perceive it as more or less devoid of any sincere meaning. To conclude briefly, we have seen here that the same imagery (borrowed from the universe of the *féerie*) can illustrate radically different attitudes in the perceiving subject *vis-à-vis* his surroundings depending on *how* it is put to use. When the princely couple of Guermantes go from being read as fairy and enchanter to being compared to actors on stage in a *féerie*, this suggests not a change in *them* or in their behaviour, but in the *protagonist*, who no longer perceives the world as an enchanted universe, but as a theatrical one. We may say, then, that he appears more disenchanted or disillusioned in the second draft, but this does not mean that the way that he perceives the world here is more 'truthful' or 'correct' than in the previous draft – it simply means that he interprets what he sees *differently*.

In the first and second versions of the 'Bal de Têtes', the Prince de Guermantes is, as we saw above, compared to a theatrical figure, Prince Fridolin, one of the main characters in Sardou and Offenbach's *Roi Carotte* – the play that Laplace-Claverie, as we saw in Chapter 4, mentioned as one of the possible intertextual references evoked in the tableau from Françoise's kitchen. The allusion to Offenbach and Sardou in a scene designated as a 'masked ball' seems just right, considering the central position that disguises and *travesti* roles occupied in their productions.<sup>424</sup> While the reference to Prince Fridolin is omitted from *Le Temps retrouvé*, it is worth pausing for a while to consider the fact that Proust originally intended to allude to this character from Sardou and Offenbach's play in the conclusion of his novel. What is particularly interesting about the insertion of this reference in the description of the prince is that it introduces

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<sup>424</sup> In his instructive, albeit short article on the presence and possible influence of Sardou in Proust's novel, Yves-Michel Ergal suggests that the *travesti* roles that Sardou wrote for the actress Pauline Virginie Déjazet during the 1860s may have influenced Proust's 'portrait de cette « jeune actrice d'autrefois en demi-travesti », qui n'est autre qu'Odette peinte par Elstir' ['portrait of this "semi cross-dressed young actress of yonder days", who is none other than Odette painted by Elstir']. Yves-Michel Ergal, 'Marcel Proust et Victorien Sardou,' in *Marcel Proust Aujourd'hui*, ed. Manet Van Montfrans et al. (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2007), p. 75.



a tension or ambiguity in this character. As we remember, the prince is alluded to as an Enchanter in the opening of the first draft. Prince Fridolin, however, the protagonist of *Roi Carotte*, is not, in fact, in possession of supernatural powers, but rather a *victim* of enchantment. The narrator's desire to see the prince dressed up as Fridolin thus serves to puzzle the reader momentarily. The mystery does not remain unsolved for long, however, and we quickly come to realise that its function was to prepare the ground for the revelation that ensues: in the play, we meet the sorcerer Coloquinte, who had her wand confiscated by Fridolin's father ten years ago and who, in order to avenge this act, decides to dethrone his son. Once Coloquinte has recovered her wand, she accordingly gives life to all the vegetables in the royal gardens, and installs a carrot, the Roi Carotte, as the new monarch. Proust's identification of the prince as a Fridolin, then, suggests that the prince is himself on the verge of being 'dethroned', as a new Enchanter enters the stage – the enchanter called Time:

Mais, voici le maître de maison. Lui, a blanchi ses cheveux et ses moustaches et cela change tout à fait sa figure, son nez étroit a l'air plus large, sa peau pâle a l'air rouge, et au lieu de son air sec dans la plus grande amabilité, ce changement de couleur lui donne un air doux au pauvre Enchanter. Mais déjà mon cœur s'est serré j'ai compris, celui qui a arrangé ce travestissement, c'est un autre Enchanter auquel je n'avais pas pensé: le Temps.<sup>425</sup>

The short passage stands out from the rest of the text. We recognise it as a typical Proustian tableau from the way that it establishes both a distance and a connection between the subject (the protagonist) and the object of perception (the prince). Presumably in order to highlight the importance of this moment, Proust changes to the present tense – creating a striking stylistic shift that brings out the dramatic quality of the passage (theatre being an art form that always takes place in the present). The rendering of the prince's body is relatively detailed, but, as is typical for the tableau,

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<sup>425</sup> Proust, *Matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes: cahiers du 'Temps retrouvé'*, pp. 32-33. [‘But, here comes the master of the house. He has powdered his hair and moustaches white and it changes everything in his face, his narrow nose looks larger, his pale skin looks red, and instead of his containment which remained austere even with the greatest kindness, the change of colour has given him the gentle look of a poor Enchanter. But my heart already aches, as I understand that the one who arranged this costume is another Enchanter, which I had not taken into account: Time’.]

its focus is not only the object of perception but also the subject's emotional reactions ('déjà mon cœur s'est serré' ['my heart already aches']). Nothing actually happens in this tableau; yet the moment is properly dramatic, for the protagonist's conception of the world is about to undergo a radical change. It is clear that Proust intended this to be a defining turning point in his novel because, all of a sudden, the protagonist finds himself faced with 'un autre et plus puissant' ['an other and more powerful']<sup>426</sup> Enchanter who he had not previously taken into consideration. The shift marks the end of an era for the Guermantes, who are instantly dethroned when this new and more powerful actor enters the stage.

The féerie continues to provide imagery for describing Time's craftsmanship in this second draft in which, just as in the first, Time is shown to fabricate illusions with the use of supernatural means and, above all, with the help of the mysterious 'tool' of moonlight, 'clair de lune'. As such, the 'végétation féerique qu'il a fait pousser sur les hôtes irréels du Palais de Contes de Fées' ['féerique vegetation that he has planted on the illusory hosts of the Fairy-Tale Palace']<sup>427</sup> is made up of a sort of 'tissu immatériel et enchanté, quelque chose comme une étoffe de clair de lune ou d'argent' ['immaterial and enchanted fabric, something like a cloth woven out of moonlight or silver']<sup>428</sup>. The image of moonlight – a motif that was of special interest to Proust and that he repeatedly associates with the féerie<sup>429</sup> – is admirably well suited as a

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> The fascination for moonlight followed Proust throughout his writing career. In fact, as Tadié reminds us in his biography on the author, the moon was something of an obsession for the young Proust, who asked for all sorts of books on the subject, and even 'une grammaire où, au mot lune « il y avait en effet une image représentant la lune avec un œil au milieu et un vague nez »' ['a grammar in which, under the word moon "there was indeed an image representing a moon with an eye in the middle and a vague nose"']. Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, p. 326. Hence, the fascination for the moon that we find traces of throughout *À la recherche* dates a long way back: the moon, Tadié concludes, 'a pour lui le visage de l'enfance' ['has for him the face of childhood']. Ibid., p. 326. In *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, we find two 'variations' over this theme, in the shape of two short texts that were given a musical interpretation by Reynaldo Hahn: 'Sonate clair de lune' and 'Comme à la lumière de la lune'. As Tadié notes, while the sonata is written as a homage paid to Beethoven and Hahn, it is Chateaubriand, Baudelaire, Musset and Verlaine that inspire the second text, and these 'clairs de lune', which Marcel 's'entraîne à décrire comme le motif obligé d'un peintre, nous les retrouvons dans *À la recherche du temps perdu*, de « Combray » au *Temps retrouvé* ['practices describing like the

‘symbol’ for the perception of time. In literature and the arts, the moon can sometimes be seen to provide a striking analogy for the human life cycle – infancy symbolised by the new moon; youth embodied in the crescent; maturity in the full moon; and the ageing body’s inevitable decline mirrored in the moon that is waning. In Proust’s drafts for the ‘Bal de Têtes’, we see that the ‘clair de lune’, alongside, and often associated with the *féerie*, provides an evocative, poetic image of the way that time transforms the human body: ‘C’est lui [le Temps] qui a aussi faufilé d’argent, grimé de clair de lune noyé de vague comme des personnages de tapisserie les hôtes du palais de Contes de Fées, qu’il a baignés de clair de lune, rendus eux aussi féériques en effet’ [‘It is him [Time] who has sewn with silver, daubed with moonlight, drowned with vagueness, like the characters in a tapestry, the hosts of the Fairy-Tale Palace, whom he has bathed in moonlight, and indeed made féérique’].<sup>430</sup>

It should be noted that there occurs an interesting development from the first to the final version, in that, whereas Time’s craft is at first depicted as a supernatural affair, the later versions go much further in identifying Time’s craftsmanship as a form of artistic labour. In the second draft, for instance, Proust identifies Time as a sort of *stage director* when he notes that, gradually, ‘sous le masque de leur chair [...] leur physionomie immuable s’était entièrement résorbée et le temps avait *fait entrer en scène* [...] des traits absolument différents, généralement ceux de leur famille’ [‘under the mask of their flesh their eternal appearance had been entirely reabsorbed and with time utterly different facial features had *entered the scene*, which were usually those of their family’].<sup>431</sup> Not merely a stage director, Time is also compared to a makeup artist

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obligatory motif of a painter, we find them in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, from “Combray” to the *Temps retrouvé*]. Ibid., p. 241. In *À la recherche*, the ‘clair de lune’ is repeatedly associated with féérique or enchanted spaces such as the Hôtel de Flandre (lit by blue moonlight through the *œil-de-bœuf*) and the hidden campo, ‘pâle de clair de lune’ [‘in the pale light of the moon’], that the narrator stumbles upon during his nighttime wanderings in Venice, ‘la ville enchantée’ [‘this enchanted city’] (IV, 229; 5, 614). Finally, in the much-celebrated passages where Proust’s narrator contemplates the sleeping Albertine, her sleep is compared to the féérique moonlight: ‘J’écoutais cette murmurante émanation mystérieuse, douce comme un zéphir marin, féérique comme ce clair de lune, qu’était son sommeil’ [‘I listened to that mysterious, murmuring emanation, gentle as a soft breeze over the sea, fairylike as the moonlight: the sound of her sleep’] (III, 578; 5, 60).

<sup>430</sup> Proust, *Matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes: cahiers du ‘Temps retrouvé’*, p. 191.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., p. 193, my emphasis.

who has transformed these faces with the help of moonlight and other equipment, powders and pencils, that he carries around in a ‘coffret magique’:

[...] on sent que c’est d’un coffret magique que l’enchanteur a tiré ses poudres colorées et son fil, les crayons dont il a assombri le coin des yeux du petit Chemisey, la poussière métallique dont il a bleui la barbe de M. de Grandchamp, sont sorties d’un coffret enchanté; et les ont pastellisés d’une couleur si surnaturelle.<sup>432</sup>

Metaphors identifying Time as an artist are found in the final version of the ‘Bal de Têtes’ as well, where ‘l’artiste, le Temps’ [‘Time, the artist’] (IV, 513; 6, 243) is compared, at one point, to a painter: ‘Cet artiste-là, du reste, travaille fort lentement [...], pareil à ces peintres qui gardent longtemps une œuvre et la complètent année par année’ [‘He is also an artist who works extremely slowly [...], in the same way that some painters keep a work for a long time, finishing it gradually, year by year’] (IV, 513; 6, 243). The encounter with this artist will be a defining one for the protagonist, for while this is not the first time he happens upon the workings of time, this experience is different from the previous, since these ‘artworks’ have been created during the timespan of his own life. When he sees how the people around him have changed, he is inevitably brought to realise that he is also subject to the laws of time. He thus becomes implicated in the spectacle in a different way than before. Whereas, in nearly all the tableaux we have studied so far, the spectator and spectacle exercise some mutual influence on one another, the impressions caused by the encounter with Time, materialised in his body and in those around him, have an unprecedentedly forceful impact on the protagonist. Hence, Proust writes in 1910, ‘il me semble que c’est à mes dépens que cela s’est fait, et que c’est dans ma force et ma puissance de vie, que l’Enchanteur est venu chercher ses poudres colorées et son fil’ [‘I feel as if this has been done at my cost, and that it is in my own strength and life force that the Enchanter came to fetch his coloured powders and his thread’].<sup>433</sup> This insight is repeated as one of the central revelations in the final version of the ‘Bal de Têtes’,

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., pp. 191-92. [‘[...] you can tell that the enchanter has taken his coloured powders and thread from a magic chest, the pencils he used to darken the corner of the eyes of little Chemisey, the metallic dust with which he coloured blue M. de Grandchamp’s beard, have come out of an enchanted chest; and have pastelled them in with that supernatural colour’.]

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

where the protagonist's realisation of his own ageing is subject to an amusing mise en scène in which various other guests address him in a manner revealing that they consider him an old man:

Alors moi qui depuis mon enfance, vivant au jour le jour et ayant reçu d'ailleurs de moi-même et des autres une impression définitive, je m'aperçus *pour la première fois*, d'après les métamorphoses qui s'étaient produites dans tous ces gens, du temps qui avait passé pour eux, *ce qui me bouleversa par la révélation qu'il avait passé aussi pour moi*. Et indifférente en elle-même, leur vieillesse me désolait en m'avertissant des approches de la mienne. Celles-ci me furent, du reste, proclamées coup sur coup par des paroles qui à quelques minutes d'intervalle vinrent me frapper comme les trompettes du Jugement. La première fut prononcée par la duchesse de Guermantes [...] « Ah! me dit-elle, quelle joie de vous voir, vous mon plus vieil ami. » [...] « Son plus vieil ami! me dis-je, elle exagère; peut-être un des plus vieux, mais suis-je donc... » À ce moment un neveu du prince s'approcha de moi: « Vous qui êtes un vieux Parisien », me dit-il. (IV, 505-06, my emphases)<sup>434</sup>

The staging of the eternally-present, although ordinarily invisible, agent of Time is a pivot in the first drafts of the 'Bal de Têtes', just as it will be the final version. As the narrator points out, in the drafts as well as in the novel, he had already sensed Time's craftsmanship as a child, in the church in Combray (IV, 621-22; 6, 354). And, as we saw in Chapter 5, time presents itself to view also in the Hôtel de Flandre, where past guests and staff have left traces on the surfaces. The 'Bal de Têtes' arguably constitutes, however, the first episode in which it is not spaces or objects, but *people* that enable an impactful 'révélation du Temps' ['revelation of Time'] (IV, 503; 6, 233). The episode thus marks a turning point in the novel, in that it is human bodies that are led to exteriorise and visualise time.

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<sup>434</sup> 'So I, having lived from one day to the next since my childhood, and having also formed definitive impressions of myself and of others, became aware *for the first time*, as a result of the metamorphoses that had been produced in all these people, of all the time that had passed in their lives, *an idea which overwhelmed me with the revelation that it had passed equally for me*. And while irrelevant in itself, their old age devastated me by its announcing the approach of my own. This was, anyway, proclaimed by successive remarks which every few minutes assailed my ears like the trumpets of Judgment Day. The first was made by the Duchesse de Guermantes [...]. "Ah! she said to me, how wonderful to see you, my oldest friend." [...] "Her oldest friend! I said to myself, she is exaggerating; perhaps one of the oldest, but am I really..." At that moment a nephew of the Prince came up to me: "As an old Parisian, you..." he began' (6, 236, my emphases).

One could argue, of course, that there have been other occasions on which people's ageing has made a profound impression on the protagonist, as when his grandmother was dying, or during his final encounters with Charlus. In both these cases, however, the radical changes undergone by the characters are due not primarily (or only) to age, but to sickness; consequently, their decay does not have the same effect on the protagonist as during the 'Bal de Têtes' – since he does not see himself 'mirrored' in his grandmother or in Charlus, the confrontation with their declining health does not create awareness in him of his own mortality. This revelation is, it would seem, reserved for the *matinée* at the *Princesse de Guermantes's*, where the way that the other guests perceive him (the way that their gazes hold up a mirror for him) brings about awareness in him of his own existence as subject to the laws of time:

Et je pus me voir, *comme dans la première glace véridique que j'eusse rencontrée*, dans les yeux de vieillards restés jeunes, à leur avis, comme je le croyais moi-même de moi, et qui, quand je me citais à eux, pour entendre un démenti, comme exemple de vieux, n'avaient pas dans leur regard qui me voyait tel qu'ils ne se voyaient pas eux-mêmes et tel que je les voyais, une seule protestation. Car nous ne voyions pas notre propre aspect, nos propres âges, mais chacun, *comme un miroir opposé*, voyait celui de l'autre. (IV, 508, my emphases)<sup>435</sup>

This passage is striking for the way that it stages the reciprocity inherent in the act of perception. The scene is set for a crucial revelation, and this revelation is evidently one that springs out of the encounter between perceiving and perceivable human bodies. We recognise here a form of mutual questioning or interrogation between bodies, and it is clearly the others' bodily reactions (the way they look at him without protesting) that provides the protagonist with answers to the questions that he (implicitly) puts to them regarding his own appearance. It is, then, through the other bodies' responses to him that he comes to realise who he is, or who he has become: like them, he has become older, as time, for him – as for them – has passed. The paragraph thus comes

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<sup>435</sup> 'I could see myself, *as though in the first truthful glass I had ever encountered*, reflected in the eyes of old men, who in their opinion were still young, just as I was in mine, and who when I described myself as an old man, hoping to hear a denial, showed in the way they looked at me, seeing me not as they saw themselves but as I saw them, no glimmer of protestation. Because we did not see our own true appearance, or age, and each of us, *as though in a facing mirror*, saw those of the others' (6, 238, my emphases).

to illustrate that perceptual reversibility upon which Merleau-Ponty, as we have already seen, will later insist: human beings cannot perceive without in turn being perceived, or, at the very least, being confronted with one's own *potential* visibility. We have studied several examples of this already, as in Chapter 5, when we observed that the protagonist's encounters with the 'fantômes subalternes' at the Hôtel de Flandre were characterised by the impression that the objects and spaces in the hotel were communicating with his senses: looking back at him, talking to him, offering their surfaces to his touch. We remember that, as Hughes and Baldwin have pointed out on separate occasions, the surfaces of the objects in the hotel can be seen to assume a swollen, convex dimension, enabling the spaces to 'look back' into the protagonist's eyes. Interestingly, we find a similar insistence on the convexity of the surfaces traced by time when the narrator evokes the Church of Saint-Hilaire in the first draft for the 'Bal de Têtes': 'Certes j'avais déjà vu les travaux visibles de l'ouvrier invisible et présent, toute la mâle œuvre de l'Enchanteur quand je regardais *le marbre boursouflé* et les tapisseries fondues dans l'église de Combray' ['Of course I had already seen the visible labour of the invisible and active artisan, all the masculine work of the Enchanter, when I looked upon *the swollen marble* and the deliquescent tapestries in the church of Combray'].<sup>436</sup> The curious image of 'marbre boursouflé', bloated or swollen marble, serves to indicate the presence of such a convexity (similar to that of the eye) in the surfaces of the church as well. Interestingly, the convexity is here explicitly identified as the work of the enchanter called Time. Thus, a connection is established, linking this sacral space to the féérique domain of the Hôtel de Flandre, as well as to the Princesse de Guermantes's drawing room, where the mutual and implicating exchange of gazes is no longer that between human being and space, but between different human beings responding bodily to one another, in ways that lead them to understand (as though they were looking into the first truthful mirror they have ever encountered) that they are all immersed in and affected by time.

The end of the novel thus throws something new into the mix, in the sense that it draws attention to how the protagonist's awareness of himself is altered in the

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<sup>436</sup> Proust, *Matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes: cahiers du 'Temps retrouvé'*, p. 33, my emphasis.

encounter with another's perception of his body. It is, in fact, quite rare that the way others perceive his body is addressed in the narrative, and, while this is not the first time that his body becomes a 'spectacle' of another's perception,<sup>437</sup> the impact that the experience has on him is unprecedented in the novel. During his first train ride to Balbec, for example, the encounter with the milkmaid, and the (perhaps only imaginary) experience of being the object of her attention stimulates his senses and increases his awareness of the world about him, but the experience does not lead him to reflect at lengths about himself. Contrary to this, we observe that, at the *Princesse de Guermantes's*, it is not predominantly his awareness with regard to his surroundings that increases, but his awareness with regard to himself. It seems that, according to Proust, a true revelation of time can only occur when the spectator finds himself implicated or addressed, as a physical body, by the *mise en scène* – that is, when he himself becomes (part of) the spectacle.

This, then, must be the reason why, as we have seen in this chapter, Proust found the theatre – which, in the novel's final act, is represented mainly by the *féerie* – to provide such a suitable analogy for the protagonist's perceptual experience. As in the theatre, the protagonist finds himself intricately implicated in the spectacle that presents itself to him in the drawing room at the *Princesse de Guermantes's*, which

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<sup>437</sup> During his second visit to Balbec, for instance, a character by the name of Céleste Albaret enters the protagonist's bedroom while he is still in bed, and describes what she sees in the following terms: 'Malgré moi, je souriais pendant quelques instants, quand, par exemple, ayant profité de ce qu'elle avait appris qu'Albertine n'était pas là, elle [Céleste] m'abordait par ces mots: « Divinité du ciel déposée sur un lit! » Je disais: « Mais voyons, Céleste, pourquoi 'divinité du ciel'? – Oh, si vous croyez que vous avez quelque chose de ceux qui voyagent sur notre vile terre, vous vous trompez bien! – Mais pourquoi 'déposée' sur un lit? vous voyez bien que je suis couché. – Vous n'êtes jamais couché. A-t-on jamais vu personne couché ainsi? Vous êtes venu vous poser là. Votre pyjama en ce moment tout blanc, avec vos mouvements de cou, vous donne l'air d'une colombe. »' ['I could not keep from smiling for a few moments when, for example, knowing that Albertine was not there and seizing the opportunity, she approached me with the words, "O heavenly being set down on a bed." I said, "Really, Céleste, what do you mean, 'heavenly being'? – Well, if you think you're anything like the creatures who walk on our humble earth, you're much mistaken – But why 'set down' on a bed? You can see that I'm lying down. – You never lie down. No one lies down like that. You floated down there. Those white pyjamas you're wearing today and the way you move your neck make you look like a dove."'] (III, 527-28; 5, 11). The passage provides a highly amusing *mise en scène* of the experience of being mirrored by another's perception, but this is not an experience that, like the one he has during the *matinée*, leads him to reconsider what he thinks he knows about himself.



turns into a mutually-affective and reciprocally-constitutive encounter between bodies of living presence. This gathering of people he knew in the past, by presenting him with images of people sufficiently different from each other to destroy the impression of continuity (similarly to how the *féerie* presents us with human beings as first babies, then adolescents, then old people well on their way towards the grave), but also similar enough for him to realise that these disparate images correspond to one and the same person, allows him to finally perceive the perpetual change that he is also subject to: ‘on sent qu’on a suivi la même loi que ces créatures qui se sont tellement transformées qu’elles ne ressemblent plus [...] à ce que nous avons vu d’elles jadis’ [‘one feels that one has followed the same law as these creatures, who are now so transformed that [...] they no longer resemble the appearance they presented to us in the past’] (IV, 505; 6, 235). When, all of a sudden, he finds himself faced with people he has not seen in years, he is forced, in order to recognise them (like the bewildered Mme d’Épinoy on the threshold to Mme Swann’s drawing room), to perceive them simultaneously in the present (with his senses) and in the past (with his mind): ‘de les regarder en même temps qu’avec les yeux avec la mémoire’ [‘to look at them with the memory at the same time as with the eyes’] (IV, 503; 6, 233). The *matinée*’s revelation of time is thus due to the fact that it allows him to see ‘toutes les images successives, et que je n’avais jamais vues, qui séparaient le passé du présent, mieux encore, le rapport qu’il y avait entre le présent et le passé’ [‘all the successive images, ones I had previously never seen, which separated the past from the present and, better still, the relationship that existed between the present and the past’] (IV, 504; 6, 234). When life is conceived as it actually is – as constantly changing – there is no figure better suited to represent it, Proust seems to argue, than that of the *féerie*: ‘Alors la vie nous apparaît comme la *féerie* où on voit d’acte en acte le bébé devenir adolescent, homme mûr et se courber vers la tombe’ [‘Thus life begins to seem like a pantomime [*féerie*] in which, from act to act, we watch a baby becoming an adolescent, then a grown man, then old and bent as he approaches the grave’] (IV, 504; 6, 235).

Similarly to the motif of moonlight in the earlier drafts, the *féerie* provides Proust’s final *matinée* with a striking illustration of the human life cycle. Entering old age, the human body bends forward and reaches the tomb in a position mirroring that

of the baby in the womb. At the very end of the novel, the *féerie* is thus finally granted the leading role, as a figure representing life itself, or, rather (as is more or less the same thing) our *perception* of life – or life, we may say, such as it is revealed to us in *art*, for, as Proust insists, the perpetual metamorphoses that we all undergo most often pass unnoticed, since Time is such a slow-working artist. In the *féerie*, however, the transformations that we are blind to in life are the very centres of attention: the metamorphoses and *changements à vue* that are the core constituents of the *féerie* are precisely what qualify the genre as a ‘symbol’ of life as we perceive it and, we should add, of the Proustian novel, in which past and present are constantly set in contact with one another when memories from the past arise in the narrator. Proust does, in fact, elegantly connect past and present, childhood and old age, at the very end of his novel when, standing in the midst of the guests at the Guermantes palace, the protagonist suddenly hears the sound of a bell that rang one day in the Combray of his childhood:

[...] c’est qu’à ce moment même, dans l’hôtel du prince de Guermantes, ce bruit des pas de mes parents reconduisant M. Swann, ce tintement rebondissant, ferrugineux, intarissable, criard et frais de la petite sonnette qui m’annonçait qu’enfin M. Swann était parti et que maman allait monter, je les entendis encore, je les entendis eux-mêmes, eux situés pourtant si loin dans le passé. (IV, 623)<sup>438</sup>

The sound of the bell is merely one out of several examples of how Proust brings the opening of his novel, along with the protagonist’s childhood, back into the narrative as *À la recherche* reaches its end. The evocation of the *féerie*, a genre that, as we have seen on several occasions in this thesis, is perfectly apt for allowing adults to relive the pleasures of their childhood (because it allows adults to be mesmerised by an enchantment that they do not really believe in *as though* they do believe in it), is another. Ultimately, then, the *féerie* provides the perfect analogy for the work not only of Time but also of Proust’s narrator, who is unable, it seems, to create his own artwork until he perceives, much like a spectator in a *féerie*, not only the past and not

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<sup>438</sup> [...] it was at that very moment of decision, in the *hôtel* of the Princesse de Guermantes, that I heard that sound of my parents’ footsteps as they led M. Swann to the gate, heard the tinkling of the bell, resilient, ferruginous, inexhaustible, shrill and fresh, which told me that M. Swann had gone and that Mama was on her way upstairs, heard the very sounds themselves, heard them even though they were situated so far away in the past’ (6, 356).

only the present but *both* these widely-separated and contradictory impressions *and* the relation that binds them to one another.

## Conclusion

Before Proust became a published novelist, he was, among other things, an occasional columnist for *Le Figaro*. In February 1903, the newspaper published an article written by Proust, the first in a series of six articles on Parisian salons; it was a column on Princesse Mathilde's salon. It was in his early twenties that Proust became acquainted with the princess, who would later be transposed into *À la recherche* in the form of a character carrying her name.<sup>439</sup> This niece of Napoléon's, already an old lady when the young writer made her acquaintance, had impressed Proust by her kindness and her gentle and attentive manner with her guests. In his article, he aims to convey the charm of the princess's manner of receiving, the 'extrême douceur qui tombe de ses yeux, de son sourire, de tout son accueil' ['extreme gentleness which falls from her eyes, her smile, the entirety of her welcome'].<sup>440</sup> However, as he immediately concludes, the best way to convey the particularities of this charm is not by attempting to *explain* it, but by trying to *show* his readers how it all played out so that they might be able to *feel* the impressions as though they had themselves been present: 'Mais pourquoi analyser le charme de cet accueil? J'aime mieux essayer de vous le faire sentir en vous montrant la princesse en train de recevoir' ['But why analyse the charm of this welcome? I prefer to try and make you feel it by showing you the princess busy receiving'].<sup>441</sup>

The quote contains what we may view as a seed from which Proust's theatrical writing later grew, for it expresses a desire to disclose lived experiences in writing that is highly noticeable in *À la recherche* as well, and that, as we have seen, is often what motivates the use of the device of staging in the novel: rather than simply explaining or analysing an experience, Proust attempts to recreate it in writing, and to make the reader *feel* what is felt by *showing* them what is seen. But *how*, in fact, may a writer enable a reader to experience how something looks and feels? As a columnist, Proust's

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<sup>439</sup> Edmund White, *Marcel Proust: a Life* (London: Viking, 1999), pp. 48-49.

<sup>440</sup> Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve; précédé de Pastiches et mélanges; et suivi de Essais et articles*, p. 446.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*

solution is to invite his reader along on a virtual tour of the salon: ‘Suivez-moi rue de Berri, et ne nous attardons pas trop, car la soirée n’y commence pas tard’ [‘Follow me to rue de Berri, and let’s not dilly-dally: soirées there never start late’].<sup>442</sup> Once arrived at the venue, meticulously drawn up by way of exact indications of how the space appears from their viewpoint,<sup>443</sup> Proust and the reader observe as the guests arrive through the entrance door to be greeted by the princess. As Brian Rogers puts it, ‘the scene is set as though the author were describing a theatrical decor, with explanations of the situation as it was before the curtain went up’.<sup>444</sup> The column thus invites the reader to take a spectator’s point of view, alongside the writer, also present in the theatrical space carefully established in the text, which allows the reader to see the action unfold before them, but without participating in the action. It is a text that *shows* the reader something: it is a *mise en scène* of a phenomenal space, but it is not, for that matter, a *staging of perception*. While the narrator of this short piece lends us his eyes to peer into this exclusive space as though we were ourselves present, he is not instated in the text as a living, experiencing subject in the same way as in *À la recherche*, where the perceiving individual’s mode of perception is made a subject in the narrative. This is to say that Proust *the columnist* has not yet made the following task, which phenomenologists will later grapple with, his own: the disclosure of the world as it is lived and experienced by individuals who are not mere observers, but who participate in it, who are affected by it, and who contribute to bringing the world to expression through their responses to this world.

We may say, nonetheless, that this early example of theatrical writing (Rogers, notably, calls the column’s opening scene a ‘tableau’<sup>445</sup>) points towards Proustian theatricality as it unfolds in *À la recherche*, and that the text may in some ways, as

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> ‘Après le dîner, la princesse vient s’asseoir au petit salon, dans un grand fauteuil qu’on aperçoit à droite en venant du dehors, mais au fond de la pièce. En venant du grand hall, ce fauteuil serait au contraire à gauche, et fait face à la porte de la petite pièce où, tout à l’heure, seront servis les rafraîchissements’ [‘After dinner, the princess comes to sit in the little salon, in a large armchair that one catches sight of to the right as one comes in from outside, but that is at the end of the room. Coming from the great hall, this armchair would on the contrary be to the left, facing the door of the small room where, later on, the refreshments will be served’]. Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Brian G. Rogers, *Proust’s Narrative Techniques* (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1965), p. 33.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

Rogers points out, be viewed as an early experiment with fictional techniques later developed in the novel.<sup>446</sup> Certainly, several of the aspects that characterise the novel's *mise en scène* are absent from this early experimentation with verbal staging, and the technique is not employed here to the same ends as in the novel. Nevertheless, the aesthetic ambition that motivates the use of staging in *À la recherche* is similar to the one expressed by Proust in 1903: rather than simply describing or explaining a perceptual experience, he cultivates, in his writing, a certain spectacular quality, so as to be able to *show* his readers how the protagonists experienced this or that situation or impression, thus enabling us to 'savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers qui n'est pas le même que le nôtre et dont les paysages nous seraient restés aussi inconnus que ceux qu'il peut y avoir dans la lune' ['know how another person sees a universe which is not the same as our own and whose landscapes would otherwise have remained as unknown as any there may be on the moon'] (IV, 474; 6, 204). My research has shown that Proust's use of theatrical references and figures in the presentation of perception is an important part of what enables him to make his readers see *with* the protagonists. The theatre comes into play in the novel through such figures and references, which the author, moreover, deploys to present his fictional universe as one whose shape and texture is created in and by way of the protagonists' perceptual encounters with it.

Why the theatre, though? What does it imply to suggest that Proust's writing of perception has not only a spectacular but also a specifically *theatrical* quality to it? My thesis has provided several answers to this question, and it has shown that the theatre has a pivotal influence on the novel, not least because the theatre is the art of *illusion*. In other words, the theatre provides the novelist with a means to express, for instance, perceptual errors, illusions and hallucinations *as the perceiving individual encounters them*, and in a manner that emphasises their subjective dimension, without thereby identifying these impressions as false or contrived. After all, since life, says Proust, is nothing but a *perpetual error*, theatrical illusions often provide the most authentic expressions of life as his protagonists experience it, as when Mme d'Épinoy stands mesmerised on the threshold to Mme Swann's 'magical' drawing room, or when Monsieur de Charlus sees a 'dead' Morel through the door left ajar in the brothel in

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<sup>446</sup> See Chapter II ('Chroniques') in *ibid.*, pp. 30-42.

Maineville, or when the young protagonist is enchanted by the sensory delights offered by the asparagus in Françoise's kitchen. In examples such as these, the theatrical reference conveys the protagonists' particular way of perceiving the world about them – that is, their individual *viewpoint*, which, as we have established, is defined not only by *what* they perceive and *from where* but also by *how* they perceive.

This *how*, in turn, is, as we have observed in several examples examined in this thesis, determined not only by external circumstances but also by such things as the perceiving subject's emotional investment in the object of perception and the degree to which the encounter with the latter stimulates the former's imagination *and* senses. Immediately, this may seem to be stating the obvious, but when we aim to grasp the function and significance of theatrical references in *À la recherche*, this insight is, in fact, crucial. Crucial because it points towards a matter that has not yet been sufficiently acknowledged and discussed among critics with an interest in Proust and the arts: that, among the many roles that the theatre plays in this novel, perhaps the most important one is the one that relates to perception; theatricality being recognised, in this literary work of art, as a *mode of perception*. It follows from this that, as we have seen, the perceiving subject (body and mind) is just as much of an object in the spectacles of the novel as it is an object of this subject's attention. What my work has shown is that, more than a mere observer or a mediator of perceptual impressions, the spectatorial figure of *À la recherche* also constitutes a veritable spectacle, and she or he is frequently made into one, both in the encounter with other perceiving subjects and in his or her own mind. The figure of the *spectateur intérieur* provides a striking illustration of the vital role that spectatorship plays in the Proustian universe, where the characters appear to conceive of themselves, first and foremost, as spectators. Spectators, or performers: constantly aware of the possible presence of a spectatorial gaze. These two roles – spectator and performer – are, as I argue in this thesis, rarely fully distinguishable from one another in *À la recherche*, and this is quite understandable when Proust's 'phenomenological' conception of perception (which regards reversibility as a quality of perception in general) is taken into consideration.

This leads us towards another answer to the question regarding the specifically theatrical dimension of Proust's perceptual writing: the reciprocal nature of the

theatrical experience, which is constituted in the encounter between bodies of living presence that perceive and perform *in the same place, at the same time*, is frequently evoked in the perceptual experiences staged in the novel. The audience-performer relation represents, in *À la recherche*, a reciprocal transmission of affect and a mutual (as Ridout was cited as saying in the introduction to Chapter 2) *becoming-for-others*, and this reciprocity is manifested in the layout of the theatre, which divides stage and auditorium while *also* enabling contact between them. By explicitly, or implicitly, evoking the theatre's layout and the constitutive presence of the spectators in the theatre when he presents perceptual impressions, Proust is able to convey the extent to which these, much like theatrical performances, are created by the mutually-affecting encounter between subject and object – or, in his words, the extent to which *every impression is double*; partly contained in the interiority of the one who perceives and partly contained in the perceived object. My discoveries suggest that theatrical references, analogies and allusions are put to use by Proust in the novel's discourse on perception precisely in order to convey that the world that the protagonists perceive is partly discovered and partly created by them.

The common element found in all the theatrical constellations examined in this thesis is the following: the spectators are recognised as intrinsic parts of the spectacles. This is the case in encounters with objects, art and people, both when the spectators are visible and when they are hidden (as in the voyeur's theatre), since the Proustian imagination is so wholly infiltrated by a structural subject-object reciprocity that, even when the characters are unaware that someone is watching them, the spectator is still 'present' in the spectacle by way of the performer's imagination. Ultimately, then, the reason why I see Proustian theatricality as revealed first and foremost in the work's staging of perception is this reciprocity of spectatorial and performing bodies, which is an invariable presence in the perceptual processes staged in the novel, and which, in *À la recherche*, comes forth as a general characteristic of perception.

The organisation of the theatrical space allows this art form to play with the subject-object relationship in a multitude of different ways, and I have argued that the positing of the theatre as a 'symbol' of all perception in *À la recherche* could be read as a metaphor for the intertwining of subject and object of perception. Hence, we have



seen that various theatrical references are put to work in the novel in order to disclose the violence *and* the pleasure of being the object of another's attention; the fear *and* the desire that this should be the case; the invigorating *and* the immobilising power inherent in spectatorship; its effects on the spectator *and* on the performer, in overt encounters *and* in covert ones, in encounters with another (or with things or with art) *and* in encounters with one's self. We have seen actors painstakingly aware that they are being observed *and* actors who forget that they are not alone; we have seen the spectatorial gaze triumphantly (or inadvertently) attracting the actor's attention, *and* we have seen it fail to do so; we have seen spectatorship aligned with a quest for knowledge, sometimes a successful one, at other times painfully not so. In other words, the (virtual) theatre of Proust's work is a theatre encapsulating a myriad of different and sometimes paradoxical constellations, and it is a theatre that, more than anything, brings to view the energy and attention that flow ceaselessly between performers and spectators seemingly in order to emphasise the paradox inherent in and truly fundamental for the theatre as an art form: that the theatre, the *theatron*, is a place in which all who watch are always also being watched, or heard, or felt.

The theatrical dimension of *À la recherche* also comes to view on a plainly formal level, in the novel's tableaux, which instate the protagonists as spectators before the ('hallucinated' or 'actual') presence of a spectacle. By combining aspects of Diderot's tableau theory with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and with Barthes's reading of *À la recherche* as an *œuvre-maquette* and as a work of 'non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality', I have presented an original analysis of the function and signification of the tableau, which I see as a device engaging the experience of theatrical spectatorship – and as a *staging device*. We have observed that the tableaux operate on several levels: firstly, they are staging devices in the sense that Proust deploys them in order to show how subjective interiority (which, as the novel insists, is fundamentally unstable and dynamic) comes to expression in the phenomenal world as the individual experiences it; secondly, the tableaux constitute maquettes – they are spaces in which the text stages its own production or exposes the 'machinery' necessary for the production of *À la recherche* as a work of art. It is the tableaux' staging of the productive relationship between spectator and spectacle that invites this

interpretation, since the Proustian spectators' reading of their fictional surroundings mirrors the productive relationship between reader and book, which, as some would say, is the relationship through which this literary work of art comes into being.

The way in which the tableau instates the perceiving individual as a spectator in the world allows us to consider this device as a means by which the text's theatrical qualities come to view, and the perpetual, sometimes explicit, sometimes more subtle, presence of a spectatorial figure in the novel's *mise en scène* of perception seemingly invites us to say, with Tadié, that, in *À la recherche*, the theatre is present, first and foremost, as a *spectacle*: 'c'est bien comme spectacle que le théâtre est présent dans la *Recherche*: pour être regardé, non pour être fait' ['indeed theatre is present in the *Recherche* as a spectacle: to be watched, not to be done'].<sup>447</sup> Proust is no dramatist, and even though he does recognise the theatrical analogy's potential for signifying (artistic) labour (as we saw in the analysis of the 'Bal de Têtes', where Time's craftsmanship is compared to that of artists and, notably, in the second draft of the *matinée*, to that of a stage director and a makeup artist in a theatre), his approach to the theatrical medium remains predominantly that of a spectator. This, however, is no small feat in a novel where spectatorship is radically opposed to passively watching something unfold. In a work such as Proust's, being a spectator is never *only* about watching (*regarder*) but always *also* about doing (*faire*), in the sense that the spectator is recognised as taking part in the creation of the spectacle. To claim, then, that the theatre is present in the novel as something to be devoured with the eyes, but not to be made, is perhaps only true to the extent that one expects the theatre of *À la recherche* to be like the theatres where we go to see the 'La Bermas' of our own time perform in Racine's *Phèdre*. These actual theatres, however, provide only in a limited sense the means and measures required to understand Proust's novelistic 'theatre', which abides by a different set of conventions and which is able to create other types of illusions; most notably, the illusion (which is also *more* than just an illusion) that we have, for a moment, new eyes, so that we are able, finally, 'de voir l'univers avec les yeux d'un autre, de cent autres, de voir les cent univers que chacun d'eux voit, que chacun d'eux

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<sup>447</sup> Tadié, *Proust et le roman: essai sur les formes et techniques du roman dans 'À la recherche du temps perdu'*, p. 375.

est' ['to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them can see, or can be'] (III, 762; 5, 237).

It has not been my purpose in this thesis to create the impression that Proust's novel is theatrical in the sense that it resembles or imitates the theatre or theatrical manuscripts. Proustian theatricality, as it comes into view in *À la recherche*, is, to state the obvious, created by properly literary means and, to be more precise, through experimentation with and exploitation of the possibilities and limitations of first-person narratives. Nevertheless, I hope to have shown that the theatricality of the novel attests to the sensitivity with which Proust apprehended theatrical experiences – a sensitivity that comes to view in the way that several fundamental aspects of the theatre inform his writing: namely, the subject-object reciprocity that transforms both spectators and performers into voyeurs *and* subjects of voyeurism; the 'energy exchange' enabled by the live presence of audience and actors, which literary critics and theatre theorists tend to ignore, and which conditions the mutual *becoming-for-others* that characterise the theatre both in our world and in Proust's novel; the creative power of the spectator, whose active participation (by way of the imagination or in a more concrete way) the theatrical medium encourages; the constant flickering of illusions and awareness on which the theatrical effect depends; and the dramatic side text's origin as a written account of (sometimes imaginary) perception.

To the extent that the discoveries of this thesis *do* suggest a form of likeness between Proust's novel and dramatic texts, this (limited) resemblance results from the novel's occasional evocation of the dramatic side text. In exploring how the theatre informs the novel, I have proposed that there is a 'structural' kinship between the Proustian tableau and the didascalies of the Romantic *féerie*, which were verbal post-performance syntheses of the spectacle from the spectator's point of view. While the didascalie sums up the complex collaboration of movement and sensory impressions on stage, as perceived from the auditorium, the Proustian tableau presents a spectacle that is contrived and composed largely by way of the perceiving subject's senses and imagination. In both cases, however, the emphasis is on how the spectacle affects the spectator (the highly visual genre of the *féerie* aimed, as we remember from Chapter 3, to impress the audience with spectacular effects), and both the didascalie and the

Proustian tableau may thus be said to disclose what Proust refers to as the *illusions of a spectator in a theatre*. The frequency with which such *écriture didascalique* occurs in passages concerned with perceptual experiences indicates, as we saw in Chapter 4, that Proust's writing of perception is a form of *theatrical writing* influenced by the non-dialogic components of theatrical manuscripts.

Among the theatrical references examined in this thesis, those pertaining to the *féerie* occupy a central place. It is the fact that these references appear so critical for Proust's presentation of the creative aspects of perception that has led me to take a particular interest in them. Time and again, the theatrical *féerie* and the related concept of the *féerique*, along with fairy-tales and other forms of enchantment, are evoked in sequences that draw our attention to how the imagination is engaged in the perceptual process, and thus in the act of bringing the world to expression. We have, for example, seen that Proust deploys references to specific theatrical acts proper to the *féerie*, such as the *changement à vue* and the metamorphoses of objects and humans into 'magical' creatures, in order to highlight how the one who perceives contributes imaginatively to the creation of the world that he or she lives in and is affected by. The intertwining of perceiving and imagining is especially noticeable in some parts of the novel, as in the perception of the inanimate, which, as we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, leaves much room for the creative imagination to express itself. However, although it certainly could be seen as a symptom of the aestheticising agency of the perceiving subject, it is, in fact, as if the animation of the inanimate – a vital constituent in what I view as the novel's *drama of perception* – above all serves to draw our attention to this individual's encounter with the otherwise overlooked life of the material world, to the interrelations between human and non-human manifested in this encounter and, consequently, to the perceiving subject's encounter with herself or himself *as a phenomenal being*.

In the end, this encounter with one's self at the centre of the theatre, as the pivot of a universe that is distant *and* present, foreign *and* intimately felt, an object of one's attention *and* a subject looking back, reveals itself as the ultimate drama of perception in *À la recherche*. Only when he situates the spectator centre stage is Proust able to fulfil the ambition that motivated him as a columnist: only then is he able to convey how the world truly *looks* and *feels*, as he turns his attention towards the inner reality

and towards the *je* that is always also part of the spectacle, in a move that involves ‘cesser de croire à l’objectivité de ce qu’on a élaboré soi-même, et au lieu de se bercer une centième fois de ces mots: « Elle était bien gentille », lire au travers: « J’avais du plaisir à l’embrasser » [‘ceasing to believe in the objectivity of what one had elaborated oneself, and instead of comforting oneself for the hundredth time with the words: “She was very nice”, reading what underlay them: “I enjoyed kissing her”’] (IV, 475; 6, 205). This willingness to get hold not only of the world but also of the self *and* the self’s perception of the world – as though from the outside, as another would see it – is, it seems, what prompted Proust to think about perception in theatrical terms and what, finally, drove him to stage perception as a drama experienced from the point of view of a spectator fully immersed, body and mind, in a world that is both real and, to no small extent, of his or her own making.

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## *Abstract*

Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27) abounds with references to the theatre, and its characters are often described in theatrical terms, as spectators and performers in the fictional universe of the novel. Critics have not overlooked this fact, and often regarded theatricality in *À la recherche* as synonymous with role-play and as something that comes to view in the contrived and artificial behaviour of the novel's characters. By contrast, this thesis argues that, among the many roles that the theatre plays in Proust's novel, the most significant ones are those that relate to *perception*. Exploring Proust's evocation of the theatrical medium, theatricality, theatrical figures and constellations as means to convey the full complexity of perceptual experiences, *Staging Perception* presents several distinct yet interrelated arguments regarding the interplay of theatricality and perception in *À la recherche*. The thesis demonstrates that, in the Proustian universe, theatricality may be conceived as a *mode of perception*, and it also examines different forms of theatricalisation of Proust's perceptual writing. It suggests, among other things, that the act of perception is subject to *mise en scène* in the narrative and that the device of the *tableau* enables Proust to mediate perceptual impressions by *staging* encounters between subjects and objects of perception.

My research examines the nexus between theatricality and perception in *À la recherche* by combining detailed textual analysis of the novel with perspectives drawn from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception, Denis Diderot's tableau theory, Roland Barthes's tableau criticism, and contemporary theatre theory. Thus, the thesis opens up a new and specifically theatrical domain within the expanding field of research that is currently working to unravel and illuminate the intricate interrelations between Proust's (perceptual) writing and the arts. Raising the question of what the theatrical qualities of Proust's writing may be, the thesis demonstrates that in order to fully appreciate how the narrative evokes and 're-imagines' the theatrical experience, we must look beyond its explicit references to the theatre. I argue that the novel draws its theatrical qualities not primarily from Proust's appropriation and use of dialogues (the mode of enunciation most intuitively associated with the theatre), but from a

concept of spectatorship that turns out to be completely enmeshed in Proust's writing of perception. The thesis suggests that the novel evokes the theatre as something like a model for staging perception as a mutually constitutive encounter between spectatorial and performing bodies of living presence, and that Proust deploys theatrical references as means to present his fictional universe as one whose shape and texture is created in and by way of the protagonists' perceptual encounters with it.

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 examines the figure of the *voyeur* as a paradigmatic example of a *staging perception* in Proust's *À la recherche*. Chapter 2 explores the novel's concept of spectatorship in relation to three types of experience capable of transforming the world into a 'theatre': travel, love and the encounter with art. Chapter 3 discusses the device referred to in this thesis as the *Proustian tableau* in light of, among other things, Barthes's criticism of the representational aesthetics that Diderot has inspired. Chapter 4 traces the historical development of Proust's theatrical writing, juxtaposing examples from *À la recherche* and 'Scénario', a text from his first published work *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (1896). Chapter 5 explores Proust's staging of encounters with inanimate objects in *À la recherche*. Examining his use of the figure of *enchantment* in qualifying the perception of interiors, the chapter brings out the 'affective texture' that our imagination and emotions give to the world that we bring to expression in the act of perception. In the sixth and final chapter of the thesis, I turn to the early drafts of what was to become the final episode of the novel, the 'Bal de Têtes'. Here, I analyse how Proust's use of the theatrical *féerie* – a genre that occupies a central place among the theatrical references in the novel – evolves from the drafts to the final version. While Proust's evocation of the *féerie* is also discussed in Chapters 3-5, Chapter 6 considers the significance that this model had for him as he crafted the conclusion to his novel in order to help us see why, at the very end of *À la recherche*, the *féerie* is granted a leading role as a symbolic figure for our perception of life itself.





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