

2009

## PROUST AND SCHELLING ON MEMORY AND TRUTH

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PROUST AND SCHELLING ON MEMORY AND TRUTH

(Spine Title: Memory and Truth)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
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London, Ontario, Canada

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO**  
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entitled:

**Proust and Schelling on Memory and Truth**

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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ABSTRACT: Proust and Schelling ask, in their different ways, what is our *rapport* to the past? What is our relationship to the past such that it can offer us the truth about itself, about its appearance, about our perception of its appearance and finally, about ourselves? Were we there when it happened (which asks the same as 'did we *have being* when it happened'), has it happened and has it finished happening? In *the Ages of the World*, Schelling explicates an ontology of the past. His formulation of *being which exists although it has no being* is a useful framework within which the past can be situated as a relationship to the present, that is to say, it is where non-being can exist in relationship to the being of the present, which I use as a formulation for memory throughout my discussion of Proust.

KEYWORDS: Proust, Schelling, memory, impressions, image, signs, experience, negativity, the unconscious, ontology of the past, epistemology

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Helen Fielding for her patient supervision, enthusiasm for Proust, invaluable insights and introducing me to Merleau-Ponty. Antonio Calcagno for kind encouragement and searching questions. Rebecca Comay for her exemplary and memorable reading of Proust which this thesis is indebted to on many levels. Tilottama Rajan's inexhaustible wealth of knowledge on Schelling.

My mom, my cat "gf", Jessica Reilly, Ayse Batur.

Last but not least: Michael Gira, John Cale, Glenn Branca, Nina Simone, Ian Curtis, the Melvins, Morrissey and Sonic Youth—my companions through dark times.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1.1 The Future of Proust.....	8
1.2 Cave Memory and Magic Lantern.....	11
1.3 “Intermittences of The Heart”.....	19
1.4 Senses and Signs.....	24
CHAPTER 2.1 A New Book.....	35
2.2 Redemption at the Library.....	45
CHAPTER 3.1 World Turning Cosmos Yearning.....	56
3.2 Blank Generation.....	61
3.3 I Keep My Visions to Myself.....	68
3.4 Tetragrammaton.....	77
CONCLUSION.....	86
WORKS CITED.....	89
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	92

## Introduction

We usually think of memory as a matter of representation through which we verify the truth of the past as *having* happened and *as having* happened in a certain way that allows us to relate to it, prove it or provide testimony for it. The wisdom of the historian, for example, is derived from his vision ("*historein*" traces back to the Greek *idein* to "see" and "*eidenai*" to know). The historian says what he sees and this is what he can readily volunteer as truth. This carries, of course, all the implication of *having been* there when the past is said to *have* happened.

Proust and Schelling ask, in their different ways, what is our *rapport* to the past? What is our relationship to the past such that it can offer us the truth about itself, about its appearance, about our perception of its appearance and finally, about ourselves? Were we there when it happened (which asks the same as 'did we *have being* when it happened'), has it happened and has it finished happening? In *the Ages of the World*, Schelling explicates an ontology of the past. His formulation of *being which exists although it has no being* is a useful framework within which the past can be situated as a relationship to the present, that is to say, it is where non-being can exist in relationship to the being of the present, which I use as a formulation for memory throughout my discussion of Proust.

*The Ages of the World* is not in any direct sense a book on memory. Schelling provides a brief discussion of the subject in the book's introduction but stages it immediately as a function of knowledge. The opening of the Introduction to *the Ages of the World* writes: "*The past is known, the present is discerned, the future is intimated. The known is narrated, the discerned presented, the intimated is prophesied*" (*Ages xxxv*,

my italics). He then goes on to pose memory as an inner dialogue of the soul representing itself to itself:

Hence there is in the person that which must again be brought back to memory, and an Other that brings it to memory; one in which the answer to every research question lies and the Other which brings the answer out of it (*Ages xxxvi*).

More than the “agreement” between like-minded interlocutors, the dialogue is suggestive of a *cision* in being which is thematic all through the book and further, prevails throughout the “evolutionary” development of the potencies. Spirit’s movement in history and towards self-knowledge and freedom is consistently troubled by its relationship to its inceptionary moment of non-knowledge. The model of the inner dialogue, as Derrida points out in *Gift of Death*, is not original to Schelling and precedes him via the Ancients. But Schelling, in particular, uses it as a model to explain the knowing subject’s capacity for non-knowledge as both the antithesis and condition of possibility for the project of knowledge to begin. In effect, Schelling asks what and how is non-knowledge that it might be posited or encrypted in a subject of knowledge? The subject to follow out of Schelling’s account is one who is opaque to himself *but* nonetheless capable of “overcoming” what is unknown in him precisely through his relationship with it. Hence, while *Ages of the World* may not be a book about memory *per se*, it is a book about forgetting and especially a positing of the first ground of the world in a deep and forgotten past.

I hope to dispel any misgivings of Schelling’s use of the terms “overcoming” or “subjugation” in the thesis proper, but simply observe here that these terms carry the sense of maintaining a *relationship* to the object that is *suppressed* because it is



*interiorized*. At any rate, Schelling's structure of self-difference and self-overcoming is compelling for an account of memory especially where memory is both *inextricable from forgetting* and *posited as its "overcoming"* (*Ages 16*)<sup>1</sup>. We could, for instance, ask Schelling's question in the context of Proust: how is forgetting possible in memory as its antithesis and its condition of possibility? How does memory emerge out of forgetting?

I find this structure of the subjugated past at work in Proust's involuntary memory which he situates *in* forgetting and the unconscious. These so-called "negative" regions of psychic being are not the places where things are destroyed or disappear completely but they allow for the survival of non-being in the state of nothingness. Involuntary memory takes place in forgetting and is itself an event of forgetting, the endurance of something in and through non-existence<sup>2</sup>. Proust suggests further that, while we were present to encounter, live and even receive the past, it remains hidden from us in essence. We do not understand the past simply by living it as something present to us, as if it were something that *has being*. Memory is not perception. Experience can only be endowed with essence and significance in a belated moment when resurrected by memory beyond immediate or external circumstances. This is Proust's saturnine wisdom in sum: redemption as remembrance means that life can only be saved as a past when it is already lost or transformed into something which (externally at least) resembles nothing of what it *was* originally. What one re-discovers through memory is not, strictly speaking, the

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<sup>1</sup> Schelling poses the relationship between negativity and overcoming as follows: "No beginning point (terminus a quo) of a movement is an empty, inactive point of departure. Rather it is the negation of the starting point and the actually emerging movement is an overcoming of this negation" (*Ages 16*).

<sup>2</sup> See also Maurice Blanchot's "Forgetful Memory" *The Infinite Conversation: The Absent Voice* p. 315.

past as it was lived, but a past that is being already transformed by forgetting, memory and experience.

But this breach in perception and representation reveals the past to be fundamentally open and as such open to interpretation. It is an event of the future in so far as our rapport with the past may be viewed as an encounter with foreignness, whose meaning has to be re-created *within us* continually. The mature narrator of *la recherche* comes to the realization that the past exists only to be remembered through writing. The essence of the past lies in our transformation or re-creation of it in writing and not as it is lived. The bildungsroman plot of *la recherche* is comprised of the movement from images of unconscious recollection (at the beginning of the novel) to its final expression in the form of writing (the novel concludes with Marcel's decision to write which takes place in a library where he recovers a lost book from his childhood).

Since my discussion of both Schelling and Proust involves the self-showing of the past as the struggle between image and word, I have followed this thread through with some interspersed discussions on vision (and the attendant motif of darkness and light), which is an apt metaphor for rationality. But Proust and Schelling's use of the theme of sight, blindness, the spectacle, light and darkness are interesting and, to my mind, worth rehearsing. God, in the example of Schelling, uses sight as a way of literally keeping the past in sight, of sustaining the past throughout its no longer having being. As I will elaborate in greater detail in chapter two, I use Foucault's work to argue that the image itself calls for a kind of renewed vision, an alternative way of seeing or reading behind or beneath the world and the word, that becomes of Proust's search.

My first two chapters discuss Proust's *la recherche*. While chapter one investigates the psychic experience of memory, chapter two seeks a more global perspective of the ramification of involuntary memory. Hence, the latter chapter is devoted to the question of what larger epistemological structure can be extract from involuntary memory, that is to say, from the structure of time which remains in a certain *rapport* with its non-existent past (to use Schelling's term [*Ages* 45]).

The focus of my third chapter is on Schelling's *The Ages of the World*. Here, I take on Schelling's account of the world's prehistorical past but choose to read it as a *pre-historical* time before philosophy and in particular, the philosophy of representation. In the penultimate chapter of *the Age of the World*, Schelling comments briefly on the state of Idealism, whose misguided heritage he attributes to three philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, all of whom he accuses of having "lacerated the world into body and spirit" or created "dead substances" from a "one-sided" "intellectualism" (*Ages* 105). In other words, 'these philosophers of representation' have contributed to the rending of the world into mind and matter—what we moderns to some extent refer to as the separation between thing and word. I cannot discuss Schelling's complicated relationship to Idealism at length except to say that Schelling's work from his middle period marks an "overturning" (to use Jason Wirth's term) of his earlier idealism which was an identity philosophy that followed Kant and Fichte. Hence, one could say that this was a past out of which Schelling himself was trying to emerge by keeping in rapport with it. In any case, there is certainly something "nostalgic" in Schelling's desire for the unity between thing and word which, moreover, he poses as a thing of the past: as bygone

and absolute in the manner of the figure of anteriority, the prime matter behind all matter, different from it yet giving birth to it, the *khora*.

But since true unity is not for Schelling a concept that can be placed outside of strife or contradiction, the past, rather than some placid fusion, is the bringing together of things such that they enter into contradiction. Schelling wonders: "Who could believe that nature" (which is "an abyss of the past" [*Ages*, 31]) "could have created the many different wonderful products in this terrifying external confusion and chaotic internal mixture, where nothing is easily found all by itself, but rather penetrated by and ingrown with other things, in peace and quiet?" (*Ages* 91). "Each life begins from contraction" because contraction is the annihilation of the formal quality that makes each thing an individual or discrete being (*Ages* 83). Things do not exist each on its own and the essence of their relationship is not *yet* intelligible. They would carry on a "malformed life," which is unintelligible to themselves and others until they attain to a higher principle that they can (*of themselves*) reflect. This is the structure of counter-projection which Schelling frames within an account of God's retrospective vision of the past. From the absolute viewpoint of having gathered all times, and subsequently of having outdistanced the past, God is able to contemplate the past from the perspective of freedom, so that the terrible past can be mediated (but, perhaps, it is also the same to say "redeemed") from the perspective of the future. This is the perspective of memory. There then remains the question of whether such recollection occurs from a perspective of freedom which is "outside" of the past and by implication if the past could be seen from the outside as a finished product or as having ended? Schelling describes history as

cyclical, revolutionary and unending. While this certainly provides us with an account of being that is always tied to history, it also complex in describing being that is not determined by its historical condition. Hence, the rotary movement of history becomes a means of conceptualizing a turning against historical finitude.

The abyssal past is the behind-the-world into which things collapse into themselves. They contradict themselves, they contradict with one another and then they dissolve into formlessness. Almost: “[b]ut this archetype of things sleeps in the soul as that which has become dark and forgotten, *even if it is not a fully dissolved image*” (*Ages xxxvi* my italics). That is, an unintelligible existence, the life of an image struggling to become word (*Ages 43*). So, at the same time that the past is “full” of formless and unspeakable “things” that make up “horrifying” “prime matter” that makes up the scene of the pure *il y a* (as Tilottama Rajan points out), devoid of man and man’s purposive history, it also carries the function of receiving the *imprint* of God’s highest concept *as God himself withdrew from the world* (Rajan 2009, *Ages 104*). The past is, once again linked to a conception of knowledge, and in particular, to the appearance and disappearance of the “key” behind all knowledge—God himself. In accounting for the *contradiction* between word and wordlessness as an “*intermediary concept*”, that is to say, in turning *opposition* into the means for a mediation or transformation of one into the other, Schelling is able to anticipate poststructuralism’s fascination with Saussure’s anagram which figures as an example of the appearance and disappearance of meaning in language (*Ages 60*).

## CHAPTER 1.1 THE FUTURE OF PROUST

We know the world through the impressions (with which it leaves us) that it leaves us with. But, to receive the world in its traces is also to concede that the world itself has already disappeared. Our perception of the world only faithfully reproduces its disappearance. Hence our first impressions are always mistaken and contain nothing of the truth, which must nevertheless be re-constituted and realized through them. That is to say, true memory allows us to re-experience what experience itself never had, and life as it was never lived.

Accordingly, Proust claims that truth is not to be found in the world of the present but in our interior world where reality leaves it “impression...printed in us” (VI 275). Proust calls this interior world an “inner book” and the impressions are themselves “hieroglyphic” or “unknown symbols”. He extends the metaphor of writing and reading to the sensations which are like “so many laws and ideas” which it is our task to “interpret” (VI 274, 273). Further, our sensation is like “a negative which shows only blackness until one has placed it near a special lamp” and even then, its truth must be “looked at in reverse” (VI 300). That is to say, sensations themselves must be read backwards in the manner of an “anagram” (V 112, 109). Proust searches for a structure that would make memory and the resemblances it discovers beneath contingent differences of time essential, and he claims to find this in the structure of a “metaphor” (VI 289).

In casting the past in terms of these unknown symbols, Proust inscribes the experience of the past within a larger project of epistemology (the appearance of the past,

in the past's self-showing, in our reading of the past). Memory is tied in a fundamental or structural way to knowledge and language. The structure of metaphor seeks, for instance, to reflect the resemblances of the past and present without reducing their historical specificities. Memory bridges the past and the present but it is not consequently the confusion of times. Instead, the essential connection between the past and the present is what allows for the selection and differentiation of memory, which is after all an ability to distinguish between events.

The impressions of memory are *traces* left behind by the things when they disappear from the world of presence. They are the remainders of things and, as such, they can be said to come after or behind things. They are what things leave behind after they lose their thingly way of being in the world, when they no longer exist as such or have being. In this sense, the remainders of memory are past having being, and they are the non-being behind being. These impressions are banished to a region beneath consciousness where they are unrecognizable and forgotten for no longer retaining the shape of their being in the world.

And yet, in this negative region of the mind, where things lose themselves and being is turned into non-being, the remainders of being continue to signify through a *symbol* that is unknown to us and remains to be translated. While the intelligence takes place in full and unimpeded light, true memory takes place in and through this abyss. Proust conceives of involuntary memory as being coextensive with forgetting. It must recreate or reconstitute its events out of what was forgotten, foreign and unknown and, as such, it is itself an event that takes place in and through the void of forgetting. The

presence of memory demonstrates that something continues to exist in the void and that forgetting is not simply nothing. If it consigns things to their immaterial state, this is to ensure preservation of meaning in non-being.

Proust suggests that the remainders of things take place within us in the form of sensations. Behind perception there is sensation: tastes, smells, images, pain, joy—these are the indexes of involuntary memory that strike us because they are outside of the intelligence, and hence also outside of the intelligence's recognition such that they force intelligence to translate their unknown symbols.

Hence, Proust conceives a being unified by memory to express the unity among intelligence, sensations and language. Marcel encounters the world but its truth is given to him "in the form of *words*," in "what lay *hidden behind* [reality, which] must be something analogous to a pretty *phrase*" (I 255 my italics). They are the signs *beneath* or *behind* the world of objects. They show us that there is *meaning* behind the world of objects. But this meaning is known to us only as a hieroglyphic sign, that is, as a sign of the unknown which can only be translated but never fully known. The past is not confined to a particular event or something that has ended. Its meaning is to be endlessly produced and recreated as an event of the future. Recollection certainly turns the last things in on the first things, but it is always with a view of opening up the past to translation. In *la recherche*, truth always arrives after the fact of experience. It is to be found in recollection, in the memory and the writing of life rather than the life lived.



## 1.2 CAVE MEMORY AND MAGIC LANTERN

“I was more destitute than the cave-dweller; but then the memory... would come down like a rope let down from heaven to draw me out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped by myself: in a flash I would traverse centuries of civilization, and out of a blurred glimpse of oil-lamps... gradually piece together the original components of my ego” (I 4)

“My drooping eyelids allowed but one kind of light to pass, entirely pink, the light of the inner walls of the eyes” (IV 241)

According to Proust, involuntary memory subjects one to “descend into depths in which memory can no longer keep up with it, and on the brink of which the mind has been obliged to retrace its steps;” it is also to “raise up out of the depth of [my] being” or “draw forth from a shadow” (IV 439, I 62, VI 273). Involuntary memory leads the mind to the brink of consciousness where, losing itself, the mind is forced to retrace its steps and compelled to remember. Proust aligns involuntary memory on the side of forgetting<sup>3</sup> rather than memory because involuntary memory is a phenomenon that can only take place *in* and *through* forgetting. This also means that involuntary memory is mediated by a phenomenon which is both its doing and un-doing. By contrast, voluntary memory is outside of forgetting. Voluntary memory remembers what it has never lost: it remembers what it sets out to remember, and even if it cannot remember, it registers a nostalgia for what it could not find, which still registers the past as present. And since “the true paradises are the paradises that we have lost,” voluntary memory cannot offer us such joy for having encountered neither losing nor (consequently) finding a memory (VI 261). The essence of things and people are not to be found in-themselves once forgetting has reduced or consigned them to oblivion. Accordingly, the whole endeavor of memory may

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<sup>3</sup> In his essay, “The Image of Proust” Walter Benjamin characterizes involuntary memory as being “much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory” (*Illuminations* 202).

be viewed as giving expression to perceptions that have become forgotten and thus, to wordless images.

In his essay on Proust, Walter Benjamin describes this endeavor as a fisherman's "enormous effort to raise his catch" (*Illuminations* 214). Involuntary memory is a counterstriving to ascend the rope of memory with the burden of images, a translation of an undifferentiated mass of image into word, in the movement from the unconscious to intelligibility. Translation, transubstantiation and transformation (I use these terms interchangeably to mean the same thing, namely, a change in *formal* qualities) are the key themes of *la recherche*, and they constitute its vocation: how to transform the images of memory into an enduring piece of writing; how to transform life into art; how to become a writer? But the past is not merely a finished product of translation; it also requires decipherment in the manner of "hieroglyphic characters," which for being unintelligible, iconographic or half image-words are nevertheless the source of endless translation (VI 273). Therefore, the past is a site where knowledge meets with resistance at the same time that it is the source of translative processes that lead to intelligence. Like a foreign country, the past is always matter of the resistances of bringing to knowledge what is unknown.

A Proust commentator observes that in *la recherche*, all walls turn into windows<sup>4</sup>. "Even if one lives under the equivalent of a bell jar, associations of ideas, memories, continue to act upon us" (V 22). While nostalgia recounts the adventure of homecoming, and habit wraps us in our own cocoons, it is the jarring experience of involuntary

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<sup>4</sup> See Jack Jordan's "The Unconscious" in *The Cambridge Companion to Proust*

memory—expressed in such ecstatic vocabulary of “extra-temporal joy” or “Fragments of existence withdrawn from Time”—that turns us outside of ourselves (VI 272, 270).

But we may be more cautious in observing that in *la recherche*, windows are metaphors of mediation rather than transparency *per se*. They allow us to see out while also seeing the world framed as a spectacle. Proust’s world is made up of signs, images and impressions. Hence, in many places, windows intersect with other metaphors of media and mediation. In one place, a broken window is patched up with newspapers revealing a world that can be encountered (indeed, patched up or *saved*) through the mediation of reading as both a technique of *distantiation* and *repetition* (and analogous to the function of memory). In another instance that confirms the conjunction of writing and memory, the Balbec seascape, framed in the window like a “miraculous sign,” is reflected along the glass front of the library of books lined up against the wall<sup>5</sup>. In chapter two of the thesis, I situate the phenomenon of memory in the larger context of literary history and particularly in what Foucault calls “the book as library,” a phenomenon of intertextuality, whose structure, I argue, is fundamentally memorializing. *La recherche* exemplifies the creation of a book as monument: in its difference, each new book reflects, remembers and renews the others that came before it. While the concern of the first chapter is to open up memory as an *inter-* or *intra-* subjective phenomenon, the concern in the second will be to follow the implication through in the larger context of literary creation.

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<sup>5</sup> “Presently the days grew shorter and at the moment when I entered the room the violet sky seemed branded with the stiff, geometrical, fleeting, effulgent figure of the sun (like the representation of some miraculous sign, of some mystical apparition) lowering over the sea on the edge of the horizon like a sacred picture over a high altar, while the different parts of the western sky exposed in the glass fronts of the low mahogany bookcases that ran against the wall...” (III 523).

Windows bring the outside world in and turn the walls of our inner world into screens. Yet, screens must to some extent obscure the windows of the world, just as reading and writing a very long book—even if it purports to be about reality—must shut out experience. What exactly do memory screens do?

In one sequence, a magic lantern projects historical scenes from the legend of Genevieve de Brabant and Golo onto the young narrator's bedroom walls<sup>6</sup> (I 10-11). This cinematic rendering of Golo's heroism is ultimately scripted and Golo is textually directed by the grand-aunt's reading to accomplish his infamous designs ("Golo stopped for a moment and listened to the accompanying patter read aloud by my great-aunt, which he seemed perfectly to understand, for he modified his attitude with a docility not devoid of a degree of majesty, so as to conform to the indications given in a text" [I 10]). Proust has staged a compelling primal scene where the spectacle is like "an impalpable iridescence" or "supernatural phenomenon of many colours" projected onto an "opaque wall" (I 10). The analogy to reading, to a writing on the wall, to memory as inscription appears inviting.

But the scene is in fact inscribed in the activity of reading as a scene of *failed reading*<sup>7</sup> since these projections are only impalpable or supernatural shapes or colors. If

<sup>6</sup> The passage reads: "it substituted for the opaqueness of my wall an impalpable iridescence, supernatural phenomenon of many colours, in which legends were depicted as on a shifting and transitory window"; "Riding at a jerky trot, Golo, filled with an infamous design, issued from the little triangular forest ...and advanced fitfully towards the castle of Genevieve de Brabant. This castle was cut off short by a curved line which was in fact the circumference of one of the transparent ovals in the slide...Golo stopped for a moment and listened to the accompanying patter read aloud by my great-aunt, which he seemed perfectly to understand, for he modified his attitude with a docility not devoid of a degree of majesty, so as to conform to the indications given in a text" (I 10)

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, de Man, Paul *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, where reading itself is said to occupy a central role in *la recherche* as the metaphor for the complex encounter between inner and external world (60).

they are 'comprehended' at all, it is as an immediate perception or childlike fascination (hence the language of shapes, colors and awe). The psychic meaning of the events always exceeds our ability to read our immediate circumstances. Hence, memory is always a belated event, not the prerogative of the child who, strictly speaking, does not remember his childhood although he perceives it (childhood is after all figured in *la recherche* as the scene of loss and forgetting, or in any case, that which needs to be searched for). Recollection and writing are the activities of a mature narrator that reinterprets a truth that was first destructive to the young narrator. Remembrance is not perception even if it seeks to repeat it.

Proust casts this breach between remembrance and perception in terms of time. Time is the index of difference. It causes being to differ from itself and intervenes between what appears and what is represented. Proust questions the very security of the subject of memory. His trenchant destabilization of various structures of signification— for example, the refusal to equate the identity of narrator and writer all throughout the novel, the different levels of textual signification (main, para and sub- texts that are not always in unison), the multiplication of selves that finds a curious analogy in the irrepressibly self-generating polyps etc.— suggests an unease with the question of *who* remembers.

In *la recherche*, our first impressions are always mistaken because they contain nothing of the truth, which must nevertheless be re-constituted and realized through them. The primal scene at hand presents us with an encounter with a destructive truth that cannot be directly processed by immediate intelligence, but which must be read (indeed

re-read), re-interpreted and re-constituted from all the intervening factors that include: the accumulated experiences of the mature narrator; and the official narrative of Golo's heroism, which itself functions as a screen that both conceals and reveals, suppresses and projects Golo's dark design (this obscuration is, like the relationship of truth and lying in *la recherche*, interesting since Golo's dark designs cannot be read separately from the official history, but indeed are read through it). Memory's interventions do not point to the full presencing of meaning behind the primal scene. Instead, it refers to a truth that can only appear as it disappears, a truth whose structure is that of the primal scene which stows away what it cannot avow for future re-interpretation, in the form of unknown symbols. A paradox becomes apparent: truth is re-interpreted but from an original moment which is itself devoid of truth.

The past may indeed return as an unread or "inner book of unknown symbols," which becomes our obligation to translate. So, while the past may not have first presented itself to consciousness, it nevertheless returns to us in the form of a past that was never present. Reading these hieroglyphs of the past, Proust explains, is an entirely creative event, "an act of creation in which no one can do our work for us or even collaborate with us" (VI 274). For we confront the past for the first time as something that is inaccessible or foreign, within our interior domain. For Proust, the relationship between involuntary memory and consciousness, as it pertains to traumatic memory, is entirely antithetical<sup>8</sup>. Involuntary memory begins where consciousness leaves off: impressions that fail to be

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<sup>8</sup> C.f. Benjamin's comparison of involuntary memory with Freudian interpretations of memory as carried out by Freud's disciple, Reik: "The function of remembrance [*Gedachtnis*]...is the protection of impressions; memory [*Erinnerung*] aims at their disintegration" in "On some Motifs in Baudelaire" (*Illuminations* 160).

experienced explicitly and consciously by the mind organism are preserved in the vault of involuntary memory, in a psychic region that is excluded by consciousness but which is not for this reason destroyed by consciousness.

Proust draws an explicit analogy between involuntary memory and metaphorical unity. We see, this for instance, in the associative leap from madeleine to Combray and in an explicit statement concerning the search for truth through memory:

truth will be attained by [*the writer*] only when he takes two different objects, states the connexion between them...and encloses them in the necessary links of a well-wrought style; truth—and life too—can be attained by us only when by comparing a quality common to two sensations, we succeed in extracting their common essence and in reuniting them to each other, liberated from the contingencies of time, within a *metaphor* (VI 289 my italics)

Authentic memory is less a matter of content than structure, and, in particular, a metaphorical structure that forges an inseparable link between being, consciousness and language. But the resemblances wrought by metaphors are not accidental. As such they are not to be found in accidental things, that is, in the external objects themselves, but rather in the *qualities* or *essence* extracted *out* of two different objects. Common essence comes into being as the transfer between different objects. Hence they are neither to be found outside the objects in themselves, outside of their appearances and also outside of their temporal contingencies.

In *la recherche*, the obscurity of the past in the form of lost time is never just a memory block, as forgetting is not a simple resistance to memory. A traumatic memory may be enveloped in forgetting, excluded from recollection, disavowed from memory, but it is after all retained as the source of all our endless translations of the past, which for this reason means that it remains unfinished although it has ended. Hence, it is his re-

interpretation of this annihilative truth, of Golo's infamous designs, that distinguishes the mature narrator from his childhood, and the writer from the autistic, hermetic cave of memory (Kristeva *Sense* 234). It is this trope of recognition, of being able to recognize one's past as distinct from one's present that is appealed to in the production of self-difference. This recognition sheds light on Benjamin's enigmatic comment on Proust, that "Proust did not describe a life as it actually was, but a life as it was remembered by the one who had lived it" (*Illuminations* 202). Lived experience is the sphere of casual talk, false friendship and wasted time and, if memory is called upon to save life, then it cannot simply repeat it, but must be infinitely more than experience, endowing experience with essence. *La recherche* is itself the product of nights spent in a cork-lined room at the end of Proust's life. In the following section, we shall see that Proust will go so far as to say, verging on self-contradiction, that to remember is to expel the life lived and replace it with images of memory.



### 1.3 “INTERMITTENCES OF THE HEART”

What constitutes the appearance of memory? In *la recherche*, memory observes the structure of language. Its appearance is that of a sign which opens and closes in the transformation that language undergoes from *image* into *sign-signification*. The Proustian project may subsequently be understood in the following terms: how can memory represent in a palpable and sensuous form—embody or resurrect—an image which it is seeking to restore from a dead language. We begin with a recollection of Balbec which I think presents one of the clearest examples of Proust’s intention to draw an analogy between memory and language. Indeed, what is particularly interesting in this example is the transfer of structures between memory and language, such that the ability of language to reveal and obscure its own meaning is discussed in terms of remembering and forgetting.

“[A]s for Balbec, no sooner had I set foot in it than it was as though I had broken open a *name* which ought to have been hermetically closed, and in which, seizing at once the opportunity that I had imprudently given them, expelling off the images that had lived in it until then, a tramway, a café, people crossing the square, the branch of the savings bank, irresistibly propelled by some external pressure, by a pneumatic force, had come surging into the interior of those two *syllables* which, closing over them, now let them frame the porch of the Persian church and would henceforth never cease to contain them” (II 325 my italics).

In this passage alone, there are two “Balbecs” and two sets of memory corresponding to each. There is first the “Balbec” of boyhood fantasy: the funeral coast, famed for its shipwrecks, and situated at the end of the world, “Finistère itself” (I 547). This is the place of creativity but also of annihilation; an immemorial past to which the world returns behind the creation of time and into which it dissolves as if formless, aqueous, impressionable and prior to lived experience. It is hermetically sealed,

immanent, sufficient to itself, and although closed off from the contingencies of time and recollection, it will continue to dictate all of our prospective searches. When involuntary memory accesses this past, language disappears and it is the image of an entire world that springs into being<sup>9</sup>. Language will cease to be a system of signification and acquire the immediacy of an image. Memory slides through the associative chains to recreate an entire world containing a tramway, a café, people crossing the square, a world which is ready finally to be encountered.

Kristeva writes, “[i]t is important to realize that the smallest unit in Proust’s writings is not the word-sign but a *doublet*: a sensation *and* idea, a represented perception or an embodied image” (*Sense* 211). A sensation-idea differs from the formalism or structuralism of the conventional sign whose entire mode of reference depends upon fixed relations (for example: the fixed reference, the recollection of the same thing over and over again, the intellectual concept that eliminates everything else that is not in keeping with its notion, etc.). The word-sign is the product of convention, and, as such, part of the lived experience that Proust characterizes as a violation or forced entry into the realm of fantasy. It is also part of the language of closure as the two syllables close over, bury or inter a deadened image. The common name of “Balbec” fixes and domesticates its fantastic images which are as unlived as they are beyond experience; but this conventional name is itself a sign of foreignness, a Persian Church, which one naturalizes into the landscape of Balbec. There remains something foreign at the heart of every sign and even in the most common name.

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<sup>9</sup> As Combray “sprang into being” from a cup of tea (I 64).

This self-difference of the sign applies to the structure of memory which in every case cancels its object in order to present it in its absence. Ricoeur calls this the “moment of negativity” in memory which, he argues, allows us to distinguish retention from impression and continuity from beginning<sup>10</sup>. Our ability to recognize something as being an object of memory (as opposed to one of perception) is contingent upon its designation as past, and therefore, of no longer having being in the world. Hence, there is the spectral quality of remembered figures in *la recherche*: those ghostly presences, characters who are resurrected from the dead and others who speak to the living from beyond the grave<sup>11</sup>—all of which express memory’s capacity to perceive its absent object in the flesh. In the same way that what is found is first lost, our ability to recall must concurrently posit its object in an involuntary realm of forgetting, the unconscious, sensations etc., where the object lies in darkness like a photographic negative (to use Proust’s metaphor), an inverse of intelligibility, an image of thought that is not simply opposed to its expression but which obliges its endless translation. We, the living, the survivors, are always translating for those who we remember since it is they who are without words, being or world.

For Proust, who conceives of involuntary memory as coextensive with forgetting, true memory can only take place as an event in and through the void. When the narrator’s grandmother dies, death, “like a sculptor of the Middle Ages,” restores her “in the form

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<sup>10</sup> C.f. Ricoeur, Paul *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Here, in so far as Ricoeur opposes the impressions to retention, he limits them to immediate perception (35). While this is not consistently the case throughout the rest of the book, it provides us with an occasion to observe that for Proust, impressions pass beyond perception. They are interiorized but not experienced, and for this reason they are forgotten by *experience* but nevertheless retained in a space that is “external to the interior” (to use Derrida’s description of the structure of the crypt in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*).

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Comay’s class lectures on “Proust and Memory”.

of a young girl” (III 471). In *la recherche* it is always the image that succeeds the thing<sup>12</sup>. An image of memory is the last thing before total oblivion—and this makes the image passive and fleeting, but also more resilient than materiality. An image is on the cusp of dissolving into nothing (Blanchot suggests that it is already “submerged” in nothingness), a vestigial existence that carries on as evidence that something “continues to exist in the void” (Blanchot *Gaze* 79).

Death is a sculptor whose creativity involves a cutting away or a paring down to what is most essential (which returns the world to its youth or beginning); forgetting forces memory to abandon what it has learnt or can recall through conventional intelligence and take up the translation of essence for oneself. Proust’s search for lost time does not terminate in the repetition of the past. Memory entails much more. It is the unity of the perspectives of past and present; but this already presupposes that it is a unity of all the faculties of imagination, intelligence and perception i.e. Perception so that impressions may be received, imagination so that what is sensed and felt may be appreciated in their absence, intelligence so that these may be translated into essence which finally closes the circle of past and present because it establishes a metaphorical unity (as opposed to identity) between first impressions and last thoughts. Therefore, what it is at stake for Proust is never just any recovery of the past, but one capable of yielding the past as essence.

For Proust, this essence takes the form of sensation: “[T]he dead exist only in us” but “the effect of their memory” is only *our* sensation of pain, which is after all “proof

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<sup>12</sup> My discussion of the image is indebted to Blanchot’s essay “Two Versions of the Imaginary” in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays* (79-89).

that this memory was indeed present in me” (IV 214). As images turn the appearance of memory into a state of near-nothingness, in the purely (pre-)conscious region of the mind where, further, these images are said to no longer correspond to anything that we have experienced or known, how can we be certain of memory’s existence? Proust argues that sensation is the only proof that there is memory *present in me*: “I felt that I did not really remember her except through pain” (IV 215). But sensation is after all fleeting and no sooner does Marcel remember his grandmother than she is turned into “a reflexion of my own thoughts” (IV 246)<sup>13</sup>. Sensation is quickly taken up by thought which dispels it, replaces it with concepts that are less contingent or subject to appearance and time, more universal and rational, in order to establish an identity between the remembered and the rememberer, in order, that is, that memory can be instantaneous to thought and identical with it: I remember what I know and can know; voluntary memory recalls what it already knows and knows to be ‘true’. This is a sleight of hand, since in its voluntary form, recollection is really representation and quite precisely, the formal representation of the thinking subject whose power lies in the instantaneity with which thought can illuminate its object. Why then does Proust insist on sensations as the vessel for memory?

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<sup>13</sup> It is not far fetched to see from this perspective why Deleuze wants to emphasize the great search in *la recherche* in terms of truth rather than involuntary memory (which for him is fleeting and itself only the material for art, which contains essence and truth because it is “immaterial” or “spiritual” (*Signs* 86).

## 1.4 SENSES AND SIGNS

The past is foreign to us. It communicates to us through signs that are unknown and require interpretation. In their most compelling form in *la recherche*, these characters are hieroglyphic. In casting the past as unknown symbols, Proust inscribes the experience of the past within a larger project of epistemology. To know the past is to know being. So we see that for Proust, memory is concerned with the appearance of the past, the past's self-showing and by implication our ability to read the past. As it turns its concern to the past, knowledge too becomes time-bound and as mortal as its object of knowledge. The hieroglyphic medium replaces LOGOS (Deleuze 105). Knowledge becomes conscious of its ability to hold the unity of thing and word, to be undercut by its own power to represent in the form of language.

...already at Combray I used to fix before my mind for its attention some image which had compelled me to look at it, a cloud, a triangle, a church spire, a flower, a stone, because I had the feeling that perhaps *beneath these signs there lay something of a quite different kind which I must try to discover, some thought which they translated after the fashion of those hieroglyphic characters which at first one might suppose to represent only material objects*. No doubt the process of decipherment was difficult, but only by accomplishing it could one arrive at whatever truth there was to read. For the truths which the intellect apprehends directly in the world of full and unimpeded light have something less profound, less necessary than those which life communicates to us *against our will* in an impression which is material because it enters us through the senses but yet has a spiritual meaning which it is possible for us to extract...*the task was to interpret the given sensations as signs of so many laws and ideas by trying to think—that is to say, to draw forth from the shadow—what I merely felt by trying to convert it into its spiritual equivalent*. And this method, which seemed to me the sole method, what was it but the creation of a work of art (VI 273 my italics).

When is something forgotten, what constitutes the passing of an event? What qualifies as wasted time? In this section, I want to suggest that for Proust the answer to these questions actually has less to do with time than with sensation. Or, where the

answer concerns time, we must realize that in *la recherche*, time itself is a mode of perception. The lapsing of days and passing of time are not themselves indicators of forgetting and remembering since they are merely the occasion and not the condition. We recognize our own forgetting (such is memory) through other indicators. Chief among them, according to Proust, are the sensations which are themselves the signs of so many laws and ideas. While first impressions are like “unknown” and “hieroglyphic symbols” sensations, felt in the return of memory (and perhaps even returning *as* an embodied memory), are inextricable from intelligence, from the faculty that intermediates between the ideas and their sensible signs. Therefore, sensibility has one foot in the external world but it has its other foot in subjective processes that determine its freedom from its material world.

“[T]rue reality,” Proust writes, is “discoverable only by the mind” (IV 229). It is “the object of a mental process” (IV 229). The truth behind the signs of what one senses is discoverable only through intelligence which does not, however, lead us towards a higher idea (as with the Ancients) but to a true *reality*. More real than either myth or immediate reality, true reality refers to the recovery of a past which is unknown to the present because, *though encountered, it remains essentially unexperienced*. It is not a matter of forgetting what was once possessed, but rather a forgetting that is made possible by a difference at the heart of perception so that what is given may *in essence* remain elusive, inaccessible and unknown. The significance of the past may certainly be given to us to encounter, to learn from, to predict and even to conventionalize. But historical facts are not by themselves profound. They

cannot tell us of truths that matter *to ourselves* or that are *present in us* because these latter, Proust argues, are contained in the signs of sensation and must be read through them. They do not carry the force of necessity because conventional truths are never forced to confront their own finitude in the form of the past. Hence, in Proust's characterization, the independent function of intelligence is applied most consistently to immediate (or unmediated) perception: "Even the simple act of which we describe as "seeing someone we know" is to some extent an intellectual process" (I 23).

Intellectual notions dis-simulate perception; they mask what we see and they obscure their object by doubling it:

We pack the physical outline of the person we see with all the notions we already formed about him... In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheek, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice as if it were no more than a transparent envelope, that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is these notions which we recognize and to which we listen (I 23-24).

Intellectual notions 'fill out': they are ideas that materialize into substance that take the place of memory. They present truths that, as it were, permit us to read only what is on the surface of a transparent envelope. But these are ultimately truths that are without "depth" because they do not invite us to search for truths hidden beneath everyday reality. Therefore, while they are the first things we 'see' they also leave us blind to the experience of the real person behind them. These are the truths that we use to recognize a passing friend or identify someone we know in a photograph. They are the banal truths which we use in society or in any such environment that already presupposes a convention that pre-ordains the appearance of truth as a correspondence between sign-word (for example, "madeleine" to the cookie rather than "madeleine")



to the essence of childhood Combray). In the same way that perceptions that are immediate cannot contain true memory but instead depend on re-presentation, conventional truths are ultimately ahistorical because they treat history as a continuum that carries the past into the present without remainder and hence, without difference. They seek only observable connections between historical periods but not the ruptures that make histories complex and multiple events that take place in time.

We may deduce from the foregoing that, for Proust, true reality, *which the mind discovers*, occurs as a function of the past. We do not use intelligence to free ourselves from the past, but to understand ourselves *in* it. Proust suggests that “reality takes shape in the memory alone” (I 260). What does he mean? Memory is certainly anterior to reality and determines its shape. But this does not mean that memory is to be understood via a return to the past or its repetition. This would reduce the search to a nostalgic fixation on the past. (Proust’s formula is: “Seek? More than that: create”). Neither can the essence of the past be understood in its external shape, its appearance or its ‘reality’: “the discovery of our true life, of *reality as we have felt it to be*...differs so greatly from what we think it is...In this conclusion, I was confirmed by the thought of the falseness of so-called realist art, which would not be so untruthful if we had not in life acquired the habit of giving to what we feel *a form of expression* which differs so much from, *and which we nevertheless after a little time take to be*, reality itself” (VI 277 my italics). The true reality of life is not to be found in the people we love or who incite our jealousy and it is not even to be found in memories that induce pain or joy. Instead, essence and truth are to be found in the domain of sensibility, in

love, jealousy, pain and joy which, while intimate in us, strike us with the force of something foreign to ourselves and our intelligence. This is why Proust insists that “essence is, in part, subjective and incommunicable” (VI 285). It is the voluntariness of our thought, our readiness to give sensations a form of expression that unwittingly takes us further away from true reality—to the point of obscuring it, and subsequently of substituting essence for appearance.

For Proust, true memory *resurrects* the past. It takes place as a *transformation* or *transubstantiation*, and hence as a going-beyond of form and substance. Memory is a “contradiction of survival and annihilation” because the survival of a memory—the envelopment of an event, person and thing in their “spiritual equivalent” which is none other than *our* sensations—implies the annihilation of its material form.

However, there is evidence that this volatilization of form is already at work on first impression:

*For things...as soon as we have perceived them are transformed within us into something immaterial, something of the same nature as all our preoccupations and sensations of that particular time, with which, indissolubly, they blend. A name read long ago in a book contains within its syllables the strong wind and brilliant sunshine that prevailed while we were reading it (VI 284 my italics).*

Memory and forgetting are never independent processes. Memory intervenes because perception and representation are already operating within the domain of forgetting. We lose our objects as soon as we receive them; we turn things into their negative images at the bottom of some cavernous region of the mind where they become inextricable from all our preoccupations and sensations: “[O]ur real impressions” are always “colored by the reflexion, of things which logically had no

connexion with it and which later have been separated from it by our intellect which could make nothing of them for its own rational purposes” (VI 260).

Following this, they cannot re-emerge without these new vessels or sensible signs which will themselves require our renewed efforts at understanding and translation. They cannot return to us except in their difference. Corresponding to these perpetual departures from our original perception, is an understanding of the past as the site of absolute loss. This past is absolute because it is everywhere operative as soon as we are perceiving-beings: “no sooner is the impression received than we begin imperceptibly to descend the slope of memory” (II 678). As soon as we enjoy the world we are already transforming it into something immaterial.

All throughout *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze highlights the centrality of the *immaterial signs* in *la recherche*, which he opposes to the worldly signs (for example, the signs which operate in the world of appearances: friendship, society, love). Consistent to his radical claim that Proust’s great search is for truth rather than for memory and time, he locates the immaterial signs—most essential because not sensuous, not dependent on temporal or formal restriction—in art, which is the privileged site of Truth<sup>14</sup>. But we see in the above that this de-materialization is already a feature of perception and even of intelligence. Further, I have attempted to provide various evidence that where there is an epistemological claim at work in Proust or where there is a search for truth, it is inextricable from memory. For Proust,

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<sup>14</sup> “What is the superiority of the signs of art over all the others? It is that the others are material. Material, first of all, by their emission: they are half sheathed in the objects bearing them. Sensuous qualities, loved faces are still matter. (It is no accident that the significant sensuous qualities are above all odors and flavours: the most material of qualities.) *Only the signs of art are immaterial*” (*Signs* 39)

the processes of forgetting and memory have epistemological implications.

Memory presents its object in its absence because this is the only objective state that will permit us the freedom to re-create the object *as* we experience it:

“So often, in the course of my life, reality had disappointed me because at the instant when my senses perceived it my imagination, which was the only organ that I possessed for the enjoyment of beauty, could not apply itself to it, *in virtue of that ineluctable law which ordains that we can only imagine what is absent*” (VI 263)

In other words, memory is the occasion for imagination to operate in conjunction with sensory experience. This harmony among the faculties of imagination, the senses and intelligence, Proust claims, is unavailable without memory, whose function is to convert the world of presence into a world of absence and thus, into a world capable of being re-created. In this sense, memory functions as an intermediary concept that suspends the world in a state of non-being so that to experience the world and to read its signs may themselves be creative acts. It is memory which allows us to feel with great depth and intensity, *without restraint*, for an object whose presence can no longer hold us captive nor determine the limits of our experience. More than their presence, it is the absence of a person or thing that determines the intensity and (for Proust) the truth of our feelings. Truth is discoverable only in the domain of sensibility, in our selves, and in the absence of the object. The resurrection of a lost object is most precisely this capacity to hold or keep within view, and hence in some region of existence, an object that no longer has non-being. “The dead,” Proust writes, “can exist in us only” (IV 214). Memory is effectively a dialogue that we hold with the dead within us. In other words, it is a

sustained relationship to the lack or absence within ourselves.

According to Proust, the imagination synthesizes. It unifies all the fragments of perception that are dispersed in time or broken off from reality into an essential and metaphorical connection. But imagination can only take place in the absence of an object because the presence of an object or our immediate perception of it is, according to Proust, always deceiving and the source of optical illusions. But Proust also applies this logic equally and especially to intellectual notions which are immediate because they seek to take the place of experience and render the search (for the meaning of sensibility) beneath appearances unnecessary for *already* being calculable in the mind. The senses of sight or touch are analogies of a comprehension that grasps, identifies and takes into itself. In their identification of appearance and essence (where seeing *is* knowing), sight and touch deliver the impressions over to intelligence, which immediately converts them into intellectual notions that are readily accessible to habit or voluntary reflection. These are not the impressions that we remember in the manner of authentic memory, as much as they are representations—the material for reflections.

Sensible signs cannot be expressed except through the mysterious signs of the past and, like the past, they cannot be reproduced or emulated but must be re-constituted and re-created. Proust's oft-mentioned "impressions" are, strictly speaking, the stuff of involuntary memory. While perceived or received in consciousness they fail to be encoded by intelligence. This is because they do not refer to what is intelligible but its traces, in the form of the sensible imprint. Hence, they figure as the signs of unintelligibility and unreadability: "hieroglyphs," "unknown symbols," "figures" (VI

274). These impressions demonstrate the difference between what is superficially perceived on the one hand and what is *felt* beneath perception on the other. Repetition, representation, and voluntary recollection merely reproduce “a miserable abstract of lines and surface” (VI 284). Concerned as they are with the details that fill out objective representation, they miss the sensible sign behind perception. In so far as they fail to reproduce the sensations of the past, representation achieves external rather than essential resemblance. Kristeva points out that this cision between *feeling* and *representing* informs the entire structure of the vocation to write, of the becoming of a writer (*Sense* 211).

Although thoroughly specular, these hieroglyphs of the past are especially troubling, and indeed blinding, for the subject of knowledge. They expose the insufficiency of his presupposition, namely, the continuity between the subject and object of perception, seeing and the seen object. While these pictorial-signs are immediately visual, perceivable and even representable they are not, however, *read* (in so far as to read them was an act of creation” [VI 274]) since it is precisely the case that it is always possible to represent, repeat, and take as true, the things that we do not understand. Hence, while these hieroglyphic characters permit objective representation, it is only to expose the vacuousness of rote repetition, of representation without sensibility. These hieroglyphs are the signs of cision or the division in ourselves that are caused by the breakdown between *perception* and *representation*.

We have internalized the signs of the world but they, in their turn, do not speak to us and instead transform what is intimate and interior to us into an “inner book of

unknown symbols” (VI 274). The past is a foreign country and its strange hieroglyphics have made us foreign to ourselves. The sensible signs that correspond to these impressions are equally ambiguous: *taste* and *smell* which are at once so familiar but nevertheless strike us with the force of the unknown because they correspond to objects that are less immediate to perceptions. These are objects that force intelligence to strike out on a different path, to re-create rather than identify with the wealth of its own readily available representations. Though muted and ultimately inscrutable these are the signs that incite all the endless efforts of interpretation and translation.

So, while the voluntary processes consist in materialization, involuntary memory observes the opposite process: it volatilizes the material form and retains essence in its immaterial form, as sensation. The annihilation of objective form is part of a larger process of transformation: from an object of perception enjoyed by sensation (but also dissolved by it or lost through it) into a spiritual equivalent for its transposition into a foreign form or word (i.e. hieroglyphic symbol) that “enshrines” it. For Proust, writing and reading helps us to re-experience the past and even to understand it. It is in this sense that the past becomes an epistemological problem that requires translation. Lost languages are incomprehensible, but this is not merely because the past is finished (this is certainly true but not the whole story). It continues to be shrouded in mystery, in its half-pictorial, half-language form that necessitates the “intervention” (Deleuze 33) of memory and its incessant translation. As it were: the past has passed but it has not yet come to an end. Remembrance is described as a change of state, encompassing various points of transfer that intervene from the immediate material (which we understand falsely or only

in parts) to an anti-material (or even ideal), but only that it may become the occasions of joy and happiness. That is to say, that it finally becomes available itself to the senses. Or rather, since it is the province of sensation rather than reflection, the past strikes with the force of an impression.



## CHAPTER 2.1 A NEW BOOK

Gerard Genette sums up *la recherche* in three words: “Marcel devient écrivain” [“Marcel becomes a writer”]. For the most part this is true. Most of the 'action' of the novel can be traced back to the fundamental breach between what one perceives and what one seeks to represent, which Marcel attempts to reconcile through writing or becoming a writer. But in this sense, the plot of becoming a writer is also interesting because it includes Proust's views on the relationship between art and truth, and why such an art should take the form of remembrance. Proust's earlier critical writings in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* already reveal an inclination for speculating on art and literature, which he carries over into *la recherche* in spite of his own caveat: “A work in which there are theories is like an object which still has a price tag on it” (VI 278). *La recherche* is of course filled with such theories (and I think, it is not always clear what their purchases are in light of Proust's caveat, that is, whether they are not themselves an anxious introjection of 'truths' that his art falls short of redeeming), and especially a theory of art and being, which is my focus in this section. My main point of reference is the following reflection that Proust makes on the function of art:

But to return to my own case, I thought more modestly of my book and it would be inaccurate even to say that I thought of those who would read it as “my” readers. For it seemed to me that they would not be “my” readers but the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a sort of magnifying glass like those which the opticians at Combray...it would be my book, but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves...I should ask them whether the words that they read within themselves are the same as those which I have written (VI 508).

The passage describes the encounter between subject and world through art. Art strives to reflect an essential relationship between the subject and his world. Art is an

object of the world but it is intimate to us because it allows us to see what is *in* ourselves. Proust frequently employs the optical metaphor of mirrors and lenses in describing literature and the role it plays in reflecting to us what is unknown to us inside of ourselves. But as a metaphor of art as an intermediary between subject and world, the optical medium is interesting in determining that reading occurs in the disappearance of the book as an object. After all, Proust appeals to “*the inner book* of unknown symbols” and reads it is “an act of creation” (VI 274 my italics). The truth of a book or the essence of art is not some thing that has positive existence. It becomes intelligible only through a certain disappearance of its objective quality and reappearance in memory. And Proust describes the truth of memory as “general,” “universal,” on the order of “law” because, like a historical process, it is recollected by no-one in particular except as an imaginary total—in the reader who comes after the writer and his work and who will resurrect what the writer has gone in search of.

In this sense, art seeks to reflect essence that applies to everyone across contingent differences. But Proust suggests further that subjective memory (childhood experiences, sensations, dreams, involuntary recollections etc.) could itself be caught up in something more “universal” and, through art, be made to reflect it. Marcel recounts in vivid detail—as if they were his own—the experiences that he himself does not live through, for example, the romance of Swann and Odette, the society of the Guermantes, and even the astronomical laws that are said to influence the social behaviors of the diners at the Grand Hotel at Balbec. In fact, these very un-lived experiences will become Marcel’s own to repeat in life and recreate through art. We certainly repeat the past out of

habit and rote, but also, in part out of a certain compulsion of the past that renders us involuntary since we cannot choose to change the past such as it *was*. The past is like a law which we cannot but *variously repeat*.

The relationship between subject and world through art may also be posed as follows: how does one create a work that relates singularly to the subject at the same time that it is also absolutely universal (Foucault, *Order* 300)? How to represent the truth of memory which begins, as *la recherche* itself, in the image of the unconscious and ends as a phenomenon of text?

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Modern literature stands outside the event of its own creation to reflect endlessly upon it. But finitude arises out of this exterior vantage, which cannot be attained without simultaneously marking out the limits of the ego, the mortality of the event out of which it is created, and the finitude of the past<sup>15</sup>. There is “no doubt” for Proust that “my books too, like my fleshly being, would in the end one day die...Eternal duration is promised no more to men’s work than to men”(VI 524). If writing is conceived out of its own mortality, is it at all strange that it should take the form of a monument, a book of memory? Benjamin seems to believe in this fittingness: “It took Proust to make the nineteenth century *ripe* for memoirs” (*Illuminations* 205; my italics). Benjamin explains that this is because life had been “chaste” and betrayed none of the secret that concerned literature—concerned as it had been with epics and stories that sought to subsume the

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault clarifies this self-reflexivity in literature as “the primary discovery of finitude [which] is really an unstable one; nothing allows it to contemplate itself” (*Order* 314).

individual into universal history (*Illuminations*, 205). By the time of Proust, the particularities of life began to reveal “astounding confidences” (homosexuality, malady, death, habit, ennui, society, etc) that became the subject of literature. We know the precision of his enigmatic literary analysis from Foucault who argues that literature at the time had just become “intransitive”, that is, it separated itself from the positive sciences of the nineteenth century and posited the ground of its own “precipitous existence” (OT 300).

Nevertheless, Benjamin’s wording is evocative of *la recherche*’s historical situation: Paris at the birth of a new century and already everything seemed old and “sunk into oblivion”. One is often struck, in reading *la recherche*, by the inevitability with which Proust figured the future through the past, as if the future could only be understood through the past: photography yields ghostly figures; cinema is anticipated in the cave-screen memory; telecommunications are “admirable sorcery,” able to “conjure” “invisible presence” in “a supernatural light,” like a mysterious “portal” able to transport speakers across intervening distance; even the telephone operators are “Vigilant Virgins,” “Messengers of the Word” who jealously guard these portals while they incessantly empty and fill and transmit to one another the urns of sound (III 174, 178).

The project of memory precipitates from the ruins of modernity, which memory reflects upon in order to save (or renew) it. This project intersects with the ‘aim’ of modern literature or at least with its “writing subjectivity” who writes about writing, and in so doing “curves back in a perpetual return upon itself” in order to make writing the event that “re-apprehend[s] the essence of all literature in the movement that brought it

into being” (*Order* 300). And Proust’s inversion—he wrote endlessly about not-writing—not only allows writing to address itself as a “pure language” but also to get behind or recover the time of not-writing, which is to say, life itself. What emerges is a language that is no longer transparent (invisible for the sake of transmitting an objective truth of some higher, moral or educative import) but that collects itself into its own medium. It becomes autonomous, even embodied and opaque like a screen, which is to say, containing and concealing and capable of producing its own meaning.

Proust wanted his entire work printed out in a single volume, separated into two columns and without any paragraphs (*Illuminations* 203). He wanted writing to achieve a specular quality, an image of seamlessness and reversibility that doubled its literary quality. Left to its own devices, language in *la recherche* becomes its own subject and object, like a character within its own story. It has almost no need for plot, to the extent that we think of plot as something outside of a language henceforth reduced to description. Or rather, it has no need for more than the plot of “Marcel devient écrivain” to which language returns endlessly through various subterfuges and analogies, from different spatio-temporal perspectives. Even occasions of oversight, willful or unwillful omission (in which language acknowledges the productivity of its own hiccups) become an occasion for the narrative to coil back into itself. They occasion what is known to Proust commentators as the “*plus tard, j’ai compris*” formula”—perhaps the most frequent incantation in *la recherche*. Therefore, to speak quite generally, *la recherche*’s complications and intrigues are not driven by plot in so far as these are themselves the effects of language, phrases, and metaphors which superimpose upon one another to form

intricate webs, subtle metamorphosis, resemblances etc. For it is this strange recursive tendency of modern language, its ability to reflect endlessly upon itself that truly allows the remembered event its infinity. So, we should not understand “not-writing” to simply mean the disappearance of the world and meaning.

The fictional artist Elstir paints from memory. “He reproduces things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed” (II 570)<sup>16</sup>. He keeps the blinds around his studio closed. He shuts the world out but it is a new creation of a *world* that emerges: “Elstir’s studio appeared to me like the laboratory of a sort of new creation of the world” (II 565). Elstir’s seascapes present *a world in its infancy*, “in which the land was already subaqueous and the population amphibian” (II 567-8). Here, “the eye,” stripped of its intellectual notion, “should discover no fixed boundary, no absolute line of demarcation between land and sea”. And because there is no distinct time as no distinct matter, the “marine *terms*” are intermixed with “urban *terms*” (II 567). And if this cosmic confusion should cause the onlooker to feel like “the “wayfarer” in one of Elstir’s paintings, who “seemed often to be stopped short on the edges of a precipice,” so likely to lose one’s way as one’s very state of being (are we on stable ground or dry land?), this is because art has regained time by returning the world to an absolute beginning, before the birth of Time (*Signs* 44), more essential than any event of the calendar, the past is teeming with as yet un-lived, unheard of, unimaginable possibilities.

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<sup>16</sup>Elstir is modeled after the British Painter J.M.W. Turner *Proust in Perspective* 227

Proust says that there are “as many worlds as there are original artists” (VI 299). That is, art is the creation of “unique worlds,” each one singularly different from the other so that we are able to speak of an artistic “style”<sup>17</sup> which gives *a* Vermeer, *a* Rembrandt, *a* “Bergottism,” “each one its special radiance,” (VI 299). The originality of style is “the expression of a radical and essential difference between diverse personalities” (II 167). That is, a *radical* and *essential* difference allows us to distinguish one thing from another (as in a unique or distinctive style unlike no other), but also to recognize an essential resemblance that is disseminated across difference. And we should not mistake this essential resemblance for a positive quality that is opposed to difference. The resemblance of style is what allows each thing to appear in its difference without losing its meaning in the world. Style wants to always reflect “true variety” and it should be contrasted against false resemblances or imitations that are “the very antithesis of variety,” “a barren uniformity” that burdens us with overabundance and deprives us of the ability to extract a singular truth from memory (II 171).<sup>18</sup>

Proust also claims that the world appears to each of us in “a difference, which, if there were no art, would remain for ever the secret of every individual” (VI 299). Without art, our existences would be monadic in the same way that without involuntariness, memory would repeat only what it can represent in a circle of identity: “[t]hrough art alone are we able to emerge from ourselves” (VI 299). Therefore, art is a creative encounter with the world and indeed, each new creation is a meeting of worlds:

<sup>17</sup> c.f. Deleuze *who* gives an excellent interpretation of style and singularity (*Signs* 161). He reads something Leibnizian in Proust’s monadic worlds, which is subverted by Art (*Signs* 163, 41).

<sup>18</sup> “True variety is in this abundance of real and unexpected elements, in the branch loaded with blue flowers which shoots up, against all reason, from the spring hedgerow that seemed already overcharged with blossoms” (II 170)

“Each artist seems this to be the native of an unknown country, which he himself has forgotten, and which is different from that whence another great artist, setting sail for earth, will eventually emerge” (V 342). The external and temporal world is *essentially* united by art. But “Essence”, “Law”, and “Truth” are themselves the fulcrum around which the work turns to reflect its readers. In this sense, essence can only be *translated* by a reader who is outside or belated to the work.

Writers, on the other hand, sacrifice themselves for their work. The fictional writer Bergotte produces works of genius only in “ceasing suddenly to live only for [himself], to transform [his] personality into a sort of mirror” (II 175). (In fact, Bergotte dies right after seeing Vermeer’s *View of Delft* which gives him cause to reflect on his later novels and to regret not having “gone over [them] with a few layers of colour, made my language precious in itself, like this[painting’s] little patch of yellow wall” [V244]). His literary production is described as a “modest machine” (III 176). And his genius, like an electrical lamp or an aeroplane converting one form of energy into another, consists entirely in the ability to *transform* or *transpose* life into art (II 175). Indeed, Bergotte figures as the difference between appearance and essence, speech and writing (“His [speech] seemed to me to differ entirely from his way of writing” [II 168]). We are told that from the day he began to write, Bergotte ceased instinctively to use his phonetic “brasses” (II 175). Marcel observes on first meeting that Bergotte’s speech “issues from a mask” or a “peculiar organ” and its delivery was “pretentious,” “turgid,” “monotonous” (II 168-9). Speech doubles onto writing; it obscures writing in repeating it, in taking its place or becoming indistinguishable from it. It takes place in society and chatter while



giving us the “simulation friendship” that conceals the fact that conversation also makes us “to a certain extent closed to ourselves” (II 173). It distracts us from the task of writing and, as such, represents the forgetting of truth in the being-in-the-world. Bergotte’s person also disappoints for not being able to manifest the essence that one finds in his writing. He is a disappointing picture of “a youngish, uncouth, thickset and myopic little man, with a red nose curled like a snail shell and a goatee beard” bearing “no connexion whatever with the sort of intelligence that was diffused throughout those books” (II 165-166).

Proust tirelessly demonstrates to us the duplicity of our first impressions. If our intelligence volunteers its pre-conceived notions ahead of an object of perception and causes us to have expectations, the impressions disappoint us in falling short of them. If, on the other hand, we indeed encounter an object for the first time, we would still fail to understand it for missing its immediate appearance and retaining only inscrutable traces of the object. The essence of things is not given in their appearance. The appreciation of Bergotte’s speech varies in time so that while “the ear did not at once distinguish” the “vital links” between Bergotte’s manner of speaking and his thought, it is in retrospect that Marcel says:

It was indeed to the writer whom I admired that the unrecognisable words issuing from the mask I had before my eyes must be attributed, and yet they could not have been inserted among his books like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, they were on another plane and required transposition by means of which, one day, when I was repeating to myself certain phrases that I had heard Bergotte use, I discovered in them *the whole framework of his written style*, the different elements of which I was able to recognize and to name in this spoken discourse which had struck me as being so different (II 172; my italics)

According to Proust, the difference between speech and writing is the difference between appearance and essence. But essence is to be found on a separate plane from intention and expression. Writing is not the expression of an intention in speech, as if speech was already complete in itself and writing came after the fact to repeat or reproduce what it is incidental to or a mere copy of. Speech and writing are not equivalent or even continuous modes of expressions. Hence, Proust says that writing is the recovery of “fugitive” sounds that “escape from a person’s lips” (II 174). *Writing finds what speech loses*. It is essential to speech because writing (and memory) allows what is lost *in* speech—that which speech loses or suppresses but which it continues to preserve in a state of non-being—to be re-experienced. Aren’t Bergotte’s vocal “symphonies” precisely what he gives up when he takes to writing? And yet, the musical qualities are precisely what Marcel admires in Bergotte’s prose: “there are in his books just such closing phrases where the accumulated sonorities are prolonged (as in the last chords of the overture of an opera which cannot bring itself to a close and repeats several times over its final cadence before the conductor finally lays down his baton” [II 174]). Proust himself endorses music: at its best, writing is the “sonorous,” “reverberating” or “resounding” of its anterior possibility, the most elemental part of speech which is sound itself. But the plot thickens, for this curving back of memory onto its anterior possibility does not merely discover some primitive past that bears no connection to the future. To be able to look back onto the past and discover its essence is to be able to see in the past “the whole framework” for the future (II 172).

## 2.2 REDEMPTION AT THE LIBRARY

“In the hallway there is a mirror which faithfully duplicates all appearances. Men usually infer from this mirror that the Library is not infinite (if it were, why this illusory duplication?); I prefer to dream that its polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite” (Borges *Labyrinths* 51)

Like its own example of the glass bookcase that reflected the sea of Balbec, *la recherche* seeks to reflect the expanse of lost time. But in circling back upon itself, in its unique recovery of its own beginning and end, it has also concurrently reflected the *world*, as if in Schelling, where in a “*small epitome*” one has concurrently grasped the history of the cosmos—where, that is to say, the individual is always already caught up in the historical processes at large (*Ages*, 3). The six volumes of *la recherche* line themselves up into what Foucault, in his assessment of Flaubert’s novel, *The Temptation* (which, for Foucault, prepared the way for Mallarme, Joyce, Roussel, Kafka, Pound and I would add—Proust), calls “a *phenomenon* of the library” (Foucault *Counter*, 91; my italics). Foucault explains:

It may appear as merely another new book to be shelved, alongside all the others, but it serves, in actuality, to extend the space that existing books can occupy. It recovers other books; it hides and displays them and, in a single movement, it causes them to glitter and disappear (*Counter-memory*, 91-2)

In its difference, a new book promises to reflect all the other books that came before it. Upon its newly polished surface, all the other books *glitter and disappear*. It promises to renew the old world, all the old books, as well as our habitual way of seeing, which it also promises to transform into “another form of sight” (*Counter-memory*, 92-3). Another writer of the library, who indeed wanted to write a book made up only of quotations, Benjamin claims the same when he says that one does not approach the

library in an “elegiac mood,” but rather in “anticipation” (*Illuminations*, 59). Hence, Foucault reads into Flaubert’s novel a spectacular quality more visionary than reading itself: an “epic drama” arises out of the print words; “the book disappears in the theatricality it creates” (*Counter-memory*, 93). What Foucault reads into is in fact Flaubert’s early intention to produce the novel in dramatic form, whose organizational structure he disbands but—for whatever reason, whether his own or textual—does not totally eliminate from his novel. Its “theatrical spectacle” haunts the book and “challenges its printed signs” with the remnants of “divisions into dialogues and scenes, descriptions of the place of action, the scenic elements, and their modifications, blocking directions for the ‘actors’ on the stage” (*Counter-memory*, 93). Foucault appeals to the “past” of the book, which is neither presented in the letters of the book nor its history. Instead, this “counter-memory” is to be found in the ruins of the spectacle, the ghostly theatre, which is silently encrypted in words—not so much as a hidden intention but a background—a trapdoor—upon which the revised text takes its place but may at anytime collapse into.

*La recherche* employs a similar analogy: “A book is a huge cemetery in which on the majority of the tombs the names are effaced and can no longer be read” (VI 310). He associates the phenomenon of the library explicit to death, i.e. one cannot write a memoir, attempt to reflect and recover the past (or past books) without simultaneously erecting their gravestone, that is, without obscuring their content. *La recherche* contains and conceals all the other old books, which glitter and disappear into the image of its memory, expelled from their existence and enduring in the form of its citation (i.e. image

of image) through which the writer sees himself or sees what he is not<sup>19</sup>. The writerly vocation entails an apprenticeship to the great masters. Will the new book (*la recherche?*) be the *Arabian Nights* or the *Memoirs* of Saint-Simon of another age, Marcel wonders? He knows that this cannot be so unless they are first “sacrificed” “forgotten” or “renounced” and then “stumbled again upon” (VI 525). That is to say, to dramatize both forgetting and memory, Proust *mimes* the great masters. He quotes, mirrors, displaces, recovers.

His characters are citations of the masters of portraiture (Odette is like Botticelli's Zipporah) and literature (the narrator is like Shahrazad from *The Thousand and One Nights*).<sup>20</sup> John Ruskin's gothic cathedrals are models for the churches of Balbec; in their unfinished grandeur, they are also said to be the architectural equivalent of the cathedral-book that Marcel undertakes to write (“In long books of this kind there are parts which there has been time only to sketch, parts which, because of the very amplitude of the architect's plan, will no doubt never be completed. How many great cathedrals remain unfinished!” [VI 508]). Proust himself had published a few essays on Ruskin and translated two of his books, *The Bible of Amiens* (1904) and *Sesame and Lilies* (1865). Diane Leonard points out an interesting linguistic aspect to Proust's frequent quotation of Ruskin, which she argues is also the resurrection of Ruskin's language of figuralism-a

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<sup>19</sup> c.f. Alain Cohen *Proust and the President Schreber: A Theory of Primal Quotation of For a Psychoanalytic of (-desire-in) Philosophy* Yale French Studies No.52 1975 p 194: “In this sense, Marcel Proust, whose art of mime was proverbial among his accomplishments, quotes his alterity which is found to be immanent and transcendent to Proust's reality in the network constructed by the narrative *je* in its fantasmatic”.

<sup>20</sup> *La recherche* compares its interminable prose to the death-defying ruses of the Oriental tale: “... Albertine's perpetual presence...forced me...to display every day greater ingenuity than Shahrazad” (VI 524). “Unfortunately, if by a similar ingenuity the Persian storyteller postponed her own death, I was hastening mine” (V 167).

kind of lost image-language that latter day literacy eventually replaced in favor of a more transparent language of communication.<sup>21</sup>

Among all the books mentioned (e.g. Hugo, Balzac, Sevigne etc., and even among the other Sandian novels), Georges Sand's novel *Françoise le Champi (the Country Waif)* occupies a special place in *la recherche*. It is Marcel's first book: "I had not then read any real novels" and "a new book was not one of a number of similar objects but, as it were, a unique person, absolutely self-contained" (I 55). It is given to him as a birthday present along with the other Sandian novels *La Mare au Diable*, *La Petite Fadette* and *Les Maitres Sonneurs* by his grandmother; it is chosen and read aloud (made singular, made sonorous) to him at bedtime by the mother. Sand herself is evoked intermittently through the novel, but *le Champi* is the first and last book to appear in *la recherche*. It connects the young narrator and mature writer and in doing so locates the action of the novel between the scene of sleep, the bedroom of the young narrator, and the (Prince's de Guermante's) library where he makes the decision to finally become a writer.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Leonard writes, "Ruskin was deeply concerned that the typological language in which the Gothic cathedral was "written" had been forgotten in his own time, although it had been the dominant mode of expression and interpretation throughout the Christian Middle Ages. According to this exegetical method, a historical event was viewed as a type or a prefiguration of another, a promise of which the later occurrence was the fulfillment. With regard to the Scriptures, figuralism or typology held that the Bible must be read on four levels: literal, figural, moral, and anagogical. On the last three levels—the spiritual levels—the signs to be interpreted were not words but the things that the words represented, which were to be read as a kind of picture-language. The cathedrals of the Middle Ages had also been inscribed in this picture-language of figuralism—their sculptures, bas-reliefs, and stained-glass windows all portrayed types or figures that were codified into a kind of language, recognizable by the illiterate masses. However, after the spread of literacy, this picture language fell into disuse and was gradually forgotten, with the result that the meanings expressed in the cathedral ornamentation could no longer be read. In his book on Amiens, therefore, Ruskin tried to restore this lost language by providing a chapter, "Interpretations," in which he presented a kind of literary guided tour through the cathedral, reading from each of its pages in turn" (*Proust in Perspective* 214-215)

<sup>22</sup> c.f. Henry, *Anne Marcel Proust: Théories pour une esthétique* Paris : Klincksieck, 1981. Henry's book is also a comparative reading of Proust and Schelling's aesthetics where she argues that Proust's gives a literary account of what Schelling puts forward in his philosophy of aesthetic. Her book is influential and it provides the groundwork for Julia Kristeva's comparison of Proust and Schopenhauer.

*Le Champi* is itself a book of Temptations of sorts; it emits “a mysterious attraction,” “an intoxicating distillation of [its] essence,” in it there is “contained something inexpressible deliciously” (I 55-56). Perhaps this temptation has also been intensified by the mother’s omission of all the love scenes in the bedtime reading: “And so all the odd changes which take place between the miller’s wife and the boy, changes which only the dawning of love can explain, seemed to me steeped in a mystery the key to which (I readily believed) lay in that strange and mellifluous name of *Champi*...” (I 56). The name of *Champi* holds the key? Shouldn’t it rather be the name of “Madeleine,” the name of the miller’s wife who is *Champi*’s adoptive mother, to whom he would return as a mature man, and whom he marries when he finds out that she is left a widow (Kristeva “*Sense*” 8)? Indeed, as Kristeva points out, the name that disappears from *la recherche* entirely except in the form of a mummified cookie, dipped and blossoming out of a sea of childhood desire, about to be ingested just a few pages ahead (no doubt, this framing is itself suspicious)—though there remains a certain “Madeleine Blanchet” in the first and second galley proofs, who is absent from the third and corrected proofs having evolved into a hardened cookie by the time of *la recherche* (*Sense* 9)?

We may read (as many have) in this Madeleine *metaphor*—for, such is the transfer that is engendered by effacement/omission and substitution of names—a strong case for Marcel’s incestuous feelings (perhaps even matricidal ones) for his mother, but the trouble of the displaced maternal name is not limited to its immediate circumstances. At any rate, this name is over-determined: apart from the immediate meaning of common pastry, or the essence of childhood, or even the name of the above miller’s wife. It is also

an intra-textual reference to a street (an intersecting street no less) by the same name where, desiring but failing direct access to Gilberte, Marcel “take[s] up position” in wait for her father, Charles Swann (I 592). It is, quite literally, the intersection of various thematic, inter- and intra- textual transferences. The name “Madeleine” is doubtlessly tied up with the problem of knowledge, i.e. of what eludes the grasp of knowledge or, what is more accurate, the possession of an object of knowledge (which is inseparable from the object of desire) in the form of its self-difference, an absolute past as a ghost of the past, as the image of memory, a common brittle cookie in which the spirit of memory has almost entirely disappeared. But this elusiveness is itself a manifestation of some larger phenomenon: inter- and intra- textual transferences that takes place between books (*le Champi*, *The Arabian Nights*, *The Bible of Amiens* and so on) and which envelopes, adds volume, complexity, and texture to the object of knowledge even as it conceals it. This then is a problem of the library.

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Trouble at the library? To be sure, it is trouble on the order of chaos:

“...we should never recapture it [the past] had not a few words...been carefully locked away in oblivion, just as an author deposits in the National Library a copy of a book which might otherwise become unobtainable” (II 301).

While an author may deposit his book in the library to prevent it from being unobtainable, he also locks it away in oblivion. So, on the one hand, the library is a fortress built to resist change. On the other hand, it is the place of transformation which it anticipates and even elicits. Hence Benjamin observes that libraries induce “a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order” (*Illumination* 60). Inside the library,



beneath the exterior of order, the procession of books, careful divisions, shelves, catalogue etc. one can no longer guarantee the “safety of the book,” the bound or hermetic text. The metaphor of the library itself seems to contain the very impossibility of containment. What was once known as “temptation” or even the unhealthy conditions of a dissipated life,<sup>23</sup> is now exemplary, transformed into material that is worthy of a book (indeed, a book that employs the terms of vocation, apprenticeship, education, becoming-writer). In the library, in the phenomenon that occurs between books, the borders between separate regions of established disciplines are continually being displaced, redrawn and re-territorialized. Knowledge is no longer something that is attributed to an individual book or author. Even names are displaced and no longer preserve the distinction between persons, books, and things, but unearth metaphorical passages that open up unexpected associations.

Therefore, the library is never purely instituted towards the safety of the book, or outside of disorder. It is, in the first place, a relationship to *disorder*. While it authorizes the privilege of finding, of browsing through or discerning individual books that are lined up against one another in the appearance of impermeability or nonexchangeability, these privileges are themselves the result of a “borrowing” in a more original and disorderly sense that makes up the *polyphonic text*, i.e. a text that bears the traces of other texts and in doing so, exceeds and defies its own conception as a *book*. Hence, the text itself becomes the locus of the book’s unbinding, the double that the book endlessly returns to, to question the possibility of overcoming its material condition. The cumbersome

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<sup>23</sup> Foucault writes “Temptation” among the ruins of an ancient world populated by spirits is transformed into an “education” in the prose of the modern world” (*Counter-memory* 87).

volumes *la recherche* may be interpreted, accordingly, as a desire to exceed the book by extending the space of text, to place a wager on immortality at the expense of the unity of the book. They hint at a recurring impossibility of lining up the work to produce the unity of a book—one that doubtlessly shadows all the efforts of organizing the novel according to a chronology, a stable sign-word or authorial voice, like a trapdoor.

They buried him [Bergotte], but all through that night of morning, in the lighted shop-windows, his books, arranged three by three, kept vigil like angels with outspread wings and seemed, for him who was no more, the symbol of his resurrection (VI 246).

They bury Bergotte but his books appear in all the shop windows. These books take his place in the world of the living and even multiply it. They outlive him but not merely as inanimate objects that are untouched by death since they themselves are permeated by death and designate it like a headstone. Rather, they are the ‘things’ that death leaves behind. Or, since death finishes without remainder, the “things” that endure past their expiration are objects of absence in spite of their presence in the world. If they persist in meaning something—perhaps even in referring to something as unspeakable as the ‘after-life’— despite the death of their author, this is because they are themselves beyond-living: their entire being in the world is defined by their ability to turn against their own finitude. Hence, inanimate objects in *la recherche* are invested with spiritual qualities: “I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object...” (I 35). As objects of memory, they are defined by their ability to reverse their material condition, to un-thing their thingly condition, and to undead their mortality: “they have overcome death and return to share our life” (I 35).

Hence, these books are taken out of their thingly circulation. They are no longer read (Marcel tells us that Bergotte's books had, long before his death, become unpopular, a shadow of the genius they once were), and they no longer refer to Bergotte. In fact, the literalness of the text should not be avoided: the books refer to the burial of the author beneath his text. And in the same stroke that they refer to his remains, they in fact refer to *themselves* as the 'things' that he has left behind. Are these unreadable and un-authored objects still 'books'? The materiality of these books should not obscure their sign—the spectacular promise of order laid out in the three-by-three arrangement of the books: the symbol of resurrection or having gone beyond the bounds of the book and, subsequently, the intimation that things do disappear without the words to signify them but neither do they, for that reason, fall back onto being mere things<sup>24</sup>. They continue to symbolize beyond the death of signification; they call into question the book, which is actually their objective being; they contradict themselves endlessly by communicating the incommunicable: read the sign but do not read the book.

Like hieroglyphic symbols, they are purely spectacular. In their visually impressive arrangement, these books are the symbol of winged resurrection. But because they deliver the message of the future, which is both unknowable and not-yet fulfilled, they are also immediately blinding and resolutely mute. They train the finite eye in “the

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<sup>24</sup> Baudrillard, Jean *Symbolic Exchange and Death* London: Sage 1993, writes “It is not true that words, when they cease to be representations and lose the sign's rationale, become 'things,' thus incarnating a more fundamental status of objectivity, a surplus reality....” (234).

faculty of being suddenly the spectator of one's own absence" (III 183)<sup>25</sup>. This is the vision of the future, defined as a retrospective.

The 'things' that remain of this world allow us to see, as Blanchot also observes of human remains, an image of the world that has been left behind, in which being has departed but *we* have somehow survived (*Gaze* 82). In this sense, 'things' are spectral images that are bound to mirror this world but already have one foot in the next and in this uncanny way, demonstrate both the possibility of being in the world and the outstripping of its worldly condition.

To be sure, no one sees what is left behind from the perspective of having gone-beyond. As Benjamin writes of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*, we approach the future backwards with our face turned towards the past, not out of nostalgia for the past, since its truth is animated only by the future and has to be anticipated accordingly. That is to say, the past is known only in the mode of intimation, with which one looks forward to a future that exists although it has no being as such. The past and the future are our blind spot: what is most certain about the future or a past—to the extent that they are absolute—is that they do not contain us. This is not to say that we cannot imagine what will happen to us in the near or far future, but that such an imagination allows us to confront our finitude as subjects.

Three by three, Bergottes' books are the symbol of his resurrection. Resurrection is, of course, the promise of an event that gives meaning or order to the past, present and

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<sup>25</sup> "Alas, it was this phantom that I saw when, entering the drawing-room before my grandmother had been told of my return, I found her there reading. I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of my presence..." (I 183)

future. Every new book that succeeds its past in an historical procession is such a promise of mirroring, in its small epitome, past, present and future.

“But each past day has remained deposited in us, as in a vast library where, even the oldest books, *there is a copy which doubtless nobody will ever ask to see*. And yet should this day from the past, traversing the translucency of the intervening epochs, rise to the surface and spread itself inside us until it covers us entirely, then for a moment names resume their former meaning, people their former aspect, we ourselves our state of mind at the time” (V 73 my italics)

But in *la recherche*, the onus of redemption falls upon the oldest book, the obscure copy that is impossible to read, written in an obsolete language, which doubtless nobody will ever ask to see.

“When he circumscribed the depths with his circle”  
(Proverbs 8:27 cited in *Ages* 94)

### CHAPTER 3.1 WORLD TURNING, COSMOS YEARNING

The world is finite but its universe is infinite. This is why Schelling says that it is the world that is “ensouled<sup>26</sup>” (*beseelen*) by the universe (*Ages* 37). To ensoul the world is to animate it, as God did<sup>27</sup> according to an expansive principle, by breathing the pure breath of life into an insensate world. But the world is also “*en*-souled” according to the senses of being “wrapped up,” “enveloped,” “enclosed” etc (*Ages* 39, 58, 57). which are frequently used in *The Ages of the World* to describe concealment rather than closure, the withdrawal of meaning rather than its total absence. Therefore, to ensoul the world is to posit it such that the grounds of its creation are doubled according to an expansive principle and a restrictive principle. Schelling compares the world to a receptacle, and at base we can take this to mean that the world opens and closes: it is restricted, enclosed and circumscribed but in the same stroke, made passive, turned into a “receptacle” that receives the soul of the infinite universe<sup>28</sup> (*Ages* 58). “Nature”, Schelling writes in the introduction “is the visible imprint of the highest concepts” (*Ages* xl). Later in the book, the implication of this reflection becomes evident as a hierarchy involving the figure of the ladder of evolution:

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<sup>26</sup> This was the contradiction that Plato also sought to represent in an imagery of the aviary that divides body and soul into their respective passive and active qualities. Rather than figuring it as the prison of the soul, Schelling departs from Plato in his analogy of the body with the universal or affirmative principle.

<sup>27</sup> Schelling describes God as pure breadth: God is the most spiritual spirit, pure, inscrutable breath. Wirth’s note traces the roots of the word *Geist* to indicate “the opening wide of the mouth and hence its relationship to the Latin *spiritus* and *anima* (breath of a God or a blowing) (*Ages* 138)

<sup>28</sup> The receptacle is “passive” and “receptive,” given a “feminine name,” engendering a childlike wisdom which is also “selfless”—in any case it is to be contrasted against the more masculine “spirit, or Word (or Logos)” (*Ages* 71).

In general, every higher potency is the archetype of the lower potency, or, to say the same in the vernacular, its “heaven”. But in order to be blessed with this, the lower potency must unfold the seed enclosed within it. For if it evinces this for its higher potency, namely, what is similar to the higher potency and heavenly, then it draws this higher potency to itself with irresistible magic and then an immediate relationship, an inner fusion, comes into being (*Ages*, 57).

The potencies organize the world into three developmental stages that influence nature, man and God. The highest of the potencies ( $A^3$ ) is the most immediate to God or “at one” with him, the lowest ( $A^1$ ) is at the furthest remove from God: his first ground of nature or dark past. What the  $A^1$  expresses in essence is: a self-difference that God does not posit outside of himself but in the interior recesses of his being since, as Schelling argues, there is nothing outside of God. Therefore, the progression of the potencies leads from the first ground of nature to God as a principle of the highest freedom. It is an evolution that departs from what externalizes<sup>29</sup> itself in the form of “horri-fying” “prime matter,” but which—in more psychically invested terms—Schelling also calls the “unconscious” or “irresistible drive and insensate movement” (*Ages* 23). We must first exist before we can act freely (*Ages* 5). Therefore, the ladder of evolution coincides with the movement away from subjective drives towards universal consciousness guided by the spirit of freedom. This perspective is governed by a “wisdom that *ascends and descends*, as if on a scale, the concatenation of beings” (*Ages* 72; my italics). The ladder of nature allows us to ascend to the perspective of God (enter into a “rapport” with him) but also to descend so that we can find in the simplest element of nature an archetypal

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<sup>29</sup> “Because that nature is what is first external and visible of God, it is a quite natural thought to consider nature as the body of the Godhead and that which is beyond having being as the spirit that rules this body” (*Ages* 46).

idea. More generally speaking, it is the capacity to contemplate the necessity for conflicts and difference in freedom, and vice versa, to divine freedom in the necessity for struggle.

In the first potency of creation, God gathers all the elements of matter together. We know that the result of this gathering is not one of fusion but of contradiction (“in gathering together it becomes an inherent contradiction” [*Ages 91*]). The primal attraction between things, the contraction of the whole, the intensification into a single point—all these are the basis of contradiction. Nothing is in contradiction that is “found all by itself,” but for this reason things that are found by themselves are also “dead matter,” i.e., severed from the universal movement towards a higher unity (*Ages 91*): in giving rise to new forms, things contradict their spatial contiguity and generate “external confusion”; or they contradict their own forms and cancel themselves in “chaotic internal mixture” (*Ages 91*).

Therefore, the hierarchy of beings is not merely progressive in that it allows us to leave one potency behind for another: we do not leave behind antithesis for a unity that excludes antithesis (what Schelling accuses Leibniz of describing “a one sided unity,” a world of representation without Being, discourse without subjects), which would then compromise the encompassing force of unity (*Ages 105*); we cannot, in a word, ‘sublimate’ antithesis. If the world seems ready to fold into the universe, like ectype into prototype, through the sheer force of attraction or resemblance, the antithesis between beings is what keeps them apart: it is their antipathy<sup>30</sup>. The universe is moved by forces which, like irresistible magic, draw the potencies together and pull them apart (*Ages 59*).

<sup>30</sup> I am drawing on Michel Foucault’s section entitled “The Prose of the World” in *Order*, in which he discovers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century representation of the universe a lost world, prior to discourse, in which language and thing were transparent to one another.



“Matter” is posited in the world “as if...in a self-lacerating rage” (*Ages* 91). These “averse forces” exist so that matter may appear in its fragmentary and multiple forms as “individual and independent centers,” but also that it (matter) may reproduce the “rotary movement” of the universe, and “move about their (the independent centers) own axes” may indeed be opened by it (*Ages* 91).

Posited in necessity and freedom, the world is internally self-divided. It is split between being-in-the-world and desiring to go beyond it. The world sustains a relationship with its own *lack* (of unity), which it posits as a *past*. In recasting the problem of lack as an ontological problem (of being and time), Schelling is able to posit lack as something that exists in spite of not *having* being. The world is compelled by its lack to strive to resemble its higher potency but in such a way that it is not ruled or exhaustively defined by this past: “[n]ecessity remains, but as something mitigated through freedom” (*Ages* 55). And the place of lack in the world, along with all the other manifestations of negativity (sickness, evil, mortality, the negative aspect of freedom), is behind positive being, like a hollow (*creux*)<sup>31</sup>, where the “archetype of things sleeps in the soul as that which has become dark and forgotten, even if it is not a fully dissolved image” (*Ages* xxxvi). A hollow that is no-where present but nevertheless ‘eternal’<sup>32</sup> in the sense of being timeless, behind or before time and giving onto the possibility to time,

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<sup>31</sup> Krell, David Farrell *Of Memory, Reminiscence and Writing*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University 1990: “Merleau-Ponty uses the word *creux* in (at least) two crucial places late in chapter four of *The Visible and the Invisible*, “The intertwining—The Chiasm” (VI 193, 198) to designate a pit of hollow that opens itself in the otherwise too solid flesh of the world, a concavity that allows there to be visibility; he also uses the word to designate “a certain interiority, a certain absence, a negativity that is not nothing” (93).

<sup>32</sup> Schelling argues that from the perspective of spirit, eternity means the inclusion of all times. But we are still in the first potency at the other end of spirit, which I argue is also ‘eternal’ (and must be so in relation to eternal spirit—I elaborate this point in the next section) but in a different sense of being timeless.

such that “the soul (of the universe) unfolding from the highest, is always enveloped and retained by the negating force as if by a receptacle” (*Ages* 58). This means that the hollow behind the world, which receives divine imprints, with a negative force such that once received it becomes dark and forgotten but whose impressions are nevertheless turned into soul—“ensouled”—and eternally unfolding.

### 3.2 BLANK GENERATION

The world began as a void that came into-being as soon as God chose himself as a beginning—as the One with being—and negated all the other possibilities (of creating something other than world, of not creating at all, or of all the other gods who might have created this world etc.). Therefore, the world's initial not-being is not outside of God, but *in* him as the creative void out of which the world, its creatures, and time will emerge<sup>33</sup>. This, as Schelling points out, is the way of the monotheistic God who “tolerates nothing” and establishes himself as the One (*Ages* 86). Schelling is precise in associating tyranny with creation:

To speak even more exactly, if it were left to the mere capacity of God's necessity, then there would be no creatures because necessity refers only to God's existence as God's own existence (*Ages* 5).

What comes out of itself in and through the void is nothing less than the purity of “God's existence as God's own existence” which *remains* after “there would be no creatures” (*Ages* 5). The total annihilation of creaturely things reveals nothing other than that there *exists* something behind the world, which is not of this world but not completely outside of it either. This is the meaning of God's anteriority, which allows the world to be created out of himself but also different from himself. Schelling cites the Ancients who thought of the first cause of the world as a “primordial matter” that was “distinct from the elements and elevated above it,” as a “fifth essentiality” (*outside* fire, water, air, earth). His act of creation is free in that it is not bound to his creatures, nor justified by them

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<sup>33</sup> The (abyssal or ungrounding) origin of the world is “an extremity, below which there is nothing, but it is for us not something ultimate, but something primary, out of which all things begin, an eternal beginning, not a mere febleness or lack in the being, but active negation” (*Ages* 32).

(their evil or “malformed life” do not define his purpose or his ability) although, as creator, he is knowable only through his creation of them (*Ages 5*).

It follows from this that what God does not choose in choosing himself, does not disappear outside of him (in keeping with the strict sense in which God is an all-encompassing unity). God leads these images of initial clairvoyance back to the hollow of the world, to a sort of *world unconscious* before the creation of the world, where they will lie like not fully dissolved images: unassimilated, not-nothing although not *yet* “brought into visible, corporeal, form, [which] is the final intention” (*Ages 93*). Schelling’s use of the term “unconscious” turns up in various places in *the Ages of the World*. It is certainly psychoanalytically inflected and used here to describe what is in effect, the primal scene of philosophy or, as Tilottama Rajan argues, a psychoanalysis of Spirit (or history)<sup>34</sup>. In this psychoanalysis of Spirit’s project of knowledge or enlightenment, the unconscious becomes the means of explaining the *self-actualization* of ideas; its *excluded region of non-being in being* preserves the contradictory existence of these images of thought, which must exist in order *to be actualized* but have no being since they are yet to be actualized.

So, Schelling speaks in terms of an idea’s self-awakening: “For already in its first awakening it is deeply stirred by the dark intimation that its actual model is in the world of spirits” (*Ages 59*). The regions of dark intimation, that is, forgetting, disappearance and the unconscious are all pre-supposed within the history in which Spirit recognizes itself. There is “no actuality” without “profound discontent” (*Ages 89*). Spirit’s

<sup>34</sup> Rajan, Tilottama “The Abyss of the Past: Psychoanalysis in Schelling’s *Ages of the World* (1815)” *Romantic Circles* Ed. Orrin N.C. Wang 2008 Paragraph 2; See also Krell David Farrell’s essay on Schelling in *The Tragic Absolute* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2005.

incitement to knowledge must come out of its “dark intimation” of itself as something that does not have being. Put differently, Spirit is only a being of knowledge in first being a being of desire or yearning, that is to say, a being constituted through its own lack (“Positing oneself as that which does not have being and wanting oneself are therefore one and the same” [Ages 16]).

Therefore, the unification of Being is staged as the relationship that being makes possible with its own lack, as the transfer that takes place between the higher and lower potencies (the chiasmic resemblance in which what is higher in the lower potency rejoins what is lower in the higher potency). But what Schelling calls higher and lower potencies are, as Rajan points out, structural positions (Rajan 2008, 21): “[B]oth potencies... want to be in a single point because both make the same claim to be that which has being” (Ages 32). Having *being* can apply equally to either potency but it cannot apply to both *at the same time*. Schelling gives the example of a person who is capable of both good and evil qualities but cannot embody them both at the same time (Ages 15). At one time, she is good (A) and at another time she is evil (B). The good (A), however, is not the *sublimation* of evil such that we may say of a person that she has always been singularly and uniformly good; evil is unknown to her or her qualities, which are outside of evil. The appearance of goodness (A) only has meaning in the *suppression* of evil (B), that is to say, in the “holding down” of the negative being in oneself so that this negative being (evil in this case) “does not... come into outwardly effect” (Ages 9). Nothing prevents a person from assuming either (good or bad) qualities since both “exclude each other *with*

*respect to time*” (Ages 76; my italics). Qualitative differences are differences of time and thus, differences of appearance.

Schelling expresses the unification of the Whole (whole of Being, whole of the universe) in the following equation: “The whole therefore stands as A that from the outside is B and hence, the whole  $= (A=B)$ ” (15). We now find out that A and B are in fact objective and subjective sides of each other: good and evil are antithetical but this opposition is itself only meaningful where the *ground* for comparison is presupposed. Such a ground is not positive. It exists behind the world of appearances but determines it *as an effect*. In advance of the being of things, we appeal to this first ground as a precondition that will determine how the temporal world will appear (to us) and the identities and differences that things will take on within it. This first ground exists only as a transferential feature of the relationship between things (Rajan 2008, 2). It is not posited prior to the comparison of A and B and yet it pre-exists it as the pre-condition that must be pre-supposed for *reason* to bring A and B together—whether this is for the sake of contradiction or unity. As in Proust, reason cannot be applied immediately to the object of perception. It is always already outside and belated to this ideal ground of unity, which is absolutely lost and as such, exists in every gesture of thought as the forgotten or suppressed first ground of reason.

For this reason, Schelling claims that “[u]tter unity” is known only to God alone. God sees an unfolding idea which he keeps in view from its first conception to its finish. In (divine) retrospect, an idea first appears “in a state of interiority,” “enraptured in blessed vision,” a “formless” “clairvoyance” which “struggles” to determine itself “as if

in grave dreams” (*Ages*, 101). For Schelling, God’s memory is this involution of the world to its ground zero. It is an essentially destructive vision of the world whose power lies in the ability to command the appearance and disappearance of the world. But isn’t this after all the capacity to remain after the annihilation of the world, after which nothing else exists but the identity of God for himself? We know that this absolute past of the world behind the creation of the world is the place of sameness because according to Schelling, “there is no time here because everything is in the process of this same indivisible act” (*Ages* 44). It is before the birth of time, difference, division and thus, before being that comes out of itself. And this sameness would be tyrannical (and eternally so) were it not for the mediation of memory. That is to say: what redeems the past, what gives it meaning or expression comes from the perspective of the future, from being’s ability to posit its object as past which is conversely to recollect it from the perspective of freedom or having already emerged from or against its own tyrannical past. Therefore, God’s utter unity—his complete knowledge—consists in a counterprojection of the past, in a future retrospection of the past:

There is no dawning of consciousness (and precisely for this reason no consciousness) without positing something past. There is no consciousness without something that is at the same time *excluded* and contracted. That which is conscious excludes that of which it is conscious as not itself. *Yet it must again attract it precisely as that of which it is conscious as itself, only in a different form.* That which in consciousness is simultaneously the excluded and the attracted can only be the unconscious (*Ages* 44 my italics)

But is this a scene of recognition, that is, of consciousness (or Spirit) recognizing itself in its own past? In other words, what is the self-relation of consciousness to its past in such a way that consciousness is not the sublimation of the

past? Schelling is clear that “Nature is not God” (*Ages* 31). God (or Spirit) does not, strictly speaking, find himself in looking at Nature<sup>35</sup>. He sees in Nature the necessity of his past—something which He has to contract or exclude—a veritable “*abyss of the past*” which Schelling defines as “the deepest of what *remains* if everything accidental and everything become has been removed” (*Ages* 31 my italics). A past which is absolute because it is *the* remainder behind the world of presence after all else is said, done and destroyed, remains *unconditioned* and *undialecticizable*. But at the same time that the past is excluded, Schelling also speaks of its attraction or *inclusion*. Consciousness excludes the past yet it must again envelope its exclusion in (consciousness); it is *conscious* of the past as not itself. Or to be more precise, consciousness recognizes the past in itself but it has already taken on a form that is different to consciousness, to presence, to being. As Derrida observes, interiority is not so easily the place of sameness but one of heterogeneity which is capable of “a *double exclusion* that cancels its object by incorporating within the psychic space and thus marking out a place of exclusion or otherness within the ego” (*Gift* 101).

Therefore, it would be a mistake to suppose that the past is like some unmoving heaven or without any relation to the present. In his periodization of epochal development, Schelling suggests that the progression of history must always involve its regression:

When one potency is compared with another potency, the proceeding potency appears lower than the preceding potency, because the preceding potency necessarily appears as a higher potency in its time than the proceeding potency

<sup>35</sup> As Rajan argues, Spirit does not see itself in nature, but a retreat of its origin, or a past that is its ungrounding. This turns the project of spirit’s self-understanding into a psychoanalysis *avant la lettre* Class Lecture 2009.



does in its time. But when one time is compared with another time and one epoch compared with another epoch, the preceding one appears decisively higher (*Ages* 84).

But this is also because the remainder of the past is only the beginning of a new future. This is the structure of regression that renders every new epoch a throwback, curving back to a beginning, a ground-zero of creation. There is no evolution without involution (*Ages* 107). Each progressive step into a new epoch conceals an invisible or internal revolution; the procession of the potency manifests itself as a continuity of events and time, which does not reveal the debt to a terrible past, a cision, a revolution, in history that must first occur to separate one epoch from another. Every new beginning marks a return, a circle, which is not one that traces the completion of history (and/or knowledge) but one that returns it to the state of original non-being behind being. For Schelling, the circle, the rotary motion, involution, revolution and so on, do more than reveal the connection between the first and last things. Or more precisely, they do not discover the identity of first and last things via a closed system. In Schelling's quotation of the proverbs it is a circle that circumscribes *depth*, and Schelling refers in particular to the depth of interiority, an individual abyss that runs concurrently as well as countercurrently to the progressive schema of history. At the end of history, an abyss opens which draws being to the depth of its past, to non-being that exists behind being. This is how the future recedes into the past.

### 3.3 I KEEP MY VISIONS TO MYSELF

The highest viewpoint is a vision of time. Schelling writes in *The Ages of the World* that “true eternity does not exclude all time but rather contains time, eternal time *subjugated* within itself” (*Ages* 43 my italics). While a finite perspective sees only discontinuity and difference in time, God’s viewpoint suppresses difference in order to envision the resemblance between the first and the last things: He sees all times as non-identical but not discontinuous. Hence, in this vision of time, being is *becoming*. Whether it is a projection of the future or a recollection of the past, being’s existence is irreducible as a potentiality of the future but also the potentiality for what was forgotten but unassimilated or undissolved in the past to once again become present and future.

Schelling describes this suppression of difference in terms of *internalizing difference*<sup>36</sup>: since God himself is eternal and consistent, he can only be the source of difference from the position of having overcome it, that is to say, by envisioning it as an image of his past. Hence, in *The Ages of the World*, the suppression of difference is always accompanied by an involution, which leads things back to their beginning behind positive being, to a past which represents the deepest interior within being itself. History, according to the highest viewpoint is a “swirling movement” of cycles, alternations, involutions etc (*Ages* 35). Suppression and involution imply that the vision of absolute

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<sup>36</sup> “These monuments of nature, for the most part, lie there in the open, and are explored in manifold ways and are, in part actually deciphered. Yet they do not speak to us but remain dead unless this succession of actions and productions has become *internal* to human beings. Hence, everything remains incomprehensible to human beings until it has become *internal* to them, that is, until it has been led back to that which is innermost in their being and to that which to them is, so to speak, the living witness of all truth” (*Ages* xxxvii my italics)

knowledge—so-called total vision—is constituted in and through difference; it is always a turning in on its own non-being:

For as that universal soul is pulled towards the lower, it is pulled away in the same proportion from the most supremely high with which it was until then utterly One (its immediate, external subject). But it is precisely through this drawing and withdrawing that the universal soul first becomes to the spirit of eternity the reproach or counterprojection (the object) in which the spirit can behold everything. *Since the spiritual figures ascend in the universal soul as images or visions, the spirit of eternity must also behold them in the universal soul as in a mirror, where, so to speak, the most concealed thought of the spirit's own subject becomes manifest to it.*

The visions of these innermost thoughts of God are hence, the visions of the future spirits that are determined...for creation...But everything passed before the eye of the eternal only as a glimpse or a vision. ...For this life, which in itself is only a dream and a shadow, still lacked divine reinforcement (Ages 66; my italics)

At the moment of spirit's highest freedom, in pulling away from its universal soul, spirit beholds its most concealed thoughts. The externalization of spirit (whence it "emerges out of itself" in the form of the universal soul [Ages 74]), allows spirit to see itself objectively. The objectivity of spirit arises at the same time that it is able to see, to distance and differentiate itself from what was once immediate, and indeed identical to it. Schelling says that spirit's "essential unity" is the place where "freedom, the intellect, and differentiation dwell" (Ages 102). Freedom and the objectivity of spirit do not come about without self-difference through which the subject also becomes opaque to herself. She becomes her own subject and object in the process of endless self-reflection, as if caught up in mirroring resemblances that do not achieve self identity but reflect an image that retreats each time further from herself. Hence, to acquire knowledge in freedom is no longer a matter of being able to shine an objective light upon an subjective region, to illuminate, dispel or sublimate what is dark or unknown within the subject herself. This is

why Schelling says that the intellect is never of itself the objective end of spirit's endeavors, but an "*intermediary* between the utter night of consciousness and levelheaded spirit" (*Ages* 102; my italics). Intelligence has no objective presentation; when the dialectic has become only form, it is empty semblance and shadow (*Ages* xxxvii). It exists as and in the intermediation between two opposites: it transforms being into non-being, intelligence produces ideas which have no objective existence, it is purely processual and thus reveals itself negatively.

In a comparable way, yearning, which is a relation to freedom, is also without an objective presentation. God *obsesses* about his primal condition, i.e. the necessity that restricts the overtures of his enterprise. But Schelling differentiates this from "yearning", which is what God does in freedom or striving towards the state of no conation [*das Nichtwollen*]: to attain to the will that wills nothing, or to aspire to the Godhead which is "not divine nature or substance, but the devouring ferocity of purity" (*Ages* 25). Because his will has no object, God does not yearn for the thing that he envisions to happen, nor for material things or the materialization of things. Instead, in yearning for nothing, God yearns for the dematerialization of things and what remains is his yearning for himself or his own freedom. Like a fire, he consumes, devours or turns them into nothing which he draws from to constitute the health of his whole his project of self-understanding<sup>37</sup>. In God's vision, things appear "utterly One" with him such that his yearning for the future,

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<sup>37</sup> "But what happens with the digestion and appropriation of food, when from out of the most diverse substances the same thing is always caused in the whole and when each part always draws precisely what is suitable to it" (*Ages* 63). C.f. *The Philosophy of Mythology*: "The indignation and the wrath with which the rapacious animal lacerates even a weak and utterly inoffensive creature, is the wrath at its own death, the principle which it feels in ruin, the final flaring up of its fury" (*Ages* p102 Karl Schelling's appended notes).

or for the actualization of these images of creation, is at the same time a yearning for himself. God is *pure actus* in that his self-wanting, lack, desire or yearning is *already* the becoming of an actualization (*Ages* 26).

Therefore, freedom, intelligence and differentiation—which for Schelling give rise to the essential unity of a subject—occasion the “apportioning” of interior spaces within the subject (*Gift* 9). Schelling reserves the dialogical structure of the self from Plato: being is “intelligible to itself through the Other” through whom it “presents” or “contemplates” itself (*Ages* xxxvi). The knowledge of the past is itself posed in terms of this dialectic: “Hence there is in the person that which must again be brought back to memory, and an Other that brings it to memory; one in which the answer to every research question lies and the Other that brings the answer out of it” (*Ages* xxxvi). But Schelling departs from Plato in his emphasis on the contradiction at the root of the dialogue of friendship, agreement and philosophy. Every instance of agreement between self and other presupposes an inner cision, a subject who comes to knowledge out of his first condition of not-knowing. Our agreement with other people on the one hand is (un)grounded by our ability to disagree with ourselves, on the other hand. In Schelling’s *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, he gives a speculative account of the actants that constitute the world. Among themselves, the actants “mutually derange each other in their productions, and none is allowed by the others to achieve the production of the originary figure i.e., they reduce themselves reciprocally to formlessness” (*First Outline* 26-27). The totality of the world is more than the agreement of its parts. In any case, being with others is troubled by a prevailing antagonism which

places a limit on the productivity of the individual and the whole. The universe is not to be found in any one finished product nor even in the sum total of finished products. It is not deducible from the world of positive appearance. If the striving for unity is what reduces the actants into formlessness, it is only so that another cycle of composability among the actants may once again begin. The products of the world are finished and closed, but what conditions this productivity is eternally open—a cyclical system that, as sure as night and day, drives the world towards and against formlessness. But since we are only given to know the “collective expression” of the forces of the universe, and since it is only as an “external effect” of itself that the universe appears to us (as world), the universe remains hidden behind its appearance (*First Outline* 51). In the same way, Schelling recasts the cision, “this doubling of ourselves,” behind the dialectics of “a questioning and answering being”; an “inner dialogue,” “a secret circulation” and “the authentic mystery of the philosopher” behind the official history of philosophy (*Ages* xxxvi).

God’s innermost thoughts acquire objectivity; they manifest, but in their most concealed form. I follow Derrida’s use of the word ‘secrecy’ “whose sense points towards a separation (*se-cernere*) and more generally towards *objective representation* that the conscious subject keeps within itself: what it knows, what it knows how to represent, even though it cannot or will not declare or avow that representation”<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> That said, Derrida specifically uses the term alongside the idea of the gift and responsibility (of being), whose meanings are in Schelling, though not immediately available. I cannot treat this in full except to say that Schelling raises the question of ethics frequently. First as something that blind nature cannot have, and whose judgment is problematic owing to “the wheel of the cosmos” that renders the frequent if not structural alternation between good and evil. Further, what it means to be subjugated to a higher force of freedom is steeped with the language of morality, though it is more precise that because what is “evil” is in relation to good, it must in some way, be a becoming of the essence of goodness. (*Gift* 20)

Derrida's term is helpful for understanding the contradictory nature in which God's most concealed thoughts becomes objective but not object, representable to Himself but not representable to others. This is the form of God's inner dialogue with himself, the question and answer that he freely poses to himself, which he does not reveal to others. Hence, his secrecy makes him the source of difference through which he is different in relation to himself and to others. He sees everything and is the foundation of all seeing in so far as the world may be understood through his purpose. And yet, he is not seen and is an exception to the rule for which He is all-seeing. Absolute freedom coincides with the choice to exempt oneself from the ground of one's own positing. It is the capacity to not-be one's condition, which may be posed in Schellingian terms as the capacity to be the contradiction of one's condition. That is: to be in a region of non-being behind positive being. Hence, the cision and partitioning of interiority are the folds into which positive being disappears in its freedom to *be* outside one's condition while remaining within one's being.

For example, while God's secret intentions may acquire their objective expression in acts of evil, in acts that appear to be outside moral rules, it is through his eternal vision that these acts contradict themselves (or their external form) and "enter into [their] own nature" as acts of freedom (*Ages* 48). However, God's freedom does not make evil disappear; freedom does not reduce evil to nothing, to an accident or lapse in the good. Evil takes place *in* freedom, or put differently, freedom—even it negates evil, gives evil (negative) being in relation to itself. Evil is the involution of freedom. God holds down or suppresses evil so that it does not come to outwardly effect. But in internalizing his past

he is able to behold it, to keep it in his vision, and to relate evil to freedom such that evil is not-nothing. *Through God*, the past and the future share the same essence. The making good of the past therefore takes place through the remembrance of the past which can only reveal the inner relationship—essence— between past and future as it pares away external difference.

God is only as not having being, in the state of involution (*implicite, in statu involutionis*), which is a transport (intermediary) of real revelation (*Ages 86-7*).

God exists but only in a “state of involution” (*Ages 87*). He makes his innermost essence implicit and buries it in his deep past. But God’s subterfuges are “intermediary,” turning points around which non-being is transformed into “real revelation”. His relationship to his innermost essence is circuitous. His acts do not end in negation or affirmation. Purely spiritual (“the spirit of all spirit” [*Ages 25*]), his concerns are limits, and the ability (as opposed to objects whose limits are external or heteronomous) to push them back into his inner essence. As internal limits, they are always behind him, and refer to his infinite ability to retain but also turn against them. He envelopes his non-being, ensouls it so that it may be (to recall Schelling’s earlier formulation) “retained by the negating force as if by a receptacle” (*Ages 58* my italics). Therefore, his intermediation consists of transportation. It employs all the figures of concealment and revelation: the envelope, vessel, containment, receptacle, crypt etc. But more generally, these figures describe the transfer between non-being and being; they conceal essence in order to transport non-being on the way to revelation.



God's subterfuges ultimately concern the difference between appearance and essence. He conceals his innermost essence, retains it in a receptacle and sends it off for future revelation because objects do not appear as essence. Essence, to use Deleuze's meaning of *envelopment*, is first implicated so that it may be explicated at a later time. The revelation of an object is withheld in spite of its self-presence. Therefore, the structure of the secrecy, the various turns and maneuvers that are required to retain and conceal (to retain what one has relegated to the status of non-being) also determines the object according to the time of appearance and revelation. Hence, the revelation of an object which is projected as an event of the future must nevertheless be explicated in terms of recollection and involution. This disorderliness of time is nevertheless Schelling's attempt to describe a structure of trauma which, because it is invested in the language of revelation, also hints at the possibility of divination. Prophecy is perhaps nothing else but this ability to read the essence of being in the malformed shapes that appear upon the scene of history. When we characterize prophetic events as those that do not belong to their own time, we perhaps come close to Schelling's structure of revelation, according to which the meaning of an event can only be retrospectively appreciated by the future.

Secrets are also the undialecticizable remainder of words and things, leftover objects that do not all acquire objectivity. God created the world in secrecy, which is why Schelling says that God is not found in the anger in which he created the world, but in "a soft murmur," a "soft wafting" that is neither nothing nor the hardness of some 'thing'. If anything at all, it is the last indecomposable thing before the dissolution into nothingness

(*Ages* 83). It is a limit internalized so that the nothingness of the world may turn in on itself and God is left with something to ponder, a secret which he represents to himself. These wordless secrets are nevertheless the last things that we return to. But for this reason, they surreptitiously condition the shape of things to come, and in this respect, they are also the first things. Our procession out of the past is only apparent, as Schelling admits, “[e]ach new life commences a new time existing for it that is immediately knotted to eternity” (*Ages* 67). The future curves back to the past. It goes out to seek what it determines as unknown. But in doing so, the future only discovers what has been hidden of its past. The revelation of the future is memorial in structure. Schelling’s progression of potencies wants to give an account of Spirit’s history as an adventure to freedom but it is a convoluted history that turns up. Hence, it finds its lurid figure in an archaic and pre-objectal God, an “eternal embryo,” or a confusion of times in which the past has been surpassed although it has not, in essence, come to pass (*Ages* 86)<sup>39</sup>.

Its account is one cast in a natural history whose cyclical pattern is that of degeneracy, regression, involution to a past that cycles back on “its own time” behind the time of man and his history (*Ages* 99). “The history of secrecy” as Derrida observes, “has the spiral form of these turns [tours], intricacies [tournures], versions, turning back, bends [virages], and conversions. One could compare it to a history of revolutions, even to history as revolution” (*Gift* 8).

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<sup>39</sup> C.f. Kristeva, *Julia Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* Trans. Leon Roudiez Columbia University Press 1982. Kristeva defines abjection as that which “preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be” (10). Schelling himself employs the word “abject” in *The Ages of the World* in what Rajan suggests as a reference to the horrors of the French Revolution (*Ages* 48, *Rajan Class Lectures* 2009).

### 3.4 TETRAGRAMMATON

Being does not appear without concealing what was first inarticulable about itself. Schelling points out that when God appeared to Moses, he concealed *his self* in the name expressed in the tetragrammaton [YHWH]. The name which God identifies as “*Jehovah*, the Elohim of your fathers... That is my name for eternity,” designates the Elohim as the receiver behind the name “*Jehovah*” [YHWH] (*Ages* 51-2). God expresses himself through this cision of the Elohim, a doubling of the subject into its objective form, that is to say, an expression which is also at the same time a dissimulation or concealment of ‘what’ the name sought to represent. ‘*Jehovah*’ is the divine name encrypted in the inscrutable fourfold tetragrammaton, like a fifth essentiality behind the elements of language. And hence, it is like the divine name that is dispersed all throughout and runs undercurrent to the text. Of the fifth essentiality, the element distinct from all the elements and elevated from it, the Ancients say that it is also the first principle, primordial matter (or mother) out of which all the other elements becomes possible (*Ages* 34). In the *Timaeus*, the elements of the world (“*stoikheia*”) are compared to the elements of language, that is, to the letters of the alphabets (*Timaeus* 48B).

Schelling evokes the tetragrammaton as the production of “two concurrent languages” that speaks to the dualism of an unknowable God who now appears (as the ground of knowledge) and disappears (as the ungrounding of knowledge) behind his name<sup>40</sup>. In this way, he anticipates the structure of concealment and revelation that would

<sup>40</sup> As Clark points out, Derrida’s point is really more complex. And the phrase itself is originally used to characterize the heterogeneity of the *khora* as a figure of anteriority. Therefore, it is not an uniform primordial mother giving birth to the same, but to *difference*, to something internally divided between what can and cannot be avowed of itself. These two concurrent languages or grounds speak to the two senses of God’s *beyond-being*. Understood in one sense, this is an exorbitant beyond-being. In another sense, it is a

later motivate post-structuralism's fascination with the anagram. For poststructuralists such as Paul de Man and Jean Baudrillard, the possibility of endlessly re-ordering the meaning of the alphabets in an anagram becomes a key example of the ability of language to withdraw meaning just as it affirms its positive function to disclose it. In fact, poststructuralism's insight is all the more interesting for being encrypted in the history of its predecessor, that is to say, structuralism itself. Saussure's discovery of the anagram finally becomes a disavowed or "forgotten" moment in structuralism's history, which *post-structuralism*—coming out of and after structuralism—will take up and indeed, retrospectively see its own condition of possibility wrapped up in this disavowal.

Baudrillard, for instance, poses Saussure's "fundamental discovery" as a kind of a missed encounter with its own "revolutionary" insights ("The principle of poetic functioning proclaimed by Saussure does not claim to be revolutionary...He himself draws no radical or critical consequences from it, he does not care for a moment to generalize it on a speculative level...It is perhaps only today, at the turn of a century of uninterrupted development in linguistic science, that *we* can draw out the consequences of the hypothesis that Saussure abandoned, and investigate to what extent it lays the advance *foundations for a decentring of all linguistics*" [*Symbolic* 195; my italics]). For Baudrillard, the significance of Saussure's discovery is on the order of a "revolution" because it is fundamentally antithetical or antagonistic to the great linguistic system of sign-signification—which is, of course, the overarching context in which Saussure's discovery takes place.

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being-beyond, which is a recuperation of an onto-theological figure. (*How to Avoid Speaking* 104, 105, cited in Clark 1995, 94-5).

In his *Cahiers d'anagrammes*, Saussure tells of his encounter with some Latin verses *in* which he reads or makes out words and names that he initially thinks are the meaningful constituents of language. But at the same time that these word *stands out* (*ek-sist*) of the language in which they are inscribed (the Latin verses)—such that they may become intelligible—they become less and less the language that they seemed to belong to at first. Instead, they demonstrate the possibility of making-meaning outside of the structure of language (*logos*). As David Clark points out, this difference between language and its sign raises the possibility of a 'language' pre-existing or outside of signification (Clark *Intersections* 106). Saussure arrives at an irreducible difference between language and its signifying elements (the alphabets themselves) only to endanger his linguistic science, which is, after all, a structure of representation through signs. The building blocks of language are “alogical atoms of *logos*” and language and representation could well be swallowed up into its elemental condition, a veritable abyss of language (Krell *Memory* 169).

Schelling's description of God's epic struggle for his self-definition to emerge out of his past is comparable to the primal anagram: “something figural comes to be out of the non-figural” (*Ages* 38). In *The Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling compares the “bond” between consonants and vowels that is constitutive of a word, to the opposition between light and darkness. As Socrates argues in several dialogues (*Theatetus* 202-a-203e, *the Cratylus* 424c, and *the Sophist* 253a-d), consonants (which literally means “without sound”) need vowels (“*its own sound*”) to be heard<sup>41</sup>. Therefore the sensuousness of

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<sup>41</sup> Jason Wirth's notes in *the Ages of the World* (*Ages* 142)

words, our ability to hear or sound them (perhaps in a way that distinguishes them from mere inhuman noise, as David Clark suggests [*Intersections* 102]), arise from the dialectical interplay between consonants and this counter-vowel; an internal limit inscribed within language that encrypts its own unspeakability as the possibility of speech<sup>42</sup>. If matter is itself non-simple (as Schelling claims in the *First Outline*), the same can be said of language which is irreducible to its material inscription, and whose disseminated letters are anagrammatic in being (what Schelling is referring to binding and unbinding forces of actants that make up matter calls in the *First Outline*) “indecomposable”<sup>43</sup> which is: the limit of decomposability after which each signifying unit “is only composable,” for being no longer decomposable (*First Outline* 31). However, like the anagram, their compossibility does not reconstitute a master-sign. The compossibility of a word out of an anagram is the unpredictable and unsuspectable result of liberating meaning from semantic organization, a breaking up of language as code, or even the production of volatile forces that are unleashed in new affinities. This destruction of language takes place as a sacrifice of its own finitude (that is: its fixity, its law of equivalence which is also the law of non-contradiction, its capacity to accumulate the value of abstract meaning like the residue of “dead language”), for the production of poetic language (*Symbolic* 202).

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<sup>42</sup> Derrida says in another context: “It is the consonant that gives the possibility of a linguistic pertinence to sound, by inscribing within it an opposition” (*Intersection* 105)

<sup>43</sup> Words are not non-decomposable entities held together by their meaning, but assemblages of signifying, phonemic and scriptural atoms leaping from word to word, thus creating unsuspected and unconscious relations between the elements of the discourse” (cited in *Symbolic* 218, Kristeva 1969 p185).

The “joy” or “passion” of poetic language derives from its ability to conceal its own meaning even as it materializes itself into an arrangement that constitutes a recognizable or “proper” word. This is the ana-grammatical structure—the two analogical grounds—of poetic language that makes it “other” to the language of signification or utility and moreover, *other to itself*. That is to say, poetic language contains its own ruse or element of uncertainty, which it places side by side with its positive or conventional meaning—as the *anti-text* into which objective meaning disappears. In this sense, the poetic exemplifies the capacity for language to overturn its code and to deconstruct its own meaning. Baudrillard argues that “[t]he poetic is the *insurrection* of language against its own laws” (*Symbolic* 198). Baudrillard continues to employ similar adjectives that describe the “revolutionary” potential in poetic creation (for example, it “*eliminates* its object,” it “*destroys*” the value of what it produces as meaning; it “*annihilates*” or “*volatilizes*” etc. [*Symbolic* 204]). He speaks, therefore, of a negativity that is unleashed in creation and thus, demonstrates the freedom to create occurring alongside the breaking up of language into signifying atoms.

The anagrammatical breaking up of language does not simply devolve into meaninglessness. Instead, it seeks the productivity of meaning behind the presentation of the word and its simplest element, the sign. It does not recuperate a master-sign but turns its (the master-sign’s) absence against itself, into a game of sign-making which is endlessly composable for being, after all, decomposable (or in the word that Schelling employs in the *First Outline* “indecomposable”). The anagram is a game played against the restrictions of the alphabets and yet it is nothing without this set of alphabets.

Language “is and is not what it is” in its presentation as words (*Symbolic* 219). The happy part that language plays in the sheltering of a secret cannot be ascribed to simple duplicity. Schelling provides us with a parallel example in God who reflects upon his terrible secret of the past from the perspective of *freedom*. What is “most manifest and most concealed” alone grants to “all things the full charm, gleam and glint of life” (*Ages* 61). What makes being shine with the glint of life is both its ability to appear and disappear, to be and not be what it is.

The structure of secrecy is not restricted to these arcane circumstances. It implicates the limits of knowledge and hence, its organization. Plato’s topology which divides knowledge into the spaces of high and low, cave and firmament, is case in point. In Derrida’s reading of this topology, the movement of ascendance into the light of intelligible Forms takes place at the expense or burial of the maternal cave. One does not move *up* into the open space of intelligibility without simultaneously tracing a depth, in which the past is buried and stored (*Gift* 8-9). So, despite the emphasis that Plato gives it, Western civilization does not simply begin with the benign gaze towards the sun (which is also the inceptionary moment of geometrical or mathematical knowledge) but owes its inauguration to a suppression of its anterior possibility (in the form of the *khora*, maternal cavern, “earth mother” etc. [*Gift* 8])). This structure of suppression engenders what Derrida calls “topique différentielle” (differential topology), that is to say, a *différance* and differentiation that must be in operation for us to perceive space and spatiality. It is the *khora* as a figure of heterogeneity and difference which makes “space and spatiality” possible as the condition presupposed in geometrical topology (Plotnitsky 172).



Platonic “ana—basis” is the inception of analogical bases, (again) two grounds that are, in fact, created out of one movement upwards. On the one hand, then, a turning towards the sun is simultaneous to and at the expense of turning away from the maternal cavern—the place of philosophy’s pre-history. On the other hand, a narrative announces the beginning of western civilization as it denounces the encrypted maternal body. Hence, the anabasis does not merely describe the continuous passage from one form of knowledge (pre-philosophical “orgiastic knowledge”) into another (Platonic philosophy, the philosophy of “goodness” which arrives on the scene to discipline *daimonic* knowledge). Instead, it describes a history in which knowledge undergoes a series of conversions or a history wherein the disciplines of knowledge themselves emerge out of the suppression, incorporation and turning in on what claims to have proceeded out of, left behind or given up. (*Gift* 7-8).

This topological hierarchy will continue to organize knowledge into spaces of rationality and irrationality: good, pure knowledge versus the demonic, orgiastic, interpenetrating disciplines of pre-philosophy up until Kant, who will inverse the hierarchy while retaining its structure for the German university.

In *The Conflict of Faculties*, Kant’s classical university organized the manifold fields of knowledge into two broad faculties, the higher and lower faculties representing empirical and speculative knowledge, both playing out the contradiction and ultimately, for Kant, harmony between freedom and necessity etc. To the higher faculty (medicine, law and theology), it gave the part of discovering truths that were of utilitarian interest to the state and its public; these represented state reason. To the lower faculty (philosophy)

it gave the part of being inspired by freedom to speak of universal truths (truths concerning everyone), even as it freely allowed itself to be subjected to the state. Philosophy is withdrawn from the positive sciences and pushed back into the vault of the lower faculty, where it plays the “negative” role of critique. As critique, philosophy has no content of its own; it borrows it from the positive sciences and “takes place” only through it. As such, it is determined by the positive sciences and the topological hierarchy suggests that it is restricted and inhibited by it. However, in allowing itself to be delimited to an inaccessible, lower and secret place, philosophy nevertheless achieves a ‘higher’ freedom than the positive sciences. Hence, it is authorized with “panoptical ubiquity” to oversee, regulate and even legislate the empirical disciplines of the higher faculty (Derrida *Eyes* 55). Philosophy does not produce positive knowledge; it occupies only a “vacant chair” (*Eyes* 62). This is the contradiction of its panoptic power, its ability to oversee all the regions of knowledge without itself being seen or as Schelling will say, without having or not-having to be one of the positive sciences. Derrida observes that Kant for this reason further points out that philosophy cannot be taught or learned in the manner of factual truths. And yet, what lies behind positive knowledge is not the unknown *per se*. The philosopher is there behind knowledge as its legislator, that is to say, as that which posits the law of reason as the final mainstay against non-reason.

But in *On University Studies*, Schelling draws attention to a contradiction in Kant: A universal truth must apply to each and all. It is everywhere absolutely and hence, it is nowhere in particular (*University*, 79). Kant restricts the negativity of philosophy to a structural organization, within the lower faculty of the institution. For Schelling, the

notion of a “lower place” is not confined to the university, but expands itself to a limit that is hidden and encrypted within the structure of knowledge itself.

## CONCLUSION

“Forgetting is the sun: memory gleams through reflection, reflecting forgetting and drawing from this reflection the light—amazement and clarity—of forgetting”

(Blanchot “Forgetful” 315)

Memory takes place in forgetting. Blanchot suggests that memory is perhaps nothing more than what the void of forgetting itself *gives*, that is to say, what forgetting passes on to memory which allows memory to come into itself.<sup>44</sup> At issue is: what happens next, what kind of rapport does memory have with the past that it has forgotten? Does forgetting simply disappear in delivering the goods over to memory?

In the preceding chapters on Proust and Schelling, I have presented a dialectical account of the relationship between memory and forgetting. I have highlighted certain passages in Proust where their inextricability (memory and forgetting) may be productively read to problematize the epistemological relationship between subject and world, perception and representation. The world of appearances does not give itself *immediately* to us to know or represent. For this reason, the truths that we go in search of in *la recherche* arrive to us only when it has past its time (it is past-being) and we are already indifferent to them. The sense of loss is indeed expansive *but* it is a precondition—the source and sun—of all the searches of memory and truth in *la recherche*.

I have wanted to show forgetting at work in the very beginning of perception and I find evidences of this in Proust’s figure of the *impressions* which, according to him, are

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<sup>44</sup> This exorbitant sense of the gift or giving beyond oneself and which exceeds what the receiver can pay—giving which is as absolute as the sun—is available in Derrida. See, for example, Derrida, Jacques *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money (Vol.1)* trans. Peggy Kamuf London: University of Chicago Press 1992

the “traces” of the world left behind in us. They enter us through the senses as material qualities but it is as “hieroglyphic signs” or “unknown symbols” that they turn up, “imprinted,” *in us*. I would like to observe a few merits in this demonstration. First, these impressions that incite us to search for the unknown truth that is interior in us, defines remembrance as a search for the unity of being which is in turn constituted by the unity of language, intelligence and sensation. If Proust’s nostalgic searching can be attributed to anything at all, it is for this unity of being, where appearance is, at long last, re-untied with essence. This is to say, when one is able to write and re-experience, or re-experience through writing, all the sensations that laid behind what was once only available to perception. Secondly, these traces of memory allows us to define memory as a remainder of being, a kind of behind-being which will help us formulate Schelling’s account of the past as the origin of origin (or precisely through this doubling, a retreat of origin).

*The Ages of the World* describes the history of Spirit as *both* evolutionary and involutory. If, as Schelling says, “the point of departure for the past [begins] in dark night,” then the procession of history is also always a looking back on Spirit’s beginning—what it conceals and suppresses in the moment that it comes into being out of its dark past (*Ages 3*). But if Spirit’s history is also the history of attaining to self-knowledge, the past—shrouded as it is—again becomes the locus of (non-)knowledge. The circle of universal knowledge that Spirit attempts to traverse and complete begins to reveal an abyss that belongs particularly to the individual being behind himself.

As with Proust, I have sought to recontextualize the problem of an unknowable

past in terms of representation. Schelling himself stresses the same in his critique of a philosophical heritage that has separated mind and matter as well as thinking and Being: “Being always stood in opposition to thinking as something impregnable, so that the Philosophy that would explain everything found nothing more difficult than to provide an explanation for precisely this Being” (*Ages 7*). Hence, for example, I read Schelling’s cision in being as the self-separation of being through which being becomes the subject who recollects herself as her own object. Spirit is able to reflect upon its unspeakable past in “holy awe” from the perspective of freedom (*Ages 67*). But Spirit’s freedom does not exclude its terrible past. *Absolute freedom* comes out of being able to subjugate or hold the negative past in relation to itself. In other words, it is the freedom to represent the past to itself without letting it come to outward expression. On the one hand, this simply means that one can carry out a representation which is known to oneself but not known or expressed publicly to others outside of oneself. However, we can also take this cryptic figure of the secret more seriously in its other sense: that non-knowledge (or the non-being of knowledge) itself is part of the freedom to *be* despite its state of interiority, or to the same, despite not having being in outward expression. Knowledge itself becomes capable of revelation and concealment, of opening a negative space into which it conceals itself even as it presents itself positively.

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