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Writing as Reading the Unreadable: A Reconsideration of the Medial Construction of Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu*

In Memory of Doris Grimm Horlacher (†) and Paul Jackson (†)

De la personne comme d'un tracé lumineux. Lumineux: elle n'est rien d'autre qu'une pensée qui se voit. De la personne comme d'une visualité. De l'écriture comme du mouvement de la lumière (...). Quelqu'un passe, geste insensé, lumineux dans de l'espace: vous voyez ou vous ne voyez pas.

Charles Grivel

The question of how far *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, Proust's enormous 'metaphor of life',¹ is, in terms of its writing as well as in terms of its themes, influenced by the emergence of new media technologies in the late nineteenth century has increasingly been the focus of critical interest for the last twenty years.² There is now little doubt that besides traditional media such as painting and music, *A la Recherche* foregrounds specific photographic and filmic techniques as well as, to give just one example, the telephone, which the narrator calls 'a premonition (...) of an eternal separation!' (IS III, 148/R II, 134). If one can argue that emergent media as thematicized in *A la Recherche* are not only the product of the narrator's creation of memory but that they also have a bearing on the text, then it is nevertheless important to take note of the fact that they are in their turn already the product of another medium called writing.

Prior to any analysis of the media as thematicized in *A la Recherche*, it seems appropriate to investigate the way in which *A la Recherche* itself functions as a medium in its own right, since the specific way in which it communicates takes place with and through linguistic signs and their inherent potentialities. Although there have been many studies of Proust's style, of his way of writing and of his use of metaphor, most of these have applied structuralist, rhetorical or other more or less traditional techniques. Deconstructive, psychoanalytic and semiotic readings of Proust have been acknowledged by critics, but are more often ignored or consigned to footnotes than used as a basis for further inquiry into *A la Recherche*,³ a text in which semiotic

distance operates in place of psychological proximity (W. Benjamin), in which distance is intended to facilitate communication and in which psychosocial factors are devalued and the role of mediation is revalued. 'Mediation', it should be clear, is understood here and throughout this article in the wider sense as including 'repurposing' and especially 'remediation' and 'mediatization' (Bolter and Grusin; Jameson (1991), 154–80, 67–96). *A la Recherche* is a text, moreover, in which it is crucial to address the question of how it functions as a medium, namely as a gigantic, ostentatious literary machine for automatic memory production (and repression). For Proust does not write from memory, what he does is to create, to write memory⁴ by means of introspection and to project an *espace imaginaire* — a gigantic 'communication model', which evolves only during the act of writing — on the yellowing screen of his 'paperoles'.

What comes first, is writing; what it produces, is memory: 'But it was a pen which (...) I had charged with electricity, and now a thousand trifling details of Combray (...) came lightly and spontaneously leaping, in follow-my-leader fashion, to suspend themselves from the magnetised nib in an interminable and trembling chain of memories' (*IS* VI, 240f./*R* III, 884). The question is to what extent writing — 'cette plume électrisée' — as a medium of communication, of linguistic mediation and as the prerequisite and embodiment of the outward projection of Proust's production of memory, is itself subject to certain rules which, in turn, affect the 'content' and the 'form' of what is being written. In a famous passage, Proust's narrator Marcel *seems* to thematize these rules himself when he states:

truth will be attained by him [the writer] only when he takes two different objects, states the connexion between them — a connexion analogous in the world of art to the unique connexion which in the world of science is provided by the law of causality — 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. (*IS* VI, 246/*R* III, 889)

If, as Proust states in 'A propos du "style" de Flaubert', 'la métaphore seule peut donner une sorte d'éternité au style'⁵ (only metaphor can grant style a kind of eternity (my translation)), if it is only metaphor that enables the narrator of *A la Recherche* to perceive the world, and if his direct gaze — just like *la littérature réaliste* — cannot discover more in the world of objects than 'merely a miserable abstract of lines and

surfaces' (*IS* VI, 241/*R* III, 885), then two further questions arise. The first question is, if we take Proust literally: is it not metaphor too, or, more exactly, its medial function, which enables him to produce his literary vision, his *mémoire*? The second question is: should we take Proust, or indeed the narrative discourse which constitutes *A la Recherche*, literally at all? After all, the narrative discourse, however theoretical its statements may be, is (a) not outside the realm of fiction and (b) subject to the rules which govern and produce writing.

One of the most important characteristics of metaphor⁶—arising from its central principle, namely the unusual combination of and the contradiction between its constituent elements—is its ability to transform the analogical relationship operating between its poles into an epistemological instrument for penetrating the unknown. In this sense, metaphor opens up reality, functions as a mode of perception and makes new aspects of reality visible and expressible. In doing so, the tension between its autonomous components prevents analogy from becoming identity, and opens up a field of creative interaction between its poles which heightens the process of signification. By simultaneously maintaining comparability and difference, the metaphor appears to give Proust a vision of the world—a vision of introspection—and to produce the new space for meaning in which *A la Recherche* as the production and *mise en scène* of memory can then be created. Metaphor, Proust's novel seems to suggest, should thus be regarded as (a) the medial model for the production of memory, (b) an unconventional organization of the world and (c) the dominant means by which this world is conveyed or expressed. What follows from this is that metaphor should be considered to be the formal structure which not only determines the level of the *énoncé* and that of the *énonciation* but at the same time functions as the *conditio sine qua non* of the complex artistic supersign constituted by *A la Recherche*.⁷

Memory/Theory: Signs and the Functioning of Metaphor

In *A la Recherche* signs not only belong to the four 'time categories' pointed out by Deleuze in *Proust et les signes*, they are also part of three series of doctrines woven into the text, namely the doctrines of 'the unrecognizability of the subject', 'the self-deception of desire' and 'the universality of mediation' (Schneider, 49–103). Proust's characters exist as signs in the medium of writing—and we could understand writing here in Derrida's sense of *archi-écriture*, which is to say in a medium of fixation (*arrêt*) and mortification, which requires

the transitory suspension of the process of dynamic development since only 'the complete emptying of the phenomenon, the sclerotic process of becoming a sign, the translation and transformation of plenitude into the obsession of writing' (Schneider, 60) allows transferability. This semiotic mechanism does not only determine the act of creation and writing itself, it finds its equivalent on the level of the *histoire*.

As *A la Recherche* demonstrates, *arrêt* and mortification are necessary for the protagonist Marcel in order to 'possess' another person, for example his beloved palimpsest-like Albertine (R III, 70ff.). But this fixation of (and upon) a living body – Marcel keeps her prisoner and watches her lose consciousness – parallels not only the process of becoming a sign, it also produces an empty screen on which Marcel can then project his own signs of desire. Thus the process of 'sclerotization' does not lead to any detailed information about the characters concerned:

the complexion of her face was so burnished and so glowing that it was as if one were seeing her through a lighted window. (...) I could not take my eyes from her face which grew larger as she approached, like a sun which it was somehow possible to stare at and which was coming nearer and nearer, letting itself be seen at close quarters, dazzling you with its blaze of red and gold. (IS II, 270f./R I, 657)

A young servant with a bold manner and a charming face (but so finely chiselled to ensure its perfection that the nose was a little red and the rest of the skin slightly inflamed as though they were still smarting from the recent sculptural incision) came in ... (IS III, 226/R II, 199f.)

This sculptural metaphor offers information on the appearance, its aesthetic value and its deficits such as the redness of the nose and the slight inflammation of the skin. But what do we learn about the servant? The person described is presented not as an individual but as a composite: both human being and sculpture. The text petrifies the servant, turns him into a statue of marble belonging in a museum and totally de-individualizes him (Schneider, 66f.). In addition to this, the signs in *A la Recherche* are characterized by the awareness that any definitive symbolic 'distillation of a person's essence', like any form of insight, can become valueless at the very next moment: 'Swann was no longer the same man. (...) To such an extent does passion manifest itself in us as a temporary and distinct character which not only takes the place of our normal character but obliterates the invariable signs by which it has hitherto been discernible!' (IS I, 282f./R I, 235). Even complex and detailed descriptions of characters very often only testify

as to their unknowability and unrecognizability. If Proust's characters in their function as signs thus appear at first sight to be superficial and imprecise, a closer look shows that these signs seem to overcome their sclerotization insofar as they prove to be dynamic, heterogeneous and polyvalent:

for whenever I saw Mme de Guermantes I realised the disparity — always, as it happened, different — between what I had imagined and what I saw. (...) Now I should not even have been able to say what Mme de Guermantes was like, what I recognised her by, for every day, in the picture which she presented as a whole, the face was as different as were the dress and the hat. (*IS* III, 62f./*R* II, 61)

Not only the interpretant/signified but also the signifier is revealed to be unstable and transitory; just as if Proust's novel attempted to demonstrate the metaphorical structure of language and the repeated substitution of the signifiers as well as the fact that their full meaning in the universe of semiosis is inaccessible (*R* II, 1115; *R* III, 891). The ascription of meaning takes second place to the very possibility of semiosis. More important than thinking conceptually is the object or event which triggers off the process of reflection (*R* II, 549); a process in which only the chance nature of the encounter with signs determines the necessity of what is being thought or remembered: 'with imperious suddenness a chance happening had caused them to emerge — in the series of forgotten days.' (*IS* VI, 218/*R* III, 867).

Understanding freed from time is the result of a coercive influence which the sign exercises on thought and which transcends subjective associations as well as reasoning (*intelligence*). In *A la Recherche*, reasoning generally belongs to the realm of the *signes de l'amour (le temps perdu)*, and of 'conscious memory' (*mémoire volontaire*), and is thus always too late to be of any help (*R* III, 878–80). In addition to that the value of the sign does not lie in its potential meaning or signified but in its ability to provoke thought as a 'faculty of the essences' (*faculté des essences*) and to enter into the circulation of semiosis, *renvoi* and interpretation: 'A writer need have no anxieties on that score when he embarks upon a long labour. Let his intellect begin the work and as he proceeds he will meet with griefs, enough or more than enough, which will undertake to finish it' (*IS* VI, 269/*R* III, 907; see also 905–8).

It is, above all, 'sensuous signs', *les signes sensibles*, which are significant for the merely mechanical production of memory. It is their specific function to produce reminiscences and to allow the past to arise in its essence, in its difference which has become immanent,

accompanied by an unknown feeling of happiness. Mechanically triggered by an analogy—‘the miracle of an analogy had made me escape from the present’ (*IS* VI, 223/*R* III, 871)—*les signes sensibles* give rise to reminiscences or discoveries, newly created impressions of ‘retrieved or lost time’. But what is felt to be reminiscence or ‘the act of remembering’ represents an independent, creative process, in which the mental double of an actual (and therefore still too material) sensation is produced (*R* III, 871). In this process space and time are transcended and new interpretations of past impressions are produced. Hence, the difference between the memory produced by the narrator and the original impression in the present, which triggers the search for its immaterial double, increases with every successive stage of mediation.⁸ By means of metaphor, by the interaction of the stimulus produced by *le signe sensible* with its immaterial double, evoked by memory, Combray, Venice and Marcel’s childhood can be generated in a *transfigured* form, making ‘death a matter of indifference’ (*IS* VI, 218/*R* III, 867, 871). These ‘memories’ belong to a different order from that of the sensations experienced in the past or present because as *fragments d’existence soustraits au temps* they surmount this strange ‘contradiction of survival and annihilation’ (*IS* IV, 184/*R* II, 759). Thus the difference between the newly created product of Marcel’s memory and his original impressions in the present and in the past is unbridgeable; it is the essence itself *l’essence des choses*—and the essence is the product of the medium!⁹

Analogous to the mechanism of ‘unconscious memory’ but on a far ‘higher’, totally dematerialized level, the work of art constructed on the metaphorical principle is able to communicate dematerialized essences: In ‘Berma’s voice, (...) there subsisted not one scrap of inert matter refractory to the mind’ (*IS* III, 47/*R* II, 48; Deleuze, 21f., 77, 81). In this case we have timeless perceptions on an intersubjective rather than merely subjective level. Like a metaphor, art transcends subjectivity and the monadic status of the individual in order to allow the communication of the differences which lie at the heart of every subject (*R* III, 159, 258, 896). Thereby, the essence must be considered as the ‘absolute difference’ which is situated in the subject, which is more profound than the subject and which belongs to a different ‘order’:

As the spectrum makes visible to us the composition of light, so the harmony of a Wagner, the colour of an Elstir, enable us to know that essential quality of another person’s sensations into which love for another person does not allow us to penetrate. (*IS* V, 175/*R* III, 159; see also: *R* III, 258, 896 and Deleuze, 51ff.)

Only art, far from all materiality and corporeality, is able to fulfil the demand for unity, '[t]his terrible need of a person' (IS IV, 153/R II, 733). By means of its inherent power, the work of art obliges the reader to deconstruct 'appearances' and notions of reality.¹⁰

On a technical or stylistic level, it seems that the 'triggering metaphor' of the *mémoire involontaire* is based on pure analogy and can be regarded as a premise for the production of memory such as the essence of past moments or the impression of eternity (R II, 765ff.). Concerning this generative use of metaphor, there are parallels between Proust and the Surrealists, whose mistrust he shares *vis-à-vis* ordinary language. Where metaphor was intended to function as a philosophical experiment in order to experience thought via uncontrolled associations with the censorship of reason excluded,¹¹ it serves Proust as an instrument for organizing unconventional conceptions of reality, and to experience and communicate extra-temporal 'truths' not graspable by intelligence, reason and conventional language. In contrast to the visions of Louis Aragon's narrator in *Le Paysan de Paris*, the triggering factors for the production of memory or vision in Proust are always double in nature, for a momentary sensation must find its analogous equivalent in memory in order to produce essences. From this point of view, instead of accommodating spontaneity, free association and alogical linkages in the style of automatic writing (*écriture automatique*), *A la Recherche* emerges as mechanical writing (*écriture mécanique*), subject to the strictest rules of a bipolar 'metaphorical' construction. Metaphor thus not only becomes productive of a narrative order (Ricardou's 'ordinal' metaphor) but can also be shown to structure the entire novel. If, following Derrida, (a) metaphor is the 'lot of thought at the moment at which a sense attempts to emerge of itself, to say itself, to express itself, to bring itself into the light of language', if (b) Aristotle's *Poetics* sets forth a possible connection 'between the function of imitation', which makes 'human actions higher than they actually are, and the structure of metaphor' which transcends 'the meaning of ordinary language into strange uses' (Ricoeur), and if (c) we take into account that *le temps perdu* and *le temps retrouvé* 'coincide with the beginning and the end of the novel,' then, as Lois Marie Jaeck points out, *A la Recherche* can be considered as a vast 'macrometaphor', the 'body' of which would be 'comparable to the "middle term" of a metaphorical phrase.'¹²

Metaphor, we can conclude, is for Proust the stylistic and structural equivalent of the psychological experience of 'unconscious memory', the underlying principle of all art, a cognitive approach to the world

and a means of creating a personal reality. By means of a fusion of two temporally distinct moments, the extratemporal 'essence' of things is engendered; metaphor thus becomes the only medium which allows the vision of essences, which is what Proust demands from the work of art. Its quality, thereby, is determined by the reciprocal assimilation, reflection and absorption of the co-present and linked objects/poles.¹³ For Proust, metaphor seems to represent the sole medium of vision and perception as well as the generative principle of literary creation. After all, it is only the apprehension of analogy which allows Combray to be invoked in the metaphorical forcefield; the sensation of the rough material of a serviette evokes the days in Balbec; the experience of the uneven road surface in the Guermantes courtyard calls to mind an idealized vision of Venice. Without metaphor, there seems to be no vision, no mediation, no production of memory, no perception—however transitory—no information either about the world outside or the world within.¹⁴ This implies the need for analogy rather than contiguity, essence rather than superficial 'truth', and mediation rather than direct access. If, then, indirect vision is the only possible vision,¹⁵ both in the perception and the production of essences, and if their mediation is only conceivable in the work of art, in style and metaphor, then we must address the nature of Proust's literary text and ask whether it really fulfils its own criteria, what the functions of metaphor are and whether we can really identify a 'metaphorical' generation of vision and memory/text.

Textual Practice: The Gradual Deconstruction of Metaphor and The Rhetoric of Desire

As microstylistic analyses by Genette and others have shown, the visual metaphors—for example the colour transferences of Elstir (R I, 899) which find expression in *A la Recherche* when the sunlight turns 'green as the water in a pond' and the sea 'topaz-yellow, (...) pale and milky like beer, frothy like milk' (IS II, 291/R I, 674)—do not lead to 'essences' but rather to superimpositions of paradoxical, phantasmagorical landscapes, to a reciprocal 'dissolving' caused by abundance and to a fallacious kind of continuity which creates the illusion of identity where none exists.¹⁶ Imitating impressionist painting techniques, Proust's writing offers a series of different perspectives and visions of one and the same object, such as the sea at Balbec, whereby metaphors repeatedly create the illusion of continuity and produce a temporary reconciliation of the polarizations and contradictions. In

Balbec, inner and outer space are affected by a kind of contamination: the room of the narrator, the dining hall and the surroundings dissolve into a harmonious continuity, ruled by the sea which the narrator is looking forward to observing 'in the window, and in all the glass fronts of the bookcases, as in the portholes of a ship's cabin' (*IS II*, 289/*R I*, 672). In order to perceive 'reality', which is itself described metaphorically as 'that vast, dazzling, mountainous amphitheatre, (...) the snowy crests of its emerald waves, here and there polished and translucent' (*IS II*, 289/*R I*, 672), the narrator has to avoid direct contact by means of mediation since his vision of 'reality' only arises as a consequence of the representation of 'reality' on the screen constituted by the glass cabinets. Metaphors are thus in constant danger of becoming totalizing instruments of reconciliation which deny the existence of differences by omitting non-corresponding features and underlining common features. The result is only too often not *l'essence* but a deceptive continuity, which can be described in terms of the loss of information and the reduction of plenitude.

Again and again, the discourse synthesises antithetical chains of connotation, both in terms of 'content' and in terms of expressive form. Visual metaphors are then typical of the projection of illusory, analogous relationships along the axis of contiguity. Originally determined by arbitrariness and conventionality, the never entirely stable nexus between the expressive form and the chain of interpretants is invested and enriched with meaning and the cause or explanation of the relationship is assumed to lie in an analogy. Thus, signifiers, such as the name Guermantes, are read as images (*R I*, 171) and invested with meaning in order to suggest their motivation and to gratify the obsession 'to discover some subject to which I could impart a philosophical significance of infinite value' (*IS I*, 207/*R I*, 173; *III*, 897). On the one hand, the protagonist Marcel acknowledges no superficial structures, as he fails to make direct observations; on the other hand, he attempts to transfer the relation of analogy (Jakobson's paradigmatic axis and metaphoric principle) which links the interpretants within the semantic field to their nexus with their expressive forms. In these cases, contiguity appears to be the basis of similarities and to be the foundation of analogy. Very often, Proust's 'metaphors' are 'metonymic transpositions' which are experienced as synaesthesia. In these, however, the transfer from cause to effect is felt as a 'metaphor', as being determined by spatial, temporal or psychological proximity (*R I*, 168, 672f., 681, 835f., 899), or as chains of comparisons which may be motivated by the context, such as, for example, degrees

of kinship (R I, 788, 823f., 855, 947–948; R III, 70). Elaborate comparisons and complex ‘diegetic metaphors’ make even paradoxical statements seem acceptable. They are employed as instruments of precision in order ultimately to underline the impossibility of such an object (R I, 80f.), or to fix the objects of desire transitorily in the narrative discourse in order to guarantee their transferability (see above). Metonymic shifts—such as the bell towers, which stand in a ‘metonymic and metaphoric relation to women the narrator desires’, become ‘stylus as well as phallus’ (Lane, 392f., 401) and adjust to their surroundings (R I, 146; R II, 1014f.)—function according to a similar mechanism as is employed in the transfiguration of the opera into a world under water: ‘the passage (. . .) was moist and fissured and seemed to lead to subaqueous grottoes, to the mythological kingdom of the water nymphs.’ (IS III, 35/R II, 38). Here the metaphoric force of the passage is contingent, ultimately, upon only one word, for the aquatic metaphors, triggered by the metaphor ‘baignoire’, seem to justify themselves. But while the metonymic displacements in the ‘baignoire’-scene are still problematised by the narrative discourse,¹⁷ Marcel’s struggle with the materiality of language—a superfluity of signifiers, ‘a line from *Phèdre* (. . .) [which] did not have the right number of feet’ (IS III, 35/R II, 38)—stands for the problem of the discourse of *A la Recherche* itself. The project of the suspension of the materiality of the signifiers in the literary work of art is thus in danger of being undermined by a rampant, uncontrollable text; by a text which repeatedly contradicts and supplements itself, and, in its proliferation and abundance, longs to escape not only from the articulation and *mise en scène* of its desire but also from the fixation and death inherent in the linear act of writing.

If we really consider Proust’s text as the ‘middle term’ of a vast ‘macrometaphor’ (Jaeck), and if we take Genette’s stylistic analyses seriously, then we must note that (a) this ‘middle term’ more often than not contradicts Jaeck’s postulation of ‘an inarticulate impression which transcends the combined fields of signification which engendered it’, that (b) its structure is essentially metonymic and that (c) the metaphor (of ‘resurrection’) is relegated to the purely mechanical, mnemotechnical trigger function of effecting the simultaneity of non-simultaneous sensations through time and space. The memory produced in the forcefield of these two paradigmatic poles is generated in a linear process on the syntagmatic axis of metonymy and very often presented in metonymic chains of synaesthetic impressions (R III, 874ff.). But there are other instances too where the deceptive

coherence of the Proustian metaphor becomes problematic. Man as a metaphor connecting infinitely remote moments of time (*R* III, 1048) loses his unity in the medium of time, which envelops *A la Recherche* as it were with an all-encompassing net; he loses all sense of continuity in his development and seems with abrupt changes (*R* I, 235)—to exist from moment to moment. The metaphor which allowed man, like a giant, to unify remote periods of time, turns out to be segmented. Between the poles of 'cold' metaphor the transparent and clearly discernable layers of the palimpsest appear. Even the continuity of love suggested by the metaphor is revealed to be false and is replaced by sequential but clearly differentiated series:

For what we suppose to be our love or our jealousy is never a single, continuous and indivisible passion. It is composed of an infinity of successive loves, of different jealousies, each of which is ephemeral, although by their uninterrupted multiplicity they give us the impression of continuity, the illusion of unity. (*IS* I, 448/*R* I, 372)

Finally, the beloved person herself mirrors the deconstruction of the metaphor by disintegrating the moment she is touched:

Albertine had often appeared different to me, so now (...) during this brief journey of my lips towards her cheek, it was ten Albertines that I saw; this one girl being like a many headed goddess, the head I had seen last, when I tried to approach it, gave way to another. (*IS* III, 421/*R* II, 365)

Proust's botanical metaphors (*R* II, 626ff.) culminate in the image of the hermaphrodite and are subject to a similar process of deconstruction. Instead of unifying the sexes it bears within it, the hermaphrodite divides them. What is dominant is not the 'hot' fusion of two sexes in the same plant, but their 'cold' contiguous relation as a source of the homosexual 'series' of Sodom and Gomorrha: 'The two sexes shall die, each in a place apart!' (*IS* IV, 18/*R* II, 616). The metaphor fails to allow the closed vessels to communicate; the whole is produced as one part among others without achieving unity or totality. Thus the notions of unity and continuity which the metaphor evokes prove to be illusory (*R* I, 371ff.) and not even the journey (as medium) is able to unify Méséglise and Guermantes. The views from the window of the train only achieve a 'totality' via the transversal (*R* III, 1029; *R* I, 655). Instead of 'hot', totalizing fusion, the medium as 'cold' transversal, as the incorporation of difference, as writing, as a fertilizing insect, as jealousy and journey, sleep or time, allows only a qualified kind

of communication, while retaining the difference and the diversity of the associated poles. Significantly, even the view from Saint-Hilaire, which is a metaphor for the (impossibility of the) transcendental self in the novel, brings the chill of death with it (*R I*, 106) and, allowing 'the viewer to embrace at once two separate and mutually exclusive realities' (Lane, 395; Jaek, 230f.; *R I*, 106), is in the last instance not really able to overcome the fragmentation of *A la Recherche* since, as the *auré* tells us, '[t]o get it all quite perfect you would have to be in both places at once; up at the top of the steeple of Saint-Hilaire and down there at Jouy-le-Vicomte' (*IS I*, 126/*R I*, 106). If, for Proust, effective communication and psychological or physical intimacy are mutually exclusive, total communication defined as complete exchange and reciprocal penetration, such as occurs through the dispossessing powers of metaphor, appears unthinkable. Qualified, 'transversal' mediation, it seems, represents the only free form of communication which prevents recuperation and 'forced reconciliation' (Adorno) by transcending difference and distance without abolishing them.

However important metaphor may be for the production of Proustian memory, it should be clear by now that it is more a structural or should we say 'metaphorical'—principle which underlies *A la Recherche* than something which characterizes the contents of memory produced within its forcefield. However much Proust demands metaphor,¹⁸ his narrator nevertheless also speaks of 'the two sets of phenomena which reality joins together' and of 'describing one after another the innumerable objects which at a given moment were present at a particular place' (*IS VI*, 246/*R III*, 889). With this demand he reduces the differences between the semantic structures produced by both poles of the metaphor and, as a result, the semantic tension of the metaphor. The incorporation of the context makes the analogical relation within the metaphor questionable. Thus, the narrator implicitly demands the infiltration of the metaphor by relationships of contiguity and therefore the infiltration of his discourse with metonymic principles. Contiguity becomes the subjective motor of the metaphor, and this in turn becomes the motor of continuity. Yet one should stress that Proust's 'metonymic principles' are metaphorical insofar as the relation upon which they are based 'is not contiguity as such but rather the identity of place manifesting the identity of the subject' (Weber, 929; cf. Warning (1996), 20), which is produced in the medium of narrative discourse and around which the *chronotopos* or 'spatio-temporal unity of place' is constituted. This

'interpenetration' of the metonymic and the metaphorical amounts not only to 'the dissolution of "objectivity" and the constitution of the site of the subject as a fictional space' (Weber, 929), but also to a certain limitation of the duality of the aesthetic situation and of the creative powers of metaphor.

Ultimately, it is the narrative discourse itself which by way of its very construction threatens to deconstruct the 'theory of metaphor'. In a 'metafigural' passage closely interpreted by Paul de Man, 'symbolic' metaphor is given explicit preference over 'literal', prosaic metonymy.¹⁹ While the metonymy is characterized 'par hasard', that is, by the chance of contiguity, the metaphor is determined by 'un lien plus nécessaire' (a more compelling tie), which means a relation of analogy based on a shared essence. If, as de Man argues, 'necessity and chance' are 'a legitimate way to distinguish between analogy and contiguity' (*sic*) and thus between metaphor and metonymy, the passage discussed is about 'the aesthetic superiority of metaphor over metonymy' (De Man, 14), while the whole passage (*RI*, 82–8) draws its coherence and expressive strength from a metonymic structure. When the rhetorical and stylistic structure revokes the discursive statement and the autonomous inventive capacity of the subject is celebrated through syntagmatic structures based on contingent associations which cannot abjure the mechanical and repetitive aspects of grammatical forms, then de Man speaks of a grammaticization of rhetoric, which shows that 'precisely when the highest claims are being made for the unifying power of metaphor, these very images rely in fact on the deceptive use of semi-automatic grammatical patterns' (De Man, 16; 57–78).

With De Man we can state that *A la Recherche* exposes the mechanical, repetitive and metonymic construction of its visions by deconstructing its own metaphors, by revoking or at least problematizing its textual statements through the contradictions between the rhetorical-stylistic and the thematic level that also, as we have seen, partly if not totally revokes itself. The 'subversion' of the discourse which glorifies metaphor becomes evident through the mechanism of contiguity. This is because metonymic relations are not simply syntagmatic complements of paradigmatic tropes but deconstruct the metaphoric pretensions of semantic necessity through semiological contingency. Where Genette has argued that metaphor and metonymy reinforce and interpenetrate each other, de Man emphasizes 'the perilous shuttle between metaphor and metonymy' which leads to the disjunction between the 'aesthetically responsive and the

rhetorically aware reading' and thus 'asserts the impossibility of a true understanding, on the level of the figuration as well as of the themes' (De Man, 72). We can not only say that it is the grammatical and mechanical aspect of metonymy within metaphor — be it 'ordinal' or 'macrometaphor' — which seems to determine the production itself of the narrative discourse called *A la Recherche*, we can go even further and — against the interpretation of De Man — ask whether the passage quoted above is about metaphor at all. As Owen Miller has argued, De Man's analysis neglects the fact that contiguity can encompass interdependence and that, in these cases, it cannot be defined exclusively in terms of contingency, '[n]or do chance and necessity provide infallible criteria in order to distinguish metonymy from metaphor, as De Man's gloss on Proust appears to intimate' (Miller, 107). If the 'air de musique humaine-été' (snatch of human music-summer) connection as well as the 'mouches-été' (flies-summer) connection in Proust's text are based on proximity, the difference between them is that the latter is founded on the additional principle of interdependence. If we accept Miller's analysis — and it is not necessary here to redefine metaphor and metonymy or to play Miller off against De Man, since both interpretations support the present line of argument — it follows that metaphor is undermined even more since it would not only be deconstructed but would even vanish from the text, which would then be about two different metonymic forms, namely 'fatal' and 'non-fatal' metonymy (Miller; Morier).

Yet Proust's novel should not only be regarded as a 'metaphor of life' or an 'allegory of reading'. As a metaphorical text, it is also a 'total metaphor', a complex artistic supersign and a self-denying *texte de désir* which undergoes a metonymic shift on the level of the *énoncé* as well as on the level of the *énonciation*. This displacement parallels the metonymic shift (a) characteristic of all metaphors and (b) resulting from their surrender to the 'pressure of the repressed' (Lacan). In *A la Recherche*, the subliminal presence of the past can be perceived in and through the never totally vanishing sobbing of the young Marcel (*R* I, 37). This past, 'the silent evening air', is produced in the space of the narrative as the absence and otherness of a never fading voice. It symbolizes the impossibility of possessing the beloved object (*grand-mother*) and leads to the problem of mediation and ungratified desire.²⁰ When the beloved object cannot be attained, there remains as a last resort mediation along the unsatisfactory route of imaginative representation, which — as an attempt by Marcel to grasp the presence of the mother by fictive projections, an attempt to

be present in another place without having to give up the security of his own location — aggravates and underscores the painful reality of absence and separation. The medium of writing — Marcel's letter to his mother as an allegory of *A la Recherche* — thus (a) becomes an instrument of a forbidden desire which must escape its articulation, (b) sustains the separation while simultaneously demanding that it be transcended and (c) anticipates death.

The mediated presence of the beloved being, the simultaneity of presence and absence, corresponds to a desire which can neither be fulfilled nor fully admitted and which has to declare itself — with 'the desperate stratagem of a condemned prisoner' (IS I, 31/R I, 28) — as fiction. On another level, too, the place of incestual desire turns out to be the place of literature. The world of the *grand-mother* is the world of Racine, Corneille and George Sand. The mother-son relationship depicted by Mme de Sévigné is not only a theme in *A la Recherche* but is relived by the protagonists, and it is certainly not by chance that Marcel's mother, *la lectrice infidèle*, reads *François le Champi* to her son.²¹ *A la Recherche* does not only depict but is also the result of a medial and eternally unresolved conflict of interest; it is a text whose task it is to possess via mediation what cannot be possessed — the phallus of the mother as the imaginary object par excellence — without, however, having to concede this fact. It is, moreover, a text which is in danger of being torn apart by rival forms of discourse²² since Marcel's crying repeatedly breaks into the dominant discourse, affects the narrating voice only to be repressed again. In its totality, Marcel's sobbing constitutes a kind of undercurrent to the dominant rationalizing discourse and distorts it to such a degree that the narrative discourse undergoes a metonymic shift as a result of its undeclared attempt to repress desire which — *en vérité* — secretly controls and engenders the text. 'Desire subverting thought, thought defending against and dissimulating desire; narration seeking to appropriate the text and being dislocated by it — this is the barely visible but legible scenario of the *Recherche*' (Weber, 927).

Since the desire which engenders Proust's text cannot be fulfilled, the act of writing can find its end only with the death of the author, or indeed the reader, if we consider every reading as a new and always different (re)writing. Proust's text is not, as Genette would have it, the *lieu de sa pensée*. It is much more the *lieu de son désir*. This difference finds its expression in a disruptive 'overdetermination of the sign', a superfluity of figural significance no longer controlled by the discourse. The metonymic structure of the text, which is to say the *subjective*

relationships of contiguity underlying the 'metaphorical' passages and even those passages which glorify metaphor, can be considered as a direct expression of desire which undermines the narrative discourse, lies beyond its control and repeatedly subverts it: 'with the same gesture that locates the discourse of desire', the metonymic movement 'dislocates it as well. The metonymy inaugurates a process of disjunction and displacement which no place, voice, or subjectivity can contain. It marks not simply the expression of desire, but its *mise en scène*.'²³

'Présence réelle (. . .) dans la séparation effective': The 'Truth' of the Medium and the Illusion of 'faire tenir une signification'

Considering the different approaches presented, namely Deleuze's semiotic, Genette's stylistic, de Man's deconstructivist and Weber's psychoanalytical analyses, it should have become obvious that Proust's text glorifies metaphor while being heavily dependent on metonymic structures. From this we could conclude that Marcel in his theoretical yet fictional statements uses the word metaphor as a metaphor, namely in a figurative sense. Indeed, *A la Recherche* appears to be a highly constructed artefact whose functioning depends not on a surrealist *écriture automatique* but on something we could call an *écriture mécanique*, a 'mechanical writing technique'. It is this mechanical technique which produces meaning, generating not only the theoretical statements of the narrator but the narrative discourse *in toto*; a discourse which on different textual levels is contradictory in itself and more than once subverts Marcel's statements about the relation between metaphor and art. From these contradictions, several questions arise. If, from a semiotic or grammatological point of view, *A la Recherche* does not primarily function because of the supposedly obscure and magical powers inherent in the metaphor but because of a 'mechanical writing technique' and if, as Deleuze suggests, the production of memory in *A la Recherche* depends on the mechanical functioning of different types of signs, would it then not be possible to draw parallels between the functioning of Proust's text and the early technical and as a rule mechanical media thematized by it? In other words, can Proust's *chef-d'œuvre*, precisely because of this techno-mechanical aspect, be considered as an example and even a *mise en scène* of the functioning and productivity of 'modern' media? And what would all this entail for the 'meaning' or semantic structures of *A la Recherche*? If, as Proust and his narrator demand, the work of art should give access to the vision of 'essences', we have to ask whether these technically

generated 'essences' are semantically filled or rather presuppose a kind of absence or even lack which is to be experienced by the reader.

Since the approach of this essay is mainly semiotic, since the role of photography in *A la Recherche* has already been studied by various critics, and since—in addition to that—there is not the space to offer a detailed analysis of how writing and 'writing with light' interact in Proust's text, I want to focus on some parallels between *A la Recherche* and a hitherto neglected modern medium, namely the telephone, *mécanique et sublime*. A close look on how the telephone is used in Proust's text reveals (once more) that face-to-face communication is disappointing²⁴ and that the face of the interlocuter is even experienced as a mask (R II, 135). In these cases the telephone simultaneously guarantees distance and proximity—'invisible but present', 'so near—in actual separation' (IS III, 147f./R II, 133)—, and the spatial distance creates a new kind of perception: 'but her voice itself I was hearing this afternoon for the first time.' (IS III, 149/R II, 135). The telephone renders the spatial distance it bridges audible, transforms distance into sound 'a tiny sound, an abstract sound—the sound of distance overcome' (IS III, 148/R II, 134)—and simultaneously reduces the person on the phone to the physical qualities of their voice while the transmitted background noise and crackling function as signs of authenticity (R II, 133; 731f.). The semiotic and external or formal aspects of the signifier almost delete its semantic aspects and what is traditionally considered as 'the signified' vanishes since intonation, rhythm, pitch and voice-quality, the pure physicality of the voice, gain an overwhelming importance: 'I discovered for the first time how sweet that voice was (...) but also how sad it was (...). Fragile by reason of its delicacy, it seemed constantly on the verge of breaking, of expiring in a pure flow of tears' (IS III, 149/R II, 133ff.). Separated from the body, the voice is invested with a body of its own and becomes the signature of the speaker. The medium effects a purgation or dematerialization while simultaneously giving access to, or better: creating, a kind of essence of the person using it. Thus the telephone does not simply direct Marcel's attention to different hitherto unnoticed significant aspects of his grandmother's voice but produces a new 'reality' and a new knowledge about her:

And because that voice appeared to me to have altered in its proportions from the moment that it was a whole, and reached me thus alone and without the accompaniment of her face and features, I discovered for the first time how sweet

that voice was; (...) then, too, having it alone beside me, seen without the mask of her face, I noticed in it for the first time the sorrows that had cracked it in the course of a lifetime. (*IS* III, 149/*R* II, 135)

Thanks to the telephone, Marcel's interlocutor appears 'in a supernatural light', and thanks to the distance simultaneously maintained and bridged, Marcel is able to discover ever more new aspects of his grandmother (*R* II, 135). We should note, however, that the essence which the voice seems to yield is totally dependent on the medium: 'Le médium ne conduit pas à l'être, il crée de l'être' (The medium does not lead to being, it creates being) (Ch. Grivel).²⁵ The medial dematerialization of the body and the materialization of the voice go so far that via the telephone, which for Marcel belongs to the realm of the marvellous—he calls it 'the admirable sorcery' and speaks of the 'sacred forces'—and is operated by 'our guardian angels in the dizzy realm of darkness' (*IS* III, 147 *R* II, 133), 'the umbrageous priestesses of the Invisible' (*IS* III, 148 *R* II, 133), communication with the beyond, the realm of death, becomes possible. The medium anticipates and transcends death: 'the urns of sound', the voices without the body, are the voices of the dead:

it has seemed to me that the voice was crying to me from the depths out of which one does not rise again, and I have felt the anxiety that was one day to wring my heart when a voice would thus return (alone and attached no longer to a body which I was never to see again), to murmur in my ear words I longed to kiss as they issued from lips for ever turned to dust. (*IS* III, 148/*R* II, 134)

but I had beside me only the voice, a phantom as impalpable as the one that would perhaps come back to visit me when my grandmother was dead. (*IS* III, 150/*R* II, 136; see also *R* II, 133, 135)

But there are serious drawbacks as well. Like any other medium, the telephone is fragile, unstable and treacherous. The 'Vigilant Virgins' are listening in, Marcel often does not get the connection he wants, and if he gets the connection, the person he wants to talk to cannot come to the phone or he is himself not able to say what he intended to say. In addition to this, the connection can be cut off at any moment and the disembodied voices are more often than not lost in the night. Thus, if communication is possible at all, it is an indirect communication, a long-distance call which never simply 'happens' but is elaborately constructed, foregrounds the nature of the medium used, produces new and unintended impressions or knowledge and epitomizes the construction and functioning of the 'communication

model' called *A la Recherche*. Proximity is no solution and there really is no escape from the media, *A la Recherche* seems to say, since one medium defaults to another, since 'the "content" of any medium is always another medium' (McLuhan, 8): the author, Proust, exists only by *writing*, the narrator, Marcel, exists only in *writing* and his reaction to failed communication (*direct speech* and *telephone*) is nothing other than a further mediation in the widest sense, namely his *imaginative phantasy* of a *painting* of a woman *speaking* on the *phone* called 'At the telephone' (IS V, 105/R III, 99).

In his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde argues that '[i]t is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors' (Wilde, 17); in *Le Temps Retrouvé*, Proust's narrator states that 'every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self' and calls the book an optical instrument which allows the reader 'to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have perceived in himself' (IS VI, 273/R III, 911). Although Proust's narrator stresses the paradoxical aspects of reading (Frye, 101, 104f.), he does not yet exclude that the subject is knowable. If, however, 'tous les efforts de notre intelligence sont inutiles' — 'the truths which the intellectual faculty (...) gathers in the open (...) are like drawings with a hard outline and no perspective' (IS VI, 257/R III, 898) —, the 'truth' of the subject — or of anything else — begins to retreat beyond the reach of *intelligence*.²⁶ As we have seen, detailed descriptions of characters only testify as to their unknowability: Albertine, 'palimpsest' and *être de fuite* par excellence, can be regarded as another allegory of *A la Recherche*; Marcel attacks the *critique littéraire* of his time (R III, 893) but is himself not able to recognize even his own article printed in the *Figaro* (R III, 567f.); the telephone — if it works — does not transmit but create new meanings, and, as we shall see, the message of the 'innumerable negatives' (IS VI, 254/R III, 895) is not 'positive' either. If, as Deleuze argues, 'l'œuvre d'art moderne n'a pas de problème de sens, elle n'a qu'un problème d'usage' (in the modern work of art, the problem is not its meaning but its usage), then the only way of finding some kind of personal truth at the core of the subject — '[to] struggle to discern beneath matter, beneath experience, beneath words, something that is different from them' (IS VI, 254/R III, 896) — lies in the active use of the *œuvre d'art*. This, the reader should use in order to develop those negative plates and *gouttes de lumière ciselées/cimentées*²⁷ of a life which 'remains ordinarily for ever unknown to us' (IS IV, 235/R III, 881). These crystallized moments of a reality 'remote from our daily preoccupations', a reality in 'which it is very easy for us to

die without ever having known [it] and which is, quite simply, our life' (IS VI, 253/R III, 895), are small semiotic units which accumulate in the subject. They produce a 'cold', incoherent and ultimately unknowable text which has its origins in exterior but nevertheless significant circumstances (R III, 880). The 'painful and for the moment incomprehensible impression (...) which death itself, the sudden revelation of death, striking like a thunderbolt, had carved within me, along a supernatural and inhuman graph, in a double and mysterious furrow' (IS IV, 184/R II, 759), does not lead to any inherent truth within the subject but can only facilitate the experience that one has misjudged one's own existence (*méconnaissance*) and was caught in a trap called the imaginary.

Thus, if we concentrate on Proust's *gouttes de lumière isolées/cimentées* and consider his novel as autobiographical fiction, it represents not a work of or from memory as such but the creation of memory itself in the form of the medial act of reading inscribed signs. The act of reading, the developing of the negatives of the soul, is conceived of as an act of writing and—owing to their specific medial characteristics—entails the confession of their exteriority and ultimate undecipherability. Reading *A la Recherche* means reading another reading which, in turn, has become writing (R III, 890). Every experience 'is the double of a text which precedes it', and Proust's novel—which narrates the constitution of its own knowledge—is 'an absolute double itself' (Schneider, 76ff.). The decoding process of the traces of life and time inscribed into the individual from outside coincides with the creative and circular, even spiral-like production of the memory/text²⁸ beyond space and time which affirms itself by movement: 'The result was, in all senses of the term, strictly incalculable'.²⁹ The continual metamorphosis and the rampant proliferation of the text of *A la Recherche* cannot be dismissed as a simple circumstance of its genesis but is one of its principal features. Proust's introspective enterprise, which spans ever greater semiotic distances, finds its expression in the very conception underlying *A la Recherche* as a 'book within a book', an 'evolution as involution', in its circularity and in the spiral-like ascent of its referential structure. Seeking, excavating, discovering, developing (i.e. converting into another state) and at the same time producing a double in the medium of writing are the *modi operandi* of *A la Recherche*, which transform every stage in the process of reading into a process of writing and limitless interpretation. As a figurative text which undercuts itself and as a model of infinite referentiality and semiosis, *A la Recherche* repeatedly demonstrates just how impossible

it is to attain knowledge via the medium of writing, to tell the 'truth' about oneself or about others.³⁰ And, as we have seen, what is true about writing applies also to the telephone and most probably to all the other modern media presented in Proust's text.

If, as Proust's narrator himself admits, 'his' novel changes with every reader (R III, 911), then it can much less be determined by its content than by the experience of the time one spent reading it. *A la Recherche* functions as a photograph of exactly that span of time which, in turn, arises from 'truth's inability to coincide with itself.'³¹ If living is reading/writing, if life is literature (R III, 895), and if literature is inexhaustible and autoreflexive, we can read/write, but we can never know by means of reasoning. Meaning and understanding in the traditional sense become unimportant. The hope to 'faire tenir une signification', 'to discover some subject to which I could impart a philosophical significance of infinite value', is revealed to be illusory and retreats behind the pure movement of the signifiers, the development or transposition of the accidentally inscribed *gouttes de lumière ciselées/cimentées* in a medium which with their double also asserts their unknowableness. Proust's *machine à épiphanies* makes its readers experience semiosis—and to a lesser degree metamorphosis—as infinite,³² opens up spaces of creativity and transcends dichotomies such as life and death or present and past insofar as it allows the creation of the double of a mind which has long ago been driven out of its body: 'Ainsi, expulsé pour ainsi dire de moi-même, je me réfugie dans les tomes' (Proust (1965), 280) (Thus, driven out of myself, so to say, I take refuge in the volumes (my translation)). This mind, of course, is an auto(bio)graphical or even autographic mind which, as the product of writing, displays its own textuality and semioticity as well as its—and our—eternal *Nachträglichkeit*;³³ a continual 'being-too-late' which originates in our *manque à être* (want of being), coincides with the *différance* of the sign and opens up the metonymic spaces of desire/writing.

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NOTES

- 1 Marcel Proust, *A La Recherche du temps perdu* (Paris, Gallimard (Pléiade), 1954), vol. III, 895. All further references are to this edition and are abbreviated as R with the number of the volume. Where quotations are included, they are taken from *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D.J. Enright (London, Vintage, 1996) (abbreviated as IS with the number of the volume). In these cases references are given for both the French and the English edition. I would like to thank my colleagues Peter Stear M.A. and Dr. Paul Jackson (†) for their assistance in preparing this article for publication. I am also obliged to Prof. Charles Grivel for the inspiring seminar on Proust he taught at Mannheim University in 1989.

- 2 See Chevrier (1982); Hanney (1983); Hörisch Hellgrath (1986); Schneider (1986); Infantino (1992); Bal (1997); see also the early article by Nantet (1958).
- 3 This does not mean that 'poststructuralist' approaches to Proust's text are marginalized. What I would like to draw attention to is rather the sometimes seemingly unbridgeable divide within Proust criticism itself.
- 4 This becomes clear if we compare for example the blueprints and the final version of the 'madeleine episode', where the 'vieille cusinière' becomes 'Françoise' and finally 'ma mère' and where 'quelques tranches de pain grillé' become 'une biscotte' and finally 'Petites Madeleines.' See also Morot-Sir (1990).
- 5 Marcel Proust, *Essais et articles*, in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1971), pp. 586–600 (586).
- 6 See Ricoeur (1975), Haverkamp (1983) and Borsò-Borgarello (1985). With regard to Proust see Genette (1966), 39–68; Genette (1969), 223–94; Genette (1972), 41–63; Weber (1972); Deleuze (1976); De Man (1979); Karalus Crosman (1979); Splitter (1979); Lelong (1981); Abe (1983); Antoine (1984); Ames (1990); Jaek (1992); Marantz (1991) and Miller (1997).
- 7 From a 'traditional' point of view, the centrally important role of the metaphor as the expression of 'une tournure d'esprit analogique qui présidait à l'élaboration même du roman proustien' (an analogical way of thinking which presided over the creation itself of the Proustian novel) and as 'le ressort principal de son écriture' (the main driving force behind his writing) can be traced back to Proust's blueprints of his novel and to his earlier works. See Marantz, 25ff.
- 8 Whenever a sensation in the present evokes an analogous sensation belonging to the past, the coincidence or overlapping of these sensations allows the narrator to extract new meanings out of the past; meanings which are produced anew again and again but, of course, even further removed from the actual event.
- 9 Since theses 'memories' cannot be verified, any attempt to make them more precise runs up against an interpretive aporia and ends in a labyrinthine but productive complex of comparisons.
- 10 'In short, this art which is so complicated is in fact the only living art. It alone expresses for others and renders visible to ourselves that life of ours which cannot effectually observe itself and of which the observable manifestations need to be translated and, often, to be read backwards and laboriously deciphered. Our vanity, our passions, our spirit of imitation, our abstract intelligence, our habits have long been at work, and it is the task of art to undo this work of theirs, making us travel back in the direction from which we have come to the depths where what has really existed lies unknown within us.' (*IS VI*, 254f./*R III*, 896).
- 11 See Bürger (1971); Weinrich (1983); Riffaterre (1969); Meier (1983).

- 12 'The original manuscripts (...) and some letters by Proust support this premise, as they provide evidence that the first and last volumes of the novel were written consecutively and the middle volumes were written later (...); so that in the event of writing itself, the middle volumes were engendered from the polaric interaction of similar yet contradictory themes introduced in the first volume of the novel and consolidated in the last volume.' (Jaek, 226); see *ibid.*, 221–43 for examples of the functioning of different 'macrometaphors'.
- 13 For a discussion of how far this introduces metonymic aspects into metaphor and metaphoric aspects into metonymy see below.
- 14 '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. And now, suddenly, the effect of this harsh law had been neutralised, temporarily annulled, by a marvellous expedient of nature which had caused a sensation (...) to be mirrored at one and the same time in the past (...) and in the present (...), and through this subterfuge had made it possible for my being to secure, to isolate, to immobilise—for a moment brief as a flash of lightning—what normally it never apprehends: a fragment of time in the pure state'. (*IS VI*, 223f./*R III*, 872).
- 15 Nature 'who, often, had allowed me to become aware of the beauty of one thing only in another thing, of the beauty, for instance, of noon at Combray in the sound of its bells, of that of the mornings at Doncières in the hiccups of our central heating'. (*IS VI*, 246/*R III*, 889f.).
- 16 See Genette (1966, 1969, 1972); see also Weber's criticism of Genette's conclusions concerning negativity and totality.
- 17 In the 'baignoire'-scene Marcel himself denounces the fictionality of the 'appearances' of what he sees.
- 18 In a letter written to Lucien Daudet, Proust speaks of those wonderful phrases, 'où s'est accompli le miracle suprême, la transsubstantiation des qualités irrationnelles de la matière et de la vie dans des mots humains' (where that supreme miracle has taken place, the transsubstantiation into human words of the irrational qualities of matter and life (my translation)). See Genette (1966), 39–42ff.
- 19 'and my sense of the day's brightness and splendour was derived solely from the blows struck down below, in the Rue de la Cure (...) and also from the flies who performed for my benefit, in their tiny chorus, as it were the chamber music of summer, evoking it quite differently from a snatch of human music which, heard *by chance* in high summer, will remind you of it later', *versus*: 'the music of the flies is bound to the season *by a more compelling tie*—born of the sunny days, and not to be reborn but with them, *containing something of their essential nature*, it not merely calls up their image in our

- memory, but guarantees their return, their actual, circumjacent, immediately accessible presence.' (IS I, 97f./R I, 83, my italics)
- 20 For the absence or arbitrariness of the law of the father—'he paid no heed to "principles"' (IS I, 41/R I, 36)—see Weber, 941ff. For an interpretation of *A la Recherche* as the 'writer's desire to become his own mother in order to give birth to himself through language', see Doubrovsky (1974).
 - 21 See Zima (1983). For a critique of psychoanalytical readings of Proust see Link-Heer (1983).
 - 22 See Spitzer (1928), 478; Jaus (1955), 55; Muller (1965); Lane (1988).
 - 23 See Weber, 930ff. 'Thus, the metonymic fiction plays a double, and conflicting, role: it opens the space of a desire, seeking to appropriate the world for the subject as its projection, excluding and neutralizing exteriority without pretending to abolish it; being contiguous to its object, the projection allows the subject to manifest itself as fiction while thus affirming its individuality; yet at the same time, the projected fiction is itself determined—and overdetermined—by a surplus of figural meaning by which the signifiers overshoot their intended significance (*signifié*), dislocate the place which is meant to contain them, and thereby inscribe the subject and its discourse in a text they no longer command or comprehend'. (Ibid., 934).
 - 24 'as though, confronted by the impossibility of seeing (...) the woman whose voice was so close to my ear, I felt more clearly the illusoriness in the appearance of the most tender proximity' (IS III, 148/R II, 134).
 - 25 Discussion with Charles Grivel during his seminar (see note 1). Without the medium there is only the 'mask of her face'. The telephone does not only bring out the qualities of the voice but also changes, even creates them. Distance creates 'truth', and the medium creates being.
 - 26 Cf. Lacan's famous statement 'Je pense où je ne suis pas, donc je suis où je ne pense pas' (I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think) (*Écrits* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1996), 517). See also: 'un livre est le produit d'un autre moi que celui que nous manifestons dans nos habitudes' (a book is the product of an other self than that which normally manifests itself in our habits (my translation)). Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1971), 221f.
 - 27 'Cemented/chiselled packages of light.' See *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1954 [Fallois] and 1971 [Clarac]).
 - 28 'As for the inner book of unknown symbols (...), if I tried to read them no one could help me with any rules, for *to read them was an act of creation* in which no one can do our work for us or even collaborate with us.' (IS VI, 233/R III, 879, my italics).
 - 29 See Warning (1996), 13f. What triggers off the production of memory is just as external as the provenance of the discovered signs. See R III, 878ff., 890, 900ff.
 - 30 See Deleuze, 112; Horlacher (1998), 290-315; Horlacher and Islinger (1996), xiii-xxi; De Man, 77; Frye, 116.

- 31 De Man, 78; Schneider, 92f.; R III, 885f.
- 32 This fact, as well as the dynamic generation/writing of memory which lies at the heart of *A la Recherche*, can even produce the illusion of life. See also Link-Heer, 68f.; Roloff (1983). See also Warning (1993) who addresses similar themes in Proust but excludes the question of mediality as well as the technical aspects of mediation.
- 33 *Nachträglichkeit* should be understood here in a wider sense than that of 'deferred action'. See also Warning (1993).