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The Novel Map

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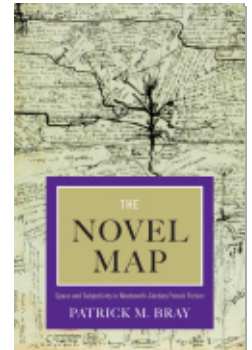
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PART IV

Branching Off: Genealogy and Map in the *Rougon-Macquart*

C'est un de mes principes qu'il ne faut pas *s'écrire*. L'artiste doit être dans son oeuvre comme Dieu dans la création, invisible et tout-puissant; qu'on le sente partout, mais qu'on ne le voie pas. *

—Gustave Flaubert, letter to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie

Moi, je tâche de travailler le plus tranquillement possible, mais je renonce à voir clair dans ce que je fais, car plus je vais et plus je suis convaincu que nos oeuvres en gestation échappent absolument à notre volonté. †

—Émile Zola, letter to Huysmans

In examining Stendhal's and Nerval's novel maps, we have seen how intensely personal and autobiographical works invent layered spaces and new subjects. Likewise, in Sand's fiction, characters imagine idealized, liberating spaces for women and men, spaces that could nonetheless exist in the real world. These works exploit a confusion between author and narrator and between real places and fictional spaces, simulating a new subject who is both preserved in an archival text and yet susceptible to the play of language. In contrast to these texts centered on individuals

*It is one of my principles that one should never *write oneself*. The artist should be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful; may he be felt everywhere, but seen nowhere.

†I strive to work the most peacefully possible, but I give up trying to see clearly into what I am doing, for the further I go the more I am convinced that our works in preparation absolutely escape our will.

who fashion space in their own image, the novels in Émile Zola's monumental series the *Rougon-Macquart* portray an entire society as it consumes itself over the course of the Second Empire. The full title of the twenty-novel series, *Les Rougon-Macquart: Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire* (*The Rougon-Macquart: The Natural and Social History of a Family Under the Second Empire*), underscores that each individual character must represent at the same time the family (of the Rougon or Macquart branch), a component of Second Empire society ("Histoire sociale"), and a universal or natural law ("Histoire naturelle"). Characters take on meaning not as unique individual subjects but as examples of larger social, political, economic, or biological phenomena; they are ultimately the objects of Zola's novel experiment. Characters, the "fonctionnaires" ("functionaries" or "civil servants") of the naturalist novel, emerge out of their specific milieu, they are "territorialized" by the textual spaces that produce them.¹

If the *Rougon-Macquart's* characters are in some sense subject to and not architects of the spaces they inhabit, if there is no "novel subject" in the series, then Zola's naturalist project seems to run counter to the novel maps of his romantic predecessors Stendhal, Nerval, and Sand. In the next two chapters, however, I argue that reading Zola's extensive notes for the series (referred to as the *dossiers préparatoires*) alongside the novels themselves exposes the artificial separation between note and novel, real document and fictional construct, author and text. The dossiers record Zola's creative process, containing the subjective and artistic origin of the "scientific" novel project and separating it from the narrative itself. Unlike earlier realists such as Stendhal, Zola did not insert a narrative "je" into his fictional texts. On a superficial level at least, no authorial presence, or even narrative stand-in, structures the fictional narrative, and yet in the dossiers Zola is everywhere present, describing his firsthand experiences, recording in detail his research, appropriating "his" characters. Just as remarkable as the abundance of "je" and "moi" in the dossiers compared to their absence in the novels, an absolute partition divides the factual origins of the novels meticulously preserved in the dossiers from the fictional novels themselves.

The author's scientific writing method along with the existence of the visual, factual dossier must be made public (in theoretical publications by Zola himself and by those select friends who saw the dossiers), but the textual, fictional novels erase their material origins as if they were spontaneous productions of the Second Empire society they represent. The *Rougon-Macquart* derives its driving force and its representational authority from the vast archive that makes up the *dossiers préparatoires*;

every observation about an aspect of society, every event, every place and character in the novel, it may be inferred, have their origin in a document somewhere in the unpublished dossiers. Inferred but not known by the reading public, since the dossiers were kept first at Zola's home, then safely stored and archived at the Bibliothèque nationale de France after his death.² These notes guaranteed for posterity, and even perhaps for Zola himself, an assurance of the authenticity, the reality behind his fictional works. Moreover, the dossiers were kept in excellent condition, whereas the preliminary drafts of his manuscripts were systematically destroyed.³ The *Rougon-Macquart* exhibits, both at the level of diegesis and at the level of the novel's genesis, a severe case of "archive fever"; origins must be conserved as the foundation of authority and hidden from view to guard against the exposure of secrets and to preserve the future from the weight of the past.

In the first chapter, "Zola and the Contradictory Origins of the Novel," I take a close look at Zola's contradictions as theoretician of naturalism, as visual thinker and writer of novels, as scientific observer and literary experimenter. Drawing from Jacques Rancière's notion of the contradictions of what he terms the "aesthetic regime," I argue that the separation of visual representation from the written word reproduces itself at every level, both within the dossiers themselves and between the dossiers and the novels. In the unrepresentable gap between note and novel, and document and fiction, authorial control gives way to chance and the unpredictability of figural language. By inscribing himself so completely in the text of the dossiers, and thus on the side of fact and observation, Zola recuperates his loss of authorial control over the fiction and asserts, in vain, the novel's subservience to the dossier.

In the second chapter, "Mapping Creative Destruction in Zola," I trace how the novels reproduce the same dynamic of authority founded on hidden documents as the dossiers, their archival origin/other. Whether the desacralized cemetery of the "Aire Saint-Mittre" in the first novel or the destruction of Pascal's research on heredity in the last, whether Napoleon III's secret plan for transforming Paris in *La Curée* or his lack of battle plan in *La Débâcle*, power hinges on the successful manipulation of archives and origins, actual or invented. Like the gap between note and novel, the difference between archival referent and representation leads to speculation, in both senses of conjecture and financial gamble, as the absent documents hold simultaneously the secrets of the past and those of the future; the repressed past preserved in the archive returns in the present as a destructive force, leaving in its wake new spaces for new subjects. I show how, at the end of the novel series, the blaze that consumes all of

Pascal's genealogical notes on his family (the narrative equivalent of the *dossiers préparatoires*) spares only the indecipherable Rougon-Macquart family tree, a document that closes the cycle in a teleological confusion, since it represents the starting point for Zola's project and the end point of Pascal's hereditary research. The Rougon-Macquart genealogical tree, a figure combining textual and visual, factual and fictional elements, confirms that meaning in the novel is born from a novel map where the frontiers between reality and fiction are continually shifting.