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The Novel Map

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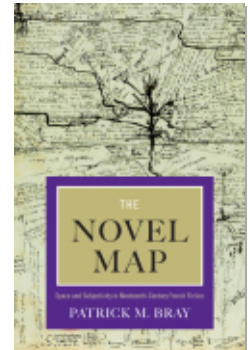
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PART V

Proust's Double Text

L'espace fond comme le sable coule entre les doigts. Le temps l'emporte et ne m'en laisse que des lambeaux informes . . .*

—Georges Perec, *Espèces d'espaces*, 180

Marcel Proust's monumental novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* captures the struggle to write the self in the spaces of the text, fictionalizing the process of the formation of textual subjectivity found in Stendhal's and Nerval's autobiographical texts, as well as the anguish of Sand's fictional characters and of Zola in his *dossiers préparatoires*. Stendhal employed the autobiographical form to gain perspective on the self; the subject was enclosed and controlled by a mapped text. The rigid mathematical and Cartesian mapped self inscribed in the *Vie de Henry Brulard* proves to be incompatible not only with a self that changes over time, but also with a text that produces a multiplicity of meanings through the very ambiguity of fictional autobiographical narrative. Though the problem of time and change is partially resolved by Stendhal through the bird's-eye-view maps evenly spaced in the text, his objective study of the self fails to satisfy the dual necessity of communicating the particulars of subjectivity while maintaining the integrity of the self. The *Vie de Henry Brulard* ends abruptly in order to save the self from certain death in and by the text.

Instead of mapping subjectivity as Stendhal had done, Nerval's works seek to envelop the self in the places it inhabits to the extent that the self becomes indistinguishable and inextricable from its environment. The Oriental Gérard, the Gérard of the Valois, or the universal Gérard of

*Space melts like sand runs through the fingers. Time carries it away and only leaves me with shapeless fragments . . .

Aurélia and of the “Généalogie” are situated in extra-temporal places that would seem to protect the self from the adverse effects of change. Nerval does not prematurely end the narrative to ensure the integrity of the self as Stendhal’s text had done, but rather has others die in his place in order to fulfill the death inherent in narrative’s dénouement. Only in *Aurélia* will an equivalent to Stendhal’s bird’s-eye view emerge in the form of the “double aspect.” The simultaneous presence and superposition of a sane or conscious narrator with a dreaming or unconscious narratee reintroduces the element of time, which had been repressed by the Nervalian subject. Time changes the self and transforms it into another, a double. The “double aspect” of Nerval’s narration suggests at the end of *Aurélia* that the text can, as Stendhal had wished, provide a means to see oneself as other through a textual image, a novel map that collapses spaces and times to reveal the becoming of the self.

Sand’s *Indiana* and *Nanon* convey the dangers and advantages of textuality for nineteenth-century women, the need to invent new models of subjectivity in the utopian spaces and hypothetical time of the novel. Similar to Proust’s novel, her works engage with and ultimately transcend the realist tradition. Zola’s division of his text into dossiers and novel, unified by the *Rougon-Macquart* genealogy, becomes an integral structuring principle in Proust’s novel. The *Recherche* is a double text unifying Zola’s split or parallel texts: at once the journal of one man’s long and painful path to becoming a writer and the novel that man eventually writes.

Proust’s novel tells the story of what happens when Stendhal’s autobiography falls definitively into the novel. The autobiographical simulacrum (that the “I” of the present coincides with the “I” of a text) becomes a simulated autobiography where the two components of subjectivity (the self and its relation to the other) are copies without originals, since “Marcel” is not Proust. The other is an exteriorized image of the self, and the self proves to be absent from the text. Just as Zola’s and Nerval’s genealogies marked the impossible coincidence of the self across time and especially of the writer with the written, Proust’s circular novel connects the novel’s conclusion (the narrator decides to write a novel) with its beginning (the narrator is inscribed as text). The death of the writing subject in text, feared by Stendhal, Nerval, and Zola as well as Sand’s fictional characters, is in Proust reversed as the only true life is now one lived in literature. But the cost of this textual life amounts to a hollowed self, written in time and not space as a perpetual becoming in text, in language, and actualized by readers who use the novel as an instrument to see themselves.

The cyclical structure of the novel calls for a cyclical reading where the key to its interpretation as a novel about time is revealed retrospectively. A first reading, chapter 9, considers the text as the story of a failed autobiography where the narrator progressively loses his identity in the spaces of his imagination, until the final revelation that his true vocation is that of a novelist. The second reading, chapter 10, considers the text as the successful novel about time, or the story of the success of literature in forming what Nerval called a "passable subject." The novel in its entirety forms a novel map: instead of a referential illusion confusing a space outside the text with the space of the text, the (material) novel (in the reader's hands) about the becoming of a writer coincides at every point with the (hypothetical) novel the writer claims to write in the future (in the reader's imagination).

