Communicating through Cork: Marcel Proust's Performative Call to Philosophy of Communication

David Deluliiis

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COMMUNICATING THROUGH CORK: MARCEL PROUST’S PERFORMATIVE CALL TO PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
David Deluliis

December 2015
COMMUNICATING THROUGH CORK: MARCEL PROUST’S PERFORMATIVE CALL TO PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNICATING THROUGH CORK: MARCEL PROUST’S PERFORMATIVE CALL TO PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION

By

David DeJuliis

December 2015

Dissertation supervised by Ronald C. Arnett, Ph.D.

Philosophy of communication replaces modernity’s metanarrative of progress with postmodernity’s many works in progress. The metanarrative of postmodernity is fragmentation, the lack of a metanarrative. In postmodernity, progress sputters and stalls, then starts on new paths. Philosophy of communication responds to fragmentation by converging the fragments of philosophy and communication. In his life and work, Marcel Proust (1871-1922) embodied the duality of philosophy of communication. Proust recognized the false grandeur behind the gold gilding of the Belle Epoque in nineteenth-century France, and reframed progress as a series of fits and starts, where the self follows false scents in a search for self-fulfillment. Proust wrote the collection of Les plaisirs et les jours (English: Pleasures and Days) and the unfinished Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve (English: Against Sainte-Beuve) while still preoccupied with Parisian high society. During the First World War, he retired to the solitude of his cork-lined...
bedroom and wrote what many consider to be the best novel of the twentieth century. Proust’s early works are fits and starts for his philosophy of communication in his magnum opus À la recherche du temps perdu (English: In Search of Lost Time). Just as philosophy of communication is a duality of philosophy and communication, each person for Proust is a duality of many superficial selves (communication) and the one, incommunicable true self (philosophy). Superficial selves communicate appearances in conversation that reflects social convention. The true self translates the essence, or cream of oneself into a work of art as an expression of the true self in solitude. For Proust, only art affirms fragmentation as a philosophy of communication.
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Communicating through Cork: Marcel Proust’s Performative Call to Philosophy of Communication

Philosophy of communication replaces modernity’s metanarrative of progress with postmodernity’s many “works in progress.”¹ The metanarrative of postmodernity is fragmentation, the lack of a metanarrative. In postmodernity, progress sputters and stalls, then starts on new paths. Philosophy of communication responds to fragmentation by converging the fragments of philosophy and communication. In his life and work, Marcel Proust (1871-1922) embodied the duality of philosophy of communication. Proust recognized the false grandeur behind the gold gilding of the Belle Epoque in nineteenth-century France, and reframed progress as a series of fits and starts, where the self follows “false scents”² in a search for self-fulfillment. Proust wrote the collection of Les plaisirs et les jours (English: Pleasures and Days) and the unfinished Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve (English: Against Sainte-Beuve) while still preoccupied with Parisian high society. During the First World War, he retired to the solitude of his cork-lined bedroom and wrote what many consider to be the best novel of the twentieth century. Proust’s early works are fits and starts for his philosophy of communication in À la recherche du temps perdu (English: In Search of Lost Time).³ Just as philosophy of communication is a duality of philosophy and communication, each person for Proust is a duality.

³ In addition to many short stories and articles, Proust wrote one novel: À la recherche du temps perdu. À la recherche was first translated into English by C.K. Scott Moncrieff between 1922 and 1930 in 6 volumes under the title Remembrance of Things Past. Considered a masterpiece in its own right, Moncrieff’s translation was based on an incomplete original French manuscript. In 1981, Proust scholar Terrence Kilmartin revised Moncrieff’s translation in three volumes using a new French manuscript published by the Bibliotheque La Pléiade in 1954 and revised in 1987. Using the 1987 “La Pléiade” edition, Modern Library published in 1992 a revision of Kilmartin’s translation by D.J. Enright in six volumes under the title In Search of Lost Time. In 1995, Penguin published a new translation based on the same French edition by six different translators under the general editorialship of Christopher Prendergast. Most recently, Yale University Press commissioned Proust biographer William C. Carter to annotate and revise the original Moncrieff translation. Following Shattuck and most English language Proust scholarship, this paper refers to the 1992 Kilmartin translation in six volumes revised by Enright. References in the original French are to the 1987 Pleiade edition, edited by Jean-Yves Tadié.
of many superficial selves (communication) and the one, incommunicable true self (philosophy). Superficial selves communicate appearances in conversation that reflects social convention. The true self translates the essence or cream of oneself into a work of art as an expression of the true self in solitude. For Proust, only art affirms fragmentation as a philosophy of communication.

In Part I (chapters 1 and 2) of this dissertation, I outline the origins of Proust’s philosophy of communication in the historical moment of nineteenth-century France, from the Franco-Prussian War and Paris Commune through the Belle Epoque and First World War. I then frame Proust’s view of communication within terms of five philosophical binaries: (1) reality and appearance, (2) general and particular, (3) climax and anti-climax, (4) intermittence and stability, and (5) sociality and solitude. Next, I explicate Proust’s mature philosophy of communication in two parts: (1) the translation into a work of art (e.g., *À la recherche*) of one’s true self as glimpsed in impressions, or “isolated perceptions” that reveal the reality behind the appearance of others and objects and (2) the recognition of the reader’s true self in the work of art. In Part II (chapters 3, 4, and 5) I argue that Proust’s early works, from the youthful *Les plaisirs et les jours* (chapter 3) to the experimental *Jean Santeuil* (chapter 5) to the visionary *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (chapter 4), are to varying degrees failures in philosophy of communication that overrely on communication in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, then overcompensate for philosophy in *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. Each of these works contains some seeds of *À la recherche* of many superficial selves (communication) and the one, incommunicable true self (philosophy). Superficial selves communicate appearances in conversation that reflects social convention. The true self translates the essence or cream of oneself into a work of art as an expression of the true self in solitude. For Proust, only art affirms fragmentation as a philosophy of communication.

6 Shattuck, *Proust’s Way*, 140.
7 English-language Proust scholarship refers to Proust’s novel in several ways. Some write out the entire title, *In Search of Lost Time*, or shorten the French title, *À la recherche du temps perdu* to *À la recherche*. For consistency, this paper follows Shattuck in retaining the French title of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, but shortening the title to *À la recherche*. All other references retain the original French in full.
recherché, but Proust admitted his arrogance in writing Les plaisirs et les jours (English: Pleasures and Days) and abandoned Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve (English: Against Sainte-Beuve) when he realized that he was not yet in full command of his philosophy of communication.

In Part III (chapters 6 and 7), I frame A la recherché as first, a communicative bridge between the binaries of reality and appearance, general and particular, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude (chapter 6), and second, a performative call to communication in which Proust sacrificed his life to communication. Proust was always hostile to communication, but only superficial or snobbish\(^9\) communication, which for Proust reflects only the expectations of others and reveals nothing of one’s true self. In his early work, Proust struggled to reconcile his philosophical hostility to communication with the fact that he was a writer, and as a writer must somehow communicate his philosophy, no matter how much he resisted. Next, I argue that A la recherché represents an about-face in Proust’s philosophy of communication, in which Proust realized that communication was the key to not only his own philosophy, but also the preservation of the human condition in literature. Proust tried to translate his true self into communicable form in Jean Santeuil, then again in Contre Sainte-Beuve, but failed both times because he was focused on only the first part of his philosophy of communication. Proust famously withdrew from the outside world to write A la recherché in what seemed like a condemnation of communication, but I argue that Proust had finally fulfilled both parts of his philosophy of communication, and ended his life early to preserve the possibility of posthumous communication in A la recherché – Proust’s performative call to philosophy of communication.

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PART I
Proust’s Philosophy of Communication against the Background of the
Belle Époque

In Part I, review the origins of the field of philosophy of communication, then lay the intellectual infrastructure of Proust’s own philosophy of communication.\textsuperscript{10} I then outline the historical roots of Proust’s philosophy of communication against the background of the Belle Époque in nineteenth-century France. Proust’s past life in the early Third Republic through the First World War became the raw materials for his writing, which I lay out in Chapter 2 in their historical and social context. Proust’s work reflects his life, and his life reflects the questions of his historical moment. Proust was born during the Paris Commune of 1871, and died four years after the end of the First World War. After the Treaty of Versailles, Europe experienced a period of economic turmoil, followed by a period of relative civil stability that ended with the shockwaves from America’s Great Depression. The shockwaves of the global economy paralleled the shockwaves in Proust’s own sensibilities, which he articulated in a series of questions that came to be known as the “Proust Questionnaire.”\textsuperscript{11}

At age thirteen, Proust wrote that his greatest unhappiness would be to be separated from his mother. He would most like to live in the land of the Ideal, with books and musical scores near family and a French theater. Proust wrote on the questionnaire that he was most likely to indulge the private lives of geniuses. He valued intelligence and morality in men, and tenderness and intelligence in women. His favorite occupations were reading, daydreaming and writing poetry. Proust filled out the questionnaire again at age twenty. At twenty, Proust’s greatest unhappiness would be never having known his mother and grandmother. He wanted to live in a

\textsuperscript{10} Proust never wrote a “philosophy of communication” per say, but communication is central to the philosophy that Proust struggled to communicate throughout his literary life. When I reference “Proust’s philosophy of communication,” I mean my own interpretation of Proust’s understanding of communication within the philosophy expounded in his writings.

\textsuperscript{11} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 10.
place where whatever he wanted would appear. He was afraid that his ideal of earthly happiness was not ambitious enough, and would not come to pass anyway if he wrote it down. He was likely to indulge only the faults he understood, and named his principal fault as the inability to will. He wanted to be the person who people he admired wished him to be, and was annoyed at having thought of himself to answer the questions. His new favorite occupation was loving. These positions of the young Proust would come to populate his early works *Les plaisirs et les jours* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, middle work *Jean Santeuil*, and magnum opus *A la recherché*.

Communication requires depth perception in time.\(^\text{12}\) Throughout *A la recherché*, Marcel is unsettled in his environment, and would prefer to stand back and watch his own experience. At the end of *A la recherché*, Marcel turns his desire to be a spectator into the communication of his experience. Marcel appropriates his experiences in society as raw materials for his novel, and affirms his place on the margins of society. With this move, Proust responds to the fragmentation of postmodernity by resituating the human condition on the margins of society in historicity, with depth perception in time. In space, depth perception is the combination of inputs from two eyes input into a single perception. Each eye sees the world from a slightly different perspective a few inches apart.

Combining the two perspectives reveals how objects relate to each other in space. Proust’s philosophy of communication shows depth perception in time. The time between events reveals their significance in relation to other events. The space between the eyes needed to perceive depth in space is analogous to the “many years”\(^\text{13}\) between impressions needed to perceive depth in time. By the time he began *Du cote de chez Swann* after abandoning *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust had depth perception in time. He wrote *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, middle work *Jean Santeuil*, and magnum opus *A la recherché*.

\(^{12}\) Shattuck, *Proust’s Way*, 118.

\(^{13}\) Shattuck, *Proust’s Way*, 120.
Beuve with the vision of *A la recherché*, but lacked the depth perception in time to follow through on his philosophy. Before the outbreak of the First World War, something clicked in Proust’s mature mind and he committed himself to writing *A la recherché*, but that was just the beginning of Proust’s long and arduous path to philosophy of communication.
CHAPTER 1
Arc of the Magic Lantern: Marcel Proust’s Philosophy of Communication

Marcel Proust (1871-1922) perceived the world in pairs. For Proust, there is “no idea that does not carry in itself its possible refutation, no word that does not imply its opposite.” Philosophy of communication contains its possible refutation as a duality of philosophy and communication. Proust embodied the duality of philosophy of communication in his life and work. Proust was born to a Jewish father and French Catholic mother. As a child, Proust spent summers in cosmopolitan Paris and winters in conservative Illiers-Combray. He slept by day and wrote by night, following long, serpentine sentences, full of subordinate clauses and long digressions, with one word. Critics called Proust a mixture of unbearable boredom and unimaginable ecstasy. For Virginia Woolf, “My great adventure is really Proust. Well — what remains to be written after that.” For Aldous Huxley, Proust is a “hermaphrodite, toadlike creature spooning his own tepid juice over his face and body.” Until age 30, Proust was a dilettante who frequented Parisian high society and struggled to find his literary voice. At the end of the 1890s, Proust withdrew from society, lined his bedroom with cork, and devoted his life to writing a philosophy of communication.

This book-length manuscript frames Proust’s philosophy of communication as a performative call to communication. My contention is that, in his early work, Proust drafted the philosophy of communication later articulated in his only complete novel, À la recherche. In the novel, Proust juxtaposes rhetoric, the means of communication for superficial selves, and art, the means of communication for the true self. Rhetoric is preoccupied with appearances in Parisian

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16 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 11.
society. Art translates incommunicable experiences into communicable form. From these presuppositions, this introductory chapter first outlines philosophy of communication as a theoretical perspective and mode of thinking. The next section gives five examples of philosophy of communication as a response to fragmentation in the work of Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, and Julia Kristeva. These vignettes are meant only to illustrate the perspective of philosophy of communication, not to argue for and against their influence on Proust. Arendt, Levinas, Benjamin, Deleuze, and Kristeva converge philosophy and communication to make sense of fragmentation. All were exiled amid fragmentation in postwar Europe, and came together in philosophy of communication.

These five philosophers engage communication from different perspectives, with one common influence: Marcel Proust. The next section outlines Proust’s own philosophy of communication through five hermeneutic entrances outlined by Shattuck: appearance and reality, particular and general, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude. The final section introduces the next five chapters. Proust was a product of the late Belle Epoque in Paris, just before the outbreak of the First World War. His work reframes progress as a series of false starts and dead ends. Proust’s philosophy of communication progressed in fits and starts, from Les plaisirs et les jours (published in 1896) to Jean Santeuil (written and abandoned between 1900 and 1905) to Contre Sainte-Beuve (written and abandoned between 1908 and 1909). In A la recherché, Proust articulated a philosophy of communication that bridges the binaries of appearance and reality, particular and general, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude as an expression of the true self in art.
Philosophy of Communication

Proust begins *A la recherché* with a fifty-page “Overture.” In the overture, Proust announces his hermeneutic entrance into the theme of memory through the metaphor of a magic lantern. The magic lantern brightens a bedroom wall with medieval legends, cut off by the arc of the lantern.\(^\text{17}\) For both Arnett and Holba\(^\text{18}\) and Chang and Butchart,\(^\text{19}\) philosophy of communication is akin to the arc of Proust’s magic lantern, an “overture” that carries existential meaning into everyday life.

**Philosophy and Communication**

As fields of study, philosophy and communication studies have followed opposite paths. Philosophy has an ancient history and sturdy intellectual foundation. Communication studies is young and uncertain about its disciplinary breadth and intellectual depth.\(^\text{20}\) As academic fields of study, both philosophy and communication lay claim to the human condition. Unlike philosophy, however, communication is reducible to definable skills valued in the marketplace, such as selling a product or writing a press release. As a result, specialists in higher education argue that the scope of philosophy is too wide, and that the history of communication studies too short.\(^\text{21}\)

Philosophy of communication reconnects rhetoric to philosophy and examines communication as lived experience. Together, philosophy and rhetoric engage the whole human person at work in the world. The intellectual study of communication has paralleled changes in the nature of communication itself. Modernity’s metanarrative of progress culminated in two world wars, leaving residual skepticism about Enlightenment ideals of objectivity and

\(^\text{21}\) Durham Peters, afterword, 502.
rationality. With new transportation technologies, geographical distance was no longer a barrier to communication. At the same time, communication technologies compressed time and space, making communication easier amid unspeakable destruction. For many, the experience of the importance of communication during war legitimized communication as a field of study during peace. Questions of communication moved from the flanks to the front of philosophical discourse in postmodernity.

The historical period of postmodernity revealed a plurality of perspectives, hidden behind the metanarrative of progress. Postmodernity constitutes both modernity and postmodernity, and contains remnants of all earlier historical periods. Postmodernity assumes and affirms fragmentation. It retreats from totalizing narratives to the experience of everyday life. The postmodern world features diverse perspectives and multiple understandings of the “good.” Postmodernity replaces modernity’s metanarratives of science, progress and individual autonomy with “petite narratives” organized around a common objective. In postmodernity, every person has a petite philosophy of communication. Philosophy of communication makes sense of fragmentation in postmodernity by unsettling the metanarrative of progress. It privileges communication as a way to engage different perspectives, and situates one’s own perspective within the plurality of postmodernity. Philosophy of communication foregrounds fragmentation in order to understand the various perspectives of postmodernity, then identifies coordinates of a given perspective as expressed in communicative practices. Philosophy of communication

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22 Durham Peters, afterword, 503.
23 Durham Peters, afterword, 507.
26 Arnett, Fritz and Bell, Communication Ethics Literacy, 38.
27 Arneson, Perspectives, 2.
affirms the plurality of postmodernity, but rejects modernity’s attempt to reduce plurality to progress.

**Philosophy of Communication**

Philosophy of communication juxtaposes communication and philosophy to reveal their common home in the human condition. Philosophers of communication ask questions about the nature and scope of human communication, and examine the consequences of philosophical discourse for communication studies. Some philosophers of communication, such as Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Gehrke, look to the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, as well as the cultural criticism of Jurgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt. Others, such as Ramsey Eric Ramsey and Corey Anton, ground philosophy of communication in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce. Still others, such as Isaac Catt and Deborah Eicher-Catt, follow Richard Lanigan’s combination of semiotics and phenomenology into communicology, the human science of communication. Regardless of perspective, philosophy of communication assumes that philosophy is a practice embedded in communication, and communication is a practice embedded in philosophical reflection.

This manuscript is informed by several recent books on philosophy of communication. In their book, *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication: The Carrier of Meaning*, Arnett and Holba outline the intellectual origins of philosophy of communication as a discipline and mode of thinking. In her edited volume, *Perspectives on Philosophy of Communication*, Arneson frames philosophy of communication as a response to fragmentation and return to the classical rhetorical tradition. In a more recent edited volume, *Philosophical Profiles on the Theory of Communication*, Hannan collects essays from communication scholars on contemporary philosophers who approach communication from multiple perspectives, from analytic and
pragmatic to psychoanalytic and phenomenological. In an Afterword, Durham Peters situates philosophy of communication within the recent history of communication studies. In another edited volume called *Philosophy of Communication*, Chang and Butchart collect excerpts on communication from primary sources, from Plato in antiquity to Peter Sloterdijk in postmodernity. These authors seek patterns in how key figures in philosophy understand communication. All look to history to understand how we are communicatively situated in a postmodern world.

Since Plato and Aristotle wrote about the role of rhetoric in the Greek polis, communication has been an overarching theme in the history of philosophy. For Plato, rhetoric could communicate the good or manipulate the masses. For Aristotle, rhetoric was an art deserving of systematic scientific inquiry. With his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle began a rhetorical tradition that shaped medieval and modern rhetoric, and continues to inform contemporary debates about the role of communication in society. Since Socrates and the Sophists, philosophy and communication have vied for legitimacy. For philosophers, rhetoric is a roadblock in the search for truth. For rhetoricians, there would be no philosophy without rhetoric. The goal of philosophy is to discover and communicate truth, without persuasion. For rhetoricians, communication is persuasion, and there may be no truth to discover.

Philosophy of communication responds to fragmentation by bringing together the fragments of communication and philosophy. It looks beyond the disciplinary and methodological boundaries of communication to engage and learn from philosophy. The plurality of postmodernity includes both philosophy and communication, and calls on both perspectives to understand how ideas are produced in historical moments, played out in cultural

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28 Durham Peters, afterword, 510.
29 Arnett and Holba, *Overture*, 10.
discourse, and embodied in communicative practices. Philosophy of communication situates communication within history, and looks for cultural codes expressed in speech. Communication constitutes one’s relations with oneself, others, and the world. Philosophy reveals how the relations come together as lived experience. Philosophy of communication examines the conditions and consequences of human communication, as well as connections between human communication and the human condition.

Five philosophers with a common influence of Proust – Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze and Julia Kristeva – illustrate Arnett and Holba’s understanding of philosophy of communication as a theoretical perspective and mode of thinking in response to fragmentation. Both Arendt and Levinas lost family in the Holocaust. They embody the fragmentation of German-Jewish intellectuals in the second half of the twentieth century. Also Jewish, Walter Benjamin committed suicide while fleeing the Nazis from France to Spain. Deleuze witnessed firsthand the destruction of the Second World War, and Kristeva the postwar fragmentation of national identities and intellectual sensibilities. Each thinker proposes a philosophy of communication in response to the fragmentation of postwar Europe. All spent their lives trying to understand how fragmentation happened. They combined the fragments left by two world wars in different ways, but with a shared commitment to questions of communication. I now outline briefly each of their projects as a prelude to my own interpretation of Proust’s project as a philosophy of communication that responds to fragmentation. Beginning with Hannah Arendt, I offer brief vignettes of each philosopher’s engagement with communication as performative examples of philosophy of communication in action, before beginning my own explication of Proust’s philosophy of communication.
Hannah Arendt and Philosophy of Communication

In separate chapters in Hannan’s *Philosophical Profiles in the Theory of Communication* and Arneson’s *Perspectives on Philosophy of Communication*, Stuart Poyntz and Ronald C. Arnett outline Arendt’s philosophy of communication as an indictment of modernity. In response to fragmentation in the latter part of the twentieth century, Arendt proposed the ancient Greek polis as a model for the postmodern marketplace. She looked to the public life of the polis to preserve the human condition. Arendt understands communication as public speech and action in service of the common good.\(^{30}\) Arendt’s philosophy of communication is informed by ancient rhetorical theory, as well as the philosophies of her teachers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Arendt acknowledges a world beyond the self, and seeks to reclaim a multiplicity of perspectives from a metanarrative of progress.\(^{31}\) Modernity transformed public speech and action into a “mass marketization”\(^{32}\) of human desires that sucks all substance from human speech and action. For Arendt, public speech and coordinated action add texture and “thickness”\(^{33}\) to human life.

For Arendt, the public and private domains constitute a natural dialectic, where public action plus private reflection creates meaning. One confronts fragmentation in public, but prepares for the confrontation in private through sustained reflection on other perspectives. The dialectic of public and private informs the communicative practices of both public and private life. A proper dialectic of public and private invites sustained questioning of the presuppositions of modernity. Arendt understands modernity as a call to conformity that replaced the act of

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questioning with unquestioning faith in scientific progress. Conformity created the conditions for mass murder, culminating in Adolf Hitler’s Final Solution.

Modernity abducted the self from tradition and encouraged the self to stand above history and aside for progress. Modernity collapsed public and private domains into the social domain. The social reduces human relationships to social connections. In the social sphere, communication takes the form of jargon and clichés. The social absolves the self of private responsibility and public answerability. The social divides society into pariahs, shunned for their nonconformity, and parvenus, who renounce their difference to conform. Within the social, progress assumes the form of social climbing that shuns the pariah and welcomes the parvenu. Most people are neither parvenus nor pariahs, but a third category of unreflective masses. The bifurcation of society into insiders and outsiders creates an undifferentiated social sphere that stops the natural dialectic of public and private.34

Modernity filled the natural “interspaces”35 between public and private with consensus and conformity. In the social, what is new is better and what can be done should be done in the name of progress. For Arendt, the fragmentation of postmodernity reorients the human condition away from itself and toward the space between public and private. Arendt calls for an “enlarged mentality”36 that engages the world from another’s perspective and looks beyond the limits of imposed consensus. Through a dialectic of public and private, communication takes the form of sustained engagement with difference. Arendt’s philosophy of communication is an alternative to progress that reclaims the space between public and private. Her reclamation project moves communication studies away from progress back to everyday life.

34 Arnett, “Dialectical Communicative Labor,” 70.
Emmanuel Levinas and Philosophy of Communication

In a chapter\textsuperscript{37} in Hannan’s \textit{Philosophical Profiles in the Theory of Communication}, Amit Pinchevski frames Levinas’ philosophy of communication as a return from ontology to everyday life. In response to fragmentation, Emmanuel Levinas chose alterity and the Other over ontology and the self. Levinas put the teachings of the Jewish Talmud into conversation with ancient Greek philosophy and contemporary German phenomenology.\textsuperscript{38} In his early work, Levinas used the language of ontology to argue that the experience of face-to-face communication was non-ontological. In his later work, Levinas used non-ontological language to locate the origins of communication in Otherness. For Levinas, communication is a preverbal and primordial relation of self to Other. Other people are impenetrably Other. Openness to Otherness must precede understanding and explanation of the Other. Levinas argued that Western philosophy was grounded in ontology, the philosophical study of being. Ontology assumes that being can be known, and that the self has a responsibility to know it. Ontology equates identity with self-identity and privileges the inner self over the outer world. Levinas replaces an ontology of abstract essences with an ethics of everyday life. His philosophy of communication moves from ontological introspection to ethical openness to Otherness, where the face of the Other announces a responsibility of the “I” to the Other: “I am my brother’s keeper.”\textsuperscript{39}

The focus of Levinas’ philosophy of communication is the moment the self comes face-to-face with the Other. For Levinas, the “I” only makes sense in relation to the Other. Knowledge of the good need not precede doing good. Instead, the responsibility of “I” to the Other opens possibilities for understanding oneself. Responsibility to the Other is irreducible to

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\textsuperscript{38} Amit Pinchevksi, “Contact and Interruption,” 343.
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\textsuperscript{39} Pinchevski, “Contact and Interruption,” 346.
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communication, but is made manifest in communication as an announcement of responsibility. As an acknowledgement of Otherness, communication “gestures”\textsuperscript{40} to the Other’s face. The contours of each human face are unique and irreducible to a common mold. The face of the Other is a visual and vocal announcement of alterity that commands the self to respond. The face-to-face meeting of self and other is an expectation of communication, where an other becomes Other through communication. An encounter with the face of a stranger announces a responsibility of the “I” to the Other, but not the Other to the “I”. Communication is not a conversation between self and Other, but a responsibility unidirectional from the self, and nonreciprocal from the Other.

In his early work, Levinas understood proximity as a call to responsibility awakened by the face of the Other. In his later work, Levinas grounds his philosophy of communication within the metaphor of proximity. Proximity is a call to communication where the Other affects the preverbal sensibilities of the self. Communication is an “event of proximity”\textsuperscript{41} that announces proximity, the Saying, before information is exchanged in speech, the Said. While the Said is ontological, the Saying is pre-ontological and ethical. The Said assumes that the world can be known and represents the world in language. The Said “proclaims” and “establishes”\textsuperscript{42} correlations between words and the world. The Saying assumes a stance of openness to the Other, where the proximity of self to the Other calls the “I” to respond to the Other’s command. Levinas argued that Western philosophy privileged the Said at the expense of the Saying. For Levinas, the Saying comes before and extends beyond the Said. The Said may reveal the Saying, but the Saying cannot be reduced to the Said. The Saying inspires the Said and the Said echoes the Saying. Communication constitutes the interplay of Saying and Said as a rhetoric of

\textsuperscript{40} Pinchevski, “Contact and Interruption,” 355.
\textsuperscript{41} Pinchevski, “Contact and Interruption,” 352.
\textsuperscript{42} Pinchevski, “Contact and Interruption,” 354.
responsibility, where proximity to the Other signals an intention to communicate. Communication interrupts ontological claims to certainty and returns to everyday life, or the performative space where one encounters the Other.

**Walter Benjamin and Philosophy of Communication**

In an article[^43] in a 1988 special issue of *Literature in Performance* on the relation of rhetoric to critical theory, Michael Bowman frames Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of communication as performative cultural criticism. Walter Benjamin was little-known during his life. After his death, he came to symbolize the restlessness and fragmentation of postmodernity. Benjamin performed cultural criticism as philosophy of communication within and outside the rigid structures of Marxism. Benjamin and the loosely-connected theorists of the Frankfurt School conceptualized the world dialectically with human reason and the market in perpetual contention. For Benjamin, the market and human reason form two elements of a dialectic, with the third to be determined. With his philosophy of communication, Benjamin sought to defend the future against those in power who protect the present in the name of progress. For Benjamin, critical theory should seek to not improve current conditions, but make current conditions more tolerable for everyone by pointing out the oppressive aspects of power structures.

The critical theory of the Frankfurt school began as a rhetorical project, meant to replenish a cultural discourse depleted by modernity. While many critical theorists of the Frankfurt school later abandoned rhetoric, Benjamin embraced the rhetorical origins of critical theory. He believed that cultural criticism recreates the world through public performance. In modernity, artists and performers sacrificed their critical stance toward society, and acquiesced to metanarratives of progress. With his philosophy of communication, Benjamin sought to

reclaim the rapprochement between performance and criticism. For Benjamin, art is an interplay of “material content,” or the work of art itself, limited by time and space, and “truth content,” a glimpse of truth that transcends time and space. The interplay of material content and truth content reflects the individual artist and reveals the human condition.

For Benjamin, the task of the cultural critic is twofold: to recognize the ratio of material content to truth content, and reclaim truth content from the market. Cultural history hinders the progress of modernity, and slows capitalism’s search for new markets. Benjamin understood cultural history as a reflection of the history of capitalism, where the market values commodities (material content) over abstract ideas (truth content). Benjamin seeks to reconnect cultural history to capitalism and reclaim truths from the metanarrative of progress. For Benjamin, mechanical production strips art of its capacity to reveal the human condition. Rather than an object of intrinsic beauty, art becomes an “instrument of communication,” or means to the end of progress. Benjamin refocuses on truth content to reclaim the work of art as a communicative weapon for social change. Benjamin problematized modernity and performed critical possibilities for recombining the fragments of postmodernity into a philosophy of communication.

**Gilles Deleuze and Philosophy of Communication**

In a chapter in Hannan’s *Philosophical Profiles in the Theory of Communication*, Alexander Kozin explicates Deleuze’s philosophy of communication as a subversion of the status quo. Gilles Deleuze grew up in German-occupied Paris during World War II, and witnessed first hand the fragmentation of postwar Europe. In response to fragmentation, Deleuze

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sought to interrupt dominant cultural discourse that ignored fragmentation. The question of communication in Deleuze’s philosophy reflects the role of communication in reality. For Deleuze, communication is the unspoken exchange of cultural signs and discursive codes. Discursive codes carry the content of communication below the surface of culture as power relations. Communication is an implicit tool of organization, used by the powerful to maintain their power. Communication compels obedience and creates expectations for what the world should look like, as dictated by those in power. With his philosophy of communication, Deleuze seeks to unsettle power relations, and undermine the capacity of communication to construct bureaucratic hierarchies. Dominant cultural discourse tries to fit fragmentation into a hegemonic status quo. Deleuze seeks to interrupt the status quo and affirm fragmentation.

Deleuze also witnessed fragmentation in the field of philosophy in postwar France. The war broke down barriers between the fields of phenomenology, the study of individual conscious experience, and semiology, the study of culturally-shared signs and sign systems. Deleuze’s philosophy of communication is grounded in phenomenology, particularly Husserl’s distinction between real and ideal mental acts and fixed and fluid essences. Deleuze shares with Husserl a focus on the “event” of human consciousness amid fragmentation. He uses Husserl’s phenomenological reduction to understand cultural signs, or semiotics. The phenomenological reduction reveals how people express culture through communication, and how communication reflects the myths, rituals and institutions of culture (Kozin, 2012). Deleuze’s looks for the limits of phenomenology and semiotics “in-between” the realms of real and ideal, where conscious experience (phenomenology) meets signification (semiotics).

The self in the social world is always forthcoming, oriented toward others in an attitude of interaction. For Deleuze, subjectivity is always schizophrenic. The schizophrenic sees the

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world as it is, in fragments, without the sense of imposed social structures. For Deleuze, 
communication constitutes reality in reversible relations. Communication imposes structure on 
the world as understandable binaries, such as male and female. Deleuze’s work follows a non-
linear and non-logical progression toward an unexpected outcome, such as a reversal of these 
binaries. For Deleuze, human consciousness is an event of expression that collects the fragments 
of the senses into a coherent vision of the world, or simulacrum. The simulacrum mirrors reality 
but, like a mirror, cannot exceed the apparent reality it reproduces. The simulacrum surrounds a 
sign with context and overwhelms the sign in its continuity. The continuity forms a narrative that 
situates the sign within the context. The interplay of narrative and simulacrum is analogous to the 
relation of word to image. The image is irreducible to any one word, but exists as a series of 
words and sequence of sentences, strung together as a continuous narrative and revealed in 
philosophy of communication.

**Julia Kristeva and Philosophy of Communication**

In a chapter in Andrea Lunsford’s edited volume, *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the 
Rhetorical Tradition*, Suzanne Clark explicates Julia Kristeva’s philosophy of communication 
through the metaphor of strangeness. Kristeva responds to fragmentation with a call to adopt 
strangeness as the postmodern status quo. A Bulgarian woman trained in Soviet linguistics and 
Marxist cultural theory, Kristeva embodied the spirit of strangeness in postmodernity. Through 
the metaphor of strangeness, Kristeva seeks to unsettle status quo understandings of womanhood. 
For Kristeva, human identity is fragile and fluid, constructed and dismantled in an interplay of 
strangeness and familiarity. Strangeness inspires an attitude of acceptance wherein difference 
leads to dialogue, and dialogue to new means of persuasion for rhetoric. Kristeva replaces an 
exclusionary, either/or rhetoric with an affirmative, both/and rhetoric that depends on
strangeness. With a both/and rhetoric, states should accept foreigners, and individuals should acknowledge in themselves what goes unspoken in culture. Kristeva inverts the traditions of rhetoric from exclusion to inclusion, where strangeness opens possibilities for informed public discourse.

Kristeva’s philosophy of communication synthesizes literary and cultural history with semiotics, linguistics, and psychoanalysis. Kristeva understands communication as an ongoing exchange between embodied human subjects. Communication is a “work in progress” that produces knowledge and shapes the identities of interlocutors. Ethos, pathos and logos are not only formal categories of rhetoric, but also dwellings for human identity. The philosophical tradition after Plato and Socrates was suspicious of rhetoric. Philosophy was associated with reality and truth, and rhetoric with appearance and mistruth. Rather than excluding difference in the same way that philosophy marginalized rhetoric, Kristeva argues that rhetoric should affirm strangeness, embodied especially by women. Kristeva reaffirms the role of women in the rhetorical tradition, and rejects tendencies in classical rhetoric to exclude anything oppositional to the dominant social order and, in modern rhetoric, anything outside the scope of reason and rationality. For Kristeva, the pronoun “I” designates a speaking subject whose subjectivity emerges from a rhetorical situation. The speaking subject is a text whose communication constitutes intertextual dialogue, irreducible to scientific language.

Kristeva looks for responses to fragmentation in cultural discourse, and from cultural discourse diagnoses shifts in the human condition. She agrees with Deleuze that life is nonlinear and illogical, and that the human condition is fragmented. Unlike Deleuze, however, Kristeva believes in the power of rhetoric to resist established thought. At once, Kristeva recognizes the constraints imposed on rhetoric by dominant social orders, and affirms the inventive capacity of

48 Clark, “Rhetoric and the Woman as Stranger,” 308.
communication to create new identities, rather than reifying received ones. The first step of resistance is to transform language. Inefficiency and irrationality should ground a new cultural discourse in poetic language, rather than scientific symbolism. Poetic language frees the self from the metanarrative of progress, and opens possibilities for making sense of fragmentation.

Kristeva seeks to reinstate rhetoric as the primary tool for navigating the plurality of postmodernity. Communication interrupts the metanarrative of progress by revealing alternative paths to truth. Kristeva injects communication into philosophy to reclaim strangeness from modernity. Modernity confused process with progress, and denied the epistemological potential of communication. With her philosophy of communication, Kristeva replaces modernity’s metanarrative of progress with petite “works in progress” that affirm and reaffirm fragmentation. Sameness and order dominated modernity. Sameness and order take residual form today as unquestioning acceptance of received social structures, such as state and religion. Difference and disorder dominate postmodernity. Kristeva follows postmodernity to the margins of society, armed with a philosophy of communication.

From different perspectives, Arnedt, Levinas, Benjamin, Deleuze and Kristeva share a commitment to philosophy of communication informed by Marcel Proust. In the Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), Arendt looks to Proust to understand the place of Jews in postwar Europe. In a chapter devoted to Proust in Proper Names (1976), Levinas argued that the true nature of people and places is hidden behind the a priori expectations of their names. Benjamin was Proust’s primary German translator. In a chapter on Proust in Illuminations (1969), Benjamin likened Proust to Michelangelo, painting the Sistine Chapel on his back in bed. In Proust and Signs (1964), Deleuze likens Proust to a spider in a web, responsive to particular
signs in a framework of universal totality. In *Proust and the Sense of Time* (1993), Kristeva reads Proust as a psychoanalyst searching for signs of the present in the distant past.

**Marcel Proust and Philosophy of Communication**

This chapter outlines Proust’s own philosophy of communication using two books by noted Proust scholars Roger Shattuck and Howard Moss. Neither Shattuck nor Moss is a communication scholar. However, both Shattuck and Moss foreground communication in Proust’s aesthetic. Shattuck writes, “The word that best sums up Proust’s philosophical attitude…is ‘communication.’” In *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust* (1962), Moss outlines the dual structure of Proust’s work. Together, Shattuck and Moss set up the binaries of reality and appearance, general and particular, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude. Both associate appearance, particular, anti-climax, stability and sociality with superficial selves, and reality, general, climax, intermittence and solitude with the true self.

Superficial selves communicate appearances with words. The true self communicates with reality alone through impressions and their translation in art. Words are appearances that stand for reality. To treat words as representative of reality is “to sacrifice to the symbol the reality it stands for.” The true self is not communicable in words, only in art. Conversation transforms the true self into a ventriloquist dummy, held up by the desires of others. Music, painting, and literature capture the visceral experience of the artist and inspire a parallel feeling in those who come into contact with art. Proust translates the vividness of his impressions into art in the form of literature. Conversation is contrived by superficial selves for other superficial

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50 Shattuck and Moss explicate either end of all these binaries, but the binaries themselves are my own.
selves. Art is an expression of the true self, directed toward other true selves. Conversation is manipulative. Art is “magical.”

The base of Proust’s philosophy of communication is an optical epistemology that sees the world in pairs, from the perspectives of microscope and telescope (Shattuck, 2000). The dual perspective creates a dual structure of love and society represented by the two “ways” of Swann and Guermantes. The dual structure creates a dual self consisting of superficial selves and the true self, represented by the “double I” of A la recherche. The dual self oscillates between appearance and reality, general and particular, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude. In Proust’s aesthetic, art stops the oscillation and captures the true self, the object of communication.

Proust’s philosophy of communication situates his true self amid fragmentation. For Proust, human experience is a fragmented sequence of meaningless events, contiguous in history. Meaning is apparent only in retrospect, when memory reveals meaning in relief. Proust affirms the progress of modernity. However, progress is made only in fits and starts and “false scents.” Proust grounds the human condition in the “raw materials” of everyday life. There is no substitute for the trial and error of everyday experience. Everyone experiences disappointment and follows false scents on the path to self-fulfillment. For Proust, the ultimate end of human existence is to progress past the setbacks and find joy in one’s own life as the author of one’s own experience. At the end of an uphill “journey through the wilderness” man comes to understand the meaning of his life. Like the boundaries of philosophy and communication, Proust’s work is never crisp and clean, but vibrates with interpretive possibilities.

53 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 77.
54 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 109.
55 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 71.
56 Proust, The Captive and The Fugitive, 328.
57 Proust, Swann’s Way, 864.
The Two “Ways”

In French, the word *du côté* has two meanings: a path or direction and manner or mode. In English, the word way also has two meanings as a path or manner. The dualities in Proust himself are reflected in the two “ways” of Swann’s Way and Guermantes Way. In *A la recherche*, Marcel spends the Easter holiday at the country house of his Aunt Leonie in Combray, a bucolic town on the outskirts of Paris. Two paths, or “ways,” lead out of Aunt Leonie’s garden into the surrounding countryside. One path, called “Swann’s Way,” leads to the home of Charles Swann, the son of a well-connected stockbroker and friend of Marcel’s family. Swann’s Way is a lowland plain, watered by a neighboring river. The other path, called “Guermantes Way,” leads to the homes of the Guermantes family, the French feudal sovereigns of Combray since the Middle Ages. The Guermantes Way is river land that saturates the surrounding plain. Although the two ways are connected geographically, they represent distinct modes of living for the young Marcel, like two distinct hemispheres of the brain. The two ways represent two paths to self-fulfillment. For Marcel, Swann’s Way and the Guermantes Way are mutually exclusive ways of life, each with its own ideals and possibilities.

Proust associates Swann’s Way with love and lust, and Guermantes Way with society and sociality. Swann’s Way represents the possibilities of biological love through the metaphors of gardens, flowers, and water. Marcel meets his first love, Swann’s daughter Gilberte, on a summer walk on Swann’s Way. Guermantes Way represents the possibilities of society through the metaphor of the party. As an adolescent, Marcel’s family moves to a hotel in Paris operated by the Guermantes family. Proust uses the metaphor of the party to represent the superficiality of the French aristocracy. The fauborg Saint-Guermantes are European royalty who embody the

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“snobbery” of the French aristocracy and value “Guermantes wit” above all other values.\textsuperscript{60} They gather at parties where the Duchess de Guermantes displays her wit at the expense of the uninitiated. Throughout the novel, Marcel follows Swann’s Way in search of fulfillment in love. He fails. He then follows the Guermantes Way in search of fulfillment in society. He fails. At the end of the novel, Marcel realizes that both Swann’s Way, with its promises of love, and Guermantes Way, with its promises of social connection, are “false scents”\textsuperscript{61} in his search for self-fulfillment. The only true way to wisdom is the “communication of souls”\textsuperscript{62} through a work of art.

The “Double-I”

In \textit{A la recherché}, Proust bifurcates the pronoun “I” (French: \textit{je}) into a duality of Marcel and the Narrator. The main character of \textit{A la recherché} is named Marcel, but he is not Marcel Proust. Marcel is a boy, and the Narrator is the same boy grown old, reflecting on his own life and telling the story of Marcel’s maturation. The pronoun \textit{je} is a fusion of the first person pronoun of \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} and the third person pronoun of \textit{Jean Santeuil} into the “double I” of \textit{A la recherché}.\textsuperscript{63} Proust’s singular pronoun contains many characters, each with its own style. First, there is Marcel, the “hero” of the novel.\textsuperscript{64} Second, there is the Narrator, a much older Marcel who tells his own story in roughly chronological order. Marcel and the Narrator are the bookends of \textit{A la recherché}. Throughout the novel, Marcel searches for what the Narrator knows, that the only way to defeat death is through art in the form of literary fiction. This leads to the third manifestation of the pronoun \textit{je}, the literary persona of Marcel Proust. The Author

\textsuperscript{60} Proust, \textit{Time Regained}, 233.
\textsuperscript{61} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 71.
\textsuperscript{62} Proust, \textit{Time Regained}, 342.
\textsuperscript{63} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 33.
\textsuperscript{64} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 7.
translates the fragments of Marcel Proust’s real life into a fiction novel. As one, Marcel and the Narrator produce *A la recherché* as the expression of Proust’s true self.

The lives of Marcel and Marcel Proust parallel each other, but their separation into two parts of a single pronoun announces Proust’s overarching goal: to free the self from its fundamental finitude. Marcel realizes that he needs rescuing from the “false scents” of love and society, and sets out to become the Narrator of his own life. Marcel the boy and Marcel the man, the two parts of the “double I,” become one and set out to write the book the reader holds. The double I creates a dual perspective of Marcel the observer and Marcel the observed, where the “I” of Proust rescues the “I” of Marcel from the “oblivion”\(^65\) of time. Time divides each person into many contiguous selves. These selves are superficial, oriented toward things outside and other than the self, such as love friendship, and society. Superficial selves experience the world in isolated fragments devoid of meaning. They communicate through rhetoric, dictated by the expectations of others. In the true, innermost self, all superficial selves come into phase. Superficial selves are snapshots of the true self, which is always in motion, subject to the “ceaseless modifications”\(^66\) of time.

**Optical Epistemology**

Proust’s philosophy of communication constitutes an epistemology of the image.\(^67\) Proust’s world is visual, made up of images brightened and dimmed by human desire. Some of Proust’s characters see photographic snapshots of single, static moments in the continuity of consciousness. Others see panoramas, or “isolated visual fragments”\(^68\) of the world. Both are incomplete and static representations of reality, unable to account for the constant motion of

\(^{65}\) Proust, *Time Regained*, 261.  
\(^{68}\) Shattuck, *Proust’s Way*, 127.
time. For Proust, communication constitutes the connection of static images in time through involuntary memory. The involuntary memory of two static images, separated by a long interval of time, sets still images in motion. The superficial self is a snapshot, or fragment, of the true self at the time. Communication through involuntary memory captures the true self as it really is, in time.69

Shattuck frames Proust’s optical epistemology as focused on inner subjective states. It has three levels, from least sensitive to most sensitive: the effect of natural light on landscapes, the effect of artificial light on man-made objects, and the unaided human imagination. For Proust the self has many selves, and truth has various visions. Visions of truth move from natural light to artificial light to the unaided human imagination. The least sensitive level of Proust’s epistemology is the effect of light on landscapes. Consciousness is a prism of human desires that determines one’s experience of the world, or the sun through a stained-glass window.70 In Proust, love highlights some people and keeps other, less attractive people in the dark. Words penetrate the consciousness indirectly, like light passing through water.71 The metaphors of monocles and magnifying glasses represent the next, more sensitive level of Proust’s epistemology. In this level, words and names assume intrigue and expectations, as if under a magnifying glass. The true self is an “X-ray”72 of superficial selves. The most sensitive stage of Proust’s optical epistemology is also the most prone to optical illusion: the unaided imagination. Through the levels of Proust’s epistemology, perception becomes more and more prone to error. Love is an optical illusion of lust.

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69 Moss, Magic Lantern, 23.
70 Proust, Swann’s Way, 61.
71 Proust, Swann’s Way, 541.
72 Proust, The Captive and The Fugitive, 40.
Proust’s optical epistemology is played out in the “social kaleidoscope” of high society. From his modest social position, Marcel miscalculates the distance between himself and the upper levels of fauborg Saint-Guermantes. From the upper levels of the fauborg Saint-Guermantes, the Princess de Luxembourg miscalculates the distance between herself and Marcel. Proust looks up and down the levels of his epistemology using another duality: microscope and telescope. The microscope enlarges phenomena too small to observe in space. The telescope observes phenomena too far away to comprehend in time. For Proust, a microscopic view of the human personality reflects people at particular times, and a telescopic view of the human personality reveals personality in time, as a composite whole.

Proust describes events and characters in several hundred pages of microscopic detail, only to reveal that the description was misleading in telescopic time. Proust places the “frames” of superficial selves under a microscope, then deduces “great laws” of the human personality from the “petty details” of individual selves. Like the objects of the microscope and telescope, the whole of *A la recherche* is beyond the scope of one mind. Proust situates even the most microscopic details into a vast framework governed by “great laws” of the human personality. At each particular moment, people appear stationary and time stops, as under a microscope. In the whole of existence, however, perceptions in the present depend on the past and future, as through a telescope. At the same time, Proust’s prose mimics the motion of time, and arrests time as an expression of Proust’s true self in art.

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75 Proust, *Time Regained*, 520.
Proust’s Aesthetic

Art reflects the innermost self, or “soul,” of the artist and constitutes the “communication of souls.”\textsuperscript{77} Proust transforms his own opaque body, incommunicable with words, into a transparent character in a novel, or “image made out of words.”\textsuperscript{78} For Proust, the human condition is forever alone, confined to the “outline” of a body. The only way out of the “solitary confinement of the human condition”\textsuperscript{79} is through art. Art opens as many worlds as there are artists. Communication through art allows one to see the world “with other eyes.”\textsuperscript{80} In reading Proust, for instance, the reader leaves reality, then returns refreshed with new understanding of oneself and the world. As a whole, human experience is incommunicable. Proust communicates the whole of his experience, and engages the whole experience of the reader. For Proust, art is a form of communication that penetrates the superficial self and reveals the innermost self.

Communication through art has two parts. First, there is an object external to the self, like a work of art. Second, there is an inner “state of mind”\textsuperscript{81} indiscernible to the self. Communication is the connection between the internal state of mind and the external work of art. For Proust, art is not outside the self, but within the self’s attempts to recognize itself in a work of art. To celebrate art without searching for the communicative link to oneself reduces art to idolatrY, incapable of communicating or revealing a true self.\textsuperscript{82} This process has four steps: sensation, impression, reminiscence and self-recognition. A sensation is any experience of the natural world through the senses, most often the eyes in Proust’s optical epistemology.

Sensations trigger impressions, or “isolated perceptions,”\textsuperscript{83} which make sensations of everyday

\textsuperscript{77} Proust, \textit{Time Regained}, 342.
\textsuperscript{78} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 142.
\textsuperscript{79} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 148.
\textsuperscript{80} Proust, \textit{The Captive} and \textit{The Fugitive}, 343.
\textsuperscript{81} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 239.
\textsuperscript{82} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 156.
\textsuperscript{83} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 108.
objects meaningful. Through impressions, ordinary objects take on a “palpable aura of
significance.” Impressions are fleeting and incommunicable, pleasurable for an instant only.
As soon as one tries to articulate an impression, the impression disappears and disintegrates into
fragments.

However, impressions can recur through reminiscences. Reminiscences, or moments
bienheureux, consist of two of the same impression, separated by “many years.” The past
impression must have been forgotten, then remembered involuntarily in the present. Involuntary
memory transforms past impressions into present reality in the form of a reminiscence.
Reminiscences bring past and present selves into phase, and provide a glimpse of one’s true self
as it evolves and morphs over time. Isolated impressions provide a glimpse into the “essence of
things” in the natural world. Reminiscences reveal the essence of oneself as an act of self-
recognition. Communication begins with the self-recognition of the artist, and ends with the self-
recognition of the reader. An artist glimpses his true self in reminiscences, then “translates” the
reminiscences into art, which captures the artist’s true self as an image. In experiencing art (i.e.
reading Proust), the reader recognizes himself in the novel, and sees his true self. The artist
reveals in art what is imperceptible in life.

Shattuck sees two aesthetic loops at work in Proust. The first loop is between art and
everyday life. This loop contains within it a second loop between the past and present
impressions of a reminiscence. The two loops are analogous. A work of art, such as A la
recherché appropriates the raw materials of past life, and communicates them as present
experiences. Life provides the raw materials for literature. Literature transcends the limitations of

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life, then returns to life with energizing force. In linking present impressions with the memory of past impressions, reminiscences infuse the past with a sense of reality, making the memory a real part of the present. Art returns to the reality of everyday life to collect raw materials, but does not share the same limitations as everyday life. The artist need not invent new materials; the artist translates the existing materials of memory into metaphor. Art is a standing reserve of past impressions that open possibilities for interpreting present experiences. Art augments life with depth and texture through the interplay of (1) appearance and reality, (2) general and particular, (3) climax and anti-climax, (4) intermittence and stability, (5) sociality and solitude.

**Appearance and Reality**

Proust’s guiding principle is that human experience is a collection of appearances, and appearances are deceiving. No person or phenomenon is ever as it seems. Appearances masquerade as a distorted “disguise” for reality. Proust associates words with appearances and superficial selves, and impressions and reminiscences with reality and the true self. Like the spoken word, impressions are momentary and fleeting, but words cannot express the feelings that impressions inspire. Feelings inspired by impressions can “escape” the self in words, but words say nothing about the impressions themselves. Words only make sense within a shared grammar, or “pre-established order.” Impressions are irreducible to common words because no two impressions are alike. Impressions break through appearance and give a fleeting glimpse of reality. Reminiscences reveal the reality of the true self by bringing the past and present into phase. As individual moments, the past and present appear real, but in reality are incomplete and fragmented. In art, past and present converge as future possibilities for making sense of

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fragmentation. For Proust, this is the “communication of souls,” or essence of communication as it relates to appearance and reality.

General and Particular

Appearance is to reality as particular is to general. Preoccupation with appearances leads to the “tyranny of the Particular,” where the objective reality of places and people fails to live up to subjective desires. Under the “tyranny of the Particular,” subjective desires distort objective reality until reality becomes disorienting, like waking up from a nap. In A la recherche, Marcel’s expectations for the transcendent beauty of Balbec church are disappointed when he first sees its ugly brick façade and an adjoining bank and bakery. For Proust, the “tyranny of the Particular,” also applies to individuals. Appearances are inaccessible. By chasing the inaccessible, individuals look away from reality. They speak as superficial selves and address superficial selves. They fail to look inward, to the reality of the true self, because they are afraid it might not match the appearance of their superficial selves. Superficial selves pine for the unpossessed, until they possess it and no longer want it. They look forward to the future and are disappointed by the present. Under the “tyranny of the Particular,” superficial selves seek immediate gratification elsewhere in another time. Superficial selves look to the future for fulfillment, farther and farther away from themselves. The result is that people are unable to make sense of fragmentation in the immediate present. Superficial selves submit to the tyranny of the Particular; The true self transcends the tyranny of the Particular through communication in art.

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93 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 323-324.
94 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 83.
95 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 84.
**Climax and Anti-Climax**

Particular is to general as anti-climax is to climax. For Proust, words alone are sterile, limited to appearances, without the possibility of penetrating reality. Words communicate appearances, and nothing more.\(^96\) Words are powerless to convey the most intense human experiences. In *A la recherche*, words wash over Marcel’s lover like waves on a rock, but fail to penetrate her innermost self. When Marcel overhears the sounds of a homosexual affair, words cannot convey his loss of innocence. The pleasure of sexual intimacy is anti-climactic, combining an instant of ejaculatory pleasure with a lifetime of regret. The anti-climax of heterosexual intercourse has possibility of procreation; the anti-climax of homosexual intercourse is sterile. Marcel’s maturation in *A la recherche* follows the trajectory of climax and anti-climax. He looks for the climax of love on Swann’s Way and social connections on Guermantes Way, and fails in both. He has expectations for the climax of the future, only to be disappointed by the anti-climax of the present. When Marcel meets the Narrator and makes his life communicable as art, anti-climax becomes climax, and communication occurs.

**Intermittence and Stability**

Anti-climax is to climax as stability is to intermittence. In modernity, long stretches of status quo were interrupted at irregular intervals by isolated crises. In postmodernity, perpetual crisis is interrupted by rare and brief intervals of status quo. In Proust, human experience is “intermittent,”\(^97\) made stable by habit. Impressions are “momentary transports”\(^98\) through long stretches of habit-induced monotony. Habit “drapes over things the guide of familiarity”\(^99\) and makes fragmentation appear whole. One superficial self cannot explain a whole personality, and


\(^{97}\) Shattuck, *Proust’s Way*, 5.


one experience cannot explain the whole of existence. Proust engages impressions and experience on their own terms, as fragments, not in relation to other selves or other people. Everything in Proust’s universe connects to everything else. Some connections are engaged by impressions, and others are dulled by habit. In time, the connections come to constitute a dynamic and imperceptible whole. Some, like Proust, affirm fragmentation and make their experience communicable as art. Others choose the distraction of superficial conversation. For both, existence is intermittent, despite the illusory stability of habit.

Sociality and Solitude

Stability is to intermittence as sociality is to solitude. Proust associates solitude with memory and art, the means of communication for true selves, and sociality with superficiality and snobbery, the means of communication for superficial selves. Solitude is the natural orientation of the human condition. Impressions, reminiscences and self-recognition occur only in solitude. The writer writes in solitude, and the reader reads in solitude. Both writer and reader must be alone for the “communication of souls” to happen. Sociality distracts the self from itself, and orients the human condition toward things other than the self. The true self communicates only through art, not sociality. The presence of another person distracts both the writer and reader from their true selves. However, sociality is only disruptive to communication when the self seeks fulfillment in sociality alone. In A la recherché, Marcel came to see sociality as a false scent. Other people became pawns in a “play outside a play” who provided the raw materials for his novel. For Proust, sociality serves solitude in communication through art.

100 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 98.
101 Shattuck, Time Regained, 342.
102 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 140.
Bridging the Binaries through Communication

For Proust, communication bridges the binaries of appearance and reality, particular and general, climax and anti-climax, stability and intermittence, and sociality and solitude. All of the binaries exist within every individual. Superficial selves are associated with appearance, particular, climax and stability. All of these states are fragments of human experience, manipulable by words. The true self is associated with reality, general, anti-climax and intermittence. All of these states are preservable in art as the expression of experience. Words are empty shells that convey nothing universal about the human condition. In conversation, speakers are not themselves, especially with those closest to them. They are least themselves with those they love. In conversation, people are so preoccupied with what to say next that they betray their true “affections” and “sufferings.” Conversation creates a “new and momentary world” where words are exchanged as empty appearances. The walls of this environment form a boundary around interlocutors that blocks words from the true self, and prevents the true self from expressing itself. In the remaining chapters of this dissertation, I follow Proust’s struggle to express his true self. Beginning with the youthful collection, Les plaisirs et les jours (1896) through the unfinished Jean Santeuil (1900-1905) and Contre Sainte-Beuve (1908-1909), Proust tried and failed to find a communicative vehicle for his philosophical vision. With A la recherché, Proust set philosophy in service of communication as defined by his philosophy.

Part II consists of chapter three on Proust’s first published work, Les plaisirs et les jours (1896), chapter four on Proust’s middle work, Jean Santeuil (1900-1905), and chapter five on Proust’s last work before A la recherché, Contre Sainte-Beuve (1908-1909). For Proust, “Wisdom is not given to us; we must discover it for ourselves, by means of a journey that no one

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103 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 109.
104 Proust, Time Regained, 813.
105 Proust, Time Regained, 813.
else can make for us and from which no one can absolve us.” Proust spent his life on a journey toward something he did not fully understand, and which turned out to be philosophy of communication. The early works of Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve are pit stops on the path to Proust’s philosophy of communication. At each stop, Proust searched for the proper way to communicate his philosophical vision, then continued onto the next stop.

In chapter three, I frame Proust’s first published work, Les plaisirs et les jours as a first draft and fragment of Proust’s philosophy of communication. In Les plaisirs et les jours, Proust lays the foundation for the philosophy of communication drafted in Jean Santeuil, tweaked in Contre Sainte-Beuve, and perfected in A la recherché. Les plaisirs et les jours was a collection of essays on a variety of themes that recur in A la recherché, from art and dreams to nature and friendship. Through his social connections, Proust persuaded the writer Antatole France to contribute the preface to the first edition of Les plaisirs et les jours, which a reluctant France described as “young with the youth of its author” but “old with the age of the world.” Critics called Les plaisirs et les jours a braggadocios book and dismissed Proust as an amateur dilettante. Proust displayed his keen intuition in Les plaisirs et les jours, but he was more interested in impressing his high society friends than making a philosophical statement. He critiqued superficial communication in Les plaisirs et les jours, but knowingly relied on the same communication in his “flowery” collection. Proust was not yet in full command of his philosophy of communication, but he would try again five years later in Jean Santeuil.

106 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 605.
In chapter four, I describe another of Proust’s false starts, the unfinished and posthumously published Jean Santeuil. In the years following the publication of A la recherché, scholars and critics search in vain for a preliminary sketch of the final product. Scenes of A la recherché were scattered throughout Les plaisirs et les jours and Contre Sainte-Beuve, but not enough to reveal Proust’s thought processes in creating the coherent vision of A la recherché. Without a comprehensive draft, the only reasonable explanation was that A la recherché came to Proust all at once as a single metanarrative. Shortly after the Second World War, Proust’s housekeeper found seventy handwritten notebooks, hidden behind several boxes of notes. Over the next decade, the scattered fragments were pieced together into a single narrative under the title Jean Santeuil. Jean Santeuil is the story of a bookish child, Jean, who enters society and returns disenchanted to his books. The narrative of the “outline map”109 of Jean Santeuil parallels the narrative of the A la recherché with several revealing exceptions. In the introduction to Jean Santeuil, Proust attributes the “essence” of himself to another novelist named C. and assumes the secondary role of messenger. Also, the mature “double I” of A la recherché is absent in the more amateurish Jean Santeuil, which represents another fragment of Proust’s philosophy of communication.

In chapter five, I locate another of Proust’s early works, Contre Sainte-Beuve, on the path to Proust’s philosophy of communication. Along with Jean Santeuil, among Proust’s papers were found what appeared to be two separate projects, one on Proust’s own developing philosophy and another on the literary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869). Sainte-Beuve was the foremost literary critic in France in the generation before Proust, and his method of looking for the meaning of a writer’s work in anecdotal details of the writer’s personal life

was very much alive during Proust’s historical moment. Proust had argued against Sainte-Beuve in *Les plaisirs et les jours* and *Jean Santeuil* that literature reflects the writer’s true self, not the superficial selves subject to history, but *Contre Sainte-Beuve* represents the most ad hominem of Proust’s philosophical attacks. Both manuscripts were dated between 1908 and 1909, after Proust abandoned *Jean Santeuil* and before he began *Du cote de chez Swann* (English: Swann’s Way). In the early 1950’s Proust scholar Bernard de Fallois collected the remains of both projects and arranged them into a single manuscript under the title *Contre Sainte Beuve*. In the manuscript as arranged by Fallois, the scenes that foreshadow *A la recherché* are no more than a means to the end of rebutting Sainte-Beuve. Nevertheless, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* represents with *Les plaisirs et les jours* and *Jean Santeuil* another layer of foundation for Proust’s philosophy of communication in *A la recherché*, which appears in preliminary form in the preface to *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, the most thorough articulation of Proust’s mature philosophy of communication outside of *A la recherché*.

Part III consists of chapter six on *A la recherché* and chapter seven on Proust’s performative call to communication. *A la recherché* is the telos toward which *Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* tend. In his early work Proust ignored his own call to communication because his philosophy of communication was singlemindedly focused on philosophy. When his opened his eyes to true communication, and acknowledged that his philosophy depended on true communication, Proust withdrew from the world of superficial communication and performed his philosophy of communication in writing *A la recherché*. In chapter five, I frame *A la recherché* as a lesson learned from the philosophical failures of *Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. After abandoning *Contre Sainte-Beuve* in 1909, Proust realized that communication was the key to his philosophy. If he
continued to dodge communication, he would continue to produce more Jean Santeuils and
Contre Sainte-Beuves, and never find the right communicative vehicle for his philosophical
vision.

In A la recherché, Proust collected the fragments of Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean
Santeuil, Contre Sainte-Beuve into a complete and coherent vision. He converged through
communication the binaries of appearance and reality, particular and general, anti-climax and
climax, stability and intermittence, and sociality and solitude that he kept separate and
irreconcilable in Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve. The famous two ways of Swann and
Guermantes appear for the first time in Du cote de chez Swann, as symbols of the
irreconcilability of appearance and reality, particular and general, anti-climax and climax,
stability and intermittence, sociality and solitude. But, unlike in Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-
Beuve, Proust resolves these binaries in the final volume of A la recherché. In A la recherché, the
young Marcel follows Swann’s Way in search of fulfillment in romantic love. He fails. He then
follows Guermantes Way in search of fulfillment in society. He fails. Likewise for the author of
A la recherché, who followed the false scents of communication in Les plaisirs et les jours, then
philosophy in Contre Sainte-Bevue and Jean Santeuil, before committing himself to neither
philosophy nor communication, but philosophy of communication in A la recherché.

In the final chapter, I frame Proust’s philosophy of communication as a performative call
to communication, for which Proust sacrificed his social life of superficial communication when
he realized that true communication was the cornerstone of his philosophy. Proust’s philosophy
of communication is informed by Plato, who grounded knowledge in the reconciliation of past
and present through memory, and his cousin-in-law Henri Bergson, who grounded human
experience in the interplay of voluntary and involuntary memory, among many others. All agree
that isolated sensations do not alone constitute knowledge. Like words, isolated sensations only assume meaning when situated within a web of other sensations. For Proust, consciousness is composite and memory is multiple. Isolated impressions and memories only make sense in relation to other impressions and memories. True selves experience the world in historicity, with depth perception in time, where present experience assumes meaning in relation to past events.

The vividness of reminiscences is a function of the elapsed time between the past and present impressions. For Proust, memory emerges from forgetfulness. An impression must be forgotten for “many years,” then revivified involuntarily. In Proust’s philosophy of communication, the goal of communication is to glimpse reality of one’s true self, rather than recollect appearances of superficial selves. After the fits and false starts of Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve, Proust withdrew from what his philosophy told him was meaningless and superficial communication, and committed himself to a life of true communication as defined by his philosophy. The interplay of Proust’s life and work illustrate the performative importance of philosophy and communication: that philosophy and communication are experienced together in everyday life as philosophy of communication.
Bibliography


CHAPTER 2
Marcel Proust in his Historical Moment

Proust is famous for one novel, *A la recherche*, first published in six volumes between 1913 and 1927. Originally intended as a three-volume novel of 1,000, then 1,200 pages, Proust expanded the novel to 3,000 pages during the First World War years of 1914-1918, when the “omni-murdering machine”\(^{110}\) of modernity made literature seem trivial. After the posthumous publication of the novel’s last volume, *A la recherche* was called by some the perfect Form of the novel and the greatest novel of the twentieth century.\(^{111}\) Others dismissed the novel as the work of an amateur dilettante, out of touch with the lived experience of his historical moment. Early French critics were especially unconvinced that an invalid, sadomasochist homosexual obsessed with high society could represent a nation built from the ground up, on the backs of soldiers and revolutionaries. Proust was just too strange, too far removed from everyday life to represent the human condition. Nevertheless, millions of readers recognized themselves in this “hermaphrodite, toad-like creature,” and saw their own historical moment in his short and sheltered existence.\(^{112}\)

Historical moments are defined by questions, which emerge in response to intellectual challenges to the human condition.\(^{113}\) Philosophy of communication responds to historical moments to the questions that emerge within a given historical moment, some illuminated by academic attention, others left darkened by disinterested neglect. Philosophy of communication is a dynamic interplay of background and foreground, where background beliefs and

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presuppositions inform foreground decisions and events.\textsuperscript{114} Proust set the motives of his characters against the background of the second half of the nineteenth century, and used history to reveal the motives of his characters who together constitute the whole of his literary consciousness.\textsuperscript{115} Proust was a philosopher of communication who assembled his characters from fragments of memory and moments of history to blur the relation of background and foreground, to the point where fiction becomes historical reality and historical reality becomes fiction.\textsuperscript{116}

In this chapter, I juxtapose the foreground events of Proust’s life with the background of Proust’s historical moment. Against the background of the \textit{Belle Epoque}, or Beautiful Era, in pre-war France, Proust emerges as an unremarkable child, preoccupied with the rich friends of his famous father. Proust was a sickly child who suffered from chronic asthma, which he later blamed on his mother’s troubled pregnancy during the Paris Commune and aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. He frequented the salons of several influential hostesses, who all admired his quick wit and imaginative energy while urging him to write more. The Dreyfus Affair and superficial extravagance of the 1900 World’s Fair in Paris revealed to Proust the existential poverty hidden behind the superficial prosperity of the \textit{Belle Epoque}. With the outbreak and heartbreak of the First World War, Proust withdrew from the outside world to his cork-lined bedroom, his own inner world of memory. For Proust, history was a reservoir of raw materials for his new novel, the perfect expression of his true self. Armed only with his memories, Proust pulled apart the background of collective history from the foreground of individual memories to reveal in relief the possibilities of the human condition.


Proust’s Historical Moment

The historical moment of Proust’s novel roughly parallels Proust’s own life (1871-1922). A la recherche span the period in France from the 1870’s, when Proust was a child, through World War I (1914-1918) and its aftermath. During the second half of the nineteenth century, a river of reason and rationality ran through the Western world. In the decades before the First World War, the river reached race and religion with Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857) and Ernest Renan (1823 – 1892), who argued that mankind can only reach intellectual adulthood by abandoning religion and committing to the scientific method. While the privileged were preoccupied with reason and rationality, the masses found their outlet in violence and instinct, what Proust called impressions. For Proust, the rhetoric of reason and rationality flows upriver, against the current of reality, away from Truth. Impressions release imaginative energy from the “living tissue” of the heart as incommunicable sensations. By the time impressions are translated into words, subject to the scientific method, they are simply sterile appearances of reality. From the security of his cork-lined bedroom, the Proust channeled his impressions of history into a realistic portrait of his historical moment, using fictional characters formed from the “mud of everyday life” in the Belle Epoque.

The Belle Epoque

Proust’s characters embody the careless optimism of the Belle Epoque. Cronin refers to the Belle Epoque, or Beautiful Era, as the “good old days” of joie de vivre, in contrast to the horrors of the First World War. The Belle Epoque runs parallel with the reigns of Queen Victoria and King Edward VII in England, Kaiser Wilhelm I and II in Germany, and Alexander

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119 Arnett and Arneson, Dialogic Civility, 32.
III and Nicholas II in Russia. Like the plot of Proust’s novel, the Belle Époque does not constitute a closed historical period. Rather, the Belle Époque refers to an attitude of optimism during the period of the French Third Republic. Beginning with the World’s Fair in 1889, the Belle Époque climaxed in Paris in the centenary year of 1900, and continued until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Peace, prosperity and political stability created the conditions for an outpouring of creative energy in literature, music, theater, and visual art. During the Belle Époque, industrial production tripled as the iron, chemical and electricity industries fueled the fledgling automobile and aviation industries.

A web of railways carried new machines mass produced by urban workers to rural farms that grew food with artificial fertilizers to feed the workers. Wages and literacy rates increased, along with the life expectancy of children and consumption of bread, beer, sugar and spirits. Amenities previously limited to the upper classes, such as gas, plumbing, electricity, and running water, were more common in middle and lower class homes. Singing soldiers walked the streets near the Seine, impressive in their signature red trousers. Women wore hobble-skirts and men wore moustaches. Happy couples ate at outdoor cafes patrolled by policemen with eighteenth-century swords. Visitors lined up on the Boulevard Haussmann for the grand opening of the ten-story Galeries Lafayette, just blocks from Proust’s cork-lined bedroom. One year earlier, architect Auguste Perret completed the famous Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, where Proust took breaks from writing to watch Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes. Throughout France, 600

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121 Albert S. Lindemann, A History of Modern Europe: From 1815 to the Present (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 140; 144; 149-150.
123 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 147.
125 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 147.
factories made 150 types of cars from Peugeot and Renault to Delaunay-Belleville, which made limousines for Russia’s Tsar Nicholas. In the skies, France was first to cross the English Channel in 1908 and the Mediterranean Sea in 1913.\footnote{C.H. Gibbs-Smith, \textit{A History of Flying} (London: Batsford, 1953).}

By 1914, France was producing over 1,000 motion pictures per year, by far the most in the world outside the United States.\footnote{Andrew Pulver, “A Short History of French Cinema,” \textit{The Guardian}, March 22, 2011, accessed March 31, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/mar/22/french-cinema-short-history.} In November 1898, the first wireless telegraph trials were conducted between the tip of the Eiffel Tower and the Pantheon four kilometers away. One year later, waves crossed the English Channel for the first time. In 1913, waves sent from the Eiffel Tower were heard by ships off the coast of America, a distance of 6,000 kilometers.\footnote{G.A. Ferrié, “Application of Wireless Telegraphy to Time-signals,” in \textit{Proceedings of the Institution of Electrical Engineers} (New York: Spon and Chamberlain, 1913), 734.} In 1905, Albert Einstein had proposed the special theory of relativity, where space and time were relative to one’s perspective, not absolute as everyday experience would suggest. Ten years later, as his countrymen marched toward Paris in the opening spring of the First World War, Einstein overturned 300 years of history with his general theory of relativity, which redefined gravity as the curvature of spacetime, or fourth dimension of space and time.\footnote{Albert Einstein, \textit{The Meaning of Relativity: Including the Relativistic Theory of the Non-Symmetric Field} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).}

However, the \textit{Belle Epoque} was a beautiful era for the upper classes only.\footnote{Gamble, “The Social Panorama,” 7.} In France, the First World War was to overturn the optimism of the \textit{Belle Epoque} and reveal the brutal reality behind its material riches. In the United States, Mark Twain called the period from 1870 to 1900 a “Gilded Age” hiding social turmoil behind the “gold gilding” of economic growth. In the United Kingdom, as transportation and communication technologies advanced in the late Victorian and early Edwardian ages, population grew, wages fell, and children went to work as
sweeps, servants and prostitutes. The **Belle Epoque** was an era of social insecurity masked by the gold gilding of technological progress and economic prosperity. Beneath the gilding of creative achievement and industrial and technological advancement lay pervasive poverty in the urban slums of Paris and conflicts between the French government and Roman Catholic Church, as well as widespread anti-Semitism and government corruption brought to light by the Dreyfus Affair. Looking back on the **Belle Epoque**, one French observer said that “we were happy then, but did not know it.”

**Franco-Prussian War**

In 1866, the United States was reconstructing the ruins of a precarious Union preserved by the American Civil War (1861-1865). In Europe, the Kingdom of Prussia and its allies defeated the Austrian Empire and its allies in the Seven-Weeks War, or Austro-Prussian War (1866). The victory for the Kingdom of Prussia in the Austro-Prussian War shifted power among the German states in Europe from Austria to Prussia, and empowered Prussia to challenge France for control of Europe. After the war, Prussia assumed leadership of the North German Confederation, consisting of 22 independent states and 30 million inhabitants, excluding Austria and the South German states of Baden, Württemberg, Bavaria and Hesse-Darmstadt. In 1868, Prussia had ambitions to expand its empire into South Germany under the leadership of chancellor Otto von Bismarck. A vacant throne left by the Spanish Revolution of 1868 gave von Bismarck his opportunity. Along with Spain’s leader by default, Juan Prim, von Bismarck nominated Prussian-born Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmarigen to the Spanish throne.

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133 Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 147.
With the nomination of Prince Leopold, von Bismarck hoped for two outcomes: to provoke war with Napoleon III of France, who feared an expansion of Prussian influence into French-controlled Western Europe, and to persuade the South German states to join the North German cause against France.\footnote{Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune 1870-71* (New York: Penguin Books reprint, 2007), 44; see also Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 34.} Although Leopold’s candidacy was revoked under French diplomatic pressure, the Prussian King William I refused to make the move permanent. In France, Napoleon was outraged, and the French press and parliament demanded war. Napoleon himself saw an opportunity to revivify his public image after a humiliating failure to establish a kingdom in Mexico. Encouraged by guarantees of victory from his generals, Napoleon fell into Bismarck’s trap and declared war on Prussia on July 19, 1870. With the support of the South German states, the Prussian-led North German Confederation outnumbered and outmaneuvered the listless French, who surrendered at Sedan on August 31, 1870.\footnote{Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 118.} With their emperor Napoleon III captured by the Germans, on September 4, 1870, the French established the provisional Government of National Defense, the first government of the French Third Republic.

**Proust: Historical Roots**

At the turn of the eighteenth century, a French Catholic merchant named Francois Proust sold spirits in the courtyard of Illiers, a small town near Chartres in the French countryside. Now called Illiers-Combray in honor of Francois’s famous grandson, Marcel, Illiers was a relic of the Middle Ages, dominated by the eleventh-century Church of Saint-Jacques.\footnote{George D. Painter, *Marcel Proust: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1989), 14-21.} Francois had a son, Adrien, and a daughter, Elizabeth. Elizabeth married a respected Illiers tradesman named Jules Amiot, who sold novelties a few doors down from Francois Proust. Elizabeth and Jules occupied...
a simple home in the rue de Saint-Esprit, where the Prousts and Amiots spent summer nights in the shade of a chestnut tree.\textsuperscript{140}

Against his father’s wishes, Adrien Proust left Illiers to study medicine in Paris. In Paris Adrien Proust met a wealthy Jewish girl named Jeanne Weil, whose uncle Louis owned a country home in the village of Auteuil, a residential suburb between the Bois de Boulogne and the western border of Paris.\textsuperscript{141} A few weeks after the wedding, Jeanne was pregnant. The Prousts settled in “one of the ugliest parts” of Paris,\textsuperscript{142} from which they never moved more than a few hundred yards.\textsuperscript{143} They married on September 3, 1870, the day before the onset of the French Third Republic.

**French Third Republic**

Napoleon’s defeat at Sedan left the road to Paris virtually unguarded. As early as August 1870, the Prussians were approaching Paris, but were called back to meet Napoleon’s troops at Sedan. Meanwhile in Paris, the newly-created Government of National Defense continued the effort of French resistance with little effect.\textsuperscript{144} In early September 1870, the Germans approached Paris from the north and south. Back in Prussia, chancellor von Bismarck suggested shelling Paris into a quick surrender, but was overruled by King William, who ordered a blockade of Paris and methodical siege of its surrounding forts and last defenses, with few German or civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{145}

As the siege dragged on through the winter of 1870, negotiations between Bismarck and the French foreign minister broke down, and the Prussians become impatient. At home, they

\textsuperscript{140} Painter, *Marcel Proust*, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{141} Painter, *Marcel Proust*, 7.
\textsuperscript{142} Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 89-90.
\textsuperscript{143} Painter, *Marcel Proust*, 4.
\textsuperscript{144} Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 119.
\textsuperscript{145} Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 119.
worried about the toll of the war on the German economy, as well as the precarious union between North and South German states. Outside Paris, the Prussian high command feared the possibility that neutral nations might join the war on the side of the French. Following Bismarck’s advice, the Germans fired 12,000 shells into Paris over 23 consecutive nights in January 1871, killing and wounding over 400 Parisians.\textsuperscript{146} In Paris, families were forced to eat their dogs and cats, as well as the “tough, coarse, and oily”\textsuperscript{147} meat of camels, kangaroos and elephants from the zoo at the \textit{Jardin des Plantes}. On January 25, 1871, the Prussians bombarded Paris with long-range siege guns. Three days later, the city surrendered.

Following the surrender, the Government of National Defense disbanded. On the insistence of Bismarck, France held national elections for the National Assembly of the Third Republic. The elections returned a conservative National Assembly, which elected former prime minister Adolphe Thiers as leader of a provisional government tasked with negotiating a peace treaty with Bismarck and the Prussians.\textsuperscript{148} On May 10, 1871, the new French government negotiated the Treaty of Frankfurt with the unified German Empire. In the Treaty of Frankfurt, France ceded the resource-rich border territories of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany, the reconquest of which would be a major motive of French involvement in the First World War.\textsuperscript{149} As part of the treaty, the German military would remain in France until Germany paid a war indemnity of five billion francs, due within five years. To pay the indemnity and free France from German occupation, Thiers and the provisional government passed several unpopular financial laws which fostered widespread unrest among the urban poor.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{146} Horne, \textit{The Fall of Paris}, 217.
\textsuperscript{147} Henry Labouchère, \textit{Diary of the Besieged Resident in Paris} (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1870), 308.
\textsuperscript{148} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 119.
\textsuperscript{149} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 105.
\textsuperscript{150} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 117-118.
Paris Commune

In the years prior to the Franco-Prussian War, a conservative Catholic countryside surrounded a few radical and republican cities. During the war and Siege of Paris, many middle and upper class conservatives left the cities for the countryside, and many radicals desperate for work left the countryside for the cities. After the war, the conservative republican countryside was made more conservative by an influx of upper class Parisians, and republican Paris was made more radical by an influx of immigrant workers and political refugees. The increasingly radical population of Paris sparred with Thiers and the conservative National Assembly over distribution of wages and the terms of surrender in the Treaty of Frankfurt. The French surrender at Sedan and the terms of the treaty angered many Parisian radicals and revolutionaries, who wanted guerre à outrance, or war to the bitter end. The Parisians wanted their own self-governing council, a right granted to many smaller French cities but denied to Paris, the home of the French Revolution and uprisings of 1830 and 1848.

Even before the Franco-Prussian War ended with the Siege of Paris, the city’s left-leaning lower and middle-class populations were influenced by the First International, an umbrella organization for the many socialist, communist and anarchist political groups founded in 1864. As the Germans surrounded Paris in September of 1870, the city’s radicals and revolutionaries were already on the move. By mid-September 1870, the Germans were overwhelming the inexperienced and poorly-trained French Garde Nationale, or National Guard. The structure of the National Guard was already cracked along political lines, with upper-class units supportive of the national government, and working class units sympathetic to the

151 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 118-119.
152 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 119.
153 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 119.
revolutions. After Napoleon’s defeat at Sedan, French resistance was fueled by memories of the 1790s, when working-class volunteers under the direction of the city council (French: commune) in Paris fought off foreign invaders under the rallying cry, la patrie en danger! (English: the fatherland in danger).

The success of the city-dwellers in the 1790’s created a revolutionary mystique around Paris that ebbed in 1848, and flowed again in 1870 with the collapse of the Second Empire and exodus of wealthy Parisians to the more conservative countryside. The smoke from the German siege signaled the fire of French revolution in the names of Saint-Simon, Proudhon and, to a lesser extent, the young Karl Marx. Most conservatives considered further war futile, and advocated for French acceptance of Bismarck’s terms. The radicals wanted to keep fighting, united in their hatred of “that monstrous gnome” Thiers. By September 1870, the Germans were camped less than two miles from Paris. They had defeated the last French defenders, and were firing shells into the unguarded city center. Within the city, the Franco-Prussian War had devolved into a civil war between radicals in Paris and the working-class units of the National Guard, and the conservative National Assembly in Versailles and its army of prisoners of war recently released by the Germans.

The National Assembly feared the revolutionary potential of the Parisian radicals; the radicals feared that the National Assembly would restore the oppressive monarchy of the Second Empire. In the spring of 1871, the revolutionaries captured key points throughout Paris, and sought to establish legal authority at Paris before marching on Versailles. Under the red flag of Paris, the Commune abolished the death penalty and burned the guillotine, in addition to the

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154 Horne, The Fall of Paris, xii.
155 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 118.
157 Horne, The Fall of Paris, xii.
progressive removal of religion from school curricula and extension to women of the right to vote.\textsuperscript{158} During the siege, Parisians were forced to eat weeds and wallpaper glue, as well as the pets and zoo animals that survived the Franco-Prussian War.

At the beginning of April 1871, Paris sustained its second siege in less than a year, this time from Thiers’s forces from Versailles. Several weeks of shells pierced the perimeter of Paris. During the second siege of Paris, the French organized “oddly festive” celebrations for the wounded and widowed that Lenin later called “festivals of the oppressed.”\textsuperscript{159} In open defiance of the National Assembly, workers would walk the upper-class sections of the Champs-Élysées singing revolutionary songs of the 1790s. From the meat of zoo animals, the restaurant Voisin offered a Christmas day menu of sardines and stuffed donkey head to start, followed by elephant consomee and a choice of bear chops with pepper sauce or roast cat flanked by rats.\textsuperscript{160}

In the early morning hours of Sunday, May 21, Thiers’s forces entered the unguarded city walls at Point-du-Jour, and occupied the Porte de Saint-Cloud and the Porte de Versailles. By four o’clock on May 21, sixty thousand soldiers had occupied Auteuil, a bucolic country retreat for wealthy Parisians like Jeanne Weil, mother of Marcel Proust.\textsuperscript{161} Over the next \textit{semaine sanglante}, or “Bloody Week,” Thiers’s forces advanced street by street through Paris, killing or capturing their countrymen with brutal force.\textsuperscript{162} In response, the \textit{fédérés}, or Communards, shot their prisoners and beat their bodies with rifle butts and bayonets. By the end of the Bloody Week, about 20,000 Communards and 750 soldiers lay dead on the streets of Paris, their bodies swarmed by rats that survived the siege. On the morning of May 27, the few remaining \textit{fédérés}

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize 158 Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 120.
159 Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 120.
162 Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 120.
\end{footnotesize}
fought the forces of Thiers in the cemetery of the Père Lachaise. The soldiers quickly overwhelmed the outnumbered *fédérés*, who lay wounded among the graves of their families. The soldiers lined one-hundred and fifty *fédérés* along the *Mur des Fédérés*, or “Communard’s Wall,” and shot them, one-by-one, just feet from the future grave of the unborn Marcel Proust.163

*Proust: Childhood*

One morning during the Bloody Week of May 22, a stray bullet barely missed Adrien Proust as he walked to work. During the German siege of Paris, it was unlikely that even a wealthy family like the Prousts could feed a mother and unborn child, but the Prousts had few options.164 Illiers was also unsafe. The Germans occupied Chartres just fifteen miles from Illiers, where Dr. Proust’s widowed mother still lived. Although Auteuil was reduced to rubble by government forces during the Paris Commune, it seemed safer than Paris for an expectant mother. In May the Prousts moved to the villa of Jeanne’s uncle Louis.165 On July 10, 1871, Jeanne’s difficult pregnancy ended with the birth of her first child, Marcel Proust.

Proust’s childhood was spent in four main settings: two foreground and two background.166 In the foreground were Paris, where Proust lived with his upper middle-class parents, and Illiers, where he spent his summers reading and exploring the countryside. In the background were the seaside resorts of Trouville, Dieppe, and later Cabourg, where Proust spent parts of every summer, and Auteuil, where he met the many mistresses of his uncle Louis Weil. As preserved in the young Proust’s imagination, these four settings were to inform the settings of *A la recherche*: Tante Leonie’s country home at Combray (Illiers and Auteuil), the Champs-Elysees and Paris homes of his parents (Paris), and the seaside resort of Balbec, where Proust

163 Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 120.
meets Albertine and the “little band” (Trouville, Dieppe, and Cabourg). Every year on the Thursday before Easter, the Prousts took a train to Chartres, then walked to Aunt Elizabeth’s house in Illiers. Depending on the weather, the Prousts would walk one of two ways from Aunt Elizabeth’s house, along the exceptional country plains toward Mereglise (Swann’s Way), or through the typical river-land of Saint-Éman (Guermantes Way).

On rainy days, the Prousts would head left on the Rue des Lavoirs toward the River Loir, follow a path lined with hawthorns through the plains of Pont-Saint-Hilaire, then circle back past the garden pond of the Pré Catelan. On nice days, or when dinner was later, the Prousts would follow the Rue des Lavoirs as far as the River Loir, then continue past the Pré Catelan to the gravel paths and lily ponds of the Les Plaisances. For the young Proust, the hawthorn hedgerows of Swann’s Way and Guermantes Way were mutually exclusive paths, like the two hemispheres of the brain. The childhood impressions of these two paths would sharpen the adult Proust’s sense for seeing reality beneath the gold gilding of the years after the Paris Commune.

**Years after the Paris Commune**

The brutal suppression of the Paris Commune was a near-fatal blow to the French left. After five years of infighting, the French finally settled on a Third Republic that would span the whole of Proust’s life. In the years before the Franco-Prussian War, the largely rural and conservative French National Assembly feared the revolutionary potential of the radical left in Paris. After the Paris Commune, upper-class conservatives were less fearful of a weakened left, powerless to express the ugly reality behind the gold gilding of the *Belle Epoque*. France’s dual humiliation in the Franco-Prussian War and Paris Commune made conservatives more conservative and radicals more radical, with no moderate fulcrum to balance the two extremes.

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The Third Republic was designed to, as Thiers said, “divide us the least,” a moniker that masked deep divisions with the illusion of stability.\textsuperscript{170} Under the cover of temporary peace in west and central Europe, Germany wanted to dominate Europe and France wanted revenge.

In 1871, elections returned another conservative National Assembly, but for five years the Bourbon and Orleanist factions of the monarchist majority could not decide on a candidate for king. In 1875, the National Assembly agreed to a provisional republic, which many conservatives called a “plaything” of Parisian leftists.\textsuperscript{171} By the end of the 1870’s, a majority of conservatives came to support the Third Republic as France recovered from revolution and diplomatic isolation.\textsuperscript{172} Also recovering were French desires for revenge against Germany, but the growth of the Third Reich turned these desires into dreams.\textsuperscript{173} By 1900, Germany was outpacing France by one-third in population, outproducing France in industrial goods, and outperforming France in science, technology, and the visual arts.\textsuperscript{174} In response, France sought to surround, or “encircle” (German: Einkreisung) Germany and stall its economic growth with traditional enemies Britain and Russia.\textsuperscript{175}

At home, France was preoccupied by a “religious war” between the religious right faithful to God, and secular left faithful to modernity’s metanarrative of progress.\textsuperscript{176} While the right clung to traditional values of Catholicism, the left followed the “secular trinity”\textsuperscript{177} of progress, efficiency and individual autonomy. The fundamentalist and Catholic right was made

\textsuperscript{171} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 163.
\textsuperscript{172} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 163.
\textsuperscript{173} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 162.
\textsuperscript{174} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 162.
\textsuperscript{175} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 148.
\textsuperscript{176} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 163.
up of mostly illiterate or semi-literate commoners. The progressive and Protestant left was made up of anti-clerical intellectuals and politicians. To the left, the “popular” Catholics were country bumpkins who occupied a lower stage of human development.\textsuperscript{178} To the right, the secularized Jews and Protestants were “godless” rebels determined to “de-Christianize” France.\textsuperscript{179}

\textit{Proust: Early Education}

Marcel embodied the duality of his mother’s Jewish roots and aristocratic sensibilities and his father’s Catholic faith and lower middle class gravity. From his father, Marcel inherited a scientific and serious mind, balanced by a playful love of literature inherited from his multilingual mother. Proust combined an aesthetic appreciation of the virtues of Christianity with a deep respect for his mother’s Jewish roots. Marcel was raised Catholic but, unlike his father, was not a true believer as an adult. The precocious young Proust was educated at the prestigious Lycée Condorcet in Paris, where he studied the modern literature of Anatole France, Proust’s future friend who would write the preface to his first published work, \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours} (1896). At home in Paris, and during the summers in Illiers, Proust spent long hours reading George Sand, a British writer who reappears in the famous goodnight kiss scene of \textit{A la recherché}, as well as Balzac, Baudelaire, and the letters of Madame de Sévigné, the favorite author of his grandmother.\textsuperscript{180}

Proust was also an avid reader of Charles Dickens, whose novels \textit{Bleak House} (1853) and \textit{Great Expectations} (1861) were among Proust’s favorites,\textsuperscript{181} and Thomas Hardy, whose novel \textit{The Well-Beloved} (1897) resembled in 1910 “what I’m writing now…though it’s a thousand

\textsuperscript{178} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 164.
\textsuperscript{179} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 164.
\textsuperscript{180} Maurois, \textit{The World of Marcel Proust}, 55.
\textsuperscript{181} Painter, \textit{Marcel Proust}, 289.
times better.”

Throughout his life, Proust acknowledged the profound influence of Alphonse Darlu, his philosophy teacher at Condorcet, and compared his own convergence of philosophy and fiction with Darlu’s convergence of abstract philosophy and everyday life with the pedagogical use of his top hat. For Proust, Darlu was the “great teacher of his life.” Along with the immaterialism in vogue in French philosophy at the time, Darlu was the bedrock of Proust’s belief in the unreality of the material world, solidified later by the Dreyfus Affair.

**Dreyfus Affair**

In the autumn of 1894, the clouds of Catholic right and secular left collided above Alfred Dreyfus, a French army captain from Alsace with secular Jewish origins. In the early 1880s, many Jewish intellectuals saw France as a model of tolerance and acceptance for Jews. France was the first nation to award Jews civil equality, and Jews were prominent in French culture and politics. Guided by the work of newly-translated Charles Darwin, whose work was hotly debated in Christian circles, French philosopher Ernest Renan wrote a best-selling book in 1883 called *La Vie de Jésus (The Life of Jesus)*. In the book, Renan questioned the historical accuracy of the gospels, and reinterpreted the life of Jesus as the transformation of an impure Jewish man into a pure Christian god. Three years later, Édouard Drumont argued in his two-volume set, *La France Juive (Jewish France)* (1886), that Jews controlled the French state and economy through a secret organization called the Syndical. Along with Renan’s, Drumont’s best-selling work

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186 Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 144.
released a cloud of anti-Semitism over France, buoyed by the belief of the Christian right that Jews, Protestants and secular politicians were in cahoots.\textsuperscript{189}

In September 1894, a French housekeeper at the German embassy found a crumpled letter addressed to a German military attaché. In the unsigned letter, a French officer promised to deliver military secrets to the Germans. French authorities immediately suspected Alfred Dreyfus, a young Jewish artillery officer who embodied everything the French right feared. Dreyfus was new to Paris, having moved from German-occupied Alsace after the Franco-Prussian War. Dreyfus was also one of the few Jews in the mostly Catholic and conservative French high command.\textsuperscript{190} With little evidence other than a superficial resemblance between Dreyfus’s handwriting and the handwriting on the letter, Dreyfus was arrested and charged with high treason. His hands and legs bound, Dreyfus was stripped of his insignia medals before a gawking crowd, which spat on his soiled uniform and shouted “Jew!” and “Judas!”\textsuperscript{191} Dreyfus was convicted of selling military secrets to the Germans, and exiled to a penal colony in French Guiana. About a year after his arrest, evidence emerged that Dreyfus was innocent, contracting a report in Drumont’s newspaper, \textit{La Libre Parole}, that Dreyfus had already confessed.\textsuperscript{192}

As more and more evidence came to light, left-leaning politicians and intellectuals rallied around Dreyfus in France as he was tortured in Guiana. After five years of hell on Devil’s Island, Dreyfus was exonerated in France and reassumed his post in the army. The Dreyfusard victory shifted French politics to the center-left, but many conservatives continued to believe that Dreyfus was guilty. By the eve of the First World War, the mystique of the Dreyfusard fight for justice had faded, revealing deep cracks in the façade of the French \textit{Belle Epoque}. The Dreyfus

\textsuperscript{189} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 146.
\textsuperscript{190} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 164.
\textsuperscript{192} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 165.
Affair, or “the Affair” as it was known colloquially, tore France into two factions, Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards, along the seams of secular left and Catholic right.193

Dreyfusards valued justice over the security of the state, and were suspicious of the overwhelmingly conservative and Catholic military.194 Anti-Dreyfusards sided with the army, whose methods for protecting the homeland should be above scrutiny of the self-loathing left.195 The social civil war between the Dreyfusard left and anti-Dreyfusard right pitted brother against brother, husband against wife and father against son, as in the Proust household.196 While Dr. Proust was an ardent anti-Dreyfusard, his son was a Dreyfusard who disapproved of anti-Semitism among Catholics, but also campaigned against anti-clericalism with his mother’s approval.197 For many Parisians, including Proust, the Dreyfus Affair peeled back the gold gilding from the French fin de siècle, which peaked with the unprecedented grandeur of the 1878, 1889 and 1900 World’s Fairs in Paris.

World’s Fairs

In the years after the Paris Commune, France suffered a severe economic depression that continued into the 1880’s.198 Citizens were restless, and dissention spread through the government. France needed to redeem itself, and fast, before another revolution embarrassed the country. In 1878, the newborn Third Republic hosted its first World’s Fair, a global exhibition of the latest and greatest advances in science and technology. The fair featured a Palace of Industry on the Champs de Mars, an amusement park surrounded by international restaurants and separate pavilions for each participating country, excluding Germany. The fair introduced Europeans to

193 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 164.
194 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 164.
195 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 165.
196 Painter, Marcel Proust, 226.
198 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 163.
the electric light, which lit up the Place de l'Opéra, and the phonograph, which played the French national anthem for sixteen million visitors.  

Seven depressed years later, Prime Minister Jules Ferry saw an opportunity to reinvigorate the floundering Third Republic through “reconciliation, rehabilitation and imperial supremacy.” Ferry proposed a new World’s Fair to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the French Revolution in 1889, and propel France to the front of the European march of progress. Construction began immediately on the cast-iron Eiffel Tower which, at 300 meters high, would become the tallest building ever constructed.

In 1900, Paris hosted its fifth and finest World’s Fair alongside the first Olympic games held outside Greece. The success of the 1889 World’s Fair did little to restore the international prestige of France. Instead, the fair exposed the worsening disunity of the Third Republic, which faced domestic opposition during the Dreyfus Affair, and diplomatic crisis with the British during the Boer War in South Africa. From April to November, fifty million visitors saw 80,000 exhibits arranged to represent the progress of Western civilization. Along the left side of the Seine stretched the Street of Nations, where visitors could see Germany’s sixteenth-century Rauthaus and ride a replica of the Trans-Siberian Railway around Trocadero Hill.

On the right bank, across a bridge brightened by incandescent lights, stood the popular Palace of Electricity, where visitors could watch steam-powered dynamos pump electricity for the entire exhibition. Visitors walked through ancient Greece to the Malreorama in medieval Paris, where they took a simulated sea voyage from Marsailles to

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203 de Tholozany, “Expositions Universelles.”
204 de Tholozany, “Expositions Universelles.”
205 de Tholozany, “Expositions Universelles.”
Marrakesh. Moving sidewalks carried hungry visitors past 207 international restaurants, then through the Champs de Mars to the Palace of Optics, where they saw the moon through a giant telescope.\textsuperscript{206} Like many observers at the turn of the century, Proust sensed a disconnect between the riches of the World’s Fair and the lived experience of the modern world, where thousands of Parisians starved on the other side of the Seine. To Proust, the overwhelming extravagance of the Fair looked more like chaos than progress, more trivial distraction than scientific triumph. Paris would not host another World’s Fair until 1937, when Proust was famous and the world’s faith in technological progress had long since faded.

\textit{Proust: Time Wasted}

Although the warning signs were present, the prevailing attitude of Parisians during this period of the \textit{Belle Epoque} was that “we don’t know where we are going, but lots of things are happening and we are going to have pleasure and fun.”\textsuperscript{207} As Proust struggled to find his literary voice in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Rodin was working on “The Thinker,” Monet and Cezanne were experimenting with impressionism, Debussy and Ravel were making music, and Emile Zola was writing \textit{Travail}, all within a few miles of each other. When the dust settled from the Franco-Prussian War, France’s empire was still second only to Britain, and Paris was the cultural capital of the new world.\textsuperscript{208} Between the Franco-Prussian War and First World War, the second wave of the industrial revolution carried an attitude of carefree optimism to the “city of lights.”\textsuperscript{209} Faster trains on steel rails brought millions of people to Paris, where they produced cars, ships and airplanes on factory assembly lines. Advances in medicine sustained a threefold increase in population. As life expectancy increased, child mortality decreased. Worker

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\textsuperscript{206} de Tholozany, “Expositions Universelles.”
\textsuperscript{207} Willsher, “Monet, Cabaret and Absinthe.”
\textsuperscript{208} Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 163.
\textsuperscript{209} Willsher, “Monet, Cabaret and Absinthe.”
discontent with monotonous work and poor working conditions were offset with increased salaries and worker participation in public government through trade unions and labor parties. The values of modernity were in the air of the Belle Époque, especially in the Proust household.

Proust’s father was famous for his efforts to keep cholera out of Europe, for which he received the red ribbon of the French Legion of Honor. Proust was enamored with the high society guests who visited his father, and later became acquainted himself with high society through his Condorcet friends, whose young mothers hosted desirable salons. At these salons, Proust was introduced to three of the chief hostesses at this period of his adolescence: Geneviève Halévy, later Madame Strauss, Laure Hayman, and Madeleine Lemaire. Known as “la Patrone” or “The Mistress,” Lemaire painted flowers and hated “bores,” two traits found in the characters of Mme de Villeparisis and Mme Verdurin, respectively. Mme Strauss was famous for her wit, the chief original for “Guermantes wit” in A la recherche. When Proust first met Laure Hayman, she was thirty-seven and he was seventeen. An original of the fictional Odette de Crécy and mistress of the real Louis Weil, Hayman doted on “mon petit Marcel” to dukes and intellectuals alike.

In 1889, the eighteen-year-old Proust volunteered for the army, and was sent to the 76th infantry regiment at Orleans. More philosopher than fighter, Proust placed 63rd out of 64 trainees in his platoon but, thanks to his father’s fame, there was little difference between life at home and life in the military. Every Sunday morning, Proust reunited with his friends in Paris, then returned to Orleans on the evening train. In Paris, he was a regular at the salons of several

210 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 147.
211 Painter, Marcel Proust, 2.
212 Maurois, The World of Marcel Proust, 57-59.
213 Proust, Swann’s Way, 290; 350; 355.
214 Painter, Marcel Proust, 106.
215 Painter, Marcel Proust, 90.
216 Maurois, The World of Marcel Proust, 59.
formidable hostesses, including Madame Arman de Caillavet, another original of Mme Verdurin and Odette de Crécy.\textsuperscript{217} The mother of Gaston de Caillavet, one of many originals of Robert de Saint Loup, Madame de Caillavet introduced Proust to France, who later became the character of Bergotte.\textsuperscript{218} Because he volunteered for the military, Proust was only obliged to serve one year, as opposed to three years for drafted men.

When he returned to Paris in 1980, Proust had to make a decision: either disappoint his father and become a writer, what he wanted to do, or please his father and become a diplomat, what he dreaded but could not decline. Proust followed his friends Robert de Billy and Gabriel Trarieux to the Ecole des Sciences Politiques.\textsuperscript{219} While his friends played tennis, Proust hosted the “Court of Love” with several women attracted to his charm and talent for conversation.\textsuperscript{220}

When Proust failed the second part of his examinations for the Faculty of Law, his parents allowed him to attend lectures at the Sorbonne, where he heard his cousin-in-law Bergson talk about involuntary memory. In the years following his military service, Proust moved through two worlds: the creative, introspective world of art and music, and the sterile, superficial world of high society. Proust spent long hours at the Louvre daydreaming about the night’s party, then longer hours at the party, admiring the amateur art on a drawing room wall.

While this period of Proust’s life was indeed temps perdu, or time wasted, the years 1890-1900 provided Proust with the impressions and personalities he would reframe as the raw materials of temps retrouvé, or time regained. On the salon circuit, Proust met Reynaldo Hahn,\textsuperscript{221} a Venezuelan born composer-pianist-singer, and Comte Robert de Montesquiou, a flamboyant

\textsuperscript{217} Painter, Marcel Proust, 65-71.
\textsuperscript{218} Maurois, The World of Marcel Proust, 71.
\textsuperscript{219} Maurois, The World of Marcel Proust, 71.
\textsuperscript{220} Maurois, The World of Marcel Proust, 74.
\textsuperscript{221} Painter, Marcel Proust, 170-175.
poet who became a primary original of the Baron de Charlus. Montesquiou introduced Proust to the Comtesse Greffulhe, the future Princess de Guermantes, as well as other “stars of the dinner table.” All were impressed by Proust’s effortless intelligence, but questioned his perpetual procrastination and encouraged him to write more.

Several years later, at the age of twenty-five, Proust published a collection of essays called *Les plaisirs et les jours*, or *Pleasures and Days*, with a preface written by a reluctant Anatole France. From 1892 to 1900, Proust continued to go out in society, while still living with his doting mother and disapproving father. He visited his great-uncle in Auteuil, and took trips to Holland, Italy and the French countryside. Meanwhile, Proust’s chronic asthma was getting worse, especially during the day. Frequent fits of breathless coughing forced Proust to work and entertain at night, when his parents were asleep and his asthma calmed. Despite the unusual hours and eccentricities, such as giving exorbitant tips to undeserving (but handsome) waiters, Proust was winning admirers in both society and literary circles.

Proust’s friends saw through an exterior of gossip-hungry frivolity into his true self of “child-like sensitiveness, delightful simplicity…nobility of heart.” At the same time, Proust’s increasing solitude stoked his natural distrust of people and skepticism of the perceptible world, cultivated in his Condorcet days and aggravated by his fights with his father over the child-like bond he had with his mother. To appease his father, Proust assumed the post of “unpaid attaché” at the Bibliothèque Mazarine, but rarely went to work. Instead, he went to “look at pictures” at

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the Louvre, where he amazed his friends with an innate ability to see the incommunicable “essence of the picture” behind the beauty of Rembrandt’s shadows or Fra Angelico’s colors.\textsuperscript{228}

Proust suffered two sorrows during this period: the death of his grandmother, and the subsequent transformation of his mother. Proust’s grandmother modeled herself as a mother after Madame de Sévigné, whose letters to her own daughter echo her own mother’s voice.\textsuperscript{229} The death of her mother sucked all vitality from Jeanne Proust, who came to resemble her mother in both appearance and behavior. Jeanne went with Marcel to Cauborg, where she sat on the beach and read the Letters of Madame de Sévigné, just as her mother had done. Proust’s circle of friends continued to grow, as evidenced by a voluminous record of correspondence that would fill four volumes.\textsuperscript{230} Proust’s friends were always impressed – and sometimes annoyed – by his “genius for suspicion,” or uncanny intuition about their motives.\textsuperscript{231} There was the amateur poet the Comtesse de Noailles,\textsuperscript{232} as well as the Bibesco brothers\textsuperscript{233} and Charles Haas, the son of a wealthy stockbroker and primary original of Charles Swann.\textsuperscript{234} Other regular guests at Proust’s boulevard Malsherbes home were the painter Frederic de Madrazo (Coco Madrazo) and the Roberts de Billy and de Flers, who also contributed to the character of Saint-Loup.\textsuperscript{235}

Proust’s father went to work early in the morning, leaving the house to Marcel and his mother. Proust would wake up late, around two o’clock, then spend the day writing on the dining room table next to his napping mother. When he felt well enough, Proust put on his overcoat and entertained his eminent friends with his impressions of Montesquiou and Madeleine Lemaire.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Maurois} Maurois, \textit{The World of Marcel Proust}, 108.
\bibitem{Maurois2} Maurois, \textit{The World of Marcel Proust}, 107.
\bibitem{Painter} Painter, \textit{Marcel Proust}, 237-241.
\bibitem{Painter2} Painter, \textit{Marcel Proust}, 295-314.
\bibitem{Painter3} Painter, \textit{Marcel Proust}, 90.
\bibitem{Painter4} Painter, \textit{Marcel Proust}, 83.
\end{thebibliography}
Other nights Proust would gather together unique assortments of his future characters in his childhood room, and observe their interactions from his unmade bed. Proust’s sensitivity was balanced by a deep insecurity brought to light by the Dreyfus Affair. In a letter to Montesquiou, Proust wrote, “…although I am Catholic, like my father and my brother, my mother on the other hand, is a Jewess. You will understand, therefore, that I have every reason to abstain from discussions of that kind…”

While he supported Dreyfus, Proust engaged the opposing position with open-minded prudence.

With the World’s Fair in full swing, the Prousts moved around the corner to the rue de Courcelles. Proust continued to live like a child, hopelessly dependent on his aging mother. Proust wrote in the dining room, surrounded by the books of his new literary obsession, the English essayist John Ruskin. What little English Proust knew was Ruskin’s English adorned with adjectives and multilevel metaphors, like Proust’s own French style.

A year earlier, Proust had begun a laborious translation of the fourth chapter of Ruskin’s *Bible of Amiens*, a collection of first-hand accounts of Christian art and history. Following Ruskin, Proust visited cathedrals throughout the Norman and Brittany countryside, comparing Ruskin’s descriptions to his own impressions.

His old friends were frequent visitors, along with new friends Louis d’Albufera and Bertrand de Fenelon, two more prototypes of the future Saint-Loup. While his circle of friends grew, Proust went out less and less, preferring instead to read the duc de Saint-Simon and Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve in his bedroom. On nights when he stayed in, Prousts and his guests would sit around the dining room table discussing art and literature over coffee and cider.

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Maurois, *The World of Marcel Proust*, 133.


Proust’s mother might stop in to greet the guests and warn her son about his worsening asthma. When he felt well enough, Proust played host at the rue de Royale or rue de Courcelles in Paris. In between fits of asthma, Proust admired the foliage of the French countryside outside Paris, and sometimes surprised his friends at the seaside resorts of Normandy and Cabourg, where he gathered raw materials for the fictional Balbec.\(^{240}\)

In November 1903, Proust’s father suffered from a stroke at work and died two days later. Proust had just finished his translation of the *Bible of Amiens* and dedicated the first edition to his late father. For the next two years, Proust rarely left the side of his inconsolable mother. He seldom went out, but updated his friends on his mother’s condition. In August 1905, she became ill with uraemia and died less than a month later. She left Proust with a considerable fortune, but without reason to live: “And now my heart is empty, and my room is empty and my life…”\(^{241}\) For fifteen months, Proust lived out the lease on his parents’ home in the rue de Courcelles, then moved to his uncle Louis Weil’s old apartment at 102, boulevard Hausmann. Proust demanded that the new room look exactly like the old, with his “long boat” table sitting diagonal to the door and to the left of the daylight.\(^{242}\)

On the table were dozens of exercise books covered in black moleskin that contained the seeds of *A la recherche*. Proust slept by day and wrote by night, endlessly editing, rearranging and rewriting the fragments of *A la recherche*. He hardly ever went out now, except to gather materials for his novel. He pressed his friends for details on music, medicine, fashion and gardening, later used in famous passages of *A la recherche*.\(^{243}\) Proust had the walls lined with cork, and set to work in the fog of his asthma fumigations. For weeks at a time, Proust rented

\(^{240}\) Painter, *Marcel Proust*, 242-246.  
\(^{241}\) Maurois, *The World of Marcel Proust*, 158.  
\(^{242}\) Maurois, *The World of Marcel Proust*, 160.  
three rooms at Cabourg: one for himself, one for his cook, and the room directly above his own, to make sure he heard no footsteps. He wrote fragment after fragment, some torn and tattered, others eaten by moths. By 1909, Proust had pieced them together into a coherent but interminably long book.

In late 1912 or early 1913, Proust finished *Du côté de chez Swann*, the first volume of what he thought would be a three volume novel. Beginning with the childhood of an unnamed Narrator in the fictional town of Combray, *Du côté de chez Swann* becomes the story of the love of Charles Swann, the son of a wealthy stockbroker, for Odette de Crecy, a disreputable socialite and prostitute. After several rejections, the manuscript was accepted by Grasset, with the understanding that Proust would pay the publication costs. In 1913, just before the outbreak of war, *Du côté de chez Swann* was released to mixed reviews.244

**France in the First World War**

During the *Belle Epoque*, unquestioning faith in progress propelled Europe to the pinnacle of productivity and creativity, but at a steep price. Britain and Germany raced to build better navies, and France wanted revenge against Germany for the Franco-Prussian War. Both Britain and Russia feared Germany, whose people were spreading to the Americas and central and eastern Europe at alarming rates. Germany feared Russia, whose population and economic growth outpaced the rest of Europe. Germany wanted to become Europe’s next major power, and the rest of the world was determined to stop it.245

For France, the Franco-Prussian War was a humiliating black eye, made permanent by the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. As the Third Republic settled into stability after the Paris Commune, France aimed to avenge the loss of Alsace-Lorraine through Plan XVII, an entirely offense

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244 Painter, *Marcel Proust*, 199-205.
strategy for occupying Germany through Alsace-Lorraine. Driven by *élan vital* or French fighting spirit, the French army would advance on Alsace-Lorraine from north and south of the Metz-Thionville fortresses, occupied by Germany since the Treaty of Frankfurt.\(^\text{246}\) While the south wing captured Alsace, then Lorraine, the north wing would march toward Berlin through the dense forests of the Ardennes.\(^\text{247}\)

Plan XVII underestimated the reserve troops of Germany, and did not account for a German occupation of France through Belgium. During the first month of the First World War, the Germans repelled the French on both sides of the Metz-Thionville fortresses and headed for France through unguarded Belgium. While France focused on Germany, Germany planned for war on two fronts: France in the west and Russia in the east. With the Schlieffen Plan, Germany planned to knock France out of the war within six weeks, before Russia could mobilize its enormous army.\(^\text{248}\)

From Germany, the fastest routes to Paris were the flat plains of Belgium. The Germans would deploy a small force to the France-Germany border to entice the French to move forward, then attack the French from the rear with the bulk of its forces.\(^\text{249}\) While the French dug shallow, temporary trenches with the hope of moving on quickly toward Germany, the Germans dug deep, permanent trenches where they could wait out the French in French territory.\(^\text{250}\) Although the Germans almost captured Paris within six weeks, the Schlieffen Plan underestimated the difficulty of sending supplies so far from German command lines.\(^\text{251}\) The Allies could reach troops by rail much faster than the Germans, who moved through open plains of the French countryside and dense forest of the Ardennes.

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\(^{246}\) Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 184.
\(^{247}\) Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 184.
\(^{249}\) Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 183.
\(^{250}\) Lindemann, *History of Modern Europe*, 189.
In the years leading up to the First World War, it was not the masses, but the heads of state who wanted war.\textsuperscript{252} Germany’s Wilhelm II saw an opportunity to seize control of a vulnerable Europe. France, Britain and Russia saw an opportunity to nip Germany’s ambitions in the bud. Britain’s young statesman, Winston Churchill, observed that “we are not meant to find peace in this world.”\textsuperscript{253} Just as objective trial and error create new knowledge in science, the pain and suffering of war would produce “betterment and progress” for Europe\textsuperscript{254}. In June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburg throne of Austria-Hungary, was assassinated in Sarajevo, the capital of Austrian-occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina. The assassination set Austria-Hungary against Serbia, the nation blamed for the assassination. Germany vowed to help its ally, Austria-Hungary, and Russia promised to help its “little brother” Serbia.\textsuperscript{255} Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, which set in motion the Schliffen plan for France and Russia, who allied with France and Britain against Germany. The declarations of war brought nationalism to a boil, and released years of pent-up frustration and aggression among the warring nations.\textsuperscript{256}

In the years before the First World War, Europe had settled into two camps, the Triple Alliance of Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary, and the Triple Entente of France, Russia and Britain. Swift defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and short-lived Paris Commune humiliated the French people. Although the French economy recovered quickly, France wanted to redeem itself on the national stage, especially at the expense of Germany.\textsuperscript{257} In the opening month of the First World War in August 1914, French and German troops skirmished in eastern and northern France. On August 22\textsuperscript{nd}, the skirmishes became full-scale battles, as Germany, Britain and France faced off on the Western Front of France. The Germans were advancing through Belgium.

\textsuperscript{252} Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 179-180.
\textsuperscript{253} Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 178.
\textsuperscript{254} Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 179.
\textsuperscript{255} Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 181.
\textsuperscript{256} Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 182.
\textsuperscript{257} Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 162.
and Lorraine, where they met the French at Sarrebourg and Morhange. In the first of four Battles of the Frontiers, the Germans forced the French to retreat from Lorraine, then pressed on toward Paris.  

Meanwhile, the Germans were advancing on France through the Ardennes as well. On August 21st and 22nd, 1914, the Germans again met the French in the Ardennes and farther north at the village of Charleroi, near the confluence of the Sambre and Meuse Rivers. Over the course of a single day at Charleroi and Ardennes, some 27,000 French soldiers were mowed down with machine guns as they charged with bayonets. By the end of the four day Battles of the Frontiers, 140,000 of 1.25 million French soldiers who saw combat were killed or wounded. A convincing victory in the Battles of the Frontiers gave Germany control over resource-rich Belgium and northern France. The battles also exposed the world to the killing capacity of modern firepower, and set the stage for bloody conflicts to come.

For the first time in military history, modern firepower made defense more effective than offense. Although most of the combat was hand-to-hand, military leaders were shocked by the brutal efficiency of machine guns and “Big Bertha” cannons used in the Battles of the Frontiers. Governments of warring nations worked to keep the worst of the news from the masses, who still largely supported the war with nationalistic fervor. Following their military training, generals continued to send waves of men “over the top” of the trenches into the “no-man’s land” of machine gun fire. After fighting all day, the lines of battle may have moved a few hundred yards, only to be reclaimed the next day with many thousand more casualties. The men followed orders, charging into certain death in stubborn pursuit of an uncertain cause. By

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1915, the Germans were advancing deep into Russia on the eastern front, and turned their attention back to France on the western front. Meanwhile, the Germans had surrounded the northeastern French fortress of Verdun on three sides.

**Proust: Living in the First World War**

Although he continued to write, expanding the novel to five volumes by 1919, the war occupied the front of Proust’s consciousness between the pre-war publication of *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913) and the post-war release of *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (1919). Proust observed that ways in which war changed France, effectively ending the *Belle Epoque* and its attitude of carefree optimism. As prestigious publishers lined up to publish his next volume in August, 1914, Proust was doubly heartbroken. His beloved driver Alfred Agostinelli had died in a plane crash off the coast of Normandy, and his brother Robert was one of three million Frenchmen deployed to the Western Front. On his brother, Proust wrote, “I have just seen off my brother who was leaving for Verdun at midnight. Alas he insisted on being posted to the actual border.”

Proust foresaw the superficiality of high society as early as *Les plaisirs et les jours*, but continued to follow the false scent of social prestige. With Agostinelli’s death in the newly-invented airplane, Proust experienced the Faustian dilemma of the *Belle Epoque*, that modernity’s promise of mastery over the natural and social worlds comes at a price. On the eve of the First World War, Proust foresaw the price in the form of war’s “omni-murdering machine” and, non-believer though he was, held out for a miracle: “But I wonder how a believer, a practicing Catholic like the Emperor Franz Joseph convinced that after his impending death he

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264 Marcel Proust, Lettres, 707-708.
265 Marcel Proust, Lettres, 707-708.
266 Marcel Proust, Lettres, 696-698.
will appear before his God, can face having to account to him for the millions of human lives whose sacrifice it was in his power to prevent.”

Even with the success of *Du côté de chez Swann*, literature seemed “wholly unimportant when I think that millions of men are going to be massacred in a *War of the Worlds* comparable with that of Wells…” While caring for troops on the front lines of Verdun, Robert was wounded but survived. Proust’s friend Robert de Fenelon was killed in December 1914, then Gaston de Caillavet one month later. In May 1915, another close friend, Robert d’Humières, was shot in the chest, leaving a wife and three children in Paris. In a letter to Robert’s widow, Proust felt “struck as if a bolt of lightning had shattered in my own heart something perfectly beautiful and noble.”

**The End of the Great War**

In late February, the Germans began to bombard Verdun with 100,000 shells per hour. French general Henri Philippe Petain promised that the Germans “shall not pass.” German general Erich von Falkenhayn vowed to bombard Verdun until the French “bled white.” Both were right. The Germans failed to take Verdun and both sides lost 400,000 men over five months. As casualties soared at Verdun, the French and British launched an offensive on the other side of the Western Front, near the Somme River. On July 1, 1916, the French and British bombarded the Germans with 2 million tons of explosives. The Germans fought back with tanks

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and howitzers, killing a record 20,000 British soldiers in one day, more than the Crimean, Boer and Korean wars combined.

After initial advances by the French, the Central and Allied powers settled into their trenches. By November 1916, close to 1.5 million men were killed or crippled with little military advantage for either side. After the historically bloody battles at Verdun and Somme, men on all sides lost their fighting spirit. While some wounded themselves to avoid the front lines, most fought on like robots, whose mechanical efficiency matched that of their machine guns.

On the home front, civilians were becoming restless, especially in Russia. The unpopular Nicholas II abdicated the throne of the Romanov dynasty to his brother Michael, who himself promptly abdicated. Without Russia, the French and British had to face the Germans alone on the Western Front.

Between March and June 1918, Germany doubled the size of its army in the Western Front, and paid for short-term advances with the lives of nearly one million men. The Germans hoped to knock the French out of the war before the Americans could arrive in meaningful numbers. By June 1918, 250,000 Americans were arriving in Paris each month. In June 1918, the Germans reached the Marne River in Chateau-Thierry, just fifty miles from Paris, where they met the French backed up by nine American divisions. At the Marne, the Germans planned to lure the Allies away from Flanders, a region stretching from northern France to Belgium where Germany would attack next. As predicted, the Germans struck first with an artillery bombardment of the false trench. The Allies set up two lines of trenches. While the full

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275 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 193.
277 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 193.
278 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 193.
279 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 193.
280 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 196.
281 Lindemann, History of Modern Europe, 196.
forces would wait in the second trench, the first trench would draw the Germans to the Marne, where the waiting French and American troops would surround and overwhelm the surprised Germans.\textsuperscript{282}

When the Germans reached the real trench, they were forced to retreat under a barrage of French and American artillery fire. In July, the Allies launched a counteroffensive which nullified the entire German offensive of 1918, and pushed the Germans back to prewar borders.\textsuperscript{283} Since the start of the war in August 1914, approximately ten million men were killed, another 20 million wounded, and the Great War was at a stalemate.\textsuperscript{284} The dispirited Central Powers began to crumble from within. First Turkey, then Austria-Hungary dropped out of the war. German troops mutinied, followed by civilians who were learning of the war’s carnage for the first time in four years.\textsuperscript{285} Germany’s Wilhelm II, said to be losing his mind, abdicated the throne and slipped into Holland. On November 11, 1918, the Allies and Germany signed an armistice in the French forest of Compiègne, and the Great War was over.

\textit{Proust: Time Regained}

Throughout the war, Proust continued to entertain admirers of \textit{Du côté de chez Swann}, abstracting about his characters and dropping hints about volumes to come.\textsuperscript{286} Sometimes Proust would go outside and follow the searchlights, or listen to an air raid, then scribble notes in his overflowing exercise book.\textsuperscript{287} With the heightened consciousness of war, Proust observed and recorded everyday life with the scientific precision of his father, then communicated its timeless truths with the sensibility of his mother. Proust was characteristically skeptical of the war’s end, preferring a peace with no outstanding debts or desires for revenge. When he heard the news that

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{282}{Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 184.}
\footnotetext{283}{Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 196.}
\footnotetext{284}{Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 197.}
\footnotetext{285}{Lindemann, \textit{History of Modern Europe}, 197.}
\footnotetext{286}{Maurois, \textit{The World of Marcel Proust}, 210.}
\footnotetext{287}{Maurois, \textit{The World of Marcel Proust}, 211.}
\end{footnotes}
the war was over, Proust rejoiced with the rest of France but worried that “gaiety was not the form of celebration I should have chosen.”

After the war, Proust’s health continued to deteriorate, slowed only by veronal at night and caffeine in the morning. Nevertheless, he managed to send the distended second volume of *À la recherché* to the publisher Gallimard. Containing what would later become both *Le Côté de Guermantes* and *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, the second volume was widely praised even by skeptics of *Du côté de chez Swann*. In November 1919, the bedridden Proust won the prestigious Goncourt Prize, given to the author of the best novel of the year. Over the next few months, Proust received over 800 letters from around the world, some calling him the greatest novelist of the twentieth century, others comparing him to his childhood heroes Charles Dickens and George Eliot.

In late 1919, Proust’s life of solitude was again uprooted when his building on the Boulevard Haussmann became a bank, “without a word of warning.” After a brief stay in a flat owned by the actress Rejane, Proust moved to his last home, a small apartment at 44, rue Hamelin near the Bois de Boulogne. In his room on the rue Hamelin, Proust lived almost exclusively on *café au lait*, as the smell of anything else triggered attacks of his ever-worsening asthma. Proust spent most of his mother’s fortune on medicine and meals for his servants from the most pricy restaurants in Paris. As the servants slept, Proust wrote upside down in bed, like Michaelangelo painting the Sistene Chapel. Beside the bed stood a bamboo table, Proust’s old “long boat,” which held his notebooks and correspondence as well as water and a burning

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candle, the only source of light allowed in the room.\textsuperscript{294} Proust went to sleep at seven o’clock in the morning, when the veronal he took at dawn started to kick in. At three o’clock, Proust awoke in a state of delirium, much like the Narrator in the overture to \textit{Du côté de chez Swann}.\textsuperscript{295} By the evening, several cups of coffee had stabilized the delirium, and Proust was ready to write all night.

For much of Proust’s life, the spheres of society and work had competed for his attention, with society winning most days. Whereas the young Proust saw the ways of Swann and Guermantes as two separate, irreconcilable worlds, the adolescent Proust saw society and work as two paths to the same goals of fame and fortune. Proust hosted guests only occasionally at the rue Hamelin, and began to set society in service of his work, using former friends for material for his novel. Proust enjoyed the company of his friends but, in the solitude of his bedroom, became disillusioned with the formality of friendship.

Proust was near death, and knew it. The friendships that consumed his early life were now burdens on his book, the sole focus of his later life. The imaginative energy pushing Proust to write came from within himself, in silence and solitude, without the distractions of society and city life. By 1920, Proust had evolved from an amateur aesthete in \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours} to a professional craftsman wholly invested in his work. Between 1920 and 1922, in between bouts of breathlessness, Proust expanded his novel to nearly 3,000 pages and over 1,000,000 words, piled in pieces beside his bed. As his fame grew, Proust invited fewer and fewer friends to his room, wanting instead to experience pure impressions undiluted by people. Some friends stayed while others faded, evidence for Proust of the fundamental flaw of friendship: “Sympathies and antipathies cannot be communicated. That is the great misfortune of friendship and of human

\textsuperscript{294} Maurois, \textit{The World of Marcel Proust}, 233.
\textsuperscript{295} Proust, \textit{Swann’s Way}, 5-15.
relations." Proust died on November, 17, 1922, surrounded by his doctor, whom he did not like, and his brother, whom he left out of *A la recherche*.

1. **The gold gilding of the Belle Époque.** The historical moment of nineteenth-century France was characterized by fragmentation, hidden behind the gold gilding of the *Belle Époque*. The *Belle Époque*, or Beautiful Era, was not a historical moment per say, but an attitude of careless optimism driven by modernity’s “secular trinity” of progress, efficiency and individual autonomy. The *Belle Époque* spanned the years from the late nineteenth century, when a series of World’s Fairs put Paris on the world stage, to the outbreak of the First World War, when the unchecked progress of the *Belle Époque* climaxed in unprecedented death and destruction. Proust wrote *Les plaisirs et les jours*, *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* with one foot in Parisian high society, the same society at which he hurled hollow critiques in his work. Just as the First World War revealed to the war the dangers of modernity, the literary failures of *Les plaisirs et les jours*, *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* revealed to Proust the hypocrisy in his philosophy of communication. Proust doubled the size of *A la recherche* during the war and, as the world recovered, Proust retired to his cork-lined bedroom to perform his true philosophy of communication.

2. **Background and foreground in philosophy of communication.** Proust’s foreground philosophy of communication emerged against the background of the *Belle Époque* in nineteenth-century France. Arnett and Arneson frame philosophy of communication in terms of background assumptions and foreground events. Events in the foreground are always informed by tradition and history, as well as the assumptions and presuppositions.

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296 Maurois, *The World of Marcel Proust*, 266.
of certain social orders. Philosophy of communication starts in the foreground in search of what Arnett and Holba call a temporal universal, or the background assumptions and philosophies that inform current events. The temporal universal is attentive to the particular within a horizon of interpretive possibilities, or “philosophies of communication” that occur within tradition, a rationality of existence, a particular social order, and between the individual and community. In moving existential meaning into everyday life, philosophy of communication encourages each person to have a philosophy of communication in the background, and to “do” philosophy of communication in the foreground.

3. Literature as synecdoche for life. Proust’s novel is a synecdoche for everyday life. The turning point in Proust’s novel comes much later than the turning point in Proust’s life. Proust realized relatively early, in the writing of Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve, that he must converge his life and work somehow, even if it meant withdrawing from the high society to which he devoted his early life. It takes Marcel until the very end of A la recherche to come to the same realization, and to set to work writing the book that the reader holds. A single mind cannot recall all three thousand pages as a whole, but only in fragments. Proust modeled this type of fragmented living, making lawful generalizations from particular observations of human behavior. Proust was enamored, then disenchanted with Parisian high culture, before withdrawing from the social world into the depths of his being in order to live forever through his art.

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299 Arnett and Holba, Overture, 1.
300 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 10.
4. **Particles and universes in philosophy of communication.** For Proust, individuals are not particles in a larger universe, but are themselves universes that are unpredictable and unobservable at the individual level. In the context of physics, the act of observing a particle modifies the particle beyond recognition. So too with the social world, where witnessing another’s behavior modifies one’s own attitudes and defines a horizon for future courses of action. For instance, after witnessing Jupien and the Baron engaged in a homosexual affair, Marcel learns to attribute the motives of many other characters to homosexual desire, an attribution to which he was ignorant before that day in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Guermantes. In literature and in life, both Marcel and Proust would rather watch themselves experience the world than taint their experiences with their own presence. Both Marcel and Proust wanted to watch themselves live beneath the gold gilding of the *Belle Epoque*, while everyone else danced on the surface.

The interplay of background and foreground is evident in the relation of Proust’s mature magnum opus, *A la recherché du temps perdu*, to his youthful works *Les plaisirs et les jours* (published in 1896), *Jean Santeuil* (written between 1900 and 1905) and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (written 1908 and 1909). All three have the same subject matter as *A la recherché*, but each lacks a different aspect of the coherent vision of *A la recherché*. Proust wrote *Les plaisirs et les jours* with the same grace and elegance as *A la recherché*, but was preoccupied with “pretty phrases” at the expense of his true self. Proust wrote *Jean Santeuil* with most of the artistic elements and some of the style of *A la recherché*, but could not yet translate the essence of himself into the novel form. Proust wrote *Contre Sainte-Beuve* with the vision of *A la recherché*, but could not reconcile his philosophy of the novel with Sainte-Beuve’s method of literary criticism.
In his early works Proust favors foreground over background. The extravagant publication of *Les plaisirs et les jours* included a preface by Anatole France and drawings by Madeleine Lemaire, both symbols of Proust’s preoccupation with high society. *Contre Sainte-Beuve* features many scenes made famous by *A la recherche*, but the focus of the book is primarily Sainte-Beuve. Just as Proust delves deepest into himself and comes closest to his true self, he runs back to reality and writes a chapter on Sainte-Beuve. *Jean Santeuil* juxtaposes the inner world of the character Jean and an outer world of objective reality. With *Jean Santeuil* Proust tried many methods of translating Jean’s inner world into writing, but the writing remained stale and superficial, without the wholistic vision of *A la recherche*. 
Bibliography


As a young man, Proust’s character was composite, like “an old book of the Middle Ages, full of mistakes.” He was eighteen, and had never worked. He wanted to be a writer but had published nothing. He was obviously intelligent and his writing showed promise, but he would rather entertain his friends with impressions of other writers than write anything himself. Proust was a regular at several fashionable salons in Paris, where he moved in the same company as much older writers like Anatole France. When France first met Proust at the Paris salon of Madeleine Lemaire, Proust was eighteen and unknown, and France was forty-five and one of the most famous writers in France. At their first meeting, Proust asked France, “What did you do to know so much?” “It’s quite simple, my dear Marcel,” responded France. “When I was your age, I wasn’t good-looking like you; nobody cared for me; I didn’t go out in society and I stayed home reading all the time.” Proust did not stay home, but started to write for fashionable literary journals edited by his society connections. Seven years later, he published his first work, a collection of essays called Les plaisirs et les jours, with a preface by Anatole France and drawings by Madeleine Lemaire.

Les plaisirs et les jours was largely ignored by critics, and Proust was dismissed as a dilettante. The book was also a commercial failure because of its exorbitant price of thirteen francs, of which one critic quipped: “Item, a preface by M. France, four francs. Item, paintings by Madeleine Lemaire, four francs. Item, music by Reynaldo Hahn, four francs. Item, prose by me, one franc. Item, a few lines of verse by me, fifty centimes. Total, thirteen francs fifty, that
wasn’t asking too much, was it?”

Twenty years later, Proust published *A la recherché* and went from amateur dilettante in *Les plaisirs et les jours* to what many consider to be the greatest novelist of the twentieth century. Proust scholars and admirers returned to the unread *Les plaisirs et les jours*, and found there the seeds of *A la recherché* in draft form. The trajectory of Proust’s thought was becoming clearer, but what of the twenty years between the amateurish *Les plaisirs et les jours* and the great *A la recherché*? In the early 1950’s, what appeared to be a rough draft of *A la recherché* was found among Proust’s papers and published under the title of *Jean Santeuil*. Also found were some scattered papers on French literary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve and Proust’s own literary theory were uncovered and collected into a single book called *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust tests various methods for translating his vision into the novel form. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust bounces back and forth between his own philosophy and Sainte-Beuve’s, as if coming to terms with own self through the misguided method of Sainte-Beuve.

In the next three chapters, I first summarize three of Proust’s youthful works, *Les plaisirs et les jours* (1896), *Jean Santeuil* (1900-1905) and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1908-1909), then situate all three as first drafts of Proust’s philosophy of communication. I review the fragments of the stories of *Les plaisirs et les jours*, vignettes of *Jean Santeuil* and sections of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, then outline the implications of the arrangement of fragments for Proust’s philosophy of communication. In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust works out his philosophy of communication, where ordinary objects carry within themselves the memories of past lives, lost forever to Time. These ordinary objects ignite impressions, which flood the souls of unsuspecting onlookers with involuntary memories of their past lives.

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The moment of involuntary memory provides a glimpse of the true self, unlimited by temporal circumstance. The past as revealed through impressions is the raw material of truly original artists, who communicate their true selves in their art. Communication is the recognition of one’s own true self in the true self of another, which only a work of art can carry. *Les plaisirs et les jours* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* are noteworthy as not only preliminary sketches of *A la recherché*, but also as Proust’s attempts to find the true, incommunicable self he meant to make communicable with *A la recherché*. In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust is content as a dilettante. He has not yet escaped the siren song of high society and wants to win some intellectual friends. In *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust has more fully fleshed out his philosophy, but still has one more hurdle in the method of Sainte-Beuve. All three works are philosophical pit stops on Proust’s path to *A la recherché*. 
CHAPTER 3
Les plaisirs et les jours: Fragments of a Philosophy of Communication

Proust’s first published work was a collection of brief vignettes called Les plaisirs et les jours. Proust adapted the title from Hesiod’s poem, Works and Days (circa 700 BCE), in which Hesiod situates the mortality of the human condition within a world ruled by immortal gods. While Homer told epic stories of heroic men and revengeful gods, Hesiod offered human nature and the human condition as correctives for the commonplace problems of everyday conduct. In Works and Days, Hesiod affirms the fundamental hardship of the human condition and extols hard work as the most human of virtues. The gods reward those who work and punish those who idle. The worker has a barn full of food and the good will of the gods; the idler has nothing but ill-will from the gods and envy for the worker. The idle man is like a stingless drone bee who consumes honey without contributing to the hive.

When he read Works and Days in the early 1890s, Proust had never had a job. He spent his days writing and his nights in the salons of several prominent hostesses. To appease his famous physician father, Proust took the unpaid position of “honorary attaché” at the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris, then immediately requested a leave of absence that lasted for several years, until it was assumed he had quit. In his early twenties Proust was certainly not a hard worker by Hesiod’s standards, but he was not exactly idle either. He was busy defending idleness from Hesiod in Les plaisirs et les jours, which replaces hardship and work with pleasure and idleness as the defining virtues of the human condition. For Proust, a human being who follows Hesiod and works all day is no better (and maybe worse) than a mindless worker bee. The real work of the human condition is contemplation in silence and solitude. It is solitary self-reflection, not communal work, that sets apart the human being from the worker bee.
This chapter frames *Les plaisirs et les jours* as a collection of rough and unconnected fragments of Proust’s philosophy of communication. The first section, titled “*Les plaisirs et les jours,*” summarizes seven separate short stories from *Les plaisirs et les jours,* which together represent the recurring Proustian themes of time, jealousy, loss, regret and habit. The next section, titled “The Path of *Les plaisirs et les jours,*” locates *Les plaisirs et les jours* on the path to *A la recherché.* The collection of *Les plaisirs et les jours* contains the seeds of *A la recherché,* but the seeds bear little more than “overripe first fruits.” Each of the individual stories is a stingless drone bee, or fragment that features a theme important in Proust’s later work, but contributes nothing to a complete and coherent vision in *Les plaisirs et les jours.* Readers of *A la recherché* will recognize in *Les plaisirs et les jours* the raw materials of the later novel, but Proust purposely keeps the fragments separate and superficial. In *Les plaisirs et les jours* Proust does not yet fully understand the role of communication in his philosophy.

**The Form of *Les plaisirs et les jours***

At the age of 25, Proust published his first work, a collection of short stories called *Les plaisirs et les jours* (1896). The title refers to Hesiod’s poem, *Works and Days,* written circa 700 BC. *Works and Days* works on two levels: as practical guide for prospering in particular situations in the Greek polis, and a moral treatise that defines the universal scope of right and wrong. Hesiod instructs the Greeks in the practical wisdom of morality. For Hesiod, one must not only know the difference between right and wrong in theory, but also recognize right and wrong in practice, then act accordingly. While *Works and Days* is undoubtedly didactic, meant to teach the Greeks how to live the right way, the poem also describes the dangers of misguided

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305 Enright, preface, viii.
notions of right and wrong. When the strong rule the weak by virtue of their strength alone, the realms of law and decency will fight, and the law of the jungle will win.

Under the law of the jungle, war is play and peace is work. Right and wrong exist as shades of strength and weakness, relevant only in times of war. Might is right for the “race of iron,” who “carp” at their aging parents, “chiding” them with crafty and cunning, false and foul-mouthed words. Born with gray hair on the temples, men of iron work all day and night, stopping only to sack the city of a weaker man. However, work (with proper balance and focus) is not the problem for Hesiod: “It is idleness which is a disgrace.” Work keeps one’s barn full and one’s brain off of another man’s property; idleness consumes without contributing back to the common good. Hesiod likens the idle man to a stingless drone bee that eats without working to produce honey, wasting the work of the other bees. Later in *A la recherché*, Proust will immortalize the bee as a symbol of homosexual gratification, but first he must figure out his own philosophy in *Les plaisirs et les jours*.

The few contemporaries who read *Les plaisirs et les jours* dismissed Proust as a talented, but amateur dilettante. Proust the man was preoccupied with the “false scent” of high society, so Proust the writer of *Les plaisirs et les jours* was content as a talented amateur, boasting how beautifully he writes. If writing for Proust is the translation of the author’s true self into communicable form, Proust was not yet in full possession of his true self. At 25, Proust still wrote in the realm of unreality, without full knowledge of his true self. For Proust, the true self is revealed in *moments bienheureux*, or two related impressions separated by ten or twenty or

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“many” years.\textsuperscript{310} Just as Time instantly and irretrievably kills the spoken word, Time retreats for a split second to reveal the reality of an impression, then kills the moment forever. Proust was only twenty-five when he wrote \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}. His whole life was shorter than the amount of time between impressions required to reveal reality in \textit{moments bienheureux}.

The structure of sheer length in \textit{A la recherché} serves Proust’s purpose of revealing in relief the structure of involuntary memory.\textsuperscript{311} The true self is revealed in impressions, the incommunicable moments of revelation brought on by everyday objects. A sensation of some physical phenomenon triggers an indescribable and incommunicable impression, which for a moment only reveals the reality beneath the superficial appearance of the object. So too for the self. Like impressions the true self is indescribable and incommunicable. When ten or twenty years later, another object triggers an impression which reveals to the current self a previous self at the time of the earlier impression, the true self transcends Time in recognition of itself across Time. If the structure of \textit{A la recherché} is sheer length, the structure of \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours} is sheer brevity, and if the sheer length of \textit{A la recherché} serves to model involuntary memory, the sheer brevity of \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours} models the superficiality of high society with which Proust was preoccupied when he wrote the thematic fragments of \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}.

\textbf{Thematic Fragments of \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}}

In this section, I outline six stories in \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours} that represent several recurring themes in different combinations. First, “Violante or High Society” represents the interplay of love, habit, suffering and high society. Second, “The Death of Baldassare Silvande, Viscount of Sylvania” introduces death into the mix of love, habit, suffering and high society. Third, “The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves” signifies the effect of absence and

\textsuperscript{310} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 113.
\textsuperscript{311} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 161.
presence on suffering. Fourth, “A Young Girl’s Confession” provides an early glimpse of the goodnight kiss scene in *A la recherche*, as well as the themes of love and high society. Fifth, “The End of Jealousy” epitomizes the theme of jealousy that drives the relationships in *A la recherche*. Finally, “Regrets, Reveries The Color Of Time” adds time to the fragmented formula of love, death, habit, suffering and high society. In his later work, Proust subjects all other themes to the all-powerful time, and identifies time as the great antagonist of his life’s work. In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, time is yet another theme among many themes, which add up to nothing but a beautiful collection of fragments.

**Violante, or High Society**

“Violante or High Society” is the story of Violante, the daughter of the viscount and viscountess of Styria. Styria is a rural and rustic estate, far from the stresses of city life and salons of high society. Violante embodied the best of both parents but lacked the strength of will to counter the passions of her heart. When Violante was 15, her parents the viscount and viscountess were killed in a hunting accident, leaving Violante under the awkward tutorship of Augustin, the steward of the Stryian castle. Without parents and far from friends, Violante spent her childhood with invisible friends, walking the countryside along the edge of the sea. One summer Violante’s solitude was interrupted by her aunt, who brought with her a young friend for Violante named Honore. When Honore and Violante were alone in a secluded part of the countryside, Honore whispered some “highly inappropriate things”\(^{312}\) in her virgin ear.

Taken aback, Violante ran back to the castle and could not sleep the next two nights, thinking only of Honore. Violante spent the next year in solitude. In place of invisible friends, Violante conjured up the image of Honore and the sweeping gaze of his green eyes. One day,

Violante learns from Augustin that Honore is in Styria, and not away at sea as she had supposed. She feverishly writes to Honore, who responds the next day that his boat is due to depart in one hour, and will not return for four years. Through her suffering, Violante experiences her first love. Her next love is Laurence, a young Enlightman who loves high society. However, Violante’s love was not returned by Laurence, who chose instead several inferior but better connected women. Determined to defeat these women and win Laurence’s love, Violante leaves the poor peasants of Styria for the high society of the Austrian court, against the wishes of Augustin. Violante promises Augustin she will return to help the people of Styria once she gains status in high society, but Augustin responds that she won’t be the same person and won’t want the same things.

With her cultivated mind and bearing, Violante very quickly reached the loftiest levels of high society. Laurence paid her constant attention, but Violante rejected his repeated advances, along with the marriage proposals of twenty other mediocre men. Augustin begs Violante to come back to Styria, but Violante chooses to marry the rich and charming Duke of Bohemia instead. The new Duchess of Bohemia immerses herself in the superficial pleasures of high society, at the expense of the charity and intellectual sophistication of the rustic life of Styria. Violante became more and more bored in Bohemia, until she resolves to return to Styria with her husband and recommit herself to a life of thoughtful solitude. But the short-term superficiality of worldly pleasures was now stronger in Violante than the urge to “live alone and through the mind,”313 as a simple girl from Styria. Violante’s every act of charity was balanced by the vanity of the Duchess of Bohemia, and every act of kindness judged by the rank of its audience. Violante of Styria and the Duchess of Bohemia existed together in one person.

313 Proust, “Violante or High Society,” 37.
The person’s true self was Violante of Stryia, not the Duchess of Bohemia, but the innocence and naivety of Violante the girl was no match for the hardened womanhood of Violante the Duchess. The young Violante was in touch with two worlds at once: a world of things and appearances, and a world of essences and realities invisible to those preoccupied with worldly pleasures. The older Duchess of Bohemia lived solely in the realm of worldly pleasures, out of touch with the invisible friends of her youth. As she read and dreamed she would again contemplate reality as Violante, only to bounce back to the sole object contemplation in high society: the self. When Violante loved Laurence from Styria, she saw society as a means to the end of love. For Violante the Duchess of Bohemia, the means and ends were reversed, with love now the measuring stick for social status. Again and again Violante put off her return trip to Styria, until she died in Bohemia hamstrung by habit.

With “Violante, or High Society,” Proust introduces the interconnections of the themes of love, habit, suffering and high society. As the daughter of a viscount and viscountess, Violante is by no means destitute. Her family rules the small village of Stryia, far from the high society of Paris. Violante experiences two loves, one in Stryia (Honore) and one in Paris (Laurence), before marrying the Duke of Bohemia. Honore interrupts Violante’s solitude in Styria and exposes her to a world outside Styria through her suffering. Laurence represents the superficiality of high society, where love is measured by social mobility. With the Duke of Bohemia Violante finds the best of both Honore and Laurence but, when she finally resolves to return to Styria with the Duke of Bohemia, she cannot make the move. Just as Augustin had warned before she left for Paris, habit had encrusted her new way of life, and replaced her true self in Styria with the superficial selves of Paris and Bohemia. In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, it is clear that Proust sensed some interconnections among the themes of love, habit, suffering and high society, but there was
still something missing. In *A la recherche*, the something missing is time, but in another story in *Les plaisirs et les jours* called “The Death of Baldassare Silvande, Viscount of Sylvania,” Proust ties together the themes with another recurring theme: death.

**The Death of Baldassare Silvande, Viscount of Sylvania**

At the beginning of “The Death of Baldassare Silvande, Viscount of Sylvania,” Baldassare is terminally ill with three years to live, and his nephew Alexis is distraught. Alexis loved his elegant and intelligent uncle more than anyone else in the family, even his own parents. Before the illness, Baldassare was the “most sublime epitome of a man,” but not without his faults. Alexis had heard from his parents that Baldassare had a violent temper triggered by vanity, but for Alexis the viscount would always be his favorite relative. Alexis prepares with his parents to visit his uncle. Alexis has not seen his uncle since the illness, but pictures his sick uncle as severe and somber as his own father, and weeps. Alexis worries that he will cry and betray his knowledge of the illness to Baldassare. He must not know that you know, Alexis is warned. But what is he brings it up, asks Alexis. You must lie.

Alexis is relieved to see his uncle as elegant as always, save the sadness in his sunken cheeks, but Baldassare is not as somber as Alexis had supposed. He still enjoys music and plays, and reads a letter from his friend the Duke of Parma with the same “little grimace.” Alexis thinks that he, too, will die, but definitely not like his uncle, “moving backward toward death while staring at life.” Alexis resolves to confront death, and not waste his life on worldly pleasures. To relieve his sorrows, Baldassare spends a few weeks at a neighboring castle, where he falls in love with a married woman. The two kiss, slowly at first, then passionately with eyes

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closed to the “distress of their souls.” After three or four weeks, the distress has dissipated into pleasure, and pleasure into habit. The viscount returns to Sylvania, with only a faint memory of these “cruel and blazing minutes.”

The following year, Baldassare was still alive but dead to Alexis, who had replaced his uncle with other living relatives. Baldassare could barely walk now. He lay in bed surrounded by supportive friends and former enemies, who consoled the viscount in his last days. Baldassare spent long hours with the “only guest he had neglected to ask to supper in his lifetime”: himself. Early on, Baldassare felt like an exile alone in a foreign land, but now, he felt at home in death, immune to the hardships of life. He looked at life like a painting without blemishes, only beauty in broad brushstrokes. One day Baldassare began to walk better, even better the next. He called the physician, who had mistaken the symptoms of a simple disease for general paralysis. Baldassare was cured, but reluctant to reassume the burdens of his former life. While dying he came to know his true self and enjoyed the company. Now his new friends were enemies again, and his beloved sister-in-law and nephew had not visited for the first time in two months.

Baldassare saw no choice but to turn again toward life, and leave behind the true self glimpsed in death. He reentered society life with all the hot-tempered irascibility of his former self. One month later, the symptoms of general paralysis recurred and Baldassare was bedridden, confronted again with imminent death but unable to extract himself from worldly life. Baldassare remained as irascible in death as he was in life, cheered only by visits from Alexis and his mother. As she rode one day to visit the viscount, she was flung from the carriage and trampled by a passing horseman. Her unconscious body was brought to Baldassare, who spent two sleepless nights at her bedside. As a dying man, Baldassare would visualize the scene and

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circumstances of his death from the perspective of the living, rather than confront death as it is, a mystery. With his sister-in-law near death, Baldassare forgot his own death to focus on hers.

Her defeat of death empowered Baldassare to die because his “most prized possession” was no longer his own life, but hers. Whereas before he had watched life like a painting, at the mercy of impending death, Baldassare now saw death from the perspective of a spectator, unsoiled by the lies of worldly life. Armed with this new experience of death, Baldassare could now face death from the front. Meanwhile, Baldassare had one month to live, and no longer took visitors. Death had blinded Baldassare’s vanity, but opened his mind to vanities long past. He hallucinated himself as the musician and aristocrat of the century, married to the sister of the Duke of Parma. While holding the hand of an imaginary friend, Baldassare settled a gambling debt with a paper knife. Now he was a child again, kissing his mother while she rubbed his feet. Now he was holding his first violin under the linden tree where he got engaged, and now the engagement was broken off and Baldassare was back at home, watching the waves with his heart. Three days later, Baldassare was dead.

In “The Death of Baldassare Silvande, Viscount of Sylvania,” Proust announces his attitude toward death: life is like a conveyer belt on which we move “backward toward death while staring at life.” The young Alexis is surprised to see that his dying uncle Baldassare still cares about material things and human relationships, even as he prepares to leave the material world. Alexis then makes the same mistake, forgetting his uncle when Baldassare is no longer useful or idyllic to Alexis. Both Baldassare and Alexis are blinded by material vanity, Baldassare by death and Alexis by life. Baldassare’s death sentence had lifted from his back the burdens of life. When Baldassare is supposedly healed, habit reassigns to Baldassare the forgotten burdens, which Baldassare forgets again when the sentence is restored.

Baldassare lives in this state of flux until the end of the story, when he forgets his own death and watches his sister-in-law face death her falling from her horse. In “The Death of Baldassare Silvande,” Proust introduces the multi-leveled voyeurism that recurs in *A la recherche*. Early in the story, Alexis and his mother are helpless voyeurs of Baldassare’s impending death. At the end of the story Baldassare watches in agony as Alexis’s mother comes close to death. The readers are themselves voyeurs of both battles with death, and forget Alexis just as Alexis forgot Baldassare. The perspectives of imposed voyeurism in “The Death of Baldassare Silvande,” model the suffering that always accompanies death, the same suffering that accompanies love in “The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves.”

**The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves**

“The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves” begins with François de Breyves, one of the most sought after women in Paris, deciding how to spend her evening. François’s friend Geneviève wants to go to a soiree hosted by Princess Elizabeth d. A., but François would rather go to a play or the opera, or even go home to bed. François was married at 16 and widowed at 20, leaving Geneviève as her closest friend for the past four years. François wavers but eventually gives in to Geneviève’s entreaties, and the two friends leave for the princess’s soiree. At the soiree, François caught the eye of Monsieur de Laléande, a friend of the princess who asked Geneviève for an introduction to François. François was flattered but declined, choosing instead to flirt for fun with the “homely and vulgar” man from across the ballroom. At the end of the party, François found herself alone for the first time with Monsieur de Laléande, who whispered to François an invitation to his home that night. François was flustered and told no

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one about the invitation, even Geneviève. Soon she forgot the invitation and, as if in a dream, could remember only his “beautiful eyes.”

Over the next few months, François searched for Monsieur de Laléande at every party, hoping for a formal invitation. She was obsessed with Monsieur de Laléande at the expense of many more handsome and accomplished men. In desperation François asked Geneviève to write to Monsieur de Grumello, her mutual friend with Monsieur de Laléande, to arrange an introduction between François and Monsieur de Laléande. Monsieur de Grumello responds that Monsieur de Laléande departed two days ago and would not return for several months. François barely made it to the privacy of her room before collapsing in convulsive sobs, heartbroken over a man she had never met, and who she found ugly. In the space left by her uprooted hopes, François sees the reality of her love. François could not stand to stay put in Paris, paralyzed by panoptic grief, but also could not go to Biarritz and compromise what little hope she had left. She withdrew further and further from society, and deeper and deeper into herself.

One day she wrote to Monsieur de Grumello, who responded that Monsieur de Laléande would not be in Paris before January. Powerless to calm her paralyzing grief, François resolved to solidify her social standing, her only power over Monsieur de Laléande, so as to facilitate a meeting upon his return. François tried to bracket her feelings and remind herself that Monsieur de Laléande was homely and ugly, but then his name or a phrase from *Die Meistersinger* would summon again all the joys and sorrows injected into the “mirage” of this mediocre man, and she wept. François cursed her imagination and ingenuity for creating this mirage of Monsieur de Laléande, and her weak will for letting it consumer her whole being, “the way the ocean engulfs

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the setting sun.”\textsuperscript{324} Above all, François cursed the “inexpressible sense of the mystery of things”\textsuperscript{325} which armed her love with the infinity of her imagination, without limiting the tortures of her grief.

Monsieur de Laléande lived two separate lives: one on the beaches of Biarritz and one in the soul of François. For François every shadow took the shape of Monsieur de Laléande, and every face his features. François had hated Biarritz before, but now had a photograph of Biarritz in her otherwise bare bedroom. François’s life assumed the “rhythm of anxiety,”\textsuperscript{326} set to the mediocre music of Monsieur de Laléande. When François lost sight of Monsieur de Laléande in a moment of meditation, he would rematerialize and with a tender look turn her brief pleasure into a pang of jealous guilt. Sometimes in the morning the mirage of Monsieur de Laléande would appear dim and indefinite, and her grief paused. Then her memory would fill in the homely and ugly features of Monsieur de Laléande and her grief would resume, now more tolerable than its absence.

François’s unrequited love for Monsieur de Laléande in “The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves” calls to mind Swann’s love for Odette in\textit{Du cote de chez Swann} and Marcel’s love for Albertine in\textit{La Prisonnière} and\textit{Albertine disparue}. When Swann and Marcel first meet Odette and Albertine, they are unimpressed. Both are disreputable women with flawed faces, but Swann and Marcel gradually come to love Odette and Albertine when the women are absent. The imaginations of Swann and Marcel perfect the flaws in the faces of Odette and Albertine, and replace the disreputable women with idyllic forms of embodied Beauty that only they can see. At the end of\textit{Du cote de chez Swann}, Swann asks himself how he could suffer so

\textsuperscript{324} Proust, “The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves,” 78.
\textsuperscript{325} Proust, “The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves,” 78.
\textsuperscript{326} Proust, “The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves,” 81.
much for such an unattractive women, and even after Albertine’s death in *Albertine disparue*, Marcel is jealous of Albertine and suffers at her expense.

In “The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves,” François suffers in the absence of the Monsieur de Laléande, a man she found homely and vulgar at their first meeting. By the end of the story, François is so accustomed to suffering over Monsieur de Laléande that the moments when she forgets Monsieur de Laléande are less tolerable than the absence of the man himself. In “The Death of Baldassare Silvande,” Proust ties suffering to death. In “The Melancholy Summer of Madame de Breyves,” Proust tied suffering to love. As early as *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust grounds the human condition in suffering. The two things common to all human beings – love and death – are always accompanied by suffering. The theme of suffering is further fleshed out in one of the most famous stories in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, “A Young Girl’s Confession.”

**A Young Girl’s Confession**

In “A Young Girl’s Confession,” a girl suffers after a suicide attempt. The first shot failed to kill her. The bullet lodged in her brain and caused complications with her heart. I was clumsy, she said, and had bad aim. The girl has up to a week to live, and wishes she could die in the park at Les Oublis, where as a child her “normally quite chary”[327] mother would shower her with affection. The girl’s mother would drop her off at Les Oublis in April, then return to Paris until June. Unlike in Paris, where she slept alone in her bedroom, at Les Oublis the girl would wait awake for her mother’s goodnight kiss. At home the goodnight kiss caused the girl “too much pleasure and too much pain,”[328] so her mother stopped the habit but not the pain. Some nights in Paris the pain was prolonged by a warm pillow or cold feet. Mother, mother! cried the girl, but no answer.

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At Les Oublis, the pleasure of the goodnight kiss was resumed for a brief moment, both by the kiss itself and the girl’s discovery that at heart her mother shared her sadness. One day at Les Oublis, the girl had two visitors: her mother and older cousin. The girl’s caretakers at Les Oublis had informed her that her cousin was coming but not her mother, for fear that she would neglect the cousin for the mother. When the girl was alone with her cousin, he caressed her virgin hands and told her things that “required the ignorance of my age to be told.”329 The girl drew back in disgust, and reveled with delight that was “poisoned at its very source.”330 She escaped her cousin through the trails of a nearby garden, calling for her mother many miles away in Paris. Soon she passed an arbor and there, on a bench by a lilac bush, was her mother, holding out her arms for a kiss. The girl leapt into her mother’s lap with all the weight of her heavy conscious. She kissed her mother with an unprecedented passion, since unsurpassed. The “divine sweetness”331 of her mother’s kiss released the weight of the girl’s conscious. Her soul grew lighter and lighter, until it levitated with the scent of the lilac bush. The next day the girl’s mother left, and her pain resumed again. The girl resolved to kill herself the minute after her mother died, in the unlikely scenario that the girl survived her mother. The girl’s pleasure came from her eagerness to share the seeming infinity of her future with her mother, but every time her mother left, she was thrown back into the fourteen years of her past, where the pleasure of every kiss was paired with the pain of her mother’s leaving. The girl acted on every impulse, with no willpower to calm the “infernal darkness”332 of her desires.

She put off year after year the “work, calm, and reflection” her mother believed would break her dependence. The girl’s parents introduced her to society, where her lack of willpower made her vulnerable to the bad thoughts of wicked men. She missed the pleasures of solitude, but society distracted her from the pain of her mother without the need for willpower. Society fanned the flame of her intellectual curiosity, now no more than a flicker. Her new vapidity was valued in society, whereas her old gravity was thought silly at home. When she no longer used it, the girl’s mind was valued, and when she no longer loved her mother, the girl was a model daughter. In society she lived (although she denied it was living) in the shallows of herself, without depth, where she waded up to her heart without getting her head wet. When the girl was twenty, her mother became deathly ill. Her last wish was to marry her daughter. Eager to please her mother, the girl took a gentle and intelligent husband, who most importantly was willing to live with the girl and her mother. They would never be apart again.

The girl’s soul was saved from her society sins just in time for her mother to recover, and host a dinner in honor of her daughter. She recreated the kiss at Les Oublis, in which all the pleasures of her past coalesced into the present form of her mother’s lips. Her new husband was absent from the dinner, having gone to visit his sister, and the girl was left alone with her former lover, Jacques. She still had no willpower, and so she could not resist the kiss of his mustached lips. She went to the bedroom with Jacques, locked the door, and lost again the innocence restored by her mother at Les Oublis. But this time her mother saw her in the mirror with Jacques, and heard her cries of adulterous pleasure. Her mother fainted, hit her head on the railing, and died. The pleasure in her goodnight kiss was always paired with the pain of her mother’s absence. Now her own carnal pleasure was paired with the pain of her mother’s death,

multiplied by the knowledge that she caused it, and the agony of seeing her mother’s death over and over for one more week, all because she was clumsy and had bad aim.

The beginning of “A Young Girl’s Confession” echoes the overture to *Du cote de chez Swann*, in which a child pines for his mother’s kiss and spends time between Paris and the country, except that in “A Young Girl’s Confession” the child is a girl, and life without a kiss was too much for the girl to bear. In “Violante, or High Society,” Violante chooses to go into high society against the advice of her tutor Augustin, In “A Young Girl’s Confession,” the girls parents send her into society against her wishes to break the girl’s dependence. In both stories, society reveals to Violante and the young girl the sterility of appearance. The young girl was not willpowerful enough to live without her mother’s kiss. Like Violante, who lost her innocence to Honore, the young girl lost her innocence to her older cousin, who fades from the story like Alexis in “The Death of Baldassare Silvande.”

When the girl grew older she was too weak to resist the advances of “wicked men” in society. She cheats on her current husband with her former lover, and witnesses her mother’s pain as she cries out in pleasure. The relationship between the young girl and her mother in “A Young Girl’s Confession” has more in common with the goodnight kiss scene in *A la recherché*, in which Marcel feels remorse for his demonstration in demanding a goodnight kiss, than the later scene in *Jean Santeuil*, in which Marcel feels a sort of self-satisfaction from his power over his mother. The mother’s kiss in “A Young Girl’s Confession” restores to the young girl her innocence, while the goodnight kiss in *A la recherché* is the end of Marcel’s innocence and the beginning of his jealousy. In “The End of Jealousy,” Proust introduces the theme of jealousy into the mix of habit, love, suffering and high society.
The End Of Jealousy

In “The End of Jealousy,” Honoré professes his love for his widowed mistress, François, in secret language that filled their empty words with “infinite meaning.” In public, Honoré and François were more than friends but less than lovers, like gods in “disguise among human beings.” Honoré and François were always thinking of each other, so that even in absence they were never far apart. For Honoré time passed in intervals of three: anticipation of meeting François, time spent with François (which didn’t count toward the total because time stopped with François), and memories of meeting François, which raised anticipation and restarted the dialectic. With every breath, Honoré exalted François, and François equaled Honoré with every exhale. Even so, Honoré feared that his love for François was finite, and would soon come to an end. Please Lord, prayed Honoré, please let me love François forever! But he knew another woman (maybe Princess Alériouvre) would eventually replace his precious François. In that case he would extract himself slowly, hiding his indifference from François with the same care that he hid his love. He himself would handpick her next lover, who must be a better man than himself.

One night François and Honoré attended the same party in honor of Honoré’s friend, Monsieur de Buivres. François left the party early, leaving Honoré alone with Monsieur de Buivres. The two men spoke about the women at the party, and that Princess Alériouvre was far more beautiful than François. While not in love with her, Honoré wanted to “possess” the princess if he could keep it from François. Why the princess, asked Monsieur de Buivres, when you can bed that “hot-blooded” François far faster? There was a man at the party who had a

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fling with François, but “her body wasn’t all that great,” and he stopped. But she must have a new fling because she leaves every party early. That can’t be! said Honoré. She is a widow, and must be home early. There is a lot she can do between 10 and 2, replied Monsieur de Buivres, who left Honoré to stew in silence. The words of Monsieur de Buivres rang in Honoré’s ears for many days afterward.

Honoré confronted François, who denied that she would ever deceive him. The words of François in their secret language counteracted the words of Monsieur de Buivres with the “sweetness of childhood bells,” but only temporarily. When François was away, Honoré saw her with not his eyes but his imagination, which “magnifies all things.” Honoré recalled the many times had deceived François with animalistic ardor, the same feelings he had for François. Certainly François had deceived him too. He had to know. One evening while walking in Paris, Honoré told François that he had deceived her. Rather than respond with her own confession, François collapsed on a bench in genuine despair, indicating to Honoré that she truly loved him. Nevertheless, the knowledge that François truly loved him could not calm the inner cacophony caused by the comments of Monsieur de Buivres. Again and again he heard the words, made infinitely injurious by his imagination.

Honoré exhausted himself on horseback and rode a bicycle all day, then filled his brain with books so he could forget François and sleep, but to no avail. Honoré prayed to God again, this time to forget François and stop loving her forever. Honoré accompanied François everywhere, filling in the form of his phantasmic jealousy with the substance of her flesh and blood. The story resumes in the respected salon of Madame Seaune, née Princess de Galaise-Orlandes and the former François. François and Honoré had made their affair public and went

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everywhere together. The world “accepted their relationship and esteemed their happiness.”

Then, on the first Tuesday in May, as Honoré was walking on the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne, a runaway horse broke both his legs and injured his abdomen. Honoré was humiliated by the “childlike feebleness” of his legless body. He resigned himself to life without legs, and worse, life without François. On his sickbed Honoré sifted through a disappointingly small stack of sympathy cards.

One of them was from Monsieur de Gouvres, François’s fling from the princess’s party, who called François hot-blooded with a bad body. Honoré felt a pain in his side and pressure in his heart. He could no longer breathe. His back was bearing down on his heart. Could this be the end? No, just a small attack of Honoré’s asthma. But what if it was the end for Honoré? Who would console François in her grief? The thought of François’s feelings for another man, not necessarily love but pleasure, was unbearable for Honoré. With his weakened will, Honoré resolved to marry François before his impending death, but she refused. Honoré was not yet doomed to death, she said, and since François had never lied to Honoré, he began to believe her. As long as he lived, Honoré would always be jealous. He hoped for François to find happiness, or even love, with another man, but could not bear to see her pleased. But Honoré’s jealousy fell short of François’s soul, stopping instead at her flesh.

Only when free of all fleshly desire would Honoré truly love François, “when the soul gets the better of my flesh.” In the absence of worldly desires Honoré saw his own soul, disclosed like a “physical pain that stabs, that degrades, and the diminishes.” Honoré’s feeble body now freed anyone to “have a fling” with François without fear of revenge. Honoré dreamed that he was suffocating under enormous pressure, but then the pressure lifted like a cloud.

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revealing to him all the burdens of his love. Honoré lived as a “crushed man”\textsuperscript{344} at the mercy of his memories of François. Honoré asked God to let him die, and in death to reveal the love beneath the cloud of carnal desire. Only in death could Honoré experience pure love, unpoisoned by carnal desires, but in death he would never experience love, because he would be dead. Honoré was near death now, but he was distracted by a little fly that landed on his leg (or where his leg would have been) then flew to his finger. The fly had replaced François as the sole object of his attention, and that was the end of Honoré’s jealousy.

“The End of Jealousy” is one of the most thorough articulations of the theme of jealousy in Proust’s early work. The story features another Honoré, who self-servingly loves another François. Honoré loves François with an air of indifference. Honoré senses that his love for François is ending, and even volunteers to choose her next lover. When a friend of Honoré’s implies that François is promiscuous with other men, Honoré’s lukewarm affection for François turns to obsessive jealousy. The end of Honoré’s crippling jealousy comes only with the end of all his bodily desire in death. In \textit{A la recherche} the theme of jealousy drives the relationships between Swann and Odette, Marcel and Gilberte, and Marcel and Albertine. Jealousy is the counterpart to the fluctuations of love.

Neither the bodies nor the words of Swann and Marcel could break through the appearances of Odette, Gilberte and Albertine to access the essence of their love. As soon as Marcel possesses Albertine, he no longer loves her, but when Marcel does not possess Albertine, he cannot function until he possesses her. Honoré’s jealousy consumes his whole life and ends only in death. Honoré only forgets François when a fly replaces François as the sole object of his dying consciousness. In \textit{A la recherche} Swann’s love for Odette and Marcel’s love for Gilberte and Albertine end anti-climactically in time. Time, not death, is the driver of relationships in \textit{A la}

\textsuperscript{344} Proust, “The End of Jealousy,” 168.
recherché. Time ties together the themes of love, suffering, jealousy, habit and high society. In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust treats time as just another theme, itself fragmented like the minivignettes in “Regrets, Reveries The Color of Time.”

**Regrets, Reveries The Color of Time**

In “Family Listening to Music,” Proust defines the truly “dynamic family”\(^3\) as a family in which each member “thinks, loves, and acts”\(^4\) for themselves but with the family. For the dynamic family, music holds the promises of youth and the regrets of age. A mother hears in music her daughter’s future, and the girl her mother’s past. Music carries the regrets of an unfaithful wife, and the habit of an unloving husband. The young hear the infinity of this world; the old hear the infinity of the next. Each member of the family, young and old, engages the music with a “unique and particular enchantment,”\(^5\) that together make up the melody of the dynamic family.

In another untitled vignette, a little boy loves an older girl. The boy wept when he glimpsed the girl, and wept harder when he didn’t. The boy could not sleep or eat, only love the girl. All he wanted was to speak to her once, to bottle for beauty for his life’s worship. One day the boy jumped out the window. He survived and lived a long life as an invalid idiot. The boy must have died inside of despair and attempted suicide, or maybe no longer wanted to live after the euphoria of meeting his beloved. No, he had simply talked to the girl, and she was nice to him. The reality of the girl’s imperfect face did not match his dream of her perfect Form. This girl who lived nearby, to whom the boy had devoted his whole conscious life, was much more ordinary than the girl who occupied his imagination. The disappointment was too much for the boy, so he jumped out the window. Out of pity the girl married the boy, but the boy never

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\(^3\) Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 112.
\(^4\) Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 112.
\(^5\) Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 114.
recognized her. For Proust life is like the older girl. Life is lovely in our dreams but, when life doesn’t measure up to our dreams, we deny the dreams, and live only for the present.

In “Moonlight Sonata,” the narrator spends his day with a beautiful but exhausting woman, Assunta, while preoccupied with another woman, Pia, as well as the demands of his father and schemes of his enemies. At the end of the day, the exhausted narrator sends Assunta home in a carriage. He lies down to rest in the open air, and dreams of total darkness on a twilit beach, “despite the impression of intense and diffuse light.” The schemes and demands that caused so much waking worry were now just natural necessities. The tree-lined lawn where the narrator slept was now a stream of brightness between “two embankments of gloom,” from which Assunta emerges in a dark coat. The narrator crawls into the coat with Assunta. They walk a few paces, and the “profound darkness” of the coat opens to the moon, weeping for the sky it sees only in darkness.

In “Ephemeral Efficacy of Grief,” Proust writes that people who provide happiness are like gardeners who fertilize the flowers of the soul. A lush, colorful garden gives to the soul a green veneer, which looks to the lover like selfless love, but actually conceals the ugly and infertile desires beneath. People who provide suffering poison the garden and pull the flowers, exposing the soul to its own self-interest. Only suffering provides the necessary distance for decisions of the heart. The lover lives on stage, as if in a play, but without the self-awareness of the actor or detachment of the spectator. The lovers’ tears will water the few seeds in the garden of the soul spared by suffering. A few seeds will sprout, but soon the tears too will dry up, leaving only indifference.

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348 Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 121.
349 Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 121.
In “In Praise of Bad Music,” Proust argues that amateur music is just as valuable as artful music. While amateur music has no place in the history of art, and means nothing to the well-bred ear, it dominates the domain of everyday life, where music reaches the untrained masses. Only a few experts can appreciate the masterpieces, but the “annoying jingles” and overused love songs of bad composers hold the “treasures of thousands of souls,” each with a different story. All classes and castes share the same mailmen of music, who deliver “messages of love” both amateur and artful. Artists should bracket their “aesthetic disdain,” and turn their attention away from the good music of the next world toward the bad music of this one.

In “Dream,” an unnamed narrator remembers his poor opinion of Madame Dorothy B. but nothing else. That night he goes to bed early. With a violent gust of wind, he wakes on a beach at Trouville, under the watchful eye of Madame Dorothy B. As Dorothy strokes the narrator’s neck and moustache, Dorothy invites him to “enter life” and share their profound and “intimate union” with “the others.” Dorothy removes a rosebud from between her breasts and brings it to his buttonhole. The narrator’s eyes fill with Dorothy’s tears. Dorothy collects the tears with her tongue and swallows to the sound of kissing. At that moment, the narrator wakes again to lightning, followed lawfully by thunder. Likewise the lawless happiness of the dream was followed by the devastating realization that the dream was not real, although the narrator changed his opinion of Dorothy. Just yesterday, he had no desire at all to see the Dorothy of this world. Now he could not live without the Dorothy of his dream.

The many vignettes under the collective title, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” are themselves fragments within the bigger fragments that constitute the collection of *Les plaisirs et

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351 Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 126.
352 Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 126.
353 Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 126.
les jours. In brief anecdotes, Proust touches on themes of nature, music, society, love, lust, jealousy, and memory. Proust is at his most poetic in “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” but the reader of A la recherche will sense something missing, something left unsaid in the individual vignettes. In A la recherche, Proust finally settled on the structure of sheer length as a model for the effect of time and the mode of involuntary memory. Proust wrote more than the reader can remember, so that throughout the novel the reader remembers involuntarily what happened two thousand pages earlier.

In Les plaisirs et les jours, and especially “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” Proust took the opposite approach, writing so little that the readers had to fill in for themselves what was left unsaid by Proust. While the universe of A la recherche is overwhelming and overdetermined, that of Les plaisirs et les jours is implied by Proust and inferred by the reader. Elsewhere in Les plaisirs et les jours, Proust wrote that the superficial life moves “backward toward death while staring at life.” In one of untitled vignettes of “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” Proust returns to the same theme, calling a person who is preoccupied with the present a cow that lives only “for the grass we are grazing on at that moment.”

Proust knew something was wrong with his life of luxury in high society but, like his characters Violante and the young girl in “A Young Girl’s Confession,” he lacked the power of will to resist. Proust left so much unsaid in Les plaisirs et les jours because he did not yet know what to say.

**On the Path to Proust’s Philosophy of Communication: Les plaisirs et les jours**

In the previous section, I outlined eight vignettes in Les plaisirs et les jours that represent the recurring themes of love, jealousy, death, suffering and high society, among others. Each story represents a single theme, or the interconnection of one theme with another, without the dialectical interplay or governorship of Time that characterize the same themes in A la

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recherché. In this section, I situate the fragments of *Les plaisirs et les jours* on the path to Proust’s philosophy of communication. The seeds of *A la recherche* can be found in fragmented form in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, but they are too fragmented to comprise a full philosophy of communication.

In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust outlines the themes of love, loss, habit and regret to which 20 years of life experiences will give substance. Even at 25, Proust sensed something amiss with the superficiality of society, namely the forces of habit and jealousy, but lacked the depth of diagnosis that the mature Proust would employ in *A la recherche* with the precision of his physician father. In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust recognized the powerful force of habit in overcoming intuitive doubts about the superficiality of society. For the Proust of *Les plaisirs et les jours*, to live is to be jealous, and to be jealous is to be a philosopher of Truth, a lover of wisdom unsatisfied with words and appearances.

Also present in *Les plaisirs et les jours* is the theme that love exists only in the mind, as an appearance untethered to reality. *Du côté de chez Swann* begins with the Narrator’s disoriented confusion upon waking from a nap and, after several hundred pages of Swann’s agonizing jealousy, ends with Swann’s asking himself how he could feel such passionate jealousy for a woman who was not even his type. Proust observed that love grows in the absence of the one loved. As the loved one ages in the absence of the lover, the flaws of the loved one fade and features grow indistinct, replaced by the lover with a Platonic Form of the loved one’s youthful Beauty. The image of Odette that so agonizes Swann materializes in Odette’s absence, when Swann can think of nothing else. Swann loves not Odette the prostitute, but Odette the image of Beauty created by his own jealous imagination. When Odette is present,

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her flaws and imperfections are too. In the last line of *Du côté de chez Swann*, Swann questions his love for Odette, and asks how a woman so average in person can be so irresistible in his imagination.

Likewise in the story, “Violante or High Society,” where Violante experiences love only when the object of her youthful affection heads away to sea: “She had not as yet known love. A short time later she suffered from it, which is the only manner in which we get to know it.”

Over the course of a relationship, the phases of love and infatuation, loss and suffering, and forgetting and indifference exist in dialectical interplay. Love and infatuation cloud the lover’s judgment and cover the loved one’s flaws. After loss of the loved one and a long storm of suffering, the storm calms and clouds clear, exposing the loved one’s flaws and leaving the lover with a level head. In both *Les plaisirs et les jours* and *A la recherché*, Proust shows the power of presence and absence to interrupt the dialectic and reorder its phases. At the end of “Swann in Love,” the middle section of *Du côté de chez Swann* describing Swann’s infatuation with Odette and subsequent storm of suffering, Swann was seemingly in the clear: “And with the intermittent coarseness that reappeared in him as soon as he was no longer unhappy and the level of his morality dropped accordingly, he exclaimed to himself: ‘To think that I wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I felt my deepest love, for a woman who did not appeal to me, who wasn’t even my type!’”

Yet, after an absence of six years between the pre-war publication of *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913) and the post-war release of *Within a Budding Grove* (1919), the indifferent Swann at the end of *Du côté de chez Swann* is now married to Odette at the beginning of *Within a Budding Grove*: “…to the original ‘young Swann’ and also to the Swann of the Jockey Club, our

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358 Proust, “Violante or High Society,” 29.
old friend had added a new personality (which was not to be his last, that of Odette’s husband.”360 The absence of Odette from Swann, and both Swann and Odette from readers during the First World War, restarted the dialectic from the beginning, with the searchlights and air raids of war standing in for the storm clouds of love. In the void of the war years between the publications of Du côté de chez Swann and À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs echo the frenzied attempts of Adrien Proust to reach his widowed mother, alone in Illiers as the Germans approached, and Proust’s own efforts to locate his brother Robert in the trenches of the Western Front.361 Proust channels his own feelings of the agonies of absence into Swann, who inexplicably marries Odette in the absence of the reader. Just as Swann emerges from the dialectic with a clear conscious, Proust exposes very early in Les plaisirs et les jours that the dialectic is only a skin-deep appearance of love.

With the down-to-earth disposition of the realist, Proust rejects the reason and rationality of realism in Les plaisirs et les jours.362 The seeming simplicity of the storylines is balanced with a “conscious sophistication”363 of style and structure. In A la recherché, Proust the craftsman sets style in service of ideas. While long, serpentine sentences represent complex ideas and situations full of caveats and possibilities, short sentences represent short-sighted decisions and initiatives, the failures of reason and rationality. While the seeds of A la recherché were planted in Les plaisirs et les jours, the seeds bore no more than “elegant and slightly overripe fruit.”364 The collection reflects the decadence of the Belle Epoque, with its preoccupation with the present and carefree optimism about the past and future. Proust himself called the collection a “flowery

363 Enright, preface, vii.
364 Enright, preface, viii.
book,“

referring figuratively to its consciously affected style and literally to the roses drawn by Madeleine Lemaire.

Even at the age of 25, Proust’s sensitivity for human psychology was evident in Les plaisirs et les jours. In one of the “Fragments of Italian Comedy,” Proust described the roles that society imposes on its “ready-made characters.” In high society, fat women are always fun-loving, even if they are sober and serious at heart, and frank men are always forthright, even to the point of rudeness and ridicule. In Les plaisirs et les jours, Proust recognized in a small part of society a principle he would apply to the whole of reality, that a “border” exists between one’s perception of an object’s appearance and the essence of the object’s reality. The border blocks perception from penetrating the object’s appearance to the object’s essence, revealing only the object’s deceptive appearance, the fun-loving behind the fat.

With Les plaisirs et les jours, Proust sought to prove himself as a genius whose elegant and effortless writing freed him from the physical exertion of hard work. Physical exertion for the young Proust was not a virtue, as in Hesiod, but a vulgar sign of commonness, forced on men of unremarkable intelligence. The manual laborer’s analogue in high society is the snob who cannot hide his snobbishness. The man who works too hard to fit in with forced conversation and failed jokes betrays the social insecurities of low birth and ill-breeding. Les plaisirs et les jours is a “reservoir of Time Lost,” where Proust unknowingly stored the earliest raw materials for A la recherche while still following the false scent of society. While Proust spent his time at plays and parties, still unclear about his literary purpose, Les plaisirs et les jours was a womb where the embryos of his future characters would develop around the same themes of time, habit,

367 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 92.
jealousy and regret. After a gestation period of the next 20 years, Proust would return to the womb of his cork-lined bedroom and affirm Hesiod by working himself to death.

Proust planted the seeds of *A la recherché* in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, but the collection amounted to little more than a “flowery” fragment of Proust’s vision. While writing *Les plaisirs et les jours*, the object of Proust’s youthful attention was high society, far from his own true self. Fifteen years later, after the detour of *Jean Santeuil*, Proust would turn his attention inward to his true self with *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, but only partially. Before turning to *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, I review four major points concerning *Les plaisirs et les jours*.

1. **Proust’s turn toward communication.** *Les plaisirs et les jours* (1896) was Proust’s first published work. In the mid-1890’s Proust was 25-years old and obsessed with high society, the setting for many of the stories in *Les plaisirs et les jours*. Proust had met Anatole France, one of the most influential writers in France, at the salon of socialite Madeleine Lemaire, one of France’s many mistresses. France encouraged Proust to stop socializing and start writing. Proust did not stop socializing, but he did start writing *Les plaisirs et les jours*, which he published several years later with a preface by Anatole France and watercolor drawings by Madeleine Lemaire. The collection was a commercial failure due to its exorbitant cost of thirteen francs, as opposed to the usual three.

2. **Fragments of a philosophy of communication.** The stories summarized above are fragments forced together to form the collection *Les plaisirs et les jours*. As individual fragments, they represent the themes of time, jealousy, loss, regret and habit, later made famous by *A la recherché*. Even at the age of 25, Proust senses something wrong with the superficiality of Parisian high society, and says so in many of the stories of *Les plaisirs et les jours*. However, Proust was too much a part of high society for his criticisms to be
taken seriously. The work was largely ignored by critics, who dismissed Proust as an amateur dilettante and his work as a derivative product of the *Belle Epoque*, with no substance below the beautiful writing and watercolor paintings.

3. *Proust’s rudimentary vision.* Proust wrote *Les plaisirs et les jours* with a rudimentary version of the vision of *A la recherché*. The collection features several scenes in neophytal form that recur in *Jean Santeuil* and *A la recherché*, such as the goodnight kiss in “A Young Girl’s Confession.” However, in *Les plaisirs et les jours* Proust had not yet begun the search for the right form for his vision that would consume the rest of his literary life. The seeds of *A la recherché* are faintly present in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, but Proust’s primary objective in *Les plaisirs et les jours* is to impress his society friends even at the expense of his vision. Nevertheless, *Les plaisirs et les jours* is noteworthy as not a fragment of *A la recherché*, but also a placeholder for the vision of *A la recherché*.

4. *Proust’s preoccupation with high society.* In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust was preoccupied with high society and its superficial friendships and form of communication. For instance, in “Friendship,” one of the shortest vignettes *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust likens friendship to a warm bed. When the “world turns sad and icy,” friends crawl completely under the covers, and hide their sorrows in the “divine fragrances” of friendship. In *A la recherché*, Proust is famously hostile to friendship and friendly communication, but also grants grace to communication, an issue on which the young Proust refused to budge.

In untitled vignette in “Regrets, Reveries, the Color of Time,” an old army officer retires to a rural cottage. No books, he says, only memories for these last days of his life. The officer

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took out a stack of yellowed photographs and letters “written on whitish, sometimes tinted”\textsuperscript{370} paper. Some letters were long and lyrical, others were short and terse; all contained momentary fragments of the officer’s two favorite memories: fighting wars and making love. For days the officer tries to resurrect the memories, to “pin them like butterflies,”\textsuperscript{371} but had to settle for a “smidgen of the glamour of their wings.”\textsuperscript{372} When the memories were too murky for the officer’s aged mind to make out, he wept, then moved on to other memories. Soon there were no more memories, and he died.

Like the army officer, Proust tried to pin his memories like butterflies to the pages of \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}. There is something ironic about \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, in which Proust communicates so well what he does not seem to believe. If the whole of \textit{A la recherche} is a philosophy of communication that converges the fragments of philosophy and communication, the individual stories of \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours} model the fragmentation of superficial communication. Proust was not yet a craftsman of communication, but he would learn from his mistake and try again in \textit{Jean Santeuil}, the subject of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{370}Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 117.
\textsuperscript{371}Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 118.
\textsuperscript{372}Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 118.
Bibliography


CHAPTER 4
Jean Santeuil: The Experimental Vehicle for Proust’s Vision

In a prefatory note written in 1905 and placed before the introduction of Jean Santeuil, Proust is avowedly uncertain about his intentions: “Should I call this book a novel? It is something less, perhaps, and yet much more, the very essence of my life…” In the introduction that immediately follows, Proust attributes the essence of his life to someone else, the writer C., who creates the character Jean from his own impressions of the past. The sickly and neurotic Jean is nothing like the lively C., who would climb the cliffs of the coast of Brittany to a small cottage, where he “scanned the sky” for memories of “sunlit summers.” With closed eyes and clenched fists, C. opened his mind to the memories brought back by the wind. Then suddenly his limbs went limp and eyelids opened. He was suffused with the sublime happiness of a past summer, and immediately returned to the cottage to write Jean Santeuil. Proust outsources the production of Jean Santeuil to C., who creates a character named Jean who is just like Proust. This circular subterfuge in the introduction to Jean Santeuil locates Proust on his path to A la recherché: Proust wrote Jean Santeuil with the vision of A la recherché, but lacked the tools to translate the vision into the communicative form of a novel.

For Proust, communication means translation, and translation consists of two parts: first, the writer translates his individual impressions as revealed in “moments of vision” into written form, and second, the writer arranges all of these individual descriptions into a coherent novel with a complete vision. An act of expression must pass both parts of this tests to qualify as true communication. Proust the author of Jean Santeuil passed the first, but failed the second test of communication as translation. Proust began Jean Santeuil where he left off in Les plaisirs et les

374 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 6.
375 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 7.
jours, with translating his many impressions into beautiful but unconnected vignettes. For Proust, a single person has many superficial selves, each corresponding to a single moment of time. The superficial selves stand silent and single-file, and speak only when spoken to by others. When a reminiscence reunites in a single moment of vision two impressions separated in time, the two superficial selves corresponding to the times of the impressions move into phase and provide a passing glimpse of the true self. In Jean Santeuil, Proust tried to impose order on the individual impressions, but without the holistic hindsight of A la recherché. The individual, stand-alone impressions of Jean Santeuil speak beautifully as individual vignettes, but say nothing about the whole of Proust’s true self.

In this chapter, I first outline the introduction to Jean Santeuil, and what it reveals about the state of Proust’s philosophy of communication from 1900 to 1905. Next, I review three representative sections of Jean Santeuil that reappear in A la recherché: Jean’s reflections on the vanity of love, the aging of Jean’s parents Monsieur and Madame Santeuil, as well as Jean’s ongoing struggle to remember his childhood and reify its “beauty and joy.” Jean’s struggle becomes Proust’s struggle to find a vehicle in Jean Santeuil for the vision of A la recherché. The next five sections situate Jean Santeuil on the path to Proust’s philosophy of communication.

Whether Proust ever intended to publish Jean Santeuil is unknown, but the unfinished manuscript was a five-year experiment in fitting his cyclical and holistic philosophy of communication into the rigid and rectangular form of the modern novel. In Jean Santeuil, communication is a necessary, but parenthetical vehicle for Proust’s vision, which unapologetically has no place for communication.

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376 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 408.
The Form of Jean Santeuil

Since the posthumous publication of Le temps retrouvé, the final volume of A la recherché, Proust scholars had searched in vain for a draft or sketch of the final product. There was the youthful Les plaisirs et les jours, published nearly 20 years before, as well as the Ruskin translations and other essays and articles, but nothing with enough intellectual depth or completeness of vision to constitute a first draft of A la recherché, or at least to reveal something of the author’s thought process. In 1954, an unfinished novel of about 300,000 words surfaced from Proust’s papers. The novel was clumsy in both prose and plot, but the similarities to A la recherché were undeniable. The first chapter even began with a boy named Jean, waiting in sleepless agony for his mother’s goodnight kiss. Proust had started the novel around 1900 and abandoned it in 1905 with no intentions to publish the manuscript.

The novel was written hastily in unreadable handwriting. Arrows pointed to footnotes, which referenced obscure marginalia some seven hundred pages before. The book begins with a first person narrator, then switches to third a third person narrator, then abandons both for a hybrid first-third person narrator-novelist named P., who narrates the action with knowledge of the novel’s ending. Proust will sometimes call a character in the novel by the name of the character’s referent in real life. Some storylines are introduced and left unresolved, while others are resolved with no introduction. Proust certainly did not mean Jean Santeuil for publication, so Jean Santeuil is “infinitely”\textsuperscript{377} less than A la recherché as a novel. But as a path to Proust’s philosophy of communication, Jean Santeuil is more raw and revealing, “more moving”\textsuperscript{378} even, than A la recherché.

\textsuperscript{378} Maurois, preface, xxii.
Jean Santeuil: Introduction

The introduction begins on a farm on the Bay of Concarneau, where the narrator has gone to stay with his friend S. The farm attracts many artists who over the years have immortalized its apple orchards in countless poems and paintings. The two friends ate fancy meals on “rough farm tables”\textsuperscript{379} that faced the sea, many miles from the nearest village. The farm was populated by a poetic gardener and “golden-hearted prostitute,”\textsuperscript{380} along with many other “stock figures”\textsuperscript{381} of fiction. The farm preserved the “living reality”\textsuperscript{382} of literature for poets and painters, who breathed the “basic substance of humanity”\textsuperscript{383} in from the farm, and out through their poems and paintings. One day S. and the narrator learned from the landlord that their favorite writer C. was sitting at the next table. They returned immediately to their room, where they drafted, then discarded several letters to C. They finally settled on the last letter, which expressed their ardent admiration and mentioned their mutual friend the duchess, in whose home they had first met C. (or at least that’s what they would tell him).

The next day at dinner they waited impatiently for C. to appear. At long last C. came in and sat down. A maid handed him the letter, while the two friends fixed their eyes on their uneaten food. Finally C. finished the letter, then left with two English ladies. With him went the self-esteem of his two fans, who sat speechless in the same spots. C. soon returned for a cigar and walked toward the two friends, who rose to meet their “admired master.”\textsuperscript{384} C. had never heard of the duchess, but nonetheless showed no suspicion as his two admirers quoted passages from his books and questioned him about the countryside and other matters “close to the

\textsuperscript{379} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 3.
\textsuperscript{380} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 3.
\textsuperscript{381} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 3.
\textsuperscript{382} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 3.
\textsuperscript{383} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 3.
\textsuperscript{384} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 4.
With one thoughtless conversation, C. gave definite form to their deepest thoughts, still vague with youth, and determined their “objects of expedition” with every passing allusion.

As the other guests left, they saw more and more of C. He wrote for hours in a tiny cottage on top of a cliff, stopping only to chase a gander of geese. C. had told the narrator that he never responds to social letters, as they drain his “electricity” before it can accumulate into a lightning storm of creative output. Nevertheless, C. was a much different person in public. He dressed in the most fashionable clothes, and spent several days at a time with the princess of the nearby Château of Kercaradec, but the happiness from the cottage never came to C. from the chateau. When he returned from the castle he was always subdued, as if he had scanned the sea from the chateau, but his eyes and fists remained closed to the happiness of the cottage. When the princess left the chateau, C. spent his mornings on a fishing boat with a local boy, then went to the cottage and wrote all night in the company of the servants. When the servants spoke to C., he would sometimes respond with the energy of the early sun, freed from the morning mist. Other times he would answer absent-mindedly, or not at all, and wait for the servant to leave so he could continue writing. On these occasions, the servants would “tip-toe” from the room with the good feeling of having contributed to a work they would never understand.

C. was for the servants a “reverend priest” of “humble pleasures,” who lived on a higher level than the lowly servants, but also had “no objection to good living.” The participation of such an “odd and intelligent creature” as C. in the same pleasures as the servants justified for the servants their humble existence on the farm, and for C. the purpose of

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385 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 5.
386 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 7.
387 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 10.
388 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 12.
389 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 12.
390 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 12.
391 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 13.
his fiction. Sometimes C. would skip his writing to swim in the sea, or to help a servant girl with her French, since they taught the language very badly in Brittany. But the girl had no faith in C., and went on reciting Turkish words with a Britton accent. For Balzac, life in the provinces was the lowest form of life, but C. preferred the workaday life of the provincial servant over the “distractions” of the highbrow Parisian professor, prone to procrastination. Unlike art, or anything of aesthetic beauty, everyday life is an “accumulation of badnesses,” which alone bring only burdens, but together constitute the “epitome of life.” Some say that art should never condescend to the lower level of life, but for C. life provides the only raw materials for art, so that art abstracted from life is not art, but idolatry.

C. wrote only about his own experience, so “strictly speaking” everything in his novel was true, but later the incidents of the novel became so commonplace in collective experience that the novel constituted its own “complete and living reality,” independent of C. Late at night he left the cottage for the dining room and sat for hours in self-satisfied silence. The bad weather had driven most of the guests from the hotel, leaving only the narrator, S., and C. C. arrived every night with several sheets of loose paper, kept ordered by an empty plate. S. and the narrator asked C. if he would summarize the book so far, then read to them each night what he wrote during the day. C. was reluctant, but eventually agreed to summarize the opening pages of the book the following afternoon, and read the rest of the book every night thereafter. C. would read a few lines, then interrupt himself with commentary and self-criticism, then continue where he left off but, just as C. had hoped, the two listeners begged him to start back at the beginning.

392 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 17.
393 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 17.
394 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 18.
395 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 18.
C. used as raw materials the seascapes and servants of the cottage on the cliff, but never looked down on their lot like most writers would. Most writers would make it known with self-conscious condescension that this servant or that seascape would appear in their novels. C. never revealed the sources of his inspiration, because for C. the servant or seascape itself was secondary to the suffusion of happiness it caused. When C. “scanned the sky”\textsuperscript{396} from the cottage on the cliff, S. and the narrator his behind a rock and watched. A suffusion of happiness “stirred the sea,”\textsuperscript{397} and opened C.’s senses to summers past, but the two onlookers “counted for nothing,”\textsuperscript{398} even if he had seen them. Just as the “sun sinks into the sea,”\textsuperscript{399} so C.’s spirit sunk into the servants and seascapes around him. In that moment, the “anonymous appearance”\textsuperscript{400} of a servant or seascape was no more in C.’s novel than S. and the narrator were in C.’s “moment of vision.”\textsuperscript{401} A mother may be eternally grateful to the doctor who helped her birth a baby boy, and even name the boy after the doctor, but the boy’s true self is not hers to dedicate. Likewise, C.’s book was born to C. with the help of the servants and seascapes, but belonged to the world as an expression of his true self.

When S. and the narrator asked C. what they most wanted to know – where C. himself showed up in the novel – C. dismissed the question with a curt comment, or no comment at all. The two friends would devote their lives to determining the relationship between C.’s life and C.’s work, because the question of life and work raised a bigger question of appearance and reality, or rather art and reality, since only art can release reality from the cover of appearance. Before they could begin, however, they were called back to Paris on important business, and said goodbye to C. with the promise of returning to the farm the following autumn. Four years

\textsuperscript{396} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 7.
\textsuperscript{397} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 7.
\textsuperscript{398} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 14.
\textsuperscript{399} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 14.
\textsuperscript{400} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 14.
\textsuperscript{401} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 7.
passed, and they never returned to the farm, and had forgotten C. As with all things that appear important at a particular time, the passage of time had diminished their obsessive desire to “disengage” reality from appearance through C.’s novel.

C. was now nothing more than a murky memory, to whom the narrator wrote four years later and received no reply. The narrator had forgotten S. too, until one day S. came to the narrator with the news that C. was dying of hay-fever, and had asked them to visit him in Saint-Cloud. They found C. in bed in a small country cottage, overlooking the leafy green landscape. C. groped for breath, and when found it, he sneezed. The landscapes he loved so much on the Bay of Concarneau were now killing him in Saint-Cloud, and the cliffs where he scanned the sea for the “basic substance” of life now put a “kindly face” on death. C. used to fear death, that “greatest of all physicians,” but now he longed for death to end his life’s suffering, and reveal the reality of his novel. A few days later, C. died. He left the unfinished novel to the narrator, who published it under the title, Jean Santeuil.

The Subterfuge of C.

In Proust’s philosophy of communication, a “border” of appearance blocks the essence, or reality, of an object from an observer. The introduction to Jean Santeuil blocks the reader from the character of Jean. The author of the introduction (presumably Proust) calls Jean Santeuil the “essence of my life” in a prefatory note, then attributes the life of the character Jean to another writer, C., who is much stronger than the nervous and neurotic Jean. In the introduction, S. and the narrator ask C. to what extent he himself appears in what he wrote, as if inviting the reader to ask Proust the same question. Proust takes up the question of the role of the

402 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 18.
403 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 20.
404 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 20.
405 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 20.
406 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 92.
writer’s life in the writer’s work more directly in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, but in *Jean Santeuil* he offers an indirect answer to the question asked by S. and the narrator. Time splits the self into many superficial selves, each corresponding to a moment in time. Superficial selves communicate through small-talk and salon conversations. One person had many superficial selves, each created in the image of someone else’s expectations. Superficial selves cannot speak to each other across time except through impressions.

In a split second moment of vision, impressions splice together two separate superficial selves corresponding to different times to give a glimpse of the true self unlimited by time. The feeling of timelessness is the telos toward which the human condition tends. The question of the role of the writer’s life in the writer’s work is the wrong question to ask within Proust’s dichotomy of true self and superficial selves. The writer’s life as understood by Sainte-Beuve and the narrator of *Jean Santeuil* only refers to superficial selves. The true self is glimpsed in the “first drops of a falling rain”\(^{407}\) or the “sudden piercing of a sunbeam,”\(^{408}\) which may become the raw materials of the writer, but mean nothing to the reader. Instead of asking C. where he appears in the novel, S. and the narrator should be asking where their true selves appear in C.’s novel, which is an expression of C.’s true self. C.’s obfuscatory answers to the narrator’s question of where C. himself appears in his novel reflect the impossibility of communication among superficial selves.

With a short introduction, Proust distances himself from the whole productive process of *Jean Santeuil*. The novel is written by C. and inspired by C.’s impressions of the servants and seascapes of the Britton cottage. After his death, C. leaves the novel to an unnamed narrator, who publishes the “version in my possession,” which implies that there exist more than one version of

\(^{408}\) Proust, *Jean Santeuil*, 7.
Jean Santeuil. The version of C.’s novel are the versions of a life as revealed through infrequent and scattered impressions. When two impressions separated in time are reunited in a moment bienheureux, the true self flashes in the superimposition of the two superficial selves corresponding to the respective times of the two impressions, but only those two. There are countless other superficial selves that are unrelated to the two impression and untouched by the moment of vision. Jean Santeuil relates the life of Jean as revealed to C. in impressions. When C. next “scanned the sky” for more “memories of the past,” his moments of vision may magnify other parts of the past not included in the published version of Jean Santeuil, and miniaturize the parts that were included. The various versions of Jean Santeuil are separate pieces of an unfinished puzzle, which only the author can complete. The next section outlines the remaining pieces of Jean Santeuil in four sections: “Reflections on Love,” “Impressions Regained,” “Parents in Old Age,” and “Movements of the Generational Tides.” These four sections represent the formative transitions in the maturation of the young Jean.

Jean Santeuil: Reflections on Love

Jean Santeuil follows the intellectual and social maturation of the character Jean. After several false alarms, Jean was in love, or at least he thought he was in love, with Madame S------, whose “exquisite profile” and “loosened hair” were always in front of his forehead, like the moon on his drives home from her house. The thought of Madame S------ pushed out all other thoughts and occupied his whole being. To Jean Madame S------ meant love, and beauty, and happiness, and life, for he could think of nothing else but Madame S------. For a moment his thoughts strayed to Stendhal, and the relationships among love, Nature, poetry, and the spirit of

409 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 7.
410 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 7.
411 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 579.
412 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 579.
the self. For Stendhal, what allows one to appreciate the poetry of Nature, and find in Nature the sublime solitude of a “thousand various thoughts,”\textsuperscript{413} is love. Love sheds the shackles of other selves, and exposes the lover to the “charms of Nature.”\textsuperscript{414} Love runs parallel with the inner life of the lover’s spirit; love exposes the self to the poetry of Nature, and in Nature reveals to the spirit the poetry of the self. Jean acknowledges that, yes, both love and poetry can free the self from the “tyranny of others.”\textsuperscript{415} But, if love preoccupies one individual with another individual, who is equally preoccupied with the other, how can love enrich the inner lives of either individual, or put either individual with the poetry of Nature, if all the poetry of Nature resides for both individuals in the objects of their love: each other?

Love must set limits on spirit, because love fixates the lover on a finite face, rather than the timeless truths of the spirit. The “life of the spirit”\textsuperscript{416} should never be sacrificed to a single face, no matter how beautiful. All the poetry of Nature comes to the man in love through one person; his sensations of Nature are not his own, but theirs. Stendhal’s “double harness”\textsuperscript{417} of love and poetry splits the lover’s personality in two. Love limits the lover’s exposure to poetry in Nature, and Nature exposes to the lover only poetry that is privy to his love. Jean knew that his love for Madame S------ could never be fulfilled in the flesh, but the feeling of being in love with Madame S------ was more pleasurable than actually possessing her. If the feeling of being in love with Madame S------ was kept separate from making love to Madame S------, then Jean knew that his love was true in the “vaguer, larger sense”\textsuperscript{418} and not just in relation to one woman.

In this sense, Stendhal was right, since Jean’s love was solidified in solitude. As a boy, Jean attributed his irrational need for his mother’s kiss to a weak will, rather than any illness immune

\textsuperscript{413} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 579.
\textsuperscript{414} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 579.
\textsuperscript{415} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 579.
\textsuperscript{416} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 579.
\textsuperscript{417} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 579.
\textsuperscript{418} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 580.
to the will. But as an adult, Jean no longer questioned the reality of the inner feelings brought back by the goodnight kiss with “personal and personal vividness.”

His love for Madame S------ was indeed an illness immune to his will, but an illness less severe than his previous loves, because the experience of his past loves was the antidote for the sufferings of all subsequent loves. The older Jean’s love for Madame S------ was solidified in solitude, or in the absence of Madame S------, but only because his will was strong enough to separate the feeling of being in love from the desire to act on that feeling. Contrastingly, the loneliness of solitude overpowered the young Jean’s will and, rather than solidify his feelings, caused him to question their reality. Stendhal was right about love and its relations to Nature, poetry, and the spirit of the self, but only for a young boy who had never experience loved. These thoughts on Stendhal lasted no more than a moment, before returning obediently to Madame S------. One day Jean was walking with Madame S------ and one of her former lovers, an old man whom she no longer loved. Madame S------ accidentally called the man by his Christian name, and he wept. The old man’s love for Madame S------ had no relation to present reality, since his love meant nothing to Madame S------, so why the “hideous” tears? The man’s tears were “old photographs” of his former love, made hideous by the “vanity of love.”

Jean Santeuil: Impressions Regained

Jean would sometimes try to remember his mother’s face in the moment of the goodnight kiss, or resurrect the hours spent reading in the courtyard by staring at flowers in a garden, but

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419 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 580.
420 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 580.
421 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 580.
422 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 580.
neither his age nor his intellect could awaken the “aesthetic joy”\textsuperscript{423} of those impressions. Later Jean was riding in a carriage along a sunlit lake. With his finger he drew shapes in the wakes left by boats, as if “human life had taught geometry to nature,”\textsuperscript{424} when suddenly the impressions came back. The space between Jean and the lake was filled with some sticky substance (imagination perhaps?), which preserves the “beauty and joy”\textsuperscript{425} of the past until they are shaken loose by a parallel experience in the immediate present. The substance resists the efforts of the intellect to remember the past, and only releases its hold on the past when a present impression sneaks past the sleeping intellect, and ambushes the heart with a “feeling that fills”\textsuperscript{426} the past with beauty and joy. In seconds the intellect will wake up and drive off the past impressions, but the beauty and joy will remain, now free from the sticky purgatory between present and past.

The lake holds “within itself a past,”\textsuperscript{427} which Jean’s unconscious contemplation of the lake awakened by chance, when he ended the clumsy efforts of conscious thought and memory. The key to impressions is memory, not conscious memory, but the “transmutation of memory”\textsuperscript{428} into lived experience, or “reality directly felt.”\textsuperscript{429} For instance, Jean had once spent time in a small house by the seaside. The house had a “far from pleasant”\textsuperscript{430} odor, which followed Jean upstairs every night to bed, and was there in the morning when he dressed, deep in the folds of his clothes and fissures of the fabric. The smell absorbed all of Jean’s worries and fears and hopes and failings, so that many years later when the house was lost to Jean’s memory, its smell brought back his whole life by the seaside, with all the feelings of his first love, and the pains of

\textsuperscript{423} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 407.
\textsuperscript{424} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 407.
\textsuperscript{425} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 408.
\textsuperscript{426} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 409.
\textsuperscript{427} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 409.
\textsuperscript{428} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 408.
\textsuperscript{429} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 409.
\textsuperscript{430} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 409.
his self-hatred. The life brought back was not past, but the “royal sketches”\textsuperscript{431} of another present, preserved in the smell of the house by the seaside. The present experience of a past impression repackages the “passing show”\textsuperscript{432} of the past as an eternal, living object of the present. As a living object, the repackaged impression contains not only the past as once lived, but also the past as still living, and the past as livable again, as eternal.

The repackaging of past impressions present experience adds to the flat planes of past and present the “rounded fullness of reality.”\textsuperscript{433} As convenient markers for the passage of time, the past (as revealed through memory) and the present (as experienced through the senses) are both subject to Time. The past is experienced through the senses; the past repackaged as the living present is experienced through the imagination which, unlike the senses, is unlimited by the “temporal circumstances”\textsuperscript{434} of life, such as old age or a common cold. Jean’s past life by the sea was preserved in the smell of the seaside house. When Jean experienced the smell again in the present, the impressions fluttered free from the smell and oscillated between past and present in an “indeterminate zone”\textsuperscript{435} of Time. As the impression bounces back and forth between past and present, the imagination sets free from Time all of the “varied, individual essences of life”\textsuperscript{436} around the impression, which memory or thought failed to free, or freed only in the fragments.

Jean writes not what he sees, or what he reasons, but only what “explodes”\textsuperscript{437} within him and galvanizes his imagination to transcend the tyranny of Time. The only true object of Jean’s writing should be not the fragments of the past or present, but only the “eternal essences”\textsuperscript{438} in

\textsuperscript{431} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 409.
\textsuperscript{432} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 409.
\textsuperscript{433} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 409.
\textsuperscript{434} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 409.
\textsuperscript{435} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 409.
\textsuperscript{436} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 409.
\textsuperscript{437} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 410.
\textsuperscript{438} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 409.
the “indeterminate zone” between past and present, which unlike either past or present, is not tied to temporal circumstances. The timeless experience of a past impression in the present is the only true happiness for the human condition, which should never settle for perversions of the past or present in mere memories. Jean expected to find happiness in small things, such as a party at a fashionable salon, or big things, such as the sea or the sky. But happiness came to Jean from within himself, when he least expected it, when an explosion of past and present releases the imaginative energy of everlasting life.

Jean Santeuil: Parents in Old Age

Jean’s parents were near death now. Monsieur Santeuil had lost his former harness and arrogance, along with the “proud irrational positivism” that fed his fits of temper. Several six-story houses had been built on the courtyard of Auteuil, the former site of the goodnight kiss. In his old age, Monsieur Santeuil admitted that yes, a scientist could be both respectable and religious, and that poets and novelists could be better company than scientists, although they were still “slightly touched.” Monsieur Santeuil still had his highbrow and haughty laugh, especially in the company of non-scientists, but old age had added to the haughtiness a touching tone of weakness. The laugh used to irritate Jean, but now Jean felt only regret for disarming his father of his only weapon in a war against a modern world he could not understand. Sometimes Monsieur Santeuil would walk with his wife beside the lake and contemplate the “high sublimity” of the stars.

With age came an appreciation of Nature, stoked by a new skill for which his younger, more dogmatically scientific mind had no time: dreaming. But Monsieur Santeuil never fully

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439 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 409.
440 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 723.
441 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 724.
442 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 724.
surrendered to this “new idealism.” He was too weak to practice science, and had to watch as other, lesser scientists were promoted in his stead. Old age had forced him to release his scientifically rigorous stronghold on reality, but contemplation of the stars by the lake was for Monsieur Santeuil a sort of consolation prize for such “long contact” with the facts of the world. The disinterested distance with which the younger Monsieur Santeuil dreamed of Jean’s future took on a new “duality of grandeur” in old, tempered by Jean’s many failings. When Jean’s parents went back to Auteuil and saw the six-story buildings standing where the house and garden and so many memories once were, Monsieur Santeuil would tell his wife to shut her eyes, just as he always did, and Madame Santeuil would shut her eyes and bury her head in her hands.

With a haughty laugh, Monsieur Santeuil would chastise his wife for hiding her eyes in her hands, when all she had to do was shut her eyes. But now, the old man Monsieur Santeuil would say shut your eyes, and as his wife held her head in her hands he would say nothing, for he too was dreaming of the Auteuil garden. Hoping to impress his father, Jean had once said to Momma, why are you covering your eyes when all you need to do is shut them? Monsieur Santeuil grabbed his son’s arm and told him to stop, could he not see that she did not want her son to see her crying? He then spoke lovingly of her parents with an “accuracy of memory” unclouded by the ferocity of her love. Sometimes Monsieur and Madame Santeuil would accompany Jean to the train station, then walk back through the Bois. As a young scientist

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443 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 725.
444 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 724.
445 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 725.
446 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 725.
smitten with objectivity, Monsieur Santueil was insensitive to the “charms of Nature,” but as an old man he saw in a graceful swan a scene of “pure sublimity.”

Monsieur Santeuil still felt nothing for cloudy days, but when the sun broke through a “beauty spot” in the clouds, his spirit broke through the barrier of objectivity, and he exclaimed, “What lovely weather!” Monsieur Santeuil now loved his wife with the same tenderness with which she had always loved him. Their walks were slow and strained. He walked with a stoop, and she with a limp. When he stooped, she supported; when she limped, he straightened. When his wife was weak, Monsieur Santeuil would grab her arm at the wrist and wrap his arms around her waist. When he got cold or breathless, Madame Santeuil blocked her husband from the worst of the winter wind. They walked like this for hours, “mingled, merged,” like two trees grown together.

Sometimes they rode round the lake in a ferry boat, with no objective other than watching a sleeping swan, or listening to the soft sounds of life on the lakeshore. Monsieur Santeuil still spoke to his wife with the same teaching tone – “Those lights over there come from the Chinese Pavilion,” or “Those carriages are waiting for people who have been dining on the island,” or instance – but these exhibitions of knowledge were no longer directed at Madame Santeuil. For the young Monsieur Santeuil, the waiting carriages and lights from the Chinese Pavilion were scientific facts to be accumulated for their own sake, and nothing more. But now the waiting carriages and lights from the Chinese Pavilion were “landmarks” of the lake, which Monsieur Santeuil loved for the sake of its “soft and poetic sensations,” and nothing more.

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Jean Santeuil: Movement of the Generational Tides

Madame Santeuil had also changed. The son she had been so careful to form in her own image was now reflected in her own way of life. Mother and son were very different, but survived together through a sort of mutual symbiosis. Madame Santeuil had come to admit that her son was indeed intelligent and popular, even if she did not approve of his outlooks or friends, and Jean began to surround himself with people his mother liked, and who shared his mother’s opinions. If Madame Santeuil was not with Jean in person, she followed him in imagination into the “society of tainted women and vicious men,”\textsuperscript{453} which Jean had convinced his mother was chaste and charming. As a young woman, Madame Santeuil did not differentiate among the vices. A wife who cheats on her husband and a husband who murders his wife are both equally bad.

Just as Monsieur Santeuil came to tolerate the humanities the more time he spent with poets, Madame Santeuil developed a sense for discerning the subtle distinctions among the vices the more she “rubbed shoulders”\textsuperscript{454} with Jean’s friends. A wife who cheats on her husband is still unequivocally bad, but to laugh at Jean’s jokes about the husband, or to make a joke herself, was slightly (but only slightly) less severe. Madame Santeuil would never approve of Jean’s friends, or be friends with them herself, but in her old age she had settled on “uncharitable gossip”\textsuperscript{455} as a middle ground between friendship and indignation, allowing her to spend more time with Jean without compromising her moral standards. Madame Santeuil had also given up her close-minded crusade to make of Jean a “man of action.”\textsuperscript{456}

\textsuperscript{453} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 732.
\textsuperscript{454} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 732.
\textsuperscript{455} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 734.
\textsuperscript{456} Proust, Jean Santeuil, 732.
If Jean would only ever become a writer, which was looking more and more likely, than it was Madame Santeuil’s duty to make Jean the best writer in the world, which admittedly has a “weakness for artists.” While Jean embodied the values of a modern world hell-bent on progress, Jean’s mother maintained the manners and prejudices of a generation past. In their mutual symbiosis, Jean and his mother had each learned to think as the other and, in thinking as the other, had each assumed the attitude of the other’s generation. The recurring habits of a lifetime begin with the random action of a single day, which added together over time equal the recurring habits of a lifetime. The actions of Jean and his mother as individuals was embedded in the social histories of their generations, so that no action was random in the context of their individual upbringings. But the actions of Jean and his mother as mutually symbiotic organisms were tied only to the other, like trees grown together.

Madame Santeuil’s recurring habits in later life were products of not her own generation, but Jean’s, and Jean’s habits held not his own social history, but hers. Each individual wave holds in its “forming, breaking, withdrawing” the fullness of the moon and the movement of the tides. One wave may stop short, interrupted by a rock, but the tides continue on unconcerned. In their symbiosis Jean and his mother were rocks in the same sea scanned by C. C. found in the “vague, yet fundamentally vast” movement of the tides the individual impressions of his past life. Through the symbiotic bond between mother and son, unusual in either generation, Jean and his mother had grown together across generations, and their individual loves for each other had taken on the shared regularity of the generational tides.

Monsieur and Madame Santeuil stepped off the boat and sat down on a bench. They scanned a newspaper, and saw that a friend of Madame Santueil’s cousin had committed suicide.

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457 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 734.
458 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 736.
459 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 735.
shortly after husband’s death. If her husband died, Madame Santeuil would never commit suicide, so long as her son was alive. She would, however, let herself die slowly of sorrow, and Madame Santeuil’s death of sorrow for her husband was no different than the “acquiescence”460 of the young woman who married Monsieur Santeuil out of commitment to middle-class conventions, or Madame Santeuil the mother of Jean, who answered her son’s call for a goodnight kiss.

On the Path to Proust’s Philosophy of Communication: Jean Santeuil

The famous goodnight kiss scene from A la recherché appears in Jean Santeuil closer to the final version than the earlier version in “A Young Girl’s Confession” in Les plaisirs et les jours. Jean Santeuil is an impressionable young boy of seven, who can’t sleep without his mother’s goodnight kiss. Jean’s crippling dependence on his mother’s kiss caused a great deal of stress for Monsieur and Madame Santeuil, who wished for Jean to grow up a “manly little fellow.”461 Jean was disposed to music and poetry, and against the wishes of his parents had no interest in civil service or foreign ministry. When Jean's parents tried to break him of his dependence of the goodnight kiss, Jean cried uncontrollably until his mother gave in and his father got angry. For Jean the only thing worse than upsetting his parents was leaving the world for even a night without his mother kiss.

His mother’s kiss goodnight was for Jean a kiss goodbye to the waking world and a kiss of welcome to the world of dreams, where he would no longer be protected by his parents. Darkness meant death to Jean, and without his mother’s goodnight kiss, he would sink with the sun into certain death in the darkness of his bedroom. In the Jean Santeuil version of the goodnight kiss, Jean calls to his mother from his bedroom window and is self-satisfied when his

460 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 744.
461 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 26.
mother acquiesces. In the *A la recherché* version, Jean writes a note and asks a servant to deliver the note to his mother. When his mother spends the night with Jean at his father’s request, Jean is remorseful and repentant. The difference between the goodnight kiss scenes in *Jean Santeuil* and *A la recherché* is the vehicle that Jean and Marcel use to communicate their visions of life and death, kiss or no kiss, to unresponsive mothers. Proust wrote *Jean Santeuil* with the philosophy of *A la recherché*, but his view of communication was still raw and unedited.

**The Problem of Writing in Contre Sainte-Beuve**

In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust legitimized his own philosophy through Sainte-Beuve. Proust needed Sainte-Beuve as a life vest, to soften his jump into the depths of his imagination with *A la recherché*. By abandoning the book, Proust left behind the last hurdle, and committed his remaining life to the vision of *A la recherché*. By 1908, when he started *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust had withdrawn from society to the solitude of his own soul, but *Jean Santeuil* was written earlier, when Proust still had one foot in the “society of tainted women and vicious men.”

*Contre-Sainte Beuve* was the final hurdle between Proust the amateur and the complete vision of Proust the craftsman in *A la recherché*. With *Jean Santeuil*, Proust proved to himself that his vision could (with some tweaks in style and method) work in the novel form. The discovery of *Jean Santeuil* not only showed to scholars what occupied Proust between *Les plaisirs et les jours* and *A la recherché*, but also, in the spirit of Sainte-Beuve, revealed the role of Proust the man in the development of Proust the author of *A la recherché*. Along with *Jean Santeuil*, Proust gave up on society and turned his attention to Sainte-Beuve.

For Proust, we remember only fragments of the past. Everything else is absorbed into everyday objects (sights, sounds, smells, etc., the stuff of the senses). In both *Contre Sainte-Beuve*...
Beuve and A la recherché, the taste of tea and toast brings back a childhood in the country, and the uneven paving stones of a Paris courtyard resurrect a forgotten visit to Venice. A border of appearance conceals the reality of the past within these ordinary objects. An impression of an ordinary object in the present reveals in a “moment of vision” one’s past lift hidden behind the border of appearance. While conscious memory recalls only fragments of appearances, impressions separated in time reveal the reality of the past as livable again in the present. The moment of vision lasts only a few seconds, but in these seconds one’s whole past life blooms involuntarily from a single impression. After a few seconds the intellect focuses on the object from which the impression originated, and the impression flees to another object to wait for another moment of vision. In the introduction to Jean Santeuil, the writer C. would “scan the sea” for “forgotten states of consciousness,” and suddenly with eyes closed and clenched fists he had his moment of vision and went immediately to write. But how could C. write down his moment of vision without using his intellect?

Proust gives no account of the time between C.’s moment of vision and his writing, other than that C. was “absent-minded” and “filled with happiness and ready to sit down and write.” Also, Proust was one of the most famously compulsive “proof addicts” in the history of literature. He died while editing a proof of Albertine disparue, the penultimate volume of A la recherché. Was editing not the work of the intellect, and would the intellect not pervert the moment of vision somehow? Maybe he could write down the moment of vision as he experienced it, the way the narrator of Contre Sainte-Beuve write down his impressions of the

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463 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 7.
464 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 7.
465 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 8.
passing landscape while riding a train. But this writing was hollow, and a later impression brought back everything of that day on the train except what he wrote down. This was Proust’s problem with *Jean Santeuil*: he had not yet found the best way to translate his many moments of vision into the novel form.

**The Two Ways of Reality and the Imagination**

The famous two “ways” of *A la recherche* are not yet present in *Jean Santeuil*, but in the introduction to *Jean Santeuil*, Proust juxtaposes reality and the imagination as two lowercase ways to the true self. C. has no gift for invention and writes only what he experiences, but C. nevertheless reformulates the raw materials of his own reality into a novel whose main character Jean is much different than his creator C. In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust prepares another problematic to which he returns in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and perfects in *A la recherche*. Like C., Proust writes about his own experience, but not as an autobiographer. In *A la recherche*, Proust starts with the uncooked clay of his own life as remembered in moments of vision, then shapes the clay into a work of art which differs from the objective reality of his life. In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust’s life (through Jean) is not yet in communication with his impressions: “And is it not more beautiful we wonder, that the imagination, which neither the present nor the past could put into communication with life and so save from oblivion and the misinterpretation of thought and unhappy memories, the varied, individual essences of life…?”

Communication as translation works on two levels in *Jean Santeuil*: first, the writer translates the raw materials of reality gathered in moments of vision into written form. These are the individual vignettes of *Jean Santeuil*. Next, the writer arranges the individual vignettes into a

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complete and coherent novel. Proust never made it to the second step of communication as translation in *Jean Santeuil*. The individual sections as arranged later still read like individual vignettes without the guiding telos that ties together the individual impressions of Marcel and the Narrator into the seven volumes of *A la recherché*. In *A la recherché*, Proust sometimes reminds the reader with subtle hints about the real-life referents of his characters – for instance, Proust’s Celeste de Albaret appears as the name of one of two servant sisters in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* – as well as the historical context of their fictional lives.

Odette de Crécy is absent from *Jean Santeuil*, but a relative constant in *A la recherché* as Odette de Crécy the prostitute chased by Charles Swann, then, Mme. Swann the wife of Charles Swann, then Mme. de Forcheville the wife of Robert de Forcheville, with whom she had betrayed Charles Swann while still Odette de Crécy. In *A la recherché*, Odette is a stable, yet changing presence who develops in relation to historical markers such as the Paris Exhibition of 1978, which tether the whole of the novel to reality. Proust abandoned *Jean Santeuil* before he could tie together the individual impressions in time, so the novel relies too much on reality even with the subterfuge of the introduction. In *A la recherché*, Proust privileges invention over reality, but not pure invention untethered to reality. Invention in *A la recherché* is the creation of a work of art using only the raw materials of reality. In *A la recherché*, Proust’s characters act out the expression of his true self against the backdrop of the historical reality of the late nineteenth century (see chapter 2). The connection to reality comes from the backdrop, not the characters on stage invented by Proust from his real experiences.

The reverse is true of *Jean Santeuil*. In the novel Proust foregrounds the Dreyfus Affair and Panama Scandal and takes a political stance through his characters. In *A la recherché*, the Panama Scandal and “the Affair” are placed in the minds of the characters in order to reveal their
worldviews in relation to other characters. The many mistakes and oversights of the unfinished
Jean Santeuil untie invention from reality and leave reality to float aimlessly above the arc of the
story. For instance, Proust places the mansion of the Due de Réveillon on the rue de Varennes in
Paris, and later describes an incident in the Place de la Concorde as visible from the Réveillon
mansion, a distance of over 160 miles. On the same page of Jean Santeuil, Proust describes
Colonel Picquart as wearing both “civilian clothes” and a “sky-blue uniform.”\footnote{Proust, Jean Santeuil, 336.}
Whether intentional or not, these errors of editing disconnect Jean Santeuil from reality, and leave Proust
to either use his intellect to edit the manuscript, or make up for the mistakes by attributing the
story to C. in the introduction. The neat knots of A la recherché are left untied in Jean Santeuil.
Proust’s attempts to describe reality were careless in Jean Santeuil because he was committed to
the imagination, but without imagination, his errors in describing reality disconnect reality
completely from imagination.

Proust’s uncertainty in Contre Sainte-Beuve is an uncertainty of scope, while his
uncertainty in Jean Santeuil is an uncertainty of style. Proust began Jean Santeuil in 1908,
shortly after the Ruskin translations and eight years before Contre Sainte-Beuve, also abandoned
by Proust. In Contre Sainte-Beuve, Proust wavers between his own vision and the method of
Sainte-Beuve, his only remaining hurdle to A la recherché. Like the writer C. in the introduction
to Jean Santeuil, Proust oscillated in his writing of Contre-Sainte-Beuve between pure invention,
for which he has “no gift,”\footnote{Proust, Jean Santeuil, 18.} and literary criticism as a defense against pure autobiography,
which for Proust is not art at all. Proust wrote Contre Sainte-Beuve with the vision of A la
recherché, but he is hesitant to commit fully to writing a novel using only his own experience,
especially if Sainte Beuve was involved. So he moved back and forth between criticism of
Sainte-Beuve and personal passages reminiscent of the future *A la recherché*, but still tied to someone other than himself, namely Sainte-Beuve.

Already in the introduction to *Jean Santeuil*, Proust wrote that C. “lacked the gift of invention and could write only of what he had experienced.”471 He then used C.’s lack of inventive talent to raise the question of the relation of art to everyday life and its correlative, the relation of reality and appearance. In that sense, everything that C. wrote was “true” because the writing was derivative of his own everyday experience. By truth, Proust the author of *Jean Santeuil* meant that which was revealed to C. in his “moment of vision,”472 and by experience, he meant that which ignited in C. the impression of a past life and flooded his “bosom” with involuntary memories. In other words, the opposite of everyday life as commonly understood. C. did not condescend the servants he wrote about because that kind of condescension would be incompatible with his philosophy. The moments of vision that inspired his art have their origins in everyday life, and everyday life provided the substance of his artistic vision.

So with Proust himself, whose challenge in *Contre-Sainte-Beuve* was to break free of everyday life as Sainte-Beuve understood it and commit completely to own, philosophically self-sufficient vision of art and everyday life. Alden argues that Proust’s challenge in *Jean Santeuil* was to balance realism and the imagination.473 Even in *A la recherché*, Proust was a realist, not because he believed that realism was a better representation of reality than the imagination, but because he never fully committed to the imagination as a vehicle for his vision. The imbalance in favor of realism is more pronounced in *Jean Santeuil*, so *Jean Santeuil* is read as more realist than *A la recherché*. However, in *Jean Santeuil* Proust oscillates between realism and the

imagination. His vision is imaginative but his prose is realist. Eventually, the incompatibility of
the vision and its vehicle overwhelm the vision, and Proust gives up the novel in 1905.

*Vehicle for the Vision*

Much of Proust’s literary life was spent searching for a communicative vehicle for his
philosophical vision. Proust understands communication as an act of translation of one’s true,
incommunicable self as glimpsed in impressions and reminiscences into the communicable form
of a work of art. In Proust’s view of communication as translation, the primary catalyst of
communication is the imagination, which alone can break through the “borders” of appearance
that conceal the reality of the past. What makes *A la recherche* a complete vision, and not only
an imperfect improvement of *Jean Santeuil*, was Proust’s commitment to the imagination as the
only “reservoir of Time Lost,” independent of the real world as it appears to the senses. By
imagination, Proust does not mean pure invention, since C. admits in the introduction to *Jean
Santeuil* that he lacks the gift of invention. The senses admit only appearances, but
imagination pushes past the present and opens oneself to the poetry of the past. For Proust, the
poetry of the past is “bound up” with appearances in the present.

Again in the introduction to *Jean Santeuil*, Proust writes that C. apologized to S. and the
narrator for lacking the “gift of invention” – but this was a “funny sort of excuse, because the
incidents of his novel are today so familiar, that even when they seem out of the ordinary, there
is no need for the gift of invention to make them imaginatively true.” Proust’s reality is born
of the imagination. The symbiosis of reality and imagination, or everyday life and art, becomes
an infrastructural assumption of *A la recherche*, but in *Jean Santeuil* Proust keeps reality and the

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imagination separate, then tries to smash them together with his intellect. Proust thought he could enjoy himself in society, then return home to write Jean Santeuil. Likewise in Jean Santeuil, he thought he could communicate the work of the imagination with the writing of the intellect.

In Contre Sainte-Beuve, Marcel tries to capture his impressions of the passing landscape while riding a train, but the impressions he writes down are only part of that day on the train that a future impression fails to resurrect. Proust abandoned Jean Santeuil because he wrote down his impressions while still “bound” up with realism as a writer and society as a man. Proust the man was still “bound up” with the superficial appearances of society, and Proust the author of Jean Santeuil was still “bound up”478 with realism. When Proust the man gave up on high society, Proust the author of A la recherche could fully commit to the imagination as the only philosophically appropriate vehicle for his vision.

Anyone can experience impressions through moments of vision, but only an artist can translate his incommunicable moments of vision into a work of art. Proust composed Jean Santeuil in fragments, then fit the fragments together to form a coherent narrative. The structure (or lack thereof) of Jean Santeuil reflects the nonlinear way in which impressions unravel the past for Proust. Proust’s moments of vision come not in chronological order, but in unordered and untimed impressions which inspired him to write. Impressions reveal the reality of the past behind the appearance of the present. When two impressions are separated in Time, they give a glimpse of one’s true self, not subject to the tyranny of Time. It follows from this philosophy that impressions come spontaneously when least expected from the most mundane objects.

The relative chronology of Jean Santeuil was imposed later by Proust and more so by de Fallois, who arranged many scattered passages each corresponding to different impressions into an intelligible novel. By why impose a time-driven narrative at all, if the appeal of impressions is

478 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 595.
to transcend Time? For Proust, the past flows centrifugally from impressions like Japanese flowers in water. As soon as the moment of vision ends, the intellect takes over, and with time tries to undo the blooming of the past with its own centripetal counterforce of habit. To try to fit the impression as experienced in an timeless moment of vision into an imposed narrative of chronology would nullify the poetry of the impressions, and close that part of the past to future moments of vision.

*The Fragments of Jean Santeuil*

The vision of *A la recherché* was opening to Proust as he wrote *Jean Santeuil*, but the young Proust could not harness the vision. While *Les plaisirs et les jours* was all writing and no vision, *Jean Santeuil* was all vision and no writing. Jean Santeuil was a five-year experiment in translation, wherein Proust tested several styles and methods for making his moments of vision into a coherent novel. For instance, the characteristically serpentine sentences of *A la recherché* move from past to present in parentheses, then work slowly back to the present through commas and semicolons. Such sentences are rare in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, but more common in *Jean Santeuil*. Instead of circling back to the present, however, the sentences in *Jean Santeuil* sometimes drift off into obscurity. Take this sentence from the introduction of *Jean Santeuil*, wherein Proust describes C.’s cheerful conversations with the servants through the metaphor of the sun, a favorite of Proust’s:

“It was a great pleasure for C. to have her stay with him on these occasions, just as I imagine on mornings when the sun, freeing its smiling face from the early mist, addresses a long and loving welcome to all nature, finding a pleasure in stoking the still empty sea, in warming the beaches, in playing among the branches rustling in the dawn wind, and in letting its friendly gaze rest on the sailor who has been afloat since the first light, filling him with a sense of well-being and happiness, beading his forehead with sweat, or earlier still, to see its friendliness reflected in the serene spaces of the sky all flooded by its radiance, and the little clouds not seeking to resist its mood of sociability, not slipping away with gloomy faces horizonwards as though called thither by more serious concerns, or others, though unsummoned, trying to take the heavenly defenses by assault, diverting
their guardians to other activities and so forcing the sun to keep its glory to itself, hovering there in mid-sky, drifting, maybe, but so slowly that like porpoises gambling among the waves in perfect weather, they seem to float scarcely moving, as though prepared to stay in the heavens indefinitely.  

In this representative passage from Jean Santeuil, the imagination and intellect work in antipathetic symbiosis, with the imagination accessing the past through impressions independently of the intellect, which then works to regain control over the imagination and impose its own order on sensory experience. The impressions came to Proust en masse, and his moments of vision dissipated before he could translate the impressions into communicable form. In Jean Santeuil, Proust had the imaginative vision of A la recherché, but resorted to realism to control the onslaught of impressions he did not yet fully understand in the context of his whole philosophy. Proust composed A la recherché in the same spontaneous way as Jean Santeuil, but in Jean Santeuil the vision was incomplete, so that the individual impressions composed independently of the whole read like realist vignettes without the shared vision of the whole.

As an example, Alden references the two descriptions of the goodnight kiss in Jean Santeuil and A la recherché. In Jean Santeuil, the already distant third-person perspective shifts from Madame Santeuil in the courtyard to Jean in the upstairs bedroom, then back down to the courtyard, then back up to bedroom. One day while his parents hosted guests in the courtyard below, Jean looked to the last light of day for defense against the darkness of his bedroom. Jean had gone down to the courtyard three times, begging for a goodnight kiss, but his mother would not budge: “a boy of seven must learn to go to sleep alone.” Jean turned out the light in his bedroom. He tried to sleep, but was kept awake by the haunting image of his heartless mother, ignoring him for her guests. Soon the darkness of the bedroom would assume the immensity of night, and the “vague” uncertainty of waking up at midnight, or morning, or never, would

479 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 9.
assume the definitude of death. If only his mother had the foresight of the Greeks, who adorned their dead with cakes so they could cross into the underworld without going hungry! Jean needed not cakes, but kisses!

Should he call her from the window? It would make her mad, but Jean would rather suffer days, even weeks estranged from his angry mother than face death alone without a kiss. At least he would be awake and the estrangement only temporary. If he didn’t call he would be alone in the underworld of sleep, forever unchosen for a kiss of salvation. Yes, eternal death was far worse than a week of estrangement. He would call from the window. Madame Santeuil saw the light go back on. Slowly the window opened, and the pale face of Jean slid sideways through the slot: “Mamma, I want you for a moment.” Madame Santeuil rose embarrassed from her seat, and went to kiss Jean goodnight. Jean lay supine on his bed with a smug smile of self-satisfaction. She kissed his forehead, and went back to her guests. A lengthy analysis follows in the realistic technique: Jean was just a boy then, but his unanswered calls for a kiss would reverberate from the “very metal of his heart” well into adulthood. Habit had since hidden from his calloused heart the torments of the goodnight kiss, but when he went to bed early or late and couldn’t sleep, the “sound of the childhood crying” would keep him awake, and he would call for his dead mother.

In A la recherche, the perspective of the goodnight kiss scene is unflinchingly first-person. In Jean Santeuil, Proust had access through his impressions to the same past as A la recherche, but in A la recherche Proust came to terms with the past in the context of the whole of his life. The fragments of impressions that make up Jean Santeuil were written with an incomplete vision of the whole, and so read like stand-alone vignettes written in the realist

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481 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 30.
482 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 31.
tradition. Proust wrote some of the same fragments of A la recherché in relation (French: rapport) to a complete philosophy of communication as translation, and so the 3,000 pages read like a necessarily single novel. Proust first had to splice together the fragments of his impressions into a whole past life, before he could arrange the written description of those impressions into the pages of A la recherché. In the next chapter, I frame A la recherché as a convergence of the incomplete philosophies of communication in Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve. But first, I list four takeaways from the state of Proust’s philosophy of communication in Jean Santeuil:

1. **Experimentation in communication:** The Proust wrote and abandoned Jean Santeuil between 1900 and 1905, after Les plaisirs et les jours and the Ruskin translations and before Contre Sainte-Beuve and A la recherché. With the exception of some parts of Contre Sainte-Beuve, Jean Santeuil is the closest of Proust’s early works to A la recherché in both style and scope. In Jean Santeuil Proust tests (sometimes successfully, sometimes not) the long, serpentine sentences for which A la recherché is famous. Proust wrote the anecdotes of Les plaisirs et les jours as isolated and unconnected fragments, with no overall vision other than arbitrary inclusion in the same collection. Proust wrote Jean Santeuil in the same way, but Jean Santeuil represents Proust’s first attempt (and first failure) to tie together the many fragments into a knot of interconnected memories.

2. **Communicative distance.** Proust wrote some of the stories in Les plaisirs et les jours in first person, some in third person, and others in a first-third person hybrid. The perspective of each vignette serves the premise of its story arc, so that each vignette stands alone as a complete and coherent entity, no matter how short. Proust also mixes perspectives in Jean Santeuil, but for a different reason: he is hesitant to write a novel

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using only his own life for fear that the novel will be more autobiography than fiction. For Proust, autobiography is the opposite of art, but fiction formed from the materials of one’s own memory is the pinnacle of artistic expression. Proust announces to the reader (or critic who follows Sainte-Beuve) in the introduction to Jean Santeuil that he, Marcel Proust, is not the owner of his own impressions. Proust distances himself from Jean Santeuil by outsourcing the writing of Jean Santeuil to another writer C., who creates a “hero” named Jean who resembles in both biography and psychology the writer who created him.

3. *Communication overkill.* To execute his plan, Proust would have to strike the right balance between reality and the imagination. In A la recherché, Proust converges reality and the imagination in identifying the imagination as the only hermeneutic entrance to reality, but Proust’s philosophy of communication in Jean Santeuil was incomplete compared to that of A la recherché. In Jean Santeuil Proust separates and keeps separate the realms of reality and the imagination. For example, in the introduction to Jean Santeuil, Proust tries to describe his own imaginative impression of a sunset, but after the sun “frees its smiling face from the early mist,” the description drags on to 100, then 150, then 200 words of reality described to death at the expense of the momentary vision of his imagination.

4. *Communicative form.* Proust had the vision of A la recherché in mind as he wrote Jean Santeuil, but he had too few memories to realize his vision. Contre Sainte-Beuve was the final philosophical hurdle to A la recherché as the realization of Proust’s vision. Jean Santeuil was a stylistic hurdle between Les plaisirs et les jours and Contre Sainte-Beuve. Although he abandoned the manuscript after five years, the failure of Jean Santeuil
proved to Proust that, with some stylistic and formal tweaks, his philosophy was indeed compatible with the communicative form of the novel. He set to work on *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.

In his first critique, Immanuel Kant distinguished between imagination and fantasy, or as Proust calls it in *Jean Santeuil*, pure invention. While fantasy is pure invention untied to reality, imagination pushes off of reality in order to invent something original. For Proust, too, the imagination cannot be pure invention – C. says so in the introduction to *Jean Santeuil* – because it is the imagination that reveals reality in moments of vision. Imagination pushes off of the reality revealed in moments of vision to create a work of art that expresses the true self of the artist.

Proust understands appearance as Kant understands fantasy. Appearance hides reality and to cover the tracks it invents a new reality apparent only to the impure and error-prone senses. *Jean Santeuil* remains a realist novel despite Proust’s attempts to privilege the imagination because *A la recherché* relegates reality to the background of the story as a reference point for his invented characters. With *Jean Santeuil*, Proust set out to show that the imagination is the only real reservoir for the raw materials of art, but ended up foregrounding reality at the expense of the imagination. Proust tried to ground his fiction in reality, but instead framed his philosophy of communication as fantasy. By 1905, Proust realized how far removed from reality he really was with *Jean Santeuil*, but it was already too late. He abandoned the book but saved its vision for *A la recherché*.

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Bibliography


CHAPTER 5

Contre Sainte-Beuve: The Final Hurdle to A la recherché

For two decades after the publication of Le temps retrouvé (1927), the only Proust manuscripts known to exist (excluding the Ruskin translations and other miscellanea) were Les plaisirs et les jours (1896) and the seven volumes of A la recherché (1913 – 1927). In the early 1950’s, some scattered papers emerged from Proust’s belongings, some on Proust’s own philosophy and others on the literary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve. For Sainte-Beuve, the meaning of a writer’s work was not in the work itself, but in the writer’s personal life as recorded in his letters and conversations with friends and family. When Proust scholar Bernard de Fallois arranged the papers into a single essay called Contre Sainte-Beuve, in which the parts reminiscent of A la recherché serve to rebut Sainte-Beuve, other scholars resisted. Contre Sainte-Beuve was indeed a later and longer work than Les plaisirs et les jours that (with Jean Santeuil, the subject of chapter five) bridged the gap between Les plaisirs et les jours in 1896 and the first volume of A la recherché in 1913. There was also evidence that Proust had been working on two essays at the time, one on Sainte-Beuve and one that looked like a draft of Du côté de chez Swann. But why put them together? And why publish at all?

Proust answered the questions in the first line of the preface to Contre Sainte-Beuve: “Every day I set less store on the intellect,” as opposed to instinct. The dichotomy of instinct and the intellect runs through all of Proust’s work, starting with Les plaisirs et les jours and Jean Santeuil. For Proust the author of Les plaisirs et les jours and Jean Santeuil, the reality of objects and relationships is revealed only through instinct. The intellect kills impressions and hides reality behind the appearances of objects and relationships. In the preface to Contre Sainte-Beuve, Proust addresses for the first time the problematic of instinct and the intellect that undergirds the whole of A la recherché. The juxtaposition in Contre Sainte-Beuve of Proust’s
impressions and Sainte-Beuve’s method is also a juxtaposition of instinct (Proust’s impressions) and the intellect (Sainte-Beuve’s method). Proust makes explicit the two “ways” of instinct and the intellect that run implicitly through *A la recherché*. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, the ways of instinct and intellect are thematic fragments within the structural fragments of Proust and Sainte-Beuve.

This chapter explicates the contribution of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* to Proust’s philosophy of communication. The section “*Contre Sainte-Beuve*” first introduces the context of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, then summarizes the content of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and the method of its namesake Charles Augutin Sainte-Beuve. The next section outlines the form of *Contre-Sainte Beuve* as arranged by de Fallois, from the preface through Proust’s criticism of Sainte-Beuve. The next section reviews Proust’s contention with Sainte-Beuve, and how Proust’s contention reveals the state of his philosophy of communication in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. The last section, titled “On the Path to Proust’s Philosophy of Communication: *Contre Sainte-Beuve*,” situates *Contre-Sainte-Beuve* on the path to Proust’s philosophy of communication in relation to *Les plaisirs et les jours*. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust writes that Sainte-Beuve started out writing in solitude, but soon substituted sociality for solitude, and “mental bursts of speed” for sustained searching for the inner self. The “mental bursts of speed” came to Sainte-Beuve as pre-packaged products, as if through divine inspiration. With these “mental bursts of speed,” Sainte-Beuve wrote an article on a different author every week, but without Marcel’s joy when he happened upon his article in *Le Figaro*. Like *Les plaisirs et les jours*, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* is a pit stop on the path to Proust’s philosophy of communication, much closer than *Les plaisirs et les jours* to the final product in *A la recherché*, but still a series of fragments.

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Origins of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*

After *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust translated John Ruskin into French, but did not publish another original work until 1913, when *Du côté de chez Swann* was released to mixed reviews. This timeline – *Les plaisirs et les jours* first, followed by the Ruskin translations, followed by *Du côté de chez Swann* after a decade of idleness – was assumed by Proust scholars until the early 1950’s, when an exhaustive exhumation of Proust’s papers revealed two previously unknown works that occupied Proust during the period from the publication of *Les plaisirs et les jours* in 1896 to *Du côté de chez Swann* in 1913.

The first was a long, unfinished novel called *Jean Santeuil* (see chapter 4), which Proust wrote and abandoned between 1900 and 1905, after *Les plaisirs et les jours* but before the Ruskin translations. The second was a short, part-fictional, part-philosophical essay called *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, written between 1908 and 1909, after the Ruskin translations and shortly before he started *Du côté de chez Swann*. In 1954, Proust scholar Bernard de Fallois pieced together and published as a single book several different and seemingly unrelated essays, some on Sainte-Beuve’s method of literary criticism, and others on Proust’s own memories and impressions. As arranged by de Fallois, the prologue and first seven chapters of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* make little mention of Sainte-Beuve. The prologue sets up the recurring Proustian problematic of intellect versus instinct, and the first seven chapters test the problematic with scenes familiar to readers of *A la recherche*, such as the tea and madeleine in “In Slumbers,” the publication of Marcel’s article in “The article in *Le Figaro*,” and the descriptions of the later Duc and Duchess de Guermantes in “The Countess” and “Monsieur de Guermante’s Balzac.”
With little transition, the next four chapters confront directly Sainte-Beuve, and refute his “shallow conception of the creative minds”\(^\text{486}\) of Honore de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire, and Gérard de Nerval. The next five chapters again shift abruptly away from Sainte-Beuve and toward Proust’s own philosophy through the characteristically Proustian themes of sociality, temporality, and names. The compatibility of the fictional and philosophical-critical elements of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* has been a subject of controversy in Proust scholarship since de Fallois’s publication of the papers as a complete essay in 1954. Citing subsequent evidence that some irrelevant essays included by de Fallois were actually from an earlier date, and that other more relevant essays from the same period were excluded, the editors of the 1971 Pléiade edition of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* cut out everything unconnected to Sainte-Beuve, which amounted to most of the book.\(^\text{487}\) More recent evidence suggests that Proust was indeed working on both a novel and a critical essay on Sainte-Beuve at the same time.\(^\text{488}\) As he wrote he would switch back and forth between the two, unsure about which form his imaginative vision would assume.

*The Method of Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve*

During his lifetime, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) was the most famous critic in France. Since his death, his many works of literary criticism and original verse have been collected into many volumes. Together the volumes of Sainte-Beuve are a historical archive of the literary atmosphere of nineteenth century Europe. Every Monday from 1849-1869, Sainte-Beuve published in a Paris newspaper an essay on contemporary literature or literary history.\(^\text{489}\) A good review from Sainte-Beuve could make the career of a good writer, but a bad review could end a writer’s career before it began or ruin the reputation of an established writer. Sainte-

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\(^{487}\) Kilmartin, introduction, 10.

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Beuve’s method of literary criticism assumes that a writer’s life and cultural context determine the writer’s work. For Sainte-Beuve, the secret to a great novel lies not in the novel itself, but in the context of the writer’s life, no matter how far removed from the content of the novel.

In his capacity as critic, Sainte-Beuve talked to the writer himself, as well as the writer’s family and casual and intimate acquaintances. He combed through the writer’s diaries and datebooks and notebooks newspapers in search of the secrets of his novel, which was nothing but a reflection of all these details. Sainte-Beuve’s work as a critic went all but unchallenged during his lifetime. Even 50 years after his death when Proust wrote *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Sainte-Beuve’s method was widely imitated, and probably contributed to the poor reviews of Proust’s *Les plaisirs et les jours* as the simple product of a Parisian snob. Also, Proust had been careful to conceal from his mother until her death in 1905, and then from a conservative literary community that he was a homosexual who satisfied his strange sexual fetishes at male brothels around Paris. Any follower of Sainte-Beuve who reviewed his work would surely reveal his secret and compromise his career. Before letting that happen, he wrote *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.

**The Form of *Contre Sainte-Beuve***

The preface to *Contre Sainte-Beuve* is one of the most thorough articulations of Proust’s philosophy of communication prior to *A la recherche*. Proust begins *Contre Sainte-Beuve* with a simple observation: “Every day I set less store on the intellect.” The intellect blocks the artist from his impressions, the only real material of art. Impressions are transcendent glimpses of reality revealed in ordinary objects. Impressions are transcendent insofar as they penetrate the deceiving appearance of an object to the real essence of the object in relation to one’s experience of the object. Here in the opening lines of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* are Proust’s early attempts to

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explicate the distinction between appearance and reality that undergirds his mature work. Appearance forms an exoskeleton around an object, but with holes like a sieve. The exoskeleton hides the essence, or reality, of the object within itself, keeping the reality of the object inaccessible to outsiders. Through the holes in the exoskeleton seep one’s past experiences of the object, such as joy in playing with a childhood toy or wonder in seeing spring flowers in full bloom, as for the Narrator in *Du côté de chez Swann*.

Impressions are the only way into the exoskeleton, and they last for only an instant. As soon as the impression ends, the person experiencing the impression is expelled from the object, but the impression stays in the object and hides there a captive forever, like “the souls of the dead in certain folk-stories.” The odds are so small that the person will ever encounter the same object and experience the same impression again, that most of the hours of our lives are lost forever after an instant. But not all the hours. The narrator recounts the hours spent as a child in a country home. Every morning he would wake up and walk down the steps to see his sleepy grandfather, who would let him taste a rusk soaked in tea. He thought of those hours often, but they seemed dead to him now, hidden in the taste of the rusk soaked in tea. One snowy evening, the narrator came in from the cold. He laid down to read by lamplight but still could not get warm, so the cook brought him some tea and toast.

The narrator dipped the toast in the tea and lifted it to his frozen lips. At the moment, “a sensation of extraordinary radiance and happiness”\(^\text{491}\) broke the dam of his intellect and flooded his mind with memories of summers in the country home. His intellect had likewise hidden many hours spent long ago on the cobblestone streets of Venice. The year before, the uneven paving stones of a Paris courtyard brought back the “flutter of a past”\(^\text{492}\) in Venice as a “fragment of life

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in unsullied preservation.” In the present, impressions are not recognized as impressions because they are mixed up with other perceptions and thoughts, which together in time constitute a continuous stream of consciousness. In the present, however, impressions have not yet hidden in the object, and therefore cannot be freed from their future captivity. Past impressions are hidden in everyday objects, doubly blocked by the exoskeletal appearance of the object and the intellect of the observer.

The experience of a later impression releases the earlier impression from its bondage in the object, along with all the memories associated with the earlier impression, “like those Japanese flowers which do not re-open as flowers until one drops them in water.” For instance, the narrator’s memories of summers in the country home were hidden in the taste of his grandfather’s rusk soaked in tea, a thing he had not eaten since. Until he ate the toast soaked in tea as an adult, the impressions associated with summers in the country home remained hidden in the taste of his grandfather’s rusk. As a child, though, the narrator did not experience the taste of tea-soaked rusk as an impression, but instead as one of many impressions of the country home: the smell of flowers, the voice of his grandfather, the colors of the sunset, etc. The narrator’s intellect was not developed enough to overpower his impressions, so he experienced the world as a mish-mash of impressions hidden in the surrounding countryside.

The passage of time allows impressions to assume meaning in relation to the intellect. The adult narrator’s intellect was mature enough to impose order on his impressions. He could recognize impressions as impressions, without the chaos of a child’s imagination. But with the power of recognition came the power of repression, so that once recognized by the imagination, impressions were immediately sacrificed to the imagination. But “intellect could have done

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nothing…at such a moment!" As soon as the intellect apprehends an object, the object loses all connection to the impression stored therein. The narrator tried with his intellect to resurrect the memories of those summer days in the country, but failed each time. The impressions stored in the taste of tea and toast resurrected the memories of the country home because the narrator never ate toast and tea, and hence never thought about it.

We often appeal to the intellect to preserve the poetry of impressions in postcards and photographs, but for Proust the author of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, these keepsakes are poisoned by the intellect. Any objects these byproducts of the intellect bring back will be forever “stripped of their poetry,” which will then hide in another object untouched by the intellect, and so on until the captive impression is freed by an involuntary impression in the present. Long ago the narrator traveled by train through the French countryside. As the train passed a pretty courtyard with trees and flowers, the narrator noted the “bright bars of sunlight on the trees,” and measured the flowers against Balzac’s descriptions in *Le Lys dans la Vallée*. Later the narrator tried in vain to resurrect his impression of the trees and flowers in the courtyard, but the impressions left these objects as soon as he wrote them down.

Now they were “pallid ghosts” of the prior impressions killed by the intellect. The application of his intellect to the impression of the courtyard had dispatched the impressions from the flowers and trees to the hammering of the linesmen and tapping of the train’s wheels. Later the narrator dropped a spoon on a silver plate, making a loud metallic clang. This single sound reawakened the poetry of the passing landscape, with the exception of the courtyard, which was now a cataract on the image of that day on the train. Sometimes an impression

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invokes memories that, despite the best efforts of the intellect, remain murky and mysterious, unconnected to a particular time and place. As the narrator walked with his friends, a green piece of canvas covering a cracked window summoned for him a “gleam of summer,” but from when and where? All the sensations of every summer came back before his consciousness, but none of them housed the gleam of summer from the green canvas.

Like “ghosts that Aeneas met in the underworld,” the sensations summoned him with “powerless arms” to uncover their secrets, then sunk back into oblivion with an “artless passionate attitude,” as if apologizing for not revealing their ruse. These sensations of summer stopped the narrator cold. As his friends walked ahead, the narrator tried desperately to define these indistinct sensations outlined by the heart but obscured by the intellect. After a minute he saw no more. The impression fell back asleep forever, and the narrator caught up with his friends. The reality revealed in impressions is more real than that produced by the intellect. Whereas the intellect would rate an esoteric novel as more learned than a children’s book, and a classical composition more moving than a “nauseating musical show,” the children’s book and musical show house the memories of childhood mirth, and with them the desires and dreams of the imagination. The artist alone can communicate the reality of impressions, so that objective observers might say that “for a man of talent he has very stupid likings.” But impressions do not discriminate between smart and stupid or meaningful and mundane, so are just as likely to inhabit a symphony as a train schedule.

The symphony may have more aesthetic value in relation to an objective standard, but the train schedule secretes the scents of every station, along with the memories of elegant salons and

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secret assignations, until the past itself is presented in the schedule while the presents holds only
boredom at the symphony. Nevertheless, even the masterpieces of the best artists contain only a
faint trace of feeling, hidden behind the ornamentation of the inferior intellect. But inferior in
relation to what? The intellect can only be inferior in relation to itself, since only the intellect,
not impressions or instinct, can make judgments of inferiority. If through impressions the
instincts reveal a reality that the intellect obscures, the intellect must set itself in service of
impressions, which immediately hides the impressions from the intellect, and so on until the
intellect ends the exercise. To resolve the problematic of intellect contra instinct, Proust turns to
Sainte-Beuve, a French literary critic who for Proust modeled the inferiority of the intellect.

*Waking Up*

The body of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* begins much like the overture to *A la recherché*, with
an unnamed narrator waking from a deep sleep. The narrator tries to pinpoint in the present a
particular time in the past, when he was already ill and unable to sleep, but “still very close to a
time” when, with only a few wakings, he could sleep the whole night. Sometimes he fell
asleep instantly, before he could say, “I’m falling asleep,” then awake unaware that he had been
dreaming. The world of dreams became real, and the waking world was “something truly
obscure.” In a dream he sees the plump cheek of a child against the “blooming” cheeks of
the pillow. He was the child, and the child awoke. It was not yet midnight. The narrator
compares himself to a sick man in a strange hotel, awakened by a stinging pain. The man sees a
light under the door, but cannot move. It must be morning, he thought. The hotel will soon be
astir and someone will come to help. Then the light goes out, for it is not morning but midnight,

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and the man must suffer through another night. Sometimes when he slept on his side, a woman would form from his rib, just as Eve emerged from Adam.

She pressed her flesh against his, now “cramped”\textsuperscript{508} by her weight, and passed her warmth through his blood, now cooled by her kisses. Finally she faded, forgotten like a “flesh and blood mistress.” In sleep the narrator slipped into the world of childhood, in which a priest threatened to cut his long curls. Like Copernicus or Christ, who opened the heavens to the earth, the priest opened for the narrator a world beyond the present, where the “world’s axis had been shifted”\textsuperscript{509} from innocence to insecurity, all by cutting his curls. The poor priest had been dead for many years, but as an adult the narrator still covered his cropped hair with a pillow and blanket, just in case he dreamed that the “old priest was pulling my curls.” Whereas the waking world reveals impressions through ordinary objects as instantaneous and involuntary feelings, dreams fill the outline of ordinary objects with the “poetry of youth.”\textsuperscript{510}

The world of dreams is not timed in the waking sense, as a series of sequential moments spliced together like slides on a projector. Instead, dreams unfold as untimed and unordered impressions, like brushstrokes in a Monet painting, which feel like an eternity when asleep and an instant once awake. A young lilac once resurrected for the narrator his twelve-year-old self, locked in a water-closet on the top floor of the country home. He was completely alone except for the lilac, which grew through a gap and watched from the window. He explored himself, pushing past the fear of dying (of what?), until “at last, a shimmering jet arched forth, spurt after spurt,”\textsuperscript{511} and settled on the lilac, like the “forbidden fruit on the Tree of Knowledge.”\textsuperscript{512} Ever
since, the smell of a lilac brought back those summer days in the water-closet, where he lost forever his innocence in an instant of masturbatory pleasure.

When he woke the narrator noticed that everything else was asleep. To the bedroom he was just another object, like a jar of jam “summoned”\textsuperscript{513} to make a marmalade, then put back to sleep on the shelf. In the “kaleidoscopic darkness,”\textsuperscript{514} the narrator woke to the heavy breathing of the “sleeping room,”\textsuperscript{515} which briefly stirred and went back to sleep. The “immovableness”\textsuperscript{516} of objects is the work of the intellect, which fixes objects in place as “what they are and not other.”\textsuperscript{517} Sleep immobilizes the intellect and frees the objects to move through the kaleidoscopic darkness, unseen by the close eyes of the intellect. When the intellect wakes up, the objects settle back in place. But the narrator’s intellect had not yet regained its faculties, and for a few seconds his body “lay guessing at its surroundings.”\textsuperscript{518} Was he at his grandfather’s house, in the bed behind the blue curtains, or maybe the resort at Dieppe in the room next to Mamma? As his intellect adjusted, his body assumed another attitude, this time in the garden at Auteuil where he sat supine in the Sun, then in his room at Réveillon, where he rested upright with his back to the window. By this time his intellect had situated the narrator in the “bedroom of time present”\textsuperscript{519} but, “having started from its own, none too certain, position,”\textsuperscript{520} his intellect misplaced the objects in the room, so that he slept on the window and saw a “streak of daybreak”\textsuperscript{521} through a chest of drawers.

\textsuperscript{513} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 33.
\textsuperscript{514} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 33.
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\textsuperscript{519} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 37.
\textsuperscript{520} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 37.
\textsuperscript{521} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 38.
When he slept in, the narrator would determine the day’s weather from the “atmospheric density” and “degree of brightness” of the streak of daylight, as well as the noises from the city street below his bedroom window. When he woke up early, he would listen to the sounds of his own “city of nerves and blood vessels,” and forecast the weather from its lively or listless labor. After a few disoriented seconds, his intellect would be fully recovered. Now that he was back in his present bedroom, the narrator imagined himself elsewhere, first by the fire in a medieval castle, then crossing the snows of southern Italy, where he was warmed by the streak of daylight in the window. Later, when the narrator would stay up all night and sleep all day, that little streak of daylight kept alive “all the possibilities of living” closed to the coming night. He never went out, but the sounds of the street and density of the daylight were enough to convey all of the day’s abstract beauty, without any of its concrete inconveniences.

The narrator opens the curtains and looks out the window. A tall girl with pale cheeks walks by below. There is no Beauty, he thought, only beautiful girls, and each beautiful girl is but an “invitation to a happiness which she alone can fulfill.” Beauty is not universal in relation to an ideal Form, but tied to particular promises of individual girls, each with her own “unsurmised ideal” for an unknown observer, like the narrator in the window. The face of a beautiful girl opens possibilities for a new life with the girl, full of the pleasures offered by her “delightful face.” But the narrator could not see fully the face of the girl walking below, only her pale cheeks across an “impassible territory” of a few feet. By now she was out of sight and

526 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 47.
527 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 47.
528 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 47.
he had turned his attention to a new girl, but the face of the tall girl with the pale cheeks gave him reason to live.

_The Countess_

After the preface and opening pages, the narrative of Contre Sainte-Beuve assumes the form of what will become _Le Côté de Guermantes_, the third volume of _A la recherché_. From the second-floor flat that he shared with his parents, the narrator watched a carriage carry his neighbor the countess across the inner courtyard of his complex. The gates of the courtyard opened and out came the countess, who “vaguely acknowledged”¹⁵²⁹ him and his parents, as well as the water-carrier and concierge. The countess’ barouche brought her to the Bois de Boulogne as she “distributed smiles”¹⁵³⁰ and the smell of aristocracy through the “insensitive”¹⁵³¹ side streets, where she wanted to delay her visits her lower-class friends who lived on the main route. On the way back from the Bois she called every merchant to her carriage door, and only then stopped to see a friend, to whom she apologized with “gentle eyes”¹⁵³² and a solemn air: “Really, it wasn’t _possible_ to get here sooner.”¹⁵³³ Nevertheless, the narrator loved the countess. She was certainly charming, but her “mysterious light” shone only from a distance. As with any person, as the narrator’s proximity to the countess decreased, so did the poetry of her charm.

As the narrator got closer and closer to the countess, in both physical proximity and social circles, her mysterious light grew dimmer and dimmer, exposing the artificiality of her charm. Now the narrator knew the countess well, and her light was totally out. One night he took the countess home to the same courtyard, but she was not the same woman in his first impression, in the carriage on that summer Sunday. The first impression of a stranger’s face is

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like the first layer of paint on a canvas. The “original physiognomy”\textsuperscript{534} of the face in these first brushstrokes holds all the “former harmony”\textsuperscript{535} hidden by countless touch-ups and years of yellowed age. The lover falls in love with the frame of a face – the curve of a nose or the arc of a smile – that forms the lover’s first impression of the beloved. Until the lover possesses the object of his love, the lover fills the frame with the first impression. But when the lover kisses his beloved, he will not be kissing the woman he loves. The curve of her nose is more severe, and the arc of her smile more acute.

He singled out another feature of her face, this time the “sweetness of a shy glance”\textsuperscript{536} in the shadow of her hat, that itself lost all poetry when she took off the hat. The former harmony of her flawed face was mixed up with the “mystical affinity”\textsuperscript{537} of her rank as a Marquis. The narrator’s intellect could categorize people by class, but instinct reserved a chasm among the classes, so that before he met the countess he thought himself more likely to fly than find himself in her house at the other end of the courtyard. The narrator recognized in her relatives the same serpentine smile, and in her butler’s blonde moustache the melody of her speech, and he fell in love with them too. Later the narrator would meet the Marquis for lunch. She formed again the outline of his first impression, but now unfilled by his fancies. What little poetry she still possessed came out in conversation as “words…and no more.”\textsuperscript{538}

On Sundays the count would hide from his wife’s guests in the second-floor library, where he read the complete works of Balzac. His set of Balzac was second in sentimental value only to a stereoscope, which few people had ever been invited to see. One Sunday while visiting the countess, she invited him upstairs to see her husband’s stereoscope in the library. In the

\textsuperscript{534} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 53.
\textsuperscript{535} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 54.
\textsuperscript{536} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 54.
\textsuperscript{537} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 57.
\textsuperscript{538} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 58.
library the count sent the sun from its “repose on his couch”\(^{539}\) and sat down next to Marcel. The wooden blinds were shut, sealing the library from the sun and any other downstairs guests of his wife. When the room was dark, the count “blazed into animation”\(^{540}\) about the genealogy of the name Guermantes, which for Marcel had lost all light, and for the count was colored by the “light of his fancy alone.”\(^{541}\)

*The Article in Le Figaro*

In *Albertine disparue*, Marcel is surprised to see an article he wrote published in the prestigious French newspaper *Le Figaro*. The scene appears in draft form in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. A long time before, the narrator had submitted an article to *Le Figaro*, a daily newspaper published in Paris. He still had not heard back, and for the past few days had given up hope of seeing the article in print. Every morning Mamma would place the paper beside his bed with the same care. But today she came with uncharacteristically “airy unconcern,”\(^{542}\) then hushed the servant and hurried from the room like an “anarchist who had put down a bomb.”\(^{543}\) The narrator knew then that his article had appeared in *Le Figaro*, but could not bring himself to believe it. The paper must have plagiarized his article, or maybe he unknowingly plagiarized another. But there was his name in the byline in the middle of the first page: Marcel Proust. It was his article. The paper had published not only his own thoughts, but also the hopes of thousands of readers, for whom his thoughts mirrored the “manifold sunrise.”\(^{544}\)

He picked up the paper and read the article as one of those readers. He was impressed by his own insight and wit, and imagined his fame filling the homes of his readers along with the

\(^{539}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 194.  
\(^{543}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 59.  
\(^{544}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 60.
The praise he imagined was coming to him would cancel the self-criticism that handicapped his writing, and stop the self-deprecation that dammed his creative output. These words of praise would finally exorcise the poltergeist of procrastination, and empower him “with the notion of his talent,” but without the “sense of his impotence.” With the confidence of “ten thousand imagined approvals,” the narrator read the article again, and froze. The article seems perfectly clear to me, its producer, but what if the readers don’t understand, or worse, don’t agree? What if people read right to page two, and miss the article on page one, or even if they read page one, what if their attentions stray to the right or left, missing the middle? Worse yet, what if they read the article but ignore the byline, or read the byline but ignore the article?

Not all hope was lost, however. Even if the article was misunderstood, the very existence of the article in Le Figaro was for Marcel the “declaration of my merit.” But why would the merit of Marcel Proust matter to a stranger? Marcel would seek out a less imagined audience: his mother. Meanwhile, a pink sky passed through the square of his window. He followed the sky from the right window to the middle, then lost it in the left. In that moment, he longed to travel by train to the junction at Jura, where a pretty peasant girl sold coffee. The girl had ignored his call for coffee, but he resolved ever since to return to Jura and “purloin her existence” under the pink sky.

Marcel finds Mamma in her room. She assure him that the article is excellent and sends him back to bed. On Saturdays the family ate lunch an hour earlier. This weekly interruption of

549 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 68.
550 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 68.
their “humdrum lives”\(^{551}\) lent a “peculiar and rather congenial quality” to Saturdays. When all the week’s “wit and creative instinct”\(^{552}\) were liberated. Saturday lunch set the family apart from all the “strangers and barbarians” who lunched an hour later, so that a visitor who came in consternation upon the family at lunch would be turned away with a “sectarian sense of piety.”\(^{553}\) As Mamma re-read her son’s article, Marcel noticed an announcement of a storm at Brest, a small coastal town in northwestern France. Marcel loved storms, so when he saw the announcement he felt all the emotions of a young girl “waiting to be asked to her first ball.”\(^{554}\) With wind, rain and hail, the mysteries of Marcel’s dreams assumed the “shape and substance”\(^{555}\) of the seas. Marcel was torn between Brest and his bed, one far away but stormed with poetry, the other convenient but without mystery.

*The Sunbeam on the Balcony*

Just then a sunbeam was born on the balcony outside his bedroom window. The sunbeam blew out with a “breath of wind,”\(^{556}\) then swallowed the windowsill with the “steadfast gold”\(^{557}\) of a summer day. Reality is revealed in the most ordinary objects, the most “insubstantial and fleeting”\(^{558}\) things that escape one’s habitual horizon of attention, like the sunbeam on the balcony. The sunbeam brings all the possibilities of a sunny day into the drawing-room of a countess or the bedroom of a commoner without the “admission of social inequality.”\(^{559}\) With its pale light the sunbeam turns the too-pink plaster of the outside wall into a “fairy palace”\(^{560}\) with

\(^{552}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 71.
\(^{553}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 72.
\(^{554}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 73.
\(^{555}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 73.
\(^{556}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 74.
\(^{557}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 74.
\(^{558}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 75.
\(^{559}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 77.
\(^{560}\) Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 78.
all the “rainbow loveliness and glowing color of Venice itself. Marcel experienced the impression of the sunbeam through the pattern of shadows on the balcony.

The pattern of shadows on the balcony was a function of not only the sun and sunbeam, but also the storm at Brent and his feelings about Le Figaro, and all the other patternless particularities of the sunbeam’s birth. The sunbeam journeyed from sun to sill with “countless faint memories” which divulged from the sunbeam a depth and volume invisible to the “eyes of the moment.”561 No two impressions are alike, but all have the common essence of pleasure with no parallel, just as the unrepeateable pattern of shadows produced by the sunbeam has no parallel except in the imagination of Marcel. Whereas Marcel saw in the sunbeam the “loveliest possibilities”562 of a palace in Venice, Félicie the servant couldn’t see “what she was at,”563 and closed the window to the sunbeam.

Look, said Momma, the sunbeam has beaten the storm! But the world is itself a giant sundial, which reflects in shadows the same sun in the “golden angel”564 on the tower Saint Mark’s and the “iron weathercock”565 on the porch across the street. Only the “eyes of the spirit”566 can stare down the sun, “but not face to face,”567 only in the “humble details” of ordinary objects overlooked by the “eyes of the body.”568 Marcel remembered in Venice the arch of a Gothic window, which Ruskin had compared to a coral reef. The arch was a masterpiece of medieval architecture, but Marcel remembered only his mother, waiting for him in the sunlit smile of the arch. In his impression the timeless art of the arch was tied to one’s particular time, when his mother waited by the window. That moment with his mother assumed all the art of the

564 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 84.
566 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 86.
568 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 86.
arch, which became an accessory to her Beauty. She kissed Marcel goodnight and left the room. His thoughts returned to the article in *Le Figaro*, then to a new article on the literary method of Sainte-Beuve.

**Sainte-Beuve’s Mistake**

Marcel’s dream of imagined approvals had dissipated, so he turned his attention to the real approvals of Sainte-Beuve’s method of literary criticism. He had been waiting for others to fight his inner feud with Sainte-Beuve, but the sunbeam had formed a phalanx of his thoughts. Now was the time to counter Sainte-Beuve with evangelical spirit of “Christ in the Gospel of Saint John: ‘Work while ye have the light.’”569 It seemed to Marcel like every critic was commending Sainte-Beuve and his method, which supposedly bridged the gap between “our vision and the actual countenance”570 of a great writer. The work of a great writer was a function of the writer’s early upbringing and later childhood, as well as his family and “literary flock,”571 and no more. From these clues would emerge the writer’s “particular turn of mind,”572 and from the particular turn of mind his “dominant passion,” and from the dominant passion his “innermost being.”573 Even Taine (with whom Sainte-Beuve disagreed) praised the method as an innovative combination of natural history and moral philosophy. Taine applied the “botanical analysis”574 of Sainte-Beuve to the whole human condition, but only as a precursor to his own scientific system. Philosophers who acknowledge no other truth than science (like Taine), must also liken literature to a “fund of truth”575 that finances science. Every epoch contributes cash to the fund of truth, so that every epoch is richer in truth than the epoch before. By Sainte-Beuve’s

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569 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 94.
method, the level of truth is determined by the date on the deposit, so that Homer and Hesiod must be more primitive than Sainte-Beuve himself because they came before Sainte-Beuve. But for Marcel art exists independently of science in the minds of every man, regardless of his historical moment. A novelist may be informed by other writers – it is said that Balzac read 1,500 books before beginning *Le Lys dans la Vallée* – but the novel itself stands alone as an authentic expression of the artist’s true self, inaccessible to the scientific method.

The received traditions of the artist no more determine his art than the hypotheses of the scientist should determine the outcome of his experiments. A present-day writer may exceed the ancients in aesthetic content, but he is no richer in truth than Homer or Hesiod. For Sainte-Beuve, a lack of historical records for an ancient poet constrains the critic to the poet’s words, with only a picture of the poet himself on the opposite bank of an impassable river. However, there is a surplus of materials on the modern writer, from which Sainte-Beuve seeks to classify the families of the intellect by sub-division, then deduce from a particular species the secrets of its art. Sainte-Beuve’s method is a biology of the intellect, more complex for human beings than for plants and animals, but still subject to the scientific method. The critic cannot fully understand a writer without knowing his religious views and daily routine, and also his wealth and weaknesses and virtues and vices, from his enjoyment of nature to his treatment of women. All of these aspects of a writer’s life coalesce in his art. The critic need only look for the clues.

Sainte-Beuve’s method of accumulating as much information as possible about the author’s life, regardless of its relevance to the author’s work, proceeds from the presupposition that the self who wrote the book is the same self revealed in everyday habits and routines. Marcel challenges this presupposition. For Marcel, the self revealed in everyday habits and routines is a mere mask of the *true* self, the only self capable of expressing its essence in a work of art. The
true self lives deep in the “bosom”\textsuperscript{576} of the artist, hidden from the expectations of his cultural milieu. Contrastingly, the self of Sainte-Beuve’s method is created in the image of culture and circumstance; it reflects the surface of the artist with no substance. Sainte-Beuve’s method looks for clues in the cultural influences of the artist, which the artist already expresses in his everyday habits and routines. Sainte-Beuve’s method always finds what it expects to find, then, because it looks for something for which it has already created the conditions, like the scientist whose outcomes always match his hypotheses.

Contra Sainte-Beuve, Marcel argues that to understand a writer’s work the critic must focus on not the writer or the work, but rather his own self, as reflected in the work of the writer. Rather than recreate a fragmentary record of the writer’s life with tangential details, which reveal nothing of the artist’s self and distract the critic from his own self, the critic should search his own bosom for what the artist’s work reveals to himself about his own self. Only then can the true self of the critic engage the work for what it is, the incommunicable self of the artist made communicable in art. Sainte-Beuve said that the materials farthest removed from the writer’s work reveal the most about the work. But for Marcel, the unpublished letters of the writer and the gossip of his acquaintances reveal the self who never wrote a book, and couldn’t write a book because it was writing a letter, or gossiping with an acquaintance.

Compared to his prose, which contained the “conjuring-tricks” of a “sorcerer’s magic circle,”\textsuperscript{577} Sainte-Beuve’s poetry comes “face to face” with reality. But Sainte-Beuve’s talent was for lying, so when his prose was stripped of ingenuities, his poetry was left dry and depthless. In judging Stendhal (one of Proust’s primary influences), Sainte-Beuve preferred to rely on recommendations from Stendhal’s friends, rather than review Stendhal’s complicated

\textsuperscript{576} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 87.
\textsuperscript{577} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 118.
books. As evidence against Sainte-Beuve’s method, Marcel notes that Sainte-Beuve knew everything about Stendhal, yet still deemed his work “detestable.” Sainte-Beuve’s biased opinion of Stendhal extends to all his “genuinely original” contemporaries, such as Balzac, Baudelaire, and Gérard de Nerval.

Marcel distinguishes between small-talk with friends and the “voice of the heart.” Small-talk of the sort studied by Sainte-Beuve distracts two friends from their true selves, so that both speak not as themselves but as each other. The genuinely original writer seals himself from such small-talk, and listens for the true self in the voice of the heart. Sainte-Beuve believed the opposite, that the writers writes only out of necessity, and saves the “cream” of himself for his private conversations. For Marcel, the true self is preserved in the bosom of the self until confronted in solitude with the voice of the heart, but for Sainte-Beuve the true self of the writer only comes out in conversations with others. The writer’s life is interesting to Sainte-Beuve only insofar as it influences the writer’s work. The true self as Marcel understands it makes no sense to Sainte-Beuve because for Sainte-Beuve all knowledge is scientific knowledge, and Marcel’s notion of the true self falls outside the purview of science. The true, innermost self is accessible only when one moves aside the manhole of the superficial self and searches the sewers of the innermost self. When the sewer is secured and the smell contained, the superficial self walks the streets above in ignorance of the true self below.

The artist differs from the average person in that the artist pays homage to the true self, and lives only for the true self, while the average person lives unaware of the true self, or distracts himself from the true self with people and parties. Sainte-Beuve himself lived in

578 Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 100.
solitude while writing, but that “world apart”\textsuperscript{582} was never more than a “tithe”\textsuperscript{583} of his social life. Sainte-Beuve believed that the writer needed other people to stimulate or counsel his creativity, and so never spent much time alone. The true self that lives in the artist’s bosom comes out only in his books. Sainte-Beuve believed that by excavating the author’s life in notes, newspapers and anecdotes, he could understand the essence of the author’s works. But these are two distinct selves, one authentic, the other artificial, and Sainte-Beuve picked the wrong one.

Sainte-Beuve based his books on second-hand conversations about the author, then sought approval for the book from those same conversationalists. The writing process for Sainte-Beuve begins and ends in the shallows of superficial selves, and never reaches the depths of the true selves of either the author or himself. For Marcel, one’s true self lies at the end of a performative “pilgrimage of the heart.”\textsuperscript{584} To find the true self, the writer-pilgrim must turn away from sociality and embark alone on the pilgrimage of the heart. While the voices of others pull the pilgrim off course, the voice of the heart guides the pilgrim to the promised land of the true self. Sainte-Beuve listens to the voices of others, which he trusts more than the voice of the heart because the voice of the heart makes no sense to his method. Through Sainte-Beuve’s method, the voices of others drown out the voice of the heart, leaving second-hand conversation as the only guide to the essence of a writer’s work.

For Marcel, the voices of others lead the pilgrim astray, away from the true self through a maze of the many superficial selves that make up one’s public persona, none of whom has ever written a book. For Sainte-Beuve, the merit of a man’s work depends on the “standing of the author,”\textsuperscript{585} and the standing of the author is assessable only in the present. Literature is a

\textsuperscript{582} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 106.  
\textsuperscript{583} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 105.  
\textsuperscript{584} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 100.  
\textsuperscript{585} Proust, “Contre Sainte-Beuve,” 113.
“contemporary affair” always reflective of and intended for the present day, and therefore must be judged only by the conventions of the current moment, namely Sainte-Beuve’s method. Sainte-Beuve cheered Chateaubriand while the author was alive, and condemned the same work as soon as he died.

The same thing happened with Pierre-Jean de Béranger, says Proust, except that Béranger was not yet dead when Sainte-Beuve changed his tune, only 15 years older. “Fifteen years is quite long enough to change a sitter’s appearance, or at any rate to bring out his features,” said Sainte-Beuve, but what about Sainte-Beuve’s features? Was not Sainte-Beuve also fifteen years older? “When I was a young man, I mingled great warmth of feeling and great enthusiasm in my paintings of poets, nor do I repent of it,” would answer Sainte-Beuve. “Today, I admit, I put in nothing, except a sincere intention to see and paint things as…they now appear to me to be.”

For Sainte-Beuve, literature was limited to the present, while the author lived himself or lived in the memories of the living. Sainte-Beuve believed this principle with such bravado that on his deathbed, he wondered whether literature would still be loved once he, Sainte-Beuve, was no longer alive to legitimize it.

**On the Path to Proust’s Philosophy of Communication: Contre Sainte-Beuve**

The structural and prosaic similarities of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* to *A la recherche* show that Proust had at least a dim vision of a much truncated *A la recherche* in mind during the writing of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. However, he had yet to find the right “tune” for his vision. If Sainte-Beuve was right that a writer was only the product of his cultural context, then Proust’s goal of recombining the raw materials of his life into a work of art that transcends time would

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589 Kilmartin, introduction, 11.
amount to no more than autobiography, a step back from even the poorly-received *Les plaisirs et les jours*. With *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust sought to debunk Sainte-Beuve so he could write *A la recherché* without being labeled a lunatic and dismissed before he started.

While he translated Ruskin from 1900 to 1905, Proust saw in Ruskin a fellow traveler in art across time, but by 1905 he had come to believe that what Ruskin called art was in fact idolatry. From 1905 on, Sainte-Beuve became for Proust the chief priest of a false view of art, which Proust had to challenge in order to prove himself as a truly original writer, not the dilettante of *Les plaisirs et les jours* or the lost soul of *Jean Santeuil*. Also, Proust saw Sainte-Beuve as a pathway to his own inchoate philosophy, which he knew in the abstract was antithetical to Sainte-Beuve’s, but had not yet fully fleshed out, while Sainte-Beuve was famous. *Contre Sainte-Beuve* was not only a bridge between the Ruskin translations and *A la recherché*, but also a bridge between Proust’s philosophy and the form of the novel. The abrupt, pained progression of de Fallois’s compilation of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, from Proust to Sainte-Beuve and back to Proust, mirrors Proust’s own oscillation between Sainte-Beuve’s philosophy and his own philosophy, and between the forms of literary criticism and fiction.

By early 1905, Proust had read enough Sainte-Beuve to fully understand his own philosophy. The oscillation between Sainte-Beuve and himself, and between literary criticism and fiction, had finally settled on himself and fiction, and he set to work on *A la recherché*. Many of the people, places and motifs in *A la recherché* were already present in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, some in draft form and others as mature themes. The theme of involuntary memory is present in the prologue and first chapters, which also feature the tea and dry toast (which becomes the famous madeleine), as well as the water-closet and orrisroot, Marcel’s quarrel with
his mother in Venice, and many other sights, smells and “street sounds”\textsuperscript{590} of the later Combray, Tansonville and Doncières. Many characters of \textit{A la recherche} also appear in \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve}, in some cases bloated with several different characters in \textit{A la recherché}, and in others as bare-boned imitations of their beefier successors. Some passages in \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} are broken up and redistributed throughout \textit{A la recherché}, and others are reassigned to different characters or scenes.

The theme of “pederasty,” which becomes a central focus of \textit{Sodome et Gomorrhe}, the fourth volume of \textit{A la recherché}, is only an underlying current of \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve}, although Marcel’s self-administered sexual arousal is much more explicit in \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} than \textit{A la recherché}. Proust read widely, and was himself a critic of literature. Whereas Sainte-Beuve focused on the writer himself, and from the writer’s life deduced the meaning of the writer’s work, Proust’s focus in criticism was always his own true self, and what truly original writing taught him about his own true self, even in his criticism of Sainte-Beuve. In \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve}, as well as in the “Portraits of Painters and Composers” in \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours} and the famous parodies of writers in \textit{Pastiches et mélanges}, Proust reads other writers on their own terms, with only the assumption that what he reads is not his to judge.

For Proust, the truly original writers – Balzac, Baudelaire, Stendhal, etc. – are able to translate their true, incommunicable selves as glimpsed in \textit{moments bienheureux} into the communicable form of a novel. As a critic, Proust is uninterested in the writer’s life, which reveals nothing of the writer’s true self (and in fact hides the true self). Instead, he reads the work of original writers for what the work can reveal to him about his own true self. Great writing calls the critic to look into the self, rather than outside the self to the life of the writer, which is itself extraneous to the writer’s own true self. The recognition of one’s own true self in the novel

\textsuperscript{590} Kilmartin, introduction, 11.
form of the writer’s true self is for Proust the essence of communication. Everything else is “words…and no more.”

In this chapter, I first outlined the origins of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, and situated the unfinished manuscript in relation to *Les plaisirs et les jours* on the path to Proust’s philosophy of communication in *A la recherché*. In *Du côté de chez Swann*, Proust ponders a sunbeam: “The dim freshness of my room was to the broad daylight of the street what the shadow is to the sunbeam, that is to say, equally luminous, and presented to my imagination the entire panorama of summer, which my senses, if I had been out walking, could have tasted and enjoyed in fragments only.” *Contre Sainte-Beuve* is a fragment of Proust’s philosophy of communication, the shadow to the sunbeam of *A la recherché*. Before moving to the next fragment of Proust’s philosophy of communication, a much longer, but still unfinished manuscript called *Jean Santeuil*, I leave the reader with the following four points from *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.

1. **In retrospect.** For thirty years after Proust’s death, Proust scholars tried to build a literary bridge between the amateurish *Les plaisirs et les jours*, published as a collection of short stories in 1896, and the mature and complete *A la recherché*, which appeared to have no precedent in Proust’s early original work. In the early 1950’s two manuscripts emerged from Proust’s papers, both with the same subject matter as *A la recherché*. One was a long and rough manuscript called *Jean Santeuil* (chapter 5), written and abandoned between 1900 and 1905, and the other a short, more complete work called *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, written in 1908 and abandoned in early 1909. *Contre Sainte-Beuve* consists of two seemingly unrelated parts: a first person narration that resembles *A la recherché* in both

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prose and premise, and a scathing critique of the famous French literary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve.

2. *Literary lineage.* Sainte-Beuve died two years before Proust was born, but Sainte-Beuve’s method of literary criticism was very much alive in literary circles during Proust’s lifetime. In many books and articles, Sainte-Beuve argued that a writer’s work was a product of the writer’s life, and to truly understand a writer’s work, the critic must first understand the writer’s life. Sainte-Beuve would talk to the writer’s friends, family and acquaintances, as well as other critics and readers of the writer’s work. The writer’s wife, finances, sexual orientation, favorite food, taste in women (or men) and weekend plans all revealed something to Sainte-Beuve about the writer’s work. A good or bad review from Sainte-Beuve could make or break a writer’s career, no matter how reputable the writer. Meanwhile, Proust was eager for recognition as a writer, but fearful that followers of Sainte-Beuve would dismiss his work as derivative of his own, admittedly unusual life.

3. *Creative imagination.* All of Proust’s work before *Contre Sainte-Beuve* was a struggle to strike the right balance between his own work and life. In both *Les plaisirs et les jours* and *Jean Santeuil*, Proust argued through his characters that the work of “truly original” writers (which Proust considered himself) is a product of not their outer lives but their inner visions and impressions. The raw materials of *Les plaisirs et les jours* and *Jean Santeuil* were undoubtedly personal, but Proust could not quite follow through on his own philosophy, choosing instead to outsource his first-hand impressions to third person characters in *Les plaisirs et les jours* and distance himself from his own work in the introduction to *Jean Santeuil*. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust took the final step toward A
la recherché in adopting the first-person narrative for the personal parts, but faltered again in jarringly juxtaposing the personal parts with critiques of Sainte-Beuve, as if Sainte-Beuve represented for Proust the final hurdle to the philosophy of communication of A la recherché.

4. *Soul of a critic.* The dichotomy of true self and superficial selves that runs through the whole of A la recherché is more explicit in *Contre Sainte-Beuve.* In *Contre Sainte-Beuve,* Proust argues against Sainte-Beuve that the conversational anecdotes on which Sainte-Beuve bases his literary judgments reveal nothing of the writer’s work. The real work of the critic is in recognizing one’s own true self in the work of a great writer, which expresses the true self of the writer. While Sainte-Beuve looked outward to the writer’s life in personal correspondence and dinner conversation, Proust embarked on an inner “pilgrimage of the heart” in search of his own true self in the work of the writer. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve,* Proust wrote down his impressions with the same imaginative energy as A la recherché, but could not break free of Sainte-Beuve and his misguided method. Guided only by the “voice of the heart,” Proust abandoned *Contre Sainte-Beuve* in 1909, and started immediately on A la recherché.

The pilgrimage of the heart begins at a fork. One path leads inward through rocky terrain to the true self, the other outward across flat land to other people. One the first path, one journeys alone, with only the company of the true self. On the second, one travels with an army of superficial selves, which each answer to the expectations of others. Sainte-Beuve chooses the second, more popular path. In the case of Chateaubriand, Sainte-Beuve accumulated enough second-hand conversation to paint Chateaubriand as both brilliant and dimwitted, so that whatever one thought of Chateaubriand, one could not question Sainte-Beuve.
In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, the two paths are irreconcilable, like the two ways of Swann and Guermantes for the young narrator of *Du cote de chez Swann*. Proust dramatized in *Du cote de chez Swann* his mistake in keeping the two paths of the pilgrimage of the heart apart in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. Proust started *Contre Sainte-Beuve* in 1908 for the sole purpose of combating what he saw as the unforgiveable sin of Sainte-Beuve, choosing superficial correspondence over true communication. By the time he abandoned *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, he still thought Sainte-Beuve was wrong, but the more mature Proust now saw in Sainte-Beuve the counterpart to his own one-sided philosophy. Proust started *Contre Sainte-Beuve* with a philosophy, and abandoned *Contre Sainte-Beuve* with a philosophy of communication.
Bibliography


PART III
Proust’s Performative Call to Communication in A la recherché

As early as 1896, Proust had in mind the conceptual background of A la recherché, but lacked the foreground methods for making his background vision into a novel. By 1910, Proust realized that to write the novel he had in mind, he must first eschew the foreground distractions of his life and commit fully to the background vision. Proust retired to his cork-lined bedroom and ended his life early to write A la recherché as his true, incommunicable self made communicable in art. As illustrated in the pages of A la recherché, Proust followed and became disillusioned with the false scents of love and society, before settling on art as the only proper medium for communicating his true self. The true self lies at the end of a “pilgrimage of the heart” into oneself, but for the artist reaching the true self is only half of the “journey through the wilderness.” Like an explorer in an uncharted land, the artist must then turn back, and translate what they saw in themselves into music (Vinteuil), or painting (Elstir), or literature (Bergotte), or acting (Berma), anything in which non-artists can recognize their own true selves. Therein lies the essence of communication.

A la recherché is the story of its own creation as a philosophy of communication. Proust moved from autobiography of his superficial selves in Les plaisirs et les jours, artificially squeezed into the novel form of Jean Santeuil, and directed at Sainte-Beuve in Contre Sainte-Beuve, to A la recherché as the true translation of Proust’s impressions into an artistic form capable of communicating his true self. Proust’s past life became the “raw materials” for his novel, not the finished product, as in Jean Santeuil, or means for rebutting Sainte-Beuve, as in

Contre Sainte-Beuve. Although Proust’s own life is clearly the inspiration of A la recherché, the novel differs from the pure description of autobiography and the pure invention of fiction in that A la recherché is the translation of Proust’s true self into communicable form, where instinct and philosophy converge with communication and the intellect. Even and especially with other people, Marcel was always alone as a spectator of his experience. The art of A la recherché was the only way for Marcel to overcome his existential isolation and communicate his true self.

In the final two chapters, I frame A la recherché as the climax of Proust’s philosophy of communication, into which he channels the lessons learned in Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve. In then argue that A la recherché represents Proust’s performative call to communication, wherein Proust answered his own call to converge philosophy and communication by withdrawing from the world of superficial communication and committing himself to the essence of communication in writing A la recherché. In his early work, Proust keeps separate the binaries of reality and appearance, general and particular, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude. In Les plaisirs et les jours, Proust falls firmly on the side of appearance, particular, climax and stability. The collection was ignored. In Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve, he switches to the side of reality, general, anti-climax and intermittence. Both books were abandoned. In A la recherché, Proust converges the binaries through the interplay of philosophy and communication. Neither philosophy nor communication nor either side of the binaries can alone capture the “all-powerful joy” of impressions. A la recherché breaks through the borders of consciousness and contingency to reveal the origins of present events and the meaning of past experiences. In the pages of A la recherché, appearance becomes reality, anti-climax becomes climax, general becomes particular, climax becomes anti-climax, intermittence becomes stability, and sociality becomes solitude. In
the sacrifice of Proust’s life to communication as defined by his philosophy, philosophy and communication converge as philosophy of communication.


A la recherché: Bridging the Binary of Philosophy and Communication

In the overture to Du côté de chez Swann, an unnamed narrator reads a book in bed. The narrator falls asleep still holding the book, and wakes up a half an hour later with the thought that it is time to fall asleep. While the narrator drifted between sleep and waking, sleep switched the scenery of the bedroom for that of the book. When the narrator wakes, he still sees the scene of the book, not the darkness that “lay like scales”\(^{595}\) upon his open eyes. It is midnight. The last light of the servants goes out, and the narrator slips back into the “insensibility”\(^{596}\) of the surrounding bedroom. Sleep confuses the coordinates of the waking world and surrounds the sleeper with shifting “gusts of memory.”\(^{597}\) Sleep stops the “order of the heavenly bodies”\(^{598}\) and sends the sleeper careening through the cosmos with the other objects in the room. Random stages of the sleeper’s life flash in a “momentary glimmer of consciousness,”\(^{599}\) then dissipate in the darkness of the past. The waking world tries to tie down time with the “chain of the hours,”\(^{600}\) but sleep lifts the linearity of seconds, minutes, hours and days and drops them on the disoriented sleeper, who tries in vain to situate the “sequence of the years”\(^{601}\) in the world of dreams.

Proust defines human experience as fragmentation, more like the world of dreams than the world of waking. In the first chapter, I outlined Proust’s philosophy of communication in terms of fragmentation through five binaries: (1) appearance and reality, (2) particular and general, (3) anti-climax and climax, (4) stability and intermittence and (5) sociality and solitude. What appears as reality in Proust’s universe is actually appearance, which hides the essence of

\(^{596}\) Proust, Swann’s Way, 3.
\(^{597}\) Proust, Swann’s Way, 7.
\(^{598}\) Proust, Swann’s Way, 4.
\(^{599}\) Proust, Swann’s Way, 2.
\(^{600}\) Proust, Swann’s Way, 4.
\(^{601}\) Proust, Swann’s Way, 4.
others and objects behind a border of stability. Stability is an illusion that makes tolerable the intermittence of human experience. The climactic promise of the past and future, like the object of one’s unrequited love, is appealing only until the future becomes present and one’s love is requited. Love is always one-sided; as soon as love is returned with equal robustness, it is no longer love but habit. In his early work, Proust was caught in a kind of purgatory between the two sides of the binaries. He was in one-sided love with the right side of the binaries but knowingly relied on the left side as well. After Les plaisirs et les jours, which fell firmly on the left side of the binaries, Proust tried in vain to capture in writing the right side while living his life from the left side.

All of Proust’s youthful works were in some way failed attempts to write A la recherché. In this chapter, I first frame A la recherché as the novel form of Proust’s wholistic vision, of which the boyish Les plaisirs et les jours, youthful Jean Santeuil and misguided Contre Sainte-Beuve feature only fragments. I then return to the five binaries outlined in the first chapter: (1) appearance and reality, (2) particular and general, (3) anti-climax and climax, (4) stability and intermittence and (5) sociality and solitude. Proust established the binaries of appearance and reality, particular and general, anti-climax and climax, stability and intermittence and sociality and solitude early in A la recherché with the two, mutually exclusive ways of Swann and Guermantes in the overture to Du côté de chez Swann. The binaries were implicit in Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve, but in his youth Proust saw the two sides of the binaries as two flanks of an “impassable river.” When Proust tried to jump from the left side of the right in Jean Santeuil, and from the right to the left in Contre Sainte-Beuve, he fell on his face somewhere in the middle and abandoned both books. At the end of A la recherché, Proust

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converged the two ways of Swann and Guermantes in the character of Mlle. Saint-Loup, whose blood contains in a single character the chromosomes of appearance and reality, particular and general, anti-climax and climax, stability and intermittence and sociality and solitude. In A la recherché, Proust said what was left unsaid in Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve, that communication is the key to his philosophy.

**Origins of A la recherché**

After abandoning Contre Sainte-Beuve sometime in 1909, Proust began what he though would be a 1,200 page novel, broken into two parts of 650 pages each. The manuscript was rejected several times before the publisher Grasset agreed to publish one volume at Proust’s expense, then the second depending on the performance of the first. Du côté de chez Swann, the first volume of A la recherché, was released to mixed reviews in 1913, shortly before the outbreak of the First World War. Critics of Du côté de chez Swann complimented Proust’s prose but questioned his vision, which Proust defended in many articles and interviews. Of all the volumes of A la recherché, Du côté de chez Swann featured the most complete narrative from beginning to end, but after the publication of Du côté de chez Swann, Proust worked hard to educate his readers that the novel was not a complete and self-sufficient novel, but the first fragment of a larger vision. Nevertheless, many readers do not make it past the first volume of A la recherché, either because they love Du côté de chez Swann and feel that it cannot possibly be matched, even by Proust, or hate the novel and agree with a young American girl who, after reading Du côté de chez Swann, told Proust not to be a poseur: “Tell me in two lines what you wished to say.”

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The publication of the second volume was delayed by war, during which Proust expanded the novel to a cumbersome three thousand pages and one million words plus. The second volume was published under the title of À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs (English: In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower, or Within a Budding Grove), in reference to the little band at Balbec. The novel won the prestigious Goncourt Prize for French literature in 1919, and made Marcel Proust a household name. Proust had finally won the fame he fancied, but there were five volumes left to publish, and Proust was near death. He edited furiously from his bedroom, and in 1920 and 1921 published in four volumes what became the third and fourth volumes of A la recherché: Le côté de Guermantes (English: Guermantes Way) and Sodome et Gomorrhe (English: Sodom and Gomorrah, or Cities of the Plain) which treats in depth the theme of homosexuality left out of Jean Santeuil. Proust died in November 1922, before he could complete the fifth (Albertine disparue [English: Albertine Gone or The Fugitive]) and sixth (Le Temps retrouvé [English: Time Regained]) volumes of A la recherché, which were published in 1925 and 1927 under the posthumous editorship of Jacques Rivière and Proust’s brother, Robert.

In both original French and English translation, A la recherché has gained a reputation as a difficult and interminable novel. The novel is more famous than read and, given the reputation of A la recherché, Proust’s early work is read mostly by scholars and specialists. Between the publication of Du côté de chez Swann in 1913 and the posthumous publication of Le Temps retrouvé in 1927, readers and critics of Proust judged his whole vision based on their reading of one volume, two at the most. Early critics of A la recherché called the novel gloomy, and Proust’s writing clumsy and careless. Some critics pigeonholed Proust into the pretentious circles of Parisian high culture. Others argued that Proust hypnotized readers with his writing to compensate for his physical sickliness.

605 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 10.
The most common complaint among critics is that Proust values artistic creation over individual identity, but such a complaint misunderstands the role of communication in *A la recherche*. For Proust, identity assumes its individuality through communication as art. The famous themes of love and lust, habit and homosexuality exist only in the mind, where they are powerless against the snobbery and selfishness of superficial communication. Since abandoning *Jean Santeuil* in 1905, Proust had tried and failed to express his true self without communicating. By 1910, Proust had withdrawn from the world of superficial communication, and sacrificed himself to the essence of communication by converging philosophy and communication in the novel form of *A la recherche*. In the next section, I outlined in six parts the six volumes of *A la recherche*.

**The Plot of *A la recherché***

*A la recherché* features five major settings. The first is Combray, near present day Chartres, where Marcel walks the Ways of Swann and Guermantes from the garden of his Aunt Léonie. The second is Paris, where Marcel lives with his parents near the Champs-Elysées, and frequents the salons of the Duc and Duchess de Guermantes and other prominent families. The third is Balbec, where Marcel meets Albertine and the “little band” on the beach and visits the Verdurins at La Raspelière. The fourth is Doncières, where Marcel meets Robert de Saint-Loup at the military barracks of the French army. The fifth and final setting is Venice, to which the young Marcel plans and cancels a trip, and where the older Marcel visits with his mother. The names of these settings drive the otherwise uneventful plot of *A la recherché*. Early in *A la recherché*, the young Marcel injects into the name Guermantes all of the intrigue and majesty of the Middle Ages. At the end of *A la recherché*, the “gods and goddesses” of the Guermantes

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family are wrinkled and unrecognizable. In time, names become nametags, and all of the intrigue once chrystallyzed in the name Guermantes unravel from the name and reassume the form of isolated fragments. The same names that had held for the narrator the promise of social advancement became for Marcel mere nametags for recognizing the wrinkled faces of people past their primes. Proust stops there in Jean Santeuil and changes the subject in Contre Sainte-Beuve, but at the end of A la recherché he introduces involuntary memory as the only defense against time.

*The Tea and Madeleine*

A la recherché begins with such an instance of involuntary memory in the bedroom of an unnamed narrator. The narrator wakes up. The heavenly bodies resume their orbits and his intellect slowly reorders the hours and years into present and past. The narrator was now fully awake, but sleep had set his memory in motion. He recalled the days between Doncières and Paris and vacations in Venice and Balbec, before focusing on the “fixed point” of his sleepless existence: his childhood bedroom at Combray. The bedroom at Combray was a source of endless agony because every night he had to leave his mother and grandmother and face death alone in the darkness of the bedroom. To ease his agony on “abnormally wretched nights,” the narrator was given a magic lantern, which projected medieval myths in bright colors on the opaque walls of the bedroom. Across the wall and window, Golo approached half of Geneviève’s castle, which was cut off by the curved line of the lantern. The doorknob and window-curtains blocked his way, but Golo absorbed every obstacle into the “supernatural substance” of his body, which distended with the doorknob and deflated in the folds of the curtains. But the lantern only increased the narrator’s agony.

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The colorful projections of the magic lantern certainly had charm, but the “mystery and beauty”\textsuperscript{610} of Golo and Geneviève upset the habit-induced equilibrium of the bedroom. At least without the magic lantern the room was familiar to the narrator. With the magic lantern, the narrator had to not only “dig his own grave”\textsuperscript{611} alone in the darkness, but also defend Geneviève from the unrelenting Golo. As the narrator dined with his family in the courtyard of the country home in Combray, the visitor bell rang. It was Charles Swann, a wealthy stockbroker’s son whose high society connections were unknown to the narrator’s family. The narrator hated visitors, because it meant another night without a goodnight kiss from his mother, who would set him up to bed and stay downstairs with the guests. The narrator waited in vain for a kiss in the courtyard, but his father sent him to bed and he climbed the staircase to his bedroom. With every step, the narrator defied his heart’s desire to kiss his mother.

The smell of the staircase spiraled up the narrator’s nostrils and flooded his system with sorrow. At the top of the staircase he looked down at his mother, but she was preoccupied. Determined to forget his mother and fall asleep, he slipped on the “shroud”\textsuperscript{612} of his nightshirt and got into the “grave”\textsuperscript{613} of his bed. But how could he sleep? His mother was on the other side of a “terrifying abyss that yawned at my feet,”\textsuperscript{614} and worse, she did not care. He had to reach his mother somehow, to show her the incommunicable anguish she was causing her only son. He resolved to write a note to his mother, begging her to come to his bedroom. The butler promised to deliver the note after the first course was served. The note was not yet delivered, but the butler’s promise freed the “concealing pleasures”\textsuperscript{615} from the finger-bowls of ice and flooded the narrator with relief and anticipation. The narrator waited, but his mother never came. The relief

\begin{footnotes}
\item[610] Proust, Swann’s Way, 11.
\item[611] Proust, Swann’s Way, 37.
\item[612] Proust, Swann’s Way, 37.
\item[613] Proust, Swann’s Way, 37.
\item[614] Proust, Swann’s Way, 31.
\item[615] Proust, Swann’s Way, 39.
\end{footnotes}
brought on the butler’s promise now prevented him from sleeping, so he resolved to kiss his mother at all costs.

He opened the window, and saw only shadows in the moonlight, moving slowly in the delicate wind. A leaf quivered, but the scene of the courtyard stayed frozen in the moonlight. He would rather hurl himself from the window then wait until morning for his mother’s kiss. Finally Swann left, and his mother climbed the staircase to close her window. With “terror and joy” he threw himself upon his mother, who angrily ordered him back to bed. The light from his father’s candle was crawling up the staircase. If he saw his boy out of bed, the narrator would never get another goodnight kiss. But please, Mamma, please kiss me goodnight! Too late, his father appeared in the doorway like Abraham about to kill Isaac. The narrator held back his sobs and waited for his punishment, but his father told his wife to spend the night with the boy. When he was alone with his mother, the narrator let loose his sobs. His mother was now dead and the staircase demolished, but the sound of his childhood sobs still echoed in his adult heart. In the country home at Combray, the narrator had once tasted tea on a moist madeleine. Many years later when the memories of Combray were faded and forgotten, his mother offered him tea and a madeleine, shaped like a scallop shell. As soon as the tea touched his lips, he was filled with the “precious essence” of his former self at Combray, facing death alone in the darkness as his mother laughed in the moonlight. He dipped the madeleine in the tea a second time, but nothing happened. The “exquisite pleasure” he felt from the madeleine was not in the madeleine, but in himself. He would have to search the dark depths of himself to bring to light his former life at Combray.

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616 Proust, Swann’s Way, 38.
617 Proust, Swann’s Way, 60.
618 Proust, Swann’s Way, 60.
The garden door of the country home at Combray opened to two paths: Guermantes Way and Swann’s Way, or Méséglise Way. Swann’s Way passed along the lush plains of Méséglise to the Swann estate at Tansonville, where Swann lived with his wife Odette and daughter Gilberte. The trail to Tansonville was lined with a hedgerow of hawthorns. Along the sides of the trail the hawthorns formed a “series of chapels” whose walls caught the overflow of hawthorns heaped on their altars. The “holiday attire” of the hawthorns tinged the yellow light of the sun with the white and pink of their blossoms. The narrator made a screen with his hands to fix the fragrance of the hawthorns in his fingers, but his feeling of intense pleasure would not leave the hawthorns for himself. On summer days the narrator would walk with his family past the Swann estate at Tansonville, but only when his wife was away from home. Many years before, Swann was a sought-after bachelor and a regular at the most prestigious salons in Paris.

Among his many friends were the Prince of Wales and Duc d’Orléans, as well as the Duc and Duchess de Guermantes and the Baron de Charlus. Swann had many suitors, but settled on a vulgar prostitute named Odette de Crécy. Odette was unattractive in person, but in Swann’s imagination she was Beauty personified. He turned down many more attractive and reputable women and slowly became obsessed with Odette, who did not feel the same way about Swann. Swann would hide behind houses and predict her passing, then arrange an “accidental” meeting at her supposed destination. He went to only one restaurant because it bore the same name as her street, and imagined Odette with other men as he ate. Swann was crippled by jealousy and prayed for peace in his heart, but peace was not precipitous for his love, and love was better than indifference. As soon as the imagined ideal of Odette was replaced by the real-life Odette,
Swann would cease to care about her comings and goings, and his love would be lost to lifeless indifference.

Sometimes Odette would send Swann a letter of love, and his jealousy would ebb enough to sleep. On these nights, the ugliness of Odette overcame Swann’s ideal until the morning light made murky her flaws and restored the perfection of her imagined face. But if Swann dreamed of Odette with another man, his jealousy would again drown his heart and be drained as tears. Swann could do nothing but move aside his monocle and wipe his wet eyes. Odette withdrew and Swann pursued. He sacrificed his own high society friends for the lower-class salon of the Verdurins, who dismissed Swann as smart and distinguished, and thus, a “bore.” Madame Verdurin would look down on her “faithful” from a “high seat, like a cage-bird” and control their every move. Swann had no respect for the Verdurins because their blood was not royal, but still joined the “little nucleus” in pursuit of Odette, who would openly flirt with other men.

At one such party hosted by the Verdurins, Swann heard a sonata played on a piano and violin. The composition combined the “compact and commanding” chorus of the violin with the major, “plashing waves” of the piano, which charmed and made minor the “mass” of the violin. For a moment, Swann forgot Odette and opened his soul to the mysteries of the music, but then the moment was over, and Swann’s soul settled back on Odette. Later Swann had a dream in which Odette’s face was distorted. Upon waking, he realized that her face was distorted only in relation to his own imagined ideal of Odette. The face so distorted in the dream was Odette’s

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622 Proust, Swann’s Way, 268.
623 Proust, Swann’s Way, 290.
624 Proust, Swann’s Way, 265.
625 Proust, Swann’s Way, 294.
626 Proust, Swann’s Way, 295.
627 Proust, Swann’s Way, 295.
actual face. With his “old, intermittent caddishness,” Swann asked himself how he could have loved a woman who wasn’t even his type.

*Guermantes Way*

When he walked the Guermantes Way as a boy, Marcel thought he would never meet the Duchess de Guermantes, his greatest hope, or go to bed without a goodnight kiss, his greatest fear. He would rather die than sleep without a kiss or live without knowing the Duchess de Guermantes. But death was too distant for the young Marcel, who thought death was no different than sleep without a kiss. He still died every night, but his mother’s kiss marked him for salvation at sunrise. Now his mother was dead, and he no longer missed her. He knew the Duchess de Guermantes, and no longer wanted to see her. In Time he had conquered his greatest fears and hopes, all except one: becoming a writer. As a young man Marcel saw in the steeples at Martinville something intoxicating and incommunicable, which he wrote down on a bumpy carriage ride in the country outside Combray.

There were three steeples, which remained motionless on the horizon no matter how fast the carriage moved. The carriage left behind one of the three steeples and continued on toward the other two. The sun smiled on their “sloping sides,” which sank into the horizon as the carriage passed, then rose up right in front of the carriage, with “barely time to stop.” The carriage continued to Combray, and the two, then three steeples waved farewell from farther and farther away, like “three flowers painted upon the sky,” until three steeples became two, and two became one “dusky shape” in the dark. Marcel wanted to be a writer so he could capture in a time capsule the feeling of timelessness from the steeples at Martinville. On the carriage he

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thought the feeling was “analogous to a pretty phrase,” and all he had to do was make the phrase as objectively pretty as the steeples. But Marcel had no confidence in his writing, especially after his father ridiculed his writing and the diplomat M. de Norpois suggested another profession.

For the young Marcel writing was a mere means to the more meaningful end of making permanent the feeling from the steeples. The grotesque faces of the fabourg Saint-Guermantes revealed to Marcel the source of his happiness in front of the Martinville steeples. The happiness was in seeing the timeless reality behind the present appearance of the steeples, which put Marcel in touch with his true self, not anything inherent in the steeples. The young Marcel mistakenly assumed that the feeling from the Martinville steeples was caused by the steeples themselves, rather than anything within himself. The “pretty phrases” he wrote on the carriage could not capture the beauty of the steeples because the beauty was not in the steeples, but in his recognition of his true self in the steeples. The feeling was not “analogous to a pretty phrase” because it had no referent for analogy other than Marcel himself. The pretty phrases were descriptive of only the appearance of the steeples, which would be unrecognizably grotesque in a few generations, like the faces of the fauborg Saint-Guermantes.

*Albertine’s Kiss*

Later Marcel becomes acquainted with a “little band” of five or six women, who descend upon the beach at Balbec like a “flock of gulls” from “God knows where.” Marcel watches as they “waltz” through the crowd on the beach unconcerned with who they step on. The girls felt no fellowship with anyone else but the “little band.” The mass of girls kicked,

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635 Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 503.
jumped and pushed through all the people in its path. One day at the beach a woman sat her elderly and invalid husband in a deck chair on a shaded bandstand, safe from the wind and sun. While the woman went to buy a newspaper for her husband, the oldest of the girls jumped over the elderly man from the bandstand, knocking off his hat and narrowly missing his head. The other girls laughed. Their adolescent faces were still unfixed by age, and reserved for Marcel the promise of future beauty. Each of the girls was beautiful, but Marcel saw them as a single mass of hands and feet and floating eyes which he could not fit to any one face. A pair of green eyes would emerge from a “pallid oval face,”\textsuperscript{637} then evaporate back into the mass. Marcel saw more and more of the mass of girls, and one pair of “obstinate and mocking eyes”\textsuperscript{638} floated free from the rest. Her name was Albertine Simonet. Marcel was disappointed to learn that she was the niece of Mme. Bontemps, a friend of the Verdurins, and not a peasant girl as he had thought. Albertine was also rumored to have homosexual relations with another girl named Andrée, but Marcel dismissed them as unfounded. Marcel’s love for Albertine injected her colorless cheeks with a “coursing stream of blood,”\textsuperscript{639} which made meaningful for Marcel the most mundane details of their daily lives together at Balbec. Marcel and Albertine played games and walked through the woods around Balbec, but always with the other girls. The early relationship between Marcel and Albertine parallel’s Swann’s courtship of Odette. From one furtive glance, Marcel formed an imaginary ideal of this “perfectly ordinary girl”\textsuperscript{640} that gave to her average features the “fluid painting of certain Primitives.”\textsuperscript{641}

Marcel longed to be alone with Albertine and kiss the pale cheeks that turned pink in his presence. One night Albertine invited Marcel to her room “so that we can have a nice long time

\textsuperscript{637} Proust, \textit{Within a Budding Grove}, 189.
\textsuperscript{638} Proust, \textit{Within a Budding Grove}, 427.
\textsuperscript{639} Proust, \textit{Within a Budding Grove}, 319.
\textsuperscript{640} Proust, \textit{Within a Budding Grove}, 563.
\textsuperscript{641} Proust, \textit{Within a Budding Grove}, 662.
together.”
He had not yet seen her, or even accepted the invitation, but the invitation itself brought Albertine’s body into phase with Marcel’s ideal. With Albertine’s words, Marcel had wedged himself between Albertine and her aunt and between Albertine and Andrée, so that when Albertine was with either her aunt or Andrée, she would be thinking of Marcel. The evening had seemed empty, with no plans or promise, but now the hotel at Balbec held all of Marcel’s happiness in spending this night and the rest of his life with Albertine. Every meaningless movement Marcel made – calling the lift-boy, sitting down in the lift, climbing the steps to Albertine’s room – brought him closer to the “precious substance” of Albertine’s kiss.

He found Albertine in bed, wearing a white nightshirt that exaggerated the pinkness of her cheeks. At once she was still, then swept away by a “vertiginous whirlwind,” like a sculpture by Michaelangelo. Just as the pink and white hawthorns on the trail to Tansonville embodied all the promise of Marcel’s prepubescent affection for Gilberte, Albertine’s white dress and pink cheeks justified Marcel’s obsessive infatuation with Albertine, which would soon be consummated by her kiss. He bent down to kiss Albertine. As a young man, Marcel had learned to see his own life in light of a vast cosmos that did not care about his trivial concerns. But now the sea and the sky and the whole cosmos seemed small and insignificant, “less than a featherweight on my eyeballs” compared to Albertine’s coming kiss, which weighed more than “all the mountains of the world.” The measured movement of the tides held nothing of the “immense aspiration” of Marcel’s breathing.

The whole horizon outside Albertine’s window could not access the circumference of Marcel’s vision, which Albertine filled completely from the front and peripheries. In Albertine’s

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642 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 698.
643 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 699.
644 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 699.
645 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 699.
646 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 699.
647 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 699.
room death was meaningless to Marcel. If a philosopher told him that he would one day die, and be survived by the sea outside Albertine’s window, to which he was no more than a “grain of dust,” Marcel would have laughed and turned his attention back to Albertine, for the sea was simply the saliva of her kiss. Albertine resisted the kiss, and threatened to ring the bell. To make room for Albertine in himself, Marcel packed away the sea and sky and flung the cosmos in a corner. Albertine would never invite him alone to her room and hide him from her aunt, then refuse him a kiss. He was about to taste the forbidden fruit of her cheeks, and warm himself by the “inner flame” of her suppressed desire. He bent down closer to her pulsating cheek, but before he could kiss her, Albertine rang the bell and ran from the room.

_The Vice of Homosexuality_

Marcel watched from a window while the Baron de Charlus walked across the courtyard of the Hotel de Guermantes, his eyes half-shut to keep out the sun. Marcel had never seen the Baron without a mask of makeup and haughty masculinity, but in the supposed secrecy of the courtyard, the Baron “momentarily assumed the features, the expression, the smile” of a woman. The Baron makes it halfway across the courtyard when he sees tailor Jupien. Both the Baron and Jupien stop and study the other. The Baron “opened wide his half-shut eyes” and fixed them on Jupien, who returned his gaze with a “look of wonderment.” The Baron recovered quickly, and looked off disinterestedly into the distance to both disguise his initial impression of Jupien and to show Jupien the beauty of his eyes in a profile framed by the sun.

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648 Proust, _Within a Budding Grove_, 699.
650 Proust, _Sodom and Gomorrah_, 5.
651 Proust, _Sodom and Gomorrah_, 5.
While the Baron reassumed his familiar “fatuous air”\textsuperscript{652} of masculinity, Jupien put his hand on his hip and arched his back and buttocks in effeminate courtship.

The Baron divverted his eyes, then ogled Jupien again with an “inattentive fixity of gaze,”\textsuperscript{653} as if investing their “reciprocal glances”\textsuperscript{654} with something more sinister. Like a pair of birds the male Baron and female Jupien danced with their glances. The Baron pursued Jupien and Jupied pulled back, content with “preening her feathers.”\textsuperscript{655} When Jupien felt that the Baron’s desire matched his feigned indifference, he left the courtyard through the carriage gate. With backward glances over both shoulders, the Baron followed Jupien into the street. Jupien soon returned, followed by the Baron, and both entered the tailor’s shop. Marcel snuck around the perimeter of the courtyard and into Jupien’s shop, where he heard groaning and grunting and other violent and “inarticulate sounds,”\textsuperscript{656} as if “one person was slitting another’s throat within a few feet”\textsuperscript{657} of him. After a half an hour the sounds stopped, and the men emerged from the shop.

For the first time Marcel considered that the ageing Baron and the much younger Jupien might be (“ineptly termed”\textsuperscript{658}) homosexuals, and that what he is watching from the window is the “miraculous possibility”\textsuperscript{659} that the Baron has found in Jupien a fellow homosexual who enjoys exclusively the “sensual pleasure”\textsuperscript{660} of older men. Marcel reflects on the many conditions that must be met before the Baron can satisfy his sexual needs, a task comparatively easy for the many more heterosexuals. Like a plant that remains sterile unless by long odds a bee or bird carries its pollen to another plant, the Baron must go unsatisfied, unless by “providential

\textsuperscript{652} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 5.
\textsuperscript{653} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 7.
\textsuperscript{654} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 6.
\textsuperscript{655} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 7.
\textsuperscript{656} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 10.
\textsuperscript{657} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 10.
\textsuperscript{658} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 8.
\textsuperscript{659} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 8.
\textsuperscript{660} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 8.
chance he finds another homosexual man who is also interested in older men and willing to keep their relationship a secret. The Baron’s homosexuality explains much of his strange behavior toward Marcel, who could now see nothing else but the Baron’s “vice.”

For Proust, because there are fewer homosexuals (though more than one might think), and even fewer who would be interested in men like the Baron, the Baron must forever settle for partial fulfillment of his pleasures. However, homosexuals occupy posts in every profession, and when they are turned down, it is most likely the doing of other homosexuals who condemn homosexuality to hamstring their own competition. The Baron had looked to Marcel like a woman because he was a woman. The Baron only maintained the appearance of a man because his “vice” was punishable by law and shameful by psychological convention, but at heart he was a woman. Inverted homosexuals like the Baron perjure themselves with every word and lie with every look at a woman.

If they are Christians, homosexuals must renounce their “very life” at the gates of heaven, or else suffer the fires of hell for seeking the same satisfaction of their heterosexual neighbors. Homosexuals have no friends because their friendships are founded on lies, and no mothers because they must conceal from their mothers their true natures until they “close her dying eyes.” As a woman, a homosexual man is often attracted to heterosexual men, who by their very nature as men at heart and heterosexuals by orientation, are incapable of loving a homosexual man. Whereas the heterosexual risks only rejection, and at worst humiliation in pursuit of women, the homosexual risks ruination of his entire life with every look at another man. Just as judges pardon Jews for racial predestination, or Christians for original sin, even

661 Proust, Sodom and Gomorrha, 8.
662 Proust, Sodom and Gomorrha, 20.
663 Proust, Sodom and Gomorrha, 17.
664 Proust, Sodom and Gomorrha, 17.
sympathetic spirits” attribute the vice of homosexuality to superficial attraction to other men, rather than the inner temperament of a woman. 

Time Regained

Time spins a web of interconnected memories that grows thicker and more unrecognizably intricate with each passing year. However, the passage of time also develops one’s sense for recognizing the “communicating links” of the web and unraveling their interconnections. All around us are things and people imbued by the imagination with “emotional significance,” but time strips things of their significance and transforms people into objects for “industrial use.” As a boy Marcel had contemplated with a “palpitating heart” the timetable for the 1:22 train to Balbec. The letters B-a-l-b-e-c and numbers 1:22 represented for the young Marcel a “delectable notch, a mysterious mark” on the path of the train. He had never been to Balbec, but he knew that the 1:22 train would bring him back to Balbec while the “morning twilight was rising over the furious sea.” He would wait out the worst of the storm in a “Persian-style church,” from “whose towers the seabirds would shriek.”

When Marcel finally made it to Balbec, there was no storm or shrieking seabirds, only a crumbling church squeezed between a bank and a bakery. Later Marcel rode the “little train” with the Verdurin “faithful” from Balbec to Douville and La Raspelière, then watched the train’s “sluggish plume of smoke” climb the rest of the Criquetot cliffs. Each stop on the little train restored an underwhelming reality to the imagined majesty of the place itself. The automobile

665 Proust, Sodom and Gomorrah, 17.
667 Proust, Swann’s Way, 549.
668 Proust, Swann’s Way, 549.
669 Proust, Swann’s Way, 549.
670 Proust, Swann’s Way, 549.
671 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 549.
672 Proust, Sodom and Gomorrah, 294.
wasted what little poetry of the place was left by the train, because unlike the train, the automobile could approach the place from a country road or side street where it least expected a visitor. For the old man Marcel, the winding route of the train was now a web of stale memories, which all led to the same place: death. To understand a relationship between two individuals at any one time, one must first review all the settings of one’s own life, “one after another,” until all the links of the web are deep and multi-dimensional enough to reflect a solid and singular relationship.

The reality of a single relationship is only revealed in relation to all other relationships, in three dimensions rather than two. Time had made multivariate what seemed to the young Marcel like a simple series of cause and effect relationships. This new, “three-dimensional psychology” not only revealed to Marcel more links in the web of memories, but also released from the memories their former beauty and poetry lost to Time. Life is lived in time, so the conscious memory can make present the past only as the past was when itself was the present. Whereas conscious memory performs a simple switch between the two dimensions of past and present, Marcel’s new method of “passing in review, one after another, the most different settings of our life,” adds to the simple series of past and present the third dimension of time. Rather than substitute the past for the present like conscious memory, Time brings past and present into phase to disclose the poetry of the past as livable again in the present. Marcel had beaten Time on Time’s terms. In each setting of his life – Combray, Paris, Balbec – Marcel unraveled the interconnections that constituted himself at each place and time.

Time had long since drained the poetry from these places, but by contemplating each place as lived in Time, Marcel could resurrect what gave the places their poetry: the split-second

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impressions that filled Marcel with the sublime feeling of timelessness. Marcel had been single-mindedly focused on the present at each place – the goodnight kiss at Combray, the Guermantes in Paris, the little band at Balbec – without situating the present in relation to past or future. Later Marcel’s conscious memory could remember the places, but none of their poetry. Only with a sense of the whole, interconnected web of his life could Marcel not just remember, but recreate and relive the poetry of the past. It had taken his whole life, but Marcel had finally defeated Time. He was finally in touch with the poetry of his past, but he still had to unwind the web of memories and recollect them into a novel before Time could kill him. Marcel returned to his bedroom and set to work on *A la recherche du temps perdu.*

**The Convergence of Philosophy and Communication in *A la recherché***

In *A la recherché,* Proust resolves the five binaries established in Chapter 1: (1) appearance and reality, (2) particular and general, (3) anti-climax and climax, (4) stability and intermittence and (5) sociality and solitude. In his early work, Proust kept the binaries apart. In this section, I frame *A la recherché* as the convergence of these five binaries under the edifice of philosophy of communication.

**Appearance and Reality**

Proust establishes the problematic of appearance and reality in *Les plaisirs et les jours,* *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve,* but with no intention of resolving the problematic. Proust keeps separate and opposed appearance and reality in his early work because he had not yet discovered how to converge the two realms in a way both consistent with his philosophy and compatible with the novel form. In all his writing from *Les plaisirs et les jours* through *A la recherché,* Proust rejects the materialism that dominated his historical moment in favor of a more subjective idealism, in which reality exists only in the minds of perceivers, rather than as a
knowable object separate from a given subject. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust bounced back and forth between his own immature idealism and the determinative method of Sainte-Beuve. When he convinced himself that his idealist philosophy could work as a novel, he abandoned *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and started *A la recherché*. In *A la recherché*, Proust again oscillates between the two opposing realms of reality and the appearance, but unlike in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, where Proust returns again and again to the real-world referent of Sainte-Beuve as a justification for his purely idealist vision, in *A la recherché* Proust forgoes the forced juxtaposition of Sainte-Beuve’s method and his own imagination.

What the young Proust calls reality (as opposed to the “pure invention”\(^{676}\) of the imagination) the older Proust calls appearance (as opposed to the reality revealed through the imagination) With the exception of recurring allusions to historical events (e.g., the Dreyfus Affair), which serve to reveal the states of mind of the characters rather than comment on the events themselves, the only real-world referent of *A la recherché* is Proust’s own past as preserved in impressions. The only way into the reality of the past is through the imagination. In *A la recherché* as in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust retains the realms of reality and imagination as epistemological entrances into the past, but in *A la recherché* both realms exist only within Proust himself. One’s conscious memory recalls only fragmented appearances of the past. The rest of the reality of the past is absorbed into everyday objects in the realm of reality, then revealed through impressions in the realm of the imagination.

In *A la recherché*, Proust retired to his cork-lined bedroom and absorbed the outside world into himself as his own personal reservoir of raw reality, accessible only to the imagination. Like C., the contrived author of *Jean Santeuil* who has “no gift for invention,”\(^{677}\)

the narrator of *A la recherché* relies on reality in his role as narrator. With *Jean Santeuil*, however, Proust abandoned the book before he could reconcile C.’s reliance on reality with his philosophical position that reality is unreliable because reality is just appearance, unless it is revealed through the imagination. By attributing the book to the fictional writer C., Proust undermined his own idealist philosophy and remained reliant on a reality in which he did not believe. The failure of *Jean Santeuil* caused Proust to question the compatibility of his own idealist philosophy with the form of the novel, and whether reality and the imagination could coexist within a single novel.

Proust would make explicit the realms of reality and the imagination in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, but the clumsy composition of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* overcompensated for reality by using Sainte-Beuve as a referent in reality, then critiquing Sainte-Beuve on Sainte-Beuve’s terms, not his own. This was a strength of Proust the literary critic, but a weakness of Proust the novelist trying to reconcile reality with the imagination. With *Jean Santeuil*, Proust mixed up reality and the imagination to the point where each became indistinguishable from the other, and he could not tear them apart. With *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust separated reality and the imagination, then tried to stuff them back together. In both *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust was working with fragments, and so produced fragments. In *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust tried and failed to fit together the incompatible pieces of reality and the imagination. Even if the pieces did fit it would not have mattered, since Proust did not yet have the rest of the puzzle.

Proust started *A la recherché* with the fragments of reality and the imagination left over from *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. The materialism most prevalent in Proust’s moment understood reality as objective, knowable and external to the self. Because the
subjective imagination distorts and perverts objective reality, say the materialists, the imagination must be neutralized by the scientific method before objective truth-claims can be made about reality. Proust’s idealist philosophy is consistent with materialism insofar as Proust keeps separate reality and the imagination, but in Proust’s philosophy reality is the obstacle to truth, not the imagination. Proust understands the nature of reality in much the same way he understands the social world. For Proust, we only understand people we do not care about. As soon as another person becomes the object of one’s attention or interest, one’s desires and expectations distort and elongate the other person’s personality in the image of themselves. In this case one knows not the other person, but an ideal form of the other person created by one’s interests and desires. Also, since one does not care to know another person in whom one is not interested, one never really knows another person, unless one receives an involuntary impression of another person who was not an object of conscious interest at the time of the impression – Likewise with reality.

As soon as reality becomes an object of attention, it is distorted beyond recognition by one’s desires. If any aspect of reality that is not an object of attention is not worth knowing or, for the materialists, not real, then for Proust we have no reliable means for determining reality, except through impressions. For Proust, reality exists not as anything outside oneself, but in the memories and sensations scattered throughout one’s lifeworld. Conscious memory recalls only fragments of the past tied to one particular time, what come to be called appearances in *A la recherché*. In Proust’s philosophy the reality of the past is stored in precisely those objects that escape one’s attention – the sound of a spoon, the smell of a staircase, the taste of tea and toast. Proust cannot make the past accessible to conscious memory because his philosophy assumes
that as soon as the past becomes archaeological object of one’s conscious memory, it is immediately distorted by one’s desires.

Proust hides the reality in the most ordinary objects, and reveals reality through involuntary impressions. The only reality that exists is the relation of one’s own sensibility to the past stored in ordinary objects. For Proust, reality is that which one is “forced to create through thought.”678 The narrators of Contre Sainte-Beuve and A la recherché tried and failed to recreate their childhoods at Combray through conscious memory. The tea and toast in Contre Sainte-Beuve and tea and madeleine in A la recherché called the narrator to relive the past in the present. When the present is an object of conscious attention, the past is susceptible to involuntary impressions, but when the past is the object of conscious memory, the impressions of the past are closed off to the present, because in preoccupation with the past one is unaware of the present.

In Jean Santeuil, Proust was preoccupied with the present at the expense of the past, and tried to compensate by attributing the past to C. in the introduction. In Contre Sainte-Beuve, Proust was preoccupied with the past at the expense of the present, and tried to compensate by returning again and again to Sainte-Beuve. The narrator of A la recherché neither denies nor affirms the existence of an objective reality external to one’s feelings and sensibility. Instead, he locates reality in the interplay of objects in the world and one’s reactions to those objects. The narrator admits that it is not easy to turn away from reality in order to know reality, and then wait for involuntary impressions. Only the reality revealed in impressions can called “ours,”679 but only in relation to one’s own sensibility, not an external reality.

678 Proust, Time Regained, 589.
679 Proust, Time Regained, 95.
Particular and General

In *A la recherché*, Proust calls the reader to recognize the ontological difference between reality and appearance. Such recognition requires an “aesthetic consciousness”\(^{680}\) that situates the particular within a horizon of interpretive possibilities. The relationship of one self to the whole self is one of particular to universal, where one self is superimposed on another. The solitary experience of reading *A la recherché* requires many readers and many Prousts: “*On ne se réalise que successivement.*”\(^{681}\) The reader who starts *A la recherché* is different than the reader who finishes *A la recherché*. Within *A la recherché* there is Proust is the critic of high society who recognized the anachronicity of the Parisian salons amid the destruction of postwar Europe. There is the retrospective artist, who recalls in vivid detail the landscapes of Combray, seascape of Balbec, and city streets of Paris. There is the classicist who perverts the paternalism of Homer with avuncular homosexuality. There is a tedious Proust and a terse Proust.

Proust models the relationship of particular to universal in his prose. Proust’s prose is impenetrable until reading it becomes habitual. When the reader comes to expect a multi-dimensional subordinate clause, Proust writes a short sentence. When the narrative calls for a short sentence, Proust writes a long one. Proust writes one or two principle clauses, then attaches dozens of subordinate clauses that give depth to the principle clause. The subordination serves to direct the reader through the thought processes of the characters. The sentence both directs the action and model in microcosm the non-linear plot. Proust has a reputation for relentless and longwinded prose, which is true of some parts of *Jean Santeuil*, but in *A la recherché* Proust chose a middle path between long sentence that models the continuity of consciousness, and

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many little sentences that model the materials of memory. Proust mimics involuntary memory with his prose, which in each “contiguous slice”\(^{682}\) of time the whole life of the novel.

Proust’s relentless prose both models and mocks the relentlessness of Time. Proust wrote, and wrote, and wrote, and wrote \textit{A la recherché} for fourteen years, and readers read, and read, and read, and read \textit{A la recherché} for weeks and months and years. Proust’s prosaic balance of brevity and prolix exemplifies the continuity of consciousness and fragmentation of memory. Differences in speech serve to differentiate characters, making them stand out among the four hundred other major and minor characters. In each of the three main settings of the novel – Paris, Combray, and Balbec – the present and particular social reality of Marcel is held together by a timeless and general web of relations revealed in fragments through gossip. Habit makes reading Proust tolerable, even enjoyable, but just as Habit pulls together the fragmentary impressions of the reader, Proust introduces a detail that calls the reader to reassess cause and effect. Summer days at Aunt Leonie’s house are monotonous until Saturday, when the family eats dinner an hour earlier. Just as the Narrator looks forward every week to the disruption of routine on Saturday, one reads Proust in a state of boredom balanced with ambivalence, waiting for a particular detail that changes the general direction of the plot.

Proust always moves from the particular to the general, and back to the particular. In \textit{Jean Santeuil}, the movement is explicit from first person to third person to first person, but in \textit{A la recherché} the movement is subtle, from Marcel to the Narrator and back to Marcel. The Narrator disapproves of Marcel’s life of appearances, but the Narrator also says that words themselves are appearances. The reader is caught in the middle of Marcel and the Narrator, hesitant to trust either the appearances of Marcel or the words of the Narrator. However, Proust adds a caveat to his philosophy of communication in \textit{A la recherché} that he leaves out of \textit{Les Proust}, \textit{Swann’s Way}, 589.
plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve: particular appearances can have a universal, or general quality that is common to the human condition. For instance, in La prissonnière Marcel captures Albertine and keeps her in his home, but he never fully possesses her because his love is limited to appearances. No matter how hard he tries, Marcel can never penetrate past the appearance of Albertine’s body to her true self, which cares little for Marcel. After Albertine sneaks away from Paris and dies in a horseback riding accident, Marcel appeals to Albertine’s lover, Andrée, not for the pleasure of loving Andrée, but for the pleasure of loving someone who loved Albertine. Words are one step removed from reality, and Marcel is blocked by Albertine’s body from her true self. Marcel held Albertine captive in his home, but was forever locked out of her heart.

For Proust, each person consists of many superficial selves. For Marcel there was the Albertine who kissed Marcel’s cheek before bed, and the Albertine who lied to Marcel with a flush in her own cheek. After Albertine’s death, Marcel did not forget Albertine all at once, but in fragments, like a tide receding unevenly. The memory of the Albertine who kissed his cheek could comfort him when he was pained to remember the Albertine who lied to him. However, one cannot possibly be all of oneself at any one time, since memory brightens some selves and blackens others. The vibrancy of memories is a function of how meaningful the memory is, but the more meaningful the memory, the more misleading the memory. In Les plaisirs et les jours, Proust takes for granted the wholeness of his memories. In Jean Santueil, Proust knew that his memories were mere fragments of an incomplete life, but he tried to force together the fragments anyway. In Contre Sainte-Beuve, Proust supplemented the fragments of his memory with the awkward presence of Sainte-Beuve. In A la recherché, Proust combined the slices of his memory into a complete narrative, in which incoherence and eloquence converge as a whole work of art.
Climax and Anti-climax

For Proust, the tragedy of the human condition is the awareness of being alive. It is human nature to look past the present and pine for the unpossessed. Like Marcel, we want to be spectators in our own experience, as if being there to experience pleasure disqualifies us from experiencing pleasure. When a subject is aware of an object, the subject itself becomes a barrier to experiencing the object’s essence, just as Marcel cannot access Albertine’s essence past the barrier of her body. As soon as the self becomes the object of its own consciousness, a “mental border” forms between subject and object, preventing the self from knowing itself. A subject conscious of an object can never touch the substance of that object as long as the subject is conscious of the object. The subject is limited to appearances of the object, colored and shaped by the subject’s desires. Awareness of being alive is tragic flaw in the human condition akin to Greek hubris or Christian pride, where one’s own consciousness becomes a barrier between oneself and one’s desires as soon as one’s desires are realized. The most contemplative and thoughtful people, like Proust, are most prone to this tragic flaw because they are aware of more things.

Early in their lives, both Proust and Marcel looked to love and society to distract themselves from their awareness of being alive, but both Proust and Marcel were restless because time is relentless. When they became aware of their tragic flaw of the human condition, or “soul error,” both Proust and Marcel withdrew into themselves and sacrificed their lives for their art. In love and society Proust and Marcel distracted themselves from the awareness that being aware of being alive was unbearable. For Proust, man is thrown into dissatisfaction with the world, confronted with a pathos of though that orients him other and elsewhere than himself.

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683 Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 84.
684 Proust, Swann’s Way, 115.
685 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 82.
Consciousness traps us within ourselves, and behavior is limited to patterns deemed acceptable by society. Proust himself was hesitant to mention homosexuality in Jean Santeuil because his family would disapprove and the book would not get published. After his mother’s death, Proust makes most of the major characters homosexual in A la recherche, and warned his first editor that the book would be shocking.

Within the bookends of birth and death, we are trapped in our bodies and caged by convention and our own consciousnesses. It is natural to try to escape this predicament by looking outside ourselves and our immediate experience, like a child who reads adventure stories or a married woman who watches love dramas. The imagination looks to transcend the limitations of self, to break free of the body. In his early work, Proust was mostly content within the walls of convention and consciousness. When he wanted out in Contre Sainte-Beuve, he became fixated on Sainte-Beuve’s theory that the walls are determinative of a writer’s work. With A la recherche Proust wanted to recapture from Sainte-Beuve the impressions of immediate experience. For Shattuck, Proust’s “paradox of consciousness” is akin to Heisenberg’s indeterminacy principle.

In the context of physics, the indeterminacy principle state that the smallest particles in the universe can be neither observed nor predicted with accuracy. Traditional principles of causation do not apply to the smallest particles in the universe. Events involving submicroscopic particles cannot be predicted on an individual level, only as larger groups. To observe events involving submicroscopic particles requires an impress of energy in the form of light. The impress of energy modifies the particles involved in the event and prevents accurate observation. Likewise with objects and other people, each of whom is made up of many selves, each of which constitutes its own universe.

686 Shattuck, Proust’s Way, 87.
In his early work, Proust was searching for himself in other people and his home in other places. Marcel spends the first half of *A la recherche* searching for himself in others and in other places, first Balbec, then Venice, then Balbec again. By the end of *A la recherche*, Marcel comes to realize that, “The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is.”

In *A la recherche*, people always want to be where they are not, and places never live up to the enchantment of their names.

Even though Swann’s visit to Aunt Leonie’s house prevents young Marcel’s mother from giving him the kiss he craved, the name Swann was more magical to Marcel than the name mother. Marcel saw his mother every day, but had only heard rumors and gossip about Swann. Similarly, the present and nearby places seem dull and boring compared to future and faraway places. The sounded syllables of a name – ven-is – invoke visions of beauty unconnected to the physical reality of the unvisited place. The young Marcel had never been to Balbec, but expected to see a “Persian-style” church where he could take refuge from “volleys of foam” and a “furious sea.” When he visited Balbec, the sea was calm, and he saw only a broken-down church bounded by a bank and bakery. *A la recherche* is a search for oneself, and a search for others and Otherness, where subjective desires overcome the “soul error” between subject and object to meet objective reality.

**Stability and Intermittence**

In Proust’s philosophy of communication, the default state of human experience is intermittence, or the “wheeling motion” between being asleep and being awake. For Proust,

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“immobility of the things around us”\textsuperscript{689} is illusory, and intermittence is hidden by habit behind the illusion of stability. The interplay of intermittence and stability is a driving theme in Proust as early as \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, In the first vignette of “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” Proust describes in detail the Garden of the Tuileries before and after a rainstorm. The Tuileries Garden is a public garden in Paris between the Louvre and the Place de la Concorde. The garden features many statues and two large basins, each surrounded by flowers and leafy foliage. Before the storm, the basins shine like living “eyes”\textsuperscript{690} and the statues embody “all the ardor of spring.”\textsuperscript{691}

As the statues hold their poses, determined to defeat the rain, the storm saddens the flowers and fills the eyes with tears. Again in “Versailles,” where the colorful fire of autumn has cooled, leaving only uniform and ashen gray. In the evening only a few autumn flowers defy the sunless sky, but the mornings are a little brighter. In the mornings the sun shines in spurts, the last flames of an “exhausted autumn”\textsuperscript{692} quickly cooled by the coming winter. Yet again in “Stroll,” where the scene is a stream in early spring. The sun is hot and the wind cold. The stream resembled in reverse a sky full of fish, chasing flashes of sunlight through the cloudy blue water. The scene shifts to a nearby farmyard, where a radiant woman welcomes her guests like a peacock in full plume, condemned to the dung heaps of a barnyard.

Like the seasons, Proust’s characters change with the world around them. In \textit{Sodome et Gomorrahe}, Proust follows a brief description of the newly-invented airplane, a symbol of progress that carries mankind “aloft in an Assumption...like a god,”\textsuperscript{693} with a lengthy account of

\textsuperscript{689} Proust, \textit{Swann’s Way}, 5.
\textsuperscript{691} Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 109.
\textsuperscript{692} Proust, “Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time,” 109.
\textsuperscript{693} Proust, \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah}, 433.
a party at the Verdurins, a symbol of sluggishness and stagnation that is “dull as ditch-water.” Proust had also introduced the theme of the seeming stability and actual intermittence of society in *Les plaisirs et les jours*. In an untitled vignette, Proust comments on the principles and prejudices of society women. Principle is the society woman’s prejudice; prejudice varies with the seasons along the folds and fissures of fashion. In an effort to completely rid herself of prejudice, the society woman collapses all depths of perspective onto a single plane, making the pleasure of reading philosophy the same as enjoying the sun or eating an orange. Whereas in the past, women were immoral by instinct, and had to make up their minds to be moral, now women are moral by nature and must use their minds to be immoral. Society women oscillate between mind and instinct, and choose the quickest route to pleasure. They pretend to predict intellectual and sartorial fashions, but actually only repeat old ones verbatim, as faithful but “old-fashioned” parrots. Their principles and prejudices “drift to and fro” with the “sweet perfume of unbound hair.”

Again in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Marcel chastises his grandmother for posing in makeup for a photograph, but later learns that his grandmother was dying, and did not want to look feeble for Marcel’s only tangible token of her memory. Earlier in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, a man begs the belongings of the woman he loves to reveal the secrets of her solitary life. The deck of cards played at her parties must remember her laugh, and the novels she fell asleep holding must hold themselves her dreams, but their silence is suspicious. In all these cases, each still shot, or “contiguous slice” of experience is meaningless by itself, since consciousness is in constant motion in time. Individual photographic snapshots or panoramas are mere fragments that reveal nothing about the changes that the self undergoes in time. In the optical epistemology which

forms the foundation of Proust’s philosophy of communication, Proust replaces the still camera with the moving cinemagraph, the “shifting kaleidoscope,” and the magic lantern. A still camera captures only static images unconnected to the whole of reality, which reflect the fundamental flux of experience still camera can than “when we watch a horse running, we isolate the successive positions of its body as they appear upon a bioscope.” The cinemagraph and kaleidoscope are products of modernity that reveal the dangers of modernity’s single-minded obsession with progress. Proust returns the medieval throwback of the magic lantern in Du côté de chez Swann to wake his readers up to the deception of appearances.

In A la recherche, people appear and disappear as different selves under the same name. In Du côté de chez Swann, Marcel seeks self-fulfillment in the familial love of his mother’s goodnight kiss. With the exception of his grandmother, Marcel’s family never fully understands Marcel, and write him off as a hopeless romantic. He then looks to the “snobs” of high society, who understand a stage Marcel, but not the Marcel. Finally, Marcel realizes his errors and finally finds fulfillment in the depths of his true self. The physical settings of Balbec, Combray and Paris, as well as the social mores of the Guermantes and Verdurin clans, exist as “fulcrums,” or touch points in the cyclical process of time. In time, the Verdurins become Guermantes, and Guermantes becomes Swann. The places and people change places, but time continues unabated. In Proust’s early work, the still images of the social customs and new technologies of the Belle Epoque remain static because time is just another theme among many. In A la recherche, time is the ultimate arbiter of all other themes. The same descriptions of customs and technologies not

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697 Proust, Swann’s Way, 2.
698 Proust, Swann’s Way, 9.
699 Proust, Swann’s Way, 11.
700 Ronald C. Arnett and Annette M. Holba, Overture to Philosophy of Communication: Carrier of Meaning (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 12.
only capture the era in stills, but also situate the Belle Epoque within a cyclical process of social change, where people and periods both die.

**Sociality and Solitude**

Proust touches on the topic of sociality and solitude in “Violante, or High Society,” and other stories in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, but *A la recherché* represents a true reconciliation between sociality and solitude. The two domains are incompatible in Proust, but may be reconciled “in a new life” where one comes to know oneself through intersubjective communication. Proust frames art as a form of intersubjective communication that breaks through the border of perception between mind and reality, and the border of contingency between ourselves and other beings. In translating an object of his experience into art, the artist makes his true self communicable. The feeling that one gets from reading the work of a great mind is analogous not to a “pretty phrase,” as in the early volumes of *A la recherché*, but to the feeling that the great mind got from writing the work, which cannot be replicated in conversation or anything other than art. This form of intersubjective conversation is the only real form of communication.

In *Jean Santeuil*, Jean (or C., if one follows the narrator’s commentary) saw his world like Noah, alone, looking out on a flooded countryside from the security of his sealed arc: “Then it was understood that Noah could never have had so clear a view of the world as when he gazed upon it from within his ark, sealed though it was, and when darkness was over all the earth.”

In *A la recherché*, Marcel has company in the narrator. Marcel and the Narrator act as “comic and straight man” with Marcel experiencing and the Narrator commenting. The knowing Narrator pokes fun at the naïve Marcel. Marcel’s comic ignorance in the first half of *A la*

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*recherché* is endemic to the human condition. Marcel cared very much about the parties he attended, but seldom spoke when he was there. He preferred to recede into the shadows and watch others socialize. In life, too, he yearned to be a spectator of his own experience, the way the omniscient Narrator watches the maturation of Marcel in *A la recherché*.

In Proust’s universe, everything is connected to everything else through analogy and metaphor. The reality of each individual is incommunicable in words. The same words of a shared language cannot describe two fundamentally distinct realities, since that kind (which for Proust is the only kind) of intersubjective communication occurs only in solitude. We are not ourselves in the presence of another, and converse only superficially with others as the person we want our interlocutors to see. Solitude prepares the mind for a “pilgrimage of the heart,” at the end of which mind and heart and instinct and intellect converge as the true self. Conversation distract the mind from the self and orients the self away from further and further from itself until the true self becomes just another superficial self that “finds no reward in its own being.”

In his early work, Proust associates communication with superficial selves. Communication is a decoy on the “pilgrimage of the heart,” the last defense of appearance against reality. In *A la recherché*, Proust adds to his one-sided perspective on communication the capacity for communication as art to rescue reality from appearance. Marcel’s repeated mistakes in love and friendship warn readers not to make the same mistakes. Proust’s readers have already taken the first step toward communication by reading *A la recherché*, but Proust’s philosophy of communication kicks in when readers learn from Marcel’s mistakes and assume the perspective of spectator or narrator of their own experiences. *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* are rhetorical warnings against communication. *A la recherché* equips readers to find fulfillment in their own lives without following too far the “false scents” love and sociality. In thousands of

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703 Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 394.
pages of introspective reflection, Proust encourages readers to mimic Marcel and look inward to recognize themselves in his writing. In *Du côté de chez Swann*, the young Marcel reads his future into his fairy tales. In *Le temps retrouve*, the older Marcel reflects on his youth, and writes his past into his own novel that secures his future. Marcel comes to know his true self, and commits himself to writing *A la recherche* as an expression of his true self, and self-help for the self-recognition for his readers.

The narrative of *A la recherche* implies that Marcel is no more sensitive to human nature than any other child (and perhaps less so), but Shattuck argues that Marcel’s experiences of death, love, vice, and social behavior overcome his innocence and sharpen his sensitivity to human nature. As a child, he manipulated his mother into giving him the goodnight kiss he desperately desired. Later, he spied on Charles’ homosexual affair with Jupien, and went to great lengths to validate his desire to believe that Albertine was innocent of infidelity, only to confirm his intuition that she was guilty. At the same time, Marcel was seemingly blind to the homosexual advances of Charlus, and ignorant of many details about the social circles he wished to join. In all these cases, communication is to blame for Marcel’s confusion. In the early work, Proust leaves it at that, but in *A la recherche* it is communication as wit and irony that leads Marcel astray in the social world, and communication as art that saves him from time.

Proust’s early philosophy of communication begins and ends with the inadequacy of words to describe reality. In Proust’s mature philosophy of communication in *A la recherche*, communication bridges the binaries of appearance and reality, climax and anti-climax, general and particular, socialibility and solitude, and intermittence and stability. Experience told Proust that a lifetime is not enough to reveal the essential nature of either end of these binaries, so Proust converges the binaries in art as communication to free them from the tyranny of time. In *A
la recherché, the Narrator is close to death and Marcel is a young child. As two superficial selves, Marcel and the Narrator bookend Proust’s existence. Marcel leads a life of appearances, anti-climaxes, particulars and stability, until Marcel becomes the Narrator and commits himself to reality, climax, general and intermittence. Proust overcomes the limitations of bodily birth and death by bridging the binaries of self and other through communication in *A la recherche*. In the final chapter, I frame Proust’s philosophy of communication as a performative call to communication, but first I offer three hermeneutic entrances into *A la recherche* as a convergence of the aforementioned binaries:

1. **The essence of communication:** *A la recherche* represents the end of the path to Proust’s philosophy of communication, where the true self and superficial selves come into phase through the convergence of appearance and reality, particular and general, anti-climax and climax, stability and intermittence and sociality and solitude. As early as *Les plaisirs et les jours* and through *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust bifurcated the human condition into the incommunicable true self, or the essence or cream704 of oneself, and the many superficial selves, or what others expect from oneself. In his early work Proust associated superficial selves with the left sides of the binaries, and the true self with the right side of the binaries, which he privileged over the left. In terms of philosophy of communication, Proust tied appearance, particular, anti-climax, stability and sociality to superficial communication, and reality, general, climax, intermittence and solitude to contemplation and reflection, the opposite and antithesis of communication. In writing *A la recherche*, Proust channeled the superficial communication that constituted

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his early life into his later work, which became the expression of his whole self – the essence of communication.

2. **Amended assumptions about communication:** The interplay of the rhetorical and philosophical traditions is analogous to Proust’s understanding of real and superficial communication. In all of Proust’s work, communication has both real (philosophy) and apparent (communication) parts. The reality or essence of communication is (1) the expression of one’s true self in art and, for non-artists, (2) the recognition of one’s own true self in a work of art. The appearance of communication is superficial conversation, or gossip or chit-chat, which distracts from the true self and recreates oneself in the image of other people. Proust’s work from *Les plaisirs et les jours*, which reflects the superficiality of salon conversation, to *Jean Santeuil*, which takes the first step toward the essence of communication, to *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, which clears the final hurdle on the path to philosophy of communication, reflects the development of Proust’s understanding of communication. The young Proust was preoccupied with the appearances of communication, while the older Proust devoted his life to the essence of communication. Proust wrote *Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* under the false assumption that all communication was superficial communication. All three books failed. In *A la recherché*, Proust amended his assumption about communication, and reserved for communication the key to his philosophy. *A la recherché* is one of the most famous books ever written.

3. **Embracing communication:** Marcel’s struggle to communicate in *A la recherché* is emblematic of Proust’s struggle to fit communication into his philosophy. Proust grants to the readers full access to the narrator’s mind, but the narrator identifies himself as
Marcel only twice in three thousand pages and gives no thorough description of his physical appearance. Without knowing what he looks like, the reader never fully identifies with Marcel and must piece together his appearance from hearsay and gossip. While Marcel is all reality and no appearance, everything else in *A la recherche* is all appearance and no reality. In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust is reluctant to identify himself with Jean and outsources the production of *Jean Santeuil* to the writer C. In *A la recherche*, it is not Proust but the reader who is reluctant to identify with Marcel. The reader mistrusts Marcel the way that Proust mistrusted communication in his early work. Just as the reader is reluctant to identify with Marcel, Marcel is himself reluctant to reveal himself as a real person with a name and recognizable character. Marcel is a spectator in his own experience, hiding from the reader behind Proust’s relentless prose. Likewise, Proust hid from communication behind his early novels, but only when he embraced communication as the key to his philosophy could he translate his vision into communicable form in *A la recherche*.

4. **Communication as response to fragmentation**: Proust’s philosophy of communication comes full circle in *A la recherche*, from its origins in communication in *Les plaisirs et les jours* to overemphasis on philosophy in *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* to convergence of the fragments of philosophy and communication in *A la recherche*. Proust responds to fragmentation by writing in the past, present and future at once, within the bookends of his life and death. *A la recherche* begins in Marcel’s bed and ripples outward from Marcel’s consciousness, until Marcel and the Narrator come together and commit to writing the book the reader presently holds. Proust’s philosophy of communication is a defense of communication against time, which reduces each person
to oblivion. The only human defense against time is memory, the “embalmer”\textsuperscript{705} of experience, but memory alone is not enough to overcome time. The raw materials of memory must be captured and communicated through a work of art which expresses the artist’s true self. Proust wrote \textit{A la recherché} to not only make up for the mistakes of \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, \textit{Jean Santeuil} and \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve}, but also to open possibilities for communication after the gold gilding of the Belle Epoque had rusted away. According to Proust’s philosophy of communication, the only way to conquer time is to communicate one’s true self in art to others, who recognize their own true selves in the art. For Proust, the only way to communicate his true self was to withdraw from the world and immortalize his true self in \textit{A la recherché}.

In \textit{Jean Santeuil}, Proust writes that the “rounded fullness of reality” exists in an “indeterminate zone” \textit{between} past and present: “And is it not more beautiful we wonder, that the imagination, which neither the present nor the past could put into communication, with life and so save from oblivion and the misinterpretation of thought and unhappy memories, the varied individual essences of life…is it not more beautiful than in the sudden leap which follows on the impact between an identical past and present, the imagination should be freed from time?”\textsuperscript{706} In \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, Proust set up the analogous problematics of appearance and reality, general and particular, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude. In \textit{Jean Santeuil} and \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve}, Proust’s one-sided understanding of communication kept the two sides apart, and looked everywhere but communication to bridge the binaries. In \textit{A la recherché}, Proust converged the fragments of philosophy and communication, and appearance and reality, general and particular, climax and anti-climax,

\textsuperscript{705} Howard Moss, \textit{The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust} (New York, NY: Macmillan), 38.
\textsuperscript{706} Proust, \textit{Jean Santeuil}, 409.
intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude soon followed. Before leaving *A la recherche* for Proust’s performative call to communication, I return to Arnett⁷⁰⁷ and Arnett and Arneson, who argues through Buber that philosophy of communication is lived in “between” philosophy and communication—between persons, between person and event, between person and idea, even in crisis.”⁷⁰⁸ For Buber, meaning emerges not through the self alone, or through the other alone, but through dialogic engagement with other communicative agents. For Proust, meaning emerges in the interplay of the writer’s true self as expressed in a novel, and the reader’s laborious attempt to recognize himself in the novel. Proust was always skeptical of communication. His early work was driven by communication in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, then philosophy in *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. *A la recherche* represents for Proust a shift in focus of attention away from philosophy or communication to the interplay of philosophy and communication in the space “between” philosophy and communication.

With *A la recherche*, Proust sought to recreate for the reader the “infinite meaning” in the words of Honoré and François in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, or what C. saw when he “scanned the sea” in *Jean Santeuil*, or what Marcel saw in the Martinville steeples in the country outside Combray. For Proust, the recreation of this “all-powerful joy” by the writer and the self-recognition of the reader in the work of the writer, is the only form of communication among true selves. Things outside and other than the self, like love and friendship, are incapable of conveying this feeling. But the reader must be careful to recognize the right self, the true self, since misrecognition is a precursor for death. In the final sequence of *A la recherche*, Marcel fails to recognize his former “gods and goddesses” the fauborg Saint Guermantes. Marcel’s

misrecognition meant either that the self he used to know had died (and by default that he too was already dead) or that he did not know the self still living (which gave him no reason to live). In the first volume of *A la recherché*, the young Marcel refused to sleep without a goodnight kiss. He would rather die than sleep alone in the darkness. Only when Marcel was near death in the final volume of *A la recherché* did he recognize that his childhood resolve was misplaced, and resolves to rechannel into writing *A la recherche* the same determination with which he demanded a goodnight kiss.
Bibliography


CHAPTER 7
Proust’s Change of Heart: A Goodnight Kiss to Communication

In Part I of this dissertation (chapters 1 and 2), I defined philosophy of communication as a convergence of the fragments of philosophy and communication. I then outlined Proust’s philosophy of communication as a convergence of the fragments of (1) appearance and reality, (2) general and particular, (3) climax and anti-climax, (4) intermittence and stability and (5) sociality and solitude. Either philosophy or communication (or one half of any of these dichotomies) alone constitutes only part of the human condition, like the mutually exclusive ways of Swann and Guermantes in Du côté de chez Swann. It is not enough to say that communication is an untrustworthy conduit that carries the Truth learned through philosophy, as Proust implies in Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve, or that philosophy depends wholly on communication, which Proust intimates in the episode of the Martinville steeples in A la recherche. Philosophy of communication injects meaning (what Proust calls heart or instinct), into the practices everyday life (what Proust calls habit or intellect).709 Philosophy of communication privileges neither philosophy nor communication, and instead converges the fragments of philosophy and communication as “habits of the heart.”710 “Habits of the heart” guide and inform the communicative practices (communication) that shape the human heart (philosophy), and set both in service of the “mud of everyday life.”711

In Part II of this dissertation (chapters 3, 4 and 5), I outlined Proust’s early works, from Les plaisirs et les jours through Jean Santeuil to Contre Sainte-Beuve, and framed each as a pit stop on the path to Proust’s philosophy of communication in A la recherche. In Les plaisirs et les

710 Arnett and Holba, Overture, 3.
jours, Proust was preoccupied with high society. In Jean Santeuil, Proust privileged instinct over the intellect, but reduced the instinct to a “pretty phrase.” In Contre Sainte-Beuve, Proust privileged the intellect over instinct, but was distracted by Sainte-Beuve. Despite their differences in style and scope, these early works share in common a hostility toward communication, which Proust associates with appearances and intelligence, as opposed to philosophy, which Proust associates with reality and instinct. Proust never finished Jean Santeuil or Contre Sainte-Beuve, and knew that something was missing from Les plaisirs et les jours. He experimented with various styles and structures and many methods of translating his incommunicable impressions into the form of a novel. With A la recherché, Proust realized that his mistakes in the early works were mistakes of communication. If he was going to translate the whole of his vision into a novel, he must grant communication a place of prominence in his philosophy. But not just any communication.

In this final chapter, I frame Proust’s corpus from Les plaisirs et les jours through Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve to A la recherché as a performative call to communication as defined by his philosophy. I then argue that Proust’s seeming rejection of communication was actually a performative call to communication, and a model for philosophy of communication. For Proust, only true selves can communicate, and only a few talented artists can translate their true selves into communicable form. But, if only a few artists could translate their true selves, and only true selves can communicate, what about the vast majority of non-artists? Were they forever doomed to an incomplete life of appearances and superficiality? Proust responded by performing his philosophy of communication, a performance through which he sacrificed his own life for the communicative sins of non-artists, so that they too can access the essence of themselves through A la recherché.
The Fragments of Philosophy and Communication in Proust

In the introduction to Part II, I recounted a conversation between Anatole France, one of the most famous writers in the world, and the young Marcel Proust, who had written nothing. Proust wanted to be like France without having to write. He asked France, “What did you do to know so much?” “It’s quite simple, my dear Marcel,” responded France. “When I was your age, I wasn’t good-looking like you; nobody cared for me; I didn’t go out in society and I stayed home reading all the time.”712 After his conversation with France, Proust still went out in society, but spent the next several years on *Les plaisirs et les jours*, then the next decade on the detours of *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. He spent less and less time in society. At the beginning of 1910, Proust was a recluse with nothing to show for his misguided labors.

The world was worried about war and cared little for literature. Maybe France was wrong, thought Proust, and maybe I was wrong about communication. In *A la recherche*, Marcel asks the same question of the artist Elstir, who responds that “Wisdom is not given to us; we must discover it for ourselves, by means of a journey that no one else can make for us and from which no one can absolve us; for wisdom is a point of view.”713 The journey from *Les plaisirs et les jours* to *Jean Santeuil* to *Contre Sainte-Beuve* to *A la recherche* is Proust’s journey to philosophy of communication. Proust journeyed with philosophy on a search of wisdom that took him farther and farther from communication. After twenty years of fruitless labor, Proust came to the conclusion that communication was with him all along.

**Philosophy of Communication as Call to Communication**

The objective of philosophy of communication is to understand how information becomes meaningful. To “do” philosophy is to communicate. To “do” communication is to

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create meaning by sharing one’s philosophy with another. To “do” philosophy of communication is to, first, understand how philosophers in various historical moments understand communication, and second, to inform one’s own communicative practices with relevant theories at the intersections of the rhetorical and philosophical traditions. The relationship of the rhetorical tradition to the philosophical tradition reveals communication as not only a topic for philosophers, but also a problem for philosophy itself. The truths of philosophy must be somehow be communicated, or else they are not truths, since they are true for one person only. But (say the philosophers) communication is erratic and error-prone, and cannot be trusted to carry the truths of philosophy. But (say the rhetoricians) by what other means can these truths be carried, if not communication? Neither is right (say the philosophers of communication) because neither nor philosophy can alone account for the whole of the human condition.

Philosophy is always a conversation, and philosophy begins and ends as the communication of philosophy situated in particular times and places, or “dwellings.” Philosophy of communication is a “dwelling” for meaning bounded by a horizon of interpretive possibilities and buttressed by the interplay of ideas, people and the fragmentation of postmodernity. The dominant narrative of postmodernity is fragmentation, or the lack of a dominant narrative. Philosophy of communication is a philosophical framework for navigating the narrative and virtue contention of postmodernity, and responding with “fuzzy clarity” to the communicative questions that emerge within postmodernity. Philosophy of communication never presupposes a single or best answer to the questions of postmodernity. Instead, philosophy of communication seeks meaning in multiplicity, and engages philosophy on the terms of

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715 Arnett and Holba, Overture, 9.
716 Arnett and Holba, Overture, 1.
communication and communication on the terms of communication to “sculpt” raw information into narratives laden with meaning. From the perspective of philosophy of communication, meaning emerges through practices of communications, or “habits of the heart,” informed by philosophical contemplation and reflection.

Arnett and Holba offer three metaphors in which communication assumes meaning: heart, pattern and fulcrum. As in the phrase, “the heart of the matter,” heart situates oneself in the world, and guides and informs communicative practices which, in turn, shape the heart. Practices performed consistently become patterns which reveal meaning. Patterns announce where to look for glimpses of meaning in a given historical moment. The historical moment acts as a fulcrum, or pivot point, for understanding how meaning changes over time. Attention to historicity moves philosophy of communication from an abstract theoretical perspective to a tool for navigating narrative and virtue contention. With its attention to historicity, philosophy of communication seeks to understand patterns of communicative practice with historical texture. Philosophy of communication responds to postmodernity’s call to plurality by equipping people to communicate amid fragmentation. Philosophy of communication seeks to understand the boundaries of communication, what counts as communication and why.

Arnett and Holba point to Aristotle’s distinction between an expert and a craftsman in the *Nicomachaen Ethics* to illustrate the prescriptive element of the philosophy of communication. While both the expert and craftsman know the necessary information associated with a craft, only the craftsman loves and invests meaning in the craft. For Arnett and Holba, the philosopher of communication is a craftsman who unites expertise and meaning in the

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718 Arnett and Holba, *Overture*, 3.
719 Arnett and Holba, *Overture*, 3.
720 Arnett and Holba, *Overture*, 12.
721 Arnett and Holba, *Overture*, 12.
study of communication. In his early work, Proust was an expert writer who wrote for other people, whether his society friends in *Les plaisirs et les jours* or his parents in *Jean Santeuil* or Sainte-Beuve in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. In Proust’s mature philosophy of communication, philosophy and communication, or instinct and intellect, work in symbiotic harmony. The intellect interprets the impressions received by instinct, and communication translates the incommunicable truths of philosophy into communicable form. In *A la recherche*, Proust was a craftsman who came to know that not all communication is philosophy of communication. By withdrawing from the world of superficial communication, Proust answered the call of philosophy of communication for people to have their own philosophies of communication that, like Proust, they make meaningful in communicative practice.

**Proust on Communication**

Proust’s philosophy of communication begins with fragmentation.\(^\text{723}\) Like all parts of Proust’s philosophy, Proust’s philosophy of communication consists of two fragments that

\(^{723}\) The theme of fragmentation in Proust’s philosophy of communication emerged from the intellectual climate of his historical moment. As a young man in the Belle Epoque, Proust followed philosophical debates between schools of materialism, which believe only in the material reality of matter and its movements, and immaterialism, which believe that material exists only in the mind. French historian Hippolyte Taine applied positivism to literature with his scientific method of literary criticism based on the categories of race, milieu, and moment, or roughly nation, environment and time. For Taine, cultural context determines (though Taine denied he was a determinist) the meaning of an aesthetic object created in that context, regardless of the artist’s individual genius. For instance, a work of art such as *A la recherche* is the product of the cultural norms of late 19th and early 20th century France, shaped by the unique circumstances under which Proust wrote, and informed by the collective experience of his life. Against Taine and other positivists, Jules Lachelier sought a middle ground between pure positivism and pure spiritualism, which for Lachelier conflated consciousness with nature in service of the spiritual. Lachelier argued that yes, we live in a shared, objective world, but that to make sense of the objective world we must impose subjective order on the world’s objects.

French philosopher Alfred Fouillée brought Lachelier back toward positivism with a more speculative eclecticism, where ideas are made manifest in movement, and movement in ideas. Émile Boutroux again tried to reconcile materialism and immaterialism by limiting the applicability of physical laws to macroscopic phenomena, like planets, while setting microscopic phenomena outside the scope of scientific observation. Boutroux turned Comte’s pyramid of the sciences on its head, arguing instead that the laws of each level emerge independently of the other levels. Proust read everyone, but for Proust the debate ended with Henri Bergson, a French philosopher who would become Proust’s cousin by marriage. For Bergson, time and space exist in Duration, as fragments of the whole of consciousness. Duration is akin to two spools, placed side by side, with a role of tape running from one spool to the other. While one spool winds, the other unwinds, until one spool is empty and the other full. In life, as with the spools, the future recedes into the past, preserved in fewer and fewer memories, until nothing, and we die.
converge in *A la recherché*: the writer’s (or musician’s, painter’s, actor’s or any artist’s) translation of his impressions into communicable form in art, and the self-recognition of the reader’s true self in the work of art. In Proust’s early original work from *Les plaisirs et les jours* through *Jean Santeuil, Contre-Sainte Beuve* and the first volume of *A la recherché*, the binaries of (1) appearance and reality, (2) particular and general, (3) climax and anti-climax, (4) stability and intermittence, and (5) sociality and solitude stood on either side of an “unfordable” river.724 Like the two Ways of Swann and Guermantes, the two parts of the binary were irreconcilable fragments of the immature Marcel’s world, “far apart from one another and unaware of each other’s existence, in the airtight compartments of separate afternoons.”725 In the final volume of *A la recherché*, the two ways converge in the character of Mlle. Saint-Loup, who embodies the unity of Marcel’s mature mind. In his early work, Proust overcommited to one side of the binaries, then overcompensated for the other, until he finally found the formula in *A la recherché* for bringing both sides of the binaries into phase and accounting for the whole of human experience in a single novel.

*Fragmentation in Proust*

Fragmentation comes from five principles, each corresponding to one of the five binaries:

(1) What we experience is not the essence of reality, but the appearance of reality, and appearance is deceiving. For the first 1,500 pages of *A la recherché*, the Baron de Charlus is the epitome of masculinity. In *Sodome et Gomorrahe*, Marcel sees by chance the Baron engaged in homosexual relations with the tailor Jupien, and realizes that the Baron’s true nature is that of a woman hidden behind the appearance of masculinity. For the last 1,500 pages of *A la recherché*,

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Marcel sees only the woman and forgets the man. (2) Preoccupation with appearance is also a preoccupation with particulars, a condition that Proust calls the “tyranny of the Particular”\textsuperscript{(726)}: we want what we do not have, until we have it and no longer want it. Promise is more preoccupying than possession, and ambition more intoxicating than achievement. While the famous person takes fame for granted, the unknown person is driven by desires of fame, but appreciates his achievements in anonymity.

(3) Under the “tyranny of the Particular,” people turn away from the essence of themselves, which transcends time, and toward an inaccessible and impossible perfection in the present, which is always anti-climactic.\textsuperscript{(727)} For Proust, time follows the sequence of sex: all-consuming anticipation for the future, then an instant of climactic pleasure, followed by disappointment and dénouement. (4) Reality is by nature intermittent, but intermittence becomes unbearable over the course of a lifetime, so habit hides intermittence behind the appearance of stability. Throughout \textit{A la recherche} Marcel struggles to overcome the intermittence of new environments, until habit makes stationary the moving scenery. By the end of \textit{A la recherche} Marcel learns to pinpoint his true self amid the intermittences of his heart.\textsuperscript{(728)} (5) Lastly, the presence of other people makes tolerable the fragmentation of all these binaries, but distracts one from the only way to overcome fragmentation: the communication of one’s true self.

Proust bifurcates the self into two parts: the true self and superficial selves. The true self is the incommunicable essence or soul or reality of oneself. The true self finds joy in its own existence, and seeks fulfillment only through itself. The true self exists outside time and space in an “indeterminate zone”\textsuperscript{(729)} between past and present. Unlike the true self, which transcends time,

\textsuperscript{726} Proust, \textit{Within a Budding Grove}, 323-324.
\textsuperscript{728} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 97.
superficial selves are limited to the present. Superficial selves are appearances of oneself created by other people in the image of their expectations. While the true self exists deep in the “bosom” of an inner world, superficial selves stay in the shallows of the outside world. People have different superficial selves for every other person, no matter how intimate the relationship. The number of superficial selves equals the number of relationships. In the overture to *Du côté de chez Swann*, a magic lantern projects images of Golo on the normally opaque walls of Marcel’s bedroom. The image of Golo distends and deflates around the doorknob and windows, never stopping in its pursuit of Geneviève de Brabant. In pursuit of friends and social acceptance, superficial selves distort and deform the true self to please and entertain as many other people as possible.

Likewise with objects, which Proust also bifurcates into two parts: the inner essence or reality, and the outer appearance. Again, the inner essence or reality of objects exists outside space and time in the minds of people who perceive the object. The reality of objects is accessible only to the instinct (or heart, or imagination, or feeling, or sensibility, all synonyms for the same mental process). The outer appearance (as comprehended by the intellect, as opposed to instinct) is deceiving and subject to decay. At the end of *Le Temps retrouvé*, Marcel does not recognize the appearance of the aged faces of the fauborg Saint-Guermantes, and in *Du côté de chez Swann*, the three steeples at Martinville first appear on the horizon as a single shadowy shape, then diverge into two, then three steeples as Marcel approaches, then recede again into the indistinct shadow of a single shape. In an early story in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust describes an assembly of ships in a harbor, their sails limp in the weak wind. The ships maintained a haughty distance from onlookers on the deck, as if they knew things the

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landdwellers did not. The ships were weakened by faraway waters, but strong enough to save the
secrets of the ocean. In Proust’s philosophy of communication, the reality of objects and the
essence of the true self exist in deep in the ocean, accessible only to oneself and only with great
effort and self-sacrifice. Superficial selves are preoccupied with the appearance of the ships at
the shore and have no desire to learn the secrets of the true self, with one exception: impressions.

*Proust’s Response to Fragmentation*

The reality of oneself and objects is accessible through impressions. Impressions are
involuntary and “isolated perceptions,” which penetrate past the appearance of the object to
reveal its reality through instinct. Impressions reveal both the essence of the object, and the
essence of oneself in relation to that object at the time of the impression. Impressions last for an
instant only, then disappear as soon as the intellect tries to make sense of the impression.
Sometimes two impressions are separated in time, with a later impression reminding oneself of
an earlier impression. These moments bienheureux, as Proust calls them, reveal one’s true self, as
lived in the past and made livable again in the present. The moments bienheureux reveal to the
true self of the present (as glimpsed in the current impression) the true self of the past (as
previously glimpsed in the past impression). The time between the two impressions may have
aged the appearance of one’s face, but one’s true self remains intact in the moments bienheureux.

In *A la recherché*, Marcel recognizes his true self in impressions of objects in the outer
world – the tea and madeleine and Martinville steeples, as well as the Vinteuil septet and
hawthorn bushes at Balbec and Combray – which trigger an inner feeling of “all-powerful joy”
and sublime timelessness. Proust’s project in *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* was to
somehow reify these impressions in writing in a way consistent with his philosophy. *A la
recherché* succeeded where *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* failed because Proust revised

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his philosophy of communication. In Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve, the fragments of philosophy and communication remain fragments. In withdrawing from the world of superficial communication to write A la recherché, Proust converged in both life and art the fragments of philosophy and communication into a performative philosophy of communication.

But why was Proust so hostile to communication for so long? Proust does tie communication to appearances and superficial selves in Jean Santeuil and reserves for reality and the true self a status “beyond the power of words”732 in Du côté de chez Swann, but communication plays little role in the foundation of Proust’s philosophy. Especially in Jean Santeuil, where the young narrator cannot communicate with his mother in the courtyard and Proust himself struggles to communicate his vision, communication is an unfortunate necessity for passing along the truths learned in contemplation and self-reflection, once communication is out of the way. For the reader who stops after Du côté de chez Swann, or even after most of Le Temps retrouvé, it seems that Proust is single-mindedly critical of communication, and has to be to stay consistent with his own philosophy. Whoever does not follow Proust’s example and withdraw from society to the solitude of a cork-lined bedroom is doomed to an unfulfilled life of appearances and superficial selves. But Proust still had one problem, which he tried and failed to solve in Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve, namely how to criticize communication without engaging his unparalleled intellect and talent for communication.

In A la recherché, Proust solves the problem by building a communicative bridge between instinct and the intellect, a subject to which I return later in this chapter. While Les plaisirs et les jours dealt only in appearances, Jean Santeuil overemphasized instinct and Contre

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Sainte-Beuve overcompensated for the intellect. Just as the two Ways of Swann and Guermantes converge at the end of *A la recherché*, along with the dichotomies of appearance and reality, particular and general, climax and anti-climax, stability and intermittence, and sociality and solitude, the two mental processes of instinct and the intellect converge as a call to communication, rather than a criticism of communication. The solution to Proust’s problem is deceivingly simple: the writer receives impressions through the instinct (philosophy), then interprets the impressions through the intellect (communication). Proust wrote *A la recherché* in fragments, in the image of impressions intuited by the instinct, then arranged the “isolated perceptions” into the form of a novel with his intellect.

Proust had finally figured out the first part of his philosophy of communication, but he still had another problem: if impressions are intensely personal revelations of one’s true self, why would anyone else want to read it? The answer to this question becomes the second part of Proust’s philosophy of communication. The essence of communication comes from the reader’s recognition of his true self in a work of art (e.g., *A la recherché*), which itself expresses the true self of the writer. Only a few great artists can capture and make communicable their impressions in a work of art, but anyone can see their own true selves in the same work of art. After the commercial failure of *Les plaisirs et les jours* and the theoretical failures of *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust recognized his responsibility as a talented artist to translate his true self into a work of art. His withdrawal from the social world of superficial communication to write *A la recherché* was a performative call for the essence of communication consistent with his philosophy.
Proust’s Performative Call to Communication

Proust published *Du côté de chez Swann* in 1913, as the world prepared for war. A year earlier, Proust had hoped to publish the whole of *A la recherche* in two, 650-page volumes before the outbreak of war. Even with recommendations from his well-connected friends, *A la recherche* was rejected by several publishers. After repeated rejections, the publisher Grasset agreed to publish in serial form and at Proust’s expense one volume of 500 pages. The rest would appear later, depending of course on the performance of the first volume. Proust balked. If Grasset would only publish the first 500 pages, it might as well publish as is the unfinished manuscripts of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* or *Jean Santeuil*, two fragments of Proust’s philosophy with no overall vision. Only the first 500 pages of *A la recherche* could not possibly convey the complete vision of *A la recherche* without the other 700 pages, which ballooned to 1500 pages during the First World War. During the war Proust wrote fragment after fragment, each corresponding to individual and unrelated impressions, then imposed the order of his vision on the incongruous fragments. Writing came easily to Proust, but the organization and editing of *A la recherche* was “more than I can handle.”733 Proust wrote *Les plaisirs et les jours* to show his society friends how well he could write. In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust juxtaposed many unconnected fragments on disparate themes and imposed no overall order other than the lukewarm preface of Anatole France and the watercolor roses of Madeleine Lemaire. Proust wrote *Les plaisirs et les jours* as a collection of unrelated stories with no necessary connection, and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and *Jean Santeuil* read much the same way, as failed attempts to force together individual impressions that are by nature spontaneous and unordered. The fragments remain fragments with no overall unity. *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* come closer to

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an overall unity, but Proust had not yet mastered his own philosophy enough to “patch things together”\textsuperscript{734} into a novel.

Proust (quite literally) devoted his life to “tying up the ends”\textsuperscript{735} of \textit{A la recherché} and giving it the overall unity lacking in \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} and \textit{Jean Santeuil}. Although the prototypes for Charles Swann and several members of the faubourg Saint-Guermantes appear as early as \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, the “two ways” of Swann and Guermantes as two diametrically opposed ways to the true self appear for the first time in \textit{A la recherché}. In \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} and \textit{Jean Santeuil}, there are no ends to tie up, only isolated fragments to force together. The introduction of the two ways of Swann and Guermantes in the first volume of \textit{A la recherché} equip Proust with two fragments, or matching puzzle pieces, to put together in the final volume, and finally fit his philosophy into the form of a novel.

At the beginning of \textit{Du côté de chez Swann}, the young Marcel sees the two ways of Swann and Guermantes as mutually exclusive paths with no common intersection, although the two paths are really only miles apart and converge at Aunt Leonie’s house at Combray. If the young Marcel took Swann’s Way to Tansonville, he thought he would walk off the end of the earth before reaching the Guermantes Way, and if he started on the Guermantes Way, he thought he would reach the other end of the earth before he reached Tansonville. At the end of \textit{Le Temps retrouvé}, the final volume of \textit{A la recherché}, the two ways converge in the person of Mlle. Saint-Loup, the daughter of Robert de Saint-Loup of the Guermantes family and Gilberte Swann the daughter of Swann and Odette. The two ways that at the beginning of \textit{A la recherché} represent only irreconcilable fragmentation, at the end of \textit{A la recherché} represent the interplay of

\textsuperscript{734} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 162.
\textsuperscript{735} Shattuck, \textit{Proust’s Way}, 162.
fragmentation and unity, where unity diverges into fragmentation, and fragmentation ferments into Proust’s philosophy of communication.

**From Fragmentation to Philosophy of Communication**

With *Les plaisirs et les jours* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust followed the path of fragmentation. *Les plaisirs et les jours* is a collection of individual vignettes that France described in the preface as “young with the age of its author, but old with the age of the world.”

The young author of *Les plaisirs et les jours* was wise beyond his years in human psychology, but did not yet understand his own true self. The older author of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* understands himself better, but only in relation to Sainte-Beuve. As early as *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust sets up the dichotomy between the two self and superficial selves. For instance, in “A Dinner in High Society,” a well-connected man named Honoré attends a dinner party, where a handsome stranger asks Honoré to tell him about the other guests.

Across from Honoré were two rival writers, each ignoring the other, “as if the chief of villains were confronting the king of imbeciles.” Further down the table were the blonde beauty Madame Fremer and the “self-made aristocrat” Madame Lenoir, as well as a “superb” Spanish woman who ate too much and a haughty humanist who quoted Homer too much. Near the humanist sat Madame Fremer’s “muzzled” husband, whose expression combined “stifled annoyance, sullen resignation, pent-up exasperation, and profound brutishness,” and Monsieur Fremer’s business associate, who shared with Monsieur Fremer a “vague fraternity” of people who would rather be somewhere else, like Frenchmen in a foreign

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country. The crowning guest was the Duchess de D., whose acquired talent for conversation matched her natural-born beauty and elegance. Honoré left the party and walked down the Champs-Élysées. Despite their differences in disposition, thought Honoré, all the guests shared the single trait of snobbery. Snobbery assumed many forms, such as Madame Fremer the foreign minister and Madame Lenoir the meteorologist, but behind the artificial whiteness of a shirt and the redness of a carnation, snobbery hid from all the real redness of the setting sun and the “becoming whiteness”\textsuperscript{742} of their true selves.

Superficial selves reflect one’s personality at one particular time, as created by the expectations of others. Any type of communication that is not the creation of or engagement with a work of art that expresses the author’s true self is meaningless communication among superficial selves. In \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, Proust sets side by side his superficial selves in beautiful vignettes, but makes no effort to tie together the loose ends. In all of the “drafts, sketches, trial runs, first shots, preliminaries”\textsuperscript{743} of \textit{A la recherche}, Proust showed a talent for writing and an outline of something important to write, but like the ships on the harbor, Proust had not yet searched the sea of his true self. Without the obsessive editing of \textit{A la recherche}, the individual vignettes of \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours} and the posthumous arrangement of \textit{Contre-Sainte Beuve} remain superficial and subject to time. While \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours} and \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} are unknown outside the small circle of Proust scholars, who read them for what they reveal about \textit{A la recherche}, the “Great Novel” has been translated into hundreds of languages for patient readers all over the world. Proust is commonly called the best novelist of the twentieth century, and \textit{A la recherche} tops many lists of the best novels of all time. It is evident from this manuscript that there are many similarities in both style and philosophy among \textit{A la}

\textsuperscript{742} Proust, “A Dinner in High Society,” 107.
and Proust’s early works, so why the stark differences in popularity? Why the mass appeal for a novel so intimately tied to one historical moment and the essence of one, very strange man? The answer lies in Proust’s philosophy of communication.

**Toward a Philosophy of Communication in Proust**

In the introduction to *Jean Santeuil*, the writer C. walked uphill along the cliffs of the Bay Concarneau, then started to run as he neared the top. In the “sublime spot”744 at the top of the cliff, C. “scanned the sea”745 for memories of summers past. The memories came to C. suddenly through impressions of the sea and sky, which filled C. with happiness and inspired him to write. For Proust impressions last only a moment, after which the intellect lessens exponentially the intensity of impressions. Proust does not account in the introduction to *Jean Santeuil* for the interval between C.’s impressions on the cliff and his return to the cottage to write, and for good reason: he did not yet understand how to translate his own impressions into the temporal and somewhat chronological narrative of *Jean Santeuil* (see chapter 5). *Jean Santeuil* sets up the problematic of the temporal order of lived reality (C. climbs the same cliff every day) versus the occasional interruptions of impressions that punctuate the temporal order of reality with sublime feelings of happiness (C. receives impressions on the cliff).

In chapter five, I outlined C.’s argument that Proust overcompensated for the temporal order of reality in the introduction to *Jean Santeuil*. Shattuck argues that Proust made the opposite mistake in the preface to *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, overreacting to the failure of *Jean Santeuil* to convey the non-narrative nature of impressions with the jarring juxtaposition of unrelated chapters.746 *A la recherché* splits the difference between *Jean Santeuil*’s overemphasis on temporal order and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*’s overcompensation with non-narrativity. The

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narrator of *A la recherché* affirms the narrator of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*’s emphasis on impressions as interruptions of temporal order – the writing of *A la recherché* interrupts the narrator’s social life, and the book begins with an interruption to the narrator’s sleep – yet insists on P.’s emphasis on temporal order in *Jean Santeuil* to demonstrate the spontaneity of impressions. The majority of the 3,000 pages of *A la recherché* follow a rough temporal order interrupted by the occasional impression or digression. Proust learned his lesson in *Jean Santeuil*, but went too far in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve* the balance between order and interruption is so overt that it becomes jarring for the reader. While Proust forced temporal order on the readers of *Jean Santeuil* and non-narrativity on the readers of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, the readers of *A la recherché* experience order and interruption for themselves in the course of the novel.

As soon as the reader gets used to Proust’s difficult prose and reading Proust becomes habit, Proust interrupts the story with an unexpected temporal twist. Proust interjects the middle of a scene with philosophical commentary, and uses the scene to illustrate his philosophy. He follows multi-subordinate sentences of 600 words with fragments of six words. The sentences of *A la recherché* are so long and so complex that by habit the casual reader of Proust allocates a certain amount of effort to reading each sentence. When Proust violates the reader’s expectations with a simple sentence, the reader can reallocate the remaining resources to understanding the implications of the short sentence. In *A la recherché*, Proust solves the problem left unresolved in the introduction to *Jean Santeuil* of how to impose the temporal order required of a modernist novel with the inherent spontaneity of impressions.

The key to translating impressions into writing is to follow the temporal order of the *impressions*, not temporal order as derived from lived experience. The temporal order of
impressions does not disregard linearity, as Proust thought in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, or chronology imposed *ad hoc* on individual impressions, as he thought in *Jean Santeuil*. Instead, the temporal order of impressions is an interruption of lived experience “encrusted in habit”\(^747\) with a “kind of innocence”\(^748\) that calls one to think about experience in new and non-derived ways. Proust constantly used similes and analogies in *A la recherché*. These vivid comparisons upset the reader’s cookie-cutter categories for understanding lived experience, and call the reader to read *A la recherché* on Proust’s terms, the way Proust read Sainte-Beuve. This is the only way that the reader can recognize his true self in *A la recherché* and communicate with Proust.

**The Two Ways of Instinct and Intellect**

Proust was a prodigious editor, but *ad hoc* editing is the work of the intellect, and the intellect poisons the poetry of impressions. Did Proust leave *Jean Santeuil* unedited because he realized early on that *Jean Santeuil* was not the right form for his vision, as Shattuck suggests, or because he did not want his intellect to taint his raw impressions in the pages of *Jean Santeuil*? Proust knew that the complete manuscript of *Jean Santeuil* was not fit for publication, but he kept the fragments as a reservoir of raw materials for *Contre-Sainte Beuve* and a reminder of the complete vision of *A la recherché*. In the introduction to *Jean Santeuil*, Proust is unclear about the relationship between the writer’s sensibility (or imagination, feeling or instinct), which receives the raw materials through for a novel through impressions, and the writer’s intellect, which fashions the impressions into written form in first fragments, then a complete and coherent novel through *ad hoc* arrangement. Proust sees the mental faculties of sensibility and intelligence as irreparably separate in *Jean Santeuil*, so much so that he outsources the work of the intellect to C. in the introduction. Proust describes in detail C.’s long, uphill walks to the top of the cliff, and

also the process by which C. translates the impressions he receives at the top of the cliff into writing, but leaves unsaid the time between the sensibility and intelligence, when the two realms overlap.

Instinct and intelligence are two opposing parts of the mind that Proust had not yet been able to reconcile in a way compatible with his philosophy. Proust outsources completely to C. the part of the mind played by intelligence in the introduction to Jean Santeuil. In the preface to Contre Sainte-Beuve, he wants to rank intelligence behind intellect in a “hierarchy of virtues,” but knows that only the intellect can rank. Proust still sees sensibility as irreconcilable with intelligence, but believes that sensibility is somehow superior to the intellect. While the intellect derives its categories from cultural convention, sensibility is originative to the individual and remains intimately personal even after the intellect categorizes its sensations. However, instinct is incapable of ranking itself above the intellect, since only the intellect can impose hierarchy. Until the end of A la recherché, which recasts as Marcel’s struggle what in Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve is Proust’s struggle to rectify instinct and intelligence, the two parts of the mind remain in their own hemispheres, like the two ways of Swann and Guermantes in Du côté de chez Swann.

Especially early in Du côté de chez Swann, the dualism between intelligence and instinct is also a dualism between communication and instinct. Marcel’s reaction to the hawthorn on the trail to Tansonville “remained obscure and vague, struggling and failing to free itself, to float across and become one with them.” Proust begins A la recherché with the same philosophy of communication evident at the ends of Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve. In an essay called “On Exactitude in Science,” Jorge Luis Borges tells the story of some ambitious cartographers

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750 Proust, Swann’s Way, 195.
who wanted to make a map the exact size of the empire it charted. The enormous map of the empire was useless to the next generation of less ambitious cartographers, who left it to rot in the sun and snow: “still today, there are tattered ruins of the map, inhabited by animals and beggars; in all the land there is no other relic of the discipline of geography.”751 As soon as a map the exact size of the empire was complete, it would change the terrain of the territory, since the territory now features a map the exact size of itself.

A new map would then have to account for not only the territory, but also the first map, but the second map would again change the terrain of the territory and require a third map to account for the second, and so on until there is no more room for maps. For Proust, communication is a product of the intellect akin to Borges’s map. Communication, or words organized into a system of language, tries to map reality “point by point.”752 In an effort to express a reality that is by nature incommunicable, communication reduces Marcel’s incommunicable feelings of happiness and timelessness from the hawthorns to a few hundred choices of words, which others can also use to describe their own fundamentally incommunicable feelings. For Proust, reality cannot be communicated because reality is revealed only in incommunicable impressions. Communication is a shared, collective phenomenon that facilitates the communication of appearances, not the reality of impressions. Communication imposes order on spontaneous impressions, and forces community on the intensely personal experience of impressions. Communication is an exchange of appearances that maps only the top terrain of experience without looking below the surface of appearance to the essence of reality. Communication reduces the intimately individual experience of impressions to the lowest common denominator of shared language.

752 Borges, *Collected Fictions*, 325.
In *Du côté de chez Swann*, Marcel sees in the Martinville steeples some “quality beyond the power of words,” which circling birds seem to cement against the silent blue sky. The young Marcel thinks that the quality in the Martinville steeples is “analogous to a pretty phrase,” but when he tries to write it down, he realizes that only appearance is “analogous to a pretty phrase,” and the quality of the Martinville steeples was reality drawn from the “obscurity inside” himself, which existed only in his own mind, invisible to anyone else. In his description of the Martinville steeples, Marcel tries to make visible this invisible feeling in a “little fragment” about the “noble silhouettes” and “sun-bathed pinnacles” of the steeples. Earlier in the overture to *Du côté de chez Swann*, Marcel engages his intellect to understand his impression of the tea and madeleine: “I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature. Whence did it come? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it?” Again, Proust found the answer in philosophy of communication.

**Collecting the Fragments of Communication**

In the overture to *Du côté de chez Swann*, the “all-powerful joy” of the impression of the tea and madeleine was something separate from the physical reality of the tea and madeleine, but contrary to common sense the physical reality is less real than the impression, and the physical reality of the tea and madeleine is not reality at all, but appearance. Marcel does not yet understand the difference in the overture to *Du côté de chez Swann*, but just as the ways of Swann and Guermantes converge in the daughter of Robert de Saint-Loup and Gilberte Swann, the hemispheres of instinct and intellect converge in Marcel’s realization that intellect and

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753 Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 89.
754 Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 89.
instinct are not distinct hemispheres at all, but complimentary mental processes that together make up the whole of Marcel’s mind in the pages of A la recherché. Only the ad hoc interpretation of the intellect makes the fragmentary impressions of the instinct usable for the writer. In Contre Sainte-Beuve, the narrator understood that the intellect is the only mental faculty that can translate his incommunicable impressions into communicable form, but looked for a loophole in the question of the instinct versus the intellect because he had already criticized Sainte-Beuve’s overreliance on the intellect.

In Jean Santeuil he dodged the question, but in A la recherché Proust finally saw the symbiosis in the relation of instinct to intellect: “Something we have not had to interpret, to illuminate by our own personal effort, something that was clear before we arrived on the scene, is not truly ours. Only those things belong to us that we draw out of the obscurity inside us and that others do not know.” All of the progress made by science accounts to no more than a life-size map of the world, because science sacrifices sensibility to a mechanical and impersonal method that defines reality as the absence of sensibility. A la recherché represents the convergence of instinct and the intellect because Marcel’s moment of vision was no longer separate from the process of writing, as in Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve. Writing is not only the process of communicating one’s own impressions to someone else, but also the interpretation of one’s own impressions for oneself.

In his writing of the “little fragment” on the Martinville steeples, Marcel treated his impressions as “analogous to a pretty phrase,” and intellect as analogous to (but separate from) instinct. He wanted to convey his personal impressions of the steeples, so he wrote down in pretty phrases their physical characteristics, still there for anyone to see. At the end of A la

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758 Proust, Swann’s Way, 89.
recherché, the form of Marcel’s philosophy of communication shifts away from objects or others to himself, where reality resides. Communication deals only in appearances; philosophy of communication first opens one’s instinct to impressions and engages instinct in search of the reality in the impressions (philosophy), then translates the reality of the impressions into communicable form (communication).

Proust reserves for the instinct the position of the ”subtles, the most powerful and appropriate instrument for grasping the truth“ but reverses his position on the intellect from *Contre Sainte-Beuve*: “It is life itself which, little by little, case by case, allows us to notice that what is most important for our heart, or for our mind, is taught us not by reasoning but by other powers.” In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust has an inkling that instinct is important, but he is concerned mostly with flexing his intellect. In “The Death of Baldassare Silvande, Viscount of Sylvania,” Proust wrote (ironically, knowing full well that he himself was also guilty) that Baldassare was a fool for “moving backward toward death while staring at life.” In *Jean Santeuil* privileges instinct over intellect and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* intellect over instinct. In *A la recherché*, Proust converges the ways of intellect and instinct within the mind of Marcel. He sets the fragments of appearance and reality, particular and general, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability and sociality and solitude in symbiotic service of everyday life.

**The Two Ways of Individualism and Community**

In their 2012 book, *Overture to Philosophy of Communication: Carrier of Meaning*, Arnett and Holba write that the American Dream depends on individualism. In a free society with few barriers to upward mobility, the self-reliant and independent individual can succeed

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with determination and hard work alone. Every individual should be able to advance by merit as far as their talents take them, no matter where they start. Society should facilitate a match between an individual’s innate aptitudes and his or her realistic vision for prosperity. In their 1995 book *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and colleagues refer to Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* describe the dangers of excessive individualism. Bellah et al. understand “habits of the heart”\(^{762}\) as mindful, yet repeated actions through which our everyday lives assume existential meaning and purpose. Habits of the heart hold the individual accountable to other individuals and make the individual aware of the interconnectedness with other individuals on which individualism depends.

Habits of the heart recognize alterity and otherness as a source of new knowledge for the individual, and the individual as needing otherness as a referent for his or her own originality. Otherness opens avenues for upward mobility unavailable to individuals in a closed system of insular sameness. Habits of the heart embrace fragmentation when the ways of the postmodern world contradict one’s own personal beliefs, or one’s actions or attitudes fail to meet one’s aspirations. Habits of the heart call one to check one’s own claims to Truth against the many truths of other people. Through Bellah et al, Arnett and Holba see in the flawed finitude of the human condition an opportunity to create community in the space opened by difference.

In *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust believed that instinct (which he associates with philosophy) and the intellect (which he associates with communication) were two separate and irreconcilable mental processes, and that instinct was somehow superior to the intellect. In *A la recherché*, Proust brought instinct and the intellect together as two complimentary parts of the whole of Marcel’s mind. As evidenced by the failures of *Jean*

Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve, either instinct or intellect alone cannot communicate the true self. Only the symbiotic synthesis of instinct and intellect, wherein the instinct receives impressions and the intellect interprets the impressions, reveals to the writer’s instinct his true self, and allows the writer’s intellect to communicate his true self without losing the power of the impressions.

Like the early Proust, who keeps separate instinct and the intellect, Bellah et al. bifurcate the American dream into two parts, or two “ways” if you will: the pursuit of individual freedom and the search for community. Like the late Proust, who converges instinct and the intellect, Bellah et al. argue that the two ways of the American dream must work together for the dream to become a reality. For Bellah et al., individual freedom is a “dialectic counterweight” to community, where community provides the societal mechanisms for individual freedom, and freedom fosters community among factions of like-minded individuals. Arnett and Arneson argue that everyday communication, or what Proust would call words or conversation, privileges the individual over community, and encourages Americans to actualize only one part of the American dream: the pursuit of individual freedom.

Privileging only one part of the American Dream is the same mistake in a different context that Proust made with Jean Santeuil, which privileged instinct over intellect, and Contre Sainte-Beuve, which privileged intellect over instinct. For Bellah et al., the inability to invite community is linguistic in that language promotes normative narcissism as the clear winner between individualism and community. Language overdetermines individual identity and limits the individual’s options for inviting community. Whereas Bellah et al. tie everyday

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763 Arnett and Arneson, Dialogic Civility, 256.
764 Arnett and Arneson, Dialogic Civility, 257.
765 Proust, Swann’s Way, 89.
communication to individualism in arguing that there are more words for self-expression than there are for invitation to community, Proust ties communication to community in arguing that communication compromises the kind of individual reflection that reveals reality. For the early Proust, communication stays in the shallows of reality, and never fully penetrates the appearance of the present to the essence of the past. The reality of objects exists below a superficial exoskeleton of appearance. The reality of people, or one’s true self, lies in the heart at the bottom of one’s bosom, below the external appearances of superficial selves. For Proust, a shared system of language lays on top of reality, like a “point for point” map, and limits one’s options for describing the essence of reality beyond its external and superficial characteristics.

At this point, it would be easy to say that Bellah et al.’s problematic of the role of communication in the American Dream dichotomy of individual freedom versus community is analogous to Proust’s problematic of the role of communication in his philosophical dichotomy of instinct versus intellect, but to say this would be making the same mistake made by Marcel in *Du côté de chez Swann* in thinking that the essence of the Martinville steeples was “analogous to a pretty phrase.” The dilemma for Bellah et al. is how to balance individualism and community in such a way that individuals benefit from community and communities benefit from individuals, without imposing community on individuals or returning to a medieval disregard for individual difference. The dilemma is akin to Proust’s dilemma when writing *Jean Santueil* and later *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, where Proust was unable to reconcile instinct (or individualism) and the intellect (or community) because he overcompensated for instinct in *Jean Santeuil* and the intellect in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. 
Call to Communication through Cork

Bellah et al. and Proust come to same conclusion from opposite perspectives: that communication is central to the human condition. By habits of the heart, de Tocqueville meant the “notions possessed by men [or women], the various opinions current among them, and the sum of ideas that shape mental habits,”767 which together constitute the “whole moral and intellectual state of a people.”768 Both Bellah et al. and Proust bifurcate the whole moral and intellectual mores of their historical moments into two opposing mental processes. Bellah et al. see in twentieth-century America a division between two pilgrimages, one in search of individual freedom, the other in search of community. For Bellah et al., communication in twentieth-century America was self-focused and synonymous with self-expression at the expense of communal dialogue. Proust saw in the grandeur of the Belle Epoque in nineteenth-century France a disconnect between instinct and the intellect. As scientific and valueless discourse preoccupied with progress, communication was not self-focused enough and therefore incapable of true self-expression through art.

Proust differs from Bellah et al. in that for Proust, self-expression is the only form of true communication, as opposed to Bellah et al., who argue that self-expression is a stale form of communication. For Proust, self-expression as understood by Bellah et al. expresses only superficial selves overdetermined by the expectations of others, and never penetrates past one’s superficial selves to the true self, or the essence of oneself. Communication as colloquially understood by Proust is driven by the intellect, but there is more to communication than meets the intellect. The essence of the true self is revealed in moments bienheureux, when an impression in the present resurrects an impression in the past and frees the true self from time.

768 Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 292.
From *Les plaisirs et les jours* through *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* to *A la recherché*, Proust’s project was largely a back and forth battle between his true self as glimpsed in moments *bienheureux* and the available means of making communicable his true self, for the sake of not only writing a “pretty phrase,” but also opening his readers to their own true selves.

Like objects in the world, communication has an essence and an appearance. The appearance of communication is conversation among superficial selves. The essence of communication is the translation of the true self as revealed in moments *bienheureux* into a work of art through the dialectical interplay of instinct, which receives the impressions, and the intellect, which makes communicable in writing the inherently incommunicable impressions. For the non-artist, the essence of communication is the silent recognition of one’s true self in the true self-expression of the artist. Proust did not trust the reader to recognize the reader’s true self in *Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* because Proust had not yet found his own true self in the interplay of instinct and the intellect. In *Les plaisirs et les jours*, Proust sought the approval of Anatole France and Madeleine Lemaire. In *Jean Santeuil*, he outsourced the essence of his life to C. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, he focused on Sainte-Beuve. Only when making the raw materials of his memory “his own” in *A la recherché* could Proust make communicable his true self, and communicate with the true selves of millions of admiring readers.

From the perspective of Proust’s philosophy of communication, which elevates solitude over sociality as a path to the true self, or Proust’s life, from which he withdrew to write *A la recherché*, it seems that Proust affirms and even exacerbates the individualism against which Bellah et al. and Arnett and Holba warn. This may be true for the early Proust, but for the late Proust, the whole Proust, philosophy of communication is a silent call to communication which
echoes from the “very metal of his heart.” Arnett and Holba frame philosophy of communication as a “dwelling for human meaning.” In Proust’s philosophy of communication, objects themselves have no meaning, and exist only in the mind of an observer. Once passed, the essence of the past recedes into ordinary objects and waits for resurrection in the “all-powerful joy” of a future impression. Ordinary objects are dwellings for the past that house the reality of the past until it is freed from time by involuntary memory. Proust solves the dilemma of the two ways of instinct and the intellect by setting instinct in service of the intellect to make the intensely individual experience of impressions communicable to other so that they too may come to know their true selves.

Through Arnett and Holba, I offer Proust’s philosophy of communication, which converges philosophy and communication in service of everyday life, as a resolution to Bellah et al.’s dilemma of the two separate searches of individualism and community. For Arnett and Holba, human meaning dwells in philosophy of communication, which “sustains, reconstitutes and builds the communicative practices that shape out ‘habits of the heart.’” For Proust, instinct is intensely individual because instinct reveals to one a reality known only to oneself and no one else. The intellect is inherently communal because the intellect infers knowledge from categories derived from culture, and relies on a shared system of language to communicate that knowledge. Proust tried and failed to reconcile instinct and the intellect in Jean Santeuil, then again in Contre Sainte-Beuve. A la recherché represents the true reconciliation of instinct and the intellect, wherein Proust used his intellect to piece together the fragments of his instinct into the whole of Marcel’s mind.

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769 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 31.
770 Arnett and Holba, Overture, 1.
771 Arnett and Holba, Overture, 3.
Arnett and Holba perform a similar convergence with philosophy of communication, which employs the intellect in an “intellectual shaping of the habits of the heart”\textsuperscript{772} to combine the fragments of philosophy and communication into a “dwelling for human meaning”: philosophy of communication. Philosophy of communication calls people to be communicative craftsmen who love and invest meaning in the craft of communication, as opposed to expert communicators who know how to communicate but do not invest themselves in the craft. Proust did not withdraw from his life of superficial communication and spend fourteen years writing \textit{A la recherche} in relative solitude solely for the sake of his own reputation. His reputation as an expert writer was already cemented in society by the time he began \textit{Du côté de chez Swann.} After the failure of \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve}, Proust realized that his opposite mistakes in \textit{Jean Santeuil} and \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} were mistakes of communication. Proust’s philosophy told him that communication was a contradiction of the true self, which one could find only through contemplation in the absence of communication with others, but he nonetheless tried to jam his true self into \textit{Jean Santeuil} and \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve}.

From an early age, Proust was an expert communicator in society, and proved with \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, \textit{Jean Santeuil} and \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} that he was an expert writer as well. With \textit{A la recherche}, Proust withdrew from the outside word and committed himself wholly to the craft of communication as defined by his philosophy. He realized that his philosophy was a philosophy of communication, and that as a talented artist he had a responsibility to communicate his true self so that other people could recognize their own true selves in his work. By channeling the communicative fragments of \textit{Les plaisirs et les jours}, \textit{Jean Santeuil} and \textit{Contre Sainte-Beuve} into the three thousand pages of \textit{A la recherche}, Proust converged the two ways of philosophy and communication in response to his own performative call to

\textsuperscript{772} Arnett and Holba, \textit{Overture}, 2.
communication which, as long as Proust is in print, will echo from the silence of his cork-lined bedroom. I leave the reader with four hermeneutic entrances into Proust’s philosophy of communication as a performative call to communication:

1. *Space between philosophy and communication:* Philosophy of communication is a performative call to communication that converges the fragments of philosophy and communication into wholistic “habits of the heart.” “Habits of the heart” are ways of living that inject existential meaning into the mindlessness of everyday life. Alone, the fragments of philosophy and communication engage existence from one perspective at the expense of the other. From the perspective of philosophy, communication cannot be trusted to carry the truths of philosophy. It is too prone to error and too susceptible to manipulation. From the perspective of communication, there would be no use for philosophy without communication because the wisdom of philosophy would be useless if not communicated. Also, if philosophy is useless without communication (but still communication is still useful without philosophy), philosophy should be no more than a sub-category of communication. Philosophy of communication privileges neither philosophy nor communication. Instead, philosophy of communication the interplay of philosophy (the search for wisdom) and communication (the transmission of wisdom) in service of everyday life and its “habits of the heart.”

2. *Fragments of communication:* The historical moment of postmodernity is characterized by fragmentation and instability. Philosophy of communication affirms fragmentation as a carrier of meaning, rather than imposing artificial stability on fundamental fragmentation. Proust’s philosophy of communication begins with fragmentation. Proust’s world is fragmented along the lines of appearance and reality, general and
particular, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability and sociality and solitude. What looks like reality is actually appearance, and what appears to be general is actually particular, and reverse. Just as a child’s imagination forgets the present and flies to the exotic lands of the future, the present is always anti-climactic compared to the good ol’ days of the past and the promise of the future. For both objects in the physical world and objects of our love, we always want what we do not have, and are underwhelmed when we possess it. The fundament of Proust’s world is fragmentation disguised as stability and habit, which make tolerable the permanent anti-climax of the present. Proust’s philosophy of communication lifts the mask from fragmentation, and bridges the binaries of appearance and reality, general and particular, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability and sociality and solitude.

3. **Reconciliation of Instinct and Intellect**: In Proust’s philosophy of communication, instinct (or sensibility or heart or feeling) plays the role of philosophy, and the intellect (or intelligence or reason) plays the role of communication. In his early work, Proust is skeptical of the intellect and privileges instinct as the only avenue to truth. For Proust, reality is revealed only in impressions, which appeal only to instinct. As soon as the intellect takes over from the instinct and tries to categorize and classify the incommunicable experience of an impression, the impression retreats into other objects unavailable to the intellect. In Proust’s early works from *Les plaisirs et les jours* to *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, the intellect does nothing but harm to the happiness of the instinct. However, if the intellect was so bad, how could Proust rely on the intellect to write a novel, and if communication was so bad, why did Proust devote most of his life to gossip and salon conversations? It took until 1910 for Proust to realize the contradiction in his
philosophy of communication. After the failures of *Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust set to work reconciling instinct and philosophy with communication and intellect in *A la recherché*.

4. **Performative call to communication:** Proust’s philosophy of communication is a performative call to communication. Proust’s philosophy of communication consists of two parts: the artist reifies his true self as glimpsed in impressions into a work of art, and receivers of the work of art recognize their own true selves in the work of art. As a young man, Proust was devoted in everyday life to the same superficial communication he criticized in his philosophy. As he wrote *A la recherché* at the end of his life, Proust withdrew from the world of high society and devoted himself to translating his true self into communicable form. The question remained, however, of how non-artists could make communicable their incommunicable true selves. If only artists could capture their true selves in art, then according to Proust’s philosophy of communication, only artists could communicate. Proust’s withdrawal from the world of superficial communication was a performance of the second part of his philosophy of communication. Proust sacrificed his own life for the sake of all non-artists, so that they too can experience the essence of communication.

Proust never changed his view of superficial communication in *Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, but in *A la recherché* he added to communication the capacity for true self-recognition in the work of a great artist as an expression of the true self of the artist. According to Proust’s philosophy, the essence of communication is self-recognition in solitude, but Proust spent his days trying to please others at parties and socials. After *Les plaisirs et les jours* and the detours of *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust realized his
communicative mistake, and committed himself to a life of silence and solitude in his famous cork-lined bedroom.

Proust’s withdrawal from the world of superficial communication was a call to real communication, the essence of communication through the interplay of his writing and the self-recognition of his readers. The same man who unapologetically assailed communication as a young man devoted his life to communication in old age, so that he could communicate long after his death. It took four tries, but Proust had finally produced his first full philosophy of communication, for which his reward was everlasting life in literature.

**Philosophy of Communication in the Image of Proust**

In Part I, I framed Proust’s historical moment as the background from which emerged his philosophy of communication, which I then explicated in terms of the binaries of reality and appearance, general and particular, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude. In Part II, I described three of Proust’s early works – *Les plaisirs et les jours* (published in 1896), *Jean Santeuil* (written and abandoned between 1900 and 1905), and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (written and abandoned between 1908 and 1909). Each work is a pit stop on Proust’s path to philosophy of communication. While *Les plaisirs et les jours* reflects the superficiality of the Belle Epoque, *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve* are Proust’s overreaction to the superficiality of the Belle Epoque, in which he overcompensated first for instinct (which Proust associates with philosophy), then for the intellect (which Proust associates with communication). In Part III, I outlined *A la recherché* as the convergence of reality and appearance, general and particular, climax and anti-climax, intermittence and stability, and sociality and solitude. There was no place for communication in Proust’s early philosophy, but *A la recherché* represents for Proust a change of heart on communication. The same man who was
so hostile to communication in the failed *Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil*, and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, sacrificed his life to communication in the writing of *A la recherché*.

The success of *A la recherché* was informed by the lessons Proust learned about communication after the failed first drafts of *Les plaisirs et les jours, Jean Santeuil*, and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. The question remains, however, of what lessons Proust holds for philosophy of communication, and what a philosophy of communication informed by Proust would look like.

A philosophy of communication in the image of Proust is both a theoretical perspective and mode of thinking. As a theoretical perspective, a Proustian philosophy of communication would study the nature and function of human communication as philosophical discourse and, just as Proust channeled the likes of Lachelier, Boutroux, Bergson and many others into his philosophy, would examine the role of communication in the work of key philosophers in their intellectual and historical contexts. As a mode of thinking, Proustian philosophy of communication would explicate the “why” behind the “how” of human communication. For Proust, all of human experience in the present is colored by human desires and expectations, as well as the prospects and promise of the future. Likewise, a philosophy of communication informed by Proust would assume that prejudice is a prerequisite for communication, then look for prejudice to understand the meaning of human communication. For Proust, meaning is fleeting. It flashes, then fades, forever in flux. Self-reliant trial and error moves existential meaning into the empty “outline” of a body. Philosophy of communication in the image of Proust assumes that meaning emerges “in the doing” of communication as a practice performed in and through the human body.

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773 Arnett and Holba, *Overture*, 3.
he wrote *A la recherché*, Proust refused to eat and drank only coffee and iced beer. His body was breaking down, but he continued to write, to “do” communication.

For twenty years, Proust had struggled to express his true self, whether in love, friendship, or literature, and failed. Now that he had solved the secret formula, he devoted every moment of his life to finishing this one book, the perfect expression of his true self: “I had decided to consecrate all my strength to it, but my strength was ebbing away as if regretfully and as if to leave me just enough time, the circle complete, to close the door of the tomb…” In the last weeks of his life, Proust refused to eat or drink, only write. He had drafted the whole novel, and was furiously editing what became *Albertine disparue*. He sacrificed his own mortality to make his characters immortal, just as the Narrator of *A la recherché* fades from the foreground of *Du côté de chez Swann* and *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, to the background of *Le côté de Guermantes* and *La Prisonnière*, to oblivion in *Albertine disparue* and *Le temps retrouvé*. In October 1922, Proust continued to edit *La Prisonnière* through a fever and bronchitis. He still refused to eat, but drank cups of iced beer from the side of his bed. His doctor and brother begged him to eat, but Proust sent them away with flowers, an apologetic offering to the last obstacles in the way of his work. On November 17th, Proust finished his work and went to bed exhausted. The next night, Proust lay breathless in bed when he began to hallucinate. Proust’s brother brought oxygen, but to no avail. Surrounded by fragments of one of the longest, and what many believe to be the greatest novel ever written, Marcel Proust died a skinny, pale and pitiful man. Even in death he looked much younger than fifty-one, as if Time had drawn back in defeat.

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776 Maurois, *The World of Marcel Proust*, 266.
Bibliography


