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Stuck in a revolving door : secularism, assimilation and democratic pluralism

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Publication date
2006

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Jansen, H. Y. M. (2006). *Stuck in a revolving door : secularism, assimilation and democratic pluralism*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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The Red Shoes Reading Proustian Memory in the Context of Secularism ¹

(...) [Er] baute aus den Waben der Erinnerung dem Bienenschwarm der Gedanken sein Haus (Benjamin 1977a [1929]: 312). [from the honeycombs of memory he built a house for the swarm of his thoughts (Benjamin 1968: 203).]

Tense pasts

In the previous two chapters, I have argued that a critique of *laïcité* invites a critique of the underlying concept of secularisation, particularly insofar as it is connected to a modernist concept of the subject. Ultimately, a concept of secularisation suggests that individual belief, or religion as ‘sentiment’ or ‘experience’, can be, should be, or is separated from culture or, more precisely, from cultural practices. I raised critical questions around the ‘asymptotic’ expectation that the separation of religion from visible, plural, polysemic practices that are suffused with habit, custom, *ethos*, and, in addition, with *others* and power, will prove able to contribute both to societal peace and individual happiness.

My critique of the dichotomous normative standpoints that result from the modernist heritage in our perception and analysis of migrant cultures and

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was published as an article, but the theoretical framework has been thoroughly rewritten here (see Jansen 2003a).

religions, has led me to suggest that conceptualising the memorial aspects of culture and religion may be crucial for deepening our understanding of the intrinsic connection of religious experience—but actually of experience in general—with the experiences, practices and power positions of the people that we are connected to.

In this chapter, I would like to flesh out this intuition a little further by returning to Marcel Proust's *Recherche*. My feeling here is that Proust's memorial narrative offers a crucial source for a contemporary way of 're-mediating' overly subjectivist concepts of experience on the one hand, and overly objectivist (structuralist) Durkheimian interpretations of the relationship between individuals and collectives on the other.² I will specifically locate Proust's contribution to the debate about secularism in his narrative of how individual characters relate to a collectively shared but also divided past in the tense intercultural situation surrounding the Dreyfus Affair. I end the chapter with a brief reflection on what Proust's narrative could add to our understanding of the requirements for 'democratic memory'.³

Proustian memory and modernity

Proustian memory is usually read in the light of what I call the narrator's 'individualistic metaphysics of memory', mainly elaborated in the theoretical reflections on writing and memory that form part of *Le temps retrouvé* [*Time Regained*], the final part of the novel. Reflecting on memory, writing and the accessibility of truth, the narrator suggests that the essence of things can ultimately be captured through metaphor, because metaphor is the analogue in literary style of the happiness produced by the experience of involuntary memory.⁴

² See chapter one for my critique of Noiriel's Durkheimian explanation of assimilation.

³ For an introduction of the main characters that re-appear in this chapter, see Transit I and chapters three and four. One important reminder: for the sake of liveliness, I translate the continuous past of the novel into a *praesens historicum*. Moreover, I separate between the 'present' in which things happen to the protagonist Marcel and the 'past' of the narrator, who recounts the course of his life in retrospect.

⁴ Many critics discussing memory in Proust, such as, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin, make little distinction between Proust as the author of the novel and the novel's narrator. I think it is useful to stick to the narratological insight that a narrator's voice is never the immediate voice of the author (see Bal 1998). In what follows, I will try to demonstrate that the reflexive piece in *Time Regained* about metaphor and memory should be read as part of the narrative and not as a final revelation of the 'technique' or even the 'metaphysics' of the Proustian novel. As will be shown later on, installing this distinction enables us to amend the interpretations of Benjamin and Deleuze, who both take the explanation in *Time Regained* as a major frame for their interpretation of the novel as a whole.

The narrator's views show affinities with Henri Bergson's philosophy of time and memory, though they also substantively differ at some points. Many commentators have turned the framework of Bergson's individualist metaphysics into a starting point for their interpretation of the novel: this tradition ranges from critics such as Georges Poulet (1964) to Gilles Deleuze (1964). One step in my interpretation will be to try to explain the subtle connection between the modernist view of the (religious) subject, which separates 'sentiment' from cultural practice, and these interpretations of memory and metaphor in the *Recherche*.

Walter Benjamin develops a striking critique of Bergson's interpretation of memory in his essay 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire' ['Some motifs in Baudelaire'] (1980) [1938] by contrasting it with a historical interpretation of Proustian memory. He understands Proustian memory through two prisms: modernity and the assimilation of the French Jews. In what follows, I will pursue Benjamin's intuition and interpret the cultural and historical aspects of memory in the *Recherche*. However, I will also argue that Benjamin's interpretation remains indebted to the dichotomous interpretation of modernity that I criticised in the previous chapters. For this reason, I will try to develop an alternative interpretation that is more attentive to the ways in which individual memories are subtly moulded through their connections with the collectivities to which they are affectively linked, particularly in times of deep cultural conflict like the era of the Dreyfus Affair.

I will explain my interpretation of Proustian memory by commenting on one particular strand in the Proustian narrative which I call 'the red shoes', thus linking this strand to the fairy tale of that name by Hans Christian Andersen (2005) [1845]. Red clothes, a red necklace and a pair of red shoes appear in Proust's novel each time it touches upon the fact that the aristocratic Madame (Oriane) de Guermantes has 'forgotten' her old Jewish friend Swann over the course of the Dreyfus Affair.⁵ By commenting on this specific narrative strand

⁵ The red clothes are mentioned for the first time at the end of *Le Côté de Guermantes* II (1988: II) [*The Guermantes Way* II (1996: III)], when Swann and Marcel pay a visit to the Duchess and her husband, the Duc de Guermantes. On the evening of the same day, the Duchess wears the red clothes to a party hosted by her niece, the Princesse de Guermantes. This episode is described extensively in *Sodom et Gomorrah* II (1988: III) [*Sodom and Gomorrah* II (1996: IV)]. At the party, Swann's Dreyfusism is publicly rejected by the Duke and Duchess. The following two times the shoes and the dress appear, they are the object of a conversation between Marcel and Mme de Guermantes that takes place after Swann's death. On both occasions, Mme de Guermantes has forgotten important facts surrounding them, facts that concern the Dreyfus Affair. While she refrains from mentioning Swann, the Proustian text evokes his memory through the repeated references to the red shoes and dress. The first conversation takes place in *La Prisonnière* (1988: III) [*The Captive* (1996: V)], the second occurs at the 'Bal de Têtes' ['Ball of the Masks'] at the end of the *Recherche* in *Le Temps retrouvé* (1989: IV) [*Time Regained* (1996: VI)].

and its intertextual relation to Andersen's fairy tale, I analyse Proust's representation of collective and individual aspects of both memory and forgetting at the conflictual historical moment of the Dreyfus Affair. I will try to demonstrate how the vicissitudes of the red shoes give us reasons for developing a less radically individualist view about the 'modernness' of modern experience than those put forward by Bergson, Deleuze and Benjamin. It will become apparent that the novel traces cultural memory as a possibly painful *noeud* between individuals and groups, connecting divided and shared pasts.⁶

Le Côté de Guermantes II: 'This is not it at all'

In his last long letter of 7 May 1940 to his friend Theodor W. Adorno, Benjamin comments on the historical aspect of the experience of time in Proust (Adorno 1977 [1940]: 203-04). Benjamin gives his brief response to a review by Adorno of two German writers, one of whom was Hofmannsthal. In this review, Adorno had written that in Hofmannsthal's work snobbery originated in the hope that happiness could be realized by obtaining a place in those layers of society where people did not exclusively (have to) concentrate on practical matters, but could turn to the pleasures of the mind. However, according to Adorno, those

⁶ In the *Recherche*, we also find an extensive narrative of the erosion of the Church as a religious institution and of the after-effects of this erosion on practices of meaning making and social distinction. In the first, most 'rural' part of the novel, *Combray*, members of the community from all social layers go to Church every Sunday, and it is around the Church that Marcel is confronted most vividly with the rituals of social distinction—for example between Legrandin, the Guermantes family, and his own family. Gradually, as the families turn more and more to Paris, the practice of habitual churchgoing comes to an end and the Church functions less and less as the symbolic centre of the distribution of social power. Most characters show little religious fervour. Mme de Guermantes is intimately connected by birth to the monarchy and thus to the history of the Church's worldly power, but she is not exactly devout or even particularly nostalgic for the nobility's political power. 'Oriane' is the queen neither of Tradition nor of secularised Catholicism. Instead, she is the 'Reine de l'Instant' ['Queen of the present moment' (1996: V, 664)], the queen of fashion and ephemerality; in Baudelaire's sense, she is a typically modern character. When they end up in Paris, most characters become fascinated by the city's transformation from the capital of French Catholicism into the capital of nineteenth-century high capitalism—but a character like Françoise, not incidentally the family's long-time servant, who perhaps feels at risk of becoming identified with the city proletariat, holds fast to her rural values. She even, in a certain sense, 'fundamentalises' them (see chapter four, on Françoise's early rejection of and later admiration for Saint-Loup). Swann displays neither religious practices nor religious 'sentiments'. But as we will see, the Dreyfus Affair greatly affects Swann's 'Jewishness'. (For an excellent interpretation of Proust's work in the context of the rise of high capitalism and the Third Republic, see Sprinker (1993) and also, of course, Benjamin, whose interpretation I will discuss from a different angle in this chapter.)

who follow the path of snobbery will not find happiness. The one searching for happiness will not be content merely contemplating the brilliance of an apparently beautiful life, but will strive to actually experience it, only to find that 'this is not it at all' as soon as he gets closer. Thus, he will repeat exactly the same experience that first inspired him to transcend his own circles. In his review, Adorno had argued that Proust was the only writer really to have grasped this mechanism.

In his comment on this review, Benjamin writes that Adorno felicitously speaks of Proustian experience as the experience of 'this is not it at all', where 'time turns into something we have lost' (Adorno and Benjamin 1999 [1940]: 329). He further suggests that Proust had a 'deeply hidden model' for this experience, namely the experience of 'this is not it' lived by the French assimilated Jews. The Proustian insight into the 'highly precarious structure of assimilation' was, argues Benjamin, externally confirmed by the Dreyfus Affair (Adorno and Benjamin 1999 [1940]: 330).

Let us now turn to the narrative strand of the red shoes, which traces the vicissitudes of Swann and Mme de Guermantes's friendship over the course of the Dreyfus Affair. At the end of *Le Côté de Guermantes II*, Marcel is in the Guermantes's salon and is told that Swann will arrive at any moment. Before Swann's arrival, the Duke tells Marcel that the relation between the Guermantes and Swann has cooled. For twenty years, Swann had been Mme de Guermantes's closest friend, appreciated by her for his fine taste and his behaviour as an experienced *homme du monde*. The fact that he was of Jewish descent was hardly a topic during the long years of friendship between Madame de Guermantes and Swann. Once, at the beginning of their friendship, at a time when she was still the Princesse de Laumes, a niece of Oriane had tried to make her admit that it was a bit strange for the sister of an Archbishop to receive the Jewish Swann, but Oriane had refused: 'J'avoue à ma honte que je n'en suis pas choquée' (1988 I: 329) ['I am ashamed to confess that I'm not in the least shocked' (1996: I, 403)]. When the niece proceeded to argue that 'converted Jews' like Swann 'remain more attached to their religion than the practicing ones', Oriane wittily replied, 'Je suis sans lumières à ce sujet' (329) ['I can throw no light at all on the matter' (403)].⁷

At the moment described, Swann has already partially lost Mme de Guermantes's friendship because of a socially unacceptable marriage, but his stance on the Dreyfus Affair now threatens the friendship in a more serious way, for the Duke in particular is a convinced anti-Dreyfusard. The Duke warns Marcel not to mention that night's party, because he is not sure whether Swann

⁷ The English translation makes it impossible to trace the subtle references to Catholicism (confession) and then the 'Lumières' ['Enlightenment'] in Oriane's respective replies.

has been invited. He explains: 'Swann aurait dû comprendre qu'il devait, *plus que tout autre*, couper tout câble avec ces gens-là [les Dreyfusards], or tout au contraire il tient des propos fâcheux' (1988: II, 865) ['Swann ought to have realised that *he more than anyone* must drop all connection with those fellows (the Dreyfusards), instead of which he says the most regrettable things' (1996: III, 668, my italics)]. Why Swann 'more than anyone'? In the course of the novel, the Duke makes many remarks about Swann's Dreyfusism, invariably accusing Swann of betraying the aristocratic circles he frequented by becoming a Dreyfusard while also being a Jew; instead, Swann should have been grateful for having been accepted by high society.

The intensity of the animosity during the Affair has caused Swann to distance himself from his old friends in the same way they have distanced themselves from him. When Swann and Marcel find themselves together during the afternoon visit, Swann explains to him why so many nobles are anti-Dreyfusards:

tous ces gens-là sont d'une autre race, on n'a pas impunément mille ans de féodalité dans le sang. Naturellement ils croient que cela n'est pour rien dans leur opinions (1988: II, 869).

[these people belong to a different race, one can't have a thousand years of feudalism in one's blood with impunity. Naturally they imagine that it counts for nothing in their opinions (1996: III, 673).]

For the first time in his long friendship, Swann is cruelly confronted with the risk of exclusion that arises at the moment of a conflict between 'groups' whose relevance he had considered *passé*. Using the available terms of his time, he deploys the naturalistic concepts of 'race' and 'blood' to indicate the extent to which historically different pasts, which appeared to have become politically irrelevant, seem to be re-inscribed into public identities at moments of conflict. He senses the illusion of the neutrality of the aristocrats who had, in modern ways and much like himself, come to think of themselves as impartial sources of opinion.⁸ After rendering the conversation, the narrator writes that Swann's 'declassing' would have been better described as a 'reclassing', because it was to his credit that his Dreyfusism made him return to 'la voie par laquelle étaient

⁸ For a reflection on the concept of 'race' in late nineteenth-century France, see my discussion in chapter three of Maurice Barrès's oppositional reaction to neo-Kantian Republican education. For a reflection on Proust's sensitivity to the affective sides of political opinion and the difficulty of impartiality, see the same chapter. A recent, compelling criticism of secularism's suggestion that we can attain a rational position in political deliberation, was developed by Connolly (1999) (see introduction).

venus les siens et d'où l'avaient dévié ses fréquentations aristocratiques' (1988: II, 870) ['the paths which his forebears had trodden and from which he had been deflected by his aristocratic associations' (1996: III, 673)].

The narrator here touches upon what Benjamin called 'the highly precarious structure of assimilation', which caused the experience of 'this is not it at all' at the time of the anti-Semitic reaction to Dreyfus. Later in the novel, the narrator describes this conflict again in terms of memory and forgetting. He writes that Swann might have developed

le sentiment d'une solidarité morale avec les autres Juifs, solidarité que Swann semblait avoir oubliée toute sa vie, et que greffées les unes sur les autres, la maladie mortelle, l'affaire Dreyfus, la propagande anti-sémite avaient réveillée (1988: III, 89).

[a sense of moral solidarity with the rest of the Jews, a solidarity which he seemed to have forgotten throughout his life, and which, one after another, his mortal illness, the Dreyfus case and the anti-semitic propaganda had reawakened (1996: IV, 104).]

The distance between the inheritors of feudalism and the Jews is suddenly not one of history any more, but one of the present. The fact that the Duke accuses Swann of betrayal as soon as his identification with the Jews is foregrounded by the Dreyfus Affair signals the extent to which his 'aristocratic associations' had always demanded from Swann a negation of his Jewish background, but also that this negation had only been virtually or potentially relevant: the concept of betrayal at least suggests that the Duke had once 'trusted' Swann.

When Mme de Guermantes finally arrives, the group starts a worldly conversation in which none of these sensitive subjects are touched upon. Instead, they talk about a necklace that Mme de Guermantes is going to wear to the party that night. At the end of the afternoon, she asks Swann to come to Italy with her for an art-historical trip the next spring. At the same moment, the Duke presses Oriane to hurry. He wants to leave immediately for the dinner preceding the party at the Princesse de Guermantes's and goes down to wait for her in the carriage. At Oriane's repeated request, Swann answers that he will not be able to come to Italy, because he is fatally ill. The Duchess reacts:

'Qu'est-ce que vous me dites?' s'écria la Duchesse en s'arrêtant une seconde dans sa marche vers la voiture et en levant ses beaux yeux bleus et mélancoliques, mais pleins d'incertitude. Placée pour la première fois de sa vie entre deux devoirs aussi différents que monter dans sa voiture pour aller dîner en ville, et témoigner de la pitié à un homme qui va mourir, elle ne

voyait rien dans le code des convenances qui lui indiquât la jurisprudence à suivre et ne sachant auquel donner la préférence, elle crut devoir faire semblant de ne pas croire que la seconde alternative eût à se poser, de façon à obéir à la première qui demandait en ce moment moins d'efforts, et pensa que la meilleure manière de résoudre le conflit était de le nier. 'Vous voulez plaisanter', dit-elle à Swann (1988: II, 883).

['What's that you say?' cried the Duchess, stopping for a moment on her way to the carriage and raising her beautiful, melancholy eyes blue eyes, now clouded by uncertainty. Placed for the first time in her life between two duties as incompatible as getting into her carriage to go out to dinner and showing compassion for a man who was about to die, she could find nothing in the code of conventions that indicated the right line to follow; not knowing which to choose, she felt obliged to pretend not to believe that the latter alternative need be seriously considered, in order to comply with the first, which at the moment demanded less effort, and thought that the best way of settling the conflict would be to deny that any existed. 'You're joking,' she said to Swann' (1996: III, 688).]

The narrator suggests that there is nothing about compassion in the Duchess' 'code of conventions', but is it not rather the case that no code can compete with the Duke's Zeus-like impatience?⁹ Swann and Oriane, in any case, are incapable of doing more than sharing their hesitation. Swann reacts ironically to the Duchess's question, answering that that would be a charming joke, but he then presses the Duchess to walk on to the carriage, because he understands the force of our 'obligations mondaines' [social obligations]. The Duchess, approaching the carriage, tells Swann that he should not care about the dinner, but this outrages the Duke, who insists on leaving *now*. At that moment, however, he suddenly notices that the Duchess is wearing black shoes instead of red ones with her red dress, and it turns out that there is enough time left to send her back into the house to change her shoes.

The intertextual reference to Andersen's 'The red shoes' gives full depth to this event.¹⁰ The fairy tale goes as follows. Once upon a time, there was a young girl named Karen, who was poor and had to go barefoot. Then someone makes her a pair of shoes out of old red cloth and she wears these shoes for the first

⁹ The narrator often compares the Duke to Zeus, particularly when the movements of his eyebrows manifest his authoritarianism.

¹⁰ Intertextuality is used here in the sense of 'something reserved to indicate a diffuse penetration of the individual text by memories, echoes, transformations of other texts'. 'Transtextuality', on the other hand, is reserved for overt relationships between specific texts. These definitions are taken from Hawthorn (1994: 126).

time to her mother's funeral. They are not suitable for mourning, but they are the only shoes she has. An old lady passes by in a large carriage and adopts Karen. She burns Karen's old shoes and Karen becomes a beautiful young lady. One time she sees a beautiful princess wearing red morocco leather shoes and buys a pair just like them. The old lady, nearly blind, cannot see that they are red. When Karen wears them to church, everybody stares at her shoes and they tell the old lady that they are red. The lady forbids Karen to wear the red shoes to church and orders her to wear black ones instead.

However, Karen cannot resist wearing the red shoes to church again and is punished by an inability to stop dancing. She even kicks the lady with the red shoes as they drive back from church in the carriage, and she can only stop dancing after she has been helped to take the shoes off. Once again, however, she cannot resist the temptation to put on the shoes, and goes to a party thrown while the old lady is dying. As a punishment, the shoes stick to her feet and force her to dance continuously. She has to ask an executioner to cut her legs off. This punishment is again not enough. When she feels she has repented sufficiently and wants to go to church again, she sees the red shoes dancing on her legs. She has to pray, give up all vanity and stay at home alone while all the others go to church before she is finally forgiven. When this happens, an angel moves her small room into the church where she meets the other people again. Her heart grows so full that it breaks. When she arrives in heaven, nobody asks her about the red shoes any more (Andersen 2005 [1845]).

This is a story of social forgetting, of the repression of mourning, of love and friendship's link to the past, and of forced integration into a collective or tradition that one is much less connected with affectively. Karen mourns her poor parents' life through the red shoes, which also promise her a better life full of parties and princesses. Her fantasies keep revolving around the church, which is *both* oppressive *and* provides her with memories of somewhere she belongs. The black shoes, the church and the old lady chain Karen to a collective past; not one of love or hope, but one of imposed continuity. The red shoes keep returning 'behind' the black ones and when forgetting about them proves an impossible task for Karen, her dancing feet have to become red themselves and must be cut off. We have *two kinds of memories* here: one memory loaded with affection and desire and one close to the 'devoir d'appartenance' [duty to belong] in the terms of the Stasi Committee (see chapter six). It would not be easy, however, to disentangle the two; not for someone other than Karen or even for herself.

Mme de Guermantes, in turn, is forced to wear red shoes instead of black ones. The continuity imposed on her is that of the parties and princesses which filled Karen's dreams. If she wants to keep her feet on the ground, she will have to forget Swann. The red shoes function as a metonymic marker for this aborted

friendship throughout the rest of the novel.¹¹ While the fuss about the red and black shoes takes place, Swann and Marcel stand outside, waiting to say goodbye, but the Duke makes them leave before Oriane comes back, shouting at Swann: 'vous nous enterrerez tous!' (1988: II, 884) ['you'll bury us all!' (1996: III, 691)].

Sodome et Gomorrhe II: a 'carcan de rubis'

The party thrown by the Princesse de Guermantes is described in the first chapter of *Sodome et Gomorrhe II*. The red clothes serve to portray both Oriane's distance from society and her conformity to it. The minute but important differences in behaviour between Oriane and the Duke that we observed before have now been suspended. Marcel, however, witnesses a compulsive aspect that pervades her behaviour. As she takes off her coat, Oriane appears to be wearing 'un véritable *carcan de rubis*' (1988: III, 61) ['a huge collar of rubies' (1996: IV, 71, my emphasis)].¹² The narrator also compares the artificial brightness of her eyes—'la Duchesse allumait pour toute la soirée' (1988: III, 61) ['the Duchess lit up for the whole evening' (1996: IV, 71)]—to that of her jewels, thereby identifying the signs of her liveliness—and her uncertainty—with her being yoked to society.

At the party, the reader is made to witness the way Oriane and her husband betray Swann. After a nationalist, anti-Dreyfusard and also anti-Semitic speech given by the Duke in front of several auditors, in which he again accuses Swann of betraying the aristocratic scene that had so generously 'adopted' him, the Duchess adds that she would never receive Swann's wife and daughter, although Swann had expressed his wish that she would do this before he died. She affirms the Duke's complaint that Swann has shown himself ungrateful to them by being pro-Dreyfus. Although Swann himself is present at the party, the Duke and Duchess do not exchange one word with him. Swann has been invited, ironically, because the anti-Semitic Prince de Guermantes, a cousin of the Duke, has become convinced of Dreyfus's innocence. He wants to tell Swann about this, as well as about a strange discovery he has just made: when he asked a priest to pray for Dreyfus at mass the next Sunday, to his astonishment the priest had told him that his wife, the Princess, had asked him to do the same thing. Thus, both are secret Dreyfusards.

¹¹ Perhaps they function as a fetish, as Sjef Houppermans remarked after a lecture I gave at the Dutch Marcel Proust society.

¹² The first meaning of 'carcan' is the iron ring that persons condemned to the pillory were made to wear around their necks. This caused a wound that looked like a red collar.

It becomes clear at the party that all the individual characters have their own opinions about the question of Dreyfus's guilt, which are only partially determined by the group(s) they belong to. However, there is a striking difference between the openness with which they defend these opinions. The Duke and Duchess are the ones to make their opinions public. The Prince and Swann exchange their words privately, and their convictions as Dreyfusards will remain private. As Marcel's friend Bloch learns about the Prince's conviction and wants to ask the Prince to sign his name to a petition on behalf of Dreyfus, Swann refuses to ask the Prince, 'mêlant à son ardente conviction d'Israélite la modération diplomatique du mondain, dont il avait trop pris les habitudes pour pouvoir si tardivement s'en défaire' (1988: III, 110) ['blending with his ardent conviction as a Jew the diplomatic moderation of a man of the world, whose habits he had too thoroughly acquired to be able to shed them at this late hour' (1996: IV, 130)]. Swann even refuses to add his own name to the petition, arguing that his conspicuously Jewish name would make the petition less convincing. This is not an unrealistic standpoint given the Duke's reaction, but Bloch finds Swann 'tiède, infecté de nationalisme et cocardier' (1988: III, 111) ['lukewarm, infected with nationalism and jingoistic' (1996: IV, 131)]. Swann's position is significant to the precarious structure of assimilation, as he is now isolated between two groups: the group whose *mores* he had entirely adopted and whose habits he cannot shed at will (of the Faubourg Saint-Germain), and the other group which required a forceful stance to start a public conflict and could not abide his undecided, overly careful behaviour.¹³

Henri Bergson and Walter Benjamin

Let us now address Benjamin's analysis of the historical, specifically modern character of Proustian memory, as developed in 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire' ['Some motifs in Baudelaire'] (1980) [1938]. The isolation of individual persons is central to Benjamin's analysis, but he does not develop his thought in the specific context of the assimilation of the French Jews around the Dreyfus Affair. Instead, he attempts to analyse the isolation of private persons in the context of what he considers to be the changing features of experience in modernity more generally. He develops his view through a criticism of the late nineteenth-century philosophy of life, particularly Bergson's, by contrasting it with Proustian memory. The specifically modern aspect of experience had not

¹³ Historically, the journalist Bernard Lazare, who was important in turning the Affair into a public issue, was not liked by the Dreyfus family because they saw him as lacking nuance, as an irresponsible troublemaker, and they at first wished to arrange things via diplomacy without addressing anti-Semitism more generally (see Burns 1991).

been questioned by the philosophy of life, which had been trying to gain insight into 'true' experience situated above or outside history through addressing poetry, nature, and the age of myth, and whose late representatives, like Klages and Jung, had become gradually associated with fascism. Bergson's work also stood in this tradition, but for Benjamin his work was by far the most challenging and convincing, also because Bergson kept pace with empirical research.

In *Matière et mémoire* (1880) [*Matter and Memory* (1996)], Bergson had argued that the individual, owing to what he called 'pure' memory, has access to a purely individual and metaphysical reality of *durée* [duration]. Bergson wanted to develop a new 'metaphysics' that would finally unravel the 'structure of our experience' independent of history, in reply to Kantian rationalism. He considered memory as divided between *mémoire pure* [pure memory] and *souvenir-habitude* [memory-habit], and, parallel to this, he saw time as necessarily divided into duration and spatialised time.¹⁴ In Benjamin's interpretation, Bergson suggests that we can freely decide to turn to the 'contemplative actualisation of the stream of life' (Benjamin 1997: 111) and away from active social life, which only gives access to *souvenir-habitude*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bergson himself saw his work as a philosophy of the relation between scientific (Kantian) rationality and a metaphysical dimension of reality, pure *durée* or becoming, accessible through what he called intuition. His critique of Kantianism was directed, in the first place, against what he considered the 'Platonism' in Kant's apriorism: the suggestion that experience is always predetermined by *a priori* forms and categories (see Bergson 1989 [1903]).

¹⁵ In this brief summary of Bergson's philosophy of time and memory, I follow the interpretation suggested by Benjamin. Following a good dialectical habit, Benjamin historicises Bergson's transcendental revision of Kant's theory of experience. However, there were also some more directly political stakes to Bergson's theory of memory, which had not escaped Marxists and other critical philosophers of the thirties. Benjamin's reading should be interpreted through the prism of the politicisation of Bergsonism. Bergson's critique of neo-Kantian rationalism was involved in the deep political fissures in European culture at the end of the nineteenth century, also because Kantianism was so heavily politicised in France at the time (see chapter five). The interpretation of memory was crucial here. During the romantic reaction to the Revolution, the past had been claimed by reactionaries such as De Maistre and Bonald, the early inspirers of French fascism and Catholic Traditionalism (see also Motzkin 1992). Maurice Barrès, in his late nineteenth-century struggle against the 'déracinés' [uprooted] rationalist Republicans, revived De Maistre and Bonald's (neo-)Traditionalism. According to Barrès, the Republicans thought that a rational morality based on reason could do without memory, which, for Barrès, meant without ethno-religious solidarity. In answer to this, Barrès developed a theory of an immediate and sacred solidarity based on the people's intuitive solidarity with their predecessors (Namer 1994: 301). Bergson's philosophy of memory had been uncomfortably annexed to this romantic tradition, also because Bergson explicitly opposed republican rationalism and because his theory of the *élan vital* had inspired Barrès and other 'irrationalist' thinkers—also those on the left-wing side such as Georges Sorel. Reinterpreting memory in a less irrational way than the Bergsonians was therefore considered crucial by left-wing progressive thinkers attached to democracy and the Republic. (Durkheim tried to 'save'

Against this suggested free access to contemplation, Benjamin argued that Bergson's transcendental understanding of experience neglected its historical conditions: it was like an 'after-image' received after closing one's eyes to the 'inhospitable, blinding age of large-scale industrialism' (1997: 111). Benjamin develops a more historical understanding of memory and experience by turning to the *Recherche*, which serves to put Bergson's theory 'to the test' (1997: 111). In contrast to Bergson, Benjamin argues, Proust presents the grasping of 'pure memory' as an involuntary, contingent event. Pure memory is replaced in Proust by involuntary memory. According to Benjamin, this involuntariness is not a natural situation, but a marker of the ways in which experience has changed in modernity. The unconnected messages conveyed by modern media such as newspapers, but also by the modern poetry of Baudelaire, testify to an increasing inability on the part of modern subjects to connect themselves to the people around them and to narrate their place in the world. Proust's distinction between involuntary and voluntary memory throws light on this 'modern experience' or, as Benjamin called it, the 'atrophy of experience' (1997: 113).¹⁶

Involuntary memory bears the mark of modernity: 'it is part of the inventory of the individual who is isolated in many ways' (Benjamin 1997: 113), or, as he puts it in the original German, of a 'vielfältig isolierte Privatperson' (1980 [1938]: 611). He now contrasts 'modern experience' ('Erlebnis') with experience 'in the strict sense of the word' ('Erfahrung'), and explains:

where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past. The rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals (quite probably nowhere recalled in Proust's work), kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again. They triggered recollection at certain times and remained handles of memory for a lifetime. In this way, voluntary and involuntary recollection lose their mutual exclusiveness (1997: 113; see also the German original 1980: 611).

Benjamin here constructs a concept of experience the structure of which depends on the existence of collectively shared moments, of rituals (or religious

memory from right-wing interpretations by giving it a societal rather than an ethnic interpretation—see Noiriel's interpretation of Durkheim discussed in chapter one and my discussion of Durkheim's view of religion in chapter five.)

¹⁶ Elsewhere, Benjamin calls it the 'poverty of experience' ('Erfahrungsarmut'), which stood at the basis of his modernist aesthetics, briefly summarised in his phrase 'Tant mieux. Nicht weinen. Der Unsinn der kritischen Prognosen. Film statt Erzählung' ['So much the better. Do not cry. The nonsense of critical prognoses. Film instead of story' (my translation)] (Benjamin 1977b [1933]: 117).

practices) in the broadest sense of the term. The split between conscious, voluntary memory and unconscious, involuntary memory for Benjamin results from the split between individual and collective memory, which, in his view, had resulted from modernity. Benjamin thus follows the modernist interpretation of secularisation as the full 'individualisation' of experience. Yet he does not understand it in terms of laïcisation or secularisation, but in terms of an 'atrophy of experience'. He also does not consider here, as he had done in his (more private) letter to Adorno, whether the isolation of the 'modern individual' might have concerned Jews more than Catholics and seculars, because the latter groups had been able to maintain or acquire a lot more organised, i.e. institutional and practical power than the Jews, who had been placed under the sign of their 'assimilation' (see also chapters three and four).

But let us first return to Benjamin. In previous sections, he had developed a concept of tradition in accordance with the concept of modern experience. There, he had confirmed Bergson's thesis that the structure of memory is decisive for the philosophical pattern of experience: 'experience is indeed a matter of tradition, in collective existence as well as private life' (Benjamin 1997: 110). This concept of tradition is then explained as follows:

It [experience] is less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently unconscious data (1997: 110).

Benjamin thus distinguishes between the products of an archival memory, where all past experiences have a fixed place, and tradition, which is presented as a continuous process within which memories can change places and form different connections. The German original of this passage makes the distinction more precise and reveals more clearly Benjamin's debt to Bergson:

Sie bildet sich weniger aus *einzelnen* in der *Erinnerung* streng *fixierten* Gegebenheiten denn aus gehäuften, oft nicht bewussten Daten, die im *Gedächtnis zusammenfliessen* (1980 [1938]: 608; my italics).

Benjamin opposes *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*. *Erinnerung* (memory) denotes a fixed, disposable stock of isolated facts; an archive. *Gedächtnis* (usually translated as 'remembrance'), on the other hand, sees data 'flow together' (*zusammenfliessen*) in a much less determined and controllable manner. This distinction is close to Bergson's distinction between 'pure memory', linked with *durée* (inner time), and habit ('memory-habit'), linked with space-time. Tradition is conceived by Benjamin as a process, as a constantly changing stream into which new experiences are inserted that change the past. It is a

process that exists on an individual as well as a collective level; and it is this process, according to Benjamin, which is only accessible by accident in modernity.¹⁷

The 'individual who is isolated in many ways' [isolierte Privatperson] goes to a party

If we now return to the Proustian salon, the division between privately hidden and publicly shared opinion recalls Benjamin's 'isolated private person', but it also gives us cause to understand the reasons for this isolation somewhat differently. All the characters are isolated to various degrees. However, they are isolated not so much because of a general loss of tradition in modernity or

¹⁷ Adorno who, like Benjamin, admired Bergson and did not prematurely discredit his work because of a presupposed 'irrationalism', criticises Bergson's doubling of the concept of time in a more philosophical manner as 'ein Stück ihrer selbst unbewusster Dialektik' ['part of a dialectic that remains unaware of itself' (my translation)] (Adorno 1990 [1966]: 327). Bergson, says Adorno, separates subjective time or duration entirely from the objective, spatial time of the watch (*Uhrzeit*). Doing so, Bergson essentialises time consciousness. Isolated, the subjective time plus its contents appears to be as mediated and contingent as the subject itself, and no serious party for the 'objective' time of the watch. But Bergson's analysis, according to Adorno, who clearly follows Benjamin here, reflects the crisis of time consciousness in modern society, where the individually lived time of experience can no longer be connected to the ways in which time has been objectified in reified and repeatable labour (Adorno 1990 [1966]: 327). Hence, instead of deconstructing or 're-mediating' Bergson's analysis of time and memory by foregrounding memory's practical and cultural, habitual but not 'purely repetitive' aspects, Adorno goes along with Bergson's modernist interpretation of the split character of the experience of time, only he explains it in historical terms. Like Benjamin, Adorno interprets modernity as producing a radically new structure of experience, split between repetitive objectivity and an emptied out subject. Such an understanding of experience is the basis of the exaggerated, dichotomous analysis of the experience of time in an imagined, fully individualised society, as we can witness in the following analysis: 'Aus der industriellen Produktion verschwindet (...) die konkrete Zeit. Mehr stets verläuft sie in identischen und stossweisen, potentiell gleichzeitigen Zyklen. Mit dem Gegensatz von feudalem Traditionalismus zu radikaler bürgerlicher Rationalität wird am Ende Erinnerung, Zeit, Gedächtnis von der fortschreitenden bürgerlichen Gesellschaft als irrationale Hypothek liquidiert' ['From the industrial production disappears (...) concrete time. Ever more does it pass in identical and spasmodical potentially simultaneous cycles. With the opposition of feudal traditionalism to radical bourgeois rationality, memory, time, remembrance are ultimately liquidated by the progressive civil society as irrational burdens' (my translation)] (Adorno 1962: 234). Talking about a heritage of the philosophy of life! A similar heritage pierces through the contemporary analyses of Islam as a 'neo-religion' resulting from the alienation, the 'deculturalisation' of the 'Muslim' individual in the *banlieues*. Theoretically blind to meaningful habit, practice, memory, and performance, that most likely exist even in the context of social exclusion, they can only see identity politics and 'atrophied experience'. This time, however, in contrast to Benjamin and Adorno, they see it mainly on the part of others.

because of the specifically 'modern' structures of their experience, but because of a specific distribution of social and *memorial* power in a conflict where individuals are forced to choose one group or another at a public level, while their personal situations, opinions and solidarities may be much more complex. Swann is isolated not only by his friends, but also 'within himself', between his overly diplomatic habits and his 'ardent convictions' as a Dreyfusard – and also because of his imminent death which no one dares to address. Mme de Guermantes's red appearance testifies to the isolation from another side. Although she is not publicly excluded, her public appearance shows a fissure between the traces of her personal will and her actual public behaviour. The narrator exhibits a strange perseverance in his comparison of her ruby necklace to a *carcan*. He repeats it when he describes Madame de Guermantes at the end of the evening, as she is leaving with Marcel and the Duke:

Droite, isolée, ayant à ses côtés son mari et moi, (...) le col enserré dans le *fermoir de rubis*' (1988: III, 117).

['Erect, isolated, flanked by her husband and myself, (...) her throat clasped in its *band* of rubies (1996: IV, 137, my italics).]

Mme de Guermantes is isolated between the Duke and Marcel, who seem accomplices in both having her chained at the same time; perhaps the narrator partly projects his own inability to act onto the way in which he perceives her.

At this point, there is a passage that Proust suppressed in the final version of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* – not mentioned in the Pléiade edition but quoted in a footnote in the edition by Emily Eells-Ogée for Garnier Flammarion (Proust 1987b) – which supports the association of Mme de Guermantes's red shoes with her and Swann's shared suffering. In this passage, Proust added the following to his description of Mme de Guermantes at the end of the party:

Maintenant qu'elle avait des souliers rouges, je m'apercevais qu'ils la complétaient [et] que cette toilette était parfaite. Mais alors je me rappelai les paroles de Swann, que la Duchesse n'avait pas eu le temps d'écouter, et il me semblait que c'était dans le sang de son ami qu'elle était baignée (Proust 1987c: 357 n. 63).

[Now that she was wearing red shoes, I noticed that they completed her [and] that this outfit was perfect. But at that moment I recalled Swann's words, which the Duchess did not have time to listen to, and it seemed to me that it was in her friend's blood that she had been bathed (my translation).]

By suppressing the direct association between Swann and the red clothes in the later version, Proust contributes to make the narrative mimic the—at least partly—unconscious and ‘social’ ways in which processes of exclusion and forgetting take place.¹⁸ The narrative strand of the red shoes is not about subjectively isolated, fully private individuals and destroyed traditions. Instead, it tells how individuals are affectively and socially linked to several groups and individuals (husbands, friends, families, classes, nations, Republics), and how they can be excluded from several or all of these groups. Swann, who had fully assimilated and ‘individualised’, was most at risk, because it turns out that his long-time friends are unable or unwilling to support him, even to tolerate him, at the moment of conflict.¹⁹

As we will see in what follows, the power constellations between these groups also seem to influence the patterns formed by the memories of those belonging to them. The story of the red shoes thus remains closer to Benjamin’s remarks on the ‘precarious structure of assimilation’ than to his analysis of modern experience in the Baudelaire essay, where he projects the modernist idea of a fully individualised society onto the Proustian narrative. I will return to Benjamin later, but will now turn to the red shoes as an object of memory.

La Prisonnière: *talking dresses*

The narrative goes on to tell, or rather not to tell but to evoke, how forgetting about Swann takes place over an extended period of time after his death and the resolution of the Dreyfus Affair. In *La Prisonnière*, Marcel visits Oriane because he wants to buy a red dress like hers for his captive Albertine. At the beginning of their conversation, Marcel recalls the way Oriane looked at the party of the Princesse de Guermantes: ‘vous aviez une robe toute rouge, avec des souliers rouges, vous étiez inouïe, vous aviez l’air d’une espèce de grande fleur de sang, d’un rubis en flammes’ (1988: III, 547) [‘you had a dress that was all red, with red shoes, you were marvellous, you reminded me of a sort of great blood-red blossom, a glittering ruby’ (1996: IV, 34)].²⁰ This is how Marcel creates poetry out of a chain of rubies and the bloody garments of the lady in red. The more carefully one reads the *Recherche*, the more the distance between Marcel and the

¹⁸ In chapter three, I have addressed another act of rewriting in which Proust erased in his final version the overly explicit references to processes of exclusion that happen at least partly unconsciously.

¹⁹ Though, as we have seen, this is not the case for everyone: the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes do tell Swann about their standpoint in the Dreyfus Affair.

²⁰ Actually, the French is not dependent on clichés like the English translation: ‘*une fleur de sang*’ literally means ‘a flower of blood’ and a ‘*rubis en flammes*’ means ‘a ruby in flames’.

narrator increases. Together, they form an exploration of conformism, as one person is split into a socially vulnerable, not very courageous young man (Marcel) and a reflective, 'remembering' narrator—who, however, always remains linked to Marcel, as I will later explain further.

Hereafter, the narrator relates how Madame de Guermantes remembers her dress of that evening well, but has forgotten that Mme de Chaussepierre was also at the party. Marcel finds it strange that she does not remember this, for not long after the party the Duke had been passed over by Monsieur de Chaussepierre for the presidency of the elitist anti-Dreyfusard 'Jockey Club'. This election had been a totally unexpected affront to the Duke. The Guermantes family had always perceived the Chaussepierrés as insignificant, highly aristocratic but dull people. At the Princesse de Guermantes's party, red Oriane had even refused to greet Mme de Chaussepierre, who, in her eyes, was a 'scarecrow', because she usually wore black woollen dresses.

The colours of the dresses are meaningful. In Andersen's 'The red shoes', red and black have the opposite meanings of happiness and freedom on the red side and religiosity and obedience on the black side. Parallel to this, in Stendhal's novel *Le Rouge et le Noir* [*The Red and the Black*] (1831), red symbolises the army and liberty after the French Revolution, while black symbolises the Catholic reaction. Now, seventy years later, Mme de Guermantes's reaction to Mme de Chaussepierre testifies to the fact that the symbolism of the liveliness of red and the obscurity of black is still maintained in society, but that the meaning of red in particular has become uncertain. At the party red Oriane, as we have seen, betrayed Swann and Dreyfus, but one of the reasons that the Duke was not elected President of the Jockey Club was the fact that Oriane, some time after the party, became known as a Dreyfusarde herself—against the wishes of the Duke.

We only learn of this fact, however, by the story of how it had to be forgotten in the Guermantes's circles. The narrator begins his account of the conversation in the Guermantes's salon with an explanation of how and why memory, and forgetfulness even more, is produced by social situations. He writes that those people active in social life—and he sees all members of society as active, much like politicians and diplomats, but 'microscopiques' (1988: III, 547) ['only on a microscopic level' (1996: V, 34)]—are so preoccupied by the near present that they hardly confide anything to their memory.

On oublie du reste vite ce qu'on n'a pas pensé avec profondeur, ce qui vous a été dicté par l'imitation, par les passions environnantes. Elles changent et avec elles se modifie notre souvenir. (...) Quant aux gens du monde, ils se souviennent de peu de chose (1988: III, 547-48).

[We quickly forget what we have not deeply considered, what has been dictated to us by the spirit of imitation, by the passions of the day. These change, and with them our memory undergoes alteration. (...) As for society people, they remember very little (1996: V, 35).]²¹

Mme de Guermantes's forgetfulness (and that of the other members of 'society') is produced by their need to feel connected to their own social group and to the present. They thus conform to what theorists of collective memory—such as, for example, Jan Assmann (1999: 39)—have pointed out, namely that collective memory tends to adapt to the social purposes of a group in the present and that, in order to ensure the continuity of that group, it tends to sieve out the memories of those events that provoked conflict.²² The 'ritual', bloody aspect of Mme de Guermantes's redness, which forces her to forget Swann, is not the product of a 'tradition' or even of a 'constructed tradition', but rather of a specific constellation of power in which all the characters are involved and intertwined from different angles and perspectives.²³

The Proustian narrative here practices a modest and sombre form of 'sharing' memories, which passes through forgetting: it tells the story of a lack of solidarity in memory under collective pressure, and also of the painfulness of such a process of repression for at least some individuals on both sides. The mini-conflict between Mme de Guermantes and her husband (as well as some other society people), produced in the course of the Dreyfus Affair, has to be forgotten because it has to be forgotten that Swann had been their intimate friend. Internal divergences resulting from the Affair are repressed and 'society' is once more stabilised.²⁴

²¹ And the more we unlearn to identify 'le monde' and 'society' with elites, the more we can be sure that we are all included.

²² Assmann takes this point from Maurice Halbwachs, Durkheim's successor at the *Collège de France* and a great inspirer of contemporary theories of cultural memory. Halbwachs was a former pupil of both Bergson and Durkheim. By publishing *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* in 1925, he tried to reinstall the tradition of Durkheimian sociology at the *Collège*, after Bergson had dominated it since Durkheim's death. Halbwachs had become wary of Bergson-inspired anti-rationalism. In an article from 1925 entitled 'Matière et société', not incidentally playing on Bergson's *Matière et Mémoire*, he argued that collective (group) memories 'frame' individual memories (Namer 1994: 319).

²³ We may even allow ourselves to read the novel as a soap opera with some reality effect: though I did not find explicit references to this in the novel, I suspect that Mme de Guermantes was secretly in love with subtle Swann instead of with her horrible husband Zeus-Basin, or at least *also* with Swann; forgetting him therefore may have cost her more than a friendship.

²⁴ Later on, the Dreyfus Affair itself is more or less forgotten in society in the name of France—except of course by historians and intellectuals for whom remembering the conflict became part of their 'duty' as citizens. Proust stresses how quickly the conflictual Dreyfus Affair ceased to divide French society as it started to prepare for World War I. Dreyfus himself, at seventy years

This is not to say that no courageous people may present themselves in the manner of Saint-Loup, a member of the Guermantes circle who becomes a Republican Dreyfusard.²⁵ Moreover, certain other people may have had so much cultural power that they were able to help Dreyfus without running the risk of exclusion (the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes)—though even they (think they) have to do this in secret. Justice, however, seems to depend on the question of whether another group cherishing other memories—and sharing a different common goal—turns up.

The narrator makes clear that the process of fully 'disciplining' memory may take time: a little later on that same afternoon, Oriane seems less forgetful than the narrator had depicted her before. She dares to contradict her husband about the Dreyfus affair. As Marcel, the Duke, the Duchess and a visitor begin to talk about the Dreyfus Affair, it becomes clear that the Duke has increased his hatred towards the Jews. He delivers a terrifying monologue in which he argues that they should be driven out because of the troubles they have caused 'La France' (1988: III, 551) [1996: V, 39]. The Duchess, on the contrary, defends a much more nuanced standpoint in which she explains why so many Jews may have been Dreyfusards:

justement parce qu'étant Juifs et se connaissant eux-mêmes ils savent qu'on peut être Juif et ne pas être forcément traître et anti-français, comme le prétend M. Drumont. (...) ils sentent bien que s'il n'était pas juif, on ne l'aurait pas cru si facilement traître *a priori*' (1988: III, 551).

[just because they are Jews and know themselves they realise that a person can be a Jew and not necessarily a traitor and anti-French, as M. Drumont seems to maintain. (...) they knew quite well that if he hadn't been a Jew, people wouldn't have been so ready to think him a traitor *a priori*' (1996: V, 39).]

Now, however, the Duke and Marcel become accomplices again in isolating Oriane's deviating opinions. The Duke replies: 'Les femmes n'entendent rien à la politique' (1988: III, 551) ['women never understand anything about politics'

old, worked as a volunteer in the *fourrage* around Paris (Burns 1991).

²⁵ However, Saint-Loup did not yet have much to lose, because his being a Dreyfusard Republican 'betraying' his group was interpreted as a result of his sowing his wild oats; no one threatened to exclude him while he was still at the Military Academy. Practically as soon as he actually joins the army, his opinion turns around and he becomes an anti-Dreyfusard after the fact. Hence, though he wants to be sincere, he is not being sincere when he tells Marcel that, while all of his friends and family worry about whether they 'belong' or do not 'belong', he simply does not care (see chapter four).

(1996: V, 39)] and Marcel, who feels things are starting to go wrong, brings the conversation back to dresses: women's talk. Shoes are again discussed: the red shoes and also a pair of golden ones that Mme de Guermantes wants to give to Albertine. Both pairs of shoes will reappear in the final conversation between Marcel and Mme de Guermantes at the *Bal de Têtes* [Ball of the Heads/Masks], which follows on the narrator's digression on memory and writing.

Counterpoint to the red shoes; memory, metaphor and truth

A critical reader might reply to my interpretation that I am tracing only one narrative strand about the memories of the most superficial character, the 'reine de l'Instant' [queen of the present moment]. My answer to this would be that Oriane's memory is a counterpoint to that of the narrator, who is diligently producing his beehive of memories, as Benjamin suggested.²⁶ Oriane is actually called the 'queen of the present moment' in the passage where she talks about Swann to his daughter Gilberte, long after Swann's death. In *La Fugitive* [*The Fugitive*], she invites Gilberte for lunch and Gilberte starts to talk about her father:

A la fin du déjeuner Gilberte dit timidement: 'Je crois que vous avez très bien connu mon père.' 'Mais je crois bien', dit Mme de Guermantes sur un ton mélancolique qui prouvait qu'elle comprenait le chagrin de la fille et avec un excès d'intensité voulu qui lui donnait l'air de dissimuler qu'elle n'était pas sûre de se rappeler très exactement le père. 'Nous l'avons très bien connu, je me rappelle très bien.' (Et elle pouvait se le rappeler en effet, il était venu la voir presque tous les jours pendant vingt-cinq ans.) (...) 'Il venait aussi ici, il déjeunait même ici, ajouta M. de Guermantes par ostentation de modestie et scrupule d'exactitude. Vous vous rappelez Oriane. Quel brave homme que votre père! Comme on sentait qu'il devait être d'une famille honnête! du reste j'ai aperçu autrefois son père et sa mère. Eux et lui, quelles bonnes gens!' On sentait que s'ils avaient été, les parents et le fils, encore en vie, le Duc de Guermantes n'eût pas eu d'hésitation à les recommander pour une place de jardiniers. Et voilà comment le faubourg Saint-Germain parle à tout

²⁶ Even when her nephew Saint-Loup dies in World War I, Mme de Guermantes does not manage to mourn for longer than a week. And this already impresses the narrator, because he considers a week relatively long for her. He had anticipated that she would mourn only briefly, because her 'Guermantes wit' might have incited her to show that she did not 'share the superstition about the ties of blood' (1996: VI, 197). The suggestion, though ironic, makes clear the extent to which at the time an affective memory of the dead, even when this concerns a family member, was associated with the Reaction.

bourgeois des autres bourgeois, soit pour le flatter de l'exception faite—le temps qu'on cause—en faveur de l'interlocuteur ou de l'interlocutrice, soit plutôt, ou en même temps, pour l'humilier. C'était ainsi qu'un antisémite dit à un juif, dans le moment même où il le couvre de son affabilité, du mal des juifs, d'une façon générale qui permette d'être blessant sans être grossier. Mais *reine de l'Instant*, (...) Mme de Guermantes en était aussi l'esclave. (...) 'Il était charmant', dit la Duchesse avec un sourire triste (1989: IV, 160-61, my italics).²⁷

As 'queen of the present moment', Oriane manifests how our solidarity with our friends, when they turn out to 'belong' to another group, may substantively shift and change over time, particularly when it concerns friends who are at risk of exclusion, who have not yet been fully 'integrated' in (the memories of) this group.

The reader critical of my interpretation might press me further now and say that I should finally turn to the novel's exploration of the less explicitly 'social' and 'forgetful' aspects of memory, which have not yet been sufficiently explored in my discussion of Benjamin's interpretation. She could refer me to the narrator's crucial digression on involuntary memory at the end of *Time Regained*, and suggest that the 'ultimate' Proustian challenge to secularism lies in the way we interpret involuntary memory and its relationship to the novel. For how should we interpret the relation between Proust's novel, his writing, and the dimension of 'pure' memory that Bergson had tried to uncover? Bergson's work, after all, was rightfully seen by someone like William James as

²⁷ I give the translation in a footnote because of the length of the quote: [At the end of the meal, Gilberte said timidly: 'I believe you knew my father quite well.' 'Why, of course we did,' said Mme de Guermantes in a melancholy tone which proved that she understood the daughter's grief and with a spurious intensity as though to conceal the fact that she was not sure whether she did remember the father very clearly. 'We knew him very well, I remember him very well.' (As indeed she might, seeing that he had come to see her almost every day for twenty-five years.) 'He used to come here too, in fact he used to come to luncheon here,' added M. de Guermantes with ostentatious modesty and a scrupulous regard for accuracy. 'You remember, Oriane. What a fine man your father was! One felt that he must come of a very decent family. As a matter of fact, I once saw his father and mother long ago. What excellent people they were, he and they!' One felt that if Swann and his parents had still been alive, the Duc de Guermantes would not have hesitated to recommend them for jobs as gardeners. And this is how the Faubourg Saint-Germain speaks to any bourgeois about other bourgeois, either to flatter him with the exception being made in his favour (for as long as the conversation lasts) or rather, or at the same time, to humiliate him. Thus it is that an anti-semite, at the very moment when he is smothering a Jew with affability, will speak ill of Jews, in a general fashion which enables him to be wounding without being rude. But, queen of the present moment, (...) Mme de Guermantes was also its slave. (...) 'He was charming,' said the Duchess with a wistful smile, (...) (1996: V, 664)].

a crucial source for a concept of 'spirituality', of religious experience free from ritual and practice, perhaps even from conflict.²⁸ And did not Proust manage to create 'signs' independent from memory, as was suggested by Deleuze, whose interpretation I will shortly address? From a moral perspective, could not this imply that we can find a model for an 'ethics of memory' in Proustian writing? In what follows, I try to show that we can indeed interpret the novel as the exploration of an alternative kind of memory, but that we cannot separate Marcel (the *moi social* complicit with Oriane) from an narrator having access to a so-called *moi profond*. Nor can we separate the forgetful Marcel and Oriane from an narrator capable of 'remembering' Swann, the excluded 'other', even though the narrator himself at one point suggests that this might be possible.

In *The Captive*, not very long before the passage quoted above on the 'queen of the present', we find the only passage in the novel (to my knowledge) where the narrator addresses one of his own characters. He addresses Swann, after having just related that he learnt about Swann's death from a newspaper obituary:

Et pourtant, cher Charles Swann, que j'ai si peu connu quand j'étais encore si jeune et vous près du tombeau, c'est déjà parce que celui que vous deviez considérer comme un petit imbécile a fait de vous le héros d'un de ses romans, qu'on recommence à parler de vous et que peut-être vous vivrez (1989: IV).

²⁸ While Bergson's metaphysics can be interpreted as remaining blind to modernity, as Benjamin argued, it can also be read as an attempt to save the kernel of religious experience as spirituality for modernity, after the separation of religion as experience or sentiment from practice. Although Bergson conceives his metaphysics entirely in the terms of the philosophical tradition, the concept of *durée* clearly has religious overtones, if only because it develops a concept of reality that 'essentially' precedes materiality and is accessible to the subject. The affinity of Bergsonian metaphysics with interpretations of religion as 'religious experience' was recognised by William James. Already in 1903, upon rereading Bergson's work, he wrote that 'nothing that he had read since years had so excited and stimulated my thought'. It brought him to 'give up logic, squarely and irrevocably' as a method, for Bergson had taught him that 'reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will, exceeds our logic, overflows, and surrounds it' (quoted from Wikipedia on 'Bergson' (2005). Bergson's work was a major source for what James called 'religious experience', analysed by Charles Taylor (2002). In America, Bergson's work was received enthusiastically. One nice piece of paraphernalia: Bergson's lecture 'Spirituality and Liberty', held in New York in 1913, which had been announced in the *New York Times* one week in advance, probably caused the city's first traffic jam (see Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2005: 'Bergson'). Bergson himself, like so many metaphysicians before him, had suggested that 'intuition' might finally give access to a truth untainted by differences of insight and opinion (Bergson 1989 [1903]: 85).

[And yet, my dear Charles Swann, whom I used to know when I was still so young and you were nearing your grave, it is because he whom you must have regarded as a young idiot has made you the hero of one of his novels that people are beginning to speak of you again and that your name will perhaps live (1996: V, 223).]²⁹

It is as if the narrator seeks to remedy his distance to Swann, revealed by the fact that he learns of his death from the newspaper, by addressing him in person. I will now follow the spur of my imagined critical reader and start by rereading the narrator's digression on writing and involuntary memory that so inspired most critics dealing with Proustian memory, even if they usually end up distancing themselves from the views expressed. The complicated relationship the narrator establishes between involuntary memory, time regained, *le réel retrouvé*, and writing, is inserted in *Time Regained* in the narrator's account of an intermediary moment of contemplation by Marcel, just before he visits his last great social event, the *Bal de Têtes*, actually a reception at the Princesse de Guermantes's.³⁰

The narrator recounts how, on his way to the reception several involuntary memories assailing him in rapid sequence had reminded Marcel of earlier momentary experiences of happiness. These involuntary memories had occurred before, at moments when Marcel's body had 'remembered' something before his mind did, or, to put it in Benjamin's seductive words—as so often conveying distinctions that are perhaps too radical—when Marcel had experienced the tenacity of 'Erinnerungen im Geruchssinn (keineswegs Gerüche in der Erinnerung!)' ['memories in the sense of smells, and in no way smells in the memory'] (Benjamin 1977a [1929]: 323, translation Benjamin (1968)). The most famous such experience had already been related in *Combray*. Marcel had dipped a Madeleine into his *tilleul*, had taken a bite, and had suddenly felt very happy. Only afterwards, he had understood that this was because he recognised the sensation of tasting such wet Madeleines from long ago in Combray, when visiting his aunt Léonie.³¹

Having arrived at the reception, Marcel has to wait in the library until a musical performance finishes. While waiting, he forces himself to analyse why these memories had always made him so happy, and why they had felt as

²⁹ The translation omits the narrator's remark that he knew Swann only *very little*.

³⁰ The 'new' Princesse is actually the 'old' Mme Verdurin, a *bourgeoise* with a low social status at the beginning of the novel, at least in the eyes of the Faubourg St. Germain. Her social climbing is one of the novel's actualisations of Proust's image of society as a kaleidoscope (see introduction).

³¹ Evidently, this happiness has also furnished the ready material for psychoanalytic interpretations.

invitations to write. In the course of his thoughts, Marcel realises that he is wasting his time in society and decides that he has to start writing a long novel. He figures that the happiness produced by the experiences of involuntary memory must have been produced by the fact that sensation and imagination came together, thus enabling him to actually experience the essence of things, 'réels sans être actuels, idéaux sans être abstraits' (1989: IV, 451) [real without being actual, ideal without being abstract'] (1996: V, 224).³²

This discovery is not enough, however. Marcel relativises the happiness produced by these memories in a nearly careless way, thinking that the contemplation achieved, 'quoique d'éternité, était fugitive' (454) ['though of eternity, had been fugitive' (228)]. It is from here that he develops the thought that writing must be the only feasible way of extending this kind of happiness beyond the short moments of involuntary memory. This would be possible through the production of metaphors, which are analogous in writing to involuntary memory because they can establish 'les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style' (468) [the necessary rings of a well-wrought style (246)] in one's sentences between two different terms.³³

Linking different impressions, objects, and memories in a metaphoric style enables us, Marcel figures out, to feel the 'joie du réel retrouvé' (458) [the joy of rediscovering what is real] (233). This gives access to 'les vérités écrites à l'aide de figures dont j'essayais de chercher le sens dans ma tête' (458) ['truths written with the aid of shapes for whose meaning I searched in my brain' (232)], of which he had realised that he was not 'libre de les choisir, qu'elles m'étaient données telles quelles' (458) ['free to choose them, that such as they were they were given to me'] (232). This, precisely, guarantees their truthfulness, their authenticity, and their individuality.

Marcel's reflections at this stage, very seriously reported by the narrator as his subsequent discoveries, do not seem to touch upon social or cultural aspects

³² I suddenly understood this phrase better when I was teaching book X of St. Augustine's *Confessions* (1991 [397-399 A.C.]), which doubtlessly inspired Proust. Augustine explores memory in the context of the question of how it is possible to love God, which later turns out to be quite equivalent to knowing about how we can achieve happiness. His rendering, in X, 8, of what loving God must be like is close to Proust's 'ideal but not abstract' essences. Loving God cannot be the love for anything physical or temporal, but it cannot be the love of something abstract (non-sensible) either: 'Yet there is a light I love, and a food, and a kind of embrace when I love my God—a light, voice, odour, food, embrace of my inner man, where my soul is floodlit by light which space cannot contain, where there is sound that time cannot seize, where there is a perfume which no breeze disperses, where there is a taste for food no amount of eating can lessen, and where there is a bond of union that no satiety can part.' (Augustinus 1991: 183).

³³ And also in much larger units of literature and other arts. For example, in the 'metaphorical' paintings of Elstir (see Deleuze 2000).

of memory. He gives much weight to the creative moment of writing, where memories and sensations, as the 'signes d'autant de lois et d'idées' ['signs of laws and ideas'], should be 'convertis' ['converted'] into their 'équivalents spirituels' (458) ['spiritual equivalents' (232)].

Later on, surrounded by books and memories in the library, he concludes that:

il me fallait rendre aux moindres signes qui m'entouraient (Guermantes, Albertine, Gilberte, Saint-Loup, Balbec, etc., leur sens que l'habitude leur avait fait perdre pour moi (1989, IV: 476).

[he was surrounded by symbols (Guermantes, Albertine, Gilberte, Saint-Loup, Balbec, etc. and to the least of these I had to restore the meaning which habit had caused them to lose for me' (1996: VI, 256).]³⁴

Now the question is how we should interpret this moment of the 'conversion' of the signs of memory into their spiritual equivalents, for this determines our interpretation of the relationship between (mediated) memory and metaphor in the novel.

The apprenticeship to signs

Twentieth-century readings of the *Recherche* have practically all left behind the (individualised and aestheticised) language of interiority, often taking their starting point in contrasting the actual narrative with the one 'projected' in the digression of *Time Regained*, which was actually written before the middle parts of the *Recherche*.³⁵ Close to Proust, in a sense, is Deleuze's hypermodernist reading. In his famous interpretation of metaphor in *Proust and Signs* (2000 [1964]), he suggests that there is a gap between Proustian memory and the signs of art produced in the novel. I will briefly address his interpretation as a springboard for returning to memory and practice.

The *Recherche*, Deleuze suggests, is not based on 'the exposition of memory, but on the apprenticeship to signs' (2000: 4). He radicalises Marcel's own interpretation of writing by interpreting the novel as the exploration of different

³⁴ By returning to this negatively connoted notion of habit as the destruction of meaning, the narrator reveals himself in his theory as the (Bergsonian) modernist that his own narrative consistently prompts him not to be.

³⁵ This has been done systematically by Descombes (1987). In literary criticism the problematic has been addressed by analysing the relationship between grammar and rhetoric, signifier and meaning, metonym and metaphor, as de Man (1979) did in his interpretation of Proustian style.

worlds of signs. The crucial sign is metaphor, the 'sign of art', because it is independent from 'material explanation' (2000: 3). Making metaphors is, according to Deleuze, a process—or perhaps, in his later terms, an 'event'—superior to interpreting 'sensuous signs' (2000: 39). In interpreting the signs of memory, too, we remain dependent on sensation, on something external. The Proustian 'essences', by contrast, turn out to be signs of art, which are the only signs capable of revealing a (monadic) individuality, a 'qualitative difference that there is in the way the world looks to us, a difference that, if there were no such thing as art, would remain the eternal secret of each man' (Proust 1954: III, 895, quoted in Deleuze 2000: 41).

However, the signs of art do not reveal a subject, but something 'implicating, enveloping, wrapping itself up in the subject', namely 'Being' or a 'region of Being', which reveals itself to the subject (Deleuze 2000: 43).³⁶ In metaphorising it is as if the world itself is newly created, and time as well. Deleuze refers to the neo-Platonist 'One' that precedes 'any development, any deployment, any explication, because it is *complication*, a complication that is essentially instable, containing many contraries, many layers, and that is the origin of a world which is essentially "expressive"' (Deleuze 2000: 45). In metaphor, essence materialises, becomes a 'sign', because metaphor reproduces the instability necessary for transmuting matter by divesting it of its fixed qualities. In sum, Deleuze encounters in Proustian style the signs expressive of 'something' preceding individual memory, which is not (mediated) habit, culture, or practice.³⁷

Yet there are a few complicating elements in the Proustian narrative, which provide reasons for hesitating in going along with Deleuze's enthusiastic interpretation. These elements give us reason to be more careful, even explicitly hesitant, about uncoupling Proustian metaphor from memory, sensation, habit,

* 'Ce n'est pas le sujet qui explique l'essence, c'est plutôt l'essence qui s'implique, s'enveloppe, s'enroule dans le sujet. (...) Ce ne sont pas les individus qui constituent le monde, mais les mondes enveloppés, les essences qui constituent les individus. "Ces mondes que nous appelons les individus, et que sans l'art nous ne connaissons jamais"' (Deleuze 1964: 38, quoting Proust 1954: III, 258).

³⁷ Deleuze's reading of 'metaphorising' (in Proust) as an autonomous moment in aesthetic production has an enormous impact on contemporary society, because it pervades contemporary aesthetics (particularly that of film) and is also seen by some as the source of a radical politics of 'intensities', a way to overcome inside-outside dichotomies by positing them together *d'emblée*, as in a fold. Deleuze has inspired Connolly, whose strong arguments against rationalist interpretations of subjectivity and political judgement I endorse, and his work also inspires alternative forms of political action, innovative philosophy, cultural analysis and art. But what I miss in Deleuze's interpretation of metaphorising is a critical reflection on the relation between 'becoming' and the 'habitual', mediated, textured sides of experience—I will explain this more in what follows.

plurality, and also conflict.³⁸ The two crucial elements are forgetting and the conscience of death. Both occur in the narrative; the first (forgetting) just preceding Marcel's revelation, the latter (the conscience of death) following it. Deleuze mentions neither, or at least he separates them from the signs of art; perhaps he represses these moments.

In comparison, Benjamin had also introduced the concept of 'convoluted time', but he had done so precisely in relation to memory. He interprets Proustian 'eternity' not as Platonic or Spinozist but, by contrast, as 'rauschhaft' [rapturous].³⁹ His explanation, however, is very time-conscious:

The eternity which Proust opens to view is convoluted time, not boundless time. His true interest is in the passage of time in its most real—that is, space-bound—form, and this passage nowhere holds sway more openly than in remembrance within and aging without (Benjamin 1968: 211).⁴⁰

It is in the context of forgetting and also of ageing that the red shoes will turn up once more.

Forgetting; 'as within a thousand sealed vessels'

Steht nicht das ungewollte Eingedenken, Prousts *mémoire involontaire* dem Vergessen viel näher als dem, was meist Erinnerung genannt wird? (Benjamin 1977a [1929]: 311)

[Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory? (Benjamin 1968: 202)]

At the beginning of his wait in the library, approaching his euphoric understanding of why involuntary memory and writing are metaphorically related, Marcel had gathered that forgetting plays a crucial role in the happiness

³⁸ I follow a rather theoretical track here. For a detailed analysis of the occurrence of 'cultural memory' in Proustian metaphor in practice, see chapter four.

³⁹ For a comment of Benjamin's interpretation of Proust which focusses on the aspect of 'rapture', see de Wilde 2006.

⁴⁰ Deleuze's interpretation contrasts with earlier Nietzschean interpretations of Proust's work, such as, for example, the interpretation by Jacques Rivière quoted by Benjamin: 'Proust tritt an das Erleben ohne das leiseste metaphysische Interesse, ohne den leisesten konstruktivistischen Hang, ohne die leiseste Neigung zum Trösten heran' (Benjamin 1977a [1929]: 322) ['Proust approaches experience without the slightest metaphysical interest, without the slightest penchant for construction, without the slightest tendency to console' (Benjamin 1968: 213)]. Rivière's heroic rejection of consolation, however, is not that much less romantic.

procured by involuntary memory. He had thought that every moment of our existence is different because we do not experience only those things on which we concentrate rationally, but also attach to them associations that have no logical connection with them and that we separate from them because they do not serve any rational purpose. Atmosphere, colours, and emotions are all attached to every single sensation. It is through these associations that even the memory of the simplest act or gesture remains 'enfermé comme dans mille vases clos dont chacun serait rempli de choses d'une couleur, d'une odeur, d'une température absolument différentes' (1989: IV, 448) ['immured as within a thousand sealed vessels, each one of them filled with the things of a colour, a sense, a temperature that are absolutely different from one another' (1996: VI, 221)]. Past and present do not amalgamate because of the work of forgetting:

Oui, si le souvenir, grâce à l'oubli, n'a pu contracter aucun lien, jeter aucun chaînon entre lui et la minute présente, s'il est resté à sa place, à sa date, s'il a gardé ses distances, son isolement dans le creux d'une vallée ou à la pointe d'un sommet, il nous fait tout à coup respirer un air nouveau, précisément parce que c'est un air qu'on a respiré autrefois (...) (1989: IV, 449).

[Yes: if, owing to the work of oblivion, the returning memory can throw no breach, form no connecting link between itself and the present minute, it remains in the context of its own place and date, if it keeps its distance, its isolation in the hollow of a valley or upon the highest peak of a mountain summit, for this very reason it causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past (...) (1996: VI, 221-22).]

The importance of forgetting lies in the isolation of past moments which preserve their distance only in that isolation. This interpretation of the function of forgetting casts a new light on involuntary memory. It depends on forgetting, a form of forgetting that is not definitive but that makes the past accessible without reducing it only to those images useful in the present.⁴¹ Such forgetting

⁴¹ Adorno realised the importance of forgetting in Proust. In a letter immediately preceding Benjamin's previously quoted one, Adorno makes a comment about Benjamin's 'Some motifs in Baudelaire' in which he draws attention to forgetting. He asks whether the decisive element of Proustian involuntary memory, which turns it into experience, is indeed the fact that the first impression is unconscious, as Benjamin had suggested. In Adorno's view, a dialectical step has been left out of Benjamin's interpretation; namely, that of forgetting (Adorno and Benjamin 1999 [1940]: 321). He adds a somewhat enigmatic and perhaps slightly moralistic explanation: both remembrance and memory are located in forgetting, and the structure of the experience of an individual person may depend in the last instance upon 'how that person forgets' (321). Here, Adorno seems to forget himself what Benjamin had written about forgetting in Proust already

causes the opposite of a flowing together in memory: there is no streaming or amalgamation of different memories as in the image of tradition or restored (pre-modern) 'experience' deployed by Benjamin (1980 [1938]) following Bergson. For Proust, amalgamation results when the subject superimposes different memories on each other. This has the negative effect that our memories lose their consistency and fade out; thanks to forgetting, this process can be put on another track.

How then can we interpret the relation between forgetting and writing? Let me return once more to Proust's explanation of metaphorising, which he had presented, we already saw, as bringing together impressions that we are not able to choose. This contingency had proven to be the condition of the

Vérité du passé qu'elle ressuscitait, des images qu'elle déclenchait, puisque nous sentons son effort pour remonter vers la lumière, que nous sentons la joie du réel retrouvé. Elle est le contrôle aussi de la vérité de tout le tableau fait d'impressions contemporaines qu'elle ramène à sa suite avec cette infaillible proportion de lumière et d'ombre, de relief et d'omission, de souvenir et d'oubli que la mémoire ou l'observation conscientes ignoreront toujours (1989: IV, 458).

[trueness of the past which they [the involuntary memories] brought back to life, (...) since we feel, with these sensations, the effort that they make to climb back towards the light, feel in ourselves the joy of rediscovering what is real. And here too was the proof of the trueness of the whole picture (...) with those unerring proportions of light and shade, emphasis and omission, memory and forgetfulness to which conscious recollection and conscious observation will never know how to attain' (1996: VI, 233).]

The function of forgetting in involuntary memory is to cause our past to become a 'livre intérieur de signes inconnus' (458) ['an inner book of unknown symbols' (233)]. To 're-member' in writing, then, might mean to 'feel' something like truth in practically unanalysable, deeply mediated combinations of images, to feel something like a balance between what should be emphasised and what should be omitted, what should be highlighted and what should be shaded. Perhaps this process could give access to individuality, but then precisely because it is so contingent rather than 'necessary' and law-like — yet at the same time historical, mediated, cultural.⁴²

in 1929 (see above).

⁴² Proust's own explanation is again close to that of Augustine, who suggests that forgetting might play a crucial role in transforming our impressions into stable concepts (essences or things in themselves) that seem independent from sensation. According to Augustine, essences

Forgetting and cultural memory

By coming to a standstill at forgetting, Proust appears to open up a space for deconstructing the suggested independence of metaphorising from experience, and also for developing a mediated understanding of the relation between memory and (aesthetic or religious) meaning making. But now we have to see that this also opens up a possibility for a non-reductionist but still cultural interpretation of experience that reaches even into its deepest layers. This may help me further in my attempt to understand memory as a mediator between freedom and belonging, individual experience and cultural practice, meaning making and relying on already existing interpretations. Metaphorically explained, we might try to understand memory's function as constitutive of our ability to regulate the relations between these pairs of concepts in terms of shade and light or foregrounding and omitting, rather than in terms of a dichotomous relationship.⁴³ Let me try to be more precise.

In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein escaped from the 'metaphysical-epistemological-modernist' framework that produces its 'either-ors' or dialectical 'turnovers' by opposing habit and freedom, culture and individual, truth and opinion and the like. He suggested, as I already recalled at the end of chapter six, that we learn to recognise things and to understand the 'rules' of meaning making only in the course of social learning processes, through practices of meaning making.⁴⁴

seem to have other entrances to our souls than sensation: 'I run through all the entrance doors of my flesh but I do not find one by which they have entered in' (1991: X, 17). So how did they arrive there? Augustine only brings up idealism after a marvellous empiricist exploration: he suggests that the seemingly gap-like distance between perception and concept is linked to forgetting, or at least to something very similar to forgetting. He suggests that conceptualisation might be the result of a process which he calls *cogitare* and which he describes in terms very similar to the way Proust understands involuntary memory. Augustine presents it as a process in which impressions that had been hidden somewhere deeply in our memories are dragged out. Like Proust, he does not link this dragging to a subjectively projected activity, but rather to a process of repetitive association which requires continuous *practice*. In this explanation, he introduces the concept of *cogitare*. This is the iterative Latin form of *cogere*, which means 'to gather': *cogitare* means to repetitively bring together things that lie disparately in memory (1991: X, 18). Later on in the chapter, Augustine explicitly mentions forgetting, which he, again like Proust, relates to a conscience of death and to our ultimate inability to grasp the 'broad plains and caves and caverns' of our memory, the 'stomach' of our minds. (I came to a better understanding of these passages thanks to a discussion with my colleague Marieke Borren.)

⁴³ Deleuze seems to forget the moment of forgetting itself, which is, we might say, the moment where his reading turns into myth, even if he suggests that we are dealing with becoming, mobility, and intensity, as Bergson had done.

⁴⁴ See Bader (2001) for a critique of constructivist views of culture drawing on Wittgenstein's philosophy of rules—in a debate with Gerd Baumann. I was too deeply involved in Benjamin's and Adorno's interpretations to understand in time that Vincent Descombes' Wittgensteinian

This does not necessarily mean that we have to reject the concept of experience as overly subjectivist. Rather, we should analyse the interaction between memory and forgetting in the production of experience. Recognising the role of forgetting may lead us, on the one hand, to take the relative solidity of concepts, habits and beliefs seriously, while, on the other hand, the consciousness that we are dealing with the results of forgotten learning processes helps us to remember that we could try to change them if we wanted to. Veit Bader has suggested we might follow such a double track. We know that we have learnt a common language, cultural and religious practices, an *ethos* (or customs), and ways of moving our bodies, but also that we have 'forgotten' these processes to the extent that we ourselves can have no immediate access to all of these beliefs, habits and practices as 'just memories', mere contingencies. They are not entirely permeable to our own wishes for change on the basis of reason(s), and we may also feel quite dependent upon these forgotten contingencies (paraphrased from Bader 1991: 120).

In other words, learning processes imprint themselves on our bodies and affects, which produces the 'texture' or 'layeredness' of culture and the fact that its lower layers may become 'sedimented' (Connolly 2002: 16, 17). Hence, though we may be able to realise that our (and other people's) habits and beliefs are not 'naturally' given, but produced over the course of learning processes, they may not be that easily accessible to active remembering or conscious change—even if we do not like them. Or, at least, change would seem to imply the necessity of transformations in many patterns at once, and a desire for change strong enough to inspire a great amount of practice.⁴⁵ Pursuing such an understanding of the role of forgetting in patterning our experience would help to develop a concept of experience that would not consider it enough to state that, from a third-person perspective, we can demonstrate that meaning is constructed and, for example, that (post-)modern religion is 'just' neo-religion, 'just' a politics of identity. Precisely because the things we have learnt are connected to forgetfulness, because they become unconscious and involuntary, they may start to function as if they were natural, original—or, in the case of concepts and metaphors, 'pure'.

interpretation of Proust's work might provide a modest, critical and convincing reading of the novel that could take me further in my understanding of the heritage of modernist concepts of subjectivity in contemporary secularism. I read Descombes' book (1987) too early and realised its importance too late. If I had time to start again, I would certainly reflect upon his interpretation. And I would then also reflect upon the work by Teresa de Lauretis (1984) on habit change, Peircian semiotics and experience (see Peeren 2005).

⁴⁵ Thoroughly changing habitualised behaviour is an option not very seriously considered by Proust—who seems to have thought that writing about them was already quite an effort. This hangs together with his mechanical, modernist concept of habit (as analogous to death and pure repetition!), a concept which, as I have already argued, is constantly crossed by the narrative.

Perhaps the role of forgotten learning processes also partly pertains to communities (or societies), causing them to be less manipulable than we might like them to be:

What has grown historically leads to a stability that makes up the *non-availability* of collective identity: there is a limit to manipulability—even when we are fully conscious of the historical contingency of communities and the collective identities that are based on them (Bader 1991: 121, my translation).⁴⁶

According to this view, forgetting plays a structural role in constituting relatively stable communities. Recognising such stability does not lead to the view that cultures (or religions) are unchangeable, 'reified' or essential. This would be to suggest that no enlightenment is possible and that critique would be necessarily ineffective. Rather, to borrow Paul Ricoeur's term, it means that they have a certain *ipséité*, and that we have to recognise this.⁴⁷

Or, in Connolly's words, we have to see the impact of the sedimented layers of culture, of its objectified, institutionalised aspects: while cultures are 'constituted in part by the perceptions, beliefs and concepts in it' and while much about the tension between different 'constituencies' is lodged in this dimension, attempts to understand the layered relation between thinking and culture also have to 'gauge' how sedimented

'memory traces'—as intensive thought fragments in a self or culture—can affect thinking and judgment without themselves being articulable, and how the application of subtle techniques sometimes affects the shape and intensity of such traces (Connolly 2002: 18).

The textured quality of culture means that we have to understand that people cannot do everything at the same time, and it also implies that it might not be wise to try and destroy or negate cultural and religious beliefs and practices or to pressure people to transform them into 'merely' conscious beliefs. Instead of disappearing altogether, memories of beliefs and practices may retreat into forgetfulness and become less accessible to reasons. They may also pop up as 'intensive thought fragments'. This may help us to understand why 'neo-

⁴⁶ We can distinguish here between the perspective of individuals and groups themselves, and a more distant or reflexive perspective. What seems mediated and contingent from the second perspective may seem quite natural and primary from the perspective of the first. We have to recognise that there are degrees of self-reflexiveness and no simple either-ors (Bader 1991).

⁴⁷ Ricoeur (1990) explains that the self has two important aspects that should be distinguished: *ipséité*, a continuity in time, and *identité*, a definition of selfhood in contrast to others.

religion' or 'neo-orthodoxy' follows the destruction of culture as a partly habitual but also partly manipulable and conscious 'tradition'. Assimilationism and secularism may encourage 'neo-cultures's emergence instead of preventing it. This is perhaps what Roy intuits in the quote with which I opened *Transit II*, where he argues that secularism produces specific kinds of religion. However, Roy forgets this in his discussion of ethnicity and his rejection of multiculturalism (see chapter six.)

It is morally important but also prudent to give individuals and communities time and to create legitimate options for voice, *and* loyalty—or rather, many loyalties, both loose and strong. I mean legitimate here not only in the legal sense; pluralists should try to convince members of majorities that members of minorities can have different practices, habits and opinions, and that they may manifest these to larger extents than everyone may like.

We should not forget that not only 'subtle techniques', but also social conflict can affect the shape and intensity of memory traces. One of the things we learn from the Proustian narrative strand of the red shoes is that it is not easy to distinguish between those elements of forgetting that make up the texturedness of selves and cultures, and the conscious repression of certain facts that occurs at the moment of conflict; it suggests that the two are entirely interwoven. The fact that Mme de Guermantes forgets Swann and conforms to her group's collective memory is only partly the product of *her* conscious repression or choice; partly, such forgetting just happens.

Le Temps Retrouvé: *dust*

Now we can address the second point at which the Proustian narrative critically encounters Deleuze's interpretation. In line with Benjamin's remark on the importance of ageing in Proust, Paul Ricoeur has suggested that Deleuze's interpretation should be confronted with the course of the narrative as it develops after Marcel enters the room where the reception or *Bal de Têtes* is actually being held (Ricoeur 1985 [1984]: 131-38). The narrator recounts Marcel's thoughts during the reception. These thoughts do not concern extra-temporality and life but, instead, death and time as they manifest themselves in the characters that he encounters one last time before starting to write his novel.

These characters have now grown old, conserved in their habits, and the memory of those who have died is present—also because we are in the middle of World War I. Here, Marcel encounters the announcement of decay, 'l'action destructrice du Temps (1989: IV, 508) [the destructive action of time (1996: VI, 298)], and he interprets it as a grave objection to his plan to finally 'rendre

claires (...) des réalités extra-temporelles' (508) [to make visible realities that were outside Time], by starting to write.⁴⁸ The narrator describes a show of

poupées baignant dans les couleurs immatérielles des années, des poupées extériorisant le Temps, le Temps qui d'habitude n'est pas visible, pour le devenir cherche des corps et partout où il les rencontre, s'en empare pour montrer sur eux sa lanterne magique (1989: IV, 503).

[aged marionettes bathed in the immaterial colours of the years, puppets which exteriorized Time, Time which by habit is made invisible and to become visible seeks bodies, which wherever it finds it seizes upon, to display its magic lantern upon them (1996: VI, 291).]⁴⁹

The destruction that he is confronted by also announces to Marcel his own death, which provides the final spur to discipline himself and write his novel. The novel, Ricoeur suggests, can only be understood as a novel about historical, even destructive time, and not about extra-temporality. A novel that will be filled with characters extended in time, as if they were

juchés sur de vivantes échasses, grandissant sans cesse, parfois plus hautes que des clochers, finissant par leur rendre la marche difficile et périlleuse, et d'où tout d'un coup ils tombaient (1989: IV, 625).

[perched upon living stilts which never cease to grow until sometimes they become taller than church steeples, making it in the end both difficult and perilous for them to walk and raising them to an eminence from which suddenly they fall (1996: VI, 451).]

This is one of the final sentences of the novel, and the book we have just read is the result of this attempt to grasp time through the lives of the characters and of

⁴⁸ It is at this moment, I would like to suggest, that he decides to write a narrative novel and not a 'largely' poetic one. In chapter four, I hope to have shown already how much 'history' is infused into Proust's metaphors. And here we might also add how much 'forgetting' is as well, for example when we interpret the whole novel as a large narrative metaphor in which the two sides of Swann and Guermantes start to interfere with each other like the circles in a pond after we throw two stones into it. This is suggested in particular by the appearance of Gilberte Swann and Robert de Saint-Loup's daughter at the reception given by the Princesse de Guermantes. But Gilberte, after Swann's death, had changed her name from Swann into 'de Forcheville', after her mother's second husband, and had tried to avoid being associated with the name Swann (1996: V, 670).

⁴⁹ As we have seen, Proust was fascinated by the force of habit, but to translate 'd'habitude' with 'by habit' seems a bit exaggerated to me.

a whole generation. But could it not be possible to perceive people in this way also more generally, in our daily experience? Perhaps it is only because of the narrator's strangely abstract view of habit as repetition that he thinks he is unable to perceive stilted people in social life, only seeing them while writing.

Only hesitatingly does the narrator address the memory of someone who has already died: Swann. Here we find a last reference to the red clothes and shoes. They are among the final topics of a long conversation between Mme de Guermantes and Marcel. They first talk about the period when Swann was still Oriane's friend. The Dreyfus Affair is not mentioned. Afterwards, they talk about the dress and shoes. Now, neither Swann nor the Affair is mentioned. As Marcel reminds her of the red dress she once wore, Oriane melancholically recalls how much time has passed since. At Marcel's request, she describes the dress in a very precise manner, but then starts to doubt whether she indeed wore red shoes with it. Were they not the golden ones? (1989: IV, 588; 1996: VI, 403). Mme de Guermantes mixes up her fairy tale with another one. The narrator only writes that he preferred not to talk about the event that made him so certain that the shoes were indeed red.

Mme de Guermantes goes on to remember the evening Marcel came to ask about the dress on behalf of Albertine, the first time that the red dress and shoes were cut off from the memory of Dreyfus and Swann. Albertine has been dead for a long time and the narrator writes that he does not mourn her death any more. However, he writes that our dead friends' *'poussière indifférente continue à être mêlée, à servir d'alliage, aux circonstances du passé'* (1989: IV, 589) [*'undervalued dust continues to be mingled, like some base alloy, with the circumstances of the past'* (1996: VI, 404)]. He adds that this means that we are obliged to make allusion to these friends when we speak of the places or circumstances in which they were with us, even if we have stopped mourning them: *'Telles sont les formes dernières et peu enviables de la survivance'* (1989: IV, 589) [*'Such are the last, the scarcely desirable vestiges of survival after death'* (1996: VI, 404)]. He adds that we have to make allusion to them even if we do not mention them, which is what happens when the narrator reminds the reader of such a small thing as the red shoes without mentioning Swann explicitly. This, however, is less than he had promised Swann when addressing him directly.

It is in the novel that we can distinguish between different kinds of remembering and forgetting, without being able to separate them. Mme de Guermantes remembers the past in an amalgamated way from the perspective of the present. The narrator is more precise and makes a detour. Through the work of remembering the forgotten, he separates the different times the red shoes appeared, remembering them in their own period, each surrounded by the painful reflections of the moment. The novel thus reconstructs the memory

of an individual, not of a group. At the same time, however, these memories testify to Marcel and Oriane's painful conformity to collective pressures. The novel reconstructs the memories of several isolated individuals in a minute way, making clear the semi-disparate, semi-shared character of collective memory that appears when one contemplates it in detail and over a longer period.

Forgetting, secularism and democratic memory

Let me anticipate the conclusion to this study with a brief reflection on the link between Proust's account of memory and forgetting and my reasons for criticising secularism in trying to contribute to a concept of what Rainer Bauboeck has called 'democratic memory' (1998). He argues the need for such a concept in a discussion of overly 'presentist' concepts of citizenship, defining it as a memory that can 'include the divergent pasts of all groups who share a common future in a democratic state' (2002: 8). We have seen that Durkheim already grasped the importance of the past for a progressive project. He included a reflection on the objective memory constituted in institutions. But Durkheim remained afraid of admitting memories of difference, like Noiriel (see chapter one).

Proust's narrative incites us to realise that the care taken to build solidarity with the 'own' group should be complemented by a democratic care to build solidarity with those whose 'difference' is remembered by the majority because they have not yet fully 'integrated' or 'assimilated'; or, as we have also explored in chapter four, whose 'difference' is remembered by the majority notwithstanding the fact that they have fully 'assimilated'.

Yet we also need to see the importance of a recognition of memories of difference in a stronger sense. Idealistically pleading for 'inclusive' memory would not be enough to remedy the 'presentism'—and I would say modernism—inherent in some concepts of liberal democracy. Democratic memory, which wants to give voice to all, should also be open to memories of difference and conflict, instead of only to memories of 'how we started to belong'. I do not mean to suggest that it would help to keep bringing up painful memories of conflict and division. But I do think that assimilatory pressures to fully 'forget' or to understand oneself as 'having forgotten' not only culture as a partly habitual background or *ipséité* but also intrinsically related painful conflicts that have resulted in a different '*identité*', may help to turn mediated memories (on both sides) into quite stable counter-identities rather than helping them to find a new place. Recognising these memories publicly, also if

CHAPTER 7

expressed in a religious vocabulary, seems more conducive to achieving peaceful plural societies that may also enhance the happiness of individuals.