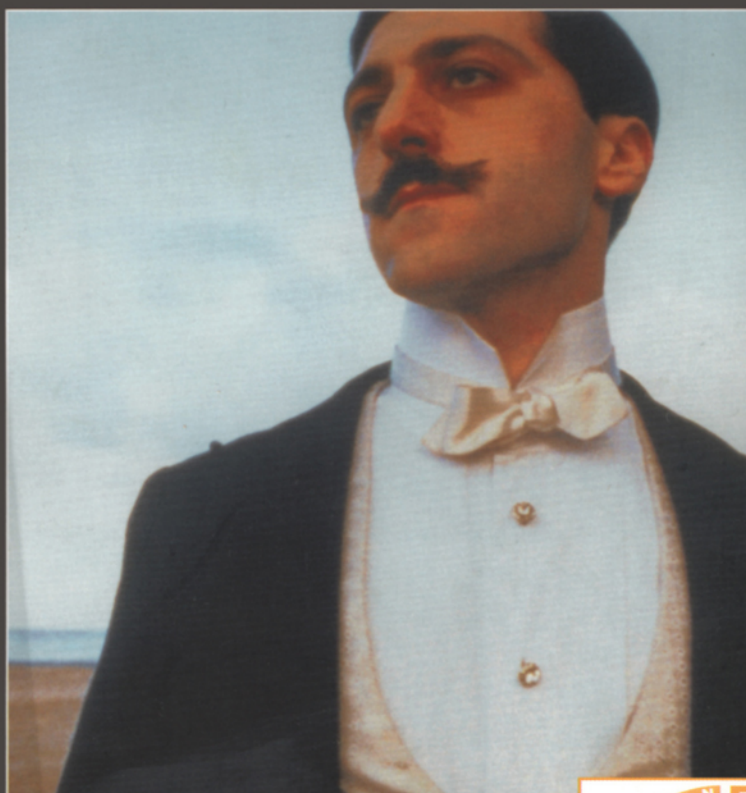


# Proust at the Movies

MARTINE BEUGNET and  
MARION SCHMID



## PROUST AT THE MOVIES

*A Sami*  
*Für Sarah Louisa*

# Proust at the Movies

Martine Beugnet

Marion Schmid

Studies in European Cultural Transition

Volume Thirty One

General Editors: Martin Stannard and Greg Walker

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2004 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Beugnet, Martine

Proust at the movies. – (Studies in European cultural transition)

1. Proust, Marcel, 1871-1922 – Film and video adaptations 2. Proust, Marcel, 1871-1922. A la recherche du temps perdu

I. Title II. Schmid, Marion

843.9'12

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Beugnet, Martine.

Proust at the movies / Martine Beugnet and Marion Schmid.

p. cm. — (Studies in European cultural transition)

Includes bibliographical references.

Includes filmography.

ISBN 0-7546-3541-4 (alk. paper)

1. Proust, Marcel, 1871-1922—Film and video adaptations. 2. Proust, Marcel, 1871-1922. A la recherche du temps perdu. I. Schmid, Marion. II. Title. III. Series.

PQ2631.R63Z5427 2006

843'.912—dc22

2005011866

ISBN 13: 978-0-7546-3541-3 (hbk)

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# General Editors' Preface

The European dimension of research in the humanities has come into sharp focus over recent years, producing scholarship which ranges across disciplines and national boundaries. Until now there has been no major channel for such work. This series aims to provide one, and to unite the fields of cultural studies and traditional scholarship. It will publish the most exciting new writing in areas such as European history and literature, art history, archaeology, language and translation studies, political, cultural and gay studies, music, psychology, sociology and philosophy. The emphasis will be explicitly European and interdisciplinary, concentrating attention on the relativity of cultural perspectives, with a particular interest in issues of cultural transition.

Martin Stannard  
Greg Walker  
University of Leicester

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# Acknowledgements

This book is the result of a harmonious collaboration that developed naturally out of shared interests, an affinity of mindsets and a strong friendship. In the course of the project, access to the resources of the Bibliothèque du Film and the British Film Institute proved invaluable. We were also fortunate to benefit from the support of a number of institutions and individuals to whom we would like to hereby express our gratitude. Our sincere thanks go to the Carnegie Trust for a research grant to consult the riches of the Visconti Archive in Rome and for financial assistance towards illustrations, to the University of Edinburgh for a generous research grant towards the material cost of editing, and to Artificial Eye and Avventura film for their authorisations to reproduce film stills. We are particularly grateful to Fabio Carpi for providing us with scripts and tapes of his films, for granting permission to use illustrations and for many inspiring discussions in the Rond Point and the Café de Flore. We would also like to express our gratitude to Claude Schwartz for authorising us to use photos from his *Luchino Visconti à la recherche de Proust*. Finally we would like to extend a very warm thank you to Catherine and Jean-Pierre Granier for their hospitality and friendship.

Edinburgh and Paris

Winter 2004

Martine Beugnet and Marion Schmid

# Introduction

Unlike other canonical writers of French literature such as Balzac, Stendhal, Zola or his own contemporary Gide, who were among the first to be adapted to the screen, Proust was discovered comparatively late by the media.<sup>1</sup> Before the centenary of his birth in 1971, which was accompanied by a flood of programmes based on his life and work, none of the seven volumes of the *Recherche* had been adapted for television and before 1984, when Volker Schlöndorff's *Un Amour de Swann* had its general release, none had been shown in the cinema. One reason for the delayed visual exploitation of his oeuvre may be the largely unfavourable reception it received after the author's death in 1922 and the publication of the last three posthumous volumes of *A la recherche du temps perdu* in 1923, 1925 and 1927.<sup>2</sup> The Surrealist writers of the interwar period vehemently criticised Proust for privileging analysis over sentiment.<sup>3</sup> In a rating of his work in the journal *Littérature* of March 1921, the four leading Surrealists Aragon, Breton, Eluard and Soupault gave him 0/20, 6/20, -8/20 and 2/20 on a scale from -25 to 20 (-25 signalling 'la plus grande aversion' [the strongest dislike]; 0 'l'indifférence absolue' [total indifference]).<sup>4</sup> Tristan Tzara opted for a spiteful -25, bringing the average for Proust down to exactly 0. The author fared little better among the generation of committed writers that dominated French literature and criticism

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- 1 Balzac leads the list as the most popular of French writers in the cinema with 40 adaptations to date ranging from André Calmettes's *La Grande Bretèche* of 1909 to *Le Colonel Chabert* of 1994. Zola follows him closely with 34 adaptations, amongst which Jean Renoir's celebrated *Nana* (1925) and *La Bête humaine* (1938) and Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Argent* (1928). Stendhal, though less popular (and also less prolific in his literary output than his two nineteenth-century colleagues) still scores 11 adaptations, some such as Mario Bonnard's (1920) and G. Righelli's (1929) productions of *Le Rouge et le Noir* going back to the 1920s. Jean Delaunoy's adaptation of Gide's *La Symphonie pastorale*, finally, won the *Grand Prix du Festival International du Film* at Cannes in 1946.
  - 2 The last three volumes *La Prisonnière*, *La Fugitive*, and *Le Temps retrouvé* were published posthumously in 1923, 1925 and 1927 respectively.
  - 3 In the first *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924), Breton comments on Barrès and Proust: 'L'intraitable manie qui consiste à ramener l'inconnu au connu, au classable, berce les cerveaux. Le désir d'analyse l'emporte sur le sentiment' [The incurable mania which consists in relating the unknown to what is known and classifiable, lulls the mind. The desire to analyse gains the upper hand over feeling] (*Manifestes du surréalisme*, Gallimard, Folio, 1994, p. 19).
  - 4 *Littérature*, March 1921, p. 7.

between the 1930s and 1950s, who charged him with having eluded the major preoccupations of his time. In 1935, the leftist journal *Europe* declared him to be ‘en dehors de la société’ [outwith society] whilst the equally left wing *Vendredi* proclaimed in 1937: ‘Proust est mort, bien mort, aussi loin de nous qu’on puisse l’être, et Dieu sait quand il ressuscitera, s’il ressuscitera jamais’ [Proust is dead, well dead, as far from us as one could possibly be, and God knows when he will rise again, if he is to rise at all].<sup>5</sup> Worse still, Jean-Paul Sartre, the most prominent promoter of *littérature engagée* and the doyen of post-war French philosophy and letters, accused Proust of complicity with the forces of reaction in an article in *Les Temps modernes* of 1947. The critic Gaëtan Picon deliberately excluded Proust from the first edition of his influential *Panorama de la nouvelle littérature française*. The way in which he explains this omission aptly sums up the hostility of French intellectuals towards Proust until the 1950s: ‘Si je ne parle pas de Proust, ce n’est pas que je l’ignore ou que je le conteste: c’est que son œuvre s’est éloignée de nous non seulement par sa date, mais par sa nature’ [If I don’t speak of Proust, it is not because I ignore him or dispute him, it is because his work has grown away from us not only by its date of composition, but by its very nature].<sup>6</sup>

A decisive shift in the reception of Proust in France occurred in the wake of André Maurois’s laudatory biographical tribute *A la recherche de Marcel Proust* (1949), as well as with the publication of two of the author’s hitherto unknown works: his unfinished first novel *Jean Santeuil* (1954) and his collection of drafts *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1954), both of which constitute an important *avant-texte* for the *Recherche*. Maurois’s biography and the new editions resuscitated a fresh interest in the author and eventually gave rise to his rehabilitation in literary and intellectual circles. George D. Painter’s two-volume biography of Proust (1959 and 1965), translated into French in 1963 and 1966, which became an immediate popular success, as well as the already mentioned centenary of Proust’s birth in 1971, were further milestones in the apotheosis of Proust. Today he safely holds the position of not only, as David Ellison puts it, ‘the French writer of all time’, but as a ‘primary figure in European Modernism occupying the same rarefied aesthetic atmosphere as James Joyce, Franz Kafka and Thomas Mann’.<sup>7</sup>

5 *Europe*, 1935; Nino Frank, ‘A la recherche du temps perdu’, *Vendredi*, 12 March 1937, p. 7.

6 *Panorama de la nouvelle littérature française* (Paris: Les Editions du Point du Jour, 1949), pp. 10–11.

7 David R. Ellison, ‘Proust and Posterity’, in Richard Bales, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 200–15 (p. 200).

While it is indisputable that the reception of Proust by the media follows the changing tides of the more general Proust reception in France in the twentieth century, changing intellectual fashion is of course not the only reason for his late adaptation, even if its impact on cinematic production should not be underestimated. Its very nature as a modernist text and its exceptional complexity make *A la recherche du temps perdu* a work far more resistant to adaptation than, for instance, the realist works of Balzac. The sheer length of the text (more than 1,300,000 words), the huge cast and expensive sets a traditional adaptation would require, as well as the novel's associative narrative structure which defies conventional cinematic chronology and, not least, the 'intellectuality' and cultural elitism often associated with Proust make the adaptation of *A la recherche du temps perdu* not only a difficult, but also a risky venture. It is unsurprising, then, that the first films on Proust were largely of a documentary nature. Gérard Herzog's *Portrait-Souvenir: Marcel Proust* (1962), the first film on Proust on French television, was followed by a series of documentaries on the author's life, times and social entourage in the 1970s: Jean-Marc Leuwen's *La Société de Marcel Proust* (1971), Guy Gilles's *Proust: L'art et la douleur* (1971), Michel Butor and Michel Favart's *Proust et les siens* (1972) and Philippe Prince's *Paris au temps de Marcel Proust* (1979). The latest and arguably best in this series of portraits is William Carter's *Marcel Proust: A Writer's Life* (1993).

The first adaptations of Proust's novel for television also start in the 1970s: Claude Santinelli's *Du Côté de chez Swann* was broadcast on 24 December 1971, starring, amongst others, Madeleine Renaud as Tante Léonie, Denise Gence as Françoise, Marie-Christine Barrault as Marcel's mother, Isabelle Huppert as Gilberte and Christophe Grimbart as the boy Marcel. A more original adaptation was attempted by American director Mark Rapoport, whose *Impostors* (1979), a production for German television, superimposes the tragic love story of Marcel and Albertine onto Dashiell Hammett's *Maltese Falcon*. Radio similarly discovered Proust in the year of the centenary with a series of broadcasts on *Les Sources de Proust*, *Proust et la maladie*, *La Musique dans les salons au temps de Marcel Proust* and *Correspondance de Proust avec Reynaldo Hahn*. Eliane Milhau and Jean Montalbetti produced *Roland Barthes sur les traces de Marcel Proust* in 1978 and Jacques Taroni adapted *Un Amour de Swann* as a radio drama in 1982. The stage arts followed suit with numerous theatre productions since the 1970s, most importantly perhaps the much acclaimed Royal National Theatre production based on Harold Pinter's film script of the *Recherche* staged in London in 2000/2001, and a smaller number of ballets, amongst which Roland Petit's *Les Intermittences du*

*cœur* with the Ballet national de Marseille in 1982. More recently, Stéphane Heuet's comic book adaptation of the novel has been a great popular success in France.<sup>8</sup>

Film, however, because of the historical and aesthetic affinities that are outlined in Chapter 1, offers the most intriguing and resonant space for contemporary adaptations of Proust. As in television, the first serious attempts to translate the *Recherche* to the cinema also were made in the 1970s, first by Luchino Visconti who, in collaboration with Italy's leading scriptwriter Suso Cecchi d'Amico, produced a screenplay in 1970, then by Joseph Losey, who commissioned a screenplay from his regular collaborator, the British dramatist Harold Pinter. Both directors were forced to abandon the project because of lack of financial backing. The *grand projet* of adapting the whole of the *Recherche* seems to have died with these two attempts, but the last 20 years have seen three partial adaptations which have generated considerable attention from critics and the media: Volker Schlöndorff's strongly criticised rendering of *Un Amour de Swann* in 1984; Raoul Ruiz's controversial surreal epic *Le Temps retrouvé* in 1999; and Chantal Akerman's well-received psychodrama *La Captive* (based on Proust's *La Prisonnière*) in 2000. Italian director Fabio Carpi, though not directly adapting the *Recherche*, has made two films, *Quartetto Basileus* (1982) and *Le Intermittenze del cuore* (2003), which are loosely inspired by the Proustian novel. Although the approaches adopted by these four idiosyncratic filmmakers differ widely, the results have in all cases spurred controversy. Their highly personal interpretations of the Proustian universe throw into sharp relief inherent methodological and theoretical problems not only of adapting a work as complex as the *Recherche*, but also, of the genre of literary adaptation in general.

In what follows, we propose to explore the rich interconnections and echoes that link the Proustian oeuvre to the cinema and to analyse the feature screen adaptations<sup>9</sup> so far attempted. An introductory chapter addresses the links between Proust and the cinema, tracing the author's (limited) exposure and ambiguous reactions to the new medium, and analysing the specifically

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8 A first comic adaptation entitled *Les Madeleines du petit Marcel* was realised by Franc Régis in 1976.

9 Proust's life and work have also inspired a number of short movies which are not readily available in video or DVD format, and, for practical reasons will not be discussed in this book: *Le Temps d'une vocation* (1961), *Les Yeux d'Elstir* (1968) *La Normandie de Marcel Proust* (1969); *A la recherche des amours enfantines* (1971) and *Marcel Proust* (1971). For a detailed list of the various adaptations of his work see *Quid de Marcel Proust*, in Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, 3 vols (Paris: Robert Laffont, 'Bouquins', 1987), I, pp. 251–55.

cinematic quality of Proust's writing. This chapter will also discuss in detail the problems inherent in adapting Proust to the screen and re-examine recent theoretical debates about the problem of literary adaptation. Chapter 2 examines the two screenplays for *A la recherche du temps perdu* by Luchino Visconti and Harold Pinter, analysing their widely divergent approaches in the context of the directors' and screenwriters' wider oeuvre and its thematic and aesthetic preoccupations. The subsequent three chapters are devoted to the detailed analysis of each of the three screen adaptations of the *Recherche* realised to date: Volker Schlöndorff's heritage drama *Un Amour de Swann* (1984), Raoul Ruiz's neo-baroque *Le Temps retrouvé* (1999), and Chantal Akerman's hybrid psychodrama *La Captive* (2000). Chapter 6 examines Fabio Carpi's melancholy *Quartetto Basileus* (1982) and *Le Intermittenze del cuore* (2003). Finally, Chapter 7 looks at forms of 'Proustian cinema', and focuses on a sample of films that engage with the legacy of Proust's work in their approach and aesthetic, even though they may not all directly refer to Proust's fiction. All chapters are strictly self-contained, leaving it up to readers whether to explore the book in a chronological or, rather, in a more Proustian, a-chronological manner. Readers with specific interests may thus choose to concentrate on particular chapters: while Chapter 1, with its historical and theoretical slant and its focus on the relationship between time, memory and the cinema, may be of particular interest to readers specialising in film, Chapter 2 may attract more attention from Proust scholars and literary specialists. Those readers wishing to focus on one film in particular may wish to turn to the relevant chapter in the first instance.

P. Krajanva first put Proust on the map of film criticism with his introductory survey *Proust au cinéma* published in French in 2003.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to this welcome, but brief study, our own book adopts a more detailed and, more importantly, a resolutely multidisciplinary approach, where literary theory is combined with film theory and criticism as well as with elements of philosophy of art. Special attention is given to the significance and role of the modernist legacy, with its distinctive aesthetic and narrative features in both Proust and the adaptations of his work for the cinema: the denial of linear time and narrative organisation, the mixing of media, the use of collage, as well as the problematisation of the narrative voice/gaze and point of view. An outline of the history and recent evolution of contemporary art cinema will thus emerge, a cinema where the themes at the heart of Proust's work – memory, time, perception – are ceaselessly explored.

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10 Brussels: La Lettre Volée, 2003.

## Chapter 1

# Proust and the Cinema

The beginnings of cinema correspond to a period of profound literary and artistic upheaval. Nietzsche's valorisation of the non-rational, Bergson's reflection on memory and time, and the emergence of the Freudian thesis on the unconscious heralded philosophical currents that continuously undermined the conventional belief in achieving a rational, scientific knowledge of the world and the human self and, as such, the possibility of the objective representation of reality. As Claude Murcia points out, the impact that such radical questioning about the perception and comprehension of reality had on literary forms, and in particular on the novel, was to affect the evolution of literary creation for the rest of the century.

La première guerre mondiale signe l'écroulement définitif du système de valeurs qui avait dominé la deuxième moitié du dix-neuvième siècle, fondé sur les certitudes positivistes et la foi dans le progrès humain. Le roman d'alors, 'réaliste' puis 'naturaliste', se fait l'écho de cette confiance rationaliste, engendrée par l'adhésion aux interprétations scientistes du réel. Emanation d'une bourgeoisie triomphante, il traduit par sa plénitude formelle et sémantique son accord avec le monde. [...] A l'aube du vingtième siècle, le roman, délivré du carcan positiviste, cherche d'autres voies d'accès à la connaissance du réel et se met à réfléchir sur lui même. Proust ouvre magistralement la voie avec sa *Recherche du temps perdu*.

The First World War signalled the definitive collapse of the system of values founded on positivist certainties and the faith in human progress that had dominated the second half of the nineteenth century. The novel of the time, first 'realist' than 'naturalist', echoes this rationalist confidence, stemming from the adhesion to scientific interpretations of reality. The product of a triumphant bourgeoisie, it translates through its formal and semantic plenitude its accordance with the world. [...] At the dawn of the twentieth century, the novel, delivered from the positivist yoke, seeks other modes of access to the understanding of reality and begins to reflect about itself. Proust masterly opens the way with his *Recherche du temps perdu*.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Claude Murcia, *Nouveau roman, nouveau cinéma* (Paris: Nathan, 1998), p. 7.

Proust's writing was characteristic of the emergence of the reflexive-subjective approach that came to inform modernist art practices which renounced the pretence of achieving a transparent representation of the world. In France, his work became the corner-stone of a literary revolution that validated an intuitive and subjective apprehension of reality, undermining traditional certitudes about the unity and coherence of the self in time.

There is thus an intriguing historical and contextual coincidence between the maturation of the Proustian project and the advent of film. Born at a time when a whole system of values and its artistic expression were disintegrating, cinema appeared caught between two contradictory pulls – the realist (mimetic) tradition and the modernist trend of which Proust is a precursor. Between recording and fiction, authenticity and illusion, art and industry, the dual status and uncertain vocation of the new mechanically based art form raised issues that would in many ways exemplify the artistic debates characterising the move towards the modernist era.

The concept of the modern shifts – or indeed slips and slides – between two related contexts. In the first it defines the general culture of the arts in the twentieth century [...] emphasising a break with the tradition of realism and mimesis in Western art and literature. At the same time it echoes in name and concept a much broader process of social and cultural 'modernisation'. This second sense, known as 'modernity', points to the global rise and hegemony of industrial, urban and technological societies. [...] Film, and the other media related to it such as video and other 'scientific technologies', always occupied a curious place in these debates and distinctions, wherever the borderlines were drawn. For some, its technical base and mass-culture associations undermined its actual or potential status as an art form; for others, it was simply a new medium to be added to the range of media which an artist could use.<sup>2</sup>

The analogical quality of film's moving image, its assumed capability to represent reality with exactitude as if from a distanced, objective observer's stance, arguably inscribed its vocation, from the start, in the realist project. Yet this particular capacity of the cinema could equally be put in the service of a reflexive or anti-illusionist agenda, just as the process of editing and montage, as a form of collage, seemed to echo the fragmentary and contradictory nature of contemporary reality and human existence. During the silent period, the most influential movements in filmmaking put cinema's technological potential and its unique recording ability in the service of aesthetic and narrative

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2 A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (London: BFI, 1999), pp. 8–11.



experiments that blurred the frontiers between dream and reality, the figurative and the abstract. In effect, to many artists and writers of the early twentieth century, cinema was a source of inspiration and renewal, a welcome factor of experimentation that contributed to the overturn of outdated artistic and literary models. Such was not, however, Proust's estimation.

### The Writer and the Seventh Art

Proust, it is often claimed in criticism, had no high opinion of the cinema, whose development coincides with the evolution of his own novel. Cinema was coined the 'seventh art' the year following Proust's death by Ricciotto Canudo in his *Manifeste des sept arts*, yet references to the new medium in *A la recherche du temps perdu* are few and far between and, at least so it would seem at first glance, tend to be hostile. In his famous aesthetic treatise in the final volume, *Le Temps retrouvé*, Proust uses the cinema as an analogy to criticise the limitations of a realist poetics. Reality, he says, resides not, as one may commonly believe, in the material world that the author sets out to describe, but, on the contrary, in the subtle relations between this world and its observer created in the form of sensations or memories. A cinematic vision of the world suppresses this crucial link and bypasses reality precisely because it adheres to it too narrowly:

Une heure n'est pas qu'une heure, c'est un vase rempli de parfums, de sons, de projets et de climats. Ce que nous appelons la réalité est un certain rapport entre ces sensations et ces souvenirs qui nous entourent simultanément – *rapport que supprime une simple vision cinématographique, laquelle s'éloigne par là d'autant plus du vrai qu'elle prétend se borner à lui* – rapport unique que l'écrivain doit retrouver pour en enchaîner à jamais dans sa phrase les deux termes différents. On peut faire se succéder indéfiniment dans une description les objets qui figuraient dans le lieu décrit, la vérité ne commencera qu'au moment où l'écrivain prendra deux objets différents, posera leur rapport, analogue dans le monde de l'art à celui qu'est le rapport unique de la loi causale dans le monde de la science et les enfermera dans les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style.

An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates, and what we call reality is a certain connection between these immediate sensations and the memories which envelop us simultaneously with them – *a connection which is suppressed in a simple cinematographic vision, which just because it professes to confine itself to the truth in fact departs widely*

*from it* – a unique connection which the writer has to rediscover in order to link forever in his phrase the two sets of phenomena which reality joins together. He can describe a scene by describing one after another the innumerable objects which at a given moment were present at a particular place, but truth will be attained by him only when he takes two different objects, states the connection between them – a connection analogous in the world of art to the unique connection which in the world of science is provided by the law of causality – and encloses them in the necessary links of a well-wrought style.<sup>3</sup>

Literature, if it wants to be truthful, must penetrate beyond the material surface of things. It must attempt to capture the trace a sensation has left on the observer and grasp the mysterious relations between the objects that constitute the world. For Proust, a truthful representation of reality must of necessity be relational, it must point to the ‘correspondences’, to use a Baudelairean concept which influenced Proust’s own poetics, between the material and the spiritual world.<sup>4</sup> But Proust goes beyond Baudelaire and superimposes on the latter’s concept of correspondence his own theory of metaphor, first developed in *A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* in the crucial scene of the Narrator’s visit to the painter Elstir’s studio on the Normandy coast. The example of Elstir’s marine paintings, which invert the traditional codes of pictorial representation by painting the earth in colours associated with the sea and vice versa, allows the Narrator to understand that there is an equivalence between the art of metamorphosis in painting and that of metaphor in literature. He decides forthwith to strive for a metaphorical art in the tradition of Elstir in his own work.<sup>5</sup> In the second, crucial reprise of the concept of metaphor in *Le Temps retrouvé* quoted above, the reflection on the stylistic value of metaphorical writing is integrated into a wider critique of realist representation which lies at the heart of ‘Matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes’. Metaphorical writing, that is, the type of writing Proust advocates and exemplifies, is now contrasted with any form of realist representation, illustrated, once again, by the aesthetics of the cinema:

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3 References in French are made to Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard: ‘Pléiade’, 1987–89) (thereafter RTP). The English translation used is Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, transl. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, rev. by D.J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) (thereafter SLT). This fully revised and updated translation follows the text of the new Pléiade Proust. RTP, IV, 468, our italics/SLT, VI, 245–46.

4 Cf. Baudelaire’s famous sonnet ‘Correspondances’ from *Les Fleurs du mal*.

5 RTP, II, 191/SLT, II, 480.

Mais il y avait plus. Si la réalité était cette espèce de déchet de l'expérience, à peu près identique pour chacun, parce que quand nous disons: un mauvais temps, une guerre, une station de voitures, un restaurant éclairé, un jardin en fleurs, tout le monde sait ce que nous voulons dire; si la réalité était cela, *sans doute une sorte de film cinématographique de ces choses suffirait* et le 'style', la 'littérature' qui s'écarteraient de leurs simples données seraient un hors d'œuvre artificiel. Mais était-ce bien cela, la réalité? Si j'essayais de me rendre compte de ce qui se passe en effet au moment où une chose nous fait une certaine impression, [...] je m'apercevais que ce livre essentiel, le seul livre vrai, un grand écrivain n'a pas dans le sens courant à l'inventer puisqu'il existe déjà en nous, mais à le traduire. Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur.

But my train of thought led me yet further. If reality were indeed a sort of waste product of experience, more or less identical for each one of us, since when we speak of bad weather, a war, a taxi rank, a brightly lit restaurant, a garden full of flowers, everybody knows what we mean, if reality were no more than this, *no doubt a sort of cinematograph film of these things would be sufficient* and the 'style', the 'literature' that departed from the simple data that they provide would be superfluous and artificial. But was it true that reality was no more than this? If I tried to understand what actually happens at the moment when a thing makes some particular impression upon one, [...] I realised that the words in each case were a long way removed from the impression that I or Bloch had in fact received. So that the essential, the only true book, though in the ordinary sense of the word it does not have to be 'invented' by a great writer – for it already exists in each of us – has to be translated by him. The function and task of a writer are those of a translator.<sup>6</sup>

The problem of realism, Proust argues, is that it captures reality at a purely material level, in other words, that it contents itself with naming and describing phenomena instead of attempting to penetrate beneath their surface. Similarly, the cinema, which he considers the medium of realist representation par excellence, reduces the complexity of the world to a series of unequivocal images, to a waste product ('déchet') of experience. Cinema's assumed inferiority in comparison to literature, then, resides in its incapacity (or, perhaps, in its unwillingness) to translate man's subjective and changing vision, in its tendency to replace connotation by denotation.

For critics of the cinema, it may come as a surprise that, as late as 1921, that is, at a time when cinema was already considered an art form by many

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6 RTP, IV, 468–69, our italics/SLT, VI, 246–47.

artists, Proust should continue to associate it with the documentary realism championed by the Frères Lumière. To understand why Proust had such reservations about the cinema, one needs to acknowledge one simple fact: he never set foot in a cinema in his lifetime. In a letter to Jean de Pierrefeu of January 1920, he cites a number of distractions no longer available to him because of his illness, which keeps him increasingly confined to his bed: ‘*Bridge et dancing* me sont je dois le dire également inconnus, et je ne suis même jamais – ce que je regrette davantage car cela m’a toujours beaucoup tenté – entré dans un cinéma. Je n’en ai jamais vu’ [Bridge and dancing are, I must say it, equally unknown to me and I haven’t even – a thing which I regret more for it has always tempted me – set foot in a cinema. I have never seen one].<sup>7</sup> As we know from the dedication to Marcel de Plantevigne in a copy of *La Bible d’Amiens*, the only equivalent of a cinematic projection he had seen in his life was the so-called ‘guignol cinématographique’ in Cabourg in 1908:

Puisse-t-il du moins, s’il traverse, ce livre à la main, Amiens, par quelque jour glacé d’automne ou d’hiver, comme dit Ruskin, se souvenir que ce guide lui fut donné un triste soir de septembre à Cabourg, au moment où allait commencer le guignol cinématographique, et trouver à visiter les vieilles pierres sacrées de la Venise du Nord en compagnie de ce pèlerin mélancolique, un peu de la douceur que j’avais la veille à voir à côté de lui dans l’appareil morne et magique venir à nous Saint-Omer, appelée par un programme, ruskinien peut-être sans le savoir, la Venise du Nord.

May he at least when, a book at hand, he walks through Amiens, on a cold autumn or winter’s day, as says Ruskin, remember that he was offered this guide one sad September evening in Cabourg, as the cinematographic *guignol*<sup>8</sup> was about to begin, and may he find, whilst visiting the sacred old stones of the Venice of the North in the company of this melancholic pilgrim, a bit of the sweetness I felt the preceding day when next to him in the gloomy and magic apparatus I saw appear before our eyes Saint-Omer called the Venice of the North in a programme inspired by Ruskin perhaps without knowing it.<sup>9</sup>

Proust’s exposure to the cinema, then, was to a medium at its very beginnings, which remained closer to the popular fairground entertainment from which

7 Proust, *Correspondance*, ed. Philip Kolb, 21 vols (Paris: Plon, 1970–93) (thereafter Corr.), XIX, p. 76.

8 The most established type of puppet show, and, interestingly, a form of spectacle often cited in films evoking the beginnings of cinema and the innocence of early spectatorial pleasures.

9 Corr., VIII, 222.

it originated than to the refined and complex art form into which it later developed. The projection of the cinematograph the author had seen at Cabourg is likely, as his reference to Saint-Omer seems to insinuate, to have been a little documentary travel show of the kind that were fashionable at the time. He had neither seen examples of the so-called ‘art film’ of the *Belle Epoque*, that is, screen adaptations of French classics and historical costume dramas which were aimed at a predominantly bourgeois and aristocratic public, nor was he familiar with the brand of impressionist cinema that emerged in France immediately after World War I, which, as we shall see later, shows considerable similarities with Proust’s own art.<sup>10</sup> His limited knowledge of the medium made him consider it as a form of mass entertainment unworthy of serious consideration. His low opinion of the cinema resurfaces in a letter to Walter Berry of 1921 in which he expresses his surprise at the news that a common friend, Mme Garrett, is involved in the cinema both as a director and an actress:

J’ai appris avec stupeur que votre amie Mme G [...] (qui vous a ôté après coup le regret d’une séparation car elle est devenue plus que grosse, énorme, et, à la différence de moi vous n’aimez pas les femmes grosses) tourne des films et joue dans les cinémas. Vous êtes si parisien que vous ne devez pas le comprendre plus que moi.

I was amazed to hear that your friend Mme G [...] (who retrospectively has freed you from the regret of a separation for she has become very big, enormous, and, unlike me, you don’t like big women) makes films and plays in the cinema. You are so Parisian that you probably find it as incomprehensible as I do.<sup>11</sup>

Proust’s contempt for the cinema seems to have been shared by Berry, who, in a letter to Proust of January 1919, excuses his hasty style of writing in the following terms: ‘Je reçois à l’instant votre lettre que l’on m’apporte de chez moi, et comme je dois partir dans quelques minutes pour une réunion, je vous écris *cinématographiquement*’ [I have just received your letter, which was brought to me from home, and since I have to leave for a meeting in a few minutes, I write back *cinematographically*].<sup>12</sup> ‘Cinématographiquement’

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10 The company *Le Film d’Art*, created in 1908, sought to promote a different, more respectable type of cinema and employed actors from the *Comédie française* to play in literary or historically based projects.

11 Corr., XX, 571.

12 Corr., XVIII, 55.

is clearly used as a synonym for sloppy style, associative structure and overall disorder. The throw-away remarks on the cinema made by Robert de Montesquiou, one of Proust's intellectual mentors in the 1890s and a life-long friend and correspondent, in a letter of May 1907 are even more damning:<sup>13</sup> 'Oh! Les beaux progrès de la Science! On en viendra, n'en doutez pas, à *mentir par cinématographe!*' [Oh, the fine progress of Science! We will, do not doubt it, be reduced to lying by the cinematograph].<sup>14</sup>

Yet, perhaps paradoxically, in spite of the low opinion he seems to have had of cinema as an art form, Proust was nonetheless intrigued by the new medium and attracted to it. In fact, his own *mise en scène* of moments when the Narrator indulges in contemplation and recollection, outlining the pleasures derived from the temporary sensation of plenitude offered by certain spectacles, occasionally recalls the viewing conditions of a cinema spectator. The opening passages from *Le Temps retrouvé*, for instance, describe such occasions where the Narrator, lying in his bed, looks at the motifs that adorn the wallpaper in his room or, looking out from his window, admires the luminescent view that presents itself to his eyes.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, the magic and the voyeuristic pleasures offered by the projection of images in the dark are vividly evoked in the passages on the predecessor of the cinematograph, the magic lantern.

In one of the first pages of *Du Côté de chez Swann* (RTP, I, 9–10/SLT, I, 8–10) the Narrator describes in great detail the magic lantern that, in the days of his childhood, was installed in his room on evenings when he felt particularly unhappy. In his evocation of the past, the lantern's projection is accompanied by the text read aloud by his great aunt, whose voice synchronises sound and image into a carefully harmonised unity, anticipatory of the talkies: 'Golo s'arrêtait un instant pour écouter avec tristesse le boniment lu à haute voix par ma grand-tante et qu'il avait l'air de comprendre parfaitement, conformant son attitude avec une docilité qui n'excluait pas une certaine majesté, aux indications du texte; puis il s'éloignait du même pas saccagé' [Golo stopped for a moment and listened sadly to the accompanying patter read aloud by

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13 Unwittingly, Berry's throwaway remark captures precisely that fragmentary nature of film that the avant-garde movements in the 1920s and, the novelists of the *Nouveau roman* in the 1960s would seek to emulate. Similarly, Robert de Montesquiou's evokes cinema in apparently damning terms, yet terms that a director like Ruiz would probably embrace wholeheartedly. His remark, though meant as an irrevocable rejection, paradoxically prefigures cinema's remarkable capacity to play with our sense of belief.

14 Corr., VII, 164.

15 RTP, IV, 275/SLT, VI, 1.

my great-aunt, which he seemed perfectly to understand, for he modified his attitude with a docility not devoid of a degree of majesty, so as to conform to the indications given in the text; then he rode away at the same jerky trot].<sup>16</sup> Yet, rather than soothing the saddened child with its bright images, the magic lantern only adds to his distress, depriving him of the precarious stability and security of his familiar surroundings. Turning the habitual into an unfamiliar territory, the projection gradually invades his entire living space, from the walls to the curtains and door knobs, turning ordinary objects into an astral body for the story's characters. The projected tale, the medieval legend of Geneviève de Brabant, a noble lady persecuted by an aggressive suitor, further increases the boy's emotional turmoil. It makes him identify in turn with the female victim and her male aggressor and, thus, on a symbolic level, confront the ambiguity he feels towards his own mother and the scruples his incestuous projection on her cause him.<sup>17</sup> The highly charged sexual dimension of the tale that flashes before his eyes is all too manifest in the narrator's choice of imagery, from the little triangular forest couched at the foot of a hilltop to the undulating feminine contours of the castle and the gradual disappearance of Golo in the folds of the curtains. Like in the masturbation scene evoked some 150 pages later, the landscape projected by the lantern is eroticised in an anthropomorphic fallacy. The cruel images of a love corrupted by the desire to possess that the magic lantern has stamped onto the boy's imagination have a lasting influence on his later love life. They shape his relations with his female partners, most importantly, Albertine, whom he subjects to the same amorous persecution as the brutal Golo. Like Geneviève de Brabant, her imaginary ancestor, Albertine will take flight from her suitor's embrace, but in contrast to the medieval story, which ends on a tone of happy reunion between Geneviève and her husband, Marcel's love story ends in the tragic death of his partner for which he feels partly responsible.

The effects of the magic lantern are thus tangible throughout the book, a foretaste of cinematic pleasures and, in their connection to childhood, a suggestion of those links between cinema and the unconscious that film theorists would be quick to outline and explore. But references to the precursor of the cinematograph also occur, albeit in an encrypted form, in other contexts, notably in the already mentioned dedication to Marcel Plantevignes. As Luc

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16 RTP, I, 9–10/SLT, I, 9.

17 For Proust's relation to his mother see Michel Schneider, *Maman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999). For the incestuous projection in the book see Serge Doubrovsky, *La Place de la Madeleine: écriture et fantasme chez Proust* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 2000).

Fraisse explains, the picture that Proust draws of himself and Plantevignes waiting by the sea to watch a cinematic projection is in fact a pastiche of a fresco cycle entitled 'The New World' by Gian Domenico Tiepolo, which shows a group of characters gathered together at the sea front waiting to see the projection of a magic lantern.<sup>18</sup> Originally painted for his father's country residence, the cycle is now housed in the Ca'Rezzonico museum in Venice, to which Proust twice makes an allusion in his dedication, thus inviting Plantevignes to decrypt the encoded still-life.<sup>19</sup> It is possible that the 'guignol cinématographique' Proust attended with Plantevignes in Cabourg was not the only such cinematic spectacle in which he took part. His friend Edmond de Polignac who, in contrast to the more sceptical Robert de Montesquiou and Walter Berry, harboured a genuine passion for the moving image, was in fact, as Fraisse points out, the first to suggest that traditional music recitals should be accompanied by projections of the magic lantern, thus not only preceding Satie's 'musique d'ameublement' [furnishing music], but also the first public performances with a cinematograph.<sup>20</sup> It is not impossible that Proust might have seen such a spectacle during one of his regular visits to the Polignac salon or in the course of one of their musical evenings.

Indeed, further, generally overlooked references to the cinema in *A la recherche du temps perdu* seem to indicate that Proust had a genuine intuition of the new medium's potential and that his overall evaluation of the seventh art may not have been as utterly damning as the references in *Le Temps retrouvé* discussed earlier seem to indicate. The ending of 'Autour de Mme Swann', the first part of *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, is a case in point. The description of Mme Swann taking a stroll in the park under the eyes of her admiring ex-lovers and social acquaintances is a crucial example of what, in literary criticism, tends to be referred to as Proust's 'impressionistic' style. The author blends light and shadow and hard and soft matter ('transparence liquide' [liquid transparency], 'vernis lumineux de l'ombre' [luminous glaze of the shadow]) to paint Odette's softly dissolved silhouette, partly hidden under the shade of her parasol. The portrait of her suitors, however, though forming part of the same phrase, is written in a style manifestly different, which Proust himself likens to the technique of the cinema:

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18 Ibid., p. 297.

19 *Proust au miroir de sa correspondance* (Liège: Sedes, 1996), p. 297.

20 Cf. Michael de Cossart, *Une Américaine à Paris: La Princesse Edmond de Polignac et son salon 1865-1943* (Paris: Plon, 1979), pp. 46-47.



D'ailleurs à tout moment, reconnue au fond de la transparence liquide et du vernis lumineux de l'ombre que versait sur elle son ombrelle, Mme Swann était saluée par les derniers cavaliers attardés, comme cinématographiés au galop sur l'ensoleillement blanc de l'avenue, hommes de cercle dont les noms, célèbres pour le public – Antoine de Castellane, Adalbert de Montmorency et tant d'autres – étaient pour Mme Swann des noms familiers d'amis.

And in fact at every turn, recognised in the depths of the liquid transparency and of the luminous glaze of the shadow which her parasol cast over her, Mme Swann received the salutations of the last belated horsemen, who passed as though filmed at the gallop in the blinding glare of the Avenue, clubmen whose names, those of celebrities for the public – Antoine de Castellane, Adalbert de Montmorency and the rest – were for Mme Swann the familiar names of friends.<sup>21</sup>

With her wisteria-coloured parasol, Mme Swann resembles the elegant *promeneuses* of a Manet or Monet. The horsemen outlined against the bright light, on the other hand, recall the series of Marey's chronophotographs. Whereas Mme Swann, who appears like the personification of an Impressionist painting, is thus connected to the nineteenth century that is the time of her prime, the horsemen are figures of modernity already carried away in their flight, making a last rest to salute the beautiful Mme Swann before their definite departure from the park. Only cinema, the medium of movement and animation par excellence, can capture their restless gallop on the sunny white avenue.

References to the cinema resurface in another context that is at once intimately and painfully linked to Modernity: the Great War. In the chapter 'M. de Charlus pendant la guerre: ses opinions, ses plaisirs' from *Le Temps retrouvé*, Proust describes the surprise which fills soldiers on leave from the front as they see life in Paris going on virtually unchanged despite the war raging only a few miles away. Restaurants are as full as ever, the only difference being that, at half past nine, when no one has yet finished their dinner, the lights are suddenly switched off and the crowd of idle diners move on to one of the new cinemas:

A l'heure du dîner les restaurants étaient pleins [...]. Puis à 9 heures et demie, alors que personne n'avait encore eu le temps de finir de dîner, à cause des ordonnances de police on éteignait brusquement toutes les lumières, et la nouvelle bousculade des embusqués arrachant leurs pardessus aux chasseurs du restaurant où j'avais dîné avec Saint-Loup un soir de perme avait lieu à 9

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21 RTP, I, 629/SLT, II, 251–52.

h 35 dans une mystérieuse pénombre de chambre où l'on montre la lanterne magique, de salle de spectacle servant à exhiber les films d'un de ces cinémas vers lesquels allaient se précipiter dîneurs et dîneuses.

When the time came for dinner the restaurants were full [...]. Then, at half past nine, before anyone had had time to finish dinner, the lights were all suddenly turned out because of the police regulations, so that at nine thirty-five the second jostling of shirkers snatching their overcoats from the page-boys of the restaurant where I had dined with Saint-Loup one evening when he was on leave took place in a mysterious half-darkness which might have been that of a room in which slides are being shown on a magic lantern, or of the auditorium, during the exhibition of a film, of one of those cinemas towards which the men and women who had been dining would presently rush.<sup>22</sup>

'By 1914', as remarks Richard Abel, 'in France, the cinema had largely supplanted the theatre and café-concert as the chief public entertainment in the provinces and had become a strong rival to them both in the larger cities'.<sup>23</sup> Pathé-Frères alone employed 5,000 people and Paris had 15 cinemas, most of them situated on the Grands Boulevards.<sup>24</sup> During the war years to which Proust makes reference, Parisians would have flocked to the cinema to see commercial narrative films (Charlie Chaplin was all the rage from 1915 onwards) as well as newsreels from the front, such as the weekly *Annales de la guerre*, and full-feature war documentaries such as *Verdun*, *L'Offensive de la Somme*, *Guerre de position*, *La Guerre de mouvement*, *Le Front allemand* and *Le Front oriental*.<sup>25</sup> Proust's evocation of a war-time cinema spectacle may sound critical at first, yet, in fact, what he condemns is not the cinema as such, but French civilians' insatiable quest for pleasure and distraction despite (or perhaps precisely because of) the collective tragedy of the War. On the contrary, by establishing a link between war-time cinema and its ancestor the magic lantern, and thus, on a symbolic level, by paralleling the Narrator's childhood and evolution with that of the moving image, he endows the medium with an undeniable magic explicitly expressed in the image of the mysterious twilight in which the projection room is bathed.

22 RTP, IV, 313/SLT, IV, 54.

23 Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism. A History/Anthology, 1907–1939*, 2 vols, vol. 1: 1907–1929 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 14.

24 Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915–1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 8.

25 Philippe d'Hugues and Michel Marmin, eds, *Le Cinéma français. Le Muet* (Paris: Atlas, 1986), p. 86.

The fascination for the cinema that is conveyed in the non-theoretical passages of the *Recherche* does, to a certain extent, relativise the damning note in *Le Temps retrouvé*, where Proust stigmatises the cinema as the medium of false reality. To fully understand his attitude to the seventh art, it is perhaps useful to consider literature's ambiguous relations to another rival art form, photography, which, roughly half a century before the cinema, was perceived as a challenge and even threat to both painting and literature. The hostile attitude of many nineteenth-century authors towards this new form of representation is well documented. Baudelaire, one of the medium's sharpest critics, pertinently voices the anxiety that many contemporary artists felt towards photographic representation. He accepts the documentary aspect of photography, its archival function, but is apprehensive towards any more creative usage of the new technology:

Qu'elle [la photographie] sauve de l'oubli les ruines pendantes, les livres, les estampes et les manuscrits que le temps dévore, les choses précieuses dont la forme va disparaître et qui demandent une place dans les archives de notre mémoire, elle sera remerciée et applaudie. Mais s'il lui est permis d'empiéter sur le domaine de l'impalpable et de l'imaginaire, sur tout ce qui ne vaut que parce que l'homme y ajoute de son âme, alors malheur à nous.

If photography saves from oblivion the crumbling ruins, books, prints, manuscripts which time devours, the precious things whose form will disappear and who request a place in the archives of our memory, it will be thanked and applauded. If, however, it is allowed to encroach upon the intangible and the imaginary, upon everything that only has a value because man puts his soul into it, then woe betide us.<sup>26</sup>

Photography, for him, pertains to the realm of documentary realism. The visual arts and literature, on the contrary, are acts of human creation and, thus, go beyond mere copying: they are a product of the artist's imagination (or 'soul' as Baudelaire puts it), not only a mechanical reproduction. Proust felt a similar unease towards photography, an art form which he accused of appropriating and claiming as its own discoveries first made in the domain of the visual arts:<sup>27</sup>

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26 Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975–76), II, pp. 618–19.

27 For a full discussion of the role of photography in Proust's work, see Brassai, *Marcel Proust sous l'emprise de la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

Bien qu'on dise avec raison qu'il n'y a pas de progrès, pas de découvertes en art, mais seulement dans les sciences, et que chaque artiste recommençant pour son compte un effort individuel ne peut y être aidé ni entravé par les efforts de tout autre, il faut pourtant reconnaître que dans la mesure où l'art met en lumière certaines lois, une fois qu'une industrie les a vulgarisées, l'art antérieur perd rétrospectivement un peu de son originalité. Depuis les débuts d'Elstir, nous avons connu ce qu'on appelle 'd'admirables' photographies de paysages et de villes. Si on cherche à préciser ce que les amateurs désignent dans ce cas par cette épithète, on verra qu'elle s'applique d'ordinaire à quelque image singulière d'une chose connue, image différente de celles que nous avons l'habitude de voir [...]. Or, l'effort d'Elstir de ne pas exposer les choses telles qu'il savait qu'elles étaient, mais selon ces illusions optiques dont notre vision première est faite, l'avait précisément amené à mettre en lumière certaines de ces lois de perspective, plus frappantes alors, car l'art était le premier à les dévoiler.

Although it is rightly said that there can be no progress, no discovery in art, but only in the sciences, and that each artist starting afresh on an individual effort cannot be either helped or hindered therein by the efforts of any other, it must nonetheless be acknowledged that, in so far as art brings to light certain laws, once an industry has popularised them, the art that was first in the field loses retrospectively a little of its originality. Since Elstir began to paint, we have grown familiar with what are called 'wonderful' photographs of scenery and towns. If we press for a definition of what their admirers mean by the epithet, we shall find that it is generally applied to some unusual image of a familiar object, an image different from those that we are accustomed to see [...]. Now the effort made by Elstir to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed, had led him precisely to bring out certain of these laws of perspective, which were thus all the more striking, since art had been the first to disclose them.<sup>28</sup>

Being born more than half a century after Baudelaire, Proust's own fears as an artist and creator were no longer directed against photography, which by the early twentieth century had established itself as an autonomous art form, but against the emerging new technology of his own time, the cinema, which threatened to infringe even more radically upon the field of the creative arts than did its predecessor photography. Taking into account all his various, and, as we have seen, at times seemingly contradictory, statements on the

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28 RTP, II, 194/SLT, II, 482–83.

cinema, it would only seem fair to say that, as with Baudelaire in relation to photography, Proust felt a certain rivalry with regards to the cinema. This is, however, not to say that he denied the cinema its right of existence, nor that he entirely questioned its aesthetic merits and popular appeal. Film, according to the passages from 'Autour de Mme Swann' and 'M. de Charlus pendant la guerre', is considered singular in as far as it can express the dynamics of movement and the poetics of speed. It can create a magic atmosphere, which plunges spectators back into the days of their childhood when projections of the magic lantern filled them at times with delight, at others with horror. But in Proust's view, and here it is important to remember that he was not familiar with the art film that emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century, the cinema remained above all documentary in its approach. Believing that it reduced reality to a pure materiality, he considered it of necessity superficial, exterior, and, thus, incapable of capturing the essences of human existence. As with Baudelaire and photography, Proust believed that cinema had its own delineated space, but that it should not encroach upon literature. More importantly still, as is evidenced in the theoretical passage from *Le Temps retrouvé* quoted above, he requested that literature should not seek to emulate the documentary model offered to it by the cinema. As long as the two media followed their own aesthetic paths, he granted each one its own right of existence and space.

### **Reviewing Adaptation: The Persistence of the Realist Model**

In retrospect, looking at the relation between cinema and literature, and at the history of screen adaptation in particular, the reluctance felt by a critic like Proust about cinema's capacity to establish itself as an art form may seem largely justified. To many observers, cinematic adaptation, so often defined in terms of faithfulness to a source text, appears like the confirmation of cinema's inferior power of interpretation. Taken too literally, worse than making film a mere copy of reality, it reduces it to the degraded copy of a copy.

The first films, whether they were the documentaries shot by the operators of the Lumière brothers, or the magic spectacle of Méliès the illusionist, lasted less than a minute. The duration matched the duration of the action depicted, and the static framing corresponded to the static position of the camera, and by extension, to that of the spectator – the point of view of an anonymous observer. First and foremost, they were considered a technological novelty, and, as we have seen with regard to Proust's exposure to the cinema,