

“iProust and the iReader, or, The Wandering ‘I’”

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Abstract. “It’s pronounced ‘Prowst,’” proclaimed the biochemist with all the loftiness of his status as an advanced *thésard*. “Oh, no, I think it’s ‘Proost,’” responded his more humble but more literary interlocutor¹. Such a debate over Proust’s very name itself seems only emblematic of the vertiginous array of approaches applied to *A la recherche du temps perdu* in the century since his death in 1922, when, as Mallarmé wrote of Edgar Poe, “Tel qu’en Lui-même enfin l’éternité le change”². While eternity may have changed Proust the writer “into Himself,” his work, like his readers, is ever-evolving. What follows is an attempt to explore certain implications of the mushrooming array of technologies through which, as we observe and reflect upon the centenary of Proust’s death, we now access his work. How has the simple, physical act of reading his volumes changed over the last century, and what are the implications of our new reading habits for interpretation?

1. The Material Book in the Age of the “Net Plus Ultra”

In contemporary Belgian poet Guy Goffette’s claim, the impact of the “Net plus ultra” (Goffette 2001, p. 78) upon the act of reading is massive. But does the digital age necessarily mean the loss of all the erotics of reading, of what Barthes called “le plaisir du texte”? Does it necessarily entail, as Goffette fears, the disappearance of the beatific, ambling stroll, the taste of grass, the plunge “between the thighs” of a book:

Puisqu’il est entendu qu’avec le Net plus ultra
la flânerie bientôt, le goût de l’herbe, le plongeon
entre les cuisses d’un livre vont disparaître aussi
certainement que les glaces de Norvège,

Continuing on to Goffette’s main clause, we find an urgent exhortation:

Profitons des minutes qui restent [...]

Pour nous livrer tout entier à ce *vice impuni* :

la lecture (Goffette 78)

With its *carpe diem* plea to give ourselves over “tout entier” to “la lecture” before it is obliterated by the “Net plus ultra,” Goffette’s apocalyptic vision of the end of reading prompts some questions. Indeed; with the advent of digital media, what *does* become of the act so absorbingly, sensuously described by the Proustian narrator as he remembers Sunday afternoons spent reading in the Combray garden - enthralled by what N. Katherine Hayles calls “the linguistic pleasures and dangerous seductions of immersive fictions” (Hayles 2012, p. 16)? Among the many rich studies of the reading act in a Proustian context, David Ellison’s *The Reading of Proust* explored the effects of Proust’s own reading (his

¹ I am grateful to my Slavics colleague Elizabeth Geballe for this savory anecdote from her personal experience as a Proust reader.

² Stéphane Mallarmé, “Le Tombeau d’Edgar Poe,” *Poésies*, Paris, Nouvelle Revue française, 1914 (8^e éd.) (p. 132-133).

appropriation of it, his resistance to it) upon his writing; subsequently, Adam Watt in *Reading in Proust's A la recherche*: 'le délire de la lecture' analyzed acts of reading and interpretation within the *Recherche*. I would now like to extend this "délire de la lecture" – its instability, its dynamism, its vertiginous excesses and arabesques, its seductions, its dangers, its misprisions and revisions – to our own contemporary, screen-surfaced, digitized reading of Proust in our new reading roles as what I will call iReaders³. Arguing in 1979 for a "new relationship between the *contemplation* and the *utilization* of a work of art", Eco shifted the act of reading from absorption to interpretation; such a shift reconfigured the work of art as "an 'open' situation, *in movement*. A work in progress" (Eco 1979, p. 65). And it is the idea of movement that will help us grasp the difference between the way we read, or "contemplated", Proust's work "then" and the way we read – or "utilize", in Eco's term – his immortal masterpiece now.

Borrowing the notion of "interface" as a shared boundary across and between devices, programs and – at times – humans, we might think further about the exchanges that cross this boundary in the reading encounter. Among other questions to be posed, as Proust's work is increasingly accessed through the interface of a screen, rather than the material page of a material book, what becomes of the metaphors of depth as an experience of subjectivity? Such depth itself might be figured in what Proust's narrator calls "ces papiers que Françoise appelait mes paperoles" (Proust 1987, IV, p. 611): fictionalized versions of what Proust's housekeeper Céleste Albaret patiently pasted to his manuscripts, and that unfold in accordion pleats to expand the page⁴. In these tactile folds, just as the madeleine scene stages all of Combray emerging from a cup of lime-blossom tea, the endless depths and layers of Proustian subjectivity bulge and strain the confines of the page, forcing themselves into new dimensions as they swell, mushroom and burst beyond its edges.

From such page-expanding, three-dimensional materiality as the "paperoles", we might turn to the dense materiality of books themselves in the *Recherche*, and ask how such materiality will be encountered by future iReaders.⁵ What will future readers make of the scene of Bergotte's "afterlife" following his death in front of Ver Meer's *View of Delft*: the bookstore window in which his displayed volumes are spread like angel's wings? What about the sweaty materiality of the grandmother's hot, arduous and loving journey to exchange birthday volumes for her grandson in favor of George Sand's rustic novels – including *François le Champi* itself, with its alluringly inscrutable reddish cover? Once books have become screens, how will iReaders of the future react to the narrator's chancing upon a volume of Sand's *François le Champi* in the Prince de Guermantes's bookcase at that climactic *matinée*, where the crucial topic and tool of his literary project are at long last revealed to him⁶? For that matter, how might these readers respond to the very setting of a library, with its shelves upon shelves of material objects? Surely, iReaders would not know the simple, tactile hunger to hold books in their hands, a yearning described by Matt Dorfman while visiting a bookstore after a year of lockdown conditions. "[I]n their natural habitat, on the shelf or on a bookstore table", writes Dorfman, books in their alluring covers "called to be held and explored. They radiated mystery and devotion to their subjects, and I was grateful just to see them in a

³ When Kindles were still fairly new, Joanne Kaufman discussed the social implications of this electronic equivalent of the plain brown wrapper; in public spaces, others can no longer identify one's reading material. Books, she points out, used to provide subtle profiling; she mentions Nicholson Baker's memory of arriving at a temporary job some years ago, carrying a copy of *Ulysses*. "I wanted people to know I wasn't just a temp," he explains, "but rather a temp who was reading 'Ulysses.'" And Kaufman concludes with the impact of screen reading upon a different public arena: "as books migrate from paper, it means the death of the pickup line, 'Oh, I see you're reading the latest (insert highbrow author's name here)'" (Kaufman 2009, p. ST 1).

⁴ Proust critic David Ellison speaks of his self-consciousness among other library patrons when needing to unfold with outstretched arm the yards of manuscript "paperoles" in the Manuscript Room of the old Bibliothèque Nationale: an image we might take as a figure for the Proustian page's expansion from two-dimensional flatness into three-dimensional depth.

⁵ See John Lurz's insightful analysis of the narrator's embodied relationship to books as material objects.

⁶ Intriguingly, the two scenes of the mother's nocturnal reading of *François le Champi* and Bergotte's death are linked in Adam's Watt's suggestive argument. Bergotte's epiphanic death, in "disentangl[ing] the conflicts of art and life in a fleeting, beatific instant of plenitude" (Watt 2009, p. 133) becomes, argues Watt, the inversion of the *François le Champi* "Primal Scene", where reading is invested "with a powerful destabilizing force, which makes it a privileged and beguiling aspect of the narrative of Proust's novel" (Watt 2009, p. 13).

physical space, to be standing in front of books again — well apart from the detached confines of a screen. And so I did. Because I could” (Dorfman 2021). And yet, we notice that such material heft, in the case of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, has actually been diminishing since the publication of what Beckett called “the abominable NRF edition” (Beckett 1931, p. 9) in sixteen volumes; we may now read Proust in the Pléiade’s Bible-thin paper in three volumes in the 1954 edition (the 1987 edition in four volumes includes supplementary material). Emblem of our increasing drift away from materiality, an edition of the *Recherche* even exists in one massive, monolithic tome, six centimeters thick, and boasting 2400 pages. And so, while iReaders of tomorrow might not know books “apart from the detached confines of a screen”, as Dorfman puts it, they will know them in new and different ways – some of which I would like to suggest here.

2. The Wandering iReader

As the very material depth and density of books as we have known them flatten onto digital screens, we might compare such lateral expansion – or dematerialized movement from depth to plane - to the brain’s inability to develop “binocularity”. The capacity to use both eyes at the same time is important to depth perception, and enlisted in Roger Shattuck’s argument for Proust’s stereoscopic vision as composed of both perception and memory. “Like our eyes,” wrote Shattuck, “our memories must see double” (Shattuck 1983, p. 47). In this way, Shattuck adjusts the dynamic of the *Recherche*, subtly weaving back into everyday, voluntary memory a far tamer, paler version of the explosive drama of involuntary memory: the coercive power to make us breathe the very air of atemporal instants “à la fois dans le présent et dans le passé, réels sans être actuels, idéaux sans être abstraits” (Proust 1987, IV, p. 451). Without the depth provided by stereoscopic vision – perception inflected by memory –, argues Shattuck, perception flattens out. It is thanks to this binocularity – the senses and memory working together - that the Proustian narrator finds himself, on rain-drenched city pavements, ecstatically breathing “l’odeur d’invisibles et persistants lilas” (Proust 1987, I, p. 183). After the cornflowers and the poppies of Combray, he claims, “les fleurs qu’on me montre aujourd’hui pour la première fois ne me semblent pas de vraies fleurs” (Proust 1987, I, p. 182). In the narrator’s experience, perception is unconvincingly faded and pallid - false, unreal, untrue – without the undergirding of memory.

Continuing with the metaphor of binocularity, we recall that an eye working not in tandem with its twin organ, but independently of it, is colloquially known as “wandering eye”⁷ – and provides a handy emblem for the shift from depth to plane, from profundity to laterality. In broad cultural terms, this corresponds to Fredric Jameson’s view of the evolution from modernism to postmodernism, where the “waning of the great high modernist thematics of time and temporality” is hastened by the rise of “categories of space” (Jameson 1991, p. 16) containing “pure and unrelated presents in time” (Jameson 1991, p. 27). In a Proustian context, such pulverization of successive temporality might be read in the curious anachronisms of Chantal Akerman’s film, *La Captive*, inspired by *La prisonnière*. Here, oppressive Belle Epoque interiors of a century earlier are punctuated by the use of slick cell phones and vintage cars in a temporal leveling-out of past and present that only seems to increase the isolation and alienation between Simon (in the role of Proust’s narrator) and Ariane (the film’s ‘Albertine’), fostering the spectator’s disorientation in such a flattened temporal landscape. Indeed, such choppy temporal incoherence is even emphasized sartorially, as Peter Bradshaw implies in observing that Simon “wears

⁷ To my knowledge, only two characters in the *Recherche* are afflicted with the condition of “wandering eye”: the Marquis de Cambremer, and a liveried servant of Balbec’s Grand Hôtel, whose older brothers have all been hired away by “des personnalités de pays et de sexe divers, qui s’étaient éprises de leur charme.” The youngest, however, is left at the hotel unwanted by foreign aristocrats, “parce qu’il louchait” (Proust 1987, III, p. 170). In contrast, the heroine of a more recent French fiction, approached by a stranger in the street who suggests coffee, agrees precisely because “il avait quelque chose qu’elle appréciait chez les hommes: un léger strabisme” (Foenkinos 2009, p. 15). Curiously, the condition of “wandering eye” as metaphor may earlier be found in a Proustian context: that of Genette’s “avant-propos” to his “Discours du récit,” where he assesses the magnitude of his project, fraught with dangers, and alludes to the risk of going astray via “un vertige, voir un strabisme méthodologique” (Genette 1972, p. 69).

expensively and unfashionably tailored suits and topcoats that gesture forward to a gloomy and reticent middle age”, whereas Ariane “is slight and simply dressed, almost like a child” (Bradshaw 2001). Just as the wandering eye breaks from depth to roam – untethered to its twin organ – across surfaces, so we might attempt to track the “wandering I” of Proustian iReaders as they break from their yoke to the narrator’s ideas of subjectivity as interiority and depth: that is, as iReaders and iProust *connect differently*, across collapsed and flattened spatial and temporal screen interfaces. Indeed, such wandering ocular organs, each independent of the other, are implied in the children’s book, *Le fantôme du petit Marcel*, in a scene where “le fantôme” is writing when he is surprised by another “fantôme”:

Gilberte? s’exclama le petit Marcel d’un ton alarmé. Que fais-tu là ? [...] Tu veux tes yeux de quelle couleur ? se hâta-t-il de lui demander. Bleus ou noirs ?
Et il trempa aussitôt sa plume dans son encrier.
- Un bleu, un noir, se moqua la petite fille (Dezon-Jones, 2014, p. 24).

Here, Gilberte’s impertinently independent eyes, one blue, one black, recall the young narrator’s confusion upon glimpsing her for the first time through a hawthorn hedge on Swann’s estate. Dazzled by eyes her blond hair would suggest to be “d’un vif azur”, he only subsequently realizes how mistaken he is, and speculates that “peut-être si elle n’avait pas eu des yeux aussi noirs – ce qui frappait tant la première fois qu’on la voyait – je n’aurais pas été, comme je le fus, plus particulièrement amoureux, en elle, de ses yeux bleus” (Proust 1987, I, p. 139). Endowed by Dezon-Jones with one of each, Gilberte’s untethered, independent eyes evoke the movement from depth to surface, from geology to geography, from what Goffette calls the “plunge between the thighs” of a book to the ramble across surfaces - and offer a figure for a new sort of Proust reader, what I would call the wandering iReader. What happens when this wandering iReader encounters iProust across the interface of a digital screen? The screen landscape is blandly, barrenly (or vertiginously, as I will be suggesting) without landmarks. There is no “you are here” marker on this map; no weighing in the hand and mind of pages read versus pages unread so as to be able to plot the compass points of one’s position. Such screen-readings “lack the weight known to the hand”, as Bryson writes of Spanish Baroque painter Cotán’s still-life featuring quince and cabbage hanging on strings. “Their weightlessness disowns such intimate knowledge” (Bryson 1990, p. 66). To be sure; yet, as we will see, such “weightlessness” becomes peculiarly, powerfully relevant at certain moments while reading *À la recherche du temps perdu*. For the absorbed rapture of being “lost in a good book”⁸, as the idiom goes, acquires new meaning as the possibility of orienting ourselves within the material object of a book evaporates. From the bliss and abandon of losing oneself in a compelling narrative, as suggested in the Combray garden reading scene (where his own “incidents médiocres” are carefully emptied by the narrator), we come to the more unsettling, destabilizing, but possibly more meaningful loss of bearings in the interface of the wandering iReader as she negotiates iProust. (This can occasionally become disconcerting when the digital screen freezes, leaving one momentarily helpless, frustrated and alone, abandoned in a digital wasteland.) What happens when the old reading habits of being “lost in a good book” are transferred to new media, with their different, other, anti-materialities? Since it is through these transformed kinds of “open” (Eco) reading that Proust’s second century will know him, we might think further about the shape and complexion these might take.

3. Close Reading vs. Hyper-Reading

In *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, N. Katherine Hayles differentiates between what she calls “hyper-reading” and “close reading” (Hayles 2012, 12). Hyper-reading, argues Hayles, corresponds to hyper-attention: an attention accustomed to rapid navigation among information systems; to the thrill and chase of information coming thick and fast. The hyper-reader prefers a high level of stimulation, with little tolerance for boredom (as Hayles puts it). We are reminded here of another colloquial meaning of “wandering eye”: the lateral sidling of insatiable desire toward ever newer, more

⁸ We recall Jasper Fforde’s literalization of this experience in his “Thursday Next” novel by the same title.



exciting, more stimulating, objects, with little tolerance for the familiarity of the unchanging same. Similarly, the (wandering) iReader roves across a pulverized temporality, calculated in fractions of a second, and transformative of the experience of duration. What we might call “deep” duration, as in Bergsonian “durée”, becomes, instead, experienced as a succession of unlinked digital spaces as the geography of hyper-reading is deployed across a lateral field of various information systems. On the other hand – and still working with Hayles’s opposition – the exercise of “close reading” involves sustained and concentrated attention to a single information system, such as the “linguistic pleasures and dangerous seductions of immersive fictions” (Hayles 2012, p. 16). Close reading, argues Hayles, tolerates a high level of what she calls “boredom”, that is, what we might infer as stimulation from a mere single source of information. Sensing the incompatibility of hyper-reading and close reading, and aware of what would seem to be the absolute, insurmountable contradiction of the two, we might feel daunted at imagining the hyper-reader’s encounter with the Proustian text. What appears to be the very impossibility of such an endeavor recalls Genette’s fearless attempt in “Discours du récit” of *Figures III*, where he chooses the sprawling, tentacular Proustian text as the ultimate test of his narratological method. Are we now, with our hyper-reading habits spread across different information systems; our need for simultaneous sources of stimulation in swift succession; our familiarity with departure-gate TV screens running three simultaneous headline banners while a voice-over comments upon an image above them; our low tolerance for boredom; up against a similar challenge as we attempt to imagine applying these to the Proustian text?

4. Reading Acts of Reading in Proust

Before turning to such a challenge, we might establish further context by noting that Hayles has been criticized for not asking how the practice of hyper-reading might inflect and ultimately transform the practice of “close reading”⁹. And it is this issue that I would like to consider in the specifically Proustian context of Maryanne Wolf’s *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, where Wolf opposes Proust’s description of reading in *Journées de lecture* to the kind of web-surfing described by Hayles as hyper-reading. Wolf analyses the layers of cognitive process, including memory itself – as we navigate what she calls a “breath-defying” sentence (Wolf 2008, p. 6) – engaged by reading the essay’s opening line of 233 words. In it, Proust celebrates the plenitude of childhood reading, the paradox by which few days are lived so fully as those we think have not been lived at all, those spent with a favorite childhood book. Wolf uses this passage to praise the joys of losing oneself in imaginary worlds: Middle Earth, Narnia, Alice’s Wonderland. However, this is not Proust’s purpose in this particular sentence of *Journées de lecture*, nor is it in the remainder of the essay itself. Instead, he lovingly details all the irritating interruptions of these other, fictional worlds: all the “obstacle[s] vulgaire[s] à un plaisir divin” (Proust 1971, p. 160): the game we’re exhorted to come play just at the most interesting passage, the bothersome bee or sunbeam obliging us to change position, the dutiful dinner consumed with the single thought of escaping to our room to finish the interrupted chapter (Proust 1971, p. 160). Ultimately, all these importune disruptions, claims Proust, become far more important to us – far more “précieux” – than the books read themselves, so that, as we leaf through them now, “ce n’est plus que comme les seuls calendriers que nous ayons gardés des jours enfuis” (Proust 1971, p. 160). In this sentence, then, contrary to Wolf’s claims, it is the interruptions and disruptions that ultimately obliterate and reconstitute the reading act, such that the book read, itself, becomes the mere material support, years later, for nostalgic communion with “les demeures et les étangs qui n’existent plus” (Proust 1971, p. 160). What Wolf reads as an ode to deep, or close reading, is, in fact an ode to its disruptions: all that distracts, intrudes, and encroaches upon the reader’s attention to trouble his “close reading” effort. In this opening sentence of

⁹ Hayles’s comparison between hyper reading and close reading is part of her polemic for Comparative Media Studies, an integrative field that would combine the two in service of updated educational programs. As philosopher Bernard Stiegler has suggested, however, Hayles does not consider what possible impacts the practice of hyper-reading might have on close reading: an issue I explore here in a Proustian context. See Hayles’s response to such critiques in Hayles (2012, pp. 250-51, note 3).



Journées de lecture, we seem to come intriguingly close to a notion of reading as, instead, hyper-reading: the surfing of a feed of disjointed stimuli peppering the attention, stimuli that ultimately acquire a nostalgic value of their own as they become more “precious” to the narrator than the text read itself. Or, importantly, as these bothersome disruptions themselves become the interweave of a more “précieux”, more meaningful, more personal “text” of the reader’s own past – the reader’s own “jours enfuis.” Proust here provides a veritable play-by-play demonstration of Eco’s notion of the “open” work, activated differently by every reader engaged in the act of interpretation. As Proust describes it in this example, the reader’s long-ago activation of a text read in childhood produces an entirely new and unique text – transforming, in this example, its source text into a personalized “calendar” of the reader’s own past.

Moving to a different reading scene, we turn to an especially familiar one for Proustians ever since Paul de Man’s scrupulously crafted analysis in *Allegories of Reading* brought it into particular visibility. It’s the sequestered, indoor reading scene in the young narrator’s darkened, cool, bedroom at Combray: the reading scene ambitiously claimed to deliver more richly, more fully, summer’s luminous outdoor splendor. Thus, runs the narrator’s claim, the morcelated flow of summer into his room: the music of flies, the pounding of dusty crates, the heat – is resumed and concentrated, served up more intensely to his imagination than if he were walking through it outside. As de Man has argued, this claim falls apart; founded upon the instability of metonymy, rather than the “necessary rings” of metaphor, the passage’s rhetoric is unable to sustain so heavy a burden. But, we might ask, with what are we now left, amidst such wreckage of rhetorical claims? The very failed metonymy itself of “le choc et l’animation d’un torrent d’activité” holds a valuable clue in the resonance with which it anticipates the heady onslaught of the iReader’s information feeds; for what we have here are precisely the disjointed fragments of a steady feed – a “torrent d’activité” – of summer stimuli. Undermining the narrator’s claim for a more complete experience when lived from within his sequestered retreat, summer is *not* delivered from the outdoors in a nicely compact zip drive as the “spectacle total de l’été”, to be processed by the centralized switchboard of the narrator’s imagination. Instead, the music of the flies, the pounding of crates, the heat, the filtered light, continue as a fragmented succession of so many bits and pieces – that is, as an information feed¹⁰. Will iReaders of the future respond to this passage for its failed ethical claims, as De Man did? Or will they instead view it, as they toggle among systems in a heady thrill of information overload, with a certain familiarity, a certain intimacy? The act of interpretation has significantly evolved since Eco’s emphasis on the “Model Reader”’s individual responsibility in activating the text; instead, today’s iReaders would seem themselves to *be* activated, in a reversal of subject and object, by the onslaught of informational “texts.” Such a reversal is consonant with what Isabella Pezzini views as “the increasingly widespread interchangeability of roles between readers and authors” (Pezzini 2019, p. 194); taking one step further, we might suggest that information feeds or flows now “author”, or activate, their (wandering) iReaders. Yet, in this very recognition of *Combray*’s summer-bedroom reading scene as an information feed, the iReader of the future will still be – though differently, now, in the digital age - the reader Proust’s narrator imagined: the reader of him (or her)self: “le propre lecteur de soi-même” (Proust 1987, IV, p. 489).

Expanding our purview from reading scenes to entire volumes of the *Recherche*, we realize that two narratives – *Un amour de Swann* and *La prisonnière* – acquire particular force and resonance when read on a screen surface. Within the obsessive Swann’s “inoperable,” cancerous jealousy, or the vast, bleak wastes of the narrator’s obsessive inquisition into Albertine’s elusive desires, the iReader’s depth perception evaporates as she contemplates the screen’s surface without any heft in her hand to situate her within the torment of jealousy’s anguished wanderings. “Surely in the whole of literature,” wrote Beckett about *La prisonnière*, “there is no study of that desert of loneliness and recrimination that men call love posed and developed with such diabolical unscrupulousness” (Beckett 1931, 54). “L’amour”, as Proust’s

¹⁰ For an illuminating analysis of the heteroclitic aspects of these stimuli, see Adam Watt’s chapter “Primal Scenes of Reading,” where Watt draws on insights from Deleuze and Leslie Hill to argue that, contrary to the somewhat “flattened impression of reading” proposed by De Man’s interpretation of this summer reading scene, reading in Proust can be a “rich, plural and highly unstable brand of experience” (Watt 2009, p. 30).

narrator realizes with anguish, “c’est l’espace et le temps rendus sensibles au coeur” (Proust 1987, III, p. 887). We imagine love to be localized, situated, within a being – a body – before us. “Hélas!” laments the narrator, “Il est l’extension de cet être à tous les points de l’espace et du temps que cet être a occupés et occupera” (Proust 1987, III, p. 607-08). Temporal succession, the ordering of past, present and future, flattens into an expanded space of undifferentiated suffering for jealous lovers such as Swann and the narrator. Reading such narratives on the unmoored surface of a screen can only further envelop Proust’s iReader within a featureless landscape devoid of any reassuring landmark or compass point; in this way, marooning the iReader’s subjectivity within the wastes of Swann’s and the narrator’s own provides, when read on a screen, a yet more powerful and intense dissolution of the boundaries of self within what Jameson calls “pure and unrelated presents in time” (Jameson 1991, p. 27).

To take but one specific example involving the dissolution of such boundaries, we have been thinking about the interface between the iReader and iProust as a relation, or exchange. But we have implicitly remained within old subject/object dichotomies engaging inside/outside oppositions as we ponder the wandering iReader’s relation to information feeds. Let us turn our wandering critical eye to a visual medium, and consider a scene from Akerman’s film *La Captive* as an illustration of this relation. It depicts Simon, himself in a bathtub, deciphering – or attempting to decipher, that is, to read - a showering Ariane beyond the screen of a semi-transparent bathroom partition. But the shower screen acts as a frame around the clearly naked, showering Ariane; the screen’s very shape instantiates a framing, and thus a boundary: a barrier that safely defines and separates Simon from Ariane, and the iReader from iProust. Or does it? Arguing otherwise, Derrida in his analysis of the frame - the *parergon* - disputes the safety of such a barrier, pointing out that the frame’s function is to disappear, to efface itself, even as it works to separate the work from the background. But in relation to the work it frames, it is background; in relation to the background, it melts into the work itself. “Où,” asks Derrida, “le cadre a-t-il lieu. A-t-il lieu. Où commence t-il. Où finit-il. Quelle est sa limite interne. Externe. Et sa surface entre les deux limites” (Derrida 1978, p. 73). Taking the dynamism and instability of Derrida’s frame to the relation between the subject and technology, the human and her tools, Nicole Anderson argues for these as mutually constitutive in her exploration of “the double sense of technology: as that which simultaneously constitutes and deconstructs subjectivity, thus forming new and ever changing ontological technologies” (Anderson 2006). The boundaries or frames that separate subject and object, inside and outside, organic and technological, begin to blur. Within this interface, the wandering iReader, it would seem, is losing herself just as effectively in a good screen - in its informational flows and exchanges - as she did in a good (material) book. Contrary to Simon’s (the narrator’s) experience of exclusion from Ariane’s (Albertine’s) intimacy, emblemized by Akerman’s “intricate glass screen, elegantly suggesting both eroticism and estrangement” (Bradshaw 2001), we ourselves dissolve within Simon’s tightly buttoned anguish; that is, Simon’s suffering absorbs and dissolves Akerman’s cinematic audience within the ebbs and flows of a different kind of screen. With its scrambling of temporal bearings through conflicting visual cues, Akerman’s film sweeps the viewer into a darkly dystopian - “disquieting”, as Bradshaw puts it, in pointing to Akerman’s “long, continuous takes” (Bradshaw 2001) - jealous obsession swallowed up in an elusive, inscrutable enigma. Boundaries become as slippery as the waters of *Combray*’s Vivonne during the young Proustian narrator’s Sunday afternoon walks with his parents: waters swirling both inside and outside the carafes that small boys have suspended in the stream to capture fish (Proust 1987, I, p. 166).

5. Conclusion: Ver Meer’s Yellow iPhone Screen

Such blurring of distinctions is evoked by Isabella Pezzini in analyzing the extent to which notions of the reader and reading have evolved since Eco proposed his conception of the “Model Reader.” In our own digital age, she suggests, “the boundary between uses and interpretations has become more porous” (Pezzini 2019, p. 194). The literary text is no longer, exclusively, the chosen province of close reading; as Pezzini puts it, “the focus of the debate on interpretation no longer finds its chosen ground in the exemplarity of the (literary) work” (Pezzini 2019, p. 194). Interpretation has become inextricably enmeshed with the digital tools we use – or that use us, their iReaders. Encapsulating this transition into the second century following Proust’s death in 1922, a scene from *Le fantôme du petit Marcel* captures the



importance of these digital tools in the age of Goffette's "Net plus ultra": "Tu écris avec une plume?" s'étonna t-elle. "Tu n'as pas d'ordinateur?" Il leva vers elle un regard interrogateur. "Un quoi?" (Dezon-Jones 2014, p. 20). Little did we imagine, back in 1923 when the episode of Bergotte's death appeared in *La prisonnière*, that Ver Meer's fatal "petit pan de mur jaune" was to spring off the canvas as the yellow patch of an iPhone screen. In light of new, screened, reading practices, Goffette's plaintive *carpe diem* – "buvons ce jour/ avant que tout retombe comme la mousse, avant/ que virtuels et plats sur l'écran nous soyons" (Goffette 2001, p. 80) becomes as poignant and quaint as the nostalgia of remembering things past. Instead, let us embrace the encounter of the iReader and iProust – however « virtuels et plats sur l'écran » – as fostering ever emerging, fruitful and rewarding new relationships with *À la recherche du temps perdu* as we embark upon the second century following its author's death.



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