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**Title**
Introduction: Proust's Modernist Sociology

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**Introduction: Proust's Modernist Sociology**

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Abstract: The introduction to this special issue sketches out some urgent forms of intelligibility that Proust's *Recherche* might hold for readers in 2022 given the many crises of the present moment. Whereas Proust's novel is often read as an investigation and valorization of various forms of subjective experience, contributions to this special issue consider how aspects of the *Recherche*'s composition might provoke us to step back and objectify subjective experience in the service of some other kind of knowledge. The introduction juxtaposes Proust's novelistic practice with Pierre Bourdieu's sociological construction of points of view. We see the social world in limited ways because we see it from a single point of view, but we can work critically to rise above those limits and envision a social field of different points of view. The introduction demonstrates how Proust's novel, like Bourdieu's sociological practice, models this form of understanding for us.

What does it mean to approach Proust and his magnificent novel in 2022, one hundred years after his death? We live in a moment of crisis: the novel coronavirus pandemic; the urgently renewed calls for racial justice; the migrant crisis; the climate crisis; the aggravation of antagonisms based on religious, ethnic and cultural differences; worries about the fate of democratic forms of government; the economic, social and cultural damage of the last 50 years that has accompanied the rising levels of income inequality and the politics of austerity in Europe, North America and elsewhere (including the declining support for public education, and for arts and humanities education in

particular); the overlapping and intersecting effects of all of these phenomena and the histories they are part of. These are not easy times. Nor were Proust's. His novel is a record and a response to a period of social upheaval and antagonism, and it was transformed in the later stages of its composition by the cataclysm of the first world war. What kinds of intellectual and imaginative tools do we need to understand and respond to times such as his or ours? The intersecting crises of our present moment might call to our attention the differences between, on the one hand, the kinds of knowledge and action that arise from what any single person can apprehend of their world through sense perception and, on the other, modes of knowledge and forms of action that are in some way collective and scientific or social scientific — requiring different kinds of concepts and instruments to assemble information which is then used to propose hypotheses about what is happening and to develop plans of action of various kinds to intervene in the world in some way. To think about public health and limit movement and wear a mask to contribute to lowering the incidence of a virus transmitted through respiratory droplets and aerosols within the human population; to understand that institutions and their norms and practices produce and maintain various kinds of inequality, including racial inequality, and to find practices to correct this; to accept the reality of unconscious forms of bias and take steps to reduce them; to accept the impact of carbon emissions on the climate and urge policies and actions to mitigate that impact; to study the structural mechanisms of the reproduction of poverty and wealth, the way that political beliefs and habits (including patterns of domination and inferiorization) are themselves inculcated and reproduced through various institutions and media forms, and the way these beliefs and habits inhabit us — all of these require a critical act: the suspension of what we

might loosely call everyday common sense, based in an immediate subjective relationship to reality, a recognition of the inadequacy of our own immediate point of view to an understanding of the world. We accept (or we don't…) that collectively developed and tested concepts, instruments and hypotheses offer us a more effective understanding of how the world is and how we are, why it is the way it is and why we are the way we are, and how these might be altered.

At the beginning of *The Rules of Art*, Pierre Bourdieu describes what a sociologist aims to perceive: 'The "reality" that he tracks cannot be reduced to the immediate data of the sensory experience in which it is revealed; he aims not to offer (in)sight, or feeling, but to construct systems of intelligible relations capable of making sense of sentient data.'[1] Sometimes, Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* seems to be very much about 'the immediate data of (. . .) sensory experience'. Roger Shattuck, for instance, calls it — mistakenly — 'a novel unflaggingly subjective in its orientation'.[2] But its own construction and its aims prove upon closer inspection to be a good deal more complex. Of the many things *À la recherche du temps perdu* can be, it can be an instrument in the service of the construction of systems of relations, of forms of intelligibility that are social scientific in various ways and that allow us both to understand the limits (the biases) of human sense perception and to develop more satisfactory ways of perceiving how humans inhabit the social world and are inhabited by it, and the consequences this has for understanding certain kinds of human action. It is the work of various compositional features of the *Recherche* that helps it reach beyond the subjective into other forms of critical understanding. All of the contributions to this special issue marking the centenary of Proust's death and considering what it might mean to read his

remarkable novel in our moment, pursue some version of this problem: how aspects of the *Recherche*'s composition might provoke us to step back and objectify the subjective in the service of some other kind of knowledge.

The limitations to human sense perception are regularly thematized in the *Recherche*; instruments that enhance sense perception such as magnifying glasses, telescopes and microscopes also crop up in important passages of the novel. But more germane for the purposes of this special issue is the presence in the *Recherche* of an interest in *concepts* or *structures* or *categories* or *ideas* that organize our perception, and in what it means to move from the level of perception to thought about how perception is organized, and what the consequences of that organization are. Take an example from *Le Côté de Guermantes*:

> It is not only the physical world that differs from the particular way we see
> it (. . .) All reality is perhaps equally dissimilar from what we believe
> ourselves to be directly perceiving, which we compose with the help of
> ideas that do not reveal themselves but are functioning all the same, just as
> trees, the sun, and the sky would not be the way we see them if they were
> perceived by creatures with eyes differently constituted from our own, or
> with organs other than eyes, which fulfilled the same purpose and
> conveyed equivalents of trees and sky and sun, but not visual ones.[3]

The narrator offers these reflections at a moment when Jupien has just told the narrator's younger self (call him the hero) that the family's faithful servant Françoise has expressed

some negative opinions about the hero's character that are not compatible with the adoration he imagines her to feel for him. The shock that he feels provides the occasion for these reflections on what he refers to as *idées agissantes* (functioning ideas) that are determinant of our perception of 'all reality'. He then wonders: 'Was it the same with all social relations?' (61). We apprehend the social world around us by means of ideas, concepts and categories that may or may not be adequate to the task. As we are all too aware these days, and as the *Recherche* demonstrates over and over again, different groups of people understand the social world differently. In any given social world, competing epistemologies exist that are distributed in ways that are linked to other divisions that structure the social field. This very observation is a social scientific one, but also a Proustian one. Proust's novel is constantly attempting to do what Bourdieu has described as the task of the sociologist: construct a system of intelligible relations that is capable of making sense of the data our sense organs provide us with regarding both the natural and the social world. In making such a construction, and then stepping back to think about that act of construction, one becomes involved with the question of point(s) of view. Why is it that the world looks the way it does from this (my) point of view? How did I come to occupy this place in social space from which I see the world in this particular way? What are the histories of this place and what are the histories that bear on me such that from here I look at the world in this way? From 'Combray' onwards, Proust's novel raises questions about the relationship between point of view and what we imagine reality to be — whether it is the physical reality of a set of steeples shifting in relation to each other as the carriage you are in moves through space, or the reality of someone's social existence. The perception of Charles Swann by the hero's family is, of

course, a classic example from the novel's opening pages:

> Even the very simple act that we call 'seeing a person we know' is in part an
>
> intellectual one. We fill the physical appearance of the individual we see with all
>
> the notions we have about him, and of the total picture that we form for ourselves,
>
> these notions certainly occupy the greater part. (. . .) Each time we see this face
>
> and hear this voice, it is these notions that we encounter again, that we hear. (. . .)
>
> I have the impression of leaving one person to go to another distinct from him,
>
> when, in my memory, I pass from the Swann I knew later with accuracy to that
>
> first Swann — to that first Swann in whom I rediscover the charming mistakes of
>
> my youth and who in fact resembles less the other Swann then he resembles the
>
> other people I knew at the time.[4]

We might, perhaps, hesitate to affirm the claim to accuracy the narrator makes regarding

his perceptions of Swann from later in life. Why would those perceptions not be subject

to some version of the distortions that characterized the earlier ones? Does objectifying a

point of view and understanding the biases to which it is likely to be subject allow one to

rise above perceptual bias?

The work of objectifying the point of view that one occupies or occupied also

involves the development of a sense of the difference between a given point of view and

many others that are either close to or distant from it in social space and time. In his

essay, 'Understanding', from the end of the collective volume called *The Weight of the*

*World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, Bourdieu wrote:

Sociologists cannot be unaware that the specific characteristic of their point of view is to be a point of view on a point of view. They can re-produce the point of view of their object and constitute it as such by resituating it within social space, but can do so only by taking up that very singular (and, in a sense, very privileged) viewpoint, being obliged to place themselves there in order to be able to take (in thought) all the points of view possible. And it is solely to the extent that they can objectify themselves that they are able, even as they remain in the place inexorably assigned to each of us in the social world, to imagine themselves in the place occupied by their objects (who are, at least to a certain degree, an alter ego) and thus to take their point of view, that is, to understand that if they were in their shoes they would doubtless be and think just like them.[5]

This is a passage that nicely formulates some of the inevitable seeming paradoxes of Bourdieusian sociology that are also built into the composition of the *Recherche*. We see the world (both the physical and the social world) in limited ways because we see it from a single point of view, and we see it in a way that is overdetermined by what Proust's narrator referred to as the *idées agissantes* that shape what we see into meaningful patterns. But we are capable of understanding that our point of view is limited and using social scientific instruments or imaginative instruments (e.g. novels) we can, so to speak, rise above those limits to envision a social field of different points of view. We can also understand how other individual points of view might be produced, and we can undertake to inhabit them for brief moments through complex and arduous acts of understanding.

Even so, we remain, so to speak, in our own place.

*The Weight of the World*, first published in 1993, was a collective volume of interviews and commentary in which Bourdieu and a team of researchers undertook to understand the difficulty of people's existences in the world of that moment. In introducing the volume, Bourdieu wrote of the compositional effort he and his collaborators made in order to arrive at 'a complex and multilayered representation capable of articulating the same realities but in terms that are different and, sometimes, irreconcilable'. He compared their project to a novelistic one: 'following the lead of novelists such as Faulkner, Joyce or Woolf, we must relinquish the single, central, dominant, in a word, quasi-divine, point of view that is all too easily adopted by observers — and by readers too. (. . .) We must work instead with the multiple perspectives that correspond to the multiplicity of coexisting, and sometimes deeply competing, points of view.' Such multiperspectivalism was important, Bourdieu insisted, because what made living together difficult in many circumstances then, as now, were the 'clashing interests, orientations, and lifestyle' that arise within any number of different social contexts in which many of us find ourselves obliged to exist.[6]

It may sometimes be more difficult to see the multiperspectivalism of the *Recherche* than it is to see that of *The Waves*, or *To the Lighthouse*, or *As I Lay Dying*, or *Ulysses* because Proust's narrator seems such a dominant presence and often an extremely self-involved one. Yet a commitment to multiperspectivalism and the critical stance that it enables on the social world runs throughout the novel and is, in fact entangled with the novel's formal procedures.

Let me offer a first complex example of this here. (Each of the other contributors

will approach this issue from a different angle.) Consider the party given by the Princesse de Guermantes at the beginning of Part II of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. The hero, during his long account of what transpires while he is in attendance at the party, will spend some time ruminating about the relation between the Princesse's evening party and the afternoon garden party that Mme de Saint-Euverte will be giving the next day. In particular, he will comment on what he learns about which guests the two events will have in common, and what that might mean about the social world in which he is now moving. At one point he remarks about the Princesse's party: 'Parties of this kind are generally anticipated. They scarcely become real until the next day, when they occupy the attention of people who were not invited.'[7] He is making reference to the columns in newspapers like *Le Figaro* that reported on social events among the elite members of French society, as, for example, this item from *Le Figaro*'s 'Le Monde & la Ville' column on March 7, 1905:

> M. Marcel Proust gave yesterday an extremely elegant, but quite small afternoon tea party, to which no more than twenty people had been invited.
>
> Among them:
>
> Comtesse Aimery de La Rochefoucauld, Duc and Duchesse de Guiche, Comtesse d'Haussonville, Duchesse de Gramont, Comte and Comtesse de Ludre, Mme Madeleine Lemaire, Marquis and Marquise d'Albufera, Princesse de Chimay, Comte et Comtesse Adhéaume de Chevigné, etc.

> After the tea, following which there was no larger reception, M. Marcel Proust's guests had the pleasure of hearing M. Reynaldo Hahn, who sang a few of his exquisite songs, while accompanying himself at the piano.

What does a text like this tell us, what does it do, what is its point, its social function? What did this text mean for or do for or to certain readers on March 7, 1905? Who wrote it? Who compiled the guest list? Were they standing in the street outside Proust's residence watching them go in or come out? Were they one of the guests or some kind of interloper? Who provided the information that Hahn performed after the tea? What role did Proust have in the drafting of this notice? I ask these questions somewhat facetiously, since notices like these would obviously have been published not only with the consent of the host or hostess, but with some degree of assistance from them, or indeed some degree of effort on their part.[8] To become a person about whose parties a notice like this might be written is a form of consecration, we might say. But not an unambiguous one: remember what Gide wrote to Proust when trying to excuse himself for his role in the decision to reject the manuscript of *Du côté de chez Swann* for the *Nouvelle Revue Française*: 'For me, you had remained the person who could be seen at Madame X's or Y's, the person who wrote for the Figaro. I thought of you — dare I admit it? — as being on *the Verdurin's Way*! A snob, a dilettante and socialite, the worst thing for us to be seen as publishing in our journal.'[9] Gide's point of view on that part of the social world that found a home in the *Figaro*'s society columns clashed, we could say, with Proust's — and with potentially serious consequences for the history of French literature!

Proust imitates a society press item in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* immediately after the narrator's observation that the 'reality' of social events happens only later, when they are reported on in the press:

> In discovering in *Le Figaro*, 'Yesterday the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes gave a grand soirée, etc.', [a socialite] exclaims, 'What! I talked, three days ago, for an hour with Marie-Gilbert, without her so much as mentioning it!', and she racks her brains wondering what she might have done to the Guermantes. (51; 3:48)

For certain individuals, the news items reveal that they have not been invited to an event, and lead them to wonder why, what that means for their own personal standing, for the degree to which they count in the world. They view the news item as having personal import.

There are other readers of *Le Figaro* who might not have been hoping for an invitation, but who might, say, follow the life of the *gratin* the way people follow sporting events. Perhaps they want to know who is in and who is out, who is rising and who is falling.[10] Perhaps they are just admirers of this or that member of the upper crust and interested to follow their fate. A bit later on, the narrator imagines such a reader encountering the news item about tomorrow's party at Mme de Saint-Euverte's, and notes that they might, if their only source of information is the newspapers, get the wrong impression:

But the fact was that the pre-eminence of the Saint-Euverte salon existed

only for those whose social life consists merely in reading the accounts of

matinées and soirées in *Le Gaulois* or *Le Figaro*, without ever having been

to any of them. For those socialites who encounter society only by way of

the newspaper, the enumeration of the ambassadresses of England,

Austria, etc., and the Duchesses d'Uzès, de la Trémoïlle, etc., etc., was

enough to make them readily imagine the Saint-Euverte salon to be the

first in Paris, whereas it was one of the last. (73; 3:70)

Important people condescend to drop into Mme de Saint-Euverte's parties and don't

necessarily stay long; if they do drop in, it is because the hostess has made such a

consistent effort to ingratiate herself with them, producing a sense of duty or obligation in

them that means in attending her party they are almost following orders:

Such salons, less sought after than shunned, to which you go only in the

line of duty as it were, take in only the female readers of the 'Society'

column. They slide over a party, a truly fashionable one, to which the

hostess, who might have had all the duchesses who crave being 'among

the chosen', has asked only two or three, and has not put the names of her

guests in the newspaper. (73; 3:70)

So which is it? Do the society items in the *Figaro* or the *Gaulois*, by registering the

transient rituals of a particular elite corner of the social world, somehow produce or

record or guarantee the fundamental reality of yesterday's parties, or do they provide an illusory and erroneous sense of which social events were the truly important and distinguished ones? (Perhaps the narrator/hero's inconsistency is an indication of the ways in which his efforts to apprehend the world he observes in a critical way are always tinged with the biases of his own point of view on that world.)

Now suppose you are not reading these items the day after, but years later, looking for information about how the social world of the time was organized. How will you factor into your research the role the hosts and the hostesses played in assuring that their parties got mentioned, or the nonchalance they exhibited regarding whether their event would even be mentioned or in how much detail. How will you factor in the desire of the columnist to be connected to this or that figure of the social world, or the columnist's own strategies in giving more or less space to this or that party, or in mentioning someone's elegant gathering for the first time, or in deciding that it is no longer necessary to mention someone who has always been mentioned in the past? How could you ever guess from these society items if the celebrities who attended wanted to be there or were somehow coerced into it? In any case, you would be looking for something immanent in society, of which articles such as these are the traces. You would be looking for the structures, the processes, the relations that made up this world as much as or more than for any specific information the passages might include. You would be looking for something about the structure and the processes of social reality that these articles *index* but cannot successfully represent.

If, in the first passage I cited, the narrator sees these social events as only coming into reality the day after they happened when people who weren't there (or perhaps even

the people who were there) read about them in the newspaper, then perhaps his underlying premise is that it is the effects these events have that matters more than anything that happens at the event. Or perhaps he is interested in that immanent social energy of which such print items are a trace, revealing that the lunches, garden parties, musical teas, dinners and soirées of a certain set of people are part of some general economy whose presence and whose structure is indexed by and can perhaps be reconstructed from traces they leave behind. Now obviously the number of pages the narrator spends describing things that actually happen during the Princesse's evening party suggests that this can't be fully true, that all of the events that happen during the party are also important (but perhaps also as traces of the event's most immediate effects). Yet the novel's analytical interest in the newspaper accounts of such events seems worth dwelling on: whatever social economy these events are part of, it functions partially by means of various media forms that make up part of its infrastructure. How and why do representations of events like these circulate within culture once they have happened? Why is it significant that they do? Such representations circulate not just in newspapers, but also in later episodes of talk, in letters, in memoirs, in novels. What kinds of value are created, maintained and distributed or redistributed through all these acts of circulation?

Social scientists use concepts to render visible structures and relations that people contribute to through their practical activities; the concept of *symbolic capital* seems relevant to what Proust's novel is investigating here. In the seminars Bourdieu was giving at the Collège de France in the early 1980s, while he was working on *Homo Academicus*, his book about the structure and the dynamics of the intellectual field in France, he would

sometimes talk about what was involved in constructing that field:

> In a game, a social space or field, we find both institutionalized and non-institutionalized aspects; to borrow a metaphor from a game, there are trump cards and a structure by which those cards are distributed, and this is a structuring principle of any field. So one structuring principle of the intellectual field that I mentioned last year is the unequal distribution of what I call symbolic capital, which can more or less be provisionally identified as reputation, fame, celebrity. This structure for the distribution of symbolic capital, which is an invisible, uncodified one (. . .) is extremely influential [*agissante*]: it may be diffuse and difficult to grasp, but it governs practices, interactions between people, nominations, rejections, patterns of association, and so on. Beyond that, a field also has instituted aspects, which is to say rules and guardians of the rules.[11]

Proust's narrator had wondered about the 'ideas that do not reveal themselves but are functioning [*agissantes*] all the same', ideas or concepts that structure how we see, act in, and interpret the world. For Bourdieu, the structure of symbolic capital is one such concept, 'invisible, uncodified (. . .) extremely influential [*agissante*]'. If one examines the way Proust treats characters such as the Princesse de Guermantes, Mme de Saint-Euverte, the Baron de Charlus and the narrator, we can see that he is operating with some such concept somewhere in mind. The Princesse's very title is, of course, an institutionalized form of symbolic capital, and given the position she occupies, she is

probably under no explicit obligation to follow any rules in the invitations she makes to her parties, even if she surely does so almost thoughtlessly, as a matter of course. Regarding her invitations, the narrator informs us that 'the surprise was sometimes as great among those who were invited as among those who were not' (51, 3:49). Somehow, the narrator has learned the principle behind her decision not to invite certain people:

> if, indeed, the Princesse, even though they were among her friends, did not invite them, this often arose from her fear of displeasing 'Palamède', who had excommunicated them. So I could be certain that she had not spoken about me to M. de Charlus; otherwise, I would not have found myself there. (51, 3:48)

Charlus's perhaps capricious excommunications and the Princesse's startling invitations to people that she 'had been neglecting for years' might cause us to think there is a randomness at work here, as opposed to the painstaking strategies of a Mme de Saint-Euverte that had over years produced a 'transmutation (. . .) from a salon for lepers into a salon for great ladies' (73, 3:70). Yet acts that appear capricious perhaps end up being as telling as acts whose strategic nature is only too apparent. They both arise out of a sense of the ordering of a certain world, and they contribute to the order of that world. Bourdieu puts it this way:

> The social world is ordered; it is continuous; it obeys certain immanent tendencies. (. . .) Because it is a space of immanent tendencies, the social

world requires that social agents take these immanent tendencies into account (I think the words 'take into account' are important), for these are things that one can count on, that have to be accounted for, and the objective future of the social world is precisely something that one can count on: the world is predictable, it is not just anything that is going to happen.[12]

As time goes by, however, tendencies may shift. Even in the best of circumstances, people may miscalculate. The dynamic between Charlus and the narrator is crucial to the analytic work the novel is doing on the structure and dynamics of the social field in which the Guermantes are predominant. Consider, for example, the moment at which the narrator has asked Charlus if he will be attending Mme de Saint-Euverte's garden party the next day, and Charlus directs his reply to Mme de Surgis, knowing that Mme de Saint-Euverte is nearby and can hear every word he says:

> 'Would you believe that this impertinent young man', he said, indicating me to Mme de Surgis, 'has just asked me, with none of the care one ought to take to hide these sorts of needs, whether I was going to Mme de Saint-Euverte's, that is, I fancy, whether I had the colic. I should attempt in any case to relieve myself in some more comfortable spot than at the house of someone who, if memory serves, was celebrating her centenary when I was making my entry into society, i.e., not *chez elle*. (. . .) Are you going to soil yourself there?' (101–2, 3:99)

One might say that he is so sure of his own symbolic capital that he has no compunction about revealing the truth of the social world, in which no matter who attends her party and no matter how it is written about in the papers the next day, it will still be discreditable. Mme de Saint-Euverte seems only to confirm Charlus's implicit assertion a few moments later when, despite having overheard his tirade, she nonetheless endeavours to ingratiate herself with him and even encourages the narrator to find a way to convince Charlus to come to her party with him the next day.

Bourdieu observed that as he worked on constructing the set of relations that existed within the French academic world, it would have been helpful to have had some kind of 'objective', agreed-upon account of people's standing within that world:

> When I was working on university professors, I looked for an objective ranking that people couldn't object to, that was public — a ranking of who was a good professor and who wasn't in a universe in which everyone is striving to know who is or isn't good, who really counts and who doesn't. But there is no such thing and that is a social fact. (. . .) Such a ranking must be made, I think, if it holds scientific interest, but keeping in mind that what is important is that, objectively, it doesn't exist. To say it another way, I can establish this ranking and treat it as an explanatory principle. Because in fact, this ranking that everyone knows but that does not exist (. . .) is the explanatory principle of many practices. It is the principle that justifies certain practices, a degree of self-confidence — that's the key

term: confidence regarding the future, objective forms of confidence,

subjective forms of confidence, and so on. Yet it is also important to keep

in mind that it doesn't exist objectively and that some of the most

characteristic phenomena in this universe are the result of that, like anxiety

or a particularly marked propensity towards condemnation.[13]

Bourdieu may be talking about the field of French higher education in the 1960s and

1970s, but it is remarkably applicable to Proust's novel — or indeed to the intellectual

fields many of us move within. We read Wikipedia entries about academics (or notice

that certain people don't have them) in the same way Proust's characters read the society

columns of the *Figaro* or the *Gaulois*. We assume that an article being published in a

'high impact' journal will do more for our careers than one published somewhere else.

We are fascinated by reputational rankings of world universities. We obsess over blurbs

and acknowledgements, and question the brilliance of this or that star in private, semi-

public and public conversations. In all these cases, it is a question of what Bourdieu calls

a 'ranking that everyone knows but that does not exist', a ranking we have internalized

and believe in and that 'is the explanatory principle of many practices' but that we are

also constantly unsure of and taking steps to update (in ways that are often perhaps more

subliminal than conscious).

A brilliant example of someone whose actions are guided by an interest in the

'ranking that everyone knows but that does not exist' is the hero of the *Recherche*. It is

within the fluctuating gap separating the hero from the narrator that a significant part of

the novel's social scientific potential resides — the potential for apprehending and then

comprehending how a sense of the immanent tendencies of the social world guides people's actions within it. The fluctuation between hero and narrator is to some degree a fluctuation between practical and consciously theoretical forms of apprehension and comprehension.

The novel in fact calls our attention to the nature of the gap between hero and narrator in the pages I am looking at here. The narrator is in the midst of a long digression related to the difficulty his younger self was having remembering the name of a woman he was speaking to at the party. Suddenly, he imagines being addressed by 'M. le Lecteur' [Mr Reader], who issues a complaint about the digression and a comment to the effect that the hero should not have been having this kind of memory problem, 'young as you were (or as your hero was, if he is not yourself)' (54, 3:51). That lovely 'if he is not yourself' allows us to imagine any number of possibilities: that this is a novel in which the narrator only pretends to be narrating the life of his younger self, and is instead narrating someone else's life, or making it up; or that there is a loose boundary between the narrator and someone else — something like an author perhaps — and that this other presence from further outside the fictional universe could sometimes intervene to remind us that this is all some kind of experiment having to do with ways of understanding a world.[14] The gap between narrator and hero and the gap between narrator and whatever is beyond him are the devices that suggest the possibility of a critical or analytical distance from individual experience that allows for a different order of understanding. (All of the contributors to this special issue touch in one way or another on the rich potential of this play between the levels of hero, narrator and novel.)

The hero, after all, seems entirely caught up in his experience of the Princesse's

party and for much of the time his concern is to find someone who will do him the service of introducing him to his host, the Prince. On the one hand, the Baron de Charlus would seem a good possibility, since he and the hero have been acquainted for some time. Yet because Charlus has insisted that the hero would need to accept him as a mentor in order to gain full admittance to the Guermantes world, and the hero has somehow circumvented him, that option seems a perilous one:

> But what made him furious was that my presence that evening at the Princesse de Guermantes's, as for some little time past at her cousin's, seemed to make a mockery of his solemn declaration, 'The only entrée to those salons is through me'. A grave fault, an inexpiable crime perhaps: I had not followed the hierarchical path. M. de Charlus well knew that the thunderbolts that he brandished at those who did not submit to his commands, or to whom he had taken a strong dislike, were beginning to pass, in the eyes of many, and however much fury he put into them, for thunderbolts of cardboard, and no longer had the strength to expel anyone from anywhere. But perhaps he thought that his power, although diminished, was still great and remained intact in the eyes of a novice such as myself. So I did not consider it the wisest course to ask a service of him at a party where my mere presence seemed like an ironic challenge to his pretensions. (43–4, 3:40)

The hero's understanding of symbolic capital seems, at this point, probably a mostly

practical and somewhat rudimentary one. The narrator is more sophisticated, and the novel perhaps even more so. For the novel clearly sees the narrator and Charlus as linked, as somehow together serving as an index of a tendency emerging in the field. That *someone like* the narrator finds himself situated in relation to *someone like* Charlus is the important data point regarding the dynamics of the field. They become from this more analytical point of view, so to speak, 'epistemic individuals' instead of 'empirical individuals'. This is Bourdieu's distinction, from *Homo Academicus.* A proper name, Bourdieu points out, is what is used to label an empirical individual.[15] It 'says that the object designated is different, without specifying *in what respect* it differs'. A proper name is an 'instrument of *recognition*, and not of *cognition*'. Regarding epistemic individuals, Bourdieu observes:

> The constructed individual, on the contrary, is defined by a finite set of explicitly defined properties which differ through a series of identifiable differences from the set of properties, constructed according to the same explicit criteria, which characterize other individuals; more precisely, it identifies its referent not in ordinary space, but in a space constructed of differences produced by the very definition of the finite set of effective variables.[16]

The hero's concerns at this party are personal ones: Is he really supposed to be there? Who will introduce him to the Prince? Who will be interested in talking to him? Who should or shouldn't he be talking to? Who does he want to be talking to? Who and what

should he be observing? And so on. But from a perspective that begins to objectify the hero (and this is what the narrator's perspective does), the questions shift to ones such as: Why is the world of the Guermantes interested in assimilating someone like the narrator? What are the properties that go into making up 'someone like the narrator'? What are the structures that create stratifications within the world of the Guermantes, between husbands and wives, older and younger brothers, powerful but strange cousins, more distant relatives, Guermantes and Saint-Euvertes?

The narrator, for instance, seems to possess an understanding the hero lacks, which allows him to assert that 'it was not as difficult as I had thought for M. de Charlus to accede [que M. de Charlus accédât] to my request for an introduction', where the delicious imperfect subjunctive suggests an alternative scenario in which his introduction to the Prince could have been more successful than the awkward one at the hands of M. de Bréauté that the novel actually shows us. Had the hero had a sufficiently complete understanding of the social universe in question, he could have found an appropriate way of asking Charlus to perform this favour for him. The passage continues:

> For one thing, in the course of the last twenty years, this Don Quixote
> [Charlus] had tilted against so many windmills (frequently relatives who
> he claimed had behaved badly toward him), and had forbidden people to
> be invited with such regularity 'as someone unfit to be received', by either
> male or female Guermantes, that the latter were beginning to be afraid of
> quarreling with all the people whom they liked, and of being deprived
> until the day they died of the company of certain newcomers about whom

they were curious, in order to espouse the thunderous yet unexplained

grudges of a brother-in-law or cousin who would have wanted them to

abandon wife, brother, and children for his sake. Being more intelligent

than the other Guermantes, M. de Charlus had noticed that only one in two

of his vetoes was effective, and, looking ahead to the future and fearing

that one day it might be him of whom they would deprive themselves, he

had begun to cut his losses, to lower, as they say, his prices. (56–7, 3:53–

4)

The Baron understands, at least in a practical way, his downward tendency. The novel

studies the dynamics of the social world that produce this downward tendency and the

novel also understands that something about the hero's upward trajectory is part of the

same system.

The narrator of the *Recherche* often seems to be gazing retrospectively at his

younger self, having acquired in the interim a critical perspective and analytical force the

hero lacks, but sometimes he runs the risk of collapsing back into the purely subjective

perspective that the hero often evinces. The hero sometimes seems able to objectify some

part of his own point of view. By the end of the novel, there are a few moments in which

the narrator's analysis of the social world in which he exists has become sufficiently

intense that he can at least briefly envision himself — his enactment of a trajectory across

time and across the social world — as much as an epistemic individual as an empirical

one. But this is a hard perspective to sustain.[17] In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu observes:

In fact, [the sociologist's] freedom in the face of the social determinisms

which affect him is proportionate to the power of his theoretical and

technical methods of objectification, and above all, perhaps, to his ability

to use them on himself, so to speak, to objectify his own position through

the objectification of the space within which are defined both his position

and his primary vision of his position, and the positions opposed to it. (15)

The potential freedom to understand to some degree why we are the way we are, and why

we are able to be where in social space we find ourselves to be, comes as the result of the

careful deployment of a variety of analytical instruments of which, we might agree, the

novel can be one. Not all novels, obviously, but certainly Proust's. But for novels to work

as instruments of this kind, they have to be read in a certain way. The essays that follow

are experiments in reading along these lines.

The interplay between hero, narrator and whatever we want to name that

perspective in the *Recherche* that is even wider than the narrator's is not the only formal

feature of the *Recherche* that can be mobilized so as to approach the novel as an

instrument for understanding aspects of the world that are not individualist, not subjective

in orientation. There is the 'tectonic shift' (to borrow Elisabeth Ladenson's phrase)

between the ending of *Le Côté de Guermantes* and the beginning of *Sodome et

Gomorrhe*, raising the question of what knowledge about sexuality means in the novel

and where it comes from. Both Ladenson and Ty Blakeney help us to think about a

number of troubling aspects of this moment in the novel, and how that trouble extends

outwards — both forwards and backwards — to other parts of the novel, in particular

because of the analogy between homosexuality and Jewishness that is put forth in

*Sodome et Gomorrhe I.* Ladenson shows how the troubles of this moment in the novel

ripple all the way back  to 'Combray' and to how the narrator's household dynamics are

described there. Ladenson demonstrates that the distanced, disinterested, putatively

critical perspective (say on religious or sexual or social identity) that the novel

occasionally proffers is one that it also paradoxically undercuts; it does so by revealing

how disinterest can, from another angle, appear as a cover for other disavowed interests

or identities. The novel, for Ladenson, not only represents characters (the Baron de

Charlus or Legrandin, for instance) trapped in this situation of disavowed avowal. It

seems itself to be an example of this predicament.

For Blakeney, a moment from *Sodome et Gomorrhe I* becomes the occasion for a

deep dive into the history of sexuality, into the moment of this volume's initial reception,

and a chance to confront the novel's traffic in uncomfortable forms of homophobia,

nationalism and anti-Semitism. Blakeney shows how the novel forces attentive readers

into painful decisions about how it might be voiced. He also raises the interesting

question of how the *Recherche*, because of the complexity of its voicing, leaves itself

open to different forms of ideological (mis)appropriation. As we make decisions about

voicing (is this or that sentence a pastiche of an odious ideological position, or an

uncritical restatement of it?), as we appropriate the novel, as we evaluate this or that

appropriation of it, we perform, as Blakeney points out, a complex negotiation' between

its understanding of its world and our understanding of that world and of our own.

Ladenson calls our attention to the fact that Proust's first readers, the people who

read the volumes of Proust's novel as they were being published, would have had a hard

time indulging in the convention, widespread among Proust's readers and critics today, of referring to the novel's narrator/hero as 'Marcel', for the simple fact that he has no name in the novel's first four volumes. He is, of course, not particularly clearly named in the two instances in *La Prisonnière* in which 'Marcel' occurs. He then goes unnamed again for the last two volumes. Early readers of Proust might therefore have been more attentive to the care that is taken in the novel to avoid naming the narrator than readers today tend to be. Brigitte Mahuzier nicely juxtaposes the strange ease many feel in calling the narrator 'Marcel' with the difficulty those same readers might have in recalling Françoise's family name — which occurs in the novel with roughly the same frequency that the name 'Marcel' does. What immanent social tendencies do we reaffirm by way of our easy assumptions about the narrator's name and our difficulty in noticing and retaining Françoise's family name? In 'Françoise's Way', Mahuzier invites us to decentre the narrator, to consider the possibility that the *Recherche*, by way of Françoise, offers us the possibility of perspectives or points of view that escape or exceed that of the narrator. Max McGuinness and Ben Beitler do something similar by situating the narrator/hero's ideological stance within the larger landscape of stances towards the Dreyfus Affair on display in the novel (McGuinness) or by situating the narrator's 'expertise' within the landscape of 'experts' of various kinds that the novel offers us (Beitler). McGuinness finds in the *Recherche* a skepticism towards the idea that it would be possible to explain, via some kind of social scientific expertise, the evolution of someone's political beliefs and sees the novel as providing a convincing representation of the 'messy complexity' of personal ideological trajectories. The novel, McGuinness avers, calls attention to a randomness or a volatility connecting affective and political

realms that could challenge most explanatory systems and most efforts at political prediction. He wonders what it might mean to exist and act politically in the presence of such volatility.

For Beitler it is not so much that the *Recherche* is skeptical of expertise in and of itself (although it has its share of pompous and dubious experts) as that it provides a critical novelistic experience of the conditions of possibility for the production of expertise ('the arrangements and processes by which new knowledge becomes effective'). It also anatomizes the experience of expertise by non-experts. It is, we might say, the expertise of a social-scientifically inclined novelist to produce a novel capable of doing all that.

Finally, in 'Proust on the Beach', Hannah Freed-Thall turns to setting as a novelistic feature that can, so to speak, upstage character. For Freed-Thall, Balbec, and its casino in particular, provides the conditions for an experiment of sorts. The social world there (Bourdieu's space of immanent tendencies) both is and is not like the social world elsewhere. You could almost say it reveals itself — or it calls attention to an experience of itself — precisely by being the same and yet different. Freed-Thall points to Proust's own interest, while in seaside casinos, in the game of baccarat, a game where there is no place for skill but only luck, volatility, contingency. Freed-Thall is interested in how the 'contingency effect' whose ground zero might be the Balbec casino, then ramifies throughout the novel — notably through its embodiment in Albertine and her sexuality, but also in the history of the novel's own composition, the contingency of war granting Proust 'an unforeseen span of time in which to expand and reconceptualize the middle stretch' of the *Recherche*. Freed-Thall reminds us that despite Proust's frequent efforts to

call attention to the overdetermining formal architecture of his novel, it is also a novel

that plays with and exemplifies — that is devoted to — indetermination in both its matter

and its form.

I wanted to offer special thanks to the contributors and to Ian Maclachlan of

*Paragraph*'s editorial board, for working on this volume under the strange circumstances

of the COVID pandemic, some of us stranded far from our usual abodes, and all faced

with closed libraries and bookstores, not to mention the worries for health and well-being

everyone has been confronting. The pandemic remains a cruel experience of both

contingency and determination, of volatility and immanent tendencies, of rampant

inequity, of risk, of luck both good and bad, of painful fluctuations between political

competence and incompetence, of the need for expertise and for a critical relation to it.

Locked down, isolated, socially distanced, technologically mediated many of us may

have been. The pandemic has nonetheless also provided (and continues to provide) an

intense experience of the inescapably social world with all of its painful contradictions

and the many challenges it poses to our understanding. I hope the approaches to Proust

collected here can encourage an understanding of the *Recherche* as something like an

ongoing experiment, one in and through which the social world (Proust's and our own)

— a space of both determination and indetermination — can not only be brought to our

awareness, but also in some measure understood.

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[1] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*,

translated by Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), xviii. If

2022 marks 100 years since Proust's death, it also marks 20 years since Bourdieu's. My

introduction to this special issue is a tribute to both of them, and to the remarkable

affinities between their two bodies of work.

[2] Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Binoculars: A Study of Memory, Time, and Recognition in 'A*

*la recherche du temps perdu'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 38.

[3] Marcel Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, translated by Mark Treharne (New York:

Penguin, 2005), 60. I will also provide page references to the following French edition: *À*

*la recherche du temps perdu*, edited by Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 volumes (Paris: Gallimard

[Pléiade], 1987–88). This passage is on 2:366.

[4] Proust, *Swann's Way*, translated by Lydia Davis (New York: Penguin, 2004), 19–20. In

French, 1:18–19.

[5] Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary*

*Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 625–6.

[6] Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World*, 3–4.

[7] Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, translated by John Sturrock (New York: Penguin, 2005),

51. In French: 3:47–8.

[8] Yuri dos Anjos in fact ascribes the authorship of this item to Proust. See

https://proustpresse.hypotheses.org/corpus/les-ecrits-de-presse/liens-vers-les-articles.

[9] Cited by Christine M. Cano, 'Mea Culpa: Gide, Proust and the *Nouvelle Revue*

*Française*', *Romance Quarterly* 50:1 (2003), 34 (my translation).

[10] See, on this topic, Caroline Weber, *Proust's Duchess: How Three Celebrated Women*

*Captured the Imagination of Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (New York: Knopf, 2018).

[11] Bourdieu, *Sociologie générale, volume 2: Cours au Collège de France, 1983-1986*,

edited by Patrick Champagne, Julien Duval, Franck Poupeau and Marie-Christine Rivière

(Paris: Raisons d'agir/Seuil, 2016), 119–20.

[12] Bourdieu, *Sociologie générale, volume 2*, 202.

[13] Bourdieu, *Sociologie générale, volume 2*, 191–2.

[14] About this moment and others like it, Christopher Prendergast helpfully observes that 'the storytelling codes adopted by *À la recherche* are such that no first-person fictional narrator is empowered to operate in this fashion; to do so is to commit an unauthorized border violation at the crossing-points of fiction and autobiography. Yet the slipping between different existential and discursive worlds is not merely a clumsy slip or an over-sight (. . .). If the text abruptly and arbitrarily switches the firewall off so as to permit a stepping from one world into another and back again, this is not a reflection of storytelling gone wrong at a very basic level. It is not a consequence of insouciance, forgetfulness, or carelessness, the kind of lapse that merits a reprimand from the narratological police. It is rather because Proust likes to not only play the fictional game but also to play teasingly with the game itself, with both its rules and its readers' (*Mirages and Mad Beliefs: Proust the Skeptic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 34).

[15] On the difficulties related to the hero/narrator's proper name and how and why these difficulties are highlighted during this party scene, see chapter 6 of Lucey, *Never Say I: Sexuality and the First Person in Colette, Gide, and Proust* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), as well as Ladenson's contribution below.

[16] Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, translated by Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 22.

[17] For more on the interplay between narrator and hero and on the narrator's concluding

social scientific vision of himself, see chapter 2 and the conclusion of Lucey, *What Proust Heard: Novels and the Ethnography of Talk* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).