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Geography and Psychology: The Battlefield of Doncières

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We can hardly imagine Marcel Proust anywhere but in his bedroom. For long years of his life, in fact, domesticity provided him with the ideal setting for literary creation. Nevertheless, the author of *À la recherche du temps perdu* also showed a marked predisposition for sociability, of which *Le Côté de Guermantes* offers an incredibly rich account. The third volume of Proust's novel indeed explores other interiors than the domestic one. For instance, Proust presents the salons of Mme de Villeparisis and of the Guermantes both to dissect the process leading to the formation of public opinion, in which he was particularly interested, and to reconstruct the steps of the "wider social revolution (hastened by the First World War), which, in very broad terms, sees the triumph of the bourgeoisie and the decline of the aristocracy."¹ For this reason, Proust's Parisian geography is grounded in a sociological analysis revolving around the idea of class juxtaposition and mingling embodied by the "kaleidoscope social" or "mondain" alluded to in multiple passages.

Nonetheless, other geographies than this geography of sociability are developed by the author in *Le Côté de Guermantes*. The military geography examined during the Doncières episode is certainly to be listed among these and will be the object of the present article. More particularly, I will contend that this section of the novel elucidates the relations between the spatial dimension of Proust's writing and the psychological reverberations of the landscape experience that it constantly displays, so as to assert the relevance of *La Recherche* for contemporary reflections on the objectivity of the representation of space. Finally, the apparent collision of the discourses around geography and psychology in the Doncières passage reveals the crucial role of exterior spaces of negotiation in the path leading towards the expression of spiritual truths. Before I analyze the main features of this military geography in depth, though, it is necessary to understand what geographical representation is for Proust.

While several studies have highlighted the topographical, philosophical, aesthetic, and narratological elements intervening in the treatment of space in the novel,² interdisciplinary

¹ Edward J. Hughes, "Politics and class," in *Proust in Context*, ed. by Adam Watt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 160–66 (p. 161).

² Accounts of the literal topography of Proustian spaces and their relation to the author's biography can be found, for example, in Christian Pechenard's *Proust à Cabourg* (Paris: Éditions Quai Voltaire, 1992), as well as in Michel Blain's *À la recherche des lieux proustiens* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012). The most important study addressing the philosophical implications of Proust's treatment of space is Georges Poulet's *L'Espace proustien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963),

research on the cognitive processes involved in mapping the spatial dimension deserves further critical engagement.³ Proust often moves through other fields of knowledge in order to explore the possibilities offered by specialized languages,⁴ and geography is surely one of these fields. However, the author seems to entertain a controversial relationship with it.

On the one hand, in fact, this discipline is associated with a flat rendition of space that literary writing is supposed to surpass thanks to the *rephrasing* of reality operated by style. This attitude of the narrator becomes patent in the first of the many passages of *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* where he describes what his former self sees from the window of his room at the Grand Hôtel in Balbec:

Et dès ce premier matin, le soleil me désignait au loin d'un doigt souriant ces cimes bleues de la mer qui n'ont de nom sur aucune carte géographique, jusqu'à ce qu'étourdi de sa sublime promenade à la surface retentissante et chaotique de leurs crêtes et de leurs avalanches, il vînt se mettre à l'abri du vent dans ma chambre, se prélassant sur le lit

championing the hypothesis of a spatialized time structuring the novel. In her book *Proust ou le réel retrouvé: Le sensible et son expression dans À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011), Anne Simon situates Proust's spatial descriptions in the frame of a "poétique de la surimpression" providing the basis for the narrator's experience of the world. For a comprehensive reading of the typology of description in Proust's writing, see also Stéphane Chaudier's recent volume *Proust et le démon de la description* (Paris: Garnier, 2018) and Annick Bouillaguet's article "Structures proustiennes de la description," in *Marcel Proust 1: des personnages aux structures* (Paris: Minard, 1992), pp. 83–99. The Italian volume *Proust e lo spazio*, ed. by Marisa Verna and Alberto Frigerio (Milan: EDUCatt, 2009), collects a variety of readings on the aesthetic use of spatial references in Proust's work. Space as intimately connected with the stylistic practice of writing (from the space of the sentence to the space of the page) is at the center of Isabelle Serça's *Les Coutures apparentes de la Recherche: Proust et la ponctuation* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010).

³ To my knowledge, two reflections on space mapping in Proust do exist, though. While Antoine Compagnon thinks of reading as "[la] prise de possession" of a territory, thus recognizing the cognitive process at stake from the point of view of the reception, Patrick Bray's analysis of the "novel map" from Stendhal to Proust reassesses forms of self-inscription within the space of fictional and real worlds, revealing "the subject's unstable position between a visual and concrete representation in a map and a readable and abstract representation in narrative." See A. Compagnon, "Proust, mémoire de la littérature", in *Proust, la mémoire et la littérature: Séminaire 2006–2007 au Collège de France*, ed. by Antoine Compagnon and Jean-Baptiste Amadiou (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009), pp. 9–45 (pp. 15–16); P. M. Bray, *The Novel Map* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), p. 13.

⁴ Jean-Pierre Ollivier contextualizes the interdisciplinarity of Proust's writing within a larger representational crisis inaugurated by science. Particularly, he refers to the "impossibilité de se représenter un réel contre-intuitif, comme celle de dessiner un atome ou de concevoir l'espace-temps." New discoveries determined a cleavage between science and literature that Proust tries to overcome. See J.-P. Ollivier, *Proust et les sciences* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2018), pp. 28–29.

défait et égrenant ses richesses sur le lavabo mouillé, dans la malle ouverte, où, par sa splendeur même et son luxe déplacé, il ajoutait encore à l'impression du désordre.⁵

This description clearly sets a distance between the representation of space to be found in geographical maps and the stylistic reworking of spatial experience, of which this passage itself constitutes a distinctive example. The fragment of space on which the narrator's gaze concentrates is framed by the window, while the movement followed by his eyes corresponds to the movement of the sun rays from outside to inside his bedroom. As Jean-Pierre Richard pointed out, sunlight is one of the principal forms in which matter manifests itself in the novel; more specifically, "la clarté solaire formant l'espace, l'instance d'une vérité pleinement dévoilée, [...], il est normal qu'elle consacre presque toujours pour Proust le moment, ou le lieu d'une inauguration."⁶ Subsequently, in the seascape described by the narrator, the presence of light informs the reader that the personal impression has activated a stylistic response, so that the description inevitably resorts to the rhetorical device in charge of enabling the subjective transformation of reality over the course of the book — that is to say, analogy. In this case, the metaphor associates, almost paradoxically, the waves of the sea with a mountain landscape (the former are associated with such words as "cimes," "crêtes," "avalanches"). The main function of this first *marine*, then, is to oppose the objectivity of the map to the subjectivity of individual reactions to landscape.

On the other hand, though, Proust's writing is undeniably concerned with localization and mapping, intended as the act that situates things in space. This interest is visible from the very beginning of the novel, where the "dormeur éveillé," as Proust calls this archetypical man lost between sleep and wakefulness, is immersed in a complete darkness hindering him from finding any chronological or spatial reference, and from understanding what happens around him. Disorientation is both physical and spiritual:

aussitôt je recouvrais la vue et j'étais bien étonné de trouver autour de moi une obscurité, douce et reposante pour mes yeux, mais peut-être encore plus pour mon esprit, à qui elle apparaissait comme une chose sans cause, incompréhensible, comme une chose vraiment obscure. (I, 3)

In order to reconstruct the map of the surroundings, the protagonist relies on his body memory and the five senses — hearing, in this particular excerpt:

Je me demandais quelle heure il pouvait être; j'entendais le sifflement des trains qui, plus ou moins éloignés, comme le chant d'un oiseau dans une forêt, relevant les distances, me décrivait l'étendue de la campagne déserte où le voyageur se hâte vers la station prochaine ; et le petit chemin qu'il suit va être gravé dans son souvenir par l'excitation qu'il doit à des lieux nouveaux, à des actes inaccoutumés, à la causerie récente et aux

⁵ Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1987–89), II, 34. Subsequent references are given parenthetically in the text by volume and page number.

⁶ Jean-Pierre Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 50.

adieux sous la lampe étrangère qui le suivent encore dans le silence de la nuit, à la douceur prochaine du retour. (I, 3–4)

In this passage, sounds allow for the reconstruction of a complex situation. In fact, the map drawn by the subject to find his orientation in this undefined space is not flat but constitutes itself as the tridimensional engraving of a personal blend of memory and imagination within this unknown setting. Therefore, according to Proust, the act of mapping is not only the byproduct of subjective consciousness, but also the conflation of description and creation.⁷ This remark is particularly interesting in the light of recent reflections on the objectivity of geographers' representations of the earth. Denis Cosgrove, for instance, defines acts of mapping as “creative, sometimes anxious, moments in coming to knowledge of the world, and the map is both the spatial embodiment of knowledge and a stimulus to further cognitive engagements.”⁸ The creativity that Cosgrove attributes to mapping casts a significant shadow on the pretention for objective spatial representations. This idea is reiterated by Franco Farinelli, who speaks of the map as a “formidable ontological device,”⁹ thus suggesting that cartography may also well become the instrument of a dangerously optimistic positivism. The map, in fact, is received as the visual correspondent of a mathematical — then, by definition, faultless — transposition of the earth. On the contrary, maps *create* the earth for the observer, who dismisses any attempt to approach their rationale critically. As a consequence, the subjective perspective and representative strategies of the geographer end up shaping the earth more than physical space asserts itself objectively in human minds. Proust appears to share an awareness of the limits of this flattened conception of geography, as well as of its ontological implications, despite being attracted by the precision required in the work of geographers. This painful admiration accompanies, for example, the protagonist's discovery that Albertine has fled to Touraine after leaving his house in Paris:

J'avais souffert une première fois quand *s'était individualisé géographiquement le lieu où elle était*, quand j'avais appris qu'au lieu d'être dans deux ou trois endroits possibles, elle était en Touraine, ces mots de sa concierge avaient marqué dans mon cœur *comme sur une carte* la place où il fallait enfin souffrir. (IV, 54; emphasis added)

Concrete geography of places in the novel and the psychological relevance that these acquire constantly cooperate in Proust's writing, since it is the protagonist's emotional response to them that relocates each particular space in his personal map, as happens with Touraine, now the neuralgic point of his suffering. Seen from this perspective, the narrator's stay in Doncières is a key moment of revelation of this progressive attribution of meaning to places, resulting in what

⁷ According to Gérard Genette and Annick Bouillaguet, the descriptive typology in Proust does not create the effect of a break within the narrative; on the contrary, descriptions account for the continuity of an act of perception in time. In other words, the description is just another type of action. See G. Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 134; A. Bouillaguet, “Structures proustiennes de la description,” p. 96.

⁸ Denis E. Cosgrove, *Mappings* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 2.

⁹ Franco Farinelli, *Geografia: Un'introduzione ai modelli del mondo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), p. 151 (my translation).

Proust calls “une sorte de psychologie dans l’espace” (IV, 608) in the final volume, *Le Temps retrouvé*.

Towards the beginning of *Le Côté de Guermantes*, the protagonist goes to Doncières, a garrison town where his friend Robert de Saint-Loup, who is also the nephew of Mme de Guermantes, is currently on duty. The young man suffers from an unrequited love for the duchess, so that the visit to Saint-Loup is not completely innocent. In fact, he hopes that his friend will talk to Mme de Guermantes to organize a meeting where he can finally be introduced to her. Doncières is different from other places in the novel, Balbec or Venice for instance, because the narrator has no particular interest in the town itself, nor has he fantasized about it as he normally does in his anticipatory reveries on traveling.¹⁰ Nevertheless, this experience will be far less important for the plot itself than for the aesthetic training the protagonist will receive here. Scholars have already underlined the importance of those passages in the Doncières section where domestic settings are observed from the outside through the window, giving life to a sort of ekphrasis inspired by Dutch painting.¹¹ Conversely, I wish to focus on two other aspects of the description of Doncières: first, the function of the military discourse intervening in its characterization; second, the transfer of the notion of palimpsest used by Robert in reference to military strategy to the aesthetic concerns presiding over the creation of the existential geography put in place in the novel.¹² This double take on the narrator’s stay in Doncières will explain the transition from a purely spatial experience to the psychological projection absorbing this place into the realm of consciousness.

From the very first description of Doncières, which precedes the actual experience of the place, the narrator focuses on some specific elements of this particular landscape:

C’était, moins loin de Balbec que le paysage tout terrien ne l’aurait fait croire, *une de ces* petites cités aristocratiques et militaires, entourées d’une campagne étendue où, par les

¹⁰ In the mind of the boy — and in the words of Legrandin, who propelled this imaginative work during their frequentation in Combray — the church of Balbec is the synthesis of two desires in one, gothic architecture and what the boy imagines to be its closeness to the sea (cf. I, 377–78); Venice is similarly reduced to its proximity to the sea, so that the protagonist is transported beforehand by “cette atmosphère marine, indicible et particulière comme celle des rêves, que mon imagination avait enfermée dans le nom de Venise” (I, 386).

¹¹ See Eleonora Sparvoli, “Un ‘Rembrandt’ di Proust: analisi di un passo del *Côté de Guermantes*,” *L’Analisi linguistica e letteraria* 1–2 (2002): 461–79, and Marisa Verna, “Le vortex de l’espace dans l’écriture de Proust,” in *Proust, une langue étrangère* (Paris: Garnier, 2020), pp. 227–37. On the characterization of Doncières as presenting resemblances with Northern towns of the Flemish and Dutch area, see the study in the text genetics of this passage by Takaharu Ishiki, “Doncières, ville du Nord,” *Bulletin d’informations proustiennes*, 20 (1989): 57–64.

¹² For an extensive account of the sociological and epistemological implications of military language in Proust’s writing, and for a study on the treatment of the topic of war in the novel, see Luc Fraisse, *Proust et la stratégie militaire* (Paris: Hermann, 2018); Brigitte Mahuzier, *Proust et la guerre* (Paris: Champion, 2014).

beaux jours, flotte si souvent dans le lointain une sorte de *buée sonore intermittente* qui — *comme un rideau de peupliers par ses sinuosités dessine le cours d'une rivière qu'on ne voit pas* — révèle les changements de place d'un régiment à la manœuvre, que l'atmosphère même des rues des avenues et des places a fini par contracter une sorte de perpétuelle *vibratilité musicale et guerrière*, et que *le bruit le plus grossier de chariot ou de tramway s'y prolonge en vagues appels de clairon ressassés indéfiniment, aux oreilles hallucinées, par le silence.* (II, 369–70; emphasis added)

The narrator's choice to introduce Doncières by the expression “une de ces” is far from neutral. Éric Bordas demonstrated that this is a recurring stylistic trait of realist prose between 1830 and 1890, typical, for example, of Balzac's writing.¹³ Therefore, Proust is once again playing with the idea of objectivity in spatial representation, in this case in the literary domain, to deliver instead a description based on incidental physical sensations and subjective impressions. From this point of view, the reference to the psychic phenomenon of hallucination at the end of the passage undermines any attempt to establish the objectivity of this experience.¹⁴ As in the first scene of the novel, the sense of hearing is associated with the construction of space, particularly the countryside surrounding the town.

By the use of two analogies, one layered over the other — the synesthesia combining the sound and the visual image of the haze, which is compared in turn to a line of poplars indicating the course of a river — the reader's attention is steered from sensorial impressions to the function of the place, that is to embrace the movement of regiments. This movement highlights, as if on a map, the essential elements of landscape. Proust's association between the construction of landscape and the military function is particularly striking given what scholars have affirmed thereafter about the birth of landscape as a cultural crossroad. According to Lacoste, in fact, we tend to think of landscapes as the view perceived from elevated points allowing for the observation of broad portions of space. Elevation and scope were also the conditions considered necessary in military strategy to select vantage points from which the enemies could be spotted, and their approach seen on time. When these vantage points lost their military function, they acquired an aesthetic relevance.¹⁵ Cueco shares the same idea of filiation, from a military to an aesthetic function, and adds: “le paysage est une vieille notion militaire qui codifie l'espace de conquête, le champ de bataille, la zone de combat.”¹⁶ Robert's digression on military strategy confirms this association, showing how the geography of a place can be symbolically invested with meanings going well beyond the literality of its objective description. By referring to this

¹³ Éric Bordas, “Un style dix-neuviémiste,” *L'Information grammaticale* 90 (2001): 33–34. Bordas introduces an example from Balzac's *Père Goriot* to clarify the use of this expression.

¹⁴ Referring to the hallucinatory nature of this prolonged sound, Anne Simon describes Doncières as a “ville fantôme, construite sur une rumeur dont elle conserve en son pavé la résonance infinie” (A. Simon, *Proust ou le réel retrouvé*, p. 251).

¹⁵ See Yves Lacoste, “À quoi sert le paysage ? Qu'est-ce qu'un beau paysage ?”, in *La Théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. by Alain Roger (Seysse: Champ Vallon, 1995), pp. 42–73 (p. 67).

¹⁶ Henri Cueco, “Approches du concept de paysage,” in *La Théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. by Alain Roger (Seysse: Champ Vallon, 1995), pp. 168–81 (p. 169).

continuity between the military and the aesthetic nature of landscapes, Saint-Loup tries to illustrate to his guest the most effective strategies adopted by commanders when preparing their battles. The protagonist, who cannot help assuming the perspective of the artist that he would like to be one day, seeks for his part some aesthetic beauty in Robert's theories. In order to enhance such a frame of reference, the latter uses the textual notion of the "palimpseste" (II, 408) to explain that every action taken during a battle is the result of the layering of ideas, contingent elements, previous knowledge that all contribute to determining its nature as "une espèce de décalque stratégique, un pastiche tactique" (II, 410) of some other battle. Among the conditions that play a role in directing military strategy, there is also the geographical context, including "l'étude de la position elle-même, des routes, des voies ferrées qu'elle commande, des ravitaillements qu'elle protège" (II, 409). Consequently, the battlefield becomes a place storing memories of the past and the setting of one single *typology* of battle *resonating* in all the actual battles that have taken place there.¹⁷ In his digression, Saint-Loup also compares battlefields to artists' "ateliers," defined as "lieux prédestinés" (II, 410), and the battle to a painting full of symbols requiring an effort of interpretation in order to defeat the antagonist. Finally, he draws Marcel's attention to the uniqueness of the place serving as a battlefield.

The rhetoric used by Saint-Loup to explain what a battlefield is has the effect of raising the content of his digression to an aesthetic level, thus legitimating its projection onto writing itself. In other words, military geography as expressed by Robert is governed by a rhetorical discourse that reassigns a symbolic value to neutral spaces. The intellectual operation suggested by his explanation consists in attributing meanings to space while describing it and reinforces Proust's awareness of the ontological value of the act of mapping — an act of description that is also a creation. Transferred onto a psychological level, the rhetorical experience of Doncières's military space allows the narrator to recognize the cognitive process underlying the ontological act that makes places find their location in the existential map of the subject. Most importantly, though, this expansion of the known world does not only correspond to a horizontal movement, but also to a vertical one — the formation of the palimpsest embodied by the concrete object of the battlefield.

This process of fixation of a palimpsestic space is obtained through the accumulation of images in the protagonist's memory. Doncières undergoes the same mental manipulation adding new elements to what is recognized as the main component of its landscape, which is a subjective construction dominated by a first auditory impression (the "buée sonore intermittente" and the "vibratilité musicale et guerrière"). Another remarkable view of the neighboring countryside — seen, once again, through a window — informs the reader that landscape is being raised to an artistic status:

Et le lendemain matin en m'éveillant, j'allai jeter par la fenêtre de Saint-Loup qui, située fort haut, donnait sur tout le pays, un regard de curiosité pour faire la connaissance de ma

¹⁷ Robert also says to the narrator: "S'il a été champ de bataille, c'est qu'il réunissait certaines conditions de situation géographique, de nature géologique, de défauts même propres à gêner l'adversaire (un fleuve, par exemple, le coupant en deux) qui en ont fait un bon champ de bataille" (II, 410).

voisine, la campagne, que je n'avais pas pu apercevoir la veille, parce que j'étais arrivé trop tard, à l'heure où elle dormait déjà dans la nuit. Mais de si bonne heure qu'elle fût éveillée, je ne la vis pourtant en ouvrant la croisée, comme on la voit d'une fenêtre de château, du côté de l'étang, qu'emmitouflée encore dans sa *douce et blanche robe matinale de brouillard* qui ne me laissait presque rien distinguer. Mais je savais qu'avant que les soldats qui s'occupaient des chevaux dans la cour eussent fini leur pansage, elle l'aurait *dévêtue*. (II, 380; emphasis added)

In this case, the countryside is eroticized through its personification as a female figure, for whom the mist is like a morning gown that will soon be removed. While the “hyperesthésie auditive” of the narrator, as Robert calls it, remains at the center of the sensorial apprehension of space in Doncières, the palette progressively widens to welcome other sensations, such as gustative and visual ones:

À travers les rideaux ajourés de givre, je ne quittais pas des yeux cette étrangère qui me regardait pour la première fois. Mais quand j'eus pris l'habitude de venir au quartier, *la conscience que la colline était là*, plus réelle par conséquent, même quand je ne la voyais pas, que l'hôtel de Balbec, que notre maison de Paris auxquels je pensais comme à des absents, comme à des morts, c'est-à-dire sans plus guère croire à leur existence, fit que, même sans que je m'en rendisse compte, sa forme réverbérée se profila toujours sur les moindres impressions que j'eus à Doncières et, pour commencer par ce matin-là, *sur la bonne impression de chaleur que me donna le chocolat préparé par l'ordonnance de Saint-Loup* dans cette chambre confortable qui avait l'air d'un centre optique pour regarder la colline (II, 380; emphasis added)

In addition, the narrator fixes his attention on the hill barely visible beyond the mist, so that the hill itself becomes a recurring presence of the mornings spent in Saint-Loup's room, even though it is not always actually seen. Gustative sensations add up to this image since the narrator usually drinks a hot chocolate while he observes the landscape. This meticulous construction of the outside space of the countryside, in which domesticity participates, furnishes a conspicuous example of the cognitive process put in place by the narrator. Interestingly, this construction also reaffirms the principle of landscape theory according to which “un paysage n'est jamais réductible à sa réalité physique.”¹⁸ As Roger underlines through the concept of “artialisation,” landscape is naturally open to transcendence, since it is primarily defined by its intrinsically aesthetic nature.¹⁹ Moreover, Cosgrove and Daniels conceive of landscape as “a cultural image, a

¹⁸ Alain Roger, *Court traité du paysage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 9.

¹⁹ According to Jacques Rancière, the birth of the “régime esthétique de l'art” between the 18th and the 19th century is deeply connected with the passage from the abstract or purely philosophical conception of nature to the concrete perception of its tangible forms through artistic objects such as gardens and landscapes, with consequences that range from the social to the political sphere, because “on ne touche pas à la nature sans toucher à la société qui est censée obéir à ses lois.” See J. Rancière, *Le Temps du paysage* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2020), p. 10.

pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings.”²⁰ Proust seems to have a similar take on spatial representation, at least on an individual level. The palimpsestic reasoning supporting such renditions becomes immediately clear:

Imbibant *la forme de la colline*, associé au *goût du chocolat* et à toute la trame de mes pensées d’alors, *ce brouillard*, sans que je pensasse le moins du monde à lui, vint *mouiller* toutes mes pensées de ce temps-là, *comme tel or inaltérable et massif* était resté allié à mes impressions de Balbec, ou *comme la présence voisine des escaliers extérieurs de grès noirâtre* donnait quelque grisaille à mes impressions de Combray. (II, 380; emphasis added)

All sensations associated with Doncières allow for the place to be fixed within a broader topographical network which also includes, in this case, Balbec and Combray. These two towns are also identified with the prominent visual sensations of golden sunlight and blackish sandstone, through which memory can easily recall them and create this comparative map. This representational tool, allowing for the compactness of spatial experience in the consciousness of the protagonist, is not founded on analogous sensorial elements — the presence of each memory in the map being granted by the uniqueness of the place — but on the cognitive process presiding over such construction and involving personal affectivity.

The tryptic formed at this point by Combray, Balbec and Doncières becomes a recurring one later in the third volume, when this geography is reiterated. This association is renewed on the day the protagonist is waiting to meet Mlle de Stermaria in Paris, another female character he had long desired to see. As often happens in the novel, action passes in the background while the workings of consciousness take on the primary role, together with the psychological phenomenology connected with the actual event. When he wakes up that day, the narrator sees again, “comme de la fenêtre de la caserne de Doncières, la brume mate, unie et blanche qui pendait gaîment au soleil, consistante et douce comme du sucre filé” (II, 684). This chronological and spatial interpolation²¹ is followed by a train of thoughts bringing the young man back to the other two towns: at first to Balbec, when he would wait to go to Rivebelle for his dinners with Saint-Loup, and then to Combray, where the wait would be accompanied by the pleasure of soon being plunged into the warmth of the sunlight announced by sounds heard from the window. While Mlle de Stermaria does not join him for their meeting, Saint-Loup arrives, fostering this recollection of past memories by his simple presence. Multiple evocations of

²⁰ Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, “Introduction: Iconography and Landscape,” in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1–10 (p. 1).

²¹ Isabelle Serça considers interpolation as one of the key features of Proust’s style. According to her, the chronological and textual displacement of fragments is the means through which memory is seen in action in the novel, making the coexistence of past and present visible. See I. Serça, “Mouvement de la mémoire/mouvement de l’écriture: la figure de l’interpolation chez Proust,” in *Proust, la mémoire et la littérature*, ed. Compagnon and Amadiou, pp. 137–56 (p. 142).

Doncières, Rivebelle and Combray pile up onto one another, causing a feeling of chronological and spatial disorientation. Memories of Rivebelle are marked by the happy thought of the women the protagonist would encounter at the restaurant; of Combray and Doncières, he recalls two typical impressions: “l’obscurité humide, tiède, sainte de crèche” of the former, and, once again, the mist of the latter (II, 691). The reflection that follows stands for the sudden interaction of the two cognitive operations determining spatial mapping — the network and the palimpsest, respectively identified with a horizontal and a vertical apprehension of space: “nous ne revivons pas nos années dans leur suite continue, jour par jour, mais dans le souvenir figé dans la fraîcheur ou l’insolation d’une matinée ou d’un soir, recevant l’ombre de tel site isolé, enclos, immobile, arrêté et perdu.” These fragments are so isolated from each other that it is possible to perceive between them “l’abîme d’une différence d’altitude, comme l’incompatibilité de deux qualités incomparables d’atmosphère respirées et de colorations ambiantes” (II, 692). Places that would be situated on a horizontal plan — bidimensionally represented on a map — are suddenly relocated on a vertical line, whose composition is not only spatially but also psychologically determined. Proust had already hinted at this psychological (and vertical) space during the Doncières episode, where the narrator reminds the reader that:

Les lieux fixes, contemporains d’années différentes, c’est en nous-même qu’il vaut mieux les trouver. C’est à quoi peuvent, dans une certaine mesure, nous servir une grande fatigue que suit une bonne nuit. Celles-là, pour nous faire descendre dans les galeries les plus souterraines du sommeil, où aucun reflet de la veille, aucune lueur de mémoire n’éclairent plus le monologue intérieur, si tant est que lui-même n’y cesse pas, retournent si bien le sol et le tuf de notre corps qu’elles nous font retrouver, là où nos muscles plongent et tordent leurs ramifications et aspirent la vie nouvelle, le jardin où nous avons été enfant. Il n’y a pas besoin de voyager pour le revoir, *il faut descendre pour le retrouver*. Ce qui a couvert la terre n’est plus sur elle, *mais dessous; l’excursion ne suffit pas pour visiter la ville morte, les fouilles sont nécessaires*. (II, 390; emphasis added)

It is clear that Proust is proposing an alternative model of spatial representation, one which does not deny the importance of geographical localization but which integrates it within a complex system, moving at once on a horizontal and on a vertical axis. Franco Farinelli calls this alternative grasp of the space of the earth a “chthonic” representation. As the geographer explains, in Ancient Greece a word other than “Gé” was used to refer to the earth; this word is “Ctón” and indicates the subterranean part that constitutes the earth under its surface. Subsequently, a chthonic representation is a representation that takes into account this verticality.²² My contention is that Proust looks for a very similar model, where different conceptions of geography are involved. Furthermore, the vertical projection of mapping figuratively suggests the idea of an interiorization of physical places, thus opening to a subjective perception of temporality. In his work on the aesthetics of landscape, Rosario Assunto explains that the experience of landscape is characterized by a nonlinear temporality abstracting the place itself from history and inscribing the subject into a metaphysical atemporality connected with

²² Franco Farinelli, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

their personal memories. As a consequence, while the bare place is taken into the flux of history, landscape eludes it by finding its location in the individual consciousness.²³

To conclude, Doncières's military geography offers an invaluable example of a non-neutral space embodying the intersection between geographical localization — a network of places — and the palimpsest, for which every place is made up of several layers of meanings to be deciphered.²⁴ Doncières becomes the tangential point where two different conceptions of space are introduced in the narrative: on the one hand, the simple rendition of geographers' space, where the narrator moves from one point to another; on the other hand, the possibility of a vertical space serving the representation of interiority. Within this space, in fact, the psychological relevance of sensorial elements generates a geographical experience that goes well beyond the mere description of a place. Not objective as geographers' maps should be, but, on the contrary, radically subjective in the way they are conceived, built and staged piece by piece throughout the narrative, Proustian geographies are biased and changeable because they are bound up with the subject's process of becoming.

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²³ Assunto associates historical time with urban settings, whereas he speaks of natural landscape as “a meta-spatial space clasping the city in its embrace.” See R. Assunto, *Il Paesaggio e l'estetica* (Milan: Novecento Editore, 1973), vol. I, p. 95. My translation.

²⁴ Anne Simon refers to the palimpsest as a hermeneutical tool coexisting in perpetual conflict with the other main model represented by the network. In philosophical terms, Simon makes the case for a “surimpression” of series of images that is never perfect, since habit always has to come to terms with “l'évolution et son imprévu” (A. Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 253). While I refer to the same concepts, my intention is to suggest their relevance at another level: Simon rightfully employs them to encompass an experience of *interpretation*; on the contrary, I assign them an ontological relevance for the *creation* of space as the foundation of the book as a whole.