

**I**f we ask: What can be known about jealousy? doubtless answers could be accumulated from official disciplines (for example, psychoanalysis, whose clinical technique and theoretical framework dictated Daniel Lagache's monumental study, *La jalousie amoureuse*) as well as from "unofficial" kinds of knowledge. I will announce at the outset, however, that I have no knowledge of jealousy, official, unofficial, or otherwise; more precisely, I know that jealousy has nothing to do with knowledge, or rather (and this is not, I admit, quite the same thing), what jealousy knows is that it knows nothing.

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## **JEALOUSY WANTS PROOF**

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Although I have no knowledge of it, I am nevertheless going to pretend for a little while that, on the subject of jealousy and knowledge, it is possible to say something else than that the one knows nothing about the other. Knowing about the other is, of course, what jealousy wants to do. It has the recognizable form, therefore, if not of a positive knowledge, then of a search for knowledge, indeed one of the most absorbed and focused forms of that search that may be observed. The "object" of its search, however, that concerning which it seeks irrefutable knowledge, is never a class or species of phenomena, a generalized condition, or a natural law. Its concern, rather, is to know fully and without remainder the other in his, in her singularity, that by reason of which he is, she is this one and no other. Jealousy is "unscientific" inasmuch as what it knows — or thinks it knows — has no validity beyond the singular being on which it concentrates all its efforts. On the other hand, no less than science, in the latter's "objective", that is, disinterested or indifferent posture, the

jealous desire to know the beloved is constrained by the limits of the phenomenality of the object. The other, the beloved appears; appearing, he or she may also disappear or dissimulate. The rules for judging the reliability of appearance – probability, logic, verisimilitude, reasonableness, and so forth – supply the tools of jealous research, but they are always double-edged since they may likewise have served to create the possibly false appearance jealousy wants to pierce. What is more, precisely because they are rules, that is, because they have a general validity or extension, they are not designed to account for the deviations of singularity, *a fortiori* of this singularity and no other, which, as we said, is all the jealous desire seeks to know. That desire to know is conditioned, then, by the impossibility of repeating in a knowable representation the singular determinations of its "object". As Proust's narrator recalls again and again in that monument to jealousy that is the *Recherche du temps perdu*, these singular determinations approach infinity, making of jealousy always an experience of one's own finitude:

How many persons, cities, roads jealousy makes us eager thus to know! It is a thirst for knowledge thanks to which, with regard to various isolated points, we end by acquiring every possible notion in turn except the one that we require ...

And I realized the impossibility which love comes up against. We imagine that it has as its object a being that can be laid down in front of us, enclosed within a body. Alas, it is the extension of that being to all the point in space and time that it has occupied and will occupy. If we do not possess its contact with this or that place, this or that hour, we do not possess that being. But we cannot touch all these points... Hence mistrust, jealousy, persecutions. (Proust 1982: 80-81)<sup>1</sup>

430

In a moment, we will have to say a word about the status of such examples. For if jealousy is the "thirst for knowledge" concerning a singular object, made impossible/possible precisely by that singularity, then the experience Proust or another may

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<sup>1</sup> "Combien de personnes, de villes, de chemins, la jalousie nous rend ainsi avides de connaître! Elle est une soif de savoir grâce à laquelle, sur des points isolés les uns des autres, nous finissons par avoir successivement toutes les notions possibles sauf celle que nous voudrions... Et je comprenais l'impossibilité où se heurte l'amour. Nous nous imaginons qu'il a pour objet un être qui peut être couché devant nous, enfermé dans un corps. Hélas! Il est l'extension de cet être à tous les points de l'espace et du temps que cet être a occupés et occupera. Si nous ne possédons pas son contact avec tel lieu, avec telle heure, nous ne le possédons pas. Or nous ne pouvons toucher tous ces points.... De là défiance, la jalousie, les persécutions. *La Prisonnière*, vol III (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1988), pp. 593; 607-08.

describe will conform only up to a certain point to a general and thus knowable model, one which may be approximated or illustrated by examples. At some point, that is, every example of jealousy will take its form from the infinitely singular being which it pursues and which appears to retreat before it. What we read, then, no longer has the status of example of some larger condition called jealousy, but requires that we apprehend it in a different way, which will have to be specified.

For the time being, however, we will pick up on Proust's suggestion here that the jealousy his narrator describes arises from the impossibility of *touching* all "the points in time and space" with which the beloved has come into contact. It would seem that it is not precisely the sense of touch that is being invoked here, rather touch is standing in for perceptual experience in general of time and space. "But we cannot touch all these points" means simply no one can reproduce the perceptual history of another. And yet, of course, it is above all a matter of touching

that concerns the jealous lover, for whom all the sensory experiences of the other may be reduced to the unfaithful touches given and received. Be that as it may, jealousy has its space, as Proust outlines here, in what could be called a perceptual gap wherein the other is never simply perceivable in the *present*, here and now, like a being "that can be laid down in front of use, enclosed within a body". The lover's jealousy is conditioned therefore not by a perception, but by the non-presentable and non-perceivable that divides his present by the other's time, past and future, by "all the points in space and time that it has occupied and will occupy". It is in this sense that I have understood Derrida's remark in *Glas*: "Not seeing what one sees, seeing what one cannot see and what cannot present itself, that is the jealous operation. Jealousy always has to do with some trace, never with perception." (Derrida 1986: 215)<sup>2</sup> And yet, perhaps precisely because its operation is not that of a perception but of an unrepresentable trace, jealousy seems to keep all the senses on alert,

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2 "Ne pas voir ce qu'on voit, voir ce qu'on ne peut pas voir et qui ne peut pas se présenter, telle est l'opération jalouse. Elle a toujours affaire à de la trace, jamais à de la perception." I have also commented on this passage in "Reading Between the Blind", intro. to *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, pp. xxxv ff). That essay was prompted by, and is a reflection on, the phrase "In everything I talk about, jealousy is at stake, it which one may read at the end of Derrida's text on Lévinas "At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am". The present paper, which might be considered an inupdate of the earlier one, has, as one of its indispensable conditions, the reading of Derrida's ongoing work and in particular *Mémoires d'aveugle, L'autoportrait et autres ruines* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990) and the seminar on "Testimony" presented at U.C. Irvine, 1993-94.

as if through redoubled effort it could close the gap that has been opened in the very sense of the present, and first of all the present of the self, self-presence. This heightened demand on the senses would aim to supply the self with that sense certainty whereby it can once again believe it knows what it knows and knows it to be real. What it wants is proof, proved by the senses, but since the jealous operation subsists on traces, it must work to see "what one cannot see and what cannot present itself". Once again, Proust could supply numerous confirmations of this blinded sight, but before citing again that inexhaustible source, we'll turn to a no less consecrated example of our theme: Othello.

What would it mean to say that the jealous operation here has everything to do with the trace, and nothing to do with perception? And therefore that it is not jealousy of anyone in the present or who has been present or can become present, that it is not jealousy of any presence? At first approach, it would seem to mean that Othello is jealous of a fiction spun by the jealous and spider-like Iago ("With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly..."; "So I will turn her virtue into pitch,/And out of her own goodness make the net/ That shall enmesh them all"). But look closer at this web: Othello demands "ocular proof" ("Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore;/ Be sure of it: give me the ocular proof"), to which Iago replies "It is

impossible you should see this". Now, that "impossibility" floats between the sense in which Iago can understand it (impossible to see because non-existent, untrue) and the sense Othello is induced to give it (impossible to see because too well hidden). But it is a third "impossible" sense that holds these two together and makes them interchangeable, much as Iago and Othello are interchangeable, each acting in the other's place, through a kind of dual and diabolical possession. The third sense would be a radical or necessary rather than contingent impossibility, the impossibility of a joining to the other without remainder, of an appropriation of the other's place, through a kind of dual and diabolical possession. The third sense would be a radical or necessary rather than contingent impossibility, the impossibility of a joining to the other without remainder, of an appropriation of the other's difference without expropriation of the self's sameness: "O curse of marriage!" exclaims Othello, "That we can call these delicate creatures ours/ And not their appetites!" Joining and dividing all the jealous couples in the play (Othello and Desdemona, but also Othello and Iago, Iago and Emilia, Iago and Cassio, Cassio and Bianca) is a web of traces of the unrepresentable, the "impossible-to-see" ocular proof. Its place is taken – the unrepresentable is presented, that is, it is made to disappear in its appearance – by Desdemona's handkerchief.

This highly artful artifact (Othello refers to it as a web) is a veil whose folds envelop the question of Desdemona's true nature – or, simply, the question of truth. When Iago says he saw the handkerchief in Cassio's hand, Othello responds: "Now do I see 'tis true." He sees nothing, of course, for there is nothing to see but a web, a net, a veil, a tissue of illusions and phantasms, the figure and the trace of his own jealousy. And the handkerchief passes from hand to hand: from Desdemona to Emilia, from Emilia to Iago, from Iago to Cassio, from Cassio to Bianca where it disappears in a fit of the latter's jealousy. This visible trajectory, however, which follows the movement of jealousy in a restricted or determined sense, is itself determined by a point of origin that, precisely, is not a point but a fathomless mystery that recedes beyond the light of reason with its demand for "ocular proof". Othello recounts for Desdemona how this enigmatic object came into his hands. The handkerchief, he tells her, had been given to his mother by an uncanny Egyptian, and it was said to hold a charm that would, as long as it was kept safe, prevent her from ever having any cause for jealousy. It thus guaranteed the bond between Othello's parents; it was the seal of their hymen. As she was dying, Othello's mother gave it in turn to her son and bade him to give it to his own wife.

Woven in "prophetic fury" by an ageless sibyl from silk spun by hallowed worms and dyed in "mummy, which the skillful/ Conserved of maidens' hearts", the thing inspires in he who receives it a kind of awe or terror ("there's magic in the web of it", says Othello) that he passes on to Desdemona with his gift: "To lose or give't away were such perdition/ As nothing else could match." After Othello, in a mounting rage, has pressed her to produce this "ocular proof" and Emilia has asked "Is not this man jealous?", Desdemona replies: "I never saw this before. Sure, there's some wonder in this handkerchief." Her response hits the mark of this jealousy which is tied less to its apparent or present object, Desdemona, than to the wonder of a trace of that which cannot be, or must not be, looked upon: a mother's union, some uncanny marriage between death and desire.

To quote one last time from *Glas*, perhaps Derrida's most jealously designed book, "One is thus jealous only of the mother or of death. Never of a man or a woman as such." (Derrida 1986: 134)<sup>3</sup> By adding to our picture of the jealous operation the elements of the mother, death, and a certain blindness, have we then begun to discern beneath its apparent traits an Oedipal model? Freud's Oedipus, but also *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for as Proust's narrator conjectures, somewhat

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3 "On n'est donc jaloux que de la mère ou de la mort. Jamais d'un homme ou d'une femme en tant que tels" (152).

disingenuously perhaps: "Jealousy is often only an anxious need to be tyrannical applied to matters of love." (Proust 1982: 86)<sup>4</sup> He then immediately goes on to speculate whether his model in tyranny has not been his father. But we are going to continue to defer this question of jealousy's model until we have considered other so-called examples. We will go next to a visual medium, film, which may be able to take us closer, at least in appearance, to the functioning of what the jealous Othello calls "ocular proof". This medium, which is a technical apparatus, a prosthetic supplement for the deficient, or simply finite sense of sight, will also introduce us into the realm of visual or video surveillance with which the jealous operation can begin to dream of finally seeing what cannot present itself.

The film *Proof* (1991) by Australian filmmaker Jocelyn Moorhouse has, besides its title, many claims on our interest, even though one might plausibly describe it without any overriding reference to jealousy. Here is my own brief description: In the first shot, we see a young man, Martin, walking down the street with a blind man's cane and a camera slung over his shoulder. He soon meets another young man, Andy, in the restaurant where the latter works. Martin takes numerous pictures of Andy at this first meeting and when the photographs are developed, he

finds Andy again to ask him to describe each one succinctly. These descriptions are then typed by Martin on braille tape and affixed to the back of each photograph. Martin and Andy's friendship will develop around this transaction which Andy agrees to perform on a regular basis. Asked to explain his photographic habit, so peculiar for a blind man, Martin replies that the labeled snapshots are proof. "Of what?" asks Andy. "That what's the photograph is what was there.... This is proof that what I sensed is what you saw, through your eyes. The truth." Once Andy has accepted the task of describing Martin's photographs, the latter says to him: "Andy, you must never lie to me." "Why would I do that?", asks Andy. In place of an answer, the film goes into a flashback: a small boy standing before a window through which streams sunlight. One hears a woman's voice beside him; it describes the sky, a garden, an empty birdbath. We see the woman, evidently the boy's mother. He asks her if the man is there raking leaves. "Yes. Can you hear him?" "No", replies the child, "he's not there". The mother then asks the same question Andy asked before this flashback began: "Why would I lie to you?" And the child answers, scornfully: "Because you can." The flashback thus sets up a structure of repetition, in which the honest Andy replaces the lying mother. In fact, this structure has al-

434

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4 "La jalousie n'est souvent qu'un inquiet besoin de tyrannie appliqué aux choses de l'amour" (598).

ready been put in place through Martin's relation to his housekeeper Celia, whose persistent sexual advances he takes a perverse pleasure in rebuffing. A similar use of flashback has established a reversed repetition: the same small child tracing with his hand the outline of his sleeping mother's face and neck; she awakes, scolds him, and grabs his hand just as it was descending toward her breast. Reversing and repeating this scene of sexual provocation, Celia responds to Martin's refusal of her explicit offers (she places his hand on her breast, he withdraws it coolly) by a kind of fairly petty torture to which his blindness makes him vulnerable. Meanwhile, Celia soon learns of Martin's growing friendship with Andy and, in jealous reaction, insinuates herself between them, which causes Andy to lie to his friend a first time without a very clear motive. This lie concerns a photograph that Martin takes in a public garden; Andy and Celia were caught together by the camera's eye without Martin realizing that either of them were visible in the frame. When asked to describe this photo, Andy lies and says there is no one in the picture. Celia contrives to have the same photo described to Martin by another, and he then learns of Andy's lie. At the same time, he learns that they have been making love together behind his back. In the face of

this betrayal, Martin chases both Andy and Celia away. There are two other flashback scenes that align this betrayal once again with the mother's. In the first, she tells him that she is going to die and can no longer take care of him. The child questions her and then accuses her of lying to cover up the fact that she no longer wishes to see him, she is ashamed of him. This is followed by a shot of the child before a closed coffin; he touches it, raps on its lid and sides and then says in a low voice: "It's hollow." At the end of the film, Martin sends Celia away definitively but reconciles with Andy. Their reconciliation is sealed when Martin asks Andy to describe one last photograph, which is in fact the first photo he ever took at the age of ten: Andy looks at it closely and then describes a garden on a sunny autumn day, a man beside an empty birdbath raking leaves.<sup>5</sup>

The jealous operation that sustains the interest of this film is Martin's: it is the device of blindness, which is relayed by the supplements that are the camera lens and the seeing eyes of others. The camera is designed to see in Martin's place: literally, he places it before his eyes, it records a scene from what would be his point of view. But its prosthetic function is divided: it replaces Martin's sight but also his mother's voice. The camera

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<sup>5</sup> It is significant that the film's spectator is never shown either this important photograph, nor its original: the garden described by Martin's mother.

does not lie, the mother does, or at least she can. On the other hand, the pictures do not speak, they cannot say "I see" and as a result they have finally nothing to do with sight. The camera does not lie because it does not speak, but it thereby also cannot tell the truth because it cannot see. Sight depends not on an eye but on an "I", on language, and thus on a relation to others. If Martin cannot say what he sees through the camera's prosthesis, it is because he cannot see as the other, he cannot see what the other sees, and yet it is only in his relation to others that he can see at all for himself. In this way, the film isolates what we may call a normal or necessary, rather than abnormal or contingent blindness as the condition of sight. When I see the other, I do not see what the other sees, I do not see the other seeing but seen; at the same time, I see not because I have eyes but because I have an "I", or rather because I have an "I" always only in the mode of not having it, in the mode of its expropriating-appropriating relation to others. This condition of sight is also the condition of jealousy, which is classically diagnosed as a reaction of fear before the possibility of being dispossessed of what one possesses.<sup>6</sup>

Here is another exchange between Martin and Andy that goes to the point of this expropriating-appropriating relation. Martin

is recounting to Andy the scene we have been given in flashback in which his mother describes the garden through a window:

"Every morning and every afternoon my mother would describe this garden to me. I saw the seasons come and go through her eyes. I used to question her so thoroughly, always trying to catch her in a lie. I never did. But by taking the photo I knew that I could, one day."

"Why would your mother lie to you?"

"To punish me for being blind."

"Does it really matter if your mother lied to you about some garden?"

"Yes. It was *my* world."

"It was *my* world": it is difficult to render, as one must try to do, the intonation of that possessive which gives the sense here. The emphasis floats between a privative meaning – it was all I had, my world was nothing but the one described to me – and a meaning of violent appropriation: the world was mine exclusively, it belonged to me alone, and she had no right to distort it or change the least detail in its landscape. If we cannot decide between these meanings, between the complaint of deprivation and the claim of possession, it is because possession here must pass through dispossession, the one relaying

436

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<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere I have analyzed elements of the classical definition of jealousy, particularly insofar as it is generally differentiated from envy: "One is jealous of what one possesses and envious of what others possess", in



the other, supplementing the other, replacing the other just as the mother's sight, her "I see ..." relays and replaces Martin's. As he tells Andy, he "saw the seasons come and go through her eyes", which is to say, his world was also not his world, and that was the condition of there being any "my world" at all. This condition, then, is not in itself or not solely, essentially a deprivation, in the sense, for example, in which Martin is deprived of sight; at the same time, this constitutive blindness also gives the only possibility of having sight, of having an "I see" for anyone including Martin, who can also say without the slightest hesitation or apparent irony: "I saw" as in "I saw the seasons come and go".<sup>7</sup>

There would be much more to say about this film if we had the time. I have not touched at all on the question of how we read the film as film, and not just as story or theme. And yet, precisely by its theme, the film is implicated in everything it projects concerning truth and lie, seeing and saying, possession, dispossession, and jealousy. If we were to cross through the fiction's frame, we might find it significant that the film was written, directed, and produced by women (and is thus something of an exception to an almost unwritten rule). But it is not this fact alone that urges us to look at the film as staging a play about gender. Martin's mother and Celia, who together figure the torment of his blindness, are each the target of his denial or refusal of an affective tie. The film seems to leave little doubt that, in refusing them both, Martin conflates Celia with his mother, and the former's sexual advances with the latter's possible (but never proven) lies and above all with her greatest lie, her own death, that ultimate dispossession which leaves Martin unable to

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d'Alembert's succinct formulation. Cf. my "Deconstruction and Feminism: A Repetition" forthcoming in *Derrida and Feminism*, ed. Nancy Holland \*\*etc.

<sup>7</sup> Martin's character throughout the film is developed as having a heightened and acute awareness of language, in contrast with Andy who must learn from Martin how to describe what he sees in less imprecise language. In particular, he makes Andy aware of visual metaphors when the latter says to him, as they are taking leave of each other, "See you around". Martin replies: "So to speak".

mourn the other in himself, the other who is himself, his eyes, and his world, leaves him to cling instead to a truth and proof that he, at least, is not dead, that he is there. The denial of mourning and the denial of these women are run together in a same denial of the other's traces in the self, that by which we are possessed and dispossessed of the very "I" who says: I am, I am here, I sense, I see, I know. At the same time, this double denial is made to stand as a kind of supporting contrast for the only affection and tie that Martin does not refuse, his friendship with Andy. I have not yet mentioned the scene in which this friendship is cemented most firmly in place: it is, no doubt not coincidentally, a scene at the movies, specifically a drive-in theater to which Andy has brought Martin so that he may have the experience for the first time of hearing someone describe moving pictures to him. The film they see together, and that Andy describes with great delight and exuberant pleasure, is what is commonly called a slasher movie: nubile and half-dressed girls are, one after the other, tracked down and killed in some horrible fashion by a sociopathic villain, man or boy.<sup>8</sup> The friendship that will from then on unite them is, however, owing less to the experience of viewing this film together, through Andy's eyes and captioned descriptions, than to an incidental confrontation

with some other movie-goers who mistake the two friends for a gay couple and begin to beat on the car, on Andy, and force them to flee the theater. This leads to a series of highly comic scenes that end with the two laughing uncontrollably together, which is the only time we see Martin laugh in the course of the film. It is a moving sequence. But what exactly moves the viewer in this moving picture? Or rather who moves us, if not the moviemakers with their fictional devices, their "lies", if you will, that give us to see as well the truth of Martin's truth, the masculine bond forged over against the background of the refusal of a woman's always possibly lying words, but also of the denial that this bond of friendship is a homoerotic one, while another screen receives faked images of young women dying for the viewer's pleasure? The two fictions, the two movies — the one we are watching and the one they are watching — frame between them the level of the real, the truth ("the proof that what I sensed is what you saw through your eyes. The truth."), which is depicted as a truth of male friendship, without women, without desire, without jealousy, but not without love or trust or pleasure, and not altogether without death. Yet the screened deaths are visibly faked, which is why they can produce pleasure along with terror; none need mourn what never had any life in

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<sup>8</sup> A less cursory reading of the film would have to add to these several determinations of the scene's significance that of another, similar scene between Martin and Celia: the latter has brought Martin to a concert hall

to experience his first live concert. When the first measures of Beethoven's Fifth are sounded, Martin says "My Go", and reaches for his heart. Celia is moved to tears by his reaction. But instead of sealing some bond between them, this experience is followed in the next sequence by Martin's most vigorous rejection of Celia's most aggressive attempts to arouse Martin's desire for her.

<sup>9</sup> For a brilliant working through of prosthetic operations, in film, in fiction, in "life", see the work of David Wills, in particular "De la lettre au pied", in *Le passage des frontières: Autour du travail de Jacques Derrida*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 1994), and *Prosthesis*, forthcoming, Stanford University Press.

<sup>10</sup> "La jalousie qui a un bandeau sur les yeux n'est pas seulement impuissante à rien découvrir dans les ténèbres qui l'enveloppent, elle est encore un de ces supplices où la tâche est à recommencer sans cesse." (III, 657)

truth. But do we see the truth? Can we see the truth? Is the truth what we see? Through whose eyes do we see the seasons change?

By leaving us with such questions, the film, I think, does something rare: it uses visual technology and technique to show the jealous search for truth operating in the blind relay between sense perception and its necessary prostheses or supplements.<sup>9</sup> It shows, that is, the blindness with which one sees and which all the technological supplements imaginable cannot fully correct or overcome. What jealous lover in our advanced technological societies has not dreamed of a total surveillance device, a video *cum* audio *cum* total sensory monitoring apparatus that could somehow faithfully record and relay everything the beloved experiences? That such surveillance, monitoring, and information-gathering technology is also increasingly the dream of many or perhaps even all of our social institutions, not just the police, that it drives an ever-larger sector of the global commercial economy, that it has dramatically heightened the importance of the media in political affairs, all of this might suggest that we should take a far wider view of the question than we can see from the vantage point of one jealous lover's torment or obsession. Nevertheless, I am going to return to Proust for a final example, not least of all because he is acutely aware of the possibilities that new technologies provide for the expanding operation of jealousy.

Marcel, like Martin, is blind. He cannot see the only thing he wants to see: Albertine, in her entirety. "Jealousy, which is blindfold, is not merely powerless to discover anything in the darkness that enshrouds it; it is also one of those tortures where the task must be incessantly repeated." (Proust 1982: 147-148).<sup>10</sup> "I should

have liked, not to tear off her dress to see her body, but through her body to see and read the whole diary of her memories and her future passionate assignations." (Proust 1982: 89).<sup>11</sup> Blind, Marcel must resort to other devices, other means to attempt to overcome the invisibility of Albertine. Or at least it seems that the means he turns to are other. At several points, a distinction is drawn between knowledge drawn from the senses, and above all the sense of sight, and knowledge that relies on interpreting what others say, on rational deduction. For example:

The testimony of my senses, if I had been in the street at that moment, would perhaps have informed me that the lady had not been with Albertine. But I had managed to learn that it was not as she said only by one of those chains of reasoning (in which the words of people in whom we have confidence insert strong links), and not by the tes-

timony of my senses. To invoke this testimony of the senses I should have had to be in the street at that particular moment, and I had not been. One can imagine, however, that such a hypothesis is not improbable. And I should have known that Albertine had lied. But is this absolutely certain even then? The testimony of the senses is also an operation of the mind in which conviction creates what is obvious.... But still I could have gone out and passed in the street at the moment Albertine said that, that evening (having not seen me), she had walked a short way with the lady. A strange darkness would have clouded my mind, I should hardly even have sought to understand by what optical illusion I had failed to perceive the lady, and I should not have been greatly surprised to find myself mistaken, for the stellar universe is easier to comprehend

440

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11 "... j'aurais voulu non pas arracher sa robe pour voir son corps, mais à travers son corps voir tout ce bloc-notes de ses souvenirs et de ses prochains et ardents rendez-vous." (III, 601)

12 "Ce qu'elle disait, ce qu'elle avouait avait tellement les mêmes caractères que les formes de l'évidence — ce que nous voyons, ce que nous apprenons d'une manière irréfutable — qu'elle semait ainsi dans les intervalles de la vie les épisodes d'une autre vie dont je ne soupçonnais pas alors la fausseté. Il y aurait du reste beaucoup à discuter ce mot de fausseté. L'univers est vrai pour nous tous et dissemblable pour chacun. Le témoignage de mes sens, si j'avais été dehors à ce moment, m'aurait peut-être appris que la dame n'avait pas fait quelques pas avec Albertine. Mais si j'avais su le contraire, c'était par une de ces chaînes de raisonnement (où les paroles de ceux en qui nous avons confiance insèrent de fortes mailles) et non par le témoignage des sens. Pour invoquer ce témoignage des sens il eut fallu que j'eusse été précisément dehors, ce qui n'avait pas eu lieu. On peut imaginer pourtant qu'une telle hypothèse n'est pas invraisemblable. Et j'aurais su alors qu'Albertine avait menti. Est-ce bien sûr encore? Le témoignage des sens est lui aussi une opération de l'e-

than the real action of beings, especially of the beings we love... (trans. modified, Proust 1982: 187-188).<sup>12</sup>

The phrase "t,moignage des sens", which I have translated as "testimony of the senses", occurs four times in this passage. It is first distinguished from "chains of reasoning (in which the words of people in whom we have confidence insert strong links)" and then declared to be a similar "operation of mind in which conviction creates what is obvious". In other words, the senses, or rather the sense of sight which is the only kind of sense perception invoked here, gives testimony, it speaks, and sets off thereby the same "chain of reasoning" as do the words of others. Like Descartes who can question whether the man we see in the street is indeed a man and not a specter or an automaton, Proust is led to concede here that "testimony of the senses" must be submitted to an operation of mind no less than the discourse of "people in whom we have confidence". To illustrate or prove his point, he will go on to give two examples of mistaken perception, but appropriately the sense in question in both examples is not sight but hearing, and specifically the hearing or mishearing of words.<sup>13</sup> This brings even closer to the surface the structure of prosthetic supplementarity whereby sight and speech, perception and reasoning, but also what I supposedly see for myself and what others say to me are changing places. And in the process, it is the very self who sees and hears that seems to be dispossessed of what it can know of itself. I say "dispossessed", but it is by being possessed as one says of someone who hears voices that they are possessed by some alien influence. And indeed this is what has happened to Marcel in his

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sprit où la conviction crée l'évidence... Mais enfin j'aurais pu être sorti et passer dans la rue à l'heure où Albertine m'aurait dit, ce soir (ne m'ayant pas vu), qu'elle avait fait quelques pas avec la dame. Une obscurité sacrée se fut emparée de mon esprit, j'aurais mis en doute que je l'avais vue seule, à peine aurais-je cherché à comprendre par quelle illusion d'optique je n'avais pas aperçu la dame, et je n'aurais pas été autrement étonné de m'être trompé, car le monde des astres est moins difficile à connaître que les actions réelles des êtres, surtout des êtres que nous aimons..." (III, 694). This passage differs considerably in the translation, which translates the 1954 Pléiade edition and not the more recent 1988 edition. The translation given here is modified.

13 "We have often seen her sense of hearing convey to Françoise not the word that was uttered but what she thought to be its correct form, which was enough to prevent her from hearing the implicit correction in a superior pronunciation. (ibid.). The other example is the word 'pistière' which the butler hears instead of 'pissotière'." Implicitly, Proust seems to want to contain this kind of error within the servant class, with its inferior language skills.

struggle to possess Albertine, to possess her without remainder, without difference, to possess her as himself and only himself, and thus finally to dispossess himself of her.<sup>14</sup>

The image which I sought, which gave me peace, against which I would have liked to die, was no longer that of Albertine having an unknown life, it was that of an Albertine as known to me as it was possible to be ... an Albertine who did not reflect a distant world, but desired nothing else ... than to be with me, to be exactly like me, an Albertine who was the image precisely of what was mine and not of the unknown. (Proust 1982: 69-70).<sup>15</sup>

But it is Marcel who is possessed and possessed of words, which are spoken by "the testimony of his senses" or by Albertine, ei-

ther of which may be lying. Albertine speaks, she speaks in him, but also she speaks to others, she is outside, outside him, and thus he is beside himself. Little wonder he prefers her sleeping form: "I felt at such moments that I had possessed her more completely, like an unconscious and unresisting object of mute nature" (Proust 1982: 67).<sup>16</sup>

The sleeping Albertine is not only mute, she is an immobile body, no longer moving between "all the points in space and time that it has occupied and will occupy", no longer under the sway of the sign of speed. Speed, the speed of movement and communications through space and time, is one of Proust's principal themes in *La Prisonnière*: automobiles, airplanes, the telegraph, the telephone. There are, in fact, numerous switching points one could indicate between the operation of jealousy and the increased

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14 In his recent study of Proust, *La Jalousie: Étude sur l'imaginaire proustien* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1993), Nicolas Grimaldi attempts to analyze the paradoxes of possession without ever putting in question the status of his own assumption that, in the sexual act, the woman is somehow literally "possessed" by the man. Because he uses this metaphor throughout as if it denoted a self-evident event, he is reduced to repeating as analysis what are in fact the most discouraging commonplaces that buttress the phallogocentric vision of desirable femininity, for example: "ainsi toute femme enfin connue et possédée réduite à la réalité de sa propre personne la vastitude du monde qu'elle nous avait fait imaginer" (33). The "nous" of that final clause, an exclusive, unreflected, masculine nous which is constant throughout the book, says it all.

15 "L'image que je cherchais, où je me reposais, contre laquelle j'aurais voulu mourir, ce n'était plus l'Albertine ayant une vie inconnue, c'était une Albertine aussi connue de moi qu'il était possible ... c'était une Albertine ne reflétant pas un monde lointain, mais ne désirant rien d'autre ... qu'être avec moi, toute pareille à moi, une Albertine image de ce qui précisément était mien et non de l'inconnu." (III, 583)

16 "Il me semblait à ces moments-là que je venais de la posséder plus complètement, comme une chose inconsciente et sans résistance de la muette nature." (III, 581)

speed of communications technology, as if Marcel were suffering from a new form of the *mal de siècle* at the dawn of the telecommunications era. Albertine torments him by the speed with which she can be transported elsewhere, by the fact that her voice and her words can be carried many miles away even as she apparently remains in his presence, and these effects of teletechnology are no less dismaying when they occur through the relays of her memory or her desire than when they pass through the technical pathways of the telephone or automobile. The one apparatus plugs into and relays the other. Albertine's mobility, her transformations, her multiplicity, all are read under the sign of the speed and even the speed of light: "O girls, O successive rays in the swirling vortex wherein we throb with emotion on seeing you reappear while barely recognizing you, in the dizzy velocity of light" (Proust, 1982: 58); "To understand the emotions which they arouse ... we must realize that they are not immobile but in motion, and add to their person a sign corresponding to that which in physics denotes speed" (Proust 1982: 573, 599).<sup>17</sup> More troubling than the speed of light perhaps, though less quick, is the speed of sound, and the relays of the telephone, that instrument that Marcel ap-

proaches with trepidation, each time invoking the "irascible deities" whose handmaidens are the switchboard operators, those girls whose disembodied voices pronounce the fate reserved for his communications. We will take just one example.

On the phone with Andrée, Albertine's more or less trusted chaperone, Marcel has let his mind wonder off into its jealous obsession, a distraction provoked by his own pronunciation of the name of his beloved. Having said her name over the phone, he is reminded of the envy he once felt when he heard Swann say Odette's name to him, an envy for the "entirely possessive sense" which the name had on Swann's lips. But rather than experiencing what he imagined to be Swann's pleasure at possessing the beloved so totally, Marcel utters Albertine's name only to find himself chasing its bearer in his mind through all the relays of a vast worldwide telecommunications network, stretching backward and forward in time. I will quote once again the passage with which I began this text and this trajectory, where Marcel laments the impossibility of making contact with all the points that Albertine has touched in her other lives, in her life as other. Read in context, we can now hear the stress of its distress placed on the impossi-

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17 "... ô jeunes filles, o rayon successif dans le tourbillon où nous palpitons de vous voir reparaître en ne vous reconnaissant qu'à peine, dans la vitesse vertigineuse de la lumière; iuPour comprendre les émotions qu'ils donnent... il faut calculer qu'ils sont non pas immobiles, mais en mouvement, et ajouter à leur personne un signe correspondant à ce au'en physique est le signe qui signifie vitesse." (III, 573, 599)

bility of retrieving all the calls made in Albertine's name over that network; but it is also the distress of a voice that, rather than venture out over the lines that stretch infinitely into the distance, keeps to itself and thus risks losing contact altogether:

And I realized the impossibility which love comes up against. We imagine that it has as its object a being that can be laid down in front of us, enclosed within a body. Alas, it is the extension of that being to all the points in space and time that it has occupied and will occupy. If we do not possess its contact with this or that place, this or that hour, we do not possess that thing. But we cannot touch all these points.

But already one of the irascible deities with the breathtakingly agile hand maidens was becoming irritated, not because I was speaking but because I was saying nothing.

"See here, it's been free all the time you've been on the line; I am going to cut you off."

However, she did nothing of the sort but, evoking André's presence, enveloped it, like the great poet that a damsel of the telephone always is, in the atmosphere peculiar to the home, the district, the very life itself of Albertine's friend.

"Is that you?" asked Andréa, whose voice was projected towards me with an instantane-

ous speed by the goddess whose privilege is to make sound swifter than lightning. (trans. modified, Proust 1982: 95-96)<sup>18</sup>

Because we too now risk getting cut off, I will try to speed up the conclusion.

I have put forward what seem to be two different explanations of the jealous operation. On the one hand, and to begin with, I said that jealousy is driven by the impossibility of knowing the only thing it wants to know: the other in his, in her infinite and unrepeatable singularity. On the other hand, we have seen at some length, in looking at *Proof* and at Proust, that it is the prosthetic or supplementary structure of the perceptual or technical apparatus itself, and its consequent blindness, that will always prevent the sort of proof or certainty that the jealous lover pursues. These two impossibilities, however, cannot finally be kept separate from each other. The condition of blindness is the condition of the other's opacity. Or to put it in terms that are not those of the obsessive visual metaphor, the "testimony of the senses" is the trace of the other's speech in me, and thus the possibility of my speech, of my saying what I see. A condition of impossibility that is also the condition of possibility: the text of jealousy is the trace of the one in the other, the one as the other.

444

But do we or can we know any other kind of text? If every text is jealous finally and first of

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18 "Mais déjà une des Divinités irascibles, aux servantes vertigineusement agiles, s'irritait non plus que je parlasse, mais que je ne dise rien. "Mais voyons, c'est libre! Depuis le temps que vous êtes en communica-



tion, je vais vous couper.” Mais elle n'en fit rien, et tout en suscitant la présence d'Andrée, l'enveloppa, en grand poète qu'est toujours une demoiselle du téléphone, de l'atmosphère à la demeure, au quartier, à la vie même de l'amie d'Albertine. “C'est vous?” me dit Andrée dont la voix était projetée jusqu'à moi avec une vitesse instantanée par la déesse qui a le privilège de rendre les sons plus rapides que l'éclair (III, 608). The translation is modified.

19 The infinity of the other, the absolute alterity of the time of the other or diachrony: this would be the place to invoke the thinking of Emmanuel Lévinas.  
20 “Alors sous ce visage rosissant je sentais se réserver comme un gouffre l'inexhaustible espace des soirs où je n'avais pas connu Albertine.... je sentais que je touchais seulement l'enveloppe close d'un être qui par l'intérieur accédait à l'infini... m'invitant sous une forme pressante, cruelle et sans issue, à la recherche du passé, elle était plutôt comme une grande déesse du Temps.” (III, 888)

all its own operation (for I am left with little illusion about having unlocked the secret of our three sample texts), this is not to say that we have discovered a model. Jealousy, rather, would seem to take and to give shape according to an even more classical device, that of the muse. Among the nine goddesses who presided over official knowledge, there is not, as you know, one whose name and gifts were dedicated to jealousy. If, then, we were to identify any name with the liberally jealous art, it could only be in an unofficial capacity, on a one-time basis, and not as a general or generalizable figure. The tenth muse would not have just one name, but innumerable names, both masculine and feminine as well as neither one nor the other: innumerable, indeed infinite, the name of the infinite as the name of the other.<sup>19</sup> For Proust or for Marcel, for example, the name was Albertine, a feminized masculine name, she whose name calls him on a search for lost time:

Then beneath that rose-pink face I felt that there yawned like a gulf the inexhaustible expanse of the evening when I had not known Albertine... I felt that I was touching no more than the sealed envelope of a being who inwardly reached to infinity... urging me with cruel and fruitless insistence in search of the past, she was, if anything, like a mighty goddess of Time. (Proust 1982: 393)<sup>20</sup>

For Proust, for example, but the example is infinite.

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