Narratives of Resistance and Remembering in Marcel Proust's Railway Station

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Abstract:
Modernity's drive to optimize and regulate urban space manifests in the metropolitan railway station, a structure whose emergence in the nineteenth-century remade spatiotemporal practices. While the station's utilitarianism would seem antithetical to artistic expression, it became an unlikely site of creative resistance at the turn of the century. Taking *In Search of Lost Time* as a case study, I argue that Marcel Proust challenges the hegemonic spatial practices of emerging capitalist systems by reimagining the railway station as a site for modern poetics and memory. In reappropriating the railway station timetable as a site of modern poetics, Proust renders comprehensible one of modernity's most depersonalized, abstract spaces – and, in representing train stations as mnemotechnic devices, identifies a narrative potential inherent even in quotidian urban locales. Proust's railway station illuminates important questions about the architectural lineage of modernist literature and the narrative capacities of each discipline, while also encouraging renewed understanding of their reciprocity.

Keywords: Henri Lefebvre; urban studies; spatial theory; storytelling; memory

Introduction

At its most basic, the railway station in the Balbec episode of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* functions as a structuring device that plots the phases of the adolescent narrator's journey to the seaside village Balbec. Too ill to travel, the narrator at first only dreams of Balbec

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and the cities listed in railway station timetables. Timetables stir his imagination, prompting him to construct elaborate mythologies from their lists of place names, but Saint Lazare railway station is the gateway between dream and actuality. The narrator's journey commences outright when he crosses Saint Lazare's threshold and departs on the one twenty-two train to Northern France. The episode concludes with the narrator's arrival at Balbec Station where he is left bitterly disappointed by the discovery that Balbec Church is not what he imagined. Using the railway station as a trope, Proust develops some of his novel's most important themes: the chasm between expectation and reality, the disappointment that comes from attaining a desired object, and art's recuperative powers. Stations link moments in the hero's journey, but they also tell the story of a new poetics that derives from the commercial spaces of modern life.

Built into any architectural form is the story of a cultural moment. Inherent in the railway station is a metanarrative about modernity's progress and pitfalls. A symbol of technical innovation, newly standardized time, and a burgeoning tourist industry, the railway station captures the modern zeitgeist and records the rise of spatial hegemonies. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that space is neither inert nor neutral; rather, space is active, charged with political volition and generated from a complex network of social, ideological, and economic forces.[1] These hegemonic forces perpetuate their influence, dictating a space's use by prohibiting certain practices and encouraging others. By imposing order and restricting movement, railway stations exemplify the modern spatial hegemony Lefebvre describes: Entering a station, travellers submit to the railway's commercial system. They register their arrival with the rail company and are then ticketed and counted, marked as human capital. Numbered and primed for transport, travellers are funnelled from lobby to platform, always subject to the minute-by-minute dictates of the railway timetable. If the commercial imperatives of railway stations grant travellers little latitude in shaping their journey by rail, Proust offers an alternative approach to negotiating these hegemonic spaces. This article argues that Proust challenges the hegemonic spatial practices of emerging capitalist systems by reimagining the railway station as a site for modern poetics and memory. In the Balbec episode, he frees railway timetables from the alienating abstraction that so often characterizes modern space. Using timetables as objects of poetic inspiration, he disrupts the novel's linear progress, bringing forth a lyrical interlude on the power and beauty of place names. Later, in *Time Regained*, the last volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, Proust

again refigures railway stations, transforming commercial transit sites into mnemotechnic devices – *loci* of memory that recover the aged narrator's past.

The railway station is a marginal structure, poised both on metropolitan peripheries and on the margins of modernist studies scholarship. Much scholarship focuses on the role of train travel in articulating modern cultural narratives, often to the exclusion of the station itself. Approaching their subject from the lens of mobility studies, Steven Spalding and Benjamin Fraser affirm the importance of rail travel in modern cultural production, concluding that 'the figure of the train emerges as a complex narrative form engaged by artists [. . .] as a way of assessing the competing discursive investments of cultural modernity'.[2] George Revill, also interested in the political, economic, and social implications of train travel, analyses the railway's role in transforming literary narrative. Underscoring the importance of rail travel for storytelling, Revill contends that train travel became a fortuitous device for nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors, creating a 'convenient vehicle for a technologically animated melodrama'.[3] Sara Danius has pointed out that besides expanding narrative possibilities, train travel also informed writers' aesthetic projects. Taking *In Search of Lost Time* as a case study, Danius argues Proust uses 'photographic and cinematographic techniques' to evince the 'phenomenology of perception' of rail travel.[4] These studies indicate a reciprocity between the railway and the cultural productions: Artists and writers channelled modern preoccupations into their figurations of train travel, and in turn, the railway transformed their art, inspiring new thematic content and formal innovation.

While these studies have done much to enhance understanding of rail travel's importance for literary productions, Wolfgang Schivelbusch's seminal study on the effects of mechanized travel on human consciousness offers perhaps the most detailed analysis not just of the railway, but of the metropolitan stations that house it. Analysing the phenomenological experience of the metropolitan railway station's ferrovitreous architecture, Schivelbusch sees rail journeys as beginning in the 'novel spatiality' of the station itself.[5] Schivelbusch argues travellers could be destabilised by the station's large-scale industrial architecture even before stepping foot on a train: The station's 'uniform quality of the light and the absence of light-shadow contrasts disoriented perceptual faculties used to those contrasts, just as the railroad's increased speed disoriented the traditional perception of space' (*RJ* 47). In this analysis, the station is seen as a setting that fundamentally altered modern human spatiotemporal relations.

Building on existing scholarship that sees rail travel as fundamental to modern cultural production, this article argues that the railway station shapes aspects of Proust's literary modernism. Drawing on the railway station as a source of poetics and as a mnemonic device leads Proust away from a fixed model of linear storytelling and toward a more dynamic form of modern narrative that relishes ornate description, digression, and reflexivity. In addition to enhancing understanding of the spatial origins of his modernism, Proust's depiction of the railway station functions as a phenomenological case study that narrativizes the traveller's experience of railway stations. The implications of Proust's phenomenological account extend beyond his novel to our own world, where designers and architects contend daily with how to construct transit sites on a 'sounder human foundation', and with the stories of travellers in mind.[6] As postmodern critic Marc Augé has shown, contemporary life is defined by *non-lieux*, mass-produced, generic spaces whose inoffensiveness saps the spirit and deadens the psyche.[7] Proust's account illuminates the possibilities and challenges of urban design both at the turn of the century and now, offering points for reflection as we consider how to build transit sites today. What ultimately emerges from a reading of Proust's railway station is a renewed understanding of the generative, dialogical exchange between architectural and literary construction, a deeper appreciation for the storytelling capacities of each discipline, and an entreaty to reimagine how we construct our built environment.

Railway Stations in Visual and Literary Art

Railway station timetables would seem to offer little in the way of creative inspiration for the aspiring writer who narrates *In Search of Lost Time*. Mundane in their listings of arrivals and departures, soporific in their imperative language, and didactic in their understanding of the commercial value of time, timetables function by regulating spatiotemporal relationships to ensure efficiency. An expression of Lefebvre's *espace conçu* – the mental or conceptualized realms of designers, planners, architects, and engineers – railway timetables are oppressive, discouraging creativity and imposing order (*PS* 38). Yet, Proust's adolescent narrator divines fictive possibilities in this impersonal space, and the timetable becomes an imaginative space for him. In two complementary sections of *In Search of Lost Time*, 'Place Names: The Name' and 'Place Names: The Place', the narrator, desperate to see the world, scours 'books on aesthetics' 'guide-books', 'and more than the guide-books, the railway time-tables' for poetic

and aesthetic inspiration.[8] Station timetables, replete with varied place names, become the loci of his fantasies. He admits that he 'too often beguiled' himself 'by looking up [destinations] in the railway timetable', and fashioning elaborate stories based on the place names' sensual and euphonic sounds (*ISOLT* II 305–6). Merely locating in the table the one twenty-two train to Balbec catalyses the 'arbitrary delights of [his] imagination', and he conjures the town in vivid detail, spinning a tale in which 'an inn-keeper would serve [. . .] coffee' upon his arrival and escort him to the seashore to watch the 'turbulent sea in front of the church' (*ISOLT* I 551–2). Just as they are for his friend and boulevardier, Charles Swann, the timetables for the narrator are as 'intoxicating' as romance novels, fuel for his fantasies and, as we will see, for Proust's characteristically discursive style (*ISOLT* I 415).

Proust was not alone in seeking poetic inspiration in the railway station. Though commercial rail travel had flourished in Europe since mid-century, artists in an array of disciplines continued to make it a centrepiece of their artistic endeavours well into the new century. For them, the railway station was a site through which to explore spatial distortion, frenetic crowds, metropolitan dynamism, and novel temporalities. Their diverse, often contradictory representations attest to the station's animating presence in the period's cultural discourses. Some artists discovered in the station a compendium of new perceptual experiences, one that afforded them the possibility of replicating modernity's disorienting splendour. In an 1877 impressionistic painting, *The Gare Saint-Lazare* (fig. 1) Claude Monet, for instance, confounded spatial logic with eddies of steam that dissolve the station's shape and set once-solid masses adrift. Interest in the creative potential of the railway station extended to the nascent art of cinematography, with the film-making duo the Lumière Brothers so realistically captured a careening train in their 50-second film *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) that impressionable spectators, fearing collision, leapt backward during the film's premiere.[9] The railway station also caught the attention of futurist artists who saw in it an opportunity to reproduce the speed of modern life. In a 1911 oil painting titled *States of Mind 1: The Farewells* (fig. 2) futurist Umberto Boccioni depicts the psychological tumult of departure through jostling travellers who collide with unbounded elements of the railway station itself. The psychological daze that Boccioni captures is elaborated in literary depictions that present the station as a space of mayhem and disorder.

Anne Green notes that in some turn-of-the-century literary representations, the railway station is

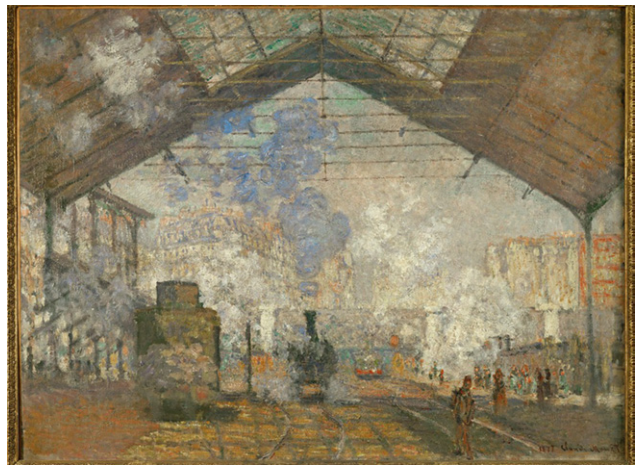

Fig. 1. Claude Monet. *The Gare Saint-Lazare (or Interior View of the Gare Saint-Lazare, the Auteuil Line)*, 1877.

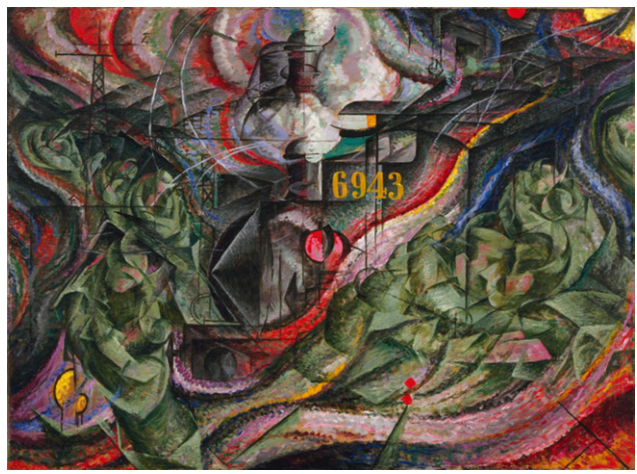

Fig. 2. Umberto Boccioni. *States of Mind I: The Farewells*, 1911.

Variously described as a labyrinth, a maze, a prison, a swirling maelstrom, a hell where the traveller suffers the torments of the damned. [The] station in these texts is a deeply threatening place which subverts all the supposed benefits of train travel. Instead of promising swift transportation to a chosen destination, railway stations are described in terms that suggest the very opposite of forward movement: the station is a place of confusion in whose swirling vortex the traveller is trapped. Rushing to buy tickets, register luggage, complete all the

> necessary formalities and find the right train, passengers are caught in a terrifying chaos from which, they are warned, they are unlikely to emerge unscathed.[10]

A frenetic site whose vortex of activities bread confusion and entrapped innocent travellers, the station came to represent pervasive anxieties about the threat of urbanity, crowds, and the speed of modern life. Building on these themes, Ezra Pound's two-line imagist poem 'In a Station of the Metro' (1913), meditates on the shockingly transient nature of urban encounters – this time in the chthonic milieu of a metro station.[11] The station's form manifested another of modernity's fixations: the bearing of the past on the present. Though sometimes represented as futuristic portals, railway stations, Caroll Meeks explains, 'often reminded their contemporaries of medieval cathedrals [with their] complex massing, bolder asymmetry, pointed vaults and towers'.[12] Raw and industrial and, at the same time, luminous and atmospheric, modern train sheds confounded the boundaries between past and present, drawing on classical architectural forms to make urban space sublime. Modern artists and writers represented the railway station as an emblem of modernity. For them, it was a nexus for the temporal, psychological, and sensory experiences that characterized modern life.

Anticipation: Railway Timetables as a New Poetics

Lefebvre's theory of spatial production helps elucidate Proust's particular treatment of the railway station and its timetables. According to Lefebvre, ideological investments are most evident in abstract spaces like railway stations. Its origins capitalist modernity, abstract space is of a piece with 'the centres of wealth and power [and it] endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates and seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters' (*PS* 49). Codified and controlled, abstract space is inimical to human expression, hindering the imagination and crippling creativity. The hegemonic ideologies that Lefebvre ascribes to abstract space reign in the railway station, one of modernity's architectural responses to emerging capitalist structures that optimizes the movement of goods – and humans made into goods.

For many nineteenth-century travellers, the promise of the railway station as a portal to new worlds gave way to profound existential anxieties about what it meant to be in and a part of this strange, discomfiting space. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), a treatise that according to Cynthia Gamble, Proust claimed to know by heart,

art critic John Ruskin locates the train station as a site of brutal mental oppression and rails against the psychic pain it inflicts on travellers.[13] Lobbing what, for him, might be the ultimate aspersion, Ruskin describes the station as an architectural structure not dignified enough for ornamentation:

> [The railway station] is the very temple of discomfort, and the only charity that the builder can extend to us is to show us, plainly as may be, how soonest to escape from it [. . .] The railroad is in all its relations a matter of earnest business, to be got through as soon as possible. It transmutes a man from a traveller to a living parcel. For the time he has parted with the nobler characteristics of his humanity for the sake of a planetary power of locomotion [. . .] Better bury gold in embankments, than put it in ornaments on the stations.[14]

Its offense lies not just in the fact that the station is an inherently commercial operation, or that it embodies modern excess, but that it degrades the humans to whom it owes existence. The result of unchecked progress, railway stations, according to Ruskin, render human beings generic, anonymized automatons – mere products deployed and transported by an inhumane system.

Proust, too, recognizes the railway station as a vexed (and vexing) space that, in severing ties to home, also fractures the self. In 'Place Names: The Name', his narrator laments the disorientation he feels when he departs from his domestic abode and enters the railway station's unfamiliar space. He explains a sense of rupture the station evokes, saying 'unhappily those marvellous places, railway stations [. . .] are tragic places also [. . .] we emerge from the waiting-room, abandon any thought of [. . .] home [. . .] once we have decided to penetrate into the pestiferous cavern through which we gain access to the mystery' (*ISOLT* II 303). For the sensitive young narrator, departing on a railway journey requires relinquishing one's 'home' – and, consequently, one's sense of self. As it does in the work of spatial theorist Gaston Bachelard, identity in Proust's work derives from domestic space.[15] We see the role the home plays in developing the narrator's identity in the opening passages of *In Search of Lost Time* when he, sleeping and lulled into a nearly primordial state, is at first unsure of who he is. Describing the dissolution of his identity, the narrator recounts, 'I lost all sense of the place in which I had gone to sleep [. . .] I awoke. . . not knowing where I was, I could not be sure at first who I was' (*ISOLT* I 4). It is his bedroom that restores his sense of self. His bodily memories – embodied memories of domestic spaces, as Bachelard suggests – draw him 'up out of the abyss of not-being'

(*ISOLT* I 6). Articulating the fundamental connection between his psyche and home, the narrator notes that he 'succeeded in filling [the room] with my own personality until I thought no more of the room than of myself' (*ISOLT* I 11). If identity is inscribed in domestic space, then Proust's railway station is a space of discontinuity and rupture: as in a ritual, one 'emerges' from its waiting room transformed, unable to conceptualize home and with one's very selfhood called into question. Railway stations, Proust's account suggests, are dysfunctional products of modernity that offer distinct advantages – expeditious travel, access to 'mysterious' locales – at the expense of historical continuity and ontological stability.

Recognizing the 'tragedy' of railway stations, Proust provides an artistic recourse to the station's degradations through his meditations on the space's banausic by-product: the timetable. A two-dimensional representation of space and time manufactured by railway companies and one arguably more oppressive than the physical station itself, the timetable would seem only to limit the station's narrative possibilities through its routinized schedules – predetermined paths for every traveller. Comprised of mundane material – destinations, times, and platform numbers – railway station timetables are practical tools, and their place names, mere signifiers, are labels that direct and instruct. Yet, for the narrator, the station's timetables are extraordinary, charged with affect and imagery.

The narrator raises cities from the sounds of their names alone. As such, Proust's narrator needs 'only, to make [the cities] reappear, pronounce the names: Balbec, Venice, Florence' (*ISOLT* I 550). His incantations unleash an effusion of images, sensations, and metaphors. When he utters the 'the heavy first syllable of the name Parma' there appears a city 'in which no breath of air stirs' – it is a city that is 'compact, smooth, violet-tinted and soft' (*ISOLT* I 441). Soft, violet-hued Parma contrasts with the name Balbec, which he imagines possesses raging seas and a solemn, medieval church. Pronouncing the name Balbec evokes 'an old piece of Norman pottery that still keeps the colour of the earth from which it was fashioned', its 'incongruous syllables' suggesting an obsolete language that he imagines he will hear spoken when visiting the city (*ISOLT* I 442). From the name Florence emerges a 'town miraculously scented and flower-like' and one that awakens in him a 'desire for sunshine, for lilies, for the Palace of the Doges, and for Santa Maria del Fiore' (*ISOLT* I 552, 550). Using the sound of each name as a guide, the narrator defines the cities, conferring on oblique signifiers history, quiddity, symbolism,

and sensation. Miraculous, unexpected apparitions materialize from the timetables, and the narrator revels in their sensual possibilities:

> Bayeux, so lofty in its noble coronet of russet lacework, whose pinnacle was illumined by the old gold of its second syllable; Vitré, whose acute accent barred its ancient glass with wooden lozenges; gentle Lamballe, whose whiteness ranged from egg-shell yellow to a pearl grey; Coutances, a Norman cathedral, which its final consonants, rich and yellowing, crowned with a tower of butter; Lannion, with the rumbling noise, in the silence of its village street, of a coach with a fly buzzing after it [. . .] Benodet, a name scarcely moored that the river seemed to be striving to drag down into the tangle of its algae [. . .] Quimperlé [. . .] more firmly anchored, ever since the Middle Ages, among its babbling rivulets threading their pearls in a grey iridescence like the pattern made, through the cobwebs on a church window, by rays of sunlight changed into blunted points of tarnished silver [. . .] (*ISOLT* I 442)

Focusing not on the place names themselves, but on their signification – on their potential meanings and histories – the narrator conjures a tale about each: There are cities of ancient gold and pearly white, silent cities and babbling cities, cities that evoke lace and others reminiscent of dark wood. He imbues in each a spirit – a *genius loci* – and a story of what it could be. Reappropriating the timetables as an imaginative space, he flouts their utilitarian dictates, fashioning an alternative spatial narrative. No longer an abstract configuration, the timetable is made poetic – a modern lyric.

Proust's treatment of the railway station timetable invites further consideration of the complicated relationship between abstract spaces and modernist narrative. Discussing the 'interaction between spatial forms and the social space in the literary text', Andrew Thacker argues that 'the material spaces of the city' can inform 'the very shape of narrative forms', including 'the spatial features of literature, such as the typography and layout on the page' as well as 'the space of metaphor'.[16] Thacker's insights about the importance of material space for modernist forms are well taken, but we should also attend to the possibility that representations of space, as much as material space, might be a source of literary modernism's formal experimentation. Proust's appropriation of the timetable shows that abstracted spaces can transform prose: With the addition of each timetable place name, *In Search of Lost Time* proliferates, surges and swells with description, capturing, in only a few paragraphs, the essence of Proust's kaleidoscopic vision and efflorescent prose. His

writing, which carefully catalogues each place name, takes on the formal attributes of a timetable – lists and sequences – but exceeds them. More than the timetable's spatial directives and inventories, Proust's prose is qualitative and enumerative, as formerly oblique space takes on a new, modern lyricism.

What we find in Proust's railway station timetable, then, is the dismantling of a hegemonic spatial system, the rewriting of spatial narrative, and the creation of a new mode of storytelling. Proust's spatial reformulation anticipates post-modern thinkers like Michel de Certeau, who argues that dreaming is the only way to free oneself from such forms of incarceration as railway travel. Travellers, de Certeau says, are 'pigeonholed, numbered, and regulated in the grid of the railway car'.[17] Yet, because 'there is nothing to do' in the train, 'rest and dreams reign supreme' (*EL* 111). Proust, likewise, counters the station's domination, finding in it a capacity for dreaming. If the Proustian railway station timetable is a panacea for the depersonalized, abstracted spaces of modernity, then, as a textual space, *In Search of Lost Time* becomes a site of resistance. The young narrator's timetable daydreams, which render comprehensible spaces that would otherwise discourage imagination and invention, show that abstract spaces need not be sapped of humanity: All space, no matter how overdetermined, is an arena for storytelling. As of yet, however, the narrator's stories are incomplete, made only of atmospherics, ephemeral sensation, and fugitive images. Dénouement comes, not from his dreams of them, but from a journey to the cities themselves.

Arrival at Balbec: Paradise Lost?

The cornerstones of the narrator's mental landscapes, the timetable place names are precarious, their nebulous natures proving their greatest defect. In 'Place Names: The Name', the dreamer becomes a traveller. Having raised cities from the sounds of their names alone, the narrator finally arrives at Balbec station only to discover that the city is fractured, split into divergent, incompatible realities. Alighting from the train, he learns he has arrived at Balbec-en-Terre, a village situated more than twelve miles away from Balbec-en-Plage, the seaside resort of his dreams: 'Nothing' he proclaims, 'could have differed more utterly [. . .] from the real Balbec than that other Balbec of which I had often dreamed' (*ISOLT* I 545-6). In the names' mystery – the source of their creative potency – lies a capacity to disappoint.

Worse than the realization that he has arrived at an ancillary village, is the material reality of Balbec Church, an architectural symbol

of the village he has come to revere and one around which his story of Balbec revolves. The church's banality is the ultimate affront to his dreams: Far from the sea where the narrator imagined it, the church is ensconced in a nondescript milieu and is a structure so small it seems 'an accident' (*ISOLT* II 322). Impervious to his fantasies, the church's architecture speaks for itself, its sculptures and statues communicating an immense mediocrity. Having dreamt so long of the illustrious Virgin of the Porch, the narrator is 'astonished to see the statue [that my mind] had carved a thousand times, reduced now to its own stone semblance, occupying, in relation to the reach of my arm, a place in which it had for rivals an election poster and the point of my stick' (*ISOLT* II 323). Confronted with the limitations of incarnate stone, the narrator realizes that the Virgin is ossified and sterile. The town's deficiencies seem literally to spill onto her, covering her in 'the same soot as defiled the neighbouring houses' (*ISOLT* II 324). Shocked by the reality of Balbec and its church, the narrator laments that 'no sooner had I set foot in [Balbec] than it was as though I had broken open a name which ought to have been kept hermetically closed' (*ISOLT* II 325). Here, the magic spell cast by the railway timetables' place names is broken, replaced by the exigencies of the material world.

Roger Shattuck and Gilles Deleuze read the narrator's experience in Balbec as an additional refrain in a pattern of collapsed dreams, another failed consummation that requires coming to terms with dashed expectations.[18] Even the narrator himself understands his trip to Balbec as a story of loss, assuming that because the village is not what he envisioned, his experience is necessarily devalued. However, this reading of the Balbec episode is antithetical to the text itself, which rather than yielding to a certain destruction is forever in the process of (re)creating what once was. Balbec is lost, but it is also found – redeemed through its telling. Salvation rests in the realization that the cosmoses that the narrator conjures have not been effaced, but are recast as a second narrative, resurrected and recouped with each subsequent reading. If this redemptive logic is dubious (textual space, is, after all, subject to the same contingencies as any material object), Proust's promise of redemption is sustained through his novel's architectural dialogic. The essence of the narrator's timetable daydreams lives on through our reformed understanding of the possibilities inherent in abstract space and through our attempts to build with these possibilities in mind.

Like the novel, the railway station is the sum of the experiences it engenders. The Proustian railway station, moreover, is the ultimate

compendium of spatial experience precisely because it amplifies the difference between the actual and the imagined. The narrator, reflecting on the 'mysterious operation' performed by railway stations, comes to see railway stations' ability to communicate difference – or loss – as the primary source of their power:

> The specific attraction of a journey lies not in our being able to alight at places along the way [. . .] but in its making the difference between departure and arrival not as imperceptible but as intense as possible, so that we are conscious of [this difference] in its totality, intact, as it existed in us when our imagination bore us from the place in which we were living right to the heart of a place we longed to see, in a single sweep which seemed miraculous [. . .] because it united two distinct individualities of the world, took us from one name to another name, and [this difference] is schematised (better than in a form of locomotion in which, since one can disembark where one chooses, there can scarcely be said to be any point of arrival) by the mysterious operation performed in those peculiar places, railway stations. (*ISOLT* II 302)

In uniting 'two distinct individualities of the world' and thereby articulating their difference, the railway station formulates, indeed embodies, a totalizing spatial experience. As the Balbec episode shows, the station's narrative potential lies in its composite nature – it is built as much from dreams and disappointments, returns and remembrances as from bricks and mortar. Just as Proust constructs *In Search of Lost Time* not on a single plane, but from juxtaposing planes of transient, remembered, and (re)created spaces, architects and planners designing transit sites must attend to the composite nature of these spaces. Recognizing the narrative potential of stations, the way they are constructed from the traveller's dreams and aspirations, disappointments and regrets, makes building more humane – more human – sites possible.

Fashioning auspicious transit sites requires special attention to their mnemonic potential. While the effects are not as powerful as Proust's involuntary memory, thinking of and inhabiting railway stations constitute a second-order experience that, like involuntary memory, annihilates the distance between an imagined world and its material reality. In *In Search of Lost Time*, involuntary memory is the redemptive alchemy that unites dissonant moments, bridging the temporal divide between the past and present. Instigated by sense perceptions – the texture of a rough napkin, the wobble of cobblestones, the taste of a madeleine, the waft of a musky scent – a moment of involuntary memory juxtaposes temporalities and

reconstructs a former state. The railway station, whose timetables elicit dreams and expectations and whose material form concretizes abstract space, unites disparate iterations of space. Like the experience of involuntary memory, the railway station, in its various permutations, abolishes temporal boundaries and creates a comprehensive spatial narrative. Building a station requires understanding how, in these complex spaces, memory and narrative go hand in hand. For Proust's narrator, not only do railway stations replicate the experience of involuntary memory, but the physical stations themselves become sites of memory – memory palaces that house his past.

New Frontiers: Reimagining Transit Sites as Cartographies of Memory

Years after his journey to Balbec, the narrator, older and transformed by the events of his life, finds himself again on a train musing over the meaning of railway station timetables and place names. In *Time Regained*, the narrator's beloved timetable, which once ranked among his favourite novels, has been made common, profaned by habit. Formerly bewitching and mysterious, the stations, the narrator explains have 'become so familiar to me that even in that time-table itself I could have consulted the page headed *Balbec to Douville via Doncières* with the same happy tranquillity as an address-book [. . .] Its atmosphere no longer aroused anguish, and, charged with purely human exhalations, was easily breathable, indeed almost too soothing' (*ISOLT* IV 697–8). An early source of desire and despair, passion and anguish, the timetables are now as inoffensive as an address book. Their lustre dulled by time, the stations' place names possess muted meanings. Names like 'Hermenonville, Harambouville, Incarville no longer suggested [. . .] the rugged grandeurs of the Norman Conquest' as they once did; instead, quotidian sentiments have displaced the illustrious narratives of his youth (*ISOLT* IV 695). 'Doncières!' he proclaims, 'Now it was merely the station at which Morel joined the train, Egleville. . . the one at which Princess Sherbatoff generally awaited us, Maineville the station at which Albertine left the train on fine evenings' (*ISOLT* IV 696, 495). The heady expectations of youth tempered, the railway station timetable – and the place names within it – have become innocuous fixtures of everyday life.

Yet, the railway stations' storytelling capacity has not been diminished, only again transformed. Previously beacons of anticipation oriented toward the future, the railway stations now serve a

modern spatial mnemonics, mapping moments from the narrator's life and allowing him to revisit his youth. Traversing the French countryside in *Time Regained*, Proust's adult narrator is propelled not into the future by the train's revolutionary steam engine, but into the ever-evolving past. In each station he discovers a memory image – a moment from his life. As 'the little train halts and the porter calls out "Doncières", "Grattevast", "Maineville"' he contents himself with 'noting down the particular memory that the watering-place or garrison town recalls' (*ISOLT* IV 648). Maineville station, he says, is particularly 'associated in my memory with Morel and M. de Charlus' (*ISOLT* IV 648). Even Incarville which had filled his 'mind with so many dreams in the past' now houses an architectural memory – 'the comfortable house of an uncle of M. de Cambremer in which I knew that I should always find a warm welcome' (*ISOLT* IV 693). Plotting his past along the train's path, he remembers 'friendships which from the beginning to end of the route formed a long chain' (*ISOLT* IV 696). Indeed, in this 'land of familiar acquaintances' the train transports him from one old friend to another (*ISOLT* IV 696). He remarks, for instance, that 'The name Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs announced to me merely that there would presently appear a strange, witty, painted fifty-year-old with whom I should be able to talk about Chateaubriand and Balzac' (*ISOLT* IV 693). Throughout this network of recollection, he knows he will find 'at each stopping-place an amiable gentleman' or friend who punctuates the journey with a cordial handclasp that prevents him from 'feeling the [journey's] length' (*ISOLT* IV 696). No longer awash in the dizzying potential of what could be, the railway stations are imbued with familiar faces and shared experiences. Its magnetic mystery dissipated, the station timetable now writes a retrospective narrative. If *In Search of Lost Time* rejects loss by preserving it, so, too, do railway stations, become architectural containers for remembrance.

Remaking the mnemonic arts to fit the dawn of a new century, Proust's narrator fashions a cartography that uses the stations as memory markers. Proust's approach to remembrance in this instance resembles ancient memory traditions in which orators imprinted images in built spaces – on a series of *loci* within an imagined architectural structure. When it came time to deliver a speech from memory, orators mentally traversed their memory palaces, returning to chosen *loci* to retrieve the memory images and enable their recollections.[19] For Proust's aged narrator, railway stations are tantamount to memory palaces, *loci* that resurrect his past. Reading Proust's railway stations as mnemonic markers situates *In Search of Lost*

Time within an ancient mnemonic tradition that relies on space as an impetus for memory.

Though Proust's railway recalls ancient mnemonic arts, his architectural thinking is equally forward-looking in anticipating the concerns of contemporary urban studies. The cartographies of memory Proust fashions in *Time Regained* are reflected in post-modern accounts that seek to redefine transit stations as spaces of lived value. As at the turn of the century, today's transit sites are perilous, constantly endanger of being subsumed by commercial systems. Articulating a discomfort reminiscent of Ruskin's unease about the transactional nature of the railway station, French anthropologist Marc Augé has explored the effects of super-modern architectural spaces that work in service to invisible ideologies. For Augé, post-modern malaise derives from the *non-lieux* (non-space), the meaning of which critic Tom Conley summarizes:

> [The] modern world constructs innocuous and disconcerting or tepidly enervating areas for which privilege is required to enter. Such are the waiting rooms in airports, accessible only to designated personnel (bearing photographic images of themselves in laminated plastic cards clipped to their chests) or travellers (equipped with boarding passes), who pass by the avatar of the *poinçoneues*, a third- or fourth-world baggage inspector who stares listlessly at a television monitor hooked to a conveyer belt, or a bouncer just beyond who brandishes a metal detector.[20]

Augé reformulates Ruskin's critique of the railway station for a technological age. In the *non-lieux*, the active discomfort evinced by Ruskin's railway station becomes a self-annihilating passivity with systems of technological surveillance replacing human volition. Yet, the effects of each space – modern or super-modern – are comparable. Ruskin's railway 'transmutes a man from a traveller to a living parcel' while Augé's *non-lieux* reminds 'us that we are human cattle' (*SL* 100, *AW* xviii). To defuse the threat debasement, Augé searches Paris's metro stations for narrative, finding in the station names stories of his past. For him as for many Parisians 'the name of this or that station' might begin as 'one name among others' but it can 'suddenly acquire a meaning, a symbol of love or misfortune'.[21] Just as Proust discovers a memory map in his train stations, Augé discovers in the metro a 'lifeline' of memories and professes that 'certain subway stations are so associated with exact moments of my life [. . .] that thinking about or meeting the name prompts me to page through my memories as if they were a photo album' (*ITM* 4). As Conley notes, 'Proust's

train of memory, which chugged along the coasts of Normandy and Brittany, will roll on the rails of Augé's metro', and, indeed, in passage after passage, the tracks of Proust's railway and those of Augé's metro seem to merge.[22] Echoing Proust, Augé writes, 'I rarely go by Vaneau or Sèvres-Babylone without pausing to think about my grandparents [. . .] From Maubert to Vaneau the habitual comings and goings of my childhood [map] out my territory' (*ITM* 4-5). He concludes his reflection on metro station names with an observation befitting Proust's study of the railway station: 'To every station are tied knots of memories that cannot be untangled memories of [. . .] rare moments' (*ITM* 9). Here, the impenetrable faces of Ezra Pound's metro station have been replaced by a lifeline of memories: Old friends, relatives, and habitués seem embedded in the metro stations' architecture. As the railway station does for Proust, the metro station for Augé enables a new kind of spatial memoir. The challenges today's urban designers and planners face may seem removed from those of Proust's era, but the question of how to build felicitous utilitarian architectural spaces is perennial. Proust's novel responds to and prefigures Augé's critiques of transit sites, reminding us that architecture almost always transgresses the bounds of its sanctioned use, whether in in adaptive reuse projects that trace a building's functional transformations or in the narratives imparted on a given structure by the people who dwell in it. Through Proust's railway, then, we are invited to reconsider the possibilities inherent in the spaces where we pass our lives.

In *In Search of Lost Time* space *is* narrative. The railway timetable, an abstract space whose ordinariness belies its imaginative potential, tells the story of a new, modernist poetics that uses place names as building materials. The distinct phenomenology of the modern metropolitan railway station, alternatively thrilling and disorienting, illuminates patterns of thought and transforms narrative: Amidst the grandeur and bustle of a railway station, novelistic form becomes an expression of space. The railway station also tells a story of reminiscence. Proust's cartography of memory instils in the mass transit sites so often characterized by their dehumanizing features a sense of the particular, the idiosyncratic, and the symbolic. This architectural understanding reverberates outward, entreating architects, planners, and designers to consider the stories that they construct. Like the young narrator, who prospectively fashions worlds out of words, architects are storytellers, 'imagining a future that does not yet exist [. . .] and [exploring] fictive possibilities that eventually condense into built environments', as architect and designer Anca Matyiku observes.[23] In the same way that the railway station provides

a scaffolding for Proust's novel, *In Search of Lost Time* is a blueprint for how to design transit sites in a way that considers their oneiric and creative potential.

As Proust's novel demonstrates, architecture reliably exceeds the builder's vision, fulfilling a function, but becoming much more. Paris's Musée d'Orsay embodies the idea that space is never only utilitarian, and dreams can't wait for purpose-built structures. In the museum, once a railway station itself, hangs Monet's painting of the Gare Saint-Lazare. The former train station has become a coffer of creativity – filled with images and ideas available to anyone who enters the space. Today the Musée d'Orsay contains, not listless passengers, but new ways of dreaming and creating. The promise of Proust's railway station lies in its ability to unite architecture and literature, such that each reconstitutes and revitalizes the other, creating, in the end, new ways of thinking about both.

Notes

1. Henri Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1984), p. 11, 26. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *PS*.
2. Steven Spalding and Benjamin Fraser, editors. *Trains, Literature, and Culture: Reading and Writing the Rails*. (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2011), p. 7.
3. George Revill. *Railway* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 117.
4. Sara Danius. "The Aesthetics of the Windshield: Proust and the Modernist Rhetoric of Speed." *Modernism/modernity*, 8.1 (2001), 99–126 (p. 100).
5. Wolfgang Schivelbusch. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth-Century* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2014), p. 49. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *RJ*.
6. Lewis Mumford. *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harvest Books, 1970), p. x.
7. Marc Augé. *Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe. (London, UK: Verso, 1995), p. 78.
8. Marcel Proust. *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin. rev. D.J. Enright, 6 vols (New York: Random House, 1998), I, p.556. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *ISOLT* followed by volume and page number.
9. Umberto Boccioni. *States of Mind I: The Farewells*, 1911, oil on canvas, 70.5cm x 96.2cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Claude Monet. *The Gare Saint-Lazare (or Interior View of the Gare Saint-Lazare, the Auteuil Line)*, 1877, oil on canvas, 75cm x 104cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
10. Anne Green. *Changing France: Literature and Material Culture in the Second Empire* (London, UK: Anthem Press, 2011), p. 40.
11. Ezra Pound. 'In a Station of the Metro'. *New and Selected Poems and Translations*, ed. by Richard Sieburth (New York: New Directions, 2010), p. 39.
12. Caroll L.V. Meeks. *The Railroad Station: An Architectural History* (New York: Dover Publications, 2012). p. 40.
13. Cynthia Gamble. *Proust as Interpreter of Ruskin: The Seven Lamps of Translation* (Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 2002), p. 60.
14. John Ruskin. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1849), p. 100. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *SL*.

15. 'Our soul is an abode', Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Space*. He continues: '[By] remembering "houses" and "rooms", we learn to "abide" within ourselves [. . .] house images move in both directions [. . .] they are in us as much as we are in them'. Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin, 2014), p. xxxvii.
16. Andrew Thacker. *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.4.
17. Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1984), p. 111. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *EL*.
18. Describing the narrator's 'bitter disappointment' following the Balbec episode, Roger Shattuck notes that the narrator's disillusionment is 'endlessly repeated' throughout the novel. Gilles Deleuze, likewise, observes a pattern in the narrator's disappointments: 'disappointment on first hearing Vinteuil, on first meeting Bergotte, on first seeing Balbec church [. . .]' Roger Shattuck. *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to* In Search of Lost Time (New York: Norton, 2000), p. 83. Gilles Deleuze. *Proust and Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 34.
19. In a seminal study of the mnemonic arts, Frances Yates documents this process of space-based memorization. Frances Yates. *The Art of Memory* (London, UK: Random House, 1999), p. 2.
20. Tom Conley. 'Afterward: Riding the Subway with Marc Augé' in *In the Metro* by Marc Augé (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp.73–113 (p. 108). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *AW*.
21. Marc Augé. *In the Metro*, trans. by Tom Conley (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p.6. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *ITM*.
22. Noting the similarities between Proust's work and Augé's, Tom Conley observes that "the memory of many sentences in À la recherche du temps perdu seemingly [chart] the course of [Augé's] book. 'Longtemps, pour moi, l'inconnu avait commencé à Duroc, début d'une série de noms dont je ne retenais que le terme, Porte d'Auteuil, parce que nous y descendions parfois le Dimanche pour aller au bois' [For a long time, for me the unknown had begun at Duroc, the beginning of a series of names of which the last was the only one I could recall – Porte d'Auteuil, because we occasionally got off there on Sundays to walk to the park]: this sentence echoes 'Longtemps je me suis, couché de bonne heure' [For a long time, I went to bed early], the beginning of Proust's novel; at the same time it renews the narrator's struggles to gain an arbitrary relation with names. Tom Conley. 'Afterward: Riding the Subway with Marc Augé' in *In the Metro* by Marc Augé (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp.73–113 (p. 79).
23. Anca Matyiko. 'Architecture Drawn out of Bruno Schulz's Poetic Prose' in *Reading Architecture: Literary Imagination and Architectural Experience*, ed. by Angeliki Sioli and Jung Yoonchun (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp.114–122 (p. 114).

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