CHAPTER 10

Talking Furniture: Féeries *for a Troubled Time in Proust, Ravel, and Chomón*

Dominique Jullien

Displaced from its dominant position in the global mediascape by the onslaught of visual media, modern literature reacted in creative ways. As the long-established preeminence of verbal arts found itself threatened by the newly dominant *Augenkultur* ("eye culture," a neologism coined by sociologist Georg Simmel, who famously correlated the modern urban experience with visual dominance),[1] writers acknowledged the growing presence of devices of optical mediation and incorporated them into their texts, even as they sometimes also exhibited suspicion or hostility against the new media. Examples of this ambivalent response include Wordsworth's aversion to industrial technologies (as Claire Grandy's essay in this volume shows), Flaubert's contempt for photography, or Proust's dismissal of a cinematographic view of reality, among many others. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous presence of optical mediation was inexorably appropriated into high literature. Marit Grøtta has shown how despite Baudelaire's strong ambivalence toward the modern media culture, it shaped and guided his perception of the urban, industrial-age world around him.[2] Even earlier, a generation before Baudelaire, a writer like Chateaubriand, who, in his grand and solemn *Memoirs from beyond the Tomb*, never mentions explicitly the mass visual entertainments of his day (panoramas, dioramas, phantasmagorias—all the spectacles that were the talk of the town at the time of his writing) can nevertheless be shown to incorporate some of the techniques of optical mediation into his writing, blending the elevated philosophical tradition of the *vanitas* with the popular thrills playing down the street.[3]

One especially rewarding strategy for literature to interact with the newly dominant visual media was to absorb these into the text in the form of metaphors. Technologies of optical mediation became tropes for mental states, such as memory or habit, as Terry Castle has shown in her groundbreaking study.[4] George Eliot's iconic statement in *Middlemarch*, equating memory to a diorama, captures this: "The memory has as many moods as the temper, and shifts its scenery like a diorama."[5] Similarly, François-René de Chateaubriand, in the programmatic foreword to his mid-century memoirs, described the layered workings of his own memory and the distinctive

compositional strategy of his memoirs in terms strikingly evocative of the diorama technique, with its changing scenes obtained by double-sided transparent canvas and light source manipulation. *Memoirs from beyond the Grave* was systematically written in one time and place while evoking multiple and shifting periods of his life, with layered texts shuttling memory back and forth between temporal strata, akin to the moving images of the diorama:

> The *Memoirs* have been composed at different dates and in different countries . . . The changing forms of my life are thus intermingled . . . My childhood entering into my old age, the gravity of experience weighing on the lightness of youth, the rays of my sun mingling and merging together, from its dawn to its dusk, have produced in my stories a kind of confusion, or, if you will, a kind of ineffable unity. My cradle has something of the grave, my grave something of the cradle, my sufferings become pleasures, my pleasures pains, so that I no longer know, having just finished reading over these *Memoirs*, whether they are the product of a brown-haired youth or a head gray with age.[6]

Appropriating the new optical technologies into the text not only enhanced the relevance of literature in a newly competitive cultural field: the metaphoric use of these technologies also allowed writers an opportunity to cross the divide between high and low culture,[7] weaving references to the popular visual entertainments of the times (diorama, kaleidoscope, stereoscope, kinetoscope, chronophotography, phantasmagoria, *féerie*, and others) into the fabric of their grand narratives. All these technologies relied on optical illusion, and as Simon During argued in *Modern Enchantments*, they made technologically induced illusion central to modern culture.[8]

The kind of experience that During calls "secular magic" (magic dissociated from any claim to the supernatural, magic that relied exclusively on machines, dexterity, skill, and illusion-inducing manipulation) is at the heart of many of the optical devices so abundantly represented in Proust, as are entertainments based on optical illusion collected by During under the term "magic assemblages." Modern technologies in Proust, including technologies of optical mediation, of communication, of speed, all lead to a new and radically different way of experiencing the world, as Sara Danius has shown in *Senses of Modernism*.[9] Most remarkably, they all partake of optical illusionism, and they are most often troped as magical. This essay proposes to look at an extended episode from Marcel Proust's novel *Remembrance of Things Past* as a point of entry into questions of magical thinking, optical illusions, and "magical" tools of mediation, and as a way of thinking about the complex and paradoxical conversation between verbal and visual genres at a time of a powerful and accelerating visual turn in European culture.[10]

Proust had no fondness for cinematography and probably never went to the cinema, which, in his time, was largely viewed as a lower-class form of entertainment, and to some extent education.[11] In the novel, the cinema is barely mentioned at all, and yet the text, strangely, is saturated with optical mediation devices of all kinds. Remarkably, although the writing of his novel coincided with the beginnings of film (in fact, Proust's dates [1871–1922] and those of Segundo de Chomón [1871–1929] overlap almost exactly), Proust had very little to say about it. Patrick ffrench, in *Thinking Cinema with Proust*, picks as his point of departure this "structural absence of cinema": while references to the emerging art of film are almost non-existent in Proust, he notes that allusions to a variety of precinematic and proto-cinematic devices of optical mediation are ubiquitous:

> Written predominantly in the second decade of the 20th century, and covering, in its fictional diegesis, a period roughly from the turn of the century until the end of World War I, the *Recherche* coincides with the birth of cinema and its rapid expansion as an industry and as a cultural form. Yet no-one goes to the cinema in the *Recherche* . . . The novel does feature, however, recurrent references to devices and motifs from the pre-history of cinema—photography, the magic lantern, the kinetoscope, the stereoscope, the modalities of projection and the screen. This prompts the hypothesis that the *Recherche* enters into a "functional competition" with the cinema, which it pursues through a dismantling of the constitutive elements of the cinematographic *dispositif* [apparatus], a regression to earlier forms, and a re-imagining of cinematic experience. The *Recherche* offers an account of a virtual cinema, different from the actual cinema as we know it.[12]

The "earlier forms" through which the novel "enters into a functional competition" with the cinema fall into two main categories: proto-cinematic optical devices, or philosophical toys; and *féeries.* Philosophical toys such as the magic lantern, the kinetoscope, the stereoscope, the kaleidoscope, the bioscope, are prominent in the narrative, whether as actual material objects or as metaphors. In fact, they can be both: in *Within a Budding Grove*, the (metaphorically) stereoscopic description of the train journey to Balbec, during which the narrator attempts to overlap two distinct sunrise views, running from one side of the carriage to the other to "reassemble, to collect on a single canvas the intermittent, antipodean fragments of my fine, scarlet, ever-changing morning, and to obtain a comprehensive view and a continuous picture of it" (*Within a Budding Grove*, II, 704–5), ushers in the reference to the prized stereoscope of the Bloch household, with which the family proudly entertain their dinner guest (II, 803). In rhetorical terms, the figure of the *syllepsis* can account for this double use; in media studies

terminology, the episode can be conceptualized as a dispositif, defined by Erkki Huhtamo as "a recurrent model that manifests itself materially, but also discursively in the cultural imagination."[13]

Equally prominent are the references to the *féerie*, a popular French theatrical genre, roughly comparable to England's fairy play or pantomime. The *féerie* was characterized by supernatural plots, an emphasis on the spectacular at the expense of the literary, and a profusion of optical illusions. The visual extravaganza of the *féerie* relied on a crescendo of sensational tricks and special effects leading up to a final apotheosis. Flying in the face of accepted French classical theatrical conventions, in the *féeries* visual thrills took radical precedence over language or plot, which were often little more than a thin frame on which to hang the series of special effects and tableaux.[14] The techniques of the *féerie* would later be adapted to the trick cinematography of early filmmakers such as Méliès and Chomón (on which more later).

References to the *féerie* are plentiful in Proust: along with many other writers of the turn of the century, Proust, a writer not known for naivety, was paradoxically fascinated by this cultural form.[15] Throughout his monumental *Remembrance of Things Past*, despite its austere, uncompromising religion of art, its high modernist "culture of redemption" (to quote Leo Bersani's famous title), Proust drew literary inspiration from the whimsical *féerie*, with its special effects and illusionistic aesthetics. An avid theatergoer, Proust attended many *féeries* in childhood, like most children of the bourgeois classes. His biographer Jean-Yves Tadié reminds us that as a young aspiring writer, Proust's theater tastes were exceptionally eclectic, and alongside canonical masterpieces such as Racine's *Phèdre*, he was also fond of various popular genres, including the music-hall, the café-concert, and the *féerie*.[16] These were precisely the genres disdained by high-minded critics who, judging the *féerie* according to traditional literary criteria, lamented its dearth of literary qualities without recognizing that its strength and originality lay in its visual, rather than verbal appeal.[17] Conversely, far from despising the *féerie*, Proust even drafted one himself. One of Proust's early texts, a short story entitled "Scenario" included in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* in the section "Comédie italienne," is a *féerie*, in which a good fairy and various animated domestic objects all give Honoré, the protagonist, advice on how to behave with his beloved. Unsurprisingly, their excellent advice will be lost on Honoré; the story has a tragi-comic ending.[18]

Throughout Proust's great novel, the *féerie* provides a master trope for numerous situations hinging on optical illusions literal and metaphorical. Arguably, this attraction toward the *féerie*, and visual illusionism more

generally, is one of the sites where the book's modernity plays out. Critics have pointed out that the *féerie's* marginal position in the canon gave it greater freedom to experiment and innovate. Because it was disdained as a minor, childish, noncanonical genre, the *féerie* found itself in a position to experiment boldly with every technological invention, and to cross generic boundaries with impunity, hybridizing melodrama, opera, and music hall features into a highly transformative genre that was no less avant-garde for being minor. In fact, its strong ties to modern technologies of all kinds predisposed it to being a "figure of modernity."[19] Long described condescendingly as a childish, naïve, simple genre, the *féerie* has recently undergone critical reevaluation as a sophisticated cultural production involving cutting-edge technology and huge financial stakes (as Frank Kessler has shown).[20] As a product of the industrial age, the *féerie* relied increasingly on new technologies, including the diorama, gas lighting, and later electricity.[21] If the storylines were indeed naïve, often drawing on fairy-tale motifs (*La Biche au bois* was based on a fairy tale by Mme d'Aulnoy, for example; see Figure 10.1) and rudimentary plotlines, the technological means and elaborate stagecraft needed to produce astonishing special effects and breathtaking optical illusions, were anything but naïve. Animated objects interacting with human actors, as well as onstage appearances, disappearances and transformations, were a staple of these plays. Historians of nineteenth-century theater describe a long list of special effects that delighted spectators, from the poetic to the farcical or the absurd.[22]

The staging tricks that made possible such optical illusions in these hugely successful plays (like the nineteenth-century hits *Rothomago*, *La Biche au bois*, *Les Pilules du diable* or *Le Pied de mouton*, which were continually reprised into the early twentieth century) subsequently carried over into early trick cinema. The most famous of the early film directors, Georges Méliès, initially trained as a magician, with a theater background, would later adapt these special stage effects to the new medium, for example through the use of stop-motion camera, as well as various editing techniques.[23] In addition, stage *féeries* began to incorporate various cinematographic projections, and eventually several of the more popular stage *féeries* would be adapted for the screen, such as *Le Pied de mouton* (directed by Albert Capellani in 1907) or *Les 400 farces du diable* (directed by Georges Méliès in 1908), which combined two nineteenth-century stage successes, *Les Pilules du diable* and *Les 400 coups du diable*.[24] Rather than simply give way to cinema, then, popular stage genres (including puppet theater, as we will see in the case of the Italian wartime film *Momi's Dream*) were incorporated and remediated into early films in various ways.[25]

Figure 10.1 Jules Chéret, 1876 poster for *La Biche au bois, ou le royaume des fées* (vaudeville-féerie en 4 actes & 16 tableaux de Blum, Cogniard Frères & Toché, 1845), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F%C3%A9erie#/media/File:JulesCh%C3%A9ret,_Affiche_de_la_biche_au_bois,_1876.JPEG. Public domain

Figure 10.2 Walt Disney, *Beauty and the Beast*. Lumière and Cogsworth, screen grab "Be Our Guest," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gzKRGcmnFs Public domain

Figure 10.3 Maurice Ravel, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, 2012 production Kathleen Kim (Fire) threatening the child (aria: "Je réchauffe les bons"), Khatouna Gadelia as the child. Conductor: Kazushi Ono. Glyndebourne Open House, Ravel Double Bill, YouTube: https://www.glyndebourne.com/on-screen/ https://www.glyndebourne.com/festival/introducing-ravel-double-bill/

Figure 10.4 Puppets shooting the canon: screengrab from *La Guerra e il sogno di Momi* (*The War and Momi's Dream*, 1917), Giovanni Pastrone and Segundo de Chomón. 37 minutes. Public domain. Vimeo (remastered), https://vimeo.com/8515592 public domain

Marcel Proust, I suggest, found inspiration in these genres apparently so antithetical to high literature, appropriating some of their illusionistic techniques in order to capture in writing the more sensational and transformational aspects of his narrative. Explicit references to the *féerie* dot the *Recherche* (at least a dozen, by Tadié's count)[26]—while implicit ones are even more numerous. As critics have shown, the iconic "Bal de Têtes" scene at the

end of *Time Regained* owes much to the aesthetics of the *féerie*. A "Bal de Têtes" (fancy-dress ball) is a popular name for a costumed ball: the narrator attends a party at the Guermantes' and fails to recognize any of the guests, thinking they are in disguise when in fact they have aged beyond recognition. Leading the ball is the Prince de Guermantes, disguised as "a king in a fairy-story" (*Remembrance*, III, 960). One of the staple trick elements of the *féerie* was the "changement à vue," in which actors were metamorphosed as if by magic.[27] The inexorable passage of time, which transforms persons so radically, is troped as just such a "magical" metamorphosis. The party guests among whom the narrator finds himself at the Guermantes reception are unrecognizable due to the many years elapsed since he last saw them. Even worse, old age has entirely dehumanized them: Bloch's head moves uncontrollably "like a piece of clockwork" (III, 969), while M. d'Argencourt is now "a trembling puppet with a beard of white wool" (III, 964); his transformation into an "old beggar" is as complete as an insect's metamorphosis (III, 961–962); another guest, the Duchesse de Guermantes, has been turned into a fish (III, 967). A typical *féerie* effect, the sudden transformation (which could be achieved by way of various invisible machines on stage, and by stop-motion camera techniques on film), is used to trope a cognitive fact (misrecognition) which is due, not to supernatural or technical powers, but to Time, anthropomorphized into a *féerie* wizard. The text borrows the vocabulary and technique of the *féerie* (the metamorphosis of the guests into unrecognizable creatures) in order to portray a momentary cognitive failure, immediately followed by the painful recognition of the narrator's own aging, of which he had been so far unaware.

Another key trick feature affects agency and causality, or more generally our understanding of reality. Animated objects, things endowed with agency and mobility, or anthropomorphic features, were a popular and eagerly anticipated characteristic of the *féerie* plays. Later filmmakers would also refine the trick by adapting it to various camera techniques. Segundo de Chomón worked for a time for the Pathé studio (earning the rather reductive nickname of "The Spanish Méliès" for his early imitations of Méliès's films)[28] and would later influence Buñuel's *Chien andalou*. He is often described as the founding father of special effects and various kinds of animation, which he explored in his more than 500 films. Chomón made toys come to life in his film *Les Jouets magiques*, and sculptures move with his invention of claymation technique in *Sculpteur moderne* (1908). The following year, in *Une excursion incohérente*, a hapless couple on a country outing was confronted by sausages filled with cockroaches, hardboiled eggs hatching mice, a haunted house, a train coming out of the sleeper's mouth, detachable heads, exploding pots with human faces, and much, much more. The numerous films Chomón made

during his Paris years with Pathé were decisive for the history of animation, and responded to an avid public demand for phantasmagorias, fairies, devils, skeletons, fantastic beasts, and other magical apparitions.[29]

I argue that reading Proust's many scenes of animated objects (my argument will draw on one extended scene in *The Guermantes Way* where the furniture in a hotel comes to life and interacts with the narrator) against the background of *féeries* both staged and filmed, can yield important new insights. Reflecting on the significance of what art historians Barbara Maria Stafford and Frances Terpak have called "furniture-to-think-with"[30] also enables us to put the high modernist classic in intermedial conversation with more popular art forms that rely on optical illusions, machines, and tricks, such as the *féerie*, the *opéra-féerie* (in the form of Ravel's *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*), and early trick films and animation, in particular those of Segundo de Chomón, both his Parisian trick films like *Une excursion incohérente* or *Hôtel électrique*, and his late Italian war film, *La guerra e il sogno di Momi* (released in 1917), an innovative mix of animation and live action, the only long animated feature film of the Italian silent film repertory.

This paper revisits some iconic scenes from Proust's *Search*, focusing particularly on the extended Doncières episode which features animated furniture and a magic telephone, reading them "visually," to borrow Mieke Bal's powerful title,[31] but specifically through the lens of the *féerie*. The *féerie*, whose influence is traceable through all three of these modernist works (Proust's novel, Ravel's *opéra-féerie*, and Chomón's trick films), will thus provide a useful model for capturing some of the complexities and contradictions of modernity. On the one hand, the avant-garde potential of the *féerie* along with its playful, whimsical dimensions are in evidence, and, on the other, the *féerie* serves as a vehicle for expressing uncertain, uncanny or dark realities—death, cruelty, or war. These early twentieth-century works, by borrowing the language of the *féerie*, all embrace a modern, liberating, illusionist aesthetic, yet the overwhelming prominence of technology also raises anxious questions and doubts about individual human agency.

An "Admirable *Féerie*": The Doncières Episode in Proust

As noted earlier, references to the *féerie* are numerous in Proust's novel, and they also apply to a wide variety of situations: guests metamorphosed by age; the cook Françoise commanding giants in her kitchen; or even an asparagus-eating episode compared to a Shakespearian fairy comedy, characterized as "lyrical and coarse" (*Swann's Way*, I, 131).[32] (Unsurprisingly, in nineteenth-century France, Shakespeare's plays were often staged, alongside *féeries*, in popular theaters, where their supernatural elements and generic hybridity,

antithetical to the French classical tradition, were better received by audiences.)[33] In the Doncières hotel episode from *The Guermantes Way*,[34] the extended *féerie* metaphor relies on two quintessential formulas of the genre: transformation and animation. The episode offers us magically animated hotel furniture, a magic telephone, and a transformation of the narrator's beloved grandmother into an old hag.

The narrator has left Paris to spend a few weeks in the fictional army town of Doncières, visiting his friend Robert de St. Loup who is garrisoned there. As an extreme creature of habit, having to spend the night alone in an unfamiliar hotel room fills him with apprehension: a pattern of anxiety, insomnia, and panic attacks in reaction to strange rooms has been established from the very beginning of the story. *Remembrance of Things Past* opens on just such a scene of anxiety, and on a kaleidoscopic succession of rooms and hypnagogic memories. The magically hostile objects in a strange room are a leitmotif, a recurring theme of the Proustian mindscape: they are present in the overture, then return throughout the book under different guises. Most dramatically, in an earlier episode, in his unfamiliar hotel room at the seaside resort of Balbec, the teenage narrator had felt assaulted by the "hostile" purple curtains, the "insolent" clock, the "merciless" mirror, even the height of the ceiling, and suffered "many a painful night" of agonizing insomnia before habit set in, returning the furniture to its inanimate state and thereby making the room habitable (*Swann's Way*, I, 8; *Within a Budding Grove*, I, 717). This vulnerable self, this inner child, immune to the passing of time, is "always the same, not having grown at all" (*The Guermantes Way*, II, 80), ready to relive his childish distress. Therefore, checking into the hotel at Doncières, the apprehensive narrator fully expects to encounter the same dysphoric situation, just as the reader expects the same defamiliarizing technique of animating inanimate objects in order to depict the painful effects of a lack of habit.

But in this episode, in a spectacular reversal of expectations, the room, the entire hotel and the objects in it turn out to be friendly. The narrator, unexpectedly, finds himself in a *féerie*: the anthropomorphized rooms, corridors, chairs, curtains, courtyards, windows, closets all talk to him and make him feel welcome during the happy nights he spends in his "enchanted domain" (*The Guermantes Way*, II, 82). The nights in Doncières can thus be read as a playful reiteration of the opening scene which combines dreams of rooms past with a magic armchair capable of flying the dreaming narrator across vast expanses of time and space.[35] In addition, the modern-day reader is reminded of more contemporary avatars of the films of Méliès or Chomón: the Disney versions of "Beauty and the Beast," especially the well-known musical sequence "Be Our Guest" in which Belle is magically served and entertained by anthropomorphic dancing and singing candlesticks, clocks, napkins, plates, forks, teapots,

and chairs, playfully referencing French rococo objects which were such a rich source of inspiration for Walt Disney and his team of animators (Figure 10.2).[36]

The *féerie* could be poetic, farcical, absurd, or silly, but its magic, as Katherine Singer-Kovacs reminds us, was not meant to frighten audiences, which included primarily children. Like dream figures, characters in the *féerie* were puppet-like, they transformed, broke down, were put back together again; they were comical in a Bergsonian sense, superimposing something mechanical over something living.[37] The writer and critic Théophile Gautier, an important intertext for Proust, and like him an admirer of the *féerie*, delighted in this cartoonish invulnerability of its characters, who could survive even the most outrageous slapstick violence unscathed.[38]

The same childishness can be seen here, in the remarkably homely and innocent Proustian passage. The hotel sequence of youthful wonder and euphoria, so contrary to the disturbing attacks of hostile objects in the earlier Balbec trip, is a deeply regressive experience overall, and this extends beyond the hotel scene, to the entire happy episode. During the weeks he spends at Doncières, the narrator is welcomed and coddled not only by his friend Robert de St. Loup but by all the men, who compete in making him feel comfortable just like the furniture does. Regression to a child's world permeates everything—the atmosphere of the barracks (where the soldiers' chief occupation seems to be entertaining their leisurely visitor), the hotel scene, the comforts of the bed, the dreams, which take the sleeper back to the enchanted gardens of his past, and even the telephone conversation with his grandmother, which reattaches him to family and childhood.[39]

Habit (the capital H Proust sometimes bestows upon it elevates it to the status of a supernatural being, a divinity or fairy) and its opposite—finding himself in an unfamiliar room or hearing a familiar voice through an unfamiliar mechanical mediation, as we shall soon see—are troped as a typical *féerie* trick: object animation. Like two sides of the same coin, the dysphoric experience (the young narrator's agonizing nights in Balbec before habit animates the furniture) and the euphoric experience (the playful and affectionate hotel furniture catering to the narrator's desires) illustrate the double-edged unreliability of habit. Habit is an ambivalent fairy, at times good and soothing, at other times malevolent, inflicting terrible pain on the narrator.[40] As the Doncières episode develops, the mood pivots from light to dark, revealing more disquieting aspects of the *féerie*.

Euphoria and its Discontents (Facetiming with *Grand'mère*)

For all its light-heartedness, the euphoric *féerie* at Doncières is haunted by darker iterations which eventually take over as the narrative veers over into

uncanny forms of enchanted technology; specifically, the telephone and photography. The cozy fairy tale of the hotel is followed by another, no less supernatural episode, albeit one in which technological mediation is associated with death and bereavement. The telephone episode, although the technology itself is described as an "admirable sorcery" (*The Guermantes Way*, II, 434), is overall strongly dysphoric. The narrator receives a call from his grandmother and decides to cut his trip short, returning to Paris to find her gravely ill. The euphoric bubble of Doncières (where time is suspended in the comforts of the enchanted hotel and the attentions of the adoring young soldiers) abruptly bursts when the telephone rings, reinserting time and death.

The telephone, still a relatively new and rare communication device at the end of the nineteenth century, is compared to a magical spyglass such as the one featured in a well-known tale from Antoine Galland's *Arabian Nights*, "The Story of Prince Ahmed and the Fairy Pari Banou." In that tale, the prince, thanks to a magic spyglass he has purchased in his travels, is able to observe his beloved from a great distance and see that she has been taken ill, a realization that prompts his decision to return home immediately.[41] Speaking on the telephone, Proust writes,

> We are like the person in a fairy tale for whom a sorceress, at his express wish, conjures up, in a supernatural light, his grandmother or his betrothed in the act of turning over a book, or shedding tears, or gathering flowers, close by the spectator and yet very far away . . . (*The Guermantes Way*, II, 134)

The Oriental reference, the telephone-as-magical-spyglass image, harmonizes the telephone episode with the magical context of the enchanted hotel. It also aligns the reference to an Oriental tale with a reference to stage adaptations of the *1001 Nights* as *féeries.* It is well documented that many *féeries*, like pantomimes in England, were drawn from the popular stories of the *Arabian Nights*, Aladdin being a perennial favorite.[42] We are reminded that the reference here is less to a text and more to an image, less to any written tale from the *Nights* and more to spectacular adaptations of it as a *féerie*.

Gone, however, is the comedic tone of the previous magic. Initially the telephone was compared to a squeaking Punchinello puppet (*The Guermantes Way*, II, 135): an image that, on the one hand, fit well with the playful, childish sphere of the old *féerie*, and on the other hand, tapped into a new technological folklore satirizing technological malfunction and discrepancies between expectations and technical limitations.[43] But the telephone later transforms into a dark instrument associated with Orpheus, anticipating death and separation. Comedy gives way to tragedy. The disembodied voice heard on the phone is "a phantom as impalpable as the one that would perhaps come back

to visit me when my grandmother was dead" (II, 137). When the call fails, "standing alone before the instrument," the narrator repeats vainly "'Granny, granny!' as Orpheus, left alone, repeats the name of his dead wife" (II, 137). The telephone no longer brings people together, but rather is a harbinger of death, "premonition of an eternal separation" (II, 135): this is confirmed when narrator returns home to find a shockingly ill-looking old woman (II, 141–3). The grandmother's actual death soon follows.

Much has been written on the spectrality of modern media: the instrument of communication with distant interlocutors is colored by the medium that proposes to communicate with ghosts of dead loved ones. As Pamela Thurschwell, following Friedrich Kittler, reminds us in *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, the association of the telephone with the Underworld, and the convergence of technology and magical thinking, are hardly specific to Proust. "Talking to the dead and talking on the phone both hold out the promise of previously unimaginable contact between people."[44] Late in his life, Thomas Edison was said to be working on an electrical device that could communicate with the dead.[45] The Proustian episode also resonates strongly with Walter Benjamin's ghostly evocation of the telephone "whose ringing served to multiply the terrors of the Berlin household."[46]

Proust was far from the only one to speculate or fantasize on a (still to be invented) visual adjunct to the auditory communication afforded by the telephone. The telephone-as-magical-spyglass metaphor seems, at first blush, bizarrely inappropriate: after all, the one thing early twentieth-century telephone communication did not allow was precisely seeing one's interlocutor. What takes place at Doncières is rather a kind of imaginary FaceTime meeting *avant la lettre*.

Yet the Proustian fantasy of seeing one's interlocutor on the telephone, along with the *Arabian Nights* image of the spyglass that accompanies it, hints at how imaginary media function, as analyzed by media theorists. Paradoxically, new technologies tend to be cast into archaic and familiar molds, as Erkki Huhtamo points out: "The newest of the new is packaged into the oldest of the old."[47] In 1908, A.A. Campbell Swinton, the inventor of television (the name "television" was coined in 1900) wrote about "distant electric vision" to describe the electronic transmission of moving images.[48] Earlier, in 1889, Edison was rumored to be working on the "far-sight machine," which would allow a man in New York to see his friend in Boston "with as much ease as he could see a performance on stage."[49] The imaginary medium of the telephonoscope (in Albert Robida's 1883 science-fiction novel *Le Vingtième Siècle*, for instance) also allows a visual experience coupled with the auditory one. In fact, the idea of video telephony was conceived shortly after

telephony itself was invented, as if to compensate for telephony's lack of visuality.[50]

In the Doncières telephone episode, however, the first, optical metaphor prepares and aligns with the second, photographic metaphor in the next episode. Severed from its visual component, the telephone communication leads to a second scene in which, conversely, the experience is purely optical and momentarily severed from verbal communication. Upon entering his Paris home, the narrator experiences a violent visual shock when he sees his grandmother transformed, as if by a magic spell, into "a dejected old woman whom I did not know" (*The Guermantes Way*, II, 143). We never see our loved ones, Proust explains, because we interpose our affection and memories between our gaze and their faces: but if "a purely physical object, a photographic plate" (II, 142) is taken, it will strip away the affective screen and reveal the cruel reality. For a terrible instant, the narrator receives this photographic "revelation" (both in the material sense of a chemical process enabling an image to appear and the spiritual sense of disclosure of a hidden truth) of his grandmother's decrepitude: "The process that automatically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph" (II, 141–2).[51] The narrator's sudden realization of his grandmother's illness is troped in terms of photography, which itself is described in magical terms as a spell that transforms a beloved family member into a hideous stranger. It is still a *féerie* of sorts, to be sure (transformation by magic trick being one of the staples of the *féerie*, as we saw), but a sinister one, in which transformation is linked to death.[52] Such a link finds its popular counterpart in the earliest films of Méliès: *Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert-Houdin*, Méliès's first trick film, features not only the disappearance and reappearance of the woman (as was performed on stage), but the additional trick of her momentary transformation into a skeleton. Similarly, Méliès's legendary discovery of the stop-motion technique features the transformation of an omnibus into a hearse.[53]

Even when he has returned home and is in his grandmother's living presence, the narrator is still subject to a mediated perception of her, since what he sees with his "camera eyes" (to borrow Suzanne Guerlac's striking expression) is but an (imaginary) photograph of her, which mechanically reveals her impending death, which opens the second part of the novel (*The Guermantes Way*, II, 142).[54] Far from providing a perfected form of communication, the telephone, along with its imaginary visual extension, perversely thwarts the dream of "ultimate communication."[55] The telephone-and-photograph scene provides an emotionally wrenching follow-up to the *féerie* of the animated hotel furniture, bringing together fairy-like talking objects (the telephone, uncontrollably talking by itself like Punchinello) with objects that mediate communication with the beyond. Animated and inanimate objects, life and

death, appear reversible, as an object endowed with life leads to (conversely) the grandmother's living presence replaced first by a ghostly mechanical voice, then by a frozen image captured through mechanical mediation.

Talking Furniture and the Uncanny

Being playful and euphoric, the talking furniture episode in the Doncières hotel would seem to evade Marina Warner's definition of the uncanny as something that crosses "the ambiguous, terrible, and enthralling borderland between animation and lifelessness."[56] It also skirts the canonical definition of the *Unheimlich* according to both Freud and Jentsch. In Ernst Jentsch's insightful essay on the uncanny (made famous, ironically, by Freud's harsh attack on it in his own essay), the uncanny hinges on the undecidability between animate and inanimate. According to Jentsch, in E.T.A. Hoffmann's story "The Sandman," the robotic Olimpia, who looks troublingly real, is the center of gravity of the uncanny: "life-size automata that perform complicated tasks, . . . very easily give one a feeling of unease," therefore "true art, in wise moderation, avoids the absolute and complete imitation of nature and living beings, well knowing that such an imitation can easily produce uneasiness." (Jentsch's prescient intuition has been revisited in recent times with the notion of "uncanny valley," studied by cognitive scientists, in the wake of Masahiro Mori's early experiments with humanoid robot Repliée Q2.[57]) However, not all dolls, not all animated objects are uncanny, as Jentsch also acknowledges. Children and premodern people, Jentsch notes, "populate their environment with demons; small children speak in all seriousness to a chair, to their spoon, to an old rag, and so on, hitting out full of anger at lifeless things in order to punish them." While children and premodern peoples share a belief in animated objects, a line separates their delight in magical or animistic thinking, from the uncanny feeling stemming from life-like automata. While Jentsch saw the living doll as pivotal to the uncanny atmosphere of Hoffmann's famous story and elaborated his theory of the uncanny on the notion of intellectual uncertainty, Freud, whose own theory of the uncanny was built in large part on the rejection of Jentsch's, flatly denied that animated toys could be uncanny or frightening. Since children in fact desire, rather than fear, the familiar objects surrounding them to come to life, dolls to Freud are not uncanny and therefore are unworthy of the analyst's serious consideration:

> Children, in their early games, make no sharp distinction between the animate and the inanimate, and they are especially fond of treating their dolls as if they were alive . . . there is no question of fear in the case of a living doll: children are not afraid of their dolls coming to life—they may even want them to.[58]

Displacing, as we know, the notion of *Unheimlich* exclusively to the father–son relationship in the Hoffmann story, along with the fear of castration and enucleation connected with it, Freud pretty much ruled out any possibility for animated objects to partake in the uncanny. As to "whether an object is animate or inanimate . . . is quite irrelevant . . . The notion of intellectual uncertainty in no way helps us to understand this uncanny effect" (138–9).

The Freudian paradigm, to the extent that it seems to negate the possibility for animated objects to be considered within the terms of the uncanny, cannot satisfactorily account for the fluid passage from euphoria to anguish in the Proustian scenes, any more than it can account for the conflict between the characters' knowledge and their experience of object agency or the return of the dead, on which numerous nineteenth-century fantastic stories hinge.[59] (And yet perhaps Freud's opposition to Jentsch, his denial of the uncanniness of animated objects, is ultimately more of a tactical move: in "The Uncanny" magical thinking, expelled at the beginning of the essay, makes a kind of back-door return, since the essay ends on the recounting of uncanny experiences that showcase the survival of animistic, magical thinking in the modern, rational psyche.[60]) In any case, Jentsch's technologically oriented theory, which takes the question of animated objects seriously, would appear to provide a more immediately serviceable paradigm here. The magical thinking common to children and premodern peoples, exploited as a form of spectacular entertainment by the *féerie*, is appropriated in Proust's writing as a defamiliarizing description of the lack of habit, whether euphoric or dysphoric.

Wartime *Féeries* and Puppet Wars: Ravel and Chomón

Animated objects of the *féerie* are thus profoundly ambivalent: they can be charming and funny, as they were in the nineteenth-century stage *féeries*, but they can also become hostile, uncanny, and frightening. As Laplace-Claverie has shown, the light-hearted *féeries* of the nineteenth-century stage were followed by much darker reimaginings of *féeries* that diverted the uncanny and magical elements for the purposes of describing the ominous and terrifying events of the twentieth century, in particular modern warfare.[61] More generally, as writers looked to violence and aggression as constitutive unconscious forces located within the psyche, or to the persistence of magical thinking and the infantile belief in the omnipotence of the will, they found that the language of *féerie* could aptly represent this often quite dark inner world. Conversely, it could also be a good vehicle for the real-world violence deployed outside of the mind, for example war. The mirroring described by Terry Castle in the context of the popular nineteenth-century entertainment

of phantasmagoria, "the absorption of ghosts into the world of thought,"[62] is at work here as well.

Cross-reading Proust's verbal *féeries* with Maurice Ravel's *opéra-féerie*, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, helps shed light on the similarly uncanny animation of inanimate objects. Ravel's opera, with a libretto by Colette, premiered in 1925, after a long delay caused by the war and by Ravel's mother's death. (Colette first drafted the libretto in 1915, when Ravel was on the front and she was a volunteer nurse.) In *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, a tantrum-prone child, rude to his mother, destructive to his belongings, and cruel to small animals at his mercy, undergoes a transformative experience when objects, toys, and animals magically turn on him. *Féerie*-style, a teacup and a teapot sing and dance, the grandfather clock waddles around, shepherds and shepherdesses come down from the wallpaper, cats sing a love duet, squirrels and insects talk, an animated fire threatens the boy (Figure 10.3), and even his arithmetic book comes to life. As they all gang up on the child, rebuking him for his destructive behavior, they accidentally wound a small squirrel: this breaks the spell, as the boy tries to heal the innocent animal, thereby releasing him from his destructive rage, and allowing him to return to the world of love via the magic word "*maman*," the final word in this opera.

The "spells" (*sortilèges*) in the work clearly belong to the genre of the *féerie*, and an array of secular magic tricks, including state-of-the-art animation techniques, are usually required in the staging of this challenging piece. The comparison of Ravel with a magician, quite common in his time (indeed, in 1939, Jankélévitch's classic biography highlighted the composer's taste for artifice, tricks, and mechanisms, equating him with a conjurer), has recently been substantiated in in-depth critical work by Jessie Fillerup, who explores the connections between Ravel and the famous magician Robert-Houdin.[63] Ravel's fondness for all things mechanical, including toys and clockwork devices, was very striking for his contemporaries: Jankélévitch describes Ravel's stage world as inhabited by "une sorte d'humanité dérisoire, une humanité automatique intermédiaire entre les hommes et les pendules" (a paltry humanity, an automatic humanity in between men and clocks).[64] Like a modern secular magician, Fillerup writes, "Ravel's fascinations with enchantment and mechanism converge in the presence of these trick machines."[65] To today's public, Ravel's affinity for the mechanical, framed by Benjamin and Adorno's theories on mechanical reproduction, epitomizes the choices of a modernist composer, wholeheartedly engaging with mechanical mediation devices of various kinds, from philosophical toys to automata, mechanical music, and more. The animated objects in *L'Enfant*, while they are part of the traditional *féerie* repertoire and belong to the comedic register, also speak to important cultural shifts caused by technologies of reproduction and the ambiguous predicament

in which the human may find itself threatened by the mechanical. Playful and whimsical they may be: but they also convey serious anxieties typical of modernity.

Despite the opera's funny, homely magic and its happy ending, therefore, it is striking that *L'Enfant* also harbors a darker side: in this "enchantment gone awry"[66] the child's sadistic tendencies (highlighted by Melanie Klein's famous analysis)[67] are played out and multiplied in the "war" of the animals that threatens to destroy his entire world. As in a psychomachia (for a contemporary take on this tradition we can think of Disney-Pixar's 2015 film *Inside Out*, where the five basic emotions that rule the heroine's mind—Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger—are personified and granted agency as characters), the turmoil in the child's psyche is externalized in the animated chaos engulfing the house. The war is both inside and outside: conversely, the destructive frenzy that overruns the play mirrors the real war raging just outside of Ravel's studio. Through the childish war of the animals and domestic objects, in which an innocent squirrel is hurt, this postwar *féerie* also points to all the children orphaned and maimed in the real war. Thus, despite the various circumstances that delayed its release until 1925, *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* is undeniably "a wartime opera."[68] Colette wrote the libretto as early as 1915, while Ravel accepted the commission for the music at the deepest point of the war, in 1916. Not only was Ravel exposed firsthand to the combat zone as a military convoy driver when he first conceived of the work: he was also acutely aware of and distressed by the suffering of civilians, notably reports of atrocities committed by German troops against Belgian children.[69] His earlier piece *Trois chansons* (1914–15) was composed directly in response to the horrors of the war.[70] An opera-*féerie* might seem like an escapist composition: but in fact the war was never far from this tale of domesticity run amok.[71]

Triangulating Proust, Ravel, and Chomón's *féeries* in a single optical network can yield new insights, as I hope to show now. One of Segundo de Chomón's films from his mature Italian period (1912–27), *La Guerra e il sogno di Momi* (The war and Momi's dream), released in Italy in 1917, is a pioneering mix of live-action narrative and animated dream sequences, with dreamer and dream images often simultaneously coexisting in the same frame in a "visionary" representation. The film was co-directed with Giovanni Pastrone, with Chomón in charge of all special effects.[72] After a long and brilliant international career, Chomón was much admired for his extraordinary special effects, from fires to volcanic eruptions, airplane crashes, shipwrecks, train wrecks, automobile accidents, battle scenes, bombings, and other spectacular catastrophes.[73] In this late film, they are all used alongside groundbreaking animation techniques. A small boy, Momi, is missing his father who is fighting on the front; he falls asleep on the sofa

and begins to dream; in his dream his puppets go to war against each other; the puppet war replicates World War I, complete with aerial bombardments and poison gas (see Figure 10.4).[74] The animated sequences, while playful and funny, nevertheless capture the horror in a way that documentaries, which were heavily censored, could not, and that the more conventional sentimental frame story (Momi's reduced family circle, waiting and hoping for news of the father) does not. "The boy's dream shows what the live-action would not dare to show: destroyed cities, generalized chaos, and death on an industrial scale," writes Carvalho Barbosa.[75] In a similar vein, F. Pacchioni contextualizes *Momi* in the earlier tradition of animated puppet films, from *The Humpty Dumpty Circus* (1897) to *The Teddy Bears* (1907), *The Dream of Toyland* (1907), or Méliès's 1908 *Au pays des jouets*, arguing that Chomón, building on yet also departing from the purely marvelous entertainment value of animation, used the puppet animation technology in the service of a "demythifying" and critical portrayal of the war.[76] In fact, Chomón's war of the puppets can also be understood in the historical context of the wartime toys for children, which reflected an ambiguous rapport with patriotic propaganda. Scholars have studied how, far from shielding children from the war, toy manufacturers marketed popular toys and games that mimicked the gruesome realities of the war, from the traditional tin soldiers to cannons, tanks, airplanes, and hospital wards complete with nurses and amputee teddy bears—and even the most notorious wartime toy of all, the "Exploding Trench," which was pulled from the shelves shortly after its release in 1915, arguably because it was felt to cross an invisible red line between the realities of war that children were allowed or even encouraged to mimic in their play, and those deemed unsuitable because they incited children's ferocity.[77]

Conclusion

Marcel Proust, Maurice Ravel, and Segundo de Chomón, I suggest, all illustrate in different ways and media the paradoxical yet compelling link between high modernist art and popular genres like the *féerie*. The nineteenth-century *féerie* becomes repurposed as a vehicle of magical transformation that enables a relationship to real-world violence, particularly modern warfare. As extended reimaginings of the *féerie*, both Proust's Doncières episode and Ravel's *opéra-féerie* follow the traditional pattern of an initiation quest. *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* ends with the happy ending required of a traditional *féerie*: the child is transformed and reconciled. Things are different in Proust—unless, of course, we interpret the ending of the entire *Recherche* as a happy ending, a *féerie* ending in which the

narrator finally, and magically, achieves his lifelong dream of writing the book. In the short term, however, darkness prevails in the narrative, just as it does in Chomón's film *The War and Momi's Dream*, which gives us no obvious happy ending. True, the "Italian" puppets triumph over the "German" puppets, but only in the dream; wishful thinking (Italian victory) wins the day, but only in toyland. The film ends, much more doubtfully, with a return to the live-action narrative, in which the noncombatant members of the family (grandfather, mother, and child) huddle together, hoping for the end of the war and the return of the father.

When reading Proust, the war (the war which greatly delayed first the completion, then the publication of *The Guermantes Way*, but which also profoundly altered the structure and scope of the entire novel)[78] is inevitably projected back onto the earlier garrison episode. War in Proust (a noncombatant) is internalized, theatricalized, and replayed on an individual plane, particularly the psychomachia acted out in Jupien's nightmarish brothel, with its parade of embodied vices and virtues and its sado-masochistic performances. Readers, likewise, cannot help but project the later war scenes back onto the euphoric weeks at Doncières, filled with friendly furniture and solicitous young men, who take such pleasure in showing off their brand-new strategic expertise.[79] The naïve confidence of these strapping young officers fresh out of military school, in retrospect, seems as frivolous as the pride they take in the elegance of St. Loup's uniforms, and as childish as talking furniture. Indeed, they particularly admire St. Loup's dashing red trousers:[80] the madder red trousers were the notorious part of the French uniform that were to prove so disastrously eye-catching in the early months of the war, making easy targets of the smart French soldiers, until they were replaced by the less conspicuous "horizon blue" uniforms. These men are children, playing at war; their games will be blown away by the technological apocalypse of a twentieth-century war.

In fact, the warm feelings in which the narrator basks during his time in Doncières will later be denounced as folly and delusion. Late in the book, the narrator pronounces a damning verdict on friendship, which he not only deems a waste of time and a distraction from the only goal that matters (artistic creation), but compares to the delusion of a madman who attributes agency to the objects surrounding him:

> The artist who gives up an hour of work for an hour of conversation with a friend knows that he is sacrificing a reality for something that does not exist (our friends being friends only in the light of an agreeable folly which travels with us through life and to which we readily accommodate ourselves, but which at the bottom of our hearts we know to be *no more reasonable than the*

> *delusion of the man who talks to the furniture because he believes that it is alive*). (*Time Regained*, III, 909; emphasis added)

With friendship thus dismissed as a "mental aberration," in C. Prendergast's words,[81] things have come full circle. In the Doncières hotel the narrator happily gives himself over to this "agreeable folly," behaving like a child who believes that the tricks and special effects on the stage are real. The real war, when it bursts onto the novel, will be nothing like this naïvely virile dream of elegant trousers, wholesome friendships, and orderly battles. The links between friendship and strategy, developed in the Doncières episode, will later find a gruesome counterpart in the links between war-as-carnage and S&M homosexuality that are woven through the wartime narrative.[82] As the German bombs fall on Paris and the blows fall on Charlus, we find ourselves in a very different kind of *féerie*—a dark, apocalyptic one, in which the traditional "apotheosis" ending of the genre has flipped to something as overblown as the *féerie* ending, but uncanny and horrifying.

Perhaps the *féerie*, and its more contemporary avatars the trick film and the animated film, with their paraphernalia of animated objects, were well suited for conveying the reality of a war that was unlike any previous conflicts, both in the scope of its devastation and in the unprecedented role of technology. St. Loup, even though he is killed before the end of the war in *Time Regained*, was prescient in recognizing the importance of technology, especially surveillance technology, in modern warfare, remarking "every army will have to be a hundred-eyed Argus" (as quoted by Gilberte, in *Time Regained*, III, 1030).[83] The new warfare technology, whether machines of transportation such as tanks and airplanes, or machines of optical mediation that applied the chronophotographic findings of Eadweard Muybridge to military photography surveillance devices, appeared to transfer agency from the human to the mechanical, as can be seen for example in the 1964 propaganda film made by the US Naval Ordnance Laboratory *It Started with Muybridge*.[84]

Friedrich Kittler, in *Operation Valhalla*, reflects on just such a shift from the human to the mechanical. As Geoffrey Winthrop-Young explains in his introduction to the volume, modern warfare was characterized by the "replacement of soldiers equipped with a 'command of free will' with killing devices," which "paved the way for the general substitution of human subjects by machine subjects."[85] Paul Virilio's vision of World War II, particularly the bombardments of residential areas, borrows the techno-magical vocabulary of the *féerie*. Virilio describes the quasi-instantaneous disappearance of an entire street, or an entire town by bombing (which he witnessed as a child) as "une esthétique de la disparition" (an aesthetics of disappearance) and a "tour de passe-passe," a sleight

of hand.[86] Troping the war as a magic spectacle would endure. The childish magic of the *féerie* could be (and indeed would be) appropriated for the expression of dramatically un-childish realities, unfathomable destruction: witness novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline (whose title, *Féerie pour une autre fois* [*Féerie* for another time], this essay borrowed), who harnessed the vocabulary and images of the *féerie* to describe the carpet-bombing of European cities in World War II.[87]

The endlessly malleable *féerie*, then, would prove a good vehicle to convey the paradoxes and the ambiguities of modernity—the fascination and the anxiety associated with the dominance of both visuality and technology. The suspicion, the contempt even, with which technology was viewed by some (a contempt directly traceable as far back as Sainte-Beuve's scathing and far-reaching 1839 attack on "industrial literature": a subset of a more general hostility towards modern industrial culture), the uneasy combination of technophilic attraction towards the playful, captivating dimension of the *féerie*, and the technophobic aversion for the uncanny, disquieting world of objects endowed with agency that it ushered in, reflected the ambivalence of a culture on the cusp of the post-human. In Proust's ambivalent, double-sided attitude to modernity, the playful delight and embrace of secular magic, the comic view of technology, the *féerie* as enchantment, coexists with anxiety, distrust, and fear: the *féerie* as disenchantment. *Féerie* all too easily flips into its darker side: thus, one moment the telephone is Punchinello, the next, it is a psychopompic instrument that ushers up the world of the dead; thus, the metamorphic guests in the final party scene flip comedy into tragedy, and the *féerie* into a dance of death.[88]

The technological apotheosis of Chomón's wartime *féerie The War and Momi's Dream*, with its farcical puppet *ragnarök*, had antecedents in the earlier trick films of Chomón's prewar Parisian period (*An Incoherent Excursion*, or *Electric Hotel*, for example) which spoke of a weird, machine-dominated world in which living objects turned on humans and modern technology had gone awry.[89] "The stop-motion animation sequences in *Electric Hotel* are narrativized as the labor-saving, but ultimately destructive" effects of technological progress, Matthew Solomon wrote. As Leigh Mercer argued, Chomón's weird mechanical world foreshadows Surrealism's ambivalent mix of fascination and repulsion towards technology.[90] It also provided a satirical counterpart to the strident glorification of war in Futurism, which bombastically celebrated the beauty of war for its "dreamt-of metallization of the human body."[91]

Perhaps what made the *féerie* so attractive to twentieth-century artists, to the point of providing them with a "figure of modernity,"[92] was indeed its profoundly paradoxical nature. It was childish, naïve, and radically escapist,

featuring fairies and neverlands, a nostalgic and preindustrial dreamworld—yet it was also the product of big industrial, modern, capitalistic processes. Its very ambivalence made it rich in resources as a space of cognition. The *féerie* resonated with a characteristic feature of the machine age, the magical view of technology, which conveyed the cognitive dissonance between archaic or age-old desires (annihilation of space and time, victory over death, dream of ultimate communication, and so forth) and the understanding (or misunderstanding) of technological accomplishments and potential. This, perhaps, could be said to be the *féerie's* specific form of the uncanny.

The *féerie* also provided an unexpected way to reconcile interior and exterior worlds. As a spectacle built on illusion, it lent itself to being appropriated as a metaphor for mental processes that also relied on illusion as their central kernel. Such is the importance of this idea that the narrator, in the final pages of the book, vows to respect the illusionism of perception in his descriptions, to represent the world not as we know it but as we perceive it. Ostensibly, he appropriates this aesthetic principle from the Impressionists. But less overtly, he is also appropriating from the less reputable *féerie* its core principle of illusion and mirage, which in turn makes the *féerie* a good point of entry into the aesthetic principle of illusionistic writing in the novel. Errors by which "our senses falsify the real nature of the world," he muses, must not be corrected for art "to give a more exact transcription of things":

> In the case of sounds, for instance, I should be able to refrain from altering their place of origin, from detaching them from their cause, beside which our intelligence only succeeds in locating them after they have reached our ears—though to make the rain sing softly in the middle of one's room or, contrarily, to make the quiet boiling of one's *tisane* sound like a deluge in the courtyard outside should not really be more misleading than what is so often done by painters when they paint a sail or the peak of a mountain in such a way that, according to the laws of perspective, the intensity of the colours and the illusion of our first glance, they appear to us either very near or very far away, through an error which the reasoning mind subsequently corrects by, sometimes, a very large displacement. (*Time Regained*, III, 1103)[93]

This externalization (this spectacularization) of mental processes—whether perception, understanding, habit, or memory—provides the phenomenological rudder of the narrative. Impressionist painters and *féerie* producers, perhaps surprisingly, relied on a similar trick, optical illusion, and the secondary, ancillary place which Proust assigns to intelligence recognizes the new primacy of sensory reality, which cuts off cause from effect, presenting first the effect. As Sara Danius wrote in *The Senses of Modernism*, mirage and

transformation, the products of modern technologies, make the Proustian world writable once again.[94] Interior and exterior worlds are reversed: rain falls into the Proustian bedroom; in Chomón's *Une excursion incohérente*, a train rolls out of the sleeper's mouth; in Ravel's *L'Enfant*, trees grow in the living room. *Féerie* techniques and tricks, no longer self-sufficient as they were in the cinema of attractions, but tightly woven into the fabric of the narrative,[95] are used to express the inner world of emotions or dreams and make it reversible with the outside world. Momi's dream contains the war; the child's anger in Ravel's *féerie* becomes cosmic, a world war.

The extended Proustian *féerie*, especially when we cross-read it with adjacent genres that also borrow from the language of the *féerie*, opens up a constellation of themes—special effects, technology, secular magic. Magical thinking rules the mindscape, linking inner experience and external world causally, and merging a forward-looking, avant-garde, cutting-edge technique with a backward-looking, nostalgic, regressive story, in a paradoxical and rewarding overlay.

Notes

1. For Simmel, "The interpersonal relationships of people in big cities are characterized by a markedly greater emphasis on the use of the eyes than that of the ears" (quoted in Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, 191).
2. Grøtta, *Baudelaire's Media Aesthetics.*
3. I have analyzed elsewhere the metaphorical incorporation of technologies of optical mediation into Chateaubriand's *Memoirs from Beyond the Tomb*: see Jullien, "Le Sourire de Marie-Antoinette."
4. On the "spectralization of mental space," see Castle, "Phantasmagoria" (1988), 29.
5. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Book V, chapter 53.
6. Chateaubriand, *Memoirs from beyond the Grave*, 4.
7. See Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 177.
8. Simon During's core argument is spelled out most forcefully in his introduction to *Modern Enchantments*, 1–3.
9. Danius, *The Senses of Modernism.*
10. A note about references to Proust in this essay: all quotes from *A la recherche du temps perdu* in the original French refer to the standard scholarly edition (1989 edition in the Bib.). For the English *Remembrance of Things Past* I quote from the classic English translation of 1982 (in the Bib.), with an occasional reference to the new Prendergast collective translation (*In Search of Lost Time*, 2002 edition in Bib.). I indicate the translator's name whenever I quote from their work (e.g., Treharne, translator of vol. 3, *The Guermantes Way*).
11. See Dixon on the cinema as a major working-class entertainment and an educational force in a British context, "A Night at the Cinema in 1914."

12. ffrench, *Thinking Cinema with Proust*, 3.
13. Huhtamo, "Screenology," 2017, 80.
14. See Yon, "La féerie ou le royaume du spectaculaire," 126, as well as Roxane Martin, who describes the genre as a "dramaturgie de l'image" (*La Féerie romantique*, 60) and an "esthétique du spectaculaire" (231), addressing generic hybridity, multimedia performance, linear succession of visually striking tableaux, self-parody, and indifference to plot logic in her groundbreaking study, *La Féerie romantique sur les scènes parisiennes*.
15. A generation of French writers born at the turn of the century are qualified as "enfants de la féerie" by H. Laplace-Claverie (*Modernes Féeries*, 78).
16. Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, I, 355–6. Conversely, the Goncourts, who in their youth had toyed with the idea of writing a poetic *féerie* (Laplace-Claverie, *Modernes Féeries*, 60) later had nothing but contempt for the *féerie*, which they derided as plebeian entertainment in their journal (March 1, 1862): see Singer-Kovacs, "Georges Méliès and the 'Féerie'," 7. Their effete writing style and superficial view of reality would become the butt of a Proustian satire and a counter-model in the novel.
17. Yon, "La Féerie ou le royaume du spectaculaire," 133. Martin's conclusion (*La Féerie romantique*, 471–8) also makes a strong argument in favor of revising established critical and aesthetic criteria to account for the vitality and originality of theatrical life in the nineteenth century.
18. Proust, *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, 48–50.
19. Laplace-Claverie, "Décadence et Renaissance," 11–12; Yon, "La Féerie ou le royaume du spectaculaire," 127; Dünne, "Raisonner avec la féerie," 6–7.
20. See Kessler, "La féerie: un spectacle paradoxal," particularly 71–5.
21. See "Georges Méliès and the 'Féerie'," 3.
22. Martin, *La Féerie romantique*, 328; Laplace-Claverie, *Modernes Féeries*, 35–7.
23. On Méliès's illusionistic techniques, see particularly Malthête, "Méliès, technicien du collage," 169–84.
24. On the transition from staged to filmed *féeries*, see Kessler, "The *Féerie* between Stage and Screen," as well as Hindemith, "Entre fées et fromages meurtriers," 51.
25. On the remediation process and the mutual influence of puppet theater and early film in the Italian context, see Pacchioni, "Lo schermo e il burattino."
26. Tadié stresses that the novel transformed the visual *féerie* into a verbal one (*Marcel Proust*, I, 356).
27. Kessler, "Changements à vue"; also Hindemith, "Entre fées et fromages meurtriers," 51, and Laplace-Claverie on the Proustian images of aging as *féerie* (*Modernes Féeries*, 80).
28. Chomón was long perceived as an imitator, and this accounted in part for the lapse in his reputation. Recent critical views have rehabilitated him: see Minguet Batllori, "Segundo de Chomón y el cine de los orígenes," 57; Cerezo, "Segundo de Chomón y El Arte de Un Cine 'sin literatura'," 127–8; Hamus, "Segundo de Chomon," 50–3; Hamus-Vallée et al., "Les mille et un visages de Segundo de Chomón," 9–10, among others.

29. Nosenzo, *Manuale tecnico per visionari*, 20. The public's taste would change after 1908, favoring a more narrative film over the cinema of attractions. Unlike Méliès, Chomón proved capable of adapting his products accordingly: see on this point Sadoul, *Le Cinéma devient un art*, 134 and 156.
30. Stafford and Terpak, *Devices of Wonder*, 11.
31. Bal, *The Mottled Screen*.
32. "Une farce poétique et grossière" (I, 119). See von Hagen, "'L'Admirable féerie'," 33–4, on these various examples of *féeries*.
33. See Treilhou-Balaudé, "Le spectaculaire shakespearien et sa réception à l'époque romantique," 62–5, as well as Laplace-Claverie, *Modernes Féeries*, 78–9.
34. *Le Côté de Guermantes*, II, 431. In the English translations, this is rendered either as "admirable sorcery" (Moncrieff, *The Guermantes Way*, II, 134), or "admirable magic" (Treharne, *The Guermantes Way*, III, 130): both translations capture the magic, but not the reference to a specific theatrical genre.
35. Michael Wood reads Proustian errors of perception as special effects, calling this "the Disney side of Proust" (quoted by Prendergast, *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 131).
36. On Walt Disney's extensive use of French Rococo decorative arts in the making of animated films, from "The China Shop" (*Silly Symphonies*, 1934) to the 1991 blockbuster *Beauty and the Beast*, see the exhibition catalog edited by Wolf Burchard, *Inspiring Walt Disney*, in particular the chapter on "Animating the Inanimate," 47–64.
37. Singer-Kovacs, "Georges Méliès and the 'Féerie'," 6.
38. "Le monde féerique est ainsi fait; le héros fût-il décapité, empalé, haché comme chair de pâté, mis dans un mortier et broyé au pilon, cela ne nuit en rien à la santé; tous les personnages se retrouveront sains et saufs à la lueur triomphante des feux de Bengale" (T. Gautier, *La Presse*, February 18, 1839, quoted by Martin, *La Féerie romantique*, 290). ([Such is the fairy world; the hero may be decapitated, impaled, chopped as pâté meat, put in a mortar and crushed with a pestle, that does not harm his health in any way; all the characters will come together again safe and sound in the triumphant glow of the Bengal fires]; translation mine.)
39. Frank Kessler stresses how much the Proustian novel is founded on strong ties between the child's world and the adult's world (Kessler, "Changements à vue," 144). Ravel and Chomón's *féeries* inhabit the same childish world.
40. "L'habitude! aménageuse habile mais bien lente et qui commence par laisser souffrir notre esprit pendant des semaines dans une installation provisoire; mais que malgré tout il est bien heureux de trouver, car sans l'habitude et réduit à ses seuls moyens il serait impuissant à nous rendre un logis habitable" (*The Guermantes Way*, I, 8). Sometimes the noun *habitude* is capitalized, sometimes not. Unsurprisingly, Habit is capitalized and divinized in the context of erotic attachments and pain caused by separation. "La force immense de l'Habitude" (IV, 12–13) is mentioned in the context of the pain inflicted by Albertine's absence; "un nouveau visage de l'Habitude" as a "divinité redoutable" is introduced a few

pages earlier (IV, 4). See Piazza, "Proust, philosophe de l'habitude," on Proust's debt to philosophers of habit, including A. Fouillée's metaphor of the "stéréoscope intérieur," 375.

41. See *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, 830–1.
42. *Aladin* was the first play staged with gaslight (then a cutting-edge technology) in Paris; it was advertised as an "opéra-féerie": see Cruz, 49.
43. On the vast corpus of satirical stories about technological malfunction, see Roberts, *Visions of Electric Media*, 40–1. In a similar vein, in Chomón's 1906 film *Le Fils du diable*, the valet, Sganarelle, communicates with Hell through a telephone: Batllori, "Segundo de Chomón y el cine de los orígenes," 62.
44. Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking*, 3. See also Dünne, who points out ways in which the *féerie* is linked to technology, in particular telecommunication (telephone, radio) and modern means of locomotion: "Raisonner avec la féerie," especially 7–8.
45. Kluitenberg, "On the Archaeology of Imaginary Media," in *Media Archaeology* (2011), 59. On Edison's attempt at technological transcendence, see also Kluitenberg, *The Book of Imaginary Media*, 166–70.
46. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 49.
47. Huhtamo, "Dismantling the Fairy Engine," 39.
48. Roberts, *Visions of Electric Media*, 106.
49. Roberts, *Visions of Electric Media*, 72.
50. Proust may well have read Robida, as this other remark about the future of telephone technology would indicate: Albertine's voice (which is immediately associated with her distinctive facial features) "was like what we are promised in the photo-telephone of the future: the visual image was clearly outlined in the sound" *(Within a Budding Grove*, I, 992.) On the desire for and invention of a visual component of the telephone, see Roberts, *Visions of Electric Media*, particularly chapters 1–3.
51. See Michael Wood's discussion of this iconic episode in terms of defamiliarizing technique as "dropping of the mask" (Wood, "Other Eyes," particularly 108) and Prendergast's engagement with Wood in terms of his discussion of defamiliarization as true cognition (*Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 126–7).
52. On the characteristic mix of comedy and cruelty in the telephone episode, see von Hagen's analysis "'L'Admirable féerie'," especially 39–40.
53. On the remediation of the stage trick into the film by Méliès, see Frank Kessler's essay in this volume, "Showing the Impossible: The Anatomy of a Cinematic Trick Image" (Chapter 7). My thanks to Katharina Rein for pointing out the addition of a skeleton in the film version. On the omnibus/hearse substitution, see Mangan, *Performing Dark Arts*, 130.
54. In Suzanne Guerlac's analysis of Proust's "camera eyes," the imaginary photograph (or memory image) taken in this episode is intertwined with the actual photograph taken by St. Loup of the narrator's sick grandmother during the first summer vacation in Balbec, which plays a crucial role in the narrator's grief and mourning at the beginning of his second Balbec visit. For a reading of both

photographic episodes in light of a philosophical analysis of habit, remembering/forgetting, and avant-garde experimental photography, see her book, *Proust, Photography, and the Time of Life*, especially 11–53.

55. For a history of communication devices real and imaginary in the Machine Age, see Kluitenberg, *The Book of Imaginary Media*.
56. Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 3.
57. Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," 12–13. See Mori, "The Uncanny Valley." On the link between puppetry and the uncanny valley, see Pacchioni, *The Image of the Puppet*, 36–7.
58. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 141.
59. Guy de Maupassant's late fantastic story "Qui sait?" ("Who Knows?," 1890), with its runaway furniture, would be a case in point.
60. For a recent discussion of the interest in animism in Freud's circle, and Freud's ambivalent view of it, see Deer, *Radical Animism*, 52–63.
61. Laplace-Claverie coins the phrase "féerie noire" (dark féerie) to describe the appropriation of the *féerie* motifs for sinister aspects of modernity. About Alfred Jarry's farcical-yet-terrifying creation, Ubu Roi, she points out that conventions of the *féerie* genre soon became an instrument of revelation and demystification from which subsequent political satires drew inspiration (*Modernes Féeries*, 68).
62. Castle, "Phantasmagoria" (1988), 29.
63. Fillerup's essay "Ravel and Robert-Houdin, Magicians" (2013) is reprised and developed in her later book, *Magician of Sound: Ravel and the Aesthetics of Illusion* (2021). Comparisons of Ravel to a fakir (Debussy), a conjurer, an illusionist (Jankélévitch), a master of artifice (Roland-Manuel), and so forth, were commonplace.
64. Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l'ineffable*; quoted by Abbate, "Outside Ravel's Tomb," 465.
65. Fillerup, "Ravel and Robert-Houdin," 158.
66. Fillerup, *Magician of Sound*, 226.
67. Melanie Klein's well known psychoanalytic reading, which focuses more on the child's rage and sadistic aggression against his mother and less on the final appeasement, was based on a review of the opera rather than a viewing of the performance: see Langham Smith, "Ravel's Operatic Spectacles," 200.
68. "Although it was completed amidst the troubled and chaotic relief of the 1920s, in conception it is a wartime opera, whose concluding gestures of reparation and forgiveness resonate with particular potency in the time and place of its creation" (Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel*, 220).
69. Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel*, 219.
70. See Jackson, *Maurice Ravel* (2–6), on Ravel's emotional distress, as well as his repeated efforts to enlist despite his poor health.
71. In acknowledgement of this, David Hockney's staging of the opera in 1981 at the Met featured characters wearing gas masks (Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel*, 218).
72. See Nosenzo, *Manuale tecnico*, 64.

73. See Nosenzo, "Segundo de Chomón, pionere del meraviglioso," 36–47.
74. See Nosenzo, *Manuale tecnico*, 47–8, on the sophisticated animation techniques used by Chomón for the different scenes of destruction in *Momi's Dream*, as well as 59–61 on the silhouettes, claymation, animated puppets, and double-impression techniques used in his many other trick films to give life to the inanimate.
75. Carvalho Barbosa, "The Man of a Thousand Tricks," 134. Claudia Gianetto also argues that comic or oneiric scenes allow for greater freedom ("La restauration de Maciste Alpino," 257).
76. Pacchioni, "Lo schermo e il burattino," 9–10. He concludes that animated puppets are especially well suited to express a critical perspective: "Grazie al fantoccio animato si comprendono con maggior forza l'atrocità, la futilità, l'immaturità e l'insensatezza del conflitto, che calpestano i sentimenti familiari e distruggono la civiltà e l'ambiente" (10). Also see Pacchioni's more recent book, *The Image of the Puppet in Italian Theater* (2022), 55–8.
77. On the exploding trench and other wartime toys, and more generally on the marketing of the war to children, see Duffett, "'Playing Soldiers?'," 239 and Kennedy, "'How Merrily the Battle Rages'," 226–38.
78. See Fraisse, *Proust et la stratégie militaire*, especially 5–9 and 39–45.
79. Luc Fraisse defines military strategy in Proust as "intellectualité pure" (pure intellectuality) (*Proust et la stratégie militaire*, 5), as opposed to the war as chaotic lived experience. Also noteworthy are his brief remarks on the war episode as oneiric narrative (61) and cinematographic narrative (62).
80. Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, II, 91.
81. Prendergast, *Mirages and Mad Beliefs*, 6.
82. See Fraisse, *Proust et la stratégie militaire*, 23–4.
83. Even earlier, St. Loup expresses the same prescient awareness: "The best army will be, perhaps, the army with the best eyes" (*Time Regained*, III, 769).
84. The film traced a smooth arc from Muybridge's galloping horse sequential photographs to instruments that calibrate, synchronize, and sequence cameras for recording the flight of ballistic missiles. Today, of course, it is done with drones.
85. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, "The Wars of Friedrich Kittler," introduction to Kittler et al., *Operation Valhalla: Writings on War, Weapons, and Media*, 31.
86. Virilio, "Vitesse, guerre & vidéo," 96.
87. See Laplace-Claverie, *Modernes Féeries*, especially 95–108.
88. Laplace-Claverie speaks of a "danse macabre" (*Modernes Féeries*, 80).
89. Federico Pacchioni also connects the earlier film *Electric Hotel*, with its infernal takeover of animated objects, to the later war film: "Lo schermo e il burattino," 8; see also *The Image of the Puppet in Italian Theater*, 55–6.
90. Solomon, "Visible and Invisible Hands," 109; Mercer, "Fear at the Hands of Technology," especially 81–2. She also points out that trick cinematography can be "delighting as much as horrifying," 88.
91. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's Futurist manifesto aestheticizing modern warfare is famously quoted in the epilogue of Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 234.

92. This is the title of Jörg Dünne's special issue of *Lendemains: La Féerie autour de 1900—Une figure de la modernité.* For Laplace-Claverie, the *féerie* is "un des laboratoires de la modernité théâtrale" (one of the laboratories of stage modernity), and a "terrain d'expérimentation privilégié" (a privileged experimental terrain) (*Modernes Féeries*, 38).
93. "Mais enfin je pourrais à la rigueur, dans la transcription plus exacte que je m'efforcerais de donner, ne pas changer la place des sons, m'abstenir de les détacher de leur cause à côté de laquelle l'intelligence les situe après coup, bien que faire chanter doucement la pluie au milieu de la chambre et tomber en déluge dans la cour l'ébullition de notre tisane ne dût pas être en somme plus déconcertant que ce qu'ont fait si souvent les peintres quand ils peignent, très près ou très loin de nous, selon que les lois de la perspective, l'intensité des couleurs et la première illusion du regard nous les font apparaître, une voile ou un pic que le raisonnement déplacera ensuite de distances quelquefois énormes" (IV, 622).
94. Danius, *The Senses of Modernism*, 95.
95. See André Gaudreault's classic argument on the evolution from cinema of attractions to narrative integration of effects ("Narration and Monstration in the Cinema"); as well as Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction," 63–70, *passim*; Hamus, "Segundo de Chomon," 57–9; Baena-Gallé, "Les codes visuels de la narration chez S. de Chomón," 75–84.

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