CHAPTER 2

A Personal Style of Face
Proust and the Physiognomy of Women

"To think that I wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I felt the deepest love, for a woman who did not appeal to me, who was not my type [*mon genre*]!" (SW 396).[1] Appearing in "Swann in Love," the middle section of *Swann's Way*, the first volume of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–27), the sentence punctuates the perceived tragedy of Swann's love for Odette: He wasted a good portion of his life agonizing over an unworthy love object. The repetitive syntax, centering a hyperbolic, self-ironizing willingness to die in the name of love, registers a sense of mourning over a misplaced time investment. On the other side of the asymmetrical syntactical formulation is Odette, who was not the right *genre* or *type*. As we will see, looking back, straining his memory to recover his first impression of Odette, Swann would realize that she did not appeal to him because she had the wrong face. This chapter rereads Proust's novel as a dramatization of a theory of memory for which the paradigmatic object of memory retrieval is a face.

"Swann in Love" was written between 1909 and 1911; its plot is set in the 1870s.[2] The novella-like section of the novel engages a complex nineteenth-century physiognomic culture.[3] In *Time Regained*, the narrator acknowledges the centrality of "Swann in Love" to his aesthetic project by identifying Swann as the "stem" of a number of his formative experiences: "[T]he raw material of my experience, which was to be the raw material of my book, came to me from Swann" (FTA 223).[4] Multiple physiognomic themes appear in "Swann in Love" – to ambiguous and often contradictory effect. Swann self-identifies as an art expert and a collector of facial expressions (SW 208), a connoisseur of faces.[5] Upon his acquaintance with Odette, Swann measures her against what he imagines as his personal museum of women, "turning her image among those of many other women in his romantic daydreams" (SW 206). This museum is anchored materially in Proust's collection of photographs, many of women and queer men.[6] The result of the comparative exercise is disappointment.

And yet Swann is a skilled physiognomist: In order to cultivate his desire, he projects an ekphrastic classical type onto Odette's face – a mechanism explored in the previous chapter. In a twist on physiognomy, however, Odette successfully refashions herself as Mme Swann, modeled on a type of her own invention. Simply put, Odette gives herself a new face.

Proust wrote "Combray," the first section of *Swann's Way*, and *Finding Time Again*, the last volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, at the same time, plotting them relationally, one as the beginning and the other as the end of his novel project.[7] This chapter argues that, between these two structural parts, the novel dramatizes a modernist theory of the face.[8] The first part of the chapter analyzes the first step in this theory, the framing of Swann's face in the early pages of "Combray" as a faux transparent envelope, a surface for social projection. I subsequently track Swann's projection onto the surface of Odette's face; the mechanism for this projection is, as in the case of *Death in Venice,* ekphrasis. The chapter then follows Odette's refacialization as Mme Swann; we witness in the possibility of Odette's refacialization a redeployment of physiognomic discourse toward modernist ends. Narratively, Odette's refacialization offers the structural anchor for the continuity of the novel across its volumes, all the way to the matinee of the last volume, which gathers its aged characters. The narrator's retrospective reflection on the work of memory as it relates to the writing of his novel identifies the face as the paradigmatic object of memory work (FTA 225). In search of lost time becomes in search of lost face. Time, memory, and the face form a modernist conceptual constellation.

The Transparent Envelope

Two of Proust's most devoted and influential readers, Walter Benjamin and Gilles Deleuze, framed their interpretation of *La recherche* in relation to physiognomy. For Benjamin, Proust's literary project is in a physiognomic relation to its historical period. "The image of Proust," he writes, "is the highest physiognomic expression which the irresistibly growing discrepancy between literature and life was able to assume."[9] Likewise, in a 1964 book that remains a reference point in Proust criticism, Gilles Deleuze argued that Proust's novel stages an apprenticeship, whereby the narrator – "the hero of the Search" – learns to decipher signs: in persons, objects, and substances. "Charlus," writes Deleuze, referring to the narrator's queer friend, "is the most prodigious emitter of signs, by his worldly power, his pride, his sense of theater, his face, and his voice."[10] Through his "line of apprenticeship" with Swann, as well as his association with

Charlus, the narrator learns, among other things, a version of physiognomy: how to read signs emitted by the face. For both Benjamin and Deleuze, physiognomy provides one order of signs in an ultimately pluralistic novelistic world, but it remains a forceful semiotic force.

Women, in particular, are classified according to a physiognomic typology. In a draft from 1910–11, Proust drew an analogy between women encountered in a brothel and works of art encountered in an art manual: "Madams allow us to replace an abstract type with an individual face. They render us the same service as . . . those other benefactors who are their analogs of a more recent vintage: authors of illustrated histories of art. . . . Like them, madams nourish us, provide us with the particular type of pleasure that consists of encountering an individual work."[11] The analogy posits a relation between the reading of artworks and the reading of women. The physiognomic understanding of art was commonplace in art history in the early twentieth century, which Proust knew well. In his work on the history of physiognomy, Frederic J. Schwartz describes Austrian art historian Hans Sedlmayr as representative of a European physiognomic mode of art history. Sedlmayr's main concept was "visible character," the belief in a physiognomic perception – of objects in the world as well as art objects.[12] The key to this mode of perception is spontaneity. Physiognomy, in Schwartz's account, represents the "perception that grasps the elements of the world, be they faces or landscapes, cultures or works of art, as wholes, spontaneously and in an instant."[13] According to Schwartz, Sedlmayr mistook instantaneous perception for vision *tout court*. The result was "the most fascinating failure of twentieth-century art historiography, its greatest scandal both ideologically and epistemologically."[14] As we have seen in the previous chapter, a number of modernist writers, critics, and theorists engaged with this scandal. Was Proust at home in the scandal of physiognomic discourse or was he exploring enemy territory? Does his comedy of manners frame the scandal, or does it sometimes risk reproducing it?[15]

In his *Essays on Physiognomy*, Johann Casper Lavater identified "the physiognomy of women" as a subfield of physiognomy. Reprints of the essays reproduced Lavater's belief that the physiognomy of women can "season and improve life, and is the most effectual preservative against the degradation of ourselves and others."[16] At stake in this subfield was the belief that a man can read the type of woman in front of him and make decisions accordingly (a similar argument applied to servants). The physiognomy of women promised to reveal the boundary between desire and love, love and friendship, purity and coquetry. Using his physiognomic

discernment, as the conceit had it, a man could see through women's "dangerous charms."[17] The idea returned at the height of the physiognomic craze of the nineteenth century, as abbreviated reprints of Lavater's *Essays* advertised physiognomy's faith that women could be classified into types.[18] An 1843 physiognomy manual published in Paris claimed to identify and taxonomize such types.[19] Line drawings traced the contours of various women types.

There are clear physiognomic statements underpinning the sketching of several characters in Proust's work.[20] Witness this formulation: "The qualities and faults of any person, as they appear in the foreground of the face, will be arranged in a different order if we come upon them from another angle" (SYGF 453). The statement both reproduces a physiognomic tenet (the character of a person appears on the face) and challenges it (a different angle of the face reveals a different character) – a signature ambivalent move in Proust's text. Importantly, the writers Proust portrays are often sketched as specialists in human hierarchies, who "enjoy classifying by species, by innate characteristics, but also by acquired characteristics" (SYGF 260). This notion of species applies to animals and humans alike; insects are a favorite foil for people. Keeping with this novelistic expertise, Proust's narrators develop philosophic and linguistic reflections on facial features. Bergotte, the writer in Proust's triad of artists, which enlists a painter and a composer within a complex intermedial dynamic, prefers the word *visage* over *face* (SYGF 127).[21] Among these physiognomic resonances – some explicit, some tacit – Proust seems to have been fascinated with the physiognomy of women, to which he brought some of the queer investments that infuse his text.

At the same time, the text offers a forceful rebuttal of some of physiognomy's central tenets. We get a glimpse of the narrator's ambivalent take on physiognomic reading at the very beginning of the novel: "None of us constitutes a material whole, identical for everyone, which a person has only to look up as though we were a book of specifications or a last testament [*nous ne sommes pas un tout matériellement constitué, identique pour tout le monde et dont chacun n'a qu'à aller prendre connaissance comme d'un cahier des charges ou d'un testament*]" (SW 19). The narrator rejects here two of the most enduring assumptions in physiognomy – that we are book-like, readable, and that we constitute a whole. Instead, he posits, "our social personality is a creation of the minds of others [*notre personnalité sociale est une création de la pensée des autres*]" (SW 19). "Personality" is social; it is not inherent to the person, but rather created

through social interaction. How is this creation facialized? The narrator responds by way of a royal *we*:

> We fill the physical appearance of the individual we see with all the notions we have about him.. . . [T]hey swell his cheeks so perfectly, follow the line of his nose in an adherence so exact, they do so well at nuancing the sonority of his voice as though the latter were only a transparent envelope that each time we see this face and hear this voice, it is these notions that we encounter again, that we hear. (SW 19)

The notions we have of others create our *perception* of cheeks and noses – as if they were a transparent envelope.[22] Proust is exposing here what Schwartz calls the "physiognomic fallacy." We might think we are reading a book through the transparent envelope, but instead we are projecting our own or our society's images of others onto the transparency of the envelope. Ultimately, the text acknowledges that such projections render us incapable of perceiving faces: "One's long-standing mental image of others deprives one of sight and hearing in their presence" (SYGF 5).

In this first instantiation of Proust's theory of the face, the narrator applies his knowledge of this practice, which he ironizes as a comedy of manners, to the different "social personalities" projected onto Swann. Those who know Swann as a man of fashion thus "see refinements rule his face and stop at his aquiline nose as though at their natural frontier" (SW 19). By contrast, the narrator's countryside family perceives Swann's "face disaffected of its prestige" (SW 19). Two distinct and conflicting Swanns coexist in the narrator's early memory (later, they multiply further). Central to both sets of assumptions is Swann's nose.[23] Following racialized, anti-Semitic physiognomic tropes, both groups identify Swann as Jewish, but the meaning of Jewishness differs from one group to the other. For the narrator, neither is the "real Swann"; both are projections. *Finding Time Again* drives the point home: "I had seen people vary in appearance according to the idea that I or others had of them, a single person being several according to the people who are observing him (various Swanns in the opening volume for example . . .)" (FTA 221). The bottom line: For the narrator, Swann is not a book. His face is an envelope on which others write – again and again.

The challenge to the transparent envelope principle leads to the multiplicity of Swann's faces, a premise complicated by the text's framing of Gilberte's face and then, and more consequentially, of Albertine's face. Gilberte's face is described as a series of snapshots out of focus (SYGF 63). Perception acquires a photographic dimension. The narrator remembers a

multiplicity of faces – as if they were photographs. Since "the beloved model keeps moving" (SYGF 63), both attention and memory are distracted in their attempts to immobilize their object. This premise is fully developed in relation to the character of Albertine: "Pleasures are like photographs: in the presence of the person we love, we take only negatives, which we develop later, at home" (SYGF 451). Importantly, the reader encounters Albertine in the narrator's reflection *before* she appears in the novel. Ramon Fernandez argues that the singularity of Proust's take on the human face rests in the fact that, by the time Albertine's face is described, the narrator has projected so many fantasies onto her transparent envelope that her physicality – the physicality of her face – can only "explode" these imaginative projections.[24]

Nonetheless, the first impression of a face remains a crucial reference point, an origin of sorts, to be revisited, over time, again and again. Her appearance having been anticipated through a number of forward-looking narrative leaps, the reader encounters Albertine as an embodied character in a scene on the esplanade, a stage for strolling and mutual examination (SYGF 370). Albertine is at first perceived as part of a group of young women – referred to as a gang of girls, a little clique, a little tribe, a bevy of girls, and the titular bouquet of buds (SYGF 375, 380). The group of girls is itself facialized. In turn, each girl is identified as a type, each corresponding to a facial feature. To the narrator, the girls come across as Greek statues set against the sea. Later, as the narrator remembers this scene, he invokes physiognomy explicitly: "[O]ur perception of faces does entail measuring; but our methods are those of painters, rather than of surveyors" (SYGF 524). The narrator, who engages in this form of pseudo-scientific measuring, distances himself from physiognomy and phrenology and claims allegiance with painters, who of course have often borrowed from the physiognomist toolbox themselves. Slowly, each girl acquires an individualized face, which the narrator struggles to decipher on the move.

Albertine eventually stands out against the esplanade crowd and her group of friends: A dark girl with laughing eyes, wearing an intriguing toque and pushing a bicycle (SYGF 374). The moment of the first impression of Albertine becomes a blur almost immediately; after he makes her acquaintance, the narrator cannot decide whether it was indeed Albertine he saw in the initial scene (SYGF 410, 450), but this indecision only amplifies the mystique. Subsequently, as Albertine's face multiplies, the first impression becomes the object of memory: "This is how I see her to this day . . . the first glimpse of her in my memory, a very slight image of a face first desired and pursued, then forgotten, then found again, a face

that since then I have often projected into the past, so as to say to myself, of a girl with me in my bedroom, 'That was her!'" (SYGF 410). The sentence "That was her!" marks the desire to *recognize* a face one feels one has seen before – against the background of the face being always already in the process of being lost. The very project of the novel the narrator would write, which he likens to an optical instrument, a magnifying glass (FTA 342), finds its impetus in the first impression of Albertine's face: "Of course, it is with that face, as I had seen it for the first time by the sea, that I associated certain things which I would no doubt be writing about" (FTA 225). The face acquires a singular metatextual role in relation to the writing of the novel – within and outside the diegesis.

Proust's framing of the first impression of the face aligns with Georg Simmel's writing on first impressions. Suzanne Guerlac has revealed key resonances between Proust and Simmel, largely through Simmel's philosophy of money.[25] The writer and the sociologist also converged over their respective framing of a "sociology of the senses." Proust's reflections on first impressions align with a modernist sociology. "It is astounding," Simmel wrote, "how much we know of a person upon the first glance.... [W]e cannot say absolutely perhaps whether the person seems smart or dumb, pleasant or vicious, high-spirited or sleepy to us.... [The first look] remains forever the tone of all later recognitions of that person."[26] As Proust's narrator is searching for the lost face of Albertine, he is searching for the tone of that first encounter, which endows her persona with a certain "air."

The novel's account of the human face intersects its other major theme – memory, a leitmotif in literary modernism. For Benjamin, a face functions as a "handle of memory."[27] In his reading of Proust, André Benhaïm invokes the face as a memory aid (*aide-mémoire*).[28] My argument is that the paradigmatic object of memory retrieval for Proust *is* the face. *Finding Time Again* is explicit: "[T]he made-up faces had given me the idea of lost time" (FTA 345). Proust searches for lost time via the lost face. In turn, if the face is a social projection, the "notions" we project on faces are often a function of memory, as *The Prisoner* makes clear in its descriptions of Albertine as a series of disparate snapshots. Chronophotography is central here; in the narrator's memory, Albertine is a collection of photographs, assembled into a blurry chronophotograph by the narrator's consciousness over time.[29] This collection of multimedia images is heterogeneous; some faces contradict other faces. In Proust's project, however, face and memory reinforce each other.

Once the multiplicity of Albertine's face is posited, the text returns to the scene of first encounter. Gérard Genette understands this mechanism

as a form of "deferred interpretation" whereby, over time, new meanings are found in the encounter with Albertine's face.[30] Genette writes:

> Marcel understands then that he had understood nothing, and – supreme truth – "that the true Gilberte – the true Albertine – were perhaps those who had at the first moment yielded themselves in their facial expression, one behind the hedge of pink hawthorn, the other upon the beach," and that he had thus, through incomprehension – through excess of reflection – 'missed the boat' at that first moment.[31]

In this sense, "first impressions" become the object of repeated reinterpretations, sometimes acknowledged as misreadings, where the first scene of reading is always already lost.[32] If the text works retrospectively in this mode, it also makes anticipatory leaps, as in the scene in which, before kissing Odette for the first time, Swann holds her face at a distance, "to give himself time to catch up and be witness to the fulfillment of the dream" and "set eyes for the last time upon the Odette not possessed."[33] Faces acquire meaning and are iteratively reinterpreted in both backward and forward narrative movements.

The multiplicity of the human face acquires the force of a philosophical aphorism in a narrative moment of heightened intensity: "The human face is truly like that of a god in some Oriental theogony, a whole cluster of faces side by side, but placed on different planes and never all visible at once [*Le visage humain est vraiment comme celui du Dieu d'une théogonie orientale, toute une grappe de visages juxtaposés dans des plans différents et qu'on ne voit pas à la fois*]" (SYGF 495, 269–70). Proust projects an Orientalist frame onto what is essentially a photographic understanding of the multiplicity of the face, seen both in motion and across time, through the lens of memory.[34] The aphorism condenses a few principles: The face is not one but many; the faces that gravitate around one self do not all belong to the same plane; the self designs a game of visibility and opacity; since an observer cannot see these faces all at once, the face becomes a mystery. Proust associates this mystery with an Oriental God. The formulation is vague ("some Oriental theogony") but Proust seems to be aware of the import of the face in East Asian physiognomy, which often serves as an archive for Western theorizing about the face.[35] One of the outcomes of this connection with "Oriental theogony" is the adjacent trope of Oriental inscrutability.

Another outcome is the association of the face with the divine. Starting from the invocation of the divine in such instances, Benhaïm reads Proust's faces alongside the work of Emmanuel Levinas as sites of unknowable alterity.[36] For Levinas, the face constitutes the mode of appearance of

the other, which interpellates the I into being and into ethics.[37] The face of the other comes before the subject and constitutes the subject's ethical horizon. Ethics is an openness or hospitality toward the face of the other, a responsiveness to the demand issued by the other's face. This face is, for Levinas, both material and transcendent. Importantly, although at times his writing on the face acquires Simmel-like phenomenological touches, Levinas's face is not, as the French word *visage* suggests, a visual phenomenon, something to see. Likewise, Levinas's face has no form.[38] In my reading, Proust deploys a constellation of heterogeneous tropes of faciality, including the inhumanity/divinity of the face. In terms proposed in the Introduction, where I suggested that the twentieth-century philosophical debate on the face can be described as a tension between Levinas, on one hand, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, on the other, Proust's project is closer to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of faciality than to Levinas's face of the other. Proust's face is visual *visage* and it is technical, produced by various technologies, including photography and literature. Much as Proust's text is in search of what Levinas refers to as the epiphany of the face, such epiphany never comes. Most consequential to the arc of Proust's understanding of facialization along these lines is Odette's face. The multiplicity of the face challenges the physiognomic premise of the transparent envelope, while the possibility of refacialization enlists a revised physiognomy into a modernist practice.

Swann's Odette

We return to the sentence with which I began this chapter. Odette does not fit Swann's profile of a desirable woman, so he designs a mechanism to curb his desire. In order to trace Odette's refacialization, we need to track this initial facialization, Swann's projection onto her transparent envelope:

> She had seemed to Swann not without beauty, certainly, but of a type of beauty [*genre de beauté*] that left him indifferent, that aroused no desire in him, even caused him a sort of physical repulsion, one of those women such as everyone has his own [*des ces femmes comme tout le monde a les siennes*], different for each, who are the opposite of the kind [*type*] our senses crave. Her profile was too pronounced for his taste, her skin too delicate, her cheekbones too prominent, her features too pinched. (SW 203)

Rendered through Proust's free indirect style, Swann's perception of Odette is filtered through a physiognomy of types. She is "one of those women" – a certain "type" or "kind." Most importantly, her profile is excessive – *too* pronounced. Compared with what? The implication is that

Swann weighs Odette's face against a tacit physiognomic law.[39] Finding himself in Odette's presence, Swann thus thinks he is in the presence of a facial type, one that "he would not have spontaneously preferred [*du genre de celles qu'il aurait spontanément préférées*]" (SW 204). He repeatedly raises doubts about "the quality of her face, her body, her whole beauty" (SW 232). The story of Swann's love for Odette has been read through the prism of his misunderstanding of her cocotte past and the narrator's discovery of that past in Elstir's painting, *Miss Sacripant*. In the context of this book, supplementing the arguments of the previous chapter, I am rereading it as a dramatization of physiognomic reading. The key word here, as Schwartz emphasizes in his study of modernist physiognomy, is "spontaneity."

The nineteenth-century "physiognomy of women" yielded a number of women types. Swann's preference for plump, rosy-cheeked women purportedly derives from his spontaneous desire: "[E]ach of these love affairs, or each of these flirtations, had been the more or less complete fulfillment of a dream inspired by the sight of a face or body that Swann had spontaneously, without making any effort to do so, found charming" (SW 203). Were Swann to have a love affair with Odette, a possibility he feels attracted to, he would have to work on his desire – find ways to curb it. Since Odette cannot spontaneously trigger in Swann the kind of reaction a plump rosy-cheeked working girl does, Swann designs a compensatory mechanism meant to realign her image, and especially her face, with another type of beautiful woman. This mechanism redeploys a "peculiar penchant [*goût*]" (SW 231) Swann has for discovering faces he knows from his everyday life in artworks. Swann deploys this skill toward the identification of the face of his coachman Rémi with a Venetian sculpted bust of a doge by Antonio Rizzo. Swann imagines that great artists, like Rizzo, "introduced into their work, faces like these which give it a singular certificate of reality and of truth to life, a modern flavor [*une saveur moderne*]" (SW 231). Note that modernity enters early modern artworks through the quotation of faces; faces travel the arc of the modern and become legible in Swann's everyday life – or, rather, the other way around: People he encounters in his everyday become recognizable in old artworks.[40] When Rémi is mentioned again, he is referred to parenthetically as "the Doge Loredano by Rizzo" (SW 238). Later, he is simply Lorédan (SW 371). It is this fine-tuned mechanism that Swann deploys in his appreciation of Odette.[41]

In order to manage his desire, Swann, an art historian, engages in a particular kind of ekphrastic exercise. He first notices a resemblance

between Odette's face and a Botticelli fresco: "Inclining her head, with those large eyes of hers, so tired and sullen when she was not animated, she struck [*frappa*] Swann by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, in *qu'on voit dans The Trials of Moses* in the Sistine Chapel" (SW 231).[42] *Resemblance* is key here: Zipporah resembles Odette. The agent of the spontaneous observation remains, like in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, ambiguous and impersonal. Benjamin's reading of *La recherche* frames a "Proust frenetically studying resemblances, his impassioned cult of similarity" uncovered in "actions, physiognomies, or speech mannerisms."[43] Deleuze and Guattari likewise pause on this node in Proust's text, to foreground the chain of such recollections: "A thing must always recall something else.. . . [A] face must 'recall' [*rappeler*] a painting or a fragment of a painting."[44] Once the observation of resemblance by way of memory is made, spontaneously, as if in passing, in the next step Swann purposefully pursues its promise (the movement between these poles corresponds to the movement between involuntary and voluntary memory). He slowly develops a method: "He looked at her; a fragment of the fresco appeared in her face and her body, and from then on he would always try to find it in her again, whether he was with Odette or only thinking of her" (SW 232).[45] For the purposes of Swann's perception, Odette becomes Jethro's daughter. Swann coaxes his perception to spontaneously "appraise" (SW 232) – the French verb is *estimer* – one in the other. In W. J. T. Mitchell's terms invoked in the previous chapter, the character of Odette constitutes an ekphrastic imagetext: Zipporah-Odette.[46]

Subsequently, when Swann wants to look at a photograph of Odette, he looks at a photograph of the Botticelli fresco. Proust had not seen *The Trials of Moses* (1481–82) firsthand; rather, he had seen it in reproductions. Photographs of Botticelli's paintings (likely John Ruskin's reproductions) represent Odette to Swann. Through this mechanism, anchored in a metonymical resemblance between Zipporah and Odette, Odette escapes the undesirable type Swann initially projects on her. She comes to embody, in his perception, a classical type, as imagined by the Renaissance and recuperated by nineteenth-century art history. She is now equipped with a certain nobility (SW 232).[47] Odette temporarily translates into "an inestimable masterpiece [*chef-d'oeuvre inestimable*]" (SW 233).[48] Swann now desires Odette. When he kisses her, it is her face he kisses, following a long tradition of face-kissing, after he appraises it – "at a certain distance" (SW 242).[49] Whenever Swann's desire needs rekindling, he re-infuses Odette's face with a dose of Botticelli; "he would place it in it, he would give her neck the necessary inclination" (SW 247). Like with

Mann's Tadzio, the beloved's face as a work of art needs to be experienced at a certain angle.

The physiognomic reading of Odette is not limited to her profile. In an ironic nod to an old Lavaterian tradition reinvented in the nineteenth century, Swann assesses Odette through a physiognomic account of her house and its furnishings.[50] In this respect, Swann becomes what Benjamin called a "physiognomist of the interior," deploying the physiognomic gaze as detective gaze, here doubling as a jealous gaze. The dominating feature of Odette's interior is a certain Orientalism: "[W]alls painted a dark color and hung with Oriental cloths, strings of Turkish beads, and a large Japanese lantern suspended from a slender silk cord (but which, so as not to deprive visitors of the latest comforts of Western civilization, was lit with gas)" (SW 228), and "immense palm trees contained in china cachepots" (SW 228). Physiognomic perception travels between the homeowner, Odette, and an exotically inviting gendered environment. Odette's domestic dressing style becomes eloquent, her clothes blending with the house and its furnishings.[51] Swann's conclusion at the end of his visit, having appraised both interior and its inhabitant: "How nice it would be to have a little woman like that [*d'avoir ainsi une petite personne*] in whose home one could always find that rare thing, a good cup of tea" (SW 230).[52] "A little woman like that" is produced discursively against the backdrop of the house, which functions as a stage for Odette's "portrait" (SW 229). Equipped with a Botticelli face, dressed in a mauve crêpe de chine, and bathed in the light of a faux Japanese lantern, Odette becomes a type Swann can imagine returning home to. As the text develops and Odette is revealed to have had at least one relationship with a woman and to cross-dress, the *Japonisme* around which this mode of Orientalism is produced doubles as a mask of queerness.[53] A certain inscrutability, inflected as queerness, attaches to Odette thus Orientalized.

In conjunction with the physiognomic reading of Odette's face and the interior of her house, Swann reads Odette's handwriting: "He received a note from Odette and immediately recognized the large handwriting, in which an affectation of British stiffness imposed an appearance of discipline on ill-formed letters [*des caractères informes*] that would have perhaps signified, to less prejudiced eyes [*des yeux moins prévenus*], an untidiness of mind, an insufficient education, a lack of frankness and education" (SW 230). "Immediately" functions as "spontaneously" above – an instant perception-cum-recognition of *écriture* as face (and the reverse: the face as writing). In this case, Odette's handwriting camouflages the character

traits of its author behind a mask of British affectation – Britishisms functioning as both class and queer motifs in Proust's text.[54] In other words, Odette fakes her handwriting, or, rather, she presents a handwriting that perhaps purposefully reads as fake. Swann's eyes are, at this point, prejudiced by love and therefore miss the "significance" of the handwriting. To other eyes (the eyes of the collective that Proust's text routinely invokes, also prejudiced but in different ways), the handwriting would be legible as a symptom of a certain kind of woman – uneducated, untidy, dishonest. Like Odette's domestic space, her handwriting becomes an object of investigation for the jealous detective gaze.[55]

Glossing Proust's use of handwriting, without linking it to physiognomy, Akane Kawakami traces multiple instances of reading in *La recherche*. Saint-Loup's handwriting, centrally, functions as face:

> I recognized instantly any letter from him, as they all show the second face every person has, the one seen in his or her absence, and in the features of which (the letters of the script) there is no reason not to believe we can see the individual spirit so clearly perceptible in the line of their nose or the tones of their voice. (SYGF 448)[56]

The shape of letters translates into a second face, inviting decoding. The reverse is true as well; faces can be read on an analogy with handwritten manuscripts. The narrator frames the face of the Balbec hotel manager, whom he encounters after his first experience with Albertine, as a handwritten script: "The features of his face had become nondescript, expressive of a meaning which, though mediocre, was as intelligible as handwriting one can read" (SYGF 380). The narrator's optical attention transforms its object into a specimen, a type – in this case, not a type of interest to the narrator, but rather one he can read in passing. Odette's handwriting, on the other hand, remains of continued interest, offering an entry point into a semiotic mechanism.

Proust deploys handwriting as an ambivalent physiognomic sign. Nineteenth-century physiognomic discourse was fascinated with handwriting.[57] Following the logic according to which Odette's face – as both face proper and handwriting – is *deformed*, the text implies that Swann has been warned, but missed the warning signs. The physiognomy of women – mocked and reproduced – certainly does not recommend marriage to such a woman. Swann, the art historian of physiognomic persuasion, should have been able to read Odette's promiscuity in her handwriting. Instead of running away, however, he designs new methods of rereading Odette, by analogy with "the deciphering of texts" (SW

284) – not the content of texts, but their handwriting type. Initially constructed through Swann's ekphrastic projection of Botticelli's painting as a canvas, a surface meant for reading and rereading, Odette claims authorial force in the framing of her own physiognomic reading. The self-fashioning of Odette as Mme Swann, a version of Mina Loy's "auto-facial-construction," offers a model for the fantasy of modernist facial self-mastery.

Marcel's Mme Swann

As Proust's text dramatizes Odette's refacialization, it shifts narrative planes – from the third-person narrative of "Swann in Love" reporting on Swann's projection on Odette to Marcel's first-person narrative. As Marcel is undergoing an apprenticeship, with Swann as one of his mentors, one of the tasks in his formative development, a test of sorts, is to "appraise" Odette – as a woman and a work of art. While the last section of *Swann's Way*, "Place Names," frames an adolescent narrator waiting to see Mme Swann pass by in the Bois de Boulogne, in "At Mme Swann's," the first section of *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, he gains entrance into the Swann household as their daughter's friend. It is an opportunity for the adolescent narrator, overlaid by older versions of himself, to reappraise Odette as Mme Swann, within the Inner Sanctum of her salon (SYGF 83).[58] Enamored with Gilberte, whom he loves following the blueprint of Swann's love for Odette, the adolescent Marcel is equally in love with Odette. Looking at the daughter, he sees her face as a portrait of her mother. Like Swann and Albertine, Odette is multiple. There is Odette the cocotte, Odette *la dame en rose*, Odette as Mme Swann, Odette as Mme Fourcheville. Multiple faces come with these multiple Odettes – up to a point. Odette is the only character in *La recherche* who creates her own face, and this self-created face endures in time. The singularity of this face offers a third step – in conjunction with Swann as a transparent envelope and Albertine as a series of photographic snapshots – in Proust's complex theory of the face. It could be said that modernist faciality is produced by the tension dramatized by Odette's face – between a multiplicity of faces and the aesthetic self-fashioning of face.

In "Swann in Love," the narrator reports on Swann's affair with Odette, which had occurred before his birth. In "At Mme Swann's" (*Autour de Mme Swann*), he reports from direct observation intermixed with gossip. Some fifteen years of Odette's life have passed between the two sections – Gilberte's age. One of the things "everyone" can notice is a striking

"change in Odette" (SYGF 39). This change is anchored in her transition from Odette de Crécy to Mme Swann – and "a new regimen, marriage" (SYGF 40). For Odette, this is a change in class; having been a cocotte offering sexual services to the wealthy, she is now a respectable, upper-middle-class wife and mother, historicized as such. How does this class transition work? The makeover is orchestrated spatially; Odette designs her own salon, on the model of the Verdurin salon. With the spatial shift comes a social transition; Odette cultivates new relationships, amassing social capital. Over time, especially since some deny her transformation (Mme Verdurin cannot bring herself to refer to Odette as Mme Swann; Marcel's parents refuse to receive her in their house), Odette sediments a change in her self-presentation. She undergoes a project of bodily recomposition. She displays a distinguished poise (SYGF 116), and she works on her pace and her walking style. She borrows facial expressions from fashionable people (SYGF 84), including some she has never met. She uses an English accent in her diction. The most visible change nonetheless occurs in Odette's face:

> She seems to have grown so many years younger. This was no doubt in part because she had filled out, enjoyed better health, looked calmer, cooler, more relaxed; and in part because the new, sleeker hairstyles gave more room to her face, which was enlivened by a little pink powder, and in which the former fragrancy of her eyes and profile seemed to have been toned down. But another reason for this change was that Odette had now reached the middle years of life, where she found in herself, or invented for herself, a personal style of face, full of a fixed character, a recognized pattern of beauty [*Odette s'était enfin découvert, ou inventé, une physionomie personnelle, un "caractère" immuable, un "genre de beauté"*]. (SYGF 192)

Age fills in the previous excessiveness of Odette's profile, diminishing its "pinched" impression, while a new hairstyle reframes the form of the face. Makeup helps reduce the old sickly appearance. What is astounding – and unique – is the claim that Odette creates a new face. Not the appearance of a new face, but altogether a new, material face. "The true reader of Proust," writes Benjamin, "is constantly jarred by small shocks."[59] The self-production of Odette's new face – *as if* through cosmetic surgery (to which I return in Chapter 5) or digital technologies of de-aging (to which I return in the Coda) – is such a shock.[60]

The text cultivates a purposeful ambiguity about how, precisely, such a facial transformation occurs. The face Odette finds constitutes a "*physionomie personnelle*" – translated, by analogy with writing, as "a style of face." Ambiguity attaches to the source of this physiognomy: Odette finds it in

herself – or invents it for herself. This is a very consequential "or." In the old physiognomy, the face comes from within; Odette would have to find her new face in herself. Or, rather, the style would find its way to the face, whether Odette liked it or not, camouflaged it or not. In Proust's version of modernist physiognomy, Odette either finds her physiognomy within herself or otherwise invents one – the distinction does not matter. Proust's syntax has the same verbs (find or invent) predicate "*un 'caractère' immuable*" and "*un 'genre de beauté*.'" What the old physiognomy presumably considered immutable character, Odette "finds or invents" for herself. Or, rather, once she fashions a new face, a fixed character attaches to it, such that "everyone" recognizes it. The same implication applies to "genre of beauty." Both "character" and "genre of beauty" are in quotation marks in Proust's text – a distinction lost in translation. Proust is quoting and mocking the conventions of the old physiognomy while staging the premise of a revised physiognomy. As a function of this new face, to which she applies a new type (*avait appliqué ce type fixe*), Odette gains the appearance of youth. As time passes, she remains young, until the end of the novel.

Compared with her new face, Odette's old appearance is revealed to have displayed "her formerly undesigned features [*ses traits décousus*]" (SYGF 192). Because of this formlessness, the old face was ever shifting, mobile, "the composition of her variable face, unfocused, unshaped [*informe*], and charming" (SYGF 193). Odette gives form to a previously unformed face. Alongside her new face, Odette's body "was now blocked out as a single profile, a unitary shape that took its outline from the woman within [*le corps d'Odette était maintenant découpé en une seule silhouette, cernée tout entière par une 'ligne'*]" (SYGF 193). Whereas the former Odette's silhouette was composed of ill-fitting parts, the new Odette constitutes a unitary line. These sentences could have been written by Simmel: Odette's face becomes an integrated whole and a legible form.

Within the fiction of the text, there is no doubt that Odette undergoes a material change of face.[61] Swann, having fallen in love with Odette's old face plus the Botticelli projection, keeps a daguerreotype from before Odette's facial transformation. This is the Odette in which Swann can still see the Botticelli facial genre. Odette's hands are likewise facialized with reference to Botticelli (SYGF 193). What the text refers to as "Odette herself" (which is not one) nonetheless rejects the association with Botticelli, especially those "things that a painter might have seen as her 'type' [*son 'caractère'*]" (SYGF 193). Note that, filtered through "Odette herself," the word *type* acquires scare quotes, here retained by the translation as well. In her agential refacialization, Odette purposefully resists the

ekphrastic Odette of Swann's making and its accessories (a Botticelli scarf). She claims the right to assemble her own face. In turn, Swann rejects not so much Odette's newly designed face as her newly acquired inscrutability.

Over time, the "creation" sediments by enlisting the help of others: "Odette, taking to designing [*disciplinant*] her own appearance, had made of her face and figure the creation from which, over the years, in its broad lines, for her dressmakers, her hairdressers, and for Odette herself, in her ways of standing, speaking, smiling, holding her hands, casting her glances, or even of thinking, there could now be no departure" (SYGF 440). Designing new facial features coincides with the disciplining of old facial features. It involves a formalism, a systematization of the face into a type (*la systématisation des traits d'Odette en un type nouveau*). Once created, the creation returns to Odette for confirmation. Odette checks the "continuity" of her creation every day in the mirror (we return to the mirror as a prop of facialization). Unlike other Proustian characters, which remain fragmentary, Odette becomes a "whole" – a unitary self. The principles of this facial self-creation are aesthetic: Odette composes her face into a work of art.

Odette's photographs post-redesign attest to her new composition – which is why Swann, ever nostalgic for Botticelli feminine grace, rejects them (SYGF 440).[62] In fact, it could be argued that what Odette uses in her own ekphrastic exercise are her new photographs as Mme Swann. The emergence and impact of photography on the second half of the nineteenth century and the turn into the twentieth century is crucial to this process: photography becomes a machine of facialization.[63] "And suddenly," Benjamin wrote about the impact of photography, "the human face entered the image with a new, immeasurable significance."[64] Proust was fascinated by photography and collected a large number of photographs.[65] The renowned modernist photographer Brassaï – who is said to have learned French by reading Proust upon his arrival in Paris as an aspiring artist, and who later wrote a study of photography in Proust's work – averred that "Proust was passionately dedicated all his life to the exploration of the human face, whose expression he traced in the countless photographs collected since his youth. For there each individual personality can be read as an open book."[66] Proust was, in other words, a *visagiste*.[67] In Proust's aesthetic universe, photographs help the composition of his portraits of characters like Odette and Albertine, and offer a compositional analogy for the multiplicity of the self, which becomes a series of "snapshots."[68] At the same time, the intermedial relation to photography helps Proust frame the modern face as an ambivalent site of

what Benjamin called "the cult of remembrance."[69] In this scene, Odette refashions herself using her own experience in the photographic studio.

Crucially, at the turn of the twentieth century, photography often reproduced physiognomic principles, enlisting the still new technology in the promise of rendering types visible.[70] Guerlac reads André Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri's reflections on the photographic situation, whereby the photographer functions as a physiognomist, selecting the model's expression that most befits her type: "Once this expression has been selected, the photographer has to try to trigger a spontaneous reappearance of it on the subject's face and to achieve this at precisely the moment they take the portrait."[71] The photographer and the model coproduce, coauthor the photographed face. In this argument, as Odette posed for the photographer, she found her new "personal physiognomy" in this pose through the collaboration with the photographer, and then settled into this type. Following this scene, she wears this new physiognomy – like a coat.[72] *Finding Time Again* reflects on this photographic predicament explicitly, suggesting that some older men use their photographic pose to become "immutable snapshots of themselves" (FTA 250). And yet this is not what Odette's invention of a face seems to suggest. It is more likely that Odette has already shaped her face into a photograph before she encounters the photographer. Put differently, as in today's selfie culture, her face is permanently composed as a photographed face (FTA 250).

Joshua Landy considers Odette, as Mme Swann, a possible model for Marcel's search for a unitary self:

> For we *are* already a set of disparate elements; whether or not we then *become* a whole of which they are parts depends on the success of our attempts at self-unification, on the measure of artistry we import into our existence. Instead of life in literature, the ultimate answer turns out to be life as literature. Instead of the aesthetic biography, what one might term the *bio-aesthetic*. And the key model here is not Marcel or even Charlus, as one might expect, but Odette – or rather Mme Swann.[73]

For Landy, the "or" that separates finding a physiognomy from inventing one is in fact an "and." Mme Swann becomes a model for Marcel: "Using her own body as the material for an organic, extratextual 'artwork,' and rigorously obeying a law that she herself set, Odette is the very figure of the dandy in the *Recherche*."[74] Odette's Anglicisms become legible through their affinities with a similarly ageless, queer, and self-fashioned Dorian Gray. We might remember that Miss Sacripant has an ambiguous face – it could be that of a boy or a girl (SYGF 428–29).[75] Elstir's painting is dated 1872, a few years before the plot of "Swann in Love." Mme Swann's face

purposefully moves away from this boyish connotation – not toward a normative face, but rather toward a feminine face that today we might recognize as femme. Importantly, it is via another photograph, a photograph of Elstir's painting of Odette, that the narrator establishes the continuity between Miss Sacripant and Mme Swann.[76] Odette-the-dandy is rewriting Elstir's painting, creating a new portrait of her queer self.

With this change in face come other changes. As with the old physiognomy, Odette's house speaks the language of type: "She had begun to weed out of this medley some of the Chinese items, which she thought now a little 'sham,' quite 'stale,' but was replacing them with a clutter of little pieces upholstered in old Louis XVI silks" (SYGF 114). Similarly, a change in clothes occurs; at home, Odette now prefers a "crêpe-de-Chine or silk tea gown" (SYGF 115). Instead of a Botticelli-inspired scarf, the narrator clothes Odette in ekphrastic images inspired by Jean-Antoine Watteau: "the pale, foamy silks of her Watteau tea gowns, floating in them, seeming to caress their flowery froth against her breasts" (SYGF 191). All in all, in the tradition of Oscar Wilde, dress functions as Odette's handwriting: "in her ways of dressing, as in a fine written style" (SYGF 195). Her color, likewise a Wilde echo, remains "mainly mauve" (SYGF 211).[77] There is a new type, but dress continues to function as a form of physiognomy. Through these gestures of self-fashioning, Proust has the character of Odette seize the change in modernist physiognomy and its conjunction with photography. She reclaims her face from Swann's ekphrastic physiognomy and enters a purposeful ekphrastic relation with her own self-styled photographs. It is this face the narrator sees, almost miraculously, in *Finding Time Again*, as "immutable as a doll" (FTA 256).[78] A passing prolepsis projects an aged Odette into the future, but, within the temporality of the narrator's tracing of her development, her face does not change.

Throughout, Proust's reader is called upon to manifest what Genette calls "narrative competence."[79] Such narrative competence includes physiognomic competence. If nineteenth-century literature taught readers about physiognomy through character, reading modernist literature asked readers to continue to deploy that knowledge, again and again, albeit to different ends. Genette developed a comprehensive theory of narrative by reading Proust, because Proust's text is both singular and exemplary within the modernist archive. This tension holds when it comes to the framing of the modern face: Proust is singular and thoroughly an exemplary modernist: The search for the face continues, even as one knows the face is a series of projected or self-projected snapshots. Between Swann and the narrator,

in the space of one generation, physiognomy has undergone a significant change.[80] There is no facial book, but we continue to read.

Age Masks

A vignette titled "Author Photo, Part Two" in Kate Zambreno's 2019 *Screen Tests: Stories and Other Writing* reads: "After a haircut: 'You look more like yourself again.' When asked to elaborate: 'Well, more like *photographs* of you."[81] Zambreno develops a literary version of the genre of the "screen test," the moving portrait made famous by Andy Warhol. Zambreno's intertextual, intermedial references include, alongside Warhol, Cindy Sherman, Anne Collier's appropriations of Sherman, films like Abbas Kiarostami's *Close-Up*, and a photograph of Maurice Blanchot in a supermarket. Using a range of photographs and film stills, Sherman, in particular, has transformed the photograph, long theorized in relation to its indexical dimension, into a medium of cyclical re-creation.[82] Alongside these references, Zambreno's short "author photo" vignette invokes modernist "author photos," like Man Ray's photographs of Gertrude Stein I explore in Chapter 4. Stein knew that she could not get a haircut without deviating from her author photo. Time is crucial to the construction of these photographs, as Zambreno well knows, among other sources from Sherman's photographic experiments with images of her aging face.[83] This chapter has given Zambreno's vignette a precursor in Proust's Odette, who uses her own photographs as props of refacialization. Over time, such photographs function as reference points, stand-ins for one's "true face" – the face that renders us recognizable to others.

Proust's interest in the passage of time, according to Benjamin, is a function of the tension between "remembrance within and aging without."[84] As one ages, remembrance, a process pertaining to interiority, offers shocks of rejuvenation. It is in this context that Benjamin formulates this insight: "The wrinkles and creases on our faces are the registration of the great passions, vices, insights that called on us; but we, the masters, were not home."[85] The ending of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* dwells on similar motifs: "I saw old men's faces carved into wrinkles and sneers by the work of the world."[86] The face ages, it acquires wrinkles and creases, but the self is not "at home" in this face, as it experiences itself independently of the aging face. The tension reaches its climax in the final volume of *La recherche*, as the narrator, who has absented himself from social life for a long time, attends a matinee, which he comes to describe as a *bal des têtes*. Christopher Prendergast describes the episode as "the great

convergence scene" of Proust's project.[87] It is also the convergence scene for Proust's reflections on the face.

The characters the text has painstakingly portrayed cross paths one last time in this scene. They have aged to the point of being unrecognizable. Most importantly to the game of social recognition, time has altered the "geology of the face" (FTA 254). To the narrator, they initially appear costumed, as if participating in a comic masked ball. Slowly, the narrator acknowledges faint familiarity with some faces. They appear as masks of people he once knew – "immutable snapshots of themselves" (FTA 250). Age appears on the face as a mask. Death itself seems written on these faces; the narrator likens the scene to a cemetery, a conceit that travels to the book he decides to write. Amplifying the insight developed vis-à-vis Albertine's face, the narrator perceives multiple faces at once, belonging to multiple planes and temporalities. He sees the faces in front of him concomitantly through his vision and through successive layers of memory (FTA 233). The task he gives himself is to match faces to proper names: "I set about introducing into the face of one unknown, completely unknown woman, the idea that she was Mme Sazerat" (FTA 239).[88] In turn, the narrator is unrecognizable to Odette, who "tried for a long time to discover my name from my face" (FTA 258).[89] The narrator returns to the premise – of physiognomic provenance – that a change in personality doubles as a refacialization: "[H]aving become different people themselves it would have been surprising if they had not had new faces" (FTA 264) – an aphoristic pronouncement alluding to the early days of the novel and the transformation of Don Quixote into the Knight of the Sorrowful Face.

As Rochelle Rives argues, "Inspired by the intersecting fields of geriatrics, endocrinology, and sexology, both female and male modernists attempted to fortress themselves against decline and the claims of time."[90] Scott Herring similarly argues that modernist culture was, by the 1920s, increasingly youth-centric, as evidenced by the extensive advertising for anti-aging products and services.[91] Rives tracks the development of early geriatrics as a physiognomic modernist discourse leading to the "facialization of old age as an unreadable text."[92] Aging faces were considered deformed and therefore in need of repair. Such repair had recourse to a range of technologies of rejuvenation – including, as we have seen, cosmetic surgery. The meeting point of modernist physiognomy and the geriatric face witnesses both the sedimentation of the perception of the aging face as defaced and the confirmation of the face as form. Age is conducive to a "deviation" from what Simmel posited as the form of the face. In turn, Loy's auto-facial-construction imagines the possibility of

returning to a youthful face as a way of placating the "bulbous stranger" one sees in the mirror.[93] What Herring calls *geromodernism*, in an effort to name modernism's concern with age, aging, and agism, is inextricably bound with processes of facialization and refacialization.[94]

In the context of this book, Proust's *bal des têtes* scene (sketched by Proust in 1910–11, as he worked on "Swann in Love") offers an occasion to reflect on the fact that the texts in its archive – Mann's *Death in Venice*, Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, and, as we will see, Woolf's *Orlando* – are centrally concerned with time: Age writes itself on the face. The exercises in auto-facial-construction I explore are exercises in rejuvenation: Aschenbach's makeover is an attempt, assisted by the barber/cosmetician, at recovering youth. Odette defies "the laws of chronology" to appear in the *bal des têtes* with a face unchanged by time (FTA 256, 258). Woolf's Orlando remains forever young but reflects on the workings of memory specifically as the ability to recall faces.[95] Returning to Stein's account of Picasso's statement, "Look at that face, it is as old as the world, all faces are as old as the world," at the beginning of the Introduction, it is likely that Picasso is pointing to "the geology of the face" marked by age.[96] If the texts in the archive of this book dramatize modernist faces, at this juncture we can add a crucial dimension to modernism's investment in the face: time. In turn, one way for modernism to dramatize the workings of time, as Proust's narrator realizes in the *bal des têtes* scene, at the climax of his epiphany about the novel he would write, is through the face.