episode, becomes even more striking as the plot begins to take shape. The narrator's perpetual disappointment with travel, love, and finally the entire faubourg Saint-Germain prompts a state of frustration serving as an empty focal point for what is felt and what is said. This frustration leads in turn to "our inherent powerlessness to realize ourselves in material enjoyment or in effective action."[64] True sensory experience, then, can only occur if we *reproduce* what is felt and said in a movement that is indeed "telescopic" and, more specifically, metaphorico-metonymic (condensing-displacing)—as with the madeleine in the movement from Mamma to Aunt Léonie.

Sensations, like time, are "regained." A sensation can only reappear, however, through a sort of deferred action, a verbal impetus. Yet a sensation also works in reverse, affecting, renewing, and recreating past sensations: "For I should have to execute the successive parts of my work in a succession of different materials" "{in} a new and distinct material, of a transparency and a sonority that were special, compact, cool after warmth, rose-pink."[65] The "new material," which is produced by joining two words (for instance, a perception welded to an idea, two perceptions and two ideas, or two representations sharing a "common essence"), is nothing but a *reification of the tension in the analogy*, which is the substance of metaphor. Although Proust viewed such incarnations with a great deal of skepticism, it appears that awkward and inferior idols, not the sort of incarnation made in the hands of a great artist like Elstir the painter, were the true objects of his criticism. Elstir explains to the narrator that one has to work one's way through "the ridiculous or offensive incarnations that must precede that last incarnation." In a letter to Lucien Daudet dated November 27, 1913, Proust describes a way of writing "in which the supreme miracle is accomplished, the transubstantiation of the irrational qualities of matter and life into human words."[66] This way of writing is Proust's way. Indeed, those who consider the sensory subtext of metaphor will see that metaphor realizes Proust's vision of transubstantiation.

"As long as that did not occur, nothing did"

The process that Proust refers to as an "analogy" or a "metaphor" is quite different from the process that formal rhetoricians have described as the replacement of a well-wrought (or abstract) term by another term that is uncommon or peculiar.[67] Indeed, the essence of the Proustian metaphor is closer to the reciprocal relationship or the sustained contradiction between two terms that some more recent authors believe underlies the ambivalent character of the metaphor.[68] If we consider the sensory subtext of signs, which is internalized through the impressions registered in our memory, we see more clearly that this condensation is very potent, one that Proust believed to be the sine qua non of literature: "Truth will be attained by {the writer} only when he takes *two different objects*, states the *connection* between them—a connection analogous in the world of art to the unique connection which in the world of science is provided by the law of causality—and encloses them in the *necessary links of a well-wrought style*; truth—and life too—can be attained by us only when, by comparing a quality common to two sensations, we succeed in extracting their common essence and in reuniting them to each other, liberated from the contingencies of time, within a *metaphor*."[69]

A given representation, such as one of Elstir's seascapes, can function only as a *metamorphosis*. A representation is more than just a name, for it is also the incorporation of the metaphor that results from substituting one name for another. "The charm of each of them {the seascapes} lay in a sort of metamorphosis of the objects represented, analogous to what in poetry we call metaphor, and that, if God the Father had created things by naming them, it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew. The names which designate things correspond invariably to an intellectual notion, alien to our true impressions, and compelling us to eliminate from them everything that is not in keeping with that notion."[70]

I have already referred to Proust's claim that the artist's imagination is similar to the creative process inherent in "life" and "nature." Metaphor is simply a way to reproduce the perpetual connections made within a living and creative reality. I would like to mention two other features of this metaphorical process, without which "there is nothing."

The "connection" described here draws together the objects whose similarities are discovered by the narrator. He superimposes them onto one another, condenses their differences, and creates linked "rings." As a continuous chain of circles, analogy serves to guide the surface of signs toward depth. As a creator of figures, the maker of metaphors is similar to a geometrician, though he enjoys an even closer kinship with the X-ray operator and the surgeon. How does he operate? How does he carry out his superimpositions?

The Metamorphic Adventures of the "Little Phrase" of Vinteuil

The "little phrase of Vinteuil," which Swann hears at Mme Verdurin's home after having heard it the year before, prompts a series of auditory sensations.[71] From the outset, the "little phrase," which is introduced by a recollection, is a carrier of memory that anticipates our perception of it and incites a wide range of pleasures expressed as a series of metaphors.

The "little phrase" is first described as "slender but robust, compact and commanding" in the violin line and as evoking a "liquid rippling of sound" and the "deep blue tumult of the sea" in the piano line. As the performance continues, the effect of the phrase is compared to "the fragrance of certain roses, wafted upon the moist air of the evening," while Swann's impressions of it are "confused" and "*sine materia*." Immediately thereafter, however, Swann experiences its "extent, its symmetrical arrangements, its notation . . . design, architecture, thought." To this chain of "links" is added a further connection. When Swann returns to his home, he responds to the "little phrase" in the same way he would respond to a "woman he has seen for a moment passing by." At that point, Proust offers another analogy: the "little phrase" allows "rejuvenation" to occur, and Swann, who does not wish to be confined to the keyboard of his five senses, feels "rejuvenated." From this perspective, the metaphor becomes a metamorphosis and a physical reality. The "ramifications of its {the little phrase's} fragrance," like the fragrance of a real person, leave on Swann's features "the reflection of its smile." Finally, he discovers the "name" of his "unknown woman": it is the andante from Vinteuil's Sonata for Piano and Violin. Over and above the name and the presence of technical (although not analogous) language, however, the mere succession of metaphors and metamorphoses causes Swann to fall in love with this piece of music, which becomes the "national anthem" of his relationship with Odette. It makes our aesthete decide to marry her, though he loves less the woman, whom he no longer desires, than the work of art—Botticelli's *Zipporah*—and especially the "little phrase" of which Odette has become a metaphor or, more precisely, a metamorphosis. We should remember that while the "little phrase" corresponded briefly to a person, in the end, Odette is placed in an analogy to the "little phrase." The series of metaphors is thereby reversed. Music is a woman and rejuvenation, and the woman can only be a rejuvenating wife if Swann confuses her with music. This "reciprocal metaphor"[72] calls on our love-stricken aesthete's imagination, but it also requires an *analogy* (loving music, loving a woman) and a *relationship of contiguity* (Odette's being next to Swann in the Verdurin salon as they listen to the "little phrase").

Proust is fond of such "reversible" metaphors, for they enable him to create a contiguous relationship between the two terms of analogy (as in such expressions as "impalpable water" and "insoluble glass"[73] where contiguous substances exchange their predicates). He refers to these analogies as "alliterations," thereby borrowing another analogy from the catalog of rhetorical figures, one that also expresses a coexistence between the analogous and the contiguous. Hence Proust suggests that the play of language is what ultimately brings together and takes apart the links and chains of his perpetual metaphors.

And yet the "metamorphic adventures" of the "little phase" are not over simply because they have encountered Odette. In the space of a few pages, Vinteuil's andante will be faced with the threat of mental derangement that menaces its composer: "Insanity diagnosed in a sonata seemed to {Swann} as mysterious a thing as the insanity of a dog or a horse, although instances may be observed of these."[74]

The "little phrase" is in turn "commanding" and "liquid," a "fragrance of roses" and a "notation," "a woman passing by" and a "rejuvenation," as well as its converse, that is, Odette absorbed by the music and made attractive again through this inverted analogy. It performs its imaginary peregrinations from metaphor to metaphor through a little phrase: "the insanity of a bitch." "Superimpositions"[75] explain each element by inserting the meaning of one link of the chain into another. Through his "analogical" approach to music, Swann's physical love, itself subjected to analogies, is sublimated to ensure its survival. At the same time, the logical processes of Proust's superimpositions adorn this love with a foretaste of the harmful excess that makes the divine sink into bestial madness. What is it that clasps these two extremities into a final metaphorical link? Is it music, Swann, or Odette? Since Proust's palimpsest is overdetermined, the question cannot be answered. Still, Proust does not negate or empty his text of meaning but gives it a dramatic, unbearable, and mysterious polyphony.

Later, on hearing the same Vinteuil sonata during Mme de Saint-Euverte's soiree, Swann's response reaffirms the earlier metaphorical intimations. He finds that the sonata contains the "charms of an intimate sadness" as well as their "very essence, for all that it consists in being communicable." The musical "form" challenges the constraints of reason, but, as we have seen, it is open to metaphor and subject to "actual ideas, of another world, of another order, ideas veiled in shadow,

unknown, impenetrable to the human mind."[76] This form is what will eventually make Swann realize that Odette no longer loves him. "From that evening onwards, Swann understood that the feeling which Odette had once had for him would never revive."[77] For that matter, nor would his love for her. Was it ever anything more than an impression or a transposition? "To think that I've wasted years of my life, that I've longed to die, that I've experienced my greatest love, for a woman who didn't appeal to me, who wasn't even my type."[78]

Metonymy and the Frame of the Narrative

As we have just seen, the abundant metaphors in Proust's imaginary world form links of a purely metonymic character. As Stephen Ullmann has pointed out, these rhetorical figures rely on the *proximity* between two sensations or indeed on their *coexistence* within the same psychic context.[79] From this perspective, each time a Proustian analogy forms a condensation between two attributes, it functions as a metonymy. The attributes are joined, or at least drawn together, within the narrator or a character's desire, dream, or "intelligence." More specifically, a spatial connection—the by-product of the sign—provides a metonymic basis for most of Proust's metaphors, the most striking example being the intricate thirty-page analogy that the narrator sets up between Charlus and Jupien's relationship and the way a bumblebee fertilizes one of the duchess's orchids. Charles hums "like a bumblebee" and Julien remains "implanted there like a tree," but "at the same instant" and in the "same place," their "conjunction" is compared to the loving relations between the orchid and the bumblebee. In this way, the two couples coexist in time and in space as well as in the narrator's perceptions: "[Jupien] struck poses with the coquetry that the orchid might have adopted on the providential arrival of the bee."[80] A relationship of contiguity thus becomes one of metaphor.

Whether it is integrated with a metaphor or merely pulled by its magnetic force, metonymy locates the Proustian analogy in a specific place. The poetic impact of the analogy is thus bound by a *frame* that may *circumscribe a plot*. Still, it is not enough to say that metonymy is so intrinsic to metaphor, for metonymy could not transform the original poetic tale that Proust planned to write into the complex structure of *In Search of Lost Time*. If metonymy, which concerns space, is to allow action to occur within the space it creates, it requires *characters* who can fulfill their destiny through that very action.

The Proustian metaphor's complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes, moreover, contain the bud of the representation of psychic contraction we call a "character." Yet this contraction will rely on events that punctuate Proust's novel (though they do not make it into a thriller).[81]

Contrasts: Disintegration or Profusion

I would now like to return to the conflictive nature of Proust's metaphors by drawing attention (as other critics have done) to the surprising contrasts found in the description of the sea as seen by the narrator from his window at the Grand Hotel of Balbec. To begin with, the narrator describes the surface of the sea in alpine terms: "that vast, dazzling, mountainous amphitheater," "the snowy crests of its emerald waves," "the glaciers that one sees in the backgrounds of the Tuscan primitives," "those waters of a green as tender as that preserved in Alpine pastures . . . less by the moisture of the soil than by the liquid mobility of the light."[82] The crest and the trough, the glacier and the waters, moisture and the mountainous, liquid and light—these contrasting terms clearly *overlap*, but do they *obliterate* one another? According to the narrator, Elstir's art, as reflected in his picture of the Carquethuit harbor, makes use of similarly contrasting metaphors. Marine terms are employed to portray the little town, and urban terms are used for the sea. In this way, water and earth conflict, unite, and share and steal their respective attributes: "Without being able to distinguish the dividing line, the chink of water between them, so that this fishing fleet seemed less to belong to the water than, for instance, the churches of Criquebec . . . the painter had contrived that the eye should discover no fixed boundary, no absolute line of demarcation between land and sea. . . . The whole picture gave the impression of harbors in which the sea penetrated the land, in which the land was already subaqueous and the population amphibian."[83]

Although we are struck by these contradictory features, which entail in both cases a moment of hallucination or confusion (are we at the ocean or in the mountains? in the city or in the water?), an additional logical movement causes us to be saturated with (rather than emptied of) perceptions. In Balbec, the sensation of the sea is enriched by majestic, vertical, and cold connotations (as well as phallic ones, if we choose to search for unconscious associations). Furthermore, Elstir's vision paints the town and the waves with a tremor of uncertainty, for he strips

them of their identity and grants them another one, that of "neither one nor the other," of "amphibians," of spatial androgens.

The feeling of plenitude returns after being annihilated by these opposing terms. The moment of confusion becomes a moment of joy. The bewilderment, then, is an ebullient one.[84] This process does not undermine or dissipate perception. It leads instead to an assimilation, an inundation, and a heightening of the senses, which serve to define the breaking points where conflict becomes intolerable and, for that very reason, a jubilation.

In Depth: Surgeons and X-ray Operators

Analogy is a concise, fragmentary technique that elicits a flash of immediacy. It divides the world and the narrative into successive loops (dense or fluid) that lend Proust's discourse a synesthetic poetry and a calculated series of freeze-frames. These sudden stimuli, arranged in a circular shape, leave us shocked, overwhelmed, irritated, or persuaded. Because of their sensory layer and their rhetoric of condensation (which closely adheres to Freud's notion of the unconscious primary processes), they impose their truths on us. *Analogy is ontology*: Proust's metaphors, which draw appearances together, also point to the depth of Being. Analogy goes beyond the visible to reach a "transparent unity" in which things (arranged in a specific order that is not the order of thought even though thought plays an important role in the process) are "converted into the same substance" without any "impurities" and in which life is made into a deep experience: "that life of ours which cannot effectually observe itself and of which the observable manifestations need to be translated and, often, to be read backwards and laboriously deciphered. Our vanity, our passions, our spirit of imitation, our abstract intelligence, our habits have long been at work, and *it is the task of art to undo this work of theirs, making us travel back in the direction from which we have come* to the *depths* where what has really existed lies unknown within us."[85]

Once the narrator has made his way (however momentarily) to this metaphorical perception, he can also reach "some general essence, common to a number of things" that will serve as his "nourishment and joy, . . . but only at a certain depth, beyond the reach of observation." *A metaphorical approach to the depths* (as opposed to mere "observation") is first compared to the art of geometry, which strips things of their sensory attributes and considers their linear structure alone. In the writer's case, this process involves a "point that was common to one being and another," "situated in the middle distance, behind actual appearances, in a zone that was rather more withdrawn." Yet the initial analogy between writing and geometric depth is superseded by another. The depth of metaphors is compared to the art of the surgeon and the X-ray operator: "So the apparent, copiable charm of things and people escaped me, because I had not the ability to stop short there—I was *like a surgeon who beneath the smooth surface of a woman's belly sees the internal disease which is devouring it.* If I went to a dinner-party I did not see the guests: when I thought I was looking at them, *I was in fact examining them with X-rays.*"[86]

This surgical incision, which Proust compares to the metaphorical creativity that internalizes "sensory attributes" and exposes "the point which was common to one being and another," recalls the metaphor he uses in an unfinished study on the art of Chardin.[87] But there the painter's magical light restores the beautiful and immediate truth of simple, well-wrought, or unimportant things. Chardin is thus shown to be the antithesis of the gynecologist. Is this in contradiction with what Proust says in *Time Regained* regarding the surgeon? Not necessarily, for as a painter of the immediate, Chardin is the polar opposite of a gynecologist who would dare to *explain* to a woman "the act she has had the mysterious strength to accomplish."[88] Chardin is more interested in matters of the flesh. Instead of resorting to scientific jargon, he associates himself with the act of childbirth without explaining it or putting it into a broader context. Twenty-seven years later, when Proust returns to this gynecological metaphor for art,[89] the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time* rejects (like Chardin) the gynecologist's explanation, even though they both focus on the same object: "the smooth surface of a woman's belly." Rather than seeking the reasons behind this, however, the narrator X-rays the woman's belly and womb, and his deepened and intimate understanding puts his seemingly innocent intentions into question. In the end, his enlightening act is not so different from the flood of light that illuminates the rough objects found in a Chardin painting. The elderly painter and the narrator are united as an ideal artist whom the young Proust described as "a man of keener awareness, his delight too intense, so that it overflowed into unctuous brushstrokes and immortal pigments."[90] Furthermore, the painter and the writer both engage in an illumination of natural birth that is presumed to be feminine, for all "creative acts proceed indeed not from a knowledge of their laws, but from an obscure and incomprehensible power, which we do not make

stronger by illuminating it."[91] Chardin, the artist of the immediate, remains with Proust throughout the novel. In Venice, for instance, when the narrator is vacationing with his mother, he finds that the blue-green sunlight cloaks the luminous reflection of Chardin and the sensibility of Paolo Veronese.[92]

From the beginning of his literary calling, then, Proust looked for a different sort of logical process, one that could surpass the laws of hair-splitting scientific inquiry. His early articles[93] suggest that he distinguished between a *substantial* style (the immediate restoration of "the divine equality of all things before the mind that contemplates them, before the light that beautifies them") as exemplified by Chardin or Flaubert and a *metaphorical* style (such as the styles of Rembrandt and then of Elstir, as well as of Proust himself) that forms imaginary bonds and reveals the unsuspected depths of beings in a way that appearances cannot. Yet Proust would eventually find it difficult to maintain this implicit opposition. Is this why he never finished his article on Chardin and Rembrandt? Although it may be true that "metaphor alone can lend a sort of immortality to a style, and in the whole of Flaubert there is perhaps no true metaphor,"[94] Proust's close analysis of Chardin's illuminated objects enabled him to go beyond their blatant substantiality, appreciating instead their unmistakable and absolute "associations," "affinities," and "friendships." Would every apparition, then, be preceded by a grouping, a fixed relationship, or the bud of an analogy? "Chardin goes further still in *bringing objects and people together* in these rooms which are *more than an object* and than a person too perhaps, which are the locus of their lives, the law of their *affinities* or their *contrasts* . . . the sanctuary of their past. All here is *friendship*."[95]

Memory, affinity, and contrast are thus to be found in the most immediate of appearances. Ontology has no need to *become* analogy. Analogy is present from the outset both as a necessary equivalent for ontology and as its absolute authority. It thus entails the necessity of art. Once there is "imagination" ("the only organ that I possessed for the enjoyment of beauty"),[96] there is analogy. Being undoubtedly precedes us, but we can only experience bliss by imagining Being through metaphors.

Even so, as the plan of Proust's novel takes shape and as the pages of his monumental work begin to stack up, analogy endures, expands, and enjoys a growing importance. Its sealed "links," "vessels," and cross-hatched moments arrange themselves within the *action* of the novel, which may not be a tableau but is surely a "social kaleidoscope."

I began by drawing attention to the narrative syntax that draws out the metaphorical links within the immense scope of the work through the psychological equivalents of metaphor that are the characters. I shall now discuss the theme of "pregnancy," which reappears suddenly when the narrator turns to homosexuality. Of course, since the metaphor is a word that is "pregnant" with meaning, pregnancy is a metaphor in its own right. In this case, however, it stands for a secret that is as perceptible as it is disguised: the secret of the homosexual. "Until that moment, in the presence of M. de Charlus I had been in the position of an unobservant man who, standing before a pregnant woman whose distended outline he has failed to remark, persists, while she smilingly reiterates: 'Yes, I'm a little tired just now,' in asking her tactlessly: 'Why, what's the matter with you?' But let someone say to him: 'She is expecting a child,' and suddenly he catches sight of her stomach and ceases to see anything else."[97]

The homosexual is pregnant with his vice, with a hidden meaning that prompts an interpretation and then disregards it. He recalls the faces described in the Zohar[98] as covered with "distinguishing marks" that are not inherited but "change according to the way a man comports himself" and imprint on his physiognomy "a book that contains his actions and the state of his soul."[99] The wise men capable of interpreting these signs upheld that in the order of metempsychosis, two weak souls can sometimes be united into one, and the stronger one becomes the mother of the weaker one.[100] When Proust, in the opening of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, discovers a metonymy of pregnancy on Charlus's face (the invert's face bears the trace of his mother's—he "may consummate upon {his} face the profanation of {his} mother"), is he referring to these Zoharic notions or relying on his own intuition?[101] Charlus does not seem to feel indebted to his mother's imprint, for he is not the one who tastes the pleasure of Mamma's reading of *François le champi* or of the madeleine's incestuous flavors. He may be filled with his mother's desire or with his desire for her, but he will be unable to give birth to a work of literature. His pregnancy is a dead end, providing no text and no time regained.

At the same time, the mother is absorbed by the homosexual, transmuted into a vice that is at once pleasure and eccentric discourse, and swept up by this detour into the accursed race. She vanishes inside "the disease that devours" the "smooth polish of a woman's belly." The vital depth of Chardin will face the secret of perversion and eventually become a kind of death threat. The gynecologist becomes a well-

informed chronicler of sodomites in order to have a clearer understanding of the X-ray–like depth of a life veering toward death.

The most crucial element in this transformation of a gynecologist into a surgeon and an X-ray operator is the accompanying change in diagnosis. The smooth belly that enshrined a life in embryo, according to the young Proust's article on Chardin, is replaced in *Time Regained* by "the internal disease which is devouring it." It is not simply a matter of a hypochondriacal deathbed disillusionment with a faubourg that was once stunning but is now a mere self-parody. Depth, whether the disease appears beyond the embryo, was an important factor in Proust's development from the time he began his novel. This striking depth offers the narrative a dramatic touch and a potential conclusion. How else could time have kept itself from desperately seeking an anecdote (as do realist novels) or from dissipating into a poetic shimmer (as does *Jean Santeuil*)? Proust successfully avoided such impasses, and by perpetually delaying the completion of his work, he waited until his familiarity with the analogy had brought him to the depths of disease. Only at that point could appearances and memories, spectacles and sensations, society and essences be telescoped into the construction of a narration, a metaphorical framework, and an act of social and historical cruelty that Proust, joyfully supported by the strength of this vision, crafted with an authoritative patience.

The Essence of Society Disintegrates Impostures

Let us go one step further into the closed spiral that makes up *In Search of Lost Time*'s metaphor-laden narrative structure.

Whereas analogies, by exposing the truth of the flesh, prove to be ontological, ontology itself is studded with images. In contrast to a writer's ascetic life, *society*, once reduced to *high society and fashion*, is nothing more than a perpetual spectacle composed of juxtaposed and contradictory appearances whose reality depends on current opinion. In this shallow universe, whim (Oriane), gossip (Aunt Léonie), fad (Françoise), loathing (Mme Verdurin), and hidden vice (Charlus, Robert de Saint-Loup, and many others) build on one another through conventions and rhetoric whose strength depends on whether their pronouncements are able to make their world and History itself a little less real.[102] People have often expressed their discomfort with the decadent snobbism or even the juvenile superficiality that characterized Proust's ventures into high society. They also criticize the important place he reserves for "society" and "fashion" in his novel. On closer analysis, however, we see that the narrator intentionally distances himself from the views expressed by the faubourg Saint-Germain society. He prefers to "sketch" its members' antics, and he enjoys X-raying an aristocracy that grips our attention at first, but whose shameful depths are brought to light in the same way that the narrator might reveal the ambiguities in a seascape, a kiss, or one of the jealous characters in his book. Proust unveils their similarities, transferences, imitations, analogies, bouncing from one appearance to the other, one political intrigue to the other, and one social group to the next.

By unraveling the intricacies of high society along with the fashions that it dictates, the narrator does not uncover their "essence." In his eyes, the only "divine" essence is contained in the experience of literature. When the essence of the spectacle is described through metaphor, it disintegrates into images, appearances, and blind imitation. The essence of the world partakes of analogy when Being culminates in Opinion, itself a daunting magnet for transference and metaphor. As a result, Proust's portrait of a given society is not an anachronism, for it speaks to present-day concerns.

Indeed, the carefully crafted pages of *In Search of Lost Time* form one of the first modern visions of the society of the spectacle. Although Proust recreated the faubourg Saint-Germain "Opinion" long before the age of mass media and television, he did so by transforming society's supposed protagonists into "appearances" resembling media "sound bites." To the passionate loves, jealousies, and deaths of the social scene, Proust's depth of vision adds the infectious omnipresence of fleeting and fickle images.

Was Proust's effort to X-ray the fashions of high society successful? The answer seems to be yes, for Proust's vision culminated in an ironic and definitive exultation. It is easy to picture Proust's sardonic (and, of course, wheezing) amusement as he leaves no stone unturned, depicting the social hierarchies, alliances, mismatches, and pretenses that make up society life. In Proust's novel, even Sodom and Gomorrah, though never redeemed, are localized and "domesticated" to some extent. The "inverts" make effective use of the "reflecting surfaces," "reflections," and shams that are social conventions, against which the rise and fall of their sentimental experiences are depicted. Would time regained in this way—through sentimental metaphors, through links between Eros and image—signal the End of History?

In some respects, yes. How might we plan for future developments or actions if no identity remains within its assigned boundaries? Oriane drops in social status by forming a salon—and Mme Verdurin becomes