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Unconscious Arts of Memory

We move on. If the writing, art, theatre, and the whole cultural experience of life from, roughly, the 1740s to the 1790s has a distinctive 'feel', compounded of the frequently fractious relations between reason, feeling and imagination encompassed by the term 'sensibility', then anything from, say, the 1840s to the 1860s onwards, for a century or so, reveals a different pattern of experience, and a different cultural configuration through which this is expressed and articulated.¹ In a self-consciously 'modern' age, 'consciousness' itself, in relation to the unconscious and the involuntary, becomes of central concern, linked to the problematical processes of memory, both individual and cultural, through which it develops and changes;² and with these processes seen increasingly in evolutionary terms, as adaptation and struggle, with 'memory' and 'heredity' always liable to slide uneasily together, the distinctive inflection of the late-nineteenth-century cultural imaginary comes to the fore. What is revealed, then, is a significant cultural shift, an evolving relation between the experience of rapid change and assumptions about mind, will and consciousness in their temporal unfolding and their capacity for revealing internal tensions and rifts.

Writing of French culture, in the early decades of the century, Reddy identifies a distinctive 'internal space' emerging in perceptions of the self, 'a space where moral uncertainty and ambiguity' take over, 'a disordered terrain of impulses, moods, bodily influences, fears, and illusions'.³ While a fertile area for artists and novelists to explore, this ensured tensions both in personal life and social relations. Consciousness and knowledge do not run seamlessly together; indeed they can fly apart. The body is inherently difficult to read, its truths obscure. In the British context, Logan claims that 'George Eliot's bodies are unable to express the truth of their feelings, because they no longer know what it is'; sensations have become 'more opaque, or elusive; it requires effort to recover their significance'.⁴ Bell notices a growing awareness that 'there is an intrinsic opacity to self-reflection', in turn echoed in 'the opacity of social

process.⁵ The relative simplicity of the eighteenth-century sincerity/hypocrisy nexus gives way to more complex possibilities of self-deception, which may defy introspection. The eighteenth-century blush can reveal embarrassment, shame and the possibility of hypocrisy; the nineteenth-century blush can reveal – what? If the agent’s motives are inscrutable to self as well as other, we are truly in uncharted waters; it becomes all the more important to understand them even as it becomes all the more difficult to do so.

We can put all this in more abstract terms. The self as a project, oriented to the future realization of its objectives, in the light of its interests, is bound to be inherently flawed if it cannot gain adequate knowledge of its motives, and cannot control, harness and direct them adequately. This self-opacity can stem from the self’s own conflicts of interest, motive, impulse and feeling, and the tensions in both seeing and presenting itself in a certain way, in the light of social conventions and expectations, and also from the problems of incompleteness and projection inherent in the paradox of self-reflection; and these can operate together. And given the difficulties here, such a self is bound to be attuned to the likelihood of past influences, and the need to recall them. The possibilities and limitations of memory, situating the individual in time, hence possessing a history, become central to the culture and to the novel, linked to the problems of recall, revelation and interpretation. In short, the effective exercise of will requires an awareness not just of the context of action but an ability to formulate one’s interests and have sufficient awareness of motives to be able to act rationally in pursuit of them. ‘Given the cherished notion of a unified self, a conscious and voluntary agent, evidence that subjects harboured knowledge unavailable to their ordinary conscious state was extremely threatening,’ claims Jill Matus, and hence ‘fanned ideas about the self as multiple and undermined the notion of will and consciousness as the prime movers in behavior.’⁶ As a further corollary, the imagination tends to lose its role as mediator between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds, becoming seen as a source of disturbance and disruption, albeit with potential as a specialist resource for art, culture and entertainment.

In effect, we can map here the emergence of two sets of distinctions, while remembering that they are not necessarily clearly articulated either in the writings of the period, or in the experiences in which they are embodied: namely, voluntary/involuntary, and conscious/unconscious. And there are good reasons for this lack of distinction. Knowledge, especially self-knowledge, and the effective exercise of will are not unconnected. Indeed, as soon as the drive to master slides into the drive to know, as it must, the positioning of the involuntary *as* unconscious becomes a logical move: the unconscious as a sort of

space of the self, variously behind or beneath, but also 'inside' it, not just an external determinant. This, in effect, breaks up the category of the involuntary: some aspects, coded as purely physical, are excluded from mind altogether, whereas others are incorporated, as its 'unconscious' aspects. If I 'involuntarily' give off signs of myself, these now invite a deeper reading, testifying to obscure depths, in varying degrees inaccessible even to myself. As we will see, the bifurcations implicit here run through, and arguably undermine, even the most influential system of thought to originate from all this, that of Freud.

This shift is indeed momentous. The eighteenth-century tendency to equate consciousness and mind, with memory seen as a relatively simple power of recall, together constitutive of self-identity over time,⁷ gives way to a model of mind in which dreams, fantasies and memory itself become evidence of layers of mind that can even come to be seen as possessing a hereditary element, and which can manifest itself in our actions in the present. Thus Laura Otis has located a 'theory of organic memory' in late-nineteenth-century culture, which 'placed the past *in* the individual, *in* the body, *in* the nervous system', so that people were said to remember 'their racial and ancestral experiences unconsciously, through their instincts'.⁸ Consciousness emerges as a precarious layer of awareness against a background of the tumult of the past, with unrecognized affects, emotionally charged images, resonating powerfully in the here and now; and given that memory incorporates past associations of events and ideas, at the mercy of this unconscious turbulence, this makes its distortion and unreliability almost inevitable. The transcriptions in memory get jumbled, or actively reworked, through the imagination; and the intensity of such memories can give pleasure or pain, irrespective of origin, although the 'intensity' can seem to testify to the reality of the origin. And what psychoanalysis will come to offer here is not the notion of the unconscious as such – that has already had its place prepared, its consequences outlined, and indeed its name, before Freud – but the idea that the unconscious has an *active* agency, that its 'doings' are not random, and that therefore a concept like 'repression' must be fundamental to how it operates. In short, as Michael Davis puts it, the unconscious becomes not just an absence, but 'an active force in its own right'.⁹ We can say then that if 'sensibility', in the *broad* sense of the term, is a sensory awareness of immersion in the world, then 'consciousness' involves the mind's focus on this, a more situated awareness, responsive to the impact of modern experience, with the unconscious positioned as hidden presupposition, present as troublesome liability but also as a possible creative resource, an ambiguously placed internal 'other'.

Science and mind

In an age when controversy raged over the position of science in culture, with positivist and materialist proponents of a 'unified science' of the human and natural worlds endlessly lambasted by their critics, it is easy to lose sight of the shared premises in the way these debates, and the nature of science itself, both drew on, and influenced, the cultural currents just outlined. Sally Shuttleworth's broad claim that in this period 'the mind and body are regarded as an indivisible circulating system' involving 'a flow of psychological and bodily energy', in turn serving as a model for the 'social body',¹⁰ is one that few would have disagreed with, though not all would have chosen to go on to cast this in the fashionable language of those two pillars of nineteenth-century scientific innovation, electromagnetism and thermodynamics. In human physiology, what was now seen as the unacceptably vague notion of 'sympathy' had increasingly faded away under the impact of the discovery of the reflex response and the autonomous nervous system – both well-established in the first few decades of the century – with the implication that reflex action and the muscular system governing facial expression entailed a separation between action and conscious will. Body acts and gestures became automatic manifestations of self-preservation, and possible evidence of 'primitive ancestry'. The body tells two distinct stories, as it were: voluntarily, in the brain; but also involuntarily, via the spinal system.¹¹ With Helmholtz and others discovering the electrical basis of the nervous system, with nerves transmitting electrical impulses along neural pathways, so memory came to be seen as 'intense or repeated electrical flows' down them, dynamic flows of association rather than a random collection of impressions.¹² By the later decades of the century, Rae Beth Gordon suggests that habits were seen as equivalent to 'the automatic responses exemplified by nervous reflex and by unconscious mental processes',¹³ and she provides a fascinating analysis of the ways in which these assumptions were manifested in the performance styles, the movements and gestures of artists in cabaret and popular entertainment, and the interactive influences between these and the sciences of the time.

Here, we can introduce the ideas of George Henry Lewes, an influential figure respected in Victorian culture as a wide-ranging interpreter of science and general polymath, remembered today mainly as the long-term companion of George Eliot. For Lewes – along with Carpenter and other leading psychologists – unconscious mental processes were not reducible to mere automatism, but involved autonomy and creativity. Lewes challenged any tendency to equate 'conscious' with 'mental', and 'unconscious' with 'physical'. He 'brought the

unconscious and the bodily into the conception of mind', as Matus puts it,¹⁴ hence adopting a holistic approach. Far from being reducible to brain, the mind extends beyond it to include 'all Sensation, all Volition, and all Thought: it means the whole psychical life; and this psychical Life has no one special centre ... it belongs to the whole, and animates the whole.'¹⁵ Consciousness thus becomes effect or result rather than cause; emotions and sensations can affect conscious thought without being present to it; but all are part of a system of psychic processes.

In exploring this, Lewes seeks to go beyond the interest in rushes of energy, focusing rather on the significance of imagery, casting his approach within a broadly evolutionary framework, but in such a way that the underlying structure retains a certain priority over the temporal frame. 'Images being the ideal forms of Sensation, the Logic of Images is the first stage of intellectual activity', he argues; hence 'The first attempts to explain a phenomenon must be to combine the images of past sensations with the sensations now felt, so as to form a series.'¹⁶ The image organizes sensory material, hence 'primitive' thinking relies on it; but it retains its crucial significance as, in effect, mediating between the senses and abstract thought. Images can, indeed, operate independently of the latter, being open to combination and recombination. Since consciousness and the unconscious are essentially continuous, images may be a direct manifestation of the unconscious, and Davis adds:

The imaginative linking of two seemingly unconnected ideas in fact manifests a connection between them in the unconscious mind, which draws on memories no longer available to consciousness. The vivid immediacy of image-based memory, once in consciousness, powerfully grips the individual's existence.¹⁷

This could almost be Proust; and the emphasis on pattern and relationship, while not strictly incompatible with the associationism of nineteenth-century psychology, in the tradition of Locke and Hume, does seem to point beyond it.

Energy and image: the force of nervous energy, of shock and sensation, produces effects that are *unpredictable*, and precipitate or permit the unfolding of unexpected unconscious patterns, connections between images. The presence of mind necessarily complicates cause and effect. Lewes distinguishes here between a 'resultant' – the regular, predictable effect produced by agents that are alike in nature – and an 'emergent', the outcome of a combination of disparate agents, such as is inevitably present in the processes of consciousness and the unconscious, mental and physical, and which is in principle unpredictable.¹⁸ He writes: 'the emergent is unlike its components in so far as these

are incommensurable, and it cannot be reduced either to their sum or their difference'.¹⁹ The imagination, working through images, is always 'emergent', never reducible to predictable cause and effect. More concretely, an episode from *Middlemarch* can be taken to exemplify this. George Eliot is describing the impact of Rome on Dorothea: the fragments of the past 'at first jarred her as with an electric shock', and then, 'Forms both pale and glowing took possession of her young sense, and fixed themselves in her memory even when she was not thinking of them, preparing strange associations that remained through her after-years'.²⁰ Here we see a dramatic disjunction between the 'electrical' cause and the images that result, and stay present, albeit unconsciously, long after the original cause has disappeared, with their own distinctive implications for her life, and linking her to 'Rome' in a web of meanings that take us out of any circuit of sensation altogether. Retrospectively, indeed, the 'cause' becomes oddly disjunctive, more a marker of the discontinuity than an active determinant. In short, we can recognize something of the tensions that surfaced in the texts of Hume and Smith, albeit in the distinctive inflection of a later age.

But, we have introduced George Eliot, so let us delve further – this time, into *Daniel Deronda*, and the way it is structured by the tensions between sensation and sympathy in this new context.

Gwendolen in distress

After Gwendolen has decided, for reasons obscure, to keep the necklace that her new friend Daniel Deronda had returned to her, the author observes: 'There is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of our gusts and storms.' This 'unmapped country', then, is not just 'out there', passive and inert; it intervenes in the events in the 'mapped' country we think we are familiar with. And Gwendolen is more than usually troubled by these gusts and storms. Subject to capricious fears, inexplicable fits of dread, the very experience of space threatens her: 'Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself'.²¹ Open countryside, the expanse of sea, figure her own self, in its boundlessness, allowing for no clear line between 'interior' and 'exterior', and extending way beyond her own comprehension. In the light of this, it seems hardly surprising that Davis can characterize the unconscious as 'a mode of interaction between inner and outer'.²²

There is also the matter of keys. Gwendolen is obsessed by locked boxes, signifying controlled boundaries.²³ Indeed, locking and unlocking, and the key as the vehicle for doing either or both, play a significant part in her life, just as they do in the life of Daniel, but in reverse fashion. For her, keys are for keeping things locked away; for him, they are for opening things up. Most vividly, there is the panel in the drawing room, which sends Gwendolen into one of her fits of alarm when she first encounters it. Unlocked, it reveals the picture of 'an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms';²⁴ she hastily has it locked, and tries to ensure she keeps the key. The image itself, detailed with such brevity, strikingly encapsulates and prefigures so much, in the plot and in her future life; it will frequently recur, to traumatize her at 'key' points, and will have its most dramatic 'realization'²⁵ when she is stranded in the yacht, in the immensity of the sea, witnessing the white face of Grandcourt – her hated, drowned husband – bobbing dead in the water.²⁶

Images and keys play out an uncanny *pas de deux* in Gwendolen's life: images that demand and defy keys, keys that cannot unlock what was never properly locked in the first place; and, anyway, what is the image that can be 'unlocked' by a key? They play across a profound discursive tension. And 'image' also conjures up the mind itself, the obscure images that trouble our dreams and demand elaboration, just as it condenses the whole idea of the unconscious and its demand for the psychoanalysis that will, ostensibly, provide its 'key'. Learning of her husband's earlier liaison with Lydia Glasher, and speculating that Gwendolen had learnt of her existence, Daniel 'thought he had found a key now by which to interpret her more clearly', a comment given further, authorial emphasis elsewhere in the text, in the claim that 'all meanings, we know, depend on the key of interpretation', whether we are dealing with words, or the feelings manifest in the body (such as the 'dubious flag-signal'²⁷ of the blush). And – whatever the problems with keys in general – this is a key that Gwendolen most certainly does not possess, or cannot use: she is endlessly inscrutable to herself.

It is also true, though, that she connives in her own state of lack of self-knowledge, wilfully keeping herself locked up, keeping disturbing secrets locked away, even as this strategy is bound to fail. In the tableau scene, where an excerpt from *The Winter's Tale* is being presented, the panel mysteriously flies open, transfixing Gwendolen in horror;²⁸ and although the miscreant – a younger sister – returns the key, the damage has been done: the eternal return of the original traumatic encounter is guaranteed, for 'something has been opened here that defies rationalization or even interpretation', as Carolyn Williams

suggests.²⁹ Later, she keeps a small knife locked securely in a drawer, fantasizing the murder of her husband, afraid of her own feelings, her deepest impulses; in the yacht, she even drops the key in the water. But he dies anyway; and the circumstances leave her possibly complicit in his death ...

Let us now take up the case of the 'poisoned diamonds'. When Lydia Glasher sends the necklace – originally given her by Grandcourt – to Gwendolen, she encloses a note, condemning her for breaking her promise not to marry him. Thus invested with the power of the curse, the diamonds produce terror, a fit, followed by 'a nervous shock' when Grandcourt enters, so that 'she screamed again and again with hysterical violence'. So, 'Truly here were poisoned gems, and the poison had entered into this poor young creature'.³⁰ And the necklace retains its malevolent power: opening the jewel-case later, she has a 'shivering sensation'; on another occasion, she is described as 'hurting herself with the jewels that glittered on her tightly-clasped fingers pressed against her heart'. The jewels not only symbolize, but enforce, the life of 'poisonous misery'³¹ she lives with Grandcourt.

What we find here is that it is not just emotions, like despair, but also structural features of relationships, such as power, that can be embedded or embodied in physical objects, which thereby both encompass, and go beyond, the role of signifier, carrying the more obscure dimension of the figural, poised uneasily between signifier and signified, metaphorical and literal. George Eliot is constantly interested in the obscure realm of cause and effect where thoughts can be manifested in objects, half-formed intuitions over here can have effects over there, and unconscious pathways can be just as efficacious as intentional ones; the possibility that 'undisclosed, half-conscious forces shape the future too',³² as Gillian Beer suggests in her exploration of this theme. Gwendolen's 'sensational' response here reflects the discontinuity and disproportion between cause and effect, and indeed the excess of effect over cause; in these circuits of sensation, effects are *always* to be found, and cannot be read off in any automatic way from causes, whether or not the latter involve conscious intentions. In this case, her guilt, her feelings of remorse, are fundamental to her reaction. Here also, the jewellery can meet the 'upturned dead face': object and image, both embodying power in the very disruption of meaning.

But they meet also in the theme of return: in the case of the jewels, the letter itself, and the curse it contains, are explicitly repeated late in the novel.³³ And, in a novel that is full of circulating necklaces and rings, this whole episode is, structurally, a repeat: as we have seen, Gwendolen has already received a previous turquoise necklace, redeemed for her by Daniel after she had lost her money

at the gaming-table, and again with an accompanying note, and again causing her distress and embarrassment.³⁴ This jewellery, too, returns to give her further trouble, this time with Grandcourt.³⁵ Pawning his own ring at Cohen's, Daniel meets Mordecai, Mirah's brother, an event crucial to the resolution of the story; and it is when Mirah's father steals Daniel's ring and Mirah realizes what has happened that his declaration of love for Mirah is finally prompted.³⁶ Ordinary objects, invested with sensational power, precipitate sensational events ...

Other episodes in the novel help to bring out this logic of sensation. Of the effect of the Rector's speech on Gwendolen, demanding that she take Grandcourt's marriage proposal seriously, we are told: 'The ideas it raised had the force of sensations.' Her response is immediate, at the level of feeling, yet this response is simultaneously described as 'ideas'. In their affective power, ideas too can *be* sensations. Hence can the channels of influence be both invisible and immediate. And although the 'ideas' may be invisible, their sensational manifestation is quite otherwise: Gwendolen is described as becoming 'pallid' as she listened, and the Rector noticed the 'strong effect' his words had produced. And if ideas can be sensational, so, of course, can emotions. Later, having been scolded by Grandcourt, she retires to her dressing-room, pale and agitated, afflicted by 'hideous' mental images: 'Even in the moments after reading the poisonous letter she had barely had more cruel sensations than now; for emotion was at the acute point, where it is not distinguishable from sensation.'³⁷ The body thereby becomes 'expressive' even despite itself, in ways involuntary and revealing. Hence, overall, Ann Cvetkovich can suggest that Eliot operates in this novel by 'converting sensational events into sensational psychological dilemmas',³⁸ which are in turn rendered even more 'sensational' by being made public, both as embodied effects and affects, and in terms of broader consequences.

Is Gwendolen 'traumatized' by all this, then? It seems reasonable to say so.³⁹ A reference at one point to her 'hidden wound'⁴⁰ would certainly fit our contemporary trauma discourse. Most significantly, we find the idea that trauma involves uncontrollable, and frequently unpredictable, repetition, with the corollary that the *first* episode only becomes clearly traumatic in retrospect, through the subsequent repetitions – as with the image of the dead face. Gwendolen herself comments, with resignation, near the end: 'Things repeat themselves in me so. They come back – they will all come back.'⁴¹ The word 'trauma' would have been available to Eliot, and the concept was beginning to occur in discussions of the effects of railway accidents, though had not attained the fashionable status – and theoretical baggage – it was to acquire in our time.

The language of affliction that was of course more widely used was that of hysteria, and we can now turn to that.

It is clear from what has been said above that Gwendolen has a very unstable sense of self, plagued as she is by disturbing visions, agoraphobic responses to space, uncertainties over her own boundaries, and unpredictable emotional outbursts and breakdowns which forever threaten the conventions of civility and her own ability to manage her self-presentation and her relations to others. Indeed, these social dynamics seem to be central to aspects and episodes where the hysteria label is explicitly invoked. For example, Daniel's departure, after comforting her following Grandcourt's death, produced 'hysterical crying', precisely, we are told, because 'The distance between them was too great.'⁴² All this fits the model of hysteria as uncontrollable emotional outburst, histrionic display, excessive feeling. But it cannot be left there, for another, rather contrasting 'symptom' is also to be found – one which, however, also fits in with what was becoming the pervasive cultural stereotype of hysterical behaviour.

When her mother finds her, in the episode just mentioned, after Daniel has left, she is initially 'sitting motionless' with 'cold hands'. This reminds us of the tableau scene: here, she does indeed emit a 'piercing cry', but maintains her immobile posture, with only her eyes, dilated in fear, suggesting her fate as 'a statue into which a soul of fear had entered'.⁴³ The statue becomes 'an image of her own private hysteria', suggests Vrettos,⁴⁴ but a very *public* image. This is not, now, the inability or refusal to communicate through excess, an explosion 'outwards', but the opposite, a withdrawal 'inside', into muteness and immobility. And this second version of the hysterical spectacle appears to position the subject or victim decisively as the hapless object of the spectatorial gaze. For Jacqueline Rose, the narrator herself adopts this spectatorial position, together with the potential for a moralizing distancing that this implies. Gwendolen 'disturbs' the gaze, hence must be punished: 'The hysteresation of the woman resides in this scenario, generated by the very form of the narrative itself.' Yet this in turn reproduces the conditions that produce the 'disturbance' in the first place, namely Grandcourt's tyrannical mastery working hand-in-hand with Gwendolen's remorse so that 'mastery and hysteria go together, with the second unleashed by the overcontrolled assertion of the first'.⁴⁵ The attempts to control Gwendolen, to *know* her – whether by Grandcourt, the narrator, or even the reader – thus drive towards their own failure, producing either hysterical outbursts or stasis. And there are hints in the novel that if this drive to transparency threatens to succeed, it is at the cost of spectralizing its victim, leaving nothing but a lifeless image; returning in the boat with the

dead body of her husband, Gwendolen herself is described as 'pale as one of the sheeted dead'.⁴⁶

Rose's approach is insightful, but ignores the broader dimensions of theatricality implicit in the spectacle of hysteria and the role of tableau in this novel. We now know that initially *Daniel Deronda* seems to have been planned both as novel and as play;⁴⁷ and we know that in 1871, just before beginning to collect material for the project, Eliot went to see *The Bells*, a melodrama in which tableau plays an essential part.⁴⁸ It seems reasonable enough for David Marshall to claim that *Daniel Deronda* 'considers its own theatrical status as it dramatizes characters who play-act on stage and in life; and it rehearses the problematic ways in which people become spectators to the spectacles of others'. The whole novel is replete with images and tableaux to challenge the reader's imagination, and that do indeed interrupt and challenge the narrative flow, and the very power of narrative to contain or tame them, just as we are reminded that we continue to see others as '*tableaux vivants*' about whom we must make up stories, in 'the theatrical distance that separates us'.⁴⁹

Gwendolen's hysteria, and her propensity to visions and fantasy, cannot, it seems, ultimately be contained by narrative. Emphasizing that Gwendolen's hysteria challenges the narrative structure, Vrettos argues that her ability to make her 'inner visions' come true, 'to see her wishes take shape outside her body', constitutes 'a spiritual and prophetic dimension to her character that is in conflict with the novel's authorized spiritual voice'.⁵⁰ The obsessive visions are an important aspect of the 'inward' version of hysteria, but they have intriguing consequences, in that her visions, like her wishes, seem to possess the power of prefiguring the future; and in that they become true, their realization involves their externalization. In *The Bells*, the murder of a rich Jew returns to haunt the murderer, years later, on a stormy night like that of the murder: he 'sees' a tableau of the crime, with him in it, so his interiority is exteriorized in the staged projection of his own past crime.⁵¹ Here, the tableau is retrospective, as it were; in the novel, it is rather that Gwendolen sees the scene, *wishes* the scene, of Grandcourt's death, sees the upturned face, and herself as guilty party, fleeing – and then it comes about.

Williams instances other examples from the novel, such as Daniel meeting Mordecai at Blackfriars Bridge, dramatically visualized in powerfully descriptive prose as a melodramatic tableau.⁵² Here, the self meets that other that it has craved, has longed for, and thereby discovers also itself, in transfigured form. As Williams suggests, such scenes of recognition are also scenes of self-reflection, 'the other face uncannily figuring the self as something seen outside itself

... interiority is suddenly extroverted and objectified as representation.⁵³ In these visions, prefigurations are also projections, recognition: the same in the other. And here again we find disturbance; for in referring, in the context of this episode, to 'images which have a foreshadowing power', Eliot is ostensibly referencing a more 'respectable' aspect of visions, presenting Mordecai as a 'visionary' in an Old Testament sense, one for whom special visions 'were the creators and feeders of the world'⁵⁴ – yet are Gwendolen's visions so different? Perhaps hysteria is not so 'other' after all ... Hysterics, it seems, are never mere victims – they can also be disturbing, questioning presences.

Daniel's sympathies

Several occasions on which Gwendolen's reactions are explicitly described as 'hysterical' involve interactions with Daniel, and it is worth considering how these self/other dynamics affect him. Rose suggests that for Daniel, 'the search for a sureness of identity relies on the disturbance of the woman to give it form';⁵⁵ and recalling also his rescue of Mirah from suicide, one sees what she means. Again highlighting the gender dynamics, Cvetkovich argues that his sympathetic encounters with women 'reveal his desire both to rescue them and to identify with them'; while the former makes him the 'patriarchal savior', the latter positions him as resembling them, and hence 'Sympathizing with them allows him ambiguously to do both ...'.⁵⁶ That the identification route poses problems for Daniel – just as experiencing identity in terms of a self/other oscillation does for Gwendolen – is clear in his response to her 'confession', near the end: stretched to the emotional limit, we are told that he is 'pierced', indeed 'completely unmanned', clearly at some risk of the hysteria that problematizes gender identity even as it positions the victim as feminine. Intriguingly, Gwendolen seems to pick up the other alternative in him here, reading him as manifesting a compassion which 'seemed to be regarding her from a halo of superiority'.⁵⁷ Are these the only alternatives present here, then: sympathy as identification, threatening hysterical excess, or sympathy as superiority, manifested in an arguably patriarchal compassion?

An observation by Marshall may help here. Gwendolen shows signs of being able to grow through her troubles, of hope for the future, when she 'begins to view herself by trying to enter into the sentiments that Deronda feels in trying to imagine her feelings'. This puts the emphasis not on identification with the other but on a kind of reflexive awareness that is made possible by taking

the place of the other, by viewing oneself *as* other; Deronda becomes Adam Smith's 'impartial spectator' for her, encouraging – by his very presence, and by enabling her to think *about* herself *through* him – the qualities of imagination and judgement.⁵⁸ And Cvetkovich, too, seems to notice some of this: his apparent suffering gives *her* strength; he helps her 'not by counselling her but by providing her with an image of how her own suffering affects him. His helplessness diminishes her own sense of futility, so that sympathy works by drawing some dividend from incapacity ...'⁵⁹ She develops a greater capacity to 'stand outside herself', get some distance, some perspective. And an important aspect of this is that her 'theatricality' need no longer exist at some distance from her, as an 'act' she 'puts on'; rather it can reside *in* the distance *from herself* that makes it a constitutive part of any viable spectacle of sympathy. While noting that Daniel's long-lost mother, the Princess, is ostensibly anti-sympathy in orientation (and 'teaches him his difference as well as his identity'),⁶⁰ Marshall points to how she implicitly understands all this, with her 'sincere acting',⁶¹ which does not mean that she is false, but rather that she stands for the view that 'the relations of sympathy' are 'inherently theatrical relations.'⁶² Because, with her, 'experience immediately passed into drama, and she acted her own emotions',⁶³ she implicitly realized the element of distance in sympathetic engagement with the other, as it was already incorporated in her own ability to 'act herself'.

Sympathetic engagement, then, involves imagination as well as feeling: Daniel, we are told, revealed 'a subdued fervour of sympathy, an activity of imagination, on behalf of others.'⁶⁴ Such sympathy is expansive, outgoing, extending one's own capacities as self. Elsewhere, Eliot herself asserts that 'The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies.'⁶⁵ And Daniel points to the dangers when 'all passion is spent in that narrow round, for want of ideas and sympathies to make a larger home for it'. It is clear that this involves the challenge of an encounter with difference. To his mother, he says that he has been trying for years 'to have some understanding of those who differ from myself'; and tramping the streets of the Jewish quarter leads to 'rousing the sense of union with what is remote'. He tries to surmount prejudice, and realizes the power of stereotypes: 'a little comparison will often diminish our surprise and disgust at the aberrations of Jews and other dissidents',⁶⁶ we are told, in a formulation that may well suggest to the present-day reader that the author is only partly successful in her own efforts in this direction.⁶⁷

And here we are entering the central theme of the later part of the novel, in which Deronda's search for the 'larger home' enforces an encounter with his own

hitherto unsuspected Jewish ancestry and a resulting commitment on his part to the Jewish cause. It is a commitment in which he does, nonetheless, propose to retain some independence of judgement; he will not slavishly follow these beliefs and customs, but will maintain his grandfather's ideal of 'separateness with communication' – which sounds like a possible recipe for life in a multi-cultural society – while accepting that his 'first duty' is to his own people.⁶⁸ And it is here that a large part of the enduring challenge of the novel itself resides. Can 'sympathy' survive this transition to a world of competing nationalities and ethnicities? Can the model of the 'impartial spectator' retain any purchase here? If the 'larger home' is identified with a *particular* group, does it not shrink back again, diminish into narrowness and exclusivity?

Now aware of his Jewish origin, we learn, in a passage worth quoting in full, that Deronda had now found '... his judgement no longer wandering in the mazes of impartial sympathy, but choosing, with that noble partiality which is man's best strength, the closer fellowship that makes sympathy practical', hence 'exchanging that bird's-eye reasonableness which soars to avoid preference and loses all sense of quality, for the generous reasonableness of drawing shoulder to shoulder with men of like inheritance'.⁶⁹ This eloquently encapsulates all the issues. The target here is a form of sympathy that had earlier afflicted him, a wide-ranging, disengaged and diffuse sympathy that, in seeing all sides to every question, leaves us indecisive, unable to act, to make particular moral choices and commitments;⁷⁰ he had succumbed to 'that reflective analysis which tends to neutralise sympathy'. Whatever Eliot's intentions here, the 'impartiality' being criticized is clearly distinct from that of Adam Smith's 'impartial spectator', who is constructed as perfectly capable of exercising judgement, making the necessary discriminations, partly because in this case 'judgement' is linked to imaginative involvement and feeling. Given Deronda's problem – that he wanted to be 'an organic part of social life', not a 'yearning disembodied spirit' – the solution presented is that he identify with the group that he finally feels able to recognize as 'my hereditary people', an identity that has 'given shape to what, I believe, was an inherited yearning'.⁷¹

What is implied here, then, is that the restless search, the willingness to expand horizons, engage with difference, must in the end result in the act of identification, an identification with 'identity' itself, in all its inevitable particularity, whether as individual or group. The nineteenth-century (organic) language of heredity, of race, is not the essential point – we can replace it with the (cultural) language of ethnicity, if it makes us feel happier; it is this idea of a necessary, fixed mooring point, as a condition for sympathetic engagement,

that is so crucial here – and troublesome. The problem is with the idea that identifications entail identity, that ‘belonging’ has to be seen *as* identity, and that only on this basis can the necessary sympathetic discriminations be made, even though one might reasonably fear that the resulting sympathetic acts are likely to be too subject to the norms and interests of the specific group – which, of course, is precisely the situation that the ‘impartial spectator’ was designed to deal with. Thus Audrey Jaffe argues that Deronda’s ‘complete’ sympathy is thus engaged ‘only when identity has been evacuated of everything but the self’s projections ... only when identity equals identity politics: when self and other merge because they are already merged into an imaginary unified identity’, an identity *already there*, so that ‘sympathy turns happenstance into fate and makes choices seem to be determined by the promptings of some unalterable essence at the self’s core.’⁷² And the point Davis makes about Deronda here would therefore be of wider import: ‘... this liberation of sympathy is also, necessarily, a limitation of its scope: it involves an assertion of specific cultural identity which implicitly excludes from its principal focus those who do not share it.’⁷³ And it is perhaps the tragedy of the modern world that George Eliot’s model has proved to be more *descriptively* prescient than Adam Smith’s. ‘Identity politics’, as a basis for wider sympathetic engagement, is necessarily broken-backed.

But it would be a pity to conclude on this note. After all, elsewhere, as we have seen, Eliot provides many positive insights that could lead in a significantly different direction. In particular, there is an episode – little remarked on, in the secondary literature – that could be seen as a paradigm case of sympathetic engagement, and one that does not require any of this paraphernalia of identity: the episode where Deronda takes Mirah, after her attempted suicide, to the Meyricks, who welcome her – a complete stranger, and a Jew – to their home. While not desperately poor, they are certainly not rich, yet welcome her unreservedly, and look after her while she finds her feet again.⁷⁴ She can thereby gain – or regain – a sense of belonging: a sense that comes both from the warmth of the love of a particular, small family group, and also resonates beyond this, as a sense of belonging once again to the world, to life itself. And none of this depends on the dynamics of identification and identity, the dualism of self and other, inside versus outside, that is clearly the danger implicit in the way Deronda’s search is presented. ‘Belonging’, one might suggest, subsumes identity, rather than being subordinate to it, since ‘belonging’ incorporates the sense in which identity can never be reflexively self-sufficient, can never be sufficiently ‘known’ to itself, and must indeed presuppose a domain that goes

'beyond', that can 'only' be felt, symbolized, projected as figuration.⁷⁵ It is this that the Meyricks offer Mirah – and the modern world.

Tea and cake

At this point, we can turn to Proust, and pursue him into the depths of what he calls the *mémoire involontaire*, the 'place' where the past is 'hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach, of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling'.⁷⁶ Undercutting conventional distinctions between realism and modernism, the continuities with George Eliot will be readily apparent, particularly in the sense of mind as deeply embedded in time, as temporal in its very structure, and emerging out of this shadowy background of the unknown and the involuntary. In Eliot, the term 'unconscious' occurs, infrequently, more often used as adjective;⁷⁷ this is also broadly true of Proust's novel.⁷⁸ But in an interesting formulation, he refers to the 'thoroughly alive and creative sleep of the unconscious ... in which the things that barely touch us succeed in carving an impression, in which our hands take hold of the key that turns the lock, the key for which we have sought in vain'.⁷⁹ Here, the idea of the unconscious as a positive force in artistic creation comes to the fore – perhaps, indeed, as the 'key' to it. At the same time, this 'place' is only accessible fortuitously, not deliberately, and the key is the encounter with some object or event that may appear to have no inherent interest in itself. And what we find here, suggests Walter Benjamin in his reflections on this, is that 'the materials of memory no longer appear singly, as images, but tell us about a whole, amorphously and formlessly, indefinitely and weightily'. And, with regard to the memory, 'whereas an experienced event is finite – at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to anything that happened before it and after it'.⁸⁰

And how does all this work? One starts with a vivid sensation, but then the mind tries to take on the search for meaning. It then runs headlong into the paradox: to seek, consciously and deliberately, is *not* to find. In his most sustained account, in the famous episode of the dunked *madeleine* that brings a childhood memory vividly to life, Proust writes:

I ... examine my own mind. It alone can discover the truth. But how? What an abyss of uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the

seeker, is at the same time the dark region through which it must go seeking and where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not yet exist, which it alone can make actual, which it alone can bring into the light of day.⁸¹

Thus does the questing mind fall headlong into the problem of reflexivity: it is itself what it seeks to find, it is its own 'dark region', and the 'finding' becomes inseparable from the projection of the creative act, 'forming', shaping, the unknown, figuration as inseparable from discovery. What makes memory possible, memory as deep recall, is also what makes it unverifiable *as* memory.

But the further details of this process are also intriguing. The narrator tells us that he can feel something inside his mind attempting to rise, something 'anchored at a great depth'. He continues: 'I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed. Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory', which is trying to follow the original sensation of taste into his mind. This must be an 'old, dead moment which the magnetism of an identical moment has travelled so far to importune, to disturb, to raise up ...'⁸² And it is then that the memory returns ...

There is an illuminating tension in the language here, as though figuration is itself challenged in thus giving an account of its own emergence. We have the physical presence of some powerful object or creature, raising itself from the immensity of the depths; then we encounter the magnet, doing the raising; and we learn that what will emerge from all this is actually an *image*, not at all what the rest of the 'imagery' might have led us to expect. This, in effect, maps – figures – the disjunction at the heart of the process, or the *two* disjunctions. First, the tension between active and passive, between mind as *producing* the 'memory' or *retrieving* it as something that is always 'already there'; and, second, going beyond this, the transition from 'sensation' to 'image', the shift from a strong sense of a physical striving, by some 'thing', possibly animate, to the 'mere' visuality of the image, as one-dimensional, as 'picture'. This maps the sense of 'shock' itself, the simultaneous exteriority of cause and immediacy of effect, 'simultaneous' yet – as was suggested by Lewes – excessive or incommensurable the one with the other, both crossing and marking the gap in the circuit. But it also maps the inner logic of this, the resulting gap *in* mind, in memory, recording the metonymy of cause and the elaborations, both metaphorical and metonymic, *within* the field of memory and the unconscious that is thereby continually constituted and reconstituted through the impact of the 'outside' and the efforts of the conscious mind to retrieve this. Hardly surprising,

perhaps, if this entity, this 'presence' that surges up, seems to be both physical *and* ethereal, both object *and* image: truly the spectral presence of an 'old, dead moment' ... What is crucial is that this establishes memory, in its capacity as *mémoire involontaire*, as unconscious, as a 'separate sphere', constituted fundamentally by images and nebulous forces, and accessible – but only with difficulty – through mapping the superimpositions and displacements, the analogies and 'correspondences',⁸³ that both enable and challenge our interpretation of such material, and our theoretical efforts to harness it.

In this particular case, the initial sensation was one of *taste*, the *madeleine* in the tea: it was this that produced the 'exquisite pleasure ... something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin'. And it is the final recognition of this as the *madeleine* his aunt had given him long ago that made old Combray 'spring into being', in all its plethora of detail.⁸⁴ This immediacy of effect, this experience of 'time regained' as 'time abolished' seems connected to the *non-visual* aspect of the original sensation, and this calls for further examination. Most generally, indeed, it is *scent* that is involved, the 'objective' correlate of the sense of smell,⁸⁵ despite the *result* being intensely visual – visual images being the key content of the *mémoire involontaire* as we actually *recall* it. Taste and smell, suggest Proust, 'bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection'.⁸⁶ Reflecting on this, Benjamin describes scent as 'the inaccessible refuge of the *mémoire involontaire*', claiming that it is unlikely to associate itself with a visual image, only with the same scent, and speculating that this is because scent can drug or anaesthetize the sense of time: 'A scent may drown years in the odour it recalls [evokes].'⁸⁷ Here we see, in an association of two experiences of scent, the relation of 'evocation' between them whereby they can be paradoxically identified, thus abolishing time, in the very presence of the 'pastness' of the past. And this in turn can be mapped onto the crucial dis/continuity here, the fact that a sensation of scent provides memory as a panorama of visual imagery, a memory which 'reacts back' so as to apparently incorporate scent and everything else: 'Combray' in its entirety.⁸⁸ And Benjamin adds that whereas smell holds memories tenaciously, memories do not hold smells⁸⁹...

Taste and smell are perhaps the most intense, the most 'embodied' of the senses; at the other extreme, sight is a sense of distance and detachment, its picturing power aligning it more with thought. It is the former senses that give experiences their distinctive 'flavour' or 'aroma': they mark experience indelibly *as* experience, in its subjectivity. But above all, they carry the 'presence' of experience. Conversely, the encoding of sight in the visual image renders it subtly timeless, at least in that it can be readily separated from experience as

such (as in the photo).⁹⁰ So, although the image as picture is what is ‘conjured up’ in recollection, from the unconscious, it is smell, scent or sound that provide the trigger, the engine, of the process of sensation and its transmission, and it is they that have to be ‘reproduced’, *in the present*, to give the moment of plenitude, of epiphany.

Some of this is further elaborated at the end of Proust’s long journey, in the final volume, *Time Regained*. Approaching the Guermantes mansion, in a mood of black despair, virtually giving up hope of ever being able to convert his material (destined to become the novel) into a work of art, the narrator stumbles over paving-stones; immediately, he experiences what he describes as ‘unquestionably the same’ happiness as he had during the *madeleine* episode, and several times since, although the details are of course different (this time it is memories of Venice that are brought back). And then, waiting in the library, a second episode: a servant knocking a spoon against a plate brings back a memory of a railwayman hammering at a wheel. And this is followed by a third.⁹¹ This speeded-up process, together with his determination to make the most of it, leads Proust not only to a more comprehensive memory of the past, but to reflect on this, and, in the process, regain some confidence in his vocation.

The crucial passage of reflection comes when he comments on the limitations of ordinary experience: everyday reality disappoints because ‘when my senses perceived it my imagination, which was the only organ I possessed for the enjoyment of beauty, could not apply itself to it, in virtue of that ineluctable law which ordains that we can only imagine what is absent’. Yet, conversely, if a sensation, like the spoon or hammer sound, is ‘mirrored at one and the same time in the past, so that my imagination was permitted to savour it, and in the present’, where the ‘actual shock to my senses’⁹² could be said to add to the ‘dreams of the imagination’ the idea of ‘existence’ such dreams usually lack, then this subterfuge permits the isolation of ‘a fragment of time in the pure state’.⁹³ What we find here, what returns, is not an echo or a duplicate, but ‘that past sensation itself’, which now ‘sought to re-create the former scene around itself’.⁹⁴ Experienced in this way, the sound or scent is ‘real without being actual, ideal without being abstract’, and immediately the ‘concealed essence of things is liberated, along with the “true self”’.⁹⁵ Thus, as Charles Taylor observes, this ‘Proustian epiphany’ only occurs when a *recurrence* of the original event, or something sufficiently similar, triggers it: the epiphany ‘has to be framed *between* an event and its recurrence, through memory’.⁹⁶

An illuminating discussion by Deleuze can be useful here for grasping what is involved in this ‘return’ of old Combray. Arguing that what is essential in

involuntary memory is 'not resemblance, nor even identity ... but the internalized difference, which becomes immanent', he suggests that the Combray encountered here is Combray 'in its truth ... in its internalized difference, in its essence. Combray rises up in a pure past, coexisting with the two presents, but out of their reach.'⁹⁷ This, one could say, is Combray as 'present' in its difference from the present it once was, as experienced, and from the presence of experience now. This reminds us of the 'pastness' of the past as virtuality, inaccessible to voluntary memory, but always 'present', nonetheless. The twin impoverishments of everyday actuality and detached intellectual abstraction can both be transcended in a thoroughgoing moment of epiphany which, although brief in itself, can have lasting results ...

We saw, in the first episode, that the non-visual senses, taste and smell, are crucial to the return of 'old Combray', in all its plenitude; in this second account, we learn that the imagination is, too. It mediates present and absent, bringing the past into presence. The 'subterfuge' of this conjunction of these two disparate realities – 'dreams' and 'actual shock' – produces existence as the presence of the past as 'virtual'. At the same time, the imagination has a synthesizing power: it gives us a sense of relations, of wholes. Is this sufficient, here, to account for the fact that the memory returns in this full density of associations? In Proust's account, it is shock, sensation, which appears to be the active force here, that seeks to 're-create the former scene around itself'. As a further reflection on this, perhaps we might have recourse to another influential thinker of the decade or two preceding Proust, the psychologist William James.

A critic of empiricism, James argues that when the mind perceives a group of objects, it does not experience a fragmented '*cluster of feelings*' but rather a '*feeling of the cluster* of objects, however numerous these may be'.⁹⁸ If the mind produces an image of the manifold of experience, feeling responds to this as a *singularity*, as a feeling of the whole; the image-forming capacity of mind – the imagination in the broad Kantian sense – provides us with the material to which feeling responds, the whole *as* and *in* feeling. So this worked-up picture or image is *felt* as embodying relationship, homologous to the original situation, hence as *memory* rather than as pure creation. Davis further claims that, in James, 'feelings exist in fluid relation to each other, rather than as discrete entities';⁹⁹ hence each 'segment' of the 'stream' of experience is not felt in isolation because it is inseparable from a 'staining, fringe or halo of obscurely felt relation to masses of other imagery'.¹⁰⁰ Experience is grasped in a way that is not only inherently relational, but also temporal. And this perspective seems to lead not only into Proust, but into Bergson and Virginia Woolf as well ...¹⁰¹

Resistance and recognition: The artistic encounter

It will be apparent that this Proustian account of memory is constantly at risk of sliding memory into creativity; the boundaries that separate recollection and recreation seem very flimsy. Indeed, by the time we reach the events at the Guermantes mansion, near the end, this close relation has become near-explicit; there is, at the very least, an essential homology between these two processes, and this is worth pursuing, this time from the standpoint of art.

Here, in the discussion of how the raw material of experience is transformed in artistic creativity, we can recall that it is the very *resistance* that is initially encountered that guarantees the most important insights, 'those which life communicates to us against our will in an impression which is material because it enters us through the senses but yet has a spiritual meaning which it is possible for us to extract'. So, the task, adds Proust, is 'to interpret the given sensations as signs',¹⁰² just as it is the 'material pattern', the 'outline of the impression ... made upon us' that remains as the token of truth. 'Only the impression ... however faint its traces, is a criterion of truth.' And this comes to us as force, as impact, not chosen by us, sensations encountered fortuitously, products neither of our volition nor of pure reason: 'The book whose hieroglyphs are patterns not traced by us is the only book that really belongs to us.'¹⁰³ And this is 'the inner book of unknown symbols' we explore in the unconscious, a book in which we have to try to read the symbols for ourselves, individually, 'for to read them was an act of creation in which no one can do our work for us or even collaborate with us.'¹⁰⁴ Thus can sensation, beyond memory, become art.

On this account, it is the presence of the impression *as* impression, as trace, carrying a sense of otherness, of an *impact* on the self from outside, that gives it its truth. And this is further manifest – as we saw in the *madeleine* episode – in the difficulty of its 'coming to the surface', the sense of physical struggle involved. Given this emphasis on the intensity of the experience in itself, any problem of 'deciphering hieroglyphics' seems rather secondary. And this has implications for the apparently important role of the imagination. Having been conjured up to bridge the gap between the original sensation and the current one, so as to present us with the immediacy of memory, the imagination then implicitly disappears again, in the *forcefulness* of the identification. Yet we are told here, several times, of *signs*, and of symbols: these would seem to call for an active *decipherment* of the book of hieroglyphics, clearly a role for the imagination. On the one hand, the language of impression, sensation, force, materiality;

on the other, that of interpretation, decipherment, meaning. We are not so far from Hume (and his critics). And although we appear not to have encountered the spectacle of sympathy as such, there is something here that might make it worthwhile for us to pause, for a moment's reflection.

These experiences of memory, of sensation, in their vividness, 'out of time': these are clearly to be contrasted with experiences *in* time, particularly the time of routine, everyday life, the zone that can be recorded, but only as fragmented and filed away, as *mémoire volontaire*. This is the zone of 'utilitarian, narrow human purpose'.¹⁰⁵ So one could say that the time of *mémoire involontaire* and creativity is the time of the recognition of the integrity of the otherness in experience, the 'time of encounter', emancipated from human interest as such – 'interest' as that which appeals to our needs and desires as constituted selves. This is, necessarily, time as the moment of communication, of engagement with otherness as the difference of other beings. A little-noticed passage from the *madeleine* episode brings this into sharp relief. Bearing in mind that objects, as signs, can embody unsuspected past relations and dimensions, Proust alludes to the 'Celtic belief' that the souls of those we have lost are held captive inside some animal, plant or object, and can only be released with the permission of the latter: 'Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised them the spell is broken.'¹⁰⁶ This passage must clearly have been noticed by Deleuze, who writes: 'It is as if the quality enveloped, imprisoned the soul of an object other than the one it now designates.'¹⁰⁷ This charismatic point of recall or creation is actually an *encounter*, then, an affirmation of shared belonging.¹⁰⁸ And this now reminds us of another author, already familiar to us here: Benjamin. It is worth reproducing the quote at length:

Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the animate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire*.¹⁰⁹

When Benjamin also tells us that '... we designate as aura the associations which, at home in the *mémoire involontaire*, tend to cluster around the object of a perception',¹¹⁰ then again, we seem very close to Proust. And Benjamin goes on here to discuss Baudelaire, reminding us of the latter's 'forest of symbols' that look at us with 'familiar glances'.¹¹¹ He even adds that 'The deeper the remoteness which a glance has to overcome, the stronger will be the spell that is

apt to emanate from the gaze'.¹¹² Aesthetic engagement is an encounter, in which the element of distance is irreducible.

We can now return to memory, and its relation to the element of artistic creativity outlined here. What is crucial is the distinctive relation to time in the Proustian novel. As Proust writes, he is situated in a present that refers to what happened in the past, to what 'must have' happened then, so as to have brought him to his present position, the position he now writes from, from whence he refers back to the past point of origin, before writing, and to the later points of dramatic revelation that both reconstruct the writing and drive it forward. Given the time that has elapsed in the writing, the distance from the origin, the 'founding moment' or the series of revelations, the actual process of writing maps the very processes of literary creativity and of remembering on to one another, through the very redoublings and recurrences, the recognitions and encounters, that constitute both procedure and subject-matter of both. Of course, the work is characterized as a novel, not as autobiography, but the way these constantly run together or overlap, or run alongside as powerfully homologous,¹¹³ exemplifies this superimposition of creativity on to memory whereby two ultimate incommensurables nonetheless make each other possible – along with the Proustian project of the modern self.

Memory, feeling and modernity

In Proust, all this is linked to a distinction – left implicit, most of the time – between the everyday world of the *mémoire volontaire* and this world of *mémoire involontaire*. In the former, the past is made 'arid' by the intellect, and voluntary memory is merely like 'turning over the pages of a picture-book', so that everyday images are 'desiccated and insubstantial'.¹¹⁴ Ordinary sensations are really just patterns of homogeneous elements, however individually distinct and distinctive each may seem. In Benjamin's hands, this becomes a theoretically developed, full-scale critique of modernity, but it also reminds us that a theory of memory itself may have to be part of its own subject-matter, itself potentially time-bound.

Erlebnis, the experience of the moment, experience as discontinuous and available to be filed as accessible memory, is contrasted with *Erfahrung*, tradition-bound experience, 'less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of an accumulated and frequently unconscious data'; and Benjamin adds that 'Where there is experience in the

strict sense of the word [*Erfahrung*], certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past'. The latter implies that societies in which collective experience, ritual and tradition enter into and reconstruct the very way individual life itself is experienced, must have a different relation to time and memory, such that even the distinction between two domains or types of memory cannot be taken for granted. This cannot be explored here, but what does emerge is that, in Benjamin's words, following Proust, 'only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject as an experience [*Erlebnis*], can become a component of the *mémoire involontaire*'.¹¹⁵ Thus, the modern self emerges as disjunctive: consciousness and recall exclude one another – save only in the imaginary or aesthetic plenitude of the Proustian epiphany – and, since past and present cannot cohere, experience is fractured.¹¹⁶ Modernity designates the time of the past as absence, of the subject as never truly self-present. And, as Ian Hacking rather poetically puts it, 'There is one feature of the modern that is dazzling in its implausibility: that the forgotten is what forms our character, our personality, our soul.'¹¹⁷

An underlying implication here is that affect cannot be stored: all that can be stored is the 'memory', the representation, of it. The feeling is dissipated, *as* feeling, or energy, in the very experience of it. Feeling *is* presence, in the here and now; it *makes* experience 'presence'. I do not remember past feelings; I only remember *that* I had them. This makes it all the more likely that the Proustian 'deep' memory is actually a process – or moment – of unconscious *recreation*, a reconstruction from the collapse of the internal barriers in the mind, from that moment when the 'shaken partitions'¹¹⁸ give way, with the resultant or accompanying sensations, or affects, in the present. And here we can revisit a controversy in psychology from Proust's own time (and unresolved since). It has often been assumed that emotions can be lodged in the unconscious, that indeed 'nothing is truly forgotten'. James, however, denied the existence of emotional memory: what surges up is actually a *new* episode of feeling.¹¹⁹ Most pointedly, the psychologist Claparède, from the same period, claimed that 'For me, it is impossible to *feel* an emotion as *past*'. He adds: 'One cannot be a spectator of one's feelings; one feels them, or one does not feel them; one cannot imagine them [image them, represent them] without stripping them of their affective essence.'¹²⁰ This may need some amendment – in some situations, at least, we can be aware *that* we have certain feelings – but the main point is plausible: attempting to grasp the feeling *as* feeling is to lose it in the grasping of it; to record it, or reflect on it, is *already* to have moved on. And Ruth Leys observes that Freud seems to agree – generally, at least – with Claparède on this 'absolute

irreducibility between affect and representation.’¹²¹ Since, for Freud, ‘Strictly speaking ... there are no unconscious affects,’¹²² it is ideas, wishes, fantasies, or, in most general terms, representations, that get repressed, and that are worked on by the unconscious processes of displacement and condensation, so that the resulting ‘symptoms’ in the present, which carry the affect, the emotional charge, can be apparently unconnected with whatever past ‘event’ was in some distant sense the cause. And this temporal hiatus provides the constitutive challenge for psychoanalysis itself ...

All this serves to deepen and extend our understanding of the paradox of reflexivity in this arena of emotional life in modernity. Can I reflect on myself, in my past *and* present, *in* the present, without losing that affective tinge that marks *any* experience as distinctive? This sense of disjunction between present and past both deepens the paradox of reflexivity, and is deepened by it: the affect, the distinctiveness of the experience of the past, is lost to me, just as my own position in the present gives me a necessarily partial view. The bounded self, exposed to the shocks of experience, finds its own past an increasing problem, returning as it does in mysterious residues and triggering opaque effects, posited as challenges to our ability to ‘exercise control’. And the present is not sufficient to itself: it leaves traces, after-effects, after-affects, just as these are also latent in it.

The Freudian moment

The most sustained effort to reflect on these ‘unconscious arts of memory’, emerging out of this preceding background – and not necessarily resolving the tensions revealed there – is, of course, that of Freud, and it seems appropriate to conclude this chapter with a brief consideration of his work here. We can begin from an interesting observation by Peter Brooks, who suggests that the second half of *Daniel Deronda* reflects a shift of emphasis from ‘seeing’ (visions, fantasy) to ‘listening’ (narrative), and that both Eliot and Freud insist that an account or encounter ‘get beyond the spectacularization of symptoms, that it becomes a listening to the body rather than simply a viewing of it.’¹²³ This again raises the issue of ‘memory as representation’, and its relation to affect.

In Freud, ‘affect’ exists in dynamic contrast to ‘idea’: but the German *Vorstellung* can also be translated as presentation, representation (and the French translation is usually *représentation*). A key passage, preceding the assertion of the impossibility of unconscious affects, can be quoted here:

An instinct can never become an object of consciousness – only the idea [*Vorstellung*] that represents the instinct can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea. If the instinct did not attach itself to an idea or manifest itself as an affective state, we could know nothing about it ...¹²⁴

In interpreting this, we can remember that while Freud's earliest position, adopted in the programmatic 1895 manifesto *A Project for a Scientific Psychology*, is one of wholehearted adoption of the materialist inheritance of the science of his time, with the mind as a system of neural networks, in which the binding and unbinding of 'nervous' energy provided the dynamic force, he had already moved well away from this by 1905.¹²⁵ We find, by then, a distinction between *Instinkt*, as innate to, and essentially identical among, members of a given species, and *Trieb* (often, but not consistently, translated as 'drive'), which is indeterminate as to object and aim, and individually variable; indeed, the latter is really about the *pressure* exerted, rather than the direction. This distinction plays a crucial part in opening up the possibility of 'mind' as an arena of relative autonomy and an appropriate topic for investigation by the new perspectives of psychoanalysis, but is not without its own problems.

Bearing this in mind, we can return to the above quote. How, then, is 'drive' related to 'affect'? In their analysis, Laplanche and Pontalis describe affect as 'expressive' of drive or instinct, 'the qualitative expression of the quantity of instinctual energy', its 'subjective transposition',¹²⁶ which seems apposite enough, albeit vague; in Kafka's version, 'The quantity of an affect is simply its intensity, while the quality refers to its positive or negative valence, pleasure or pain', and tension is central to it.¹²⁷ It has no representational content: ideas or memory traces can be attached, detached, or reattached. Hence affects have 'ideational representatives' (*Vorstellungsrepräsentanten*) to which they can become fixated, and it is these that constitute the core content of the unconscious.

All this serves to remind us of the underlying structural tension, and suggest that it may be unresolved. On the one hand, we have the language of drive and compulsion, of force and energy, in this distinctively Freudian version of the circuit of sensation, which does indeed allow for the circulation of energy among the sectors of the psychical apparatus; and on the other hand, issues of representation, meaning, and cultural translation, the decoding of thought, dream, and fantasy, whether conscious or unconscious, and without any promise of resolution. Translating the language of drive into the more clearly cultural language of desire does not resolve this, for this merely perpetuates the necessary indeterminacies of the former in the language of the latter. If affect

is allowed to be unconscious – and, more particularly, if instinct or drive are allowed to be unconscious – then the relative autonomy of the unconscious, and the existence of the psychoanalysis that has postulated it as its subject matter, come under threat: the unconscious would collapse back into ‘nature.’ And here, in the uncertain status of the unconscious, the apparent incommensurability of ‘affect’ and ‘representation’ (or ‘idea’) can be brought into focus. If affect is unconscious, body is brought *too close* to mind, threatening to overwhelm it; affect has to be kept ‘sufficiently’ separate, to one side, and triggered as *effect*. Yet this too presents problems: the risk of *too great* a separation between the economic point of view on one hand, and the dynamic or topographical on the other, threatening to fracture Freudian ‘metapsychology’ by taking the economic out of the mental apparatus altogether, and leaving many of the crucial insights and applications of psychoanalysis, particularly when they involve crucial reference to affect – as in the case of trauma – largely broken-backed. And it may be that the grandeur and power of the Freudian system – along with its irresolvable problems – is inseparable from this aporia at its core.

An implication of this is that trauma and hysteria – presented in psychoanalysis essentially as cause and symptom – may rather be seen to reflect and embody the two incommensurable wings of this Freudian project, along with the underlying tensions of the relations between sensation and sympathy. And it is to them that we now turn.