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Proust and the Visual (book review)

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AUBERT, NATHALIE, ed. *Proust and the Visual*. Cardiff: UP of Wales, 2013. ISBN 978-0-7083-2548-3. Pp. 245. 116 €.

In his masterpiece *À la recherche du temps perdu* Proust systematically endeavored to delineate the conditions of possibility of all visibility and this particular task constitutes an integral part of both the progression of the narrator's journey toward becoming a writer and the unfolding of the novel itself. Indeed, Proust's unique intuition was to connect the aesthetics of the visual to the ontological aesthetics of the event of looking. Hence, the image emerges from the impasse of classical metaphysics where it was reduced to an illusion, for it encompasses the process of perception as well as the writer's task to express it adequately in a quest for truth. This challenging volume of twelve essays written by Proustian specialists and part of the *Studies in Visual Culture* series, treats the rich phenomenological category of the "visual"—defined as manifesting in the image both space and time—whose prominent role in the Proustian novel is at the heart of its modernity (1). Organized in three parts, the first examines the philosophical implications of this quest for truth, taking up analyses of the thing, the body, the relationship between the seer and the visible in order to show that they acquire their full meaning outside a psychological interpretation. First, Aubert argues that Proust's masterwork provided a model for philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's conception of expression as absence of closure and infinity of sense. Adam Watt follows with a close textual focus informed by phenomenology, concentrating on the Narrator's reflections in the Bois de Boulogne in the closing pages of *Du côté de chez Swann*. Next, using philosopher Giorgio Agamben's diagnosis of the twentieth century as an age that lost its gestures, Patrick French analyzes a passage of *Le côté de Guermantes* where the Narrator describes the balletic movement of Robert de Saint-Loup. Part one closes with Hugues Azérad's chapter illustrating how poet Pierre Reverdy's seminal definition of the modernist image could be brought to bear on Proust's own conception. Part two examines how Proust questions our

relationship with the world through the workings of certain images and textures (handwriting, color, matter). Akane Kawakami's essay shows how handwriting delivers discrete elements of signification discernable as signs. Karen Haddad and Thomas Baldwin focus on "areas" of the novel (picture planes, thresholds, ekphrasis) whose narratorial status is unstable or problematic, while Sarah Tribout-Joseph's essay invites reflection upon the link between the allusion to painting in the text and the referenced work outside the text (4). Áine Larkin locates her research at the paradoxical intersection of anti-photographic aesthetics and photographic poetics at work in the narrative. Part three, with essays by Vincent Ferré, Florence Godeau, and Marion Schmid, extends the field of enquiry of Proustian criticism beyond the novel itself, examining the remarkable range of visual practices—paintings, artworks, and film and theater adaptations—that have found their origin in Proust's text. This innovative collection offers fresh insights into the author's vital role as one of the founders of the emerging field of visual studies.