AURA AND CHARISMA

By
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RESUMEN:

Aura y Carisma

El artículo parte de las definiciones que Weber trazó del concepto de "carisma" y Benjamin presentó del concepto de "aura". Nuestro autor extiende luego cada una de esas nociones al campo para el que fue específicamente creada la otra, es decir, el "carisma" se aplica al horizonte del arte mientras que el "aura" se proyecta sobre las personas. De tal suerte, es posible distinguir hasta qué punto existen una literatura y un arte carismáticos, en tanto que los personajes y objetos de ficción que ellos crean engendran consecuentemente en nosotros una experiencia aurática. El análisis de pasajes de la *Odisea* y de *A la búsqueda del tiempo perdido* prueba con creces la conexión entre las dos categorías y ayuda a lograr una delimitación mutua y más precisa de ambas.

ABSTRACT:

The article starts with the definitions of two notions: "charisma", given by Max Weber, and "aura", presented by Walter Benjamin. Our author enlarges each of

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those concepts and applies them respectively onto the field where the other has been created, that is to say, "charisma" is articulated to the world of art and "aura" is projected on persons and characters. So, it is possible to discover the existence of charismatic art and literature and, at the same time, the characters and the fictional objects created by them produce an auratic experience in the readers and beholders. The analysis of several passages taken from the *Odyssey* and *In Search of Lost Time* proves the connexion between the two categories and provides a mutual and precise delimitation of both of them.

There is a lively discussion of "aura" in aesthetic theory, where all paths lead to Walter Benjamin[1]. There is also a lively discussion of "charisma" in sociology and political science, where all paths lead to Max Weber[2]. These two categories have never met, as far as I know, though they are closely related. The powerful gravitational pull of two important thinkers holds them in separate orbits. Lift them from those orbits long enough to focus on their relatedness, and we find a useful set of concepts for analysing history, cultural phenom-

1. I don't know of serious commentary on "aura" apart from discussions of Benjamin. The recent and excellent *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* does not have an entry on it and the word does not show up in the index –which of course means only that it is not yet canonized. Recent work with reference to Benjamin is abundant however: Aura is one of the topics "assigned" in the volume *Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Marrinan, Stanford, Stanford Univ. Press, 2003. Eight of the thirty essays address the topic directly. Also, Robert Kaufman, "Aura, Still," *October* 99, Winter 2002, 45-80; Lutz Koepnick, "Aura Reconsidered: Benjamin and Contemporary Visual Culture," in *Benjamin's Ghosts: Interventions in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*, ed. Gerhard Richter, Stanford, Stanford Univ. Press, 2002, 95-117; Willem van Reijen, "Breathing the Aura –the Holy, the Sober Breath", *Theory, Culture and Society* 18, 2001, 31-50; several essays in *Benjamin's Blind Spot: Walter Benjamin and the Premature Death of Aura*, ed. Lise Patt, Topanga, CA, Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2001.
2. Important recent work with bibliography of earlier studies: Philip Smith, "Culture and Charisma: Outline of a Theory", *Acta Sociologica*, 43, 2000, 101-111; Charles Lindholm, *Charisma*, Cambridge US, Blackwell, 1990. Stephen Turner, "Charisma Reconsidered," *Journal of Classical Sociology,* 3, 2003. All of these studies show a developing unease with Weber's grip on the subject. Turner sees the term banalized to the point of meaninglessness in the present.

ena, art and literature, one allied to the current urge to get "beyond metaphysics and hermeneutics"[3].

Max Weber's famous, much cited definition of "charisma" holds up well in reference to charisma of person:

> [charisma can be defined as] *a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader* [4].

Broaden the context from religious authority in rulers, and this applies well to many charismatic figures: teachers, movie actors, presidents. For our purpose it will do to accept personal charisma as a quality allied with talent and other sort of gifts (Gk. *charismata*) which may easily be perceived by the admiring beholder as beyond the attainment of normal human beings, supernatural, or divine. My argument is that charisma is also a quality of works of art and of characters represented in them[5], which/who can inspire the same sort of admiring wonder and urge to imitate as living charismatic figures. As a quality of works of art[6], charisma creates the appearance of the grandiose in the person or world represented, makes it de-

3. A good summary of this trend with survey of literature and suggestions for a new approach in Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004.
4. Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers with an Introduction*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 48.
5. The only serious attempt I know of to analyse literature with this concept is Rafael Falco, *Charismatic Authority in Early Modern English Tragedy*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Also Falco's earlier article: "Charisma and Tragedy: An Introduction", *Theory, Culture & Society,* 16, 1999, 71-98.
6. Here and throughout I use "art" to refer to all forms of representation, literature, painting, sculpture, photography, movies.

sirable, places it just beyond human and natural proportions, and inspires imitation in the viewer/reader. That is, it has effects on the viewer/reader like the human quality of charisma. Charismatic art is beyond and above nature, while remaining within human bounds. Phidias's statues of the gods were recognizable as human beings, just humans of extraordinary size, strength and beauty. Charisma of art gives a magnified, exalted semblance of life. Its basic impulse is to create a world grander than the one the reader or viewer lives in, a world of beauty, sublime emotions, heroic motives and deeds, godlike bodies and actions and superhuman talents—in order to dazzle and astonish the humbled viewer and lift him, by emulation or envy, up to the level of the world or the hero represented[7].

"Aura" is more difficult to pin down, and neither Walter Benjamin's pronouncements, nor decades of commentary on them have clarified it. His pronouncements on aura are few and orphic.[8] The best known is in his most influential essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [9]. Prior to mechanical reproducibility, the unique work of art possesses "authenticity" and "aura". The authenticity of an object is

7. On emulation and envy, see René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965. In later works, Girard developed his idea of "triangular desire" into "mimetic desire," usable both in religious and literary relationships. See also *Violence and the Sacred*, trans, Patrick Gregory, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, esp. pp. 143-168.
8. The inventory in Marleen Stoessel, *Aura: Das Vergessene Menschliche: Zu Sprache und Erfahrung bei Walter Benjamin*, Munich, Hanser, 1983, is, I assume, exhaustive.
9. I will quote from the newer translation, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility", Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge MA, Harvard Univ. Press, 2003, 251-283, though I have occasionally called on the earlier translation by Zohn in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken, 1969, 217-51. The title in *Selected Writings* is literally closer to the original, though little is gained in return for its clunkiness in comparison to "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".

> *the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it* (p. 254).

The ambiguity of the last phrase in Benjamin's text ("bis zu ihrer geschichtlichen Zeugenschaft") is evident in Zohn's earlier translation, *"to the history which it has experienced"* (p. 221). The original German allows an authenticity constituted by both what the object has witnessed and what others have testified on it. I'll come back to "authenticity," which seems to receive something like a substantive definition here. "Aura", however, is defined only, or largely, as that which is lost in the work of art, once it is mechanically reproduced:

> *One might encompass the eliminated element within the concept of the aura, and go on to say: what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura* (p. 254).

The mode of reception, even of art with no religious content, is "the cult". But in the age of photography and cinema, the work of art experiences the "decay" and the "withering" of aura. The reproducible work of art can only emerge and gain legitimacy at the cost of *"a shattering of all that has been transmitted … a shattering of tradition"*.

So, for Benjamin aura is some essence lost, some quality that has withered, decayed, and disappeared from technologically reproducible art. In illuminating it, he deepens the obscurity:

> *We define the aura* [of natural objects] *as the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye –while resting on a summer afternoon– a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch* (p. 255).

The jump from the work of art to nature is a Goethean gesture, suggesting that the true work of art is natural and that nature perceived in its ordered beauty is itself a pure work of art[10].

10. On the Goethean elements of this definition, see van Reijen, "Breathing

Benjamin's view is that the advent of photography and cinema signals the loss of the cultic admiration of art. The "real presence" of the canvas that actually received the brushstrokes of Leonardo or Renoir, that sat in their studios as the glory of Renaissance Florence or of nineteenth-century Paris accreted around it and clung to the authentic and irreproducible canvas like a ghost to its grave, inexpressibly present but unapproachable, mysteriously tucked into its materiality, near and yet distant –sensible and yet impalpable, like the shadow passing across the face of the viewer which mediates briefly the real presence of the distant tree branch. Replace the unique work of art with a xeroxed copy, a photographic copy, a digitalized copy, and the diminished collection of images and colors remains, bared of its accumulation of ghosts.

the Aura", (n. 1 above.) The image is Proustian, says Jürgen Link, "Between Goethe's and Spielberg's 'Aura'", in *Mapping Benjamin* (n. 1 above), 98-108. Link criticizes Benjamin's idea of aura as a "hopelessly disparate" fusing of theological, spiritistic, psychiatric and aesthetic connotations, making for a concept that is "inoperative".

The process indicated in the definition just quoted ("a distance, however near") would seem more or less invulnerable to historical change, and yet Benjamin historicizes aura decisively in its relation to western art. The undergirding of "The Work of Art" is the idea that essentially "auratic" art is finished in the twentieth century. What passes now as art is something poorer, more dangerous, more available to fascist manipulation and capitalist exploitation. Benjamin sets out bravely to theorize the managing of a new art, but with the clear sense that not much good is going to come, compared with what has passed[11].

"Aura" remains a difficult concept, and it is remarkable to note the power of the indefinable (or undefined) at work. Benjamin the magician waves the magic wand of resonant concepts, and their evocative character works its spell. Like the vine that grows from Jack's magic beans, they have proven capable of exfoliation far

11. Cf. the Reading of Hans Belting, *The Invisible Masterpiece*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001; orig. Munich, 1998, pp. 18-19.

more lush than the seeds that produced them. Commentary has focused on what Walter Benjamin meant much more than on what aura in literature and art might be. It was possible for Werner Fuld already in 1979 to lambaste the exegesis until then as *"directionless profundity"*, open to interpretations that contradict *"without any ill effects on the incomprehensibility"* of the idea. Nearly all commentaries, says Fuld, have in common that "they explain nothing and are themselves in need of explanation"[12]. Fuld himself goes on to explain not the concept of aura itself but its genesis in Benjamin's thought, or rather one element in that genesis. Add to this that much of the commentary aims at the "decline" or the "withering" of aura, and the enterprise looks like the pursuit of the receding accessibility of an undefinable concept.

Benjamin's statements on aura have become more a hindrance than a help to understanding it outside of the crisis of art in the early twentieth century. So far as I know, no one has applied the concept of aura to the analysis of a work of art or literature – with the possible exception of Jürgen Link and Benjamin himself, in his essay on Baudelaire[13]. The restriction to an audience of worshipful cognoscenti hides from view a far more pervasive role of aura as an element in art and literature. If not omni-present, it is ineradicable, not vulnerable even to grand shifts in representation and transitions in media, like the ones through which Walter Benjamin lived[14]. My purpose in this study is to broaden the approach to aura, remove it from the historical context in which Benjamin's comments situate it, and make it usable as a critical con-

12. Werner Fuld, "Die Aura: Zur Geschichte eines Begriffes bei Benjamin", *Akzente* 26, 1979, 352-370 (here pp. 352-3).

13. Robert Kaufman's essay in *October* 99 (n. 1 above) rescues "aura" as a critical concept but only by putting Adorno's revision and Bertolt Brecht's criticism in the foreground.

14. See Petra Kuppers comments in "The Survival of the Aura: Walter Benjamin's Desire", in *Benjamin's Blind Spot*, (n. 1 above), pp. 37-42. When it has "withered" in one medium, she claims, it is possible to "excavate the aura in another place, see it changing shape and resurfacing in a form appropriate to the modern world of reproduction" (p. 38).

cept. I hope to illuminate its mystery without dispelling it.

The view of aura I present is closest to Benjamin's comments in his Baudelaire essay where he designates as aura

> *the associations which, at home in the* ***mémoire involontaire****, tend to cluster around the object of a perception…* [15].

While my view revises Benjamin's ideas somewhat, it is to a great extent consistent with what I imagine Benjamin's positions would have been if he had developed them into workable categories to analyse literature and art. It is useful to see the relatively ghostly phenomenon of aura in connection with charisma, only perceivable as a physical, embodied quality.

Charisma, either embodied in a living person or a work of art, ordinarily involves the projection, willed or unconscious, of an aggrandized essence, a role or simply a nature beyond what normal human beings possess. The suggestions that issue from the charismatic figure, the visible claims of the body or audible ones of the voice, swell into inflated visions in the mind of the beholder. These draw often on well-known images, quite possibly supplied by the figure him/herself, narratives, historical figures, which are themselves powerfully charismatic: Alexander the Great is Achilles redivivus, Caesar is Alexander reborn; John F. Kennedy revives King Arthur's court (Camelot), Ronald Reagan is the cowboy riding out of the west for whom most issues can be resolved with a punch in the nose or a shot from a six-gun. Charisma itself, however difficult to define precisely, is an actual quality inseparable from the physical presence of its possessor, person or work of art. In contrast, aura exists only in the mind of the observer; the imagination creates it and projects it back onto the person or object that inspired it. Charisma is a quality of persons; aura can appear on things, places, events, and persons[16].

15. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, p. 186.

16. Weber left open the possibility of the charisma of things. A throne and sceptre possess a kind of power. The distinction between charisma and aura is useful here: the former is restricted to persons; the latter is promiscuously available. See the

Whereas charisma of art is a problem in aesthetics, aura is a problem in the psychology of the imagination. Aura does not exist apart from a subjective consciousness perceiving it in contrast to, say, brushstrokes and facial modelling, which exist no matter who sees them. But whereas representation creates charisma in persons (a tree cannot possess it), aura, which exists only in the consciousness of the perceiver or the collective consciousness of a culture, gets projected onto a wide, in fact, unlimited variety of objects, persons, places, experiences. Trees are a very good screen for receiving and projecting aura[17]. Charisma is both inborn and cultivated. The parallel to talent is useful. Someone may be born with a talent for music to match Mozart, but if s/he does not practice, it comes to naught, might as well not exist. If the gift is physical –beauty or athletic skill– it is highly open to cultivation and virtually invites heightening through display. Charisma is also highly open to fraud and fakery (as is art). The means of display can become the sign of charisma rather than the thing itself. A king who is scrawny, ugly and retiring can be magnified by dress and staging into monarchic status; a rock star with no musical skill can exercise charismatic force produced artificially through the work of producers and spectacle[18].

discussion in William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 14 ff.

17. One of the experiences of reawakening memory in Proust is the incident with the three trees seen on his carriage ride with Mme. de Villeparisis near Balbec. He never manages to solve the riddle they pose, but the experience of happiness they give him has a virtually redemptive power. Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff, New York, Random House, 1951, Part 2, pp. 20-23.

18. There is a strong tendency in sociological studies to deny that charisma is anything other than a power granted to some random beneficiary by a group who agrees to do so. See Edward Shils, "Charisma", in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1968, Vol. 2, pp. 386-90. Also "Charisma", in his *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), 127-134, and "Charisma, Order and Status", 256-275. And Turner, "Charisma Reconsidered", (above n. 2). The position is hard to defend except in

Charisma and aura both operate within a fundamental mode of imagining, as broadly rooted in human psychic experience as dreaming. That claim of universality explains, and I hope justifies, the spread of sources I refer to. This essay is basically an analysis of passages from Homer and Marcel Proust, both of whom offer good examples of both concepts at issue. Proust's great masterpiece can be regarded as an extended meditation on aura and its effects on the memory and imagination. My claim of the universality of the mode of thinking at work in both suggests that I could range even wider, but I'll restrict the discussion to those two.

— I —
Odysseus's Charisma

A passage from Homer's *Odyssey* gives us a paradigm case of charisma both inherent in the person and constructed with the help of aura. Odysseus's stay in Scheria, the land of the Phaecians, runs from Book 5 to Book 12 and includes Odysseus's own retelling of his wanderings. Two episodes interest us: the "courtship" of Nausicaa and Odysseus at the court of King Alcinous and Queen Areté.

When Odysseus first presents himself to Princess Nausicaa in Book 6 of *The Odyssey* he looks like some sea-monster washed up onto the shore to die, naked, brine-soaked and scum-crusted after twenty days of struggle with the ocean and his great enemy, Poseidon. When the Phaecian princess rouses the sleeping Odysseus from his bed of leaves, he emerges, takes an ill-considered lunge towards the women – *"grimy with salt he was a gruesome sight, and the girls went scuttling off in every direction along the jutting spits of sand"* (6.136 ff.)[19]. He throws himself down at a discreet distance from the princess, hails her as a goddess, wheedles his way into her private thoughts in un-

the limited context that interests the sociologists, rule and authority. Works of art can be faked and forged, but that does not mean that art itself is something that exists only in the mind of beholders. On the contrary, fakes cannot exist without some authentic original.

19. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E. V. Rieu, London, Penguin Books, 1991.

arranged conspiring with the goddess Athena (*"Most blessed is he who can take you home as a bride. Never have I set eyes on any man or woman like you"* –6.157 f.; *"may the gods grant you your heart's desire; may they give you a husband and a home"* –6.181 f.). He also lets drop, tucked into a compliment to her beauty, that he was once a commander of armies.

Nausicaa's first response: *"Since your manners show you are not a bad man or a fool…"* (6.187). *"Since your manners show…"*. The man of the word, the *polumechanos* and *polumetis*, the civilized man, whose weapon is the word, the speech, the clever thought, overcomes his barbarous appearance by his bearing and his courteous and subtle speech. We might expect some observation like: although he looked monstrous, the wise princess could see beyond surface appearance. (And what an arsenal of greatness is hidden behind this surface! This piece of talking flotsam is the great Odysseus, man of many turnings and many contrivances, king, hero of the Trojan war, contriver of the Trojan horse, conqueror of monsters, lover of goddesses.) But no, Odysseus is all surface. He is what he appears, as are all the characters in Homer. His greatness is not perceived until it is made visible[20]. What Nausicaa knows after Odysseus's first words is that he is a man of smooth speech and fine manners –nothing more.

The second step in his emergence is his appearance. He asks the ladies to withdraw so that he can bathe without offending decency. Then he grooms himself with the help of Athena:

> *… Athena, daughter of Zeus, made him seem taller and sturdier and caused the bushy locks to hang from his head thick as the petals of a hyacinth in bloom. Just as a craftsman trained by Hephaestus and Pallas Athene in the secrets of his art puts a graceful finish to his work by overlaying silverware with gold, she endowed his head and shoulders with beauty. When Odysseus retired to sit down by him-*

20. See the great study of Homeric style by Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1953, "The Scar of Odysseus".

> *self on the seashore, he was radiant with grace and beauty* (6.229-237).

So his exterior needs work, just as a rough carving needs sculpting and ornament, but after some divine sprucing-up he is transformed. This is not epiphany. Some hidden form is not revealed behind the veil or mask of an external form. It is transformation from one state to another. One skin-ego (the long-suffering wanderer) is exchanged for another (the charismatic gentleman and hero)[21]. Athena makes him into the man he is with the transforming gift of charisma. Its effects on Nausicaa:

> *Nausicaa gazed at him in admiration and said to her beautiful-haired attendants: 'Listen, my white-armed girls, to what I am saying. This man's arrival among the god-like Phaeacians was not opposed by all the gods of Olympus. When we first met I thought him repulsive, but now he looks like the gods who live in heaven. I wish I could have a man like him for my husband, if only he were content to stay and live here'* (6.229-245).

The god-like appearance of Odysseus rouses dreams in Nausicaa. Athena knew that they would. The goddess is playing in a calculated way on the young girl's hopes for a husband. Both Athena and Odysseus know perfectly well that he is not a candidate. But they are willing to benefit from her fantasy. It is a kind of seduction[22]. Her desires and hopes are answered by his presence, his appearance, his speech and manners. She has no idea who he is, how rich he is, whether he can support her in the manner she's accustomed to, or whether he's a rogue and seducer. She knows only how he looks and acts.

21. I take the term "skin-ego" from Didier Anzieu, *Skin-Ego* (orig. *Moi-peau*), trans. Chris Turner, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989.

22. Virgil's adaptation of the scene has a much harder edge. Venus heightens the beauty of Aeneas to protect him in the land of Dido (*Aeneid,* Book 1). The result is that the queen conceives a fatal passion for him which ends in suicide. The "seduction" of Nausicaa is just as opportunistic, but gentler and more civilized.

This is charisma without any admixture of aura, or only a trace of it (I once commanded troops).

— II —
Odysseus's Aura

The episode of Odysseus's scar was famously analysed by Erich Auerbach in the first chapter of *Mimesis* in terms of Homeric ***style***[23]. Auerbach's essay has dominated the thinking on the passage so strongly that we have to put it aside in order to get at the role of that passage in the larger narrative context of the *Odyssey*: the scene is primarily a reflection on the coalescence of Odysseus's identity.

The context is this: Odysseus has returned to Ithaca and made his way into his own royal palace, still unrecognized, disguised as a grubby beggar and wanderer, his ragged appearance produced again by Athena's arts of make-over. His old nurse, Eurycleia, washes his legs and feet, and when she touches a scar on his thigh, she at once recognizes him as Odysseus. The touch generates memory. She recalls two separate kinds of events: first, what we might call the primal events which establish his identity: his birth, his parentage and grandparentage, the connection through his grandfather with the god Hermes (which accounts for his cunning), then the name-giving; and second, the hunt on which Odysseus many years before received the wound, torn in his thigh by a raging boar, which many years later would reveal the true identity of the seeming beggar (19. 386-475).

So he is twice marked "Odysseus" by the events that Eurycleia recalls: first, his character is set, at least indicated, his birth recounted, his name given; second, his outer identifying mark is put in place. All of the first part could have been omitted if the origin of the scar were all that mattered. What mattered is the origin of Odysseus. That which established his identity at birth authenticates its revelation in the present of the narrative[24]. The physical mark,

23. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, pp. 3-23.

24. See the good commentary by Alice Mariani, "The Renaming of Odysseus", in *Critical Essays on Homer*, ed. Kenneth Atchity, Boston, G.K. Hall, 1987, 211-223, p. 214: "… the story of Odysseus' naming and the gaining of his scar is in itself

the scar, is important as an outward sign, but the moment of recognition has its depth and resonance from the "involuntary memory" it awakens. The memory of how Odysseus became Odysseus exposes, for the nurse, the false identity he has assumed. In other words, the boar hunt is a more or less superficial element of that flash-back, the occasion for the scar. Its essence is, how the infant grandson of Autolycus was made into Odysseus. That is the logic that ties the reminiscence to the recognition scene: before the narrative, he was a ragged beggar. After it, he "becomes," once again, as primally, Odysseus. The character suddenly appears to Eurycleia richly "historiated." She sees his identity doubled in time. His identity exists or is perceptible only in the mind of Eurycleia; no one else can see who it is, certainly not by looking at him, not even by looking at his scar. His "presence" is nothing. Eurycleia "experiences the aura" of Odysseus, which transforms not him –his physical appearance remains unchanged– but her perception of him from beggar to Odysseus-in-disguise. Once his stories are present in the mind of the beholder, he is "seen" as the man he is. A person is not only the physical form that presents itself to the viewer. S/he is also the collection of events, deeds, accomplishments that has accreted around him or her in the course of a lifetime,

> *the quintessence of all that is transmissible in (it/her/him) from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the history which it has experienced.*

The scar of Odysseus is aura without charisma.

— III —
Queen Areté Stunned

Odysseus has a series of debut scenes at the Phaecian court (Books 7-12). These episodes provide a complex example of aura and charisma working together.

When he enters the royal palace of King Alcinous and Queen Areté, he seats himself like a beggar in the ashes of the fireplace.

a revelation of identity, an exploration of who Odysseus is which reaches back into the beginnings of selfhood".

Later he is invited to a place of honor –because of the obligation of hospitality, not because of his appearance or stature (they don't even know who he is until several days into his stay)– and he begins to tell his stories, first, his release from captivity with the goddess Calypso and his perilous sea voyage to Scheria. He spices the narrative with self-aggrandizing tidbits: that he was so desired and courted by the goddess Calypso that she offered him immortality and eternal youth –and he turned her down; that Zeus himself had taken sufficient interest in him to ordain his release from Calypso and sent Hermes to arrange it; and that Poseidon is his mortal enemy. In other words, a man who pleases and vies with gods[25], the wonderment of the listeners is multiplied by the contrast between his humble arrival and his claims of a heroic destiny. Again he has established himself in their esteem, rising literally from ashes to become a man worthy of a king's daughter and his largesse –both of which Alcinous offers to his still unnamed guest:

> *'I wish that a man like you, like-minded with myself, could have my daughter and remain here as my son-in-law –I would give you a house and riches'* (7.312-314).

At the athletic games held on the next day, Odysseus is the guest of honor. He already has high standing, but the goddess again magnifies his appearance:

> *Athena invested his head and shoulders with a divine beauty, and made him seem taller and broader, so that he would inspire the whole Phaeacian people not only with affection but with fear and respect* (8.19-22).

The dynamic of lowering his position to effect a dramatic rise is also at work in the athletic games. It is set in motion by Odysseus's request to be excused from participating; he's too old and tired from his travels. A young Phaeacian champion insults him by saying he is just making excuses; he probably doesn't have

25. It is the misfortune of the Scherians that they do not react with caution to his revelation that Poseidon is his enemy. They will be severely punished by the sea god for helping Odysseus.

any athletic ability anyway. Odysseus is stung both to strong words and impressive demonstrations of his abilities: he picks up the biggest discus available, hurls it while still wearing his cloak (the equivalent of a modern athlete competing in his street clothes), and outdoes all the Phaeacian competitors.

So by now he has established his god-like and god-favored appearance, his skill in speech, his aristocratic manner, his desirability as husband and lover, and his talent in athletic contests.

At the banquet the same evening, Odysseus, now highly honored by all the Phaecians, reveals his name grandly:

> *'I am Odysseus, Laertes's son. The whole world talks of my stratagems, and my fame has reached the heavens'* (9.19-20).

This is prologue to his stories of his contests with monsters and witches and his conversations with the dead. The stories which Odysseus tells also play in the mode of the other charismatic qualities: he has faced great danger, was the victor in contests with supernatural creatures, has travelled where no man can go, spoken with the dead and learned things no man can discover. Fabulous experience powerfully heightens personal presence.

In the middle of his story of the visit to the dead, Odysseus pauses, and his audience sits in stunned silence, *"held by the spell of his words"* (11.333). Queen Areté breaks the silence with a speech that voices the beguiled admiration all share:

> *Phaeacians… what do you think of this man, his looks, his presence and the quality of his mind?* (11.336-7).

An odd summation: Odysseus talks fantastic adventures, and the queen praises his appearance!

Odysseus: *"I overcame the cyclops and Circe and journeyed to hell"*.

Areté: *"What a body and what a mind!"* [26]

26. The queen's comment has troubled more than one reader. Cf. R. D. Dawes, *The Odyssey, Translation and Analysis*, Sussex, The Book Guild, 1993, p. 448: "Into the void the hostess Arete steps with a crudity quite at variance with what we have come to expect of her… Even those

Its oddity makes it worth a close look. *"… his looks, his presence and the quality of his mind…"* – "… *eidos te mégethós te idè phrénas éndon*...". The phrase is not easy to translate. Common translations are "beauty" and "stature"[27]. Robert Fagles reduces *mégethos* to the physical: "his build"[28]. But none of the English renderings conveys the kind of allure suggested by *eidos te mégethos*. The phrase implies radiance, god-like qualities[29], and might also be translated as "looks and grand presence".

What logic leads the queen to turn from a fabulous narrative and its contents to the narrator's "looks" and "grand presence"? Areté's comment would have been better placed, in terms of a strict narrative logic, at the beginning of Book 8, just prior to the athletic contests, where Athena gives Odysseus divine beauty and stature for the second time (8.19 ff.). There his *mégethos* emerges as a visible quality. The praise of Areté responds to no physical change in Odysseus, only to the accumulation of fables.

The logic that allows the queen to admire an Odysseus refashioned after his stories are told must be this: Alongside his visible excellences –his godlikeness, his beauty, his civility– some big thing has appeared that is not exhausted by a listing of his qualities and his deeds. His stories become an accretion on his body; he is what he tells. Adventures appear some-

of us who do not adorn drawing rooms ourselves will deem the allusion to Odysseus's physical appearance an irrelevance."

27. I've cited the translation of E. V. Rieu: "… his looks, his presence and the quality of his mind…". Chapman gives, "… this man, / So goodly person'd, and so match'd with mind", and Samuel Butler, "Is he not tall and good looking, and is he not Clever?". A. T. Murray, "looks, stature, and the balanced mind within him". Richmond Lattimore: "Phaiakians, what do you think now of this man before you / for beauty and stature, and for the mind well-balanced within him?"

28. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles, New York, Penguin, 1997, p. 260 (11. 381-2): "'Phaecians! How does this man impress you now, / his looks, his build, the balanced mind inside him?'"

29. The phrase occurs several times in *The Odyssey*, once in praise of Circe's godlike beauty and presence (5.217) and once in Odysseus's flattering speech to Nausicaa, where he compares her beauty and stature to that of the goddess Diana (6.152).

how written on his surface, as though tattooed there or transmuted into stature and beauty. That is how the queen perceives him once the accretion of the past is present in her mind: she sees his aura not as a physical mark, but as a ghostly accretion on his person. In this case aura compounds charisma. It works like a king's cloak or a priest's robe. Stories of past adventures can be donned, and they alter the appearance of the man in that inner center of the beholder's imagination where status is negotiated.

The clear intention of the episode is to create a drama of the emergence of Odysseus from nothing, from pure, natural man, "the thing itself, unaccommodated man", to a man endowed with every feature of charisma. It is not adventure that these books are primarily about; adventure and combat are present, but as elements along the hero's trajectory to the stature of the fabulous man. The drama of the construction of stature culminates in a "viewing" scene, where the queen invites her court to marvel at his physical presence (charisma) and "all that is transmissible about him" (aura). Clearly aura has a major role in charismatic self-representation, and that, I believe, is the real importance of Areté's praise: it recognizes the invisible but highly perceptible aura of the man of many adventures.

Charisma is unthinkable and non-existent without a physical presence to radiate it and an observer to be enchanted by it. Aura is evoked by many stimuli: scars, objects, stories, praise.

— IV —
Two Goddesses Return Marcel's Gaze

The panoramic portrait of high society at the theater in the beginning of Marcel Proust's *Guermantes Way* is one of the great virtuoso passages in the seven volumes of *In the Search of Lost Time.* The narrator, Marcel, the half-fictional persona of the author, sits, secure in his sense of insignificance, on the ground floor. He observes the performance on stage and the far more interesting spectacle of the aristocracy in its loges and boxes, and transforms them in his vision into a society of gods and goddesses, looking

down from Olympian heights on the mortal world beneath them.

At the high point of this long scene, something remarkable happens which jars the narrator out of his comfortable sense of autonomy: he looks up the to box in which Mme. de Guermantes and her cousin the Princesse de Guermantes sit. The passage I cite is shortened, much of the Baroque profusion of its single sentence! is lost:

> *When I turned my eyes to* [the duchesses's] *box, far more than on the ceiling of the theatre, painted with lifeless allegories, it was as though I had seen, thanks to a miraculous break in the customary clouds, the assembly of the Gods in the act of contemplating the spectacle of mankind… I was happily aware that my being was dissolved in the midst of the nameless, collective madrepores of the audience…when, at the moment at which the blurred shape of the protozoon devoid of any individual existence which was myself must have entered the impassive current of those two blue eyes, I saw a ray illumine them: The Duchess, goddess turned woman and appearing in that moment a thousand times more lovely … raised towards me the white-gloved hand which had been resting on the balustrade of the box and waved it in token of friendship. My gaze was caught in the spontaneous incandescence of the flashing eyes of the Princess, who had unconsciously set them ablaze merely by turning her head to see who it might be that her cousin was thus greeting, while the Duchess, who had remembered me, poured upon me the sparkling and celestial torrent of her smile*[30].

What has happened here? Next to nothing: as Marcel sat in the audience, the Duchess and the Princess de Guermantes recognized and waved at him. A perfectly everyday event presents itself as secularized epiphany and assumption scene. But in Proust's imagination it is a transfiguration. The channel opened by the sets of eyes that suddenly lock onto each other is an unexpected and unannounced as a magical trans-

30. Marcel Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff, New York, Random House, 1952, pp. 70-71.

lation from ordinary everyday self-encapsulation into an inaccessible realm, a sultan's palace or a sea-god's ocean cave –set significantly against the lifeless artworks that adorn the ceiling. Proust anticipated the distinction between allegory and charisma in setting the pulse-accelerating encounter with living goddesses against the disengaged, Kantian enjoyment of artworks, which is actually just time-consuming boredom. The Princess and the Duchess live and yet are divine, they are out of a fairy tale or a myth. If the gaze of these higher beings does not immediately change his life, it intensifies his longing to live in their world, and it hardens his persuasion that that world is an Elysian realm of immortals who enchant mortals by their glamourings. Many kinds of experiences in the novel can catalyse this transfiguring vision, even though there is a persistent, nagging, double vision: he can see the characters and the whole society of the aristocracy as shallow, selfish, stupid, and callous, and yet it can not tarnish or debunk their transfigured state, which itself forms a reality more pure than that which the fleeting moments of the present "reality" or any given act of callousness or malice might present to him.

What Proust experienced in the opera, with its division into the immanence of the gallery and the transcendence of the loges, the worshiper experiences when communing with an icon. The psychology of visual reciprocity lifting the beholder into a realm where higher beings live is at work in both cases. When the worshiper looks at an icon, convinced that the image is a living vessel of the revived saint, then the occupied icon can look back at him[31]. In the case of icons the agency of the work of art is activated by the theology of the image: of course the object looks back; Christ lives in it. Proust and the icon worshiper both "experience the charisma" of the revered object, because it stares back at them. The phrase in quotation marks varies one of Walter Benjamin's central statements on "aura": *"To experience the aura of a thing means to*

31. See Anna Kartsonis, "The Responding Icon", in *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Church in Byzantinium*, ed. Lisa Stern, University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1998.

invest it with the ability to look back at you"[32]. If persons return your gaze, the experience is perfectly natural, unless it happens to be the king, or the rockstar in performance, or a god. Then the experience is powerfully charismatic[33]. It plants in the mind of the beholder the fantasy of living at the same level of existence as a near supernatural being. Benjamin uses the term "aura" to encompass the experience. Given my distinction between aura and charisma, Marcel's experience is one of charisma, though Benjamin refers to "things" invested with the ability to stare back. The ability of objects (as opposed to duchesses and princesses) to stare back depends on a psychological willingness in the viewer to vivify the object. It is easy and on the surface rational to deny that there are any real effects at all, just some event in a psyche triggered by its own subjective content: empirically speaking, scars, baked goods and trees do not communicate with those who look at them.

The emotional life of Proust's narrator is a study in the psychology of the devotee of charisma. The presence of stunningly beautiful women elegantly dressed, elevated in space and social standing and surrounded by others at least as exalted and unattainable, transmutes in the observer's imagination into celestial figures participating in celestial events. The act of profound condescension which allows two of the Olympians to acknowledge his existence presents itself with the impact of an act of grace and divine election. The two women appear to Marcel as "fabulous," that is, in-

32. Walter Benjamin, "Ueber einige Motive bei Baudelaire", in W.B. Schriften, ed. T. and G. Adorno, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1955), 1. 461. The brief comment has taken root. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1992. Also James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*, San Diego, Harcourt Brace, 1997.

33. See Fred and Judy Vermorel, *Starlust: The Secret Life of Fans*, London, W.H. Allen, 1985, a collection of testimonials of fans writing to and about rock stars, very useful texts on charismatic experience. It is common for an obsessive but one-sided relationship to form between fan and rock star when the fan has the impression that the star is looking straight at her, singles her out (*"It's as if he or someone or some silent voice or a force inside me thinks it's important that I know about him"* –p. 50).

spiring fables. His imagination ranks them in the hierarchy of existence, and they shoot up to the top, because his imagination has been commandeered, overwhelmed, and the criteria of reasoned judgment and realism are thrown overboard. He would presumably bow down before the two goddesses if he were in a position to do it. One significant result of the evening at the theater is Marcel's passionate though distant love for Mme. de Guermantes. He shares the experience, pared down to its core of devotion to a charismatic figure, with many fans of rock stars.

— V —
The Transparent Envelope

At the beginning of *The Captive* Marcel, cured of his love for the duchess, Marcel has another vision of Mme. de Guermantes, this one a double vision. He encounters her almost daily. He might see her, he says, on a rainy day in hat and furs with an umbrella in her hand. Many intelligent people, seeing Mme. de Guermantes dressed this way, would see in her "merely a lady, like any other":

> *I had adopted a different point of view in my method of enjoying people and places. All the castles of the territories of which she was Duchess, Princess, Viscountess –this lady…seemed to me to be carrying them on her person, as the figures carved over the lintel of a church door hold in their hands the cathedral they have built or the city they have defended. But my mind's eyes alone could discern these castles and these forests in the gloved hand of the lady in furs who was a cousin of the king. My bodily eyes distinguished in it only… an umbrella*[34].

The passage juxtaposes empirical observation and auratic vision. Proust as perceiver can distinguish reality ("bodily eyes") lucidly from the product of his imagination ("my mind's eye"), in contrast to many of the aura-struck. The bare reality of an ag-

34. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Volume 5: The Captive*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff & Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright, Modern Library, New York, Random House, 1993, p. 30-31.

ing society lady with a fur coat and an umbrella is, in a way, false. It misrepresents her stature, her titles, her possessions. The writer corrects reality, makes those invisible attributes part of her person. "Reality corrected by imagination" or at least "amplified", is not a bad formula for the process of creating aura.

The appearance of the past written on the present, the projection of stories onto things, events, experiences, in the present, perceived by the observer as a quality of the thing observed, is an essential event in *In Search of Lost Time.* Memories coalesce in an object or a melody or a landscape or a person, the *petites madeleines* being the most prominent example.

Proust shrewdly analysed the process by which the perceptions of the observer accrete and project themselves onto the physical presence of the person observed:

> *None of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone, and need only be turned up like an account-book or the record of a will; our social personality is a creation of the thoughts of other people. Even the simple act of 'seeing someone we know' is to some extent an intellectual process. We pack the physical outline of the person we see with all the notions we have already formed about him, and in the total picture of him which we compose in our minds those notions have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice as if it were no more than a transparent envelope, that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is these notions which we recognise and to which we listen*[35].

Conversely, the "notions", impressions and events contained in any given person or object or set of events can be mysteriously stamped on some mark or sensation or thing, which opens up, miraculously –traumatically, it will appear to the beholder– to

35. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Volume 1: Swann's Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, New York, Random House, 1998, p. 23-24.

disgorge its "contents". This is Marcel's experience with the *petites madeleines* and Charles Swann's with the "little phrase" from Vintueil's sonata. And it is Eurycleia's experience with the scar of Odysseus.

— VI —
Narratives of Charisma and Aura

One kind of narrative organizes and composes the inferences drawn from a face, a body, a physical presence. Marcel's transformation of the Guermantes cousins into goddesses shows that form of imagination at work. In another episode, Marcel glimpses a village milk-maid in the gaudy light of a sunrise at a brief stop of his train. She becomes the embodiment of a happy life; the observer looks at her like a museum visitor gazing at a Vermeer, and the full course of a blissful pastoral existence filled with simple country events unfolds in his imagination. Narrative attaches to an individual, whether it is presented as attached or not[36]. Cognitive psychology has taken a serious interest in the "narrative construction of the self" in the past two decades, but the focus is, understandably, on normal characters writing their own normal narratives[37]. Charismatic

36. Gary Wills made good use of the concept "charisma" in his study of Ronald Reagan, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home*, New York, Doubleday, 1987. This passage captures the "story-making" quality of a charismatic presence: "Reagan runs continuously in everyone's home movies of the mind. He wrests from us something warmer than mere popularity, a kind of complicity. He is, in the strictest sense, what Hollywood promoters used to call 'fabulous'. We fable him to ourselves, and he to us. We are jointly responsible for him" (p. 2).

37. See for instance *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, ed. Theodore R. Sarbin, New York, Praeger, 1986; Jerome S. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990; *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, ed. Ulri Neisser and Robyn Fivush, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994; *Narrative and Consciousness: Literature, Psychology and the Brain*, ed. G. D. Fireman et al, Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press, 2003. Theodore Sarbin has articulated the process by which a sense of self is derived from literary models: "The Quixotic Principle: A Belletristic Approach to the Psychological Study of Imaginings and Believings", in *The*

characters inspire stories in the admiring observer, and in those stories they dream the myths that that character projects.

The physiology of narrative is (or would be, if there were such a discipline) the study of how narrative attaches to the physical presence of its subject and is derivable from it, how, to recur to Proust, the notions we form from a person's destiny or infer from the physical presence, sit in the curve of his cheeks, follow exactly the line of his nose, blend harmoniously in the sound of his voice –in short, how the body contains the stories which it implies and which have formed it– and becomes the medium which expresses them.

Aura involves some physical presence, or body part, or object, able to call up in the observer the narrative it "contains". Without the silent or voiced or visualized claim, "I am a story", there is no aura. Here the contrasting pair, icon and relic, perfectly reiterates the juxtaposition of charisma and aura. Icons are what Max Weber would have called "pure forms" of charisma, if he had extended his thinking on the subject to include art. The icon is a representation of a human presence which does not function if it is not perceived as containing a divine person and transmitting sanctity. The relic, however, is not a representation. It is a "remainder," a thing left behind (= Lat. *relictum*), a part of a saint's body, or a thing once in contact with a holy person (contact relic). The arm of a saint is not a representation. It is an authentic part of the actual saint (assuming it's not a fake. But even if it is, it works if the worshiper believes in its authenticity). Its allure, its ability to perform magic, to heal, to sanctify, is aura operating as what is accepted by its beneficiary as a supernatural force. The aura invest-

Social Context of Conduct: Psychological Writings of Theodore Sarbin, ed. Vernon L. Allen & Karl E. Scheibe, New York, Praeger, 1982, 169-186; "The Poetics of Identity", *Theory and Psychology*, 7, 1997, 67-82; and a number of essays in *Believed-In Imaginings: The Narrative Construction of Reality*, ed. Joseph de Rivera and Theodore R. Sarbin, Washington, D.C., American Psychological Assoc., 1998, esp. Sarbin's "Believed-In Imaginings: A Narrative Approach", 15-30, and "The Poetic Construction of Reality and Other Explanatory Categories", 297-307.

ed in such objects is powerfully evocative. A piece of the true cross calls up the story of the crucifixion, or rather the entire life of Christ and the meaning of his death, at least in the minds of those who know the story and share the belief in its meaning.

An icon represents; a relic evokes. An icon operates through presence; a relic through absence. The two have compensatory insufficiencies: the icon on the one hand is a copy, the form of cheating and lying inherent in art; it promises real presence and operates through that promise, but delivers only a semblance. The relic on the other hand is authentic and genuine (though highly fakeable), but it is small, partial, truncated and dead. The icon depends on hyperrealistic representation to aid the illusion of presence; a relic evokes the stories that cluster around the object. The same opposition applies to charisma and aura.

The chapter on charisma and aura in the yet unwritten *Psychology of the Imagination* will be about the process of imagining stories and re-narrating memories that a person, an object or a work of art "contains". The eye wants to see, and the mind to discover, more than bare, unhistoriated reality presents it with. It wants to correct reality and see the thing itself in its full scope. Our imagination is wiser in this than our reason. Odysseus sitting unrecognized in the ashes of the royal hall is not reality but deception. Mme. de Guermantes seen without the knowledge of her wealth, rank and status, is not truly Mme. de Guermantes. Who they really are only becomes evident when the unadorned image is corrected by his stories. But in the telling they weave a texture around them truer to their identity than what the mere sight of the person him/herself stripped of stories can present to the eye of the observer. The imagination is a weak judge given its vulnerability to deception, but it knows that, fake or not, more belongs to personhood than presence, something reasoned judgment might dispute.

The concept of anonymity is as slippery as the tree falling in the forest and its noise. The genius of *King Lear* as a contribution to the psychology of charisma is in gradually removing from

the old king his kingship and all its trappings and posing the question, what is a man without them? Once reduced to "the thing itself, unaccommodated man", the king's person dissolves into insanity, or rather, he loses "personhood". "Persona" is the Greek word for "mask", a significant joining of personhood with the outer surface of the person. The "person" unmasked, the individual without the accretion of gifts, talents, without rank and authority, means the reduction to less than human. Take away from a king his regalia, throne, retinue, and you take away those things that constitute the "person" he is (also the experience of Richard II). There is no such thing as the king as private citizen. Having given up his throne and lost "the large effects that troop with majesty", he discovers that without them he is nothing, that "the thing itself" is an absence. His insanity is the loss of "persona" in both senses.

Only an anatomist could warm to the wisdom that says the naked living presence is the person. In the reality of the psychic life, the physical presence of the object or person viewed works evocatively on the imagination, and the things evoked are part and parcel of the person who inspires them.

We also want to imagine things and objects as inhabited or haunted by the people who owned them and the events that transpired around them. (That is the psychology of relic-worship.) For that reason, celebrity belongings or famous movie props (Dorothy's ruby slippers, the tee-shirt Marlon Brando wore in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*) bring huge amounts of money when sold at auction. They are strongly evocative because of the mystery of personal charisma, the nearness to culticly revered bodies that still hovers around them and the events, fictional or real, in which they participated.

Things get charged with stories, and so they contain the destinies to which they were mute witnesses. Proust's *petites madeleines* dipped in tea awaken years of events together with their casts of characters, mysteriously packed into a little bit of baked goods. In empirical fact, Proust's *madeleine* is not packed with anything other than milk and flour, still the memories engendered by the

olfactory stimulation, seem to Proust present in the thing, not in the mind stimulated by it:

> *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) which we do not suspect*[38].

Hard-headed realism would declare it absurd to spend $600,000 on a pair of red shoes covered with shiny red sequins. But if they evoke Dorothy, the land over the rainbow and unexplained magical forces, their worth rises far beyond their objective materiality[39]. The same is true of an old tee-shirt.

Quite apart from the working of the sensorium and of memory, the idea that objects retain something of the person who owned them or of the events in which they played a part, is rooted in the workings of the imagination, which wants to see and reveal the story or memory concealed in the thing. Balzac draws on this process, evoking, in cast-off clothes, the agonies of their previous owners. Here is his description of second-hand clothing stores in Paris:

> *You find there the garments tossed aside by the skinny hand of Death; you hear, as it were, the gasping of consumption under a shawl, or you detect the agonies of destitution under a gown spangled with gold. The horrible struggle between luxury and starvation is written on filmy laces. A queen's physiognomy may be recovered beneath a plumed turban, whose position calls back and virtually reconstructs the absent face*[40].

The same logic is at work in the Magritte paintings showing a piece of clothing partly trans-

38. *Swann's Way*, trans. Moncrieff/Kilmartin, p. 61.

39. On the curious cult of this particular relic, see the website of the Ruby Slippers Fan Club: [http://users.deltacomm.com/rainbowz/rubyslipperfanclub/introduction.html]. And on celebrity cult objects in general, Chris Epting, *The Ruby Slippers, Madonna's Bra and Einstein's Brain: The Locations of America's Pop Culture Artifacts*, Los Angeles, Santa Monica Press, 2006.

40. Honoré de Balzac, *A Harlot High and Low* (*Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes)*, trans. Rayner Heppenstall, London, Penguin, 1970, p. 165. Minor liberties taken.

formed into its wearer, at least retaining the imprint of her body parts. Proust finds in Mme. Swann's (Odette's) clothing not only the woman's previous audacious sexuality, but, further infused, an entire past style of life:

> *As in a fine literary style which overlays with its different forms and so strengthens a tradition which lies concealed among them, so in Mme. Swann's attire those half-hinted memories of… a tendency, at once repressed, towards the 'all aboard', or even a distant and vague allusion to the 'chase me' kept alive beneath the concrete form the unfinished likeness of other, older forms… about which your thoughts incessantly hovered… perhaps because… there was a sort of personality permeating this lady's wardrobe… She… was surrounded by her garments as by the delicate and spiritualised machinery of a whole form of civilisation*[41].

The experience of aura is entirely subjective. It is imperceptible until it's asserted: Mme. de Guermantes –just a woman in furs until "the castles in her hand" become visible. Charisma is visible at the first glance, in fact the first glance is the real entry point of charisma, since the critical judgment that would dismiss as imaginative folly something as elusive as charisma, is not yet alert and at its post. Love-at-first-sight is that kind of experience. If we see only the tee-shirt Marlon Brando wore in a movie, it means nothing without a label. If we see Marlon Brando wearing it, acting out Stanley Kowalski, we feel the force of physical presence immediately.

Seeing aura is related to seeing ghosts. Walter Benjamin once called aura a "Gespinst": *"ein sonderbares Gespinst von Raum und Zeit"*. While the term indicates something woven, it hints at something ghostlike. A walk through a battlefield calls up platoons of ghosts, the ones who died there and still haunt the field. Of course, they exist only in the imagination of the tourist experiencing the aura of the place. To "experience" aura is something like seeing a ghost[42]. Proust used that trope to

41. *Within a Budding Grove*, Part 1, pp. 274-5.

42. Gerhard Richter develops this

describe the appeal of the three trees who call to him on his ride with Mme. de Villeparisis at the curve in the road to Hudimesnil: *"Like ghosts they seemed to be appealing to me to take them with me, to bring them back to life"*[43]. Walter Benjamin himself experienced ghosts –without making a connection to his thoughts on aura. Ghosts may not exist in reality, but a rich weave of associations in the psychology of individuals can make them perceptible.

To sum up: "Charisma" is a quality of the physical presence, the appearance, manners, speech, and carriage, of a human being who possesses a gift, a special destiny, or any number of admirable qualities. Not every observer will perceive or credit those qualities, but those who do will romanticize, mythologize them, project them into the supernatural. They will love and revere the person they see in that light. The experience is constituted by one who inspires it and one who is inspired. Charisma cannot exist unperceived.

"Aura" is that quality which the crystallization of things lost or hidden, the sudden apparition of the reassembled past, seems to confer on the evoking object, that which rises up in the mind of the beholder from the scar of Odysseus, the cookie dipped in tea, or the bone of a saint[44].

connection into the theme of *Benjamin's Ghosts* (n. 1 above). On Benjamin's own experience with ghosts, see Richter's introduction to the volume.

43. *Within a Budding Grove*, Part 2, p. 23.

44. As also van Reijen argues: "Breathing the Aura", (n. 1 above), p. 47: *"Unconscious memory can be activated and overwhelm the narrator only by an unexpected physical experience. Bumpy cobblestones or the taste of the* ***madeleine*** *trigger an experience that can safely be called 'auratic'".*