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Lost in the Fold:

Space and Subjectivity in Gérard de Nerval's "Généalogie" and *Sylvie*¹

One of the first victims of, and rebels against, modernity, Gérard de Nerval attempted to redefine the boundaries of his own subjectivity through a remapping and enveloping of both internal and external, remembered and perceived space. The folding of space frees the subject from logical constraints and allows for nearly limitless recreations of the self. Nerval's use of the fold coincides with the definition provided by Gilles Deleuze in *Le Pli*. According to Deleuze, the fold is the philosophical and aesthetic figure that structures the work of Leibniz and the Baroque. Deleuze's reading of the Baroque proposes that, "le propre du Baroque est non pas de tomber dans l'illusion ni d'en sortir, c'est de *réaliser* quelque chose dans l'illusion même, ou de lui communiquer une *présence* spirituelle qui redonne à ses pièces et morceaux une unité collective."² In this sense, we could call the folds of Nerval's texts "baroque"; the "Généalogie" and *Sylvie* realize through folds in the text the illusion of the unity of the subject, a unity based on the inextricability of folds in matter to the folds of the perceiving or hallucinating subject. Inside and outside, memory and reality are confused and hallucinated in the fold, which is the site of a perpetually shifting subject.

Through a crossed reading of Nerval's obscure "Généalogie" and one of his most illustrious works, *Sylvie*, this essay explores the liberating possibilities as well as the eventual dangers of a spatial conceptualization of the subject. The juxtaposition of the "Généalogie" and *Sylvie* uncovers the centrality of the fold to Nerval's spatial and textual

imagination. In these two texts, he abandons the logical, modernist Cartesian grid in favor of the ambiguous, curved fold, as the distinction between inside and outside disappears in the pleats of his convoluted narrative. Nerval's folds manipulate space itself to envelop the subject in the world. Nerval's quixotic quest is to unify his visions, to create his illusions at will, to make the world conform to his desire.

I. Il n'y a pas de *Nuits des temps*

The document commonly referred to as Nerval's "Généalogie fantastique"³ presents an extraordinary enfolding of social and psychic space through the condensation of hundreds of genealogical annotations onto a single manuscript page. Probably composed at the end of March 1841 during Nerval's first internment in the clinic of Dr. Esprit Blanche,⁴ the "Généalogie" predates the *Voyage en Orient* and anticipates the obsessions of *Les Filles du feu* (1854) and *Aurélia* (1855). According to Jean Richer, the first version of *Aurélia* (also from 1841) presents remarkable similarities to the "Généalogie," which suggests that 1841 may indeed be the defining moment of Nerval's imagination.⁵ Richer and Jean-Pierre Richard have done considerable work to situate the "Généalogie" within Nerval's opus and to interpret the development of the inner logic of the manuscript.⁶ However, the form of the "Généalogie," its quality as image, has literally been overlooked, despite the fact that the tension between the visible and readable is key to the interpretation of this labyrinthine text.

The "Généalogie" is devoted to three uneven parts of Nerval's inner world: his father's family (Labrunie), his mother's family (Laurent), and his literary pseudonym (Nerval). As many critics have remarked, Nerval is the anagram of his mother's maiden name (LAVRENT), a partial anagram of his father's name (LABRVNiE), and the name of his maternal uncle's property, the *clos de Nerval*. Nerval claims that the property near Senlis was an ancient Roman camp and traces the name back to the twelfth Roman emperor, Nerva. The literary/textual name Nerval links the two families Labrunie and Laurent and situates them in space and epic time. The "Généalogie" sets out to create the matrix from which Gérard Labrunie de Nerval emerges. The goal of the drawing and the lineage is to make "sense" (both as meaning and as direction) of the disparate origins of the self.

The material page is folded into four equal parts and the graphic

details follow the folds, perhaps added afterwards. The folds in the page may indicate that Nerval folded up the already tiny document (12cm by 21cm) to be placed in his pocket. The top half of the page begins with Nerval's characteristic precise and orderly writing, in a description of his paternal origins. The bottom half, devoted mainly to the maternal side, marks a distinct change, since the now much more chaotic script is the inverse of the top half, the page rotated 180°. Connecting these two halves, and further dividing the page into fourths is a peculiar mass of lines that Richard describes as “une jungle graphique [. . .] tout autour d'un ‘tronc’ vaguement poilu et bulbeux, pourvu d'excroissances irrégulières, et achevé, *vers le haut*, par une touffe de racines—forme qui pose au milieu de la page la noirceur insistante d'une sorte de caillot d'encre—[. . .].”⁷ The “trunk” of a traditional family tree is here inverted with its roots pointed upward, which suggests that it is not a tree at all. This plant is all roots branching out from what appears at first to be a center, but upon closer examination reveals lines in every direction stemming from multiple centers. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the “rhizome” suggests a particularly tempting explanation for the “Généalogie fantastique,” as they define a rhizome as an “anti-genealogy.”⁸ They affirm the possibilities of “rhizomatic systems” (decentered, without origin, spreading out horizontally like grass) over “arborescent systems” (vertical, hierarchical, centered on meaning and truth). Connections are made, in the “Généalogie,” to apparently unrelated names and places that bridge great spatial and temporal distances and create new meaning. The “Généalogie” is not, however, a purely rhizomatic system; the borders of the page mark an outer limit and the main root, or trunk, draws the corners towards the center, the location of Gérard Labrunie. The “Généalogie” could therefore be described as a hybrid between the arborescent and the rhizomatic.⁹

These two systems, each with their own functions, find their expression in the “Généalogie,” not only through the ambiguous plant, but also through an inscription and rebus at the center of the text, drawn over the plant: “Tour—et pont [a drawing of a tower and a bridge] toujours 3 enfants.” The meaning of the inscription is explained in the top (paternal) half, of the text, where Nerval claims that three Labrunie brothers, knights of the emperor Othon, founded three families in Poitou, Périgord, and Quercy. Nerval's branch would be from

Périgord, where there are three “anciennes tours de Labrunie” (which anticipates his poem “El Desdichado,” where the lyric “je” is “le Prince d’Aquitaine à la Tour abolie”). He then gives an etymology which links his name to the tower and to the bridge: “(Bruck en gothique-allemand signifie *pont*) Brown ou Brunn signifie tour et touraille [. . .] Browning ou Brownie en Irlande, Irlande: La Brownie, esprit de la tour et des ponts.” The geographical and etymological musings of the name Labrunie unite two very different symbols, the tower and the bridge. Towers connote elevation, hierarchy, surveillance, and stability, having the same symbolic function as trees. Bridges are already double, connecting two or more places; by definition, they imply movement and change (and therefore are “rhizomatic”). Richard has noted the unconscious sexual symbolism of the couple tower and bridge,¹⁰ and indeed, a productive force is generated from their juxtaposition. A reading of the “Généalogie” through the lens of the Tower/tree and Bridge/rhizome metaphors provides a framework for describing the tensions between control and metamorphosis within Nerval’s textual world.

The etymological frenzy of the text produces the most salient aspect of the “rhizomatic.” On the bottom of the maternal half of the manuscript, the word “étymologies” is boxed and set apart, as if an invocation of the transformative powers of language. As any reader of Proust knows, etymology and toponymy, linked to genealogy, are prone to flights of the imagination as their practitioners seek to find the origins of a lexical unit in the dust of the archive and family memory. A combination of fanciful etymology and creative genealogy subverts “arborescent” linguistic structures and paternalistic lineages. Instead of finding one origin, the text’s etymologies spread out over all humanity to encompass families from France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Africa, America, and ancient Rome. Two branches from his father’s side, Labrunie (brown or burnt) and Dublanc (white) engulf the entire page, uniting the white space of the blank page with the dark blots of ink. The most bewildering etymologies are Nerval’s Greek inventions. Besides transforming Orléans (a virtual homonym with his mother’s Laurent) into the “Greek” Ὀρλέανς, he suggests another Greek root for Labrunie: Λαμβ-βρωνος-βρούνος (Lamb-Bronos-Brounos). Richer gives the translation as “qui saisit le tonnerre,” linking Labrunie to the heroic race of Prometheus,¹¹ and by extension, the heroes of the Oriental myths of the *Voyage en Orient* and *Aurélia*.

Nerval's etymologies steal the fire from the "Nom du père"; they displace family origins and produce subversive associations between other figures of (national and literary) authority. In the bottom half, the words "Bourgogne 16e—Origine Dordogne—Joseph B[onaparte]—Joséphine B[onaparte]" form two triangles around the word/name Montaigne. The rebus which results is a visible figure of a pyramidal mountain and a readable allusion to Michel de Montaigne. Nerval seems to link himself to Montaigne, the original introspective writer of the Renaissance who was also famous for his tower in Aquitaine. If the connection between Mountain/Montaigne/Tower were not evident enough, Nerval draws a line from the "a" of Montaigne to the edge of the page where he writes "Toürrēyne, Turenne, Touraine." Once again, Nerval combines different symbols (here tower and queen) to indicate the name of a famous "ancestor" and a place of origin.¹² The metamorphosis of "Tour" undermines the semiotic stability of the mountain. He plays with his (literary and spiritual) fathers' names, creating chance relationships to substitute an official lineage with a spiritual affiliation. Writing and drawing take the place of the father's name and question the authority of order.

Folded space provides a surrogate order for the domination of the father, as it performs the same control over lineage and identity as language. The two folds of the page channel the excess of etymology and link the bridges. The borders of the manuscript page prevent a run-off of the text; an incredible amount of information is condensed, like in a dream, into a small paginal area. Consequently, no space is left blank; everything has its place. Dividing branches of the family into distinct segments are very thick lines, especially on the paternal half, that find their way back to the main "trunk."

The metaphorical "tours" have corresponding visual markers that anchor the names to places: a Count's coat of arms, the points of a Lombard crown, a map of the Dordogne river valley and its three towers, and numerous crosses which indicate geographical locations. Next to the toponym "Terre de Nerval ou Nerva" is the word "granit," which provides a solid foundation for the Nervalian dynasty. Under the "Terre de Nerval" is drawn a thick horizontal line out of which grow vertical lines leading to the city Roma. These lines literalize the etymology of granite ("grain") and sprout another genealogical plant that links Nerval (or the emperor Nerva) to Rome.

The map in the lower right hand corner offers a totalizing view of space that grafts genealogy onto geography. The top of the map is labeled “Isle de France” under which lies a small circle—Barrys¹³ (Paris)—inside a larger circle, Senlys (home of the Valois dynasty and Nerval’s maternal family). The circles render Paris an island, separating Nerval’s native city from the rest of the world. South of Barrys/Paris are Ὀρλέανς, Mont d’Or, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Marseille, Roma, and Corte. The cities are connected by a line to emphasize the absolute relationship between them: Nerval’s ascendance. The correspondence between family, body, and place is revealed by a diagram placed next to the map of the “Isle de France”:

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Race < main > – pays

pied >/

The physical self is caught between the determining factors of race (used by Nerval as synonymous with family or clan) and country, genealogy and space. The body itself is divided into three symbolic parts and functions: the eye, the hand, and the foot. In the “Généalogie” the diagram brackets the subject between two hierarchical concepts (race and country) and by extension the city space of Paris (Race—Pays: Parys/Paris). The subject of the “Généalogie” is contained within and disciplined by the lines of space and race that it drew for its own expansion.

The necessary focal point of the “Généalogie” reveals and obscures the controlling mechanisms of the text: the fusion of the two folds into Gérard Labrunie de Nerval. On the maternal half of the main trunk stems a branch linked to Étienne Labrunie (Nerval’s father) where, in relatively small letters, is written “fils unique Gérard (nom de baptême) Labrunie (nom patronymique) né à Paris en 1808.” If one were not aware of the author of the “Généalogie,” the inscription of Gérard’s name would not be readily apparent. And yet, it appears at exactly half way between the two ends of the genealogical plant, providing the keystone that supports the entire structure of the text. The simple facts of place and date of birth supplant the extraordinary wanderings across time and space. All other events in the genealogy are subsumed under the relatively modest assertion of Nerval’s official identity. However fantastic the rest of the genealogy might be, Gérard’s own

place in the text is absolutely serious; he avoids his pseudonym and clearly affirms the fact that he is his father's son. Underneath Gérard Labrunie's "birth" is written "Et[ienne] L[abrunie] marié à Marie Victoire Laurence fille de Pierre Laurent et de M. Vict[oire] Boucher d'Ermenonville." Nerval's mother appears only in this line (the father's name is written numerous times), but erroneously; her actual name was Marie Antoinette Laurent, and she was often called Laurence. The text repeats the grandmother's name twice (Marie Victoire), and feminizes the grandfather's name, in order to inscribe a sort of matriarchy into the genealogy. Moreover, the mother's actual name is absent, escaping the direct representation of symbolic language. Curiously, this is the only line of the "Généalogie" that Richer does not transcribe, as if he were obeying the text's own erasure of the mother.

Time itself is subsumed under the inscription of Gérard Labrunie. His birth date, 1808, is one of only three exact dates (one being the date of the genealogical "research" mentioned in the text's heading). Throughout the "Généalogie" time is spatialized by placing a very vague chronological order to the spatial lists of family members; yet everywhere unexpected juxtapositions of names emerge from vastly different places and epochs. Indeed, the fantastic etymologies work to question the idea of chronological progression, temporal cause and effect. The manuscript's towers watch over time, seeing into the past and fusing it with the present. "Tour," in the masculine, is also turn or return, as in the expression "tour à tour;" the eternal return of genealogy, etymology, and space guarantee the continuation of the subject. At the bottom of the page, near the word "étymologies" and the diagram linking "race" to "pays," is the phrase "Il n'y a pas de nuits des temps." This ambiguous affirmation may suggest that nothing is lost in time, that through the proper lens (memory, etymology or geography?) the past can be observed and spatialized. The inscription of time onto the page, the end of time's progression, represents the ultimate control over the subject's identity. All possible links with the past and future coexist with the subject in the text; the subject is all being and no becoming.

The "Généalogie fantastique" is the totalized image of Gérard de Nerval's identity. The carnivalesque overturning of the traditional genealogical family tree upsets paternal hierarchy and national space; and yet, other structures of perception and control are left in place to

inscribe and delimit the subject. Instead of sketching a purely arborescent structure that constructs truth according to value and order, Nerval draws a rhizomatic plant stretching across time and space to subsume everything under the momentous birth of Gérard Labrunie.

The space of the manuscript page reinforces both the control of the subject and the control over the subject. The borders of the page limit the expanse of writing, the extent of metaphor. The two folds of the text (the horizontal fold that separates the paternal from the maternal, and the vertical fold formed by the genealogical “plant”) divide space and time into quadrants (Nerval’s “quartiers de noblesse”). The page is in effect folded in on itself, pulling the disparate elements together into the location of Gérard’s birth. The etymological derivations serve as an incantation that invokes all of Nerval’s virtual selves in order to trap them in the folds of the “Généalogie.” The world is recreated in Nerval’s image; the subject becomes mesmerized by its own reflection.

II. Le dénouement vous échappe

Nerval’s 1853 novella, *Sylvie, Souvenirs du Valois* (later included in the collection *Les Filles du feu*), expresses and extends the tensions of the “Généalogie fantastique” in narrative form.¹⁴ In *Sylvie* the power of the subject to surpass its temporal and spatial limitations (offered by etymology in the “Généalogie”) is everywhere put into question. The confusion of perception and memory, of author and narrator, instead of allowing the textual subject to rewrite the world in its own image, undermines the faith in the subject’s ability to organize and control its relationship with the outside. The textual subject, which in the “Généalogie” was able to anchor all possibility, is no longer able to be its own foundation, nor that of the objective world. A persistent fear of solipsism in *Sylvie* drives the narrator to search for a foundational referent. The fold, as had been the case for the “Généalogie,” structures the text, channels and focuses all experience on the subject. The ordering of space substitutes for the dissolution of the subject and the uncertainty of perception, simulates unity and stability, and abates the changes wrought by time. The subject in *Sylvie* depends both thematically on the isolation of the Valois region (the subtitle is *souvenirs du Valois*) and structurally on the mirroring of the chapters.

Caught in a hallucinatory world of his own creation, the Nervalian subject struggles to regain control of his illusions. As he becomes

progressively lost in a (post)modern labyrinth, devoid of inside and outside, he must, as Nerval says in his introduction to *Les Filles du feu*, “saisi[r] le fil d’Ariane, et dès lors toutes [s]es visions sont devenues célestes.”¹⁵ The seamstress Sylvie plays the role of Ariadne for Nerval’s Theseus; by way of her narrative thread, she leads the narrator out of his psychic labyrinth and exchanges the preeminence of space and simulacrum for that of time and difference.

Most critics and readers have taken *Sylvie* for a nostalgic and enchanting tale of the French countryside. This interpretation is encouraged in a letter Nerval wrote to Maurice Sand: “C’est une sorte d’idylle . . . J’ai voulu illustrer aussi mon Valois.”¹⁶ The use of the Valois is not, however, as innocent as it appears. The evocative and memorable Valois landscape provides the propulsion that drives the narrative and defines the narrator. The first half of the text tells the tale of a cultivated Parisian who begins to fall in love after a long obsession with an actress named Aurélie. While musing about the actress, he reads in a newspaper that he has become rich again in the stock market, perhaps allowing him to obtain his love. In his words “[j]e touchais du doigt mon idéal. N’était-ce pas une illusion encore, une faute d’impression railleuse?”¹⁷ It soon becomes clear that her material reality does not interest him. In the same newspaper, he notices an announcement for a village fete in the Valois region, which recalls tender childhood memories. Half dreaming, his entire youth unfolds before him. He remembers his love for a mysterious noble girl named Adrienne who became a nun, and the jealousy of his other love, Sylvie. The love for the actress Aurélie is suddenly explained by her uncanny resemblance to the nun Adrienne, but this is deeply troubling for the narrator: “Aimer une religieuse sous la forme d’une actrice! et si c’était la même!—Il y a de quoi devenir fou!”¹⁸ He decides to go to the village fete in the hope that Sylvie can save him from the “dangerous passion” (dangerous, presumably, since it could lead to madness), and in the hope that he can take a foothold in reality (“Reprenons pied sur le réel”).¹⁹ In the carriage ride to the countryside in the middle of the night, he “recomposes the memories” from the time he used to frequent the Valois. Other memories ensue, leading the narrator further into a dream-state.

The purpose of the voyage is to find the solution to an unsettling enigma: whether Aurélie is the same woman as Adrienne. The answer

is to be found within the narrator's memory, triggered by his presence in the Valois and his discussions with Sylvie. Space does not offer more objective evidence for the identity of the two women, but instead plunges the narrator deeper into his own self-centered memories. The exclusively subjective character of the Valois is made possible by its unique geographical location: it is relatively close to Paris, and yet there is no rail service to the region (to this day, the modern traveler has to take a bus from Chantilly). Nerval and his narrator imagine that the Valois is cut off from the modern world, hermeneutically sealed off from historical time.

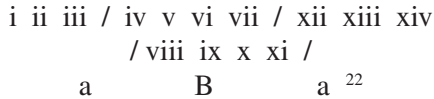
In *Promenades et souvenirs*, Nerval laments the railroad's isolating effect on some of France's ancient cities:

Si je pouvais faire un peu de bien en passant, j'essayerais d'appeler quelque attention sur ces pauvres villes délaissées dont les chemins de fer ont détourné la circulation et la vie. Elles s'asseyent tristement sur les débris de leur fortune passée, et se concentrent en elles-mêmes, jetant un regard désenchanté sur les merveilles d'une civilisation qui les condamne ou les oublie. Saint-Germain m'a fait penser à Senlis [. . .]. J'aime à contrarier les chemins de fer [. . .].²⁰

Places in the Valois such as Senlis and Ermenonville have been abandoned and removed from the circulation and life of the modern world. They become introspective, self-reflexive, concentrating space inwards (as does the text itself). They become protected from time; the neglect of the outside world guarantees that they remain in the past as portals in time for the Parisian traveler. By challenging the railroads and traveling by outmoded means of transportation (by carriage and on foot), Nerval is able to voyage into the spaces of the past and into the realm of memory. In *Sylvie*, the trip to Senlis at night from Paris allows for the narrator to write the text through memory ("Pendant que la voiture monte les côtes, recomposons les souvenirs du temps où j'y venais si souvent"),²¹ creating a virtual Valois and the illusion of a stable subject.

The spatial isolation of the subject is reproduced by the structure of the text. The chapters do not follow a standard chronological order, but, rather, a spatial order as they correspond transversally with each other. The fourteen chapters of *Sylvie* reflect upon each other as if duplications, with a complex double symmetry. Chapters from the beginning and the end echo each other in concentric circles and share parallel

themes. An episode of representation, reenactment, or remembering occurs in each chapter of the first half, which, effectively brings to life a memory or an ancient tradition (similar to the revival of the narrator's desire). Léon Cellier has meticulously catalogued the correspondences (episodes, themes, and recurring objects) of the chapters (here represented by roman numerals) in order to propose a diagram of the overall structure:



According to Cellier, the first three chapters are repeated in the last three, but inversely (“123 . . . 321”), indicating a closed structure.²³ The central eight chapters also replicate each other, creating a fold in the narrative. These eight chapters, in fact, are where the memories of the Valois are most concentrated. Like the two axes of the “Généalogie fantastique” formed by the horizontal fold in the page and the vertical fold of the genealogical plant, the arrangement of the chapters creates a space in which the enveloped Valois is coextensive with the narrating subject.

The pivotal moment of the novella lies in the seventh chapter (the final chapter of the first half), “Châalis,” which reproduces in miniature the mechanisms of the fold found in the rest of the work. Within the narrative, it marks the transition between the memories/dreams of the Valois, and the harsh present reality experienced in the second half. At the center of the text, the chapter folds space inward, such that the narrator/subject is imprisoned within the Valois. The first sentence of the chapter literalizes the enveloping of the narrator as he approaches the region: “Il est quatre heures du matin; la route plonge dans un pli de terrain; elle remonte. [. . .] [N]ous nous arrêtons à la maison du garde, à l'ancienne abbaye de Châalis.—Châalis, encore un souvenir!”²⁴ The fold in the terrain announces the complete enfolding of space, in which the Valois and the narrator are enclosed. The transition from the present to memory or dream is revealed in the repetition of the abbey of Châalis, the first instance being the real, the second the memory/dream. There is a further repetition within the word itself, the very unusual double “a.” The fold creases space into two seemingly identical halves. Châalis evokes the English word “chalice” and the French “calice,” simultaneously reinforcing the function of containment (the chalice as cup) and the sacred space of the Valois (the “chalice abbey”).

The folded space of Châalis produces the most dense and hallucinatory experience of *Sylvie*, as the narrator's desires are confirmed by his memory/dream. The narrator, along with Sylvie's brother (another double), observes a private party that happened some time in the past. The uncanny quality of the event is induced by the mix of the abbey's architectural styles (Byzantine, Gothic, Italian Renaissance) and the sense that the two (modern) observers are intruders.²⁵ An allegorical play is performed by the young girls of the neighboring convent. Adrienne, the narrator's first love whom he suspects later to be the actress Aurélie, plays the role of a holy spirit who incites angels to admire Christ. The scene, as the narrator remembers it, realizes his desire to fuse the spiritual nun with the heartless actress. The vision is so perfect that the narrator wants to doubt that it ever happened: "En me retraçant ces détails, j'en suis à me demander s'ils sont réels, ou bien si je les ai rêvés"; "Mais l'apparition d'Adrienne est-elle aussi vraie que ces détails et que l'existence incontestable de l'abbaye de Châalis?"²⁶ The realism and vividness of memory's details correspond to the accuracy of perception, either substantiating the memory/dream or questioning the sanity of the narrator. In the last sentence, another fold in the terrain brings him out of his illusions into reality: "Ce souvenir est une obsession peut-être!—Heureusement voici la voiture qui s'arrête sur la route du Plessis; j'échappe au monde des rêveries, et je n'ai plus qu'un quart d'heure de marche pour gagner Loisy par des routes bien peu frayées."²⁷ Plessis is a common toponym in France that has its origins in the Latin stem *plecto* (to fold or to plait) and comes from *ples*, a terrain enclosed with hedges that have branches folded over each other. The fold at the beginning of the chapter is thus mirrored at the end, setting the chapter apart from the rest of the work (as the text is detached from the outside, and the Valois cut off from modernity). The folds form a spatial envelope outside of time, where everything corresponds and repeats and where distinctions are broken down.

The hallucination ends when the narrator leaves the fold. Daylight comes to the Valois, and the narrator/Nerval slowly comes to realize that the region no longer reflects his nocturnal reverie. The second half of the text marks the narrator's disillusion as he chases after the ideals sprung from the memories or dreams of the first half. The narrator tries to re-inscribe himself into the past in order literally to stage the visions

of his memory (as evoked in the first half) as he encourages Sylvie and Aurélie to reenact moments from his past and his imagination. If he can prove that Aurélie and Adrienne are the same person, and if he can win back Sylvie's love, the "I" of the past (or of his hallucination) will be identical to the "I" of the present. The narrator proceeds by coaxing both Sylvie and Aurélie into revisiting the abbaye de Châalis and reenacting the hallucinated scene of Chapter Seven, with the hope that the young women will confirm the identity of Adrienne. Sylvie refuses to reveal all that she knows. At the end of the penultimate chapter, Aurélie, however, becomes enraged that the narrator loves her only because of an empty resemblance to another woman, declaring, "Vous ne m'aimez pas! Vous attendez que je vous dise: 'La comédienne est la même que la religieuse'; vous cherchez un drame, voilà tout, et le dénouement vous échappe."²⁸

The dénouement does not, in fact, come about through the efforts of the narrator, but rather through a last-minute disclosure from Sylvie. Following Aurélie's rebuttal, the final chapter of the novel jumps forward to the present, a number of years after the main events of the rest of the text (indicated by the use of the present tense instead of the simple past). The overwhelming desire in the first thirteen chapters to repeat the past, to celebrate ancient traditions and songs, to find harmony in nature, and to root identity in space is resolutely denied in this last chapter. Space is no longer the container of memory, of the self; as the narrator declares, "Châalis,—que l'on restaure,—vous n'avez rien gardé de tout ce passé!"²⁹ He recounts that he often travels to visit Sylvie, who is now married with children.

In the final lines of the text, he confesses that he forgot to include an important detail; he had taken Sylvie to see Aurélie's theater troupe and had asked her if there was any resemblance between the actress and the nun Adrienne. Sylvie laughs at the idea, and then, more seriously, pronounces the last words of the text, "elle est morte au couvent de Saint-S . . . vers 1832."³⁰ Sylvie's revelation turns the repetitive fantastic tale into a realistic novel. She has fulfilled her role as the actual narrator of the novel; her profession as lace-maker or seamstress implies that it is she who ties and unties the narrative knot. This dénouement evokes the first date in the text, thus rupturing the timelessness of the tale, and connecting narrative to death. At the same time, however, Adrienne has become a real person through her death; the

narrator no longer doubts whether she ever existed (and thus can be sure of his own sanity), because of Sylvie's confirmation. A narrative thread offers a way out of solipsism, away from the endlessly obsessive repetition of the past, and towards an acceptance of time and of the difference it engenders.

Gérard de Nerval's experiments with textual space, the "Généalogie" and *Sylvie*, revolt against the Cartesian mapping of space that produces rational, homogenized subjects. Instead, external and internal, social and psychic space are folded into each other, are literally complicated and multiplied, with the result that the subject occupies the ever-changing line of the fold. As the "Généalogie" graphically illustrates, enfolded spaces proliferate connections and possibilities, upset borders, and deliver to the subject an almost limitless power to redefine itself in time and language. However liberating this new spatial model may seem, it creates a labyrinthine world in which the subject can no longer distinguish inside from outside, past from present, self from other. The rhizomatic roots of the "Généalogie" structure and control space even more effectively and insidiously than the Cartesian grid, since they pull and manipulate everything in space towards the subject. The virtual reality of Nerval's hallucinatory enfolded space intensifies and exaggerates modernism's spatial obsession, anticipating the deterritorialized, "non-lieu" of postmodern utopia.

Sylvie exposes the dangers of and offers a tentative solution to Nerval's textual folds. The narrator of the novel confuses memory and identity with the space of the Valois as he searches for a foundation upon which to base his sense of self. The text is structured not according to chronological narrative, but rather according to spatial contiguity. The narrator only regains his sanity after he abandons control over the outside and accepts the inherent difference of others revealed by time, and not space. Subjects change over time, in a sense they are because of what they become. A text based solely on the association of place would tend to confuse time periods, negating the temporal progression of narrative, and therefore any progression of the self. The distinction of subject and object, inside and outside, self and other can only occur through the introduction of time, not necessarily of chronological time or of a "grand narrative," but rather through the true time which makes possible becoming and difference. The real

narrator of the novel would be Sylvie herself; she is the only character who changes substantially over the course of the text, from a peasant seamstress to a modern industrial worker, from a young innocent girl to a proud mother. It is she who introduces time, through the date of Adrienne's death but also by her own example, and thereby imposes her difference on the narrator. As long as the dénouement escapes him, as long as he is unable to grasp the narrative thread, the narrator is destined to wander the labyrinth of his own illusion. Only the difference of Sylvie-Ariadne can set him free.

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Notes

¹I would like to thank Michel Zink and Stanley Hoffman for their assistance in opening up the guarded labyrinth of the Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, where I was able to consult Gérard de Nerval's "Généalogie." I would also like to thank Mireille Pastoureau, the general director of the Bibliothèque, for the permission to publish an image of the "Généalogie."

²Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1998) 170.

³The heading Nerval himself gave was "Généalogie d'après des renseignements pris à Francfort, le plus récemment vers 1822." The manuscript is found at the Institut de France, in the Collection Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, D 741, folio 78. It measures approximately 12cm by 21cm. The other half of the manuscript page details numerological facts about Napoléon's life, and has never been fully deciphered. The "Généalogie" (without the accompanying life of Napoléon) was first reproduced in Aristide Marie, *Gérard de Nerval; le poète—l'homme* (Paris: Hachette, 1914), and then (incompletely) transcribed by Jean Richer in *Nerval: Expérience vécue & création ésotérique* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1987). An enlarged photographic reproduction has been included at the end of this article.

⁴Richer 47.

⁵Richer 51.

⁶Jean-Pierre Richard, "Le Nom et l'écriture," *Microlectures* (Paris: Seuil, 1979) 13–24.

⁷Richard 13.

⁸Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980) 32.

⁹Deleuze and Guattari insist that the arborescent and the rhizomatic are not polar opposites that would divide up the world into good and bad: "Il y a des nœuds d'arborescence dans les rhizomes, des poussées rhizomatiques dans les racines. Bien plus, il y a des formations despotiques, d'immanence et de canalisation, propres aux rhizomes. [. . .] Ce qui compte, c'est que l'arbre-racine et le rhizome-canal ne s'opposent pas comme deux modèles [. . .]" Deleuze and Guattari 30–1.

¹⁰Richard 14.

¹¹Richer 49.

¹²Richard 16.

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¹³Richer notes that, in *Promenades et souvenirs*, Nerval connects “la bari ou nef mystique des Egyptiens” to Paris and its heraldic ship. Richer 48.

¹⁴Nerval, Gérard de, *Œuvres complètes*, eds. Albert Béguin and Jean Richer, 2 volumes (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1978).

¹⁵Nerval 158.

¹⁶Cited in Sarah Kofman, *Nerval: Le charme de la répétition: Lecture de Sylvie* (Lausanne: l'Âge d'homme, 1979) 11.

¹⁷Nerval 244.

¹⁸Nerval 247.

¹⁹Nerval 247.

²⁰Nerval 139–40.

²¹Nerval 248.

²²Léon Cellier, “De ‘Sylvie’ à *Aurélia*: Structure close et structure ouverte,” *Archives des Lettres modernes* 12, no 131 (1971) 28.

²³Cellier 35.

²⁴Nerval 256.

²⁵Nerval 257.

²⁶Nerval 257–8.

²⁷Nerval 258.

²⁸Nerval 271.

²⁹Nerval 272.

³⁰Nerval 273.