Intoxication: Reading Between Proust and Barthes

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> The artist gradually comes to love for their own sake the means that reveal a condition of intoxication: extreme subtlety and splendor of color, definiteness of line, nuances of tone: the *distinct* where otherwise, under normal conditions, distinctness is lacking. All distinct things, all nuances, to the extent that they recall these extreme enhancements of strength that intoxication produces, awaken this feeling of intoxication by association: the effect of works of art is to *excite the state that creates art* – intoxication.[1]
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> *I write because I have read.* [*J'écris parce que j'ai lu.*][2]

Since their publication, Barthes' late lecture courses have received a wide array of critical attention. A large part of this scholarship has attempted to deal with the question of how Barthes' thought and method in his final years might be said to involve a departure from his earlier work, namely, a departure from the semiotic or structural analyses carried out in texts like *Mythologies* or *S/Z*. In contrast to the comparatively systematic nature of these earlier works, the lecture courses – which, between the review snippets on the back covers of the English translations of *Comment vivre ensemble* [*How to Live Together*] and *Le Neutre* [*The Neutral*], are characterised as 'idiosyncratic', in terms of Barthes' teaching style and preoccupations, a total of three times – undoubtedly do differ in their approach. In the lecture courses, Barthes does depart from his earlier methodology, which would often see him turning a sharp eye on a single text or subject matter, to instead move among many disparate texts in service of what he announces in his 1977 inaugural lecture as his – that is, the professor's – 'fantasy'.[3] However 'free' or even 'loose' this may seem in comparison with the methods of his earlier work, and however general the topic for each year's lecture course may seem, there is nevertheless a penetrating and urgent specificity at the heart of Barthes' late discourse.

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At any rate, how exactly to characterise the nature of the shift between the so-called 'early Barthes' and 'late Barthes' remains an open question. Did Barthes simply turn from structural analysis to something else entirely, something opposed to it, whether a broader idea or practice of 'writing', or even something verging on autobiography? Does the late work indicate a renunciation of the earlier work, a disregard for its 'rigour' – and, consequently, is the late work therefore sloppy and 'unrigorous'? Or is there something else going on in the late work, a new development? And if so, what direction does this development take?[4]

These questions become even more complicated when considering that the final lecture courses in particular, given under the title *La Préparation du roman* [*The Preparation of the Novel*], have generated a heightened measure of controversy, both contemporaneously and in their more recent critical reception. In an early session of the course, Barthes already acknowledges and carefully responds to this controversy, which, as he notes, in fact stems from a misunderstanding of his intentions.[5] To highlight the stakes of this controversy, however, it is worth citing an especially critical example from recent years. Jonathan Culler has taken Barthes' late thought to task more than once, with the *Préparation* as his specific target. Far from taking these courses as a new development, Culler seems to regard them as a sort of regression on Barthes' part, a forgetting or disavowing of his earlier work. At times, Culler's tone serves to disarm or soften the point of Barthes' approach; for instance, Culler writes that 'there is [...] *something winning* in the self-exposure of Barthes's desire to be a writer, as if writing a novel were such an extraordinarily difficult feat that the most one can imagine is aspiring to it'.[6] Culler also writes that, in contrast to his earlier writings, in the lecture course

> Barthes explicitly adopts the sacralization of the work and shows no interest in text any more. [...] [I]n the course we have reversion to the Work as the fetishized object of desire [...] with no reason to think that we are spiralling back to it at another level rather than embracing something once rejected. I note that the interest in language, which animated the earlier conception – a change in our idea of language and consequently of the literary – has simply dropped out rather than been revised in some newly sophisticated way.[7]

Though one could certainly argue that Barthes's late courses indulge to some degree in a mythologisation or fetishisation of 'writing', I suggest that it is only possible to fully agree with Culler's argument if we disregard Barthes' many explicit comments and qualifications pertaining to the task and method of the lecture courses, and instead insist on reading the 'late Barthes' solely through his earlier writings. With reference to further critiques that Culler levels about this supposed shift, Lucy O'Meara writes:

> Though apparently a radical departure, Barthes's new science is connected to his previous writing [...] The difference is the change of interest regarding what lies beneath [codes]: no longer concerned with political uses of the sign, Barthes now wishes to demonstrate the individual impulses that underlie any attempt at objectivity, thus inaugurating a new – though apparently regressive – demystification'.[8]

In other words, even the apparent opposition between the two seemingly divergent tendencies in Barthes' thought does not stand up under further scrutiny. O'Meara's contribution to this discussion is crucial in that she refuses to be taken in by differences in style or tone, which allows her to see that, just as much as his early work, Barthes' late work questions 'the grounds of subjectivity', covers 'important critical, ethical and social problems', all – and this is the crucial and potentially misleading difference – precisely '*via* a deliberately contingent discourse'.[9] This contingency, itself a mark of a 'desire to valorise aesthetic experience', is linked for Barthes 'to an ethics of the intellectual'.[10] In short, then, at least part of Culler's grounds rely on the assumption that aesthetics, ethics, and method are incommensurable, an assumption that Barthes strongly rejects, especially in his later work. Methodologically, Barthes' decision to structure his final courses around the *fantasy* of writing a novel (rather than actual plans to write one) must be understood with this – as well as his comments in the inaugural lecture – in mind as, in part, a strategic gesture.

In this context, another important point should be noted: namely, Barthes' statement that 'the novel, indeed, this is what is before me [*[l]e roman, effectivement, c'est ce qui est devant moi*]'.[11] According to O'Meara, this 'should be understood in the most absolute sense – [the novel] is something which, by design, will *always* be ahead for Barthes, no matter how far he advances'.[12] This idea is revisited by Barthes in the *Préparation*, with reference to

Mallarmé. Referring to Mallarmé's 'dossier on the "book" [*dossier [...] sur le Livre*]', Barthes says: 'according to that dossier, before he knew what he was going to discuss in the book he was planning, Mallarmé reflected upon the structure of his work and the abstract conditions of all literature; *very few pages of the manuscript deal with what the book should say* [*d'après ce dossier, Mallarmé a réfléchi sur la structure de son œuvre et sur les conditions abstraites de toute littérature, avant de savoir quelles étaient les choses mêmes dont il avait l'intention de parler dans le livre qu'il préparait. Il y a très peu de pages du manuscrit sur ce que le livre devrait dire*]'.[13] Does this not set the scene for Barthes' 'fantasy' of the novel, the novel that, as he does not hesitate to specify, remains *to come*? Does not Mallarmé's vision of, and work on, *Le Livre* serve as a precedent for – and, however much his intentions and methods differ from those of Barthes, *research toward* – the state of preparing to write, of wishing to write, of desiring to write?

Le Livre, consisting of Mallarmé's dream of writing a sort of *total book*, was envisioned as being unbound, so that it would be read in a different order each time, giving it an air of performance and improvisation. Maurice Blanchot, whose writings are littered with references to Mallarmé and his *Livre*, comments in his aptly-titled *Le Livre à venir* [*The Book to Come*] that, because of this, 'The book is always other, it changes and is exchanged by comparing the diversity of its parts [...] Moreover, the book, unfolded and refolded, scattering and being gathered back together, shows that it has no substantial reality; it is never there, endlessly to be unmade while it is made [*Le livre est toujours autre, il change et s'échange par la confrontation de la diversité de ses parties [...] De plus, le livre, se déployant et se reployant, se dispersant et se rassemblant, montre qu'il n'a aucune réalité substantielle: il n'est jamais là, sans cesse à se défaire tandis qu'il se fait*]'.[14] Such a book would have no original, and would always be in progress. This suggests also that, the book's possible 'completeness' or material existence notwithstanding – that is, even if Barthes were actually planning to write a novel, and even if he were successful in doing so – there still would remain an intransitive state of writing, of desiring to write, that is well worth examining in its own right. Even if 'complete', then, the book would still be *to come*. At any rate, as evidenced even just by its very presence in the *Préparation*, Mallarmé's *Livre* is an important ancestor to Barthes' fantasy of the novel.

In a different way, something similar can be said about Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, itself an unfinished work, despite being over

3,000 pages long. As we will see shortly, Barthes' own attitude toward Proust's novel bears similarities to Mallarmé's own ideas about the Book; Barthes even comments at one point that Proust's novel 'is a true "mobile", and may in fact be the incarnation of Mallarmé's long-sought Book [*c'est une œuvre qui constitue un véritable « mobile », c'est peut-être la véritable incarnation du Livre rêvé par Mallarmé*]'.[15] This is related to Barthes' likening of the *Recherche* to music, as we will see in the pages to come. First, however, it is important to note that Barthes' fantasy of the novel as elaborated in the *Préparation* courses received criticism explicitly in connection with his identification with Proust, and the fact that he did not produce a finished novel has been seen as a failure, despite (again) his careful comments about the nature of that project. I follow Steven Ungar, who notes that, 'rather than insist on Barthes's failed repetition of a Proustian itinerary, it is more instructive to trace the limits of that repetition in view of what Barthes has left as the unwitting legacy of his final texts'.[16] As Barthes makes clear in an early session of the *Préparation*, he is primarily concerned with isolating and attempting to inhabit and elaborate on the *desire to write* as a state, a way of being, rather than simply discussing his supposed plans to write a novel, and both Mallarmé and Proust (among others) are drawn upon in his evocation of this state. Above all, and however we understand the 'departure' represented by the late lecture courses – and especially the *Préparation* – they should be read in this context, as a reorientation of Barthes' research. This reorientation, which Barthes begins referring to in his final years as his 'Vita Nova', involves much more than a change in focus; moreover, it involves something essentially other than a shift in methodology or style.

Barthes' 'Vita Nova' or *new life* is set into motion not long after the passing of his mother in October 1977. This event triggers a shift in Barthes' thought and writing, a shift that resonates with a similar situation in Proust's life. It is well known that the death of Proust's mother – during a time when he was hesitating between essay and novel in terms of what form his projected work will take – played a significant role in his turn to a *third form* [*tierce forme*], and the eventual inception of the *Recherche*. In a 1978 lecture where he discusses his own desire to begin writing in a new way, Barthes evokes this moment in Proust's life, saying: 'What Proust *recounts*, what he puts into narration, is not his life but *his desire to write* [*Ce que Proust raconte, ce qu'il met en récit (insistons), ce n'est pas sa vie, c'est son désir d'écrire*]'.[17] The event that shook up Proust's life and caused him so much pain was, of course, the

catalyst for writing the *Recherche*; but – crucially, in Barthes' eyes – this event was not the subject of his writing, meaning also that it is a mistake to regard the *Recherche* as a strictly autobiographical text. Along these same lines, Barthes makes an important distinction about the parallel between himself and Proust: 'by setting Proust and myself on one and the same line, I am not in the least comparing myself to this great writer but, quite differently, *identifying myself with him:* an association of practice, not of value [*en disposant sur une même ligne Proust et moi-même, je ne signifie nullement que je me compare à ce grand écrivain, mais, d'une manière tout à fait différente, que je m'identifie à lui: confusion de pratique, non de valeur*]'.[18] In other words, Barthes does not identify with Proust the author of the *Recherche*, but with the Proust who desires to write, the Proust whose experience is articulated by the narrator-character Marcel who similarly, throughout the novel, is subject to this desire.[19] It is of course clear that where Barthes does identify thus, he does not do so based on any biographical parallels, which are only symptomatic of a deeper identification with this very same desire to write. Barthes is primarily interested in this desire not as a way to achieve some end, such as the production of a novel, but as an intransitive state, a disposition, a sensitivity, and moreover as one that is *necessary*, by virtue of its being awakened by a painful and earth-shattering event.[20]

Though he never devoted an entire book-length study to Proust's writing, Proust is present, in one way or another, throughout the entire trajectory of Barthes' thought. In his 2019 book *Roland Barthes: The Proust Variations*, Thomas Baldwin convincingly lays out the nuance of Proust's place in Barthes' thought, and the extent to which Proust circulates beyond the passages where Barthes does explicitly refer to his work.[21] In particular, Baldwin argues that, in distinction from the general, sedimented idea of Proust in popular culture, and even in distinction from certain generally accepted scholarly readings of Proust, 'the novelist [Proust] is frequently made to inhabit Barthes's oeuvre not as part of an instrumentalizing, "studious elaboration", but as a series of *punctum*-like intensities'.[22] As Barthes puts it in a 1972 round-table on Proust, 'Proust is unique to the extent that all he leaves us to do is *rewrite him*, which is the exact contrary of exhausting him [*La singularité de Proust c'est qu'il ne nous laisse rien d'autre à faire que ceci: le réécrire, qui est le contraire même de l'épuiser*]'.[23] To engage with a text in this way is to introduce a creative component, though this component is necessarily prompted by the text itself; as Barthes says – and hence Baldwin's

title – to do so is to 'operate variations [*opérer des variations*]' on the text in question.[24] The idea of 'operating variations' on a text once more recalls Mallarmé: 'Mallarmé calls the reader "the operator". Reading, like poetry, is "the operation". [...] Reading is operation, it is the work that is accomplished by being suppressed, that proves itself by confronting itself and suspends itself while still asserting itself [*Mallarmé appelle le lecteur « l'opérateur ». La lecture, comme la poésie, est « l'opération ». [...] La lecture est opération, elle est l'œuvre qui s'accomplit en se supprimant, qui se prouve en se confrontant avec elle-même et se suspend tout en s'affirmant*]'.[25] As the performative nature of *Le Livre* makes clear, the reader must take an active role in reading – and, in a way, in constituting – the text. If we consider this in terms of the task of the critic, who must not only read but also write about the text at hand, Barthes' statement about research resonates all the more deeply, while at the same time becoming even more complicated: '*In Search of Lost Time* (and all the other texts that accompany it) can only elicit ideas of research and not research itself. Therefore, Proust's text is excellent material for critical desire [*la Recherche du temps perdu (et tout ce qu'on peut y agglomérer d'autres textes) ne peut provoquer que des idées de recherche et non pas des recherches. Dans ce sens-là, le texte proustien est une substance superbe pour le désir critique*]'.[26] This 'critical desire', of course, is but one variation of the more general desire to write that Barthes cites in '*Longtemps*', and it is no mistake that both kinds of desire arise in response to Barthes' encounter with Proust.

In keeping with this sentiment of desire, it should not come as a surprise that Proust seems to haunt Barthes' thought, especially in the lecture courses, with their 'idiosyncratic' fantasies – the fantasy of writing in particular. However, keeping in mind the unmistakable connection between Barthes' engagement with Proust on the one hand, and his more general methods and concerns in the lecture courses on the other, the nature of these 'ideas of research' that Barthes finds to be elicited by Proust's text is not always certain. What is clear is that, like much of what falls under the purview of Barthes' late work – and perhaps to an even greater degree – Barthes *encounters* Proust, rather than treating his writing as an object of strict and direct scrutiny. In turn, this highlights a unique dimension that Barthes offers in his writing and teaching on Proust: that of his *experience* of reading Proust.

As Baldwin emphasises, Barthes reads Proust against 'the Proust brand' so prevalent in popular culture.[27] Barthes does not achieve this simply through a 'rigorous' reading of Proust – that is, a systematic reading, or one

that places itself specifically in opposition to the popular understandings of Proust, scholarly or otherwise – but instead by reading Proust with an attentiveness to where the text *affects him*, where the text *pricks him*. He does this, in other words, by being as sensitive to his own reading experience as he is to the text at hand. Clearly, then, the 'rigour' of Barthes' early work cannot be so easily opposed to that of his late work, which involves not only a novel, creative, and carefully considered method – with reference to Proust, of course, but not only that – but also levels of patience, perception, receptivity, and reflection that demand to be understood according to the context in which they arise.

Drawing together these two strains in Barthes' late work – his unique way of encountering Proust, and his preoccupation with the desire to write more generally – I wish to suggest here that Barthes' late thought can be read in terms of a certain *intoxication*. For Nietzsche, intoxication has a dual and circular status: it is at once 'the effect of works of art' and '*the state that creates art*', meaning also that it can be aligned with circulation rather than influence. In close accord with this, Barthes says in the *Préparation* that '*I write because I have read* [*J'écris parce que j'ai lu*]'.[28] As a state of intoxication, this feeling is not only creative, but also involves heightened perception; as Nietzsche writes, intoxication involves 'extreme subtlety and splendor of color, definiteness of line, nuances of tone: the *distinct* where otherwise, under normal conditions, distinctness is lacking'.[29] In the present context, I will refer to Barthes' intoxication as a kind of 'aesthetic intoxication', both because, in a primary sense, it is itself a kind of experience – and furthermore, as I will argue, an *aesthetic* experience – and because, in a figurative sense, it is also 'aesthetic' insofar as it concerns at once the reception and (at least the drive toward) the production of a work of art.

While it would not be difficult to read Barthes along these lines with reference to any number of writers, it is his intoxication by Proust in particular that I will highlight in this essay, for two main reasons. First, because of the careful attention to detail that Barthes pays in, and to, his own engagement with Proust. And second, because of the nature of Proust's text, and the analogous effects that it has on Barthes. Not only is the *Recherche* a text concerned explicitly with writing, but it is also concerned with the experience of writing – and, more importantly in the case of Barthes, with the experience of *desiring to write*. The *Recherche* is in large part a reflection on writing, the desire to write, and the states that influence them. And, in the novel, the

experiences that inform the narrator in his desire to write have a fundamentally aesthetic dimension – in other words, even when they are not explicit instances of the famous Proustian 'involuntary memory', and even when they do not concern works of art, they can be characterised as aesthetic experiences. In fact, what is especially compelling about Proust's novel is the nuance with which it depicts aesthetic experience. Despite the narrator's habits and memories, and far beyond what is indicated if we look only to the 'Proust brand', aesthetic experiences tend to occur when he least expects them, as if by chance, in the midst of his life. These experiences, generally speaking, involve an acute attention to or perceptiveness of his surroundings.

If Barthes is intoxicated by Proust in a way that involves a sensitivity to writing and aesthetic experience, both with reference to Proust's novel *and in general*, then it is safe to say that his engagement with Proust's writing also involves the sensitivity and perceptiveness that is common to intoxication in Nietzsche and aesthetic experience in Proust. Furthermore, in response to critics' misgivings about any possible 'departure' indicated by Barthes' late thought, what is in question is not any difference in 'rigour', but rather his reorientation around a particular sensitivity to aesthetic experience, primarily in response to his experience of reading Proust. This, I suggest, makes it all the more necessary to set the stage for a real encounter between Barthes and Proust, in the spirit of circulation, rather than reading Barthes-on-Proust by 'studiously' examining his comments on Proust.[30] Such an encounter would mirror the way that Barthes encounters Proust in his own thought. Therefore, with the creative approach of Barthes' late thought in mind, my method in the remainder of this essay will consist of examining a passage from the *Recherche* – a passage, no less, that finds the narrator in a state of intoxication from drinking champagne – with the aim of articulating the nature of Barthes' intoxication by Proust. Though Barthes does not comment on this particular passage, citing it allows for an encounter between the two writers along the lines of what I have referred to as aesthetic intoxication, both literally (for Proust's narrator) and figuratively (for Barthes as a reader of Proust). In this sense, this essay is inspired by Baldwin's goal of '[seeking] out new creative tensions between literary texts and critical approaches to them'.[31]

The passage in question, from *Le Côté de Guermantes* [*The Guermantes Way*], finds the narrator spending time with his friend Robert de Saint-Loup and Saint-Loup's mistress, Rachel, in the back room of a restaurant.

Eventually, drinking champagne during what is by his account an exhausting day of spending time with the quarreling couple, the narrator becomes tipsy:

> By dint of drinking champagne with them, I began to feel a little of the intoxication that had come over me at Rivebelle, though probably not quite the same. Not only every kind of intoxication, from that which we get from the sun or from travelling to that which is induced by exhaustion or wine, but every degree of intoxication – and each should have a different 'reading', like fathoms on a chart – lays bare in us, at the precise depth which it has reached, a different kind of man.[32]

> À force de boire du champagne avec eux, je commençai à éprouver un peu de l'ivresse que je ressentais à Rivebelle, probablement pas tout à fait la même. Non seulement chaque genre d'ivresse, de celle que donne le soleil ou le voyage à celle que donne la fatigue ou le vin, mais chaque degré d'ivresse, et qui devrait porter une 'cote' différente comme les fonds dans la mer, met à nu en nous exactement à la profondeur où il se trouve un homme spécial.[33]

Following the narrator's initial distinction between his present state of intoxication and an earlier one, two significant points should be highlighted here. First, he acknowledges that intoxication can be identified by *type*. This lines up with the idea that intoxication can have any number of triggers, whether chemical or otherwise. Mentioned by name here are the sun, travelling, exhaustion, and wine, and each may in a different way bring about a distinct state of intoxication.[34] Second, he suggests that intoxication might be considered in terms of *degree*. This is especially striking, given that the motif of measurement appears a number of times in the *Recherche*, especially as regards the narrator's responsiveness to the weather, which itself is a nearly constant presence in the text.[35] The text here refers to measuring the depths of bodies of water, and while it is imperative to avoid conflating this with his evocations, elsewhere, of his 'internal barometer [*baromètre vivant*]',[36] this reference to measurement with regard to his internal state – as well as the novel's ultimate refusal to lend this measurement a determinate set of correspondences or functions, thus problematising the idea of 'scientifically' quantifying experience in the first place – makes this passage reverberate in an unmistakable way with the narrator's sensitivity to atmosphere. This sensitivity alone, and especially this heightened attention to detail, is

implicated in some of the narrator's most compelling aesthetic experiences.[37] And, like atmosphere, intoxication has both a literal and a metaphorical status with regard to the narrator's – and Barthes' – internal state.

Intoxication, thus far, is portrayed by the narrator as a state capable of being influenced by multiple factors, and is therefore quite complex. After acknowledging that type and degree are at play in any state of intoxication, the final lines of the above quotation suggest that intoxication has a reflective element, in what we might consider the Kantian sense. For Kant, reflection is a process that involves one's attunement to, and contemplation of, one's own state; in the present context, it 'lays bare in us [...] a different kind of man' according to its kind and degree. The narrator is able to remark upon the vicissitudes of intoxication to the extent that he is able both to distinguish one state of intoxication from another and to recognise the variables involved. The other stipulation that comes with this is that – since for Kant reflective aesthetic judgments are not in service of the understanding, a concept, or any final end – any state of intoxication would be primarily an *experience*, a purely creative moment that does not yet have in its view even the creation of a work of art.

Before moving to the following lines of the passage, it is important to make connections between this vision of intoxication on the one hand and some of Barthes' comments about Proust on the other. As early as his 1973 *Le Plaisir du texte* [*The Pleasure of the Text*], Barthes writes: 'Proust's good fortune: from one reading to the next, we never skip the same passages [*Bonheur de Proust: d'une lecture à l'autre, on ne saute jamais les mêmes passages*]'.[38] A few pages later, he writes: 'My pleasure can very well take the form of a drift. *Drifting* occurs whenever *I do not respect the whole*, and whenever [...] I remain motionless, pivoting on the *intractable* bliss that binds me to the text (to the world) [*Mon plaisir peut très bien prendre la forme d'une dérive. La dérive advient chaque fois que je ne respecte pas le tout, et qu'à [...] je reste immobile, pivotant sur la jouissance intraitable qui me lie au texte (au monde)*]'.[39] Even before the lecture courses, then, Barthes thematises a certain *drifting* – a disrespect for the whole of the text, including a disrespect even for Proust's biography, all of which anticipates the project that takes shape in the *Préparation*. As Culler rightly points out with reference to writers' biographical details, Barthes 'prefers [...] the biographically hazy, perhaps, or *biographèmes* – salient images, which are, in fact, novelistic, life as literature'.[40] Malcolm Bowie sees Barthes as advocating for readings of Proust that 'are light, partial

and tangential' rather than overly serious.[41] Taken together, and keeping in mind that the drifting Barthes outlines not only leads him to skip certain passages, but would also lend to those passages that he does read a certain heightened intensity, these comments can be understood as signs of Barthes' intoxication by Proust.

Somewhat in passing, it is also worth noting that drifting is structurally similar to both aesthetic experience and intoxication. To first consider aesthetic experience, and taking as a minimal definition Joseph Tanke's remark that aesthetic experience is 'the sensuous mode of apprehension that Kant distinguished from the cognitive, moral, and practical aspects of human experience',[42] we could say that both drifting and aesthetic experience 'disrespect the whole' in certain ways: aesthetic experience involves a disrespect for teleology, whereas drifting disrespects narrative trajectory. By landing on various passages, seemingly at random, the drifting reader will be met with a series of *scenes*, rather than a linear narrative progression. These scenes, in turn, take on a kind of quiet intensity, much as in Barthes' discussion of the haiku.[43] At the same time, intoxication is similar to drifting in that it facilitates a sense of perception that is both heightened and selective. Intoxication, then, like drifting, disrespects what would be the logical 'whole' of what we traditionally understand as experience, instead creating its own logic, which is fundamentally individual not only to the person undergoing the experience in question, but to the moment itself: a kind of haze, which allows certain images to shine through, while sliding over others.

Returning to the passage from Proust, the narrator goes on to describe the restaurant's back room. Shifting quickly from a description of his surroundings to a hypothetical meditation on their qualities in the eyes of 'the drinker', these lines seem both to be affected by his intoxication, and also to be reflecting upon it, as he considers – in a shift to the third person – the ways in which his intoxicated state affects his description:

> The room which Saint-Loup had taken was small, but the single mirror which decorated it was of such a kind that it seemed to reflect a score of others in an endless vista; and the electric bulb placed at the top of the frame must at night, when it was lit, followed by the procession of twenty or more reflexions similar to its own, give to the drinker, even when alone, the idea that the surrounding space was multiplying itself simultaneously with his sensations, heightened by intoxication, and

> that, shut up by himself in this little cell, he was reigning nevertheless over something far more extensive in its indefinite luminous curve than a passage in the 'Jardin de Paris'.[44]
>
> Le cabinet où se trouvait Saint-Loup était petit, mais la glace unique qui le décorait était de telle sorte qu'elle semblait en réfléchir une trentaine d'autres, le long d'une perspective infinie; et l'ampoule électrique placée au sommet du cadre devait le soir, quand elle était allumée, suivie de la procession d'une trentaine de reflets pareils à elle-même, donner au buveur, même solitaire, l'idée que l'espace autour de lui se multipliait en même temps que ses sensations exaltées par l'ivresse et qu'enfermé seul dans ce petit réduit, il régnait pourtant sur quelque chose de bien plus étendu en sa courbe indéfinie et lumineuse, qu'une allée du 'Jardin de Paris'.[45]

Revolving around the mirror, this description thematises *reflection*, and the narrator imagines that his surroundings can be expanded, as if to infinity, by the mirror's reflective capacity. However, at least in the English translation, it is paradoxically only a *single mirror* that is imagined as making this expansion possible. Taking this at face value, we may very well attribute this fact to the intoxicated narrator's perception of the room – after all, the room seems to be 'multiplying itself simultaneously with his sensations'. However, resonating with the way that Barthes' *experience* of reading Proust permeates his late thought, these lines suggest at the same time that the *single* mirror might also serve as a figure of the act of reflection. For Kant, after all, the act of reflection is something that the (individual) subject performs; in the present passage, even if there is only one mirror, it reflects the subject – the narrator – and thus allows him to see himself while he himself is engaged in reflection. And the function of the mirror, as assisting in the expansion of the room, no matter how small, recalls the importance of drifting, motionlessness, and disrespect for the whole that Barthes details in *Le Plaisir du texte*. These qualities – on one level, the tendency to allow one moment, image, or sensation to exist in itself, as if endlessly, to become the *only* moment, image, or sensation, to the exclusion of all others, even to the point of possible inaccuracy or error, but also (and more importantly) a kind of interdependence of the text and its reader – should be understood as aspects of aesthetic intoxication.[46]

In French, '*unique*' – in addition to meaning 'only' or 'sole' – has connotations of distinctiveness, singularity, uniqueness. Aside from

introducing a possible ambiguity between original and translation, this is in line with the mirror's role in this moment as an endlessly proliferating surface, rather than a plane that would simply reflect back what is placed before it. This mirror is 'unique' because it is operating on more than one level. Instead of straightforwardly regarding his reflection in the mirror, 'the drinker' here has the feeling of presiding over a vast space, despite what he notes as the meager dimensions of the room. With his expanded sensation comes an endless, as it were, expansion of his surroundings, with no concern for 'objectivity'. The emphasis on the mirror's ability to proliferate, in distinction from mimetically reflecting or representing, recalls a section from the *Préparation* in which Barthes – discussing Proust's *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and 'the Passage between an anterior Book and an ulterior Writing [*le Rapport du Livre antérieur (du livre lu, du livre désiré) à l'Écriture ultérieure (l'écriture du livre à faire)*]' – states that 'literature isn't born of direct imitation but of the proliferation, the enunciation of the world as a movement of Mirrors [*la littérature ne naît donc pas d'une imitation directe, mais de la profération, de l'énonciation du monde comme mouvement de Miroirs*]'.[47] Besides bringing to mind the always-futural project of writing, of *the book to come*, Barthes' comments at once align the mirror with what O'Meara notes as the epistemological perspectivism of his late courses, and with the nature of aesthetic intoxication insofar as it – while remaining without an end in sight – triggers endless proliferation.[48]

We can also recall here Barthes' comment about 'operating variations': if literature, and the *Recherche* in particular, is to be read in terms of proliferation rather than imitation, then the act of 'rewriting' a text (namely, Proust's text) would take part in this very same proliferation. The proliferation set into motion by the literary text, in other words, generates further proliferation. Rather than leading to a mess of aimless imitation, however, this proliferation is a necessary part of the writer's task; thus, following his quotation from *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Barthes states that inspiration factors into the transition from the *read book* to the *book to come* – meaning both the book to be written and the writing to come – insofar as it involves an attunement to the reflective nature of experience and the creative impulse alike. What could this be if not an acknowledgement of Nietzschean intoxication, the moment – which is at once a *moment*, a discrete experience, but also potentially a period spanning many months or years – between the '*livre lu*' and the '*livre à faire*'?

In *Le Neutre*, Barthes expands upon Baudelaire's discussion of intoxication, stating: 'as for myself, the state of consciential hyperesthesia reaches its specificity, its "revelatory" paradox when the sharp seizes the blurry: sharp consciousness of the blur, of the fuzzy → it's what one could call: consciousness of mist [*pour moi, l'état d'hyperesthésie consciencielle atteint sa spécificité, son paradoxe « révélateur » quand l'aigu saisit le flou: conscience aiguë du flou, du non-aigu → ce qu'on pourrait appeler: la conscience de brume*]'.[49] As is the case for Proust, intoxication for Barthes is paradoxical, multi-dimensional, involving disparate elements that would otherwise be opposed. For Barthes, the indistinct and the precise are side-by-side in intoxication: sharpness and blurriness at once. In the *Recherche*, the paradox of intoxication involves a vivid commitment to the imaginary; the 'mist' of the Proustian narrative is such that what is imaginary or hypothetical can no longer be pulled apart from what is, so to speak, 'actual'. Thus, in the lines from Proust quoted above, the description is both general and particular. It concerns both a position imagined by the narrator, which is attributed to a general subject, but also his own experience in a moment of drunkenly regarding the mirror, which prompts this imaginary digression in the first place. Bringing this principle to bear on the question of Barthes' 'aesthetic intoxication', the 'consciousness of mist' can thus be understood as integral to the method of his lecture courses, where his thrust is not hermeneutic, but reflective: he is driven to reflect on haiku and the *Recherche* both, insofar as it is a reflection on an *instant* – moreover, an instant of, an *experience* of, reading – that makes it appropriate for them to be considered together.

Finally, Proust's narrator returns his gaze to himself, and the passage moves from the general or hypothetical back to the concrete. Seeing his reflection in the mirror, and yet not quite recognising it as himself, he is overcome by an intense sensation:

> Being then myself at this moment the said drinker, suddenly, looking for him in the glass, I caught sight of him, a hideous stranger, staring at me. The joy of intoxication was stronger than my disgust; from gaiety or bravado, I gave him a smile which he returned. And I felt myself so much under the ephemeral and potent sway of the minute in which our sensations are so strong, that I am not sure whether my sole regret was not at the thought that the hideous self whom I had just caught sight of in the glass was perhaps on his last legs, and that I should never meet that stranger again for the rest of my life.[50]

> Or, étant alors à ce moment-là ce buveur, tout d'un coup, le cherchant dans la glace, je l'aperçus, hideux, inconnu, qui me regardait. La joie de l'ivresse était plus forte que le dégoût; par gaieté ou bravade, je lui souris et en même temps il me souriait. Et je me sentais tellement sous l'empire éphémère et puissant de la minute où les sensations sont si fortes que je ne sais si ma seule tristesse ne fut pas de penser que le moi affreux que je venais d'apercevoir était peut-être à son dernier jour et que je ne rencontrerais plus jamais cet étranger dans le cours de ma vie.[51]

Not only a return to the first person, but a true meeting of the first and third person (the 'I' also being the 'he'), these lines intensify the 'reflection' prompted by the mirror, rendering the narrator's generalisation of his own experience all the more explicit. Under the spell of the 'joy of intoxication', his narration here touches on several points that resonate with some key concerns of the *Recherche*, as well as justifying Barthes' fidelity to the personal in his lecture courses. Significantly, these lines convey that intoxication, here as elsewhere, can provide a release from the narrator's otherwise uneasy state.[52] The present passage, for example, directly follows the narrator's failed attempt to 'endow with an aesthetic character and thereby justify and rescue, these hours of boredom [*douer d'un caractère esthétique, et par là justifier, sauver ces heures d'ennui*]' – that is, his immediately preceding attempt to salvage this very same day that he spends with Robert and Rachel, during which he becomes intoxicated.[53] With this in mind, if we take the narrator's ecstasy in the face of his intoxication as indicating the occurrence of an aesthetic experience, this marks one instance among others of the unpredictability of such phenomena in the *Recherche*. Given the text's overarching concerns and the events that lead up to his intoxication, I argue that passages such as this one reveal Proust's true sensitivity to the aesthetic: in the present case, aesthetic experience does not merely occur as a surprise, but *directly follows a thematised attempt to bring about an aesthetic experience*.[54] Furthermore, these lines make explicit reference to the temporality of aesthetic experience ('the ephemeral and potent sway of *the minute* in which our sensations are so strong'), which is occasionally accompanied in the text by a sense of sacrifice or finality with reference to the narrator's own life. Here, for example – beyond the lack of an ultimate purpose for this experience – 'the hideous self' who appears in the mirror seems to be 'on his last legs'. This exemplifies the reflective nature of

intoxication: no further use, no future moment, is mixed in with the present experience.

This experience – which we might call, keeping in mind Kant's employment of the term 'mere', a moment of *mere* experience – is just one example from the *Recherche* where the narrator's experience is not put to work in service of some deeper truth or memory.[55] This is simply *a moment of experience*, a moment that could be considered an 'error' in the context of the narrator's 'apprenticeship'. Passages like this do not advance the narrative as do, for example, the novel's passages of involuntary memory, and are accordingly underrepresented in Proust scholarship.[56] Needless to say, it is not difficult to see why the *Recherche* might resonate with the haiku form, nor is it difficult to see why Barthes' juxtaposition of the novel with the haiku would provoke controversy. Nevertheless, as Barthes says in the *Préparation*, if there is a 'truth' belonging to haiku that is also common to these moments in the *Recherche*, it is 'not a conceptual truth, but [a truth] of the *Instant* [*non conceptuelle, mais vérité existentielle, de l'Instant*]'.[57] In the lecture courses, besides being influenced by his general 'aesthetic intoxication', Barthes also refrains from gestures of mastery over the text, and this can even be seen when he explains his reasons for not wishing to publish the *Le Neutre* courses in book form.[58] In this explanation, he cites 'the Ephemeral [*l'Éphémère*]'; and we might say that this decision, as well as his engagements with Proust, indicates an acceptance of the idea that he, Barthes the reader, as well as his experience, his reading, his teaching, his writing itself – and here we should also hear *all* experience, *all* reading, *all* teaching, *all* writing – might be ephemeral, or might even be, like 'the hideous self' in the mirror, *on their last legs*.

I do not claim in this essay to have exhausted this passage from Proust, nor to have fully drawn out the implications of Barthes' engagement with Proust, nor even the implications of the particular encounter staged here – far from it. Instead, in the spirit of Barthes' late thought, and taking inspiration from the title of Baldwin's book, I hope by staging this encounter to have *operated* one of many possible *Barthes variations*. Countless such variations are possible, and seem to me to be crucial for doing justice to the dimension of Barthes' late thought that is so complex and that has so often led to misunderstandings. On the one hand, a 'creative' reading of Proust is necessary, not only due to the enormity of his text, but also because that text complicates our commonly agreed-upon ideas of aesthetic taste while

concerning itself explicitly with the experience of art and writing. And on the other hand, Barthes' late thought will in principle be done a disservice if it is not read alongside whatever text Barthes is concerned with – especially, as I argue here, the *Recherche*. To conclude, then, I would like to once again emphasise that Barthes' 'aesthetic intoxication' – his sensitivity to Proust's writing and, in turn, his awareness of and investment in his own desire to write – should be taken into account in any assessment of his 'departure' from his early work. Barthes' unmatched sensitivity permeates not only his late writing and thought, thus still paying dividends years later, but were also indispensable for his pedagogical ethics in his own time.

Notes

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 434.

[2] Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, trans. by Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 131; *La Préparation du roman* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003), p. 242.

[3] Barthes states: 'It is to a fantasy, spoken or unspoken, that the professor must annually return, at the moment of determining the direction of his journey [*C'est à un fantasme, dit ou non dit, que le professeur doit annuellement revenir, au moment de décider du sens de son voyage*]'. Roland Barthes, 'Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège de France, January 7, 1977', trans. by Richard Howard, *October*, 8 (spring 1979), 15; 'Leçon', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), vol. V, p. 445. Further references to the *Œuvres complètes* will be given in the form of *OC*, followed by the volume and page numbers.

[4] There are many recent responses to this question with reference to Barthes' late thought, but I will cite just a few here. Neil Badmington shows that Barthes' *Journal de deuil*, a journal he kept after his mother's death, 'complicates matters by casting new light on the development of the *punctum*' – and, crucially for what will follow, links the origin of the *punctum* to Barthes' 'Vita Nova'. Neil Badmington, '*Punctum Saliens*: Barthes, Mourning, Film, Photography', *Paragraph*, 35.3 (November 2012), 304. Youna Kwak stresses the palpable intimacy of Barthes' late autobiographical writing, noting that Barthes' late works not only draw upon 'l'intime', but that this 'intime' 'seems to suggest a blurring between disciplines and epistemologies (such as "psychology") and the differentiated forms of content ("the psychological") that these disciplines can produce'. Youna Kwak, 'How to Read Barthes: Autobiography's Intimacy Effect', *French Forum*, 44.3 (winter 2019), 406. Nicholas O. Pagan takes Barthes' seeming unconcern for language in his late work to be a sign of his movement toward phenomenology, suggesting that 'The "being" of literature [...] has to be more phenomenological than linguistic'. Nicholas O. Pagan, 'Barthes the Phenomenologist and the Being of Literature', *Mosaic*, 52.1 (2019), 29. Adam Watt, also dealing with the *Journal de deuil*, argues that 'Proust's life and his fiction offer crutches to Barthes as he comes to terms with his loss'. Adam Watt, 'Reading Proust in Barthes's *Journal de Deuil*' , *Nottingham French Studies*, 53.1 (2014), 105. This is just a small selection of articles on Barthes' late work, but it is nevertheless telling that, while each one has a different focus, they each seem to connect Barthes' late work with his 'turn' toward the personal, and show that this turn propelled his thought into new dimensions that would not otherwise have been possible.

[5] Dispelling the rumour that he is in the process of actually writing a novel, or that he was even planning to write a novel at all, Barthes states: 'here Wanting-to-Write

relates to the Novel [...] I've even heard it said (the path rumors usually take) that I'm writing one, which isn't true; if it were, I clearly wouldn't be in a position to propose a lecture course on its preparation: writing requires secrecy [*le Vouloir-Écrire dont je parle ici, c'est celui du Roman [...] J'ajoute que j'ai entendu dire (trajet coutumier de la rumeur) que j'étais en train d'écrire un roman, ce qui est rigoureusement faux; car si cela était, si j'étais déjà dans l'écrire-un-roman, je ne pourrais évidemment pas proposer un cours sur sa préparation, parce que, tout simplement, écrire a besoin de clandestinité*]' (p. 11; p. 35). Two sessions later, with reference to his use of 'my' ('"my" haiku', '"my" novel', etc.), Barthes clarifies: '"*My*" doesn't refer, or doesn't *ultimately* refer, to an egotism, a narcissism (objections that, so I'm told, have been made of this course) but to a Method *[« Mon » ne renvoie pas, ou ne renvoie pas finalement, à un égotisme ou un narcissisme (ce n'est pas la même chose – reproches faits parfois, paraît-il, à ce cours)]'* (p. 23; pp. 58-59).

[6] Jonathan Culler, 'Preparing the Novel: Spiralling Back', *Paragraph*, 31.1 (March 2008), 111; emphasis added.

[7] Culler, 'Preparing the Novel', 114.

[8] Lucy O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 53.

[9] O'Meara, *Roland Barthes*, p. 2.

[10] O'Meara, *Roland Barthes*, pp. 2-3.

[11] Roland Barthes, *Prétexte Roland Barthes: colloque de Cerisy* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1978), p. 366; translation mine.

[12] O'Meara, *Roland Barthes*, p. 167.

[13] Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 177; *Préparation*, p. 328; emphasis added.

[14] Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 266, note 14; *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 330, note 1.

[15] Roland Barthes, 'Proust Round Table', in Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, trans. by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, ed. by David Lapoujade (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2006), p. 29; 'Table ronde sur Proust', in Gilles Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous: Textes et entretiens 1975-1995* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2003), p. 29.

[16] Steven Ungar, 'Barthes via Proust: Circular Memories', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 22.1 (spring 1982), 10.

[17] Roland Barthes, '*Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure . . .* ', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 283; '« Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure »', in *OC* V, p. 464.

[18] Barthes, '*Longtemps*', p. 277; '« Longtemps »', in *OC* V, p. 459.

[19] As O'Meara writes: 'There is a willed provocativeness about Barthes's identification with Proust, despite the disclaimer that this is not a preening comparison of himself

to the great novelist. The provocativeness inheres in identifying, as Barthes claims, with "Marcel" rather than with "Proust": "marcellisme" is a wilful abandonment to a *personal* investment in literature and a quasi-biographical interest in the compositional dilemmas of the writer' (*Roland Barthes*, pp. 74-75).

[20] For a discussion of the intransitive nature of this writing and this desire to write, see Jacob Bittner's 'Roland Barthes and the Literary Absolute: The Conditions of the Necessity to Write Intransitively', *Barthes Studies*, 3 (2017), 2-24. Available at: http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/barthes/files/2017/11/BITTNER-Roland-Barthes-and-the-Literary-Absolute.pdf (accessed 29 January 2021). It is also worth noting that Barthes' investment in writing that has no goal, or whose goal is in permanent abeyance, is an indicator that he takes Kant's aesthetics seriously.

[21] My use here of 'circulation', rather than 'influence', is informed by Baldwin's acknowledgment that 'Barthes himself was not keen on "influence"', and that, for Barthes, 'the notion of circulation [...] is more accurate than that of influence'. Thomas Baldwin, *Roland Barthes: The Proust Variations* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), p. 17.

[22] Baldwin, *Roland Barthes*, p. 5. Baldwin is of course referring here to Barthes' distinction between the *studium* and the *punctum* in *La Chambre claire* [*Camera Lucida*]. Baldwin's point is that, rather than analysing the structure of the *Recherche*, or elaborating a 'theory' of the text, Barthes engages with Proust in what is perhaps a more direct way, a way that draws upon his experience and that reveals how Proust's writing *punctures* or *pricks* him. As he writes in the context of photography, 'A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me) [*Le punctum d'une photo, c'est ce hasard qui, en elle, me point (mais aussi me meurtrit, me poigne*)].' Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 27; *OC* V, p. 809.

[23] Barthes, 'Proust Round Table', p. 30; 'Table ronde sur Proust', p. 30.

[24] Barthes, 'Proust Round Table', p. 53; 'Table ronde sur Proust', p. 49. Barthes says this while likening the idea of variation in Proust to variation in music; his statement reads as follows: 'the Proustian text becomes, little by little, through the sort of Heracliteanism that critics are caught up in, a type of sheet music full of holes with which one will be able to operate variations instead of performing them [*le texte proustien deviendrait peu à peu, par l'espèce d'héraclitéisme qui saisit la critique, une espèce de partition pleine de trous sur laquelle effectivement on pourra non pas exécuter, mais opérer des variations*]'.

[25] Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, p. 242; *Le Livre à venir*, p. 331.

[26] Barthes, 'Proust Round Table', p. 29-30; 'Table ronde sur Proust', p. 29-30.

[27] Baldwin, *Roland Barthes*, p. 1. Two examples of this 'brand' from the Anglophone world immediately come to mind. The first example is from the world of American television, *The Sopranos* in particular. In a therapy session, Tony Soprano has an

insight about a forgotten or repressed childhood memory, arrived at only after his therapist urges him to consider the possible associations between capicola – which at this point is linked to his fainting spell – and his father. His therapist Dr. Melfi, in response to his skepticism of such connections, tells him, with reference to Proust, how 'that one bite [of the madeleine] unleashed a tide of memories of his childhood, and ultimately of his entire life'. The second example, more concrete, comes from the world of ubiquitous chain dining establishments: Starbucks sells madeleines. Both of these examples, of course, suggest that a large part of the 'Proust brand' has to do with Proustian involuntary memory (and, in these two cases, with the madeleine passage in particular, the famous opening scene of the *Recherche*).

[28] Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 131; *Préparation*, p. 242.

[29] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 434.

[30] Ungar points to this necessity as early as 1982: 'Neither Barthes read via Proust nor Proust read within Barthes, but an ongoing interplay between the two' ('Barthes via Proust', 9).

[31] Baldwin, *Roland Barthes*, p. 1.

[32] Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, 3 vols, (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), vol. II, p. 174.

[33] Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), vol. II, p. 469.

[34] Though it is beyond the scope of this essay, an exploration of the implications of each kind of intoxication would be worth undertaking.

[35] One cannot mention weather in Proust without referring to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *The Weather in Proust*, ed. by Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[36] Proust, *Remembrance*, vol. 3, p. 73; *Recherche*, vol. III, p. 586. Of particular interest in connection with this are the narrator's various references to barometers, which signal the importance of weather and atmosphere to his affective states. With reference to Barthes' discussion of haiku and weather in an early session of the *Préparation* course, O'Meara notes: 'The apparently banal question of the weather becomes fundamental to our non-dualistic sense of self' (*Roland Barthes*, p. 147).

[37] For a reading of one such instance where the narrator's aesthetic experience is in direct conversation with the atmosphere, see my '"*Pour cet état si particulier*": Disinterest and the Impersonal Resonance of Aesthetic Experience', *SubStance*, 49.3 (2020): 19-36.

[38] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 11; *OC* IV, p. 224.

[39] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 18; *OC* IV, p. 229. The idea of disrespecting the whole comes from Nietzsche; see Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche et la philosophie* [*Nietzsche and Philosophy*], where Nietzsche's call to lose respect for the whole is

quoted. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 22; *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), p. 26. For Barthes, this sentiment returns in *Le Neutre*, when he makes a caveat about his treatment of certain subjects in response to a student's letter: *'when I cite from Buddhism or from Skepticism, you must not believe me: I am outside mastery, I have no mastery whatsoever, and, to make it clear, I have no other choice than (Nietzsche) to "lose respect for the whole"* [*quand je cite du bouddhisme ou du scepticisme, il ne faut pas me croire: je suis hors maîtrise, je n'ai aucune maîtrise, et, pour bien le signifier, il me faut bien (Nietzsche) « ne pas respecter le tout* »]'. Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. by Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 64; *Le Neutre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), p. 97.

[40] Culler, 'Preparing the Novel', 118.

[41] Malcolm Bowie, 'Barthes on Proust', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14.2 (fall 2001), 513.

[42] Joseph Tanke, 'Communicability Without Communication: Kant and Proust on Aesthetic Pleasure', *Diacritics*, 45.1 (2017), 78.

[43] In the *Préparation*, Barthes says: 'Haiku: a sign that has no meaning *[[L]e haïku ce serait peut-être un signe qui n'a pas de sens*]' (p. 73; p. 164). A few sessions later, and with specific reference to Proust, Barthes notes: 'as in the haiku, what's at stake or staged is the "*That's it*", the *Setting a Bell Ringing* [*comme dans le haiku [...] c'est que ce qui est en cause, ou en scène, c'est le « C'est ça », c'est le Tilt*]' (p. 104; p. 224). Here, the haiku (and its correlate in Barthes' fantasy of the novel) – the '*That's it*' in particular – would seem to embody the moment of aesthetic experience, in the sense that it depicts a moment with nothing beyond or outside of it, or at least with no thought to what is beyond or outside of it. Within a text itself, this is a flash of affect before there is any chance to bring it under the umbrella of a larger narrative trajectory. These flashes would be moments that do not advance the plot, per se, and would thus correspond to a mode of reading that is attentive primarily to momentary intensities. Again, this evokes Barthes' discussion of the *punctum*, which 'will disturb the *studium* [*vient déranger le studium*]' which, in turn, is that by which, culturally, 'I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions [*je participe aux figures, aux mines, aux gestes, aux décors, aux actions*]' (*Camera Obscura*, pp. 26-27; *OC* V, p. 809).

[44] Proust, *Remembrance*, vol. II, p. 174.

[45] Proust, *Recherche*, vol. II, p. 469.

[46] In general, and also with particular reference to Barthes' critical and pedagogical ethics, this attention to subjective perception should not be taken as solipsistic. On the contrary, as O'Meara argues with reference to what she calls Barthes' 'deliberately contingent discourse', 'Barthes believes the overt assumption of subjectivity in one's

discourse is vital. The problem is the *masking* of personal interest under a mendaciously "objective" discourse' (*Roland Barthes*, p. 2, p. 92).

[47] Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 136; *Préparation*, pp. 252-53.

[48] See O'Meara, *Roland Barthes*, p. 3. In this capacity, as she writes, this approach *'is aesthetic'* (p. 3; emphasis added).

[49] Barthes, *The Neutral*, p. 98; *Le Neutre*, p. 135.

[50] Proust, *Remembrance*, vol. II, pp. 174-75.

[51] Proust, *Recherche*, vol. II, pp. 469-70.

[52] One other notable example of this comes in *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* [*Within a Budding Grove*], when the narrator becomes intoxicated during a train ride, at least partly to alleviate his anxieties about being separated from his mother. See *Remembrance*, vol. I, pp. 697-702; *Recherche*, vol. II, pp. 7-14.

[53] Proust, *Remembrance*, vol. II, p. 174; *Recherche*, vol. II, p. 469. For a reading of the immediately preceding passage, see my forthcoming chapter '"*Peut-être aurais-je dû penser*": Research and Event in Proust', in *Literature and Event: Twenty-First Century Reformulations*, ed. by Mantra Mukim and Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 2021).

[54] I emphasise this because, in my reading, it heightens the stakes of the unprecedented nature of the narrator's encounter with the aesthetic. If the narrator is markedly a creature of habit, and if aesthetic experience is decidedly contrary to habit, it does not follow that a relaxation of habit is sufficient for an aesthetic experience to occur. For the narrator to have an aesthetic experience *despite* his habit, I would argue, is all the more testament to the 'impossibility', as it were, of the aesthetic – in other words, the fact that it is untethered to categories, concepts, and objects, but also to subjective states. This, in part, is what gives value to Barthes' ethics of reading, since it introduces a dimension of his own singular experience into the treatment of the text at hand – a dimension that cannot be anticipated or said to correspond to anything whatsoever, a dimension that is furthermore not simply 'subjective'.

[55] For a careful explication of the place of 'mereness' in Kant's third *Critique*, see Rodolphe Gasché, *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant's Aesthetics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), especially the third chapter, 'On Mere Form'.

[56] D. A. Miller notes Barthes' shift from systematic analysis to the later concern with 'effects whose smallness, flatness even, makes precisely for their value: an incident dislodged from the teleology of plot; a gesture excised from the consistency of character; a turn of phrase set to drift far beyond the practical exigencies of information or function'. D. A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 48. In this context, see also Rudolphus Teeuwen, '"What's Fragile Is Always New": The Truth of Literature in Roland Barthes' *The Preparation of the Novel*' , *symploke*, 28.1-2 (2020): 207-23.

[57] Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 25; *Préparation*, p. 64.
[58] See Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 7; *Préparation*, pp. 24-25.

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