# Beyond the Fragment in

# The Preparation of the Novel:

# Exploring the Subtle Relationship Between Rhapsodic and Patchwork

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From his first book, Writing Degree Zero, Barthes tended to write in fragments, a practice that reached its apogee in his works of the 1970s. He even thematized and theorized this approach using the terms 'patchwork' and 'rhapsodic'. For a long time, these two words were considered almost synonymous. However, in his 1978 lecture, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', which served as the prelude to the courses The Preparation of the Novel, Barthes explicitly contrasted the two. Until his passing, he consistently maintained his opposition as evidenced by his posthumous work, Marcel Proust, Mélanges. This raises the question of why Barthes made this abrupt change.

The dream of the novel occupied a central place in Barthes's last years. Writing toward the novel and its thematization gave its title to his 1978–1980 courses at the Collège de France, *La Préparation du roman (The Preparation of the Novel)*. Specifically, there are two unexplored, fascinating, and enigmatic themes: 'the preparation' and 'the novel'. Barthes spent two years gradually approaching what he called the novel, examining literature, photography, cinema, and even painting. Proust, with his work *À la recherche du temps perdu (In Search of Lost Time*), undoubtedly played a crucial role in the project's vast corpus of references since Barthes's commentary on Proust touched on precisely these two central themes. It is in his reflections on how Proust produced his masterpiece that Barthes clarified the sense in which his 'preparation of the novel' is to be understood.

Perhaps wanting to write a Novel (or *the* Novel? or *my* Novel?) is to invade, to inhabit a practice of *domestic* writing (like haiku, which is also domestic writing, the writing of the household, of everyday life). I remember that Proust himself compared the novel that's being written to a dress that the seamstress cuts, assembles, threads, in a word *prepare*: it is in this sense that the Preparation of the Novel should be understood, as fifty years ago we said the preparation of a dress.<sup>1</sup>

This unique technique of Proust's writing, which he himself saw as akin to sewing a dress, was described by Barthes as 'rhapsodic' (le rhapsodique<sup>2</sup>).

## Rhapsodic as Patchwork

In the works that preceded The Preparation of the Novel, the notion of the rhapsodic was much less common and representative than concepts such as 'degree zero', 'myth', 'writing', or 'neutral', but it is not entirely unfamiliar to those well-versed in Barthes's thought. The rhapsodic had already appeared in his seminar on rhetoric, where Barthes discussed a rhetorical exercise known as *declamatio*. This exercise involved a kind of improvisation in which the discourse, 'having no persuasive goal but being purely decorative, is destructured, atomized into a loose series of brilliant fragments, juxtaposed according to a rhapsodic model'.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the term refers to a way of combining fragments without order.

Barthes's interest in the rhapsodic remained unwavering throughout his life. He thematized this term in his book *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, published in June 1971. In 'Sade II', a part of this work, Barthes named a fragment 'Rhapsody' and said:

there is a rhapsodic structure of narrative, especially proper to the picaresque novel (and perhaps to the Proustian novel). To recount, here, does not consist in developing a story and then untangling it, adhering to an infinitely organic model (to be born, to live, to die), i.e., to subject the series of episodes to a natural (or logical) order,

which becomes the meaning imposed by 'Fate' on every life, every journey, but in purely and simply juxtaposing iterative and mobile fragments: then the continuum is merely a series of bits and pieces, a baroque fabric of odds and ends ... the rhapsodic (Sadian) novel has no *meaning* or *direction*, nothing compels it to progress, develop, end.<sup>4</sup>

For Barthes, the rhapsodic is a baroque assembly of fragments without direction, and Proust's and Sade's novels align with this definition due to their disordered combination. Additionally, this quotation foreshadows Barthes's later work, as he would go on to analyse the rhapsodic structure of the *Search* in his course at the Collège de France.

It is worth noting that the rhapsodic also appears in the new foreword Barthes wrote for the republication of his *Critical Essays* in September of that same year. We should remember that by 1971, the semiology movement had passed its peak, and studies of signs had shifted direction. Barthes made clever use of the rhapsodic to defend his work, which he stated, 'belongs to the rise of semiology'.<sup>5</sup> He wrote:

First of all, at the level of the book itself, the plural is always here: all these texts are polysemic (as was the author during this period – 1954–1964 – when he was engaged at once in literary analysis, the outline of a semiological science and the defence of Brechtian art theory) and the assembly of them is rhapsodic: from the start, there was no intention for a general sense, no desire to assume an intellectual 'destiny': only the splinters of a progressive work, often obscure to itself.<sup>6</sup>

This rhapsodic assemblage allows for the establishment of a tension between the discontinuity of the diverse texts and the continuity that unites them under the name of structuralism. As Mathieu Messager observes in his analysis of this book, 'Barthes pursues in a fragmentary way the history of literature as a signifier system that he calls for'. The rhapsodic results in a kind of combination of heterogeneous texts, or, if you prefer, a juxtaposition without order. It is therefore no coincidence that this term reappears in a crucial fragment of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Here we encounter another important term that merits analysis:

#### the patchwork.

Self-commentary? What a bore! I had no other solution than to *rewrite* myself – at a distance, a great distance – here and now: to add to the books, to the themes, to the memories, to the texts, another utterance, without my ever knowing whether it is about my past or my present that I am speaking. Whereby I cast over the written work, over the past body and the past corpus, barely brushing against it, a kind of patchwork, a rhapsodic quilt consisting of stitched squares. Far from reaching the core of the matter, I remain on the surface, for this time it is a matter of 'myself' (of the Ego); reaching the core, depth, profundity, belongs to others.<sup>8</sup>

This passage clearly encapsulates how this book was formed: through rewriting and adding. These were typical ways for Barthes to combine his fragmentary texts. Indeed, his major works of the 1970s – The Pleasure of the Text, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse: Fragments, – all appeared as compositions of fragments. For each of them, Barthes deliberately disrupted the original order in which they were written; he sought to avoid a linear progression by adopting a more arbitrary combination. We can also mention 'Variations sur l'écriture' (Variations on Writing), a text that Carlo Ossola's research revealed was originally intended for publication as a book, and which, too, is divided, reorganized and combined in a non-linear order, sharing the same structure as The Pleasure of the Text: there is 'a same subdivision into keyword headings, texts developed in the form of short paragraphs, arranged by alphabetical order'. In this sense, this work, which focuses on the history of writing, retains a radical aspect of fragmentation.

When Barthes treated his books as patchwork, these works rejected all literary genres in the strict sense, as well as all prescribed literary forms, and moved towards heterogeneous coexistence. The pinnacle of the patchwork approach is evident in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*: cards, drawings, photos, musical scores, autographs, postcards, caricatures, fragments of textbook, and more are combined in a way that follows no rules. If *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* is considered a quasi-autobiography, the most remarkable difference between this work and the

conventional autobiography is that Barthes's book denies the unity typically established by the latter. Mathieu Messager captures this distinction well:

Like a kaleidoscope, Roland Barthes's portrait is deformed in the process of being recomposed, forcing the reader to take a step back, not only from his reading habits, but also from his convictions about the 'truth' of the autobiographical subject.<sup>11</sup>

For Barthes, patchwork has long been synonymous with rhapsodic, a connection evident in his homage to Benveniste, in his 1976–1977 course 'Comment vivre ensemble' (How to Live Together) and in his 1977–1978 course 'Le Neutre' (The Neutral). 12 There is even a trace of the two as synonyms in a card that Barthes prepared for his courses 'The Preparation of the Novel'. 13 Furthermore, due to the prominence of the fragment quoted from *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, the term 'patchwork' has become more widely recognized than 'rhapsodic'. Many researchers, in analysing the fragmentary nature of Barthes's work, have employed the term 'patchwork' to describe his approach. 14

These facts inevitably led us to believe that patchwork would also reappear and play an important role in Barthes's lectures on the preparation of the novel and in the novel he anticipated. The reality, however, is shocking: by 1978, Barthes revisited the term 'patchwork' only to contrast it with 'rhapsodic' and diminish its value in favour of the latter.

## Rhapsodic versus Patchwork

Let's revisit the pivotal moment when the use of these two words shifted. On 19 October 1978, Barthes delivered a lecture entitled 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' at the Collège de France, which 'condensed into a few striking figures the issues at stake in the course to come'. <sup>15</sup> In this lecture, Barthes discussed a well-known motif from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, where the author used the metaphor of sewing a dress to describe his writing process.

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At the end of the seventh volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, which is also the last volume, in other words, at the end of the end, the narrator reviews or/and opens his own writing, confessing that he wants to write a great book, a cosmic book encompassing everything, a 'Livre' (the Book) in Mallarmé's sense. But he knows full well that such a desire for totality is impossible, so he laments:

And in these great books, there are some parts that have only had time to be sketched out, and which will probably never be finished, because of the very magnitude of the architect's plan. How many great cathedrals remain unfinished!<sup>16</sup>

To build a great cathedral, what an impossible utopian project! A fantasy cannot be open at all. Like a great cathedral, a great book is difficult to complete. For Proust, it seems that his own writing is not such a great work, but rather a kind of sewing, like what Françoise, his maid, does.

I would work near her, and almost like her (at least as she used to do: she was so old now, she could hardly see), because, by pinning a supplementary leaf here, I would make my book, I can't say ambitiously like a cathedral, but simply like a dress. When I didn't have all my pieces of paper with me, my 'papieroles', as Françoise called them, and when I just didn't have the one I needed, Françoise would understand my nervousness, she always said she couldn't sew if she didn't have the right number of thread and the right buttons. And because, by living my life, she had developed a kind of instinctive understanding of literary work, more precise than that of many intelligent people, still more so than that of stupid people.<sup>17</sup>

Proust likens his work to his maid sewing a dress, which easily makes us think about the concept of 'text' that Barthes promoted in the 1970s, given its close association with the idea of 'textile'. In this sense, it is not surprising that Barthes shows interest in Proust's motif of 'sewing a dress'. What is unexpected, however, is that Barthes, while discussing Proust's method of writing, suddenly contrasts rhapsodic and patchwork:

The structure of this work will be, strictly speaking, *rhapsodic*, i.e.

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(etymologically), *sewn*; moreover, this is a Proustian metaphor: the work is produced like a gown; the rhapsodic text implies an original art, like that of the couturiere: pieces, fragments are subject to certain correspondences, arrangements, reappearances: a dress is not a patchwork, any more than is *A la Recherche du temps perdu*.<sup>18</sup>

Barthes characterizes Proust's masterpiece as rhapsodic. In etymology, the word 'rhapsodic', originating from the ancient Greek  $\dot{\rho}\dot{\alpha}\pi\tau\omega$  'sew', and  $\dot{\omega}\delta\dot{\eta}$  'song', literally means 'sewing of songs'. In this sense, the word is closely related to sewing. However, a simple etymological analysis is not enough. The association with sewing doesn't allow us to distinguish rhapsodic from patchwork, since the definition of patchwork, both in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* and in the *Trésor de la langue française*, also refers to something linked to the textile, to the combination of fragmentary fabric. We believe it is the proximity of the general definitions of the two words that makes them appear as synonyms in Barthes's earlier work. So, we must go back to Barthes's text to understand the distinction between them. Allow us to quote three of the most relevant extracts from *The Preparation of the Novel*:

As you know, Rhapsodic in Greek *rhaptéin* means to sew. So it's what's sewn, it's pieces that are sewn together, a bit like a patchwork but probably more organised in the sense that a dress is not only a patchwork (and you'll remember that Proust, at the end of his work, wanting to give the theory, the theory of literature, explains that the Work, the literary work, must be made as by a Seamstress, it's the metaphor of the seamstress). So evidently the Rhapsodic distances the Object, magnifies the Tendency and magnifies the *Writing*.<sup>19</sup>

[T]he Rhapsodic (the origin of the Greek word is *rhaptein*, which means 'to sew', so the rhapsody is a whole of various pieces that are 'sewn together, it's a bit like a patchwork').<sup>20</sup>

Last year, an auditor quite rightly pointed out to me that *In Search* of *Lost Time* was in fact a fabric of fragments, but there is also an *architecture* (in the musical sense) in the *Search*, which is not of the order of the plan, but of the order of the return, of the marcottage:

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a return *foreseen* by Proust (and at that moment this book of fragments becomes 'a book, architectural and *premeditated*').<sup>21</sup>

In the first two extracts, the patchwork is presented alongside 'rhapsodic', but the expression 'a bit like' suggests there are nuanced differences between these two terms. Precisely, Barthes does not change the definition of the patchwork, but he thinks that the rhapsodic is more organised, more oriented than the patchwork, that there is a motif and an end (a dress) in the rhapsodic. And if we remember that the *Search* is rhapsodic, then the third extract explains unreservedly what rhapsodic means. It is an ordered assembly of pieces that transforms a fragmented text into an architectural and premeditated book, that turns the fragments into a Mallarméan Book.

The publication of *Marcel Proust, Mélanges* highlights an intriguing detail: A card included in the book reveals that the terms 'patchwork' and 'rhapsodic' were still considered synonymous during a certain period when Barthes was reflecting on Proust's work. In the card no. 97, Barthes wrote:

Rhapsodic

RTP I, start

Call the fabric of the Blocks – proper to the Proustian way: i.e., the un-narrative (for example: I, 23)

= *Rhapsodic* Or Patchwork.

Make the theory of the Rhapsodic (it's better than 'Discontinu').

Link it to the Epic, Brecht?<sup>22</sup>

This card comes from Barthes's Grand fichier (large filing system). In Bernard Comment's words, this system is 'the matrix of his writing, of his books, of his teaching'. <sup>23</sup> In essence, Barthes's article 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' and his courses on the preparation of the novel at the Collège de France are grounded in this filing system. This brutal mutation of these two words, rhapsodic and patchwork, is therefore part of his analysis of Proust. This abrupt change prompts a question: what does this shift signify? We propose that the return of the 'work' in Barthes's

last years is closely linked to this opposition, if not provokes it.

### Return of the Work

The notion of 'text' was central to Barthes's thinking in the 1970s, when he replaced the notion of 'work' with this term. In our opinion, the essence of the opposition between the work and the text lies in the question of structure and organisation. As the opposition between patchwork and rhapsodic shows, patchwork is an assembly of fragments of textile without architecture. This means that patchwork has an important property: it completely preserves the heterogeneity of the fragments, there is no organisation. And we can relate the patchwork to the text because the text is also inorganic:

The metaphor of the Text is here again detached from the metaphor of the work; the latter refers to the image of an *organism* which grows by vital expansion, by 'development' (a significantly ambiguous word: biological and rhetorical); the metaphor of the Text is that of the *network*; if the Text expands, it is by the effect of a combinative operation, of a systematics (an image, moreover, close to the views of contemporary biology concerning the living being); no vital 'respect' is therefore due to the Text: it can be *broken*.<sup>24</sup>

In the contrast between the work and the text, the work has an organist form, the image of an organism logically presupposes finitude from an external point of view; the text, which has no frontier, is infinitely open to the outside, since its form is inorganic, which logically presupposes the possibility of a juxtaposition of heterogeneities.

In his 1971 article, 'From Work to Text', Barthes contrasted the work with the text, showing a clear preference for the latter. *The Pleasure of the Text* is a continuation of this re-evaluation of multiple senses. In *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, Barthes declared that almost all his writing, from his earliest texts onwards, was fragmentary short writing.<sup>25</sup> This type of writing consists in rejecting the totality to maintain a kind of heterogeneity. This characteristic even extends to Barthes's painting:

Never having done more in the way of painting than some 'tachiste' daubing, I decide to begin a patient and regular apprenticeship in drawing; I try to copy a Persian composition of the seventeenth century ('Nobleman Hunting'); irresistibly, instead of trying to represent the proportions, organization, and structure, I copy and naïvely connect detail to detail; whence unexpected 'conclusions': the horseman's leg turns out to be perched right on top of the horse's breastplate, etc. In other words, I proceed by addition, not by sketch; I have the antecedent (initial) taste for the detail, the fragment, the *rush*, and the incapacity to lead it toward a 'composition': I cannot reproduce 'the masses'.<sup>26</sup>

We need to remember that his amateur abstract painting was also a kind of text, so this passage also implies that he was aware of the advantages and limitations of the text. Obviously, at this time, he still preferred the text, the patchwork, and the fragments, but to some extent, the opposition between the work and the text prepared the way for the return of the work. It was in this contrast that he realized that fragmentary writing could not lead to a composition, to an organisation.

If we consider *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* as his first novel, following Barthes's statement that 'It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel', <sup>27</sup> and *Camera Lucida* as his second novel, according to his words in the last session of *The Preparation of the Novel*, <sup>28</sup> we must point out an important difference between the two 'novels'. The first novel is characterized by fragmentation and disorder in its writing style, whereas the second, despite also being composed of fragments, exhibits a clear structure: the text follows a dialectical progression from light to darkness, spanning from day to night. <sup>29</sup> The crucial difference between the two novels lies in the presence or absence of an organisation. It is therefore not surprising that the work, as an organism, has returned.

The resurgence of the work is most clearly seen in *The Preparation of the Novel*, whose two subtitles are 'From Life to the Work' and 'The Work as Will'. We no longer see the emphasis on the text. In addition, we can find such changes in Barthes's cards devoted to Proust. For example, in card no. 9:

History of the work ≠ history of the Text (pre-text, etc.)

(I say 'work' – and not 'text', contrary to a recent fashion, in which, in fact, I participated).<sup>30</sup>

From 1977 onwards, Barthes declared that he wanted a work, a novel with structure, 'a real novel, the kind we read in the evening'. This new idea for the novel was deeply influenced by his mother's illness and death, and Barthes sought to harness the power of the novel to confront his depression and to express his enduring love for her. When Barthes declared his project for the novel, he made it clear that such a novel has structure and themes; it is a 'tenacious desire to paint those we love'. He understands that there is a conflict between what he is going to do and what he has done in the past. Specifically, it's the conflict between the first novel as an assembly of fragments (patchwork) and the second novel, which has an organisation and subjects. Let's quote his words:

The problem of the fragment then arises in a way that is maybe heartbreaking, but at the same time very exciting, because it is very possible that I will then be obliged to reject the current idol of my writing, which is the fragment.<sup>33</sup>

Barthes's desire to write a novel led him toward a notion of totality, even as he remained deeply committed to the fragmentary nature of his previous work. He grappled with the tension between the text and the work, as well as between the diary and the novel, and between the Album and the Book. It is in this context that the opposition between the rhapsodic and the patchwork is proposed, the former absorbing and overcoming the latter, implying a simultaneous grasp of structure and fragmentation.

## From the Journal to the Novel

For Barthes, Proust's novel was a kind of model for the novel he wanted to write. In some of his cards devoted to Proust, we can see that Barthes often compared Proust's writing with his own writing project. The question,

then, is how to imitate according to Proust, and what is the significance of Proust's novel?

In 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', Barthes noted at the outset that this lecture was not just about Proust, but rather about 'Proust and I'. <sup>34</sup> He emphasised that his link with Proust lay in 'an association of practice'. <sup>35</sup> What, then, was the particularity of this practice? Barthes provided a direct answer: the 'Search ... is the narrative of a desire to write'. <sup>36</sup> Moreover, Barthes identified this desire to write not only within Proust's novel, but also in Proust's practice of writing itself. He therefore paid close attention to various biographies of Proust. As seen in Marcel Proust, Mélanges, Barthes referred to the biographies of Proust written respectively by the following biographers: Henri Bonnet, Georges Cattaui, Léon Pierre-Quint, Georges D. Painter.

Of these four biographies, Georges Painter's is probably the most important for Barthes. Barthes explored Proust's background and way of life through Painter's book, treating this biography as if it was Proust's own writing. In his 1966 essay 'Les vies parallèles', Barthes highly praised Painter, whose work also served as an essential reference in *Mourning Diary* (*Journal de deuil*) and *The Preparation of the Novel*. He even remarked that Painter's biography is like the last volume of the *Search*.<sup>37</sup>

For Barthes, at first sight, Proust's life is 'the life of a son of a worldly, idle, wealthy family'. From this perspective, the heroic deeds, dramatic conflicts, and tragedies typical of a conventional biography are absent in Proust's story. What emerges from Painter's biography is the image of a literature amateur who lacked self-confidence and was hesitant to act. Barthes saw this as a defining characteristic of the *Search*. The title 'Les vies parallèles', borrowed from Plutarch, reflects the parallel between the life of the narrator in the *Search* and Proust's life as depicted in Painter's biography. The key insight is not to trace the origins of the novel through Proust's life but to recognize that Proust appears to have created two works: his life and his *Search*. This parallel is drawn by the repeated pauses and changes in Proust's life and by the indecision in his writing.

Such indecision manifests as an ambiguity of literary genre. Barthes noted that 'In Search of Lost Time was preceded by many writings: a book, translations, articles'.<sup>39</sup> In 1909, Proust faced a crucial period of hesitation, with two possible paths before him: one leading to the essay or criticism, and the other to the novel. Initially, Proust indented to write a critique

titled Contre Sainte-Beuve to refute Sainte-Beuve's theory.

However, this project was never carried out, partly for a real reason, since the Figaro rejected the text, and partly for the fact that from the outset, his writing was mixed: Proust was not content to write simple criticism, but he was also writing romanesque fragments for this text.<sup>40</sup> After that, Proust devoted himself entirely to the writing of the *Search*. Finally, this book successfully combines essay and novel in an unclassifiable literary genre. It is at this point that Barthes first proposed the opposition between rhapsodic and patchwork, and he believes that Proust's *Search* is a rhapsodic text.<sup>41</sup>

Barthes placed significant emphasis on the genetic studies of the *Search*, and frequently explored the writing processes of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and the *Search*. Much of what Barthes transcribed and summarized in his cards focuses on the merging and fusion of these two works. At the same time, Barthes compared his own writing and project with Proust's ambiguity. In cards no. 19 and no. 19 bis:

19
(Bonnet)
In fact, what should I draw from all this dated history of the work?

1. Apart from *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, there is only one work, the *Contre Sainte-Beuve* already being the *In Search of Lost Time*. Indeterminacy, interferences, and confusion between them. It's as if I had two or three projects, various notes that I 'try' in one or the other, ...<sup>42</sup>

19 bis but one day, I will merge it all together and it will work out.<sup>43</sup>

'It's as if I had two or three projects, various notes that I 'try' in one or the other, but one day, I will merge it all together and it will work out.' This quote captures our attention. We know that one of the main parts of the novel Barthes wanted to write consists of several diary texts. As Éric Marty says in his introduction, the three diaries, 'Incidents, au Maroc naguère...', 'Soirées de Paris' and 'Journal de deuil', they are the texts that

have been written for Barthes's novel project, 'Vita Nova'.<sup>44</sup> In other words, somewhat analogously to Proust, what are not novels constitute a novel: for Proust, it is the dialectical relationship between the essay and the novel that creates the *Search*; and for Barthes, it is these diaries that constitute his novel to come.

Barthes frequently referenced André Gide's *Journal*, stating, 'Gide is my original language, my *Ursuppe*, my literary soup.'<sup>45</sup> He acknowledged that he assembled fragments in a style reminiscent of Gide. Barthes's body of work includes numerous diaries, such as the three previously mentioned – 'Incidents', 'Au Maroc naguère...', and *Journal de deuil* – as well as *Carnets du voyage en Chine* and 'Délibération'. In the Fonds Roland Barthes at the BnF, there are additional unpublished diaries and notebooks. Moreover, his paintings, many of which are meticulously dated, are closely connected to this practice of daily writing.<sup>46</sup>

Barthes never abandoned the journal, a manner of writing in which words are recorded in a disordered form without a specific end in mind. This style lacks depth and makes no Platonic claims to the truth. What are noted in the diary are the immediate phenomena of everyday life, moments in which interpretation has yet to occur. Barthes referred to this as signifiance, i.e., where no definite meaning or signified emerges, as everything remains suspended. In this sense, we can say that this practice of writing is in principle consistent with the patchwork, which is an assembly of fragments without structure or organisation.

However, a question arises: is the published diary or the diary awaiting publication also without structure or purpose? Barthes himself had doubts about this. If we examine his work closely, we can see that Barthes was always cautious about the genre of the diary. In *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, he noted that 'the regular practice of the fragment' tends to slip into the 'journal', <sup>47</sup> and he followed this observation with some self-criticism:

Yet the (autobiographical) 'journal' is, nowadays, discredited. Change partners: in the sixteenth century, when they were beginning to be written, without repugnance they were called a *diary: diarrhea* ...

Production of my fragments. Contemplation of my fragments

(correction, polishing, etc.). Contemplation of my scraps (narcissism).<sup>48</sup>

The completed journal cannot be rid of narcissism, which made Barthes deeply suspicious of the diary as a form. On the one hand, the diary, as an assemblage of fragments, is the immediate outcome of the daily writing. On the other hand, as the diary takes shape, it begins to transform into a work.

For Barthes, writing a journal gave rise to what he described as a 'diary disease: an insoluble doubt as to the value of what one writes in it'. <sup>49</sup> This doubt stemmed from the fact that there were three distinct phases in the practice of diary writing, each of which evoked entirely different feelings in him.

Initially, when I write the (daily) entry, I experience a certain pleasure: this is simple, this is easy. Don't worry about finding something to say: the raw material is right here, right now; a kind of surface mine [...] Then comes the second phase, very soon after the first (for instance, if I reread today what I wrote yesterday), and it makes a bad impression: the text doesn't hold up, like some sort of delicate foodstuff which 'turns', spoils, becomes unappetizing from one day to the next; I note with discouragement the artifice of 'sincerity', the artistic mediocrity of the 'spontaneous'; worse still: I am disgusted and irritated to find a 'pose' I certainly hadn't intended: in a journal situation, and precisely because it doesn't 'work' doesn't get transformed by the action of work -I is a poseur: a matter of effect, not of intention, the whole difficulty of literature is here. Very soon, continuing my reperusal, I get tired of these verbless sentences [...] In a third phase, if I reread my journal pages several months, several years after having written them, though my doubt hasn't dissipated, I experience a certain pleasure in rediscovering, thanks to these lines, the events they relate, and even more, the inflections (of light, of atmosphere, of mood) they bring back.50

By analysing the above passage, we can indeed divide the three phases into two categories. The first phase obviously belongs to the first moment of writing the diary, during which consciousness only touches the act of writing itself. During this time, writing has no purpose, everything can be treated, so there is no difficulty in 'finding something to say'. The second and third phases both belong to the moment of reading the finished diary as a work. At this point, the author returns to his writing to 'reperuse' and 'reread' it, and his feelings, positive or negative, come from the reflection on his work. This distinction is confirmed by Barthes himself, who states:

I am not attempting any kind of analysis of the 'Journal' genre (there are books on the subject), but only a personal deliberation, intended to afford a practical decision: Should I keep a journal *with a view to publication*? Can I make the journal into a 'work'?<sup>51</sup>

Obviously, the question that tormented Barthes was not how to write the diary, but how to publish it, in other words, how to transform the fragments of daily writing into a closed work. <sup>52</sup> If we do not allow ourselves to be influenced by the impression that Barthes has rejected the work, we will see in a passage from the 'Deliberation' the possibility of a transition between the journal and the work. And it is in this passage that the journal is linked to Mallarméan Album:

The book, 'architectural and premeditated', is supposed to reproduce an order of the world; it always implies, I believe, a monist philosophy. The Journal cannot achieve the status of the Book (of the Work); it is only an Album, to adopt Mallarmé's distinction (it is Gide's life which is a 'work', not his Journal). The Album is a collection of leaflets not only interchangeable (even this would be nothing) but above all *infinitely suppressible*: rereading my Journal, I can cross out one entry after the next, to the complete annihilation of the Album, with the excuse that 'I don't like this one'. <sup>53</sup>

The idea that the journal is 'infinitely suppressible' gives it the possibility for it to become a work. Barthes noted that he 'can cross out one entry after the next, to the complete annihilation of the Album' through the process of 'rereading' the diary. However, this also suggests that the writings are being shaped by a conscious subject. Through deliberate

'rereading' and deletion, the journal transitions from a disordered Album – a mere assemblage of fragments – to a work with purpose and direction, something architectural and premeditated, or as Barthes might term it, a Book. In other words, for Barthes, the diary could shift from the side of the Album to the side of the Book through a conscious and purposive arrangement, which he refers to as rhapsodic. This is why, even though Barthes was aware of Mallarmé's stance, which devalues the Album in favour of the Book, he did not entirely align himself with it. For Barthes, both forms were desirable and possible:

- a) The pile of notes, of detached thoughts, forms an Album; but this pile can be constituted with a view of the Book; the future of the Album is the Book; but the author may die in the meantime, there remains the Album, and this Album, by its virtual design, is already the Book.
- b) At the other extreme of time, the completed Book returns to being the Album: the future of the Book is the Album, just as the ruin is the future of the monument.<sup>54</sup>

By examining Proust's work and its genesis, Barthes discovered a dialectical relationship between the *Search* and the preparation of this work. When the fragments of Proust's writing are sewn together, assembled in a rhapsodic style, the novel is made, or if we take Barthes's terms, 'Ça prend'.

# Rhapsodic, the Architectural Fragments

We could say that Proust's novel is an ideal book for Barthes. The *Search* has a certain structure, a certain continuity rather than a simple assemblage of fragments. In fact, in a 1979 interview, Barthes explicitly declared his renunciation of the fragmentary nature of the journal in favour of the totality of the novel. He said that he was 'very strongly tempted these days to write a long, continuous work, something nonfragmentary', using the *Search* as his model.<sup>55</sup> Barthes clearly stated his desire to create a novel, 'a kind of writing that would no longer be fragmentary'.<sup>56</sup> And in the first

part of this interview, we can see that Barthes linked the Gide's journal to the patchwork, a way of assembling fragments that resides in disorder and disorganisation. We finally understand why Barthes contrasted rhapsodic with patchwork, two words that were synonymous in his earlier writings: while both the rhapsodic and the patchwork refer to an assemblage of fragments, in contrast to the patchwork, the rhapsodic has a cohesive architecture, an edifice, and a sense of totality.

Barthes's reflections on the banality of the journal made him aware of the limits of fragmentary writing. So, he tried to get away from the patchwork, but without abandoning the fragment, his favourite writing style and a source of infinity. This is why he proposed a subtle variant of the patchwork, the rhapsodic, which inherits and transcends the former, and which implies an organised combination of fragments. His reflections on the Album and the Book are a continuation of his reflections on the patchwork and the rhapsodic. The Album and the Book desire each other, want to be each other, and this constitutes a cyclical and dialectical spiral in the sense of Giambattista Vico.

For Barthes, Proust's writing is simultaneously on both sides, i.e., the side of the Album and the side of the Book. The preparation of the *Search* belongs to the Album, while the *Search* itself becomes the Book. We would venture to say that the same thing applies to the preparation of the novel and the Barthes's novel, that the two do not follow one another in linear temporal order but represent two states of writing – the Album and the Book. The concept of the rhapsodic serves as a bridge between these two states, linking them in an intricate and compelling manner.

#### Notes

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- <sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Old Rhetoric: An Aide-Mémoire', in *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 11–94 (p. 28). The quotation is from 'L'ancienne rhétorique: aide-mémoire', published in 1970, but it is certain that Barthes used the term 'rhapsodic' during the 1964–1965 academic year, as can be seen from the 1964–1965 Seminar manuscript conserved at the BnF (the Bibliothèque nationale de France), of which the extract corresponding to the quotation is as follows: 'Improvisation (declamation) relegates to 2nd place the problems of general  $\tau\alpha\xi\iota\varsigma$  (capital of ancient rhetoric): discourse, having no persuasive goal but being purely decorative, is destructured, atomized into a loose series of brilliant fragments (a kind of rhapsodic composition).' Roland Barthes, 'Manuscrits pour Séminaire 1964–1965: Recherches sur la rhétorique (I): l'ancienne rhétorique', Fonds de Roland Barthes, Cote: NAF 28630 (22) BnF, Paris, feuille n°51. Our translation. We would like to thank Éric Marty for allowing us to consult this document.
- <sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. by Richard Miller (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 139–40. Italics in original.
- <sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques*, in the *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), vol. II, pp. 269–528 (p. 272). Our translation. Barthes's *Œuvres complètes* will henceforth referenced as *OC* followed by volume and page number.
- <sup>6</sup> Barthes, *Essais critiques*, p. 272. Our translation.
- <sup>7</sup> Mathieu Messager, *Roland Barthes* (Paris: PUF, 2019), p. 61. Our translation.
- <sup>8</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), p. 142. Italics in original.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Armine Kotin Mortimer, 'Le manuscrit du Plaisir du texte de Roland Barthes et l'ordre de l'écriture', *Genesis (Manuscrits-Recherche-Invention)*, 9 (1996), 105–16; Armine Kotin Mortimer, 'Coïncidence: réécriture et désécriture de *Roland Barthes'*, *Genesis (Manuscrits-Recherche-Invention)*, 19 (2002), 169–89; Anne Herschberg Pierrot, 'Les manuscrits de *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. Style et genèse', *Genesis (Manuscrits-Recherche-Invention)*, 19 (2002), 191–215; Claude Coste, 'Préface', in Roland Barthes, *Le Discours amoureux. Séminaire à l'École pratique des hautes études (1974–1976), suivi de* Fragments d'un discours amoureux: *inédits*, ed. by Claude Coste (Paris: Seuil, 2007), pp. 19–45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, ed. by Nathalie Léger, transcriptions by Nathalie Lacroix (Paris: Seuil, 2015), p. 57. Our translation, italics in original. <sup>2</sup> Cf. Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, pp. 49, 269–70, 482–83. In Barthes's text, we can find the following four orthographies: rapsodie, rhapsodie, rapsodique and rhapsodique. We don't find any difference in meaning between them. In quotations we retain their original orthography, and in our analyses, we uniformly use rhapsodic (rhapsodique).

- <sup>10</sup> Carlo Ossola, 'L'instrument subtil', in Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* précédé de *Variations sur l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), pp. 7–22 (p. 17).
- <sup>11</sup> Messager, *Roland Barthes*, p. 95. Our translation.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. Roland Barthes, 'Rasch', in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), pp. 299–312 (p. 312); Roland Barthes, *How To Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces: Notes for a Lecture Course and Seminar at the Collège de France (1976-1977)*, ed. by Claude Coste, trans. by Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 18; Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the College de France (1977–1978)*, ed. by Thomas Clerc, trans. by Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 207.
- <sup>13</sup> See card 97 in Roland Barthes, *Marcel Proust, Mélanges*, ed. by Bernard Comment (Paris: Seuil/INA, 2020), p. 309.
- <sup>14</sup> For example, Mortimer, 'Coïncidence: réécriture et désécriture de *Roland Barthes*'; Pierrot, 'Les manuscrits de *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. Style et genèse'; Charlotte Garson, 'Roland Barthes, de l'essai comme roman', *Études*, 12 (2015), 77–84.
- <sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du roman I et II: Notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France 1978–1979 et 1979–80*, ed. by Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2003), p. 17. Our translation.
- <sup>16</sup> Marcel Proust, *Le temps retrouvé*, ed. by Pierre-Edmond Robert (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 338. Our translation.
- <sup>17</sup> Proust, *Le temps retrouvé*, pp. 338–39. Our translation.
- <sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 277–90 (p. 281). Italics in original.
- <sup>19</sup> Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, pp. 269–70. Our translation; italics in original.
- <sup>20</sup> Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, p. 344. Our translation; italics in original.
- <sup>21</sup> Barthes, La Préparation du roman, p. 345. Our translation; italics in original.
- <sup>22</sup> Barthes, Marcel Proust, Mélanges, p. 309.
- <sup>23</sup> Bernard Comment, 'Une sélection de fiches du grand fichier consacrées à Proust', in Roland Barthes, *Marcel Proust, Mélanges*, p. 239. Our translation.
- <sup>24</sup> Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *The Rustle of Language*, pp. 56–64 (p. 61). Italics in original.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, pp. 92–95.
- <sup>26</sup> Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, pp. 93-94. Italics in original.
- <sup>27</sup> Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, p. 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. Barthes, La Préparation du roman, p. 554.
- <sup>29</sup> Camera Lucida, with its 48 chapters, can be neatly divided into two parts. The first part, chapters 1–24, is the day, because it begins with this line: 'One day (Un jour), quite some time ago, I happened on a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852.' The second part, on the other hand, is the night:

'Now, one November evening (un soir) shortly after my mother's death, I was going through some photographs.' Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 3, 63. There are thematic differences between the two parts – for example, the first part focuses on public photography, while the second part is concerned with private photography – but the separation between them is bridged by an ultimate image and purpose, the mother and love.

- <sup>30</sup> Barthes, *Marcel Proust, Mélanges*, p. 245. Our translation.
- <sup>31</sup> Antoine Compagnon, ed., *Prétexte: Roland Barthes* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1978), p. 367. Our translation.
- <sup>32</sup> Compagnon, *Prétexte: Roland Barthes*, p. 368. Our translation.
- <sup>33</sup> Compagnon, *Prétexte: Roland Barthes*, p. 368. Our translation.
- <sup>34</sup> Barthes, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', p. 277.
- <sup>35</sup> Barthes, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', p. 277.
- <sup>36</sup> Barthes, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', p. 277. Ellipsis in original.
- <sup>37</sup> Cf. Roland Barthes, 'Dossier d'enseignement pour un cours donné à Rabat', in *Marcel Proust, Mélanges*, pp. 31–43 (p. 35).
- <sup>38</sup> Roland Barthes 'Les vies parallèles', in *OC*, vol. II, pp. 811–13 (p. 811). Our translation.
- <sup>39</sup> Barthes, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', p. 278.
- <sup>40</sup> Cf. Barthes, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', pp. 277–90; Roland Barthes, 'Ça prend', in *OC*, vol. V, pp. 654–56; Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, pp. 468–73.
- <sup>41</sup> Cf. Barthes, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', p. 281.
- <sup>42</sup> Barthes, *Marcel Proust, Mélanges*, p. 252. Our translation. Ellipsis in original.
- <sup>43</sup> Barthes, *Marcel Proust, Mélanges*, p. 252. Our translation.
- <sup>44</sup> Roland Barthes, *Album: inédits, correspondances et varia*, ed. by Éric Marty and Claude Coste (Paris: Seuil, 2015), p. 372.
- <sup>45</sup> Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, p. 99. Italics in original.
- <sup>46</sup> Barthes sees his paintings as a kind of writing, which he calls illegible writing (écriture illisible). See my article, 'Peinture de Roland Barthes, une écriture au moyen', in *Colloque Désœuvrer* (Paris: Éditions des Beaux-Arts de Paris, forthcoming). Most of Barthes's paintings have no title, but almost always bear the date on which they were painted. In particular, Barthes numbered his first five hundred and forty-two paintings from 1971 to 1973, and all those works we have found bear dates. You could say that Barthes's paintings are a special form of daily writing. Tiphaine Samoyault also takes this view in her biography of Barthes. Tiphaine Samoyault, *Roland Barthes*, (Paris: Seuil, 2015), p. 140.
- <sup>47</sup> Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, p. 95.
- <sup>48</sup> Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, p. 95. Italics and ellipsis in original.
- <sup>49</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Deliberation', in *The Rustle of Language*, pp. 359–73 (p. 359). Italics in original.
- <sup>50</sup> Barthes, 'Deliberation', pp. 359–60. Italics in original.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Barthes, 'Deliberation', p. 360. Italics in original.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> See Samoyault, *Roland Barthes*, pp.141–42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Barthes, 'Deliberation', p. 370. Italics in original.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, pp. 351–52. Our translation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes', in *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962–1980*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 321–37 (p. 329).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Barthes, 'Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes', p. 329.