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Transnational Paradigms of Modernist Pictorial Memory: Carpaccio, Vermeer and Narrative Structure in Proust's *Search*

Abstract: To talk about memory in *In Search of Lost Time* is a tautology today. Yet, in the interpretative discussion opened by new modernist studies and following Rabaté's transnational approach, reading Proust's work can open new horizons and show how his literature develops innovative operational concepts – historically situated yet still relevant for our present – used by contemporary theorists. Didi-Huberman's concepts of *anachronism* and of "pan" (*patch*), related to painting and image, both draw on modernism, and Proust anticipates them by using the pictorial techniques of the foreign painters Carpaccio and Vermeer to renew the French narrative tradition. By linking Didi-Huberman's *patch* to Ricœur's ideas on literary temporality, this article explains and exemplifies this concept and shows how it can be applied to Proust's literature so as to emphasize the importance of cultural experience for the construction of personal and collective memory through narrative structures.

Keywords: Modernist Anachronism; Cultural Memory; Retrospective Cosmopolitan Tradition; Pictorial Narrative; Temporality.

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The present paper considers the way Proust assimilates pictorial techniques from Carpaccio and Vermeer in his narrative in order to revive the French novelistic tradition by drawing upon other mediums and other cultural spaces and tries to discuss the connection between the configuration of textual temporality and the writer's conception of literary history. In what follows, I use the conceptual apparatus provided by Didi-Huberman's notions of *anachronism* and *patch* (and Rabaté's insight that modernism reinvents the past as a *global* culture) to analyze two key scenes in the *Search*, where geographical areas outside of France forge new paradigms of remembering: Marcel's discovery of Albertine, his deceased partner, in a painting by Carpaccio and Bergotte's death in front of the "little patch of yellow wall" in Vermeer's *View of Delft*. I end with examples of how *patches* can be translated from painting to literature, relying on Ricœur's *Time and Narrative*.

As Rentzou points out, French-speaking criticism was somehow reluctant to accept modernism, an attitude translated into a gap at the very centre of global modernism[1]. Although Joris-Karl Huysmans

used the term without a trace of irony in a 1879 manifesto, around 1913, in both French and English, "modernism" became an ambivalent, often pejorative term, used to designate a desperate desire to be fashionable[2]. This is also evident in Proust's use of the word. In *Guermantes*, Marcel notices that his aristocratic friend Robert de Saint-Loup is a *modernist*, dominated by intellect[3] because he refutes the ideas of his father; moreover, he is a follower of Nietzsche and socialism, and he is close to Kant and Baudelaire. Saint-Loup is affectionate towards Marcel but unable to understand his passion for the aristocracy. In the former's case, "modernism" seems to point towards a radical modernity that has no patience with a bygone era[4].

Given the interest he takes in his friend's father and the older French history the latter symbolizes, the narrator distances himself from Robert's definition of modernity. This distance stands out because, as the editors of *Historical modernisms* affirm, "there is a confusion between 'modernity', which, as Baudelaire knew, combines the sense of the eternal and the transient, and 'modernism' […] as defined by a few masterpieces produced in 1922"[5]. Moreover, I concur with their assertion that, while modernism is transnational, it cannot be transhistorical. A distinction has to be made between Proustian modernism and Baudelairean modernity. Rather than seeing in modernity one half eternal and the other half fugitive, like Baudelaire, the modernist feels that his time is already coming to pass.

Thus, Marcel mocks young Mme de Cambremer (the wealthy sister of an engineer, socialist in art but secretly aspiring to a higher social rank) by saying, "in order to gratify her taste for the modern [*son goût de modernisme*]," that the smell of roses wafting up to the terraces is "just like Pelléas"[6]. The same lady, consumed by her passion for the avant-garde, says *Pelléas* is more beautiful than *Parsifal*, since musicality is obsolete. As if to counter this display of snobbery, Marcel (a bourgeois able to describe the last vestiges of the *Ancien* Régime in a new writing) dwells more on Wagner than on the *ballets russes*, which he otherwise knows well, being thereupon similar to Charlus, a connoisseur who uses the term *modernism* derisively to those who disdain Nietzsche or Goethe on nationalistic grounds: "[T]he public, after resisting the modernists [*modernistes*] of literature and art, is falling into line with the modernists of war, because it is an accepted fashion to think like this and [...] little minds are crushed, not by the beauty, but by the hugeness of the action"[7].

Elstir, the painter Marcel meets in Balbec, is modern (but not *modernist*) because he paints yachts, just as Carpaccio and Veronese did with vessels of their time[8]. The Berma is modern because she transforms *performance* into a masterpiece[9], whereas the more ambivalent Rachel is modernist[10]. Mme de Guermantes, a "great lady playing the countrywoman, […] who knows the charm of what belongs to her and is not going to spoil it with a coat of modern varnish"[11] has the same (apparently) careless pronunciation as Françoise, the devoted cook, while the duke is modern when he makes fun of the aristocracy[12].

Because of his apparent rejection of the avant-gardes, Proust was often defined as an anti-modernist and closely connected to Baudelaire[13]. In fact, Proust's modernism is the third way between *avant-gardes*

and *arrière-gardes* (who wanted to come back to literature such as it was before Romanticism, in a form of neoclassicism[14]), that is "the classical modern", modernism[15]. In his Eliotean modernist "theory of art as memory", every artist must take the history of art from the beginning[16]. Grouping Baudelaire, Racine and Manet in the same paradigm ("allowing for the differences between the times, nothing is so Baudelairian as *Phèdre*, nothing so worthy of Racine, of Malherbe even, as the *Fleurs du mal*"[17]), Proust wants to be a *classic*, as the "modernist [*vrai moderne*] becomes a classic rather than becoming old-fashioned"[18]. Still, he inherits the myth of the artist as a prophet of the future, incomprehensible by his present[19]. Moreover, Rentzou suggests modernism has been absorbed by French culture to the point where it does not seem *historical*[20] anymore, which is all the more plausible considering the *Search* was, for Compagnon, the French site of literary memory *par excellence* (in 1992[21]). It became a site of French literature thanks to the affinity of the '60s culture to the modernist critique of history[22], but also because it consciously accumulates within itself the history of French literature in the shape of memory[23].

Nevertheless, this site of memory gives prominence to foreign arts, as we shall see. I now employ Rabaté's methods with a view to *historicize* my reading of modernism and introduce it in "the broader context of a newly 'globalized' world literature"[24], in which the cosmopolitan side of Proustian modernism can emerge. Consequently, I will attempt to identify the key points that connect Proustian memory to the international context, to the inspiration he takes from other mediums that enable him to change his point of view on his own culture. I will thus emphasize the *invention* of an artistic tradition shaped by a retrospective look and the invention as *invenire*, as encounter with the Other[25]. To this end, Proust conceives the *origin* (in Benjamin's terms) as an *eddy* which "subverts everything the origin as root would like to establish"[26]. This is how Carpaccio, Fortuny and Vermeer all become examples of a tradition that is no longer orientalist, but capable of incorporating new aesthetic principles. Rabaté, "[l]ike Proust, insist[s] upon the idea of 'inventing' a tradition, in order to describe more than the fashion for japonisme of the last decade of the nineteenth century, or the newly discovered Negro art, [so as to] broaden the sphere of European consciousness"[27]. I follow this path.

Proust's invention of a paradoxical *new tradition* shows the extent to which modernism is fascinated by time but skeptical when it comes to history[28]. This hybrid of old and new is characteristic of modernism which, in order to elaborate paradigms for understanding the future, "looks back over the barren waste of modernity to some pre-modern, prelapsarian paradise"[29]. Memory makes it possible to open up history through "a salutary increase in the complexity [*complexification*] of time models", like that of Proust's anachronistic montages from which derives "a non-trivial phenomenology of human time, [...] attentive to individual and collective processes of memory"[30]. Literature is capable of translating alternative time models into the lived experience of reading, thus dissociating itself from an "objective" form of history and actively involving the individual into the memory of a group.

Didi-Huberman theorizes a modernist anachronism and uses it to criticize contemporary art history, thus illustrating the contemporary uses of modernist theories. In *Devant le temps*, he recalls having involuntarily seen a certain resemblance to Pollock's drippings in one of the panels accompanying Fra Angelico's *Madonna of the Shadows*. Of course, it would be absurd to claim Fra Angelico is the father of action painting, or to deduce from this anachronism the idea that art history is achronic[31]. However, this resemblance introduces an unease into the method, and requires the art critic to recognize euchronia as an illusion, in order to take the image out of its fixed state and turn it into an operational concept[32].

If, as Didi-Huberman asserts, anachronism runs through all contemporaneities, in the "ontological wandering" of the work of art[33], we owe the deconstruction of the illusion of euchronia to modernism. The author traces it back to the work of Walter Benjamin, Aby Warburg and Carl Einstein, for "a recurrent feature of modernism is the need to reinvent a certain past"[34]. It is precisely through this trial and error that *contemporaries* (in Agamben's terms) belong all the more to their time that they do not fit into it perfectly, and "are thus [...] irrelevant, [but] precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, [...] more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time"[35]. By exploring this incompatibility, Didi-Huberman aims to bring out an *unconscious* of history[36], for anachronism is present in objects as an impure temporality, made up as much of their past as of their latent future.

When everything has been taken into account, the experience on which *Devant le temps* is based resembles that of Marcel in front of Carpaccio's *Patriarch of Grado*:

> Carpaccio […] almost succeeded in reviving my love for Albertine. […] On the back of one of the *Compagnie della Calza* […] I had just recognized the cloak that Albertine had put on to come with me to Versailles in an open car […]. [S]he had flung over her shoulders a Fortuny cloak […]. It was from this Carpaccio painting that that inspired son of Venice had taken it, it was from the shoulders of this *Compagnie della Calza* that he had removed it in order to drape it over the shoulders of so many Parisian women…[37]

Here, anachronism is *cultural* as well as psychological (by means of involuntary memory): it is thanks to one of Fortuny's creations, inspired by the Venetian Renaissance, that the narrator comes to recognize his lover, who obviously was not the model for a 15th - century painting, but retrospectively becomes its focal point. It is no longer Swann seeing Odette in Botticelli's Zipporah, as Swann remained at the level of a simple emotional analogy. In *The Captive*, Fortuny's dresses painfully evoke a Venice Marcel cannot visit because of Albertine, making his stay in Paris feel like a captivity, while in *The Fugitive* these creations recall Albertine herself, bringing the menace of disenchantment over the city of his dreams.

Therefore, in addition to the narrator's imagination, the cultural element of Fortuny's dresses establishes the link between the memory of the woman and the city. The Spanish artist, who lived in Venice

and Paris, drew inspiration from classical Greece, the Renaissance and Venetian art of the 15th and 16th centuries, as well as from Wagner and his *Gesamtkunstwerk*[38]. The Fortuny leitmotif appears for the first time in the *Young Girls in Flower*, where Elstir, although a modern painter, admits the church of Balbec can be a better artwork than an Odilon Redon, then qualifies Fortuny's dresses as "too much of a fashion anachronism"[39], while paradoxically finding the church of Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse lacks aesthetic charm as it is too new[40].

Marcel, in contrast, explicitly shows that he is not afraid of anachronism, since he distances himself from Elstir's opinion: hence I think the *Search* is more than a continuation of Baudelairean modernity. Unlike for Baudelaire, for Proust anachronisms are not a refusal to admit that one's present is historical (which makes anachronism a negative trait of the work of art), but a component of one's own present, revealing that "the contrast between [the] existential richness and the dull […] evolution of history is a false antithesis"[41]. The present as seen by Proust is more impure, haunted by countless temporal layers of the past.

So haunted that Collier likens Carpaccio's *mise en abyme*, in which each ship seems another miniature Venice – a point Elstir makes about the *Meeting and Departure of Betrothed Couple* and the *Arrival of the Pilgrims in Cologne*[42] – to Proust's novelistic technique. The fissile subject of modernism seems to find its *eddy-origin* in those paintings of Saint Ursula, where Etherius' departure, his meeting with Ursula in Brittany and their departure for Rome are all depicted on the same canvas. Proust wanted to refer to the *Arrival of the Ambassadors* in the scene of Albertine's cloak, but he was only able to obtain a reproduction of the *Patriarch of Grado*[43] to help him in developing the episode. At any rate, the essential is that Carpaccio's distinctive sense of narration tends to overcome the constraints of pictorial temporality: instead of a painting that can be grasped with a single glance, the paintings of Saint Ursula introduce a prolonged, linear, almost *textual*[44] temporality into the painting observation process.

We could therefore establish a parallel between the way Proust juxtaposes two (or three) narrative points of view to create literary refrains, and Carpaccio's organization of his Saint Ursula paintings, in which "against [the] contrapuntal temporal and spatial continua we pick out the visual and narrative patterns, rhythmic variations on a motif"[45]. For example, in *The Intermittencies of the Heart*, the young Marcel feels the immediate emotion caused by sudden remembrance ("Upheaval of my entire being."), which takes him back to a Marcel from a previous moment, who had been helped to take off his shoes by his grandmother ("The being who came to my rescue […] was the same who, years before, in a moment of identical distress and loneliness […] had come in"), while the narrator comments on the mechanisms of memory ("That reality has no existence for us, so long as it has not been recreated by our mind"[46]). Three temporal planes are interwoven, each with its own tempo: that of the reminiscing Marcel is as alert as his sobs; that of the intermediate Marcel is composed, while the narrator takes his time to meditate on the year that has elapsed and on "the anachronism that so often prevents the calendar of facts from corresponding to that of our feelings"[47].

Following the painful memory that leaves him suffering, the young man wanders through the hotel in Balbec in the grip of emotion and without the strength (as he himself admits) to pay attention to all the details Marcel-the-narrator nevertheless describes in minute detail, just as he quotes and comments on a card from Mme de Cambremer. While remarking he could not (at the time he received the card) have taken an interest in the affairs of the petty nobility, the narrator does not fail to give descriptive details of the flowers, the blue sea seen from the Cambremer estate, as well as anecdotal details (e.g. the fact that the Marquise had arranged for Mme Verdurin to rent La Raspelière)[48]. Constantly, at least two narrative points of view are juxtaposed without blending, intertwined in the *Search*, like "the two elements [in Marcel that Albertine's presence responds to] remained apart" in *Sodom and Gomorrah*: the "terrible need of a person" (felt for his mother at Combray) and the "longing to see again the soft as velvet face" that would bring him to Balbec, "by the mauve September sea"[49].

Carpaccio's painting as a "unifying factor merging memory and mourning"[50] acts both on a narrative and a thematic level in Marcel's association between his mother and the woman in black in the painting representing the martyrdom of Saint Ursula. The Proustian multiple selves could thus follow a pictorial logic that pushes forward the medium of writing and language. Just like the observer of the paintings sees the same character multiplied in several juxtaposed episodes, illustrating different circumstances of his life, in the *Search*, the narrator chooses the model of the constellation articulating numerous narrative identities, "in [the] time [of] different and parallel series"[51], instead of the continuity *in perspective* of a unique picture.

The innovation of the Proustian novel draws on this Venetian past without adopting a distanced, orientalist position towards it. Instead, Proust's novel fully integrates this past in the aesthetic experience and, moreover, in the *cultural* experience of remembering. In the *Patriarch*, the painting Proust quotes in the episode on Albertine's cloak, the profusion of mundane details (belonging to the reality of the 15th century) was supposed to prove the reality of the miracle of the relic of the Holy Cross (having taken place in the 14th century), which had cured a possessed man at the Rialto – the very hallmark of the "eyewitness style"[52], already grounded in an anachronism. The documentary aspect (but also the aesthetic one, stemming from the painter's passion for infinite detail) of this painting attests to a reality of the collective memory (the miracle) through its later reconstruction (Carpaccio's painting).

Proust seems to make use of a similar technique, even though his purpose is not religious (nor commercial, as was the case for Carpaccio). By choosing to describe Paris during the war, a city crowded with colonial armies, in the manner of Carpaccio or *The Thousand and One Nights* and not in the way of Delacroix and Decamps[53], Marcel rejects orientalist tradition in order to invoke an organic cosmopolitanism based on the association between Paris, Venice and Constantinople[54]. He acts similarly when observing the geological strata of French history in the cry of the merchants ("this rag vendor […], after drawling the other words, […] utters the final syllable with a sharpness befitting the accentuation

laid down by the great pope of the seventh century"[55]). Carpaccio provides a narrative, but also a descriptive, a cultural paradigm.

I would even suggest Proust's choice of Carpaccio, the "last great poet of the century of Humanism"[56], who could not adapt to the naturalism of the Cinquecento, is not random: it is precisely the reality filtered through a certain subjectivity provided by this painter's works that the writer appreciates. Carpaccio's paintings are *architectural*[57], in a way similar to the *Search*. By bringing mediaeval legends to his Venetian homeland, Carpaccio accumulates details with a "Northern" or "Flemish" appetite, more akin to Van Eyck than to his Italian contemporaries[58]. His pre-realist and so recognisable Primitive world is recuperated in a post- (19th century) realism literature, whereas in the Cinquecento it quickly became archaic and sank into oblivion for having failed to adapt to the main line of evolution going from Giovanni Bellini to Giorgione[59]. The pictorial canon of Ruskin's and Proust's time, which they both subvert, was still Vasarian and made Carpaccio a minor, mediaeval, not modern painter[60].

Let us now return to Fortuny. Before the revelation of Albertine's recognition in a member of the *Compagnie della Calza*, this is how the narrator describes the Venetian couturier's dresses:

> These Fortuny dressing gowns [rose] from their ashes, sumptuous, for everything must return in time, as it is written beneath the vaults of Saint Mark's […]. [T]hese gowns, even if they were not those genuine antiques, […] could not be said to have the chilling effect of the artificial, the sham antique. Like the theatrical designs of Sert, Bakst, and Benoit, […] Fortuny gowns, faithfully antique but markedly original, brought before the eye like a stage setting […] that Venice loaded with the gorgeous Orient where they would have been worn, […] by the reappearance, detailed and surviving [*surgissement parcellaire et survivant*], of the fabrics worn by the doges' ladies[61].

Here, Proust does not rely on what is actually written on the vaults of Saint Mark's, but on Ruskin's depiction of them in *Stones of Venice*. More exactly, Proust transposes the resurrection of Christ ("everything must return") into a resurrection of forms[62]. As for the "surviving" (*survivant*) forms, a term that resembles Warburg's *survivances*[63], Proust takes the concept from Mâle, according to whom Western religious art preserves Persian and Arab[64] forms. Forms survive, waiting for their *content*: forms are latent contents in quest of an anachronistic resurrection through difference. It is precisely this invocation of new content that makes Fortuny dresses so thought-provoking. By associating Carpaccio to Albertine through Fortuny, Marcel acknowledges that images are temporally overdetermined[65] and derive their meaning from their past as much as from their future, hiding, like literature, "anticipatory reminiscences we find there of the very idea, the very sensation, the very artistic effort we ourselves are expressing at that moment"[66].

Marcel thereby goes even further than Elstir in his attempt to give depth to the past. He goes beyond impressionism. Moreover, when transposed to literature

(as a technique), Impressionism acquires a temporality that leads to a revolution not far removed from the Cubist and Futurist avant-gardes, because the instantaneous perception of a painting does not function the same way as the essential linearity of literature and language. Thus, although Proust seems to have been indifferent to the artistic revolutions of 1908 (the birth of Cubism) and 1922 (the transition from Dada to Surrealism), his novel follows "a parallel trajectory in the way art and the artist incorporate technological mediation in their aesthetics of perception"[67]. From the steeples of Martinville to the female passers-by glimpsed from the train, all desirable because they are chopped up by speed, and to those "ten Albertines"[68] in succession before a kiss, to Saint-Loup leaving a hotel like Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*[69], to the juxtaposition of images in the two halves of the memory, Proustian temporality is close to Cubist montage due to its unprecedented passion for *contrast*, not to the blending of times.

I believe this stems not so much from a simple perception influenced by technology as from the new Proustian vision of an extended world. Rivière, the same man who presented the Proustian novel as Racinian in a reverse literary revolution[70], described it in 1922 as cubist, because of the multiplicity of points of view, connected only by narration[71]. Keller finds potential concrete sources of Proust's Futurism-Cubism in Boccioni and Dunoyer de Segonzac, and notes that to associate "geometry in space" with "psychology in time" (as Proust does) in 1913 is to make a clear reference to Cubism[72]. For Marcel, Impressionism is already *passé*, as is Decadence or the style of the Goncourts. Through literary (and theoretical) Cubism, Proust discovered, like C. Einstein, that *vision* cannot be reduced to *perception*[73].

Thus, in the novel C. Einstein was dreaming of, and which could rightly have been the *Search* (according to Azérad), "the individual person rises or falls in volume, in their sensations of self or of things, approaching as closely as possible to lived experience"[74]. Literary Cubism reveals the ability of Proustian writing to create dialectical images, both structural and cultural (the two are interrelated), two of the most striking of which are the superimposition between the Charlus-Jupien encounter and the bumblebee pollinating the orchid, and the juxtaposition between Rachel – the former prostitute, and Rachel – Saint-Loup's fashionable lover[75]. Didi-Huberman points out, again following C. Einstein, that it was also the Cubists' admiration for so-called "primitive" art that changed the direction of art history, introducing a kind of *ancient novelty* coming close to Benjamin's dialectical image of the upheaval of the history of forms. Whatever the case with the cubists, for C. Einstein it was a matter of overcoming the opposition between timeless art and disillusioned modernity by means of a modernist dialectic that would create "an interweaving of origin and modernity"[76]. The essentially transnational character of modernism leads to a new sense of history.

The same, I believe, is true of Proust. The temporal density of the *Search* comes from a cultural density. The novelty of the narration could be ascribed to Proust's exposure to other cultural spaces and his absorption of their aesthetic paradigms. His *japonisme*, for example, symbolizes an innovative aesthetic paradigm. Yoshikawa,

after having examined Proust's irony about the dilettante japonisme of Odette or Mme Cottard[77], and the exoticizing *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic of the Goncourts, focuses on the Japanese "game" involving pieces of paper unfolding in the water, a metaphor for the memorial emergence of Combray after the first taste of the madeleine: "as in the game wherein the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little pieces of paper which […], the moment they become wet, stretch and twist and take on color and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, solid and recognisable, so in that moment […] the whole of Combray […] sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea"[78]. While this description of the *suichûka* remains somewhat fanciful, since in Japan only flowers unfurl in the water, and not cities, Proustian *japonisme* contrasts with Loti or Montesquiou's[79].

This is how the narrator relives for himself the crisis of Impressionist painting, for which *japonisme* was "the end of European illusionism and the beginning of the modern"[80]. It is when the piece of Japanese paper blossoms in the water that he learns how to remember Combray and to begin his novel[81]. Once again, as in the case of the passion for Fortuny and Carpaccio, the *other* and the *elsewhere* are the hallmarks of a new artistic sensibility that moves up the chronology of French art. Once more, psychological memory depends on a new cultural memory of modernism, where geographical alterity stands for a change in narrative form.

However, there is also a metamorphosis of the forms of memory. Proust had already spoken in *Pleasures and days* about "certain recollections that are like the Dutch paintings of our memory, genre paintings in which the characters, often of mediocre social status, are captured during a very simple moment of their existence"[82]. After comparing the flowering of remembrance to the blooming of the Japanese chrysanthemum, it is the Dutch memory that takes on a pictorial form. The two are not as far apart as they seem, Holland having been the "China of Europe" during the 19th century, and Amsterdam the "Venice of the North"[83]. The "rediscovery" of Vermeer itself in 1842 by Thoré (and France), when the Holland of the Golden Age replaced that of the 19th century, was a cultural anachronism (but in fact one constructed by the French reading of Dutch painting, since Vermeer had not been forgotten by collectors, but only by critics and art historians[84]). Vermeer emerges as a 17th century *contemporary*, a paradoxical modern "sphinx"[85], the justifying source of a new sensibility already germinating in Proust.

Thoré stressed Vermeer's non-Europeanism and noticed in 1858, like Proust, the reality, the materiality of the walls in his paintings, "made of real mortar", but he treated it as an excess, almost a flaw of the painter[86], thereby criticizing precisely his modern side. In 1921, Vaudoyer (whose article inspired Proust's own description of the patch) was the first to speak of the "paradoxically lasting impression [Vermeer's painting] makes on the beholder"[87], an impression which is paradoxical given that his subjects are of the most ordinary sort. In fact, the "modern feeling"[88] of Vermeer's paintings comes from his *Impressionist*[89], sometimes almost Pointillist brushwork - the precision of detail is abandoned in favor of a precision of *light* as a unifying

factor in the representation of textures[90] - herein lies his originality in his time, not in his subjects. Vaudoyer departs from the interpretation along the lines of Thoré, according to which Vermeer's "naturalism" stems from an absence of style[91], and states that "blood is evoked [in his paintings] not by nuance, but by its essence"[92]. Fortuny's fascination with fabrics is reminiscent of the materiality of the "little patch of yellow wall", for in Fortuny's Aristotelian conception of fabrics, "the task of the artist was to discover the form inherent in the material"[93]. In his quest for the spirit of the fabric, Fortuny explores Carpaccio's work, as if pictorial representation had the privilege of uncovering this spirit rather than concealing it. Vaudoyer appreciates the reality of creation, not that of reproduction – much like the inner realism of Proustian modernism.

From the very outset, the art critic associates Vermeer's painting with the experience of remembering, asserting that once you see the real *View of Delft*, any copy pales in comparison with the memory you keep of it[94]. I think this picture already has the blurred reality of a memory as recreated by thought, its spiritual materiality, by the property that a memory has of seeming clear the first time it is recalled and of gradually breaking down into more visible strokes, components, the closer it is examined. Bergotte, Marcel's favorite writer during his childhood, dies in this way, equally lured by the recollection of the detail that demands to be *looked at again*, stronger than any reproduction, in front of a humble "little patch of yellow wall (that he could not remember) […] so well painted that it was, if one looked at it by itself, like some priceless specimen of Chinese art, of a beauty that was sufficient in itself"[95].

Why a *Chinese* work of art? Vermeer's materiality, his "Chinese faculty", which is also the source of his modernity according to Hale, is at the same time a distinctive feature that distinguishes him from modern French painters (Impressionists in particular) – according to Vaudoyer[96]. From this angle, in the very respects where his technique heralds the Impressionists, Vermeer already surpasses them. Liedtke, similarly to Didi-Huberman, even talks about a tendency towards abstraction in Vermeer[97]. The *patch* undermines "the rational and French art of a Bergotte"[98]. Bergotte's pursuit of the coolness of a Venetian *palazzo* in a painting borrows heavily from the traditional interpretation of Vermeer, summed up by Hertel as follows: "The Venice sought in vain in the other Dutch paintings is linked to the anticipated Chinese specimen in Vermeer"[99]. Meanwhile, Froula sees the reference to Chinese art as a manifestation of the new historical sense of the 20th century. In her opinion, the invocation of Chinese art, inspired by Vaudoyer's article, shows an awareness of the multiplicity of times in the work of art (due to its multiple geographical origin[100]), as it suggests the influence of the trade with China and of Chinese ceramics on the Dutch art of the Golden Age.

Both Vermeer's Holland and Carpaccio's Venice were cultural crossroads on the border between East and West. Indeed, the very reference to the Chinese know-how suggests Vaudoyer's (and Proust's in his wake) in-depth knowledge of history around 1921, since porcelain was first introduced to the European market by the Dutch in the 17th century, and appears in

the works of Dutch painters, including Vermeer. By the time he wrote the Bergotte scene, Proust's understanding of Chinese *technê* had evolved[101], so that the little patch of yellow wall, pure matter transcending the form-content dichotomy, came to concentrate a new sense of art history, mediated by the psychological afterwardness of the symptom[102].

In addition to its theoretical potential, the little patch outlines an entire geography of modernism, because Proust differs from James, Fromentin or Havard in that, for him, Vermeer's works do not duplicate Dutch reality, but are something *yet to be seen*, which "multiplies" the world[103]. For Bergotte, this *old novelty* is closely linked to his own past, for he equates the little patch to a yellow butterfly, as if his childhood were coming back to him: "he fixed his eyes, like a child upon a yellow butterfly that he is trying to catch, upon the precious little patch of wall"[104]. This moment parallels the one in which the discovery of Combray, which involves the use of *japonisme* as a counter-system enabling Marcel to surpass the limitations of Western art[105], and contrasts with the effort to write made throughout the book. From Proust to Vermeer and from Bergotte to his childhood, human life, like writing, completes its revolution of remembrance in an act of awakening, whose origin is defined from the present moment – and which requires a new manner of narrating.

Proust's interpretation of Vermeer is still highly innovative and interesting from a theoretical perspective. Didi-Huberman contrasts the patch (*pan*) with the detail, in the sense that the latter embodies an "ideal of knowledge and totality"[106] in opposition to anachronism (to the *differences*, I would say, so precious to Proust). In contrast, in the *patch* the painting shows its material cause, i.e. painting itself: in Vermeer, patches are portions of colour in which the mimetic is not carried all the way to the end, in which matter "does not follow a logic of opposites"[107]. Didi-Huberman observes the "trembling duration"[108] Proust brings into opposition in his reading of the *View of Delft* with a panoramic vision that transcends the beholder. If it is the *patch* of the "little patch of yellow wall" that is interpreted as yellow (not the wall), it is because it has come closer, by virtue of a materiality similar to that of the layer of colour touching our[109] (and Proust's) present.

Didi-Huberman uses Proust's description of Vermeer in his deconstruction of iconology: the patch is not a sign, but a "substance"[110], a refrain, a recurring motif, a "symptom" in Vermeer's work. This notion allows us to talk about Proust's modernism in structural terms. The detail has an extension, whereas the patch has an intensity (an inner duration, we could say) where "the part devours the whole"[111] and reintegrates in it most unexpectedly. I believe the patch should be seen as an element of technique (form) that overflows into a change in the genre (content) of the canvas. The hazy, textured style of the patch represents precisely the gap between the tradition of the topographical landscape and the *View*[112]. In the former, precision and fidelity are essential, whereas in the *View*, the focus is no longer on perspective (the angle is distorted) but on the "character of the city profile"[113], and the logic of the ensemble is in this way hijacked by the patch(es). Somewhere between the topographical relevance and the painter's fascination with the *spirit* of the city – materialized and made *material*

by the light – lies the power of the close-up look to influence the distant gaze. It is for this reason the *patch* holds such latent potentials.

We could reintegrate the notion of *patch*, used by Didi-Huberman in relation to Vermeer's paintings, into Proustian narrative, more complex than Proustian theory. I would like to advance the hypothesis that, in the *Search*, the patches are surges of uninterpretable, of temporal irreducibility – a notion I derive from Ricœur's *Threefold Mimesis*[114]. Imaginative variations form the basis of new temporal models which are not only described in theory or realized in terms of chronology, but also experienced phenomenologically through reading. By the *emplotment*, literary temporality provides meaning to the *senseless*[115]. Through sensitive changes in literary temporality, the different quality of time produces a new meaning in its very form, just like the segments of Vermeer's painting where what takes precedence is painting for its own sake, and not the accuracy of the representation: the opposition between form and content is thus transcended. The metaphor of the Vermeerian patch seems to be the model for the modernist temporality inscribed in Proust's *Search*. The real experience of fictional time inserts the structural anachronism into the lived experience of temporality.

Just as the Vermeerian patch changes the logic of the whole, the way Proust expands a single scene (through the pseudo-diegetic[116]), by garnishing it with analepsis, prolepsis or comments, changes the nature of the novel, which thereby transforms from a novel about memory into a veritable social fresco of memory. A spectacular analepsis, which explains the character's presence at the Villeparisis party, is introduced by the name of the Prince of Faffenheim. The narrator goes from its enthralling sound ("The […] name preserved […] the heavy 'delicacies' of the Teutonic race, projected like green boughs over the 'heim' of dark blue enamel") to the half-ironic, half-dramatic account of the Prince's insistence that Norpois help him join the *Académie* and to the way the former exploits his "enchanted" forests to buy cars. Marcel reproduces fragments of direct speech ("[A]s soon as [Faffenheim] had returned to the subject of the Institut, M. de Norpois had repeated: 'I would like nothing better; nothing could be better, for my colleagues'"), and even the Prince's thoughts, then assumes authorial omniscience, which contrasts with his subjective point of view ("This was a kind of reasoning of which M. de Norpois, formed in the same school as the prince, would also have been capable"[117]). Marcel does not hesitate to render the thoughts of characters in scenes from which he is absent. The web of memories Marcel assimilates is that of an entire era, with its *salonnard* underside – but it is reinscribed by Marcel's consciousness in the lived experience of temporality.

We should also consider the transition (very frequent in Proust) from an iterative narrative to a punctual narrative without replacing the *imparfait* with the *passé simple*, in the pseudo-iterative[118]. A good example would be the episode in which the narrator recounts the usual scene of him reading on a bench as a child, and then goes on to describe the discussion between Aunt Léonie and Françoise, with a great abundance of details of dress, gestures, weather and even time. The extreme specificity of the scene - the aunt commenting

on the time and the lack of light ("Only half-past four! And here am I, obliged to draw back the curtains just to get a tiny streak of daylight. […] Only a week before the Rogation-days."[119]) and the narrator's dwelling (albeit theoretically absent) on the old woman's flushed cheeks and the images falling from her prayer book – creates an unexpected effect when compared to the preserved *imparfait*, thus creating a kind of uninterpretable temporal transition between the punctual (singulative) character of the scene and the use of the (iterative) *imparfait*.

Proust is a gifted creator when it comes to weaving temporal knots, as we can see in the configuration of the passage where Marcel asks the guests at the hotel in Balbec about the girls he had seen the day before[120]. This is immediately coupled with the moment when, well after that day in Balbec, Marcel looks at the photograph of the "young girls" when they were still children. A constellation appears here: the Marcel who knows the adolescent girls is superimposed (in the narrative) on the older Marcel who looks at the photograph of these same girls, taken when they were still children and consequently long before Marcel had met the adolescent girls. In this interweaving, another time is added to the times lived, a time from which Marcel (both young and old) is absent, that of the little girls in the photograph. The photograph as an anachronistic object (from the future) in relation to the point of reference of the story where we are at the given moment of the narrative – as a literary *patch* – shows how memory is distorted, contaminated by each new insight about the past.

Equally difficult to place is the narrative description of an evening's progression, between the moment of entering the room and the encounter with Saint-Loup. The fragment begins by designating, in the *passé simple*, an action that is part of the first narrative. However, immediately afterwards, it becomes difficult to find one's way: using a surprising *passé simple* to indicate the gradual change and advancement of the seasons, the narrator seems to begin, in the *imparfait*, a catalogue of the landscape-paintings seen from his window. The descriptive-narrative passage goes far beyond the framework of a single evening ("*Presently* [*Bientôt*] the days grew shorter [*diminuèrent*] and at the moment when I entered [*j'entrais*] my room the violet sky seemed [*semblait*] branded with the stiff, geometrical, fleeting, effulgent figure of the sun […] was leaning [*s'inclinait*] toward the sea on the hinge of the horizon like a sacred picture over a high altar […]. *A few weeks later*, when I went upstairs [*quand je remontais*], the sun had already set [était déjà *couché*]"[121] (italics ours)). At the end, Aimé returns to Marcel's room ("There was a knock at my door; it was Aimé"[122]), and the punctual scene continues where it left off. The narrator recounted, in the span of a single wait between returning to the room and the dinner at Rivebelle (a *patch*), all the intervals of this type, for the entire Balbec season. By employing language to reveal the differences between the moments of sunset, Proust re-establishes duration, dilated by all the differences accumulated in the reverie of a single evening (in *narrated time*), thus nuancing the *time of narrating*[123]. Indeed, Proust is concerned with the idea *difference* is only possible in art, as "the world of differences does not exist on the surface of the earth, among all the countries that our perception renders uniform"[124].

In conclusion, I hope to have shown how Proust uses the modernist anachronism arising from the discovery of cultural paradigms belonging to other cultural spaces as a means of renewing narrative within French tradition. By inventing a subsequent tradition that includes Carpaccio as the precursor of the multiple selves and Vermeer as the herald of a new temporal structure in the work of art, Proust opens up Western literature and achieves a modernist revolution that follows, but does not imitate, that of painting. His conception of anachronism arises from an understanding of the complex geography of the work of art, which situates it in a web of temporalities, changing the narrative of memory. It is hardly surprising that his contemporaries regarded him as 'barbaric', 'Talmudic' or 'Arabiscoid'[125] – in a word, foreign.

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