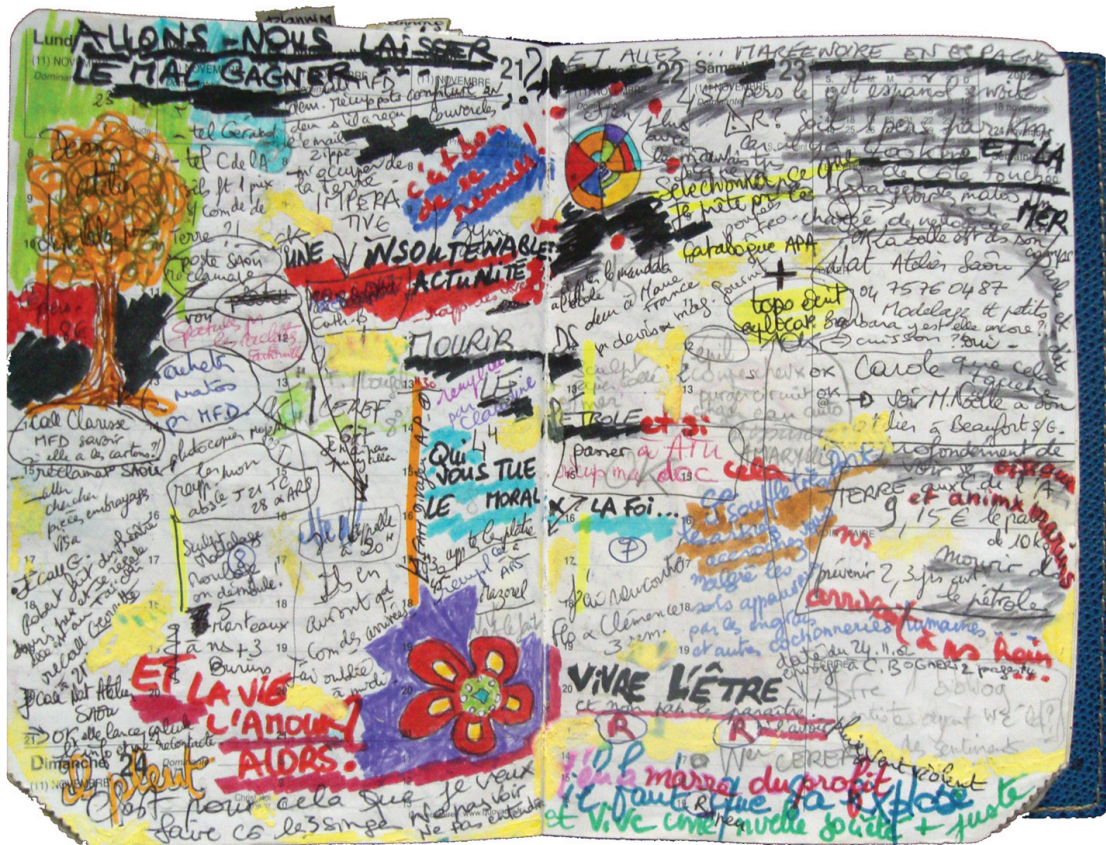


# Philippe Lejeune

# On Diary

Edited by

Jeremy D. Popkin  
& Julie Rak



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# On Diary

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Philippe Lejeune

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*On  
Diary*

EDITED BY

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&

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TRANSLATOR

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— Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak



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## PHILIPPE LEJEUNE, EXPLORER OF THE DIARY

JEREMY D. POPKIN

Philippe Lejeune hardly looks like an explorer. He has no hiking boots, carries no bushwhacking equipment, and maintains that he does not even like to travel. Like the French *coureurs des bois*, the intrepid French voyagers who made their way into the interior of North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, Lejeune cannot resist the lure of territories that have not been mapped, where rumor says the game is plentiful and no rules have been imposed. In the first half of his scholarly and professional career, Lejeune crisscrossed the unknown terrain of autobiographical writing. His celebrated essay, “Le pacte autobiographique,” was a kind of metaphorical Northwest Passage, opening a new route for literary studies; just as the *coureurs des bois* had returned laden with valuable pelts, Lejeune enabled critics to reap a rewarding harvest of first-person texts, and to push back the frontiers of their discipline. Thanks in good part to his initiative, the domain of the autobiography became more heavily populated and acquired the characteristics of civilization: scholarly conferences, learned journals, contesting interpretative schools. Did it become too settled, too organized, too tame for Lejeune? At any rate, one day he was seen heading off into the woods beyond the last trading post on the frontier of autobiographical territory, carrying only a small notebook—or perhaps a few loose sheets of paper. He was headed for the land of the diary.

As in the case of the autobiography, Lejeune knew the hostile legends that circulated about this unexplored territory. It was said to be a region of arid, barren landscapes, devoid of aesthetically satisfying monuments. Rumor depicted the inhabitants as primitive savages, going about naked and spending too much time and energy contemplating their own navels to produce anything worth bringing back to civilization. And yet Lejeune persisted. He began to send back reports: new species of flora and fauna, previously unobserved customs, strange specimens. Furthermore, Lejeune reported, the inhabitants of this new country were not an isolated species, cut off from the rest of humanity, practicing an unknown cult. In fact, they had relatives throughout

the civilized world, where diary-keeping has been practiced, if not in secret, at least without attracting much attention, for hundreds of years, as one of the most widespread forms of writing. Philippe Lejeune thus confirmed that the most important outcome of any voyage of exploration is not so much knowledge of the Other as new insight into ourselves.

Surveys in France have shown that far more people there keep diaries than engage in any other form of regular writing. One suspects that the same is true in many other countries, although, as Lejeune suggests in the essay on “Surveying Diaries, Surveying Cultures” in this volume, much remains to be learned about the variations in the practice in different cultures. Because the overwhelming majority of diary writers do not aspire to see their words published, however, the diary exists at the margin of literature, and most diarists would not label themselves as authors. And yet, when diarists take up their pens or sit down at their keyboards, they become indistinguishable from novelists, poets, or autobiographers: they, too, are performing the alchemy that transforms inchoate thoughts into words on paper or screen that can potentially be shared with readers, known and unknown, and that can confer on the person who sets them down a kind of immortality. The diary is the point where life and literature meet, and Philippe Lejeune’s highly accessible essays speak both to students and scholars of the art of writing and to the millions of people who engage in the practice of recording their thoughts and actions.

*On Diary* brings together a selection of the numerous essays about diaries and diary writing that Philippe Lejeune has published in the past twenty years. Five of the selections have appeared in English before; the others are translated here for the first time. It can fairly be said that this volume offers the most comprehensive presentation of his work on this subject available in any language. One can hardly improve on the autobiographical account of the development of his interest in diaries than Lejeune himself has provided in his essays “The Practice of the Private Journal: Chronicle of an Investigation, 1986–1998” and “Composing a Diary.” As he explains, the subject was something he knew about from personal experience—like many people, he kept a personal diary in his youth—but something he had long considered unworthy of serious attention. He gave up his own diary when he discovered the autobiography as a form of literature: “Autobiography meant growing up. Becoming an adult (good-bye to immaturity) and a writer (writing ‘well’)” (“Composing” 168).<sup>1</sup> It took a “road to Damascus moment” to change his perspective and make him take up the practice again. Before long, his personal practice of diary writing began to affect his writing and teaching; the “unifying utopia” of the autobiography, in which a life is narrated according to formal aesthetic rules, lost its attraction for him. Instead, he turned to studying the more modest, but

perhaps more intense genre (if it is one) of the diary, and the ways in which it “sculpts life as it happens and takes up the challenge of time” (173).

In his work on autobiography, Lejeune had already refused to limit himself to the study of canonical texts by famous authors. He had interested himself in the democratic potential of life writing, devoting attention to the narratives of unknown writers, and finding creativity in the most unliterary accounts. He was similarly determined not to limit his exploration of diaries to those rare works that have been accepted as literature. In 1988, as a complement to his personal engagement with diary writing, he placed an appeal in a French periodical, *Le Magazine littéraire*, asking other diary writers to tell him about their personal journals: why they kept them, what they wrote in them, what kind of paper or notebook they used, what they did with their writings. In 1990, he published the responses he received in a volume entitled “*Cher cahier . . .*”: *Témoignages sur le journal personnel* [“Dear Diary . . .”: Testimonies about personal diaries]. Reading other diarists’ accounts of their writing habits revealed to Lejeune the remarkable variety of diary-keeping practices. Some diarists are motivated by a need for intense self-exploration; others want to keep a record of their thoughts or actions for their own purposes or to pass down to their descendants. Lejeune realized that diarists also differ widely in what they record, in the routines they develop for their writing, in their choice of bound notebooks versus loose sheets, in their preference for writing by hand versus the use of the typewriter, or more recently, the computer, and in what they envisage doing with their diaries. “*Cher cahier . . .*” convinced Lejeune that the published diaries of recognized authors revealed only a tiny corner of a much larger landscape.

Lejeune’s next diary-related book, *Le Moi des demoiselles* [The “I” of young ladies], represented a new stage in his approach to the subject. In one sense, it was a more classic example of literary scholarship than “*Cher cahier . . .*”, since here Lejeune discussed texts—diaries written by young French women during the nineteenth century—that he had read, whereas in “*Cher cahier . . .*” he limited himself to introducing the confessions of diarywriters whose productions he had not seen. But Lejeune pushed the boundaries of conventional scholarship by presenting his research in the form of a “research diary” that recorded the development of his project and his ongoing reactions to the material he was studying. His conclusions were thus generated by engaging in the very practice he studied, and readers of the book were invited to see Lejeune as part of the same phenomenon he was studying, rather than as a detached observer anatomizing his specimens. In his foreword, Lejeune acknowledged that he had not discovered any unknown diaries that deserved to be elevated to the status of literary masterpieces. He emphasized the insights into social psychology that

these texts afforded, and the contribution that they could make to the developing field of women's history. Above all, however, he insisted on the importance of the light they shed on a widespread form of writing practice: "We must give ordinary writings the attention they deserve" (11).

Another dimension was added to Philippe Lejeune's work on diaries in 1997, when he and Catherine Bogaert, a fellow member of the Association pour l'Autobiographie (APA), a group he had helped found in 1992 to promote interest in and conservation of unpublished life writing documents,<sup>2</sup> put together an exposition of diaries, which was presented at the Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, the central library of France's second largest city. From the outset of his inquiries, Lejeune had taken a lively interest in the materiality of diaries, but his publications on the subject had necessarily been limited to descriptions of manuscripts; the Lyon exhibition allowed him to show how much more there is to a diary than just the words of its text. Even the black-and-white illustrations included in the exhibition catalogue demonstrated the amazing variety of forms that a diary can take, and the ways in which authors have combined words, pictures, and sometimes documents or other objects, to create journals that sometimes amount to veritable works of art.<sup>3</sup>

This lesson is brought home even more effectively in the striking volume that Lejeune and Bogaert published in 2003, *Un Journal à soi. Histoire d'une pratique*, whose color photographs present the diary as an *objet d'art* and demonstrate the vast range of its forms. In these pictures, one can see the way in which handwriting and formatting individualize diaries, and the many ways in which authors express themselves. One author included daily color drawings to record the weather on his family's farm, another made funny drawings of his office coworkers, and one young woman carefully glued the butt of her first cigarette into her diary. The diarists in *Un journal à soi* range from the world famous—the book includes a reproduction of the page on which Louis XVI carefully recorded "Nothing" next to the date of 14 July 1789, and some pages of Anne Frank's diary—to the unknown, underlining the way in which diary writing brings celebrities and ordinary individuals together. In 2006, Lejeune and Bogaert coedited *Le Journal intime*, an anthology of selections from French diaries that offered readers a taste of the content of many of the works featured in their illustrated volume. (A section of the introduction, "Counting and Managing," is included in *On Diary*.)

Even as he was pursuing projects that stressed the materiality of the diary, by putting journals on display or presenting them in photographs, Lejeune was also turning his attention to the development of new forms of entirely non-material diaries, those kept on computers. He was one of the first literary scholars in any language to take an interest in the now ubiquitous genre of

the blog. Like “*Cher cahier . . .*”, “*Cher écran . . .*”, published in 2000, relied in part on a survey of diarists who wrote on computers or made their diaries accessible online. Lejeune’s sensitivity to the way in which the medium used for diary writing affects the content and the possibilities of the writer’s project allowed him to see that the encounter of the computer and the Internet with the personal journal marked a genuine cultural turning point. The fact that private diaries can now be instantly shared with unknown readers all over the world, and that diarists can receive reactions to their musings as they write, has created radical new possibilities for this long-established form of writing.

The series of books that Philippe Lejeune has written or compiled devoted to diaries hardly exhausts his contribution to the study of this poorly understood genre. Much of Lejeune’s most interesting work on the subject has taken the form of conference papers and journal articles. A number of these have appeared in collections of his work, notably *Les Brouillons de soi* (1998) and *Signes de vie* (2005), together with essays reflecting his ongoing interest in other forms of life writing, particularly autobiography; others have been published in scholarly journals and publications such as *La Faute à Rousseau*, the journal of the Association pour l’Autobiographie. Lejeune has participated in numerous conferences on first-person writing, and some of his essays have appeared, in French and sometimes in English, in collections of papers from such meetings; several of these pieces are included in this volume.

Although Lejeune’s writing on diaries has taken many forms and appeared in many venues, there is an underlying unity to his approach to the subject. Since his personal road to Damascus moment in the 1980s, he has been an unabashed evangelist for the diary. By writing about his own diary-keeping practices, he has made it clear that he is not merely exploiting an understudied subject: he is writing about something that has deep meaning for him personally. This makes his essays on diary quite different from his earlier work on autobiography, although no reader of his work on that subject could doubt that it, too, engaged him deeply.<sup>4</sup> As he writes in “Composing a Diary,” he now realizes that he will never write an autobiography himself, and that he would not even want to: “How could I have wished for that unifying utopia?” (168). But he proudly affirms his identity as a diary writer, because the diary, unlike the autobiography, allows for change and growth. This, for Lejeune, is the essential attraction of diary writing: it is a realm of freedom, whose practitioners can decide for themselves how to behave, and then change the rules as they please. Diarists can, like Lejeune himself, start and stop keeping their journals. They can write about anything they want. They can keep their texts to themselves, share them with intimates, aspire to see them published, share them with the world on the Internet, or destroy them. They can think of

themselves as authors in training, and use the exercise of diary writing to polish their skills, but they can also ignore all the requirements of literary style, which can be as confining as the rules of moral and religious propriety. In Philippe Lejeune's embrace of the diary, we see echoes of the spirit of adolescent rebellion so eloquently evoked in his essay "Lucullus Dines with Lucullus," included in this volume, and also of his earlier interests in the Surrealist movement and in various forms of experimental writing, as well as traces of the spirit of the great libertarian movement of May 1968 in France, which occurred just as Lejeune was beginning his academic career.

Lejeune thus rejects some of the arguments that have been made in the past about the benefits of diary-keeping. Some of his essays dissect moralistic arguments about the value of personal record-keeping as a means of self-improvement: Marc-Antoine Jullien's proposal for panoptical diaries that would drive their authors to make maximum use of their time each day, or the French Catholic Church's dissemination of a model of diary writing as a form of spiritual training for young women in the nineteenth century. One can, however, sense Lejeune's glee when he shows how diarists subjected to these schemes successfully subverted them. The only constraint on the diary that Lejeune accepts is that of time: if writers do not date their entries, they are not keeping diaries. This is not a moral or aesthetic constraint, but an existential one: by recognizing the inexorable flow of time, the diarist confronts the inevitability of change, and ultimately of death, and finds in the practice of writing a way to cope with this realization. At the same time, however, as Lejeune argues in his essay, "How Do Diaries End?" the open-ended nature of the diary "protects us from the idea of the end"; it is one of those illusions "that gives us the courage, day after day, to live out the rest of our lives" (193). But this is more than an illusion: "If you have taken precautionary measures, you will still die, but your diary will not" (198).

The essays brought together in this volume fall into three groups, devoted to the origins and development of diary-keeping practices, theoretical questions raised by diaries, and Lejeune's studies of particular diaries or groups of diaries. Although the diary is often taken to be a spontaneous expression of individuality, it is in fact a cultural practice that has a history, as the essays in the section on "Origins" demonstrate. As Lejeune shows in "Counting and Managing," the diary as we understand it required the development of a certain kind of material culture: in particular, it only became a realistic possibility once a relatively inexpensive yet durable medium—paper—became available. Prior to that time, the materials available for writing were either, like papyrus or parchment, too costly to make a purely private project feasible, or else, like the wax tablets used by the ancient Romans, were meant to be erased and

reused. The development of the diary also depended on the development of a collective consciousness of time as something linear and measurable. Lejeune sees a close connection between the emergence of the diary, at the beginning of the early modern era, and the development of clocks and calendars. In a broad sense, Lejeune's account links the development of the diary to the spread of other modern cultural practices, such as bookkeeping, that rationalized other forms of memory. He thus takes issue with a long tradition that associates the diary above all with the development of spirituality in the early modern period. While this may be true to some extent in Protestant England, across the Channel, Lejeune concludes in his essay "Spiritual Journals in France," "the personal diary, which developed in France beginning in the late eighteenth century, does not seem to owe much to Protestantism or the spiritual journal" (76). His research thus forces us to consider that there may have been many routes to our modern diary-keeping practices.

The diary of the seventeenth-century English author Samuel Pepys—one of only two non-French diarists excerpted in Lejeune and Bogaert's anthology—is the earliest known personal chronicle that strikes us as truly modern, but Pepys was definitely ahead of his time: the diary did not really begin to flourish until the late eighteenth century—the age of romanticism. In France, at least, as Lejeune demonstrates in the essay "On Today's Date," this is the period when the practice of precisely dating the moment when entries were made establishes itself. The modern diary is thus contemporary with the modern autobiography, another product of the same period. The end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth is also, as he shows in "O My Paper!", the moment when diarists begin to address their diary as though it was an intimate friend in whom they could confide. The diffusion of the practice of writing to one's "dear diary" is significant: even though each diarist wrote in private, the spread of the formula indicates that diarists were increasingly aware that they were following a widely diffused model. Indeed, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the French moralist and educational theorist Marc-Antoine Jullien published guidelines for diary-keeping, although, as Lejeune explains in "Marc-Antoine Jullien, Controlling Time," few followed his rigid formulas—not even his daughter, whose lively diary is preserved along with Jullien's papers.

In modern times, diary-keeping is generally coded as a feminine practice, even though, as Lejeune points out in several of his essays, the majority of *published* diaries are by men. His study of "The 'Journal de Jeune Fille' in Nineteenth-Century France" adds to the picture of the diary as a historically conditioned form of writing by showing how young women's diary writing was systematically encouraged as a form of spiritual discipline during this



period, especially by the Catholic Church. Lejeune's investigation of these young women's diaries also demonstrates the impact of published models, such as the journal of Eugénie de Guérin, even though, as he shows, these published versions were often far removed from the original texts. The nineteenth-century young women who kept diaries in France were given strict guidelines to follow, and their writings were often highly formulaic, but as Lejeune discovered, some of them managed to inflect their diaries in unexpected directions and turn them into vehicles for genuine self-discovery. Furthermore, as the intense religiosity of the mid-nineteenth century declined, women's diaries became more individualized, as demonstrated by the famous journal of Marie Bashkirtseff, selections of which were published in 1887. In Lejeune's hands, the diary thus becomes a sensitive indicator of trends in cultural history, and a prime source for the exploration of women's experience in the past.

While Lejeune is concerned with the history of the diary and the evolution of journal-keeping practices, he is also deeply involved in the problems of diary writers in the here and now, and in thinking about the meaning of this kind of writing. Like his earlier subject of study, the autobiography, the diary has often come under attack as an inherently unworthy form of writing. Critics have damned it as "unwholesome, hypocritical, cowardly, worthless, artificial, sterile, shriveling, feminine, etc.," as Lejeune shows in "The Diary on Trial" (147). The French debate about diaries may have been particularly virulent—one hopes that Lejeune's essay will provoke parallel studies for other cultures—but it raises some real issues about the energy and effort that devoted diarists pour into their private writings. The participants in this debate have included distinguished French writers and critics, and as Lejeune shows, even a young law student by the name of François Mitterrand, who later made a name for himself in another line of work, serving as president of France from 1981 to 1995.

The study of the diary calls for an answer to the simple question, "What is a diary," with which Lejeune begins his essay "Composing a Diary." Lejeune approaches the question by retracing his own engagement with diary writing, which he practiced as an adolescent and then rejected when he turned to the study of "serious" literature. After he returned to it, he learned to practice it in several different ways, leading him to realize that, although we all think we know what the diary is, in fact it is a protean genre with no fixed definition. For him, finally, what defines the diary is the way in which "it sculpts life as it happens and takes up the challenge of time" (173). Despite the fluidity of the diary form, all diarists face certain choices, which Lejeune explores in "The Continuous and the Discontinuous." If they choose to write on paper,

do they keep their diary in notebooks or on separate sheets of paper? The notebook “operates at the level of the fantasy that Paul Ricoeur calls ‘narrative identity’: it promises some minimal measure of unity,” Lejeune writes (176), but he himself initially preferred loose sheets, each independent of the others. And in any event, he claims, diary writing is necessarily discontinuous, a matter of stringing together disconnected entries. And yet they are related to each other by rhythms of repetition and variation that may not be obvious to the writer but that appear when the diary is read.

How do diaries end? As Lejeune says in his essay on this topic, the autobiography is “turned toward the past,” and manuals on how to write one outline “rituals of closure,” but “the diary is virtually unfinishable from the beginning, because there is always a time lived beyond the writing, making it necessary to write anew . . .” (191). Nevertheless, there is a limit: the author’s death will necessarily bring the diary to a close. Lejeune meditates on “the black ink congealed at the bottom of the last page of [French diarist] Jehan Rictus’s last notebook. Did he knock over his inkwell as he died?” (199). The diary’s open-ended nature is thus an illusion, but Lejeune asks, “is it any different from the illusion that gives us the courage, day after day, to live out the rest of our lives?” (193). And diary writing is not entirely an illusion. The author’s body will crumble into dust, but the diary text may achieve immortality, since “it can change bodies, be recopied, published. I will be incinerated, my body reduced from one to zero. I will be preserved, my diary will stay on a shelf in the archives” (198).

The diary may be in part an illusion—a dream of defeating death—but it is not, Lejeune insists, a fiction. In “The Diary as ‘Antifiction,’” he argues that, unlike the autobiography, the diary does not borrow from the realm of literary imagination. “An imaginary reconstruction of the present could only be viewed and experienced as a lie, or insanity, and would be difficult to keep up over time,” he writes (202). Certainly diaries are subjective, but this does not mean that they are essentially false. Conversely Lejeune finds novels presented in the form of diaries artificial and unsatisfying. They cannot have the open-ended quality of real diaries, which are necessarily “written without the knowledge of where it will end. A diary-novel is always written to lead to the ending” (207). Furthermore, the attraction of reading a diary is based on “the feeling of *touching time*,” a sensation that can only be generated if we sense that the diary author was recording his or her real experiences and thoughts (209).

Lejeune’s theoretical analysis of the diary is developed in close connection with his study of particular diary texts, both his own and those of others; he notes that critics of diary writing, such as Maurice Blanchot, often seem to

have only a secondhand acquaintance with the genre (“Diary on Trial” 160–61). In “Auto-Genesis: Genetic Studies of Autobiographical Texts,” Lejeune compares the problem of studying the evolution of an autobiography with the seemingly impossible challenge of studying the development of a diary text. One can, in some cases, learn valuable lessons about the shaping of a life narrative by studying rough drafts or successive published versions, but “a diary, if it is a real diary, has no *avant-texte*” (223). To be sure, as Lejeune writes, “the image of the diary as ‘writing on the first try’ is somewhat mythological . . . diarists start writing in their diaries throughout the day, while living” (224). In most cases, however, the traces of these preparatory processes are inaccessible. Published diaries, however, almost always undergo some kind of editing, and, often, rewriting, either by their authors or by someone else, and, as Lejeune shows, the study of these transformations is often quite interesting. Among other things, as he notes, “the text of a diary does not inspire the respect that people generally have for texts. Who would have the audacity to rewrite personal correspondence? Who would feel authorized to doctor a poem? When it is a diary nobody seems to mind” (227).

Lejeune’s theoretical guidelines for the study of diaries are put to brilliant use in his moving account of “How Anne Frank Rewrote the Diary of Anne Frank.” Anne Frank’s diary has been central in Lejeune’s thinking about diary writing, just as the published version of her work, which is without question the most widely read diary of all time, has become central to all thinking about the diary genre. In an essay that is at once an example of rigorous scholarship and a testament to the importance of a text whose accessibility sometimes threatens to confine it to the category of “young people’s literature,” Lejeune reconstructs the process by which Anne wrote her diary, and then, two years after she had begun and when her rapid maturation had enabled her to see her earlier thirteen-year-old self in a new perspective, began herself to edit what she had written with the intent of making it publishable. When the Nazis brutally interrupted her life and her writing in August 1944, Anne left behind not one but two diary texts. When Anne’s father returned from Auschwitz in 1945, he recovered a collection of notebooks and loose sheets stemming in part from the original diary and in part from Anne’s own rewritten version, but parts of both had been lost. A simple transcription of these documents would have been incoherent and unlikely to interest many readers.

When he decided to carry out his daughter’s wishes by having her diary published, Otto Frank had no choice but to engage in a process of editing and selection: the two incomplete diaries (whose texts have now been published in a critical edition that makes it possible to compare the manuscripts

with the published version) sometimes covered the same events, but in other cases he had only one or the other of the two versions. Otto Frank has often been accused of censoring embarrassing passages of the diary, but Lejeune shows that the opposite is actually the case. Anne, who had expected that she and the other inmates of the “Secret Annex” would survive the war, had edited out material that she thought might offend members of the group, as well as references to her own sexual development, her feelings about her parents, and her love affair with Peter, the young boy whose family shared the Franks’ living quarters, which she had ended before she finished rewriting the diary. Otto Frank, the sole survivor of the group, decided that his daughter’s memory would be best served by letting readers have as full a picture of her life and writing as possible, and so he restored many of these cuts, even some that said things that must have been painful for him to read. Holocaust negationists have seized on the fact that the published diary of Anne Frank is an edited version to try to discredit its documentary value. Lejeune shows that retracing the steps by which the words Anne put down on paper were transformed into the text we now read gives us a deeper appreciation of the truth that the diary reveals: the story of a gifted young woman discovering her talent as a writer, and using the diary form to take readers into the heart of the terrible experience she was living through.

Trapped in her family’s hiding place, Anne Frank was nevertheless in the mainstream of the European world’s diary-keeping traditions. She was given the blank notebook she wrote in as a gift, with the expectation that she would use it for a diary; she drew some of her inspiration from books she read, and she knew that her journal might well be published when the war ended. In his “Surveying Diaries, Surveying Cultures,” Lejeune reminds us that the practice of keeping a diary may not be as familiar or accepted in other cultures. His article explains some of the techniques he has developed to obtain information about diaries in European countries, and their limitations when they are applied in a society like Algeria, where such writing “is discreet and localized and makes people feel uncomfortable.” To study diaries, Lejeune continues, is to touch on a topic that “brings into play all of the dimensions of culture” (275). We cannot assume that diaries have the same significance all over the world.

The section of this collection devoted to “Practices” includes two selections from Lejeune’s pioneering study of diaries written on the computer, “*Cher écran . . .*”. Most writing on this subject has concentrated on the phenomenon of the blog, to which Lejeune devoted half of his book. The first essay included here, “The Diary on the Computer,” focuses on another issue: what difference does it make to write a diary on the screen, as opposed

to writing by hand or using a typewriter? Drawing on responses to a survey he circulated, Lejeune noted that computer diarists were aware, for example, of the individuality that handwriting confers on a text, but that some of them found the impersonal appearance of writing done on the computer “liberating,” and felt that the machine had “a sort of therapeutic listening quality that adds clarity to everything you have to say” (288). Whereas revising a handwritten journal entry strikes most diarists as somehow illicit, on the computer such editing leaves no traces and seems more natural; Lejeune himself admits that he now does this routinely. In “Diaries on the Internet: A Year of Reading,” he sums up his own experience of reading other diarists’ online productions, concluding that the new medium suits the personal journal better than any form of paper. Online, “the diary can finally breathe, stretch out on a chaise lounge, and relax. Computer files and loose-leaf pages lend themselves wonderfully to writing fragments. But files are even better than notebooks for endless accumulation” (316). Lejeune’s studies of the diary have thus come along just at the moment when this new technology is transforming the practice in fundamental ways. But will diarists who write online be any happier when they reread their old productions than their paper-covering predecessors? (And as software continues to evolve, will their electronic files still be readable at all when their authors come across them in the Internet’s equivalent of an attic after thirty years?) In “Rereading Your Diary,” Lejeune suggests that format may not change the bittersweet nature of the mature diarist’s reunion with an earlier version of his or her self.

It seems entirely appropriate to conclude Philippe Lejeune’s wide-ranging survey of the history, the theory, and the practice of diary writing with the delightful essay, “Lucullus Dines with Lucullus.” It is at once historical—inspired by a story from classical antiquity, and ranging rapidly over diary-keeping practices from many centuries—and theoretical—because it raises the question of whether writing meant only for oneself is legitimate—and personal, since it describes Lejeune’s own adolescent diary. Lejeune concludes his amusing essay by recalling how, as a child, he badgered his parents to tell him whether a person needed a license to drive a car in his own yard. As he puts it, “I already had a taste for the auto, in every sense of the word, and I was dreaming of a ‘free’ zone (again, in every sense)” (335). Although his essays repeatedly remind us that diary writing is a practice influenced by culture and even by technology, Lejeune ends by affirming the diary as one of modernity’s most important sites of freedom, a place where individuals can be alone to amuse themselves, to develop their creativity, but also to ponder the deepest questions of human existence and the mystery of death.

Lejeune's work is both criticism in the highest sense, enabling us to understand the phenomenon of the diary in new ways and to read diary texts with new understanding, and also intensely personal. His approach combines scholarship with autobiographical reflection, and very deliberately, with diary writing practice. For all the originality of his approach to the subject, Lejeune writes in a highly accessible style, quite different from what the label "French literary theorist" normally leads readers to expect. Profound things can be said about the diary, he shows, without resorting to esoteric language or elaborate theoretical constructions. It would be inappropriate to discuss this most democratic of genres in a way that would exclude most of its practitioners. Instead, Lejeune develops his ideas in a highly personal style, sometimes, as he explains in "Journals of Exploration," in a "research journal" that is itself a form of diary, a move that puts him on the same level as his subjects, seeking, like them, to capture the movement of time and the impact of daily experience. He does not hide his unabashed enthusiasm for his subject, but he is never preachy, and his lively sense of humor keeps him from becoming too serious about an activity that, as he points out, has its absurd side—so much effort to create and preserve texts that may never be read!—as well as its serious purposes.

If any obstacle might hinder Anglophone readers' appreciation of Lejeune's studies of the diary, it is the fact that he naturally draws the majority of his examples from texts written in French. Few even of the published French diaries he discusses will be accessible to readers unfamiliar with that language, although a handful of them have been translated, in whole or in part.<sup>5</sup> Lejeune himself is sensitive to the differences in diary-keeping practices in different cultures, as his essay on French spiritual diaries demonstrates. Although the specific texts and authors discussed in many of his essays will be unfamiliar to most Anglophone readers, the questions Lejeune raises are not culturally delimited. Diarists all over the world face the same problems of purpose, choice of tone, and selection of materials, and Lejeune is skilled at bringing out the general points raised by any specific example. In any event, many of the French diaries he has brought to light are as little known in France as they are in the wider world: the majority of these texts have never been published, and the printed versions of diaries often represent only a small fraction of the original texts. (Although Lejeune does not make the point, the Internet now offers a new possibility for making the full texts of diaries that are too long for publication accessible online).

For more than a decade, since my interest in the topic of autobiography led me to seek him out, I have been privileged to count Philippe Lejeune as a friend and to follow the development of his writing about diaries. As a sometime diarist myself—I was pleased to be able to contribute to his archives a

photocopy of the first page of my first diary, a travel journal kept on a trip abroad when I was seven years old—I have learned to understand my own engagement with this writing practice better by reading his essays. As a historian, I have come to understand the complex issues raised by these chronicles, which members of my discipline have often mistaken for simple and transparent sources. It is a pleasure to be able to help in making Lejeune's writings accessible to a wider audience, which I hope will include not only academics but anyone who has kept a diary.

## NOTES

1. References to or citations from "Surveying Diaries, Surveying Cultures," "The Practice of the Private Journal: Chronicle of an Investigation, 1986–1998," "Composing a Diary," "Counting and Managing," "Lucullus Dines with Lucullus," "How Do Diaries End?," "Spiritual Journals in France from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," "On Today's Date," "O My Paper!," "Marc-Antoine Jullien: Controlling Time," "The 'Journal de Jeune Fille' in Nineteenth-Century France," "The Diary on Trial," "The Continuous and the Discontinuous," "The Diary as 'Antifiction,'" "Auto-Genesis: Genetic Studies of Autobiographical Texts," "How Anne Frank Rewrote the Diary of Anne Frank," "Journals of Exploration," "Rereading Your Diary," "Diaries on the Internet: A Year of Reading," and "The Diary on the Computer" refer to articles in this volume.
2. On the establishment and development of the Association pour l'Autobiographie, see "Les 10 ans de l'APA," a special issue of the group's journal, *La Faute à Rousseau*, and in this volume, "The Practice of the Private Journal" (40–41).
3. For the exhibition catalog, see Lejeune and Bogaert, *Un journal à soi, ou la passion des journaux intimes*.
4. For a selection of Lejeune's essays on autobiography that have been translated into English, see *On Autobiography*.
5. Among the classic French diaries that have been translated into English, in whole or in part, see *The Private Journal of Henri Frédéric Amiel*, the *Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff*, and André Gide's *Journals*.

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# DIALOGUE WITH THE FUTURE: PHILIPPE LEJEUNE'S METHOD AND THEORY OF DIARY

JULIE RAK

*The diary is a wager on the future. It bases the individual . . . on ipseity, a sort of abstract commitment to remain faithful to oneself.*

—Philippe Lejeune, “Rereading Your Diary” (316)<sup>1</sup>

I have never had coffee with Philippe Lejeune. I have never even met him. I saw him once, reading a marvelous paper that became the essay “How Do Diaries End?” Until now, that essay was one of the few glimpses of Lejeune’s thinking about diaries in the English language. But listening to Philippe Lejeune unfold the mysteries of diary writing—how does one end a diary, and how do diaries make that “wager on the future” when so many are written never to be published or even read ever again?—was a defining experience for me as a scholar of auto/biography and life writing. That day, Lejeune showed his audience a kind of writing that few ever analyze, and he did it in such a friendly, delighted way that it felt like having coffee with someone who puts down the cup to show you a girl’s diary with a little lock on it, or who puts in your hands a few sheets of paper filled with cramped handwriting, or who opens a computer file, and lets you see how the productions of so-called “ordinary” writers have their own magic. Reading diaries by writers who are not Anaïs Nin, or André Gide, or Samuel Pepys, demands a different way to find and interpret texts, a different relationship to things like the materiality of writing itself, and an awareness of the relationship we have to the passage of time. In that work, and in his writings which have not been translated into English until now, Lejeune explores how the most overlooked and devalued form of writing in the fields of literary studies and history—diary writing—is an opportunity to explore the development of modern selfhood in the western world, and to record the process of creating personal narrative within scholarship.

For Lejeune, this exploration is also an act of love. When he began he was, as Jeremy Popkin says in his part of this introduction, an explorer in an undiscovered country who found many people living and working there already,

in anonymity. The experience turned Lejeune from being the scholar who was most famous for creating “the autobiographical pact” as a way to identify autobiography’s unique generic properties, and who wrote about autobiography as literature in the works of writers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Michel Leiris, into a scholar who champions diary writing as “antifiction” rather than non-fiction, into a scholar who invented new methods of text collection and analysis in order to understand what this writing is about. Lejeune’s change of methods also led to a change in the kinds of texts he examines: not only is Lejeune one of the few scholars who tries to theorize diary writing across a range of historical periods, but also he should be credited with doing pioneering research on online diaries and blogs. In particular, Lejeune’s work on online diaries in the early stages of the internet’s development in the 1990s potentially provides a way to theorize what has become known as Web 2.0, the development of online content by ordinary users which has at the heart of its practice the knowledge, authority, and experiences of users themselves as well as the character of the selves they create and represent for themselves and each other.

### SEEING INTO THE FUTURE: METHOD

As I mentioned, Philippe Lejeune is mainly known in the English-speaking world as the inventor of “the autobiographical pact,” a tacit agreement a reader makes with the author of a text which has non-fictional truth claims. The reader has to assume that the author’s proper name in the world outside the text matches the name on the cover of the book, and the first-person pronoun within the narrative itself. If any of these elements do not match, the book is considered to be fictional. The autobiographical pact proved to be a useful tool in the attempt to understand what the generic properties of autobiography might be (or, to the skeptical eyes of Paul de Man, what autobiography could never be). However, when the study of autobiography moved away from debates about its qualities as a genre to an embrace of its discursive properties across a range of texts and practices, few scholars considered the potential of the autobiographical pact as a way to explore how a genre works in the public sphere.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the understanding of the pact as a way to determine (rather than just describe, as he had intended) generic properties became the way that English-speaking scholars saw the work of Lejeune. Just as the actor Christopher Reeves was typecast as Superman for the rest of his career and even his life, in the English-speaking world, Philippe Lejeune became best known for creating the autobiographical pact, to the exclusion of his work on diaries and online writing. One of the casualties of this omission, which *On Diary* aims to correct, is Lejeune’s approach to research methodology.

What does Lejeune have to tell those of us who are interested in auto/biography studies and popular culture about method? For one thing, Lejeune has become an interdisciplinary researcher in a unique way. Excerpts in *On Diary* show Lejeune's interest in the historical origins of the diary in France and in the rest of Europe which create a genealogy of the form as a trace rather than as a history. Diary writers did not publish their diaries (and most, of course, still don't), and so there is no way to argue for the impact of—or anxiety of—influence. Diarists somehow began to create daily accounts of their lives, but how could they have done this in privacy, and even in secrecy? Lejeune's approach to this problem includes a social history of the diary which links it to other social innovations in the west, including the advent of the clock, the watch, the calendar, the account book, and the spiritual journal, and which sketches some classical origins from the materiality of daily composition on tablets in ancient Rome. In this, Lejeune's work resembles the work of scholars like Felicity Nussbaum or Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff on diaries by women where they seek to connect the growth of diary-making as part of the development of western subjectivity and of gender identity. In this work too, I see a respect for what ordinary people produce and think about in opposition to the social prejudice (and the prejudice—too often—of intellectuals) “ordinary” things and people have engendered since the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that the work of Philippe Lejeune on diaries is in dialogue with the narrative theory of Paul Ricoeur and Gérard Genette, as he says himself in this volume. But Lejeune's approach to diary writing by ordinary individuals also recalls—at least for me—Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* and its theorizing of everyday activities by ordinary people. Here is Certeau's picture of what ordinary people do in capitalist systems:

As unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality, consumers produce through their signifying practices . . . “indirect” or “errant” trajectories obeying their own logic. In the technocratically constructed, written, and functionalized space in which the consumers move about, their trajectories form unforeseeable sentences, partly unreadable paths across a space. (xviii)

In this, I see echoes of Lejeune's understanding of diarists as other, ordinary, silent producers of culture who create their own logics of expression: diarists make secret spaces within a larger social world. Certeau goes on to talk about how reading itself is a productive, and silent, act within the spaces of consumerism and the production of print, but Lejeune has us pause within another scene of production: personal writing, a practice which as he demonstrates in this volume, developed alongside the development of early printing and script,

and which continues as its silent partner. Diarists, for Lejeune, are also “poets of their own acts” who perform the present for an unforeseeable future.

Lejeune’s methods recall for me too Michel Foucault’s later work on the care of the self and the origins of selfhood in confession. Foucault’s interest in documents about penance and confession, which for him formed the seventeenth century origins of the repressive hypothesis, has similarities to Lejeune’s interest, found in “Spiritual Journals in France from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries,” in the development of the encouragements found in similar documents to write “self-examinations” of one’s conscience in monastic communities during the same period. And Foucault’s examination of archival documents about ordinary lives, which form the foundation of educational and medical discourse that regulated everyday sexuality,<sup>4</sup> has a parallel to Lejeune’s theorizing—from archived diaries—of the development of diary discourse in France during the eighteenth century from the idea of a letter to oneself to (with a sense of transgression which Foucault would have found familiar) the decision by some female writers to write about themselves even if (or perhaps because) others think them unhealthy or crazy (“O My Paper!”). But where Foucault would probably have seen the transgressive tendency of diaries to be a counter-discourse or counter-memory practiced by individuals who had been taught by their societies to confess and therefore be a subject, for Lejeune these “confessions” can form a counter-tradition of subjectivity which influences the development of private life, but is not completely subsumed by the training of the proper self practiced by institutions. This kind of confession, after all, has a passionate address, which is to oneself or is part of the process of self-formation. But diary writing still holds itself away from the world of print. The confession is to the future or to the beloved page, but not—and this is important—to any authority. If anything, diaries evade authority.

Other pieces by Lejeune depart markedly from the approach of scholars who work in archives to find diaries, or who comment on diaries by famous writers. Lejeune has made his own diary writing practices the subject of his investigation, partly because diaries do not act like literary texts, including (for him) published autobiographies. For one thing, diaries are not written for any readers other than, sometimes, diarists themselves, and so they contain rhetoric which is not designed for other readers. Diaries are not, therefore, literary documents, even though they can have aesthetic merit. They are records of a life process rather than finished narratives about a life, and as such they are only part of the practice of narrating and understanding what a life means. Moreover, they are the written traces of that process in medias res—diarists compose life narratives as their lives are happening, with no way to move the

narrative towards the future. As Lejeune says in “The Diary as ‘Antifiction,’” this is why the attempts to imitate diary writing in fiction are often unsuccessful, since no diarist can know how a diary will end—“we [diarists] are writing a text whose ultimate logic escapes us; we agree to collaborate with an unpredictable and uncontrollable future” (204)—but all writers of fiction or autobiography know the ending. Therefore, attempts to interpret diaries as one interprets literary texts or historical accounts of a life will contain what Lejeune says is too much “fiction,” which he understands as too much focus on the organizing principles of a text and not enough focus on process. What to do with diaries, then? Each one probably has similar elements, but each one must differ from the others. They are repetitive, rough, elliptical—in short, they are not for us. We are voyeurs when we read the diaries of others. Lejeune’s solution has been to give others permission to be voyeurs: he lets us see how he composes his own diaries as a record of what the process can look like, and he shows the compositional process of other diarists in concert with his own. Delightfully and not at all in the dry style of so many theorists, Lejeune shares his own diary-making process with us: we learn of his resistance to writing diaries in books because he likes the freedom of loose-leaf paper, his notes to himself on train journeys, his wry comment that rereading old diaries can be an exercise in humility (could I really have been like that, he asks in mock horror), his enjoyment of secret diary-keeping when he was a teenager, his love affair with diary writing on the computer, his delight in the split (playfully half-revealed to us) of his own intersubjectivity in his diary writing as he creates and “consumes” himself in an endless, secret feast. Unlike personal narratives written by scholars like Carolyn Steedman, Nancy K. Miller, or bell hooks, Lejeune’s descriptions of his own process does not narrate his life story so that his experiences explicate the meanings of other texts or other experiences. It is not the experiences themselves which matter to Lejeune so much as the rhetorical strategies which he (and other diary writers) uses to make sense of experience-in-the-making. In this way, Lejeune makes the private process of much diary writing into a community record that we all get to enjoy. To me, this is a methodology of the heart. It is impossible not to share Lejeune’s delight, his love of the often touching naïveté that diary writing often displays (including his own), his generosity towards the writing of ordinary people, and his understanding of the writing process. And so these essays do more than tell me about diary writing: they make me want to go back to my own poor, dear diaries of my childhood and teenage years, which I still keep on a bookshelf at home and have not wanted to read, and make friends with the writer I was then. Perhaps Lejeune can show me, and many others, why it is worthwhile to dialogue with the past and the future through one’s own diaries.

Lejeune's way of collecting texts, particularly through the Association pour l'Autobiographie (APA), is also a methodology which connects Lejeune's work to the broader study of popular culture in the English-speaking world. Of course it is possible, as Lejeune himself and many other scholars have done, to study diaries from the past by reading them in archives and by applying methods from historiography and book history to examine the material conditions of their production, the variations from drafts of diaries like those of Anne Frank, and so on. But the study of popular written ephemera in cultural studies is faced with a major methodological problem: what is the archive of contemporary texts? How can a researcher know how to identify and analyze material which is not bounded by an archive, particularly when so much material is so easily available? Lejeune's early answer to this question was to create an archive of the present. He placed an advertisement in various French newspapers asking for diarists to send the APA their diaries for reading and analysis. Thus far, the APA has received 500 diaries, in addition to other personal texts. The members of the APA archive these diaries, read them, and conduct research on them. Later on in his investigations, Lejeune placed advertisements which asked diarists to send diskettes with diary files, and which asked them to discuss how they kept diaries on computers and why they would do so. As online diary writing began to become more popular in the 1990s, Lejeune also read online diaries (especially by young women in Quebec, Canada) and kept his own diary on a computer so that he could understand how the process of diary writing and revision onscreen imitated and departed from the process of keeping diaries on paper.

For the study of popular print culture, Lejeune's method is important because it creates an archive that circumvents the problem of studying unpublished (and therefore uncollectible) contemporary materials. Although it is true that the diarists who submit material are self-selecting (there are many more diarists who did not answer Lejeune's advertisement), the number and variety of responses received by the APA provides a rich sample of diaries which otherwise would remain unknown. To this end, Lejeune also worked with a curator at the Lyon municipal library to display 250 diaries for the public to see. As he says in "Surveying Diaries, Surveying Cultures," the materiality of diaries means that they are not, like published works, infinitely reproducible: they need to be seen as original documents, and read or viewed with an eye to the conditions of their material production.

Lejeune and the other members of the APA have also made qualitative data collection part of their methodology because the collection of individual accounts cannot account for diary writing as a process. Lejeune says that "a diary is not only a text: it is a behavior, a way of life, of which the text is

merely a trace or by-product” (“Surveying Diaries” 262). The difficulty involved in understanding a diary which was not meant to be read means that some meanings cannot be known. Therefore, Lejeune and the APA have conducted short surveys with targeted groups to find out how many people write diaries and what kind of diaries they keep. Lejeune also advocates doing more in-depth interviews with diarists, and where possible, comparing the interview material with the material of the interviewees’ diaries to get a complete picture of diary rhetoric.

This type of research is familiar to those scholars working in the social sciences. But to my knowledge, it is still rare to have interviewing connected to requests for written accounts, particularly in the humanities, with the notable exceptions of scholars like Jan Radway or Elizabeth Long who work between the areas of literary analysis and cultural studies in the study of reading. As more and more researchers become interested in the potential for doing research on popular texts, Philippe Lejeune’s approach to doing diary research as a record of process (his own and the processes of others) rather than an elucidation of texts which are already in print has much to offer the field of print culture studies, and the area of popular culture studies generally. For decades, the study of auto/biography and non-fiction has situated itself within literary studies, with its methods of close-reading and textual analysis. But as Lejeune points out frequently, the non-fictional or anti-fictional properties of diaries demand a change in our research methods. Lejeune’s approach, or at the very least his contention that methodology must suit the area of investigation, could be fruitful for other ways to study popular culture and auto/biographical discourse which will take investigations far from the territory of the literary, and into the domain of the social.

### **NOT SEEING INTO THE FUTURE: DIARY THEORY**

As Philippe Lejeune himself has observed at various times, the study of diaries has been met with indifference, incomprehension, and hostility. Historians have regarded diaries either as transparent source documents or personal records which should be taken with a grain of academic salt (see Popkin). English-language literary scholars have examined some diaries, most notably the diary of Samuel Pepys, for their historical content (Pepys famously saw a play by Shakespeare and was a witness to the 1666 Great Fire of London). Feminist criticism which highlighted the importance of women’s experiences and the fact that few women have been able to be professional writers until recently has made a small industry of examining Virginia Woolf’s diaries. Studies by Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, and Margo Culley in

the United States, in addition to studies by Helen Buss and Katherine Carter in Canada, have focused on diaries by non-literary women, and have worked out how the diary form has been an important means of expression for women from many cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds.

But generally, diaries have been a minor area of study in a number of fields because they are, like letters, not written with a mass audience in mind, and yet they do address an audience and cannot be read as transparent, objective documents. As their detractors in France, many of whom are given voice in Lejeune's essay "The Diary on Trial," say, the diary is regarded as a minor, non-literary, feminized form which contains its own narcissistic pathology. Even if a scholar wants to read diaries (your own or those of others), other challenges await those who wish to study them. The unpublished ones are hard to find and often hard to read: their repetition and focus on details which may not interest others can make them tough going. And yet, like letters and emails and other examples of everyday rhetoric, millions of people around the world keep diaries, and significantly, they know how to keep them. How did the form spread? Why is it so popular with people—especially young people—who would never dream of publishing their writing, and who are so often not taken seriously as writers by their elders? What is the relationship between diaries as material objects and diary rhetoric? What is the phenomenology of diary-keeping, and what does it mean to write to oneself, and to read that writing years later? Are diaries, like the memoirs of ancient Rome, a kind of "pre-writing" that helps writers do other writing projects, or are they something completely different? What happens when diary rhetoric appears online in blogs, Facebook and MySpace applications, and video sites like YouTube?

In the work of Philippe Lejeune, diaries have an eloquent and passionate champion who is interested in theoretical questions of diary composition, writing, and circulation. One of the challenges of working on diary writing in the English language has been the lack of theoretical investigation available on the process of diary writing. The manuscript variants of the world's most popular diary, that of Anne Frank, as Lejeune's essay in this volume shows, have not even been critically examined until very recently, and have even been the occasion for false accusations made against her father, Otto Frank. Here is where Lejeune's approach, even with his use of French examples that are unfamiliar to English-speaking readers, can be helpful. Lejeune's approach to the diary links it to temporality: diaries are only diaries because they have dated entries. But, more significantly, paper diaries are not addressed to others. To whom, then, are they addressed? Lejeune suggests that diaries, even those created with the help of a computer, are addressed to a



future self, the one who will reread them (perhaps immediately, as an editor), or to an uncertain reader of the future, whether that person is the diarist or someone else. This is the wager on the future which Lejeune posits: an unfolding of time in life, and of time in “diary time” which can address the past, but which is most concerned with making sense of the present as it accumulates each day.

A diary is a way to “account” for oneself and to manage time: in that sense, as Lejeune observes in the essay “Rereading Your Diary,” it is a type of narrative time which Paul Ricoeur describes, but its rhythm is that of discontinuity rather than of continuity. Diaries do not present consistent pictures of a life: they show an identity in process, even as they are part of the process itself of creating identity, day after day. In the essay “The Continuous and the Discontinuous,” Lejeune tracks what some of this process involves: as filters for everyday life since one really cannot tell everything to one’s “dear diary,” diaries are what Lejeune calls “traces” of life where the discontinuous nature of everyday events is managed by “repetition and variation” (176). But the slippage between the movement of time beyond the diary and the repetition of patterns and events within the diary means that the diary is “a piece of lacework or a spider web” (177), where there are many gaps and omissions which only the writer can see as continuous because only the writer holds the key to the world beyond the diary itself. And even the writer of a diary cannot do more than see what the accumulated effects of diary writing might mean because the diary has the future as its ultimate addressee. This future must always be a horizon, since the diarist will never reach it, but it is also a promise to that future and to whoever reads the diary then. And in this futurity, Philippe Lejeune sees a dialogue between text, writer, and reader which rewrites the autobiographical pact as the pact of diary performance in time and through time. Lejeune’s theorizing of this most private of writing worlds, therefore, returns the diary to the social world which informs it and to which it gives shape:

A diary is not only a place of asylum in space; it is also an archive in time. I escape the present and make contact with a vast future. I lay by provisions for a future writer, and leave traces for a future adult whom I am helping by recording his history, someone who will later help me better understand the confusion I am experiencing. We are helping each other across time. (“Lucullus Dines with Lucullus” 324)

Philippe Lejeune’s love for the diary and his desire to explore the theory and practice of diary-making in all of its forms has too long remained, like so many diaries, hidden away from scholars and diarists who cannot speak French. My hope is that *On Diary* at the very least makes known to a new

audience an aspect of Lejeune's thinking. And at the very most, I hope that *On Diary* changes how we find, interpret, and understand these fascinating performances of the everyday which are all around us, even on our own bookshelves.

## NOTES

1. References to "Rereading Your Diary," "Spiritual Journals in France from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," "O My Paper!," "The Diary as 'Antifiction,'" "Surveying Diaries, Surveying Cultures," "The Diary on Trial," "How Anne Frank Rewrote the Diary of Anne Frank," "The Continuous and the Discontinuous," and "Lucullus Dines with Lucullus" are to this volume.
2. For a summary of approaches to autobiography as discursive as opposed to generic, see my introduction to *Autobiography in Canada*. Notable exceptions to this tendency include the discussion of the autobiographical pact in Leigh Gilmore's exploration of the legal dimensions of autobiography by non-writers; see also Jeremy Popkin's discussion of Lejeune's importance for reading autobiographies by historians, my discussion of Lejeune in "Autobiography and Production," and Laura Marcus's treatment of Lejeune in *Autobiographical Discourses*.
3. For a genealogy of "ordinary" in the English language as an expression of social prejudice, see Williams 224–25.
4. For one of many examples, see Foucault 31–33.

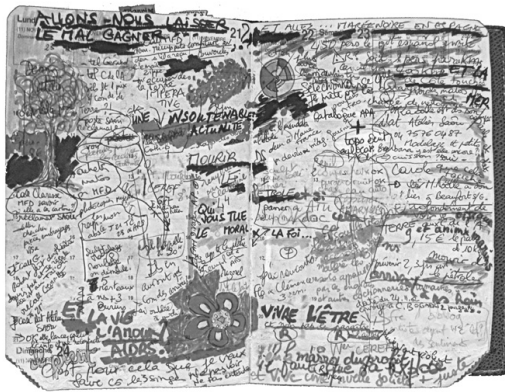
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# PART I

## INTRODUCTION



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## THE PRACTICE OF THE PRIVATE JOURNAL: CHRONICLE OF AN INVESTIGATION (1986–1998)

For twelve years now I've been investigating the reasons why, and the ways in which, so many "ordinary" people, who are not writers, write a diary. This investigation has given rise to about thirty publications of different varieties. Today I feel that I have reached a conclusion. Here I intend to go back over my research by telling its story. This narrative will thus form, essentially, a sort of auto-bibliography. References to the publications will punctuate my narrative like the beads of a rosary.

I'd like to start by saying why I began with these investigations—and why *so late*.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is not common practice to speak of oneself in presenting one's research. But I have often questioned others about their own journals: it is simply a matter of honesty to contextualize, at least briefly, my own situation as a diarist. I was born in 1938. I kept a private journal, from the age of fifteen, for a good ten years. Then I decided to put my adolescence behind me, and with it, my habit of keeping a journal. I became a teacher and researcher. When, in 1969, I chose a research area, I turned not towards the diary, but towards autobiography. At the same time, after an interruption of several years, I returned to a personal mode of writing, trying to compose, parallel to literary criticism, autobiographical texts. In my mind, the journal continued to be associated with ideas of anguish and lack of direction: it was a very immediate form of writing, and marked by distress. I wanted to regain control of my life, capture it at the roots, and reconstruct it. Moreover, my adolescent journal was badly written—indeed, utterly *unwritten*. I considered it rubbish. I wanted to move on in my writing style, to become presentable in public. As a result, from 1969 to 1986, I threw myself into the study, and the practice, of the autobiography *against* the journal—doubtless keeping in mind, meanwhile, the secret intention to return one day, better equipped, to the territory of my adolescent years. The diary of those bygone years hibernated in a cardboard

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"Tenir un journal." *Poétique* 111 (Sept. 1997): 359–81. Trans. Russell West. *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History*. Ed. Rachel Langford and Russell West. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999. 185–202.

box, awaiting retrieval. From *L'Autobiographie en France* (1971) to *Moi aussi* (1986), I published six or seven books on autobiography, without ever paying the least attention to the genre of the journal. The only work that might have favor in my eyes, in that it provided a sort of solution to my dilemmas, was Claude Mauriac's *Le Temps immobile: fifty years of private diaries*, published by Mauriac in ten or so volumes between 1974 and 1988, but without chronological order, a labyrinthine circuit allowing the separate strata of the past to resonate with one another, an autobiographical act constituted of a *massif* of diary fragments.

In 1986, after the publication of *Moi aussi*, I found myself one day, pen in hand, paper before me, writing a date at the top of the page and starting to narrate: my journal began to follow its course once again like a river welling up after a long underground trajectory. Since then I have hardly stopped writing, first of all on my antiquated typewriter, then on the computer. It was this return to a practice, which I will mention again in my conclusion, which abruptly brought to my awareness a critical *absence*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Around 1969, I chose to work on autobiography as, apart from the inaugural study by Georges Gusdorf ("Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie," 1956) and Jean Starobinski's essays, there were in French almost no studies on autobiography as a *genre*. On the other hand, regarding the private journal, there was Alain Girard's excellent 1963 book, *Le Journal intime* (Paris: PU de France, 1963), followed by Béatrice Didier's study, also titled *Le Journal intime* (Paris: PU de France, 1976), both well-documented syntheses.

But were they really so well documented? In 1987, I realized that these studies included a sort of *blind spot*, a point of view which ignored part of reality.

For there are two possible methods of studying private diaries.

The first, obviously, is to read the texts. This is the method of the authors mentioned above, who read and enumerate in their bibliographies a large number of diaries.

This method has two limitations.

1. One can, as a rule, only read published texts, which immediately raises questions as to methodology.

*Sampling.* Publishing privileges texts by writers or prominent personalities. The great mass of private journals are written with no intention of publication; if one doesn't investigate this great mass of unpublished journals, how can one be sure that the published elements are representative of the whole? Drawing attention to the two or three journals by unknown persons

published in book form simply begs the question of the criteria by which they were chosen from among the *millions* of diaries written in France over the last two centuries.

*Transformation.* It is rare to publish a journal in its written form without rewording or cuts. Most journals are so long and repetitive that they are unpublishable. The two most famous diaries in French, those by Amiel and Marie Bashkirtseff, are cited and commented upon by critics who have never actually been able to read them in their entirety. The complete edition of the Amiel diaries, comprising twelve weighty tomes, has only just been finished, and though available in printed form, remains inaccessible to the great majority of readers who have neither the time nor the stamina necessary to do it justice. It is probably not wrong to assume that only the editors of the complete edition, in the last analysis, have read Amiel's diaries in their entirety—and that over a period of ten years. The diary of Marie Bashkirtseff remains unpublished, for the most part, to this date.

So we need to leave the domain of the printed book. But how does one come by the original diaries? Archives and libraries are not well endowed with private diaries, and in any case only give access to modes of writing belonging to the past. Family archives are difficult to track down. Moreover, and I shall come back to this point, it is the fate of the great majority of journals to be, at some point, *destroyed*, either by the authors or by their descendants. Whence the paradoxical situation of the journal, as a mass phenomenon, being so difficult to grasp.

2. The second limitation of concentrating upon published journals is that before becoming a text, the private diary is a *practice*. The text itself is a mere by-product, a residue. Keeping a journal is first and foremost a way of life, whose result is often obscure and does not reflect the life as an autobiographical narrative would do. Journals only follow one or two of the many threads making up the fabric of a life; written for oneself, journals are filled with implicitness, and kept irregularly. One has to learn to read between the lines. Far from their shedding light upon a life, it is only with the help of a context that one is able to shed light on them. Which is why the journals of writers or well-known figures are often a preferred object of study, their works or lives allowing one to make more sense of the text. Moreover, the texts often give little information on the practice of their composition. Journals often comment upon themselves, of course, but this metadiscourse is a mere ritual to be interpreted. Many aspects of the practice of writing are ignored by this ritual: what is included and what is censored; the role of communicating to others the contents of a private journal; and obvious as it may seem, the reasons for destroying a journal.



These reservations led me to have recourse to a second method, one apparently opposed to the first, but in fact complementary to it: namely, to question the writers of diaries themselves without reading their journals.

Such questioning can take various forms. The reader will see that I have used questionnaires distributed to groups of persons (see items numbered 1 and 2 in the following), and a call for personal accounts issued in the press (items 3 and 4): one can also make use of the semi-directive interview based on a set of questions, as a young sociologist, Malik Allam, has since done (his study, *Journaux intimes: Une sociologie de l'écriture personnelle*, based on eighteen interviews, was published by L'Harmattan of Paris in 1996).

This method of research too has its advantages as well as its limitations.

The questionnaire method allows a large sample of persons to be contacted (about 1,500 in my successive campaigns), and to reach a population not already sifted by the criteria of the inquiry (thus including a large number of non-diarists). This makes it possible to gauge the frequency of diary-keeping according to a large number of parameters—age and gender in particular. A social constraint does of course remain: I carried out my inquiries among groups drawn from the high school and the university milieus, as well as teachers in continuing education or retired persons. Which of course does not constitute an accurate cross-section of society, far from it. On the other hand, the information gathered, despite the open-ended character of the questions, remains fairly limited in qualitative terms. In contrast, the free account or the semi-directive interview offer very rich information, but the small number of diarists concerned (forty-seven for “*Cher cahier . . .*” [item 4], and eighteen for Malik Allam), and the fact that only diarists are included—volunteers moreover—deprives these methods of all quantitative representative value.

Moreover, such methods only allow one to explore the contemporary period. And how can one be sure of the accuracy of the accounts given? The ideal would of course be to be able to read, at the same time, the diaries about which the interviewees speak. This is sometimes possible with journals kept in youth by persons now of adult age—although even then this may be difficult, and even more so with “living” journals. The researcher rapidly finds her- or himself caught up in interpersonal relationships which make the usage of the personal account virtually impossible. One does well to avoid the traps of transference, maintaining a cautious distance from an activity which can too easily turn into voyeurism or vivisection.

My own researches have used the two methods alternately. I started with interviews, then, moving back into the past, progressed to exploring archives. I started, to be absolutely candid, without knowing quite where I was headed, and the rest followed step by step. My researches resemble those Russian dolls where each element emerges from the one preceding it.

I shall go through the various stages of my research rapidly, with all due apologies for the doubtless frustrating character of such an account: the references refer to articles or books published in French, whose content or theme I will summarize briefly. This account, though rapid, aims to stimulate analogous research in other countries, if this has not already been initiated. The example has already been followed in Spain. Manuel Alberca has used my questionnaire with the high-school population of the town of Malaga, discovering that, contrary to the original hypothesis, Spanish youth keep diaries just as often as French youth (*La Faute à Rousseau* 13 Oct. 1996: 54–56). And I have just mapped out a study to be carried out in China among school children in Beijing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Everything began in January 1987 with a discussion with a friend of my age, a teacher like myself. She deplored the fact that, in her opinion, many fewer youth of today keep a diary than when we ourselves were younger. I was convinced of the contrary—there ensued a heated discussion. After about five minutes, we managed to agree on at least one thing: neither she nor I were able to prove our point of view. We searched in vain for the slightest hint of an answer in the books by Alain Girard or Béatrice Didier. Starting the next week, we decided to inquire of our students. My friend put together a short questionnaire, and came back to me astounded, having to admit that I had been right. I had no reason to crow, however, for being unable to make any sort of comparison with the past, it would have been impossible to come to definitive conclusions. Upon which, I decided to undertake a more systematic study. In France, many people imagine that keeping a journal is a thing of the past. My hypothesis was the inverse; namely, that the practice of journal writing is linked to the rise in school attendance among adolescents, and that the enforcement of primary and secondary education and an increasing tendency to stay on at school contributed to the spread of the practice of the diary, rather than to its disappearance.

### **INQUIRY BY QUESTIONNAIRE (1987–1988)**

I undertook this study between May 1987 and March 1988. The questionnaire took the form of a double-sided page containing sixteen questions, some directive, some open-ended. Initially it was filled in by different groups of persons in the secondary or tertiary education sector (583 in all). More than half (356) said they had kept a journal at some point in the past, or that they currently kept a journal. Of these, 111 kept a journal at the precise moment of the inquiry.

An analysis of 99 replies by adults allowed me to identify four typical “profiles”:

1) A journal begun in adolescence and maintained to the present day (8 persons of 99): this is a fairly rare practice.

2) Simply a journal kept during adolescence (42 out of 99); the average profile is of a journal kept for two or three years between the ages of 14 and 17: this is the most frequent scenario.

3) An adolescent journal followed later by a journal kept at some point in adult life (see below) (22 out of 99).

4) No journal kept during adolescence, only a journal kept in adulthood (19 out of 99).

One can draw two conclusions from this evidence. First, that adolescence (especially for girls) is the principal period of diary-keeping; but secondly, that a fairly large number of persons keep a diary during moments of crisis or significant periods of adulthood (diaries of relational crises, of psychoanalysis, or a period of bereavement; diaries of holidays, of course, or of political or professional life). A journal can be begun at any moment in one’s life; in the later years of life, bereavement or retirement often trigger the practice of diary writing.

The third conclusion I drew was that, although one could distinguish broad categories of journals, there was an astonishing variety of forms and functions of the journal. The further my inquiry took me, the less I was inclined to generalize, and the more I admired those who, without ever having read journals, believe they know what a journal really is.

The questions asked in the questionnaire touched upon

—the object of the journal (factual chronicle or intimate journal);

—its frequency (which was often difficult to evaluate because of the variability of this factor);

—the material form of the journal (a huge majority were notebooks, with the occasional loose-leaf format, and practically no type-written or word-processed journals—but since 1987 the situation has probably changed in this respect);

—additional elements accompanying the written format (poems, notes, drawings, photos, objects, documents, quotations, etc., all occurred very frequently);

—the place where the journal is kept;

—where the idea of beginning a diary arose from: replies mentioned either the *circumstances* (crises, changes of address, bereavement, etc.), the *function* of the journal (calming oneself by written expression, gaining greater clarity within lived experiences, struggling against forgetting, creating a memoir for the future), or the *inspiration* of the journal (the gift of a notebook, a reading of Anne Frank, the desire to imitate a girlfriend, etc.);

—whether the diarist rereads her or his own writing;  
 —whether one allows others to read it;  
 —whether the journal is destroyed, in entirety or in part (which is often the case).

The questions asked those who had not kept a journal if they had ever thought of keeping one, and in that case, why they did not; all respondents were asked which other forms of writing they may have practiced within the last year (a list of suggestions was appended).

The results of this inquiry were published as

1. *La Pratique du journal personnel. Enquête*. Special number of *Cahiers de sémiotique textuelle* 17 (1990). Nanterre: Publidix, Université Paris-X Nanterre.

This slim volume also analyzes a study undertaken by the French Ministry of Culture in 1988 on the cultural practices of the French population, in which 7 percent of the persons questioned—which is to say, about 3 million—said they had kept a journal within the last year. Also included in the volume is a study undertaken by two stationery companies that produce diaries, and a bibliography of studies on the private diary published in French since 1940 (191–98).

Since 1988 I have used this questionnaire several times for studies undertaken in secondary schools, with the cooperation of a team of school teachers (for example, in 1993 at the Lycée de la Plaine de l’Ain in Ambérieu-en-Bugey, covering 12 classes and 338 pupils). The results of this study were published as

2. “Et pourtant ils écrivent!” Rev. of Philippe Artières. *La Faute à Rousseau* 3 (June 1993): 29–36.

It is clear that during adolescence girls write a great deal more than boys, and that they do not write the same things: the girls write *expressive* texts oriented towards intimate communication (poetry, journals, letters), while boys favor *creative* texts aimed at producing an effect in the context of social communication (fiction, comic strips, short stories, film scripts, etc.).

In addition, I often use the questionnaire as part of my courses on autobiography, as a means of sparking discussion on the students’ own writing practice.

### **CALL FOR PERSONAL ACCOUNTS (1988–1990)**

In February 1988, the *Magazine littéraire* asked me for a preface for a number on personal writing. As the number, devoted largely to well-known writers,

took no account of “ordinary” personal writing, I suggested I might talk about the latter subject. I presented the first results of the questionnaire-inquiry. At the end of the article, simply on the off chance, I issued a call to readers, asking them to write to me describing their own diary writing practices:

3. “Cher cahier . . .” *Écrits intimes*. Spec. issue of *Le Magazine littéraire* 252–53 (Apr. 1988): 45–46.

The replies came in, 47 in all, roughly divided between women (27) and men (19). The youngest respondent was 14 years old, the oldest 82, but more than half the replies came from young adults between the ages of 20 and 40. Each letter resembled a mini-autobiography or a mini-self-portrait. I replied, often asking questions pertaining to the most interesting aspects of the letters received. The respondents wrote once again. What was I to do with this evolving accumulation of correspondence? I felt myself inadequate to edit it, even less to gloss it. Eventually, I simply decided to treat it as “forwarded mail”—publishing it as it was, as a volume of documentation, ostensibly without commentary.

The volume included a preface, in which I explained this rather adventurous undertaking. I reviewed the problems posed by all these letters in the form of a series of questions:

—Does one write out of a situation of need or crisis, out of a situation of well being? And does writing lead to a deterioration, or to an improvement, or perhaps something in between these two, of the writer’s existential situation?

—Is journal writing a neurotic or obsessive activity, or an exercise in training or self-discipline? Is it the evil or the cure, or both at once—a sort of homeopathy? Does it reflect, according to a popular conception, a preoccupation with “navel-gazing,” or a form of Epicurean or Stoic philosophy, an *ars vivendi* or a sort of wisdom?

—Does the journal encourage a facile, loose style of writing, or is it a workshop where style is crafted or forged at the same time as the personality of the writer? What are its links to other forms of writing—is it a secondary activity, or the very core of creativity? Where are the boundaries of the journal, given that it can incorporate a variety of poems, drawings, objects, and documents? Indeed, does the journal constitute a genre?

—Can a journal ever be “sincere”; is it not inevitably self-censoring and narcissistic? Can it ever really be secret? Isn’t it always, in the last analysis, motivated by a search for communication, by a will to persuasion?

—What happens when an “intimate” journal is communicated to a reader—for example, to a husband or wife? When it is uncovered, for example, by a parent?

—Why, and how, is the journal kept or preserved? Why, sometimes, is it destroyed? And what becomes of it (if not destroyed) after the author's death?

The answers to these questions were provided by the forty-seven sets of letters, which I published in their original form, omitting my own letters. The conclusion was provided by three of the respondents, whom I had asked to read the collection in its entirety, and who then offered their reactions. Lastly, an analytical index of the contents (223–47), arising out of a minute analysis of the contents of the letters, reconstituted in twelve or so small “chapters” the results of the inquiry.

I also made a list of the thirty or so metaphors employed by the diarists to describe their journals, adding up to a sort of poem:

Breath – the breath of life – flowing water – island – sheltered harbor – mirror – shattered mosaic – way-markers – laboratory – spinal column – crutch – safety-railing – magic ritual – crooning chant, litany – pen-pusher's occupation – message in a bottle – outlet – digestion – shitting – water-closet – cesspool – pus – masturbation – drug – cigarette – bomb – radioactivity – body – mummies – withered flowers – herbarium.

This book polarized my circles of acquaintances: some people thought it was rubbish, others were completely bowled over by it. Eventually I found a publisher:

4. “*Cher cahier . . .*”: *Témoignages sur le journal personnel*. Recueillis et présentés par Philippe Lejeune. Paris: Gallimard, collection “Témoins,” 1990.

I continued to receive mail after the book had been published: the responses of some of the respondents to their own accounts, which they discovered printed next to others they now read for the first time; but also belated responses by other diarists. The press received the book positively, notwithstanding some critical reviews. In an avant-garde magazine called *Recueil*, a certain Marc Ligeray took me to task for allowing ordinary people, who had no idea of how to write, to express themselves in print. In due course I replied to his criticisms:

5. “Lettre ouverte sur le journal intime. Réponse à Marc Ligeray.” *Recueil* 21 (1992): 58–62.

This incident is revelatory of the contempt felt in French intellectual circles for autobiographical writing or the keeping of a journal, activities held to be “not art proper.”

The publication of “*Cher cahier . . .*” was a venture with incalculable consequences for myself. It was followed by two gatherings I organized under the auspices of the Research Group on Life Narratives that I direct at the University of Paris X-Nanterre. First of all, a conference:

6. *Le Journal personnel*. Ed. Philippe Lejeune. Proceedings of the Colloquium of May 1990. Nanterre: Publidix, Université Paris-X, collection RITM, 1993.

And following this conference, a one-day symposium on “Autobiographical archives” (19 June 1991), which brought together archivists, librarians, historians, sociologists, and others.

The morning session was devoted to foreign experiments in the collection and curatorship of ordinary autobiographical writings: in particular, Saverio Tutino introduced the audience to the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale which he had founded in 1984. His project was beautifully simple: a national contest for autobiographical writings would supply a new sort of archive aiming at publicizing and preserving the writing of non-professionals. The failure of his project was predicted by all and sundry. He gained the support of the mayor of a small town in Tuscany, Pieve S. Stefano, and successfully founded the archive; this small town is now the capital of Italian autobiography. Every year the archive receives around two hundred texts. A reader’s panel selects about ten of them for submission to a national jury. In September, during the annual village festival, the winner is celebrated. Her or his text is then published, along with selected others; all the autobiographical texts are available for consultation, with a catalogue and index, at the town hall of Pieve S. Stefano. At the time of writing (1997), the collection holds more than 2,500 autobiographical texts, among them a large number of diaries.

The afternoon session was devoted to preliminary discussion of projects that could be launched in France:

7. *Archives autobiographiques*. Ed. Philippe Lejeune. Special number of *Cahiers de sémiotique textuelle* 20 (1991).

The drawback of the projects presented during this symposium was that they often necessitated patronage and financial support at an institutional level. This means that they are often doomed from the outset, for as the saying goes, God helps those who help themselves. . . . As a result of the publication of “*Cher cahier . . .*”, I met others like myself who were fascinated by ordinary autobiographical writing; they rapidly became good friends of mine. One of these, Chantal Chaveyriat-Dumoulin, suggested that we found a non-profit association (under the Act of 1901). Thus, fifteen people met under my roof

in November 1991, as the “Association pour l’Autobiographie” (APA), with the aim of bringing together those with an interest in writing or reading autobiographies or private diaries.

At present (1997) our organization counts more than 500 members. It publishes a journal, *La Faute à Rousseau* (three numbers a year). It includes small working-parties meeting in Paris, Tours, Lyon, Marseille, Strasbourg, and Geneva. It receives, reads, glosses, and stores all the autobiographical texts offered by the public, amounting to more than 350 in the last five years (1992–1997). The texts are summarized in a bi-annual publication entitled *Le Garde-mémoire* (two numbers to date).<sup>1</sup> The autobiographical collection thus created can be consulted at the municipal library of Ambérieu-en-Bugey, not far from Lyon (Address: APA, La Grenette, 10 rue A. Bonnet, 01500 Ambérieu-en-Bugey, France). Diaries in the strict sense make up a small proportion of the texts held by the collection, often clean, typewritten copies. But three persons have already donated original journals, one of them consisting of twenty-six notebooks, 5,000 pages in all, covering a period of more than fifty years. A small group has been formed to reflect upon the particular problems raised by reading a handwritten journal composed by a living contemporary—the allusive, repetitive nature of such a journal, and the danger of invasion of the writer’s privacy.

### YOUNG GIRLS’ JOURNALS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1988–1990)

It’s time I came back to my own research. Questionnaires and personal accounts are not enough: how did one go about reading the diaries themselves, anterior to the creation of the APA. In Orléans, a Catholic organization called “Vivre et l’écrire” [Live and write about it] (12 rue de Recouvrance, 45000 Orléans) has been working in support of adolescent writing for years. The organization offers adolescents the possibility of writing to an adult, and of joining writing workshops in a school environment. It also encourages the adolescents, when they want to stop writing their private diaries, or to destroy them, to leave them in safekeeping with the organization: “Don’t destroy your diary! Leave it in our care, we’ll look after it for you! We’ll read it, with your permission, or hold it confidentially, until some later date when you may want to collect it.” More than a hundred adolescents have left their journals with this archive, where I was able to browse and read them. Eventually I conducted a study on one of the journals kept in the collection, by Cécile, consisting of eight notebooks kept over two-and-a-half years. I was struck by the quantity of disparate objects glued in her notebooks: letters, photos, bus tickets, theatre tickets, flowers, bits of wood, school reports, records of her weight (she was trying to lose weight), cake wrappings (it wasn’t working), newspaper articles,



and so on. I studied the system constituted by all these collage objects, a system which I called a “Herbarium-journal”:

8. “Le journal de Cécile.” *Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse* 40 (Autumn 1988): 47–60.

One of my colleagues, Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, has carried out a structural analysis of seven of the journals in the collection (the study can be found in the 1990 conference proceedings, *Le Journal personnel*).

In 1987 the French translation of the Dutch critical edition of *The Diary of Anne Frank* was published. This edition offers a page by page “montage” of the three versions of the text: the original journal, its rewriting by Anne herself, and the published text of 1946. It is an extraordinary document, but one not used to full advantage by the Dutch editors themselves. I undertook a minute comparison of the three versions of the text, and wrote a “genetic” study designed to complement the Dutch preface. Anne Frank’s father has often been accused, unfairly, of censoring his daughter’s diary in preparing it for publication. The truth is almost the opposite: Anne censored her own writing—or rather, as I discovered with great excitement, she undertook, during the last three months in hiding, the extraordinary project of rewriting her journal almost entirely with a view to publishing it after the war was over! Thus one is faced with an original journal, direct and profuse, and an other, filtered and stylized, both of them in Anne Frank’s handwriting. Sections of the original notebooks were lost at the time of her arrest, and the rewritten version, though intact as a manuscript, had not been completed. Thus her father was left, after the war, with two incomplete versions of the diary. He composed a text based on the rewritten version, but reinserting subjects which she had seemed to want, for obvious reasons, to leave out had she survived, in particular her romance with Peter. Her father brought back to life the love affair of the deceased youngsters—a love affair which he had in fact opposed. . . . Nonetheless, he did respect Anne’s censorship of the topic of sexuality, as it would have been impossible to do otherwise at the time. I analyzed, page by page, the translation of the manuscripts, in order to sort out the history of this text—a text which reveals Anne and her father to have been two great writers, and two persons of great sensitivity:

9. “Comment Anne Frank a réécrit le Journal d’Anne Frank.” *Le Journal personnel* [item 6]: 157–80 (see 233–62 of this volume).

### **YOUNG GIRLS’ JOURNALS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (1991–1993)**

After the publication of “*Cher cahier . . .*”, one reader (Chantal Chaveyriat-Dumoulin, already mentioned above) sent me extracts of the diary of her

great-grandmother, Claire Pic, as a young girl, written during the Second Empire (1862–1869). It was marvelous. In some respects it was similar to the diary—by no means marvelous—which I had kept as an adolescent. I read the entire thousand-page journal, and said to myself that there must be many other equally interesting journals by unknown young girls. I spent a year searching the Bibliothèque Nationale for nineteenth-century journals published after the death of the girls concerned, in public archives, and even with the families, by means of requests on radio, or at the end of public addresses, etc. I unearthed 117 nineteenth-century young women’s diaries. I discovered how difficult it was, but at the same time how fascinating, to read these small, handwritten notebooks.

I said above that a private diary, by definition, is allusive. Implicit reference is preponderant in the private diary, so that the reader spends a great deal of time trying to guess what is being spoken about; this is all the more so in the case of a bourgeois girl’s diary of the nineteenth century. Such journals were written, initially, *under duress*, for moral and educational reasons, and supervised by the governess. Even when the young ladies gained more independence, prudence and good manners were obligatory. For the uninitiated reader, factual chronicles just as much as spiritual journals remain relatively opaque. One must give oneself time, accustom oneself slowly, as one would do upon entering a darkened room. The very fact that deciphering the handwriting slows one’s pace has a certain utility: it affords valuable time to understand; little by little one assimilates the non-said, one picks up the code, one notices the gaps, one begins to read between the lines. . . . It is fascinating to follow, across the course of the century, from diary to diary, the progressive liberation of these young women usually promised in marriage (they keep their journals as they wait, as a prisoner might await his sentence), and often in search of more personalized means of self-realization through writing or artistic activities.

I tried to find a form capable of communicating this strange experience of reading young women’s journals. It seemed to me that the simplest method was to keep a journal myself. The book in which I described these researches, *Les Moi des demoiselles*, is framed by my own research journal: a year, from July 1991 to July 1992, at the beginning of the book, and at the conclusion, the month of October 1992. My own journal takes up about a third of the book. Within this framework, ten chapters give a glimpse of a range of unpublished journals. Then a catalogue details the 117 journals. Then follows an anthology of nineteenth-century texts, mainly by educational specialists, concerning the practice of diary writing, on its benefits and dangers. Additionally, an anthology of texts by the young women themselves, writing, in their journals, about their journals. And finally, as in “*Cher cahier . . .*”, an analytical index presenting the contexts of the book in a systematic fashion. I love indexes. The

book is a patchwork showing the work of research in progress, and showing what a gripping, but also difficult task it is to read a journal:

10. *Le Moi des demoiselles. Enquête sur le journal de jeune fille*. Paris: Seuil, collection “La couleur de la vie,” 1993.

At the same time, I published a synthesis of the types of journals encountered (chronicle of events, truly personal diary, spiritual journal), and analyzing the system behind the upbringing of young girls (the diary, overseen by the governess, served simultaneously as stylistic practice and moral guide), and demonstrating its development at the end of the nineteenth-century, and the appearance, with Marie Bashkirtseff and Catherine Pozzi among others, of diaries of a more modern variety:

11. “Le Je des jeunes filles.” *Poétique* 94 (Apr. 1993): 229–51 (see 130–44 of this volume).

Added to this, as a sort of postscript, I undertook two reception studies, at two extreme ends of the generic spectrum. On the more conventional side, I examined in *real* diaries the effect had by a successful fiction about young women’s upbringing, the *Journal de Marguerite* (1858) by Mlle Monriot (constantly republished and read up until 1914). In a more revolutionary direction, I analyzed the reception of the Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff in the press and in several adolescent journals of the era:

12. “Le *Journal de Marguerite*.” *Le Récit d’enfance: Enfance et écriture*. Ed. Denise Escarpit and Bernadette Poulou. Paris: Éditions du Sorbier, 1993. 41–62.

13. “La réception du Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff (1887–1899).” Marie Bashkirtseff Colloquium. Nice. Sept. 1995.

### **A YOUNG GIRL’S JOURNAL OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (1994–1995)**

The last episode of the saga of *Le Moi des demoiselles* was an edition of the first known young woman’s journal in France, that of Lucile Desmoulins (1770–1794). This very short diary had already been published in a fragmentary and random form. Based on the manuscripts, I produced a systematic and methodical edition. The book starts in an objective mode, concentrating on the textual history, moves on to the text of the Journal, then to the critical notes, and finishes on a subjective note, with my own journal of the month of 1994, kept as I was finishing the book: there I offer my interpretation and comment upon my work. My aim was to write a book where objectivity and

subjectivity could be presented together but distinct from one another—a history book and a book of tenderness:

14. Lucile Desmoulins. *Journal 1788–1793*. Ed. and intro. Philippe Lejeune. Paris: Éditions des Cendres, 1995.

### GENERAL PERSPECTIVES (1995–1998)

Can one ever know when one has arrived at the end of a research project? Never at any moment did I know where my project would lead me in subsequent years. All this was possible because I never meant to write a book about private diaries. On the way, several fragments of research did turn into books—but into odd, rather bizarre books. Despite this, in recent years I kept coming back to more general questions beyond the limited horizons of specific case studies. Occasions arose for more general preoccupations, or I provoked them. It is perhaps best to classify these directions for research by listing eight of these questions.

#### HOW DOES ONE READ AN OTHER'S JOURNAL?

Followers of the psychologist Ignace Meyerson (1888–1983) asked me to explore the unpublished notes he had made for lectures held towards the end of his life, from 1963 to 1983, and collected in the Archives Nationales. For years he had worked over the diaries of Maine de Biran, Stendhal, Constant, turning obsessively around a central problem: the extraordinary difficulty of reading a journal by someone else, the paradoxical opacity of texts written with transparency in mind:

15. “Ignace Meyerson et l'autobiographie.” *Ignace Meyerson*. Ed. Françoise Parot. Paris: PU de France, 1996.

#### HOW DOES ONE RE-READ ONE'S OWN JOURNAL?

Meyerson did not keep a journal himself. My own situation is different. It is a moving experience, both pleasurable and terrible, to go back to one's old diaries. I have spoken of mine in several half-theoretical, half-autobiographical articles:

16. “Journal.” *Sincérité. L'insolence du coeur*. Ed. Christine Baron and Catherine Doroszczuk. *Autrement* (série Morales) 18 (1995): 88–95.

17. “Relire son journal.” *La Quinzaine littéraire* 698 (Aug. 1996): 26–27 (see 318–20 of this volume).

18. “Témoignage.” *Regards sur l'autobiographie et le témoignage*. Spec. issue of *Lecture Jeune* 84 (Oct. 1997): 9–12.

## WHAT ARE THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF A DIARIST?

In *La Faute à Rousseau* I write a regular column called “Chronique de jurisprudence” [Legal diary] where I consider personal writing from a legal point of view. I have mentioned here only two of these articles, but all of them touch more or less on the private diary, and appeared as *Pour l’autobiographie* [For autobiography] (Paris: Seuil, 1998). What becomes of one’s private diary after one’s death? Can a private diary be confiscated by the judiciary? Other articles written for this column touch upon the respect of privacy, professional secrecy, or journal writing in prison:

19. “Je fais mon testament.” *La Faute à Rousseau* 5 (Feb. 1994): 34–35.
20. “Votre journal peut-il être saisi?” *La Faute à Rousseau* 8 (Feb. 1995): 35–36 and 9 (June 1995): 37–39.

## WHY LOVE OR HATE THE JOURNAL?

Upon organizing a conference at Nanterre on “L’autobiographie en procès” [Autobiography on trial; 18–19 Oct. 1996], I decided to read a paper myself on the private diary. Where does the extraordinary aggression visible over the last hundred years, with regard to the journal, come from? I opened my paper by presenting a profusion of quotations by notable persons (from Goethe to Maurice Blanchot) describing the journal as *unhealthy, hypocritical, cowardly, intellectually worthless, artificial, sterile, withering, feminine*. . . . And why the ambivalent feelings of the diarists themselves (of whom the most striking example is Amiel)? I tried to untangle this bundle of complexes and hatred, which has prevented a cool, reasoned approach to the practice of diary writing to this very day:

21. “Le journal en procès.” *L’Autobiographie en procès*. Ed. Philippe Lejeune. RITM 14 (1997): 57–78 (see 147–67 of this volume).

## HOW MANY PEOPLE KEEP A DIARY?

Is it 7 percent of the French population (according to a government survey on cultural practices undertaken in 1998), or merely 3 percent, according to another government survey on leisure activities in France (1995)? Which-ever figure is correct, this is nonetheless a large group of the population. I undertook an analysis for *La Faute à Rousseau* of the points touching the private diary in the 1995 government survey, and I gave an interview with *Libération* which made some impact: from April 1996 to January 1997 numerous magazines and radio and television stations devoted columns or airspace to private diaries as well as to the Association pour l’autobiographie:

22. “Le journal intime entre les lignes.” Interview with Emmanuelle Peyret. *Libération* 19 Mar. 1996: 24.

23. “Olivier Donnat, *Les Amateurs. Enquête sur les activités artistiques des Français.*” *La Faute à Rousseau* 12 (June 1996): 6–7.

#### WHERE CAN ONE FIND LISTS OF JOURNALS PUBLISHED OR HELD IN ARCHIVES?

Let me come back to my initial obsession. Why is there no bibliography of diaries published in French? Why is there no similar catalogue of handwritten journals collected in archives and public libraries? What methods ought to be used to collate such comprehensive bibliographies or catalogues? I love inventories as much as indexes. In order to think about these questions, I set out to draw up a *catalogue of catalogues*, a *bibliography of bibliographies*, examining the ways in which France and other countries (Germany, USA, Canada, Great Britain, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Poland) have inventoried their national autobiographical heritage to date:

24. “Les inventaires de textes autobiographiques.” *Histoire, Économie et Société* Apr.-June 1996: 299–322.

#### WHY NOT EXHIBIT PRIVATE DIARIES?

It’s never been done, in France at least. The odds are against it, the risks being boredom or indiscretion. There would be nothing less visually attractive than an ordinary private diary, under glass, open at a single page, which one can neither read nor flick through. And there would be nothing more delicate than exposing to public gaze something written for oneself alone. These considerations did not stop me from composing, in February 1996, the “script” for an exhibition of journals which would bring together both famous and obscure journals in order to lay out, in a manner both didactic and analytical, various aspects of the practice of private writing. The exhibition would be accompanied by a video, made up of conversations with diarists (the equivalent of “*Cher cahier . . .*”, as it were). This very project was taken up by the Association pour l’autobiographie and suggested to the Municipal Library of Lyon, which accepted it. A combined team from the APA and the Municipal Library, led by the director of the exhibition, Catherine Bogaert (APA), organized the project, with the assistance of the sociologist Malik Allam, the author of *Journaux intimes*, who carried out the video interviews. I have spoken in two articles of my explorations in the manuscripts department of the Bibliothèque Nationale:

25. “Soliloque.” *La Faute à Rousseau* 14 (Feb. 1997): 70–72.

26. “Au pays du journal.” *Nouvelle Revue française* Apr. 1997: 53–63.

The exhibition took place in Lyon from 30 September to 27 December 1997. Around 250 journals were presented behind glass along a labyrinthine route, along which the visitors were guided by a dramatic scenario (the history of a journal from its inception to closure), by a series of accompanying commentaries on display boards, and by transcriptions of the diaries. One can gain an idea of the exhibition by consulting the catalogue, which is organized around the same format and conception as the exhibition:

27. *Un journal à soi*. Catalogue établi par Philippe Lejeune avec la collaboration de Catherine Bogaert. Exposition Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon. 30 Sept.–27 Dec. 1997. Association pour l'autobiographie.

In 1998 the issues raised by the exhibition were taken up by a televised thematic evening devoted to the diary by the Franco-German television channel ARTE (9 June 1998). Two original documentaries were made, one presenting the practice of the private journal in general terms (produced by Atik Rhamini and Vassili Silovic), the other devoted to seventeen diary-notebooks by an adolescent, Ariane Grimm (produced by Roland Allard).

Also in 1998, I gathered together in two books published by Seuil a part of my work from the last ten years. In one, with the militant title *Pour l'autobiographie* [For autobiography], texts 5, 16, 17, 19, 20, 25, and 26 are to be found; in the other, devoted to genetic studies, *Les Brouillons de soi* [Drafts of the self], texts 8 and 9 are to be found, as well as a previously unpublished text in which I had fun analyzing the opening lines of the diaries of Stendhal, Benjamin Constant, Maurice de Guérin, and Amiel:

28. "Quatre débuts." *Les Brouillons de soi*. Paris: Seuil, collection "Poétique," 1998. 387–418.

There are two possible conclusions to this small narrative of research, one personal, the other epistemological.

On the personal side, I wish to mention two turning points in my own life during the period of this research—the intimate side of the public inquiry, in short.

As a youth, I kept a diary because I had no one to whom I could talk. Miraculously, this has changed completely. My interest in diaries has become a motivating force for sociability, because my passion for intimate discourse was able to evolve into a passion for listening. "*Cher cahier . . .*" changed my life.

As an adolescent writer, I adopted the rule of total spontaneity. I refused to rewrite my diary, which was of course why it was rubbish. I was even reluctant to correct its spelling. Since 1991, I have been working on a word processor. While writing the journal of *Le Moi des demoiselles* on my Macintosh,

I realized that it was possible to work over a diary in the present, “crafting” an entry while remaining close to the truthfulness of the momentary emotion. I realized that the journal form was not incompatible with the process of composition: a dramatic and argumentative line of prose could be constructed in such a way as to meet the future. These of course are not particularly original discoveries. I began, thus, not to keep a diary, but rather several diaries, successive and sometime simultaneous, sometimes in dialogue with the diaries of my youth; and the constraints which I placed upon myself have finally, in my eyes, erased the dichotomy between journal and autobiography.

From the epistemological point of view, I wish to say something about the status of these researches, and of the journal itself.

Is a scholar of poetics not perhaps pursuing a wild goose chase by investigating—at best as a sociologist, in the worst scenario as a sort of journalist—the writing practices of all and sundry, examining and collecting unreadable texts? No: on the contrary, he is following one of the paths suggested by Gérard Genette in *L'Œuvre de l'art* [The work of art]. A work of art, claims Genette, is an artifact with an aesthetic function. He gives an example of an artifact with a non-aesthetic function: the anvil. I propose the journal. Whence this preliminary anthropological study seeking to define the ordinary, normal aspects of the practice and of its products. For the journal, unlike the anvil, was progressively invested, during the nineteenth century, by certain diarists, and subsequently by publishers and readers, with an aesthetic function. It was then printed, thus passing from what Genette, following Goodman, terms the “autographical regime,” to an allographical regime. The Lyon exhibition sought to reverse this evolution by recalling that the journal is fundamentally “autographical,” like those texts which artists call a “single-copy edition”: it signifies by virtue of its paper, its ink, its spelling, and its script, and many other aspects, while the printed text only captures words, and often very few words. To publish a journal, then, is like trying to fit a sponge into a matchbox.

My inquiry thus manifests a strong reactive streak. The diary is a social outcast, of no fixed theoretical address. It rarely receives the charity of careful study. It is never to be seen on school syllabi (which is perhaps just as well). It never comes up as the subject for the didactic or academic exercise of the *explication de texte*. When a prestigious critic such as Maurice Blanchot devotes a few pages to the diary, it is only to use it as a foil for literature. Does such a critic really know what he is talking about?

I undertook this study in order to find out more precisely what we are talking about when we speak of the diary, and in order to spark off other studies: for this is an immense field, as yet largely unexplored, in particular in the area of poetics.



My work does not stand alone. Its development has coincided with the development that can be traced through the publications which have appeared since 1986. My own personal evolution thus occurred in synchronicity with the times. It's up to others now to continue the task.

#### **NOTE**

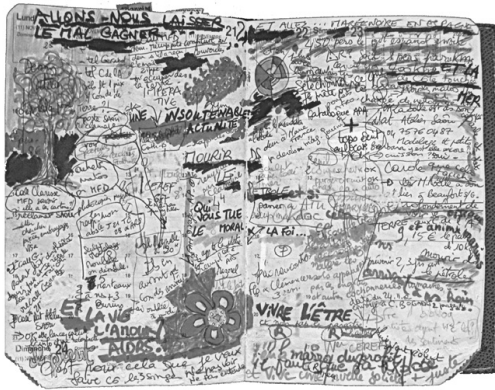
1. EDITOR'S NOTE: as of 2008, *Le Garde-mémoire* has published eight numbers.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

For recent years (since 1982), see the published volumes of my *Bibliographie des études en langue française sur la littérature personnelle et les récits de vie* [Bibliography of French-language publications of personal literature and life narratives], numbers 3, 7, 13, and 19 of *Cahiers de sémiotique textuelle*, and numbers 4, 8, and 13 of *RITM* (Université Paris-X Nanterre).

## PART II

### THE DIARY: ORIGINS



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## COUNTING AND MANAGING

The diary, like writing itself, was born of the needs of commerce and administration.

In business, it is important to keep track of transactions and to know the status of your inventory. Which means making a record and dating it. Accounting serves two purposes: an internal purpose (business management based on full and accurate information) and an external purpose (to stand as evidence in the event of a dispute). This function remains unchanged through history, from the earliest known accounting systems in Chaldea or ancient Egypt right up until today, when our banks obligingly send us regular statements of credits and debits, a financial journal that we can paste into our notebooks next to the record of our states of mind. To keep an account means that you can write and that you own something: it is a way of exercising a modicum of power, however limited. The form of the account book probably acted as an inspiration or model for the less financial and more personal journals that people began keeping of their other “properties” in the modern era. In the fourteenth century, the first “family books” of the Florentine merchants were an offshoot of their account books. That is the origin of what are known as “*livres de raison*” (the Latin *ratio* meaning “account”). Some religious journals kept by girls in the nineteenth century are laid out in columns like account books. They used one page for each week and one line for each day with two columns, one marked “V” for victories (over the Devil) and the other marked “D” for defeats, with the total at the bottom. In the early nineteenth century, Marc-Antoine Jullien suggested that young people should manage their daily lives using a commercial system. And how many people, even today, still keep their personal diaries in ledgers or datebooks?

All communities need to keep a record of their official deeds, laws, regulations, and decisions, with the exact dates, and of the signal events in the life of the community: what is known today as the “Official Gazette” or journal. An administration without a written memory is crippled. A country with no archives is unsure of its identity. What else is a civil register, for example, but a journal in which a society records its most intimate facts: the births, marriages,

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From “Ouverture.” *Le Journal intime. Histoire et anthologie*. Ed. Philippe Lejeune and Catherine Bogaert. Paris: Textuel, 2006. 40–56.

and deaths of its individual members? That is the basis for everything else. Such records, which existed in ancient Rome, disappeared during the Middle Ages and then were re-established in France in 1539 by the edict of Villers-Cotterêts. So up until the sixteenth century, the journal was basically a *community* affair.

Very little is known about these “collective journals” from Antiquity or the Middle Ages, for one very simple reason: almost all of them were kept on fragile media that have been lost. Brimming with hope, we open the slim volume published in 1827 by Joseph Victor Le Clerc under the delectable title *Des journaux chez les Romains* [Diaries from Roman Times]. Alas, this book, useful as it is, does not show us any account books, journals, or chronicles. That cannot be done. What it does do is to track the references or allusions to journals in Latin texts (speeches, letters, poems, treatises, etc.) that, having been stored on parchment, escaped devastation. Even in Pompeii, nothing has been found but a few tablets from a banker. So what do we know? Very little indeed. We know that in early Rome there was a sort of annual rather than a daily publication that was known as the Annals of the Pontiffs. We know that under the Empire, the formidable Roman administration relied on a series of “journals” called *acta: acta civilia* (civil documents), *acta forensia* (all regulations, laws, elections, etc.), *acta militaria* (the legions had their own account books and travel journals), judicial documents (court records), etc. And we know that there was even a sort of press that spread the news (but how?) throughout the Empire (*diurna acta*). To which should be added bankers’ and merchants’ accounts.

And what about private individuals? It seems that in Rome, most heads of household or heads of family might keep two types of journals: account books (*codex* or *tabulae, accepti et expensi*, a book of income and expenses), and chronicles (*commentaria*) in which they noted minor household events. Such journals appeared under other names as well: *ratio, ephemerides*, or *quotidianum diurnum*. They were usually kept by a secretary. What did they contain? The only insight on that comes from a work of fiction, Petronius’s *Satyricon*, in which Trimalchio’s steward interrupts his master’s extravagant talk to read him his registers, which he says are like the city registers. And indeed, all they contain are collective events that have occurred on his vast domains: a fire, a capital execution, a case of sexual misconduct, births, economic or financial news. We get another indication of the contents from Suetonius’s *Life of Augustus*, in which the emperor asks his granddaughters not to do anything that could not be recorded in the household book, thus indicating its official nature.

So there was nothing personal about the private journals of the Romans. They always dealt with the life of a small community; they were written by a secretary; they contained either accounts or an objective chronicle of daily life. That is what we can deduce from these rare glimpses into them. None has actually been found. They were probably written on tablets. How long were they kept? Were they meant to be passed on? We don't know. But the fact that tablets were cumbersome and re-usable must have given them a limited life.

So the “diary” form did indeed exist in Antiquity. As we will see, the “care of the self,” as Michel Foucault calls it, also existed in its own realm. But the two did not manage to connect.

### CARING FOR ONESELF

Open Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius* (4 BCE; 65)—letters to a friend and dialogue with the self—and read the beginning of letter 83: does this not sound like a plan for a personal diary? Lucilius has asked Seneca to tell him about one of his days, and he does: “I'll turn a searching eye on myself and (most salutary act!) review my day. What breeds the worst in us is the fact that no one looks back over his life. We think of what we're going to do. Yet our plans for the future depend upon the past” (19). He then narrates his day in detail, meditating or moralizing on certain incidents. What he does here for Lucilius—in writing, as an exception—is what he does for himself each day mentally, at least if we are to believe the treatise *On Anger*, in which he describes his practice:

Your anger will cease or moderate itself, if it knows that each day it must come before a judge. Could anything be finer than this habit of sifting through the whole day? Think of the sleep that follows this self-examination! How calm, deep and unimpeded it must be, when the mind has been praised or admonished and—its own sentinel and censor—has taken stock secretly of its own habits. I make use of this opportunity, daily pleading my case at my own court. When the light has been taken away and my wife has fallen silent, aware as she is of my habit, I examine my entire day, going through what I have done and said. I conceal nothing from myself, I pass nothing by. (110)

The technique of examining one's conscience each night is very old. It seems to have come from Pythagoras (sixth century BCE), who gave the following advice in his *Golden Verses*:

Let not the stealing god of sleep surprise  
Nor creep in slumbers on thy weary eyes,  
E'er ev'ry action of the former day  
Strictly thou dost and righteously survey.  
Where have I been? in what have I transgress'd?

What good or ill have this day's life express'd?  
 Where have I fail'd in what I ought to do?  
 Inquire severe whate'er from first to last,  
 From morning's dawn 'till evening's gloom is past.  
 If evil were thy deeds, repenting mourn,  
 And let thy foul with strong remorse be torn.  
 If good, the good with peace of mind repay,  
 And to thy secret self with pleasure say,  
 "Rejoice, my heart, for all went well to-day."<sup>1</sup>

This form of examination, which Socrates later praised, is found throughout Antiquity alongside techniques for dialogue with others. It is one of the "spiritual exercises" through which one can achieve mastery of the self. Unlike Pythagoras's formula, it is less about sifting through the good and the bad based on moral standards than it is a sort of hygiene by which to gain control over one's behavior, withstand the pressures of the world and reversals of fortune, and attain a sort of serenity.

Today, we are astonished that this technique did not lead to people keeping diaries, but there it is: the idea never occurred to them. When people examined their consciences, they did so mentally, and never thought of writing it down or keeping a record over time. When something was written down, it was in the form of notes taken during this individual stock-taking to draw general lessons from the process, nuggets of wisdom that one could reread for one's own edification or convey to others. It was this process that led to Epictetus's *Manual*, the treatises and letters of Seneca and Plutarch, and perhaps the most fascinating text of all, which occasionally borders on the personal diary in its tone and allusions: Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*.

But there is no diary. No, the young woman pensively nibbling on her stylus in a fresco from Pompeii may be about to jot down some notes on her reading or write some maxims, but she is not keeping a diary. It is difficult for us to grasp the immense gulf that exists between the attitude toward writing and the perception of time back then and how we think of them today. Seneca would never have written *for himself* what he wrote to Lucilius. Despite numerous references to his personal experiences, Marcus Aurelius's thoughts are never dated or given a temporal order. They are immersed in a sort of eternal present, always equidistant from death. It was not until two centuries later, when the first Christians revived the Stoics' spiritual exercises for their own purposes—with a more "repressive" twist—that the first inklings of the practice of diary-keeping began to appear. Let me repeat that no diary from that period has been preserved. The only actual practices we can imagine—and they were probably rare and rudimentary—come from these prescriptive texts. But if we needed to find a patron saint of the personal diary, it would

surely be Saint Anthony (fourth century). This is how his biographer, Saint Athanasius, summarizes his teaching on this point:

He added that as a safeguard against sin, the following should be observed: Let us note down and write down our deeds and the movements of our soul as if we were to tell them to each other. If we are utterly ashamed to have them known, be assured that we shall cease sinning and even cease thinking anything evil. For, who wishes to be seen sinning, or, when he has sinned, does not pretend otherwise because he wishes to escape notice? . . . Let the written account serve us instead of the eyes of our fellow monks, so that, blushing at the writing as at being seen, we may not even think an evil thought, and, moulding ourselves in this way, we shall be able to bring the body into subjection, to please God, and to trample on the snares of the enemy.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly afterward, Saint Basil added an important innovation: he recommended that people work on one fault at a time, comparing their results from one day to another. Writing would no longer serve merely to anticipate and internalize the gaze of others, but would allow a person to observe the self over time, though the scope of observation was still narrow.

Throughout the Middle Ages we find references to this technique, which was restricted to religious communities and gradually became part of the preparations for confession. This was not yet a developed and lasting “journal,” but a schematic accounting of sins that was erased after each confession. And these summary examinations of conscience were quite different from what would become the spiritual journal that, beginning in the sixteenth century, was instead part of a dialogue with God.

The following anecdote, which dates from the seventh century, may make it easier to understand why the personal journal did not develop until the Renaissance. During a round of visits to convents, Saint John Climacus noticed a monk with a strange outfit: “I looked even more closely at the monk in charge of the refectory, and saw with astonishment that at his belt he was carrying small tablets on which he wrote down all of his thoughts, so as to give an exact accounting to the abbot who was the head of the monastery. Many other monks were doing the same, and I finally learned that the father superior had ordered it.”

Tablets attached to the belt are perhaps not the best means of keeping a journal.

#### **FROM TABLETS TO PAPER**

What with today’s “graphics tablet” and the “tablet PC,” the idea of the tablet is still part of the language, but most people are unaware of its origins.



Nineteenth-century researchers were puzzled when they first found the remains of ancient wax tablets during their archeological digs. A number of tablets have been unearthed in the century and a half since then, but these remnants are negligible compared to the vast scope of the practice. Tablets were the main physical medium for everything that we now call “ordinary writing”: school exercises, accounts, letters, notes, and draft texts of administrators, businessmen, and private individuals alike. Until around 1500, apart from monumental writings engraved on stone or metal, there were two ways of writing: on a durable medium (initially papyrus, which gave way to parchment in the early part of the Common Era) or on an erasable medium (mainly tablets). Through repeated recopying in “scriptoria” (copying workshops), a small portion of what had been written on papyrus in Antiquity has come down to us via parchment and paper. In contrast, almost everything that was written on tablets, a vastly greater amount of material, has been lost. Our only direct knowledge of “ordinary writings” from Antiquity is from “ostraca” (re-used pottery shards) and papyri, most of them preserved in the arid regions of Egypt. Régis Burnet, in *L’Égypte ancienne à travers les papyrus. Vie quotidienne*, paints a fascinating picture of everything that was written on papyrus in Hellenistic and later Roman Egypt: inventories, accounts, reports, applications, letters, but no journals of any kind. We know a great deal about Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and yet just one small archeological find could change the landscape entirely.

Tablets were usually made of wooden boards that were hollowed out slightly on both sides to create a small border that held a thin layer of colored wax (black, red or green) in the cavity. To write on the tablet, a stylus was used to engrave the wax. Corrections could be made (the stylus had a point on one end and a scraper on the other), and the tablets were re-usable. Two, three or more of them were often attached together using wires or cords, with no wax on the front and back, to form a “codex.” This technique was later copied with parchment to make the switch from rolls to the “book” form. Tablets therefore had a limited surface area, were difficult to read (engraving in wax is less visible than a line written in ink), were cumbersome despite their thinness, and were fragile and temporary: their content was not meant to last. This was something like writing in sand or on a piece of slate. It is neither as private nor as long-lasting as the forms we now prefer for our private writings. Had it been written on tablets, the diary of Henri-Frédéric Amiel, instead of fitting into one large suitcase in 173 notebooks, would have filled an entire house plus its outbuildings.

In any case, the idea of privacy is incompatible with the status that writing had up until the late Middle Ages. During Antiquity, reading was an oral

activity: people read out loud, articulating the text, with the sort of mental and physical effort that is seen nowadays only in children who are learning to read. Silent reading was made easier in the Middle Ages with the separation of words in manuscripts, and it spread from the world of monasteries to the rest of society. In Antiquity, writing itself was often oral, since it was common practice for people to dictate to secretaries. Granted, there is a recent case in which a writer, Georges Simenon, dictated his personal diary (twenty volumes of *Dictées* published between 1975 and 1981).<sup>3</sup> But that is a rare case, silence and solitude being arguably more suited to privacy.

Everything changed with the arrival of paper in Europe. Paper was not the sole reason for the development of personal writing from the Renaissance onward (it had arrived in the Arab world during the Middle Ages without having the same effect), but it was a contributing factor. Initially imported from Italy, paper began to be produced “industrially” in France in the fourteenth century. People usually stress the fact that paper superseded parchment because it was cheaper and easier to use in printing. More importantly, long before that, paper had killed the tablet. By 1500, tablets had almost completely fallen out of use in Europe. Paper was lightweight, offered unlimited writing space, and though less durable than parchment, was much more durable than tablets: it had longevity on its side. It revolutionized the system of ordinary writing in administration, commerce, and academia. One example: it enabled the revolutionary development of “Venetian accounting,” which accompanied the expansion of Italian capitalism beginning in the fifteenth century, and required each company to keep a series of different books in parallel. That would have been prohibitively expensive on parchment, and would have taken up far too much space on tablets. Daily writing was now affordable for everyone, businesses and individuals alike. The word “journal” (meaning “daily”) was an adjective first. What noun does it become attached to in the late Middle Ages? “Journal paper.” No one said “journal tablets,” much less “journal parchment.” The modern journal arose from paper.

Paper was bought in sheets, which were folded in four, eight, or sixteen to produce a “*cahier*” (*quaterni*, sheets folded in four). This booklet could be stitched after folding, or one could write on a series of notebooks and then have them bound together. Industrial-scale production of bound or stapled booklets, school notebooks, commercial ledgers, and blank books for miscellaneous uses did not become widespread until the nineteenth century. Around the mid-eighteenth century, however, a new type of item did appear: the annual almanac calendar, which “formatted” blank paper by pouring it in advance into the mold of *time*.

### THE CLOCK AND THE CALENDAR

We have difficulty grasping the idea that the way we experience time (planning our days, organizing our future, recalling our past) is a highly relative historical fact. It was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that time took on a form close to the one we now know. And it is still changing with incredible speed. Keeping a diary is clearly related to this revolution. The practice of keeping a *personal* journal emerged in Europe between the late Middle Ages and the eighteenth century, at the same time as the mechanical clock was being developed, on the one hand, and in conjunction with the appearance of the annual calendar and the datebook on the other. Having noted this coincidence, it is difficult and perhaps artificial to draw clear-cut links between the new techniques for measuring time and the new forms of personal journals. But we can contemplate such links with reference to the facts, which are impressive.

What time is it? How much time did I spend doing such and such a thing? Before the fourteenth century, the answers to those questions could only be given in vague terms. There was no way to measure time individually, except with an hourglass! And the collective points of reference were vague (the length of “hours” varied with the seasons) and full of gaps (sundials only worked during the day and in good weather).

What day is it? Does August 13 fall on a Sunday or a Tuesday this year? How many days are there between Saint Leo’s day and Saint Ursula’s day? Answering questions such as these required acrobatic operations using the only tool available until the mid-seventeenth century: the perpetual calendar.

What is a “datebook”? Until the eighteenth century, this was a text that told you what to do on the same day every year, the devotions for various religious festivals, annual fairs, the dates for sowing and planting, etc.

Then, little by little, ways of measuring and perceiving time changed.

The mechanical clock was invented in Europe in the early fourteenth century. It began as a huge mechanism housed in the bell towers of convents, to better regulate their religious and economic activities (the clock serves to synchronize human activities as much as to measure time), and later in town clock towers. It was gradually miniaturized (into the “chamber clock,” which a person could have *at home*, and the “body clock,” which a person could have *on oneself*—what we now call a watch) and perfected (to the point where a minute hand was added to the clock face in the mid-seventeenth century). David S. Landes, who wrote the first major cultural history of time, *Revolution in Time*, describes the effect of miniaturizing the clock: “Hourly bells are at best intermittent reminders. They signal moments. A chamber clock or watch is something very different: an ever visible, ever audible companion and

monitor. A turning hand, specifically a minute hand (the hour hand turns so slowly as to seem still), is a measure of time used, time spent, time wasted, time lost. As such it was prod and key to personal achievement and productivity” (89). Once it was measurable, the time of everyday life became precious and irreversible. Writing would allow us to make better use of it, and to keep track of it. Read the introduction to Marc-Antoine Jullien’s essay on *L’Emploi du temps*. Its systematic side may make us smile, but it says something profound about the new relationship between writing and time.

The annual calendar was introduced to France around 1650, and took a century to become firmly established: it was not in standard use until around 1750. Prior to that, the same calendar was used every year, giving the impression that time was repetitive and immobile. It did not show the days of the week. The cycle of days was indicated by the letters A to G, and for every year you had to know which letter stood for Sunday (the “dominical letter”) to calculate which day fell on any given date. Although a perpetual almanac began to be published in the eleventh century, it was useless for constructing an organized vision of time, since all of the years were jumbled together on the same page and you could not know what year an event occurred in unless you knew the anniversary date. (This is what happens in the chaotic family book kept by Montaigne and his family members in Beuther’s almanac.) It was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that annual almanacs appeared with blank spaces for each day: they are usually laid out as account books, with columns for income and expenses. But nothing stopped people from recording other things in them and turning them into journals, or even using them as datebooks, in the modern sense, by noting down meetings and plans. It was the beginning of a new era. Time was no longer represented only cyclically, but also as a vector, irreversible and moving toward the future.

## NOTES

1. Translation, with slight alterations, from *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras* 8–9.
2. Translation, with slight alterations, from Defarrari 185.
3. The twenty volumes of *Mes dictées* were published between 1975 and 1981 by Presses de la Cité. All of Simenon’s autobiographical texts (including *Mes dictées*) were collected in two volumes (vol. 26 and 27) of *Tout Simenon*.

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## SPIRITUAL JOURNALS IN FRANCE FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

The research I am sketching out here broadly covers the intersection between two sets of texts:

1) the “journal” or “diary” form, defined as a *series of dated traces*; that is, a practice of making notations extended over time: a single notation, such as Blaise Pascal’s *Mémorial* dated 23 November 1654 “from about ten o’clock until about midnight” is not, properly speaking, a journal;

2) spiritual writing, which deals with the relationship between man and God.

My approach may appear reductive, forcing the immense range of spiritual writings (think of Abbé Brémond’s dense series of volumes on *L’Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*) onto the Procrustean bed of the “journal” form. However limited it may be, this approach is nonetheless illuminating because it addresses two important problems:

a) *from the point of view of spiritual writing*: to what extent can writing a journal assist in the salvation of the soul? Does the diary belong to God or to the Devil? Is it advisable for a person to keep one? Does the journal have to be *monitored*; that is, guided by a *directeur de conscience* or spiritual director? And what should it contain?

As we will see, the answers to these questions vary depending on the religion and the period.

b) *from the point of view of the diary and its history*: what role has the spiritual journal played in the development of journal-keeping practice in general? Should it be considered the origin of the practice? Should it be considered the origin of the personal diary that appeared throughout almost all of Europe in the late eighteenth century? If religion did influence the rise of private writing, did it do so through the spiritual journal or some other avenue? In other words, is the personal diary the child or the cousin of the spiritual journal? Did the historical factors that transformed the idea of the individual and individual expression in the late eighteenth century also have an effect on religion and ordinary writing practices?

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“Les journaux spirituels en France du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle.” From “Problématiques de l’autobiographie.” Spec. issue of *Littérales* 33 (2004): 63–85.

I am deliberately turning the question in all directions. Georges Gusdorf and others have charged me with downplaying the religious origins of writing about the self. Sensitive to that charge, I wanted to look at the evidence and assess the situation. This leads me to add a third intersection in defining the subject of my study:

3) “in France”: in the vehement notes to his fine book, *Lignes de vie*, Georges Gusdorf also criticized me for not knowing German. That is one of my great regrets. But his remark led me to think that perhaps my lack of sensitivity to the religious origins of autobiographical writing owed as much to a national situation as to personal bias. Try looking in a library from the classical period (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) for a spiritual journal written in French that was published at the time: you will find *none*. Even if you look for one that was published later, you will find very few. But in Germany or England, the situation is quite different.

Of course, one might wonder whether it makes sense to use national language as a criterion for the classical period. Surely what matters in this field are distinctions between religions and religious orders? Large orders such as the Company of Jesus are international organizations, true enough. But it is also true that national cultures exist. In my field of study—the personal diary—there is a significant difference between France and England (to take a country whose language I speak). France lagged behind by over half a century: practices that were common in English from the mid-seventeenth century on did not catch on in France until the second half of the eighteenth century.

So here I am at the intersection of these three areas: the diary, spiritual writing, and France, on the threshold of research that has just barely got under way and that I am perhaps not the best qualified person to carry out. Not only do I not speak German, but even in French, spiritual writing often strikes me as a foreign language. I confessed this earlier, when I was studying the diaries of young girls in the nineteenth century:

### 15 December 1991

Problems of spiritual journals: I have a hard time reading them, or rather, skimming through them. Same problem with the exemplary biographies they are often inserted into. I just cannot believe that people seriously wrote these things, or read them. In a moment of exasperation, I referred to stereotyped formal language. At other times, I am convinced of my unworthiness and see it instead as a sort of algebra. God, the Incarnation, the Trinity, etc. seem to me just a set of  $x$ ,  $y$  or  $z$ . Some people manage to communicate amongst themselves using that algebra, a completely abstract but effective language that governs their relations with others, themselves, and the world. Personally, I get nothing out of it, and just like at the end of equations, everything seems to add up to zero. And yet I can take an interest in people who take note of the color of the sky or how they spent their day.

The question is whether religious discourse is the major model for diary writing, even for people who no longer believe. My debate with Georges Gusdorf is at stake: figuring out whether, as he puts it, the personal diary came down from heaven. (*Le Moi des demoiselles* 39)

Having acknowledged my limitations, I must put my personal problems behind me. I notice that I have not remarked on a fourth intersection that appears in my title:

4) “to the late eighteenth century”: a spectacular change occurs in France beginning in the early nineteenth century, and more specifically in 1814, when Catholicism returned with a vengeance and took control of education. In the nineteenth century, the number of spiritual journals began to rise—encouraged, guided, and often published by people’s spiritual directors. These journals were often kept by girls and women. This practice, which was restricted to the founders of religious orders or exceptionally spiritual individuals until the late eighteenth century, became much more common at that time, and was promoted by edifying publications.

And what of its origins, prior to the early sixteenth century? On this point, I will refer to the book I published with Catherine Bogaert, *Un journal à soi. Histoire d’une pratique* (24–25, 56–59), and will only repeat the main point. The idea of writing one’s sins down in preparation for confession, and to prevent oneself from doing things one would be ashamed to tell people, comes from Saint Anthony (fourth century). So he can be baptized the father of the spiritual journal, if you will, although this is only the “repressive” branch of the practice, not its “mystical” branch. But in any event, these summary notes could not be kept private, nor could they be kept for very long, because a proper medium was not available. Until the fifteenth century, ordinary writings were recorded on cumbersome, ephemeral wax tablets. It was the arrival of paper in Europe that really permitted the spread of journal-keeping as a common practice beginning in the fifteenth century, in the form of ship’s logbooks, company account books, travel journals, historical chronicles, family record books, etc. Far from being at the origin of this burgeoning of the journal in the dawn of modernity, the “spiritual” variety was one of the last to make its appearance, during the Counter-Reformation.

#### WHERE SHOULD WE LOOK FOR THEM?

There are three major trails to follow:

1) *Published texts*: this will be a time-consuming task using ordinary bibliographic tools, an overview such as Abbé Brémond’s collection, and in particular the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*. In 2003, a team of historians from the Université Paris-IV (Centre Roland Mousnier) began compiling an inventory



of all published or unpublished “private writings” from the late Middle Ages to 1914. This work, which will take years to complete, will be crucial for this sort of study.<sup>1</sup>

Another problem is getting an accurate picture of how texts actually circulated. Let’s take an example: the *Mémorial* (1542–1545) by Pierre Favre (1506–1546): sixteen manuscript copies are currently held in various libraries in Europe, which is indicative of real internal circulation at the time, through the Company of Jesus; but it was first published in 1853 in the original Latin and Spanish, and was translated into French in 1959 by Michel de Certeau: a delayed “historical” publication that had no significant external impact. The same goes for the spiritual journal of Ignatius of Loyola (1544–1545)—or what remains of it (he refused to let his biographer Louis Gonçalvès de Câmara read it)—which was only published in 1934 (and translated into French in 1960).

2) *Unpublished texts* (or the unpublished manuscripts of partially published texts): the most obvious thing is to look for them in the archives of religious communities. So far, I have worked in the archives of the Sulpician order and the Jesuits. For a variety of historical reasons, these archives often do not contain any documents from before the late eighteenth century. The Jesuits were shut down in France in 1762 and did not begin operating again until 1814, under the leadership of Pierre de Clorivière, but their archives had been scattered. The papers of most religious orders were destroyed during the Revolution: the Saulchoir library, for example, has nothing but “a few miserable scraps” left from the old Dominicans. Nevertheless, the different orders should be gone through systematically, as the Paris-IV historians will likely do with their study.

The absence of published texts is irrefutable, but no final conclusion can be drawn about unpublished texts. As in archeology, anything is still possible. And even if the archives had not been destroyed or broken up, we would not have found texts in them that most certainly existed, because people may have written private or personal journals for themselves or at the request of a spiritual director and then destroyed them.

3) *Indirect accounts*: there is still reason to believe that even if the *output* of journal-writing practice has been lost, its existence may well be indirectly proven in two ways: through prescriptive or prohibitive passages in treatises on piety, or through references or comments in correspondence on spiritual guidance.

Without going into detail, I will lay out an overview of what I have found so far on ordinary (institutional) Catholic practices, special (individual) Catholic practices, and Protestant practices.

## ORDINARY CATHOLIC PRACTICES

We must avoid developing misleading ideas about the role of the journal in the spiritual life of French Catholics in the classical period on the basis of a few exceptional cases. I have still not found a spiritual journal written by a lay person, and have found very few by members of religious orders.

Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* (1548) have nothing to do with the world of the journal. These are *spiritual* exercises that are never put into writing, and in principle leave no trace. The only exception, for individual self-scrutiny, is the one Loyola began by adopting the traditional method of "check-marking" sins. This is the degree zero of writing: a mark is put beside each sin on one line, and once two days have been compared, the paper is destroyed. No mention is made of writing for general scrutiny or in any of the exercises that follow. They are part of an *oral* pedagogical relationship with a spiritual director who gradually "sets" the exercises and follows and guides their development. The text of the *Spiritual Exercises* is itself a sort of teacher's manual that the person completing the exercises is not meant to see. Three centuries later, Freudian psychoanalysis would go down a similar road, discouraging the analysand from reading theoretical texts, disqualifying writing as resistance, and staking everything on speech and the transference relationship.

The paradox is that Ignatius himself and his early companions kept journals in a wide variety of forms (see below).

Wasn't anyone tempted to *write* the spiritual exercises? Yes, but apparently it was more for pedagogical than for personal purposes. We have one point of reference, a century later, with the spiritual writings of the Jesuit father Claude La Colombière (1641–1682). Two years after his death (1684), four volumes of his sermons were published, along with one volume entitled *Réflexions chrétiennes*. In particular, however, a volume entitled *La Retraite spirituelle* was published containing notes on a four-week retreat at Lyon in 1674 following the plan set out in Loyola's *Exercises*, and notes from a few retreats between 1674 and 1677. This is not a continuous journal: he only writes during retreats, within the "pre-shaped" framework of the *Exercises*. Nor is this a "personal" diary, since the real aim of the exercises is renunciation of the self. Instead, this is an example that is given as a model. These admirably written texts have a personal flavor that makes it easier to identify with them, but they do not really have any personal content, which would deflect attention towards their author: they open a pleasant path towards depersonalization. The message in publishing them is not "Use writing to sustain you in your voyage towards God, and keep a journal to improve yourself," but "Do

your spiritual exercises as I do them; I have written them down to teach you not how to write, but how to pray.”

If you look at any of the spiritual guidebooks from that time, there is no encouragement to keep a journal or even to use writing to accompany or support one’s efforts to come closer to God. Writing is not on the program. I have consulted Gabriel Du Préau, *De la connaissance de soi-même pour parvenir à celle de Dieu* (1559), Saint François de Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévote* (1609), Jean-Jacques Olier, *La Journée chrétienne* (1655), Jean-Joseph Surin, *Guide spirituel* (1661), Pierre de Saint-Romuald, *Journal spirituel* (1667), and Madame Guyon, *Le Moyen court* (1685). One of these guidebooks, by Pierre de Saint-Romuald, even says the opposite. In his “Advice for avoiding certain illusions” (“*Advis pour se garder de certaines tromperies*”) (335–39), several remarks seem to point directly to the risks of pride or self-indulgence that could arise from keeping a journal. With the Devil pulling the strings, a journal would become an occasion for sin. Here in particular are deceptions Nos. 7, 11, 13, and 17:

7. Do not take pride or vainly trust in yourself if you enjoy some appreciable sweetness or consolation in prayer, for they may arise from three things: 1. From the Holy Spirit; 2. From the excellence of the subject matter; 3. From Satan, who sometimes gives heretics great tenderness of heart, such that they may even shed tears as they read the Holy Bible or Legends.

11. Pray to mortify yourself, and mortify yourself to pray; in short, use prayer as a means of better observing God’s commandments (which must be every Christian’s principal goal), but do not pray because you have acquired a taste for the exercise.

13. Tell no one of the favors that you receive from God, for, apart from the fact that it is stupid and vain, you also run the risk of losing your devotion entirely, and those very favors. When perfume becomes stale from being left open, it no longer smells good.

17. Do not consider spiritual exercises as part of some exercise or art; use them only as a means or measure whereby to do your duty in a more orderly way, and for all else put your trust in God and in the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

It is tempting to juxtapose these warnings with the direct encouragement to keep a journal that we find at the same time in some treatises on piety in England, such as John Beadle’s *The Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian* (London, 1656), or Isaac Ambrose’s *Prima, the First Things in Reference to the Middle and Last Things* (London, 1654). Isaac Ambrose even makes a personal contribution since, after praising the diary (below), he provides three weeks from his own diary (13–31 May 1641) as an example!

To this purpose we read of many Ancients that were accustomed to keep Diaries or Day-books of their actions, and out of them to take an account of their lives: Such a Register (of God's dealings towards him, and of his dealings towards God in main things) the Lord put into a poor Creature's Heart to keep in the year 1641. Ever since which time he hath continued it, and once a year purposes (by God's Grace) to examine himself by it; the use and end of it is this:

1. Hereby he observes something of God to his soul, and of his soul to God—2. Upon occasion he pours out his Soul to God in Prayer accordingly, and either is humbled or thankful—3. He considers how it is with him in respect of time past, and if he hath profited, in Grace, to find out the means whereby he hath profited, that he may make more constant use of such means; or wherein he hath decayed, to observe by what Temptation he has overcome, that his former errors may make him more wary for the future.

Besides many other uses, as his own Experiences, and Evidences, which he may (by the Lord's help) gather out of his Diary.

Elisabeth Bourcier, in her book on *Les Journaux privés en Angleterre de 1600 à 1660*, cites dozens of spiritual journals that exist in manuscript form or from which excerpts were published in pious biographies during that period. John Beadle's and Isaac Ambrose's advice formalizes a common practice by stressing the pedagogical role of *rereading*.

There was nothing of the kind in France, where solitary writing was seen as fraught with danger. When French Catholicism changed its attitude in the nineteenth century and began recommending journal writing, it would be under strict supervision, and the journal would be incorporated into spiritual guidance. When spiritual guidance made use of writing in the seventeenth century, it did so very differently, even though spiritual correspondence had the regularity of a journal. For one thing, as a person renounced the self, he was anticipating the gaze of the director whose advice he was seeking; for another, the diarist detached himself from what he wrote, since he sent his letters off and only kept the replies. That explains why we mainly know this practice through letters from spiritual directors who, for their part, rarely kept letters from their correspondents. The letters on spiritual guidance that we now have access to through publication (from Gaston de Renty, Jean-Jacques Olier, Madame Guyon, and Jean-Pierre Caussade, for example) have one feature in common: the director never advises keeping a diary or writing anything other than letters. They systematically steer their disciples towards prayer. The aim is complete detachment from the self. The letters themselves, expressing doubts or qualms, are seen as weaknesses; they might be pardonable and useful weaknesses, since they are asking for help, but it is clear that anyone who might engage in such self-scrutiny alone would be lost. "Do not

look at yourself to scrutinize what you have done,” writes Madame Guyon to the young Marquis de Fénelon in 1716. Listen to her elaborate on this leitmotiv to Otto Homfeld, another disciple:

You ask me what I meant by the expressions *letting go of your thoughts and keeping your heart unhindered*. What I mean is that we are naturally inclined to reflection, which greatly hinders and troubles the peace of our souls. We want to see, know, and feel what we are doing; if it is something imperfect, we are at great risk of being troubled and discouraged by it; if it is something good, presumption excites our minds almost in spite of ourselves. And even though we may not consent to it, it cannot fail to tarnish the pure surface of the mind which, like a mirror, must be cleared of these two breaths of sadness and self-complacency, so that God appears there as he really is. (*Correspondance* 698)

Meaning that the diary is a *fog*.

But mightn't it be a good thing for such a fog to be expressed, as it is in the letter, so as to *unhinder* the soul? And isn't it possible that an individual who is solidly guided by an institution may be capable of self-guidance; that is, doing the same thing for himself that his spiritual director does for him? In short, that the diary might be a *lifeline*? These questions are also a reflection of my concern about the information gaps in this field. To be sure, I have not yet found in the available documents an example of an “ordinary” spiritual journal from before the late eighteenth century. But when I read the journal of the Jesuit Pierre de Clorivière (1735–1820), it seemed to me that he was not following an individual initiative but a learned practice, and therefore probably a common practice. The various journals and texts kept by this Jesuit between 1763 and 1773 are visibly part of a training system. It so happens that Clorivière, the man who re-established the Jesuits in France in 1814, was able to leave us his archives, whereas analogous practices by other eighteenth-century Jesuits must have been lost. These practices must have been common in the training of priests and were then “secularized,” so to speak, in the early nineteenth century, meaning that they were extended to the education of adolescents in religious schools. Clorivière's spiritual writings (published in 1935) thus include a whole battery of exercises of which the journal was just one part: Resolutions, Spiritual Accounts, Life Program, Retreats, Spiritual Demonstrations (addressed to directors), and the Journal. Here is how the editor of his work analyzes his system with respect to the journal:

Father de Clorivière uses three different expressions in his personal notes: it is either a *Journal spirituel*, a *Journal d'oraison*, or a *Journal de conscience*. The *Journal d'oraison* is the one in which he notes down the subject of his prayer, the resolutions he makes, and the graces he receives; the *Journal de conscience* contains the contents of his triumphs and weaknesses; the *Journal spirituel* is a combination of the first two when they are not kept separately.

The first page of the spiritual journal kept from September to December 1770 is reproduced in *Un journal à soi* (58–59). The first two entries (9 and 10 September) are given below (Clorivière writes in English because he is being trained in Brussels to work in England, the Jesuits having been shut down in France in 1762). These notes begin on a positive and programmatic note: subject (for meditation); virtue; resolution; and graces. They then move into the negative and the retrospective: an examination of conscience about the day's lapses. The resolution gives rise to an accounting inspired by "individual self-scrutiny" but focusing on the positive: Clorivière checks off on one line the number of actions performed, to be compared with the number of actions promised.

September 70

Vanity in words. Too great carelessness in watching over my tongue.

Sensuality. Indulging in one's humour, being interiorly vexed against one, and being glad of hearing others speak ill of him.

10. Subject: Parable of the Sower.

Virtue: A faithful correspondance to divine inspirations.

Resolution: ten acts of recollections, and dependance on Christ: in the morning [12], as many in the afternoon [10].

Gifts: Peace, Devotion, Silence.

Though in the midst of distraction I was pretty much recollected, but was not careful enough to discourse of pious things: as edification requires, being with people just come from the noviceship.

To conclude these remarks on ordinary practices of spiritual journal writing, what is striking is that until the late eighteenth century they never spilled over into secular society: they remained cordoned off and hidden in religious space. And that is even truer of what I will call special practices.

### **SPECIAL CATHOLIC PRACTICES**

These are exceptions, or rather sets of exceptions linked to the founding of a religious order, to moments of invention and violence, and to ardent mystical adventures—instances when individuals take unprecedented initiatives with no real models to follow, and which rarely serve as models to be followed by others. Journals written in these circumstances are *different* from one another. They have no common traits. To some extent, these are unique phenomena, "monsters." As far as I know, there were two particular events that inspired such journals: the founding of the Company of Jesus in the sixteenth century, and the founding of Saint-Sulpice in the seventeenth.

Michel de Certeau, in his edition of the journal of Pierre Favre, lists seven journals kept by the first Jesuits, and states that they all belong to the same type:

Closely tied to the Ignatian concept of self-scrutiny, the journal expresses a dialogue with God in the form of a discussion with the self: by recognizing that God is “moving” through his action, the apostle cooperates increasingly closely with the Work indicated by his own “vocation,” and discerns in himself the remaining points of resistance to God’s creative activity. (82 n.1)

So far I have read three of these seven “journals” (by Ignatius of Loyola, Pierre Favre, and Jérôme Nadal), and was more aware of the dissimilarities between them. The model described by Michel de Certeau is taken from Pierre Favre’s journal. He discusses it in his annotated edition and projects it onto the others. Here is this journal’s “program,” as set out in the opening lines (15 June 1542):

In 1542, on the eighth day of the Body of Christ our Lord, a particular desire entered me to begin immediately what I had hitherto failed to do, through pure negligence and laziness: to write down, so as to remember them, some of the graces that the Lord has given me in prayer to tell me how to conduct myself, or for purposes of contemplation, discernment or action, or for any other way of progressing in spirit.

But before entering and going forward into the future, I felt it proper to note down some points of my past life, according to what I remembered having experienced with particular consciousness of thanksgiving, contrition, compassion or any other spiritual feeling inspired in me by the Lord or taught to me by my guardian angel.

This journal, which we only know from copies, was written first in Spanish and then in Latin. It begins with an autobiography and covers one year (June 1542–July 1543), stops, and then picks up again for five months in 1545. These notes, which were taken after mass or in the evening, express (sometimes through admonitions in the second person, where Favre addresses his soul) all the work of perception and interpretation of the graces he receives. This journal, which he later rereads, allows him, as he puts it so well, “to enter and go forward into the future”: it is an instrument for acting on the self, and accompanies a burst of fervor. Here is another description of the program (11 October 1542):

After mass, reflecting upon what I was doing as I said it, it seemed to me very important to write down what I should insistently pray to God for: to spark and strengthen my memory, so that I could remember each past spiritual exercise, and I should pray it out of the merit of the passion of Christ, who is our great memorial;

2. to make my mind attentive to the exercises I was doing; 3. a will that desires the exercises to come. Not that these three faculties are separated in such actions, but the memory looks to the past, the intelligence to the present and desire to the future.

Ignatius's and Nadal's journals have similar functions, but their pace is very different. Pierre Favre's journal is written in a manner that is both analytical and personal. Ignatius's journal is personal, but not analytical. Nadal's is analytical but not personal. By "analytical" I mean an approach that explains situations in such a way that they can be understood by oneself later, or by an outside reader. I call "personal" a dated approach that foregrounds the impulses of the soul, and creates a dialogue with them. It was misleading to publish Nadal's *Observationes spirituales* under the name of *Spiritual Journal*: they are almost never dated, and rarely depict his own personal story. These notes, which are the fruit of his prayers and are presented impersonally, were prepared for publication by him. The journal of Ignatius of Loyola is quite the opposite. His two notebooks, kept in 1544–1545 while he was preparing the *Constitutions* of the Company of Jesus and meditating over the choice of poverty and the missionary purpose of the new Order, were never meant to be read by anyone else. It is the first example of a totally private piece of writing. His journal, which revolves around the daily experience of mass, takes the form of a detailed recording (explicit at first, later replaced by a coded system of abbreviations and signs) of tears shed before, during, and after mass, and of the *loquela* (internal voice) that he hears at different times: the quantity and quality of the voice is described each time, but never its content. So the journal does not contain any ideas, reflections, or information; it is devoted entirely to a sort of spiritual weather report for purely internal use. It is impressive reading. He makes us dream of the possible existence of other private practices that have left no trace. We should remember that it is in spite of Pascal that we know of his "*Mémorial*," which was sewn into the lining of his clothing. Other Ignatiuses and other Blaises may have written down and then destroyed their most intimate dialogues with God.

The second sprouting of journals we can observe accompanied the founding of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice in Paris in the 1640s. Only three journals this time, all three truly "monstrous" in all ways. I have to describe them briefly because they are for the most part unpublished and inaccessible, whereas the Jesuit journals I spoke about have been published. Firstly, Marie Rousseau (c. 1596–1680), the widow of a wine merchant to the court, who was in permanent dialogue with the Holy Virgin and inspired Jean-Jacques Olier (see below): she began her journal in 1629 and continued it until 1656 or 1657. Only the middle part, 1640–1649, is extant. It takes up 10,096 pages in thirteen volumes at the Bibliothèque Nationale (FR 19326–19338). She is the



subject of an unpublished doctoral thesis by Thierry Bourgeois, who transcribed the year 1645 (506 pages, one-twentieth of the whole). You should know that Marie Rousseau, who kept this journal on an order from Father Bataille (she later quarrelled with him and for a while worried that he would not return the sections of the journal still in his possession), rarely did any writing herself! She dictated to Jean-Jacques Olier or Louis Laisné de la Marguerie, who in turn used copyists. Her journal is a beehive, a collective workshop gathering the honey falling from her lips, originating from the Holy Virgin or Jesus. She feels like an unworthy interpreter of the divine word (16 June 1641):

When I write these words from my Jesus, I put down only one word to say more than ten thousand for the things that we will see happen and when I come back to my senses and know what I have written, ah! what shame and resentment I feel, to see that what I have written is in no way equal to the justice of God. But when I remind myself that I do it out of obedience, then the shame recedes and I continue.

Now here is the same scene, described in 1642 by Jean-Jacques Olier (Vol. II, 196–97):

For seven or eight whole hours she says that she is writing only the least part of all that she sees, she says one word that expresses sixteen, in short, she writes nothing that pleases her, so much greater is the material left out than what is written down, which is an almost infallible sign of her true insight, particularly on the subject of the very Holy Virgin. And what is even more significant is how she is always nearly beside herself and going into ecstasies as she writes. I am grateful to my GOD for the grace of having seen her in that state, for having seen her beside herself with her extreme suffering, I have seen her complaining that she could not see well enough to write, so preoccupied was her soul internally, thus hiding from her senses the faculties required for the service of that soul. I see no more assured secretary of the Holy Spirit in the Church than one that faith provides us, but for special Souls there is no greater mark of loyalty and submission than can be seen in her manner of writing. She does not use her mind at all and refrains from writing anything that she doubts comes from God. She submits everything to her very capable director, writes only out of the impetuosity of an internal spirit that is quicker and stronger than her own and that, having no preconceived notions, confuses nothing with the DIVINE spirit. In short, she is a marvel who is one of a kind.

What does she write this way? Visions, revelations, and prophecies, which allow her in particular to guide the career of Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–1657). In 1642, Olier took charge of the parish of Saint-Sulpice, a parish that had gone astray and that he intended to reform. He had a great deal of trouble doing this: in 1645, a riot was organized against him, but he managed to establish a seminary at Vaugirard. Having first come under the guidance of

Father de Condren, he later began keeping a journal under orders from Father Bataille. That journal, which runs from March 1642 to February 1652, fills 3,045 pages. This unpublished journal is held in the Saint-Sulpice archives in eight bound volumes. A full typed transcription was made between 1965 and 1975 by Father Charles Rabeau. It begins, like the journal of Pierre Favre, with retrospective recapitulations. The first three volumes (over 1200 pages) cover six months (March to September 1642), volumes 4 to 6 cover six months each, volume 7 covers a year and a half, and the last volume covers six years: the rhythm slows. For the year 1642, we therefore have 2,900 pages from Marie Rousseau and 1,400 pages from Jean-Jacques Olier, overlapping journals of a partially shared life, since Olier was one of the secretaries of a prophetess who guided his decisions. The third journal, which does not have the same status, is the one kept by Father de Bretonvilliers (1621–1671), Olier’s disciple and successor at Saint-Sulpice. Begun in September 1647 on Olier’s advice, it consists of three volumes. It is also held in the Saint-Sulpice archives, together with a full copy made during his lifetime.

Why did I say earlier that these journals were “hard to get at”? Even when transcribed (which is not the case for the bulk of Marie Rousseau’s journal), they are highly resistant to reading, both because of their size and their torrential, unevenly controlled flow. They have nothing in common with the first Jesuit journals, which were concise and controlled. I spent long afternoons in the Saint-Sulpice archives reading in full four of the eight volumes of Jean-Jacques Olier’s journal: I am probably the only non-Sulpician ever to have done so. I know Marie Rousseau through Thierry Bourgeois’s partial transcription and from one session researching her manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale. I only glanced at Bretonvilliers. That is the state of my knowledge. I said earlier, out of honesty, how distanced I feel from mystical writing. But is proximity necessarily more clear-sighted? When I read the studies published on Olier, most of which were written by Sulpicians, I sometimes have difficulty recognizing the landscape that I saw in his Journal. It is difficult to find the right distance when speaking about extreme experiences. I kept a reading journal of my Sulpician afternoons. I reread it with embarrassment: having entered a private world that was not expecting my visit, I was obliged to show the utmost reserve. I am including two fragments from September 1642 that provide two different “tones” from Olier’s journal: the first, which appears less often, gives the tone of the man of action that he was, a great reformer and organizer; the other, more commonly found, is the tone of his intimate dialogue with God, a dialogue whose every exchange he records, setting off the divine replies with special characters (shown in bold here).

[9 September 1642]

To the glory of God this Tuesday morning 9 September the day after the Holy Nativity of Our Lady on which it is the custom of our Lord, as I have noted elsewhere, always to begin his purposes and new occupations being in prayer I was so intimately united with my master that he took away all my powers, drawing me into him fully, and losing myself in his holy person. After that it pleased him to begin to instruct me on the orders I was to follow to settle the Parish and whose illumination began yesterday.

Firstly I saw how I should have a few pious persons in each street who could notify me about what was happening in all the households on the street, and in particular to notify me if there were persons living a bad life so that they could be recalled to order.

Secondly today I saw in prayer how I must have midwives assembled to instruct them firstly on baptism and secondly on what they should say to women who have just given birth and the feelings with which they should support them during their illness and labor, which is a very precious time yet one that is ordinarily used very badly and to no purpose whatsoever.

[28 September 1642]

This disposition must be in priests who must act forcefully and courageously to ensure that the Majesty of GOD is known and honored and to that end it recently pleased the goodness of my Lord to tell me a few days after he expressed in me the holy mystery of the resurrection, **You will act with strength now**, as well as on the subject of the prior disposition which is zeal towards GOD after having caused me to lift myself to him, to which I replied that while bedridden my director had forbidden me from occupying myself with him, out of goodness he said **I will occupy you myself**, which pierced my heart and I replied to him Lord you love me well, he said **Well, what do you want**, my master if you were to address some beautiful soul but to me, and he replied **I am in love**. But on the subject of this strength, since I told him that I was too weak of body to serve him, and especially too weak of lung to preach him he replied **I will give you twice the strength and a double lung** I did not understand that word and it was understood that he would strengthen my lung, not only to preach him but also to love and to bear the effects of his love which are often severe and impair one without the mercy of GOD. I understood the next day that that was the meaning of those words, when it pleased his goodness to add **Prepare yourself for love** which touched me deeply.

### PROTESTANT PRACTICES

I always believed that Protestantism was more favorable to personal expression than Catholicism, as evidenced by the amazing development of the Puritan journal in seventeenth-century England and pietistic literature in eighteenth-century Germany. I still believe it. But it would be dangerous to extend that reasoning to a country in which Protestantism was a minority

religion and under threat: to my knowledge, there were no Protestant spiritual journals in France during the classical period. It may be dangerous, too, not to distinguish between the different branches of Protestantism. Nevertheless, before the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, French Protestants, like Catholics, wrote many *livres de famille*, memoirs, and chronicles, but no spiritual journals. Why not? Because the Protestant community was under constant threat, and the story of the group's immediate survival was more important than the work of individual salvation? Or because French Calvinism was not conducive to that type of practice? And because French Protestants shared with Catholics an abhorrence for pride and self-regard that precluded any written culture of the self? That is the thought that comes to mind when reading *L'art de se connaître soi-même* by the Protestant Jacques Abbadie (1692), although he never mentions the problem of writing. Indeed, it is astonishing to compare this with what was happening in a neighboring French-speaking country, Calvinist Geneva. In France, there is nothing resembling the *Éphémérides* of Casaubon (1559–1614), the erudite Genevan who kept a journal (in Latin) beginning in 1597. Here is the beginning of that journal (passages that were in Greek are in italics):

*Nothing in the world is as precious as time*, and the Latin Stoic was quite right to say that time is the only thing that we honor ourselves by being stingy with. In order to keep an accurate accounting of such a precious asset, and in order never to suffer the blow of repenting too late, I have decided to write this *ephemeris* and keep an exhaustive record of my time: in this way, I will make a good investment and render grace to God the Great and Almighty. In so doing, should it happen that I have wasted time doing nothing or dispersing my efforts, I would know that also and would be aware of my misfortune or silliness. I therefore address my prayer to you, Great and Almighty God, and in the time that is left to me to live, I will unrelentingly devote to you *all my zeal and industry* to progress in knowledge, to worship you unstintingly, to heighten your glory and sustain the cause of letters, while also working towards my salvation and the salvation of those dearest to me.

Therefore, under the auspices of God *most excellent and merciful*, at the outset of my thirty-ninth year, this is how I spent the first day, the eighteenth of February 1597 *of the incarnation of Christ*.

*18 February.* We arose *at around* the fifth hour, or shortly afterward. Thereupon, having combed our hair as usual, we entered the sanctuary of the muses and, having made a prayer of supplication to God, we remained absorbed in reading Suidas until about the tenth hour. From breakfast until the fourth hour, we prepared ourselves for the *lesson* that was to follow. At the fourth hour, we taught. Immediately after dinner, we again prayed to God thrice Great and thrice Almighty and went to bed. However, on that day or the day before, recalling that Demosthenes in his wisdom had often copied Thucydides, we undertook to make a copy of a book of the Hebrew holy scriptures. It was the Book of Esther.

As we can see, Casaubon's practice was very restrained: a realistic concern for managing his time and the reference to ancient wisdom seem just as powerful as the desire to save his soul or hold a dialogue with God. Is this journal, which resembles the chronicle as much as it does prayer, a specimen of a common practice in Geneva, or is it an exception? What happened to the practice of the journal in Geneva after this, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Did ordinary people—Rousseau's aunt Suzon or Pastor Lambercier—keep a journal? Once again, it is hard to say: what is certain is that for the time being we know of no other cases of "spiritual" journals in Geneva before the late eighteenth century, and Protestant books on piety are as silent on the subject as their Catholic counterparts. Another study that might be done is to explain why the practice of the *personal* journal seems to be more common in Geneva in the second half of the eighteenth century (see *Un journal à soi* 50–53) than it was in France at the time. And it was not until the 1880s, with the publication of the journals of Amiel and Benjamin Constant, that the Protestant "color" was seen in French-language diaries. The personal diary, which developed in France beginning in the late eighteenth century, does not seem to owe much to either Protestantism or the spiritual journal.

## OUTLOOK

That last sentence is quite categorical: we should not draw any conclusions prematurely, because my exploration did confirm two things:

Our utter *lack of knowledge* about private practices that may have left no trace, and in particular our (happily temporary) lack of knowledge about the traces that do exist: no inventory has been made of journals or diaries held in public archives or accessible private archives. It must be clearly stated: the journal (and not only the spiritual journal) is still in large part *terra incognita*. Many surprises are to be expected in the years to come, as the inventory being done by the Paris-IV team develops, particularly with respect to manuscripts.

The *uncertainty* of cause-and-effect relationships: once we have some precise knowledge about the actual situation, it would seem more important to do a close analysis of practices and texts than to speculate about simplistic correlations based in large part on biases and ideology.

The main difficulty for this study derives from the nature of the experiences recorded or evoked in spiritual journals. These are intense or extreme experiences that we struggle to comprehend or imagine, and that have often been commented on only by like-minded scholars: Jesuits study Jesuits and Sulpicians study Sulpicians. Where might we find resources that take a broader view, one that is less involved but equally understanding?

Something to think about!

**NOTE**

1. Information about this project can be found at <http://www.ecritsduforprive.fr>.

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## ON TODAY'S DATE

### 1 JANUARY 2004

One should never start the New Year without plans, even modest ones. For some time now I have been thinking of doing a bit of research on the *dating* of diaries. And, for that matter, on dating things in general. It has probably already been done. I imagine that studies already exist, for letters at least, since the date is a basic element, along with the signature and the address. Let's get straight to the point: the modern diary does not really become what it is until the day it begins to resemble the letter in that respect, when the date moves out of the field of the enunciated and into the field of the enunciation. Let me explain. In a letter or a legal document, the date not only specifies but also *certifies* the time of enunciation: I am writing to you today, on such and such a date, sometimes at such and such a time. Or we are entering into this contract today, on such and such a date. That is important when reading the letter or executing the contract. It is a pact of truth: backdating a letter or a contract is cheating.

For a long time, the people who kept *livres de raison*, family books, chronicles, and even diaries were fairly uninterested in the date on which they were writing, and rarely took the trouble of telling the reader what it was. All that mattered was the date of the events being narrated. Read the Sieur de Gouberville (1522–1578): “On Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> I did not move from this place. In the morning, Cantepyre went to the [plés] in Barfleu” [Le samedi XIIIe, je ne bougé de céans. Dès matin, Cantepyre allla aulx plés à Barfleu]. Or Pierre de l'Estoile (1546–1611): “On Tuesday the 28<sup>th</sup> of the same month, on the Day of the Innocents, a great many people going by after the King who had just emerged at the [Bacq] of the island of St. Denis, were drowned . . .” [Le mardi 28<sup>e</sup> de ce mesme mois, Jour des Innocens, tout plain de Gens passans après le Roi qui venoit d'en sortir, au Bacq et l'isle S. Denis, furent noiés . . .]. Or Héroard (1551–1628): “On Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup>, awoke at seven hours after midnight . . .” (this is little Louis, the future Louis XIII, three-and-a-half years old, whose chronicle Héroard is keeping). The date is contained within

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“Au jour d'aujourd'hui.” *Epistolaire. Revue de l'A.I.R.E.* 32 (2006): 57–70.



the narrative, and events that took place three hours earlier are described as though they were three centuries old. Everything is written in the historical past tense. That is what makes it difficult to distinguish between history, memoirs, chronicles, *livres de raison*, and diaries in this literature from the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. As a result, people narrate events but rarely comment on them. Emotions, when they are mentioned, are already at a distance. “I was angry” is a piece of information, whereas “I am angry” would be, well, anger! When the date is related only to the content being enunciated, the act of enunciation itself is muted, even if the chronicler uses the first person, which is still just an arid form. On the other hand, setting the date off at the top of the page to indicate *the time of writing* is a crucial gesture, one that separates the enunciator from his narration and paves the way for the personalization of the subject matter. It is not exactly the same thing to write “Tuesday morning 9 September . . .” or “To the glory of God this Tuesday morning 9 September . . .” as Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–1657) does on 9 September 1642 in dating the written prayer that begins his “entry” for the day. One more step and the date will be set off from the text.

Analyzing all of this is a tricky thing: one has to look in detail at many sets of texts from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. There will not be any clear-cut break, but transitions, mixed forms, discrepancies between contemporary practices, late adoption, and innovation. This gesture—which to us seems so simple, writing for ourselves after putting down “today’s” date—is in fact a breakthrough. It seems natural to us, but it is not. More generally speaking, we can say that it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that people’s relationship with lived time began to resemble our own. People did not always have clocks in their houses or wear watches on their wrists in order to measure their use of time. Nor did they always have datebooks to plan the future (the datebook appeared in the mid-eighteenth century). You need the printing press to make datebooks. You need paper before you can write in a notebook. Can we say, as Alain Girard does, that “People used ink and paper in all periods and in ever greater numbers as education became more widespread” (7)? Paper, which was invented in China, did not reach Europe until the fourteenth century: what did people do before then? All they had to write on in daily life were wax tablets, which were heavy, indiscreet, and ephemeral. If there were any personal diaries in Antiquity or the Middle Ages, they all melted with the wax that held them, for none has been found. Today, 1 January 2004, it is snowing at Fontenay-aux-Roses, and I am writing this on my computer screen. But this little research project on dating, laced with highly philosophical musings and duly dated, will reach you on good quality paper. Now back to work!

**3 OCTOBER 2005**

## ON THE TRAIN TO GRENOBLE. THE DATE

My study on the date should analyze, for the journal or diary, the shift from the *chronicle* or *account book* system, where the only date that counts, in the end, is the date of the reported event and not the date of writing . . .

[so these texts are often written in two stages: notes taken in cursive that are thrown out once a clean copy has been made, notes that are probably not themselves “dated” with the date of writing. Since the notes are written relatively close to the events, the date of writing is deemed uninteresting and self-evident. The important thing was the date of events, and this system will be found, probably to different degrees, in the work of chroniclers (see Léonard Michon’s Preface), of people who keep *livres de raison* that may or may not resemble diaries (cf. René Favier on the first notebook of Pierre-Philippe Candy’s half financial, half erotic diary), of Louis XVI, and of most of the eyewitnesses and people who chronicled the wars of the Revolution and the Empire: none of them fetishizes the immediacy of writing or the *trace* of the moment so that, although these cases would lend themselves to a basic genetic study, such a study would be impossible since the original notes have always been lost. The various kinds of “books” used in commercial accounting give us a codified image of what those stages are, since as I recall, there is the “daybook” (or draft) in which all operations are recorded one after another in the order in which they took place (so it acts as a sort of authoritative “black box” because it was written on the spot and serves as evidence) and a set of different record books in which the same operations are redistributed and classified—a crucial distinction—as they are copied. Were the daybooks preserved? In any case, this shows how the successive stages were institutionalized, whereas in the activities I am going to describe (chronicles, then soldiers’ “march books”) the formalization is implicit and invisible. As I was going through materials at the *Bibliothèque nationale* last September 30, I found it striking to see that almost all the so-called “march journals” of soldiers of the Empire were in fact simple chronicles arranged according to the dates of events and often reconstructed long afterwards from notes that no longer exist, and that this was done without a second thought: no one cared, and it did not in the least affect the credibility of the narratives]

. . . to the system of the letter in which the date of writing becomes crucial . . .

[on this subject, use the notes on Louis Odier (1748–1817); he sometimes gives in parentheses in the body of the text the date when he actually wrote an entry for a day that was actually already in the past, a rather amusing “catching up” that straddles both systems: he could have just skipped over the “days off” and “caught up” on them within the entry on the day of writing (subordinating the date of the events to the date of writing), but since he is still living within the chronicle form, the continuity of the calendar is very important to him, and he does the opposite—showing that he still feels guilty of a sort of lie, which he insists on setting straight—since in straddling the two systems, he can no longer help recording the date of

writing, out of honesty, but can not yet give it the dominant position in the hierarchy [see example 2, p. 89]; I could find other situations in the same period, in particular the fascinating parallel passage in which Azais cautions himself against the trickery of continuing to write for several days under the same date. These qualms show that for him the date of writing has become the most important thing, which is all the more remarkable in that the entries in question have no connection whatsoever with the dates of events, since they contain nothing but ideas [see example 6, p. 92]. (Also analyze the clear distinction Rétif made in *Mes inscriptions* between the date of events and the date of writing.)]

This subject is so fascinating that I could really use it for the March seminar.

To continue, take the example from the same period of the playful creation of the word “*heural*” (“houral”) by Benjamin Constant’s correspondent [see example 4, p. 91], but see if this refers to the content (a minute description of the use of time throughout the day, written up retrospectively) or the enunciation, fragmented and dated, like the almost minute-by-minute entry, for example, in Mathieu François de Bertrand’s diary entry for 31 December 2003.

Idea for a title: “On Today’s Date.” We’re arriving in Grenoble, it is 11:28 a.m.

### 23 NOVEMBER 2005

#### ON THE PARIS-LYON TRAIN

*It is actually November 25, 6:05 a.m. I am (unusually) not sleeping and am taking the opportunity to clean up my notes from the day before yesterday. The original, written in red ink on a notepad, will go in the trash (because I never bring my computer on the train) in a system of writing and copying reminiscent of the livres de raison and of Louis XVI.*

*I copy these notes as they are, even if they are redundant on some points (Odier). After finishing, I had written at the top: “Follow up, important.” And they are important, especially on the connection with the signature. But they are only beginnings.*

*These ideas, which were jotted down on the Paris-Lyon train, were inspired by the Limoges colloquium on personal writings, and particularly the papers on signatures in livres de raison.<sup>1</sup>*

#### “On Today’s Date”

Dating one’s writing

—2 models:

- the letter
- the legal or administrative document (see what formulas are used in dating documents—a distinction is sometimes made between the date of the event recorded and the date on which it was recorded, for example in birth certificates)

—Link between date and signature: it is impossible to date the time of writing without simultaneously identifying the author of the writing

An “obvious” point, but an important one to be examined in detail. Even a collective identity is ultimately represented by a qualified individual.

As proof of this close link, point to the invalidity or inadequacy of these signs when they are separated:

—dating without signing

—signing without dating

And when a person dates something, he is dating his signature as much as the thing being signed.

A crucial bond.

Unpack its obviousness.

On the Paris-Lyon train

This Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2005, 7:51 a.m.

P.L.

The place is less important than the date, because it was only when, playfully, I actually dated my signature that I instinctively *located* it: I had not thought about all this before.

Open an expandable file on “On Today’s Date,” and begin collecting examples and bibliographic references.

The problem of “catching up” in a diary (last echo of the common practice of retrospective writing in the *livre de raison* and the chronicle; examples of catching up in Louis Odier’s diary: he could have caught up without saying anything; the new gesture is pointing to (that is, dating) the act of catching up).

The opposite problem of *internal* dating in letters that become a diary (find Constant’s correspondence with Madame de Charrière and the expression “*heural*”).

*Go back to this, especially using Béatrice Fraenkel’s book on the signature; books on accounting; and a history of legal and administrative records, if such a thing exists. Also see what books on the linguistics of enunciation say about self-referentiality—deictics and their referents.*

*Another idea for a title (not as good): the chronographical (or autochronographical) pact.*

**WEDNESDAY, 29 MARCH 2006, 9 A.M.**

A feeling that my research subject is tenuous, fragile, and marginal compared to the seminar subject (letter-writers are going to be disappointed), and that my research itself is barely sketched out and split between two paths, one theoretical (an analysis of pragmatics that I may not be the best person to carry

out but that I feel is missing, since little or nothing exists on the pragmatics of the date), and the other historical (the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century origins of the diary, which have never been studied from this point of view and are little known; talk about my project).

Make up a set of examples but note that it only provides a range of cases for purposes of analysis and is not meant to trace a history.

Explain my little project on Friday, and in the evening keep a journal of any objections or suggestions made.

*9:15 A.M.*

I couldn't sleep this morning and was mentally turning these stories of pragmatics every which way.

A letter-writer who puts the date down sends his letter: he will never see this date in a series with his previous—or subsequent—letters, and the date identifies a unique, distinct object; for him, the dates that make up a series are on the letters he has received. They are part of a dialogue of dates that includes waiting, forgetting, laziness, silence, and crossed communications.

A diarist, on the other hand, can see all of the dates at once, in series and on the same physical medium, as well as any problems of continuity or regularity. The only dialogue here is with time itself. The dates may share the haphazard and scattered nature of the events described. Or they may be bound by a rule of writing, the most common one being a requirement of writing daily with (and here I come back to my problem) two possible variations: the thing enunciated or its enunciation. Saying something about each day (even after the fact) or saying something each day (even if it's not about that day).

But for letter-writer and diarist alike, the date of writing is thus usually linked to some (interpersonal or private) moral rule.

*9:50 A.M.*

For the past hour I have been dating the time of writing by hand, rather artificially, punctuating (and distinguishing) the stages of my thinking by glancing at my watch. The computer could do it for me. Someone should write a history of "authoritative" mechanical records. First there was date-stamping letters (certifying the place and time of sending rather than of writing, but thereby guaranteeing that the letter had been written *before*). Now there is electronic date-stamping, not only in our computers but also throughout society, since many of our acts (usually acts of payment rather than of writing) are recorded down to the second, often without our knowing it. On my computer, in any event, I no longer have to date my writings: that is done automatically. And if I make a mistake or cheat, the machine will correct or expose me.

**THURSDAY, 30 MARCH 2006, 10 A.M.**

So my “tenuous” subject is how the date moved from the third person to the first person in the diary. This subject is more diffuse than tenuous. There is no “date” for it, in the sense of a “turning point”: it is a gradual shift, new practices being added to old ones without displacing them.

I could show its very early beginning in the ritual opening or closing of some *livres de raison*, where the date is proclaimed in the first person: “I, Such and such a person, on this day, Date, begin (or end) this book for such and such a reason.” In the book itself, dates are “in the third person” (although the first person is used there, the dates refer to the contents enunciated and not to their enunciation) [see example 1 below].

I could also highlight the “revolution” (unknown at the time: only now are we able to link together phenomena that were unaware of one another) brought about by Rétif de la Bretonne [see example 3, p. 90]: he turned “first person date” into its own literary genre, a sort of “haiku” (date, then a word or a name) that was incomprehensible to anyone but the enunciator, melding the time of writing and the time written, and programming his rewriting to the annual return of the date. Summarize the three phases of the process: (a) the practice of inscribing the date (which transforms that date into a “letter to myself in the future,” since the “future me” will have to “answer”); (b) the autobiography of this practice followed in a narrative that was occasionally dated like a diary (*Mes inscriptions*); (c) when the narrative catches up with the present (on 4 November 1785), the autobiography fades out and the diary function comes to the fore, and a hitherto “told” practice of dates (based on a present looking back over the past) becomes a “telling” practice of a dated present looking towards the future.

The Rétif example should be the best one to help show what the dating systems in the modern diary and in letters have in common: the entry into a space of dialogue. The date on a letter presupposes an implicit and prior “I am writing to you”; the date in the diary, in Rétif’s case, as for many private writers through the ages, says “I am writing to me” or “I am writing to me/you,” so to speak. The date of enunciation presupposes that when an enunciator appears, an (external or internal) addressee appears simultaneously. So these tenuous ramblings about the date join up with my other set of ramblings, already published in *Un journal à soi*, on the emergence of the “letter to oneself” and the personification of the physical medium (“Dear paper”). The diary gradually becomes “private” in the second half of the eighteenth century by merging with the enunciation system of the letter, but also by altering the spirit of the letter through the internalization of the addressee.

I am going to give another example, apparently anecdotal, but all these “tenuous” things are painting the same picture. This is the practice of *copying* one’s letters before sending them. The Internet now makes this automatic, but it used to be a choice that required an effort. Copying a letter meant adding a new addressee: oneself (which used to be done traitorously, without telling the first addressee, using “blind carbon copies”). To copy one’s letters is to keep a diary of one’s correspondence: gathering letters addressed to different correspondents into a single collection based on their single source. The copied letter is not only virtually articulated with the correspondence received from each addressee, then; it also paints a portrait of the letter-writer that is known only to him (since none of the addressees sees the letters written to other people) and meant only for him (making up a personal archive that is rarely read by anyone else in its entirety). Has a history been written of the practice of copying letters? It probably has, and my future epistolary scholars will inform me about it. The literary “letters” written in Antiquity were actually works of art, but I imagine that in modern times it started as an administrative practice that was picked up by the most notable or literate people, and then became customary for more ordinary writers. I don’t mean someone like Rousseau, who carefully kept copies of the notes he sent to Madame d’Épinay or Diderot at the time of their falling out, but I see that Louis Odier, a nice young man, eighteen years old, who did not have a falling out with anyone, frequently refers in his diary to his active and neatly filed correspondence, making it a sort of appendix [see example 2, p. 89].

Since the seminar is on the connections between the letter and the diary, I can show how the diary becomes “private” by taking over the letter’s system of enunciation, but also how the letter, through a sort of backlash, can pick up on the logic of the diary through the internal (dated or “houred”) fragmentation of a single missive. Letter-writers often use the word “journal” to refer to a narrative of daily life done regularly or in detail. One might say that the letter itself becomes a diary from the moment a single letter distinguishes several times of enunciation by dating them. This is what we find, for example, in the letters Constant sent to Isabelle de Charrière from Brunswick in 1788 (sometimes there are more than ten sub-dated “entries” in one letter). Was it the letter or the diary that started this kind of fragmentation? Probably the letter. But the most impressive thing is when the enunciation sticks to the immediate present within a single letter or diary entry, announcing that it is going to stop and then starting up again by telling what has happened since it stopped: reality enters the very core of the text in a sort of dialogism with the *hors-texte*, which thereby becomes virtually textualized. This seems simplistic or infantile, but it is a minor revolution, a breach in narrative continuity: before

our very eyes, between two sentences, the future becomes the past. Give two examples: Rétif, fragment 700, and my dear Lucile, Wednesday, 8 July 1788, 2 p.m. [see examples 3 and 5, pp. 90–92].

**THURSDAY, 30 MARCH 2006, 11 P.M.**

I have finished my set of examples.

There are many other lines of investigation to mention. My initial research on almanacs and daybooks. The research on spiritual journals, etc. Using this pragmatic approach, I should go back to sets of texts I began exploring, like the July 14 series. Add a bibliography to the examples.

What am I going to say tomorrow? When you're writing, a work journal is a flexible way of getting a reader involved in the adventure of your research—but is it a good method for oral presentations? Tomorrow I will have to wrap up these notes, take a good look, and forge ahead: let's hope I find some inspiration! I should at least sketch an outline.

I have a weakness for research journals. Last Saturday, in Nantes, I gave a talk on my own research journals, one that I prepared in a short time, between 7:30 and 9:51 a.m., on the Paris-Nantes TGV in the form of a travel journal that I simply read out to them and commented on. As I was preparing it, I came across a very interesting “note,” to be quite sincere, from my text “Sincerity” (1994), which I am reproducing here:

29 OCTOBER 1994

I'm back again, earlier than planned. It's an emergency. But who's to say that it really is October 29<sup>th</sup>? You see, the date creates a sincerity effect. It sucks you in. Is the thing really truer because it was thought of on a Saturday, by me? But it's true that I thought of it on a Saturday. Thought of what? I don't remember anymore. See you tomorrow.

Well, that's a good closing: see you tomorrow, precisely! Then I'll tell you what happened.

**SATURDAY, 1 APRIL 2006, 8 A.M.**

Today is the day after tomorrow, and tomorrow was yesterday: I was lazy. I just read this diary and commented on the examples. Sitting at the back of the room, my friend Michel Longuet, a designer and diarist, had promised to take notes during the discussion, which he did. Ten speakers or so, responsive and sympathetic.

No, no one referred me to a “pragmatics” of dating texts, or a study focusing on the practice of dating texts and its effects. Instead, it occurred to me



that the problem had probably been broached, from a practical point of view, in secretarial manuals and other literary or business textbooks. Thank you to Geneviève Haroche, who made up a quick bibliography for me that same evening over a delicious tiramisu. Another idea: perhaps this pragmatics of the date exists in English or German? Put out a call on the “IABA” discussion list. Go outside the French context: it’s a universal issue. Follow up.

I leaf through Michel Longuet’s notebook.

Chapelain copied his letters, conscientiously changing the date of the draft to the date of the clean copy (Bernard Bray). The word “date” used to mean the place as well as the time of writing a letter (José-Luis Diaz). André Gide and Paul Léautaud pointed out right in their diaries how they had fiddled with the dates, just like my charming Louis Odier (Michel Braud). Young Russian diarists traveling in Europe in the nineteenth century switched back and forth between the Orthodox calendar and the Gregorian calendar (Catherine Viollet). In the diary, the date is not so much to inform an addressee as to make the gaps between entries detectable: in short, the rhythm (Brigitte Galtier).

Yes, dear Odile Pauchet-Richard, there is a moral concern attached to any date, which brings up the connection with religion and points to the Protestants, Switzerland, Calvin, and the clock-making industry. But behind it all is “Venetian” accounting, which arose in the fifteenth century when the paper-making industry started up. Account books and logbooks have no particular religion, but it’s true that the Protestants individualized and internalized these monitoring techniques more quickly, which explains why a good Catholic (so to speak) like Diderot, writing to Sophie Volland on 14 July 1762, was able to reinvent the wheel by describing to her as nearly impossible a diary practice that had already existed for more than a century in England.

Yes, finally, dear José-Luis Diaz, absolutely: the date itself is neutral; its (explicit or implicit) articulation in discourse is what makes it part of either the enunciated or the enunciation. Let’s go ahead and do that. It is now 9:08 a.m. on this Saturday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, this is not an April Fool’s joke, my computer can certify that, and here I close this journal which—the word count tells me—has just reached the required 25,000 characters, including spaces. And time.

#### NOTE

1. The papers given at this colloquium have been edited by Michel Cassan, Jean-Pierre Bardet and François-Joseph Ruggiu and published in *Les Écrits du for privé. Objets matériels, objets édités*.

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**EXAMPLES**

- 1 Jean BEAUSIRE (1651–1743)  
*Journal 1738–1740*, unpublished  
BHVP ms 1323

*BEGINNING:*

1738

In the name of god this page has been begun  
on today's date Monday 20<sup>th</sup> of October  
seventeen thirty-eight to stand as  
my Journal in notes of certain matters  
that I deem fit to write down

*ENDING:*

This journal has ended today  
Tuesday evening 26 January 1740

- 2 Louis ODIER (1748–1817), *Journal*, unpublished  
*Bibliothèque publique et universitaire*, Geneva

[*Distinct discrepancy between the date of the matter enunciated and the date of enunciation (16–24 July 1767)*]

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup>. Here my laziness is the reason for yet another pause in my diary. A fairly long visit to Madame Dehuc about her youngest son, and the arrival of Paquet with Monsieur Roux, Gourjon and Devillas the Younger, that is all that my memory can provide of interest for this day (I am writing on the 19<sup>th</sup>).

[*There are short entries to catch up for the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup>. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, after catching up, he writes his real entry for the day, but:*]

20<sup>th</sup>. Another pause out of laziness (I am writing this on the 24<sup>th</sup>).

[*He quickly summarizes July 20<sup>th</sup> and then writes: "I am not saying anything for the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. I don't remember anything memorable happening on those days." Then he summarizes the 23<sup>rd</sup> and writes his entry for the 24<sup>th</sup> properly on one page.*]

### 3 Nicolas RÉTIF DE LA BRETONNE (1734–1806)

My main aim was to arrange *anniversaries* for myself, something I have had a taste for my whole life and that will probably be the last to go. To me the future is a deep, frightening abyss that I dare not sound: but I am doing what people do when they are afraid of the water: throwing a stone into it. This is something that is happening to me right now; I write it down, and then add, "What will I be thinking in one year, on the same day at the same time?" The thought nags at me; I follow it as it develops throughout the year; and since almost every day is the anniversary of something I've noted down, every day brings a new pleasure. I say to myself: "So here I am, in this future whose veil I would never have dared to lift, even had I been able to! It is here; I am looking at it; in a moment it will be the past, just like the event that seemed to tell me it was nigh!" I savor the present, and then I turn back to the past again; I enjoy both what is and what no longer is; and if I am in the right frame of mind (which does not always happen), I toss another stone into the future, knowing that the river of time, flowing along, will eventually leave it high and dry. That is the reason for my dates, which are always correct in my notebooks, and for the ones that I still do every day.

*Monsieur Nicolas*, Pléiade, I, 480–81

[4–5 November 1785]

551. September 4 (Today), this is where I've got to with the record of my *Inscriptions*: last night I thought of following this work up with the details of my ailments. From now on, I will continue writing day by day what happens to me, until the end of my life. Today I am taking this paper into my bedroom at Rue Saint Jacques so that no one will see it.

552. September 5. Spent the evening at M. de Toustain's yesterday, where I learned that my wife was together with that despicable Augé; out of admiration, she read that monster's letter to his wife. I wrote nothing this morning; I got up to go to the printer's to have Guillot's name taken off the frontispiece of the second volume of the *Françaises* and show it to Maisonneuve, who didn't want to print the book; then I saw Guillot, and I ordered the printer to have that bookseller give him the 3734 *livres* in banknotes: sheet B volume II, in the evening.

[20 April 1786]

700. April 20. Fifth anniversary of the date 20 *aprilis cum Sarâ in hac insulâ*. Morning, 5 pages that finish the *Dissipée*. At the printer's, reworked the revision of *Statuts, Parisiennes*. Granger, reread 2 of [volume] I; I am going to have dinner at M. Beaumarchais's.

Went to dinner. Beaumarchais was at M. de la Reynière senior's. The son is furious in exile, according to what Mme de Villiers told me. I chatted with Eugénie, who showed me her *Metamorphoses* by Ovid. I read my *Figaro* article and left my *Contradicteur* prospectus.

*Mes inscriptions*

[ed. Paul Cottin, Plon, 1889, pp. 127–28 and 191]

#### 4 Benjamin CONSTANT (1767–1830)

Letters to Isabelle de CHARRIÈRE

[4 March 1788]

I have decided to always have a letter under way that I shall add to, in no particular order, and into which I'll put everything I need to tell you until the next mail day, no matter if it is half a sentence or a long essay; as long as I am writing to the person with whom I was so happy for two short months, that is enough.

[16 March 1788, morning]

You will not receive my first letter until the day after tomorrow. I await that day impatiently, constantly reproving myself wholeheartedly for not having written something to you earlier. I could not imagine what a monstrous gap it would make to miss two mail deliveries when there are two hundred and fifty leagues between us. Had you wished to, you could have taken a cruel revenge. I can expect nothing from you until the 3<sup>rd</sup> (unless you have written to me before receiving my letter). I must admit that I find it hard of you to have switched suddenly from the charming *hournal* to ordinary correspondence, and that you only begin your letters after receiving mine and send them right away.

Isabelle de Charrière, *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. III  
Geneva, Slatkine, 1981: 55, 70.

#### 5 Lucile DESMOULINS (1770–1794)

*Journal 1788–1793*. Éd. des Cendres, 1995, 136–37 [7–9 July 1788]

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup>. I didn't go out all morning. We went for a walk in the Park. It was raining quite hard, we took cover and then—I don't think I need to

write it down! I will remember it. After half an hour, we got back into the carriage and came back here. I sent someone to fetch the eggs. I came back up and Mar. [Sylvain Maréchal] and I played badminton. I slipped away. Do I have to tell everything? Good Lord, how boring this is. We ate supper. And then we came up again. I sang, though I didn't really feel like it.

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup>. I had a puffy eye when I woke up this morning. My sister did too. And Mar. too – but it's charming. I am writing this at 2 p.m. We are being called for dinner, I'm leaving.

Mar. went to L. I've been at my piano the whole time. I would really like to finish my story, but I can't. Good Lord, how stupid I am. I had to make so many detours last night! We finally made it. I didn't sing at all.

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup>. Mama and I went into the woods. What a wonderful outing: it was overcast, we were both melancholy, both on the same subject of broken hearts. Oh Mama. . . .

## 6 Pierre-Hyacinthe AZAÏS (1766–1845)

Diary, unpublished

Bibliothèque de l'Institut, Paris

MS 2645, Volume IX, folios 36 v<sup>o</sup>-37 r<sup>o</sup>

5 Vendémiaire An XI (27 Sept. 1801)

My diary having become a book almost in spite of me, I find myself compelled to give each article a form that makes it pleasing to me. That is why I am not always accurate about the time of writing or about minor circumstances that would coldly and fastidiously interrupt a description I am throwing myself into or a discussion I am developing.

For example, rarely do I finish an article in the same place and on the same day that I begin it. I am in the middle of writing my thoughts and feelings, but time presses and I am forced to stop; so I stop, without stopping the article, which I like to round off and finish suitably.

So only the beginning and the first seven or eight pages are correctly dated. When I go back to writing it, I don't note the time or place, unless that is called for by the joy of description. That is my habit now because my diary is intended for my future pleasure. And now, I have just inserted this note in order to correct that inaccuracy, which I may not remember some day. I want my diary to justify my own confidence, and therefore it must be truthful, or tell me in what things it is not truthful.

## O MY PAPER!

When did it become possible to address personal writings to the physical medium on which they are written? When did “Dear Diary” begin to be used as the heading for a journal entry?

Clearly, this is an imaginary addressee, kept behind closed doors. But when did people start using the pretense of creating a private space by developing or deploying (and for whom?) a dialogic relationship with themselves?

I stress the idea of “beginnings” because it touches on something complex and obscure: the birth of the personal journal (Pachet). Autobiography, a public act, has a solid history based on events and the crossing of thresholds, guided by precedents and made visible by the reception of published texts. Not so the personal journal, which was developed blindly by individuals who, unbeknownst to one another, decided to keep private or secret writings, most of which have been lost. But these decisions to write were underpinned by a collective logic, and contain patterns that we must discern from the few traces that remain. In France, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that a public image of the diary began to emerge, although it had been well established as a private practice for half a century before that. When, in 1834, Maurice de Guérin spoke effusively to his diary (“O mon cahier . . .”), kept in a notebook that very nearly did not survive, but that was published in 1862, it was definitely not the starting point of a tradition. He was merely picking up on words that had flowed from the pens of other young people since the late eighteenth century. That is why our search for private writings scattered in public archives is so crucial.

I am going to attempt to locate the beginning of this practice by taking a series of samplings between 1762 and 1834. It lies at the crossroads of two opposite systems of expression:

the monologic system of the chronicle, in which information is noted down with no indication of the addressee; and

the dialogic system of the letter or the prayer, in which the fact that it is addressed to someone, that contact is made, may actually be more important than the information itself, and may not require that any information be conveyed, or, as in the love letter, may indeed *be* the information.

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“O mon papier!” *Les Écrits du for privé : objets matériels, objets édités*. Ed. Michel Cassan, Jean-Pierre Bardet, and François-Joseph Ruggiu. Limoges: PU de Limoges, 2007. 287–95.

The personal diary occupies a space between these two: on the one hand, it is “more than” the monologic situation (someone is being “spoken to”), and on the other hand, it is “less than” the dialogic situation (that someone is not someone else, but myself). Addressing one’s notebook or paper is one possible device for taking up this new posture of *self-address*.

### **1762: A PHILOSOPHER DREAMS OF THE DIARY**

On July 14, 1762, Diderot explains to Sophie Volland that in writing letters to her, he is carrying out a program for a sort of personal journal—he does not use the term, which did not yet exist—that he has dreamed of:

My letters are a more or less faithful history of my life. Without meaning to, I am doing what I have so often wished for. Why, I said, an astronomer will spend thirty years of his life on top of an observatory, his eye glued day and night to the end of a telescope, simply to determine the movement of a star, and no one makes a study of himself, no one has the courage to keep an accurate record of all the thoughts that come into his mind, all the feelings that agitate his heart, all his sorrows and joys. . . . But it would need a lot of courage to reveal everything. One might find it easier to accuse oneself of planning a great crime than to admit harboring petty or low or despicable feelings. . . . This sort of self-analysis would have its uses for the writer too. I am sure that in the long run one would be anxious to have nothing but good things to enter in the record each evening. (102)

Diderot uses the conditional, as though describing a utopia, in speaking of a practice that was already well established in England and Germany, but of which he seems unaware. He emphasizes its “anthropological” aspect, anticipating the project of public disclosure in Rousseau’s *Confessions*: “the courage to keep an accurate record of ourselves.” He then evokes its usefulness “for oneself” only in reference to its prophylactic function. But on a personal level, he is nowhere near the idea of writing only for himself. The purpose of his letters is to make Sophie present to him by making himself present to her: “As for me, far away from you as I am, there is nothing which brings me closer to you than to tell you everything and by my words to make you a spectator of my life.” The shadow of the personal diary, glimpsed momentarily, recedes: the other person, and love, are what count.

### **1774: A YOUNG GIRL THREATENS TO SPEAK TO THE TREES**

Manon Phlipon (1754–1793), who would become Madame Roland by marriage, corresponded for thirteen years with Sophie Cannet, a friend from her convent-school days. Manon pours out her feelings to her friend, draws a self-portrait for her, and confides in her about her emotions. For notes on her

reading and thoughts, she kept a special little file entitled *Leisure Activities*. But when it comes to talking about herself, she must say it to Sophie. Gradually, however, she begins to realize that she may not need her friend for this, and since both of them love to make jokes, she finally suggests to Sophie that she is nothing but a pretext:

Don't feel too smug about having news from me so often. I am not writing for you, although I am writing to you: I feel so fraught with sensitivity today and I don't know what to do with it. . . . I know that all I can do is to describe the situation, and I think that given one more degree of illusion, or just a different place, and you wouldn't have to put up with reading it, because I would write to some spirit of my own devising, or to one of my friends the trees, in whose shade I would lie. If you know of anything more mad, feel free to say so. (223–24: letter of 19 Sept. 1774)

Manon Phlipon approached this further degree of illusion, moving towards “madness,” but never crossed the line: she stayed on the brink of the diary (Diaz).

### **1788: A YOUNG GIRL ADDRESSES HER PAPER AS “YOU”**

A few years later, another young girl was less restrained, and fell into that madness. Her name was Magdalena van Schinne (1762–1840), she was Dutch, the daughter of a merchant, and French was her language of education. At first, she wrote a long collection of letters to a friend or one of her sisters. We do not know whether these were fictitious or are copies of letters actually sent. In them, she poured out her feelings of sadness while also writing a chronicle of family life and of public life in The Hague. Then one day, in October 1788 (at the age of 26), she gave up the fiction of writing letters and wrote directly to her sheet of paper:

O my paper, henceforth you shall be the only one to hear my ideas, my feelings, my cares and joys. Here, I will be able to pour out my soul entirely; with others, even with my best friends, I want to learn how to hide things, or at least I no longer want to tell them about myself. You alone will be my confidant. When my heavy heart longs to unburden itself, you will not cruelly reject it. You will not misinterpret what I confide in you; when my pen is borne along by happiness, you will not have a morbid talent for snuffing it out in an instant. I will have you by my side always, to turn to when in need. Sometimes you will convey the homage I pay to the Almighty, the benevolent being who gave you to me to console me, who gives me signs of his goodness both in what he grants and what he denies me. O my Lord answer the prayers I repeat so often, calm my passions, do not let them lead me astray at this time when my reason is losing its grip, when it is turning into delirium, at this time when I almost wish to offend you. (79–80)



She addresses first her writing paper, and then God. Prayer is another possible trope for internal dialogue, which may in turn represent the secularization of prayer. A third trope—posterity—occasionally crops up. Magdalena, believing herself gifted, dreams in jest of her readers from “the year two thousand four hundred and forty.” Driven by boredom, mood swings, and a passion for writing, she explores every possible position for a private form of writing doomed to solitude. The trope of “paper” predominates because it serves at once as a confidante (“I would like to pour out my soul on paper, this silent yet effective source of consolation,” 81) and a writing workshop (she rereads her diary and finds it highly interesting). She probably loves paper itself physically—its texture and maternal warmth. She may also love the word “paper,” which is masculine and paternal. Paper as “transitional object”? In any event, apostrophizing her paper soon becomes a ritual. When she returns to diary-writing in 1801 (at the age of 39) after a five-year hiatus, she begins with virtually the same words:

O my dear paper, you who were so often the discreet confidante of my pleasures and sorrows, become once again my consoler and friend. Where could I find another like you? You will accept my admissions of fault without rancor. You will not make false accusations against me, will not twist my words or thoughts or blame me for your own faults and errors, but when I ask your opinion, you will reproach me for the errors I have committed, forcefully and openly but without animosity. Ah dear friend, I say it again, become once more the guardian of my thoughts and actions, and sometimes those of others. (169)

“Confidante, patient consoler, discreet guardian, loyal friend”: the beginning of a long litany. No doubt Magdalena and each of the many diarists who repeat these formulas over the following two centuries believe that they are inventing them. The terms they use are so similar that it is difficult not to attribute the pattern to common sources: religious discourse, educational formula, literary topos (lyrical invocation, dramatic monologue)? Perhaps. But could it also be that these sources, which had existed long before then, began to feed into a specific historical situation in the late eighteenth century? At that point, the modern individual had to take charge of and internalize the control that had hitherto been exerted mainly from outside: the “heart of hearts” became a reality.

### **1815: A LAWYER KISSES HIS DIARY**

Antoine Métral (1778–1839), a lawyer from Grenoble, wrote in a diary that he kept in small notebooks with pages that he folded and cut himself: “What a pleasure to get back to you, dear notebook, the most intimate and secret

confidant of my thoughts, whom I leave and come back to without the slightest complaint from you. . . . You bring me insight and experience” (20 January 1813). And again, two years later: “I write these thoughts down, not to make them public but because my brain needs to unburden itself. This sanctuary in which I place them will never be defiled, because I will not open its doors to all and sundry. When love transports me to the side of a beloved mistress, I like to take my pleasure in mystery and secrecy, and an outsider’s gaze is irksome. So when I am alone with these pages, on which I impress my thoughts like secret kisses on tenderly beloved lips, I will keep them hidden from the curious gaze of men” (February 2, 1815).<sup>1</sup> The pages are lips. These are nuptials with the self. No personal diary had yet been published. People wrote quite innocently, unaware of other people’s diaries. It was unthinkable that this would ever appear in print. An amazing time: between the late 1780s and the early 1860s, secrecy actually existed. Just as every lover reinvents love, every diarist found original words—always the same ones—to speak to his dear diary.

### 1828: A GIRL DISOBEYS HER FATHER

Stéphanie was sixteen years old and she was so sad she could die. Her papa was an expert in happiness, an apostle of the personal journal. His name was Marc-Antoine Jullien. In 1808, he published an *Essay on a method for the organized use of time as the best way to be happy*. All that was required was that you not waste your time, get organized, and take control of yourself or submit to the control of your father or a male friend.<sup>2</sup> To that end, he proposed keeping an array of books or agendas, and gave a useful piece of advice: avoid all self-satisfaction and write about yourself in the third person. Stéphanie found that tedious and did the opposite. In ordinary notebooks, she takes pleasure in secretly reviewing her family’s sorrows and her own, in the first person. Worse yet, she addresses her notebook as “you”:

I am alone in the little bedroom, seated at my table, and I am writing. I’m sad, and am having black thoughts that are so horrible I don’t dare think about them. I suffer and no one consoles me, I cry and no one dries my tears. There is no one but you, my friend, my only consolation, I confide all of my sorrows in you; you feel for me and soothe me; it seems to me that as I write about my suffering, I suffer less, and it delights me to think that although I am tasting the sweet satisfaction of telling you my sorrows, no living being will read them as long as I live; I am all alone, so alone, and I don’t think I trust anyone enough to show this to them. (5 Apr. 1828)

Finally she is about to leave Paris for the summer, to return to the family seat at Loches. She is looking forward to the trip, but is worried . . . about

her diary worrying: “I’m sure you are very worried about whether I’ll take you with me, and I certainly want to; I must admit that the thought of going two or three months without seeing you, without being able to confide my sorrows in you, was distressing” (12 June). On Monday, she packs it away: “Good-bye, my friend, I’m packing you away, we are not leaving until Thursday morning; I am bringing you with me and since I’m locking you up, I won’t see you until Loches. Good-bye, whenever I feel bad in the meantime, I’ll really miss you for the next 4 days. Good-bye” (16 June). On Tuesday, she unpacks it: “I can’t resist, my dear friend, I’m too unhappy, I need to pour out my heart and I’m undoing all my little packages to see you once again; after this you’ll think, if it’s possible, that I don’t love you” (June 17). The following Sunday, after arriving in Loches, she is worried: “Here you are, my bosom friend, here you are after 6 days; did the trip tire you out; as for me, I was exhausted” (22 June, five o’clock in the afternoon). The story of a disastrous trip. A few hours later, she cannot wait any longer: “You’re surprised to see me, my friend, but I need you, my savior, my benefactor, my only friend, without you I would succumb to the pain I feel; I can’t stand it anymore, console me, save me; you see my tears; they make me feel better; I am suffering, yes I am suffering now. Are you going to ask what is the matter with me?” (22 June, evening). The story of a horrible evening. And so on and so forth. She draws it out; I shorten it. She is childish and tragic. She scares herself with her repetition: “O my friend, I am suffering, I am suffering a great deal. I have already said it enough, and I’m afraid to repeat it too often: I will suffer always. You are the only one who understands me and you console me when I’m sad” (5 July). Did she suffer *always*? You should know that she later married and had a son, and that in old age she wrote and published some charming children’s stories. But for the time being? The summer in Loches turned out fine in the end, but not the return to Paris! “It’s been such a long time since I’ve seen you: don’t think that I’ve forgotten about you because, on the contrary, I love you more than ever, but I’ve had such an awful time since then that first of all I was worried I’d make you too sad and then I didn’t want to think about my sadness for fear I’d make it worse” (27 September). Poor diary!

### 1834: A BROTHER FORGETS HIS SISTER

Eugénie de Guérin (1805–1848) devoted her life to her younger brother Maurice (1810–1839). When he left the family manor of Cayla to try his hand at being a poet in Paris, she wrote letters to him, and soon began writing a diary addressed to him, which she gave to him from time to time whenever they saw each another. She was unable to write just for herself. After his death, she

tried to continue writing a diary for her friend the writer Barbey d'Aureville, and when he slipped away, she stopped. She never knew during his lifetime that her brother had also kept a diary, from 1832 to 1835, a truly private diary in which he wrote things he did not tell her in letters that she complained were much too dry. It was only after his death that she got the diary, his *Cahier vert*, which he had given to a friend who had gone to America. She must have felt stricken. In it, Maurice makes a declaration of love to his notebook. He thanks it for being “what no person had ever been to him,” and every last feature of the portrait he paints of his notebook is—bittersweet homage!—exactly what Eugénie had been for him:

O my notebook, you are not just a pile of paper to me, an unfeeling inanimate thing; no—you are alive, you are endowed with a soul, intelligence, love, goodness, compassion, patience, charity, pure and unwavering sympathy. You are to me what I have not found in mankind, a tender and devoted being who becomes attached to a weak, sickly soul, wraps it in affection, understands its language like no one else, knows its innermost being, shares in its sadness and revels in its joys, lets it lie on your breast, or at times leans on it in turn to rest; for it is a great consolation to the one you love to lean on him as you sleep or rest. (20 Apr. 1834)

These are just a few examples. Others from the same period will come to light as we proceed with our archeological dig into deeply personal writings. Self-address can take other forms too. One can write to a part of oneself. I have found a charming example from the same period in the unpublished diary of Elisaveta Alexandrovna Moukhanova (1803–1836), a young Russian woman who kept her diary in French from 22 May to 31 December 1822.<sup>3</sup> She was nineteen years old and engaged to young Valentin, who was leaving for a six-month course of medical treatment in the Caucasus. For the sake of propriety, she wrote letters to him that she never sent, but would give to him when he returned. They vowed to think of each other at eight o'clock every evening, and in this way to keep diaries for each another. When the young man returned, this immense deferred letter was replaced by a very different diary: Valentin seemed to her so lukewarm, so uncertain of their future, that she needed to pour out her heart. But she was so used to the epistolary form that she would never think of writing directly for herself. So she came up with the idea of writing “to an ideal friend” (that is the expression she uses), which she addresses at first with the formal “vous,” later switching to “tu,” and calls “my dear friend,” “my good friend,” a friend whom she would finally call “dear reason.” Don't worry, the story ended in marriage—for love.

It would be possible to address an imaginary character with an invented name, although I have not come across an example of that.

You will have noticed, however, that in the examples I have found, the diary is always addressed occasionally within the body of entries, and is never used as a regular opening. There is no diary in which all of the entries begin “Dear Diary.” A quick scan of my study of young French girls’ diaries in the nineteenth century (*Le Moi des demoiselles*) confirms this: diaries are often addressed, but rarely at the outset or systematically. Even the diary of a petty laborer published under the title *Mon cher petit cahier* (Lyon, 1870) does not use that formula. Throughout diaries, on the other hand, one often sees, “Ah! my poor diary!,” “Good-bye dear diary, I’ve finished this notebook” (Renée Berruel, *Le Moi des demoiselles* 168), “I’m going to confide in you, paper, how this love came over me, for you will keep my secret” (Fanny R., *Le Moi des demoiselles* 190), “My dear notebook, you are the one I choose to confide in about my sorrows” (Marie-Joséphine Morel, *Le Moi des demoiselles* 325), “Into my pocket you go, little notebook!!!” (Mathilde Savarin, *Le Moi des demoiselles* 327), “Diary, I’m afraid that you will be indiscreet so I’m not going to tell you about it” (Augustine Guillemiau, *Le Moi des demoiselles* 327), etc.

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What remains to be done is to compare the French tradition with other national traditions. I have put the question to Suzanne L. Bunkers, who specializes in women’s diaries in the United States: she has seen very few diarists address their diaries prior to the 1840s, and referred me to the diary of Caroline Seabury (1854–1863), which she edited. Scholars in other fields, particularly in England, Germany, and Holland, should be asked the same question. Perhaps some differences are related to the history of “fancy stationery.” It seems that in England, blank books with the word *Diary* printed on the cover have been sold since the nineteenth century: this would have made “Dear Diary” flow from the pen more naturally. Since when have blank books been sold in France for the sole purpose of being used as diaries, and was that ever really done before the recent production of fancy stationery for adolescents and children? So we are embarking on a three-part inquiry: the first personal diaries written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; the history of the marketing of physical media; and above all, the forms and functions of addressing the self, and what the emergence of self-address tells us about a crucial turning point in history.

## NOTES

1. Antoine Métral’s unpublished Journal, in fifteen notebooks (1812–1819), is found in the Grenoble Municipal Library; see also Bourgeois.

2. For more on Jullien, see the following essay, “Marc-Antoine Jullien: Controlling Time.”
3. For published excerpts from Moukhanova’s Diary, see Gretchanaia and Viollet.

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## MARC-ANTOINE JULLIEN: CONTROLLING TIME

What use have you made of the last twenty-four hours? Could you say how long you have spent on each of your activities? Try hard to remember and give a precise figure for each of them, with the help of an analytical classification of the various types of activities. Write down those figures today, tomorrow, and the next few days on the columns of a table that will enable you to record daily variations and calculate averages. Then examine the results and ask yourself whether you have put your time to good use, and whether you have got the balance of your activities right. Should there be more of this, less of that? During the following weeks, use the same method to check how well you have kept your good resolutions. Your life will be changed and you will attain happiness, and be thankful to me. But you should really be thankful to Marc-Antoine Jullien (1775–1848) and his *Biometre or Hourly Memorial* (*Biomètre ou Mémo-rial horaire*), a small booklet which was published in 1813 and was reprinted several times. It was part of a triptych, for two more booklets by Jullien were also available in bookshops. They could be described as pre-printed logbooks, each meant to be filled in with a record of the events of daily life, as seen from a particular point of view. The three elements of the set were as follows:

(1) An *Analytical Memorial or Journal of Facts and Observations* (*Mémo-rial analytique, ou Journal des faits et observations*), in which you could dwell at length on one or two interesting facts. One might say this has the effect of a magnifying glass. You note down only one item per day and expatiate on it. You can write briefly or at length: no format is preset for you, the booklet is not laid out like a calendar with the dates printed in advance. The divisions are not horizontal but vertical, and five columns are provided. The central one is meant for the text itself. On the left, two narrow columns: one to indicate the number ascribed to each entry, the other one to indicate its date. On the right, two more columns: one for the subject of each entry, and the other for cross-references with other entries dealing with the same topic. The novelty of the device was to make it possible to establish what we now call a system of indexation. The disorderly nature of ideas jotted down at random, day after day, is corrected, as the titles in the fourth column and the figures of cross-references make it possible for some order to be established as one goes

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Trans. Marie-Danielle Leruez. From *Controlling Time and Shaping the Self: The Rise of Autobiographical Writing since 1750*. Ed. Rudolf Dekker and Anne Baggerman. Forthcoming.

along. In that respect, the *Memorial* is analytical. Jullien says he borrowed from Locke the idea of classifying the topics of a text that was by definition heterogeneous in order to make it usable.

(2) *A General Diary or Practical Record of the Use of Time (Agenda général, ou Livret pratique d'emploi du temps)*. This log-book gives a general overview of activities, detailed but abridged. The aim is both the opposite of that in the *Analytical Memorial* and complementary to it: you note as many things as you can in the smallest possible space. It is no longer a question of elaborating on facts, and each day is given the same limited space. This practical booklet includes the diary proper and a series of five specialized *Memorials*. The diary provides a third of a page for each day with, on one side, a column for assessment (good, average, or bad, symbolized by the signs +, 0, and -) and on the other side a column for “research words,” which makes indexing possible, this being left to the user’s discretion. The specialized Memorials include an economic Memorial (subdivided into various tables: assets, liabilities, miscellaneous remarks, cash book), an epistolary Memorial (a list of letters sent and received), a literary or bibliographic Memorial (a list of books read), and lastly a mnemonic Record or Tablets of Memory meant for notes concerning personal affairs, philanthropic reflections, historical memories, and obituaries. In contrast to the *Analytical Memorial*, which focused on reflection, this *General Diary* is meant for the whole range of practical memories.

(3) *The Biometre or Hourly Memorial*, which gives a summary of the use of each day in a purely quantitative way, and which, somehow, shrinks the perspective as a telescope does (two weeks on a single page). The booklet is intended neither for reflection nor for memory but for action. It is meant to make you aware of the use of your time in order to improve it, and is therefore the instrument of practical morals. The main features of the plan are shown in Appendix 1.

Not only was the pedagogy of the booklets novel, but their material presentation was also relatively new: the printed almanack with space provided for writing had become common in France only in the second half of the eighteenth century, as Francesco Maiello has shown in his *History of the Calendar* (1996).

Two key ideas underlay the whole system: organization and efficiency, the former being the means of achieving the latter. The underlying method and morals are laid out in a book which explains the whole system, Jullien’s *Essay on a Method Aiming at Improving the Use of Time, The Best Way to Be Happy (Essai sur la méthode qui a pour objet l’emploi du temps, meilleur moyen d’être heureux, 1808)*, which appeared in revised and enlarged editions in 1810, 1824 (the one I will quote from, *Essai sur l’emploi du temps*), and 1829. This large book expounds the philosophy behind the plan, describes



the three booklets, and gives examples of how Jullien himself used them. The reader will find excerpts from this work in Appendix II, and is advised to read them before proceeding any further with this paper.

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Who was Marc-Antoine Jullien? He had been brought up by enlightened parents, and as a very young man, at the age of seventeen, he engaged in revolutionary action on Robespierre's side and was commissioned by the Committee of Public Safety (Comité de Salut Public) to reestablish "Montagnard" order in Nantes and Bordeaux. He was fortunate enough to escape the Thermidorian repression. He later took part in Napoléon's Italian campaign and the Egyptian expedition, but only obtained a secondary post in the administration of the army under the Consulate and the Empire. Under the Restoration and the July Monarchy, being debarred from a political career by his revolutionary past, he turned to cultural journalism, and in 1819 founded *La Revue Encyclopédique*, which he ran till 1830. Excluded from political life after the Revolution, Marc-Antoine Jullien turned his energy to promoting a revolution in education. He married in 1801, and within three years, three boys were born to the couple, followed by a daughter. In 1808, precisely at the time when Napoléon was reforming universities along fairly traditional lines, Jullien published his *General Essay on Physical, Moral and Intellectual Education* (*Essai général d'éducation physique, morale et intellectuelle*), strongly inspired by Locke and Rousseau, in which he outlined a plan of education for the sons of the ruling classes. The most original and the least Rousseauist part of this plan is his scheme for learning how to control the use of one's time, which he developed at the same time in his *General Essay* on the subject and also in the booklets I have described. What was Marc-Antoine Jullien's experience of education? First and foremost the education he had received from his parents and what he had read in books; he had no experience of teaching. From 1810 onwards, he passionately adhered to and supported the experiments of Pestalozzi (1746–1827), to whose care he entrusted his own sons for a while, and whose propagandist and popularizer he became when he published *Esprit de la méthode d'éducation de Pestalozzi, suivie et pratiquée dans l'Institut d'éducation d'Yverdun* (1812). He was a very active militant in the field of education: he launched the idea of "Comparative Education" in 1817, which heralded the advent of Education as an academic subject, and he took a keen interest in mutual education, popular education, and innovations in education more generally.

Were I to draw his portrait as he appears in his books on pedagogy and the various biographies of him that have been published over the years, I would say he was a man of the Revolution who had once wielded great power

and been in the thick of action, and who later failed in all his political ambitions, in spite of his adherence to France's successive political regimes. He had to find a new field of action, and his ambitions turned to the training of the new elites. His scheme of education aimed at providing new leaders for a democratic country. He was trying to teach others how to succeed where he himself had failed. He had a passion for organization—that is to say, both planning and controlling. His experience in the army was certainly more important than his pedagogical experience. He was a compulsive reformer and innovator, which led him to sponsor libertarian experiments which were quite alien to his disposition, and in which he tried to put some order. His book on Pestalozzi is astonishing: he first quotes a long and crystal clear autobiographical letter by Pestalozzi, and then, in order to be better understood, no doubt, translates Pestalozzi's practice into a very abstract system with labyrinthic subdivisions. He was a polygraph who delighted in explaining everything. His bibliography is impressive: essays, treatises, sketches, handbooks, leaflets, booklets, appendixes, revised edition after revised edition. His rhetoric is verbose (numerous repetitions—meaning that a lot of time was wasted!), and he has no sense of humor. He is a thorough author who always goes over every topic exhaustively. His *Essai sur l'emploi du temps* is followed by a copious exposition of twelve principles (397–494) which reflect the philosophical movement in contemporary France: he wants to found the social sciences on the same principles as the physical sciences, and draw a moral code from those principles. He represents a transition between the Enlightenment and the new order of the industrial society in the nineteenth century. He is a complex and fascinating character. Several biographies of him have already been written, either from the political or educational standpoint, but an overall study of his personality, career, and works remains to be done. Documents about him abound, particularly letters. Surprisingly, this advocate of the diary has not left one for us to read. Could it be that he destroyed it?

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Given that any pedagogy must strike a balance between the two poles of child psychology and the definition of a goal to be reached, it is clear that Marc-Antoine Jullien's proposals on the use of time definitely tip the scales towards the latter. They are all about inculcating children and adolescents with the sort of behavior deemed salutary by the author. Not all children, mind you: only boys. And not all boys, only those of the ruling classes. Jullien's aim is similar to that of the Imperial University, which was being established in 1808: training the leaders of the nation. This is a far cry from Pestalozzi's libertarian and democratic outlook: indeed, the control of time and the use

of the diary are never mentioned in the depiction of Pestalozzi's method by Jullien. The behavior he wishes to inculcate is in conformity with an ethic of efficiency, entailing the full use of all time available and the right balance of activities. He proposes equal shares of eight hours for sleep, leisure, and work. All this is meant for "the class of men who can think" (*Essai sur l'emploi du temps* 154), those who make society move forward. The rules he proposes are irrelevant for workmen, peasants, or clerks; that is, for the great majority of people, whose time is not their own and who are coerced into being efficient. The rules are irrelevant as well for the women of the upper classes, whose use of time obeys different rules and is controlled by religion. Jullien's *General Essay on Education* recommends that these young boys should be educated away from their families, in sorts of cohorts placed under the leadership of governors. Their lives are divided into three stages: up to the age of eighteen they remain under the control of a governor; then comes a stage of military training, in which they do their national service. When they are discharged, at about twenty, they embark on a five years' grand tour throughout the whole wide world to observe and learn; on their return, at the age of about twenty-five, they are ready to get married and take an active part in the life of the country. On a double page, the program of education for each year is set out (age one, age two, up to the age of adulthood—that is, about twenty-five) in five columns: the middle ones being devoted to physical, moral, and intellectual education, and those on the right and left giving an overall view of the whole year and of the use of time. The program for the use of time appears under the heading "moral education." It starts with a preparatory stage at the age of seven, and is not in full operation till the boy is fourteen.

What is the aim of education? Happiness. But how does one reach happiness? Through self-control. The aim of education is not the salvation of the soul, as with the Christian model. Religion here is not prominent, and is reduced to a sort of ecumenical deism, which he justifies on pp. 149–151. Nor is Jullien's aim a return to the model of antique wisdom. Happiness is not linked to a form of self-control resulting in detachment, as with Marcus Aurelius; it is linked to control of oneself and others, and to a practical life strongly rooted in action. In that system, which originally claimed to draw from Rousseau, the focus is on efficiency, which of course is totally un-Rousseauist. However, Jullien's model and the Christian model it replaces do have something in common: the struggle against passions, although for different reasons. For Christians, passions jeopardize salvation. For Jullien, they jeopardize efficiency. Puberty and sexual desire are tackled in an embarrassed and repressive way (paradoxically, since his theory deems "physical" education so important). Not a word on affective or sentimental education is to be found.

Far from dealing sympathetically with a real individual, the system is meant to break in young boys in an authoritarian way, with an obsession on control.

It is thanks to his personal experience that Marc-Antoine Jullien devised his plan to use the diary as a means to teach control. When he was a little boy, his parents used to keep a diary of *his* life, which they made him read. Later, he internalized the practice, and in his turn, kept a diary when he was away, to provide material for the letters he sent home. This early experience, obviously a happy one, inspired him with a terrifying system of total supervision, which reminds us of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon: everything must be visible. In Jullien's program, from the age of seven up to the age of fourteen, the governor keeps a detailed diary of the child's activities, which he makes him read every other day. Thus the young boy gets used to seeing himself reflected in the mirror of a text. The governor, who probably has several pupils, must thus keep parallel diaries for years. When the boys reach fourteen, the governor hands over the task to them, but contrary to what might be expected, this does not mean that each pupil keeps his own diary: in fact, each of them in turn writes his own *and* his fellow-pupils' diaries, thus taking over the governor's former role, and after one month, hands over the task to someone else. It is not clear at what moment a boy deals exclusively with his own diary and ceases to write that of fellow pupils. But even then, the adolescent is not autonomous. The situation is reversed: he keeps his own diary but must give it to read to whomever supervises him—governor or father. In Jullien's *Essai sur l'emploi du temps*, adults are advised to submit their diaries to a friend for appraisal every three or six months (125–26), a practice which, the author claims, proves to be more useful than going to confession. Moreover, adults are also advised not to write their diaries in the first person, but in the third, referring to themselves as if they were another person, in the same way as the governor did, and they are also advised to use an assumed name, even several, probably to avoid the temptation of self-complacency induced by a single heteronym. The system reveals a genuine phobia of secrecy and intimacy. The inner self must be transparent, and the individual must be a glass house. Nothing could be further from the romantic soul reflected in Arvers's sonnet: "My soul has its secret, my life its mystery" (*Mon âme a son secret, ma vie a son mystère*). Marc-Antoine Jullien idealizes his experience as a child, and ascribes all sorts of virtues to this kind of diary controlled from outside. In particular, he believes that it will lead everyone to truthfulness, and that using the third person under assumed names will be conducive to objectivity.

In his *Essai sur l'emploi du temps*, he recalls that, according to Suetonius, "Augustus forbade his family and granddaughters to say or do in secret anything that could not be written down in the log-book of the family," which

led Jullien to write the following marginal note: “The use of a family log-book in which the father would note the most important actions of the children’s life and so that they could be shown at the end of each year would be a very moral domestic institution, likely to produce the best effects.” One may doubt that it is in the interest of a *pater familias* to change into Big Brother, and one may wonder about what really happened in the Jullien family. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there is something fascinating about grafting two record-keeping practices that might seem antithetical: the vanishing genre of the “livre de raison” and the then-emerging personal diary. Marc-Antoine Jullien was not alone in thinking that keeping a diary testified to one’s virtue. Joseph Bergier (1800–1878), a merchant from Lyon, dreamt of a society in which it would be compulsory to keep a personal diary, so that abstaining from doing so would be tantamount to admitting to a guilty conscience. This can be seen as a variation of the preventive function emphasized by St. Antony as early as the fourth century: keeping a diary is a way to avoid committing actions that one would be ashamed to mention in it. The difference is that, with Jullien or Bergier, you are not controlled by your virtual inner self, but by the very real prying eye of a social or family group.

Marc-Antoine Jullien is obsessed with efficiency and terrorized at the idea of waste. With him, planning out the use of time is no longer a means towards an end, such as virtue or happiness: it has become *the* end. Wasting one’s time leads to vice or unhappiness. One might almost imagine that his system would be as suitable for the organization of crime as for that of virtue, as convenient for the organization of leisure as for that of work. The main point is that every second should be turned to advantage, that the inescapable flight of time should thus be obliterated, and that there should be something to show for every minute. Such is his obsession that he gives a recipe (330) for how to live thirty-four hours a day!

Jullien sees his system as a continuation of the moral tradition, and claims Pythagoras, Seneca, and the Gospel as his masters. In reality, at the end of his *Essai sur l’emploi du temps*, he mentions three sources of inspiration which he puts at the same level: predictably enough, the religious or philosophical method, but also, more surprisingly, the military model, and that of commerce. Why? Probably because the aim of the army and of commerce is to win. Moreover, both are collective organizations, whereas the religious or philosophical tradition, though it may have a collective basis, is geared towards the individual. This unexpected amalgamation of the three methods reminds the modern reader of recent approaches, and he promptly re-reads *Discipline and Punish* (*Surveiller et Punir*, 1975), wondering whether Michel Foucault had known Marc-Antoine Jullien’s works. No, Jullien escaped Foucault’s notice, which is a pity, as he seems to be the missing link in Foucault’s demonstration. In the

section “Docile Bodies,” starting from a study of the changes in military drill, Foucault tries to show that analyzing time and breaking up gestures into their component parts have become instruments of power, and how group techniques and individual progress go hand in hand. Let us quote:

The disciplinary methods reveal a linear time whose moments are integrated, one upon another, and which is orientated towards a terminal, stable point; in short, an “evolutive” time. But it must be recalled that, at the same moment, the administrative and economic techniques of control reveal a social time of a serial, orientated, cumulative type: the discovery of an evolution in terms of “progress.” The disciplinary techniques reveal individual series: the discovery of an evolution in terms of “genesis.” These two great “discoveries” of the eighteenth century—the progress of societies and the geneses of individuals—were perhaps correlative with the new techniques of power, and more specifically, with a new way of administering time and making it useful, by segmentation, seriation, synthesis and totalization. (160)

Foucault likes to shelter behind the word “perhaps” to suggest fascinating but unprovable “correlations.” Two pages after, we find the same caution about the management of time, when he wonders about the link between the organization of monastic life and that of industrial life:

Perhaps it was these procedures of community life and salvation that were the first nucleus of methods intended to produce individually characterized, but collectively useful aptitudes. In its mystical or ascetic form, exercise was a way of ordering earthly time for the conquest of salvation. It was gradually, in the history of the West, to change direction while preserving certain of its characteristics; it served to economize the time of life, to accumulate it in a useful form and to exercise power over men through the mediation of time arranged in this way. Exercise, having become an element in the political technology of the body and of duration, does not culminate in a beyond, but tends towards a subjection that has never reached its limit. (162)

It is my turn now to add a “perhaps.” It seems to me that Jullien went one step further towards that “dependency”; that is to say, towards the construction of a subject who becomes autonomous only by taking responsibility for his own subjection. In the monastic, military, or industrial system analyzed by Foucault, the control and analysis of time apply to the individual, but the initiative and sanction remain collective. In Jullien’s system, the status of the individual changes from being controlled to being in control. Control is interiorized. Jullien says clearly that everyone must be his own general-in-chief, his own managing director, and should impose an iron discipline on himself and bring his accounts up to date. Therefore, he says the same thing as Foucault, except for the fact that what he presents as happiness, Foucault analyzes in terms of power. They certainly both exaggerate: our experience

as subjects is neither as happy nor as dependent as they make it. Nevertheless, there is something very true in Jullien's injunction and Foucault's analysis. Even though Jullien's booklets were never very influential, they reveal the deeper logic underlying our construction as subjects, perhaps carrying it to the point of caricature. When surveying the evolution of the diary from Antiquity to the present, one becomes aware that it derives from the models of administrative control and commercial management. Each of us has become a state in miniature, with its government, its legal department, and its archives. Perhaps today the self is the State.

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Marc-Antoine Jullien's method is striking because of its urge to totalize, its systematic and obsessive character. Going over one's day to examine one's conscience, writing down the events of one's life to escape oblivion, were already fairly common practices at the time when Jullien was writing. But if one proceeds in an empirical way, according to the mood of the moment, one may well miss the central point, and fail to take a firm grip on one's life. What makes Jullien different is his thoroughness. At the end of his *Essai sur l'emploi du temps*, he honestly indicates the sources he draws from. He mentions three sources, and all three are persons who invented devices to record everything. First comes Locke. From all of Locke's work, Jullien seems to have remembered only one thing: the system he used to index his reading notes, a rather convoluted alphabetical system which Jullien explains as best he can. There is no point in keeping a diary if it is impossible to trace what was written in it: indexation is a form of capitalization. Jullien himself devised a far clearer system to index both the *Analytical Memorial* and the *General Diary*. In that respect, as in many others, one can easily imagine that, had computers existed then, he would have been delighted and would have made ample use of information technology: the search function, hypertext links, or simply a good data base.

His second inspiration is Benjamin Franklin, who in his *Autobiography* explains the method he used to acquire the fourteen essential virtues (though he confesses that he rather failed in acquiring two of them: order and humility) over cycles of fourteen weeks. That implied first establishing a complete list of virtues to be acquired, classifying them in order of priority (starting with those that conditioned the acquisition of others), and then, without attempting to acquire them all at the same time, devoting one week to each, ticking off every day the number of lapses, in order, cycle after cycle, to achieve a faultless performance. In doing so, Franklin combines two traditional techniques in a novel way, the general examination and the particular examination, thus uniting the analytical approach and the urge to totalize.

Would Jullien have been patient enough to correct his defects in this way, one after the other, had he admitted to having any? One is under the impression that the only thing that attracts him in Franklin's device is the totalizing aspect. Indeed, far from insisting on the progressivity of the method, in his "General Observation" (522–23), he complicates it to excess by proposing to extend the practice to physical and intellectual occupations. And, though he refers to Franklin's progressive system, his own booklets always propose the simultaneous use of all types of assessment and control.

His third inspiration comes from a friend who wished to remain anonymous, and who perfected the technique of the *Biometre* by imagining a monthly graph, on which what could be called a satisfaction index was recorded (graded from 0 to 20), the medium line being rather strangely called the "sleeping line" (was it because below ten, one had better sleep than live?). Of course, Jullien immediately suggests combining (the very word he uses) these graphs with notebooks in which each day's assessment would be justified, with Franklin's list of virtues, with the *General Diary*, with the *Biometre*, "to complete the use of our method." Combining, completing, nothing must be left out. One is struck by this frantic passion for measures and figures. The quality of the things which are quantified seems to matter very little. What was important about Franklin's virtues was not that he practiced them, but that there were fourteen of them, and that none of these should be overlooked. In all his books, Jullien seems without moral anxiety or psychological curiosity. No scruples or introspection intrude, but only a constant monitoring process intended to assure that no aspect of the self escapes recording.

\* \* \* \* \*

Was this method for monitoring the use of time applied by anyone? But before answering this question, let us first see how the method was elaborated. Let Jullien answer:

This is the fruit of some spare time that the author had been able to find in 1805 and 1806 when he was employed by the army as sub-inspector of equipment and men, a post corresponding to and assimilated to the rank of adjutant general. He was then separated from his three sons, and it pleased him to put together for them the lessons of his experience and the advice he intended to give them one day as guidance for their lives. He also took advantage of the relations with young military men that his rank and duties afforded him to make some of them apply various aspects of the method he was then devising. He tried to establish and base his method firmly on practice, in order to assess precisely how useful it might prove to be. (19–20)



Jullien says that he took some relevant criticisms of the first edition into account. He quotes laudatory reactions, and answers unfounded objections at length (130–50). Besides, subsequent editions and translations testify to a fairly wide readership: the *Essai sur l'emploi du temps* was translated into German as early as 1811, and a counterfeit edition was on sale in London in 1822. It is a pity no testimonies of independent users exist. In his presentation of his booklets, Jullien stressed that readers could pick and choose in his method:

The perusal of these three booklets will enable the reader to see that their uses are distinct and different and that each individual can, as he wishes, restrict himself to one of them, according to how active and full his life is, or according to how likely the nature of his activities is to make him fulfill all the requirements of the method or apply it only in part. (232)

In fact, we have firsthand accounts of only two occasional users, admittedly important ones in the tradition of the diary, those of Maine de Biran (1766–1824) and Henri-Frédéric Amiel (1821–1881).

Maine de Biran bought a copy of the *General Diary* for 1815, not an unusual purchase for him since he had already bought an ordinary diary in 1813, called *Diary or Pocket Tablets for the year 1813*. He wrote down brief daily notes regularly in the space provided by Jullien, and filled the small “Review” at the end of each month. In January, he now and then gave an assessment for the days (good, average, or bad), but he did so only nine times between the 1st and the 20th and then gave up (no “good,” four “average,” five “bad”). As for the series of Memorials (added as appendixes), he made a half-hearted attempt to use them but soon gave up, and he wrote his reading notes or reflections anywhere (even in the obituary Memorial). Maine de Biran thus dropped Jullien’s unusual layout to use the diary in the usual way, while he simultaneously kept another diary for 1815 with longer entries from January to September. What he found in Jullien was an encouragement to regular writing, but he did not feel the urge to go on with Jullien’s devices. The rest of Maine de Biran’s diary, which he wrote until he died, shows no trace of Jullien’s influence.

With Amiel, things are altogether different. The *Essai sur l'emploi du temps*, which he read in February 1840, when he was nineteen, led him to resume his diary after an interruption, and he then used the third person (at least on the first day . . .), giving a detailed account of the way he used his time. Though his enthusiasm was short-lived, there are clear signs that Amiel appreciated the techniques advised by Jullien, particularly the planning and the hourly tables, and the marginal notes meant to build up an index. Jullien’s proposed model made Amiel feel guilty all his life, as can be concluded from the two other occasions when his diary mentions the *Essai*. On January 19th, 1854 (he was then thirty-two), he reflects on the philosophical aspect of the book—that

is, on Jullien's twelve great philosophical principles. The next day he writes, "These last days, I have been haunted by the idea of order, planning one's life, the use of a timetable, the art of administering and capitalizing on one's work, of mobilizing one's notes and papers: in short, the art of turning to the best advantage one's strengths, resources, intellectual and other assets: in two words using and accounting for one's life, an essential chapter in the art of living, 'Lebenkunst.' Reread quite a large part of Jullien's curious and important work (*The Use of time*)," and he goes on to lament at length his own incapacity at establishing such a plan of life for himself. On March 23rd, 1860, when he was thirty-eight, on the title page of the forty-first notebook of his diary, Amiel chooses to write a sentence by Jullien: "With all the minutes we have wasted, we could have achieved some immortal work," and on that very day, reading Jullien has been, he writes, his only positive action. Apart from that, "I did nothing but come and go and talk." Amiel's diary, though written with Jullien's ideas in mind, seems to belie his thesis. Jullien said keeping a diary methodically guaranteed happiness. Amiel kept such a diary, better than Marc-Antoine Jullien himself, as far as we can judge, and yet sank into lamentations and sorrow. Perhaps the human soul is more complicated than Jullien thought? Have the authors of guidebooks to "personal growth," who sell happiness, been really happy themselves?

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The reader of the *Essay on the use of time* might expect to find an answer to the question, since Marc-Antoine Jullien, as the good pedagogue that he was, set the example by filling himself several pages of his various booklets. Alas, these specimens make you feel that you are looking at cardboard dummy articles on display in a shop window. Most of the time his entries for various dates are mere repetitions of passages of his main text. The few vague and uninteresting autobiographical notes lead to trite general remarks. The dates seem fictitious, all his entries are written on a Monday, in January, and the year is unspecified; initials abound, and the reader is incredulous and bored. It reads like a catechism for adults, with instructive stories and edifying anecdotes. Could it be that what Jullien attempted to do was simply impossible? Could it be that it is not so easy to speak of oneself publicly and lay oneself open to the judgment of others? The reader is left with an uneasy impression of insincerity and evasion. The question will remain unanswered, since Jullien's actual diary, which he kept according to his own method, has not survived. Neither have the diaries of his three sons, for whom, as we saw, the *Essay* had theoretically been written.

What a relief it is to be brought back from Jullien's ideal to reality when reading a charming diary of 202 pages written by his daughter from March

13th, 1828 to June 16th, 1829 (it is kept in Moscow with the Jullien papers). Miss Stéphanie Jullien, then sixteen, is a typical girl of the romantic period. She pours out her melancholy on every page in a naïve and complacent manner. She deplors the emptiness of her days, the sadness of her family—her mother was ill and her father overwhelmed by troubles and cares—and makes occasional feminist remarks: “That is what comes of being a woman, you lead a sad life, I am already beginning to see it.” Far from aiming at objectivity and speaking of herself in the third person, under assumed names, she addresses her diary as “tu,” and kisses it like a friend, almost a lover. In the early nineteenth century, father and daughter apparently take extreme and opposite stands as far as the diary is concerned: reason as opposed to sensitivity, restraint as opposed to outpouring of feelings, order as opposed to revolt. But the daughter’s diary also reveals her deep affection for and attachment to her father, and a passion they shared: that of a life either guided or reflected by writing.

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**APPENDIX I: THE BIOMÈTRE**

**TABLEAU DES DIVERS EMPLOIS DE LA VIE JOURNALIÈRE,  
CONSIDÉRÉE SOUS LES QUATRE RAPPORTS**

JANVIER

A	B	PHYSIQUE			MORAL			INTELLECTUEL			SOCIAL				P	Q	R	S
		C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	L	L	M	N	O				
1																		24
2																		24
3																		24
4																		24
5																		24
6																		24
7																		24
8																		24
9																		24
10																		24
11																		24
12																		24
13																		24
14																		24
15																		24
TOTAL DES HEURES																		360

Diverse Uses of Daily Life—in four categories: explanatory notes

Each column of the BIOMÈTRE is distinguished by only one letter of the alphabet

A. Numbers of the day of the month, or Dates

B. Daily temperature

Physical Life

C. Tranquility, or sleep

D. Eating, or meals

E. Activity, or exercise: walks, swimming, etc.

Moral Life

F. Inner life, religious or meditative: prayers, religious practice; moral ledger, keeping records of time usage

G. Domestic and familial life

H. Economic life: of necessity or of interest

Intellectual Life

I. Intellectual life required by work, relative to a profession, to obligations

J. Intellectual pursuits unrelated to obligations

L. Literary life, reading

Social Life

L. Letter writing, correspondance

M. Traveling life, voyages and tours, business trips, comings and goings

N. Civil and social life: societal connections, visits, games, etc.

O. Entertainment: theater, dancing, concerts, and festivals

P. Passive and contemplative life—abandoned *au far niente*: dreamy moments, wastes of time

Q. Numerical life, or life expressed in numbers: number of hours of each day, of every two weeks, of each month

R. Mnemonic life: comments and memories

S. Rational life: signs indicating whether one is satisfied or dissatisfied with one's use of the day

## APPENDIX II

## 1

**M. A. Jullien's personal method**

Several of those who had read *The Art of Employing Time* and approved of the fundamental views and of the rules of conduct that the treatise contains, had expressed the wish that there should be added to the philosophical theory therein developed the means to practise it painlessly and effortlessly.

As the author himself applied exactly the advice he gave, he sought with the most careful attention the various sorts of improvement that could be brought to his method, which he wanted to render simple and easy, as well as complete. He had started by keeping a diary, in which, every night or every morning, he put down on paper the main memories of his daily life. He liked to remember that this habit of his went back to his early years and that, even in his childhood, the tender concern of his parents had prompted them, in order to arouse his sense of emulation and his zeal for work, to write down for him all the details relating to his studies and the domestic events that could hold his attention and be engraved in his memory. One of the first books in which he learnt to read, was a narrative which went faithfully back over his first impressions, occupations, and games. After being sent away from home at an early age, he followed the path that his first guides had opened up for him. Every night he would write for himself an account of the most interesting things he had done, seen, or heard during the day. This short and accurate report provided him with the material for the letters he would send to his mother every week, and this excellent woman, who would otherwise have found her son's absence difficult to bear, was, as it were, brought closer to him, and, somehow, associated with his life by means of intimate and continuous communication and regular correspondence.

But, after a while, all the pages of the diary were filled up and offered a confusing mass of notes, most of which had outlived their interest and could afterwards be of no use whatsoever. One got lost in the details as in an inextricable maze and many useless or childish things had to be perused in order to collect a few important observations and facts here and there.

The author wanted first to establish methodical divisions in his diary, and to distinguish the various aspects of life that most often recurred therein: *Physical life and gymnastics*—with details relating to the preservation, changes and recovering of health, walks and exercises of the body; *Moral and inner life*—affection, passions, the study of the human heart and character; *Domestic and family life*; *Economic life*—receipts and expenditure; *Outer and social life*—portraits, anecdotes, incidents and observations; *Wandering and travelling life*—

description of places, public establishments, monuments, statistical details, etc.; *Administrative and public life*; *Military life*; *Intellectual, literary and philosophical life*; *Epistolary life*—correspondence; *Vegetative and passive life*—or vacant and wasted moments; *Dissipated life*—games, the theatre, social intercourse. Next, he included in his divisions the branches of human knowledge on which he happened to collect scattered notions in his conversations or when reading, and he put in specific *words* of research, or conventional *signs*, at the beginning of each of the entries in his diary, so that, through the mere perusal of these words or signs, he might easily find the entries he wanted to read over again or consult.

He then thought he was in a position to organize in a definitive way the *Memorial* which he describes as analytical, or the *Journal of Facts and Observations* by having five columns drawn on each page in order to note down separately:

the number of each entry

the dates or an indication of the places and days when they were written

the entries themselves, relating to facts, observations and various details, drafted in a concise way and dealing with noteworthy things

the research words, or the specific titles allocated to each entry

and lastly, the numbers for the cross references between corresponding entries or entries dealing with the same subject or analogous subjects.

The author was thus able to bring together and compare entries which were connected in one way or another, to look for and find easily those he wanted to consult, and he succeeded in establishing the greatest order in a book where the disorder of things and ideas stemmed from the very nature of the human and social life it recorded and depicted. By dint of trial and error he finally managed to lay out his *Journal of Facts and Observations* according to the model that the reader will presently discover.

*Essai sur l'emploi du temps*, 1824, 225–29

## 2

### **A general plan of education**

#### *Childhood and Adolescence*

7 – From an early age, our pupils are trained to surrender their own will to the reason of others, in order to be capable, later on, to listen to the advice of their own reason and follow it. As soon as they reach their seventh or eighth

year, their tutor shall establish a daily record of their actions, their studies, their progress and of all their pastimes and physical exercises, which they will be made to read every other day and the effect of which will necessarily be to interest them, encourage them, to enable them to appreciate what is good and useful, to form their minds and hearts, to stimulate their self-pride, to make them attach great value to their self-esteem and the esteem of others, justified by the inner testimony of their conscience, and lastly to train them into the salubrious habit of keeping a watchful eye on their own conduct. . . .

When they reach the age of fourteen or fifteen, our pupils shall be given the responsibility to continue and to keep this record themselves, daily, in order both to provide for themselves a strict and detailed account of the use of each moment and to train them in writing with ease. Each of them in turn shall hold the pen during a whole month, and shall, day after day, write down a review of his life and that of the young fellow pupils attending the same institution and entrusted to the care of the same tutor.

Besides the numberless advantages resulting from this method, which are developed in the second part of the plan, it provides the tutor with a powerful means of emulation, and a daily-renewed opportunity to accustom his pupils to fulfilling their duties towards their school-fellows and towards all those they have to deal with, to keeping their promises with religious scrupulousness, to being noble and sincere, faithful and steadfast in keeping a secret, and above all, at all times, to adhering strictly to the truth, to professing a generous loyalty and the utmost frankness, to shunning with scorn and horror the very shadow of a lie as a shameful and vile act.

14 – This habit of keeping a daily record, first written by the master when his pupils reach their seventh year, and that they must now start to write for themselves, obliges them to give an account of all the objects they see and all the impressions they feel. Each day bring its contribution, adding to their experiences and moral qualities: thus, they learn to appreciate the value of time and never to waste a fraction of it.

*Essai général d'éducation*, 1808, 172, 186

### *The adult age*

Each individual, anxious to work towards his self-improvement and happiness, must, either before surrendering to sleep or on rising early in the morning, devote a few moments to recapitulating everything he did, heard, or observed in the course of the previous day.

That transient and brief examination precisely takes up a portion of time which is lost for all men, and which is thus retrieved and put to the most fruitful use.

This moment which seems intended for this very purpose and on which social life itself has no claims is seized upon to plunge into his soul, to collect himself, to remember everything he has noticed or learnt, everything he has done or said, wisely or foolishly, usefully or uselessly, to the benefit or to the detriment of his body, his soul, or his heart.

He gives himself a complete and severe account of the use of each and every instant during the course of the preceding twenty four hours.

He, so to say, asks each finished day the question: of what benefit were you for my physical, moral or intellectual improvement, for my happiness? I made you my tributary: did you pay your debt? Time is considered as a tenant farmer who is bound by a lease that must be strictly abided by, and who pays a rent, or as an individual who is submitted to a toll. This rent or toll is paid for each fixed distance or term.

*Essai sur l'emploi du temps*, 1824, 51

### *Writing in the third person*

In order to feel more at liberty when writing daily, one should speak of oneself in the third person, as if referring to a stranger and under assumed names chosen by oneself which it is easy to change and alter at will. Thus one is not held back by considerations of self-esteem, fear of other people's judgment, false modesty, vanity or pride; therefore one writes a truthful account of one's life, without fearing indiscreet confidants or obnoxious critics. One should also use assumed names when writing about other people, be it in laudatory or derogatory terms; thus one can garner without scruples or embarrassment actions, observations, characteristic or instructive anecdotes that can cause offense to no one; indeed one's intention is not to point at or depict such and such a person but to study, comprehend, and describe Man in his manifold forms, Man, that real chameleon, that bizarre assemblage whose infinitely delicate and variegated nuances can only be captured and fixed through a long and gradual process, through a long experience of observing and a large number of observations about many different sorts of persons.

*Essai général d'éducation*, 1808, 126

## 3

### **Discourse on method**

The *military method* which makes several thousand individuals maneuver as if they were a single body animated by a single soul, through its prodigious effects also testifies to the power of man's genius even when it is used to create means of destruction of his fellow creatures. According to this method, all ranks are closely inspected in succession, from the very lowest to the highest, and words of command are swiftly transmitted down the ranks, from the



superior one of commanding general to that of private soldier. This sort of ascending and descending chain of command makes it possible to supervise and direct all the movements of a large group of men as easily as if they were a single individual. In the same way, thanks to our tables of the distribution of our daily activities and of the time devoted to each, none of our actions, nay, none of our thoughts escapes scrutiny. Days and hours come under review at appointed times, like so many isolated fractions of an army corps whose successive inspection makes it possible to appraise how well or poorly the army is controlled. Both the details and the whole can easily be assessed together by a trained eye. The same rigorous precision that military hierarchy makes it easy to enforce on army manoeuvres applies to our way of distributing and, so to say, of maneuvering the different hours of the day.

The *commercial method* has greatly contributed to the advancement of societies, by furthering the free circulation of goods that are now everywhere available and offer both incitement to and rewards for work; it establishes such method in *book-keeping* and in the endless variety of *accounts opened* for each correspondent, for each market place, for each type of deal, that it is always easy to check each of these accounts by collating each of its elements, which appear in various forms and can thus be compared. Our *books* offer a perfect similarity with the *ledgers* of merchants and bankers and with the comparisons of bulletins of market places which inform you at a glance about the rise or fall in the value of government bonds or of the commodities in each country. We transpose the *current accounts* of trade in our *moral method*; and, every day, in just a few moments, we make up a detailed account of our expenditure in the last twenty four hours. We are thus, at all times, in a position to break down the use of our days, to keep up exactly with its variations, to go down as we wish to the minutest details or to bring them together and compare them and reach more or less elevated generalities.

Our method of control and recapitulation of one's life, leaves, so to say, no place for disorderliness, apathy, laziness or boredom; it is rich in teachings, experiences and memories. It is intended to provide at the same time:

A kind of *moral mirror* and a faithful portrayal of our life, that is of great use to assess whether it is well or badly ordered, just as one sees in front of a mirror whether one is well or badly attired

A *moral thermometer*, which informs us about your physical, moral, intellectual temperature, observed day after day, and about the relationship of the atmospheric constitution to the individual constitution and our life

A *moral watch*, the dial of which does not show the march of hours but the use of hours;

A *moral compass* that enables us to find our bearings in the midst of the ocean of the world, or to adjust and plan the various parts of our time so as to put them to the best possible use

A *moral spring*, that will provide all our faculties with continuous and salutary impetus;

A *moral pair of scales*, which is used to weigh our actions, our relations, and almost our thoughts, and which provides a comparative measure of the products of life, assessed by the hour, the day, the fortnight, the month, the year

A sort of *moral panorama*, which, from a single view point, brings together an infinite number of details, of which we are interested in perceiving and assessing an overall vision;

And lastly, an *addition to a young man's education* and a real *moral guide*, a reliable friend, a discreet confidant, a sincere adviser whose teachings do not wound his self-pride, and are bound to influence his reason, and who, thanks to the mysterious sign added to each day's page, reveals to us whether or not we are satisfied with our conduct and passes the inward sentence on our life that every man's conscience dictates.

Bacon and Descartes have, in their philosophical works, shown how our *capital* in *ideas* and *the sciences* should be exploited; Adam Smith, in his research on the wealth of nations, and other writers who have dealt with political economy, have shown how one should exploit one's capital in *money* and *work*; Aristotle, Montesquieu, Mably, J.-J. Rousseau, in their books on legislation and politics, how to exploit *capital* in *men*: these are my guides, and what I wanted to demonstrate was how *capital* of another kind, combined with the above mentioned ones, can be exploited: TIME, the only capital man cannot increase in quantity, but which he can easily put to more profitable use. ORDER widens space, and the GOOD USE OF TIME actually increases the length of our life.

*Essai sur l'emploi du temps*, 1824, 392–95

## WRITING WHILE WALKING

Little, if anything, is remembered about Pierre-Hyacinthe Azaïs (1766–1845). He gained some notoriety for his philosophical treatise *Des compensations dans les destinées humaines* (1809). After 1850, he was forgotten. Only Pyrenees enthusiasts occasionally remembered him long enough to ridicule *Un mois de séjour dans les Pyrénées* (Paris, 1809), a book that I am going to praise. In the 1970s, Michel Baude rediscovered and studied his extraordinary anniversary diary: from 1811 to 1844, Azaïs kept 365 parallel diaries, one for each day of the year. He was a second-rate philosopher, but a sort of genius of the personal diary. In any event, he was a pioneer: what he did had never been tried before, had never even been imagined. And few have done anything like it since.

Let me tell you about his first diary, which he kept from 1798 to 1803, a copy of which is held in the Bibliothèque de l'Institut in Paris (over two thousand pages in eight volumes). What a shame for us, and for him, that the original diary has been lost! One of his inventions was outdoor writing, just as the impressionists did outdoor painting. What he was after, as much as authenticity of place, was the authenticity of the moment. He was seeking *instantaneity*. Madame de Charrière teased Benjamin Constant for chopping his letters into pieces by noting down the time when he wrote each part. She said that it was no longer a journal, but an *houral*. So let us tease Azaïs for trying to write a *minutal*.

Perhaps you need to have been in prison to dream of writing outdoors. Perhaps you need to have had a brush with death to make you want to seize the very sharpest tip of the moment. After publishing a counter-revolutionary pamphlet in 1797, our Azaïs, musician, teacher, and philosopher, was forced to go into hiding after the coup d'état of 18 Fructidor (4 September 1797). He lived as a recluse for more than two years, until May 1800. It was a gentle enough seclusion, first at the Tarbes hospital, where former nuns who were also opposed to the Revolution hid him in their “pharmacy,” and then with sympathizing families. At the hospital he read Saint Augustine, reflected on time and “compensations in human destinies,” and after a year thought of keeping a diary. He started it on 4 September 1798. At first planned as a moral guide (he called it “my little monitor”), this diary quickly became the

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“Écrire en marchant.” *Lalies* 28 (2008).

barometer of his love life (there were girls in the families that took him in), the confidant of his reveries in nature (he sometimes went out on the sly), and especially a laboratory for his ideas and a rough draft of future works. He was amazed by the plasticity of the “diary” form, so much so that one day he wrote enthusiastically, “If we had two lives, I would spend the first one writing my diary” (6 October 1801)!

Keeping a diary, like writing a letter, required paper, a stable backing to support the paper, a pen (goose feather sharpened with a penknife), and ink in an inkwell. This was an indoor occupation. There were traveling “writing desks,” small sets of portable furniture that could hold everything one needed for writing, but it was still necessary to perch somewhere. Even when traveling, people wrote while *seated* on a chair in front of a table or something that served that purpose. Look at plates II and III of the article on “Écritures” from the *Encyclopédie*, and you will see that writing is a serious affair. But, you will ask, what about the pencil? Just because they have the same name, you must not confuse the pencils that were traditionally used to draw (a sort of chalk or pastel) with the pencil that was invented at the end of the sixteenth century in England. Ultimately perfected in 1795 by Conté, this pencil was a lead inside a wooden sleeve and could be used to write rough drafts. Its use spread quickly in the early nineteenth century, but at Tarbes, in the final years of the eighteenth century, they were little known. And they did not do away with the need to sit down or lean on something.

It is a shame that Azais’s original diary has been lost: we would have found out whether he wrote evenly and cleanly in the mobile situations we will see him in. In June 1799, while he was still in hiding in one of the towers of the Tarbes hospital, his “young friend” (the painter Jean-Baptiste Jalon, born in 1771, five years his junior) gave him a gift that would change everything for him:

My young friend was kind enough to give me a small piece of furniture today that will be of great good use to me. It is a handsome tin box that can easily hold a small stock of paper of the size I am currently using, a small writing desk, some pens, a penknife, and a sheet of cardboard slightly larger than my paper. All of this is packed up in a very portable way, and will accompany me always in the solitary outings that I will be able to make one day. This briefcase will have the advantage of protecting everything it contains from the rain, so that while I am traveling, and no matter where I go, everything I need to put my feelings or observations in writing will be at my disposal. My diary is one thing that will never be interrupted.

I gave in to my impatience to enjoy this little acquisition immediately. I went to write beneath my north window, in the position I imagined I would take up while outdoors; I was pleasantly surprised to see the ease with which I was able to do this, and it quickly transported me to a time when I will be able to write in the midst

of nature, in one of the delightful positions that my imagination easily recalls from memory. (12 June 1799)

He had few chances to use this device as long as he was in hiding. In March 1800, he secretly spent two days in Lourdes but did not take his “box,” and regretted it bitterly:

I regretted not bringing my little writing utensils; I would have described things on the spot rather than doing it today from memory; not that my description would have been more accurate, because I am still here, but I would have had the pleasure of dating the picture at the very place and at the moment when it struck my gaze; this would have made it more pleasurable to me one day. I will never go for another walk without my little box; I want to put all my pleasures to good use. (13 March 1800)

So he does not miss his box so much for the accuracy of the description (he has a good memory) as for the thrill of being plugged directly into time, an “existential” feeling in the manner of Rétif de la Bretonne (whom he must not have known). The date must be free of all arrangement, of all fiction. The “pleasure of dating” consists of being hooked into a little bit of eternity when you write the date, making the fugitive and the eternal coincide with that inscription, and on the other hand of “passing the current along,” making it possible to transmit the here and now into the future by creating a range of possible anniversaries over the years.

“Liberated” in May 1800, Azaïs hardly had time to enjoy his freedom: on 30 May 1800, he fell so seriously ill that he was close to death for three or four days (he called it “my brush with death”) and took a long time to recover. From July to September 1800, he finished convalescing at the home of his friends at St. Sauveur, on the road to Gavarnie. Two months of solitude, walks, and reverie during which he first had the idea of *writing while walking*. No longer to recompose in the evening what he had seen or thought of during the day, but to write *live*, from life and in the moment. This required an improvement in the little box, which his friend again supplied. He recalled the moment in May 1801:

One year ago I only wrote outside on a small cardboard sheet that did not provide enough support for my hand. It was only at St. Sauveur, and even then quite late in the day, that I substituted the briefcase that my friend had made and sent me. Today, I find it even more comfortable to use a small board that is stiff but light and fits into the pocket I use for it. Carrying my briefcase in my hand, I had the highly embarrassing appearance of someone who wants to be noticed. (30 May 1801)

There is progress here, from the small sheet of cardboard to the stiffer “briefcase.” But I have trouble imagining how he juggled the pen and inkwell:

surely he must still have sat down somewhere? It was after his first try, during a three-day outing to Gavarnie, that he described his invention in detail in the note we are about to read. How could his umbrella support his briefcase? And if it did, how could Azaïs later do away with it, as he tells us below, by “reshaping” it? I cannot make head nor tail of it, but I trust this candid and inventive man. In a note to his 1809 book (161), he confirms that in 1801 he reduced the device to “a simple board, very small and light, strapped to my walking stick,” which allowed him to write down his entire philosophical system while outside.

On another occasion, I realized why it is in our nature always to arrive late at discovering simple, original ideas: because it is a good thing for our pleasures and benefits to be evenly distributed over the course of our lives. Today, my system for writing while walking is singularly easy and comfortable. I would do less well at a table, and I would not have the pleasure of going forward or moving around; this exercise is very good for body and mind. It gives my mind different points of view, which allows my imagination to roam. I sit down, get up, lie back, and lean over; I do whatever I want, and my table never leaves its horizontal position. I walk as long as it takes to find a way to express a thought; then I stop wherever I happen to be, standing or sitting, it doesn't matter: my pen keeps going. So it is that now, still walking or writing, I am across from Luz, facing the Gave de Barèges. I took the small path this evening that overlooks the St. Sauveur road where it starts and leads to the village of Sazos.

I feel that in this position, and in this occupation, I could walk the road from here to the Pic du Midi, to Paris, to the end of the world without getting tired and without realizing it, as long as I was not in a hurry.

The idea of writing like this is amazingly simple, and perhaps no one had thought of it before. I thought of it a few days before I went to Gavarnie, and it made the trip especially pleasant.

But using my umbrella as a horizontal support for my briefcase made it inconvenient to put down and heavy to carry. This morning, I do not know where from or how, the idea came to me of reshaping it, and here I am, still walking, with no other luggage than my briefcase. Without realizing it I reached a very lovely fountain, still with a view of the charming valley of Luz, flanked by the Gave de St. Sauveur running along the mountain I am on and crossed by the Gave de Barèges. I write, stroll, and take a very pleasant path that was unfamiliar to me. Countless times, while enjoying this happy idea, I have wondered why I did not think of it earlier. (14 September 1800)

It is luxurious to be able to say, “here I am now, still walking and writing. . . .” Because writing, which will later enter the order of the *deferred*, adheres to the referent here so that, through a sort of mirror effect, the intermediate distance seems to us to have been erased and *we* are there too! In the

highly developed diaries he kept at St. Sauveur during these summer months in which he came back to life, Azaïs played on that effect in two ways. Since he was a musician, I will say that he used it at times melodically and at other times harmonically.

But first, a word about this St. Sauveur diary, written from July to September 1800. We know it in two forms. One copy (part of the full copy of the Diary) was made by his wife after 1809 (he married late, in 1808, and his wife became his collaborator). In this copy, she skips over the passages of the journal that were selected for publication, but makes reference to them. This section of the diary was published by Azaïs in 1809 under the title *Un mois de séjour dans les Pyrénées*. He had already published, without much success, an *Essai sur le monde* (1806) that he would later develop under the modest title of *Système universel*. His book *Des compensations dans les destinées humaines* (1809) had been better received, but feeling that it was not being appreciated at its true worth, he wanted to legitimize his theories by demonstrating his sensitivity to nature. Hence this 227-page volume that was probably a first: prior to that, no personal diary had been published in France during its author's lifetime. Of course, it was a long-established practice to publish travel journals. But the (unprepossessing) title says it well: this was not a trip; it was a *stay*. The book carried out the plan of the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*: Rousseau had promised a "shapeless diary" of his thoughts, but in the end composed well-planned texts that did not at all resemble a diary. So Azaïs was being original. But he did not take his sincerity all the way: the published journal is selected, backdated (1797 instead of 1800), and embellished with elaborate fantasies at the end (182–207) that, we must concur with his detractors, are not the most successful pieces of writing. He would have done better to stick to a diary that is engaging and original as is.

The "melodic" process is keeping his diary in the form of a string of small reports that he records minute by minute. We have to assume that Azaïs had a watch, although he never mentions it. To say that he recorded them down to the minute may be an exaggeration: he measured time roughly, in quarter hours, half hours or whole hours. He only gets down to minutes (and even then in multiples of five) at dramatic moments. On the second day of his excursion to Gavarnie, at 1:45 p.m., in the midst of a heavy snowfall, rapidly taking notes and freezing from the cold; at 2:05 p.m., he merely notes: "At the foot of the falls; it is soaking me"; at 2:15 p.m., having retreated to a distance, "It was a beautiful sight; I was unable to describe it on site . . .," after which he describes it at length, ten minutes late but from a dry spot. The notations are separated by indications of movement ("Walked for a quarter hour"). They are brief and sober when he describes the gradual changes in

the landscape as his point of view shifts (Azaïs points out several times that writing is superior to drawing and painting because it is able to include time). The notations are long and emphatic when he gives free rein to emotion, at which point they read more like theatrical monologues or lyrical poems than a diary: “What is that I hear! . . . What a terrifying noise echoed through the mountains! . . .” The general idea is to replace the reshaped time of the retrospective narrative with the suspense of a series of present moments ceaselessly opening into an unknown future.

The “harmonic” process consists of weaving the diary text (narrative of actions or thoughts) together with notes about the context (sensations or incidents that are contemporaneous with the time of writing). Azaïs had the original idea of having these notations printed in a smaller font and in parentheses, something like the stage directions in a play. He uses this process only seven times throughout the published work, but the reader quickly realizes that other passages could have been presented in the same way. For example, on 8 September (94), he is describing the mountain landscape that can be viewed from his “cabin” when: “(I interrupt myself to take note of my admiration for a charming little insect. It began by crawling on my hand; now it is making its way up my pen . . .),” and he describes the insect’s form in detail and gives full lyrical voice to his admiration. In spite of appearances, these parentheses are not digressions: they are just as relevant as the passage they interrupt. Indeed, can a diary have any other subject than whatever comes to the mind or attracts the attention of the person writing it? Our man is so reasonable that I won’t go so far as to say that he is intuiting automatic writing or the free association of ideas. But he has the makings of a mystic, and in my view he proves it less (as he thinks) through his feelings about the Pyrenees than through his fascination with writing.

His minute-by-minute diary from the Pyrenees in 1800 has one feature in common with the anniversary diary he kept from 1811 to 1844: the practice of writing as a spiritual exercise, whose purpose is to place you on the point of the moment—the attention paid to the present, the desire to leave a trace of it by placing those traces in a series, and to grasp something connected with eternity.

I have chosen to quote passages of metadiscourse on writing in which I believe that Azaïs shows his intelligence and intuition, rather than his descriptions of landscapes, which might have made him sound pompous and naïve. It is clear that the notebooks of Ramond de Carbonnières (1755–1827), the founder of Pyrenees studies, which were published in 1930, are much more precise and rich than Azaïs’s. I read their travel notebooks on Gavarnie (Ramond from 1792, Azaïs from 1800) side by side. Ramond is more curious



and detailed, more serious, and more interesting overall. He also notes down the times, but does so in the evening, after the fact. This is where Azaï's has his revenge: in the mystical vibration of the present. Granted, he was an incomplete genius: he did not have the artistry of a Eugénie de Guérin, who could convey the flavor of the moment in three words. But he had the idea that if it is useful to take geological and botanical samples, or to observe people's habitat and customs, then it is also not a waste of one's time when traveling to note the phantasmagorical image of a cloud playing with the peaks:

(I was going to turn my mind back to the Coteretz road; I will delay that return momentarily to take note of a beautiful coincidence that only happens in the mountains. I have in my sight one of the mountains that rings the Luz basin; a cloud with a clear-cut outline forming a horizontal band is cutting the mountain's summit off from its rounded base. This peak creates a lovely effect between the white of a cloud and the azure of the skies; the beautiful setting makes the form and color stand out even more sharply; the imagination has to place the summit onto its base because otherwise, separated from it by a dark vapor that cannot support anything, it presents the idea of an imposing mass cast up into space and suspended in mid-air.) (2 Sept., p. 56).

## THE “JOURNAL DE JEUNE FILLE” IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

*Matten: Saturday, August 1, 1992.* I am late. I feel somewhat guilty and embarrassed. I have been working on this subject for more than a year. I have conceived the book I am about to publish, *Le Moi des demoiselles* (1993), as a journal, to avoid a synthesis that I feared would be premature. I shall attempt to write this synthesis now . . . for you. I am in the Oberland, near Bern, Switzerland, sitting in a small bedroom with a low ceiling; the window, lined with geraniums, looks on the mountains; it is late in the afternoon and a thunderstorm is near. The simplest introduction is to tell you everything.

\* \* \* \* \*

It all began with a double surprise.

The first surprise was autobiographical. I had just published “*Cher cahier . . .*”, a collection of testimonies on contemporary diary practice. One of my readers sent me excerpts from the diary kept by her great-grandmother, Claire Pic (1848–1931). Young Claire had kept a diary from the age of fourteen until her marriage. The excerpts chosen by her granddaughter were entries in which Claire commented upon her keeping a diary. I was dazzled. Maybe an old prejudice about the trivial and sickly sentimental character of girls’ writings had been lingering at the back of my head. But all of it was swept away. Claire’s writing was perceptive, sensitive, and tragic at the same time. It took me almost a whole year of work, not only scientific, but also within and upon myself in order to clarify and accept the identifications that triggered my sudden delight and enthusiasm for Claire’s writing. Although I am male, born in 1938, I sensed between Claire’s diary and the diary I had kept as an adolescent a close resemblance that allowed me to feel in complete empathy with what was, after all, very different from my own experience as a diarist. I read the whole diary (four notebooks, 1,030 pages), and undertook a study of the numerous moral and physical self-portraits that Claire had drawn in the entries that preceded her engagement.

The second surprise was epistemological. Claire’s diary was captivating. When she began writing in 1863, she noted that her best friends also kept

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From “Le Je des jeunes filles.” *Poétique* 94 (Apr. 1993): 229–51. Rpt. *Le Moi des demoiselles* (Paris: Seuil, 1993). Trans. Martine Breillac. *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*. Ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1996. 107–122.

diaries. They lived in Bourg-en-Bresse, near Lyon, France. Thousands and thousands of girls must have kept diaries all over the country, throughout the century, thus providing quality and quantity. I felt that there must be some published studies of these diaries; yet, when I looked for one, there weren't any. Well, I thought, at least accounts of diaries in general must mention these young women's writings?

What these critical studies say I considered insignificant, and for a simple reason: these books (Leleu, Girard, and Didier) rely on published diaries, and even more specifically, diaries available in print or in library collections. The authors of these studies did not have the curiosity to read the diaries published in the nineteenth century, let alone to try to read the unpublished diaries that are abundant in family archives. I felt that these studies lacked knowledge or interest in the subject of girls' diaries—all the more surprising since in English and German-speaking countries, personal diaries have been cataloged and studied for a long time. Out of passion for Claire Pic and indignation at such ignorance, I decided to become the dedicated servant of French girls' diaries. I have been fulfilling this function for a year. Three challenges initially arose: I had to (1) find the diaries, (2) learn how to read them, and (3) learn how to talk about them.

### FINDING THE DIARIES

So far, I have located ninety-six of them, whereas books about diaries list only four or five. One can look for these writings in four different sources:

*I. Diaries printed during the nineteenth century (until 1914) (54 diaries).* This is the main source. I have explored it by going through the catalog of the Bibliothèque Nationale (code Ln 27, under "Biographies individuelles"). In most cases (47 diaries), the diary was published after its writer's death. The diarist died, often of tuberculosis; and after her death, her relatives found her diary and decided to publish it. Two purposes operated in conjunction: the desire to cultivate the memory of the deceased, but primarily, the desire to instruct the living, an edification task that pertains to mourning. The first diaries of this kind were a variation of a traditional genre: religious biographies. Until 1860, the texts that those biographies relied on were mostly "resolutions" or "rules for living" of little originality, which remained after a girl's death; the biographies relied also on fragments of correspondence.

Since 1860, families have published diaries, complete or partial. Most of the time, they have been published locally. The best ones have been bought (or appropriated) by specialized publishers in Paris or Lyon. A sort of market for religious biographies has been created, which means competition and the appearance of best-sellers. The most successful diaries published have been

those of Eugénie de Guérin (1805–48, diary published in 1863); of Alexandrine d'Alopeus (1808–48) and of her sister-in-law (*Récit d'une Sœur*, by Mme Craven, published in 1866); and of Marie-Edmée Pau (1845–71, published in 1876).

The problem with these publications is that their authenticity may often be questioned. The actual diaries, which have disappeared, must have been shaped in a particular way, purified, stylized to conform to the religious model. Very often, the diaries are presented in unrelated fragments, mixed with other documents, letters in particular, and drowned in the hagiography written by a priest or the family. These characteristics do not apply to the three works quoted above, but generally to the whole body of religious biographies.

After studying these texts, I extended my investigation to encompass exemplary works written for an audience of French girls: the novel-diaries. One of them, now totally forgotten, played a major role in the history of the diary: *Le Journal de Marguerite* (1858), by Mlle Monnot. I shall examine it below.

*II. Diaries printed in the twentieth century (15 diaries).* These are recent publications based on manuscripts, with a historical purpose; thus they are reliable. These diaries were published because the diarist or one of her close relatives or friends was famous, or because the document presented some interest for the history of mores and mentalities.

*III. Manuscripts preserved and cataloged in public archives (5 diaries).* I am unable to provide an exhaustive study of these manuscripts, but research in this particular field does not yield extensive data.

*IV. Manuscripts held in family archives (22 diaries).* Family archives are an excellent source of diaries, but it is difficult to reach the families and the diaries. I have made calls on radio stations, placed ads in newspapers, or called for diaries at conferences; but mostly, I have relied on personal connections and acquaintances.

Unpublished diaries or manuscripts published in the twentieth century paint a very different picture from those published in the nineteenth century. A reader goes from one surprise to another; from a standard work that follows a pattern to the excitement of writing in a natural voice, if one may say so. One realizes that in the nineteenth century, diarists were censored both ideologically and aesthetically. One sees small, tiny notebooks or several hundreds of pages, sometimes almost a thousand. Either there is no information about context, or the diary is only part of a well of family documents of great interest. One discovers terrible tragedies, or moments of happiness that have remained deliberately secret. One must negotiate with the families, take

care of preserving the manuscripts. It is a task far more absorbing than reading books in the Bibliothèque Nationale. More important, one has to learn how to read.

### LEARNING HOW TO READ THE DIARIES

First one has to decipher the handwriting, then learn how to understand the “code” of composition. I can read printed text fast, but girls’ diaries written in the nineteenth century do not allow this. It is impossible to skim the text or anticipate the next page. Large slanting handwriting, adorned capital letters, and the very light color of the fading ink prevent easy reading. In a few cases (rare enough, fortunately), I had to copy the text in order to read it. This slowness, however, is an advantage. The time I need to read the diary is also time I can take to understand. It allows for more empathy. I withhold my judgment, and I learn to listen. Reading a handwritten diary brings forth a lot of emotions. I can read the signs written on that particular day, without knowing about the future. A diary in print, on the contrary, is constrained by a future already determined by typography.

The main difficulties, however, are rhetorical.

*The implicit.* Very few diarists begin with introducing themselves and providing information about their background, milieu, or personality and appearance. For them, these things go without saying. A century later, because one does not know this context, it can be difficult to understand the text. It is even true for chronicle diaries, and more so for spiritual diaries.

*Repetitions.* The first task of the editor is to eliminate repetitions. Strangely, repetitions do not bother me while I am reading handwritten diaries: in fact, they give a certain thickness to the experience of time I share with the diarist.

*Gaps.* There are accidental gaps, due to the loss of some notebooks: one has sometimes the beginning, or the end, or what is in between. There are also real gaps; when the writer kept a diary only during certain periods of her life, the rest of her experience is buried in silence.

The major rhetorical difficulty lies in learning how to decipher the code or thematic framework within which the diary articulates itself. These diaries, in which sometimes the writer declares that she will “confide everything to her little notebook,” appear to be extremely self-censored. All that pertains to the body, to sexuality, remains outside the scope of the diary. A girl could keep a diary, without any interruption, between the ages of eight and seventeen, without mentioning at all the transformations brought about by puberty. The expression of feelings and emotions is usually extremely reserved. Even in a diary written for the diarist herself, preferences, inclinations, affections

cannot be voiced until love has been sanctioned socially by an engagement. The need to express herself, before public acknowledgment, must find its way into indirect allusions, general statements, or vague lyrical outbursts. This kind of language can be so mysterious that it can be decoded only with the benefit of hindsight when, the engagement concluded, the girl expresses herself explicitly. Since most of these inclinations do not lead to formal engagements, many sighs and dreams remain invisibly interwoven in texts that impatient readers will find uninteresting or tiresome.

Generally speaking, it is difficult to imagine a personality by reading a diary. Keeping a diary might correspond to only one type of activity in its writer's life, and have limited functions and meanings. Diaries conceived as daily chronicles do not mention the internal life of their writers, but it would be audacious indeed to imagine that there is no internal life.

More than many others, diaries by French girls resist surface reading, all the more so because they are often written as an assignment and follow ideological and formal patterns that one can trace from one diary to the other. These repetitions could weary the reader. On the contrary, one has to remain watchful, be sensitive to the variations in the use of set patterns, and to the writer's peculiar way of modifying or inverting these patterns.

I may be exaggerating the difficulties a little, but barely. At the same time, I am displaying my attitudes or hypotheses for reading. When I open a diary, I ask myself how well the girl will come out of it; I look for her attempts to demonstrate a personal tone and voice, which happens, of course; I observe how she constructs her identity. Otherwise, I try to discover the "code," the innuendoes, the ellipses. . . . If nothing emerges, I have to resign myself: some girls feel comfortable with following the set pattern.

### **LEARNING HOW TO TALK ABOUT DIARIES**

First and foremost, it is a matter of tone. The experience of sympathy, empathy, of listening to the voices in those diaries is difficult to convey in writing. One has to overcome the general contempt and condescension that surround the phenomenon of nineteenth-century girls' diaries. Many other scholars have never read any of these diaries, yet they are always convinced that these diaries are a recreational activity, like stitching or playing the piano: meek, sickly sentimental, and boring. The committed and tragic discourse I shall adopt about these girls' attempts to achieve an identity is not well accepted, because of a prejudice common to the extremes: the most "macho" men and the most "feminist" women. For instance, I found it strange that the French feminist movement never became interested in these diaries, which

offer many opportunities for captivating analyses. But this lack of interest is understandable: these feminists focused on militant and prominent personalities who gave to the current movement a historical identity, and paid limited attention to the “herd” of more or less obedient and untalented victims.

Another problem arises: the literary value of the diaries. Readers often ask if I think that the diaries are of publishable quality, if I have found other Marie Bashkirtseffs. It is a non-issue. In France, currently, there is no market for girls’ diaries; it is impossible to buy a copy of Eugénie de Guérin’s or Marie Bashkirtseff’s diaries in any bookstore. More important, publication is not my goal. What I want to circumscribe and understand is a collective writing adventure. My task is to decode the meaning of those texts within their contexts. I don’t have to rate them or locate potential publications.

As a matter of fact, I started from the opposite stance, assuming that every diary is interesting. They don’t have to be evaluated like literary works, which they are not. This nondiscriminatory approach is sometimes a source of irony and astonishment in academic circles. But a historian does not have to select material.

One cannot help preferring certain works and feeling reluctant toward others. I was very disturbed by my natural distrust of religious discourse and spiritual diaries, which constitute a sizable proportion of the corpus. I have great difficulties in making a clear distinction between genuinely spiritual experience and what I call “empty rhetoric.”

Perhaps my greatest difficulty is discussing texts that my readers will never be able to read. Most of these diaries are inaccessible, buried in the Bibliothèque Nationale or in family archives. There are many of them, about a hundred, and some very long. How to convey such a profusion?

In *Le Moi des demoiselles*, I tried to solve this problem in two different ways. First, I set up my reading itself as a journal, kept from July 1991 until July 1992. I hope that the identification process will produce a chain reaction, the readers identifying with me as I am identifying with nineteenth-century diarists; this journal on diaries should serve as a bridge between experiences.

Second, I provided the information I had discovered in different forms: sketches of diaries drawn in a few pages; a chronological bibliography of diaries with a brief note on each text; and an anthology of texts about diaries and diary practice, all extracts from education manuals for girls, from model novels, or from actual diaries.

I wanted to convey the experience without laying it down in a simplifying synthesis based on general observations. I hope to avoid this pitfall now by summarizing the main features I have discovered in the corpus of diaries.

### EVOLUTION THROUGHOUT THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In France, girls have apparently been keeping diaries since the 1780s. The first three diaries recorded are those of Albertine de Saussure (born in 1766, diary in 1783), of Germaine Necker (born in 1766, diary in 1785), and of Lucile Duplessis (born in 1770, diary in 1788). The first two diarists were from Geneva. Despite its brevity, Lucile Duplessis-Desmoulin's diary, whose pages are scattered in several different collections, has never been published in its entirety.

I have not yet found any diaries by girls written between 1789 and 1814, during the French Revolution or the Empire (Napoléon's rule). Nor have I found many diaries written under the Bourbon Restoration, from 1814 to 1830. Two chronicle diaries provide an account of the events of 1814: one is by Marie-Adèle Audouard de Montviol, the other is by Caroline Le Fort. In addition, there is a chronicle of social life, by Amélie Cyvoct, and an account of a transatlantic journey, by Aurore Saint-Quantin. I have found no personal diaries, however.

Thus, it appears that the trend that appeared in the 1780s had been literally stopped by the French Revolution, returning only forty-odd years later. In 1829, Alexandrine d'Alopeus's diary, written by a girl of Swedish descent, gives new momentum to the interrupted movement.

A forty-year gap. Is it an actual one or the result of a gap in the information about diaries? There are indications that girls were still keeping diaries during those forty years. Alix de Roys, Lamartine's mother, kept a diary before her marriage in 1789; Aurore Dupin, while staying at the Couvent des Dames Anglaises around 1820, was called "Calepin" (notebook) by her young classmates; Marie d'Agoult, born in 1805 of a German mother, wrote in her memoirs: "In my younger years, I had felt the necessity to keep a record of my impressions, in the German manner."

Obtaining diaries containing this kind of information depends on two factors: the preservation of the documents themselves, and the knowledge and communication of their existence. One may assume that the common practice in the late eighteenth century was the destruction of such documents. The diaries were lost or destroyed by the diarists themselves, or burned at their death or on the occasion of later inheritance transactions. Nonetheless, I managed to locate about a hundred diaries dating from more than a century ago, which is a considerable improvement over the general ignorance that prevailed in the field. In comparison to the actual number of diaries written and preserved, however, the number I have discovered is pathetically small. Moreover, the further back one goes in time, the more likely the diaries are



to have disappeared (which could account in part for the gap between 1789 and 1829).

Yet, it seems that keeping a diary became a more common activity only from the July Monarchy, on or after 1830. One may put forth a simple explanation: the development of education for girls. A correlation exists between girls' education and diary practice since, as will be demonstrated later, keeping a diary has become a method of instruction. It is often required of girls who are educated at home. In boarding schools, on the contrary, diaries are generally prohibited, but they have the attraction of a secret activity and are objects of imitation and emulation. A gregarious aspect is added to this supposedly solitary activity. In 1841, the young Louise Ancelot, at the Couvent des Dames de Picpus, noted in her diary that in her class, diaries had become the latest fashion. Finally, the evolution of the Church encourages the writing of particular forms of diaries during retreats, along with "resolutions" and "rules for living." I have found about a dozen diaries written between 1830 and 1848; this is not many, but they offer enough variety to illustrate a widespread phenomenon. Diary-keeping was not a highly codified practice, except in the religious domain. Romantic girls showed greater variety in tone and the use of a natural voice than those of the following generation.

After the romantic generation came the years of "moral order." The 1850–80 period has been more favorable for my research: I have located thirty-six diaries. There are three possible explanations for the existence of more diaries: (1) more girls started keeping diaries; (2) those diaries have been better preserved; and (3) for the first time in the history of the diary, certain pieces from diaries were published. Within ten years, these unacknowledged writings became a literary genre with its own canon and classics.

In 1858, the publication of Mlle Monnot's *Journal de Marguerite* was a landmark event. This novel was written as a diary that narrates two years in the life of a girl around the time of her First Communion, between the ages of ten and twelve. Of course, the novel is also a treatise of practical morality. But at the same time, *Journal de Marguerite* is a captivating novel: a travel story written when Marguerite's family left for La Réunion, a moving portrait when Marguerite discovered death, losing a young brother, her best friend, and her father. More important, it is the perfect diary, well kept and narrated, and also self-reflexive. Owing to the success of *Journal de Marguerite*, Mlle Monnot wrote a sequel in 1864, *Marguerite à vingt ans* [Twenty-year old Marguerite], in which Marguerite finally entered a convent. Mlle Monnot managed to reproduce with credibility the style of a child, natural, simple, naïve sometimes, while preserving the confidence and steadiness of an adult's writing. She codified the writing of diaries that had been kept since 1830. The *Journal de*

*Marguerite* was read with enthusiasm by several generations of little girls, until 1914. Sometimes it brought them despair: they found the model overwhelming because real girls do not generally write such long and beautiful diaries.

In 1862, reality overtook fiction with the publication of Eugénie de Guérin's diary. Eugénie was hardly an adolescent when she began her diary at the age of twenty-nine, but her writing immediately began to be used as a model for girls: "There remains from the life of Eugénie de Guérin as she herself related it, a great lesson in moral strength and resignation. . . . This work is an admirable source of learning. We might further say that it is very pure and touching reading" (*Journal des demoiselles* 105). This diary has a pure and musical style, strength, and resignation.

One finds the same combination of qualities in *Récit d'une Sœur* [A sister's story/story by a Sister, 1866]: Mme Craven composes a sort of bouquet or anthology, using diaries written by her sisters, her brother, and her sister-in-law Alexandrine d'Alopeus in the 1830s. Today the reader is struck by the mournful atmosphere pervading these volumes; as in the *Journal de Marguerite*, death is a source of obsession and fascination. This sort of education teaches young female writers how to die well rather than how to live well.

*Marguerite*, Eugénie de Guérin, and *Récit d'une Sœur* soon became classics, and were recommended reading for girls, according to their mothers and teachers. From 1863 on, until 1914, it became common to publish a diary after the death of its young writer, as a source of instruction for her peers. For publishers specializing in religious writing, a new market had been created, and the competition was fierce. Priests from provincial parishes took a chance and submitted diaries for publication. One of the most successful works was *Le Journal de Marie-Edmée* (1874). Marie-Edmée Pau (1845–71) was a girl from Nancy who had decided to become an artist, specializing in drawing, and to achieve a personal destiny. But because she was also very religious (she wrote a book about Joan of Arc), her diary was published as another instance of traditional edification. I was astounded when I started reading it, first because it is very well written, with as much musicality as Eugénie de Guérin's diary, but with a lighter rhythm and more variations of tone: life, not death, breathes through Marie-Edmée's work. Marie-Edmée talks about her diary: "My diary is like a mosaic in which I insert a tile of all sorts of colors; it is the tree on which Robinson Crusoe carved a mark each day, and which he used to count the years spent in exile; it is made of nothings . . . yet very precious to me, as precious as all that is unique and whose loss I could not recover" (April 19, 1863).

My second surprise originated mostly in the ambiguity of Marie-Edmée's discourse: religious, of course, but also, maybe in a shy way, clearly *feminist*.

She is eighteen, and has decided despite her relatives' advice to become an artist:

I shall go abroad and lead a bohemian life, I shall become an artist. Come what may. Yes indeed, this is what I need in order to live; otherwise, like many others, I shall drown in the unnerving calm and the unacknowledged selfishness of a spinster. I would soon dwindle to nothing in the stifling atmosphere of an ordinary existence. What I need is space and freedom; what I need is an independent life whose responsibility rests with myself alone; what I need is to do away with the support of friends and family, in order to find strength in my own will. How inconvenient to be a woman for such great schemes! (May 1, 1863).

I would love to see a new edition of this text, with a perspective radically different from the 1874 edition.

Because it has to summarize an entire century of history, this short synthesis probably overlooks crucial issues like the flavor of the texts and the real adventure I experienced in discovering them. An obstacle appears: the limitations imposed by listing the works under certain periods. What I call the "moral order" diary (1850–80) had in fact an influence until 1914 or even later, but was fraught with tensions and contradictions. Diaries published after their writer's death are not only models for edification. A diary might be published because it is beautiful, like Caroline Normand's diary, published in 1865. Spiritual diaries sometimes display instances of feminist discourse. Moreover, society evolved, slowly, along with the system of education. Around 1880 a major shift seems to have occurred. The main outcome of this shift, although its effects were not felt until later, was the creation of public secondary education for girls (Camille Sée act, 1880). I found diaries written in secondary school around 1900 or 1910. They are similar to current diaries: their authors are girls who have the official opportunity of a professional life ahead of them. The shift that occurred in the 1880s is most explicit in two works that marked their times.

In 1881, Edmond de Goncourt, in his preface to *La Faustin*, sent out a message to his female readers. He wanted to write a realistic novel about girls' lives. He asked his female readers not to tell him about extraordinary adventures, but about

their personal impressions as young and very young girls, details on the simultaneous awakening of intelligence and the consciousness of one's beauty, their confessions on the new being born in the adolescent girl after Communion, their confessions on the perversions of music, their long reflections on the feelings of a young girl when she first goes into the world, their analyses of feelings in unacknowledged love, their revelations of delicate emotions and worthy reserve, and, finally, all of the unknown 'feminité' which lies in the depths of a woman's soul, ignored by husbands and lovers throughout their lives.

With keen psychological insight, E. de Goncourt did not ask his female readers to send the diaries they kept in their adolescence. Only now, with distance and experience, can they unveil what their diaries quite appropriately kept silent or revealed indirectly. He requested confessions but with a preimposed framework. Yet, other girls did not look like the sketch drawn by Goncourt. His call for documents itself partook of the mythology as illustrated by his attribution to nature—with the newly coined word “feminité”—that today appears dated.

Goncourt received confessions from his female readers after all, and even a diary that helped him in the writing of his novel *Chérie* (1884), where he drew a fine portrait of a girl who lived under Napoléon III, during the Second Empire (1851–70). *Chérie* was a normal girl of her times: she read *Le Journal de Marguerite* as a child; as an adolescent, for a year she kept a diary recording her vague emotions. The diary that Goncourt attributed to her authorship is stylized but far less unrealistic than those found in edification novels. If one has been able, like myself, to read a great number of actual diaries, the gap between them and the fictional ones appears fascinating. Goncourt’s study contributed to the creation of a critical image of the girl, by extracting her from a normalizing world and considering her as an object of analysis, even if it did not occur to him that society transformed females from the dominant class into respectful and obedient young women.

Can this critical stance be internalized and assumed by a girl in her own diary? And if that is the case, shouldn’t it lead to revolt? At the beginning of my analysis, I mentioned two books: the second one is Marie Bashkirtseff’s diary (1858–84, published in 1887). It is difficult to discuss it for many reasons. First, the greater part of it remains unpublished. The 1887 edition covers only a third of the diary, in a collection of excerpts sometimes assembled incoherently and always heavily censored. The manuscripts that are part of the Bibliothèque Nationale collection are being transcribed, but the overall length of the work will make publication difficult. Moreover, this text is at odds with the tradition I have just described, an “abnormal” work, ahead of its time. Its publication in 1887 created a major shock. Against the musical and subdued image of Eugénie de Guérin’s diary, it is a violent, invigorating explosion of narcissistic sincerity, a rebellion against the conditions imposed on girls and women. Marie, a member of a wealthy Russian family that had settled in France, was looking for love first, but trying to escape both marriage and free love; she exhausted her emotional energy in dangerous flirtations and sentimental impasses. She looked for that self-realization that love cannot provide in artistic creation. She enrolled at the Académie Julian, and learned painting; when she died of tuberculosis, at the age of twenty-six, she

had managed to be acknowledged professionally by her peers. But she knew that if she died young, her claim to fame would be her diary, which she had been keeping since the age of fifteen, filling eighty-five notebooks and thousands of pages. In May 1884, six months before her death, she wrote a preface to her diary. This preface, published in the 1887 edition, is a sort of “manifesto” for the diary, similar to what the introduction to Rousseau’s *Confessions* is for autobiography. This manifesto implies, in a departure from the tradition described above, that the diary was written in order to be read one day by the general public. According to Marie Bashkirtseff, writing it for general reading did not diminish its sincerity—quite the contrary! The preface concludes as follows:

If I were to die thus, suddenly, victim of an illness? . . . I might not know that my life is in danger: people will hide it from me, and after I die, they will rummage through my belongings, they will find my diary, my family will burn it after they have read it, and soon, nothing will remain of me . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing. I have always been most horrified by this idea: live and be so ambitious, suffer, cry, fight, and in the end, oblivion! . . . oblivion!

. . . As if I had never been. If I do not live long enough to become famous, this diary will be interesting for the naturalists; it is always curious to see the life of a woman, day after day, without pretense, as if nobody in the world were ever to read it, but written, all the same, in order to be read one day. . . . For I know that *you* will think I am a very nice person. . . . And I am telling everything . . . everything. If I did not, why write a confession? As it is, *you* will see that I am telling everything. . . .

This diary is a complete subversion of the “moral order” diary, a proud claim to self-value, a commitment to revealing the truth, a message for future readers instead of reserve, indirect hints, and the distant looming of private life. Marie Bashkirtseff’s diary displays some of the changes that will appear progressively during the 1880–1914 period. But it is ahead of its time, as the Eiffel Tower was in 1889. It foreshadows a line of diaries where introspection, active contestation of the condition of women, and interest in writing stand out as defining features.

Marking the way to modernity with the help of a few precursory works is to some extent an illusion. History is slow at times: “moral order” continued to be the rule for part of the dominant classes even after 1880. The deep transformation illustrated in the diaries mentioned above is largely due to the improvement of secondary education for girls. Progressively they are offered professional perspectives similar to those available to boys. These developments do not reach their full effects until after the First World War.

History has shadowy areas. For the 1880–1914 period, it may be difficult to obtain the diaries kept by the families because the events narrated in them

are too close. For the early nineteenth century, the destruction of diaries prevented a full assessment of the practice; for the beginning of the twentieth century, withholdings do. One is either too early or too late. My corpus provides, I think, a fairly representative view of diaries until 1880 or 1890; for what comes afterward, I feel as if I have, through random encounters, done only surface exploration; the bulk of the subject is still to be uncovered. Hence my hesitation in concluding this overview. My only certainty, although I am unable to prove it, is the movement toward democratization and secularization of diaries between 1880 and 1914. This trend, however, does not alter a significant feature that I have not discussed thus far: the wide discrepancy, throughout the nineteenth century, between girls' and boys' diaries. . . .

I shall stop here, at the threshold of a larger research project. What I have stated about the common ignorance of young women's diaries also applies to women's diaries in general. To tell the truth, outside the sphere of famous literary figures, this generalization also applies to men's diaries. As a matter of fact, the entire field of ordinary, everyday writing remains very much unknown in France. Too often historians become interested in such documents only for the information they contain, neglecting the history of the writing practice itself. Literary interpreters, as for them, would seem to overlook texts of little value. When I talk about my research, I can see that people pity me. Some, worried, ask, "But for you, where does literature stop?" For me, it never stops. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

*Le Cadière d'Azur: September 1, 1992. Deadline.* I am writing the last words of this overview that I started exactly a month ago. Why did I frame the text with two journal entries? To recall that it is a *work-in-progress*. The embarrassment I mentioned at the beginning is not a pretense. How do I generalize, how do I make assertions, when every new diary discovered changes my views and recalls the extent of what I still don't know? Since August 1, I have read Eugénie Couturier's (born 1853) adolescent diary: 8 notebooks and 850 pages. She was the daughter of a physician in Vienne, whom she always calls "this good little father." She was raised in the "moral order" system, the *Journal de Marguerite* type. . . . When she did not keep her diary carefully, she was not allowed to take Holy Communion the following Sunday. It made me blush for my own critical words. It can be asserted that when this type of education is implemented with love, it gives good results. Her granddaughter, who gave me the diary, described Eugénie as a generous person, liberal, happy, and what I read also convinced me. My impressions were the same when I read the diary kept by a young woman from Aix-en-Provence, Elise Chaumery de Sorval,

who was sixteen in 1896 (4 notebooks, 220 pages). Then I read her grandmother's diaries, Julie Arnaud (born 1825), and so few are the texts from the romantic period that I had a sort of revelation, in particular with the diary she keeps in secret from her fiancé. Also I have just received the description of the diary of Yvonne Doux de Labro, born in 1884 (15 notebooks, 2,384 pages) which I have not read yet; she had a passion for politics, she fell in love, never married, and eventually became a composer.

I am in Provence; through the wrought-iron bars of the window, above the screen of my PowerBook, I can see the vineyards and the olive trees; the wind, the mistral, has been blowing strong since last night; the simplest conclusion is to stop, now.

### GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

#### BOOKS WRITTEN IN FRENCH ABOUT DIARIES

- Didier, Béatrice. *Le Journal intime*. Paris: PU de France, 1976.
- Girard, Alain. *Le Journal intime et la notion de personne*. Paris: PU de France, 1963.
- Hébert, Pierre. *Le Journal intime au Québec*. Montréal: Fides, 1988.
- "Le Journal intime et ses formes littéraires." Actes du Colloque de Septembre 1975. Geneva: Droz, 1978.
- "Le Journal Personnel." Actes du Colloque de Nanterre, May 1990. Nanterre: Publidix, 1990.
- Lejeune, Philippe. "*Cher cahier . . .*": *Témoignages sur le journal personnel*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.
- . *Le Moi des demoiselles: Enquête sur le journal de jeune fille*. Paris: Seuil, 1993.
- . "La Pratique du journal personnel." *Enquête: Cahiers de Sémiotique Textuelle* 17 (1990).
- Leleu, Michèle. *Les Journaux intimes*. Paris: PU de France, 1952.
- Pachet, Pierre. *Les Baromètres de l'âme: Naissance du journal intime*. Paris: Hatier, 1990.

#### GIRLS' DIARIES

For a complete list and a detailed introduction of all the diaries located, see the bibliography in Lejeune, *Le Moi des demoiselles* (cited above). The diaries are presented in the order of the writers' births. Between parentheses, after the girl's name, the dates of the diary's composition are given.

1766. Germaine Necker (1785). *Cahiers Staëliens* 28 (1980): 55–79.
1766. Albertine de Saussure (1783). *Le Mois suisse* Nov.-Dec. 1939; Jan. 1940.
1770. Lucile Desmoulins (1788–1790). *Journal 1788–1793*. Paris: Éditions ds Cendres, 1995.
- 18••. Aurore Saint-Quantin (1824–1835). *Un voyage de Nantes à Cayenne en 1824–1825*. Caillé Jacques. Montpellier, France: Dehan, 1975.
1804. Amélie Cyvoct (1822–1823). *Revue des deux mondes* 1 Dec. 1922.

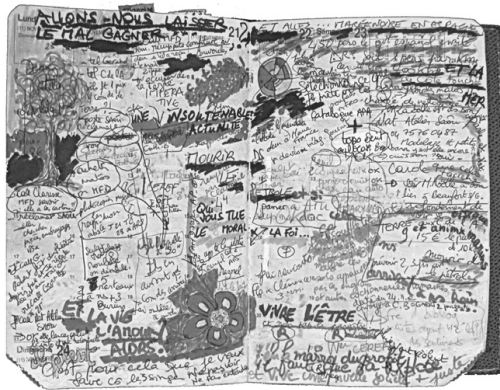
1805. Eugénie de Guérin (1834–1840). *Journal et lettres*. Paris: Didier, 1862. Complete critical edition. Paris: Lecoffre, 1934.
1808. Alexandrine d'Alopeus (1829–1836). *Récit d'une sœur: Souvenirs de famille recueillis par Mme Augustus Craven, née La Ferronays*. 2 vols. Paris: Claye, 1866.
1825. Louise Ancelot (1841). *Histoire d'une âme*. Georges Lachaud. Paris, 1888.
1825. Julie Arnaud (1844–1846 and 1847). Unpublished; family archives.
1841. Caroline Normand (1857–1861). *Souvenirs et pensées d'une jeune fille*. Rennes, France. 1865.
1845. Marie-Edmée Pau (1859–1871). *Le Journal de Marie-Edmée Pau*. Paris: Plon, 1876.
1848. Claire Pic (1862–1869). Unpublished; family archives.
1853. Eugénie Couturier (1864–1875). Unpublished; family archives.
1858. Marie Bashkirtseff (1873–1884). *Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff*. Paris: Charpentier, 1887. Reedited in 1980, Paris: Mazarine, out of print. Manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale collection, Paris.
1879. Elise Chaumery de Sorval (1896). Unpublished; family archives. (Elise is Julie Arnaud's granddaughter; Julie was born in 1825).
1884. Yvonne Doux de Labro (1902–1912, 1915–1916). Unpublished; private collection.



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## PART III

### THE DIARY: THEORY



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## THE DIARY ON TRIAL

Turn the page and read the indictment.

It seems the diary is *unwholesome, hypocritical, cowardly, worthless, artificial, sterile, shriveling, feminine, etc.*

You are horrified at first. It makes you want to fly to the defense of the poor diary, as though someone were being mugged on the street right in front of you. Surely it can't have that many faults! What else are they going to pin on it?

But by the time you get to the postscript, another disturbing idea has begun to dawn on you: there is no way that people can have said the diary had all those faults! No doubt the quotations are all accurate, but each of them says just one thing: putting them all together makes them look as though they come from a single source. There must be some favorable views of the diary, but they are not quoted alongside the criticisms. Finally, the proposition that the list of criticisms could go on indefinitely reveals the truth: we are dealing with a paranoid collection. Rousseau is not dead! It's the "gentlemen's" plot he raved about. Classic paranoia, based on a clever and misleading assemblage of very real quotations.

And besides, let's be honest: taken one by one, are these criticisms really groundless? Are the people who made them imbeciles or madmen? I see great wise men on the list (Goethe, Ernest Renan), humanist novelists (Jules Romains, Georges Duhamel), an intellectual renowned for his profundity (Maurice Blanchot), but what is worse, an expert on the subject (Béatrice Didier), and worse yet, the defendant himself making a full confession: *Amiel!* No, where there is smoke, there is fire.

But to be really fair, we have to follow through. What list of defenses can we put up against this list of charges? Is there, as in Rousseau's *Dialogues*, a positive feature to match each negative one, and what would it be? Let's try: *wholesome, honest, courageous, great, natural, fertile, expanding, masculine, etc.* I don't dare continue reversing the postscript. This list gives just a small taste of what fans of the diary would say, but it reveals some aspects of the detractors' ideology.

Where do we find what fans of the diary say about it? For one, in the dozens of letters sent to the Association pour l'Autobiographie in 1996 following

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"Le journal en procès." "L'Autobiographie en procès." Spec. issue of *RITM* 14 (1997): 57–78.

articles in *Libération* and *Télérama*. Or in the letters from the forty-seven correspondents in “*Cher cahier . . .*”. These are varied, nuanced texts full of desires and doubts, passions and reservations, simply because they are discussing something they know about, something complicated.

### THE DIARY IS . . .

#### UNHEALTHY

It is a dangerous genre, at times unwholesome, a genre that is usually chosen by people who can't write anything else and which, unless exceptionally well done, must be condemned a priori to some extent. We feel that a man who has time to keep a personal diary has not properly grasped how very wide the world is, and what a huge number of things there are to know about. . . . A person who is thirsty to know reality is drawn outside of himself. That is why a genius like Victor Hugo never had the leisure time to look at himself.

Ernest Renan, “Henri-Frédéric Amiel”  
*Journal des débats*, 30 Sept. and 7 Oct. 1884

#### HYPOCRITICAL

The idea of writing about their lives seems totally outlandish to most of them. Keeping a diary may even be perceived as a “hypocritical” act: if you write things, that means you are hiding something, and honesty (or honor) requires that you say things “out loud” and “face to face.” . . . “No, not me, no, no (laughter) I liked to say it out loud, that's how I am, when I have something to say, I say it; I don't write it down, I'm honest, I say it!” (Woman, CAP, 54 years).

Bernard Lahire, *La Raison des plus faibles* (1993), 149  
(survey of wage-earners with low cultural capital)

#### COWARDLY

I do not believe that the diary, when made into a system and practiced rigidly, can escape at least a tinge of cowardice or a small measure of bitterness. Anyone who relieves himself in this way has not quite had the courage to tell other people, or to say in front of them, the things that he believed were really true. Also, he is almost always seeking revenge. He puts things down in his secret notebook that he knows, nine times out of ten, will never be refuted. No matter how little experience he has had of life, he flatters himself in some vague way that his writing will never perish, that some day it will be an authority on the people and events it tells about, that the people involved will no longer be around to defend themselves, and that the surviving eyewitnesses

will be intimidated because a document has an advantage over a memory. It is a delayed stab in the back; it is a time bomb.

Jules Romains, *La Douceur de la vie* (1939), 6–7

#### WORTHLESS

The diary has a sort of double worthlessness, each of which happily compensates for the other. Someone who is doing nothing with his life writes that he is doing nothing, and voilà: he has done something after all. Someone who is distracted from writing by daily trivialities comes back to talk about them, complain about them, or delight in them, and there you have it: his day has been filled up. . . . In the end, one has neither lived nor written, a double failure that gives the diary its tension and solemnity.

Maurice Blanchot, “Le journal intime et le récit,”  
*Le Livre à venir* (1959), 225–26

#### ARTIFICIAL

This confessional delirium gives the conscience—and therefore the “diary”—access to thoughts that would never have seen the light of day in a spontaneously moral life, thoughts that thereby lose any reasonable relationship with the rest of the soul and with the world. One can only imagine the misrepresentations and perversions that this practice promotes. . . . How many people, carried away by these orgies of secret literature, manage to fashion themselves into an artificial character that they must then play and sustain!

Georges Duhamel, *Le Notaire du Havre* (1933), 29–30

#### STERILE

If carnivores make for mediocre game because they live off of other animals, then any animal that lives off itself would make the worst eating of all. A cat that chases its tail is a rather ridiculous creature. Well! Doesn't a private diary show us someone who is engaging in both of those sterile occupations: chasing after himself and making a meal of himself?

Henri-Frédéric Amiel, *Journal*, 19 December 1867

#### SHRIVELING

What a man knows of himself, his feelings and observations, represents the least part of his existence. . . . The soul is unaware of itself in normal conditions, and only painful impressions remind it of itself. Any man who speaks about himself and his past will be tempted to write down the painful details, and when he does so, if I may put it this way, his personality becomes shriveled.

Goethe, letter to Lavater, 4 October 1782 (about his diary)

## FEMININE

There is a certain “femininity” to diary writing, and it is precisely this passivity, this casualness, this rather soft fluidity that bears some similarity to an image of femininity that was established in the nineteenth century. . . . Although we are not equating femininity with pederasty, homosexual tendencies can also be seen in diarists. Not all of them acted on, of course. These tendencies may be latent or may only crop up periodically. The names Jouhandeau or Gide spring to mind. One might wonder, too, whether it is that sort of unconscious, repressed drive that keeps diarists in a permanent state of indecisiveness about marrying. If the reader has followed our reasoning and agrees that diarists are fixated on the mother and refuse to confront the oedipal conflict, then he must agree that our analysis is consistent and that these diverse aspects of diary writing are necessarily connected.

Béatrice Didier, *Le Journal intime* (1976), 106–107

Exercise: using the works list in the bibliography, or others, find quotations that use and illustrate the following adjectives: CHILDISH - BORING - IMMATURE - ONANISTIC - LAZY - FANATICAL - GOSSIPY - NARCISSISTIC - FAILED — etc.

Let us follow their example and steer clear of simplifications either for or against. Because “for” simplifications exist too: I am thinking of American self-help books that praise the diary as the royal road to “personal growth” and a universal key to happiness. And the “against” simplification is not pure paranoid reconstruction. Harry Mathews has just published a novel, *The Journalist* (Dalkey Archives, 1997), that is based on the most anti-diary of clichés: the diarist character (who also happens to suffer—indeed!—from diarrhea) has a mania for writing and classifying that keeps him from living: the more notes he takes, the less he understands what is happening around and inside him; and he ends up going crazy.

I will explore these complications in two parts: the network of misunderstandings and the history of the debates.

### MISUNDERSTANDINGS

## AMBIVALENCE

The trial of the diary does not merely oppose two camps, for and against. It takes place at the same time within the ranks of people on the “for” side. Here are several examples, beginning with my own.

As a teenager, I loved my diary and I thought it was useless. I was just as hard on it as I was on myself, and probably just as self-indulgent. It was the sign of my failures, in life and in writing, and it was my only hope. The rest of my life, and my career as a researcher, have been marked by two recantations.

I hated my diary with a passion and gave it up. Around the age of thirty, I threw myself avidly into the practice and study of autobiography *against the diary*. Autobiography was not only the pact but also the structuring and the seduction. It was a search for meaning, the creation of a form, against inconsistency and hackneyed repetition. One day, early on, I even wrote a parody of the diary as a sort of exorcism. For fifteen years (1971–1986), I forged ahead. True enough, my (fragmentary) autobiographical writings, which had dates on them and which I did nothing with, piled up in my wake like another diary. I gave up on those too. I had long fallow periods, or droughts. That was part of my rhythm. A person can live without writing, floating weightlessly or going with the flow, propelled by inertia or drifting along. I was lucky enough to have two registers of expression. My university publications kept the flame alive and served as an outlet. They brought me a form of social recognition without the burden of veracity. It is better to talk about the pact than to keep it. Around the age of fifty, I suddenly returned to the practice of diary writing with a passion. I cherished my typewriter and adored my computer: a mid-life crisis! But I learned how to write this diary like a text, and to structure it like an autobiography. It no longer kept me wrapped up in myself, since at the same time I was doing one survey after another on other people's practices. And now here I am a militant, an apostle of diary writing! I wonder when the third recantation will come?

I am testing out the psychologist Edmond Marc's analyses on myself: defenses, barriers, bold moves and retreats, fear of other people's privacy if it sends me back to my own when I try to avoid it, or proselytism that embarrasses or irritates others (7–18).

These fluctuations throughout my life are matched by another division: the division between writing and reading. I might as well admit it; I don't really like reading writers' published diaries. It has always seemed like a false genre to me. That's not fair, I know, but there it is. I only fell in love with diaries when I began reading them in manuscript. On the other hand, I have noticed that many writers who are afraid of keeping a diary for themselves (for fear of weakening their genius) smack their lips over other writers' (some other writers') diaries. They sip them like liqueurs, which turns my stomach.

I look around myself and see recantations and ambivalence at every turn. A person keeps a diary passionately during his adolescence, or when going through a crisis. Time passes. It resurfaces again and then seems *ridiculous, pitiful, idiotic, stupid, absurd, sterile, useless, insipid, mediocre, mawkish, and irritating* (*La Pratique* 119). The author immediately tosses it in the garbage without a second thought. People who insult the diary are often former diarists who have moved on. The same logic leads people to say that the diary is an old-fashioned practice on its way to extinction, when everything shows



the opposite is true. I asked a fifty-year-old person who was making that argument whether she had ever kept a diary. An embarrassed blush: “Yes, but I was fifteen.” A sin of youth!

Here’s another one: a person does not have to have given up on a diary to believe that the diary is dead or cast aspersions on it. As chance would have it, one of the sets of personal papers I have received for archiving belonged to Marie Rauber, one of the first primary school inspectors in the late nineteenth century. They contained, among other things, the offprint of a vehement article she published in 1896 in the *Journal des instituteurs* opposing the use of diaries as a teaching tool, an article that broadens into a general condemnation of the personal diary as a disease, based on the deplorable examples of Michelet, Eugénie de Guérin, Amiel, Goncourt on the one hand, but also on a personal diary several thousand pages long that she kept from 1887 to 1909. Is this sheer schizophrenia? No. She likely felt that her diary, the vengeful chronicle of a pioneering career, was different from other people’s whining.

It gets even better. The private diary is one of the few literary genres that have given rise to studies that are both in-depth and hostile, or at least highly ambiguous. Critics who study the novel, short story, drama, poetry, graphic novels, or detective novels may rank them or have a preference for a particular author, period, or variety, but they never denigrate the *genre* itself. Whereas until the last few years, at least in France, they had no qualms about denigrating the diary. The diary had its hostile experts and murderous aficionados. They felt justified in this by the ambivalent attitude of some diarists, like Amiel.

Read the preface from Maurice Chapelan’s anthology (1946), Georges Gusdorf’s analyses (1948), or the studies by Michèle Leleu (1952) and Béatrice Didier (1976). The overall theme is either *medicalizing* or *moralizing* critical discourse. Overall, the personal diary is treated like a disease or a symptom. It is studied in terms of characterology (Chapelan, Leleu) or psychoanalysis (Didier), or evaluated in the name of some other idea of the personality (Gusdorf).

It is as though the practice of keeping a diary, touching as it does on the equilibrium of the personality and our social bonds, made us feel uncomfortable. It is not just individuals but entire institutions that have been or still are perplexed by it: in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church only advocated diary writing if it could control and limit it; today, Freudian psychoanalysis is often suspicious of writing as resistance to treatment.

A hypothesis: what I have just said may partly explain why putting the diary on trial is something of a French specialty. Places with a strong Protestant tradition, or where Jungian psychoanalysis has thrived, have developed

a very different diary writing culture: it has become a customary practice that is discussed and taught at school. There is no agonizing about it. That may be a good thing. Or it may be a shame.

#### MISLEADING SLANT

In this trial, not only is the prosecutor himself suspect, but the investigation has also been botched, because the defendant is still on the lam, so to speak. What do we know about him? We take his self-accusations at face value, and take the printed text (usually a literary text) to be the reality of the diary, a text that has been “deposited” in our libraries the way water leaves a lime deposit.

Yet the diary is only secondarily a text or a literary genre. Like correspondence, the diary is first and foremost an activity. Keeping a diary is a way of living before it is a way of writing. And having the diary itself is not enough to tell us whether this activity is achieving its intended purpose. I remember the motto “To weigh oneself is to know oneself; to know oneself is to be healthy” [Qui souvent se pèse, bien se connaît; qui bien se connaît, bien se porte], which used to be printed on public weigh scales. That is debatable, of course. But here is Marie Rauber arguing the opposite: “They take their pulse so often that they make themselves feverish.” That is even more debatable: what does she know about it? How can we know what happens in a life that contains a diary? There is nothing more mysterious.

Most criticisms of the diary are based on value systems that are fundamentally at odds with the diary’s value system. But they seem to be justified by the mere fact that the diary often *appears* to accept those criteria.

People judge it as a self-portrait.

It is true that diarists are often aiming at introspection. I keep my diary to paint a portrait of myself and to know myself better. It is easy to raise objections based on principle (sincerity is impossible), and to make a *de facto* list of cases of censorship, self-indulgence, making mountains out of molehills, wallowing in pain, etc., which keep the diary from being a likeness of the person. It gives a partial and “deformed” view of the writer, an anamorphosis or caricature. The outside reader has to add all sorts of corrections or supplementary information to reconstruct a plausible picture. It is nothing like an autobiography. Ignace Meyerson spent years on this sort of corrective work, especially on Benjamin Constant’s diary.<sup>1</sup> The most difficult part is imagining what the diary means to its author while he is keeping it and when he rereads it. Because a diary is like lacework, a net of tighter or looser links that contain more empty space than solid parts. Everything depends on what sea you throw it into. By the time it reaches us, it is nothing but a mass of strings lying on the beach at low tide. For the person keeping a diary, it implicitly structures his days, providing an organizing principle for his behavior. What is put down

on paper in the evening is only one link in the chain. The diary is not a text: it only becomes a text once the author dies. During the diarist's lifetime, it is a *to-and-fro* movement, an *occupation*. So there is a gap between the reader's perception and the reality of what happened.

The diary is also judged as a book.

It arrives in the reader's hands in the form of a book. There are fans of the genre, but usually it is deemed inferior, or detrimental to more structured creations. It is evaluated within a horizon of expectations that is foreign to it. Because of its aim (private or familiar), its growth through repetition, its mode of production that does not involve work and many other features, the diary is considered monstrous and unreadable, a form of raw art. Despite diarists' preference for using notebooks, the diary is in many ways the opposite of the book. It belongs essentially to the realm of the manuscript, and its endless proliferation makes it more akin to the computer screen and hypertext than to the closed linear form of the book. In some ways, it is unpublishable. Very few diaries are published unedited and in full. To turn them into books, they are polished, cut, and reorganized. At that point, the diary is but a shadow of its former self. It has lost its unique charm but is still not really pleasing to its new master. It has to compete with a synthetic product, the often hybridized ersatz of the epistolary novel and the off-key diary-novel. In opposition to these artificial and necessarily unfulfilled expectations, we must imagine another culture of the diary, a patient and empathetic approach to the manuscript text, an approach in which a personal piece of writing is given a personal reading.

#### IGNORANCE AND GENERALIZATION

Everyone has an opinion on the diary. No one feels unqualified. Everyone takes their little bit of experience as the norm. After ten years of study during which I tried to wrest myself out of ignorance by methodically putting together a body of knowledge, I often met people who would deliver a whole lecture on the subject in three minutes. With the diary, everything reinforces people's biases: the difficulty of getting access to the thing under study, and the strength of their emotional involvement.

I first observed this in myself. What is our experience of the diary? All we really know is our own, and we tend to imagine that other people's diaries are just like ours. Based on my adolescent diary, for a long time I thought that people only wrote their diaries when they felt like it, that loose-leaf pages were used as often as notebooks, and that people never showed their diaries to anyone. My research for "*Cher cahier . . .*" showed me that there was a wide variety of behaviors, and that in certain respects I was in the minority (loose-leaf pages are not popular). There is no such thing as a typical diarist. There are many varieties, sects that look askance at one another: "He does

*that?* I could never do that!” with almost the same disgust that people feel about lovemaking practices that are too different from their own.

People are tranquil, learned, and assertive in their ignorance. On several occasions I have tried to find critics who could speak about the personal diary at conferences. The sad thing is that I found them! People who had never once held a real diary in their hands or read one and yet knew all about them.

One of the reasons for this ignorance is that reading published diaries gives people the feeling that they know something. That feeling is not an illusion, of course, since there is a rich and fairly varied body of published works. But it should be questioned. Strangely enough, the books by Michèle Leleu, Alain Girard, and Béatrice Didier seem to have been written without these three authors having seen the manuscript diaries they discuss. And above all, without their making the least effort to delve into the huge mass of unpublished diaries. They never even raise the issue.

Of course, one pays a heavy price to access that reality, and the possibility of saying anything valid about it could be postponed *ad infinitum*. It would take a lifetime to read and study the 34,862 pages of French poet Jehan Ric-tus’s diary. And there are probably well over 34,862 other diaries waiting for us in one place or another. There are as many diaries out there as stars in the night sky. But the work can be shared. And there is nothing stopping us from sampling.

Another thing that leads people to make generalizations is that there are landmark diaries that have become models of the genre. To many people, who often have not read him, Amiel with his 16,000 pages (a paltry sum), his failures and hesitations, creates a sad image of the diary as an illness. An overview of the reception of published diaries in the 1880s would show how the standard image of the diary as stemming from neurosis, gossip, and pride developed during that decade with the publication of the diaries of Amiel (1882–84), Goncourt (1887), and Marie Bashkirtseff (1887).

Indeed, we must go back over the whole history of the debate to shed light on our current biases.

### HISTORY OF THE DEBATE

Honor where honor is due: this history was first traced by Alain Girard in 1963, based on copious documentation. Revealingly enough, this excellent chapter talks almost exclusively about objections to the diary. I will summarize the main points.

Up until about the 1880s, since the diary was not yet seen as a literary genre, critics usually took a psychological or moral point of view, and considered the diary as an educational method. Around 1800, when Marc-Antoine

Jullien began preaching his “Use of Time” method to young people, the objection was raised that the diary might narrow their minds by teaching them the habit of seeing only details, and might dry up their hearts and sap their willpower, turning them into ditherers. The Catholic Church was of two minds: while it condemned self-indulgence and soul-searching, it nevertheless saw the diary’s potential for spiritual guidance leading to God. Criticisms of all kinds were unleashed at the turn of the century, when the diary came onto the literary scene, upsetting certain rules of civility with its self-indulgence, immodesty and gossip, and trespassing on the territory of other genres. In the eyes of literary elites, one of the diary’s misdeeds was its popularity. It was guilty of unfair competition. Alain Girard divides this violent offensive into major battles, distinguishing different waves of assault between the 1880s and the late 1940s. First there was the criticism he calls pseudo-sociological and pseudo-scientific, an assault led by Renan and Paul Bourget (1883), who labeled it yet another *mal du siècle* (degeneracy, overanalysis, and paralysis of the will). At the same time, following on Brunetière’s very fierce attack (1888), a litany of psychological and moral objections was unfolded by Jules Romains, Georges Duhamel, and Jean Dutourd. Then there was what he called the “intellectualistic” criticism of Julien Benda and Paul Valéry. Finally, in the late 1940s, there were Georges Gusdorf’s ambiguous attacks, reprising criticisms of the diary as analytical decay, but preserving it as a possible spiritual exercise useful for constructing the self.

I found two things striking in this panorama.

Why does Alain Girard say so little about the “for” side except for one rather swift concluding section about “the art of the diary”? To read him, there seem to be only two possible types of discourse: the *trial* or the *debate*. I use *trial* to mean a violent one-sided attack, which is also picked up *de facto*, but in a dialogical way, in the other structure: the *debate*. In France, the *against* voice easily becomes free-standing, while the *for* voice, scrupulous and timid, preaches by example and puts the diary through an examination of conscience, thus incorporating the *against* side into its discussions. Lapsing into the very simplifications that I criticized earlier, I will give Amiel as an example. Roland Jaccard compiled a set of passages in which Amiel assesses his diary, and divided it into seven short chapters that make up a sort of mini-debate. Three chapters against (*L'éternelle rechute sur moi-même—Témoignage à charge—Journal négligé, journal ennuyeux—The eternal relapse into myself—Witness for the prosecution—Neglected diary, boring diary*), two chapters for (*Une météorologie intérieure—La pharmacie de l'âme—An internal meteorology—Pharmacy of the soul*), and two rather sinister forward-looking chapters predicting the future of the diary as a work and the death of its

author (*Je ne laisserai que des fragments—J'ai vécu, déçu, déchu*—I will leave nothing but fragments—I have lived, declined, and fallen). To tell the truth, the general atmosphere is bleak. But Amiel's clear-sightedness, intelligence, and verbal brilliance lead him to anticipate a century of debate on the diary, from Brunetière (1888) to Gusdorf (1948). He had already said everything on the topic, and often said it better than his successors. This little collection does for the personal diary what the Preamble to Rousseau's *Confessions* (in the Neuchâtel manuscript version of his work) did for autobiography.

So debate is the privileged form of discourse on the diary, mirroring the diary itself. A man hesitates on the threshold of the diary: should he risk it? He weighs the pros and cons. This is Jallez at the beginning of Jules Romains's novel, *La Douceur de la vie* (1939).<sup>2</sup> It is Roland Barthes in the short text aptly titled "Délibération" (1979). Georges Gusdorf finds himself in the same critical position in his thesis. And this deliberation can take place in multiple voices when newspapers launch an investigation and publish the pro and con responses and the ambiguous responses, all together or in separate categories.

A second comment on Alain Girard's overview: he does not pay any focused attention to what I will call *aesthetic* criticism of the diary: the diary as a substitute for literary creation, in opposition to it, or as a threat to art. This criticism is already present in Amiel; we see it in Brunetière, who is obsessed by art and work; it is also part of Jallez's deliberation, although as a minor consideration (the "great" writer turns outward, careful not to sacrifice his literary work to the diary). Perhaps it is merely a matter of emphasis and period. Writing in the early 1960s, Alain Girard could not be aware, as I am now, of the hatred or the aesthetic fear of the diary that developed beginning in the late 1950s, not among the French public, but among certain writers.

Picking up on Alain Girard's study, I would like to supplement it with four vignettes.

The first one comes from the period he analyzes. I found a fascinating document that he missed, a study of the personal diary published in 1938 by the *Revue Montalembert*. Then come Maurice Blanchot (1959), Roland Barthes and his "Délibération" (1979), and a major study from the *Monde des livres* (1982).

To these four examples I could have added the polemical discussion between Marc Ligeray and myself after the publication of "*Cher cahier . . .*" (1991–1992). But weighing the pros and cons is fine; being both the judge and a party is trickier.

THE *REVUE MONTALEMBERT* (1938)

This was a right-wing Catholic student publication. An elderly lawyer, Auguste Prénat, sent an article that gave the publishers the idea of doing a survey.

The old gentleman wondered whether today's young people (in 1937) still kept diaries the way they had done at an earlier time (probably around 1900). His letter is a charming and nuanced plea for the diary, a genre that he believes has fallen into disuse. He sees it as a way of combating the passage of time, and above all as a healthy means of managing one's moral life and developing one's personality. He rejects certain deviations—the “vain search for style”—warns us against certain disadvantages—narcissism, banality, gossip, unhealthy dreams—but “is there anything that men cannot abuse?” To him, the diary is on the side of enlightenment and action. It's an apologia made from a moral (Christian) and political point of view. He is not interested in literature, which he sees as more of a defect. One keeps a diary for oneself, and it is a pleasure to reread when you get old (young people take note!).

The *Revue* picks up where he leaves off. It restates the problem set by Prénat. An old democrat, he contrasted the diary, which structures the individual, with totalitarian deviations (communism, fascism, and racism). The *Revue* asks whether the diary is not a rather sterile literary game, as opposed to what the times required: action. With a somewhat confused presentation (which has the merit of leaving the reader his freedom) it asks four questions, two on reading, one on personal practices, and one asking for an assessment of the diary.

The journal published eleven responses in its February and March 1938 issues. The call was made to both male and female students: only male students responded; four signed their names and seven were anonymous. There were seven diarists and four non-diarists; six responses in favor and five against.

The first batch (February, five responses) seem fairly verbose and bookish to me, at least on the first two questions about reading. With no real practice of reading private texts to discuss, the responses are cut and dried, with a few blunders and a great many clichés. When it comes to the last two questions (on writing and assessment), by contrast, these students know what they are talking about, and are livelier. Except for the first respondent, all of them keep diaries, and the second and third discuss them directly. They assess the psychological advantages and point out some disadvantages or pitfalls to avoid. They have no notion of publishing their writing, and the problem of artistry seems not to have occurred to them. They strike me as young, serious, and inexperienced.

The second batch (March, 6 responses) is more weighty and mature. It is also organized more dramatically. First three negative texts, in ascending order of quality (the third one, in the form of aphorisms, is quite well done), so that we take their organized attack on the diary more and more seriously. Then there is a combative piece dedicated “To the adversaries of personal

diaries,” an excellent piece that first refutes the arguments of the previous responses and then attacks the detractors’ motivations. This is the strongest part of the survey: the diary is no longer on the defensive: it brilliantly blasts and confounds its adversaries. The bullet ricochets back into the *against* camp. François Mitterrand, then a young law student who is cultured and self-confident, renews the attack against the diary and introspection by dint of sophistry.<sup>3</sup> This is countered at the end by a vibrant personal account in favor of the diary, along the lines of the first batch but with greater maturity.

A month later, in April, the magazine draws its conclusions. It had asked for facts and received arguments. It comments on the attitudes from both sides, and awards points and demerits. It gives Mr. Prénat a piece of good news: there are still young diarists! And it is happy about that, ending with an apologia for sincerity. Some of the responses seem weak. But the debate is serious, committed, and lively. A dialogue between generations, a meditation on privacy in the looming shadow of war. I found three things especially striking.

This is a true debate in which two positions are put forward convincingly: the *against* position, as Alain Girard analyzes it, with all of the arguments and biases that it is interesting to see coming from the pens of young students; and the *for* position, defended by the magazine’s moderator, by Auguste Prénat, and by most of the responses, which draw a picture of the Catholic culture of the personal diary. I was probably wrong when I said earlier that the *for* is only ever presented alongside the *against* in a deliberation. Here it is free-standing, hedged around with nuances and warnings, but holding up on its own. The reason that Alain Girard was unable to individualize the *for* voice is that before the 1980s, discourse favorable to the personal diary was almost always included in personal diaries. The first visibly “militant” pro-diary books were the one by Claude Bonnafont, *Écrire son journal intime* (1982) and my collection, “*Cher cahier . . .*” (1990).

One of the consequences is that, in conducting a trial of the diary here, we end up with a trial of the anti-diary, so to speak, and even a trial of the non-diary, since Auguste Prénat begins by claiming that the attitude of young people of his generation, who gave up on the diary after trying it out, could be chalked up to laziness and shame. But the main volleys of reproaches are not against the abstainers (who are entitled to their views!), but against the diary’s adversaries, stigmatizing their ignorance, their mental blocks, and their almost racist aggression. In a slightly different context, this is the same treatment I tried to apply to Marc Ligeray’s literary elitism.

Indeed: my third surprise was how little of the debate touched on the question of literature, simply because no one who replied had any real plans of becoming a writer. They are basically debating psychological and moral



matters. They talk about a taste for writing well, sometimes a fear of writing too much (stigmatized as artifice or a desire to seduce), but never the fear of “not writing enough,” so to speak. The diary’s artistic inferiority compared to other kinds of writing is not a problem for them, as it would be for some writers beginning in the late 1950s.

MAURICE BLANCHOT (1959)

The title says it all: “The Personal Diary and Narrative” (“Le journal intime et le récit”): from now on, the diary is going to be judged in relation to the Work, within the context of the literary mystique. It will be the profane as opposed to the sacred. This fairly short article has three parts. The diary, which is bound by the calendar and devoted to the superficial, is first contrasted with the narrative, which is purported to have the sovereign freedom to create symbolic expression: Benjamin Constant’s diary is a failure, his novel *Adolphe* is a success. Second part: “The diary as a trap.” The diary is presented as a cowardly way of writing by avoiding Writing: Maurice Blanchot says he finds it “troubling” that Virginia Woolf kept a diary, as though he had caught the Virgin Mary nattering with the neighbors. You think you are holding onto your life by writing it down in a diary, and in the end you have neither lived nor written. Finally, in the third part, he wonders whether the diary, after all, might not escape worthlessness by becoming the diary of the Work. Sure, but since the Work is impossible, it too must become impossible. One dreams of Kafka or the French poet Francis Ponge. “Yes, Ponge,” he soberly concludes.<sup>4</sup>

This is an important text. Not because of what it says about the diary, for Maurice Blanchot admits that he is basing himself on other people’s arguments by stealing a few quotations from Michèle Leleu’s book on characterology (1952, *Les Journaux intimes*). It is a thesis outlined with brio, but without any real knowledge of the subject. Maurice Blanchot only spends time with diaries that flirt with the Work, like Joseph Joubert’s<sup>5</sup> and Kafka’s. With fascinated horror, he discovers other people in Michèle Leleu’s hospital or Virginia’s scullery, and quickly shuts the door on them.

This text is important because of what it says about Blanchot and his ideology, an ideology that has since been adopted by a large part of the literary intelligentsia. This religion of art, inherited from Mallarmé, goes along with the conviction that only fiction can be profound. The desire for truth, which is ethically respectable, would be an aesthetic catastrophe and would condemn writers to superficiality. The autobiographical pact spells the death of literature. “You must be superficial to make sure that you are sincere, a great virtue that also takes courage. Profundity has its satisfactions. At least profundity requires the resolve not to live up to the oath that binds us to

ourselves and others through some kind of truth” [Il faut être superficiel pour ne pas manquer à la sincérité, grande vertu qui demande aussi du courage. La profondeur a ses aises. Du moins, la profondeur exige-t-elle la résolution de ne pas s’en tenir au serment qui nous lie à nous-mêmes et aux autres par le moyen de quelque vérité]. Happy are they who know where profundity lies! But unhappy are they who do not share that conviction, for they will be excluded and teased. Here I am referring to Jacques Lecarme’s study on the anti-autobiographical hydra. It is amazing how fiercely one segment of French literary circles opposes other people’s autobiographical expression, as though it were a threat to them. And perhaps it really is a threat, if we think in terms of market shares? Because not everyone in the country hates autobiography and the diary. Far from it. But such is the cultural prestige of those who brandish anathemas that we end up feeling ashamed of reading other people’s autobiographies, or of keeping a diary ourselves.

Reading this short essay as someone who had kept and read many diaries, I did not recognize my own experience. I was like one of those people who traveled to the Soviet Union in the 1960s and were stunned to read propaganda describing the abject poverty that reigned in a capitalist West on the brink of collapse. And this cold, violent text sounds like an insult. I am sorry for the satirical tone that I have adopted in responding to it: my excuse is that it takes courage to say that the emperor has no clothes. Yes, yes, Blanchot.

ROLAND BARTHES (1979)

We are in the late 1970s. Autobiography makes a comeback! Roland Barthes has tried his hand at self-portraiture (*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, 1975), is hovering on the edge of autobiography (*Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, 1977, *La Chambre claire*, 1980), sidles around the diary, gives it a try and lets it be known that no, it is not his genre after all (“Deliberation,” 1979). I’ve found some reading notes from the time in my own diary, and give them to you unedited:

What is this deliberation about? A canny writer looking to “invest” his writing in something and making an assessment, like one does when checking out mutual funds, to see what return he’ll get on a personal diary. First of all, he sees four possible advantages: (1) individuation of his style; (2) leaving a historical trace; (3) enticing readers who are curious about the way he does his work; and (4) a workshop for sentences. He then decides to consider the problem in light of two diary entries he has written. So he quotes them and then takes up his pen once again to illuminate the three drawbacks of the diary: (1) it is *non-essential* (unlike the Book or Work, from which nothing can be removed, here you can remove everything because it is so unstructured. The only thing that takes on any consistency is the self. But that’s enough about egotism); (2) it is *unnecessary* (a minor pleasure, not a passion); (3) it is *inauthentic* (writing in a coded, stereotypical language; the spontaneous is artificial).

And then what? He ends nonetheless by dreaming of Kafka's diary, or of a diary that he himself would work "to death" but that would no longer really be a diary.

The diary is examined critically here as though it were a personal investment. Why does Barthes condemn the diary based on the mediocre sample he produced? And is it really mediocre? The coquetry of quotation: he neither comments on these fragments nor analyzes them: we don't know what is good or bad about them, and besides, it's ridiculous to judge a whole diary from one or two entries. He gravely wonders whether they are publishable: but he published them! The act belies the question. So a person can be just as insincere in a critical text (this one) as in a diary. Indeed, he claims to have done the least possible damage in a calamitous genre: blame it on the diary.

He has no interest in any of the diary's functions other than literary ones. Why bother writing a diary if you are not supposed to publish it? Quite the opposite of the diary's origins. The very idea of privacy vanishes. In the past it was yes to the diary as long as it will never be published or written to be published. Now it is no to the diary if it cannot be published!

I reread my notes: it's true, but after all is said and done, it's unfair. Barthes doesn't have Blanchot's stuffy tone. His coquetry does have its tenderness and warmth. His uncertainty is not comedic or calculated; it is real and heartfelt. Everything points to the deep autobiographical desire that emerged in his later years, including the posthumous publication—against his wishes—of another attempt at a diary in 1979 (*Incidents*, 1987). In the 1979 essay, he speaks with nuance and finesse of a practice he knows about: I like the first page of "Deliberation" very much. It is not easy to return from Mallarmé to Amiel, or rather to reconcile the two. This text is fascinating because it seems blurred by the interference between two contradictory ideologies. Apparently he reaches the same conclusion as Blanchot: the diary is only bearable if it is worked *to death* (an awful expression). But who knows where life and writing would have taken Barthes? Like Leiris and Perec, he was a discoverer, capable of using his contradictions to invent a new form.

He was no longer around in 1982 to respond to the survey in *Le Monde des livres*.

*LE MONDE DES LIVRES* (JULY-AUGUST 1982)

An excellent survey of writers. The questions were simple: 1) Do you keep a diary? If YES or NO, why or why not? 2) If YES, what do you write in it? What is the relationship between your diary and your literary writing? 3) If YES, can you give us a few pages to publish? We don't know how many writers were surveyed or how they were chosen. All we can see is that there were twenty-seven responses: twenty-two men and five women! No doubt because fewer women writers are published. Or is it that women are less

likely to answer this sort of question? That would confirm what the survey shows: their sense of privacy.

Those five women (Marie Cardinal, Claire Etcherelli, Zoé Oldenbourg, Christine de Rivoyre, and Marguerite Yourcenar) all say that they have kept a diary, almost always in tandem with their literary writing but in some ways unconnected with that writing. Like ordinary people, in fact. They are the most reticent: either they have destroyed their diary, or are going to destroy it, or want to keep it to themselves. None of them sent a page to be published.

Of the twenty-two men, thirteen said no and nine said yes. Of those nine, there were three public diaries (Jean-Louis Curtis, Michel Déon, Michel Tournier), and two that the authors were not sure were diaries at all (Raymond Abellio and Hervé Bazin). That leaves four private diaries (Jacques Borel, Alphonse Boudard, José Cabanis, François Nourissier). Of those nine writers, six sent pages to be published (Tournier, Bazin, and the four private diarists). And all of the claims for fiction and against the diary come from the men.

This split is striking, even if based on a sample too small to be reliable.

Second observation: the generally moderate tone of the contributions. There are few ironic or violent texts (Ormesson's pirouettes can hardly be called violent). The only texts that stand out for their tone are perhaps those of Roger Grenier and Pierre Gascar. For the most part, this is not really a trial or a debate: the writers explain their own practices, and justify them in general terms. They are often harsh and serious, but not violent, which is all the more striking in that they nonetheless reject the diary across the board.

Third observation: as might have been expected given the respondents' profession, aesthetic and practical arguments clearly predominate over moral or psychological ones (insincerity, indiscretion, narcissism). The diary is a waste of energy, a scattering of thoughts. Whether traditional or avant-garde, novelists overwhelmingly share this opinion. Here are two voices that illustrate the consensus:

It is not that I find the self necessarily detestable. It is just that the personal diary would be repugnant to my sense of reserve, my taste for privacy, which is something I cultivate. A privacy that is above all a way of guarding what is essential, i.e., the material that I intend to use in works of fiction; and also, the mental energy I need to make use of that material. . . . If you keep a private diary, your usable material and your creative energy leak out through a thousand cracks. [Jean-Louis Curtis]

Keeping a diary regularly stifles your work in progress, depriving it of the portion of thought and madness that would inevitably be sapped by the private work which thereby becomes abusive and frustrating. And it means robbing myself of the time and energy that I've devoted to the diary, a secondary work, instead of keeping it for the main work, the primary work, which demands my undivided attention. [Jacques Chessex]

The survey comes down to a sort of match between the diary and fiction that is lost in advance, since all twenty-seven writers are novelists. No poets, dramatists, or essayists seem to have been surveyed, or intellectual or artistic people more generally, to give a broader context for the underlying issue: the possible links between the diary and creativity.

These links are only one aspect of diary-writing practice, but they are front and center because writers are the only diarists or non-diarists that the cultural media want to talk about. But the diary is everyone's concern. So everyone should be surveyed. The pros should be heard as well as the cons, and it would be hoped that each individual could explain his own practice without criticizing the practice of others. That is the aim of the surveys I have been doing since 1987, either through questionnaires (*La Pratique du journal personnel*, 1990) or calls for personal accounts ("*Cher cahier . . .*", 1990), as well as Malik Allam's surveys (*Journaux intimes. Une sociologie de l'écriture personnelle*, 1996). That is the purpose of the *Association pour l'Autobiographie* (APA) created in 1992, and the exhibition *Un journal à soi* (Sept.–Dec. 1997, Lyon Municipal Library).

In short, we need to know more about the diary before we can discuss it, and the trial must become a debate.

\* \* \* \* \*

Have I analyzed this trial from the outside, or have I become improperly involved in it, as counsel for the defense? Probably both. Here are a few concluding remarks, to gain some distance from the debate.

The important thing is not so much to defend the diary as to understand why it is being attacked. Because of the shortfalls that underlie the practice of diary writing, the diary can act as a sort of virtual opponent, a saboteur, in the context of a whole series of positive ideologies or strategies (of knowledge, action, art, God, etc.) The enemy of the diary is someone who sees in it some of the elements of his own psychic conflict: he charges in and makes the diary a scapegoat, not stopping to think about what it really is. In some ways, the diary "reads" him. But in another way, he "reads" the diary, and his identity-driven furor runs up against something real. I was suggesting this at the beginning, despite my playful tone: where there is smoke, there is fire. Yes, there is something negative, something divisive or *suspensive* in this intermediate space, this airlock between the individual and the world, this "heart of hearts" where we invent a language for ourselves. Yes, the diary is both a retreat and a source of energy in each person's dialectical relationship with the world, which he uses to construct and sustain himself as an individual. Some people use it as a resource; others use it as a foil. It is anything but neutral. For better

or for worse, it plays a part in all our psychic conflicts, and perhaps what we should be worrying about is the day when it stops being a topic of debate.

The important thing is that this debate should not stop us from studying the diary. There has been very little exploration in this field as yet; almost everything still remains to be done. I see three major avenues of study: an inventory of published or unpublished diaries that are accessible in the archives; analysis of the diary as a form of behavior; and finally, a study of the diary as a text, which should focus on problems of rhythm. Now let's get to work!

### NOTES

1. On Meyerson's research on Constant's diary, see my "Ignace Meyerson et l'autobiographie."
2. *La Douceur de la vie*, volume 18 of Romain's series *Hommes de bonne volonté*, has been translated into English as *The Sweets of Life*. The preface in which the character Jallez debates the merits of diary writing has been republished in Romain's *Journal de Jallez*.
3. After World War II, François Mitterrand embarked on a long political career. He was president of France from 1981 to 1995.
4. Francis Ponge (1899–1988) published editions of his poems that included successive drafts, offering a sort of diary of his creative process.
5. Joseph Joubert's (1754–1824) *Recueil des pensées de M. Joubert*, a sort of intellectual journal, was published in 1838.

### STUDIES OF THE DIARY ON TRIAL

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Includes a bibliography of writing on the personal diary, 1938–1997: 121–25; see 33–52 of this volume.

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## COMPOSING A DIARY

What is a diary?

I studied the genre for more than a dozen years before it occurred to me to define it. I know very well what a diary is! I kept one as a young man, between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. I stopped for a quarter century, and when I reached my fifties, I started up again. It's easy enough: you take some paper, or your computer, you write down the date, and then you write whatever you're doing, thinking, and feeling. There is no set form, no required content. You have a free hand. The word "diary" itself is straightforward.<sup>1</sup> Unlike "autobiography," it's not one of those strange words over which people do battle, lobbing concepts at one another and splitting hairs. When I started working on autobiography around 1969, I had to define, contrast, and classify. The subject had such porous borders! There were so many gradations between autobiography and biography or autobiography and fiction, and there were so few "pure" autobiographies! And how did this scholarly term, invented in the late eighteenth century, relate to the older and somewhat different traditions of confessions and memoirs? Furthermore, at the age of thirty-one, I had written nothing autobiographical at all—it was just a dream. Now that I'm twice that age, it seems clear to me that I will never write an autobiography: the dream has lost its hold on me. "Autobiography" in the singular leaves me cold. How could I have wished for that unifying utopia? My life has to resonate and expand, it has to go on changing, my past has to ferment. I might possibly—even probably—write autobiographical *texts*, in the plural. But to free them of all hegemonic intent, it is best to write several, and to date them. That means returning to a new form of . . . diary! I've rediscovered my adolescent self: in old age, I reach out to my youth.

But that is quite a distance to span. I spent my middle age ignoring the diary. Between 1969 and 1986, I published six books on autobiography and never once considered the diary. Autobiography meant growing up. Becoming an adult (good-bye to immaturity) and a writer (writing "well"). But isn't it a betrayal to write well and live badly? I mean: write neatly; I mean: write soberly and clearly. An appalling memory: 1969, reading André Maurois's too-sober *Mémoires*. So biography-of-himself, so well turned out, a

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"Composer un journal." *Signes de vie. Le pacte autobiographique 2*. Paris: Seuil, 2005. 63–72.

neatly arranged closet, a carefully laid-out French garden. My life is nothing like that! During my “autobiography” years, I looked for the opposite model, a sturdy 4 x 4 capable of navigating my bush and my deserts. That’s why I was fascinated by Michel Leiris and the poetic weaving of a writing without end. At first I tried, like him, to construct great tapestries of ideas and words. It just wasn’t me. I was meant to work in fragments. Yet another byway leading me back to the diary.

How I detested the poor diary! That’s how it is often defined, in fact: by a series of insults strung together. You tell it what’s what. You don’t explore its margins or limits, just reel off its deadly sins. In January 2000, while straightening up my office in Villetaneuse (my university), I came across a page of notes I had written on March 20, 1980 to prepare for . . . my first course on the diary! Twenty years later! Well, let me tell you, what a thrashing I gave it! I had not a single good thing to say about it. The irony of it: this dated sheet of paper has now become a diary page, bringing me face to face with a past that would have gently faded from memory. When you write an autobiographical text (that’s what I’m doing today, Sunday, May 7, 2000, on a mild overcast day), it’s better not to have your past in front of you. Contrary to what people say, the diary is the enemy of memory, because it keeps your past from changing! That’s why so many diaries end up in the garbage bin. So I was severe back then, but I got it right. I describe the diary correctly, but judge it mercilessly. Sit down, listen, and take notes as I recreate my lecture from March 1980. Of the thirty or so students I had that year, I suppose there must have been many a diary-writing young woman who thought I was harsh, or a bit hung up. Or maybe not. They must have seen me for the disappointed lover and aspiring writer that I was. I circled around the diary with the idea of going back to it. My punishment will be not to change anything in the text, which is given here in full.

\* \* \* \* \*

*MARCH 20, 1980. THE DIARY. NOTES AND THOUGHTS.*

Approach the diary in terms of *reading* it.

Use the *novel in diary form* as a tool for observing the personal diary, insofar as it tries to reach a *compromise* between the characteristics of the diary (immediacy, contingency, no control over time, no attempt at literary communication) and of the novel (reconstruction, meaning, communication). See my analysis of *Le Horla*.<sup>2</sup>

There is a gulf between the diary as it is *written* and the diary as it is *read* (by someone else, or even by oneself later).

The diary, which is often seen as a struggle *against* time (pinning down the present, etc.—preserving memory) is actually based on a prior *yielding* to time (which is atomized, exploded, reduced to moments). We can think of time in several different ways. And the diary reflects (but only *afterwards*, in the reading) at once the most naïve (uncontrolled and unwilling) adherence to the present and a sort of surrender.

The true, authentic diary (meaning an *honest* diary) is:

Discontinuous

Full of gaps

Allusive (personal writing acts as a *mnemonic sign* for the person writing, “that way I’ll remember”—but remember *something other* than what is written about). Every written page holds in suspense, but only for the person who wrote it, an entire “reference” that the person can access solely through that writing but that is nonexistent for any other reader. “I understand myself”—like photos, etc. The exact opposite of literary communication.

Redundant and repetitive (the perfect exemplar of singular narrative, taken to an insane extreme, incapable of summary, of subsuming related material under one heading, etc., stuck in the madness of repetition that is life itself)—(the fascinating thing about the personal diary is that it repeats in writing the very thing that writing should save us from: it is tragic by its very nature).

Non-narrative: of course, each sequence tells something, etc., but it is not constructed like a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. There is no *sequentiality* as analyzed by Barthes, Brémond, and others: *it is written without knowledge of the ending*, and the tragic part is that it is always *read* with knowledge of the ending, which can often be, quite simply, death.

New thought: the striking thing about the three adolescents’ diaries being presented today.

the beginning is always the decision to *start* writing (birth certificate of writing);

the end comes: (a) either from outside (in the three cases at hand, it is always death, one way or another—adolescents’ diaries are only published if they die young, or long after they have become famous, or if they themselves in old age are trying to make something of their past); (b) or from a sort of decision not to write anymore (death certificate of writing, giving up writing to begin living—which is more or less clearly the case for *L’Herbe bleue* and Nina Kosterina).

That explains the dramatic structure of these diaries and their extraordinary success (when writing stops, life stops too . . .).

But for most real diaries, people survive; death does not step in to insert a final period and *sign* what becomes a tragic book.

So how do you retrieve your life?

Obviously it falls into the category of the *unreadable* . . . if the adult (a) abandons her manuscripts but goes back to them later; (b) keeps up this crazy activity throughout her life.

Solutions for turning it into a narrative:

use it to write a narrative;

*sift* and *rewrite*?

do a montage (as did Claude Mauriac).

\* \* \* \* \*

This is unsympathetic. It is true enough, but only in a relative way: the diary is evaluated from a perspective that is foreign to it—that of the *book*. It took me some time to realize this. And to find . . . an answer.

I had a Road to Damascus moment. I can see the pictures from my catechism: Saint Paul struck by a bolt from heaven and falling off his horse. . . . It wasn't quite that spectacular for me. One evening I found myself writing with no end in sight, using the simplest words to put down in painstaking detail things that had to be rescued from oblivion. I wrote in longhand, in ink. Then for three or four years I wrote on the typewriter, very quickly, correcting nothing except trivial errors. I had become an adolescent again, and there I was rereading my old diary and copying out the beginning, succumbing to the temptation to clean it up a bit. He was so chatty, so awkward, so emphatic at times. . . . Now that I knew how to write, why not give him a hand?

And then, yet another road to Damascus, the computer, which finally made its way to my desk in late 1990. I had held out for quite a while. It seemed complicated; I was a little scared. It's children these days who are educating their parents and handing them the future. Thanks to them I became a convert, finding the answer to my problems in the keyboard and screen. Dear screen! I came at it in a roundabout way. Working on a study of young girls' diaries from the nineteenth century, I kept a "field diary" where I would jot down ideas, insights, leads. . . . It was something I did out of habit, but on the computer screen. I was looking at this diary with a reader's eye: wouldn't my diary actually be more interesting for a reader than the study I was supposed to write and whose form I had been seeking in vain? I quickly decided: the draft would be the final text! But then . . . it had to be a clean draft. So there

I was, for the first time in my life, writing a diary as though it were a book. A diary *for a reader*. It was a real diary (once the day was over, I never went back to erase, add, or change anything), it fulfilled the autobiographical pact (I described as accurately as possible how I was conducting my study and the development of my ideas), but it was also written with an eye to other people's expectations and pleasure. I avoided tacit meanings and repetition. I tried to construct the text using foreshadowing and echoes—that is, in the manner of musical variations. I polished my style, as though I were Flaubert at Croisset (my ideal). Never going on to the next paragraph until I'd checked the assonances and rhythmic flow of the one at hand. I would never have done this on paper, but now it was so fluid, there were no traces left by the reworking. I also gave the diary a narrative structure using episodes and the sense of an ending (vaguely foreseen yet uncertain). These constraints were delightful. Every day when I sat down in front of my computer, my head and heart teeming with all I had to say, they helped me get a handle on what the day had brought. This work was not artificial ornamentation or a comedy of seduction that distanced me from the truth. There is nothing truthful about writing badly. The most exciting part was the *risk* I was taking. Because once a page—mullied over at length—was finished, I was not allowed to touch it again. So I could not make a mistake. Especially in composition. I must have a perfect feel for the paths opening up before me. This kind of writing, having built up during the course of the day, poured out of me the moment I began to write. More than a “technique,” it became a way of life, a moral code. And, I must admit, it was pleasurable. In that, as in other things, I could see that I was no Flaubert (!). I didn't writhe around on sofas screaming in pain because a sentence was not coming to me. The sentence always came; I must not be exacting enough.

The most exciting thing was *finishing*. Because the idea of “finishing” is alien to the idea of a diary. The last word of a diary kept for a lifetime is death. But what I'd undertaken was a limited project, a bit like a travel diary or a vacation diary, which you naturally stop writing once you get home. As the end of my research, or the reader's patience, approached, I set a deadline: I would stop on such and such a day! It became a race against the clock, managing to get everything said without slowing a descent that must be quick, leaving the reader feeling hungry for more rather than satiated.

So there I was, fifty-three years old, writing the diary of *Le Moi des demoiselles*, and this polished diary was the answer to a comment I had made to myself at the age of eighteen in consternation at my awful writing: “If I ever want to ‘write,’ I'll have to discipline myself somehow. . . .” It took a long time, a lifetime, following quite a winding path to arrive at that discipline! And to divest myself of the naïve idea that the results would be artificial.

Polishing a journal in “real time” is probably a banal “discovery” that many another has made without using a computer. But for me it was a flash of inspiration. And it didn’t stop there.

Once I had discovered the charms of the process, naturally I tended to go back to it. Not always, but whenever it seemed called for. In 1994, to get out of a tight spot after being asked for a piece on the impossible subject of “sincerity” (published in *Pour l’autobiographie*). In 1995, to wrap up my edition of the *Journal* of Lucile Desmoulins. And very recently, from October 4, 1999 to May 4, 2000, to tell about my exploration of online diaries (“*Cher écran . . .*”).

The unexpected consequence was that after *Le Moi des demoiselles*, I applied this strategy to my real diary, my personal diary. I started writing a readerless diary *as though there were a reader* (other than me). A diary, or rather *diaries* (here too, the singular bothers me). Thematic diaries, limited and constructed. Sometimes two diaries at the same time. And always composed using this system. The subject was no longer a research project that the diary was explaining, but my life itself, to which it was meant to give shape and meaning. Much riskier, and tragic, to be leaning over the edge of my future. My research was more or less predictable. But my life does what it wants and doesn’t always ask my opinion. Far from it! And is it possible, in the dead of night, when you’re writing only for yourself about painful things, to follow through on unpleasant overtones? Yes, it is, and indeed it is useful. Work is a form of meditation. By going slowly, you can sift through things, prune, articulate, understand things better, or less badly. And perhaps it is only in the present that the desire to compose reaches full harmony with the concern for truth-telling.

Of course, this diary without a reader *now* is being written with a view to a future, distant, unknown reader, a chimerical great-grand-nephew from the late twenty-first century, whose future birth will erase my death, and who will carry on for me. These scenes composed “from life” must make my life as transparent to him as Pieter de Hooch’s paintings make seventeenth-century Holland to us.

In 1980, my notes suggested three solutions for turning a diary into a constructed text: use it to write a narrative (that is, make something entirely different out of it, an autobiography or a novel); sift and rewrite (tidy it up); or, like Claude Mauriac, do a montage. These solutions are all predicated on a reworking after the fact. They are not a guarantee against artifice or heaviness. The diary as it is composed has more modest ambitions. It does not purport to take in all of existence, to resuscitate the past, or read a person’s fate. For brief periods, it sculpts life as it happens and takes up the challenge of time.

## NOTES

1. Translator's note: A line discussing the distinction in French between "journal intime" (diary) and "journal de presse" (newspaper) has been left out here, since in English this is not an issue.
2. A tale of the supernatural by Guy de Maupassant, the second version of which (1887) is in diary form. The most recent English version is *The Horla*, translated by Charlotte Mandell.

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## THE CONTINUOUS AND THE DISCONTINUOUS

“The continuous and the discontinuous”: I am going to focus my thoughts on the personal diary, and goodness knows, I feel as intimidated as when I was a teenager assigned an exam question with just fifteen minutes to produce something presentable. Zeno comes to my rescue first, with his famous paradox on dividing spatial movement ad infinitum to show that Achilles will never catch up with the tortoise—as though movement could be discontinuous!—and then Bergson’s refutation of it, and Valéry’s meditation on it in a well-known poem, “The Graveyard by the Sea,” or rather in one verse where he invokes “Zeno! Zeno! cruel philosopher Zeno!,” whose ending I remember like this, obsessed as I am by my subject: “Oh, what a tortoise-shadow to outrun my soul, Amiel’s giant stride left standing”—it’s Achilles, of course, not Amiel, but how can one help but think of that other paradox, the one that Harry Mathews wrote an entire novel about (*The Journalist*): the story of a man who spends so much time writing about his life that he has no time left to live it. And here I am slipping into philosophy—never my strong suit—right through to Deleuze and his image-movement analyses, and wondering how the diary, which projects discontinuous views of life, manages to recapture its movement.

I find all of this intimidating, and when I’m intimidated I hunker down and barricade myself in my diary. A diary is a place where you’re not afraid to make spelling mistakes or be stupid. Of course, ever since we developed the vile habit of publishing diaries, many people put on a suit and tie to write about their private lives. But you and I wear our old bedroom slippers and don’t give a hoot. So I am going to follow the trail of my thoughts and we’ll see where they lead us.

### THE PHYSICAL MEDIUM

When I retreat into my diary, the first thing I find that is related to our topic is the physical medium. I’ll leave aside the computer (and come back to it later). Two major types of media can be used: the notebook and loose-leaf pages—in other words, the continuous and the discontinuous. There are two schools of thought on this: I am a “loose pages” person, and I am in the minority.

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“Continu et discontinu.” *Signes de vie. Le pacte autobiographique 2*. Paris: Seuil, 2005. 73–90. Originally presented in the series “Continu et discontinu,” Villa Gillet, Lyon, 2 Apr. 2003.



At least 90 per cent of diarists are of the “notebook” variety. I was struck by that when I first did a survey on the question fifteen years ago. I thought I was the norm, and instead I found that almost everyone did what I hated doing. How can a person write in a notebook?! It’s the same as with lovemaking and other private behaviors: at first you don’t know what other people like, and when you find out, they’re unfathomable. I’m exaggerating a little: I do understand, since I tried the notebook method with my adolescent diary. I was not won over. I can see what other people are looking for: the assurance of continuity. No matter how irregular their writing practice, no matter how variable the subjects they deal with or the choices they make, they are taking out a sort of life insurance: the notebook will *scar everything over*, linking it all up and melting it together. This notebook—sewn, glued, stapled, or bound with spiral wires—on which people often write their names, operates at the level of the fantasy that Paul Ricoeur calls “narrative identity”: it promises some minimal measure of unity. This reminds me of my Zeno again: the discontinuous notes written in the notebook will transform the whiteness of the notebook, inert when purchased, into a vibrant space of movement, which is in essence continuous.

Two small problems crop up here. First of all, what happens when my notebook is filled up and falls back into discontinuity, while my life and my writing continue? How do you mourn a notebook that, once it is finished, ceases to be the image of a whole and becomes, so to speak, nothing but a “loose notebook” in a series that is once again discontinuous? Some notebooks contain moving good-byes that actually mean *au revoir*, because people make sure to construct a sort of “ultra-notebook” using procedures that restore continuity: numbering, which turns each notebook into the page of a larger notebook, and standardization; that is, choosing a notebook with the same form or a similar one. These gestures, which extend the desire that led to its selection beyond a single notebook, speak of something fundamental: fear of death. The life insurance I spoke of is not only a guarantee of unity, but also of duration. The ideal would be to write in a never-ending notebook. Since there is no such thing, canny diarists keep a stock of extras on hand to make sure they never run out. Although there is no such thing as a never-ending notebook at the stationers, something like it exists with the computer. I can keep my diary on a single file and never face a discontinuity in the physical medium, given the size of hard drives.

I mentioned that there were two small problems. Here is the second one. There are notebooks and then there are notebooks. Or rather, there are notebooks and there are datebooks. The notebook is ideal because it does not offer—or rather, force on you—a model for writing. The datebook, on the

other hand, “formats” the writing space according to the supposed rhythm of time. In principle, this is to help you plan the future. But in practice, many agendas are used as diaries. When that happens, the contradiction between the supposedly continuous and homogeneous tempo of life and the discontinuous and heterogeneous writing of it becomes visible to the naked eye: pages left blank, entries of different lengths, either very short or spilling over onto the next day. One could well imagine a diarist who made a point of recreating on paper an identical image of life’s continuity, forcing himself to write each day, without fail, enough text to cover the space available, with the last word of the last sentence falling precisely on the lower right corner of each page. Such people exist! And there are people who feel ill if they skip one day in their diary, and are compelled to fill in the blank or get caught up.

Since I am taking the liberty of going off on tangents unapologetically, as I do in my diary, I would like to open a small parenthesis here. First of all, I am looking askance at myself: am I being truly rigorous? Am I not confusing continuous/discontinuous with regular/irregular and homogeneous/heterogeneous—that is, confusing problems of space with problems of rhythm or content? And isn’t it precisely the datebook used as a diary that raises the essential problem, the problem of rhythm, which the notebook disguises? Couldn’t this tangent be the subject of a second digression? Let us keep it in reserve. This last parenthetical remark brings me back to my subject: could it be that my satirical treatment of the obsessive diarist springs from my own equally bizarre obsession: a passion for loose-leaf pages? Where does it come from? From a love of discontinuity. In my adolescent diary, each entry was made on a separate page. I never began the next entry in the blank space at the end of the previous one. I had read Heraclitus: you never bathe twice in the same page. For me the diary was a way of detaching myself from life, and I could not spoil the distance this gave me by immediately reconnecting to another continuity through a notebook that would bring me face to face, upstream, with the weight of the already-written, and downstream, with the immense emptiness of a future of blank pages demanding to be filled.

I didn’t want to escape the slavery of life only to succumb to the slavery of the notebook. I wanted just for a while to be—or to feel—free. To start from scratch on a blank sheet of paper, and let go of all those connections. Of course, that was also an illusion. And of course, it could not last. Once the sheet had been duly dated and written on, it went back into the homogeneous space of the pile for the year—a pile that I contemplated with satisfaction as it grew (whereas a notebook does not change size as it is filled with black, unless you turn it into a reliquary stuffed with documents that expand it into obesity). Even when joined together, however, my entries remained separate:

each one retained the trace of the moment in which it was written, on an individual medium that had its irregularities. They had separate bedrooms, rather than sleeping in the same paper. Their relationship with time was the same as for letters, and in fact my diary was modeled on the letter at first: I wrote “letter to myself” at the top of each page. What’s strange is that on the computer, for the past ten years, my diary-writing behavior has been the inverse: I would never dream of opening a file for each entry (there would be no point, since it’s all the same thing), and I have no qualms about continuing to write in one huge file (since the previous entries are invisible and there is nothing afterwards). But enough about me.

### THE RHYTHM

Let’s pick up on the trail left by the form of the datebook. What discontinuities do we move through on the way from the very real continuity of life to the partially imaginary continuity of the notebook? Because while the notebook might be continuous, diary writing certainly is not. It is fragmentary. It is made up of a series of “entries” or “notes”: that is the name we give to everything written under one date. These units, which are separated from one another, have their own morphology: date at the top, a beginning, an end, and possibly internal divisions (thematic divisions when different topics are covered in one entry, or rhetorical divisions when the entry is divided into paragraphs). So each entry is a microorganism caught up in a discontinuous whole: between two entries, a blank space. One follows another according to the order of the calendar and the clock, a continuum by which their discontinuities and irregularities can be gauged. That is one of my current research subjects, the link between the explosion of the diary form beginning in the late Middle Ages and two major revolutions in measuring and vectorizing time: the mechanical clock, invented in the early fourteenth century and gradually miniaturized so that from the seventeenth century on, each individual could measure his own time; and the annual calendar, which replaced the perpetual calendar in 1650 and transformed time into an irreversible and dynamic process. So entries are laid out in temporal order, and purport to recapture or evoke the continuity of time by coming one after another.

Of course, that is hardly the case! Let’s take an example and look at what happens in an average person’s diary. Certain writers, such as James Joyce, Michel Butor, Claude Simon, and Serge Doubrovsky, have constructed immense fictions to represent the continuity of one day in a life. But before we overwhelm the poor diary with this comparison, we should recall that these writers took years to build their models of a single day. And they were so exhausted by the effort that they never built another. It took them countless

days to tell about just one day. But the diarist is in the opposite situation: he has ten minutes to tell about twenty-four hours and he will have to do the same tomorrow, and the day after that, always.

Granted, the diary would like to be the temporal equivalent of what the sorcerer's mirror is in space, able to concentrate on a thin surface the total image of the surrounding reality. To be a sort of "panopticon." That is what it sometimes claims to do: "Dear little diary, I will tell you everything." But that is an illusion. Far from being a sorcerer's mirror, the diary is a filter. Its value lies precisely in its selectivity and discontinuities. Of the thirty-six possible facets of a diary, it will choose just one or two, those facets that represent whatever is problematic. Things that are going fine or that go without saying are left implicit. That's why a diary is rarely a self-portrait, or if it is taken as one, it sometimes seems like a caricature. Let's say instead that one day is, in reality, a continuous, sketchy mass, and the diary is a sculptor who gives it form by removing nine-tenths of its material, or a draftsman who draws a silhouette in a sketchbook with three pencil strokes.

This work of sifting—separating the real, digesting it, rejecting most of it, and making sense of the rest—is the work of life itself. But the diary takes it to the extreme by laying down the results and building these results into a series. A small parenthesis and a large piece of news: thirty years ago, when I was young, I set out a definition of autobiography that was certainly valuable, but fairly specific and chatty, which fit into three lines. Now that I'm older, with the benefit of wisdom or laziness, I am proposing a more general and economical definition of the diary, one that fits into three words: a diary is a *series of dated traces* [série de traces datées]. The date is essential. The trace is usually writing, but it can be an image, an object, or a relic. An isolated dated trace is a memorial rather than a diary: the diary begins when traces in a series attempt to capture the movement of time rather than to freeze it around a source event. All definitions are attractive (we like having points of reference) and annoying (we hate shackles). So we look for their weak point. And if we can't find one, we make jokes: isn't the diary a *narrative of traced dates*? Whatever. Close parenthesis.

So the diary's discontinuities are organized in series and rewoven into continuities. Suppose the contents of your day can be divided into 99 categories. Today you are going to write about things in, let's say, categories 38 and 86. Are you going to write about 5, 47, and 79 tomorrow? And about something else the day after? That is highly unlikely, luckily for your diary, which would lapse into incoherence. The diary has the opposite tendency: it is methodical, repetitive, and obsessive. You will write about topics 38 and 86 again tomorrow. In the tapestry of your life, you follow very specific threads, and only a small number of them. Just four letters, *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d* are usually

enough to flag the contents of a single diary. The diary itself may well be a narrative, but first and foremost it is a piece of music, meaning an art of repetition and variation. It occurred to me, while reading a month of May recorded at Cayla by Eugénie de Guérin, that her diary was a sonata on two themes: springtime and death. Or while analyzing one year in the diary of the young Catherine Pozzi, I realized that the ostensibly varied entries were all answers to one of these questions: “who am I?” (introspection) and “what should I be?” (deliberation).

You are no doubt aware of Benjamin Constant’s apparently strange idea: in May 1805, depressed by the death of his friend Madame Talma, he decided to keep his diary using numbers—not 1 to 99, but 1 to 17, representing his habitual activities or attitudes, which he identified by reading his previous diary. A look at this strange list is enough to tell us that numbers 1 to 4 would have sufficed: physical pleasure, work, and uncertainty about everything else (mainly women). The diary’s thematic obsessions are reinforced by the regularity of its forms. By definition, writing a diary is free, totally free. But in fact, each diarist quickly settles into a small number of forms of language that become “molds” for all of his entries, and never deviates from them. Which prompts me to nuance the opposition that I set up earlier between the continuity of the medium—the notebook—and the discontinuity of the fragmentary writing: it is indeed fragmentary, but it is also repetitive and regular.

All of these considerations go toward asking that the diary be studied some day as a rhythm. Such a study would have two dimensions: first the internal and then the external. The internal dimension would begin with an analysis of the diary text itself, to establish its internal morphology (themes and forms) and how the links between them are organized: precisely what one does in musical analysis when parsing a sonata or a fugue. One would use a textual unit of measurement: the quantity of writing, measured in lines or pages. The external study would then compare the results with another parameter: time, measured in days, weeks, or months. The continuities and irregularities of writing would become visible immediately. I remember that, for my talk at the exhibition *Un journal à soi*, I made a diagram of one year in Amiel’s massive, regular diary and compared it with the diagram of Captain Dreyfus’s diary from Devil’s Island, which was a tragic decrescendo. The point was to illustrate, using a striking example, that practices are highly variable. I remember preparing a much more detailed, day-by-day representation of the unpublished diary of Paul Jamin, an adolescent from the nineteenth century, through which I was able to visualize huge, nearly imperceptible pockets of silence within the flow of the text. The blank space between two entries is the same size if the diary stops for a day or a month, and the eye, if

it ignores the dates, joins the entries together. I remember the detailed quantitative studies I did comparing the rhythm of Anne Frank's original diary with the rhythm of the loose-leaf pages on which she prepared a version for publication by regulating and channeling the torrential flow of the real diary. And since that exhibition was in Lyon, I would like to mention that Charles Juliet's diary has just been subjected to a very interesting "rhythm analysis" by Stéphane Roche, a young researcher whose thesis contains a set of "diarograms," so to speak, that reveal the temperature curve of the diary and its development over some thirty years. He was following up on an idea that I proposed in *Le Moi des demoiselles*: perhaps I should patent it and develop it as diary analysis software? It could be used to produce a rhythmic typology of diaries, just as Michèle Leleu once tried to do with characterology. I've been held back by my fear of becoming a cyber-Diafoirus of diarismology.

### THE ACT

Yes, I am on the wrong track. I must tackle the problem from a different angle. I have focused too much on the diary as a product, whereas it is an act. The important thing is not to measure the discontinuities with a ruler, but to find out how they are experienced. First I will try to explain how and why the diary is a *piece of lacework*, a *sport*, an *art of improvisation*. And I will conclude by speaking of two brilliant diarists you may not be familiar with, diarists who invented new ways of grasping the continuities of life through the discontinuities of the diary.

The diary is a piece of lacework or a spider web. It is apparently made up of more empty space than filled space. But for the person who is writing, the discrete points of reference that I set down on paper hold an invisible galaxy of other memories in suspension around them. Thanks to association of ideas and allusions, their shadows and virtual existence linger for a while. Gradually they evaporate, like a flower losing its scent. This is an astonishing feature of the diary that makes it unlike almost any other type of text: no outside reader can read it the same way as the author, even though the very purpose of reading it is to discover its private contents. You will never really know what the text of my diary means to me. The discontinuous made explicit refers to an implicit continuum to which I alone hold the key, and one that does not require any numbering system. To get close to the truth of another person's diary, then, one must read a lot of it for a long time. A diary is a dark room that you enter from a brightly lit exterior. It is so dark in there that you can't see a thing, but if you stay there for half an hour, you begin to see outlines, silhouettes begin to emerge from the shadows, you begin to make things out. It's like learning a foreign language, with all of its implicit content and connotations.

Diary writing is a sport. By that I mean that it is not first and foremost an art that is developed to give meaning or pleasure to others. Instead, it is a performance. Something like skiing or sailing: for your own purposes, you use the energy from a natural force that carries you along. Keeping a diary is surfing on time. Time is not an objective, continuous thing that the diarist tries to portray from the outside using tiny discontinuous brushstrokes, as a novelist would. He is himself caught up by the movement he is sculpting, moving along with it, emphasizing certain lines and directions, transforming this inescapable drift into a dance.

Earlier, I caught myself in the act of intellectual vagueness when I conflated the continuous and the regular, and here I am now in a state of complete metaphorical drunkenness. Oh well. I'll go for broke and compare the diary to musical improvisation, which requires both mastery of a technique and immediate acceptance of the unknown. I will have to compose on whatever canvas life offers me, often without asking my opinion. We all know that people generally look down on the diary form. The diary is said to have no form of its own, to be marred from being facile, "the art of non-artists," as Thibaudet said of autobiography. I am doing my utmost to prove the contrary: that no art is subject to greater or stricter constraints. This is a type of writing for which none of the ordinary working procedures is allowed: the diarist can neither *compose* nor *correct*. He must say the right thing on the first try. People don't know the future when they write their diaries: you might have a set of hypotheses about what will happen tomorrow, and you may prepare lines of writing that actuality will choose between, but at the end of the day, you are collaborating blindly on a soap opera with an unpredictable screenplay. Besides, you are not allowed to make corrections later. When the clock strikes midnight, everything must remain just as it is. The diary's value lies in its being the trace of a moment. If I begin fixing things the next day, I do not add value to my diary: I kill it. As with watercolors, you cannot retouch it later. As soon as you become aware of these constraints, you find them exhilarating. Here's a confession: for twenty years, I thought that in the field of truth-based texts, autobiography was the highest form of art. I have changed my mind: the diary, when written exactly, now seems superior to me. But since *composing* and *correcting* are a necessary part of building form, one must learn to do those things *in the moment*. With computers, corrections can be made on the fly: I only close my entry once it sounds *right*. The practice of keeping a "working journal" made me aware of composition procedures that remained open to the future. I learned this while writing a journal for publication: the journal that frames *Le Moi des demoiselles*. I then extended this method to my private diaries, to take them to a new level of tension and authenticity, in my secret space.

One last parenthesis: poised at the razor's edge of the moment, the diarist must decide each day whether to continue or discontinue her diary. The verb "discontinue" is rarely used now in this transitive way, with a meaning somewhere between suspend, interrupt, and stop, but is also indicative of remorse for betraying continuity as a value. Sometimes people do decide to discontinue their diaries, but usually it is something they later realize, sadly, that they have done: "Dear Diary, how could I have abandoned you for . . . (a month, two years)." In fact, you have done fine without it, and it is only when you feel the need to write once again that your happy neglect feels like infidelity. Why do I say "happy"? Because it is not clear that continuity at any price is a value. The diary unifies the personality, but it can also ossify or rigidify it. You become your own pencil pusher. Sometimes you have to stop looking at yourself, forget about yourself, and plunge into the world and the future. There are different degrees in how you "discontinue" your diary: mild, through neglect; medium, by voluntarily suspending it; strong, by stopping forever; and violent, by destroying it. It's true: many diaries are completely or partially destroyed by their authors. This should not necessarily be interpreted as a small suicide. It's more like pruning the trees at the end of winter to prepare for a vigorous spring. Molting. Life needs discontinuity and renewal. What's more, a diary's discontinuity may be quite relative. Most people who like to write have several writing work sites that do not follow the same routine: their flow of energy affects them differently at different times. Your diary may dry up as your correspondence burgeons. Or some writers (usually men) come back to their diaries in between creative periods. They put themselves on standby, waiting for the flame of their genius to flare up again.

So rest assured: there is nothing wrong with stopping your diary. I offer this piece of comforting advice because I have often noticed that discontinuity scares people, who usually long for continuity. Continuity with the future: I am thinking of the small, quite remarkable gesture made by some diarists who, once they have finished their daily entry in the evening, plan ahead by writing the next day's date, taking out an option on the future, reaching out to it, a magical gesture of conjuring. Continuity with the past: I am thinking of two extraordinary works that have not been, and perhaps cannot be, imitated. Works that used the diary and its discontinuities to grasp the profound continuity of life. I see that I have not cited many diarists, but my favorites are here: Benjamin Constant, Eugénie de Guérin, Catherine Pozzi, Anne Frank, and Amiel, with his giant stride left standing. Imagine Amiel "discontinuing" his diary, stopping one month, like a train in the middle of nowhere! Once his diary reached cruising speed, around 1847, he was all about continuity: he used sewn notebooks of the same size, numbered, and



in particular, he prepared an index so that he could move around in his past. So there you have it: the diary creates continuity, not only between today and yesterday, but also across the whole span of one's life. Can it give us access to a fundamental permanence? When we plunge into the abyss of the past, is there another way to sound its depths besides the reminiscence indicated by Proust, and before him Nerval or Chateaubriand? Can voluntary memory, mobilized by the diary, be just as effective in this quest as involuntary memory? My two explorers along these lines are Pierre-Hyacinthe Azaïs, whom you have probably never heard of, and Claude Mauriac. Here are two quick sketches of their extensive work.

Pierre-Hyacinthe Azaïs, 1766–1845. Like Rousseau, he was a musician (a viola player and composer), a man of letters, a teacher like Rousseau, like Rousseau a philosopher and the inventor of a system. Here is his doctrine, as summed up in a biographical note: “His doctrine, which he claimed was founded on science, holds that the universe is explained by two forces, expansion and compression, which ultimately give rise to a single principle of equilibrium, ‘constantly invariable in a constantly varied movement.’ This law of compensation explains both the physical world and individual psychology as well as the history of nations.” We do not know whether it was an attempt to test this law on himself, or simply to derive greater pleasure from life—it was probably both—but Azaïs undertook a monumental Anniversary Diary. From 31 December 1810 (he was 44 and had just married) until 7 December 1844 (he was 78 and would die two months later), he kept a journal every day, virtually without interruption (when he noticed one afterwards, he filled it in by writing “lacuna/gap”), on loose-leaf pages divided into 366 bundles, one for each day of the year, including the thinner bundle for February 29, a total of more than 12,000 entries over a period of thirty-four years. This unpublished diary, which is held in the Tarn Archives, has been carefully studied by Michel Baude. Every day, Azaïs writes not by picking up on the day before, as you or I would do, but by picking up on the same day from the year before. He does not write merely “in continuation”: he first rereads the entry in question to remind himself of what he was doing on that date, then compares his situation with how things were a year earlier, and enters into a dialogue with the diarist from a year ago. His life is solidly moored to the past by 366 ropes that are constantly retightened. He spends his time comparing the changes in his health, family, work, and especially his social successes. He wants to become a member of the Academy but does not get in. The theory of compensations is some consolation: he sees every rebuff as improving his chances for posthumous glory. From one year to the next, he apostrophizes, consoles, and encourages himself. And little by little, his

life takes on the consistency of reinforced concrete—or rather the consistency of a tapestry in which the shuttle of writing solidly binds the warp and the woof. This composition protocol makes it rather dizzying to read his diary. If you want to follow Azaïs through the month of October 1824, you have to go through 31 files. If you want to read the “October” bundle in its current order, you have to go back over this man’s life 31 times from the age of 44 to 78! I am planning to publish part of this text, and am looking for a method. The answer probably lies outside the classic space of the book, in the area of hypertext. So I will create an Azaïs site or CD-ROM full of links, so that each person can choose how he wants to make his way through it.

The idea of hypertext is also required for Claude Mauriac, 1914–1996, whom I will discuss more briefly since his work is available in bookstores. His diary exists in two forms: the original diary, handwritten in notebooks and then typewritten on loose-leaf pages, kept from 1927 (age 13) until his death in 1996, for sixty-nine years, in chronological order, and taking up three linear meters of shelves in the closets in his home. Then, under the title *Le Temps immobile* (“Motionless Time”), fifteen volumes published by Grasset between 1974 and 1988, followed by a few volumes of *Le Temps accompli* (“Completed Time”) (Claude Mauriac had first thought of titling it *Le Temps écroulé*, or “Collapsed Time”), presenting the labyrinthine arrangement of a rereading based on two devices: *analogy* (looking for everything that appears similar or creates echoes across the years, and finding all of the hidden consistencies beneath the surface diversity), and *arbitrary sampling*, or what Claude Mauriac called “diving,” in which Mauriac does like Azaïs, but with one variation. Strangely enough, Azaïs (as far as I could tell from my partial reading) always does a shallow dive, so to speak, into the waters of the preceding year, not ten, twenty, or thirty years back (once that was possible). Claude Mauriac, however, discovered the idea for *Le Temps immobile* in 1963, when he had thirty-five years of journals behind him, and his sampling is vertiginous. I started my own diary at the age of fifteen, on 11 October 1953, so next fall I will be able to look back over fifty years in my writing and perhaps I will be tempted to see whether, through the monstrous chaos and discontinuities of a life, I have made a single step forward.

A few words in conclusion.

Throughout this exploration, continuity and discontinuity have often seemed to me to be linked to changes in means of communication or measurement. Let us open a media path à la Régis Debray. The rise of the diary in the late Middle Ages as a form of personal expression coincided with the rise of paper and the clock. And our current entry into the virtual space of information technology and an excess of communication (as opposed to

transmission) will no doubt give rise to new conduits in the field of the diary, and will transform it.

Second path: I am struck by the creative resources in this field, even though fiction is banned from it. Extremely easy, extremely difficult. Perhaps, for anyone who takes this challenge seriously, a new frontier?

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## HOW DO DIARIES END?

The question occurred to me in 1997 as I was preparing an exhibit called *Un Journal à soi* [A diary of one's own], created by the Association pour l'Autobiographie at the Lyon public library (Lejeune and Bogaert). My approach was didactic: I wanted to construct a story where the spectator would follow the different phases in the life of a diary, just as in the good old days, in primary school, they used to show us the workings of the digestive system, beginning with a mouthful of bread. A story, Aristotle will tell you, must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Here, it needed to follow the diary writing process represented in the exhibit.

### WHAT IS THE END OF A DIARY?

The problem arose at three different points in the sequence we were planning for the exhibit.

—The beginning of a diary is almost always indicated: it is rare to begin one without saying so. In one way or another, you *mark off* this new territory of writing—with a name, a title, an epigraph, a commitment, a self-presentation. . . . We had plenty of such beginnings, so we wondered if similar rituals existed for ending a diary.

—In the exhibit's section on time, we examined the first and the last pages of diaries that had been kept throughout an entire life: the diary of Amiel (1839–1881, forty-two years worth of writing, 173 journals, 16,800 pages), of Jehan Rictus (1898–1933, thirty-five years, 153 journals, 34,800 pages), and of Claude Mauriac (1927–1995, sixty-eight years, we have yet to count the total number of pages, but the journal measures three and a half meters).<sup>1</sup> The section on time was meant to demonstrate the immense duration of an existence, to show the transformation of diary writing over time. We didn't expect it to tell us much about endings, since the diary writer is often not the author of the diary's end and doesn't even know that "this" page would be the last.

—The end of our sequence led us to examine the idea of an ending, leaving aside those *de facto* endings (the most numerous kind) that weren't

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experienced as such, and trying to grasp the ending as an act, in all senses of the word:

- a) a voluntary and explicit stop (to a journal that has not been destroyed);
- b) the destruction of a diary (an energetic and definitive closure);
- c) a rereading (subsequent annotation, table of contents, indexing);
- d) publication (a transformation that assumes some sort of closure).

We were overwhelmed. What a contrast between the simplicity of a diary's beginning and the evanescence of its ending: the multiple forms ending can take (stopping, destroying, indexing are all different, even opposite actions); the uncertainty of point of view (is the ending the act of the person writing—and at what moment of writing?—or of the person reading?); and the impossibility, most of the time, of grasping this death of writing.

Classic texts on the diary, in French at least, offered no help: they ignore the problem. Nor did “How to” manuals provide any assistance. They are full of good advice on how to wrap up an autobiography. But it wouldn't occur to anyone to explain how to end a diary. It would be like writing a treatise on suicide.

To unravel this knot, I made a compilation of sixteen endings from diaries. I have followed Descartes's method, to “divide these difficulties into as many fragments as necessary to best resolve them,” but without intending to resolve them. I will thus distinguish among:

- 1) the ending as a horizon of expectation. I will try to show how the diary is experienced as writing without an end;
- 2) the end seen in relation to finality, or rather, to the possible finalities of a diary (I will distinguish four); and
- 3) the end as *reality*, the diary faced with the death (natural or voluntary) of its author.

These will be three meditations on writing, life, and death.

### **HORIZON OF EXPECTATION**

“To be continued in the next episode. . . .” “Stay tuned. . . .” When you write the entry of the day, you don't know what will happen in the next episode, nor whether it is already inscribed in the Big Book, as Jacques the Fatalist would say. But by writing today, you prepare yourself to be able to live tomorrow, and to piece together, in a predetermined framework of writing, the story of what you will have lived. All journal writing assumes the intention to write at least one more time, an entry that will call for yet another one, and

so on without end. I once had a look at the hospital journal of the poet Louis Guillaume—a small, unfinished notebook. Each day, after finishing his entry, he would write down the next day's date. One day, without even knowing it, he wrote down the date of his death, and the diary remained on hold. This is why it is so pleasurable to purchase a new datebook every January. It's an annual life insurance. The diarist is protected from death by the idea that the diary will continue. There is always writing to be done, for all eternity. The intention to write one more time presupposes the possibility of doing it. You enter into a phantasmagoric space where writing runs into death. The infinite post-script. . . .

Here, for example, are the last lines from André Gide's last text, a meditation in the form of a diary, written six days before his death. In it, you can observe two contrary yet complementary tendencies: in the first paragraph, the refusal to finish, the desire to write, to write anything at all, in order to go on living; in the second, a theatrical "final word," doubtless premeditated. If you really have to finish, better do it yourself, and carefully polish your exit:

No! I cannot admit that with the end of this notebook, everything will be over; that it will be done. Maybe I will want to still add something more. Add I don't know what. Just add. Maybe. At the last minute, add still something more. . . . I'm tired, it's true. But I don't want to sleep. It seems that I could be even more tired. I have no idea what time of night, or day, it is. . . . Do I still have anything to say? Something more to say I don't know what.

My own place in the sky, in relation to the sun, mustn't make dawn seem any less beautiful.

Before turning at greater length to diaries that end naturally, let's put aside those cases where endings are predetermined: vacation or travel diaries, work or research diaries, or the journal of a spiritual retreat, a pregnancy, and so on. Their limitation is simultaneously chronological and thematic. These are partial diaries, devoted to a single phase and organized around a particular area of experience. The self extends beyond the scope of these diaries and will survive their ending. The problem of the ending only becomes crucial in an "all-purpose" diary, written to accompany a life for as long as possible. Nevertheless, this all-purpose diary has its own rituals of closure, but only of *partial* closure, which assume the diary will continue. It's a sort of relay, with one visible face turned towards the past, and another virtual face turned towards the future. Closure can come at the *end of a period* (a week, a month, a year), and include a summary (information) and/or an assessment (appreciation) of the period coming to a close. This activity is often marked materially within the physical diary: an extra space is left at the end of each cycle. This practice

resembles a religious soul-searching or—in another register—a final invoice of personal accounts.

Closure can come when you *run out* of material. You get to the end of a notebook, and it's a chance to look back before tackling the next one. Sometimes, the notebook itself has acquired a personality, even a proper name: you tell it your good-byes, you mourn it. Thus Ariane Grimm was unable to tear herself away from her dear little "Copper": "I still have *so many* things to tell. I will tell them to Popcorn. My little Copper, I don't want to leave you this way. Thank you for everything. I kiss you on the lips, Copper" (122).

The diary writer can put off the moment when his or her material runs out. You don't want to abandon the notebook, so you write on the back cover, or you add loose pages. Or you can anticipate the depletion of materials: you abandon your notebook with many blank pages left. The choice of material is tied to an apprehension about death. The size and thickness of the notebook selected do not merely correspond to practical constraints. If it's too big, I'll never finish it. The excess space is the silence of death. If it's too small, I'll run up against the final word. Here for example is Simone, a young girl of sixteen, who at the end of her first diary explains why she chose an identical notebook for her second one:

Here I am on the last page of this dear diary.

It knows everything, it can tell me all, let me easily evoke everything that has happened in the past four years. My joys and my sorrows, my ideas, my thoughts, my ambitions and my disillusionments, my good memories, my regrets, my friends, my loves, my family, I have told it everything, confided everything, and filled it full to bursting. It will cede its place to another, which will be green just like it, which will even have the same format, to give the impression of forever starting over.

The preference for loose pages, or for the indefinite space of a computer file, can no doubt also be explained by the desire to avoid the situation of the end. You escape both the obligation of filling in and the need to stop.

Now let's get back to the rituals of closure. They are part of the virtual structure of a diary, which I will call a "shuttle," an oscillation between the past and the future. They partition off the past, like lowlands reclaimed from the sea and protected by dikes; and this structuring and protective operation that I undertake today with respect to yesterday seems to be the model of the operation that I will perform tomorrow on what I have written today. This is because the diary is not only the recording of successive presents, opening onto an indeterminate future fatally closed by death. From the beginning, the diary also programs its own rereading. It might in fact never be reread, but it could be. It's like a radar signal that you project towards the future and feel strangely

coming back to you. Without this presence of the future, you wouldn't write. The diary no longer leads to the contingency of an absurd ending, but toward the transcendence of one or several future rereadings. You don't imagine it finished; rather, you see it reread (by yourself) or read (by another).

A shuttle: I see the diary as a giant, invisible loom. There is only woof because there is warp. But rather than spin out this potentially risky metaphor, I will construct a model to describe the relationship of opposition and complementarity I believe exists between autobiography and the diary.

An autobiography is virtually finished as soon as it begins, since the story that you begin must end at the moment that you are writing it. You know the end point of the story, because you have reached it, and everything you write will lead up to this point, explaining how you got there. An autobiography is turned towards the past, so if something escapes you, it's the origin, not the ending. Even if the ending changes place during the writing process, I continue to coincide with it. I am always at the endpoint of my story.

The notion of an "unfinishable" autobiography is based on a double confusion: between autobiography and biography (which I won't discuss here), and between autobiography and diary. It is as diary that autobiography is unfinishable. Likewise, it is as autobiography that the diary can be "finished." All autobiography is finishable. The proof is that "how to" handbooks devote entire chapters to the rituals of closure. That you survive your autobiography is only a consequence of the fact that the act of writing, situated in time, can only be imagined from the perspective of the diary. The diary is virtually unfinishable from the beginning, because there is always a time lived beyond the writing, making it necessary to write anew, and one day, this time beyond will take the shape of death.

A diary is turned towards the future, so if something is missing, it is not the beginning, but the end that changes in the course of writing it. When I meet up with the future, it slips away from me by showing up once again in the beyond. To "finish" a diary means to cut it off from the future and integrate that future in the reconstruction of the past. The movement I called "shuttle" aims to recuperate periodically the diary as an autobiography. Provisionally summarized and evaluated, the diary nevertheless retains its status as a diary open to future reinterpretations.

Within autobiography, though, the movement of representation of the time of writing opens the text up to the virtual dimension of a future without end. As soon as the end of the autobiography has been determined, this provisional opening will be reintegrated as an element belonging to the past world that one will have "closed." Certainly, such a thing as a pure diary, without any autobiographical reconstruction, can exist. And, at the other end



of the spectrum, so can pure autobiography, which gives no representation of the time of writing. That is what justifies the analysis that I just made. More often than not, we can find a trace of one tendency within the other. It is a question of hierarchy or of dominant traits.

Finally, though this is rare, there is writing that wants to balance itself at the center of the system, trying to escape death by equalizing the oscillation. What a dizzying and chimerical effort! This assumes that we can neutralize or de-emphasize the story line. Story is undoubtedly necessary for constructing our identity, oriented towards the past, but its Aristotelian obsession with heading towards an ending is . . . deadly. Two writers, among others, have tried it. Michel Leiris, in a diary entry dated September 26, 1966, dreamed of a writing that death could not interrupt:

A book that would be neither an intimate diary nor a fully formed work, neither an autobiography nor a work of imagination, neither poetry nor prose, but all of that at once. A book conceived so as to be able to constitute an autonomous whole at whatever moment it is interrupted (by death, of course).

He thinks that he has found the solution in the musical device known as the variation:

Whether or not the musical suite is interrupted here or there should only be of secondary importance, since there wouldn't be a progression towards a "conclusion," but merely proliferation. (614–15)

But how do you associate the structure of musical variation with that of a diary, whose flux is irreversible and unforeseeable? Perhaps the association can only be indirect, by recycling a past journal into a composition which is itself in the form of a current journal. That is what Claude Mauriac tried to do. He reconstructed his journal into a gigantic accumulation of labyrinthine explorations, using a present which is itself subject to the flow of time, but which he integrates and disperses in his *montage*. . . . Some of his titles, those of the series (*Motionless Time [Le Temps immobile]*) or of one of the volumes (*Eternity Sometimes [L'Éternité parfois]*) make you think inevitably of "Achilles immobile in mid-stride." But Mauriac could not avoid the problem of the ending. He wanted to find an ending for the series, to have a last volume, a last chapter of *Motionless Time*. . . . Then, despite his decision, he started over again with a new series, that he first imagined calling *Collapsed Time [Le Temps écroulé]*, which was courageous, then *Completed Time [Le Temps accompli]*, which was imprudent, since the series itself, which was not very coherent, and which frequently reverted to chronological order, gave precisely the impression of time collapsing.

It is often said that the diary is defined by a single feature: dating. Chronological order is its original sin—and ours. Certainly, the diary is also a form of fragmented writing that can be compared (and associated?) with other fragmentary genres, such as lists or musical variations, which have various relationships to the notion of an ending. But with the diary, it's different still, for at the end of it all, the idea of what comes next protects us from the idea of the end. If this is an illusion, is it any different from the illusion that gives us the courage, day after day, to live out the rest of our lives?

### FINALITIES

So far, I have been arguing about the diary as if it were a whole, taking as my reference point an “all-purpose” diary that accompanies the diarist throughout his or her life. This is reducing the genre to just one of its varieties, and not the most common one. My research, and the preparation of the exhibit, have shown me the extreme diversity of diary forms and functions, and above all, the transient and scattered nature of diary writing practices throughout a lifetime. People who remain faithful unto death to one and the same diary are rare. You keep a journal for a week, six months, a year, for one reason; fifteen years later, for another reason, you stop and start up again with a very different kind of journal, and so on. These are relationships, passing fancies. There are periods with a diary and periods without. Keeping a journal is often an activity for periods of crisis: discontinuity is typical. Discontinuity, for that matter, is part and parcel of the diary's rhythm. There are two schools of diary writers. There are those who write each day out of discipline or habit, who suffer when they skip a day and “catch up” when they're behind, filling in omissions. And there are those who write, more or less regularly, when they need to. In the latter case, the most common one, how do you know if a journal is “finished”? Suppose I haven't written in three months. I pick up my pen and in a few seconds the continuity of writing sews up the hole. Or I don't, but I think about it, sometimes composing journal entries in my head that I never write down—everything is left in suspense. Or else I completely neglect my journal, and it's when I suddenly find it again that I realize it's “finished.” For example, Roger Martin du Gard wrote in 1949, one month after his wife's death:

For the past month I have been watching myself think, act, suffer, and continue to live in a kind of stupid astonishment. I am trying to understand what has happened to me, what I am feeling. I am living in a kind of lucid stupor.

The fact that I have not been tempted even once to open this diary, to record the most serious event of my entire life, surely proves that *this diary is finished*, that it no longer responds to my needs. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Finally, I want to outline four distinct functions of the diary. Doubtless there are others, and a real diary fulfills several functions at once. These functions include expression, reflection, memory, and the pleasure of writing.

**1. To express oneself.** I divide this first function in two: to release and to communicate.

*To release*, to unload the weight of emotions and thoughts in putting them down on paper. This impulse can be associated with conservation, but its affinities are closer to the impulse to *destroy*. Putting something down on paper means separating it from yourself, purifying and cleansing yourself. You can also push purification to its limit and get rid of the paper. In general, this gesture is not foreseen from the beginning. It's in the course of a subsequent rereading, or when one stumbles upon the diary by chance years later, that the irreparable act is carried out. I say irreparable because it is not uncommon to regret this little suicide after the fact. . . . But for some diarists, the destruction, anticipated from the beginning, is ritually accomplished on a set date. I was truly astonished the first time I discovered a case like this, but since then, I have met several other people who regularly destroy their diaries while continuing to write in new ones. The future self is liberated from the weight of the past by this destruction, while the present self is relieved by the new writing. The function of expression is dissociated from the function of memory—one can even say it is tied to a function of forgetting. This is the logic of shedding. You leave your old skin behind you. You get rid of it to be reborn! It's Phoenix. Is the act itself melancholic? Joyous? Do you reread your diary before destroying it? Do you feature your destructive act at the beginning of the new diary that you will eventually throw away in turn? Often, it's a question of annual rites of passage—a sort of spring cleaning, after which you set out again, lighter.

*To communicate*. You empty your heart out onto paper because you are alone, unable to pour it out to a friendly ear. “Dear Diary,” or “Dear Kitty,” as Anne Frank wrote. The “end” of a diary can come simply because this problem has been resolved: you meet a person with whom you can talk or to whom you can write. An intermediate phase might involve showing the diary to this person. The classic example is the adolescent's diary, which stops at the threshold of a grand love affair or a definitive commitment. The diary has every chance of being preserved, or even given to a new real-life confidant, who can respond. It is the letter, or the daily conversation that will take up the slack. Take for example the end of the diary of Dominique, who, when she was seventeen, imagined burying her diary, and who is now abandoning it for good at age twenty-five, when she meets the man of her dreams:

I have met a man who will know how to love me and whom I am going to love. His name is Jean-Pierre. He is young, looks like a lost adolescent. [She describes him]. I think that our chance encounter has saved both of our lives. His story touched me to the depths of my soul.

I will never write again.

**2. To reflect.** Again, there are two aspects—to analyze oneself and to deliberate. The diary offers a space and time protected from the pressures of life. You take refuge in its calm to “develop” the image of what you have just lived through and to meditate upon it, and to examine the choices to be made. A diarist like Amiel even reserved a special notebook to record his (matrimonial) deliberations (*Delibérations*). This activity of reflection is often associated with the functions of expression and of memory, in diaries that are kept a long time. But reflection is also at the heart of diaries maintained in times of crisis. A crisis diary is, if I dare say so, in search of its own ending. You are constantly searching how to get out of the crisis, and as a consequence, out of the diary itself. Hence the little diary kept by Benjamin Constant in 1803, that he called *Amélie et Germaine* (should he marry Amélie to escape Germaine de Staël?). Constant made a slender notebook for himself that he divided from the start into numbered chapters. The end was on the horizon: he did not marry Amélie, but he finished the story (only to jump into it again later). It is said that psychoanalysis is “interminable.” But it is also said that you can do it in “pieces.” These pieces must certainly be cut somewhere. Surely then, you leave a diary the way you leave an analyst.

**3. To freeze time.** To build a memory out of paper, to create archives from lived experience, to accumulate traces, prevent forgetting, to give life the consistency and continuity it lacks. This is obviously the cardinal function of the problem examined here. Ideally (if I can say so!), the end should only come to the diary from the outside. Here we’re in the state of mind of the collector. The accumulated series, growing by one unit each day, is always incomplete. Stopping the daily entry is a relative failure; destroying the diary is a total failure—at least from this perspective. I will come back to the problem of death and suicide in a minute.

**4. To take pleasure in writing,** since one also writes because it is . . . pleasant. It is good and pleasant to give shape to what you live, to make progress in writing, to create an object in which you recognize yourself. But other forms of writing can satisfy this need and compete with diary-keeping. There is nothing dramatic about stopping a diary, when memory is not its most important function, and when it is not the only form of writing available. The flow of energy that courses through the practice of writing in a diary can

be directed elsewhere. You often hear of writers (usually men) who say that diaries are wasted efforts, good only for idle moments between two writing projects. Stopping a diary is then a healthy management strategy, enabling greater literary productivity. The attenuation of a diary, used as the laboratory for a writer's entire *oeuvre*, can also lead to or accompany a gradual abandonment or slowdown of the *oeuvre* itself, as was the case for Pierre Loti and Michel Leiris. Other connections certainly exist between the diary and creative writing, which make the "end" of the diary a minor problem, or the variant of a larger question—the end of writing.

Reviewing all the functions of a diary demagnifies the problem of its ending. We see it as part of life's current—not alone in being faced with the threat of death, but carried along in the flow of investment and divestment, subject to stops and starts. Let me sketch, at random, a few accounts of how diaries are ended. Sometimes you feel your diary is atrophying, unraveling, dissolving. You keep it with less conviction, and then you are fed up with it, you are dismayed at the results, disgusted with the repetitions; you are amazed at having been able to maintain it, and you wake up from it as if from a dream. It is because you have changed. Something has died in you—perhaps a virtual addressee, of whom you were not even aware, but whose disappearance has made the edifice crumble. Or, on the contrary, the diary dies a violent death because it has met an unwanted reader. The adolescent trauma of having your diary read by someone close to you can ruin any possibility of personal writing for years, sometimes forever. Or, in a different manner, here is the closure of a diary used as a *constraint on writing*: I need to wrap up this diary, which depicts a particular slice of my life, before next Sunday, or exactly a month from now. The anticipation of an ending involves the diarist in what might seem the very opposite of the ordinary practice of keeping a diary: the work of composition. I have done this work more than once, both when I have kept diaries destined for public consumption, for example as part of *Le Moi des demoiselles* (about nineteenth-century young girls' diaries) or of "*Cher écran . . .*" (about online diaries on the web), but also in private, in my personal diaries. You sail freely through the surprises of everyday life while maintaining a course for the punchline up ahead. It's very stimulating. And anyway, doesn't this taste for wrapping up appear at the most elementary level when the diarist carefully polishes the last line of an entry?

A day arrives, however, when the end is no longer a rhetorical strategy. The end of writing and the end of life appear in profile, together on the horizon. The range of possibilities diminishes, slowly or suddenly.

## ENDINGS

You persevere, or you resign yourself. . . .

*Perseverance.* You know that the end is near. You were already keeping a diary, and all of a sudden you fall ill (Matthieu Galey) or you weaken gradually (Amiel): the diary is transformed into a battlefield against death. Or perhaps you have never kept a diary, and the idea of chronicling your struggle day by day (Johann Heuchel) or occasionally recording your decline (Alphonse Daudet) seems like a way of holding yourself up. What you write about in secret you can spare others. You need to go easy on them so they can support you. At the same time, you call on them as imaginary witnesses to the struggle going on privately: one day, afterwards, they will read about it. In contrast to the end of one individual life is the fact that the species continues; their reading will connect them to your agony. While I'm writing, I survive. And then, as my body self-destructs, I reconstruct myself in writing by noting this destruction. I who suffer become active again. I get the upper hand. This mastery is not imaginary, even if it does not spare me from death. Lucidity. Black comedy. Self-image intact. Perhaps a diary sometimes helps you to "die well," the way religion used to do.

*Resignation.* You hang your head, you put down your pen. You don't have enough strength for the daily routine. Of course, it is necessary to distinguish between agony (you want to continue, but you cannot: Amiel's last journal entry is on April 29, 1881, he died May 11th) and old age (you could continue, but you don't want to). A diary that has been kept regularly stops, just like that, without warning. More often, the entries become scarce, then dissolve. Sometimes the diarist herself certifies the atrophy (Virginia Woolf, January 15, 1941). Sometimes, in a touching gesture, the diary's abandonment is thematized in the final entry, and there is a farewell ceremony. This is a difficult and contradictory gesture, since you recognize the value of what you are abandoning. Or you might start up again several more times, like an actor who hasn't finished his last performance. You begin to give up on your activities; you go into retirement. Henceforth you will advance unprotected towards death, without the shield of writing. Thus, Pierre Loti, who finished his diary twice, wrote:

December 30, 1911 [age 61]. I stop this sad diary of my waning life on this page. I began it thirty years ago. It does not interest me anymore and without a doubt, it would not interest anyone after me. I take my leave . . . in oblivion.

August 20, 1918 [age 68]. Today, on the 20th of August, in anticipation of my death, I am definitively stopping this diary of my life, begun nearly forty-five years ago. It does not interest me anymore and could no longer interest anyone else.

Perseverance and resignation are personified by two writers who were friends—André Gide (persevering) and Roger Martin du Gard (resigned). Martin du Gard, after having stopped his diary, observed very critically that Gide was clinging to his (and Martin du Gard took up his pen to write down this observation . . .). The trope of the *Ultima verba*, accepted or refused, is everywhere. It was snowing February 23, 1986, the day that Matthieu Galey died, following a horrible and draining illness. He had the strength to take note of it, and make one last witty remark: “Last vision: it is snowing. Immaculate Assumption.”

The diary of the end is a struggle against the end—until the end absorbs the diary along with the rest, we might say. But that’s not quite right: death can prevent me from continuing my diary, but it can’t undo the diary. Paper has its own biological rhythm. It will long outlive me. It will end up yellowing and crumbling, but the text that it bears will have its own reincarnations; it can change bodies, be recopied, published. I will be incinerated, my body reduced from one to zero. I will be preserved, my diary will stay on a shelf in the archives. They will publish me, multiplying my text from one to one thousand. Having read so many books from the past, or manuscripts written by those long dead, I know that literary survival is no illusion. Hence the importance of last wills and testaments. If you want to take your secrets with you to the grave, have your diary placed in your coffin. If you prefer to survive, choose the executor of your estate with care. Otherwise, in one or two generations from now, your diary will end up in the trash or in a secondhand shop. If you have taken precautionary measures, you will still die, but your diary will not.

Perseverance and resignation: we find the same duo in suicide. A truly successful suicide is silent. It has no other language than the act itself as an enigmatic sign. But many suicides cling to life with a few words. According to a curious statistical study from the nineteenth century (Brierre de Boismont), one out of three suicides leave very brief letters and notes, either close to their side or mailed, in which they explain, justify, accuse, deplore, bid farewell. I recall a news item from *Libération* (March 16, 1995) that astounded me. A young girl was found crushed on the cement base of the last support pillar on the Normandy Bridge, after a forty meter jump. Her diary had fallen next to her at the base. According to the police, the diary “revealed suicidal tendencies.” Seven texts in my anthology of diary endings involve suicides: three suicidal impulses or attempts on the part of adolescents, and four successful suicides by adults. The tragic conflict between the acceptance of life implied by writing and the refusal of life signified by suicide can be read in the different forms that diary endings take. This contradiction is at its most extreme

in the Malagasy poet Rabearivelo, who kept a minute-by-minute account of his suicide in his journal, trying to write until the last second, even as he was dying, pen in hand, and ending with one last unreadable word. Perhaps it was his signature (Boudry). One finds the same behavior, even more detailed, in the diary of the Quebecois writer Hubert Aquin (who attempted suicide on March 29, 1971), whose example I could add to my anthology. As for Paule Régnier, she had planned her suicide for midnight: she dated her last entry at ten o'clock, and inscribed the words "The End," leaving her diary behind her before moving on to her attempt, which took place outside the scene of writing. There is a still longer interval in the case of Cesare Pavese, who ended his journal on August 18, 1950, with "I will write no more," without saying how long it would be until the "I will live no more," which came nine days later. Drieu La Rochelle announced his suicide in his journal on August 11, 1944, and failed in his attempt. In the journal he took up afterwards he did not announce his second attempt, which did succeed. In every case, these dedicated diarists announced their suicide and commented on it, one way or another, in diaries destined to outlive them. Of course, there are also diarists who commit suicide without informing their diaries, leaving their diary (or its future readers) at a loss. "L is in the middle of trimming the rhododendrons," writes Virginia Woolf at the end of her entry of March 24, 1941. Three days later, she kills herself, without another word. But a total suicide is one that drags the diary along in destruction, as was the case for Sylvie:

The day I decided to end my life, I thought it best to destroy everything that concerned me—photos, papers, and of course this diary that related day after day of my life for more than seventeen years. Leave nothing behind: that was my goal. I did not burn my notebooks *religiously* as is often the case; no, I preferred to tear them up one by one and throw them in the trash, a place which, it seemed to me, best suited me at the time.

I failed in my attempted departure. So I had to go on living.

Death itself can write in a diary. Or at least it can collaborate with writing in misguiding the diarist's hand, less and less sure of itself. Death is in the last stuttering, stammering lines of Catherine Pozzi's diary (November 25–29, 1934): the mind and the hand no longer obey. It is on the last page of Claude Mauriac's journal. Losing his sight, he declares that he can no longer reread himself and is stopping: "illegible" is his last word, almost illegible itself—a despairing verdict. And death is in the black ink congealed at the bottom of the last page of Jehan Rictus's last notebook. Did he knock over his inkwell as he died? We will never know—the answer is drowned in the shadow of death.



Everything comes to an end, even this presentation. I hope it has not darkened your morning, and that it will make you look upon your diary with tenderness.

#### NOTE

1. Amiel's diary has been published in twelve thick volumes by Éditions l'Age d'homme; Rictus's diaries are unpublished, but his notebooks are in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's Manuscript Department; and while unpublished as a whole, Claude Mauriac's diary has been partially published by himself in the montage of the fifteen volumes of *Le Temps immobile* (1974–1988) and *Le Temps accompli* (1991–1996).

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## THE DIARY AS “ANTIFUNCTION”

I’ve just Googled the word “antifiction” and found that it’s free, at least for literary theory. A hip-hop group has staked a claim, but that’s it. No competition. These days, the minute you invent a word, you have to take out a patent. Serge Doubrovsky thought he had invented the word “autofiction” in 1977, but in 1998 his little cousin Marc Weitzmann claimed that Jerzy Kosinski had already invented the concept in 1965, something that Philippe Vilain has just taken the time to disprove in *Défense de Narcisse* (2005). I tell this amusing story because I created “antifiction” out of irritation with “autofiction” (both the word and the thing). I love autobiography and I love fiction, but I love them less when they are mixed together. I do not believe that we can really read while sitting between two chairs. Most “autofictions” are read as autobiographies: the reader can hardly do otherwise. These are autobiographies that take twisting paths towards the truth. Sure, why not? But we have virtually no way of knowing where the twists are. So my personal preference is for texts that face up to the impossible truth—sometimes in oblique ways, as we see in Georges Perec and others, but faithfully and without resorting to invention. Autobiographers are often suspected of having a weakness for invention, something that autofiction writers embrace on purpose but that autobiographers turn out of naïveté. This is the slippery slope of memory, traditionally seen as a vice. We have Paul Ricoeur to thank for making a virtue of it under the lovely name of “narrative identity.” We are not mendacious beings; we are narrative beings, constantly reconstructing the past in order to fit it into our plans for today’s world. But even when guided by an ethical concern for truthfulness, that kind of reconstruction means flirting with invention. It seems to me that on that count, autobiography and the diary have opposite aims: autobiography lives under the spell of fiction; the diary is hooked on truth.

Let me be clear: I do not mean that autobiographies are false and diaries are true. I am talking about the dynamics of these two writing postures, both of which are present in varying proportions in all personal texts. In a study on how a diary can “end,” I tried to show that the problem of autobiography is the beginning, the gaping hole of the origin, whereas for the diary it is the

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ending, the gaping hole of death.<sup>1</sup> Any autobiographer can end his text by taking the narrative up to the point of its writing. His biggest problem is upstream: building something solid behind it. But the past puts up only minor resistance to the powers of the imagination. “Long ways, long lies” goes the proverb. The same cannot be said of the future. Diarists never have control over what comes next in their texts. They write with no way of knowing what will happen next in the plot, much less how it will end. The past is wonderfully malleable. It is relatively easy to ensure that it does not contradict you (although the truth does sometimes come back to bite people!) The future is pitiless and unforeseeable. You do not have any elbow room with the future. And the present—the diarist’s subject matter—immediately objects to anything that smacks of invention.

I found my ideas on the incompatibility of fiction and the present echoed in Roland Barthes’s last lecture course, *La Préparation du roman* (2003):

Can one make Narrative (a Novel) out of the Present? How does one reconcile—dialecticize—the *distance* implied by the *enunciation of writing* and the *proximity* of the present as we are swept along in it? (The present is what sticks to you, as though you had your nose up against a mirror.)

[Peut-on faire du Récit (du Roman) avec du Présent? Comment concilier—dialectiser—la *distance* impliquée par *l’énonciation d’écriture* et la *proximité*, l’emportement du présent vécu à même l’aventure. (Le présent, c’est ce qui colle, comme si on avait le nez sur le miroir.)]

Since Barthes is after literature at all costs, he solves the problem with the idea that there is an “art of the present” or “art of notation”: the “haiku.” It seems to me that he is only half right. The haiku is an art of the moment, not of the present. The moment is a piece of time wrested out of continuity, out of the constant flow that moves from the past towards the future (or vice versa!); it already has one foot in eternity. The present is that poor thing that runs along, this rocking motion that we each experience all alone. The haiku is rarely dated and is often impersonal. For Barthes, the haiku is a good image of the present, while the diary is a bad one. With its date, its details, its first person, its contingency, its solitude, the journal is something he has tried out and written off (in “Délibération”).

An imaginary reconstruction of the present could only be viewed and experienced as a lie, or insanity, and would be difficult to keep up over time. How could you adjust yesterday’s lies to match today’s realities, every single day? It would be a full-time job just keeping the two in parallel. They would soon diverge infinitely. Naïve fiction, or deliberate autofiction, are easy in a retrospective or summarizing autobiographical narrative. The diary makes it

impossible, or at least very difficult: the diary is "antifiction," in the same way that we say "antilock" or, let's say, "antipest." Which brings me back to my neologism. My purpose in cobbling this word together is not to create a new genre by drawing yet another pigeonhole in the current literary scene, but to refer to a constant property of this type of writing.

The fact that the diary is "antifiction" obviously does not mean that it is "antisubjectivity." This distinction, which people are at pains to make when discussing an autobiographical narrative, goes without saying for the diary, which could not possibly be more subjective or less fictional. Nor does it mean that the diary is "anti-art": it is a common error these days to confuse art and fiction. Catherine Rannoux recently published an interesting stylistic study under a strange title, *Les Fictions du journal littéraire* [The Fictions of the Literary Diary]. She analyzes dialogism and intertextuality in Paul Léautaud, Jean Malaquais, and Renaud Camus, three French diarists among the most intent on the pursuit of truth. But does language contain anything other than "fiction"? All language is shared and every narrative is a construction. What distinguishes fiction from its opposite, and gives the word its meaning, is that someone exercises the liberty of inventing rather than setting out to tell the truth (which may be a naïve project, but then life itself is naïve).

The word "autofiction" has had great success because some contemporary writers have been intent on being seen as artists ("I am a bird, see my wings," said La Fontaine's bat), as though the truth did not have wings too, as though trying to tell the truth were not a powerful constraint that could lead to the height of artistry. But with the diary one must seek artistry in something other than fiction, which leads us to the challenging of certain academic canons. The diary is a sort of "installation" that plays on fragmentation and the tangential in an aesthetics of repetition and vertigo that is very different from traditional narrative aesthetics.

So my neologism is a sort of plea. My entire background lies behind this little lexicographical adventure. I love reading fiction, but am incapable of writing it. As an adolescent, I kept a diary that disappointed me: I wrote about my life's disappointments badly, but accurately. That is why, as an adult, I threw myself into autobiography as a subject of study and a personal practice: constructing a work of art in the field of truthfulness or delineating the truth through the work of writing. Or rather, both at once. That is what lay behind my theory of the "autobiographical pact," which is clearly an "antifiction" pact. But one of the differences between autobiography and the diary is that in autobiography, antifiction is a commitment that must be made and kept. For the diarist it is a fundamental constraint, like it or not. All you need do is to make a commitment to keep a diary and the rest is decided for you. You're

already on board. It is like the law of gravity: inescapable. If you start inventing things, you are quickly tossed overboard. There is no need to sign a pact with the reader. It is a mystical alliance with Time. I have avoided defining the diary in terms of privacy or secrecy: that is an important dimension, but a secondary one that is optional and recent (dating from the late eighteenth century). The main thing is how the diary relates to time and supports truth-seeking. Since the 1980s, I have gradually disengaged from autobiographical construction. What I liked in Michel Leiris's poetic writing was that he had stopped writing narrative and was looking for a sort of "perpetual motion" of writing the self that revolved around the present. But this was a vague, undated present. Although I have no intention of imitating it, the model offered by Claude Mauriac in *Le Temps immobile* has since come to fascinate me: in his diary of an autobiographical reading of his diary, the retrospective reconstructions are no longer destructive and overwhelming because they leave the diary intact while exploring it, and follow along smoothly as the exploration diary unfolds. The real problem is less the danger posed by the gaze of outsiders than that of writing in the face of tomorrow, in the face of emptiness, in the face of no one, in the face of death. Choosing to keep your diary secret is significant because when you do that, the vast emptiness of time opens before you. Stendhal observed that this frees you of the need to please or persuade. You cannot imagine the mentality of the people who will read you a hundred years from now: all you can do to please them is to try to tell the truth.

This little word "antifiction"—not a very attractive one, I must admit—seems to say something different from the English "non-fiction." It is more combative and less soft. It is also more precise: it does not apply to all texts that contain no fiction (negative definition), but to a specific category of texts that adamantly reject fiction (positive definition). The diary grows weak and faints or breaks out in a rash when it comes into contact with fiction. Autobiographies, biographies, and history books are contaminated: they have fiction in their blood. Of course I realize that I am exaggerating and over-simplifying. There are shades of grey and nuances; it's not always quite so simple. But "antifiction" is like a magnifying glass: the things it magnifies are real. To get back to where I started: look through the current "autofictions" for texts that are an author's actual, dated diary. There are none. On the other hand, take *Le Mausolée des amants*, the diary of Hervé Guibert, who is a major autofiction writer in other texts, from *Mes parents* to *Le Protocole compassionnel*. His diary, which is a laboratory for his autofictions, unfolds along truthful lines, although Guibert erased the dates when he published it to make it literary.<sup>2</sup>

The argument I have laid out is simple: now I have to back it up with evidence. I will then turn the debate around, because there is a sense of malaise

in both directions. The diary repudiates fiction, but isn't fiction also very uncomfortable when it tries to *imitate* the diary?

Evidence seems difficult to come by. Since I am stating a negative thesis, it should be up to my adversaries to give examples that disprove it. Michel Braud, a friend of mine who specializes in diaries, went down that road and came back empty-handed: there are a few autofictions that include the diary form, but he had to acknowledge that they were not real diaries. Even when they use the author's real diary, it is always from a position of hindsight: the diary used is not a fiction, and the fiction is not produced under diary conditions. Gide's *Cahiers d'André Walter* attribute an edited text from the actual diary of the (living) author to a (dead) fictional double, but these *Cahiers* are not the diary. This is an autofiction just like any other, not a *fiction-diary*. The latter would consist of someone keeping a diary in the real world of a life that he invents for himself. The only example we might find of that would be the product of insanity or lies.

On the insanity side, Patricia Highsmith's wonderful novel *Edith's Diary* (1977) springs to mind. It is not in diary form. In third-person narration with internal focalization, the novel follows the life of the heroine, a young woman who faces a series of misfortunes: a good-for-nothing son and a husband who cheats on her and then abandons her to start a new life, leaving her burdened with an ailing elderly uncle. We see her gradually change course and begin to "remake her life" as well, but we see it through her diary, bits of which are occasionally quoted. It has two registers: realism for certain aspects of life and fantasy for others, especially the son's "success story." This story starts out as a game, but she gets caught up in it and it begins to develop independently of reality, soon leading to the exact opposite and to the final catastrophe. This psychopathological study is of course a novelist's invention, not a real document. But I have come across something similar: three datebooks from 1989 to 1990 that were purchased in a second-hand shop and deposited with the Association pour l'Autobiographie. The diarist, a woman of about fifty, sometimes had two sons and was going to a notary to divide an estate worth billions, and at other times lived alone and tried to get work as a cleaning lady.

Let us leave behind these heavy pathological cases to look at some more light-hearted games. I used the word "lies," which assumes that the diary is being read by someone else, something that now happens with the Internet, where it is possible to deliver a personal diary to an audience as soon as it is written rather than retrospectively. This means that the reader knows as little about the future as the diarist does. It also allows people to write under a pseudonym, which may encourage them to invent things. But how would we know? Only if the diarist told us. This happened on the Internet in French in

2000. A young nineteen-year-old woman, supposedly named Frannie, began an extensive diary in April and continued it until October. At that point she broke down and confessed that she had lied about some things and could no longer bear to be mired in lies that were paralyzing the truthful diary that, deep down, she wanted to keep. Her letter of confession is amazing. She explains that the fictional diary she intended to keep in the beginning soon started to seem “pseudo-fictional,” was impossible to maintain over the long term, and was at odds with her deepest wish. I will quote her at some length to provide what I hope will be a refreshing break in the middle of my demonstration.

Some things that are in my diary are not true. Why did I write them? I never meant to lie to my readers, and certainly not to trick them; it all started with a mistake in the beginning that I regretted horribly afterwards. In the beginning, when I first started my diary, I wanted to write a fictional one. Of course, the heroine was very much like me—my age, my town, my way of thinking—and all I changed were a few biographical details. But I realized almost immediately that what I really wanted was to keep an authentic diary. I wanted to, needed to, because there was no point inventing things. What I didn’t realize at the time was that I should have stopped the pseudo-fictional diary right away, let some time go by to clear my head, and then started a real one, explaining to my readers right away what had happened. Instead, because I was so scared at the time that some of my friends might come across the diary and figure out that it was me, I decided to continue with it, turning it into my own diary but keeping the original changes so that I could remain anonymous.

The only part that is a bit different is my biography; all of the thoughts that I wrote, everything about my personality is true. I really am 19 years old, but I was born in September 1981, not in June as I wrote in my diary. I live in Paris, but not in a maid’s room. I live in a studio apartment. My parents don’t live in Paris, they live in another large city; I left home last year to go to university (I really am studying modern literature at the Sorbonne). That is why I didn’t talk about them much. I don’t have a sister; I invented Gladys because I always wanted one, but I didn’t make her too close to how I’d like her to be so I wouldn’t feel too bad that she doesn’t exist. On the other hand, I really do have a brother, who is 16.

Ulysses exists, and we met almost the way I described it, but months earlier; I have been with him since January. I didn’t talk about him in the beginning because he reads my diary regularly and it would have bothered him to have me talk about him (that’s why I don’t think I’ll say much about him from now on). . . .

I decided to write the truth today for two major reasons. For one thing, I hate the thought of lying to my readers, even without really wanting to, both the ones I know and the ones who have never written to me; I feel guilty about doing it, and that has made me feel awful. For another thing, I am tired of having a diary that I can’t say everything in. This has been weighing on my mind for months. That’s why I brought Ulysses in: I wanted to gradually get back to my true situation. But I realized that it was not enough, that the old lies would always bother me.

When consulted, Frannie's readers forgave her, and she has now begun a new, more specific, and less lengthy diary. I'm sorry to say that I don't know what has happened to it, or to her. The Internet is an ephemeral medium: everything in it disappears without leaving a trace. Frannie's story is real, and ended with a return to the desire for truth. It is only in the imaginary world that such stories can last. Régine Robin, in *Cybermigrances* ("La confusion des agendas," 2004), imagines five parallel diaries kept by her and four other people with the same name as her. She scatters and braids between them all the possible or invented dimensions of her real life. The act of imagining gives her permission to do this: her light, suggestive narrative shows her control over an identity that would end up being confused and lost in the imagined story.

So real diaries have nothing to do with invention. In the opposite direction, literary fiction has a great deal of trouble imitating them. Here are two examples.

The highly developed genre of the "diary-novel" cannot create any illusions: it is a hybrid creation trying to reconcile two contrasting aesthetics. The diary-novel is based on what I will call a series of "*effets de journal*," just as Barthes speaks of an "*effet de réel*," effects that by their very intent point to the text as fiction. No one who knows the diary could be taken in by it, and in any case that is not what fiction is aiming for, any more than a theatre director is trying to take you in by using one tree to represent a forest. Fiction uses homeopathic doses of the features of the diary that distinguish it most from conventional narration. Their most recalcitrant feature is their huge size (also a barrier to publishing real diaries, which are sometimes much longer than anything the book format can handle). But diaries also have repetition, lack of coherence or relevance, unevenness, implicit meanings, and allusions. And above all, there is no a priori ending to the narrative: that is the crux. A real diary is always written without the knowledge of where it will end. A diary-novel is always written to lead to the ending. The universe of real diaries is contingent. The universe of a diary-novel is governed by that providence known as the novelist. Even if the author creates some "contingency effects," those effects are signposted. When we live and write in our diaries, nothing is really signposted. Our lives are a series of potential scenarios that are reshuffled each day, and we are only half aware of them. No one knows where he is heading, except towards death.

I have always been bothered by the term Gérard Genette proposed in *Figures III* to refer to diary narration: he called it "intercalated," to distinguish it from retrospective narration. That is the effect it has after the fact, upon rereading. A diary that is reread by its author in light of what has happened



to him in the meantime transforms life into destiny. Our diary gradually becomes autobiography in our wake (without becoming fiction, since retouching is not allowed), but it still opens into nothingness in front of us. When I write my diary, I am not “intercalated” between two equivalent things: there is something behind me, nothing in front. Writing a diary is “progressive”: it advances with the moving front of life, digesting the near past and filling the near future with plans. It is like a jet engine or surfing. I want to emphasize the diary’s dynamic, forward-looking image; it is always on the very crest of time moving into unknown territory, whereas people often depict the diarist as a placid shopkeeper constantly looking back with a short-sighted gaze. No, the universe of the diary, beneath its routine appearance, is at once tonic and tragic. We are writing a text whose ultimate logic escapes us; we agree to collaborate with an unpredictable and uncontrollable future.

The absence of control that characterizes real diaries contrasts with the imaginary control of the novelist. Roquentin in *Nausea* may not know where he is going, and keeps his diary like a lost man seeking his way in an absurd world, but Sartre the novelist knows where he is taking his character, and we know that he knows, and that is reassuring. Whereas Sartre the diarist in *Carnets de la drôle de guerre* maintains a brilliantly controlled discourse, but it is obvious to us and especially to him that in fact he does not know where he is going at all, and that no one knows. The diary’s greatness lies in that humility. The diarist does not pretend to control the world.

To go back to the difficulty of imitating the diary in fiction, I would add that it is a convention like any other, similar to the epistolary novel or the memoir-novel, and that the diary-novel has certainly produced a number of masterpieces. The only “failure” would be if these imitations claimed to substitute for reality, a claim they do not make. That is the claim made by another genre, however, the “imaginary diaries” of real people (a variation on the “imaginary memoir”). They are a clear failure, compounded by a kind of tactlessness. Anyone who tries to invent a diary that a real person could have written (or perhaps did write, but lost) takes the risk of making a public display of his lack of imagination and talent, as well as lack of respect. Imagine someone writing your diary after you die! All he could do is to take information from other sources and reshape it into conventional and pastiche forms. If he were to stray into what would amount to biographical hypothesizing, he would come across as a fraud. In any event, it is by definition impossible for him to create the effect that all real diaries create, the effect that we like them for: surprise. People never write the sort of diary one might think. We are often taken aback, either out of disappointment (for example when Raymond Queneau’s diary of the *Drôle de guerre* was published in 1986), or out

of amazement (when Sartre's notebooks from the same period were published in 1983). Clever people who claim to know what someone else would write in their heart of hearts are apt to come out looking naïve. The (excessive!) harshness of these statements understandably prevents me from giving any examples, especially since people often set out on these undertakings with good, if misguided intentions and the praiseworthy desire to prolong the life of someone they identify with. It would be better if they turned their gazes back on themselves and kept their own diaries.

I am being harsh towards the imitators of a genre that is itself often judged harshly. But if people are so eager to imitate it, doesn't that mean that it has its charms after all? Charms that people succumb to unwillingly. It is a conventional exercise in France to denigrate the diary in the name of an academic or Mallarméan mystique of literature. The latest is the *Dictionnaire égoïste de la littérature française* (2005), where Charles Dantzig, in his article on "Personal diaries," lines up all of the criticisms that have been lobbed at them for the past hundred years. The main one is that, unlike all self-respecting works of art, diaries are not structured on the basis of the ending! The diary is probably literature's bad conscience, constantly standing for the incompleteness that it seeks to exorcize. A late arrival in the field of literature, it appears to be a canker on it, the bad student who at the end of the exam hands in nothing but labored drafts. To which there are two possible replies: if you play the game Blanchot proposes and place yourself in the field of literature, you can regard the diary as a force of opposition and renewal that challenges classical aesthetic models by introducing fragmentation, repetition, and especially its unfinished quality as dynamic sources of inspiration, and taps into a new type of relationship between author and reader, with a more active role for the reader.

One last word on my neologism: to speak of "antifiction" in France today is to raise the specter of the Antichrist. But this is not a crusade like the one that Christophe Donner launched with his essay *Contre l'imagination* (1996). No, there is nothing more beautiful than fiction. And nothing is as difficult or goes out of date as quickly. One of the paradoxes of the diary is that having a date on it immunizes it against aging, and is even an advantage. This is not to say that it has chosen the easy path. "Easy" and "difficult" are words that only have meaning within the logic of work. The journal is on a different playing field. It is in a daunting face-off with time. What it is betting on, if there is any bet, is escaping death by building up traces and hoping to be reread. And the passion for reading diaries is based on two things: the feeling of *touching time*, if I can put it that way, a thrill that helps readers put up with and even appreciate many things that would be imperfections from a classical literary point of view. And in addition, the feeling of participating in a *relay*

*race*: I read another person's diary just as one day someone might read mine, anticipating a good turn that I hope someone will do for me, even though I know that at the end of the day, death alone will have the last word.

## NOTES

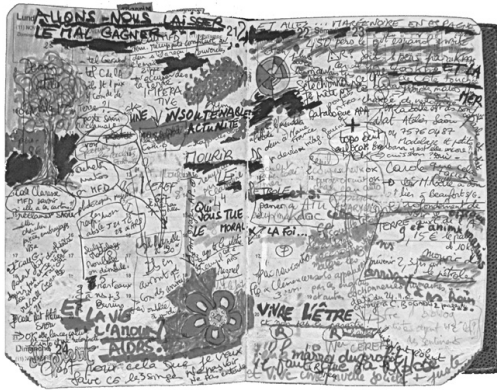
1. See the preceding essay, "How Do Diaries End?"
2. Hervé Guibert's autofictional novels have been translated as *My Parents* and *The Compassion Protocol*. For his diary, see *Le Mausolée des amants. Journal 1976–1991*.

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## PART IV

### THE DIARY: PRACTICES



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## AUTO-GENESIS: GENETIC STUDIES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS

How does one become a “geneticist?” Why didn’t I become one earlier? And have I really become one? It is a fact that for nearly five years I have been working on the avant-textes of contemporary autobiographies: Sartre’s *Les Mots* (1964), Perec’s *W ou le souvenir d’enfance* (1975), Nathalie Sarraute’s *Enfance* (1983), and, more recently, the *Diary* of Anne Frank. I did not begin these studies with any overall plan—it was a series of chance occasions: an invitation to be part of a Sartre team at the Institut des Textes et Manuscrits Modernes, a seminar on Perec, hearing a lecture by Georges Raillard on the manuscripts of *Enfance*, a new edition of the *Diary* (or rather *Diaries*) of Anne Frank. But there’s no such thing as chance.

A glance backward reveals that my curiosity has deep roots. My first essay on Proust’s “petite Madeleine” was part of a comparison of two drafts of that famous episode (“Écriture et sexualité,” 1971). Next, I studied the transformations of childhood narrative in Rousseau (*Le Pacte autobiographique*, 1975) and Vallès (*Je est un autre*, 1980). I tried to “undo” some finished products: Victor Hugo’s “biography,” written by his wife (*Je est un autre*), the film *Sartre par lui-même* (see “Ça s’est fait comme ça, 1978), the ethnographic narrative of Adélaïde Blasquez, *Gaston Lucas, serrurier (Moi aussi*, 1986). I have also rummaged through archives for the truth about my great-grandfather’s memoir (Xavier-Édouard Lejeune, *Calicot*, 1984).

A glance inward reveals something about my own motivations. First of all, of course, intellectual curiosity: can one fail to think that the history of a text will illuminate its structure? Yet I also felt a detective’s curiosity—the desire (as naïve or fruitful as it may be) to see if and how the autobiographical “pact” was respected. Finally, deep down was the curiosity of a fetishist and a lover. These are the books that I love, and I was very pleased to partake of a little more of their intimacy. I had the occasional joy of being treated like a “favorite.” Or else the impression of being initiated into a secret, of bearing witness to a sort of “primal scene” of literature. Without strong motivations like this, one cannot overcome the doubts and discouragements of a long, dreary, unrewarding, trivial, and sometimes fruitless task.

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Trans. Jed Deppman. *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-Textes*. Ed. Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrer, and Michael Groden. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2004. 193–217. From “Autogenèse: L’Étude génétique des textes autobiographiques.” *Genesis* 1 (1992): 73–87.

I would like to offer here two essays on the activities of geneticists, both of which raise the same problems: Do *generic* specificities exist for the work of literary creation? Is the *avant-texte* of a fictional work strictly comparable to that of an autobiography or a diary? Or, put slightly differently, do generic specificities exist for the *study* of such a work?

The first essay deals with autobiography. It suggests that there really is something particular to it, even if this something is not everything. Above all, it shows that genetic study deals with a new terrain on which to treat the thorny questions theorists of autobiography ask themselves about the relations between the self and language, art and truth.

The second essay deals with diaries. This is a very special case: diaries, by definition, seem incapable of having *avant-textes*. Yet they do, and this little study, written as an introduction to the analysis of the *Diaries* of Anne Frank, is something akin to a future research program.<sup>1</sup>

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The first thing to notice is that from the *reader's* point of view the autobiographical text has a different relationship to its *avant-textes* than do texts of fiction, poetry, or thought. Knowing something about a novel's or a poem's *avant-textes* may be of interest to specialists who think about creative mechanisms, but it changes nothing about how these texts function for a reader. It may even annoy readers if it ruins the pleasure of reading. The opposite is true for an autobiography. Far from being a parasitical element, knowledge of the *avant-textes* is relevant and relates directly to the central purpose of the text and to the reader's expectation. This is so for two reasons:

The subject of an autobiographical text is the past history of its author. Yet autobiographical writing is itself part of this history, and in fact is often represented in the text itself. To differing degrees, autobiographies comment on their own genesis: authors may stage their project's origin, keep some sort of writing journal or chronicle, or comment on the techniques they employ or the difficulties they will face. Readers are thus deeply interested when supplementary information surfaces on all these points, for they are put in a position to verify what the text says. All the more so because:

The object of an autobiographical text is the truth of the past, and its contract implies both the possibility and the legitimacy of verification. Indeed, readers will have different reactions depending on whether the text has the appearance of being truthful or mendacious, a problem that has little meaning for a novel or a poem. One of the possible ways we can go about verifying texts is to confront them with external historical data (documents, testimony, etc.), but for most subjective and private elements this is impractical. Comparing

texts with their avant-textes, however, allows for an investigation into precisely these areas. One can see the additions, suppressions, and transformations that are so full of meaning.

In *Enfance*, Nathalie Sarraute recounts her childhood by staging in dialogue form the progress she makes in exploring her own memory and her understanding of the past. Now, Sarraute's real childhood is not available to me. The "childhood" of the text *Enfance* would become accessible, however, if the author were to agree to send me its rough drafts, and indeed she did, giving me the avant-textes for chapter 2. So, suddenly I had the tools to compare the staged genesis in the book's "fictional" dialogue with its real genesis, to see how, and why, through these various versions, the contents of memory are modified.

Of course, the danger would be to believe that avant-textes tell "more truth" than texts when they simply tell something else. Our detective curiosity, which takes the requirements of the autobiographical pact with utmost seriousness, has an undeniable but limited pertinence. It must be used as a means to go beneath the surface, to tear ourselves away from what is obvious and from the univocality of the "final text," and to gain access to the movement that produced the text. Generally, what one discovers in penetrating backstage is so complicated that one is quickly forced to abandon any "regressive" attitude of verification. One must replace that attitude with the more "progressive" task of constructing what Paul Ricoeur calls a "narrative identity."<sup>2</sup> This is not to be understood as a translation, more or less accurate, of a preexisting truth, but as the creation of a self in language. It takes place on two levels, psychological and aesthetic.

#### PSYCHOLOGY

Avant-textes allow for in-vivo study of the mechanisms of memory and of the evolution of a self-image. This last is something that can change as a function of time or of intended audience. What one observes is not necessarily on the order of the unconscious. Yet it is something that authors either do not see (is it possible to perceive the changes in one's own memory?) or have no interest in showing.

One can therefore see memory in the acts of *sifting*. I was able to study, thanks to the avant-texts of *Les Mots*, but also thanks to the early work for *Carnets de la drôle de guerre*, the way Sartre had removed from *Les Mots* not only every memory of his childhood sexuality, but especially every memory of his "literary" youth that did not square with his intended demonstration (a child without contact with reality, an author without a public.)

One can see memory in metamorphosis: memories of childhood change in signification or even in content as a function of the ideological evolution of



the author. Between 1939 and 1950, Sartre changed certain memories of his childhood religious life from positive to negative. During an intense period of work that must not have exceeded a few weeks, the key phrase of chapter 2 of Sarraute's *Enfance*, which was supposedly branded in memory, changed formulations several times in order to adapt to a varying psychological interpretation.—True or false?—That would be a problem for a biographer seeking to scrutinize the past. For a geneticist, these are simply clues about the transformation of the autobiographer's present project. As early as 1764, Rousseau described this double dimension of "truth" in autobiography: "In abandoning myself both to the memory of received impressions and to my present feeling, I will paint the state of my soul doubly, both the moment when the event occurred to me and the moment when I write it; my style . . . will itself be part of my story."<sup>3</sup> Genetic study permits one to unfold the second dimension.

It sometimes happens that autobiographers themselves decide to take control of this genetic work, thereby becoming "auto-geneticists" of sorts. It is a difficult enterprise and therefore rare. The process of observation may be retrospective—I think of Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1959) or of chapter 8 of Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. It can also be prospective, as in Perec's great unpublished project, *Lieux* (1969–75), which was a system of writing under strict constraints designed to enable him to observe directly the evolution of both his memory and his writing. Perec's "experimental genetics" was supposed to last twelve years. He assigned himself the task of writing, at twelve Parisian locations related to his own life, two texts a year: an objective description of the place, done on site, and an evocation of memories linked to that place. As soon as they were written, the texts were sealed in an envelope that was not to be opened for twelve years. He abandoned the experiment in the sixth year, however, and never opened the "memory" envelopes. I described the whole project in *La Mémoire et l'oblique* (1991). These examples seem to me to *authorize* the genetic study of autobiographies. Far from being a reductive approach, externally imposed, this kind of study might be an extension of the autobiographical act itself.

#### AESTHETICS

One can also look at the author's own search for a seductive and convincing form to express the truth of a self and a history.

For writers, this form owes much to the abilities acquired during work on earlier writing. While studying Rousseau, Leiris, and Sartre, I was struck by the way they reinvested their earlier works—the mythological or dialectical structures for Rousseau and Sartre and the mechanisms of language for Leiris—in their autobiographical writing. Autobiography is often a "second"

writing that must be understood in an intertextual space. In this sense there are no grounds for assuming that the avant-textes of autobiographies are anything unique: in my opinion, we should study them in something like an “inter-genetic” space. This could best be done by comparing the work procedures—such things as the distribution of the different stages from the initial project to the definitive text or the techniques of correction—with those of other works. Different writers would probably produce different results. Sartre’s manuscripts, for example, show different registers depending upon the genre. There is a long, flowing, theoretical kind of writing, often written while the author was on speed, a style that is the opposite of a “literary” writing (*Les Mots* belongs here); that is a more meticulous work involving corrections and revisions on separate sheets. Moreover, Sartre himself has many registers of autobiographical writing. The *Carnets de la drôle de guerre*, similar to a letter, excludes “on the spot” as well as a posteriori corrections—a practice of writing totally opposite to that of *Les Mots*. Without having seen other manuscripts of Nathalie Sarraute, I can only assume that the meticulous work on words and phrases in the manuscript of *Enfance* is analogous to her practice in her novels, what she calls “choosing her wool, her colors, and mixing the hues”—weaving the tapestry of text.

As far as overall procedure is concerned, however, Sarraute did in fact change her method. At first, her novels were written entirely in a single go and then reworked several times from start to finish. *Enfance*, by contrast, was written step by step, chapter by chapter, without a primary work on the overall whole. She would not begin a new chapter until the preceding one had reached a quasi-final state. At the same time, her resistance to the classic genre of childhood memories led her to introduce a daring system of exposition, a dialogue between two voices (herself and her double). There, in a totally different context, she made use of the experience in writing dialogue that she had acquired in her works for radio. It is exciting to see her “test out” this system in the avant-textes for chapter 2, varying proportions and connections as she seeks a very delicate balance.

More generally, one might think that the autobiographical situation forces the writer to make some methodological changes. The many practical guides for writers in the United States do not give exactly the same advice, after all, to those who wish to write a novel and to those who attempt an autobiography. Among other things, the inventory of one’s memory, the narrative organization, the articulation of a previous as well as a contemporary point of view, the choice of a system of exposition (and an audience), all pose specific problems.

Autobiographers often explain their own method in their preambles or at other crucial points in the narrative. It also happens that they devote a

great part of their text to describing their “workshop.” Michel Leiris gives us examples of both: the method of writing in *L'Age d'homme* (1939) is later described and evaluated in “De la Littérature considérée comme une tauro-machie” (1946). “Tambour-Trompette,” the final chapter of *Biffures* (1948; the first volume of *La Règle du jeu*), and the rough drafts of its first chapter “Mors.” In her book *Michel Leiris au travail* (1988), Maubon had no choice but to implicate herself in (and then develop and illustrate) the very problem Leiris himself proposed.

Two main things are therefore at stake in genetic studies of autobiography: *generic specificities* (how does autobiographical writing differ from other forms of writing?) and *generic innovations* (how and why is a writer led to innovate?). Current research has a tendency to concern itself with the second of these, as one can see by glancing through the “Examples of Genetic Criticism” section at the end of this essay. Maubon has explored Leiris’s “constrained” writing, and Catherine Viollet has compared thirty-three attempted beginnings for the autobiographical novel *Kindheitsmuster* to see how Christa Wolf avoided writing “I.” Viollet has also engaged in wider research on the avant-textes of the beginning sections of modern autobiographies or autofictions; she aims to see how writers feel their way into a system of exposition and a contract with those who will read their narrative. I have myself worked on several Perec inventions. As of now, his editing procedures, strategies of self-limitation, and contractual and expository games are probably the most interesting points to pursue—to which one may add, shifting the subject from creation to “manufacture,” the genetic study of “autobiographic,” collaboratively produced documents. These documents create a transparent effect: “Here we have, straight from the horse’s mouth, the life of X.” If one has access to all the avant-textes of these documents (tapes, transcriptions), one can better see that above all they express the ideology of whomever has put the narrative together or made the transcription, edition, or presentation.

#### DIFFICULTIES

For autobiographical as well as for other texts, the difficulties are enormous. I will indicate them rapidly, so as not to discourage those who would like to participate in research that for the most part is exciting. The main difficulties deal with the availability of avant-textes and the ways they are used.

It is rather difficult for us to know how classical authors up until the nineteenth century worked because they thought it natural to destroy their rough drafts. Since the manuscripts we do have are often the author’s final clear copies, they do not give us much information. For Rousseau’s *Confessions*, for example, we possess very little; aside from the two final manuscripts, only a partial copy of one intermediary stage (the Neuchâtel manuscript) and

a few loose pages. Hermine de Saussure's study attempts to fill in this enormous gap through meticulous analysis of the correspondence. We also suffer from scarcity in the case of the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* because Chateaubriand decided to erase the traces of his work (a fact that may seem paradoxical, or else very understandable, because he involves the work in the narrative itself).<sup>4</sup> Yet this erasure was not complete: anyone who is interested should see the fundamental work of Jean-Claude Berchet on the first few books of the *Mémoires*. For Stendhal, the situation is the reverse. The manuscripts of all the autobiographical texts have been preserved, but they are themselves planned according to very modern and improvisational manuscript aesthetics that renders them exciting, atypical, and virtually impossible to edit. Reading recent essays on the *Vie de Henry Brulard*, for example, one has the impression that only the *happy few* who have actually seen the manuscript know what they are talking about.<sup>5</sup> But the great problem is that no inventory of nineteenth-century autobiographical texts has yet been compiled. This would be the first thing to do, and would perhaps allow us to find exciting collections of avant-textes material. All too often, the modern "critical editions" use the available avant-textes as mere "variants" or as documents to confirm or deny the "veracity" of the final text. This is the case in the recent edition of Marie d'Agoult's *Mémoires, souvenirs et journaux*, which uses avant-textes without really attempting any genetic study of that great unfinished autobiography. Yet at the moment when she was writing her *Mémoires* in 1865–66, Marie d'Agoult jotted down in one notebook her ideas, her first sketches, and the problems she had in elaborating them. Sandrine Cotteverte has begun to study and edit this notebook, of much greater interest than the simple genesis of Marie d'Agoult's text. It could serve as the basis of a sort of general grammar of autobiographical "gestures."<sup>6</sup>

The problem is different for contemporary authors. It has become more common to keep rough drafts; authors are interested in the traces of their own work. If they are famous, they are also aware of the marked value of autographs. Yet it is problematic for authors to capitalize upon them while still alive. Such a practice puts the author in a kind of space beyond the grave, takes away control of the work, and, when the work is autobiographical, takes away life itself. Sarraute was at first rather hesitant about giving me the rough drafts of a chapter of *Enfance*. Why should she make public something with which she had precisely not been satisfied, something not as good as the final text?

Making real use of avant-textes is itself a long and laborious process. Before being able to analyze the work of a writer, one must establish the text and reconstruct its history with precision. This preliminary task can absorb, and even exhaust, a researcher's strength. Without having established the chronology of the writings under consideration, it is impossible to do genetic study.

Yet this is all the more difficult because the genetic documents themselves have tremendous gaps. For chapter 2 of *Enfance*, Sarraute gave me everything she found: ten sheets that she called the “Final manuscript” comprising the corrected fragments of two earlier versions (all of which, incidentally, did not entirely add up to the published text), and twenty-five loose sheets that belonged to about ten early versions, only one of which was (more or less) complete. The rest were the beginnings and middles of a short narrative whose sequence I couldn’t use as a compass because it was exactly what Sarraute was trying to vary in as many ways as possible. When, taken by despair, I went to see her for some hints, she looked at the sheets all fanned out and said meditatively: “That’s work. . . .” The time came when I too was forced to reflect upon this. The Sartre team at ITEM, working on the manuscripts of *Les Mots* acquired by the Bibliothèque Nationale, faces an enormous, but spotty, archive (about a thousand pages). After study, a single typed page sitting in a pack of unclassified “random pages” revealed the existence of a whole writing (and typing) “campaign” of which it was the only remaining witness. Some of Sartre’s papers, scattered under unbelievable conditions, periodically surface in small lots in public sales. We work in both hope and fear that one of these resurfacings will send us all back to the drawing board.

The work involved in the transcription, decoding, and unfolding of the writer’s different operations (additions, suppressions, substitutions, displacements) is long and dry, and can produce documents so complicated that they seem illegible to the uninitiated who look at them. One has the impression that only those who have established them can really use them. If I question whether I’m really a geneticist, it is because I have never accomplished, in a systematic manner, such a work. The transcriptions of *Les Mots* were a team effort. Perec’s manuscripts have a characteristic of having very few corrections and are very readable. Sarraute’s are heavily corrected, but they have a very clear system. Moreover, since she stipulated that I might comment on them but not edit them, I was not able to perform that task.

Sometimes you hear that textual geneticism is a very costly operation with very little benefit. People wonder why the prefaces and afterwords in serious editions are so critically emaciated. In fact, genetic criticism is plagued by two dangers: excessive professionalism, the entanglement in a necessary but enormous work from which one emerges weak and without the strength to profit from it; and the opposite danger of amateurism, the impatience of hasty critics who see only their own problems, and out of a rich genetic archive select only the elements that support their theses or interpretations. Working as a team allows one to avoid these dangers by lightening the tasks and increasing the comparisons and controls.

A solid genetic archive free from every preconceived idea and interpretation must be established. Yet perhaps it does not really reveal its richness until one comes to it with a question. One's question may be theoretical, such as Villet's about speech acts, or it may deal with the selection and transformation of memories. It may also be a test of a hypothesis. In 1973, I did a study of the narrative sequence in *Les Mots*, and put forward hypotheses about its dialectic rather than chronological nature and about the gaps in its construction. Today the manuscripts of *Les Mots* are available. I will be able, once the order of the writing "campaigns" has been established as solidly as possible, to analyze the variations in sequence and dating of Sartre's memories, the ways they are staged, their soldering . . . that is, to surprise Sartre in his tinker's workshop. Above, I exaggerated the difficulties a little. We overcome them when we really wish to resolve a problem. After having reflected upon Sarraute's comment, "That's work," I ended up more or less understanding the puzzle of those thirty-five pages because I absolutely wanted to know what relation existed between the fictional image of her work that she gives in her book and the real work of which the manuscripts bear the trace. It's a question of passion.

The last problem to solve: how to communicate to others what one has found? First, by telling them about this passion. Insofar as it is possible, one must relate the genesis of one's own search. It is useless to withdraw into impersonality, leaving the reader to face an inert mass of dead, dreary, scientifically described manuscripts. Portraying the movement of my quest, I can offer it as an image analogous to the lost object that we seek in these drafts and erasures: the movement of creation. It is more interesting to visit a digging site with an archeologist than to see shards of pottery arranged in a window. And it is not less scientific. Genetic studies are destined to result in narratives. To end this first essay, I offer one for the genesis of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*.

#### GENESIS

In 1969–70, I subscribed to *La Quinzaine littéraire*, in which Georges Perec published in serial fashion a bizarre adventure novel entitled *W*. I'm hard-pressed to summarize it. A narrator tells how he was put in charge of finding a child lost in a shipwreck near Tierra del Fuego. For various reasons, he himself had taken on the identity of this child. At the end of six chapters, the text splits in two. The original narrator seems to have disappeared. Taking the place of the narrative already underway is an "objective" and methodological description of an olympic colony established on an island of Tierra del Fuego. Apparently euphoric at first, the description turns slowly into a nightmare: beneath the olympianism, the horror of the Nazi camps appears. Then the description stops suddenly: the island is destroyed by a catastrophe,

and we learn nothing of the story of the child. In 1975, Perec published a book (announced as early as 1970 but delayed), this time with the title *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. It is the same story, but chapters of his own childhood are interspersed among the fictional chapters. At the center of his childhood story is the disappearance of his mother at Auschwitz in 1943. The reader must read alternately the chapters of each story, which seem to know nothing of each other. These painful gymnastics contradict all of our reading habits. Yet the structure creates a tremendous elliptical effect; it is up to the reader to grasp the relation between the two narratives, and above all to sense why it is impossible to express the relation.

How could one resist the desire to know more? Maybe directing one's curiosity to the history of such a book is itself a manner of escaping the horror it designates. Yet at the same time it repeats the story that is told in the book. A narrator goes off to find a lost child. I go off to find a lost narrator. Genetic research takes the baton from "genealogical" research.

It is rare, and impressive, to work on the posthumous manuscript of a writer who is your contemporary. (I was born two years after Perec, who died in 1982.) In 1987, I was able to access all the documents relating to his work. First, I did historical research to date and categorize the different elements of the story I found, and then I reconstructed something like a "psychological novel" of its creation.

Twice in a row, for the magazine and then for the book, Perec went through the same cycle of hardships. He experienced failure and silence, and was unable to escape his despair except by inventing procedures capable of transmitting that very despair to the reader.

Inspired by an adolescent fantasy, the serial novel was at first supposed to have been an exciting science-fiction novel à la Jules Verne, one that would have expressed his childhood indirectly. Yet very rapidly (how could he not have foreseen it?), he was submerged in the horror that he had put forth, to the point where he lost his voice (the second part of the serial novel is not written in the first person) and was forced to abridge a text that sickened him, and that readers of the journal could hardly tolerate. The failure of the serial novel led him to conceive of writing an autobiographical book into which the *W* fiction would be integrated and its meaning made explicit.

A second project and a new beginning full of hope. He conceived of a revolutionary project, a book intermingling the chapters of three different sequences: the *W* fiction, his childhood memories (told in a completely "straight" manner), and a third series that would elucidate the relationship between the first two by telling the story of *W*'s adolescent fantasy, its resurgence in his adulthood, and the very difficulties he had in writing the book.

But these difficulties were such that he was also unable to finish the second project. He started to write the second series, the childhood memories, with great difficulty, and then, on account of these difficulties and others that resonated with his own emotional life, he abandoned everything. Four years later, after a psychoanalytic cure, he took up the manuscript again and found a solution: he had to remove the third series and transmit his discomfort to his readers, confronting them brutally with the unexplained link between the first two series. This procedure recalls the one imposed on him by the magazine—to organize in some way the *disappearance of the narrator*.

One can well imagine the interest there is in reconstructing such an adventure by examining scattered documents and critically reading the final text. Yet that is not all. While taking inventory of these manuscripts, I quickly discovered that they were part of a much larger autobiographical project, of which the plans had been sketched in 1969 in a letter to Maurice Nadeau (printed in the small volume *Je suis né*, 1990). The unfinished *Lieux*, discussed above, is part of that group. As one thing led to another, I came to explore all of Perec's autobiographical projects, first in order to think about their common strategy and then to explore *Lieux* and *Je me souviens* in detail. In 1987, I plunged into these archives for a few months. The trip wound up lasting four years, and has resulted in a book, *La Mémoire et l'oblique* (1991). It is unclear whether these travels are really over.

Over the course of this first essay, I've used the various metaphors of detective investigation, archeology, and psychological novel for genetic research. Perhaps I should add alchemy. Sometimes geneticists say they are progressing toward a "science of literature" as if they hoped to change the lead of avant-textes into pure gold, and discover the secrets of creation.

## DIARIES

By its very definition, the genetic study of diaries seems to have no object. A diary, if it is a real diary, has no avant-texte. It is written from day to day; that is why it has value for the person writing it, as well as for the reader, if there ever is a reader. Reading a diary, I like to believe that I am really reading what was written, in those very words on that very day, and not some artifact rewritten or rearranged afterwards. This has nothing to do with sincerity. Let us assume that the diarist has made a mistake, or tried to fool himself and us on a given day; at least I am sure that it is his own bad faith on that very day that I have before my eyes. His blindness or his silences. The very words that he used.

From this perspective, we cannot speak of any "genetic" study except by displacing the meaning of the word. Each diary entry constitutes a unique



text, but because the succession of entries is controlled by a system of variations, it can be a site of learning and evolution. I can see how the entries' construction strategies (periodicity, length, internal structure) change or do not change. The same thing goes for the phrasing and the style. I cannot compare the text of August 13 to its *avant-textes*—there are none—but to the texts of August 12, or 11, yes. Diaries allow one a live view of how a given writing engenders itself by repetition (the tendency to auto-imitate is very strong) or by variation. I catch myself dreaming of quantitative studies: diaries on computer, with graphs. Frequency and length of diaries, evolution of the subjects broached, types of discourse used. Diaries are already cut into discrete units, explicitly inscribed in the frame of the quantifiable variables of time. They are practically begging to be analyzed for their rhythms. To classify diaries according to criteria of character seems arbitrary. . . . On the other hand a musical typology might make some sense. . . . But I'm wandering. How could we ever hope to distinguish between what, in a given diary's evolution, is on the order of apprenticeship or work (for which the idea of "genesis" could make sense), and what is on the order of narrative being enacted, of the transformation of life itself? I wander especially far when I abusively extend the meaning of the word "genesis" and then refuse to see it where in fact it is.

The image of the diary as "writing on the first try" is somewhat mythological. No matter how rapid and invisible it is, all writing is the product of an elaboration of some kind, most often mental and occasionally oral. Diarists start writing in their diaries throughout the day, while living. Diarists are ruminants. They live as forms awaiting contents. They have their schemes, their sentence structures, their paragraphs—and their attentions, their turned-on obsessions. Certain things and not others are apt to fecundate this apparatus. Gestation is most often unconscious (but not always), and results in an apparently rapid delivery onto paper. In her *Diary*, Virginia Woolf makes amusing observations about the problems that her mental or oral drafts cause her, when the peripherals of everyday life perturb their gestation (see April 18 and May 28, 1918; *Diary* 1: 139–42, 149–52). The weakness of genetic studies is that they must always deduce mental operations from the traces they leave: here there are no traces.

Sometimes, however, glimpses into this hidden backstage area can be had. The idea would be to compare a diary to its referent. Suppose that a diarist notes a conversation with someone and that, without his knowing it, that conversation had been recorded. Such a thing does not happen every day. It is our luck that it did happen to a famous diarist, Paul Léautaud. On September 4, 1950, on his way to record the next of his interviews with Robert

Mallet, he met Julien Benda in the studio, who had himself just finished a recording with Pierre Sipriot. They made a little small talk without knowing (was this malice or a mistake?) that the recording continued. These fourteen minutes, which correspond to three pages in Léautaud's *Journal*, are now in the radio archives.<sup>7</sup> We have two ends of the chain. And it is text against text. Dreaming, now: what if Benda had also kept a diary. There is no need to dream: it is in fact the case. I transcribed it and did a short study. Three levels. One "conversational" analysis based on the recorded sound (hilarious and Moliéresque in my view). A study of the narrative of the conversation in the diary, obviously very different, and centered more on Benda. A feast for analysts of reported speech, focalization, etc. The real surprise is elsewhere. It turns out that there is a chicken-or-egg problem here: is the diary the source of the conversation or vice versa? One has to ask because, in rereading the diary from the preceding year, I saw that a great number of words spoken by Léautaud to Benda appeared there. They were either original notations or, already, narratives of conversations, or notes taken from his own letters. Diarists are ruminants with several stomachs.

Yes, we are now very far from the idea of genesis, above all because diaries are forms of praxis, not artistic works. A diary cannot be understood as a trajectory governed by a project. Rather, there is a circulation between conversation, correspondence, and diary, a triad that one must supplement with the invisible interior "monologue" in order to obtain a nice spreadsheet with two series of entries (written/unwritten, internal/external dialogue). Of course, in this circulation, each genre has its own constraints, and I suggested above how diaries can themselves engender diaries. The problem is that the circulatory system of autoengenderment requires difficult and delicate observation.

Let us console ourselves by holding fast to the narrow fringe of genesis that one can read from manuscripts. Working on paper, we erase words, change terms, add something forgotten, and make other minimal adjustments according to the logic of the expressive movement itself. (Marie Bashkirtseff, with the back of a cuff or the swipe of a finger, wipes the wet ink away from the beginning of an unwelcome phrase and then writes over it in the same place. Or perhaps two minutes or an hour later one returns to what one has written, but now with a reader's eye—at this point one's work is already guided by the imperatives of communication.) It also happens that, for reasons of practicality (it is impossible to carry the "real" diary everywhere) or of psychology (the need for a time of maturation), diaries are written at two different times—initial, rapid notes made in some kind of medium, and then a clear copy or newer development on the (final?) medium. These corrections and doublings make genetic study possible, even if the stakes involved seem small.

Once the night has passed and a new day has dawned, however, the field of study suddenly widens. Diarists may perform all sorts of operations on their diaries: crossing out words or names, ripping out pages, making corrections or additions—all this either on the original manuscripts or as free-wheeling new copies of material that may eventually become entirely rewritten. Perhaps they do such things because they are dissatisfied, because they themselves see their diaries as first attempts at expression or as works to be taken up again later. Or else they are thinking of publication: they must acquit themselves well. Or perhaps a diarist (famous or not) is dead. People want to publish the diary. Exciting, sure, but too long. So it is cut, tailored, resewn, and explained. Maybe the diary *has* no avant-texte: but it *becomes* the avant-texte of the presentation or rewriting that is made of it.

From this perspective, any published diary must be considered to belong to a composite genre. If it is an autopublication (generally before death), then the text must also be understood as an autobiographical construction (example: Gide's *Journal* in 1939). If it is a hetero-publication (generally posthumous), then as a biographical construction (example: Bashkirtseff's *Journal*; André Theuriet's 1887 edition of it is partial and doctored).

Unlike a diary, such a genesis does leave traces. Even if the work has been erased, its point of departure remains. Editors rarely burn the manuscripts of the diaries they edit. We have only to compare. Certain cases are enough to set one's mind to dreaming: for example, in Québec, the case of Henriette Dessaulles's (1860–1946) admirable adolescent diary (1874–1880). Of this we possess only a rewritten version she did by herself between 1898 and 1908 without leaving any trace of the original.

This field of study is enormous since it is likely that almost no diary has been published in the form in which it was written. Maybe the diary is by definition unpublishable: there is an incompatibility between it and the “book-form” that is a veritable Procrustean bed. It is like trying to make a sponge fit a matchbox. To make a book, one must, at the minimum, cut and explain, perhaps also rewrite. In a way the “diary-novel” that appeared in the nineteenth century is a model of the orthopedic apparatus that has since been often applied to real diaries. But I know I'm exaggerating. I'm wrong to speak in absolutes. The book form and reading habits have evolved. There is today a public, or fractions of a public, capable of, and enthusiastic about, reading thousands of pages of a diary, but not just any diary: fixating on a chosen author gives one extra strength. Yet I exaggerate only a little. The history of editing teems with examples of diaries that have been censured, pruned, and doctored, sometimes by the authors themselves and sometimes by heirs or editors. And diaries now have prefaces, whether autograph or

allograph, to disguise or justify these operations (see Jerzy Lis, “Le Journal d’écrivain”). Nudes with affectations, putting on gloves.

The text of a diary does not inspire the respect that people generally have for texts. Who would have the audacity to rewrite personal correspondence? Who would feel authorized to doctor a poem? When it is a diary nobody seems to mind. As soon as the possibility of publication arises, the text of a diary becomes an *avant-texte*, a rough draft that needs polishing up, or a sick person who needs help getting dressed. More than a hundred years after her death (1884), we are still waiting for a true edition of the diary of Marie Bashkirtseff, the manuscripts of which are available at the Bibliothèque Nationale. The edition of Amiel’s diary (*Journal intime*) has just barely been finished. Claire Paulhan, who edited several diaries (including Catherine Pozzi’s) in the collection “Pour mémoire” under her direction, admits that she herself feels the necessity to exercise what she calls an “aesthetic censure” in the diaries’ own interest. I could take even more striking examples from certain truth specialists (ethnologists, sociologists) who have altered their diaries for delivery to the public. Jeanne Favret-Saada, after having published a theoretical study of witchcraft in the Bocage region of France (*Le Mots, la mort, les sorts*, 1977), chose to divulge her “diary of the terrain,” but only the first year of it, and not the actual text of the diary. Instead she asked a friend of hers, Josée Contreras, to rewrite it with her. *Corps pour corps* (1981), a book signed by both of them, is in fact a chronicle presented in the form of a diary, written from a diary, but not at all the original diary, which seems to have been partially destroyed during the operation. Rémi Hess, pioneer of the “institutional diary,” considered his own diary unpublishable, and submitted it to a series of operations of aesthetic surgery that he described in the preface of his book (*Le Lycée au jour le jour*, 1989).

These operations can be seen as improving the texts (such is the prevailing spirit: make the text “readable,” interest the readers, and do not try their patience) or as deteriorating it (the authenticity that gives the value to this genre is reduced or destroyed). Here we are right in the middle of the conflict between expressive and communicative functions. In this conflict, two forms of compromise are common today: (1) diarists reconcile themselves ahead of time to the demands of communication (today’s writers know very well how to do this); (2) some readers find it pleasant to read something that was not written for them, and agree to pay the tax levied in patience. Either way a conflict remains, and one is greatly tempted to think that what would be unacceptable in a book (the page layout, to start with) is precisely what is most intimate in a diary. Certain types of relationship to the self and to time are lost when we bend to the demands of communication.

People who write diary-novels, of course, attempt to preserve elements that are contrary to communication, but in infinitesimal doses. They produce a kind of “diary effect” in the manner of Barthes’s “reality effect.” On one side, these elements include length, the fact of repetition, a massive number of things left implicit, discontinuity and gaps in information, and a “first draft” character of writing. On the other side we have immodesty (exposing things about oneself that one would presumably have an interest in keeping secret, such as weaknesses, embarrassment, and faults) and indiscretion (every diary compromises other people, whether by revealing things about some people to third parties, or by revealing how one really sees other people without telling them). But I’m wrong to present these two series of elements as if they were equally opposite to communication; the second—weakness of the human soul!—would in fact have the tendency to facilitate it.

I would propose starting from situations of rewriting and performing a sort of “differential” study, with the idea of bringing forth what is specific to, and irreducible about, diary writing.

Would that be a truly “genetic” study? Yes, although the situation is paradoxical: “genesis” implies a study of a creation, and a valorization of the point of arrival. Now, since I consider the final work to be a destruction, and I valorize the point of departure, it seems that I am taking the opposite point of view. As we have seen, however, my position is more nuanced; I wish to bring to light the conflict between two logics of writing. Moreover, the paradox is only on the surface. The desire to know the genesis of a created literary work is unnatural, or at least once removed. The desire to know the original state of a diary is perfectly natural, for it is precisely what motivated one to begin reading it in the first place.

There is another reason for doubting whether this is really a “genetic” project: often we will be dealing with rewriting done by somebody other than the author. Now, up until today genetic studies have remained closed within the magic circle of the idea of the author. But the only circle that can contain *these* studies is that of the text. The fact that there are two authors is simply a particular modality of textual work. There is no reason to exclude it.

I tried to complete my project starting with a group of contemporary adolescent diaries. Now differential study assumes that one possesses both a beginning *and* an end point, so as to establish a typology of the operations leading from one to the other. For this study, in every case (except one), I had only the starting point or the end point. To finish this essay, I am going to recount the instructive (mis)adventures of this research project. Ultimately, they led me to do a genetic study of the *Diaries* of Anne Frank.

As I say, at times I had only the beginning point. Such was the case for my own adolescent diary, and for the diaries that I was able to consult in the archives of the “Vivre et l’écrire” association in Orléans. I studied one of these diaries, Cécile’s, to see how the text of the diary was put together with all the other accompanying documents (written or not). In every case, I had manuscript pages or notebooks in front of me but no books. Books were only dreams at that point, very distant on the horizon. Obviously, a great deal of work must be done to extract books from such manuscripts. Everything is long, repetitive, and mixed. I mean, *would* be long, repetitive, and mixed, *if it were printed*. Yet when I read the manuscript notebooks, none of those adjectives came to mind. I had plenty of time, and the diaries often seemed brief compared to the time of life that they evoked and accompanied. It is true that my own diary is very badly written. I was tempted, I must admit, to flush it down the toilet. I tried to, and then gave up. It wouldn’t have solved anything, and it wouldn’t have been me anymore. There I am, clumsy and ungrammatical. Yet the experiment was interesting: I was able to see just how strong the urge is to correct a diary that one is recopying. I also daydreamed while reading Cécile’s diary. How could one cull from these eight notebooks that narrative of growing up that she herself was thinking about when she bequeathed her diary to “Vivre et l’écrire”?

Sometimes I had only the terminal point. The book was there and the work had been done, but I no longer had access to the beginning. That is the most frequent case. To facilitate comparisons I had chosen a corpus of adolescent diaries, and with the idea that it would be easier to communicate with the teens or their editors, I had chosen contemporaries. That was a mistake. There were two boys and two girls. The first boy was Gabriel Matzneff. He did not answer my letter. I asked him whether the beginning of his published diary was whole or whether he had made certain selections, and how he had done so. The second boy was Wolinski, whose *Le Bécoteur* (1984) I had greatly admired.<sup>8</sup> His response was to return my own letter to me with “yes” answers or other brief comments in the margin, as if it were a corrected assignment. “I cut out a lot, but I didn’t add or change anything.” He changed proper names. The beginning and the end of the book correspond to those of the diary. He wrote on perforated graph paper in a little brown folder. That’s it. This economical answer was hardly an inspiration to push things further. And why, after all, put one’s nose in the diaries of others, even if they have themselves published them? By publishing them they had traced the exact limit of their indiscretion. On the girls’ side of things, first of all I had Stéphanie, the author of *Des Cornichons au chocolat* (1983), “with the collaboration of Philippe Labro.” A brief preface describes the nature of his role:

The editor decided, at that point, to have me read the text, and I asked to meet Stéphanie. Together, we were going to work towards a new form for the book. This meant that I played the role of journalist, asking for clarification on certain points and suggesting to Stéphanie that she return to such and such a theme or episode, or else that she go further in letting her emotions, moods, laughters and sorrows show. I never touched her writing. On the contrary, it was necessary to preserve the power of her tone and the originality of her style. Simply, in the way the miners of the Klondike gold rush would sift what they gathered in the river to find the nuggets, so too we would work to select our material. Then we would classify and build. We would change, as well, certain people's names and places so as not to embarrass the real actors in this still-living story.

This rewrite, done after the diary had been handled for two years under the "direction" of a professional writer, seems to have been especially significant (and successful: it is a very good book). But "Stéphanie" wished to remain anonymous: it seemed therefore out of the question that one could ever see the original manuscripts. And Philippe Labro, for his part, kept silent when one of my students wrote him to ask about his work. The second girl was Ariane Grimm, the (posthumous) author of *La Flambe: Journal intime d'une jeune fille* (1986), a book her mother published two years after her death in a motorcycle accident. This book (also very successful) suggests the possibility of seeing the original notebooks; the first page of each of the four published notebooks is reproduced in facsimile facing the text, which is itself a literal transcription of it. But as for the rest of the diary, perhaps it was changed after all? I was able to see the notebooks, but the recent death of Ariane made a study of this kind inappropriate.

Thus my entire corpus had disappeared. Choosing contemporary diaries had not been a brilliant idea. One girl and one boy remained. The boy was the adolescent Claude Mauriac; the writer Claude Mauriac, seeing my embarrassment, offered his original diary to me so that I could compare it to the use he makes of it in the vertiginous eleven-volume presentation of *Temps immobile* (1974–1978). In this way, the possibility of continuing this study opened up, and I thank him warmly. The girl was Anne Frank, whose original *Diaries* were published for the first time in Holland in 1986. This edition reveals a surprise, and sweeps away any doubts one could have had about the authenticity of the texts. Anne Frank was herself the first person to rewrite her own *Diaries*. During the last three months of her stay at the Annex, she almost entirely rewrote the diary of the preceding two years, with the intention of publishing it herself as soon as the war was over. Thus, *two* texts of the *Diary* exist, both in Anne's hand. The situation has been complicated by the fact that neither of these two texts is complete. Some of the original diary's notebooks have been lost, and Anne had not finished the rewriting

when she was arrested. In order to construct a coherent book, in accordance with Anne's plans, her father had to perform a kind of structural rewrite. The Dutch critical edition gives us all we need to follow the two rewrites: Anne's, then her father's. However, since this exemplary edition itself remains only on the threshold of the genetic reflection that makes it possible, I have begun, in broad strokes, the genetic study that is required. Anne Frank, rewriting her own diary to give it the form of a book, offers us a sort of ideal experimental situation to seize this "difference" between private writing and public writing.

Autobiography, personal diary. . . . Even if generic specificities do not account for all of the processes that one can observe, they have the advantage of opening up reflection in areas where one can generalize. Studies of the whole corpus of a given author are indispensable, that is obvious. Yet if they are pursued exclusively, they run the risk of resulting in airtight studies on a small number of congenial works. Asking about the specific practices of a whole genre permits us to establish transversal links between different authors, but also to ask about works that are perhaps less inventive but which reveal basic generic constraints. It also lets us avoid the trap of individual psychological interpretations and instead map our questions onto the terrain of writing. Thus one can hope to ask the same questions I posed with respect to autobiographies or diaries about numerous other writing practices, such as theatrical texts, automatic writing, short stories, poems with fixed forms, dialogues . . .

## NOTES

1. Lejeune first presented his work on Anne Frank at a 1990 colloquium on diaries in Nanterre. In 1998 he published a revised version of the essay in *Les Brouillons de soi* (331–65).
2. Ricoeur develops this idea in *Time and Narrative* (3:244–49) [trans. note].
3. This quotation is from the Neuchâtel manuscript of Rousseau's *Confessions*. It is not normally included in the French or English editions of the *Confessions* [trans. note].
4. In his essay in *Genetic Criticism*, "With a Live Hand: Three Versions of Textual Transmission," Jacques Neefs gives a detailed genetic analysis of Chateaubriand and Stendhal [trans. note].
5. Several of Stendhal's books, including *Le Rouge et le noir* and *La Chartreuse de Parme*, are dedicated in English "to the happy few" [trans. note].
6. Cotteverte has since published this edition as "Le Cahier 1865 de Marie d'Agoult" in *Genesis* 16 [trans. note].
7. I spoke of this recording in "La Voix de son maître: L'entretien radiophonique," 116. See also Paul Léautaud.
8. Wolinski is a cartoonist known only by his surname [trans. note].



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## HOW ANNE FRANK REWROTE THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK

Almost everyone has read the Diary of Anne Frank. But who really knows the story of the text? It is at once awful, complicated, beautiful, and paradoxical.

Awful because the violence of History, which killed Anne, also had its effect on her text: when she was arrested half of the diary disappeared forever, although the rest of her papers were saved. Furthermore, after its publication, the Diary was subjected to vile attacks by Holocaust negationists who challenged its authenticity.

Complicated in that this story came to light in 1986 when the critical edition of the manuscripts was published in Holland. That edition was translated into French in 1989 as *Les Journaux d'Anne Frank* (Calmann-Lévy),<sup>1</sup> an edition so rich and complex that it was misunderstood. The introduction to this edition, which is historically and philologically remarkable, deals only cursorily with the issue of text genesis. It creates the opportunity for an inquiry that it does not itself undertake. My purpose here is to extend this inquiry by way of an analysis of the twofold rewriting process that produced the text we are familiar with.

It is a beautiful story about two true writers: Anne herself, since it was she, locked up in the Secret Annex, who transformed her diary into a work of art; and her father, Otto Frank, who used the papers that had been saved to complete, respectfully and intelligently, the work that death had cut short.

The paradox is that this story raises questions about the status of the text, part work of art and part document. The Diary of Anne Frank has achieved a mythical status on three levels. She is one of many witnesses and victims of the Holocaust. She has become an exemplary figure of the Adolescent. But she is exemplary on another level: she has shown us that everyone can write, and that writing can save people, if not from death, then at least from being forgotten. Anne is a very young adolescent, an amateur writer, or rather a budding writer, who was transformed by circumstances—although she did not live to realize it herself, even though it is what she wanted—into a great writer whose work has enriched the lives of millions of readers. Read as a simple testimony but in fact experienced as a masterpiece, her published diary

<sup>1</sup>"Comment Anne Frank a réécrit le journal d'Anne Frank." *Les Brouillons de soi*. Paris: Seuil, 1998. 331–65. Revised 1 Nov. 2005.

gives people hope and courage: it legitimizes all so-called ordinary writings. Studying the genesis of the text may fill us with admiration, but it is also liable to make us feel uneasy. When we read a diary, we need to believe that what we are reading is literally what was written on that day.

Otto Frank and the original editors were aware of that, since in 1947, the reader was informed at the beginning of *Het Achterhuis: Dagboekbrieven van 12 Juni 1942–1 Augustus 1944* (*The Annex: A Diary in Letters, 12 June 1942–1 August 1944*) that “except for a few passages of little interest to the audience, the original text is published in full.” This presentation implied that there was *one* full original text: we will see that there were *two* texts, both incomplete. It also implied that the cuts were minimal and did not alter the meaning of the text in any way. Up until 1986, then, the Diary was read as an unedited document whose authenticity was guaranteed.

Authentic it most certainly is, but in a much more convoluted way than one might think.

I will present my research into that convolution in two parts.

First, I will give an overview of the text’s genesis based on the situation created by the 1986 editors, Gerrold van der Stroom and David Barnouw. In textual genesis studies, the researcher often puts so much energy into sorting out the tangle of rough drafts that when the time comes to analyze them, he is exhausted. The 1986 editors did not intend to do a study of the Diary’s genesis but to establish its authenticity once and for all, which they did authoritatively. In doing so, they generously laid the foundation for a genetic study of the text, sparing others the preliminary work. I first tackled this subject in 1990, shortly after the translation of their critical edition was published in France. During a visit to Amsterdam in April 1997, I was able to see Anne’s original manuscripts, thanks to the good offices of David Barnouw.

The second part will be a sort of diary: from 1990 until today, I have been following the transformation in editions of the *Diary*, a history full of twists and turns that is most certainly far from over.

## I: GENESIS OF THE SECRET ANNEX

### THE FACTS

On 12 June 1942, Anne Frank turned thirteen. One of the birthday gifts she received was a “poetry album” with a red-and-white checked cover in which she began to keep her diary. Three weeks later, on 5 July, her older sister Margot was called up by the SS for deportation. Otto Frank decided to hide the whole family immediately in the hiding place he had prepared in the Annex to his company’s offices. Naturally, Anne took her diary with her. Until her

arrest two years later, on 4 August 1944, she kept her diary in a series of notebooks, of which three have been preserved:

— *Notebook 1* (the poetry album), kept from 12 June to 13 November 1942 (with a few later additions on pages left blank, and comments made during a rereading in early 1944);

— Some lost notebooks, no one knows how many, which she kept between 13 November 1942 and 22 December 1943; we have to assume that these notebooks existed since, along with the notebooks that were preserved, they are the basis for the rewriting of some “loose pages” (see below); also, Anne herself refers to them in the beginning of notebook “2”: “Dear Kitty, Daddy has tracked down another new diary for me” (22 December 1943, *Diaries* 427);

— *Notebook 2*, kept from 22 December 1943 to 17 April 1944 (into which she also copied her story “Cady’s Life”);

— *Notebook 3*, kept from 18 April 1944 to 1 August 1944.

These notebooks will be discussed later, when I analyze how they were rewritten. But Anne did other writing, alongside or based on the diary, that sprang from a wish to *compose*. The diary itself should therefore be seen in the context of this gradual development of a writer’s plans.

I detect four stages to this development.

The first stage, internal to the diary, is the change in the writing system that occurs in the week of 21 to 28 September 1942: the use of fictional addressees begins (characters from the *Joop ter Heul* series of novels), the beginning is illustrated retrospectively, and there is a new regularity: what had at this point been a vague project hitherto becomes a structured, continuous text whose virtual literary status is indicated by the reference to *Joop ter Heul*.

Each of the other stages appears in a different physical medium.

— The *book of quotations*: a narrow, neatly kept record book into which Anne copied noteworthy passages from her reading, from June 1943 until 2 July 1944; this book went completely unpublished for a long time; it was not mentioned at all in the 1986 critical edition of the Diary, although it had been saved along with the other papers; it was only in 2004 that Gerrold van der Stroom came out with a beautiful facsimile edition along with a transcription (*Mooie-zinnenboek*, Uitgeverij Bert Bakker Amsterdam).

— The *account book*: this book was also kept carefully, as though it had been copied from another manuscript. The first word of each paragraph is prettily underlined in red. Anne prepared a detailed analytical table of contents. In one special column, she indicates the genre of each text. To simplify, there are autobiographical scenes, either contemporary (“The Secret Annex”) or retrospective (“The Jewish Lyceum”—the Jewish secondary school she had



attended the previous school year, 1941–1942), as well as what Anne calls “Invention,” which are most of the texts that the editors grouped together under the title *Stories*. Begun in March 1943, this book contains only autobiographical scenes until 6 August 1943. The first story, “The Kitten,” appears on 7 August. There are a few more autobiographical scenes, but after that inventions predominate until 23 April 1944, the last date when it was used. These stories merit separate study: they begin as fairly simple moral tales, and evolve into more complex autobiographical fictions. The last one, “Cady’s Life” (which was not copied into the account book, but at the end of notebook 2) is the most fully developed. On 11 May 1944, she sketched out how she planned to continue this story (*Diary* 647). But on the same day she refers to another literary project, which she had first thought of during the summer of 1943 while writing “Scenes from Life in the Secret Annex,” and which she kept on the back burner until 28 March 1944, when a minor incident inspired her to act.

— The *loose pages*: On 28 March, while listening to Radio Oranje (Dutch radio broadcasting from London), she heard Minister Bolkestein make a call for eyewitness accounts. It is best to let her tell it herself:

Dearest Kitty,

Bolkesteijn, an M.P., was speaking in the Dutch News from London, and he said that they ought to make a collection of diaries and letters after the war. Of course they all made a rush at my diary immediately.

Just imagine how interesting it would be if I were to publish a romance of the “Secret Annex,” the title alone would be enough to make people think it was a detective story. But, seriously, it would be quite funny ten years after the war if people were told how we Jews lived and what we ate and talked about here. (29 Mar. 1944, *Diary* 578).

A week later, spurred on by this idea, she writes at greater length about her plan to become a journalist and writer:

I must work, so as not to be a fool, to get on to become a journalist, because that’s what I want! I know that I can write, a couple of my stories are good, my descriptions of the “Secret Annex” are humorous, there’s a lot in my diary that speaks, but—whether I have real talent remains to be seen. . . . I am the best and sharpest critic of my own work. I know myself what is and what is not well written. Anyone who doesn’t write doesn’t know how wonderful it is. . . .

And if I haven’t any talent for writing books or newspaper articles, well, then I can always write for myself. But I want to get on; I can’t imagine that I would have to lead the same sort of life as Mummy and Mrs. v.P. and all the women who do their work and are then forgotten, I must have something besides a husband and children, something that I can devote myself to! (5 Apr. 1944, *Diary* 586–87)

She is indeed the sharpest (if not the best) judge of herself, since now, as she writes her diary by following the drift of her moods and thoughts, as she has always done, she realizes that it is not presentable or publishable as is. She apologizes to Kitty for this:

I really believe, Kits, that I'm slightly bats today, and yet I don't know why. Everything here is so mixed up, nothing's connected any more, and sometimes I very much doubt whether in the future anyone will be interested in all my tosh.

"The unbosomings of an ugly duckling," will be the title of all this nonsense; my diary really won't be much use to Messrs. Bolkesteyn or Gerbrandi.<sup>2</sup> (14 Apr. 1944, *Diary* 603)

The days go by. Anne has to work on her "Cady's Life," and it is clear that all her hopes for a breakthrough as a writer are wrapped up in her Stories. On 21 April, she mentions her intention to publish one of the stories, obviously under a pseudonym (*Diary* 616). On 9 May she finishes the story of Ellen the fairy, and copies it onto good quality paper to give her father for his birthday. On 11 May, she takes stock of her literary plans once again:

You've known for a long time that my greatest wish is to become a journalist someday and later on a famous writer. Whether these leanings towards greatness (insanity!) will ever materialize remains to be seen, but I certainly have the subjects in my mind. In any case, I want to publish a book entitled *het Achterhuis* [The Secret Annex] after the war, whether I shall succeed or not, I cannot say, but my diary will be a great help. Cady's life must also be finished; this is how I've imagined the continuation of the story. (11 May 1944, *Diary* 647)

So on 11 May, the plan for an autobiographical book based on the diary and the story of Cady seem to be on an equal footing: Cady even seems to be given some priority, since Anne sketches out the rest of the story, whereas the book based on the diary is still just a hypothetical project, for after the war, if she makes it that far.

By 20 May, everything has changed:

Dear Kitty,

At long last after a great deal of reflection I have started my "Achterhuis," in my head it is as good as finished, although it won't go as quickly as that really, if it ever comes off at all. (20 May 1944, *Diary* 653)

The project thus had a two-month incubation period (from 28 March to 20 May). Then two and a half months of intensive work that would be halted by her arrest. Anne seems to have given up on the stories and devoted herself entirely to the *Secret Annex*. The diary does not tell us anything about this work; indeed, the diary itself is slowed by this competing activity.

This time, Anne does not work in a notebook but on loose pages. These are colored 21.4 x 27.5 cm pages, folded or cut in half. Each “letter to Kitty,” begun at the top of a new sheet, was self-contained. This system probably allowed her to work more flexibly, adding new entries later or rewriting some of them without affecting the rest—in short, a sort of word processing system.

What genre does this rewrite belong to? Ambiguous and indeterminate. If we go back to the statements made before 20 May, we see that Anne was initially contemplating a “romance of the Secret Annex” (29 March), while also emphasizing its value as an eyewitness account (“how we Jews lived,” also 29 March). Subsequent statements (7 and 14 April) mainly stress the need to write and compose well. On 11 May, it is no longer a novel but simply “a book about the Secret Annex.” In practice we will see that she decided to follow her notebooks very closely. She keeps the diary form, simply addressing entries “to Kitty” from the beginning, a form of address she had only gradually begun to use in the real diary. She also does some pruning, reshaping, and partial rewriting. In terms of fiction, she merely prepares a list of invented names with which she intends to replace real names for publication (*Diary* 61–62), but she did not have time to use them: the real names are kept in the rewrite. We have to imagine her at her table with the original notebooks beside her, the contents of which she is putting into “publishable” form on sheets of salmon, pink, ivory and blue paper. The work proceeds quickly, the pages pile up, and in a few weeks the rewrite would catch up with the present. Having begun fifteen days before the D-Day landing, she might have been able to finish the *Secret Annex* by the time Europe was liberated.

On 4 August 1944, when the Germans entered the Secret Annex, Anne had already written 324 pages, the last entry being dated 29 March 1944. The writing of the loose pages was cut short (according to the critical edition, all of them were preserved). But in the chaos that followed the arrest, some of the original notebooks disappeared. The German Silberbauer scooped up the Franks’ money and jewelry. The father tells how it happened: “Then he picked up a briefcase in which my daughter Anne kept her papers, including her diary notes. He shook the briefcase out onto the floor and then put our jewelry and our money into it” (*Diary* 22). That evening, Miep Gies was able to get into the annex: the floor was strewn with papers and books after the Germans’ general search of all of the closets. She picked up all of Anne’s writings that she could find: notebooks (but not all of them), the book of quotations, the account book, and the loose pages. Some more pages were retrieved a few weeks later when the Germans had all the contents removed

from the Annex (*Diary* 62). Miep Gies gathered together all of Anne's writings with the intention of giving them back to her when she returned, if she returned.

On 3 February 1944, Anne had written in her diary, after referring to the Holocaust: "I have now reached the stage that I don't care much whether I live or die, the world will still keep on turning without me; what is going to happen, will happen, and anyway it's no good trying to resist. I trust to luck, but should I be saved, and spared from destruction, then it would be terrible if my diaries and my tales were lost" (*Diary* 481).

Anne was not spared. She died in March 1945 at Bergen-Belsen. All the residents of the Secret Annex died, except for Otto Frank, who was still alive when the Russian army liberated Auschwitz on 27 January 1945. He was repatriated to Holland via Odessa, arriving in Amsterdam on 3 June 1945. It was not until late July or early August 1945 that he knew for certain that Anne was dead. Miep Gies then handed all of her papers to her father.

#### HISTORY OF THE BOOK

This is where the amazing history of the book begins. Anyone who wants to follow it in detail should read the scholarly Introduction to the critical edition of the *Diary*. The Dutch edition came out in 1947 under the title *Het Achterhuis: Dagboekbrieven van 12 Juni 1942–1 Augustus 1944* (*The Annex: A Diary in Letters, 12 June 1942–1 August 1944*). The book was translated into French in 1950 (*Journal d'Anne Frank*, Calmann-Lévy), into German in 1950, into English in 1952, and then into many other languages. Fifteen or sixteen million copies have been sold, with numerous adaptations. But beginning in the late 1950s, here and there, doubts were also raised, with rumors and then accusations followed by trials: was the diary genuine? In France, the "revisionist" view would be put forward by Robert Faurisson. Otto Frank died in 1980. In his will, he left all of Anne's manuscripts to the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation (RIOD). In 1986, the Institute published a critical edition of all of the Diary manuscripts, preceded by a monumental Introduction over two hundred pages in length that establishes beyond the shadow of a doubt that the manuscripts are genuine, but that also explains why the 1947 edition may have laid itself open to suspicions. I must immediately add that it also shows that Otto Frank did an admirable job, literarily and humanly, in completing the rewriting and rearranging that Anne had begun, in the same spirit in which she had undertaken them. His only error, if error there was at all, was not to have clearly explained to the first readers, in 1947, the situation he had found himself in. But could he have done that without undermining the book's effect?

The Dutch critical edition of the *Diary* (1986) was translated into French in 1989. It should have laid to rest all misunderstandings and errors. We can see from the reaction in the French press that nothing of the sort happened. The very wealth of material presented on the genesis of the texts makes it difficult to read. For each diary entry, a single page contains the following, set out in paragraphs, from top to bottom:

- A. the text of the original diary (if extant);
- B. Anne Frank's rewriting of it (if extant);
- C. the published text.

This clever system, which made it possible for me to do the work I will present, is also very restrictive. It is taxing to read five hundred pages of a text in three differently shaped versions. As I mentioned, the Introduction says very little about the evolution of the text. In its two hundred pages, just one line refers to Anne's rewrite: "She changed, rearranged, sometimes combined entries of various dates, expanded and abbreviated" (*Diary* 61). It refers to Otto's edit in a slightly less perfunctory manner, but since the differences between A and B have not been analyzed, the focus is on easily detected cuts. The history of the text is not really picked up until after the first typewritten text: it covers the negotiations with the publishers and the extensive rearrangement by editors and translators.

Left to his own devices, a hurried reader will merely find things in the original diary (particularly about sexual and family matters) that do not appear in the published text, and will draw the conclusion that Otto Frank censored his daughter's diary. That is what some journalists did, thus lending credibility to new errors that are all the more difficult to root out because they seem to be substantiated by a critical study. For example, here is a scientific-sounding heading from *Le Quotidien de Paris* (4 October 1989): "An opportunity to compare the full edition with her father's 'expurgated' version." The article itself tells us that Anne's rewrite was purely stylistic, and attributes all of the cuts to Otto Frank. We will see how absurd it is to present it this way.

The reader must try to understand the situation Otto Frank was in when he found out about his daughter's diary (quite apart from his emotional state and the fact that he was in mourning). He had *two* versions of the diary to deal with: they were *heterogeneous* (stylistically and to some extent thematically, since Anne pruned the original diary as she rewrote it); both were *incomplete* (the original diary was missing an entire year from the middle; the rewrite of the ending was suspended at the time of the arrest); and finally, they were in some respects *unsatisfying*: Otto Frank clearly felt, as Anne had, that the original diary was both too plain-spoken and too prolix; but on some

things he also thought that Anne cut too deeply as she rewrote it. In any event he had to do something, because he did not have a complete, publishable text. He had to edit it, and he made a clear choice: he decided to complete the work that Anne had begun.

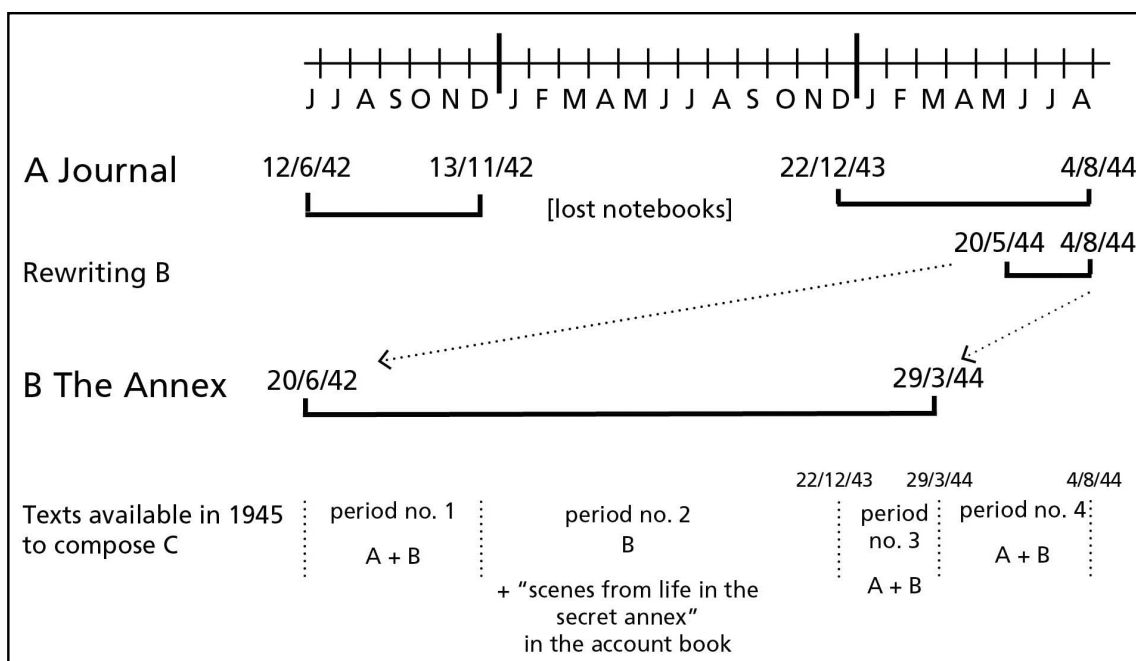
Otto Frank was missing some of the original texts. On the other hand, awful as it is to say it, he knew something Anne did not: the fact that Anne had died. *The Secret Annex*, rewritten on loose pages (version B) and published by Anne herself after the liberation of Europe, would have been an interesting firsthand account, but probably not a fascinating book. As we will see, it would have been missing the portrait of awakening love, and the happy ending of the liberation would have made it a picturesque adventure book rather than a tragedy. Yes, it is an awful thing to say, but in some ways death is a writer. Since Anne and Peter had died, Otto Frank was able to partially lift the censorship that Anne had imposed on herself, and include more from the original diary. Today, we read her burgeoning life in the light of her death:

“I don’t want to have lived for nothing like most people. I want to be useful or give pleasure to the people around me yet who don’t really know me, I want to go on living even after my death! And therefore I am grateful to God for giving me this gift, this possibility of developing myself and of writing, of expressing all that is in me!” (24 Mar. 1944, *Diary* 569)

So Otto Frank takes Anne’s rewrite as the framework for his own edit, adding corrections and lengthening wherever possible or necessary. I say “edit” advisedly: the subsequent rewriting of details was not done by Otto Frank, but by the Dutch publishers and by translators. It is horrifying to see how many people felt entitled (meaning, in their minds, duty bound) to improve Anne Frank’s text. Otto Frank had revised nothing. He was forced to accept the revisions to ensure that the book was published.

The position he found himself in as he attempted to compose a publishable text (text C) was far from straightforward. Because half the diary had been lost, and because the loose pages were unfinished, he was working with a “highly unstable” set of texts with four configurations:

- first period (12 June–13 November 1942): both versions A and B are extant;
- second period (13 November 1942–22 December 1943): only B exists (plus the “Scenes from Life in the Secret Annex” in the account book);
- third period (22 December 1943–29 March 1944): both A and B;
- fourth period (31 March–4 August 1944): only A is extant.



The table above elaborates on one that appears in the critical edition of the *Diary* (66). I have shown the writing of the original text (text A) on the first line, while distinguishing between the preserved notebooks and the lost notebooks; the second line shows the act of rewriting on loose pages; the third line shows the rewritten period (text B). At the bottom, finally, is the situation Otto Frank faced while composing C.

For each of these periods I will analyze, to the extent that the documents allow, first Anne's rewrite (the shift from A to B), and then Otto Frank's rewrite (the shift from A+B to C).

This analysis is based on a close reading of all three versions, but I have been as succinct as possible, and have presented my conclusions directly without including detailed evidence, to avoid problems of communication caused by an exhaustive approach.

My qualitative study is accompanied by a quantitative study involving a comparison, for each period, of the number of entries and the length of the text. These figures are provided in an appendix.

#### THE REWRITES

##### Period No. 1: 12 June–13 November 1942

##### *Anne Frank's work (A → B)*

There is a huge difference here between A and B.

The diary is much longer than the rewrite. It includes a series of funny ID photos and documents, with comments by Anne. The first entry addresses the notebook itself (12 June). Then, until 21 September, Anne writes directly,

with no explicit addressee. Beginning on 21 September, the entries take the form of letters addressed alternately to eight characters from *Joop ter Heul*, a series of novels for young girls by Cissy Van Marxveldt.<sup>3</sup> Anne writes to each in turn, asking for news from them. One of these characters is Kitty. At the end of the notebook, on 13 November, this system is still in place. The entries that come before the move to the secret annex (on 5 July) do not mention the situation of the Jews, although it was already critical. When the family moves into the annex, Anne describes only the annex itself, which she is just finding out about, but not the offices, which are already familiar to her. Especially in the beginning, the Diary seems much more childish than the B text. On the other hand, it is very straightforward in discussing sexuality (3, 4, 10 and 20 October). It is very clear that the diary did not really take off, did not become a systematic, conscious practice, until more than two months after the move to the annex: the week of 21 to 28 September was decisive. Before that, Anne did not really feel like keeping a diary, didn't see what the point was, and had trouble keeping it up—it was a sort of chore (*Diary* 199). When she finally began really working on her diary, she reappropriated it through two crucial acts: representing an addressee (writing it to characters from a novel), and representing the speaker: on 28 September she retrospectively illustrated the beginning of the diary by pasting in a series of photos of herself as well as some other documents, and as if to make a new start, rewrote the first page (*Diary* 182).

Two years later, Anne Frank reworked her thirteen-year-old's diary with the benefit of her fifteen-year-old maturity and the artistry of a novelist who knows how to set out a story. The quite astonishing adult savvy that she brings to the task is one of the reasons for the suspicion that surrounded the book. Right from the beginning, the revised diary is addressed only to Kitty. The first entry is a sort of programmatic preface in which she introduces herself to the reader: she leaves out the initial description of her birthday and the list of gifts she received. Heavily reworked, the account of her life during the month of June, before the move to the annex, mentions the situation of the Jews (historical background), and includes an episode in which the father announces the existence of the hiding place in advance (dramatic foreshadowing). The text is now conceived in relation to a reader. When the family moves to the annex, Anne takes care to describe the whole building and not just the annex.

This same concern for the reader is what prompts her to cut the brief passages dealing with sexuality. This “censorship” was not done by the father, but by Anne herself, so that her text would have a chance of being published: she was well aware of how things worked. And she was right: when her father submitted the text to the publishers, they had reservations about what little



outspokenness still remained! Anne is very straightforward in her diary. Of course, there are moments when she is ashamed as she rereads her diary: on 22 January 1944, rereading what she had written a year earlier (on 20 October 1942) about expecting her first menstrual period, she reacted negatively: “I could never write such a thing now!” (*Diary* 287). She sees herself as “an innocent young thing,” and chides herself for writing so “bluntly” (304). But that doesn’t stop her, two days later, from describing in detail her conversations with Peter about sex (463–68, 24 January 1944), and then summarizing her sex education (545, 18 March 1944), describing her female organs in minute detail (566–67, 24 March 1944), etc. She is writing for herself, and it is the pure and simple truth. There are some areas of reserve in this truth-telling system: when, at her request, Peter gives her a lesson on male sexuality, she mentions the lesson but not its contents (559, 23 March 1944). But in the spring of 1944, on the loose pages, she writes a book whose main subject is the adventure of a Jewish family during the occupation. Her discoveries about sex, which would make some people laugh and would shock others, are completely out of place there. She cuts them out.

So the information is reshaped (to a greater or lesser extent), but overall it remains true to the subjects covered and the voice of the original diary entries. On the other hand, it is presented quite differently. Naturally, the documents (photos, etc.) disappear. There is extensive rewriting involving condensation and redistribution (the entries are no longer on the same dates). The scattered, childish side of the writing is toned down. In looking at the third period, I will analyze how Anne Frank went about transforming the diffuse, repetitive flow of the diary into an interesting, well-structured book. On top of that, she also felt obliged to take her prose from 1942, still childish and impulsive, and mold it into her more controlled style of 1944.

*Otto Frank’s work (A + B → C)*

The father almost always follows version B. But he sees that Anne has gone too far in opening the text with a solemn programmatic preface. He tries to soften it and make it sound more natural. He puts the birthday story back in, though he shortens it, as well as the conversations with a friend, Hello. For the story of the move to the annex, he follows the B text almost word for word. After the move, he begins making small cuts to B and adds some things from A, but these adjustments do not affect the overall tone, which comes from the B version.

He also had to choose a system of names for the whole book. It is a compromise between what Anne does in version B (where everyone has their own names), and what she had in mind for publication (all of the family names would have been changed, and all of the first names except for hers and that

of Mr. v. Pels; for “Frank,” she had first thought of “Aulis” and then “Robin”). Otto Frank decided to keep the real names of all members of the Frank family, thereby imposing an autobiographical reading of the text; he used the names Anne invented for all of the other characters, except for young Peter whose first name he kept (Anne was thinking of renaming him “Alfred”), and Miep Gies. We are not told about these name changes, which were made to maintain people’s privacy. The reader is therefore convinced—correctly—that he is reading Anne Frank’s actual diary rather than a work of fiction.

### Period No. 2: 13 November 1942–22 December 1943

#### *Anne Frank’s work (A → B)*

In principle, we have no way of evaluating this, since the original notebooks (A) have disappeared, except in the very special case of the account book, parts of which Anne uses (although the critical edition does not reproduce them).

It is nonetheless possible to make a series of hypotheses and observations.

*Addressee:* at some point during this period, Anne must have moved from the system of multiple addressees (still in effect on 13 November 1942) to the Kitty system (already in effect on 22 December 1943); but we do not know when or how.

*Omissions:* in the original diary, Anne must have discussed subjects that she omitted on the loose pages. We have two incontrovertible indications of this. At Christmas 1943 (24 December), she alludes to a private talk her father had with her at Christmas 1942 about his youthful love affairs. There is no mention of this in the loose pages for Christmas 1942. We can also see that Anne herself, in rewriting the Christmas 1943 passage, (very consistently) omitted the references to the secrets shared in 1942. It was Otto Frank who made the surprising and moving decision to restore this reference in version C! He is no longer in the same situation as Anne, and he has different selection criteria: in the third period, he often puts things back in that Anne had left out. Another part that was undoubtedly cut was material dealing with sexuality. In notebook 1, we see Anne impatiently awaiting her first menstrual period (20 October 1942, 287); in notebook 2, she commemorates the event, which has taken place three times (6 January 1944, 442): it is unlikely that she would have failed to mention the event itself in the notebooks that came between those two entries.

*Reshaping:* the frequency of entries in the loose pages (B) is very irregular, and even a bit strange: there is not at all the same feeling of continuity that we get with notebooks 1 and 2, so much so that I wondered whether we actually had all of the loose pages. Wasn’t it possible that some pages had been lost during the great chaos of the arrest? But when I expressed my doubts to

the Dutch publishers of the critical edition, they assured me that there was every reason to believe that the set of loose pages was complete. They therefore create the image of discontinuous activity: in the space of one year, on nine separate occasions Anne would have had to let two weeks go by without opening her diary, which seems highly unlikely, even if we take into account that beginning in March she was also writing in the account book. This distortion is one of the effects of the reshaping that I will describe in discussing the third period. Even if the set of loose pages is “complete,” we must remember that Anne’s work stopped abruptly and was frozen in a state that was probably, in her mind, not yet definitive.

*Rewriting:* we can assume that the stylistic difference between A and B must have been much greater at the beginning of the period than at the end (based on a comparison of the changes made at the end of notebook 1 and the beginning of notebook 2).

*Otto Frank’s work* ( $A + B \rightarrow C$ )

He had very little room to maneuver. He was able to complete B by adding the only fragment of A from this period (an entry from 2 May 1943 that Anne had written in notebook 1), and two bravura pieces from the account book, which he divided into four entries (13 July and 18, 20 and 23 August 1943), complementing the material that Anne herself had borrowed. In the other direction, he also made a few cuts. He took out a story from the account book (“The Kitten”) that Anne had included in one of her entries. He shortened some rather long passages and removed short ones on various subjects. This minimal retouching was done out of a concern for composition, and at times also out of respect: Otto Frank reduced the number of attacks on the dentist Pfeffer (one of Anne’s favorite targets), and took out all of the jokes about how he, his wife, and the van Pels parents spoke Dutch (accent, vocabulary errors, etc.) This was not just a matter of sparing Anne’s “victims,” but of giving a balanced portrait of Anne herself, whose repeated expressions of pique might be irritating. But all in all, text C is very close to text B.

**Period No. 3: 22 December 1943–29 March 1944**

*Anne’s work* ( $A \rightarrow B$ )

Here, we can compare again. But for Anne herself, the situation is different than in Period No. 1. The writer of the loose pages (June–July 1944) is now very close in time to the narrator of the diary (December 1943–March 1944). A gap of six months at the beginning closes to only four months by the end. The fact that they are becoming closer has two contradictory consequences.

On one hand, the diary’s narrator has developed some psychological maturity (as evidenced by the “autobiographical” entry of 7 March 1944), and

some writing experience, thanks to the diary itself and the account book. So the writer of the loose pages feels much closer to her. In addition, the reader no longer needs extra information to understand the narrative: we are no longer at the expository stage. For all of those reasons, Anne can follow the real diary much more closely. So the entries are now almost always on the same dates as in the original diary. The work of rewriting seems to follow principles of composition similar to those of the epistolary novel: calibrating, centering, and pruning.

*Calibrating:* Anne tends to regulate the size of the entries by taking out entries that are too short (a letter has to have a certain substance, has to develop a story or line of thought) and chopping up entries that are too long (she divides them into several letters).

*Centering:* a letter must have one main subject. If an entry has several subjects, Anne keeps or develops one of them and cuts out or shortens the others.

*Pruning:* major repetitions must be avoided from one letter to another. While repetition is natural in a diary, it is difficult to take in a book; this concern explains the disappearance of entire letters, and guides the “centering” of the shortened letters.

On this last point, before she had even thought of the Secret Annex idea, Anne realized that her diary amounted to “chewing things over”: “Dear Kitty, I asked myself this morning whether you don’t sometimes feel rather like a cow who has had to chew over all the old pieces of news again and again, and who finally yawns loudly and silently wishes that Anne would occasionally dig up something new” (*Diary* 470, 28 January 1944).

On the other hand, during these winter months of 1944, the narrator of the diary is having her first experience of love, while the writer of the loose pages, a few months later, is disengaging from the affair. It all started on 6 January 1944, following a striking dream that caused Anne to become interested in Peter and gradually win him over. The first kiss was received on 16 April, and returned on 28 April. Following a long difficult talk with her father on 7 May, Anne decided to pull back from Peter a little. In the original diary, before 7 May, we follow the story of this love step by step; after 7 May, everything becomes muted and all we have are occasional overviews on the stages of the detachment (19 May, 14 June, 15 July). It is also after the crisis of 7 May that Anne decides to devote herself to rewriting the diary: by disengaging from love, she is able to engage in writing. But when her rewrite reaches January 1944, will she keep the detailed description of the blossoming of a love that she has just renounced? No, that is impossible—just as it is impossible, on the other hand, to leave it out completely. We can see that she is hesitating. She takes out so many letters for the months of February

and March that she leaves an image of greater friendship with Peter, but not of love. It is possible that she had not yet made her final choice: we must remember that her work was broken off suddenly.

Anne “censors” herself on two other points: almost everything to do with sexuality (her own sexual development and her conversations with Peter about sexuality, which I mentioned earlier), and some of the things she wrote against her mother. On these two points, as for the crush on Peter, we must remember that this text was meant to be published under her name right after the war. From that point of view, it is not what she cut out but what she left in that is surprising, and that seems very daring even now.

The upshot of all this work is a drastic reduction in quantity, a reduction that is particularly significant for the month of March 1944 (perhaps because it is unfinished?)

*Otto Frank's work* ( $A + B \rightarrow C$ )

Otto Frank has the same possibilities here that he had in period No. 1 to make B richer by using material from A that Anne had omitted. In period No. 1, he had used these possibilities skillfully, but discreetly.

Now he would use this resource more fully, because the change in situation between 1944 and 1945–46 (the deaths of Anne and of all the main characters in the story except for him) prompted him to make different choices than she had made. Anne had personal reasons for covering up, in a narrative that she intended to publish herself, the love she had renounced. Now she and Peter were both dead. Otto Frank decided to put back into the narrative most of the letters that Anne had taken out in which she talks about the beginnings and early development of this love. On the other hand, for the most part he abided by Anne’s censoring of the passages on sexuality and of a particularly unpleasant letter about her parents (8 February 1944)—so unpleasant, it seems, that for years after Otto Frank’s death (in 1980), the Frank family continued to oppose its publication.<sup>4</sup> Otto Frank also cut short hostile passages about the dentist Pfeffer, although he also included some letters about daily life than Anne had taken out.

By the end of this editing, text C looked very different from text B. Otto Frank restored all of the psychological complexity and emotion of the love story—the very love that he had countered with his advice about being cautious. How could we help but feel that something deeply moving happened here? It is absurd, despicable even, to say that Otto Frank censored his daughter’s diary: the truth is more or less the opposite. It was Anne who censored the text for various reasons. He took out all of the cuts that he felt it possible to take out. He restored the richness of the original diary and gave his daughter back the only experience of love she would ever know.

### Pause: The Letter with Three Confessions (6 January 1944)

I pause to give at least one example in more detail. This is the letter of 6 January 1944, which contains three confessions. At this point, the Franks have been living in the annex for a year and a half. Anne is fourteen and a half. She has three notebooks: one for notes on her reading, the one she keeps her diary in, and one in which she is collecting her attempts at literary writing. For the time being, the diary and the literature were clearly separated. Her diary was the place for secrets.

Dear Kitty,

I have three things to confess to you today, which will take a long time. But I *must* tell someone and you are the best one to tell, as I know that come what may you always keep a secret. (*Diary* 440)

The three confessions are:

1. An expression of her resentment towards her mother. The impossibility of taking her as a role model or respecting her. Her lack of tact. The story of how she had hurt Anne's feelings once (before the annex). (29 lines)

2. Thoughts on prudishness, the tendency to blush (an article she had read by Sis Heyster). The changes of puberty in a young girl. Despite the disadvantages, Anne feels that they are a sweet secret. Anne discovers that she is her own person. In the evening, she wants to feel her breasts. Even before the annex, with her friend Jacque. "I asked Jacque whether as a proof of our friendship we might touch each other's breasts. Jacque refused." A fascination with women's nude bodies. (39 lines)

3. "Now for my third confession and this is closest to my heart." The night before, longing to speak to someone, a conversation with Peter. His shyness makes her feel tender. But she is not in love with him. When she woke up that morning, she had remembered a dream: Peter Schiff, the boy she used to love, saying that he loves her and kissing her softly. An intense feeling, as though he was there. Recollection of other dreams of people's presence she has had recently. Then Anne tells Kitty the history of her admirers: Sally Kimmel in kindergarten; Peter in primary school (who was three years older than her and dropped her); almost all the boys, and Hello, at the Jewish lyceum, who were in love with her though she did not love them. A return to the image of the dream, and a long romantic outpouring about the old Peter. (141 lines)

*Anne's work (A → B)*

Imagine Anne with these pages, probably in late June or early July 1944. Certainly she is perplexed. The entry for 6 January is important: this is where the amorous adventure with Peter begins. For the first time in this rewrite, she

has to decide whether to include it, although she has now moved beyond it. What is more, this is a monster of an entry: it deals with three different subjects and is far too long. And then those three confessions, which could only be made to Kitty: could she really make them public? What to do?

First move: centering. One entry, one subject. Each confession would be dealt with separately. I will take them one by one.

Mama? As she reads her diatribe from January, the Anne of June is dismayed: it is childish and unfair, impossible to keep in. The 29 lines against Mama are taken out. She finds it striking enough that she decides to replace the lines about past indignation with an expression of her present-day indignation. So she takes a sheet of paper and invents an entry for 2 January 1944 in which she shows herself at that time rereading unfair things she had supposedly written about her mother a year earlier, and she gives the Anne of January her current feelings. Now *that* is righting one's wrongs! This entry is pure invention (between 30 December 1943 and 6 January 1944, there are no entries in the original diary) and out of sync with her real feelings at the time. But justice is done! (42 lines)

Prudishness, the changes of adolescence, menstruation, love of the female body, her proposal to Jacque? First of all, this is off topic, and second of all, publishing such things was unthinkable. It is deleted. (0 lines)

There is still the dream about the old Peter. She will leave it in, since this is the origin of her friendship with the current Peter and because it basically expresses her need for love. But it is too long, so she splits it into two entries, one on the correct date (6 January, 50 lines) and the other the next day (7 January, 45 lines). She takes the opportunity to tighten up the text a bit, and cuts all of the gushing at the end.

Naturally, we must look at the treatment of this letter within a broader context: Anne deleted the earlier, shorter entries of 27 December (Christmas gift) and 29 December (dreams about Grandmother and Hannelie). The following entry, 6 January, gives a distanced and lucid analysis of her relationship with her mother, most of which Anne keeps. The cuts impoverish the text, and the calibration of entries gives them a rather monotonous rhythm.

*Otto Frank's work (A + B → C)*

The father's strategy is not simply to go back to text A, but to flesh out text B—his base text—by reinserting fragments from A. He puts the short entries from 27 and 29 December back into B. He keeps the false 2 January entry. But he wants to put the first two confessions back in. So he creates a new entry dated 5 January: the letter with the three admissions has become a letter with two confessions (“Dear Kitty, I have two things to confess to you today . . .”). For the third confession, Otto Frank keeps the layout of B, with

two entries on 6 and 7 January. This means that one entry from 6 January in the original diary has multiplied into four entries, for 2, 5, 6, and 7 January. This creates a certain contradiction, since on “2 January,” Anne feels sorry for a verbal attack against her mother that she actually mentioned on 6 January (and which becomes 5 January here). This is softened by Otto Frank’s removing an offending phrase (“she is precisely the kind of example that I do not want to follow”).

The main thing is that Otto Frank put the second confession back in after Anne had left it out completely. It is hard to accuse him of censoring his daughter’s diary. The courage it took to make this choice can be seen from the alarmed reactions of the initial Dutch publishers, who had taken out, as shocking, Anne’s story about her proposal to Jacque (who rejected it) that they touch each other’s breasts (*Diary* 69, 70).

#### Period No. 4: 31 March 1944–4 August 1944

##### *Anne Frank’s work (A)*

The rewrite of the diary ends with the 29 March 1944 entry, the day when Anne mentions the appeal on radio Oranje. This was probably a coincidence. Of course, this could be a skillful composition procedure, the book ending with the event that gave rise to it. A simple hypothesis that cannot be verified. In April and May 1944, the diary itself continues at a normal rhythm, but gradually slows in June and July. There are two obvious reasons for the slow-down. Beginning on 7 May, Anne stopped talking on a daily basis about her relationship with Peter, who was a major presence in the preceding months. From 20 May onward, most of her time was devoted to writing the loose pages. To turn the problem around, she was then writing too little to tell whether this writing affected how she kept the original diary.

##### *Otto Frank’s work (A → C)*

This time he no longer has Anne’s work to use as a basis, and is confronted directly and solely with the original diary. He must therefore take on both the rhetorical development (calibrating, centering, and pruning) and thematic selection, creating a text that is a precise continuation of period 3. Of course, he includes everything to do with the love intrigue with Peter: the growing intimacy between the two teenagers, the exchange of kisses, and then the crisis of 7 May. His cuts, which are minor, either match the parts Anne had previously censored (a few passages on sexuality) or are chosen by him (a few nasty remarks about Pfeffer and indiscreet information on people who were still alive). The most glaring cut involves the long feminist discussion that ends the entry from 13 June 1944, Anne’s fifteenth birthday (*Diary* 678). We must admit that, despite all his good qualities, Otto Frank was hardly politically correct.



Of course, he leaves out the three lines in the letter of 20 May in which Anne announces that she has begun writing *The Secret Annex*, since that would reveal to the reader that there had been a rewrite. Overall, the C text is very close to the original diary, three-quarters of which he kept.

### Quantitative Analysis of the Changes

This quantitative analysis, like the study above, is based on the hypothesis that none of the loose pages has been lost. Even with this hypothesis, we must remember that Anne's work was stopped suddenly: she could have changed her choices later.

The numbers indicate, respectively, the number of lines of text in the French translation / the number of entries.

#### *Period 1*

The first period is divided into three sub-periods that are dealt with in substantially different ways:

— before the Annex: Anne shortens by one-quarter, Otto lengthens again;

— story of the move to the Annex: Anne multiplies by 4 and splits it up; Otto follows what she has done;

— the stay in the Annex after moving in: Anne cuts by one-half; Otto puts some things back.

	Before	Move	After	Total
A	320/6	56/1	1292/32	1668/39
B	241/6	231/4	687/16	1159/26
C	337/9	236/4	767/18	1340/31

The analysis of A underestimates it: it refers only to the text and does not take into account the photographs with Anne's comments, or the other inserted documents. Notebook 1 contains more than a dozen documents, reproduced in the proper place in the critical edition of the *Diary*. These are mostly sets of ID photos with funny comments—see in particular the set pasted in on 28 September 1942 (190), and 18 October 1942 (272, 281, 282, 284). Notebooks 2 and 3, on the other hand, contain almost no inserted documents.

#### *Period 2*

The figures show that texts B and C are very close: B, 2,017/49; C, 1,851/50. They also show a fairly low frequency of writing (less than one entry per week). We have no way of assessing the frequency of A. But we can assume that the actual diary was twice as long for this period and was written in twice as often, reasoning by analogy with the “after move” sub-period of Period 1.

*Period 3*

The third period will be divided into months. The first table covers Anne's rewrite. The most striking thing is the way the real diary explodes in March (she writes three times more than in February, almost every day), whereas the rewritten diary keeps up the same rhythm as the January diary, a deliberate regularity that is also linked to the waning of love.

	22–31 Dec. 43	Jan. 44	Feb. 44	1–29 March 44
A	154/5	525/8	512/12	1526/26
B	61/2	449/9	225/4	433/9
B/A	40%	86%	43%	28%

And here are Otto Frank's adjustments:

C	132/5	522/10	369/10	857/18
C/A	86%	99%	72%	56%

*Period 4*

Otto Frank kept three-quarters of the original diary: A: 2544/45; C: 1825/45.

**2: WHICH TEXT SHOULD BE PUBLISHED TODAY?**

1990

One question arises at the end of all this: based on the work done by the *Diary's* editors, is it possible today to give the public a new version of the diary of Anne Frank?

The critical edition—which is lengthy (719 pp.), expensive, and very difficult to read—does not perform this function. Version C, insofar as it is in line with Anne's plan and represents a remarkable piece of work carried out by Otto Frank with talent and sensitivity, could legitimately remain the standard paperback version. But we might hope to have an updated version of the original diary made accessible to the public. Text A could be given for periods 1, 3 and 4, and version B could be inserted, perhaps in italics, for period No. 2. A preface would explain the reasons for this arrangement. Not only would this be an uncensored version, but the most exciting part would be to see the development of Anne's writing from the rather childish pages of the beginning to the extraordinary maturity of the last few months. When she rewrote *The Secret Annex*, Anne made her writing homogeneous, and erased one of the most telling signs of time's passing. She felt that she had to do this in order to conform to her idea—an idea we all share—of “the book.” But if we really want to read her Diary, we should stick close to the text itself, and restore this adolescent writing in all its freshness.

1992

I wrote that section in 1990. Today I have to add a postscript: a new edition of the Diary of Anne Frank has come out since then! It is the French translation of a version edited by Mirjam Pressler on the initiative of the Anne Frank Foundation in Basel (*Le Journal d'Anne Frank*, Calmann-Lévy, 1992, translated into English in 1995).

My idea was too simple, too philological, too noncommercial. A different choice was made.

Mirjam Pressler put herself back into the father's shoes and started his work over again. Like him, she took version B as the foundation, and expanded it using fragments from version A, more extensively than he did. For period No. 4, she followed version A, with some cuts. This perfectly acceptable way of assembling the text gives the reader more information than the version produced by Otto Frank in 1946.

Why does it still make me feel uneasy?

It is going to add to the confusion: there are three "Anne Franks" in French bookstores today: the Livre de Poche *Diary* (1950 edition with a preface by Daniel-Rops, and a new afterword by Isabelle Rosselin-Bobulesco explaining the background of the text); *Les Journaux d'Anne Frank*, Calmann-Lévy, 1989 (the critical edition); and *Le Journal d'Anne Frank*, Calmann-Lévy, 1992 (the so-called definitive edition). Of course, any new edition would have had this effect, given the situation. But it was conceivable that after the publication of the critical edition, any new edition would not be a new *creation*. That is what this version is, so that the critical edition is already, to some extent, outdated! Of course, it will never be outdated in that it provides versions A and B, the unchanging foundation for any work. But now we have to add version D to version C.

Mirjam Pressler followed these principles: she restored everything that Anne had censored because it was contrary to publishing practice at the time or did not respect the family; but she also pruned and beautified the text. The new edition seems to assume that today's reader will appreciate Anne's honesty but will be put off by her clumsiness. So one of Anne's choices (censorship) is overturned, but the other (her reshaping) is retained. So repetitions or trivial details are omitted, and the whole thing is grafted, sutured, homogenized, assembled, and polished.

Perhaps this should have been clearly explained. But the editing is presented in a confusing way. Granted, the situation is complicated, as you will have seen if you have followed me thus far. But aren't readers entitled to have someone try to tell them the truth? The French publisher states on the cover of the book that "This volume presents for the first time in French the definitive version of the Diary of Anne Frank." The only thing that makes this a

“definitive” version is the legal situation that transfers the writer’s copyright to her heirs, allowing them to do whatever editing and rewriting they want based on the papers that have been preserved, and prohibiting all other publications. But the only definitive thing is actually to publish the remnants of versions A and B faithfully, which has been done. The book cover also contains unjustified allegations about Otto Frank’s work. We are told that he cut passages out for reasons of decency or privacy. We have already seen what really happened. It is amazing that the French publisher of the critical edition could retail errors made by journalists who were incapable of reading it correctly.

The publicity cover on the book promises: “A new diary: Anne Frank’s voice revealed at last.”

In fact, there is one insurmountable contradiction between wishing to continue Anne’s project (composing a literary work) in her place and wishing to “reveal” the reality of her writing and her work. Thus the “definitive” edition once again censors the key sentence from the beginning of the 20 May 1944 entry that might raise questions in the reader’s mind: “Dear Kitty, At long last after a great deal of reflection I have started my ‘Achterhuis,’ in my head it is as good as finished, although it won’t go as quickly as that really, if it ever comes off at all.” The reader might realize that what he or she is reading is not Anne’s real diary, or her fictional diary, but a third (or even a fourth!) text composed in its place.

### 1997

Another development has occurred since last December: Mirjam Pressler’s new version, first published as an ordinary edition, has been released as a mass-market paperback, replacing Otto Frank’s version. But this time it has an invaluable postscript by Isabelle Rosselin-Bobulesco that gives the reader the necessary information on the history of the text. Still, hold onto your old editions if you want to know the text that millions of people read between 1950 and 1996, and to read Anne Frank’s “real” journal, delve into the critical edition.

It is painful to admit that half of Anne’s diary has been lost forever, and that the rewrite she began is unfinished and imperfect. It is as intolerable as her death itself. That intolerability underpinned Otto Frank’s work of mourning. His love for Anne prompted him to bring this ghostly diary back into existence, a diary that haunts us still. Now we in turn are the bearers of that love, that unhealable wound.

### 1998

A dramatic turn of events. An incredible but predictable new development: the “definitive” edition is not definitive! The loose pages, which the editors of the critical edition assured me were complete, were not!

Like everyone else, I have just found out from the French press, which picked it up from the Dutch press, that a 74-year-old Dutch man, Cor Suijk, has three pages from the Diary that were given to him by Otto Frank shortly before his death.

These three pages, two blue and one pink, belong to the set of loose pages. A photo was published in *L'Événement du jeudi* (17–23 September 1998: 47). So these are not fragments of the original diary, but of the rewrite. The two blue pages, transcribed in full by the Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* (26 August 1998), contain an entry from the diary (letter to Kitty) dated 8 February 1944 in which Anne analyzes her parents' marriage. They must be the rewrite of a 47-line passage from the original notebook on the same date, a passage that was not reproduced in the critical edition because of opposition by the Frank family (although the omission and the reason for it were indicated: in it, Anne was said to have given an "extremely unkind and partly unfair picture of her parents' marriage").

The pink page contains an introductory text in which Anne says that she does not want anyone to read her diary, least of all her family. The newspaper does not say whether this letter is dated, and the front of it is not visible in the photo from *L'Événement*. The loose pages already have a similar introduction dated 20 June 1942. The page that has been found is repeated material. Is it a draft? An alternative version?

Two comments before we go any further.

What is visible on the blue sheet seems to confirm that none of the numbering was done by Anne Frank. It is therefore impossible to say that we have the complete set of pages written by Anne. Since the editors did not realize that these two sheets were missing, the same may be true of others.

I would especially like to underline one thing that has been misunderstood. The writing of the loose pages stopped on 29 March 1944 and may be incomplete. But whatever the case may be, it is *unfinished*. The arrest froze this work as it stood on 4 August. Who knows but that two weeks later some pages might have been tossed in the wastebasket, or that some entries from the original diary left out by Anne might have found their way back in? Everything was still provisional and in flux. Anne never reached the point of making a final decision on what she would or would not put into her book. I have studied the last three months of the loose pages in detail (January–March 1944): it is a fluid, inconsistent work in progress. Another indication is that these sheets give people's real names, whereas Anne had drawn up plans to change the names (with two variations), probably for use in another round of editing.

So first of all, these three pages, which were in the father's possession, were not included by him in the set of loose pages when he numbered them. Secondly, he physically separated himself from them in 1980.

Why? All we can do is to accept Cor Suijk's explanations (from an interview in *L'Événement du jeudi*), even though they seem fairly absurd at first blush, as I will show. But don't scruples and pain sometimes lead to illogical behavior?

\* \* \* \* \*

Let's take the pink sheet first. I only know fragments of it from quotations in the press. In *Het Parool* (26 August): "I had never done it before [kept a diary], and if I had a friend I could tell about everything that's on my mind, I would never have dreamed of getting a big notebook with a cardboard cover to gossip in and say all sorts of silly things that won't interest anyone later." In *Libération* (3 September): "I'll make sure that no one gets their hands on it. No matter how nice Father, Mother, and Margot are, no matter how much I tell them, they have nothing to do with my diary and its 1,000 secrets." Some journalists suggest that this contradicts the idea of publication, and Cor Suijk himself says that is why Otto Frank took the page out. I must be dreaming! This text seems to be a first version of the two loose pages 1 and 2 whose contents, with similar wording, were included by the father in the text published in 1947! Have a look! Since 1947 the beginning has read: "I have no intention of ever letting anyone read it." We find the same thing today in a draft that was set aside, and the father is being accused of being an imposter and hiding things! Of trying to hide something he actually published!

Nor is there any contradiction on Anne's part. The narrator of the loose sheets is a thirteen-year-old girl who is going to keep a personal diary for herself, just as Anne was at that age, and as she still was at fifteen, since after becoming an "author," what she composed was this artificial diary, no doubt intended to interest unknown readers, but also to avoid revealing her real journal to them or to her family!

What is troubling, apparently, is that the father felt troubled. But just think what he went through! What an awful trial it was for him to read, in 1945, the notebooks that would have remained secret if Anne had lived. It was not his place to read them, and it was a sign that she was dead, and yet it *was* his place, to make sure that the book she had been planning was published, and to keep her alive! The only additional thing in the draft is the (very kind and natural) reference to "Father, Mother, and Margot" as excluded addressees. So yes, those words continued to hurt him, even though, as we have seen, there was no real cause for hurt. And in that lies his greatness.

\* \* \* \* \*

As for the second text (which you will read in full below and which Solange Leibovici translated from Dutch to French for me so that I could continue

covering this story “live”—thank you Solange!), it is unpublished and new, and it must be the 47 lines written in the original diary on 8 February 1944 that the father did not use in 1947, and that the Frank family kept out of the 1987 edition, where the omission is mentioned.

Dear Kitty

As I seem to be undergoing a period of reflection at the moment and letting my mind range over anything and everything, my thoughts have naturally turned to Father and Mother’s marriage. It has always been presented to me as an ideal marriage. Never a quarrel, no angry faces, perfect harmony, etc., etc. I know a few things about Father’s past, and what I don’t know, I’ve made up; I have the impression that Father married Mother because he felt she would be a suitable wife. I have to admit I admire Mother for the way she assumed the role of his wife and has never, as far as I know, complained or been jealous. It can’t be easy for a loving wife to know she’ll never be first in her husband’s affections, and Mother did know that. Father certainly admired Mother’s attitude and thought she had an excellent character. Why marry anyone else? His ideals had been shattered and his youth was over. What kind of marriage has it turned out to be? No quarrels or differences of opinion—but hardly an ideal marriage. Father respects Mother and loves her, but not with the kind of love I envision for a marriage.

Father accepts Mother as she is, is often annoyed, but says as little as possible because he knows the sacrifices Mother has had to make.

Father doesn’t always ask her opinion—about the business, about other matters, about people, about all kinds of things, he doesn’t tell her everything because he knows she’s far too emotional, far too critical, and often far too biased. Father’s not in love, he kisses her the way he kisses us, he never holds her up as an example, because he can’t. He looks at her teasingly or mockingly, but never lovingly. It may be that Mother’s great sacrifice has made her harsh and disagreeable toward those around her, but it’s guaranteed to take her even farther from the path of love, to arouse even less admiration, and one day Father is bound to realize that while, on the outside, she has never demanded his total love, on the inside, she has been slowly but surely crumbling away. She loves him more than anyone, and it’s hard to see this kind of love not being returned.

So should I actually feel more sympathy for Mother? Should I help her? And Father? I can’t, I’m always imagining another mother, I just can’t—How could I? She hasn’t told me anything about herself, and I’ve never asked her to. What do we know of each other’s thoughts? I can’t talk to her, I can’t look lovingly into those cold eyes, I can’t, not ever!

If she had even one quality an understanding mother is supposed to have, gentleness or friendliness or patience or something, I’d keep trying to get closer to her.

But as for loving this insensitive person, this mocking creature—it’s becoming more and more difficult every day.

Yours, Anne

This text shows us yet again how intelligent and sensitive Anne was, how mature and skillful in deciphering the unspoken. Was she right? I cannot say. But the portrait that she draws of her parents' marriage, even if she was wrong about it, is at least indicative of a future novelist full of talent. The tragic power of this page, and its harsh treatment of the father, probably explains why it was left out in 1947, and why the family kept it out in 1987.

What does Anne tell us here that isn't in the rest of the diary published in 1947? Not much, apparently. But something, nonetheless.

Does it give us the scoop that Otto Frank had had a great love affair as a young man before marrying the woman who became Anne's mother? Absolutely not. Otto had told Anne about that at Christmas 1942. Anne writes at length about her memory of the story in her original diary on 24 December 1943, and Otto Frank, who could easily have taken it out (since Anne had omitted it in her rewrite), kept this entire passage, as though he wanted us to know the surprising thing he had done: confiding in his youngest daughter about his youthful romance. Since 1947, thanks to Otto, all readers of the Diary know this story.

Does it tell us that Anne complained about her difficult relationship with her mother, was unhappy because her mother did not love her, and sensed a distance between her parents? That is not new either. Certainly, in the loose pages Anne had herself tried to tone down what she said about her mother, and Otto in turn erased some harsh things. But those precautions are negligible compared to what is still said, and what Otto left in. Since 1947, readers have known what Anne thought of her mother.

What is new here is the way Anne links the two things as cause and effect, and her assertive, impartial, and stern attitude toward her parents *as a couple* (and not just toward her mother). She doesn't make accusations: she explains. She shows that her father is responsible. She is tempted to excuse her mother. This reversal of power was probably difficult for Otto to accept. But one can hardly speak of "censorship" in describing the editing done by this admirable man, who was under no obligation to publish anything at all, who took it upon himself to do so, and who published the important parts and left everything in. He was entitled to have his own feelings respected, and it seems to me that Anne would have thoroughly approved of everything he did.

Why, when he numbered the pages (at an unknown date), did he leave these ones out? Why did he give them to Cor Suijk in 1980? Here is Mr. Suijk's answer: "It was in March 1980. The German revisionists were challenging the authenticity of Anne's Diary, and a court in Hamburg was investigating. The police asked Otto to give them all the material in his possession. Otto was very honest and could not lie. So he gave me these letters. That way he could remain honorable while also making sure that the police did not find



out about them. He told me then that he had thought of destroying them, but didn't have the heart to do it. Later, I came to see him with the letters. I thought he had acted on impulse and that he might want them back. He just put his hand over his face as a sign that he was afraid. He wanted nothing more to do with them" (qtd. by Sophie Perrier in *L'Événement du jeudi*).

In my eyes, Otto's sense of guilt is unfounded. But it can be explained. Anne's letter touched on a painful part of his life. The very act of reading and publishing the diary had been a terrible and at the same time a healing experience for this sensitive, scrupulous man. And how could he not have been thrown off kilter by this incredible return of Nazi persecution, by these deniers who, at the end of his life, placed him in the position of an accused man?

The behavior attributed to Otto Frank might seem Jesuitical—if that were not quite simply *absurd*. The actual introductory page says virtually the same thing as the published text. And the loose pages from 8 February 1944 seem to merely repeat what was in the notebook that Otto kept and conscientiously left to the RIOD! Otto never destroyed anything; he merely postponed revealing certain passages. Giving the pages to Cor Suijk was a sort of platonic exorcism through which he was able to express his pain while continuing to do his duty.

I must say that I was floored by how the press that I was able to read covered this "event," based on journalists' lack of knowledge and sometimes sheer meanness. Sophie Perrier in *L'Événement du jeudi* sinks the lowest. Her title: "The letter stolen from Anne Frank." Sub-title: "Pages torn from the Diary and hidden for fifty years have just come to light. They squarely contradict the rest of the book." Her article's conclusion: Otto Frank's behavior was "very ugly" (sic). Truly, there is nothing worse than libel. You have probably read some of the articles. I hope that this small correction will act as an antidote. It is a provisional correction. I wrote it after finding out as much as I could, but I have not seen all the pages. As soon as they arrive at the RIOD, I'll be back on the train to Amsterdam.

## 2001

They're at the RIOD and I still haven't gone. I waited patiently for the Dutch publishers to come out with a new augmented version of the critical edition, which they did this year: the two additional "letters" are included in the "B" section. I suppose there is little chance that the French publishers will do likewise and publish a new version of the translation of this crucial book.<sup>5</sup> But the "definitive" paperback book has admitted that it is not, by incorporating the unpublished entry while still claiming to be "definitive," until the next change comes along.

I am happy that I used a “diary” form for the end of this study, leaving it open-ended. I intend to continue my research at my leisure. Now two points.

The first is very straightforward: I would like Anne Frank’s only unpublished text, the notebook with her reading notes, to be published in Dutch. It is astonishing that the Anne Frank Foundation, which has the copyright and financial rights over her work, has not yet done this.

The second thing is less straightforward: I would like to do a precise study of the loose pages—on the pages themselves, not the transcription—and piece together whatever we can find out about Anne Frank’s work by looking at her choice of paper color, how the text is laid out on the pages, the few places where she scratched things out, the inking, and the irregularities in pagination, to figure out what happened later. So I still need to go to Amsterdam.

## 2005

1 November 2005, rereading what is written above. I am happy that the notebook with reading notes was published last year, even though there is little hope that it will ever be translated into French or English so that I can read it. I wonder why there has never been a colloquium on the Diary of Anne Frank. Many biographies and “spin-offs,” a few critical texts, but little dialogue or debate. It seems to me that the remarkable critical edition inspires more respect than attention. I have just read, in French translation, Barry Denenberg’s book, *Shadow Life: A Portrait of Anne Frank and Her Family* (Scholastic, 2005). The author says that he spent five years “researching and gathering documents,” and takes the liberty of writing an imaginary diary by Margot, but believes that Otto Frank censored his daughter Anne. Generally speaking, it seems as though Anne Frank’s story prevents people from reading her diary as a text. The work she began, and that her father finished, bothers readers who are hungry for firsthand accounts and who cannot conceive of editing as anything other than twisting or censoring that account. As I reread my whole study, I see that there are two directions in which to take my research: on the loose pages, to get as close as possible to the mystery of their composition; and, on a more personal level, an autobiographical reflection on why I identify so passionately with Otto Frank.

## NOTES

1. For the English translation of this edition, see Barnouw and van der Stroom; all quotations and pagination are from their first, unrevised edition.
2. Gerbrandy was Prime Minister of the Government of Netherlands in exile in London. Bolkestein was his Minister of Education.

3. On the decisive influence of this reading, see the account by Anne Frank's best friend, Jacqueline Van Maarsen, *My Friend Anne Frank* (18 et seq.), and the study by Berteke Waaldjik.
4. *Diary* 482. This cut, which was imposed on the publishers by the Frank family, was presented in these terms: "In the 47 lines omitted here Anne Frank gave an extremely unkind and partly unfair picture of her parents' marriage. At the request of the Frank family this passage has been deleted." A serious accusation was being made against Anne, without the reader knowing the grounds for the offence or the accusers' arguments. The publishers, who do not make any comment throughout the rest of Anne, took the accusation upon themselves here. Neutrality would have required that they simply state that the family had requested that 47 lines be deleted. We will see later how this passage from the original diary censored by the family became public in 1998 with the revelation that Otto Frank himself had removed the loose-leaf page containing the passage.
5. A revised critical edition was published in English in 2003.

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## SURVEYING DIARIES, SURVEYING CULTURES

I am honored by being asked to speak at a conference in Algiers on autobiography and life writing in Algeria. I cannot claim to know very much about these kinds of writing in Algeria, but it is an opportunity to think about the methods I have used in studying the diary in France, and the extent to which they might be applied in countries with very different cultures.

The diary's distinct status has led me to change the method of study I originally developed in my work on autobiography. For autobiography, I had worked out a theoretical line of thought—one that I hope was useful—and studied the texts of masterpieces of the genre, from Rousseau to Leiris, Sartre or Perec. For the diary, I got back to basics and went out “into the field,” following two lines of investigation: trying to find original diaries, and doing surveys of people who produce diaries.

I will cover the first point quickly. Where do we find original diaries? For the past, we find them in archives and libraries; for the present, we find them in the archives set up by two active associations and through their networks. In France, two associations collect unpublished autobiographical writings by ordinary people: Vivre et l'écrire (12 rue de Recouvrance, 45000 Orléans), which has over one hundred contemporary adolescent diaries, some of them accessible for reading (an amazing experience, I must say); and the Association pour l'Autobiographie et le Patrimoine autobiographique (La Grenette, 01500 Ambérieu-en-Bugey), which I founded with some friends in 1992 and that currently has over 1,600 autobiographical texts (a good one-quarter of which are diaries) available for reading. Whenever possible, diaries should be read in the original, in large quantities, and in sets. When I turned to the past and wanted to study the diaries of adolescent girls from the nineteenth century, I gathered more than a hundred of them so that I could study their historical development and the various competing models, deviations, innovations, etc. But how could I convey to my readers the experience of having direct contact with the original documents? How could I myself avoid the trap of the printed page? On my initiative, the Association pour l'Autobiographie organized an exhibition at the Lyon municipal library in 1997 where people could see 250 real diaries. I have also continued working

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“Projet d'enquête sur la pratique du journal personnel en Algérie.” *L'Autobiographie en situation d'interculturalité*. Blida: Éditions du Tell, 2004. 1:31–49.

with Catherine Bogaert, the curator of the exhibition: we have published a book aimed at giving people direct knowledge of the documents in large format and in color that also gives a historical overview of diary writing practice (*Un journal à soi. Histoire d'une pratique*).

Why would we want to do *surveys* as well? Isn't it enough to see the notebooks? No it is not, because a diary is not only a text: it is a behavior, a way of life, of which the text is merely a trace or by-product. Besides, reading a diary is a very difficult thing to do. It is one of the few kinds of writing that, when it is read, cannot mean the same thing to the person who wrote it as it does to other people: there is a huge amount of implicit content, and what is "written between the lines" changes everything. You may have had this experience upon rereading your own diary after several decades: it seems like a stranger's diary because you have lost access to the implicit content. For all of those reasons it is a good thing, if possible, to ask questions of the people who produce diaries (a chronological list of the surveys that have been done so far is appended to this essay). There are at least three possible methods.

*Questionnaire administered to a group.* This is where I started, in 1987. (The current version of my questionnaire is shown in the Appendix.) The idea is to have it filled out *on the spot* by a group of a known size that has come together for other reasons (high school classes, student groups, etc.) In my experience, this takes about fifteen minutes. It takes a few minutes to explain the purpose of the survey and that the questionnaire is anonymous and is obviously not mandatory, but that it would be kind and helpful of them to fill it out. All of that presupposes a certain level of understanding between the person distributing the questionnaire and the group. It is also good to let the group know that this person will not be the one who analyzes the questionnaire, and is only acting as an intermediary. The questionnaire is handed out and then collected five or ten minutes later, when it looks as though they have completed it. The total number of people in the group should be recorded in order to calculate the number of abstentions.

I have used this method with middle school, high school, and university classes, groups in continuing education, and groups of retired people. It has taught me a great many things. Of course, this questionnaire is far from perfect and could be designed very differently. I will make three remarks. My chosen method has been only to ask questions about facts with open or closed answers that do not require detailed explanations or assessments. That can be frustrating, because sometimes (when they keep a journal) people want to say more. And that is usually in response to question 10 ("How did you get the idea of starting"), where I have left a bit more space to let people expand on their answers. Second remark: my questionnaire is still *indiscreet*. People

who have not kept a diary will complete it in two minutes while the rest, by the very fact that they are still writing, single themselves out in the eyes of the group as past or current diarists. In middle school classes, these discrepancies can even create discipline problems. I have not found a solution yet. Third remark: to be used in Algeria this questionnaire would have to be rewritten, and this is something I will come back to, especially in terms of language (for one thing, what languages would it be in? And would it contain any questions on the language practices of the person being surveyed?)

*Calls for individual accounts.* This is the second method I have used. In April 1988, I published an article in *Le Magazine littéraire* about my questionnaire-based survey, and in the last paragraph I asked the *Magazine's* readers to give an account of their practices if they wished. I had no idea that I would receive such a fulsome response, perhaps because I myself would never have answered this sort of call! I received 47 replies that were often autobiographical sketches (people had to talk about their lives in order to situate their diary writing practices). I wrote back with questions, they replied again, and so on. It was impossible to cut these poignant accounts up into excerpts or quotations to support a critical study. I decided to publish them as they were, in full, in a book (*"Cher cahier . . .": Témoignages sur le journal personnel*), where my only intervention was to add a categorical analytical index that re-arranges the subjects of the accounts.

*Oral interviews.* This method was used by Malik Allam, a young sociologist of Algerian origin, who put them into an insightful book (*Journaux intimes*) that links the practice of diary writing, which is too often seen as purely individualistic, with the process of socialization. In some cases, Malik Allam was able to get access to the diaries themselves, and it is clear that the richest research experience is one in which the diarist's account can be compared with the text of his diary.

What countries have these different survey methods been used in? To my knowledge, mainly in France. So far I have not said much about intercultural studies, the main subject of our conference, but I am getting to that. You must have asked yourselves by now whether such a survey (and the issue it is based on) can be transported from one culture to another. When I started working on the diary, one thing that astonished me was to see that no one seemed to have done this sort of survey in German- or English-speaking countries, even though they have many studies on diaries, anthologies, manuals on how to keep one, and so on. But that's precisely why: the diary is so much a part of education and daily life there that it is "self-evident." People don't feel the need to do surveys to rehabilitate it or to discover a secret side that is already accessible to everyone. It is part of the air they breathe. Each country has its

own diary culture, and that culture is mainly linked to its religious traditions. It might be possible to distinguish a Northern European culture in which the diary feels at home, and a Southern European or Mediterranean culture in which the diary is less at ease. There seems to be a correlation between a strong Protestant culture and a widespread practice of keeping a diary. (Either one is the cause of the other, or both share the same cause.) This struck me recently while studying the diary in the early modern period (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) in France. I noticed that there was no real tradition of the spiritual journal in France, and that in the late eighteenth century not only did the French lag behind the English in keeping personal diaries, but they also lagged behind their neighbors in Geneva. And this gap can be seen clearly in mentalities today: in France, a Catholic suspicion of pride has been replaced by a psychological diagnosis of narcissism. We have gone from sin to disease, which comes down to the same thing: it's *bad*. Whereas farther north and to the east, the diary is seen as ordinary behavior that, like any other kind of behavior, can be properly used or misused but is not bad in itself, indeed quite the contrary. My survey, purporting to be scientific and therefore universal, is in fact the product of a specific cultural situation, that of a society that feels uneasy as it engages in diary writing intensely, but with a bad conscience.

Can this survey be “exported”? Is it not a methodological error to think that an act can be defined by its form and compared directly from one society to another, without taking into account its differing functions and the general symbolic economies of those societies? Isn't it also improper to use the pretext of science to impose one's own norms on other people, who may take offense? Won't surveys done abroad indirectly really reveal mostly things about French identity through the difficulties they run into? I have to admit that these thoughts have come to me gradually over time and are now reaching their culmination. I will tell you about my successive incursions into Spain, Russia, and finally Algeria.

My initial lack of insight was probably due to the fact that the survey was being tried in another country for the first time. My friend Manuel Alberca, a professor at Malaga, wanted to repeat my surveys in Spain. A diarist himself, he was shocked by the widespread idea in Spain's literary and university circles that the diary was foreign to the Spanish mentality, an idea that seemed to be borne out by the fact that very few personal diaries are published, and there is general silence surrounding the practice. He decided to look into it using two methods: the questionnaire and the public call for personal accounts. His survey, which he updated me on regularly, showed that beneath the veil of silence, the practice of diary writing was just as extensive, varied, and active as in France. He published his study in 2000 under a splendid title: *La escritura*

*invisible* [Invisible writing]. It was enough to go to my head and give me the naïve idea of launching a crusade to free all the muzzled diaries of the world, had I not been wise enough to reflect on the similarities between Spain and France, and in particular the weight of the Catholic tradition, which is even stronger in Spain. Was the same true of Portugal and Italy? And what was the impact of Spain's political background? Since Franco's death in 1975, the country has gone through a powerful gradual liberation not just of the diary, but of autobiographical speech in general. I also wondered whether, in our contemporary world, there was an "international association of adolescents," a youth culture that transcends all other religious or national cultures. A "globalization" even in the most commercial sense, since the stationery industry has moved into Asia (Hong Kong and Taiwan) and manufactures "Diaries" with identical formats that are sold under different covers in each country. And why is it that, no matter what the country or the religion, it is mainly girls (including in Algeria) who keep diaries in adolescence? I am raising this wide range of questions all together, because I am aware that simplification is fatal to intercultural studies: we tend to construct and contrast schematic national identities. My survey may not be directly exportable, but perhaps it will be indirectly revealing.

My second experience abroad was very different. For several years now, I have been participating in a scientific cooperation program between two teams of French and Russian researchers (from the CNRS-ITEM "Genèse et autobiographie" group in France and the Russian Academy of Sciences), initiated on the French side by Catherine Viollet and on the Russian side by Elena Grechanaia and Elena Galtsova. Our aim: cultural contact between the two countries in the field of autobiography. Among the studies that have been launched is the exploration of numerous French-language diaries kept in Russia in the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. These diaries, hitherto unexamined, are slumbering in archives in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other cities. I have also proposed that our surveys on contemporary diary practice be repeated in Moscow. So far the results of these surveys have been problematic. The questionnaire-based survey ran up against translation problems (words or concepts with no equivalents) and then pedagogical interference, if I can put it that way: the overwhelmingly affirmative results obtained in schools were explained by the simple fact that teachers had made the students write journals. But even that is a sign, as in English-speaking countries, where writing a journal (not necessarily a private diary) is part of the school routine.

The call for personal accounts was published on 4 March 2002 in *Knizhnoye obozrenie* [The book observer], and was signed by me to instill confidence



in people who are more likely to respond to a foreigner than to a fellow Russian. Even at that, the results were thin: only fifteen responses were received, some of them addressed to me even though we had clearly asked people to write to the Russian researchers conducting the survey. I had difficulty responding to these letters in which people confided in me about lives lived in a context that was unfamiliar to me. That reinforced my conviction that surveys like these can only be done by insiders. Why were there so few responses? For two reasons, beginning with Russians' wariness of all surveys (they won't even respond to the census!). But at a deeper level, in Russia people do not feel that talking about their diaries is taboo, and they discuss their diaries openly, so a call such as mine is not perceived as "liberating," as it was in France and Spain. This was confirmed during a one-day symposium on the diary held in Moscow in late October 2003. It seems that the Orthodox religion has never looked askance at the diary, which is widely practiced in the most varied settings. Many personal diaries that were kept during the darkest days of the Soviet régime are now being discovered in the KGB archives, diaries that were seized when the diarists were arrested. Even researchers from the Academy of Sciences talk about their diaries, something that is much rarer amongst CNRS researchers in France. The survey results have been published in Russia by Elena Galtsova.

My third experience is in Algeria, a country with three languages that bears the historical imprint of French colonization and where Islam is the state religion. One of the main subjects of this colloquium will probably be figuring out why the individual commitment to tell the truth about oneself, which characterizes public autobiography, is so rare here. Why do people prefer fiction, or to stay in the field of personal accounts, why do they choose to merge into a collective subject that is more a "we" than an "I"?

With the help of Charles Bonn, I did initial reconnaissance by searching the LIMAG database on Maghrebian literature (<http://www.limag.refer.org>) (using the keywords "diaries," "autobiographies," and "critical studies" on both of those genres). There are almost no published personal journals. If we look at the past, of course we find Mouloud Feraoun's *Diary*, which to me is a masterpiece whose desperate lucidity and generosity make it akin to the writings of Primo Levi. But that is an isolated work. People will no doubt be able to point out some titles that do not appear in LIMAG. Algerian writers do not publish diaries, and we were unsuccessful in our search for firsthand accounts based on the publication of diaries by unknown people. This situation may be understandable: it takes time for a diary to become publishable. We will have to wait until 2040 or 2050 to read the no doubt fascinating and admirable diaries that have been written in the past two decades. But I found

two books published in France that give evidence of a regular diary writing practice amongst young Algerian girls who have French as their mother tongue. The first is an adaptation: *Dakia, fille d'Alger* (Flammarion, Castor Poche, 1996), a diary from the year 1994 by a fourteen-year-old girl, "a Moslem high school student in Algiers, a teenager caught in the torment of a history she cannot understand," according to the introductory material. This "exemplary" diary has a preface by Simone Veil, who states that it "stands as a symbol of the strength of Algerian women who are resisting the attempts to enslave them," an indication of the ideological stakes involved in keeping a diary.<sup>1</sup> The second book is Maïssa Bey's contribution to the anthology *Journal intime et politique. Algérie, 40 ans après* (Éditions de l'Aube, 2003). Five Algerian writers, three of whom live in France (Mohamed Kacimi, Nourredine Saadi, and Leïla Sebbar) and two in Algeria (Maïssa Bey and Boualem Sansal), were asked to keep diaries for three months, from August to October 2002. Maïssa Bey begins the exercise with thoughts of the diary she kept as an adolescent, although she no longer wants to give way to her emotions as in the past: "I have to train myself. Find once again that movement towards myself that I had stopped or suppressed for so long. But without returning to the states of mind and delirious introspection that overburdened my private diaries as an adolescent." She seems to be bothered by the ambiguous status of the exercise proposed to her, since this diary has neither the freedom of *expression* of a real private diary nor the freedom of *invention* that she finds in her fiction writing: she feels that she is losing out on all fronts, something I am not convinced of, so striking did I find these few dozen pages. Still, she expresses well the double movement of expansion and restraint that probably characterizes self-expression in Algeria.

We are unlikely ever to know Dakia's real diary (the book is a stylized and shortened adaptation), or the diary of the adolescent Maïssa Bey, but we can be sure that the personal diary does exist in Algeria, although within limited circles. That was confirmed at the early stages of a survey done in April 2003 in the French department of the University of Oran. In December 2002, in Paris, I met Dalila Belkacem, an assistant professor from the university who had come to talk to me about her work on Mouloud Feraoun. She agreed to try out the survey, which seems to have been a delicate and perhaps even a difficult matter. She added her own name and the university's to the top of the questionnaire, but that did not entirely overcome people's reluctance. Some of the students did not fill out the questionnaire, but we do not know how many, which makes it impossible to translate those numbers into a percentage. We might wonder whether some of the answers are sincere, or whether the questions were correctly understood. But here are a few figures and an

overall impression. Of the 101 responses that I saw, 75 were from women (ages 18 to 22) and 26 were from men (ranging widely in age). Fifty of the women said they had kept a diary, and 25 of them still kept one. Most of the diaries had been begun between the ages of 13 and 15. The reasons given (question 10) were the ones we might expect: memory (the wish to preserve a trace of the past) and especially loneliness (a word that came up repeatedly, the feeling of “emptiness”). Nine of the 26 men said they had had some experience of keeping a diary, but I found their responses difficult to interpret. The overall impression that I felt was ambiguous: there was a vague discomfort, yet a significant number of women seemed pleased to be asked about a practice that was important to them, and some of the questionnaires were filled out very carefully. So the practice of keeping a diary is fairly common, and responses are comparable to what we received in France. But obviously this small group (first-year students at the University of Oran) cannot be considered representative of Algeria as a whole. Finally, my questionnaire, which was designed in France, left out the problem of language: do people write in their mother tongue (and what is that?), or in a second language?

I can continue this sketch of the survey by repeating some of the conversations I had after my presentation. Several students came to tell me that they were in the habit of writing things down on paper and destroying them soon afterwards. Was that keeping a diary, they asked? I said yes and no: no because the trace was gone, but yes because of the act of expression, which nonetheless had a formative effect. One student came to explain to me in three points why the private diary was impossible or improbable in Algeria, and she was good enough to reformulate them in two subsequent e-mails:

First of all, there is religion: the very fact of putting down on paper, for example, that you witnessed a theft without reporting the person makes you an accomplice, whereas if you keep that deep down inside yourself, it could soothe your conscience. There is also family: even if you have your own room, there is always a little brother or sister to go through your things. At my place, what belongs to one belongs to everyone. It is inconceivable to have secrets in the family. And then there are your parents. Just imagining how much you could hurt them if you died and they read your diary. How awful for them to realize that they never knew their child.

In response to my questions, she said,

Our religion actually has something similar to Christian confession, the difference being that we are face to face with the imam: there is nothing between us. But I have to admit that it is difficult for a person to go and confide in an imam who may pass judgment on him. We are not taught to “express ourselves” here. It’s not that we are prevented from doing that, no. But there are always limits that turn

into a sort of self-censorship as you get older. It's like when you're a child, you can run to your father and tell him that you love him, but as you grow up, you can't do that anymore, even if you know it would please him. With respect to our sins, it's simple: we keep them to ourselves. People who are lucky enough to have a room of their own might keep a diary, but unfortunately, I don't think we have a culture of the personal diary yet in Algeria. I had a diary a few years ago, but I stopped writing, not really for the reasons I've given, but because so far I haven't found the words to express what I'm feeling.

Two students came to bring me the completed questionnaire that I had handed out as documentation. One of them (age 21) had begun a diary at the age of 18 and kept it for a year and a half: "The idea came to me one sad day when I had witnessed a bomb exploding right in downtown Algiers, but I didn't start it right away because I was in shock, so I couldn't put it into words." She kept her diary on loose-leaf pages at first, and later in a diary notebook that she was given as a gift, and showed it to her best friend. It also contained poems, quotations, and decorations. The other woman (age 23) had kept a diary for a year when she was 14, and then again when she was 18: "I started it during the year of the school boycott (1994) for the Amazight language in Kabylia." She kept it "where no one at home, especially my father, could find it," and gave it to her best friend and her boyfriend to read, "but never to my closest family members." She also put in personal poems and quotations. On the second day of the colloquium, finally, a journalist came up to me to tell me that what I was doing was wrong. It was a breach of privacy. We spoke for a while and she ended up telling me that she regretted that her parents had never encouraged her to keep a diary. That evening, I had dinner with some Algerian friends, he a doctor and she a professor of philosophy (both retired), and their son, a business manager: all three thought that the personal diary did not exist in Algeria.

So here I am about to begin surveying a practice that does indeed exist, but that is discreet and localized and makes people feel uncomfortable. It brings into play all of the dimensions of culture, and therefore of intercultural exchange, all the more so since it is seen as non-Algerian because of language (Arab, Berber, and French; oral culture and written expression); the family (can one isolate oneself from it?); the status of women; religion (a major issue that I have barely touched on is how Islam views self-expression); politics (connected with the previous issue); and the idea of literature (as opposed to ordinary writing).

I will finish by asking *who* can do such a survey, *how*, and *why*.

*Who?*—Certainly not me. Although I would be interested in following developments, such a survey can only be done from the inside, from a position of understanding and complicity, by someone who is Algerian and has kept a

diary. Could a literary researcher do it? Would the person be able to give up the universe of the book and enter the underbrush of the notebook? Perhaps this would be more appropriate for a sociologist? Should it be done by a veteran researcher or someone who is just beginning a career? Alone or in pairs? I remember on the last day of the colloquium a third-year student coming to ask me, a little concerned, whether I had already found someone.

*How?*—I think that the questionnaire should be avoided at the outset. It is somewhat delicate in France and even more so in Algeria. It would be better to start with a call for written accounts or oral interviews, and an analysis of individual trajectories so that a more suitable questionnaire can then be designed. The questionnaire should first be tested on small groups of volunteers who will help improve it. Perhaps the question of the diary is too pointed and people should be asked about their writing practices more generally, with the diary introduced later on as one of several questions or as a final point. That would exclude fewer people and would probably yield more information.

*Why?*—That is a good question: why indeed?  
But then, why not?

#### NOTE

1. Simone Veil, a major figure in French politics and feminism since the early 1970s, is associated particularly with the 1975 law legalizing abortion in France.

#### SURVEYS ON THE PRACTICE OF THE PERSONAL DIARY

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Two surveys: the first was on use of the computer to keep a personal diary; similar to the one in “*Cher cahier . . .*”, it was based on the 66 responses received, 27 of which are published; the second was on diaries kept online on the Internet, and was based on direct observation.

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[ED. NOTE: This site contains, among many life writing resources, the original of the survey translated on the following pages.]



10 How did you get the idea to start your diary?

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

11 Do you ever read your diary?

- Every time you write in it?
- Sometimes? (specify) .....
- Rarely
- Never

12 Have you ever read your diary to anyone? YES NO (circle)

If YES, explain why and to whom: .....  
 .....  
 .....

13 Have you ever destroyed all or part of your diary?

YES NO (circle)

If YES, specify: 1)  completely  in part  
 2) means of destruction: .....  
 3) when and why? .....

14 Have you ever imagined or wished that you diary be published?

YES NO (circle)

Go to question 17.

15 You have never kept a diary. However, have you ever thought of doing so or had the intention of doing so?

YES NO (circle)

16 If YES, what kept you from following through with your intention or idea?

.....  
 .....

17 During the last twelve months, have you done any of the following for your own pleasure? (check off the kinds of writing you have done; specify others not listed):

- poems  cartoons
- songs  childhood remembrances
- stories or fables  autobiography
- novels  thoughts, essays, reflections
- plays or scenarios  newspaper articles
- extended correspondance (family relations, friendship, or love)
- others (specify) .....



## THE DIARY ON THE COMPUTER

My apartment is a typewriter graveyard. Here are my two Olivetti Lettera 32s, the ones I started out with in the seventies. They were like Chinese bicycles—simple, mechanical, and portable. Professional use: an affordable way to type up books and articles for myself. I must have typed up private texts now and then. Here's the Smith-Corona C-500 electric that I bought around 1980, heavy and humming, with its ribbon cartridges. I treated it like a high-powered motorbike—brushing its teeth and getting its engine rebuilt—but now I see that it was nothing but a scooter or a motorized bicycle. I was hitting 90 clicks an hour, and took pride in typing “at the speed of thought” (and Lord knows I'm a fast thinker!) But correcting typos was a royal pain. Slipping little bits of chalky paper in to erase the error by typing over it. Or once you took a page out, taping the corrected passages onto it so that each page became like a patched-up pair of trousers. For texts that other people would see, it was dreadful. But for a diary, who cared? For four years (1987–1990), I breezily typed up diary pages by the kilometer, correcting by hand. After 1986, I also had a little Apple (IIc) at home, with a tiny illegible screen. When I realized that you had to hit a combination of keys to switch to italics, that seemed like a lot of song and dance to me, and I gave it up. My kids played on it. Today, covered in dust, it sits waiting to be tossed in the garbage or donated to a museum. But little Apple grew up, and by the late '90s I let myself be talked into buying a Mac IIsi. It was love at first sight. This Mac won my heart and made me happy. As I composed *Le Moi des demoiselles* on it, I discovered a new way of keeping my diary. I learned to write slowly. Gone were the kilometers. Because it is so easy to make revisions, I write by the millimeter now. Amiel edited and revised by Flaubert: the Mac is my “gueuloir,” the place where I can try out my texts at the top of my lungs—except in silence. Soon after that I also got my PowerBook 145 for mobility and privacy. In 1997, the IIsi was replaced by a Performa 6320—only the screen remains, hooked up to a more powerful PC. My computers and printers take up an entire room: private life and work life share the same space. I can see my most private thoughts appear on the screen, or bits of chat from the other side of the world via the Internet. It's a good thing there are firewalls. No viruses or voyeurs will ever sneak into the nooks and crannies of my heart.

From “*Cher écran . . .*”: *Journal personnel, ordinateur, Internet*. Paris: Seuil, 2000. 15–42.

Ah, dear screen. I do love the screen, and that is surprising. Could I have imagined it myself, twenty years ago? And yet it was foreordained: I have never liked notebooks, or my handwriting. A betrayal waiting to happen. When I started keeping a diary again in 1987, I gave the typewriter a chance. It always happens the same way: you internalize a scholarly or professional practice and co-opt it for your own personal purposes. But the typewriter had never done the trick. After a hundred years in existence, it had made few conquests in the realm of private writing. Stiff, noisy, bureaucratic, official—it doesn't speak to the heart. Certainly I loved my Smith-Corona, just as Claude Mauriac loved his Hermès Baby, but there are only a handful of us. In 1988, when I did my research for "*Cher cahier . . .*", typist-diarists were few and far between. My hypothesis is that the computer will succeed where the typewriter failed. Because it's flexible. Because it's young and playful. Because it's linked to a new space of communication. But that's just a hypothesis, and my enthusiasm may be an illusion. Each person is blinded by his own experience, and in writing, as in lovemaking, finds other people's practices disgusting.

That is why a second survey is called for. We are on the brink of a new era. Twenty years ago, the personal computer did not exist; today, 20 percent of French households have one. Who was talking about the Internet ten years ago? Today (November 1998), 3.7 percent of French households are connected. A tenuous beginning; France is lagging behind. So between May and July 1998,<sup>1</sup> I sent out a call for firsthand accounts in the literary press and on the radio. This was the notice published in *Lire* in June 1998:

### Calling All Diarists!

You keep a personal diary on computer. I am looking for firsthand accounts of this new practice. Did you keep a diary before (by hand? by typewriter?) Do you still do so in parallel? When and how did you come up with the idea of keeping a diary on computer? What else do you use your computer for? When, how and why do you print it out? Do you make back-ups? Computers and privacy (secret diary, shared diary?) Computers and text processing (do you make corrections? As you go, or afterwards?) Computers and editing. Diaries and hypertext. Diaries and multimedia, image, sound. Comparison with writing. Advantages, disadvantages. Differences. Preferences. Send me your response.

My questions are a tad "reactionary": they suggest a comparison with the notebook. I ask whether or not the new medium meets the expectations established by the old one. In short, is the computer a good notebook or a bad one? But also, is it something other than a notebook? If it's a bad notebook, that means it consents to being a notebook and we forgive it: no one is perfect. But if it is something other than a notebook (or even its opposite) at the

same time, or in addition, then that is frightening: what are we getting into?! We had already asked these questions at the beginning of *La Faute à Rousseau* 5 (Feb. 1994, “What Do You Write About”). Here are two diametrically opposed answers that agree on one (far from obvious) point: the computer implies an external addressee.

Laurence Martin:

I wonder, as I finish these lines on a word processor, why it never occurred to me to keep my diary on computer. Let’s suppose that I have a laptop: could it be the same as my “outdoor notebooks”? I doubt it. The way I produce my private writings seems the exact opposite of the virtual, infinitely revisable written text that appears on a screen. What I write in my notebooks, in a style that is often telegraphic, is nothing but the trace of what I have felt and thought at a given time. The fact that I may use certain passages as “raw material” for other texts does not change that in the least: for me, private writing is always fugitive writing, speaking the truth of an instant, something that I could never “go back on.” When you reread and rewrite texts, isn’t it because they are meant for other people to read? So the different types of media I use, which correspond to a generic distinction (writing for oneself/writing for others), are to me the material form of an attitude in writing: whatever I write on 8 x 11 sheets of paper can immediately be viewed, but whatever I write in my notebook is carefully hidden from sight behind a cover.

Graham Woodroffe:

I refuse to say “personal” diary, because the diary I write is mainly intended for readers I don’t yet know or will never know, but who I hope will look favorably on my openness. And it’s this idea of the “posterity” of my electronic diary that seems to me much more satisfying than a diary kept in multiple notebooks. First of all, it fits onto small diskettes, which means that it can be stored more easily and longer than if it were in “scribblers.” In the future, it will be able to leap from one medium to another across future generations of computers. So it is virtually indestructible. But what I see as the main advantage is the possibility of taking this diary into the new multimedia age. It’s now possible to combine my text with pictures, graphics, animations, or 3-D models to make it a sort of electronic scrapbook. In a few years, everyone will be capable of adding video and audio clips to their texts. That’s the future. Being more than a diarist: being the electronic architect of your own existence. Leaving posterity the electronic version of your life rather than a pile of moldy notebooks. Pass your own CD-Rom on to future generations as humble testimony of your existence on Earth.

Laurence and Graham provide several possible axes of opposition. A number of other axes cross dizzyingly in people’s actual experiences. I received sixty-six replies, half from men and half from women, between the ages of nineteen and seventy-five. Thank you to all of my correspondents from the bottom of my heart! Some will appear here in disguise, referred to

by their first names, usually together with a number that refers to the anthology when I quote them briefly. But all of them nourished and stimulated my thinking. What about people under the age of eighteen? There is one exciting indicator: a study of 600 teenagers at the Cosne-sur-Loire high school in 1998 yielded some fifteen who said they occasionally used a computer, whereas the practice seemed to be nonexistent in a 1993 study at Plaine-de-l'Ain high school in Ambérieu. These figures should be treated with caution. Olivier Donnat's recent survey on *Les Amateurs* showed, for example, that 9 percent of diarists used computers, but it was not clear whether they used them *to keep their diaries!* We must recognize that cyberdiarists are still a tiny minority. My correspondents, most of whom keep a diary on computer, are not representative. It's impossible to quantify the contents of their answers, although some dominant trends emerge at times. How should I process these 66 sets of responses? I envisaged three methods. First, content analysis that would yield a detailed index: this essential task forms the basis for the presentation you are going to read. Then, the opposite method: an unedited publication of the accounts, as for "*Cher cahier . . .*" in 1990. In order to be appreciated, the replies need to be read within the context of the delightful mini-autobiographies that were often sketched out in the letters. But here, the narrower purpose of the survey required that texts be selected to cut down on repetition: I included 27 of the 66 replies in my book. But the main thing was to do an overview based on this work: a quick categorizing of problems substantiated by numerous quotations. And here you have it.

### DEAR SCREEN . . .

People who say "Dear Notebook" cannot understand how anyone could be on a friendly basis with a computer screen. Yet it's hardly more ridiculous! Or less ridiculous for that matter! The computer actually has more going for it in this metonymic operation. The notebook is inert, flat, an inanimate object, the ghost of a letter, an ersatz book. The computer has more depth and personality, it's a living being that starts up and shuts off, plays tricks on you and watches you. I will let Pascale explain:

Keeping a diary on computer is easy for me. There's a sort of security that has something to do with the virtual environment. It has some kind of obsessive quality that allows me to categorize myself, think about myself and fit myself into what (my life, that is) seems at times like a black hole or a comet's tail. The screen contains an invitation to write in that it dictates order. There is a physical environment—colors on the screen, flashing, humming, the blinking cursor that is lifelike and makes you feel less alone.

It's obvious: the computer is a cat. The writer's mascot. The pet that fills up solitary lives. We make fun of spinsters who talk to their cats or dogs. My Word 97 program has a pop-up with a little paper clip who has sparkling or languorous eyes and comments on my every mouse click while imitating it. Sometimes I feel like smacking him. I switch him off. And other times I miss him. There he is, a person. Now here is Cécile, explaining how a laptop is a pocket mirror.

Since the day I got my laptop PC, about a year and a half ago, I've been keeping a very choppy diary, that is, written intermittently. I have to say that the idea of a diary, a sort of alter ego, was very much part of the *plan* for getting a laptop. The very shape of the laptop, which opens like a book and is a sort of mirror that you lean over, had an effect on me.

You lean over a laptop. With a home computer, you have to sit facing it. Gwenaël accurately describes this face-to-face encounter with its expectations, challenges, and complicity. This virile battle with the computer is undoubtedly a fantasy of hers, but this long lyrical text, from which I am giving some excerpts, shows the computer's vast potential for identification:

I have atrocious handwriting. . . . Though I may not be able to write on the computer as quickly as I do by hand, it lets me control the pace at which I transcribe my ideas into a form that can be read easily and revised immediately. And the music of the keyboard, when everything is flowing smoothly and the lines are filling up. . . . And then the silence, just the humming of the machine, and the whole room in stillness with the cursor flashing in one corner, reminding you that the writing has stopped. . . . The rituals of turning on and booting up the computer take time. You have to wait for the computer to give you the green light before you can start writing; it can't be opened or closed as quickly as a notebook. A computer is arrogant: it's big and heavy and takes up space (except for laptops, and even then). The disadvantage is that you can't take them everywhere, and the advantage too is that you can't take them everywhere. It means not only that there are certain times for writing, but above all, that there is only one place. . . . A diary is not only writing, it is a time, a way of being somewhere so that you are not somewhere else. You are there to be sure that you are there. And the computer lords it over you; the top of my head is just a few centimeters higher than the screen; I am still taller than it, even sitting down. But all I have to do is slide down a little in my chair for it to tower over me. Humming dispassionately, imposing its rectilinear arrogance on me and compelling me to sit up, back straight, head aligned, gaze steady and horizontal.

Personalization can take picturesque forms: one of my correspondents has a "dynasty" of computers that have been given human names; another speaks of a "harem." And the similes are not always favorable, since they range all the way to "refrigerator."

## PATH

What makes analysis tricky is the ambivalence in people's behavior, and even more so the sheer variety of paths they have followed. How did they come to use the computer? Often, it seems, it started with some other occupational or practical use. A person rarely buys a computer *for* personal writing. So they are already fairly familiar with its use. Are computer diaries the first diaries people have kept? It does happen (seven cases) but more often, for my correspondents, the computer replaced an earlier handwritten diary. Some people who had kept a handwritten diary much earlier came back to diary-writing thanks to the computer. Others (the majority) make the leap within the continuity of the same diary, sometimes with an intermediate typewriter phase (my own case). Some people, after trying out the computer, return to writing by hand (three cases). Others keep both a computer diary and a handwritten diary with different purposes and contents. Some people only use the computer to make a clean copy of their handwritten diary, or to do a more literary rewrite. Sometimes letters (which can be kept on a computer) become a diary, and sometimes vice versa. And some of these behaviors can be seen in the same individual all at once. That is why it would be impossible for me to present a clear table with figures, and especially to correlate my analyses with clearly distinguished behavior profiles. I will nonetheless make two general observations. My correspondents (who read literary publications or listen to France-Culture) are almost all avid writers who have gotten into computers along the way. The opposite background, computer buffs who get into writing, is virtually absent. The universe of online diaries on the Web should be explored by other means right on the Web, as Emmanuelle Peyret did in 1997 for a small survey that I was involved in (*Libération*, 9 May 1997), and as I did more systematically in 1999, as we will see later. But I should point out right away that this practice, which is well developed in North America, is very rare in France. Most online diaries in French are from Quebec.

Second observation: often for avid writers the important thing was not so much any given practice as the possibility of having two different writing spaces, being able to divide their activities between the two, move from one to the other, and so on. Here, for example, is how Michèle draws a parallel between her computer diary, which she writes in the morning and has never printed out, and her handwritten notebooks, which she carries with her throughout the day:

The place and time are different, and so is the nature of the entries. The notebook means mobility and diversity, so it is more focused on the outside world and on the moment, though not exclusively. My computer diary is usually introspective

and a way of reflecting on the day before or the day after, a sort of stock-taking, looking first backward and then forward.

Paradoxically, my notebook is more carefully written, even though I sometimes have less time, because I know it might be seen, by me and by other people. My writing style is terse and curt. The computer is good for ordinary things, whatever is making you happy or sad, going over the same old anxieties or thoughts day after day, a branch above the roof.<sup>2</sup> If I want to I can destroy everything, delete it all, so why not get it all off my chest?

It's not about having a preference; I use the two in very well-defined ways, but nothing stays the same forever.

I am therefore going to run through a diagonal cross-section of these letters along eight axes: trace (personal or impersonal), distance, revision, confidentiality, rereading, the experience of "virtuality," and communication circuits.

### TRACE

What remains of me, if I don't write by hand? For a long time, writing was a collective practice in which the individual hardly left his mark. It was only in the nineteenth century that writing became individualized, even autobiographized. Philippe Artières (*Clinique de l'écriture*) has shown how the fledgling science of psychology took hold of writing at that time and treated it like a universe of symptoms, a body in which each individual's history, character, and pathology could be deciphered, a skin of the soul that, like a fingerprint, was unique and revealing. Diarists were the first to lend significance to their handwriting. I recall publishing an article (*NRF*, April 1997) showing that diaries lost three quarters of their meaning once they were put in print, as well as organizing an exhibition of original manuscripts as "psychic fingerprints" (*Un journal à soi*, curator Catherine Bogaert, APA and BM of Lyon, 1997). The exhibition poster, created by Tomi Ungerer, made a funny play on the idea of the trace: a cat that has dipped its paw in the purple ink used by schoolchildren makes an even line of paw prints across a notebook. I also remember my interview with Bruno Lussato, one of the first people to write about the impact of computers in France, in June 1997. An expert in microcomputers who had written a personal diary in calligraphy illustrated with fabulous drawings, he blew me away when I talked to him about diaries on the computer. He told me all about the right brain and the left brain, which are opposed, irreducible, and irreconcilable! He was right, no doubt, and yet I loved my poor Mac, which offered other satisfactions, spatial and sensual satisfactions that I didn't dare say any more about.

My correspondents are often in agreement with him on many things. Their discussion has two poles: the pleasure of the act itself and the depth of

information in the trace. The index of “*Cher cahier . . .*” will refer you to excellent accounts of how much attention is devoted to choosing the physical media (notebooks and papers) and tools (pencils, pens, inks, etc.), and to the pleasure of inscribing things. I give the floor to my new correspondents. Ev-elyne would like to write with her whole body:

I am not considering keeping a diary on computer, which I certainly think is a highly useful tool, but when it comes to personal writing I need to have physical contact with what I'm putting on paper: if only I could write with my fingers, even my whole body! I'm exaggerating a bit, the proof being that from time to time I clumsily (or propitiously) brush my fingers across the ink before it's dried.

Stéphanie prefers writing on paper for practical reasons, but also because it's raw:

The reason I don't type my thoughts directly onto the computer is that often when I feel like writing I'm not at home, or I don't feel like going to my office. If I come home drunk at 3 a.m., it's easier to find a pen and a piece of paper. I like the rawness of it. When I reread what I've written, I see my mood in the writing.

Mahine likes to take the pulse of her past by scrutinizing the ink, the paper, and the line of the writing, and even comments added later:

By rereading, I can access another level of memory and emotion through the very form of everything to do with the layout of the writing. . . . Three lines hastily scratched out on four weepy pages on the topic of the day (to take one at random, the-fragility-of-love-and-guys-are-all-jerks, etc.), the new pen that's as skittish as a cat, a color of ink (oh yeah, that's right, I had a turquoise period, yuck!), the choice of paper (3 horrible yellow pages in September of one year because that's all I had left, but if I copy them onto white paper now, it won't have the same meaning) and finally the context of the time period. . . . And to top it all off, what makes all these meanderings and second thoughts so valuable are the comments (amused, sarcastic, serious, sometimes/rarely disapproving) added in the margins over the course of successive rereadings and that make me smile and say, “Whew! What a long and winding road!”

The verdict seems to be in: the notebook wins hands down over the computer when it comes to the pleasure of the act and the richness of the written inscription. As to the latter, it's easy to agree: writing on a screen doesn't give much information about the diarist. You can play around with fonts or page formatting, but only up to a point. As for inserting documents with scanning or multimedia, the fact is that hardly anyone uses those techniques yet, and some people even rule them out in the name of a sort of asceticism. People like Michèle:



I haven't touched, so to speak, any computer applications like multimedia, pictures, or sound. To me the diary is an inward search, a way of recentering myself. Multimedia is the opposite, it scatters your energy, which is precisely what I'm trying to counteract through this daily recentering. It's intriguing to see other people use it, but I haven't yet exhausted the pleasures of introspection. What I find irresistible with the computer that I don't get with paper is the anonymous, neutral, disposable side of the writing. No beautiful or ugly traces left behind, no love of paper or notebooks to distract me.

So pleasure is not always wrapped up in writing by hand or on paper. Ten of my correspondents have difficulty writing or don't like their writing, and some prefer the screen to paper (to the point where they never print out their diaries). We have also seen that the computer has a stronger physical presence than the notebook.

As for the richness of the information that handwriting conveys, is that really an advantage? Is it necessarily pleasant to be confronted with the signs of the self as soon as one writes something? Many people don't like to hear recordings of their voices or to watch themselves on video. Autographic self-satisfaction is of course much more common, but it is not universal. When it comes to the diary, impersonality in writing can be liberating.

### DISTANCE

I was struck by the similarities between the five accounts we are going to read. The computer is credited with a sort of therapeutic listening quality that adds clarity to everything you have to say, and thanks to the neutrality of typeface, allows you to see yourself objectively, to step outside yourself and gain some distance. As we will see, other factors play a part: sitting across from the screen, the possibility of revising, and especially the fantasy of an unknown reader. Through this beneficial distancing, people who are in distress and feel disgusted with their writing or are blocked in silence can find a way back to themselves. The experiences described do have a dramatic side, but it is conceivable that for some people, to a lesser degree, the computer lends itself better than the notebook to the diary's cardinal functions of expression and deliberation. Sandra quickly gets to the main point:

Handwriting always binds us to ourselves: it is so hard to see ourselves objectively, through a prism that we are contained within! Whereas the computer does not contain us: it is neutral and identical for everyone. Consequently, at least to my way of thinking, it makes the text easier for anyone who is seeking with great difficulty to *be*.

What's more, when you write onscreen, you are putting yourself into words directly across from you, not below you, as you do when writing with a pen. So

you are contending with yourself as an equal, not in a position of weakness. I think that unconsciously that makes things less painful. And you get a real dialogue with the written self facing you, written in neutral characters, and the despondent writer in search of an identity is no longer seeking with bowed head, absorbed in her private writing.

### Nathalie:

I've been keeping a personal diary on computer since 1995; I started it while undergoing psychotherapy. I had made a few handwritten attempts earlier, but had never gone through with it: fear of the self, or of the blank page? I don't know. . . . I noticed that it was easier to get my ideas, words, and sentences down properly this way. I like the distance that the screen gives me, as though I could observe myself from inside and outside at the same time. I also like being able to (re)work sentences and paragraphs (edit) and I find the precision this gives me preferable to crossing things out.

Sylvie made a suicide attempt, during which she destroyed all of her handwritten diaries. It was the computer that helped bring her back to writing:

I discovered computers during an information technology internship. It was a revelation: I didn't like writing with a ballpoint pen at all any more. Using a keyboard was so much better! First of all because of word processing and the fact that there were no more crossed out sections, but especially because the computer, with the screen and keyboard, puts a much greater distance between the writing and the writer. . . . Also, writing your diary on a computer involves a whole ceremonial: turning on the screen, settling in at your desk, opening a new document: in fact, there are a lot more constraints than when you write in a notebook that you can carry everywhere, open any time, and that you can paste pictures or blades of grass into, things you can't do with a computer, unless you use a lot of hardware that distances you even further.

In the beginning that distancing worked perfectly for me, and gradually helped me get back to writing. I really needed to externalize myself through writing—as I have always done—but I did not have the *emotional capability*. The computer helped me get past that.

Laure also got over her writer's block thanks to the computer:

After denying the clear signs of this disease (depression), I had to accept it and deal with it.

So one day I sat down in front of the computer that I usually used to prepare classes and assignments for my students. I told it everything that was weighing on my heart and mind and that might therefore be the cause of or a part of my "ill-being." After writing four pages I felt very frustrated, because after all that work of introspection, what had I gained? So I printed out the pages and sent them to my doctor, somewhat apprehensively.

He agreed to this written psychotherapy. I am still doing it, but the last few pages I sent to him were handwritten. Your inquiry made me think about the different interpretations or understandings that one might find, in my own case, between a text that's written by hand or using computer hardware.

The return to handwriting is, for her, a sign of improvement. Finally, let's listen to Claire, who rewrote her personal notebooks (which were "a part of therapy") on a computer and discovered the beauty of the screen:

You must admit that the computer has done away with the very tangible aspect of emotion. Its typeface can come across as neutral and impersonal. So it's not as easy to translate emotion on the computer, since it no longer derives from a sort of imitation of handwriting, but from a more rigorous choice of the right wording. . . . I also found with the computer that I could feel the outline of an addressee just beneath the surface that I was writing. The novelty for me was realizing that by choosing the computer, I had unconsciously expressed a desire to be read by someone besides myself.

The distance between me and the screen shouldn't be seen as a disadvantage. I turn myself into a character. With my notebook, writing was a direct expression of whatever was affecting me; with the computer, I become an actress, but also—and this is new—a spectator. . . . Work (my position facing the screen underlines this) and reflection are important parts of it. You might say that the computer diary takes on a certain "literary" quality.

## REVISION

Some visitors to the *Un journal à soi* exhibition were amazed to see that almost all the notebooks were written in one go, clearly and definitively, with nothing crossed out. We probably think of a manuscript on display as a "draft" on which one expects to see revisions that justify putting it on display, signs of the writer at work. Nothing of the sort here! Writers are not the only people capable of such certainty in their writing: the most obscure diarists say what is on their minds right off the bat, or at least they are wedded to their expression of it. If they add any nuance or changes, they do so by continuing to write, and rarely by going back to erase things. There are several reasons for this. The diary is a daily writing workshop in which you gradually learn through rereading and repetition. Also, diarists are "ruminants." Without realizing it, as they go about their daily lives they are mentally composing the entry they will write "spontaneously" that evening. These "mental drafts" leave no trace. The silent composition phase ends in front of the paper with the last few hesitations, pen in hand. Even if the result is unconvincing, the diarist forges ahead with what he still has to say: he will do better next time. He will change a badly chosen word, will add an idea in the margin that comes to

him too late or something he has forgotten, but that's about all. He would never think of "reworking" his text and if he does, he'll feel uncomfortably like an imposter leaving visible evidence behind. Wouldn't that be, retrospectively, a compromise with his actual experience, and prospectively, a form of play-acting, an attempt to draw some future reader in? And would it be any fun to reread a text full of revisions? The ideology of spontaneity and the restrictive medium of the notebook (you cannot redo the page) make the diary something like a watercolor: retouching is out of the question, so you must get it right the first time.

The computer reverses this beautiful structure: word processing, like painting in oils, makes it possible to rework a piece indefinitely and undetectably. When "notebookers" find out that someone keeps a diary on computer and revises it, they are outraged (it's not sincere any more!) and vaguely jealous (it's too easy!). They forget that they make a virtue of necessity and that their diaries are just as carefully (and just as legitimately) composed. What difference does it make whether I hesitate silently between two words or write one down, only to realize that it doesn't work and use the other one instead? If my sentence starts off badly, if I ramble on, if some assonance sounds unpleasant, one swipe of the eraser and I start over—what of it? The only rule that must be followed is that the work has to be done at the time of writing, on the same day, not later. The computer does indeed make it possible *also* to add, erase or revise things afterwards without leaving any visible sign. But what would be the point? To me, the value of my diary lies in its historicity. My stupid statements, my moments of awkwardness and bad faith derive their value from being "fresh," like newly-laid eggs. Cheating would defeat the purpose of the whole undertaking.

I'm referring to my own experience here, not that of my correspondents, to vary the rhythm of this collection. My great discovery, as I have said, was learning to slow down. Revising is so easy: it would be a crime to stay with your first attempt! I can no longer leave a paragraph until I feel it is perfect. Working on your style is a meditation exercise. I'm not looking to please, but to find the *mot juste*, the one that conveys and encapsulates my experience.

And you do that for a confidential diary that no one will ever read?

Well, yes. Today, Lucullus dines with Lucullus.

Using the same keyboard that I spin my wheels over, where I end up writing ten lines in half an hour, others will type away at full speed, sending e-mails without punctuation or spilling out a chatty online diary to perfect strangers. Everything is possible with the computer: the important thing is the real or imaginary network it is plugged into. When I write my diary there is no rush. I'm offline in my own closed space with no one else around. The

time I take to write it anticipates the time that will pass before it is read, by me or by a highly unlikely posterity. My words must be powerful enough to cross that immense empty space. I like to write at night. Now and then, I save my diary on the hard drive of eternity.

Many of my correspondents revise and like revising. Stanislas does two edits, first onscreen and then by hand on a hard copy:

With word processing, I can revise my writing immediately: I revise my text as I write. So the written pages are clean, with correct spelling, and have a book-like quality (justified paragraphs, double-spaced, some words in italics). From the time I began working on computer, however, I've had a particular technique: I allow myself to make revisions as long as I'm writing. Once the session is done, meaning once I've finished writing, my computer text is finalized; it won't change and will be archived as is. I print out my text after each session and after that I only make revisions, additions or cuts on paper. I like this approach because when I reread my diary, I can tell the difference between the first draft and the retouches.

Nicole likes to reread what she's done. She is keeping a diary of her daughter's childhood years, and gives it to friends and family to read. With the computer, she can have a finished text:

The undoubted advantage of the computer is the possibility of making clean edits and inserting events into the right spot, or words that have slipped your mind and only come back to you after you've finished writing. . . . Since I've always enjoyed writing, it's a pleasure for me to reread the narrative of a day or days gone by and to rewrite if necessary (if it hasn't been printed out) to eliminate repetition, change a word, trim a sentence, add a detail or comment, or take out extraneous details, or just to clean up typos. In that sense, the computer is very uninhibiting.

### **PRIVACY**

There are two problems: the privacy of the act, and protecting the finished product. Obviously this applies only if the diary is confidential. If you write in a notebook or on sheets of paper, someone would have to lean over your shoulder to read your text; but sitting lit up in front of you, the screen is conducive to a loss of privacy. If someone should walk in on you, will you have time to save and close the file? Often a computer is shared by a family or a couple. Here is Marie, age 19:

I started with the computer in early '96 and for a year and a half it was on the mezzanine; I made sure not to be typing while my mother was nearby. That created a lot of stress: as soon as Mom approached, even without coming into the room, I would quickly hide my text by moving the cursor down. For that reason, I would often write in the evening when everyone was in bed; since the sound of the keys

tapping bugged them, they were happy to go along with it when I asked them to move the computer to my bedroom. Since then, I've been writing in my office with a lot more peace of mind, although I jump and yell "wait!" when my mother knocks on the door. I know she won't look, but I can't help it.

Yes, the computer is too visible. It is also bulky, heavy, expensive, hard to carry around (even a laptop), and on all of those counts it is easily contrasted with the notebook. But I doubt that it is less private than the notebook. There is nothing easier to hide than a notebook, yet the history of diary writing is rife with dramas around discovered notebooks. The risk is neither higher nor lower with a computer. Some of my correspondents protect themselves with a password. One of them told me that he hides his texts at the bottom of folders with misleading names (so misleading that he ends up losing things himself!). Another avoids leaving his on the hard drive and saves it on diskettes that he stashes away. But didn't I learn from the trouble an American president [Bill Clinton] recently got into that computers store a memory of everything you type, *even if you delete it?* There's a "black box" lurking in its entrails: everything that you enter can be held against you. In any event, most computer diarists make printouts, and then face the initial problem, with the added inconvenience of letter-size paper. It's always risky to write one's secrets down. You feel more anxious with a computer because you don't understand the technology. On one hand, you're worried that your text might disappear completely by being deleted inadvertently, and on the other hand you're worried that it will turn up somewhere that it shouldn't. To avoid the first problem you back up your diary, and then you run an even greater risk of the second problem. The only solution is to give up writing! But these fears are not universal: I also received declarations of absolute confidence in the privacy of computers.

### REREADING

Why do people write their diaries in notebooks—that is, on sets of folded and stitched pages? To give continuity to a text that is fragmentary by definition, and to make it easy to read. The diary has its origins in ships' logbooks and the account books of commercial or agricultural businesses (what were known as *livres de raison*). The diary's basic functions are memory and organization. From that point of view, there is no denying that the computer is a better notebook than the notebook. The diary's internal structure is flexible thanks to its division into folders and the hierarchical order of files: you can keep parallel diaries on different subjects and for whatever time period you choose. Everything is immediately accessible: you can consult any part of your diary as you

write (instead of having to leaf through piles of notebooks). It saves space: a computer is larger than *one* notebook, but smaller than fifty. Using the “search” function, you can look for a single piece of information or a whole set. Indexing is easy. You can link up with other areas of your computer: with letters, for example. Or your autobiographical work-in-progress, if you’ve got one under way. Your work, if you do that on the computer too, or your reading notes, or just your datebook. Personal diary software is available in the United States (a sort of advanced datebook). I have never laid a mouse on it, and only know about it from the list of software drawn up by Michèle Senay, one of the key people in private French-language diaries on the Web (<<http://www.colba.net/~micheles/loi.htm>>). She hasn’t tried them either. Like her, I doubt that they are really useful. Word processing offers enormous resources. The list goes on: if you want to take excerpts from your diary, or edit a version, or rework part of it in a new form, or do any sort of rewrite at all, it’s dead easy using a copy that leaves the original intact. Naturally you can do a linear cut-and-paste edit, but what’s to stop you from using hyperlinks?

A look back at the history of the personal diary shows that the computer brings to life the dream of many pioneers who ran up against the limits of the notebook. The names of these precursors of information technology include Marc-Antoine Jullien, Pierre-Hyacinthe Azaïs, Henri-Frédéric Amiel, and Claude Mauriac.<sup>3</sup> Jullien (*Essai sur l’emploi du temps*, 1824), using accounting as a model, developed a “database” for managing daily life. Azaïs dreamed of the folder/file system, and divided his diary folder into 366 daily files for each day of the year (he filled them for 33 years, from 1811 to 1844). More modestly, Amiel worked on a retrospective indexing of his huge diary using marginal notes, but gave it up for lack of time and energy. As for Claude Mauriac, one might say that his *Temps immobile*, constructed using his typewriter, Scotch tape, and a photocopier installed permanently in his apartment, is a brilliant piece of bricolage that anticipates the computer from an absolutely hypertextual point of view. Still faithfully using his 1930s-era Hermès Baby, he witnessed at the end of his life—too late—the advent of machines that were the answer to his dreams.

### VIRTUALITY

Do people reread their texts on screen or on paper? Do they print them out in the end? Why or why not? Is the computer a mere adjunct to paper, as the typewriter once was, or has electronic form achieved independence? This is the surprise in my survey: a good one-quarter of my correspondents (seventeen out of sixty-six) say that they never print their diaries out and have no intention of doing so. They prefer to leave their diaries virtual. Before their

eyes, on screen, this text that appears and disappears at will is as fluid and immaterial as their consciousness. The screen is more private than paper. When I think about it, it's true that I make a printout at the end, or always plan to. But I live for months with my diary onscreen without printing it out. When there is a hard copy, it's a "dead" backup that I store in an archive. I reread (or don't reread) onscreen before continuing. Pressing the button at the top of the scroll bar on the right-hand side takes me back in time. I make it go by again. It's like leafing through pages, but different. When I write, I never really know where I am in relation to the whole, I no longer think "page"; I'm in the middle of an indeterminate space. My file has a beginning, like a notebook, but I quickly lose sight of it (even though that's where I always land when I open the file). On the other hand, there is no preassigned end point and I am always at the end. Once I've been writing for a while, the date disappears at the top and I don't even know anymore how much I've written. I often write at night. The computer is a sort of underground tunnel with galleries that connect me with archipelagos of past nights; the screen is a nightlight, my diary a dream that spreads like a sheet of water across its luminous surface. Here I am getting all lyrical. I'll turn it over to Jean-Yves who, given his dislike for paper, was unable to keep a diary until he discovered the computer:

I never make a printout. I have no need for one. My diary is something strictly private. I don't write it to convey anything, but to free myself from something. People who know me know that I keep a diary, but no one will ever read it. The fact that it's electronic, virtual, makes it easy to keep it from being seen and also gives me permission to express myself freely without limitations. Turning it into an object would destroy that freedom. For the way I use my diary, I have no problem with reading it on screen.

The keyboard and mouse are the tools I use to sculpt words and ideas with a flexibility that I wouldn't have faced with the material reality of paper, a blank surface on which you have to dare to write letters that immediately become final. It's less traumatic to select a paragraph with your mouse and erase it than to tear up a page. You don't destroy anything when you delete text that is only virtual until you print it out. You are allowed to make errors. There is no way to correct what you've written on a sheet of paper, no matter what you do.

### **CIRCUITS**

So everything depends on what's at the other end of your computer: nothing, a printer, or the Web.

If it's "nothing," you are swimming in virtuality, but that doesn't rule out communication (you hand a diskette to a friend) or permanence (there's nothing easier than burning a CD-Rom in the hopes that posterity will still



be able to read them, and that they won't end up like the poor old 78 rpm records).

If you have a printer (which is usually the case), you're sailing with wind and steam in a system where all sorts of balances are possible, but usually it's paper that has the last word: you're still thinking "book." That's the basis for this study: comparing the computer and the notebook. Of those people who say they print out their diary for personal use, some point out that they assemble the sheets into the shape of a notebook or volume (using folders, cardboard sleeves, or bindings). Printing also makes it possible to distribute it on a small scale, especially when the diary is more of a family, local, or workplace chronicle.

If you're on the Web, you've moved into a space whose logic is the opposite of the personal diary: the instantaneous instead of the delayed, and communication instead of restraint. It's not exactly the same as conventional correspondence (which involves a delay and a specific addressee), but a form of written conversation with a stranger, what I call "bavardage," known on the AngloWeb as "chat." I'll stop here, first of all to refer you to the excellent book by Benoît Mélançon, *Sévigné@Internet*, and secondly because a distinction should be made between e-mail, discussion groups, and personal pages, each of which has its own logic. This will be the subject of a second complementary study with the opposite aim: instead of focusing on the speaker, it will look at interaction, moving from the medium toward the diary. Does keeping a diary on the Web really mean writing a diary (sometimes by hand!) and then entering all or part of it in order to publish it, an approach that is at least semi-archaic? Wouldn't it mean, instead, writing directly on the computer for an audience of strangers? What sort of censorship shapes these revelations? What happens when I read other people's diaries at home, on my own screen? The short summary that concludes this study will touch on these problems through one last "case."

### SUMMARY

Here are the main things that I learned from reading the 66 sets of correspondence and reflecting on my own experience. I forgot to mention that 39 of the initial letters were written on a word processor, 21 were handwritten, and 6 arrived by e-mail (*Le Magazine littéraire* had posted my call on its website). The next survey I have in mind will not be done through the literary press but through web-based discussion groups. I have tried to be objective, but I must admit that I have defended computer diaries rather fervently. I hope that the zeal of a new convert has not led me astray. Here are the four responses I found most surprising:

—the most old-fashioned response, from Paul, who sent a “diskette in a bottle,” as though merely subscribing to Internet service was not enough!

I’ve sent a diskette in a bottle! I wrote a letter as though I were writing to a friend, saved it on a diskette and—without making a hard copy—put it in a small metal container (a medicine bottle) that I taped up with thick packing tape I purchased in a drugstore. The diskette has my name and address on it. I threw it into the river!

—the most logical response, from Philippe, who along with his account sent me a diskette containing volumes 1, 2, and 12 of his diary so that I could see how it changes, and asked me to send it to the Association pour l’autobiographie (APA) as its first electronic deposit;

—the funniest one, from Jean-Yves, is also a diary he sent, on 8 x 11 paper printed on both sides. It is not a personal diary but a parody of a newspaper called *L’Indiscret* (“The Tattler”), with a huge front-page headline: “Exclusive: personal diarist tells all to renowned scholar Professor Lejeune” and an alluring sub-title: “The famous Professor Lejeune meets someone who acknowledges that he keeps a personal diary on his computer. Interview.” Then he puts my questions from the *Lire* notice in point form and answers them at length. One of the nicest responses I received, Jean-Yves’s story is amazing and his analyses incredibly sharp;

—the most revealing one, from Gilles, who is in his forties and has been keeping a handwritten diary since the age of fifteen. He has just started a personal chronicle that he keeps in parallel on the Internet: his three letters, from August to November 1998, talk about the incompatibility of the two types of writing, with the true diary threatening to overwhelm the chronicle either by making it indecent (impossible!), or as soon as he becomes aware of the impossibility, making it empty and useless, so that he stops the Internet diary and goes back to his notebook.

His chronicle is then sent to the “Diary Orphanage,” a cooperative site for abandoned diaries, where it was joined by Michèle Senay’s. Her documentary site, “L’intimiste,” is rich and lively, the best guide for people who are interested in current diary practice. Michèle’s path is even more instructive. At first she posted excerpts from her real handwritten diary on her website. In the section below, addressing readers of “L’intimiste,” she explains why she stopped doing that. I will let her have the last word.

I used to publish excerpts from my diary on this site. Now and then I would even add pieces that were written specifically for my web-based mini-diary. I recently gave up on this idea: there’s something attractive about the idea of web diaries, but at the same time it is overly laden with a meaning that makes me pull back. In the beginning, I wanted to be read; that’s often the main reason for having a web

diary. “Sharing,” “interacting,” “expression”; those are all nice-sounding words that convey the same idea: the need to be read, known, and appreciated. I also told myself that it would be interesting to try for once not to think about what other people would say; to force myself to publish my states of mind without leaving anything out, maybe I could stop worrying so much about whether people were looking at me. But each time, the opposite happened. Each time, my doubts and hesitations were stronger than my desire or need for honesty. Each time, I ended up regretting my intimate revelations, sometimes to the point where I would censor myself or just completely erase an entry that was too personal.

So what’s the point? What’s the point of writing unless you’re going to be honest? But the Web is probably not the place for total, unrestricted honesty. It’s completely in its element on paper, but here, where it can be seen by one and all? I’m not sure that’s for me. Other people can pull it off, and I admire them for it. But I would still rather tell all in private than tell only half to the whole world.

## NOTES

1. Like the survey that was done for “*Cher cahier . . .*”, this survey was based on a call for firsthand accounts in *La Faute à Rousseau* 16 (Oct. 1997), *La Quinzaine littéraire* (1–15 June 1998), *Lire* (June 1998), *Le Magazine littéraire* (July–August 1998 and website), *Culture-Matin* (1 July 1998) and *Radio-Luxembourg* (4 July 1998). I received sixty-six replies, not all of them from people who kept diaries on computer.
2. “Un arbre par-dessus le toit,” a line from Verlaine’s “Sagesse” (1881).
3. For Jullien, see the essay in this volume, “Marc-Antoine Jullien: Controlling Time”; for Azaïs, see “Writing While Walking” and the last part of “Continuous and Discontinuous”; for Mauriac, see the last part of “Continuous and Discontinuous.”

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## DIARIES ON THE INTERNET: A YEAR OF READING

From October 1999 to October 2000 I did a study of a phenomenon that was just beginning to appear in the French-speaking world: online diaries. Today, in 2008, given the explosion of blogs, it is hard to believe that in November 1999, after a month of systematic searching on the Internet, I had found only sixty-nine diaries. Things are moving so fast that my study already has a sort of archeological value. At the time, I was dealing with a single shrub showing a few buds; today, it is a forest of trees in full bloom. I observed these diaries by keeping (not online) a journal of my exploration, a sort of travel journal, from 4 October 1999 to 4 May 2000. This journal was published, together with an anthology of the thoughts of those pioneers on their own practices, as *“Cher écran . . .”: Journal personnel, ordinateur, Internet*. Below are a few excerpts from that journal.

My book was published in October 2000: I also kept a journal that month, to monitor the critical response and especially to see how the bloggers I had observed would react. This second journal, a sort of postscript, can be accessed on my website at <<http://www.autopacte.org>>.

### MONDAY 4 OCTOBER 1999

Catherine Bogaert was right: a publisher (anticipating the audience’s reaction) will assume that a book on diaries with the title *“Dear Screen”* must be about “online” diaries on the Internet. It’s funny that so many people should think of that, when probably 95 per cent of French people have never “surfed the Web,” and there are so few blogs in French. It’s a fantasy, like online sex chat (which does exist), a sort of vaguely illicit thing that people talk about at once knowingly and disapprovingly.

What kind of experience have I had with them? It’s been a series of disappointments. I have gone exploring a number of times, through Michèle Senay’s site or the French Yahoo, only to return exhausted, angry, or disgusted by my expedition into a poverty-stricken land. Yes, I have to say it: almost every reaction I have had thus far has been negative. When you’ve been working on real personal diaries, everything in blogs feels like a caricature or prostitution: it all seems to ring hollow. I was in the wrong frame of mind. Blogs

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From *“Cher écran . . .”: Journal personnel, ordinateur, Internet*. Paris: Seuil, 2000. 191–240, 378–422.

should probably be read differently. In a space where the general public surfs and engages in anonymous dialogue, maybe they come across as profound and authentic to people who are not used to reading private texts? I try to bring myself around, because it is truly unpleasant to feel scornful. I don't want to inflict the same insults on these poor web diaries that my "dear diaries" have been facing for a century (meaning the century since a few of them were led astray by being published).

Let's try to gain some perspective by taking a "media studies" approach. In the early seventeenth century, the mainstream of the journal (the habit of writing on paper every day what is happening around you and sometimes inside you) split into two different branches. In French, the same name ("journal") was used for both, while in other languages the vocabulary was differentiated ("diary" versus "newspaper" in English). One of these practices (the social chronicle) consisted of publishing periodically in printed form. That was how the press was invented, first as a periodical and later as a daily publication. The other practice (the personal chronicle) remained unchanged: handwritten and unpublished. It was not until two centuries later, in the second half of the nineteenth century, that it became customary to print certain personal diaries, but with a substantial gap between the time of writing and publication as a book, since the author had to die first! So there was a significant delay, the writing had gained some authority, and it was printed in book form, which meant that entries written one day at a time were read as a single unit.

How did we arrive at the current situation after that? Along two different pathways.

In terms of personal writing, beginning in the 1880s it gradually became customary in France for people to publish, if not an entire diary, then at least a significant and careful selection in one volume during the writer's lifetime (Edmond de Goncourt did this in 1887, Léon Bloy in 1896, and so on). This was the path taken by André Gide, Charles du Bos, Julian Green, and many others. For the past thirty years, a number of French authors have themselves published, during their lifetimes, a series of volumes of their diaries at more or less regular intervals fairly soon after they were written (André Blanchard, Jacques de Bourbon-Busset, Renaud Camus, Michel Ciry, Charles Juliet, Gabriel Matzneff, Claude Mauriac, Marc-Édouard Nabe, Claude Roy, etc.). This sort of publication—although in book form and with some delay—achieves a periodic rhythm that mimics the rhythm of the writing itself.

Something similar occurs in journalism that is a mirror image: some columnists use a personal style, thus adding an autobiographical twist to periodical texts that end up looking like a "diary" (including such writing as François

Mauriac's *Bloc-Notes* and the chronicles of Bernard Franck or Claude Roy). These texts are often collected and printed as books.

The final destination from both sides is the book, with all that implies about construction, authority, and distance. Something closer to the blogs I am discussing here would be publishing (on paper) a personal periodical whose sole subject is the author's interests or experiences. Indeed, such a publication was developed in the United States as the Internet grew: it is known as the "me-zine" (see the *New York Times*, 15 May 1995). But me-zines still require paper and a distribution system, and they come out monthly or quarterly rather than daily.

The Internet is revolutionary in that it allows anyone to publish instantly and as often as they like (working "online" means going live); to attain virtual worldwide publication (although actual distribution is still a thorny issue: how do you publicize your site and bring in more visitors?); and to have potential interactivity (through reader feedback). A person can either be thrilled by the possibilities, or realize, on second thought, that they are the total opposite of the conditions that led to the development of the personal diary, which is based on a different notion of time (delay, maturation, and accumulation) and of communication (deferred or exclusive, that is, based on secrecy). With the Internet we face the paradox of writing without "*différance*," writing that is almost as instantaneous as speech, and privacy with no inside, since everything seems to be outside immediately. The *internalization* of social structures that created the individual self (the "heart of hearts") seems to move in the opposite direction on the Internet.

Those are my initial ideas (or biases?) to be compared with reality.

#### **FRIDAY 8 OCTOBER 1999, 2 P.M.**

A short pause. I have chosen the journal form to express my own take on things. People might have been surprised by my categorical judgments on what is true or false, or the things I particularly liked. The amazing part is that I set out prepared to despise everything, and yet I liked four of the six diaries I saw. I didn't have the same unpleasant reaction as I did two years ago, of being confronted with people who were trying hard to be "interesting" or were talking without saying anything. Is it the chance outcome of random sampling, or am I getting softer? Because I know that it isn't unusual for people to feel compelled to share their diaries. Not that they want to publish them, but they need an outsider's gaze, someone to sympathize with what they have experienced and approve of the form they have created. I know this because I have *felt* it, although I resist the temptation. And because at the APA we receive requests like this: "without depositing my diary with you

permanently, would it be possible to have one or two people read it?” This is a delicate request that calls for *a priori* sympathy from those accommodating readers: but they may not like what they read! Reading a personal diary that is being kept by someone else takes a certain commitment, whether the experience is a euphoric meeting or a hellish trap! So the APA deals carefully with these offers on a case-by-case basis. On the other hand, it is seeking by every possible means to get autobiographical texts into circulation without their having to be published. Clearly the Internet meets that need, and everyone’s freedom is respected there.

**WEDNESDAY 13 OCTOBER 1999, 5 P.M.**

It’s a bit like nudism, really. From the outside, the Internet can’t be seen. You have to enter it. Inside, people can do just as they please, and no one forces you to stay. On the other hand, it’s a strange world where only acceptance is accepted. You are in a state of *critical weightlessness* there. You cannot doubt, criticize, or hate anything without excluding yourself from the game. Does this teach tolerance or does it make people unrealistic and irresponsible? All things become equal, and passing judgment makes you guilty. I have to admit I’ve been troubled by the properties of this new space that turns life into a dream. People pretend to be in dialogue. They think they’re asking for feedback, but all they hear are echoes. You glide, surf, slip, pass through, and nothing has happened. But then suddenly the Internet is actually experienced as an internal space, a huge dream bubble that reflects the outside world, minus its violence, the sort of comfy refuge that the notebook is too, in its own way. Like the steamy interior of an oriental bath where everyone can relax, scantily clad, and luxuriate in a massage.

**MONDAY 25 OCTOBER 1999, EVENING**

In four days, I have just read two and a half years of a diary that has converted me forever: *Mongolo’s Diary (almost)*. It is admirable. And it’s such a relief to admire something! I can breathe easier. I was feeling mean, disloyal and petty, wandering through diaries I was observing with feelings of suspicion or detachment. I was like an ethnologist who fraternizes with a group of people for the sake of “participatory observation” that will end the minute he gets back to his own crowd. A double agent! A parasite! By dint of cutting and pasting, I was plundering the best from everyone, their metadiscourse about their practices, gathering nectar to store in my collection. And then I met Mongolo.

The first thing I notice is that he uses hypertext links. I hadn’t come across anyone before who did that. With one click, I’m taken straight to a

character index telling me who Mrs. BB or Fred or Jessie is. If he alludes to his habit of not unpacking his suitcases when he gets back from a trip, he has a link with the relevant passage from the previous month, etc. At the top of each page, he has an “anniversary reading” (the same day one year ago, two years ago, etc.) and the beginnings of an index (the entry is given two or three keywords). But it’s done with a light touch: the entries are not littered with useless links. It’s a discreet presence, not a clunky gadget. All of a sudden I feel at ease. I detect a “tone,” a way of being that feels right. The very opposite of the caricature I initially imagined. I’m glad I got everything out on October 4. Now I can take stock of how far I’ve come. Yes, this journal is turning into a conversion story. I had my road to Damascus, or, like Saint Augustine, heard a voice telling me, “Click here to read.” I opened the book at the right page. This will be difficult to explain to other people.

Mongolo is a young French student in computer science. He has been living in Scotland for three years and going to university, where he is now doing a Ph.D. He has just turned 25. In early 1997, he was sending e-mails every day to his best friend Fred, back in France. He told him everything, discussed everything with him. He had the idea of reaching a larger circle of recipients by posting his previous e-mails on a personal website and continuing the daily chronicle of his life and ideas in a public forum. He writes regularly and at length (without going on too much) and has a range of interests. He never talks about anything without thinking about it first: it is always interesting. He often posts his ideas without telling a story: his diary shows the real effort he puts into thinking about the world. In talking about his private life, he strikes an impressive balance between openness and reserve, something that is translated in the title of his diary by the humorous tag “almost.”

And of course he is constantly thinking about his own practice, and he takes initiatives as a result: it was he who thought of setting up the Personal Diary Orphanage for abandoned diaries; for diaries that are kept regularly, he has a “circle” called “Souvent” (a calque of the English “Often”). His diary is constantly reflecting on itself. Yesterday, Sunday October 24, while I was attending an APA board meeting, he was writing a nuanced, highly accurate entry on the “blog.” I am reading the entry on my screen this evening, telling myself that there’s no reason for me to continue this work: he has already summed up the major points, and he knows what he’s talking about. All I have to do is quote him. His way of being and his thoughts illuminate the entire field. He is a sort of model practitioner-theorist, like Amiel for the diary or Montaigne for the essay. Reading him gives the same sort of pleasure. He is nourishing, restful, and stimulating all at once. I will stop this panegyric. A laudatory tone is out of place between friends.



**WEDNESDAY 27 OCTOBER 1999, EVENING**

I've just done a quick tour that has left me demoralized. First the "Diarist Registry," an "international" catalogue that contains almost nothing but English diaries, some 1800 of them. The effect is overwhelming, especially the heading for picnics and other little get-togethers for diarists from Texas to Wisconsin. I went back to Quebec to go through the list of the *Cercle des jours écrits et imagés* ("Circle of Days in Writing and Pictures"). I did not have much luck, because the few sites I visited left me feeling terribly sad: self-satisfied platitudes about I did this and I did that, daily trivialities served up piping hot, or on the contrary, literary posing and contortions. It makes you wonder how the former can even take an interest in their lives and why the latter go to such lengths to make themselves appear to be interesting. Drearly drones or fussbudgets. Bloggers like Mongolo are few and far between. What's the use of making a list of these pitiful offerings? The worst part is that they all go overboard on presentation, with the sort of window-dressing you might see at a fancy pastry shop, with superimposed backgrounds, colors, borders, flashing lights, doo-dads, bonus photos, spirals, emoticons, help! It makes you long for the good old 96-page notebook and the blank page! OK, enough grumbling for one evening. Good-night all!

**SATURDAY 30 OCTOBER 1999**

A month on the Net? Am I going to insist on closing this journal on November 4? Otherwise I might start going in circles, or maybe up the wall. The journal form turns my reading into exploration, excuses my lapses of language, and adapts itself to a moving object by falling into rhythm with it. I can also wrap it up when I want to.

So I have gone through the sixteen diaries chosen from "Souvent." Make that just fourteen: I am so inept that I was unable to activate two of them ("Mes états d'âme"—My States of Mind—and "La Bulle de MoX"—Mox's Bubble). Near gender equality: five men, seven women and two couples (one real couple, married this summer, wedding photos, they're expecting a baby; the other couple, if I've understood correctly, only know each other through the Net, she a young prof just starting out and swamped, he's fifteen years older). Age: sometimes hard to pin down; but most of them are between twenty and thirty years old; the oldest is the Archangel Daniel (52, a young retired Quebecker who's a grandfather nonetheless, and like me hopeless at computers since a certain Nicolas, a young French man, maintains his site for him); then a 38-year-old mother, the Insomniac, an awfully nice person; the man in the false couple who must be in his forties, and then Liloo, who

is 31. All the rest are under 30, but over 20: no teenagers. The youngest is Fran, at 21. Various occupations, all involving knowledge of computers, all high school graduates with at least a few years of college or experience in business or administration: the world of the office. But it's hard to say because these rascals are often careful. They discuss all sorts of subjects openly but keep their jobs in the background, for fear of repercussions. Country: Quebec comes first (seven), but France is a close second (six), then Lilloo from French-speaking Switzerland. That may be the new thing, that in the past year or two French people have started blogging. This is supported by statistics: between November 1998 and May 1999, the number of French households with an Internet connection rose from 3.7 per cent to 6.1 per cent. Finally, eleven of these fourteen sites are less than a year old. Mongolo is the only one over two years old (he says that for a blog, two years is "old age"). This young man is a veteran. He has not given up. Because it is a tough job to stay on the Web for weeks at a time, finding new inspiration every day! He will have earned his retirement.

Generally speaking, there are two opposite (though sometimes related) trends: the humorous chronicle and the private diary.

The humorous chronicle often gets its material from the little incidents of daily life, but they are only a pretext. It's a cross between a newspaper column and a writing workshop. You find your little topic for the day. A fairly free-flowing trend that can pick up on e-mails received, opinions discussed, experiences shared, etc. "My aim is to share some of my thoughts on life and daily events. I also want to inspire you with my little poems and songs" (Archangel Daniel). "I just want to express myself, think aloud, leave my mark on this amazing web of the Internet. Maybe some people will want to respond to the things I say; I hope so" (the Insomniac). "Sometimes you feel like sharing your opinions. I have felt that and I still do. So now I regularly post my thoughts online, my conflicting feelings and wild imaginings of all kinds" (the Electric Firefly).

As for the personal diary, it is usually factual and systematic (use of time), and sometimes shameless or indiscreet (exposing all aspects of private life). Fran's diary is a good example of this trend. "Thank you for coming into my world. Come and share my joys and sorrows. You will be able to write to me and that will boost my spirits when I'm feeling low." Lilloo is on the same wavelength as Fran. Sophie the erotic plays an exhibitionist game. The young married couple, on the other hand, despite going on about how in love they are, remain fairly reserved in the end. But the very archetype of the personal diary, with all its freshness and freedom, is that of Isabelle from Quebec ("No Entry") who, after considering removing posted passages, decides to continue

freely: “So I will continue as I began . . . meaning I will reveal my soul, my personality, and all those little details that make me the Isabelle I am! As well as all these incidents and little anecdotes that happen to me day after day. . . ;-))” (15 April 1999).

The chronicle sparks discussions. It presupposes an effort at composition, and often the search for a “tone,” which may be cheeky, mannered, direct, lyrical, and so on. You develop a recognizable voice, a more or less distinctive *style*, turn your personality into a character. That’s the case of “Zuby” (“Let me show you the world through my eyes”), of “Electric Firefly,” and “ApoStrophe.” There is a bit of that in Archangel Daniel’s writing workshop. But this “actor” side (which is also often found outside the Internet!) is not inevitable. Some chroniclers don’t force things and just have a natural tone—I am thinking of Mongolo and the Insomniac. It is a real pleasure to hear a true voice.

Bloggers are looking for fellow feeling. They operate on the principle of live and let live, take me as I am, trying to interest people by giving a faithful and detailed picture of a life, not by drawing the reader in with the charm of their conversation. The composition is looser. There is often a tendency to choose a language close to a spoken style, imitating an internal monologue or addressing a sympathetic listener. Same observation as earlier: “oral” postures like this are not exclusive to the Internet, and they are found in many a good old-fashioned notebook.

The chronicle is often a sort of flirtation with the personal diary, touching it and teasing it, but in the end steering clear. Or rather, it’s the personal diary that pulls back. This evening, I have just delved back into the chronicle of my friend the Weaver, who put it very well last April 27:

Oops! A week has sped by and I haven’t written a line here or given it a second thought, I’ve been so focused on living in the moment. A beautiful, rich week. Surprise, desire, emotion, pleasure, and laughter all mixed together. And as often happens to me, I am running up against the limitations of this chronicle, proving to anyone who might still have illusions that it’s not at all like a personal diary: I cannot tell about the best things here; they have to stay strictly private. Too bad, in a way.

That’s my little overview. I have tried to be as objective as possible. The study should be extended to two other major circles. I am struck once again by just how ephemeral these ephemera are. Thirteen of the fourteen diaries did not exist in 1997 when Catherine Bogaert and I created the “Un journal à soi” exhibit. How many will still be active two years from now? I kept a list in my files of the blogs from the “*Cercle des jours écrits et imagés*” as of 9

September 1997: there were twenty-one of them. Going over the list today, I find only four survivors (Mongolo, L'Agora, Outaouais, and Brume)—five if I add Zabou, but his blog has actually stopped. All the rest are either dormant or gone. It is difficult to generalize about such small numbers, but chronicles seem to survive better than personal blogs.

### SUNDAY 31 OCTOBER 1999, EVENING

As I reread this, I am struck by how aggressively I treat Fran. Twice I have given short quotations of details from her diary that I found shocking (October 12 and 29). But I also realize that she makes a good point: if you don't like it, leave. So why did I stay? And even come back? And why don't I like it? It's suspicious. I remember that in 1782, half the critics howled because in his *Confessions*, Rousseau told about peeing in Madame Clot's cooking-pot and enjoying being spanked by Mademoiselle Lambercier. They stigmatized triviality (peeing) or obscenity (spanking). Not enough meaning, or too much: maladjustment to the antipollution standards of the times. Do I want Fran to check her catalytic converter? What bothers me is that she is not bothered about me. Young women in the nineteenth century never spoke about their bodies, and you should have seen how I jumped to their defense, how I lambasted the censorship they were subjected to, the poor things! But when young women today talk to me like their best friend or their gynecologist, all they get is a taste of my sarcasm! Behave yourselves, ladies, please! So what is it I want? My reaction is all the more unfair and unpleasant in that Fran is natural, guileless, and trusting. She is just telling us about the problems she faces as a girl, the nasty tricks her body plays on her. There is no end of such talk in women's magazines. People have every right to talk about these things in their diaries: this is the daily bread of the private world. It's true that I would rather not know. It's true that I'm more disturbed by her matter-of-fact speech than by Sophie's highly coded somersaults. She is not looking to please or displease anyone, she is just telling it the way it is, and as a good disciple of Rousseau, she knows that the truth is in the details. Intimate girl talk that is quite widespread in other venues is suddenly pushed by the Internet into the public twilight of a unisex space. This provides an occasion to reflect on gender differences in autobiographical practices (both writing and reception). That is the topic of the next APA Round Table, in March 2000. Do men write as much about this as women in their personal diaries? Do they talk about their bodies in the same way? In any case, my apologies to Fran. If this weren't a journal, I would have deleted those aggressive parts. But this reading trajectory, which others may repeat, should be left in to shame myself and instruct others.

**MONDAY 1 NOVEMBER 1999**

I continue meandering from site to site. A high school student in her final year (17 years old) began a diary on September 15 (“I have nothing planned for tomorrow. . .”). Alegria, a history student, 20 years old, Quebec, has been keeping a charming, very saucy diary since May. In October she went to a GT (Get Together) of the Société des Diaristes, which was very nice, it’s basically like the APA, except for a different generation, but what am I doing acting like an old grump, it’s a different kind of interaction, that’s all, and it is heart-warming to think that they enjoy and help one other. They’ve become a little circle of friends. Alegria meets Moebius, who missed the last GT. And this year the Weaver was visited by Zuby, who was passing through Paris. At Christmas ’97, Mongolo turned up in Montreal. I leafed through the Moebius blog, it’s fine, sure, but sometimes I have trouble understanding why they’re so enthusiastic about one another; there’s something I’m not getting. In fact, these diaries end up becoming one huge chat session, a conversation network. There are some people whose identities have been “burned,” like Arianne, who started a new blog under a second pseudonym to escape from her milieu. She is 24 years old, in Quebec, and is looking for a new relationship, a new boyfriend. A little 13-year-old from Quebec, Judith (“Push”), has just started out, but she says she also writes a lot in her diary on paper. The whole thing seems to be mushrooming. I also come across some vintage blogs, like the one that Brume, a mother of four, has been keeping since January 1997. She’s been around longer than the venerable Mongolo! And another mother (“*Le Monde de Sally*” or “Sally’s World”), a Quebecker by adoption with a nineteen-year-old daughter, who started in May. And so on.

My mind is reeling from surfing. Sometimes, when I’m in an epic mood, I feel like Dante being guided by Virgil through the circles of the virtual World. Let’s say it’s more like Purgatory, although some sites do aim for beatitude. Dante clicks and Virgil drops down the “Archive” menu for him. Sometimes I feel as though I’m making a mess of the job, moving too quickly, like a professional taster who takes the wine into his mouth, seeks out the flavors and aromas, then spits it back out. This evening, I feel as though there are too many of them. And I’m not the only one! Just imagine that the Société des Diaristes Virtuels [Virtual diarists’ society] is considering a numerical quota! A major consultation is under way on its home page because it’s proposing a limit of 50 diaries. I understand them, they want to stay friends, hold their little GTs quietly in Montreal bistros, not turn it into a major conference. But then one of the old diaries will have to die before a new one can enter. Waiting lists, applications, votes. The looming prospect

of competition and bottlenecks. Many diaries have visit counters, and some, like Mongolo, install alerts for their readers (now promoted to “subscribers”), who receive an e-mail when a new entry appears! I remember how dizzy I felt when I saw the list of 1,800 English diaries. I am going to spend my last few hours counting the French ones.

## TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 1999

Done. The method is simple: combine the lists from webring catalogues and Yahoo. Of course, I may have missed a few diaries posted on personal pages. But by the same token, readers will miss them too. I had assumed there would be around one hundred, and I was close. There are 69 active diaries and 42 dormant or dead ones. That’s a total of 111. I will list them at the end of my study, indicating the webring or engine that referred to them. That should make it possible to track their development a few years from now. A study could also be done of titles and themes. The main thing is to avoid saying “Georgette Dupont, My Diary, January–November 1999.” But fake phrases are just as stereotyped and sometimes less informative. It is best to be allusive, metaphorical, and casual. But similar poses hide very different texts: one is often surprised (positively or negatively). How many of them have I read in full, leafed through, or glanced at? I’ve just counted: 32 of the 69 active ones, and 10 of the 42 dead ones. In many cases I have let myself be guided by the bloggers themselves. This is a representative sample, I hope.

The part I enjoy most is composing the anthology of excerpts. I have just done this hypothetically, unsure that the authors will give their permission. But I have put such care into arranging this collection that I would be heartbroken to see it thinned out. I have worked out the links between them and the pacing. I have only kept texts I liked and that I felt were representative. I have two goals. Bloggers, like conventional diarists, are extremely attentive and lucid about their practices. My aim is twofold. Using excerpts from Amiel, Roland Jaccard was able to put together a sort of short treatise on diary-writing (Ed. Complexes, 1987). Before (and with) the excerpts from Mongolo, the excerpts from my eight bloggers (seven of whom are women) will deal with practically every aspect of blogs, based on concrete situations. But there is also the pleasure of the text. One might say, “that’s not private.” It is private, but this is an epistolary or conversational privacy. I have tried to give the reader an idea of the various tones in this dialogue with an invisible interlocutor. Unlike the reader of a book or a periodical, this reader may loom up from behind the screen and enter the same space in which you have written your own blog. How do you talk to him? You may adopt a familiar or a lyrical or a meditative tone: there is a whole range of possibilities.

**WEDNESDAY 3 NOVEMBER 1999**

Before finishing up, I take a look back. This one-month trip may be the modest beginnings of a serious study in sociolinguistics or psychosemiotics. I don't feel serious, I feel light, even vulnerable, and what I have done is, I believe, something of an empirical media study. You have to go into the field. Put yourself out there. Use your biases to become part of the situation: that is knowing how to become engaged. And stay detached enough to survey the field: that is knowing how to disengage. I have tried to show how fragile the notion of privacy is. Writing for oneself in a notebook is not a "natural" situation that is somehow changed by the advent of new media. The computer is no more artificial than the notebook. It merely changes the relationship with writing. And the Internet opens up a new mode of communication that removes all the distinctions we had become accustomed to with paper, so much so that we are afraid we may lose our souls in it. We feel so passionately about these things! So compelled to exclude people who do things differently! I have taken up every position by turns. For twenty years, I was fiercely prejudiced against the diary. Then I went over to the other side and gave the floor to people who write by addressing the medium they are writing on: "Dear Diary. . . ." Then I moved onto the computer, and here I am doing a second study, "Dear Screen . . . ," to explain myself to people who have remained loyal to paper, and to teach them tolerance. But haven't I been intolerant toward bloggers, whom I used to call gossips? Everything comes full circle: first I was a "modern" confronting the "ancients," and now here I am an "ancient" facing the new "moderns." That is the story you have just read. Have I made any progress since October 4? Not to the point where I have embraced the blog wholeheartedly. But enough to recognize, once again, that the self is not an unchanging essence that has now been altered by disastrous technical progress, and that it has always been shaped by the development of new media. Enough to feel that I am in friendly territory, to have points of reference, preferences, and already to have my own little habits. I am stopping this journal but will continue mouse-clicking.

**WEDNESDAY 24 NOVEMBER 1999**

Wednesday morning. Things happen fast on the Internet. When I wrote to my correspondents in late September for last year's study, their replies came back over a period of more than a month. Here, in the space of three days, I already have seven replies out of nine. And some of them are apologizing for taking forty-eight hours to respond! These replies are positive, with comments or criticisms that I am finding very helpful. Since these are private letters, I

will not quote from them here. On the other hand, I can quote Fran's reaction because she published it in her diary: "Well done, honest, but some people might feel hurt." I would add: it is not intended to hurt anyone. If my survey had turned out negative, I would have stopped after a few days. I have no desire to hurt anyone. And I would be devastated if I were to turn anyone off of blogging. Fran goes on: "I can't complain too much, although he had trouble getting used to my style, so I'm fine." While I begin soul-searching along those lines (who else might have a complaint?), Fran suddenly changes tack: "On the other hand, I didn't appreciate it so much when Stéphane started criticizing me for talking about him and not respecting his private life. Nice. This diary is the only thing I've considered worthwhile in a long time, and he had to go and destroy it?" I immediately drop my soul-searching and get back to a favorite topic of mine: the legalities.

The Internet is not an enclave where the law doesn't apply. Internet users themselves emphasize this. Mongolo copyrights his blog and tells those who may not understand the © sign: "Do not reproduce these pages without my permission." Still, at least in French law, since the text has been published by its author, the reader has the right to make short quotations. Sophie, with a touch of parody, makes sure to warn minors that her site may be too racy for them: "WARNING: The contents of this site may be inappropriate for minors, and even for some adults! ;-)." Putting one's diary online is an act of public disclosure that creates certain rights (Mongolo) and duties (Sophie). But there is more than just intellectual property rights and the protection of minors. The main point is the one Stéphane quite properly raises. Unless we live on a desert island or in a cell, our private lives include other people. They are never entirely our own private property, but are always a sort of jointly held property. We are not allowed to make confessions on behalf of other people. This is a legal issue (although it's hard to imagine Stéphane getting an injunction against Fran to stop writing her blog!) and a moral issue. The self-censorship that we see on the Internet is not necessarily a sign of timidity, but of respect for others. That is also why the good old notebook tucked away in a drawer, the one you write everything in, is so nice. I was struck when the Walker stopped herself last June 27 just as she was about to share something that would have made her feel better—she talks about a storm battering her heart—but then said: "I won't do that because, apart from the people whose names I don't know, there are people I see every day and I have to show them the same respect I show myself." The fact that she is anonymous does not change anything. If I found out that, without my knowledge, someone very close to me was writing about me in her blog under the name of Gustave, even if she signed it "Dulcinea del Toboso," I would be outraged.



Fran ends her tirade against Stéphane: “I nearly told him that in any case this blog will probably last longer than our relationship, but I said nothing.” But she did write it, to us, and I have to admit that this bothered me. It got me back to my interrupted soul-searching, but in a different direction. Is it possible to love your diary more than a person—someone you love? And I recalled a recent entry in which Mongolo asked the same question but answered it the other way round: he would probably stop his blog if he were living with Mrs. BB, unless she ordered him to keep writing it. In any event, he added, his diary would end some day, as long as it was for a good reason. That could be the touchstone of true love.

### SUNDAY 5 DECEMBER 1999

Is there a “psychological profile” of the typical blogger? The question occurred to me as I was doing my rounds this evening. Mongolo has been silent since Wednesday. The Weaver has only occasionally been weaving, and I’m reduced to rereading his chronicle for Sunday the 28<sup>th</sup>, but it was so beautiful, a walk through Paris, and I could see him as a new Louis-Sébastien Mercier or a Rétif de la Bretonne. His chronicles are little prose poems, fables, or morality plays, so sensitive. The Firefly had dinner with him last Thursday. No psychology there! The idea of the profile came to me as I read Fran’s and then Isabelle’s blogs one after another. Hyperactive, chatty, excited, and both of them have been immersed in their inner emptiness lately! Fran: “I really don’t have anything to live for right now, not even a goal in life. So if you’re happy, if you love life, and if you’re ambitious, make the most of it because not everyone has that” (December 5). Isabelle, who was not selected for the modeling competition that had completely preoccupied her for two months, takes it well at first and then falls apart: “But what I realized when I woke up this morning is that I was empty!” (December 1). Certainly she will bounce back, as well as Fran. That’s their rhythm. And they’ll be down in the dumps again, over and over. It’s possible that their blogs are a way of filling that great inner void, a project that fills them up.

But I refuse to believe that a similarity glimpsed in passing between two or three blogs amounts to a profile, and I refuse to let it turn the diary into a pathology. I have always been skeptical about Michèle Leleu’s system of character studies (*Les Journaux intimes*, 1952), or Béatrice Didier’s psychoanalysis on diary writing as a return to the womb, a homosexual tendency, etc. It seems to me that the facts themselves have not been established, and their links to the diary are sketchy. If one wanted to draw a correlation between a personality type and online blogging, I would ask first of all that the

personalities of the 68 bloggers who were online on 4 November 1999 be analyzed, and secondly, that they be compared with a representative sample of 68 non-diarists from the same generation and the same social class. I did not do this, I cannot do it, and so I refrain. I'm not saying that you wouldn't find overrepresented categories, etc. But my basic premise is that life is difficult for all of us, and that it also provides an infinite number of outlets, passions, and imaginative behaviors. The practice of keeping a diary (offline or online) may be a part of different behavioral strategies, and many other practices may have similar functions. Judgments about "the diary," taken as a single unit, have nothing to do with science, often arise from biases, and serve to cover up a lack of knowledge. I remember one psychoanalyst who, never having seen any real diaries, could do nothing during a round table but repeat with conviction, "It's a security blanket, it's a security blanket."

My surfing took me to other sites this evening, especially the site of Strophe, who is much better than Sophie at writing in praise of love and the joy of living. And then there are the meditators, the philosophers, and the idly curious. Their security blankets have all the colors of the rainbow and will help me get to sleep. See you later.

#### **TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER 1999, EVENING**

A small literary episode. *Lire* is preparing a report with the title "Are You All Writers?" This afternoon, Catherine Argand came to interview me. I talked to her about the magazine *Écrire et Éditer* ("Writing and Publishing"), which is aimed specifically at the small audience of people who like to write and are thinking of publishing: she didn't know it existed. Why the report? It seems that editors are drowning in manuscripts, and what's more, poor things, half of them are autobiographies. What a catastrophe! The question being tossed out to the readers of *Lire* seems to be an insult, and an invitation to get lost. It's funny that people whose job it is to publish things should be upset that so many people want to be published. Yet these aspiring writers legitimize their power of legitimizing! But it's easier to operate in a closed circuit with a stable of confirmed writers and relationships. A manuscript that comes in over the transom has very slim chances. What would have happened if Johann Heuchel's parents had approached a publisher directly? I hear the word "literature" bandied about by people who seem to think that they know what it is, and act as though they have been given a personal mission to protect it. It is the dominant religion, with its saints, sects, and true believers. So they come to me to add a populist, secular touch. I answer to the best of my ability, as though sitting an oral exam on the question, "Can anyone be a writer?" I answer in two

parts: write (yes); publish (no). Then in subsections, with one subsection on the Internet toward the end. The struggle for survival is “softer” there than in the book world. You can be “visible” from the get-go, and then remain visible without ever being “seen.” Lack of success does not lead to elimination. The Internet provides a sort of stratigraphy of the natural selection process, whereas the publishing world only shows us the winners. This needs to be nuanced: many published books have no readers and end up being pulped! There are worse things than being rejected by a publisher: being rejected by the reading public is a punishment without appeal. On the Internet, the spectacle of this disaster can last indefinitely. But is it a disaster? Not really. The Internet does not work like the vanity press, with its naïveté and pretensions, but like self-publishing, which is active and responsible. People have created the product themselves, and have gone to the trouble of publishing it. They assess the difficulty, they are more modest, and they adapt. They are not after glory, but only a response. When they get one, even if only from a few readers, they relish it. Although visit counters do exist, the Internet shifts the emphasis from quantity to quality of reception. Digital printing led to “micro-publishing.” The Internet has created “micro-reception.” We have already seen this at the APA: people who thought they wanted to be published are thrilled because they have been read, truly read, by two or three people they can talk to.

### FRIDAY 3 MARCH 2000

Another good-bye tour: for the Round Table I’m leading tomorrow on “the proper noun” at the *Maison des Écrivains* (Writer’s House), I’m rereading my anthology of virtual diarists to see what they say on this topic. I find it amazing how much respect they have for their names. They almost always hide them, but never change them. I have not found a single family name, real or false. When a first name is given, it always seems to be real. Nicolas is Nicolas and Isabelle is Isabelle. They never use a pseudonym that resembles a real name, which would well and truly hide them. They take shelter behind fanciful nicknames, which turn out to be masks. But these nicknames, which should allow them to avoid detection by people close to them, sometimes come from their childhood! This is the case of Alegria and Mongolo. And as much as it shows a desire to hide, this choice is indicative of the joy of creating a new identity. You rename yourself, make yourself a totem. Read down the list of the sixty-eight active diaries. Often the nickname is part of the title, and sometimes the title is used as a nickname. And you can change them! Alegria did not have the same personality when she signed herself “T” in a previous blog-life. Mongolo, tired of the character he has become, dreams of escaping under a new name. The Insomniac would like

to start over with a cruder, more direct diary: why not, she throws out, “the Insolent Rebel,” “the Unfulfilled,” or “Desires, Wants and Needs”? And these masks are fragile. Isabelle finds out from her sister that their mother discovered her diary months ago. Mongolo is surprised to receive an e-mail sent to his real name, as is my poor Lilo when she finds out that Gaétan was secretly reading her site while their relationship was floundering! As for the praiseworthy efforts to change other people’s names, they collapse like a house of cards once your own identity is revealed. I was thinking of this as I read the list of characters that Mongolo obligingly provides for his readers. These games inspired by discretion (distancing oneself from friends and family members) are all the more charming in that they dispense with authorial vanity: no one is thinking about publishing in the real world to land on the shores of posterity. They don’t want to be famous, they want to be popular: the dream is to recruit a small circle of friends, your very own fan club.

### WEDNESDAY 19 APRIL 2000

*In Parentheses, Question Mark, Mulling Things Over, My Soul Is in Your Hands, Forest of Dreams, Den of Madness, My Secret Island, Harmony, Poesia, Her Words, White Rat Moaning, Cécotine’s Secret, Diary of Abeille Bee.* Thirteen titles out of fifty. Schoolboy poetry. It’s the first day of school and here are the names of the new students! Let me explain: I took an inventory on 4 November 1999 to compare with the situation on 4 November 2000, then 2001, and so on. But before I finish this book, I wanted to know what had happened in six months. Fran closed her Circle and sent her little bunch over to the Communauté des Écrits virtuels (CEV, the “Virtual Writing Community”), which is better equipped and more efficient. As for the blogs, there are no longer 68 of them, but 120! Yes, nearly double the number! That’s if I’ve counted right, because it’s a devil of a job. The names sometimes change from one circle to another, the sites occasionally change names, and some are shown as open when I know very well that they’re closed or not operating (the Weaver, Zabou, Sophie, Brume, who said his good-byes in early March, the Solitary Walker, etc.) Overall, a dozen or so have closed down, while more than sixty have started up. In the fall, when I do my counts, I will see whether the male/female balance is holding up, whether France has become active (it doesn’t look that way), etc. Most of the bloggers are 18 to 34 years old. The CEV has three age groups up to 34, then just one for “35 and over”! And the little vilage from last fall is no more. There’s a whole new crowd that the veterans, those with eight months or even a year of online seniority, welcome into their circles, but soon it will be impossible to tell them apart. How do you choose from a menu of two hundred dishes laid out in alphabetical order?

**SUNDAY 23 APRIL 2000**

Which diaries should I read? Michel Longuet, who keeps an illustrated diary in notebooks, has just got onto the Internet and posed this question. I tell him to be adventurous, to shop around. But first I make up an introductory selection for him, six titles to represent the range of tones: methodical (Mongolo), emotional (the Firefly), bubbly (No Entry), melancholy (the Insomniac), poetic (Strophe), romantic (Zuby, “Let me show you the world through my eyes”). I could have added the familiar (Fran or Lilo), the picaresque, etc. And this is simplifying things—these diaries have plenty of other tones—to show him that anything is possible. And to inspire people to add a new tone: their own. The blog has constraints and resources that are just beginning to be explored. It is a new frontier.

To make the selection, I dive back into Zuby’s blog, whose title is a line of poetry and the text delightful. She knows how to select material, build a scene, play on an emotion, and speak directly and simply. I have reread everything since January. The scenes in the bakery, the strike at the UQAM (University of Quebec at Montreal), her preteen internship, her new love, which she writes about sweetly and in veiled terms. And then, surprise, on April 15 there’s a photo of her taken by the Weaver last year when she came to Paris, and of the Weaver as well, which she displays as a “wanted” poster. I immediately go back to the Weaver’s diary (May 1999) and my own. The friends of our friends are our friends.

Would I like Zuby’s diary this much if I received it in book form? The wrong question: why is the book the point of reference? For the past century it has kept diaries in shackles. Real diaries, infinite and deliciously chatty, are condensed and cut down to fit into these Procrustean beds, leading to tortured expectations about “style” and “depth.” We taste them like liqueurs. On the Internet, the diary can finally breathe, stretch out on a chaise lounge, and relax. Computer files and loose-leaf pages lend themselves wonderfully to writing fragments. But files are even better than notebooks for endless accumulation. And the website is a garden with pathways, crossroads, and viewpoints; it turns time into space without shrinking it.

## JOURNALS OF EXPLORATION

### PARIS-NANTES, 7:20–9:40 A.M.

SATURDAY, 25 MARCH 2006

GARE MONTPARNASSE, TGV, 7:20 A.M.

I'M HEADING FOR NANTES. MARIINE LANI-BAYIE PUT THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE: LAST YEAR SHE PUBLISHED AN ISSUE OF HER JOURNAL, *Chemins de formation*, on travel notebooks and research journals; today she has summoned us for the oral exam! I can't just repeat what I've already written. Anyhow, it was just a joke. At first I tried to get out of this, telling her that I abhorred travel diaries. "But that's just it! Explain why you abhor them, that will be fascinating!" How could I pass up an opportunity to be fascinating? So I took her up on it. But really, where's the interest in telling people about what you don't like? You feel more inspired and useful telling people what you do like, and why. In the article, I gave two examples of "good" diaries: the hiking notebooks that Violaine and I kept during our trips to Oisans in the early 1960s with the GUMS (university mountaineering, hiking, and ski club), and the research journals that I started keeping in the late 1980s. Let's call them "exploration journals" instead. Today, I'm going to tell their story.

7:30 a.m. The train pulls out. I have just over two hours ahead of me.

To illustrate my presentation, I have prepared a list of those exploration journals, going from *Le Moi des demoiselles* (1993) to "*Cher écran . . .*" (2000), and an excerpt from my interview with Philippe Artières ("Je ne suis pas une source," in *Signes de vie*, 2005).

The adventure for me was not just keeping research journals, which is nothing special, but keeping them *for publication* rather than for the research itself. Previously, (if I may underline my—very relative—originality), research journals were either never published or were published posthumously (1<sup>st</sup> stage), or were published by the author during his lifetime, but *after* the results had been published (2<sup>nd</sup> stage). My third stage was to publish them *while my research was under way*, instead of publishing the results. That is, I turned it into a presentation procedure.

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"Journaux d'exploration." *Chemins de formation au fil du temps . . .* 10–11 (Oct. 2007): 257–61.

Another distinguishing feature is that all of my research journals are research journals *about journals* or diaries. So there is a *mise en abîme*, or echo effect, since I practice the very thing I am studying, right before the reader's eyes.

One consequence of my "third stage" is that, unlike the journals of Bronislaw Malinowski or the ethnologist Jeanne Favret-Saada, there is no change in either the status or the audience of my exploration journals between the time of writing and the time of publication. They are written *for publication* from the outset, are the result of a conscious strategy, and constitute a sort of social drama, just as blogs do now (the only differences being the publication lag time and the lack of feedback). This is controlled production with no chance of inadvertent breaches of privacy.

So this is a new genre, or more modestly, a new variation on a familiar genre. It resonates with one side of contemporary creativity, the fantasy of auto-genesis: delivering the worksite along with the finished building. I think of Claude Mauriac (his *Temps immobile*, "the only literary work in which the scaffolding is part of the construction," he said, or his novel *Radio Nuit*, enveloped within a diary about its creation). This is an aesthetics of the *installation*, to use the vocabulary of the visual arts.

How did the idea come to me?

While keeping the journal for *Le Moi des demoiselles*, was I reacting to the unobtrusiveness for which I had been criticized after "*Cher cahier . . .*" (1990)? Perhaps. But are the two books really that different? "*Cher cahier . . .*" was already all about scaffolding. After receiving forty-seven replies to my survey on the practice of keeping personal diaries, I had decided not to turn these personal accounts into tools by cutting them up into sections in order to present a summary. I had chosen to publish them in full and unedited, without comments, leaving the reader to judge while I tiptoed away.

In fact, "*Cher cahier . . .*" had a public side and a hidden side.

The public side was that unobtrusiveness, for which the respondents themselves chided me. Before publishing the book, I had three of them read it. They asked me why I hadn't added a forty-eighth account: my own. I explained in the preface that "the role of the researcher is to stay out of the picture." My stepping into the field of observation would have falsified the results. But after all, isn't it the same concern for methodological neutrality that prompted me to remain silent in "*Cher cahier . . .*", and then, in *Le Moi des demoiselles*, to put my involvement on display? Either not to intervene or, if I did intervene, to do it very openly so that the reader could judge what was what.

The hidden side was that from 1988 to 1990, while doing the survey and then writing and publishing the book, I kept a huge diary, hundreds of closely

written pages. A *real* diary that inextricably mixed together my personal life and the day-by-day, hour-by-hour chronicle of my work. A *truer* diary than any of the exploration journals I've published since. Clearly, it was unpublishable. It was true because it was meant to remain secret. But by keeping it, I became accustomed to scrutinizing my actions and explaining my hypotheses, biases, and involvement.

So I was torn between a strict objectivity displayed for the public, and a wild subjectivity that, although I kept it private, I was already objectifying and controlling through my writing.

What's more, my "public objectivity" in "*Cher cahier . . .*" was based on a decision not to construct anything, to deliver the whole thing as a kit and leave it up to the reader to make something of it. I made the same decision for *Le Moi des demoiselles*, which contains substantial excerpts of original documents, an inventory, an anthology, and portrait galleries, all in support of a comprehensive study that is not there: my journal appears in its place. I write the story of the book I do not write.

There are two possible explanations for this strategy:

First of all, laziness! Fleeing in the face of difficulties! I said it straight out: I wrote the journal of *Le Moi des demoiselles* because I was incapable of, or repelled by, the thought of writing a serious, well-structured book (a thesis!). It was the same thing in 1994, when I was horrified by the idea of composing an assertive, pretentious article for a collection on "Sincerity": I opted for sabotage and (quite sincerely!) kept a diary about my inability to write the article. That's why I have been accused of being messy, disorganized, and chaotic: "it's impossible to tell what you're getting at." And while we're on the subject of criticisms, let's add play-acting, since my diary was anything but spontaneous, made a great show of being "natural," and sounded slightly off-key, especially to people who know me well and who found this disorderly and casual style off-putting. I was like a kid who tries too hard to attract attention. A chatty, play-acting kid.

But there's rigor too! I've always liked people who show what they're doing and how they're doing it. My model is Freud's Case of the Wolf-Man (published in 1918 as "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis"): he tells us about his research, hypotheses, and errors, respects his readers, and gives them the wherewithal to repeat the study in some other way. Quote the passage from Valéry that I like to take shelter behind: "I apologize for putting myself on display like this, but I feel that it is more useful to tell people about your experiences than to simulate knowledge independent of any person and observation without an observer. In truth, there is no theory that is not a carefully prepared fragment of some autobiography."<sup>1</sup> I have already used



this quotation as an epigraph in *Moi aussi* (1986), a collection that had something of the *patch-work* and the *work-in-progress* about it, and that I baptized a “*livre-promenade*” or “stroll-book.” But I was on the wrong track. All that was missing was the idea of the diary.

### 8:50 A.M., SABLÉ TRAIN STATION.

I’m back to my old tricks with these notes. Keeping a diary about preparing the talk that I’m about to give. Once I’m in Nantes I’ll take the tram, get off at “Shipyards,” cross the bridge. And then “launch” my boat.

Now back to my story.

After my (private) diary about “*Cher cahier . . .*” (which I wrote at top speed on the typewriter, just as it came to me, with no concern for composition), there was a redistribution in 1991–1993 between my private and public writings.

For a while (a fallow spell), all private diary writing stopped.

Then I learned a new way of keeping a diary, thanks to the “public” journal of *Le Moi des demoiselles*, the first one that I kept on computer. That became a journal that was *polished* (I developed the habit of *working on* the writing in each entry, thanks to word processing) and *composed* (through selection, structuring, silences, foreshadowing, repetition, and an effort to link the entries together, all of this obviously done on the fly, since I was not allowed to go back and change anything).

Once *Le Moi des demoiselles* was finished, I went back to writing a private diary, this time using these new techniques. I was trying out what I call the “composed diary,” with a beginning, a middle, and an end, a set of (formal or thematic) rules, diaries with the same type of composition as novellas, improvised with unpredictable input from life.

Then a change of tack in 1994 when I tried using this “novella-diary” technique twice for public journals: from June 1 to 30, I wove an “afterword” for my edition of the *Diary* of Lucile Desmoulins, and from July 30 to November 2, I grudgingly threw together my article on sincerity.

So what I have just described (handwritten on my yellow “Country” steno pad) is a sort of ping-pong to-and-fro movement between public and private writings. The switches affected not only the form but also the act itself at times. To explain my interest in the diaries of young girls in the nineteenth century, for example, I had to talk about the diary I myself had kept as an adolescent. In my present-day public journal, I have begun discussing my private diaries from the past. Something that is banal for all but two of the book’s readers: my parents. They were bowled over by these revelations about a teenager that they had not entirely *known*.

Am I going to say that when I speak? Leave them in peace. Leave ourselves in peace.

**9:12 A.M., ANGERS.**

Let's recap. In *Le Moi des demoiselles*, the journal is more than just a procedure for presenting information; it is also working on something to do with private life: I am learning a form that will be taken over anew by the private diary, and it also represents a minor (but really a major) coming-out.

After that book and my two "novella-diaries" in 1994, things became compartmentalized again in the years that followed. It was out of the question to turn the "research journal" into standard procedure, which would soon become tiresome and self-satisfied. And my private diaries, after benefiting from that little breath of fresh air, disappeared back into the darkness they prefer, there to develop in silence.

When in 1998, ten years after "*Cher cahier . . .*", I launched the venture of "*Cher écran . . .*", a survey of the practice of diary writing on computer, I chose *not* to use journal form (unlike *Le Moi des demoiselles*), but also *not* to leave myself out of the picture (unlike "*Cher cahier . . .*"), and I added my own account to the ones I had collected for analysis.

But when it came to the second part of my survey, the practice of online diaries on the Internet, I went back to the "journal" form. Is that because it was easier, out of laziness, merely to repeat the procedure from *Le Moi des demoiselles*? Not at all! The adventure had a new element now: the thing being observed was developing in a *time* that I would be part of. The diaries of young girls in the nineteenth century were complete and immobile: I was the only one who was moving in relation to them by discovering them. The "online diaries" were mobile, and day by day I moved with them as I read writing that was just as unpredictable for them as it was for me.

**9:41 A.M. THE TRAIN RUNS ALONG THE LOIRE RIVER.**

Just ten more minutes!

So my "*Cher écran . . .*" journal is quite different; its form is richer and more substantiated than in *Le Moi des demoiselles*. I am doing a reading that is contemporary with the writing, with intriguing or dramatic feedback, since my journal had an impact on the diaries I was observing, once it was published (for example, interfering in the cyber-diarist Lilloo's private life). In addition, my dated observations soon took on historical and even archeological significance, since the "virtual" landscape of the Web not only changes but also disappears over time. I had the idea of extending my work through a sort of

“after-sales service”: each year, in October, I would do a cross-sectional observation. I only did this in October 2000. But even so, it became a unique firsthand account. For where are the blogs of yesteryear?

The suburbs, we’re slowing down.

The SNCF wishes me a nice day and hopes to see me again soon. Little does it know, it will see me again at 6 p.m., and this presentation will already be a memory. What am I going to do? Read these notes? Probably commenting on them at the same time? Or improvise outright? We’ll see. The train slows even more, and I stop writing. I will silently mull this over as I take the tram, cross the Yards, and make myself amiable. Here I go!

### 9:50 A.M., NANTES.

#### NOTE

1. Je m’excuse de m’exposer ainsi devant vous; mais j’estime qu’il est plus utile de raconter ce qu’on a éprouvé, que de simuler une connaissance indépendante de toute personne et une observation sans observateur. En vérité, il n’est pas de théorie qui ne soit un fragment, soigneusement préparé, de quelque autobiographie.

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## REREADING YOUR DIARY

Yes, you write your diary *for yourself*, and that is what makes it private. You are fifteen years old, writing for a future self whom you do not know, who will be someone different, but who you nonetheless trust. You put yourself in the hands of the stranger you will become. The current identity that it is the diary's purpose to create and define will one day become part of an unforeseeable identity, one which it will have given rise to and which will judge it. The diary is a wager on the future. It bases the individual not on what Paul Ricoeur calls *sameness*, since the individual will have changed, but on *ipseity*, a sort of abstract commitment to remain faithful to oneself. We sometimes try to imagine the self that we will become, this person who takes on the airs of the superego or a big brother. You might see this as a form of protectiveness, or you might be wary: what teenager hasn't been afraid that as he gets older he will become as obtuse as the adults around him? Then the relationship switches around, and *sameness* begins to appear: you take the future adult under your protection, you write so that he has no excuse, to make sure that he cannot forget. In fact, the two attitudes must coexist: you look to a future self to understand your current chaos and insist that he must be faithful to his past. You think of him on your birthday. Sometimes you speak to him. You write to yourself care of general delivery in the future. But he remains a vague silhouette, and you will never meet him.

It is he who will meet you some day (the day when you are him). It is liable to be a difficult meeting.

Rereading a diary is a sweet and daunting thing to do. It can be downright unpleasant, like listening to yourself on an audio tape or watching yourself on video. You should like yourself, but you don't. You don't recognize yourself and yet it really is you. And it's too late! A year or two down the road, you are unsettled: you've forgotten the details of your daily life, but you've also forgotten what you wrote; you have gradually laid down an accommodating, flexible image of the past, but now you come face to face with the rough edges of real life. Your memory is contradicted. You feel like a mythomaniac and as though you have been locked out of yourself. That is why many diaries, although theoretically written to be reread, never will be. Or the bonfire

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"Relire son journal." *Pour l'autobiographie*. Paris: Seuil, 1998. 225–28.

will reread them. Spring cleaning. You no longer recognize yourself and you throw out your old skin, a molting. Or you recognize yourself only too well, and it's a little suicide. Or you open it up and see nothing there: the life that you thought would be attached to these scribblings has evaporated, the wine has gone stale. Either that or it has become a sauce so thick that it's disheartening: you don't have the time: you close the book, saying "later, I'll look at it later." You die without rereading it.

But sometimes a dialogue begins. There is the close-range dialogue that ensures the continuity of your diary. Each time I write, I look at the last few pages. I pick up on the plot of my soap opera, find the right key and carry the tune along. And then I assess the ground I have covered, the twists and turns of my journey.

There is the short-range dialogue, where you squabble with yourself: you write out your annoyance. Like a teacher, you write ironic comments in the margins, or you add footnotes like a scholar. The youthful diaries of Marie Bashkirtseff, Pierre Louÿs, and Catherine Pozzi are packed with this sort of vengeful annotation. You disarm a future reader by raking yourself over the coals. This is similar to the asides in a play. In fact, the reader will be more annoyed by these stagings of your annoyance. He will take the side of the candid adolescent being beaten up on by an arrogant young adult whose "maturity" seems even more candid. No, no, we should let life go by. Besides, isn't it a hindrance to reread one's journal? Doesn't that mean keeping an eye on yourself? We must forget all that, leave it behind and forge ahead into the future.

And now here we are at the other end of life. Here is my diary. I gave it up and then started it again. I forgot about it, but kept it. Here it is. It's a vast landscape spread out behind me. Now I have more time behind me than in front of me. Will I even have the time to reread myself? A great dialogue begins. I file things. I make up folders, find the letters and photos that go with it. I am burdensome. I am burdened. My loose-leaf pages run loose no more: they pile up. I have become my own litigation department. I make things worse by keeping a diary of this dialogue with the old me. I have two models. Wolinski, the cartoonist, who drew eighteen brilliant frames for a cartoon strip about rereading his adolescent diary (*Le Bécoteur* or "The Smoocher," Belfond, 1984). And Claude Mauriac, the labyrinthine writer of *Temps immobile* ("Motionless Time") and then *Temps accompli* ("Completed Time"), who died just as his last volume was coming out under the biblico-Proustian title *Travaillez pendant que vous avez la lumière* ("Work While the Light Lasts," Grasset, 1996). The diary is an art of the fragment. It is made for editing. Which explains the idea of writing an autobiography by putting pieces

of one's diaries together with no chronological order. A mosaic. It is the only way not to flatten the past into the *sameness* of the present. Let it vibrate, in its difference, in its strangeness, with its possible todays unfulfilled. Time is mobile. Life is loss. The editing is not meant to fuse the parts together and caulk the seals, but to open the floodgates a little. Let's put our trust in *ipseity*.

But here's the thing: in order to reread myself, I must *rewrite* myself. Or at least recopy myself, so that I have the materials to edit in the future. I wrote by hand back then. Today I sit in front of a computer screen. I am going to *enter* my past.<sup>1</sup> Lovely expression. Awful task. I follow myself step by step, sentence by sentence. Will the feelings come back if I mimic the words? I get used to myself again. The amazing thing is that the worse it is written, the better this works. Repetitions, rambling, overlong passages, awkward bits—parts that an editor would cut mercilessly and that also irritate me—are the surest route towards myself. I don't know how, but they put me back in touch with the implicit content. It's like a language you used to speak but then forgot, and that comes back to you by gradual immersion. I am ungrateful, often tempted to clean up the text, and sometimes I give in to that temptation. Is that cheating? Unfortunately, it's not the diary that needs revising, it's my life. It was impossible for me to copy some of the pages. I left blank spaces. I stopped for months. It was like the judicial reenactment of a crime. I refused to mimic those gestures, to put myself back into that skin. So the writing took a detour. Another diary, a current one, has been grafted over that gap so that I can explore it, as though I were acting as an investigating magistrate. To be put on file for future editing.

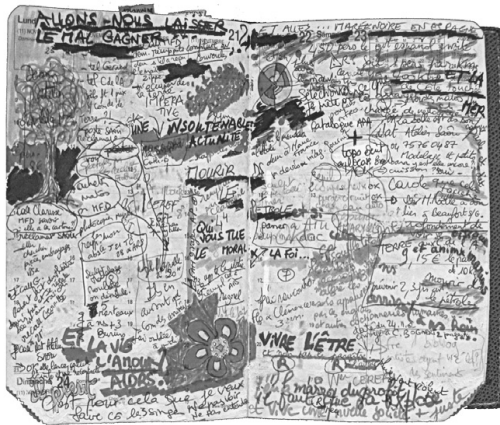
Yes, there is a tragic sweetness to rereading one's old diaries. And it is a real dialogue. From the bottom of my past I am listening to someone; and I feel something working its effects on us, him and me. For *sameness* and *ipseity* must come together before the harrowing sentences that open Emmanuel Berl's *Sylvia* make sense. I will use them to close this little account: "My life does not resemble my life. It has never resembled it. But I used to be able to bear the gap between me and myself fairly well, and now I find it harder and harder to take. I used to feel it was natural, but now I find it shocking."

#### NOTE

1. The verb is *saisir* in French, meaning to enter data on a computer.

## PART V

## CONCLUSION





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## LUCULLUS DINES WITH LUCULLUS

I have been fascinated by Lucullus since I was a boy, and I thought of him the moment I was invited to this colloquium. Lucullus was a Roman general who fought against Mithradates, was a rival of Sylla, and had the wisdom not to seek supreme power when he returned to Rome victorious. Instead he enjoyed, with pomp and generosity, the immense fortune that he had amassed from the wars. He was a friend of Cicero and Cato. This is an anecdote about him as told by Plutarch:

Once, when he supped alone, there being only one table and that but moderately furnished, he called his steward and reproved him. The steward professed to having supposed that there would be no need of any great entertainment when nobody was invited; he was answered, “What, did you not know, then, that to-day Lucullus dines with Lucullus?” (237–38)

I thought that was wonderful. I loved it that this gourmet had such a succulent, culinary name, a name that was nearly a palindrome. I liked the way he spoke of himself in the third person. I imagined him making polite small talk to himself from both sides of the table, doubled as in a mirror, or like Alec Guinness in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, playing all the roles. I was struck by this intimate scene transformed into a world event. And I was especially struck by the moral I saw in the story (perhaps mistakenly): that one should treat oneself with the same care, the same cuisine, and the same respect with which one would treat others, and vice versa. Where his Roman friends and Plutarch saw pride, I admired his generosity. Do not forget that Lucullus had an unbelievably magnificent library that he opened to everyone. I was also amazed, and troubled, as a child, to learn that the same word—“hôte”—meant both the person doing the inviting and the person invited, so that hospitality operates through a sort of reversible osmosis between the two roles, and Lucullus’s bon mot illustrated that perfectly.

I thought about his phrase later as I reread the diary I kept as a teenager.

What is a personal diary? Is it when Lucullus dines with Lucullus, and there is just one dish on the menu—Lucullus himself? Where self-hospitality culminates in self-tasting? Where you lick your chops over yourself in private?

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*Signes de vie. Le pacte autobiographique 2.* Paris: Seuil, 2005. 215–27.

That's what people think when they have never kept a notebook, that the self doesn't really taste all that great. But at this point the parallel becomes hard to maintain. In the scullery of my notebook, I often sit eating from the corner of a table, and aren't the items on the menu things that I wouldn't dare serve to anyone else? Am I getting closer to the truth by switching things around this way? No. We must beware the trap of the extended metaphor. Similes do not amount to reasoning. Let's just use the notion of self-hospitality and the Lucullus story as hooks, and then go on to reason freely.

Lucullus reminded me of Philippus—myself—and you will soon see why.

I am going to tell you how I started my personal diary. And I will do it with a hypothesis: that to some extent, the life of the individual repeats the life of the species. My adolescence resonates with the adolescence of western civilization, which it entered in the second half of the eighteenth century.

\* \* \* \* \*

When did my Diary begin?

There is no doubt about the date: 11 October 1953. I was fifteen. Going on fifty-five years ago.

But it's not as clear as all that. If I had been a good boy, or a good little girl, who takes a new notebook and writes the date at the beginning, then sure. But I was writing on loose-leaf pages. The page for 11 October that is now at the beginning of my diary has a number "8" on the back, circled in ink. It was part of a set of numbered pages, only a few of which I still have, mainly poetic meanderings from that autumn of 1953. I no longer wrote in alexandrines, or about love, as I had the previous spring. I was tormented by God, by the idea of nothingness, and vented my feelings in ragged shreds of prose that no longer even sought the support of rhyme but still had the fragmented form of poetry. In the beginning, my diary entries were interspersed with these ramblings, and at some point I had to number everything. Then, as my diary took shape and reached cruising speed, I pushed the bits of prose poetry aside and put the budding shoots of my diary front and center in my new bouquet. Some of those numbered shreds are still attached.

My problem that autumn was how to move from poetry to prose.

Enunciation was not a problem with poetry. It was a matter of speaking to anyone and everyone: and because they were meant to appeal to an audience, poems were public texts. Since the age of ten, like many children, I had been writing poems to show my family, who applauded them while chuckling behind my back. When I was twelve, along with two friends, I was a founding member of the Classical Literary Association (CLA) (already a fan

of associations!) Until that point, everything I wrote had been intended for others. But at the age of fourteen, I was shaken to the core. I fell ill, and realized that I was mortal. Sent to a sanatorium in Chamonix, I discovered the violence of the world. I was bullied and sometimes beaten. I set my jaw and kept my mouth shut. Who could I tell? For the first time, I invented a private language—a fairly rudimentary one—that was meant for me alone. In the perky letters that I sent my parents every day, I expressed my deep despair using a graduated system of underlining and dots embellishing my signature. Unbeknownst to them, I was sending messages to my future self through them: in this way, I would be able to recall, and perhaps write about, my hell. I also continued writing poems and showing them to people. Of course my writing took a lyrical turn, and I went through a Lamartine phase and then a Baudelaire phase. When I got back to Paris in the spring of 1953, the clouds parted and my muse took flight: I wrote a series of love poems that were so clear, so direct, so autobiographical, that I destroyed them all in a panic. That was the first and only time that I have ever destroyed my writing. The last pages have been cut out of my poetry book. All you can see is one or two line beginnings. I soon regretted doing it. I still regret it. But it means that I can imagine those poems as better than they were. In the autumn of 1953, my inspiration shifted and I became tormented by metaphysical angst, God, the origin of the world, and death, rather than by love. That was even harder to talk about with my family. My mother was pushing me towards a conventional and sentimental but faithless religion. My father was an atheist. We never spoke about it at home. I had an inner life and no one to show it to. I had to deal with it on my own. I had no friends. It was up to me to show myself some hospitality. I sought refuge in paper.

But how to go about it? That wasn't as clear as with auto-eroticism. I didn't know how to do it with myself. At the top of one page, before 11 October, I find this: "If I had a deep dark secret to keep, I would never write it down: that is the last and worst thing to do." So I did have a secret, and I did think about writing it down, but I was afraid. Instead of writing the secret, I wrote that I was afraid to, and instantly felt less afraid. Clearly I could no longer keep silent. The solution was not to write things down and then destroy them, as I had done at first, but to hide them. In other words, to fashion a space in which to be alone with myself. A cozy little home for myself. A studio apartment made of paper. It wasn't difficult at first; I had just one or two notebooks of poems and a few pages of my new diary. Later the pages began to pile up. I was lucky enough to have a small table with two locking drawers, and a room of my own. Since it was also the guest bedroom, my diary stopped when I went into exile—for hospitality's sake!—in my older brother's room.

I met with myself in secret. No one ever read a line of what I was writing, or even realized what I was up to. It was only ten years ago or so—once I began talking publicly about my diary—that my astonished family realized it had been harboring a diarist in its midst: “We never saw you!” Auto-hospitality precludes hetero-hospitality. I didn’t put a sign on my door saying “*Don’t disturb. Philippus dines with Philippus.*” Closed doors for my private dinners.

Being so used to making my writing a social thing, I didn’t know how to write alone. A poem, my lyrical outpourings, those were meant for an audience. But this prose that I was trying out, these narratives, these meditations—who were they for? What voice should I use? I had to legitimize myself and play two roles: the person who opens the door to welcome someone in, and the person who knocks and is let in.—*Is that you? What a surprise! Come in, make yourself at home.* Like many children and teenagers, I suppose that I was already used to taking care of myself like a special guest. Little gifts are part of a friendship: I would give gifts to myself, especially during the time when I was so miserable from loneliness. Here’s my copy of *Les Fleurs du mal*, from the “Le Flambeau” collection, the one I bought in Chamonix in November 1952 with my pocket money and inscribed to myself. I wrote: “*to Philippe,*” signed it “*Philippe,*” and dated it “*November 1952.*” Someone had thought of me. That was a consolation. I must have guessed that this might be considered silly, because I hid the inscription at the foot of the last page: no one was going to witness my first private ceremony.

On 11 October 1953, when I took up my pen to write prose, what attitude was I supposed to adopt? I had to split myself in order to receive the letter I was going to write to myself. I sent it to myself General Delivery in my desk drawer. The letter was the only model I had to follow, and my diary—because that’s what it was—only discovered its true name three months later, on 12 January 1954.

So here is the first page. At the top, centered, in capital letters, is written: LIBERTÉ. It’s both a title and a cry. My diary begins like a list of complaints. In early October 1953 I was fifteen years old and had just begun Grade 11 at the Lycée Henri IV. Perfectly ordinary. But I had not set foot in a school for a year and a half. I had been living at my own pace, following my own whims, and although there had been other constraints, I could no longer tolerate those of a high school. So I wrote the subject in the heading, as though I were writing a book. But I also showed who I was writing to. No, this cry of revolt was not addressed to the school principal or to my parents but to “*Ph. animo suo,*” and it was dated. My Latin was finally coming in handy. The beginning of my Latin translations read, “*Cicero Tullio suo salutem dat.*” I would write to my soul, with all due courtesy. To tell you the truth, I would be writing my

soul. But the only way I could do that was to imagine writing *to him*. I would occupy all positions: sender, message, and receiver. Sender and message, fair enough. But was I the receiver? I was standing in for him, presupposing him, miming him, conjuring him, anticipating him, taming him, and embodying him: in short, I spoke his dizzying absence. Let's go back to my 11 October entry. It ends with the ritual closing of Latin letters: "Vale," and my signature: "Ph." I scan the whole year that followed. In the third entry, I tried out a new phrase: "Medical report on my soul." This was an allusive return to the medical reports on my body that I had sent to my parents from the sanatorium. Then "*Philippus animo suo d.s.*" appears again several times. Then "Medical report on my soul" is shortened to "Report," and then a new formula: "Letter to myself." The word "diary" appears just once as a heading, and when I refer to what I'm writing, I tend to speak of "letters." Several times during the course of the year, the entries appear as imaginary letters to real people, or missives to God, or speeches really addressed to Philippe, to catch him out, sympathize with him, or call him to witness. The following summer, a few entries would be addressed to a certain "Mitia," a phantom conjured up by my reading of Tolstoy. There are a lot of people in my diary, and there is no one. I was playing dolls with myself.

What makes the word "hospitality" an apt one? It describes well the writing system that I set up to arrange a hospitable space for myself. But perhaps it does not fully capture the possibilities it opens up for variations on the recipient.

The realm of paper, like a house you are invited into, is a protected space where the laws of the outside world are in abeyance: your actions don't have the same consequences and are not sanctioned the way they would be anywhere else (I'll come back to this later). That doesn't mean that you can do just as you please: the guest must respect his host and obey the rules and customs of the house. It is not a lawless space. But the host, who is none other than you yourself, can apply a stricter or a laxer code of conduct. In some houses, you are asked to wear slippers. Self-hospitality does not necessarily mean that anything goes. Usually it's a unique mixture of rules and freedoms. When you look at a personal diary, it's interesting to see the code of good manners that the diarist has adopted (organization, regularity, neat penmanship, and style), but above all, to see where he has lifted the censorship: what more (or what else) does he allow himself to say? It's as though you were leaving the reception rooms and going into the bedroom: is it tidy, has it been cleaned? Are the closet doors open, or left ajar? There is a wide range of styles, from the museum bedroom to the pigsty. Mine was a little messy, with iffy spelling and cursive handwriting. It wasn't written like my

homework assignments or letters to my parents. I had my opening and closing rituals—often dating, classifying, and signing. But I wrote the whole thing in one go, with no corrections. I ended up feeling terrible about this because my diary was not just an outlet: it was also a writing workshop. I was caught in a dilemma: if I corrected it, it wouldn't be sincere anymore! But on the other hand, I was ashamed of writing so badly. "I write horribly. I feel I should go over this again, work on it. But I've always hated that sort of exercise: firstly out of laziness, but also because of the idea that the first draft is the good one, the true one, the only 'brilliant' one (!). I admire what I write so much that it seems sacrilegious to touch it (even if it were to improve it). Also the idea that it would be artificial. But if I ever want to 'write,' I'll have to discipline myself somehow" (2 November 1956).

I was writing badly, but was I telling all? Not completely—I did have some self-respect—but almost. In the beginning, I edged around a few pockets of silence that gradually shrank. One day I felt ashamed of having received myself in my diary in such an "unpresentable" state. But it was only for me! And it was true! Erasing a single line would have ruined the value of the whole diary. I didn't just have a right of asylum; I also had a duty to tell the truth. It took courage to accept my shame. My diary was a bubble, a diving bell protected from the pressure outside. I often thought of it when I saw astronauts floating in a space capsule, or while reading *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. I had a safe refuge there. I could breathe, relax, float, even scream or cry if I wanted to.

But a diary is not only a place of asylum in space; it is also an archive in time. I escape the present and make contact with a vast future. I lay by provisions for a future writer, and leave traces for a future adult whom I am helping by recording his history, someone who will later help me better understand the confusion I'm experiencing. We are helping each other across time. I voice my pain "to all the Philippes of the future. I am sending myself a message across future times." I am reading Proust, and anticipating looking back: "Actually, what I would like, later on, is to be a writer. A writer who tells my story. Perhaps what I'm writing in this diary will be of some use" (19 February 1955). Well, you did it, dear Philippe! Not "being a writer," but "telling my story." Nor does the idea of hospitality quite account for another effect, what I called "deliverance through paper." "How funny, deliverance through paper! It seems to me that as soon as I've written something, it's not entirely me anymore, and even if no one knows about this paper, my pain is shared by millions of people, or by myself later. And then there's the joy of feeling described, understood, if only by oneself. The happiness of having triumphed over your pain, because you've managed to turn it into something else: a written page" (12 October 1955).

Let us now take a leap back into the history of the personal diary. There were two waves of internalization. The first was self-surveillance. Putting a prosecuting attorney on duty inside each individual. This internalization of the repressive gaze was first recommended in the fourth century by Saint Anthony, the great patron saint of the prophylactic or preventive private journal: “Let us note and write down our deeds and the movements of our soul as if we were to tell them to each other. If we are utterly ashamed to have them known, be assured that we shall cease sinning and even cease thinking anything evil” (Deferrari 185). This educational cliché reappears throughout the history of the diary. And my diary functioned well in that sense: I recorded my turpitudes in it to shame myself, though that wasn’t especially effective. The other type of internalization, the one we are dealing with today, is the opposite: that of the friendly gaze. This second wave comes late: there is scarcely a trace of it before the second half of the eighteenth century. People no longer have a confessor inside them, but a confidante. A friend to whom you can tell everything, who will not judge you, who will understand you and say nothing. It’s the internalization of the personal letter. Before the eighteenth century and the advent of the personal diary, forms already existed in which the individual verbalized his emotions or deliberations to himself: lyrical discourse or the dramatic monologue. No one was surprised to see Hamlet or Rodrigo keep their private diaries aloud in front of full houses. But almost every real individual, rather than talking to the walls, has addressed friends or family, orally or in writing, through conversation or by letter, up until the day when people realized they could do it without others, and that everyone is his own best friend. So I get the feeling that what happened to me when I was fifteen, in the fall of 1953, is what happened in Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century: the incredible idea of taking a sheet of paper to write to no one, to write to oneself, to write the self. This was difficult to arrive at directly: the form of the letter was needed as a transition.<sup>1</sup>

I will conclude, in a last homage to Lucullus and auto-hospitality, by delving once again into my childhood memories. Before I began amusing my family with my poems, I had irritated them with my legal quibbling at the age of around eight. They told me this story often to show that it went way back, that even as a little boy I was already splitting hairs. We lived near Bordeaux in a house with a big yard. It seems that I absolutely had to know whether a person could drive in his own yard without a driver’s license. I already had a taste for the auto, in every sense of the word, and I was dreaming of a “free” zone (again, in every sense). I hope you won’t slap me with a ticket.



## NOTE

1. For more on this transition, see “O My Paper!” (95–103).

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\* \* \* \* \*

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—une Bibliographie générale sélective des écrits en langue française sur l’écriture autobiographique

—une Bibliographie détaillée des écrits en langue française sur la pratique du journal personnel.

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