Critical Essays on
ROLAND BARTHES

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ROLAND BARTHES

edited by

DIANA KNIGHT

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CRITICAL ESSAYS
ON
WORLD LITERATURE

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For Bob

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Publisher's Note

Producing a volume that contains both newly commissioned and reprinted material presents the publisher with the challenge of balancing the desire to achieve stylistic consistency with the need to preserve the integrity of works first published elsewhere. In the Critical Essays series, essays commissioned especially for a particular volume are edited to be consistent with G. K. Hall's house style; reprinted essays appear in the style in which they were first published, with only typographical errors corrected. Consequently, shifts in style from one essay to another are the result of our efforts to be faithful to each text as it was originally published.

Introduction

DIANA KNIGHT

If Roland Barthes's entry onto the Parisian stage was stage-managed, to some extent, by his mentor, Maurice Nadeau, it was applauded by such significant figures of the early postwar period as Maurice Blanchot, Albert Béguin, and Lucien Febvre. From the moment Barthes's earliest work first attracted such distinguished attention, it never failed to elicit a strong response. The essays selected for this volume illustrate Barthes's impact as writer, theorist, teacher, and personality on a remarkable range of the leading figures of French intellectual life from the 1950s to the present day. All of these figures are too important as thinkers or creative writers in their own right to have been directly influenced by Barthes, but all, in distinctive and powerfully written essays, demonstrate a more diffuse intellectual debt and their belief in Barthes's lasting importance. Indeed Barthes cannot be reduced to a specific theoretical legacy: his historical significance lies in his extraordinary impact on successive generations of literary and cultural theorists in the second half of the twentieth century, in itself one of the most fertile periods in the history of French thought and cultural debate.

This is the first retrospective collection of critical writing on Barthes in English or in French.[1] In attempting to carve a first path through some 50 years of engagement with Barthes's work, I have drawn heavily on French material to illustrate his reception during his lifetime and in the years that immediately followed his death. Of the 32 essays, reviews, and other extracts included here, 22 were first published in French (and of these, 15 are translated into English for the first time). Yet Barthes's work, from around the early 1970s at least, has already been enormously influential within Anglo-American literary and cultural theory. This influence was first mediated by the excellent expository accounts of Barthes by anglophone specialists of French literature and thought and by the first trickle of translations of Barthes's texts.[2] By the late 1970s this trickle had increased to a steady flow, with a significant reduction of the time gap between publication in French and in English translation. By the time of Barthes's death and the series of posthumous collections that followed in the 1980s, the American reception in particular had more or less caught up with the French and, in terms of its the-

oretical importance, effectively overtaken it. In Britain and the United States, engagement with Barthes's work has been central to the delineation, absorption, and development of successive theoretical trends, from structuralism, poststructuralism, and psychoanalysis to the more recent turn to cultural studies. The latter has kept Barthes's work at the center of debates on gender and homosexuality, on Orientalism and the representation of other cultures, and on the writing of the everyday. Once considered theoretically pioneering in itself, Barthes's oeuvre has established itself as one of those bodies of work that are themselves sufficiently dense and wide ranging to meet the challenge of theoretical renewal.

The 1,133 studies recently sifted by Gilles Philippe are but the academic manifestation of Barthes's reception.[3] *Roland Barthes, Phenomenon and Myth,* the title of Andy Stafford's recent intellectual biography, is an explicit allusion to Barthes's own mythology on the reception of Rimbaud.[4] The formulation is certainly appropriate for the more mythical dimensions of Barthes's reception in France. As early as 1956, for example, Barthes made a literal appearance on stage, not in person, but in the character of Dr. Bartholomeus I, the terrorist theater critic of Ionesco's *L'Impromptu de l'Alma.* This play, a satirical attack on the language, aesthetics, and politics of *Théâtre populaire,* the polemical theater journal of which Barthes and Bernard Dort—Dr. Bartholomeus II—were founding editors, was but the first of the bizarre series of literary incarnations of Barthes that includes Werth in Philippe Sollers's *Femmes* and Armand Bréhal in Julia Kristeva's *Les Samouraïs.*[5] It is also the first example of Barthes being publicly cast in the role of ringleader (in Ionesco's play three different theater critics take on the name Dr. Bartholomeus), just as, in the famous *On Racine* quarrel of the 1960s, Barthes was the incarnation for Raymond Picard of a fraudulent New Criticism and of all its practitioners, despite the wide divergences in their respective approaches to literature.[6] Similarly, but equally mythically, the name *Barthes* came to function, especially outside of France, as a sort of metonym for *French structuralism.*

Meanwhile the real Barthes was developing a readership that was popular as well as academic, not least because Barthes's public persona acquired a media dimension over the years, which was fostered by interviews in newspapers and weekly journals and by a significant number of radio broadcasts. This reached a high point with an appearance in 1977 on the popular television book program *Apostrophes,* which led, not surprisingly, to quite unprecedented sales of the newly published *Lover's Discourse.* Even within the academic world, Barthes's reputation as teacher and intellectual had reached superstar proportions by the mid to late 1970s, as he struggled to negotiate the competing demands of belated professional recognition (his election to a Chair of Literary Semiology at the institutionally prestigious Collège de France) and the adulation of a veritable court of students, friends, and disciples (a court of which the 1977 Cerisy colloquium now appears as a sort of microcosm).[7] The public shock and palpable sense of loss that followed Barthes's death in 1980

revealed the extent of the transferences that had locked an entire generation into a bizarre love affair with Barthes.

After the obituary articles and the spate of commemorative special issues of journals that followed in the early 1980s, French interest in Barthes abated significantly, until three publications created a new wave of polemical debates around his work. In 1987 François Wahl (Barthes's editor at the Éditions du Seuil and his acting literary executor) included two previously unpublished pieces in the collection *Incidents:* despite their uncertain status both were clearly autobiographical and both contained explicit representations of Barthes's homosexuality. In 1990 Louis-Jean Calvet published the first biography of Barthes's life.[8] The hostility with which it was received, and the reasons advanced for that hostility, add up in themselves to a significant episode in any narrative of Barthes's reception.[9] In revealing that he had been refused permission to quote from two extensive collections of personal correspondence (one of which extended from Barthes's school days right up to his death), as well as from an early creative text, Calvet opened up an acrimonious debate over the fate of Barthes's *inédits,* and specifically over the apparent desire of his former editor to control the reception of Barthes's oeuvre, as well as its posthumous boundaries.[10] In particular, permission had been refused to publish the important lecture courses delivered at the Collège de France between 1977 and Barthes's death in 1980. In 1991 a pirated publication in *La Règle du jeu* of Barthes's introductory lecture on *Le neutre* was designed to bring matters to a head;[11] it succeeded, from one point of view at least, in reducing them to a farce. "Writing is the loss of every origin, of every voice," declared one of the judges at the court case that ensued, quoting from "The Death of the Author" as evidence, apparently, of Barthes's intentions relative to the nonpublication of his lectures.[12] Notwithstanding the importance of the critical issues at stake in this power struggle, this was a comic moment around which Barthes himself might have woven a fine mythology.

The positive side of these public disagreements was a general renewal of critical interest in Barthes and an ongoing debate that has kept the reception of his work to the fore. The crucial issue underlying this succession of controversies was, in different guises, the status of Barthes the man relative to the body of his work. It is a status that affects critical readings as much as the outcome of disputes over publication, significant as the latter remain to serious scholars of Barthes's work. That a biographical approach should emerge as critically taboo, alongside the maintenance of a cult of Barthes the personality, may well seem paradoxical. Retrospectively, of course, it is apparent that Barthes's oeuvre was never a series of disembodied texts. In this sense, his reception in the United States was several steps ahead of his reception in France, in that the emerging American trend toward personal criticism, along with the growth in importance of gay studies, made American critics especially receptive to a Barthes who was more empirically autobiographical than the one so playfully staged in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes.* The blocking

of D. A. Miller's "gay" preface to the English translation of *Incidents,* subsequently published in a separate volume as *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (1992), was a significant pointer to the potential divergence of French and American approaches to Barthes's work.[13]

If I have run through some of the noisier and more controversial aspects of Barthes's reception, it is because they belong, certainly, to the myth of Roland Barthes. It is also the case that some writing on Barthes has been sycophantic and pretentious; this, too, is part of the critical baggage that Barthes carries with him. Like any myth, Barthes's reception is the site of contradictions that, if explored in depth and in detail in a book-length study, would provide considerable insight into his period, the contexts in which he has been read, and the ways in which he has been written about. Such, however, cannot be the aim of a brief introduction to Barthes's reception. Nor would I wish to demystify, or to question the good faith of, any of the essays that it serves to introduce. Many of them take as their starting point an obvious admiration for Barthes's writing and a fascination that recognizes the strong presence of the voice, personality, and vision embodied in that writing, of a style in all senses of the word. Yet fascination is never infatuation, and all are marked by an independence of mind that guarantees the integrity and lasting value of their response.

According to Serge Doubrovsky, in an obituary reassessment of *On Racine,* Barthes's enemies were not mistaken: the real scandal was his language.[14] Barthes's use of language has always irritated his detractors, either because they have been genuinely repelled by it or because they resisted Barthes's ideas but could more easily target their expression as pretentious—and dismiss the content as meaningless—than outargue Barthes on his own territory.[15] Barthes's use of the French language was idiosyncratic lexically rather than syntactically, and his predilection for neologisms (though sometimes ironized) was tied up with a genuine groping toward new concepts.[16] In short, his language was at the heart of the sheer originality of his vision. Maurice Nadeau, who launched Barthes in 1947 by publishing his very first article in *Combat,* saw this immediately and set out the parameters of Barthes's earliest reception by introducing him as an unknown young writer who was obsessed with language and had something new to say, but whose essay would be found dense at the level of argument and lacking in concessions in the way it was written—hardly an article for a newspaper in fact, but one that he nevertheless felt compelled to publish.[17] When *Writing Degree Zero* was subsequently published in book form in 1953, Nadeau reaffirmed this wager on Barthes's quality and future importance ("a remarkable début"), promoting him as an essayist of quite exceptional promise. Other reviewers (who included Maurice Blanchot and Jean Piel) sensed that they were dealing with a significant first publication by a new writer on the scene and acknowledged the conceptual boldness with which Barthes was attempting to carve out a

new route through contemporary debates on language.[18] An interesting exception was J.-B. Pontalis in *Les Temps modernes* who, despite a careful overview, remained unconvinced by the argument of "this somewhat slim volume," suggesting that "the rigidity of Barthes's distinctions, and his sometimes annoyingly self-assured tone, might be thought to mask some confusion in his thinking." Indeed, the force of the central concept of *écriture* was rarely fully understood, either because Pontalis was right that it was not properly thought through or because such an original idea needed a few years to clarify itself and become assimilated as a point of reference.

Barthes made his reputation in the hotbed of literary and cultural journalism of Fourth-Republic France and had the privilege to be reviewed in such significant publications of the period as *Combat, Esprit, Critique, Les Temps modernes,* and the new *Nouvelle Revue française.* Before long Barthes was a reviewer as often as he was reviewed, not least through his central collaboration in the newly founded *Lettres nouvelles* and *Théâtre populaire.* Looking back, however, it is fascinating to watch Barthes being reviewed by figures who at the time were certainly better known and intellectually more significant. His book on Michelet, for example, could not have received a higher consecration than the extraordinarily positive appraisals by Lucien Febvre and Albert Béguin. It is true that Febvre takes Barthes to task for underestimating the determining role of Michelet's poverty and voices a passing unease with the overly personal "terminology" and occasionally irritating subheadings (he pinpoints "Michelet's 'lesbianism' " as "an equivocal and ultimately obscure formulation"). But these reservations are advanced in the context of praise for Barthes's essay as "one of the most lively and astute pieces of writing ever devoted to Michelet." Interestingly, Febvre elaborates these qualities through the use of a negative foil. This is the assiduously pedogogic, dull life-and-works study of Michelet by an American specialist, Oscar A. Haac ("Monsieur Haac"), who applies himself indifferently—"without love or hate"—to his neat classifications of his subject matter. "Roland Barthes," on the other hand (clearly unknown to Febvre at the time), "would probably put all of his efforts into escaping his professorial status, should he have one." This is an astute insight into those qualities of Barthes's writing that would later provoke his ambivalent reception within the Academy, not least through an equally imaginative approach to Racine's plays.

Béguin's review could not be more different in tone, but similarly approaches Barthes's reading of *Michelet* via what it is not, contrasting its kindly gaze, its nonjudgmental generosity of approach—its acceptance of Michelet's good faith—with all those demystifying seekers of hidden motivations, be they psychoanalytic, existential, or ideological, who would put their subjects in the wrong. Above all, and like Febvre, he claims that Barthes has brought Michelet's work back to life by refusing an artificial distinction between the man and his writing, by putting aside his system of ideas, and by focusing instead on "the singularity of his being, as defined by obsessions,

preferences, and a highly charged choice of words." Thus Béguin sees all the force of Barthes's subheadings, with such formulations as Michelet's "feminary" and "bestiary" identified as keys to his most fundamental bestowal of meaning onto the world. Béguin closes with the intriguing suggestion that Barthes's method—a "pertinent questioning" that "goes to the living heart of imaginary worlds," and therefore works only "on poets and creators of images"—be used as a touchstone of the quality of its subject matter. If the results would be disappointing for modern historians, they would be "worthless with doctrinaire critics." The implication, perhaps, is that Barthes's method might appropriately be applied to his own obsessions and own highly charged choice of words. In this spirit, Michel Butor's essay on *The Fashion System,* to be discussed later, could be seen as one superlative attempt to read Barthes as he himself reads Michelet.

Of the mass of critical material that now exists on Barthes's *Mythologies,* two of the best (though little known) accounts are still the contemporary reviews by Maurice Blanchot and André Green. Both place the text very firmly on the terrain of the everyday (which has now resurfaced as an obvious but relatively neglected theme of Barthes's work), and both set *Mythologies* at the point of intersection of collective and individual experience. Although Blanchot had undoubtedly seen the importance of *Writing Degree Zero* (he gave one of the best expositions of its contents), he is far more explicit in his praise of *Mythologies:* "the entire study is remarkable." Barthes is aligned with the "great denouncers" of modern thought (the great "hoax" of the title would be better translated as "fraud" or "deception"), but his importance lies in the way he fills in the gaps left by those grand denunciations that remain at a general level. This he achieves through precise attention to banal reality in his "severe and sprightly" essays ("little myths add up to major mystification") and through the conceptual boldness with which he conjoins ideology and formalism in his afterword to isolate, "purely and simply," the meaning of the formal mechanism of myth. In Blanchot's account, as in Green's with its more explicitly Freudian frame, ideological distortion resides not in dissimulation but in a series of latent meanings nested and folded into each other. Green's review is especially interesting for extending the discussion into the psychopathological relation of self to other and for generally exploring the Freudian parallels that were signaled by Barthes in "Myth Today," but have attracted far less critical attention than his use of Saussure or Marx.

Gérard Genette's essay, originally published in *Critique* in 1965 as a review of *Critical Essays,* remains one of the finest overall evaluations of Barthes's semiology. In taking seriously Barthes's axiology of the sign, Genette attributes central importance to the 1955 essay "The Diseases of the Theatrical Costume," one of the immediate targets of Ionesco's satire in *L'Impromptu de l'Alma* ("Costumology is in reality a veritable cosmology. . . . Your suit (*costume*) is very ill. It will have to be cured," and so on).[19] Serge Doubrovsky's lively intervention in the *On Racine* quarrel, published the fol-

lowing year, was not only a historically important defense of Barthes on the part of a Racine specialist; it is still an incisive overview of Barthes's metaphorical approach to the power structures of Racine's tragic universe, as well as a persuasive demolition of the main points of Raymond Picard's incoherent and impressionistic attack. Doubrovsky is careful to maintain a personal distance from some aspects of Barthes's analysis, the better to defend the latter's right to approach Racine as he does. The occasional irritation that he confesses to feel over some "eminently Barthesian adjectives" may or may not be tactical; it leads, certainly, to a useful positioning of Barthes as a "precious" critic: "one who enjoys projecting his thought in the form of conceits and expressing truths in ironic paradoxes."

Doubrovsky's attentiveness to Barthes's poetic approach to the determining concepts of a tragic cosmology—his personal inflection of key words like *light, shade, solarity, embrace, blood,* and *paternity,* and the interpretative weight they progressively accumulate—provides an interesting parallel to the approach of Michel Butor in his essay on *The Fashion System,* first published two years later in 1968. That both *On Racine* and *The Fashion System* were often regarded as structuralist texts, with the latter as the ultimate, unreadable example of scientific semiology, highlights the originality of a counter-approach. Where Doubrovsky retrospectively sees that the frame of the human sciences, if not exactly a charade or an alibi, is the most dated part of Barthes's staging of a profoundly personalized reading,[20] Butor instantly cuts through the academic mask of the pseudothesis and its technical language to Barthes's most secret strategy: the theft of women's language in the ultimate forbidden domain. The taboo naming of women's clothing (Barthes surrounds the epigraphic quotations from women's magazines with the "tweezers of scientific lanaguage"), the cutting up of the infinite garment of Fashion (the vestimentary code), the act of stripping (the choice of a progressive subdivision of the female anatomy to illustrate the "dichotomous series"), the continual retreat whereby "the Enchantress" (the Fashion that conceals Woman) entices her pursuer ever further into her lair, are brilliantly explored in one of the most subtle ever immersions in the private underside of Barthes's personal cosmology.

Philippe Sollers's "R. B.," published in 1971 as part of *Tel Quel*'s special issue on Barthes—and postdating *S/Z, Empire of Signs,* and *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*—inevitably marks the transition to a new era in Barthes's reception. Barthes seems to have been partly complicit in this critical colonization of his writing, contributing an important interview to the volume, happily assuming his identity as R. B., participating in *Tel Quel*'s collective *Théorie d'ensemble,* and accompanying the delegation from *Tel Quel* that visited China in 1974.[21] Though Sollers may appear to bury the real Barthes under the weight of his Tel Quelian, pro-Maoist discourse, the essay is an affirmation of Barthes's mobile response to the world and his profoundly antifascist outlook.

Curiously, while Barthes's detractors invariably take him to task for the terrorism of his language and narrow dogmatism of his ideas, his admirers underline the truly democratic openness of his writing and worldview. Stephen Heath's *Vertige du déplacement,* an early and influential monograph on Barthes published in French in 1974, takes its place in this tradition by focusing on Barthes's tactic of permanent displacement. The "practice of writing" is both a key phrase in Heath's exposition of Barthes and part of the subtitle of a book he had published in English two years previously on the *nouveau roman* and its intellectual context.[22] That context was broadly Tel Quelian, and Heath was a pivotal figure in the cross-fertilization of French and Anglo-American critical traditions that occurred in this period. While *Tel Quel* enthused about Joyce, the world of English studies in Britain had begun importing Heath's Barthes.

I pick up Barthes's French reception shortly before his death with two short texts on photography, by Renaud Camus and Hervé Guibert, respectively. The future importance of both authors (at the time young and little known) once again increases the interest of their own interest in Barthes. The extract from *Tricks* is an early but typical example of the omnipresence of Barthes in Camus's writing; for 20 years now, Camus's relentless output of diaries, travel notes, and other creative writing has been a rich source of discussions of Barthes. The later work of Guibert, at the time photography reviewer for *Le Monde,* is also filled with echoes of Barthes, not least where Guibert is writing about real or imagined photographs.[23] Both were familiar with Barthes's occasional pieces on photography of the late 1970s and were already aware that Barthes had abandoned his semiological approach to representation for a heretical interest in the photographic referent. Like other cultural theorists who would have difficulty coming to terms with the argument of *Camera Lucida,* in *Tricks* it is the American Jeremy who has absorbed the lessons of the structuralist Barthes too well. The narrator's comically heated defense of Barthes's retreat from the received way of talking about photography is useful as a rare discussion of the latter's text on Daniel Boudinet,[24] as well as an engaging illustration of Barthes's strategic recourse to the *bathmology.* The timing of Guibert's review makes it one of the very few contemporary discussions of *Camera Lucida* unmarked by the melancholy context of Barthes's death. He identifies as one of Barthes's "strengths" the playful mix of philosophically technical vocabulary and trivial, everyday turns of phrase, as well as his adoption with each new book of "uncommon, disparaged, neological, or outdated words," which bring new life to language before congealing in their turn. Placing the book in the context of Barthes's other recent writing on photography, Guibert focuses unproblematically on the "sincerity" of the viewing subject, predicting that photographers will not like this book that can be understood intuitively and will "leave a trace more persistent than that of its predecessors, because that trace is more affective."

The near coincidence of Barthes's death with first readings of *Camera*

Lucida determined its reception for many years to come. The memorial special issues that appeared in the early 1980s (*Poétique, Communications, Critique, Textuel*) were especially haunted by this text, as is Tzvetan Todorov's "Late Barthes," a moving tribute as well as an influential periodization of Barthes's oeuvre according to the status of his critical discourse. Although Jacques Derrida's "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" was also a virtuoso linking of the content of *Camera Lucida* to its context, the extracts reproduced here focus on his discussion of the return of the photographic referent through the musical interweaving of the *studium* and the *punctum;* according to Derrida, these are not transferable concepts outside the movement and argument of Barthes's text. Julia Kristeva's essay, also set up under the sign of mourning, is haunted less by any specific text than by Barthes's voice. Personal memories are merged with a self-conscious refusal to "let go": the irreplaceable qualities of Barthes—the man and the work, the ethic and the style—are captured in the loss of a voice, "the only literary-critical discourse of modernity," whose absence is immediately apparent when any innovative book appears: "there is nobody in a position to talk about it."

After such melancholy tributes, the wit of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Philippe Lejeune introduces a welcome shift in tone. Part of the extract from Robbe-Grillet's autobiography appeared in the *Nouvel Observateur* on the first anniversary of Barthes's death. Republishing it in 1984, he uses the original political context—the electoral campaign of 1981 that brought Mitterrand to power—to extract an apolitical lesson from Barthes's writing and to use him as the bizarre vehicle of an attack on the Socialist government's refusal to adapt to circumstances: "It is said that on the day of his fatal accident Roland Barthes had lunched with François Mitterrand. Let's hope that on leaving he convinced him of the radical virtues of pulling back, of re-examination, of continuous change." In a humorous but astute overview, in the tradition of those of Sollers, Heath, and Todorov, Barthes is promoted as a "slippery thinker" whose messages constantly veer off in new directions. More original, in fact, is Robbe-Grillet's gloss on Barthes's very public toying with the idea of writing a real novel: "like Sartre before him, Barthes discovers very soon that the novel or the theatre—more so than the essay—are the natural setting in which concrete freedom can be most violently and effectively acted out." And although the late Barthes aspired strangely to something that sounded like a traditional nineteenth-century novel, he was subtle and devious enough to transform it into something "new, baffling, and unrecognizable." The humor with which Robbe-Grillet delineates Barthes's fear that he was some sort of impostor (neurotically suspecting the existence of real semiologists and so on) is carried over into Philippe Lejeune's masterly pastiche of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes,* also published in 1984. This is at once an engagement with the linguistic, rhetorical, and theoretical maneuvers of the original autobiography, a trumping (and devaluation) of a pastiche that had offended Barthes in his lifetime, Michel-Antoine Burnier and Patrick Rambaud's

Le Roland-Barthes sans peine (Roland Barthes without Tears),[25] and a self-conscious assessment of the difficulties inherent in the genre. At once ironic and affectionate, this tour de force was a significant intervention in Barthes's reception. It also put paid to the dying of Barthes and permitted a return to less doleful analysis of his work.

I have chosen Paul de Man, another pivotal figure, to introduce the section of Anglo-American theoretical readings of Barthes. This text was apparently written in 1972 (*Mythologies* and *Critical Essays* had just appeared in English translation) and was intended for publication in the *New York Review of Books;* in the event, and despite the author's claim that the catch-all term *structuralism* had become part of intellectual popular culture, it was considered too technical for a general readership. The essay opens with a discussion of the relationship between American and French literary criticism and clearly aims to situate Barthes for an American audience. American criticism is deemed rich in technical instruments but less good at relating its findings to wider historical, semantic, and epistemological issues. But what starts out as an enthusiastic overview of Barthes's conjunction of ideology and linguistic semiology ends up by signaling his philosophical limitations in the face of the poststructuralist challenge of Foucault, Derrida, and de Man himself. Despite the "genuine theoretical challenge of *S/Z,*" and the fact that Barthes's intellectual context is the human sciences rather than philosophy, de Man sees his discourse as running up against the problem of the "truth value" and "aberrantly referential implications" of its own interpretations.

Arguably, it was such charges of philosophical naïveté that led Barthes to retreat (albeit ironically) from the semiological enthusiasms that reached their high point in his work in 1970 and 1971. Fortunately, instead of following the deconstructive route himself, Barthes was to find a new voice and an unassailable epistemological position through a self-conscious immersion in the imaginary. As Lejeune puts it, pinpointing the trick of the "floating inverted commas": "It's not me—it's my imaginary!" Barthes was also rescued of course by other theoretical approaches, not only the psychoanalytic readings that a text like the *Lover's Discourse* obviously invited but also the feminist and gay readings that chimed with the "strongly personal, even confessional" elements already identified by de Man as a distinctive feature of Barthes's writing.

Despite the progression of his own interests from French structuralism to deconstruction, Jonathan Culler's disappointment with *The Fashion System* was straightforwardly methodological. Culler's role in introducing Barthes to English and American readers was a significant one, not only for his clarity as an exegete but also for his willingness to challenge Barthes in the interests of improving structuralist models. The context in Culler's own work was his desire to harness linguistics to develop a fully fledged model of "literary competence," along the lines of the science of literature somewhat nonchalantly

proposed by Barthes in *Criticism and Truth.* What seemed at first sight a promising example of the linguistic model applied to a cultural system ends up as an exemplary failure, a "confused, incomplete and unverifiable account of the vestimentary code which cannot serve even as a specimen of formal analysis." This was blamed partly on lack of rigor and staying power and partly on neglect in deciding what exactly the classifications were designed to explain. Typically, Culler gives an excellent account of the interplay of object, variant, and support in Barthes's vestimentary code, indicating the extent to which he himself might have been capable of elaborating a more convincing model of "fashionable competence." Arguably, Culler's critique was simply a strong misreading of Barthes's aim, a misreading that was very fertile for his own work, but took him away from Barthes's, leading him, ultimately, to lose interest in it.[26]

Just as Culler is enticed into Barthes's *Fashion System* by the lure of the vestimentary code, so Barbara Johnson is drawn into *S/Z* by its opening section, in which Barthes sets up a critical value system based on the paradigm of difference, with all the Nietzschean, Saussurean, and Derridean connotations that the term had acquired in the period. Any ensuing disappointment is of course strategic, in that Johnson's 1978 MLA paper unfolds as a textbook example of a deconstructive reading, "the careful teasing out of the warring forces of signification within the text itself," as she famously puts it, whereby the binaries of the readerly and writerly, of theory and practice, and ultimately of criticism and literature are unraveled in turn. Her description of *S/Z* as "one of the earliest, most influential, and most lucid and forceful syntheses of contemporary French theoretical thought" could apply to her own essay, which has also become an unavoidable point of reference for any discussion of castration both in Balzac's text and in Barthes's reading of it.[27] To suggest that Johnson was proposing nothing of which Barthes himself was not already aware—about *Sarrasine,* about the status of his own reading—is of course to get sucked into the deconstructive game. Elizabeth Wright, who takes Johnson's conclusions as the starting point of her discussion of the *Lover's Discourse,* transposes the question of meaning production—the reciprocal contamination of readers and writers—from a philosophical to a psychoanalytic context. Barthes's text is above all valuable for the self-consciousness with which he displays the various effects of transference: the reader/lover in transference is both staged and read by the writer. Not only is he in this sense performing a higher-level psychoanalytic reading than a critic like Shoshana Felman—when she works on the text of another writer[28]—but he is one step ahead of Lacan and even André Green in that by building into his discourse the transference of the critic he allows his own readers to escape entrapment. More straightforwardly, Wright gives a powerful account of the text's equation of romantic love with transference love, pointing out that Barthes takes the concept of the imaginary from D. W. Winnicott as well as Jacques Lacan, so that the amorous subject who addresses the absent mother alternates

between the "benign" perspective of the former and the "dire" perspective of the latter.

Though both Johnson and Wright pick up issues relating to sexual difference, feminist critics in the mid-1980s were hesitant in their approach to Barthes's sexual politics, not least in the context of debates on the role of "men in feminism." In an essay that circles around *The Pleasure of the Text,* Jane Gallop plunges with typical intellectual verve into the politics of pleasure and perversion, "articulated in a feminist context." For Gallop, both love for the mother and Barthes's homosexuality are especially difficult to evaluate from a feminist viewpoint. Where Wright would link these theoretically through the concept of transference love, Gallop links them causally and biographically and is led, in the supposed name of a feminist politics, to voice a distrust of the "motives of homosexual men," who "choose men over women just as do our social and political institutions." Similarly, Barthes's desire to dismantle the fixed binaries of gender, in the first instance linguistically, is suspected of being another attempt to silence women when they are at last forcing themselves onto political, literary, and theoretical agendas. Yet Gallop does give homosexuality a place on such agendas, despite her uneasy and ultimately inconclusive approach: "But I am not prepared here to explain Proust and Barthes as male homosexual authors. For I do not know how to articulate the relation between their lived homosexuality and their writing." This relation is at the center of D. A. Miller's *Bringing Out Roland Barthes,* which turns around the general issue of the politics of naming or not naming homosexuality, both as a context shaping the reception of Barthes's work and an issue within it. His discussion of the Goddess H. explores the contradiction in Barthes's writing between the bad Name and the good Letter, whereby the more homosexuality was silenced as signified, the more openly it saturated the signifier. This "phobic" sacrifice of a name left the "appeased deity of *general theory* as fixed as ever in its white-male-heterosexual orientation," made it possible, that is, to overlook the theoretical importance of homosexuality-as-signifier (to stop taking Barthes seriously as a theorist just when his work was emitting "that resonance of the body which *Writing Degree Zero* had earlier called style"). What is more, not naming Barthes's homosexuality plays into the hands of homophobic critics who, already assisted by Barthes's reticence, can avoid confronting "why they do him down."

Some of the theoretical hares that have been set running in this section of groundbreaking Anglo-American readings can be tracked through a series of essays placed under the broad umbrella of Barthes's aesthetics. For Trinh T. Minh-ha, in her "Plural Void" of 1982, Barthes's refusal of naming is to be linked to a Taoist wisdom, and the "suspended discourse" of his essay on China—his "maternal" acceptance of the wholeness of the other—is "a response to ethnocentrism and its ally, phallocentrism." Barthes is no distant (paternal) observer seeking to decipher Japan and China but a reader of his

own position vis-a-vis exoticism and ethnocentrism: what we read is neither the observed nor the observer, but "the observing." Only once does Trinh T. Minh-ha fault Barthes's understanding of Zen and Tao, references to which are traced through to the *Lover's Discourse* and *Camera Lucida.* The fact that Asian metaphysics does not recognize any form of transcendence—that haiku designates "an unencumbered real"—is addressed in Naomi Schor's authoritative overview of the shifts in the status of reality in Barthes's aesthetics. The general context of her discussion is an interest in the gendering of aesthetic categories and the conceptual systems that support them. Thus her feminist suspicion is brought to bear on the degendering of the formerly feminine detail at the very moment of its aesthetic rehabilitation: is degendering simply defeminizing, "leaving the masculine and its prerogatives intact"? Certainly the eroticized detail that marks Barthes's late writing is placed under the regime of perversion, "which subjects sexual difference to a radical and endless oscillation."

Schor's essay has established itself as an important point of reference for discussions of the Barthesian detail. Steven Ungar usefully tracks the tension between semiology and phenomenology across all of Barthes's writing on the image. He brings theater into the same frame as photography and cinema and ends up in dialogue with Schor, as well as Eisenstein and André Bazin, once he reaches Barthes's "The Third Meaning," a key text for such accounts. Trinh T. Minh-ha's mother and father principles, Wright's transference love, and Schor's regime of perversion all find a place in Martin Grisel's analysis of Barthes's writing on music, where the interplay of the Lacanian imaginary, symbolic, and real is doggedly pursued across the Oedipal and transferential space of the romantic lied. The Nietzschean undercurrent of Grisel's discussion comes to the fore in Johnnie Gratton's almost heretical reading of *Camera Lucida,* which turns its back on the biographical theme of Barthes's grief at his mother's death and refuses to read the text "straight." The ironic representation of an act of self-expression—which has been more willingly conceded to the other texts of Barthes's "imaginary" period—becomes an excessive flaunting of subjectivity articulated through the Nietzschean *for-me.* The idiosyncratic subject of enunciation wavers between the anarchic and the childishly peremptory, as he disregards the generalities of science and culture and refuses, above all, an adult acceptance of reality. In short, this is another Oedipal reading of a fetishistic structure, but one with a markedly different tone. Not only does the photographic punctum emerge from this reading as an extension of the for-me, but Barthes's affirmation of *his* mother against *the* mother, which has so moved so many critics, is another "outburst of subjectivity," albeit a key episode in the staging of a stubborn regressiveness.[29]

The final two essays in this collection release Barthes from the grip of the imaginary, though both, in different ways, pursue the theme of "reading in detail." Indeed, the unassuming detail remains a key to whatever conflation of ethics, semiotics, and aesthetics is considered to mark the work as a whole.

Both Philippe Roger and Michael Sheringham quote the delicate delineation of the incident to be found in Barthes's preface to *Aziyadé:* "what *falls,* gently, like a leaf, onto the carpet of life." The Barthesian incident is the point of intersection of insignificance as content and form. For Sheringham, the everyday and the ordinary are a crucial parameter of Barthes's intellectual development, the meeting point of the "ethical, existential, and hedonistic dimensions of his passion for the processes of signification." For Roger, it is the seemingly insignificant form of the preface that suddenly reveals the essential Barthes: "what if what really mattered was to be found in these occasional pieces?" Roger's essay was written for a 50th-anniversary special issue of *Critique,* where it followed a reprint of Barthes's preface to *Aziyadé,* already published in the journal in 1972. As such it echoes the original context of Barthes's essay—a commission for an Italian edition of Loti's novel—but above all Barthes's strategy of using a few pages to open up an ethic and an aesthetics, as well as a world. Barthes's reading of the "boundless freedom" of Loti's "sojourn" in Turkey is linked to his own relation to *Critique,* and to the other French journals that Barthes passed so lightly between. At the same time, this supposedly minor essay is made to carry on its delicate shoulders the whole range of Barthes's past and future themes, be they theoretical, literary, political, or biographical. Perhaps the most interesting dimension of Roger's tour-de-force essay is its reevaluation of his own earlier argument about Barthes's relation to literature: when Eurydice flits through the euphoric pages of the Loti preface, it is no longer to figure the tragic impossibility of "Literature," but simply to say a "polite hello."[30] This leads Roger to propose the sparkling and relatively relaxed sequence of *New Critical Essays* as a key to Barthes's oeuvre, as well as one of its summits.

The context of Sheringham's essay, newly written for this volume, is a book-length study of French writing on the everyday. Sheringham positions Barthes in a postwar context that included Henri Lefebvre and rereads his work from the perspective of later theorists of the everyday from Michel de Certeau and Georges Perec to Annie Ernaux. Despite the difference of tone and focus, Sheringham concurs with Roger's scaling down of the stakes. Paradoxically, Sheringham's stress on a change of proportion gives a new significance to the deliberately low-key writing of a text like Barthes's "Chroniques," published in the *Nouvel Observateur* around a year before his death, and at the time considered an embarrassing, unsuccessful attempt to resurrect the genre of the mythology.[31] Thus even the "general downscaling of intellectual preoccupations," which Gratton has proposed as the postmodern, ideological context of the Barthesian amorous incident, can claim Barthes for its own, despite the countertrickle of grander narratives of his project—a trickle that shows no particular sign of drying up.[32]

Barthes famously declared of Proust that while not in any sense a "specialist" of his work, Proust constantly accompanied his thinking and had become one

of his permanent points of reference for reading the world around him.[33] For more than a few of his critics, specialist and nonspecialist alike, Barthes has clearly filled this role of a "complete world-reading system." Even those who use him to explore their own theoretical agendas—from feminism for Gallop to the everyday for Sheringham—reveal an intimate familiarity with all of his work and write as if it mattered to test their claims against the case of Barthes. In his memorial oration at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault spoke of Barthes's "paradoxical ability to understand things as they are yet invent them with unprecedented originality." To this could be added his ability to elicit a comparable response. Barthes has been read as intensely in Britain and the United States as in France, and the best critical writing has always renewed his work by the originality of its understanding.

Notes

1. My choice of essays and my account of Barthes's reception are restricted to material published in French or English.
2. Jonathan Culler, Stephen Heath, Philip Thody, Annette Lavers, Richard Howard, and Richard Miller were significant figures in this respect as exponents and translators of Barthes during his lifetime.
3. Gilles Philippe, *Roland Barthes* (Paris: Memini, 1996).
4. Andy Stafford, *Roland Barthes, Phenomenon and Myth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998). For the Rimbaud mythology see Roland Barthes, "Phénomène ou mythe?" *Lettres nouvelles* 2, no. 22 (December 1954): 951–53.
5. See Philippe Sollers, *Femmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), and Julia Kristeva, *Les Samouraïs* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).
6. See Raymond Picard, *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture* (Paris: Pauvert, 1965).
7. The proceedings were published as *Prétexte: Roland Barthes* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1978). Barthes himself was present at this event, which was loosely organized around his work.
8. See Louis-Jean Calvet, *Roland Barthes: A Biography*, trans. Sarah Wykes (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).
9. For his own account, see Louis-Jean Calvet, "RB dans la presse: Bio/Critique," in *Barthes après Barthes: une actualité en questions*, ed. Catherine Coquio and Régis Salado (Pau: Publications de l'Université de Pau, 1993), 231–34. See too Diana Knight, "Vie de Barthes," *Modern and Contemporary France* NS3 (1995): 463–68.
10. See A. Duchesne and T. Leguay, "RB et le capitaine Nemo," *L'Infini* 37 (1992): 57–74.
11. Roland Barthes, "Le désir de neutre," *La Règle du jeu* 2 (August 1991): 36–60.
12. For details of the lawsuit see "À qui appartient la parole des maîtres disparus?" *Le Monde*, 18 October 1991, p. 26, and Maurice Peyrot, "L'écriture 'contrefaçon' de la parole," *Le Monde*, 22 November 1991, p. 46. The court awarded damages, prohibited further publication, and reconfirmed the French law of 1957, whereby pedagogical lectures belong to the author's estate. For indignant reactions see "Témoignages," *La Règle du jeu* 3 (January 1992): 155–62.
13. See the review article by Antoine Compagnon, "Barthes's Open Secret," *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 February 1993, p. 5.
14. See *Nouvelles littéraires* (3 April 1980).
15. In this respect, René Pommier has continued in the same vein as Raymond Picard,

years after Barthes's death. He pours scorn on *On Racine* without attempting to outargue either the Barthes of *Criticism and Truth* or Doubrovsky's intervention. See his *Roland Barthes, ras le bol!* (Paris: Roblot, 1987) and *Le "Sur Racine" de Roland Barthes* (Paris: SEDES, 1988).

16. For an interesting early discussion of Barthes's language see Annette Lavers, "En traduisant Barthes," *Tel Quel* 47 (1971): 115–25.

17. See *Combat,* 1 August 1947, p. 2.

18. See Maurice Blanchot, "Plus loin que le degré zéro," *Nouvelle revue française* 9 (September 1953): 485–94, and Jean Piel, "Fonction sociale du critique," *Critique* 10, no. 80 (January 1954): 3–13.

19. See Eugène Ionesco, *Théâtre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 2: 46.

20. *Nouvelles littéraires* (3 April 1980).

21. On Barthes's relation to *Tel Quel* see Philippe Roger, *Roland Barthes, roman* (Paris: Grasset, 1986), 302–17.

22. Stephen Heath, *The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing* (London: Elek, 1972).

23. See especially Hervé Guibert, *L'Image fantôme* (Paris: Minuit, 1981).

24. First published in *Créatis* in 1977.

25. See Michel-Antoine Burnier and Patrick Rambaud, *Le Roland-Barthes sans peine* (Paris: Balland, 1978).

26. For further discussion, see Diana Knight, "Roland Barthes: the *corpus* and the *corps,*" *Poetics Today* 5 (1984): 186–89.

27. See Diana Knight, "*S/Z,* Realism, and Compulsory Heterosexuality," in *Spectacles of Realism: Gender, Body, Genre,* ed. Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 120–36, and Claude Bremond and Thomas Pavel, *De Barthes à Balzac: Fictions d'un critique, critiques d'une fiction* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).

28. Wright's section on Barthes is followed by a discussion of Felman's reading of *The Turn of the Screw.*

29. The essay is part of a larger study of "expressivism." See Johnnie Gratton, *Expressivism: The Vicissitudes of a Theory in the Writing of Proust and Barthes* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000).

30. Barthes's quest for the ideal book was a central thread of Roger's *Roland Barthes, roman.*

31. The "Chroniques" were published between 18 December 1978 and 26 March 1979.

32. See Johnnie Gratton, "The Poetics of the Barthesian Incident: Fragments of an Experiencing Subject," in *Roland Barthes,* ed. Diana Knight, special issue of *Nottingham French Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 63–75. My own monograph, Diana Knight, *Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), is a counternarrative in that it proposes a teleological account of Barthes's work, whereby everyday reality is subsumed as a central ingredient of the writing of utopia.

33. See Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 36, and *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962–1980,* trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), 194.

FRENCH RECEPTION: EARLY REVIEWS (1953–1958)

Writing Degree Zero

MAURICE NADEAU

Language, the raw material of literature, has long been the object of a contemplation which is by no means spent. It began with the admissions of those authors who were first to confess to the difficulties of writing: not Hugo, not George Sand, Stendhal, or Balzac, but certainly Flaubert. It accompanied the first modern work in linguistics (Saussure) and philology (Littré), and became a mandatory chapter of the major philosophical essays of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has amounted sometimes to attacks aiming to discredit a tool previously considered reliable (Lautréamont), to throw it out with the rubbish (Rimbaud), or to use it for purposes other than those it proclaims (Mallarmé). But what has "use" got to do with anything? With Mallarmé language achieves transcendance. From communication to expression, from expression to a "translation of silence," it loses its instrumental qualities as it becomes the trace on a seismograph divulging unspeakable secrets. It can be noise without signification or supreme act, vanishing in an all-transforming blaze of glory. After Valéry, the Surrealists, Jean Paulhan and Maurice Blanchot, we find ourselves at the heart of a mystery in which language, writer and the act of writing become one, and where writing itself is clouded in gravest suspicion and becomes the ultimate conveyor of silence. Having come full circle, should we now simply wait at the end of this impasse?

This is precisely what Roland Barthes has refused to do. Starting from the simple principle that writers have not ceased to exist (whether or not their conscience is clear is of little importance), he asks whether it is not better to look at the way language is employed in every one of their chosen genres, and perhaps by every one of them. Instead of an abstract reflection upon a poorly defined object, a reflection which can either bring about a conclusion that is the opposite of what one wished to demonstrate (as is the case for Paulhan) or that flies in the face of the obvious (as is the case for Blanchot), Barthes considers the continued production of novels, poetry and drama and chooses to weigh up the mass of data which he finds before him. As this method cannot but take the form of a chronological study, he naturally finds himself telling a

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story which, when it becomes a history, leads him to assess its links with the history of societies.

This method is not new: it is the one used by those economic and cultural historians, and those social scientists, who work in a loosely Marxist tradition. This is, however, the first time it has been applied to a history of literary language (not to be confused with a history of literature) even if Barthes, along the way, dispels any fear that it will end up as a mere description. If, like his predecessors, but no more so than they, he comes unstuck at the insurmountable barrier that is the actual production of writing, he surrounds it so clearly on all sides that the final door to be broken down comes into full view. Whereas, in respect of language, a point had been reached where it had become difficult to make out the object of contention, Barthes, slowly but surely, leads the reader to the heart of the problem, clearing away all the debris that was muddling the issue. He offers no new "views" on language, but explains its whys and wherefores with all the scientific exactitude that the subject can stand.

He begins by taking his first precaution, which is an analytical one. Literary language is not just everyday language, elevated in status by the particular use that is being made of it; rather it is, for each particular author, a unique composite produced from a language (*langue*), a style and a writing (*écriture*). A language is the "common property" of all those who speak it, "a body of prescriptions and habits common to all the writers of a period." It is, by definition, a social object, a raw material given more generously to the man of letters than clay to the sculptor or color to the painter, and which is capable in time of the countless transformations with which we are familiar. What, then, is style? It is a language peculiar to the individual author for which he is no more responsible than he is for his mother tongue. If language is a social object, style is an individual object arising from what is generally known as temperament, that other term for the individual's "secret, personal mythology." The writer does not choose his language any more than he does his style. They are given to him, either by society or by his own nature. He adopts them as though they were a natural habitat where language forms the horizon and style "the vertical and solitary dimension of (his) thought." These natural phenomena, social or biological, form the indispensable basis of a literature. And yet, they are not enough: they fall short of it.

For Roland Barthes, literature only comes into existence when a collection of signs "unrelated to idea, language or style" can be recognized. These signs take shape like a shorthand and through them language becomes a rite, with "the choice of a certain human behaviour" at its source, and a transmutation "that carries man to the threshold of power and magic" at its outlet. Literature itself thus circumscribed, Barthes gives the name "writing" to the collection of signs that signal the existence of this literature. Unlike language and style, which are objects, writing emerges as a function. It is, he says, "form understood from the point of view of its human intention," and defined

as "a relationship between creation and society." It follows that it is bound, as are all human products, to history and its crises. The reciprocal effects of one upon the other can be studied. A history of writing can be written. It could be said, for example, that Mérimée and Fénelon have the same writing, for "despite being separated by a century and a half, by linguistic phenomena and contingent features of style, they use a language loaded with a common intentionality, they draw on a common idea of form and content, they accept the same type of conventions, they share the same technical reflexes. . . ." On the other hand, despite being approximate contemporaries, "Mérimée and Lautréamont, Mallarmé and Céline, Gide and Queneau, Claudel and Camus, who spoke or speak French at the same stage of its historical development, use modes of writing that are profoundly different. Everything separates them: tone, delivery, purpose, ethos, the naturalness of their expression, so much so that the common factor of period and language means little relative to modes of writing that are so dissimilar, and are so sharply defined by their very dissimilarity."

The relationship between writing and history is not, therefore, purely mechanical, as today's followers of historical materialism would have us believe. If history, too, is a human creation, it simply sets for the writer "the limits of a choice," "a necessary option between several moral attitudes pertaining to language." It weighs upon him, but in a very specific way, forcing him "to *signify* literature in terms of possibilities beyond his control." The bourgeoisie, first ascendant then triumphant, offered its writers, classical and romantic alike, a single writing which was untouched by the 1789 Revolution. It was only around 1848, when the bourgeoisie dissociated its interests from those of society as a whole and lost its taste for the universal, that a plurality of modes of writing began to emerge, the current explosion of which corresponds to a crisis of History identifiable by so many other factors. Or, as Barthes also says: "What separates the *thought* of a Balzac from that of a Flaubert is a variation within the same school; what distinguishes their modes of writing is a fundamental break, at the point where two economic structures come together, provoking at their juncture decisive changes in mentality and consciousness." Essentially functional, writing cannot fail to be an "act of historical solidarity" which assumes on the part of the writer a choice of value-system and a mode of commitment—non-commitment and the refusal of all values being, of course, just another form of commitment.

The unique writing of the bourgeoisie does not even warrant the name of writing until the classical period. Indeed, until 1650, the French language remained uncodified; its structure fluctuated while grammarians gradually pinned it down. Then it became a slave to the expression of ideas and feelings (form being considered entirely appropriate to content), without ever "spurning its pedigree, since it was only a felicitous backcloth against which the act of thought was thrown into relief." Of course, adds Barthes, classical authors did debate problems of form, "but the point at issue was in no way the plural-

ity or meaning of modes of writing, still less the structure of the language; the only thing in question was rhetoric, the ordering of discourse towards the goal of persuasion." Furthermore, it is significant that just as rhetoric fell out of favor, classical writing ceased to be universal and gave way to modern modes of writing. The language of the 1789 Revolution is still a rhetoric, the writers and orators of the time raising words to the level of events by various methods, the most obvious of which is grandiloquence, so that if Romanticism shifts the object of literature, it keeps its instrument, the legacy of tradition. Hugo alone gives a hint of an explosion of the language characteristic of the eighteenth century. It is this latter, though, that continues to be taken for the "norm of good French," an "hermetic language, cut off from society by the entire thickness of the literary myth; a kind of sacred writing adopted indifferently by wildly divergent authors out of some sort of austere duty or gourmandism, a tabernacle of the awe-inspiring mystery that is French Literature." For this myth of "literature" to be shattered, and for the act of writing gradually to be thrown into question, a new historical situation had to emerge, whereby the bourgeois writer would become conscious of his social condition as separate from his intellectual vocation. From about 1850, each author sets about resolving in his own way the following problem: how does one write without giving in to a myth? How does one use language to kill literature?

The first step, however, involves the claiming back of the profession, of the specialization through which the modern author removes himself from the sphere of bourgeois activities. The "artist" is the antithesis of the "bourgeois," rather in the same way that the proletarian, with whom the artist does not, however, wish to be confused, puts himself forward as the antithesis of all things bourgeois. In truth, he is torn between these two classes, sharing with one his education, and with the other his profession which, for Gautier and Flaubert, Valéry and Gide, is akin to the achievement of an arduous task. The "craftsmen of style" take pride in making it known that they work long and hard on form, as if they wish to enhance its value through the hours they put in. The Naturalists, despite their very different agenda, overdo this approach and increase in their works the number of formal signs by which their specialist skills might be recognized. It was as if, rather than creating works as such, they saw their role "as providing a literature that could be spotted from afar." They fell into a conventional writing that bore the mark of their school, the canons of which have been readopted by the current upholders of "socialist realism."

This unrelenting work on style, combined with the fear of lapsing into naturalist platitudes, was to lead to obsession with form and, thence, to preciosity. In Huysmans and Barbey d'Aurevilly, and in their descendants, Montherlant or Breton, the sentence is loaded with intentions and splendors, an "extraordinary drapery" signalling the presence of the work of art to be appreciated and admired. Along these lines, Surrealist preciosity aspires to

being a super-literature closed off to the common man, but opening out onto mysteries the secrets of which only the initiated can penetrate, while the writer, shedding his craftsman's garb, styles himself upon sorcerers, prophets and mystics. It is clearly indicated, in Breton for example, that "the writer" can give but a vague approximation of the supernatural world in which he evolves. The strange thing is that he achieves this approximation not so much by the inspiration or intuitions of poetic genius, as by an "atrocious expenditure of work" on form. There is nothing more concerted, nothing more predictable in its apparently incoherent images and, ultimately, nothing more stereotypical than one of Breton's sentences. The attempt to bring about an effusion of literature through an influx of what lies beyond its boundaries leads to literature of the worst kind, just as Rimbaud's dive into the depths of silence or Mallarmé's rendering of the ineffable bear the seeds of countless scribblers. Literary language is never healthier than when rejuvenated by onslaughts, feigned or genuine, of this kind.

This astonishing accumulation of a century's failures appears to have led today's authors to two very different solutions. There are those, like Camus, who would like to recover the lost innocence of language in writing made "white" or reduced to its "zero degree." It would play a straightforwardly instrumental role, as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and would represent a return to transparency. And then there are those, like Céline, Queneau or Prévert, who seek to dissolve literary language in social languages, by giving the former the natural "opaqueness" of the latter. Whether writing is "white" or "opaque," the intention is the same: to destroy the literary myth, to sunder its universe of signs by taking it over from the inside, and by replacing the language that upholds it with that of everybody: the language of newspapers or that spoken by different sections of society. Unfortunately this new writing, which wishes to set itself apart from time and history, soon belies its innocence by developing a rigid predictability, by forging a manner that becomes another sort of writing, or, quite simply, a writing, where once there had been the freedom of an "undefined language." The writer, for whom form was to cause no more problems than it did for the journalist, becomes the prisoner of an attitude by which he can be recognized, just as one can recognize and tell apart the practitioners of "opaque" writing whose language, even if it replicates almost exactly the spoken language of a specific social group, always remains cut off from it by the thickness of a myth. When Éluard declares that the poet speaks the language of "all men," he conveys both a desire and the current impossibility of its satisfaction. It is impossible to move away from literature via literature.

Is the solution not then to be found, perhaps, outside the trio of language, writer and literature? In history and society? If the case which has been being heard against literary language for the last hundred years has as its sole aim to reconcile the language of the writer with that of "all men," it is clear that the doors of the fortress, within which the writer is revered and

snubbed in turn, must be broken down. It is no less clear that deliverance can only come from the outside, from a society from which all notions of class or other distinctions have first been eradicated. Locked within the limits of a convention or of a readership while he dreams of being heard by all, the writer will only find a universal audience in a society that is universally reconciled with itself. The "problematics" of language exist side-by-side with the problematics of societies, and it is the latter which must be resolved so that the writer can stop oscillating between the pride and the humility of his split condition, can stop projecting all responsibility onto Form, onto writing. Both object and subject of a history, writing must be seen as *Necessity* ("it testifies to the division of languages, inseparable from the division of classes"), and as *Freedom* ("it is the awareness of this division, and the very attempt to get beyond it"). In other words, it is a question of passing from the existing alienation of language to the re-creation of a fresh and innocent language, belonging to each and everybody, a language at one with the world and which would express the exact signification of the world. This would mean the end of literature, as it would the end of History, but who would bemoan this double loss in a world in harmony?

This history of writing, gathered into one hundred and twenty-five pages upon which we have felt able to elaborate freely—since they open themselves continually to all kinds of development—marks an important step in the evolution of reflection upon language. As far as language is concerned, we had got to a point where we no longer knew what we were talking about, prisoners of the very myth which we wanted to discuss. We were sinning both through an insufficiency of method and an overdose of subtlety. Roland Barthes is rather like Descartes succeeding the Scholastics. It is hardly possible that anyone carrying his work further (he himself, first and foremost) could in future ignore his fundamental distinction between language, style and writing; only in writing will they be able to posit the intersections of work and writer, of language and man. Above all, since writing signifies choice and commitment, it will be impossible to deny that there would not be a "problematics of language" if there were not first of all a problematics of societies. To seek to resolve one without the other, in the name of an eternal literature and an eternal man, is to condemn oneself to a vicious circle which a hundred years of dramatic and futile research ought nonetheless to warn us against. In the same way that physics calls upon mathematics to solve its problems, literature can only tackle its own with the assistance of history which, in a larger context and in a more intelligible manner, also bears the marks of human behavior.

If this relationship is obvious, it is not simple; moreover, it cannot be developed without running into a few difficulties. Admittedly, Barthes at no stage goes in for banal claims passed off as adequate explanations. It would have been desirable, however, to point out that if each new attempt at writing is ultimately inscribed in history, it is originally, and by its very nature,

something quite other: it is, in fact, an insurrection against history. No author turns to writing intent simply upon going with the flow or playing his part in a ballet. On the contrary, he seeks with his work to annul all those which have preceded it, to provide at last "the place and the method," to figure, like Mallarmé or Kafka, both "an end and a beginning." The historian considers him the victim of an illusion; but it is an illusion full of creativity that produces, every so often, a masterpiece. It is the flip-side of a freedom which knows no bounds and which can go as far as to change the very necessities to which it is bound: language as social object, style as product of a temperament. Only once they were dead and their works complete did Rimbaud, Kafka or Joyce enter into history. Who would dare to guarantee that they were able, while still living, to imagine the final form of those works? If Camus's attempt appears destined to failure, can one say what the future holds in store for those of a Céline, a Queneau or a Prévert, and, above all, for those of their successors? Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, all united their bourgeois public behind them in the eighteenth century. Is it too much to dream of one or several authors managing to capture the attention of hundreds of thousands of men from all classes and all countries, and through whom an anticipatory image might take shape, idealized of course, of a "reconciled" society? The writer is bound to the history of man, but not as victim or "interpreter." He is an actor in a drama that surpasses him. In other words, he can also modify its course. His labors lose their illusory character as soon as the work he has produced bursts into the world and becomes a factor in changing the ideas, feelings and beliefs of those touched by it, and all the more so when these people are apparently destined by historians to more concrete roles.

Furthermore, this actor, provided he is of sufficient stature, continues to act indefinitely. History is bigger than him in as much as it can consign him to oblivion or even, by some terrible accident, eradicate him body and soul. However, a Rabelais, a Diderot or a Stendhal, whatever their particular problems may have been, and whether or not they were masters of a "unique writing," are actors in today's history to the same extent as our contemporaries, and often more so. If literary forms evolve, they never disappear entirely within some problem of writing. They do not follow on from each other in the way of economic, social or political forms which base their triumph on the ruin of those they replace.

These simple comments cannot aspire to the status of objections, or even of reservations, in regard to a work so conspicuous in its originality and richness. Their formulation here is an invitation to Roland Barthes not to ignore them, but to incorporate them into the development of a body of work that shows such promise. This is a remarkable debut. It heralds an essayist who, today, stands head and shoulders above all others.

Writing Degree Zero

J.-B. PONTALIS

It is not for the first time that questions are being asked of literature; wariness and suspicion have produced a proliferation of inquisitors. But the taming of the literary beast is no easy task, and just two main methods have emerged. One is to try to pin down as nearly as possible the act of writing, expressing wonder at the very phenomenon of language and seeing in the act of speech the most difficult and fundamental vocation of the subject: take Paulhan's false naïveté or Blanchot's patient analyses. The other is to tackle this act from the other side, examining it as a somewhat special form of production: this entails studying the writer's situation in society, embedding literature within history and, finally, defining literary language through those for whom it is intended: this is Sartre's approach. The problem with these two methods, the first of which gives prominence to a power of expression both absolute and non-temporal, and the second the socio-cultural meanings accruing to it, is that they are liable never to meet up. A reconciliation of these two perspectives is the seductive aim of Roland Barthes's somewhat slim volume; it is an attempt to bring to light the relationship between writers and society through the very use which they make of language.

This new ambition requires new concepts, and that of *writing* is one of them: "writing is essentially the morality of form, the choice of the social arena within which the writer decides to situate the Nature of his language. . . . It is a collection of signs which are unrelated to the ideas, the language or the style, and which are destined to define, from within the richness of all available modes of expression, the solitude of a ritual language." Thus what is usually referred to as form would present a dimension which, if less visible than style, technique or tone, is decisive in other ways. It amounts to a system of values—explicit or otherwise—which determines, organizes and actually *constitutes* literary language; not a rhetoric, but all that a rhetoric implies in terms of social and moral presuppositions. If, for example, we read novels, we become aware, through the variety of subjects, styles and techniques, of a deep-rooted identity which is, precisely, novelistic writing. Novels have a common way of signifying literature: they rely on certain conventions

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which concern the world and the function of literature, and which it is possible to analyze.

If the concept of writing seems difficult to pin down, and the realm of facts covered by it poorly defined—can one speak of facts of writing as linguistics speaks of facts of language?—it's because "writing" purports to take account of a function of literary language which had been insufficiently recognized or, at least, whose ethical significance had not been acknowledged. Thus Barthes is right to contrast it with the more familiar notions of language and style (but why doesn't technique get a mention?). However, by defining them as things—language as a social product and style as a biological one—and by according to writing, so as to enhance its privileged status, all that part of language that pertains to action and choice, Barthes fails to make this comparison convincing. His view would appear to be that language is no more than a "body of prescriptions and habits" to which all people of a group are subject. Style is similarly dismissed: it's no longer anything more than a "germinative phenomenon" or a Humor. If language is reduced to habits which the writer cannot fail to adopt, and if style finishes up as a series of automatisms or mannerisms, it is clear that both lie outside that art described as a "pact linking the writer to society."

The question is this: how could we accept such definitions? According to Barthes, what the writer finds in the language he writes is "the geometrical locus of all that he could not say without losing, like Orpheus turning to look back, the stable meaning of his enterprise and the essential gesture of his sociability." It is possible that language provides no more than a necessary, but seemingly negative, condition of communication, possible that it is precisely reduced to a sort of vast, neutral, exterior, abstract body, the institutional massivity of which is unassailable and which it would be better to replace with a system of univocal, transparent, and easily communicable signs. But this is a foreign language, not the one that I speak. If linguists invoke the style of a language it's not on account of a passion for metaphors, but in order to designate the way in which the forms that convey meaning are laid out and organized, or the way in which a linguistic tool functions and unfolds over time. This being the case, how can the essence of the past historic be analyzed without studying its differing value as between spoken and literary language?

In truth the rigidity of Barthes's distinctions, and his sometimes annoyingly self-assured tone, might be thought to mask some confusion in his thinking. An example of this is the way his definition of style—"tone, delivery, naturalness of expression"—is elsewhere applied to writing. The reason is that he oscillates between two extreme terms: choice and submission. But if it is true that every writer reinvents language and does not simply borrow its words and forms as if language were a repository of meanings, it is even clearer that style is the result of a conquest. It is not the product of an agile consciousness in total control of all its endeavors; nor is it the emanation of a

blind unconscious. If it comes down to a tone, rhythm, approach, or set of mannerisms by which we can instantly recognize Stendhal or Flaubert, this only goes to show that style, rather like a face, is at once a powerful source of expression and a fixed entity. After all, maybe the interest of the concept of writing does not reside in its designation of a new space which goes by the name of literature: if its purpose is to allow us to grasp the social meaning of literature, isn't this because it can be a historical object? There is, indeed, a history of language, but it does not have a direct bearing upon my present consciousness as a speaking subject. Furthermore, since language is the most institutionalized, the most stable and the least subject to individual initiatives of all human products, its history is not easily compatible with a total history. At the other end of the scale, style is something that escapes any history: violence, limpidity, meticulousness, or cry, it is always the manifestation of an individual who wishes to make heard his own, individual voice. For Barthes, only writing which is the object of a choice could be the object, too, of a real history, and could thus be related to other expressions of social life.

Barthes is led, therefore, to outline this history. It begins with classical writing which is also a class-bound writing and, as such, is bound up with the plurality of rhetorics, genres, aesthetics, styles and even political changes for as long as bourgeois ideology has a monopoly on universality; it is a single writing that submits to a truth of things by reducing itself to an instrumental and ornamental function.

Then, around 1848, when the writer's conscience no longer exactly coincides with his social condition, this golden age of sublime innocence apparently comes to an end; whether they undermine language or glorify it, never again will writers take it to be that supple instrument, devoid of flesh and lacking malice, of which masterpieces were made. Modes of writing proliferate: *craftsmanlike* (from Flaubert to Gide: literature will be saved not by virtue of its destination, but thanks to the work which has gone into it); *naturalist* and petty-bourgeois (to write well comes to mean placing the correct emphasis on a word, seeking an expressive rhythm, in short "providing a literature which stands out a mile off"); *white* or reduced to its zero degree, born of an austere will to reduce language to an algebra and restore a naked responsibility to thought alone (Camus); a writing, finally, which aims to assimilate *spoken language,* not only in fragments, as is the usual case in dialogues, but totally, through delivery, lexicon and even orthography, and which claims "to reconcile the writer's word with the word of men" (Queneau).

In passing, Barthes indicates other solutions, or other impasses—for these lines of attack tend to end up by reinforcing both literature and the writers' guilty conscience—all of which testify to what might well be called a moral stand: a refusal to make any sacrifices to the great literary myth and to walk innocently into a temple where only traps await. These attempts, however sincere and necessary they may be, carry their failure within them: they presuppose a reconciled, homogenous society where all men might under-

stand each other and where language would cease to be alienated. This wish is utopian twice over (relative to the nature of society and relative to the nature of language).

Should we limit our criticisms to the schematism of Barthes's approach, and put our trust in the method he seeks to promote? Let's simply point out that any theory of the relationship between literary forms and social change can only be convincing in as much as it respects the internal logic of those forms. We find in classical authors such as Montaigne and Pascal, not to mention poetry, a premonition and illustration of certain linguistic possibilities far removed from what Barthes calls classical writing. If we speak of a life of the mind, it's in relation to this power of anticipation as well as the power of remanence: a great author is present among us other than as a period piece, an economic structure or even an ideology.

This highly general remark, one which would be valid for any sociological approach to aesthetic forms, brings in turn another. The limits of Barthes's method become patent when we recall that he puts Stendhal and Fénelon under the same heading—at which point he becomes guilty of something more than schematism. It has been shown a hundred times how the act of writing implies distance and contestation of the existing state of affairs, and how the true writer distinguishes himself from the "scriptor" by his immersion in this act of writing, by the trust he places in its freedom, in its ability to make convincing and real the meanings it uncovers and to open up a new path to things and ideas. If everything in a work is subordinate to this act, if everything must first be related to this central focus, we should perhaps speak of "writing" only outside of the world of literature when the term designates the linguistic usage of a particular social group. Moreover, are not the most convincing pages of Barthes's book those which deal with the modes of writing of political parties or of journals, such as, for example, the redoubtable writing of *Les Temps modernes?*

Michelet Not Dead

LUCIEN FEBVRE

Living history . . . But isn't the most living of all histories that of the men who received the precious gift of resurrection? *Lazare, veni foras*—and Lazarus arose, came forth, and walked. His family and friends, gathered around him and affected by the word, set off; the society which framed him also began to move and became fully intelligible once more for the contemporaries of the miracle worker. Such a gift is as rare as it is precious. In France our Michelet possesses it, in its plenitude.

I said "fully intelligible for the contemporaries of the miracle worker." A relativism which will come as no surprise to those who, like me, think that the organization of the past as a function of the present is precisely the social function of the historian. Of a present which will obviously be the tomorrow of the past. Now Jules Michelet, born in 1798, growing up and educated during the First Empire, was a mature man in full control of his ideas when the July Sun gilded his youthful intelligence. He enjoyed the most enviable of platforms, that of the *École normale*. He had published his *Vico*, visited Germany and its thinkers, and the living strengths and dead grandeurs of Italy. From his countrymen he had inherited the twofold tradition of the eighteenth century, that of Voltaire but above all, above everything, that of Jean-Jacques. Early on, in secret, he had learned to extend it in unconventional directions: that of Babeuf—of whom Michelet senior, small-time printer soon put out of business by the imperial police, had become a follower and almost an accomplice. The author of *The People* liked to position himself between two revolutions: "the great land revolution," which his father had witnessed, and "the great industrial revolution," whose powerful expansion he saw and understood. In fact his true historical period ended in 1848 at the latest. It was with those French citizens born around 1789 and beginning to die off between 1850 and 1860 that he felt really in tune. It was for them, make no mistake about it, that he wrote his work—that he brought back to life a whole historical world which could give them this delight and this strength: to recognize themselves just as they would like to be, in a past organized in accordance with their tastes.

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But there's the rub. There was so much life in this man, he had such foresight, moreover, concerning the aims of his successors that, refusing to acknowledge his age, to recognize that *The History of France* was conjured up more or less out of nothing—I mean out of nothing more than the bold intuition of a genius—we consider ourselves intelligent when we reproach him for what we call his mistakes and his oversights. Let us rather admire the fact that, 121 years after its publication, we can still read his *Tableau of France,* not to mention his 108 year-old *Joan of Arc* or his more than centenarian *Revolution.* Let us admire, and leave it to fools, one finger raised pedantically, to explain to us that assiduous cultivation of the collection *Peoples and Civilizations* would be a better preparation for the 1954 *agrégation.*

Now it is quite certain that a renewal is on the way—I mean, of course, a renewal of studies and other curiosities concerning Michelet. For reasons which, in part, would have seemed unmentionable to our fathers. For the fact is that Michelet's *Diary* is shortly to be published by Gallimard. The delvers into private lives are looking forward to a big treat. I have some reasons for thinking that this treat won't be quite what they expect. But on the world of ideas, investigations and observations that this diabolical man carried in his head; on his mystical love affairs with Clio; on his feelings and desires, on all that is partly tied up with his accessory women, I mean his flesh and blood women, in themselves mediocre and taking advantage of him, what revelations—and what psychological conundrums, sometimes somewhat murky! So then, a fine army of Michelets will process before our eyes? Already, stepping right up, comes an advance party. Their number is two. An American, Oscar A. Haac, well educated in French Studies by an excellent teacher, Henri Peyre, professor at Yale University. And a Frenchman, Roland Barthes. The first who appears committed to an academic wager. The second who would probably put all his efforts into escaping his professorial status, should he have one. The former who, without love or hate, applies himself with assiduity and indifference to reviewing what he calls *The Founding Principles of Michelet*—the latter who, in a collection of "Ever-living Writers" (*Écrivains de toujours*), gives us a *Michelet by Himself,* living and lively indeed, and intellectually most stimulating.

Oscar A. Haac's book certainly represents, on the part of a foreigner, a vast effort to master a difficult author. And to lay out his conclusions in very good French. But I spoke just now of an "academic wager." In what does it consist?

The academic, as we know, is pedogogical. Which means that he devotes considerable effort and a certain meticulousness to the construction of his edifying tables of contents. He takes great care to divide things up and make distinctions. If need be he numbers his sections: 1, The life; 2, the work.—1, The body; 2, The Soul.—1, Intelligence; 2, Sensibility, etc . . . anxious as he is to reconstruct for us a Michelet or a Thierry or a vulgar Henri Martin. Just as he chooses to address Athénaïs in the familiar *tu* form. One reads in terror

lest this Father of History (since there are Fathers of the Church) be referred to as "Jules" without more ado.

Roland Barthes is another thing altogether. His intention, if you like, isn't so far removed from that of Mr. Haac: except that he doesn't speak of "founding principles." He wants to restore to Michelet "his coherence," to rediscover the structure of his existence, "a thematics, if you like or, better still, an organized network of obsessions." Which excludes, needless to say, any careful compartmentalization of "the man" and "the work." Any obsessive and puerile dichotomy.

Nothing is so amusing as to read one after the other a chapter by Mr. Haac on Social Justice and the Revolution, "founding principles of Michelet"—and some paragraphs by Roland Barthes on what he, in contrast, calls the "themes" of Justice and Revolution. How right he is in what he says and how full of insight! How strongly one feels that he has been nourished, and well nourished, on the best of Michelet! How he judges from within, and no longer from without! How he loves and understands the life that was in Michelet, and how he uses life to understand Michelet! There are some limits perhaps to his knowledge, for all that it is extensive. Probably he paid insufficient attention to "the magisterial Monod," as we used to say when speaking of the most wide-ranging and most marvellously substantial of the many writings on Michelet by my good master: thoroughly nourished by the *Diary* from which he so ably extracted what mattered. When this *Diary* is published Barthes will realize this, and will to draw out yet more fodder for his commentaries. But when one reads him it is not at all of these minor quibbles that one thinks. Some will be annoyed by a terminology which is a little too personal. By certain sub-headings which irritate at first glance. I don't much like Michelet's "lesbianism" (p. 136): an equivocal and ultimately obscure formulation. It needs explanation. But having said all this, which really doesn't matter much, I really must draw attention not to a disagreement, but to an oversight.

Michelet was born poor. He had a pauper's childhood. Moving house (often a moonlight flit) sometimes every six months, at best every two years. From one damp cellar to another. Imagine the little Michelet, puny and under-nourished, wondering every morning whether he would see any food that day, pushing the borrowed cart on which had been piled the few bits of furniture, the printing press and equipment, and setting off for new hardships. And then, to be poor, if you stay poor. . . . But he was someone who, though poor, thanks to charity grew up away from his family (which he returned to each evening) in *lycées* lorded over by the arrogantly overfed sons of the new rich. He was "Charbovary"—but a Charbovary with an empty stomach.

"Petty bourgeois" is easily said. Let's be careful not to use it as a clichéd answer to everything. All his life Michelet bore the painful scars of his hungry and humiliated childhood. All his life he felt ill at ease in well-off parts of

town. Don't forget that he kept the grand promise made to "Poinsot" never to make a rich marriage. And that a day came when, to keep him on the right side, to keep him "in order," he was offered a rich Protestant marriage. All the social proprieties. Unparalleled moral standards. Authentic bourgeois dignity. Money. A religion, but a liberal one. Michelet turned it down. For him it was enough that he already felt isolated and ill at ease at those sessions of the Institute where we see him sitting alone, reading, but not out of place.—But his love affairs? One would need to write a book on that topic. His affairs with his servants were held against him. His Marie and his Victoire, and doubtless many other Maries and many other Victoires besides. Good heavens! With these simple girls he dared. He didn't feel ill at ease. He even dominated them. He was "Sir." The Boss. The one paying the wages.

Okay, okay. . . . I don't want to use that to establish an erotics of Jules Michelet, son of a pauper, pauper himself, puny and sickly with his large head on a feeble body. Roland Barthes doesn't need me to look again at what he has written and, if he thinks fit, reconsider his interpretation of Michelet in love with the aid of this key—which is hardly, in any case, a passe-partout. But any Michelet "brought back to life" without the help of Poverty—and not a Poverty wandering the Umbrian countryside, in the footsteps of the Poverello, but a Poverty stagnating without hope at the back of Parisian courtyards, amongst filth and despair, side by side with sick people expiring their meaningless lives in short breaths—any Michelet imagined without reference to this atmosphere and this despair will never seem to me an authentic Michelet: rather, perhaps, a Michelet cut off from his main root.

That said, I consider Roland Barthes's book to be one of the most lively and astute pieces of writing ever devoted to Michelet. The noble pauper who wrote *The People.* And I can think of nothing so evocative as that succession of portraits. With the astonishing and frightful 1847 daguerreotype right in the middle. One wants to hide it, for decency's sake.

Pre-criticism

ALBERT BÉGUIN

Roland Barthes's *Michelet by Himself,* published in the collection "Écrivains de toujours," towers way above all the other books in the series. Not that some of them aren't excellent, each identifiable as belonging to a particular type of criticism, be it traditional or currently fashionable (moderately psychoanalytical, tendentiously Marxist—though not excessively so—aggressively existentialist, academic-style biographical: there are approaches to suit all tastes). But Barthes is the first to date to inaugurate a method, to try his hand at a mode of investigation as original as a Bachelardian analysis was in its day or, more recently, Georges Poulet's insistent questioning of his chosen authors. In his preface, with true or false modesty, Barthes describes his method as "pre-criticism" and explains what he means by this: what is involved is in no way a history of the life or ideas of Michelet, still less an explanation of one by the other, but a "restoration of this man's coherence," a rediscovery of "the structure of an existence (I don't say a life), a *thematics* if you like or, better still, *an organized network of obsessions.*" True criticism, explains Barthes, would only start at the point where his stops.

This way of putting things, at once trenchant and ambiguous, doesn't describe the enterprise clearly enough to prevent the expectation of a psychoanalytical investigation (a network of obsessions) or a phenomenology of the sort practiced by Maurice Blanchot. Barthes's originality is only apparent when he is carefully read, and seems to have escaped those shocked by the book and judging it a profanation or an act of indiscreet curiosity. Indeed, unless the author's intentions are taken into account, his approach might well be confused with the least legitimate intrusions into someone's secret life, or with the unearthing of anecdotal details—especially dubious ones—through which too many biographers willfully denigrate the work under consideration and think they have said all that there is to say once they have uncovered its pathological origins. One could not, however, make a worse mistake than to compare Barthes's aim with that of a so-called criticism which cannot wait to

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discount a writer's work and reduce his creation to a more or less regrettable personal misfortune. This "reductiveness" to all too human woes and weaknesses is the inspiration behind a whole critical literature tinged with psychoanalysis and inaugurated, with a Boetian malice, by Dr. René Laforgue's significantly entitled book, *The Failure of Baudelaire.* Failure? Of course, if the poems are excluded from a balance sheet listing only the poet's wretchedness, illness, and perversions; but that's no longer Baudelaire, it's any old Charles, ill-born, ill-raised, ill in tune with his society. A portrait traced in this manner leaves us without any means of access to *The Flowers of Evil* or their significance: or to the meaning that Baudelaire's language has for us, his readers, or even the benefit that the poet himself first derived from it. Sartre's famous essay is merely a much more intelligent version of the same, with a more reliable method, which perhaps increases our knowledge of certain human attitudes, is perhaps rich in examples supporting a pre-established anthropology: but is of no help at all when it comes to understanding the only thing that matters: Baudelaire's poetry. (I do not deny, by the way, that the philosopher or psychiatrist has the right to use, for his own ends, the irreplaceable evidence constituted by a writer's life-history, backed up by the outlook of the "subject" of this history, to illuminate or support his arguments. I am only dubious about the ability of these commentaries to elucidate the work.)

Readers of Michelet who harp on about profanation have no trouble finding fodder for their complaints in Roland Barthes's essay. It's always tempting to turn straight to a page distinguished by a sub-heading like "Michelet-the-voyeur," or "conjugal blood," or "the wild-strawberry-woman" in order to denounce its lack of discretion; indeed, certain chapters, taken in isolation, can be superficially likened to a criticism which is excessively keen to denounce personal flaws. Protests will follow—elsewhere it will be cause for delight—concerning the extent of the attention that Barthes pays to Michelet's erotic idiosyncrasies, his obsession with blood, his desire to see rather than to possess, to be a husband-chambermaid rather than a husband-lover. Questions will be asked as to the seemliness—elsewhere this very unseemliness will be cause for rejoicing—of representing through these sexual foibles the man who restored to the French their history and nourished successive generations with their greatest enthusiasms. Note will be taken of the fact that Barthes's choice of texts is effectively restricted to works written after Michelet was fifty, that very little use is made of the great *History of France,* that Barthes never once, as far as I can see, alludes to the childhood recollections (which, for a "Michelet *by himself,*" is indeed somewhat surprising). Is it legitimate to use only these private regions of life and to anticipate the publication of Michelet's *Diary* by revealing here and now, on the sole basis of published writings, the dubious obsessions which, apparently, he dared to admit in terms so unequivocal that the publication of the personal sections has been postponed several times? If, as various people have claimed, Barthes's "pre-criticism" amounts to this psychological investigation, can one

voice one's approval without joining the ranks of those who rub their hands each time a respected man is brought face to face with his run-of-the-mill weaknesses?

Except that it's not Barthes but the shocked (or maliciously delighted) readers who focus on this revelation of depravity. The essay on Michelet is distinguished from the usual sort of psychoanalysis by at least two features: first, the concern to place this kind of exposure in the context of the whole person, the global vision and undisputed greatness of the work; second, the respect for its tone and what I shall call the benevolence, the kindliness of the gaze. What makes most Freudian analyses of works of art so unbearable, and existentialist descriptions (Marxist too, in fact) so impugnable, is that they invariably react to the author with indignation, or try to put him in the wrong. Everything comes down to camouflage, disguised failures, unpleasant secrets, lies to be brought to light. Any great or pure notions advanced, any seductive turn of phrase, are denounced as impostures, as mere masks covering hideous faces, as contrivances concealing a can of worms. The critic is a gentleman who knows a great deal more than the author about the impure sources of his art, and who exults at every blow struck against the idol, the myth, the disguise. A sarcastic tone comes naturally to this perspicacious and knowledgeable race; if some sentence is quoted it is invariably accompanied by an ironic "translation" aiming to show what the text is "really" *saying,* especially if the author did not consciously *mean* to say that but something else and, as far as possible, the opposite . . .

Roland Barthes's tone is rigorously opposed to such malice. At the risk of harming his reputation with those spiteful people of whom he is not one, I shall say that he is generous and that above all he has that originality which is these days unusual of always conceding his author's good faith. He describes, he doesn't denounce. He listens, accepts the admission as true and the metaphor as valid, without trying to lift it up to see what lies underneath; the poetic image, or the recurrent sensation noticed on account of its frequency, are dense objects for him, treated as such, significant as such, and not at all as the equivocal symptoms of a resourceful bad conscience. With an ingenuity that, in his case, goes with lucidity, considerable knowledge, and an intelligence that will not easily be fooled, he plays the game as required by the writer, committed to the belief that one can write to express what is, and not only to disguise it. It's not in Barthes that one will encounter that suspect use of the familiar *tu* form so characteristic of the doctrinaires (*pions*) of modern criticism. Indeed the tone of the doctrinaire has noticeably evolved since the solemn moral lectures that Brunetière administered to his victims. It has become familiar and scornful, inquisitorial and cocky, beneath its armature of scientific terminology. But it's still the doctrinaire even if, instead of defending established values, he sets out to show that all men, and especially the most prestigious, are the same liars, all internally consumed by the same ravages. What places Barthes at the opposite pole of such officiousness is that

armed with just as much science, and with just as many of the tools of modern research, he persists in thinking that the creator of a work could well be the very person he appears to be in that work.

The obsessions that Barthes brings out so clearly weren't hidden by Michelet, but were insistently manifested in a multiform repetition that asks only to be recognized. The worth of this "trusting" criticism is more authentic than that of the distrusting kind which is ceaselessly bent upon replacing the man as he reveals himself by a completely different man as he supposedly conceals himself. It is better to be complicit in frankness than in a supposed lie which more often than not belongs to the investigator rather than the investigated. And it is more worthwhile, more demanding too, to apply the mind to understanding the links that unite a person and their message through the changing manifestations of language, than to bring to light something sordidly obscure but dressed up, as it were, in an illusory brilliance.

The difference between the two critical attitudes can be traced back, when it comes down to it, to two contrasting attitudes to literary creation. The literary work, which today's doctrinaires consider deceitful (in the most commonplace sense of the word), is repudiated from the outset, at which point what matters is to see through the private behavior which the writer has supposedly disguised in protective garb. This definition which, moreover, could only apply to low quality hacks, establishes a hostile relationship between critic and author, and that is the relationship least likely to lead to profound insights. To position the other as an enemy and a guilty party is to make him irremediably other to oneself, an object at best for sentencing or withdrawal of the charges, in other words for complete incomprehension. It's not that a degree of falsity doesn't enter into the greatest of works, but this is a creative falsity, which signifies the true by an image which is necessarily different from the true, but without being chosen with a view to deceit. The ideal example would be that of Corneille's characters, projecting before them an embellished or ennobled image to which they then try to live up (a fertile deceit of which Louis Herland, author of *Corneille* in the "Écrivains de toujours" series, appears to have not the least idea). Trusting criticism recognizes that the true writer, despite the illusions of art, can only write in an attempt to capture what seems to him to be his truth, or that part of his truth which is important enough to be communicated to others. The relation of the writer to the reader, which the critic's relation to the writer will reflect, is one of generosity and giving, and consequently of closeness or identification with the other—the best possible route to the understanding of other people.

Roland Barthes eminently belongs to this second category. The enumeration of obsessive images isn't an end in itself, like revelations that would be produced by the administration of Penthotal to texts. Once recognized, these images are placed within an "organized network" which enables the reconstitution, as Barthes was at pains to warn us, of the "coherence" of a man, "the structure of an existence": the "description of a unity." The recognition that

Michelet's universe is firmly gendered, that he qualifies both the mythical entities of history and the predominant images of private life as male or female, is not sufficient. It must then be shown, through attention to detail and the production of compelling analyses, how this dominant vision articulates a complete "thematics," examples of which are alternately drawn from Michelet's confidences on his most secret behavior and the interpretations of universal history which present themselves to his understanding. Gambling, sleep, crawling, the sensation of swimming in the flux of human becoming, the aquatic quality of some forms of reality, the conjunction of Justice and Grace, tears, blood, a thousand other beneficent, malefic or reciprocal themes make up between them a very rich entity with complex interconnections. This entity deserves to be called Michelet, and its bringing to the fore permits the designation to embrace both the man who lived from 1798 to 1874 and the entire history of humanity, the very history of the cosmos as Michelet understood and recreated it.

The value of the enterprise becomes clear once one sees that rather than excluding the work in the manner of contemporary psychoanalysis, this Barthian analysis (should it be Barthesian?) effectively brings it to life and enhances our understanding. A paradoxical experiment allows us to verify this achievement. It occurred to me to compare Roland Barthes's recent essay with the pages on Michelet that he wrote for us and which were published in *Esprit* in 1951. In this brief study, which preceded the naming of themes and images, Barthes was above all interested in Michelet's conception of history as a substance to be devoured, yet devouring in its turn; as a constant flux, furthermore, from its beginnings to the Revolution, but halted towards the end of the eighteenth century by the very triumph of the Revolution, and followed by a "post-history" which Michelet, living in it himself, could no longer account for. Barthes likened this difficulty to that which Christians must have felt after the Redemption when, contrary to expectations, the end of the world was slow to materialize. He might have alluded too to the uncertainties of Marxist eschatology, less and less able to come up with any account at all of the time following the advent of revolution, of history beyond the resolution of historical conflicts.

Barthes limited himself to a brief summary, at the beginning of his book, of these insightful comments on Michelet as historian, devoting the rest of the text, apparently, to a study of the imagination and private behavior of the historian rather than his vision of human becoming. The strange thing is that the 1951 analyses, although they provide a key for understanding the work and appear to address its problem areas head on, throw less useful light on it than the new essay, which focuses more on the creative workings of Michelet's imagination than his global conceptions. We leave this text with a keen desire to reread *The History of France,* certain that it will come vividly to life and that we'll discover its true meaning. It's precisely at the point where Barthes appears to neglect the work that he offers more suggestive indications of its

true inner workings. Why should this be, if not because his critical method, instead of disassociating the reality which is common to Michelet and his works, recomposes that reality, reorders it, and points out its living origins, its insistent imagery, its fascinating sources?

Gradually, over the years, Michelet's writings had become somewhat hazy for us. He was disappearing into the past because we had identified him with his system of ideas, his explanation of the unfolding of history, the beliefs dictated by his enthusiasms and severities. But now he is quite rejuvenated by Barthes's decision to focus our attention on that part of him which derives not from the beliefs of his era but the singularity of his being, as defined by obsessions, preferences and a highly charged choice of words. Now that we are familiar with Michelet's "feminary," we will appreciate the attention his language deserves when, as so often, he qualifies the sex of nations, of cosmic phenomena, of all natural life. Once made aware of Michelet's "bestiary," we will understand that we aren't dealing with a game but with a bestowal of meaning when Robespierre-the-cat, Marat-the-toad, or Napoleon-the-bull loom up in the foreground. I hope that Roland Barthes, with the same diviner's rod at the tip of his fingers, will one day traverse Balzacian territory: he would make some very fine discoveries there.

The results would be more disappointing with modern historians, and worthless with doctrinaire critics. For this is another virtue of Barthes's critical method: it only works on poets and creators of images, on the truest and greatest. An excellent touchstone: mediocrity, pedanticism and sham literature have no reply to make to such pertinent questioning, by which I mean questioning that goes to the living heart of imaginary worlds.

The Great Hoax

MAURICE BLANCHOT

That we live in a fraudulent world where our gestures, our words and thoughts—our writings too, of course—come to us supplied with a deceptive meaning which we do not detect, which not only gets accepted by us as our own, as if it came naturally from ourselves, but which within us and by means of us dodges and divides and changes form, with the result that we ourselves employ this duplicity, sometimes for our own, barely conscious purposes, sometimes in the service of greater powers whose accomplices or victims we are: none of this, presumably, should surprise us, since Montaigne, Pascal and Montesquieu, then Hegel, Marx and Freud, in short, an impressive number of thinkers and learned men have pointed it out and demonstrated it to us, sometimes with a precision well able to dispel all doubts.

Yet we are not really aware of it. The extremely general form of this denunciation, as I have just expressed it, in itself gives rise to misperceptions. It mixes together ideas and arguments very different from each other, as if the better to render the type of trickery it warns against anodyne and innocuous. If we are informed that all men are completely deceived, by Descartes's evil genius, for example, Sade's God or the cosmic malice or benevolence in science fiction, or again by some impersonal mechanism said to be put in motion inevitably even by the most flawless usage of language and thought, we can be quite certain that this disclosure is part and parcel of the hoax, a more dangerous form of which it is simply designed to cover up.

The great advance achieved by Marx and by Freud consisted in adapting the forms of this altogether abstract fraud to the particular circumstances of history—collective and personal history. Right away we feel accountable and individually targeted by the gaze of these great denouncers. As long as it is a question of all men, of all times and of everything we say and do, everything is all right; the matter concerns only everyone, that is to say, no one. But when we must learn to distrust ourselves, because we have such and such an income, activity or even dream; when, moreover, we come to suspect that certain of our ways of being and of speaking take advantage of us in a broader conflict which, at every instant and every step pits us against other men with

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whom we believed ourselves to be united, then wariness, dated and localized, becomes graver, and we begin to take seriously this deception which is specific to us though conforming to general laws, which is hidden yet manifest and possessed of its own exact and scientifically discernible bases, which is proven and nevertheless inadmissible.

Men have always sensed a huge deception. The entire culture of the East tells us so. But what is more intriguing is that we seem to have been prepared to draw from this disturbing situation an almost happy feeling; yes, a vast, calm sort of happiness. For to be duped is first off to be innocent. To participate in this great celestial fraud through one's consciousness of it is to do nothing, even at one's most active, except yield to the pleasure and vanity of a prodigious entertainment, and if one must accomplish painful acts, it is to lighten the pain of this useless operation till it is but a game. We are mere playthings; thereby we are granted the right to every form of play.[1]

Children, whose suspicion that they are constantly being deceived is ever vigilant, show us the connection between games and an uncertain, indefinite deception which renders all acts thrilling, solemn and wondrous. Childhood is the metaphysical age of deception. But, when children perceive that certain grown-ups, generally their parents, are the instigators of this duplicity directed against them, then everything is apt to become more serious; distrust solidifies. The dividing line which until then, at least in bourgeois milieux, split the world in two—on one side family members and close friends, the luminous world of the good, and on the other side the street, ill-dressed people, night prowlers, evil—distressingly passes right through the territory children had felt to be secure: their parents may still embody the good, but it is a good which can't be trusted, and craftiness is required to protect oneself against it. Indefinite, marvellous beguilement takes the deliberate form of the lie: mystification is humanized.

It is in the eighteenth century that the idea of a plot secretly fomented by some men against others brings trickery down from heaven and ignites within each individual a specific distrust, ready to flare up in violent action. To us this seems very puerile. Priests as conscious agents of a universal conspiracy, the world divided up into a small group of men who know, who choose and decide, a great number of others who know less and do not decide but act in conformity with the secret knowledge, and the ignorant masses, compelled to act and live in total incomprehension of the meaning of their movements—this view worthy of a novel, which in fact does fuel novels up through Radcliffe, Jean-Paul, Goethe and *The Visionary* by Schiller, seems to us painfully crude by comparison to the labyrinthine ideas of the Orient. And so it is. But this crudeness has considerable educational importance. It restores concrete reality to mystification, gives it a social form, lends it a human face and, dividing the world strictly between tricksters and the tricked, makes the former responsible and inclines the latter to violence. The

idea of a plot presupposes the intention to deceive. "I have nothing to do with it" loses currency as an excuse. The Revolution and the Terror are propelled by the idea of a responsibility which is always entire and won't stand for any qualification. It's always all or nothing. To be suspect in the slightest is to be completely guilty, and that means death. To be suspect is to have within oneself something obscure and indecipherable, which must be read, inversely, as the proof of a clearly and intentionally evil undertaking—of membership in a shady intrigue from which death will separate one right away, in the most decisive and, as it were, trenchant manner. The plainly displayed death by the guillotine's blade is meant precisely to cut clean through the snarl of the plot which no one would ever manage to untangle. This clarity is the clean decisiveness of reason, and reason also has the sharpness of that cut which isolates the head and, in certain cases, ironically prepares its apotheosis.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have unfortunately complicated things and established the category of guilty innocents. The work required to explain the kind of mystification to which men are apparently given, and to show how, without directly wanting to or even being aware of doing so, they deceive each other and themselves, motivates every aspect of these two centuries. This is the great task of modern thought. The notion of an unconscious, in the form made current by a simplistic interpretation of Freud, is one of these types of explanation, but we ought to bear in mind that it is to Hegel that we owe the most convincing perspective—also the most insidious—on this process of deception, its necessity and possible resolution. On this point Marx owes everything to Hegel. The idea of alienation comes expressly from Hegel, and Marx simply limited its application[2]—perhaps mistakenly—while at the same time enriching it by showing it operating originally in economic and social phenomena. I will not go back over the meaning of this process: how it happens that man must separate himself from himself and from nature in order to assert himself; how he has to plunge part of himself into the objects and works which separation—that is, negation—enables him to complete; how he ceases to recognize himself in what he makes; how, from this difference between the work where his negation is already realized and what he thinks of it (the knowledge he has of it), there results a delay, a clouding over, a disfigurement, but also a disquietude: man is always late with respect to himself and to the part of himself which he has brought to fruition; his thought lags behind his action and his language also relies, in order to say what is, on forms and categories which no longer correspond to that reality. This tardiness is disturbing, but not only disturbing, for the perpetual unevenness between what we do, say and think, obliges us to become conscious of the difference, to deepen our awareness of it in our efforts to abolish it, whence an ever more vigorous development which wards off falsifying stabilization.

The important point, from our perspective, is how thin the idea of alienation has become. What in Hegel and even in Marx still had great formative value[3] is practically nothing more today than an insult. Alienation is considered to be the conscious doing of the ruling classes: they impose ways of speaking and thinking which serve to perpetuate their former supremacy. Again we lapse into the idea of an intentional falsification. How does this happen? Consciousness is mystified and mystifying, in the sense that what it thinks and says can only be thought and said in a form which alters its content, or else superimposes on the truth of the content a falsifying signification which covers it up, changes it or even uses this parcel of truth the better to put over the intended deception. (A classic example, which I formulate by over-simplifying: I reflect upon man in general and I say: either human nature is depraved or else man is by nature good. These lofty thoughts signify in reality nothing other than this: we must renounce the idea of modifying the current conditions of man—bourgeois society—for there is an immutable, eternal human nature; let us then not disturb private property.) Naturally, I am not always aware when I speak, or especially when I listen, of this other speech which necessarily accompanies my own. Thus I am a sort of clown of language who thinks he is master of what he says, all the while speaking exactly the way a greater master causes him to. Should I happen to sense this, I come upon a strange, fantastic scene which gives me the impression of a glinting void: I suspect another who is, however, me, of fooling me incessantly; I am ready to extend this duplicity, simulation and dissimulation to everything and make of it the basis of thought until, in this excessively general view of consciousness ever foreign to itself, I unexpectedly encounter the very ideology most apt to mask reality and stabilize mystification. Whence a certain anger, the idea that only action and violence will put an end to this trickery and that, if there is mystification, it is because there are mystifiers and one must deal with them first.

The influence of militant Marxism has accelerated the simplification. A more and more direct and meagre vocabulary is considered sufficient. The ruling class is no longer content to benefit from illusion, it gives birth to lies and undertakes to organize deception. Fascism was a spectacular version of this active lie. Imperialism is another. The opium of the people is no longer just religion; all manifestations of culture and pleasure bear the poison within themselves and spread it. Thus the accusation is general, but it is also merely general. It remains surprising that a doctrine which ceaselessly calls ideologies into question has never undertaken to analyse them precisely, has produced nothing that could pass even for a sketch of a science of ideologies,[4] has not even described their role in our everyday life. This is a surprising lacuna (as if Marxism were no less frightening to Marxists than to others; as if they feared they'd find in it who knows what dangerous novelty). But that is why any book which would fill the gap is so important, and why we owe our attention

to *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes,[5] if we are really concerned about the silent and perpetual hoax which is inside and outside us, which is the air we breathe and the breath of our words. How could we be indifferent to this effort to rectify images, this exposure of our ulterior motives?

I doubt, however, that this more accurate reading of ideology will please everyone. Yet the resistance mounted against it and the character of this resistance will also surely teach us something. Every month for two years, most often in *Les Lettres Nouvelles,* Roland Barthes has published a relatively short text in which he comments on an incident he chooses at will from our banal reality: sometimes a very small event, an advertising slogan, something said by an actress; or some object of collective curiosity, Minou Drouet, for example, or the speeches of Monsieur Poujade; or again, one of our more lasting institutions, the Tour de France, the strip-tease, the wrestling match. All such incidents contribute, through the intermediary of the press, the radio and cinema, to the intimacy of our life, and they compose its substance even when we think we remain untouched by them. This is what we all live on, let there be no doubt about it. Roland Barthes offers a commentary, then, on our everyday life, but a commentary which is actually a reading. The manner of approaching the smallest events—the empty ones with which we fill our empty moments—as if it were a matter of a text to be read, and of bringing to light, in this apparently insignificant, perfectly obvious text, a more hidden and thus more crafty meaning, is in itself very characteristic. It comes in part from phenomenology and from psychoanalysis. These two great methods, different as they are one from the other, share certain traits: first, they are interested in everything—there are no more areas of special interest—and second, they approach things with the supposition that they hold more meaning than meets the eye, and perceive in them a series of latent meanings nested and folded into one another, which are to be exposed without violence, by a slow and patient approach whose movement should somehow reproduce its meaning—the direction and the aim which its meaning comprises. That is why phenomenology seems, in some of its undertakings, to be only a description, a description which would be a "decryption," a way of deciphering the hidden centre of meanings by going towards them according to a movement which mimes that of their constitution and also by a sort of sovereign negligence, capable of leaving aside the presuppositions of all naïve knowledge. Thus one sees why Husserl, no less than Freud and no less than Marx, figures among the great denouncers.

Roland Barthes's book will have its place in this same enterprise. In it one finds collected those brief essays, severe and sprightly, entertaining and threatening, wherein we are obliged to discover with alarm all the active collaboration in politically and philosophically serious designs which our passive participation in the superficiality of our day-to-day existence implies: when we look at photographs of actors from a famous studio, when we use soaps

and detergents, curious about the whiteness which is so highly recommended to us, and about the deep foam which is lavished on us, or when we eat our extremely rare steak and become interested in Einstein's brain, don't we feel, with a lazy complicity, that we are playing our part in a game which is by no means innocent, thinking something a little different and speaking otherwise than it seems? And we have the impression that we would do well to look closer. In bygone days we were warned about the candid air of the devil, who liked to wear the mask of the good; then Freud came along and revealed to us all our disguises; but it was still only a question of us and our responsibility with regard to our dreams or our souls: that was a great deal, it wasn't much. Now, it's the whole wide world that is at issue, and triviality weighs more heavily upon us.

Little myths add up to major mystification; Roland Barthes's book teaches us this. But it teaches us something else as well: in a long final essay, where he is no longer interested in the content of the myth but in its form, he manages to isolate, purely and simply, the meaning of this form, and to determine the conditions for its use, discovering the way myth imposes itself without either concealing or giving itself away. Thus Barthes's book is a formalist study of ideologies. The conjunction of these terms alone indicates the boldness of the book. The entire study is remarkable. Roland Barthes shows that myth today is essentially a language. Next he shows that this language resides underneath another which it empties and impoverishes, so as to introduce, as if surreptitiously, behind the factual meaning it displays, its intent: a value which it seeks to impose. If one uses Saussurian formulae, it is a matter of two interlocking semiological systems, the second manoeuvring the first. It's a case of borrowing a language. One language steals another and uses it as an alibi, presenting itself in the other right along with the (factual) meaning of the other, so as to pass off the political, moral or religious value—the teaching which it seeks to make us accept—in the innocent guise of a statement of fact. What was a sign becomes a signal, what had designated proclaims but the proclamation—and this is the essence of the fraud—keeps the form of a neutral language which aims only to make statements. The proclamation installs within a language that shows and names another one that commands and enjoins: it signifies in two senses of the term: by notifying—as when the authorities notify someone of his dismissal or eviction (by transmitting an order, then, or a value judgement)—all the while simply making something known, and seeming thus to denote and to communicate only a judgement of fact.

Roland Barthes uses the following example: an illustrated magazine shows a young Black dressed in a French uniform, who, facing the French flag, gives the military salute. The image, taken by itself, says only this: here is a Black soldier saluting the French flag. It's a piece of information, the transmission of a fact which really and indubitably occurred. But let us look more closely and listen inside ourselves: what does this image say to us? This,

for example: "France is a great empire; all her sons, regardless of colour, serve under her flag; how proud this Black is to be French; what a fine answer to the anti-colonialists, etc." (This second language, having a clear gist but no specific content, can easily go on forever.) Now let us observe this legerdemain carefully: in the second language there is a political doctrine, a whole moral and political system, a complex set of values, which may be very good or very bad; that is not the issue. What makes this a mythic expression is that it presents itself under the auspices of a tiny factual truth within which it presumes to lodge and to sum itself up as a reality, the reality of "this fine Black saluting the flag just like one of our own boys." One could say: the image and the statement it signifies—"somewhere a uniformed Black salutes the flag"—do actually prove the existence of something like the French Empire. Granted. However, the image is not being employed to assure us of the existence of this Empire but rather of its civilizing excellence, its value and, since the fact which is represented is real, the reality of this value: its proof. We have clandestinely and illegitimately moved from one mode of thinking and one system of expression to another which, however, is irreducible to the first.

The implication is that everything serves myth and that there is no limit other than a formal one upon the exercise of its power and its scope. Perhaps, though, one might remark as follows: of course we always speak on top of another language. In everything we say there is a thickness of language, a sediment of words always supplied in advance, in which ours establish themselves comfortably and almost silently. We hardly ever say anything; we just move like fugitives into a prearranged communications system, speaking a language that is already spoken, not even speaking it, but letting ourselves be spoken in it or simply letting it speak in our stead. This substitution is the primary feature of all language, not only of mythic language. In fact, although mythic language makes use of the void in language which is also plenitude, it does not institute that emptiness. But what characterizes mythic language is not only that it is a language on top of another one (in this case, one should say underneath another), but, most important, that it is a didactic language, swollen up with pretentious aims and arbitrary values, inside another language which disguises it in the candour of a bit of factual truth, or in other words, dresses a convention up as *nature.*

The myth of today lodges in insignificant affirmations of the harmless and picturesque variety which none but a pedant could possibly suspect of seriousness, and which it secretly loads up with a supply of distorting significance—a real stowaway travelling in the hold of our words. Roland Barthes quotes this information from a newspaper, after the armistice in Indochina: "For his first meal General de Castries ordered French fried potatoes." Later, the President of the Veterans of Indochina observed: "General Castries's gesture of ordering French fried potatoes for his first meal has sometimes been misunderstood." And here is Roland Barthes's commentary: "What we were asked to understand is that the request of the General was by no means a vul-

gar, materialistic reflex, but a ritual episode whereby the General came home to his French ethnicity and appropriated it anew. The General knew our national symbolism well; he knew that the potato prepared in this manner is the nutritional sign of 'Frenchness'." In reality it is possible that he had an innocent yen for the dish which for some time he had not been able to enjoy, but mythology doesn't let anything go unused: everything must have significance and value; everything must say a little more than it actually says and take on an obscure sacramental meaningfulness. Everything is enrolled in one or another of the primary concepts which night and day inhabit our thoughts.

There we have, I believe, one of the conclusions that should be drawn from these abuses. We are devoured by signs, we smother under the weight of values, we consume them and thirst for them. Everything transpires as if we were happy only when surrounded by these signals, behind which are hidden enormous systems we have no desire to control. That is why a tricolour or a red flag pleases us more than a patriotic or a revolutionary speech. And each day new images function as myths, or old formulas return which, to our surprise, have not lost their magic appeal for us. The expression "army morale" periodically furnishes a good example of this. It is composed of noble words which are not necessarily political: "morale" (which simultaneously reads as "moral") and "army"—young men whose fate concerns us—are powerful realities and principles. But what indefinable hybrid and fantastic idol is formed by these words put together? And if to them is added this third, rather vague but also rather alarming term, "dangerous" (which is understood as "disastrous") we arrive at this unique and forceful expression, "dangerous for army morale," which functions like the word *mana* or *taboo* in other cultures and whose religious influence we all undergo. In the enemy camp, the words "counter-revolution," "defence of the proletariat," "class struggle" exert exactly the same power. All these expressions have lost their meaning and no longer function at all except as signals, ethical forces, allusions to formidable transcendent principles which it is forbidden to approach, especially for the purposes of a precise analysis.

Here we touch upon explicit politics and, consequently, the phraseology is a little less hidden (though still very effective). But in all areas we are exposed to this hyper-language, these empty utterances overloaded with intentions, whose object is not to communicate with us according to their rigorous meaning, but to serve as ostentatious figures, as gestures, as signals which set off in us reprobation or approbation, depending on the type of systems involved and the orchestration of the relevant ceremonies. Stendhal's little factual truths have become ritual tokens, "significant" because of this hyper-sense which manipulates words and commands our adherence by candidly taking shape right in them. Speaking of the Abbé Pierre, Roland Barthes remarks upon our amazing taste for icons and observes how confident we feel in a vocation when it is spectacularly guaranteed by a face and a pic-

turesque costume in which all the signs of the apostolic legend can easily be discerned.

What accounts for this? Whence this "consumption of signs" characteristic of us, this frightful pressure which values exert upon us?[6] Nietzsche thought he could change everything by calling for a transmutation of values. But that is not even a first step. It is against the very notion of value that thought must be defended, for thought is as if infested with value which, offering it the alibi of hyper-sense and the prestige of what must be, removes from thought the responsibility of thinking according to what is, and poorly, always somewhat short of thought.

Poverty of thought and poverty of language. Modern literature, as Roland Barthes knows, through the disavowal of this hidden hyper-sense which is afforded it by literary form, and by the use of a given genre or of particular literary conventions and indeed of everything which indicates literature as literature—through its perpetual opposition, its violent contrariness, its refusal of itself and of all natural legitimacy—is one of the paths opened yet always closed back up, towards that essential poverty, that rigorous privation and practically mortal retrenchment which make literature as poetry the affirmation most staunchly opposed to myths. I imagine it will inevitably be said that this frail literature, scarcely existing, is not much to count on in the struggle against the great hoax. True, it is not much. But here weakness, and the language that models itself on what lies short of all force, impede the trickster more than strength, his inevitable accomplice.

Notes

1. Our good fortune to be just a moment in the divine game has been movingly expressed by Plato.

2. For Hegel, objectification is in itself an alienation of the logos. For Marx, objectification is not an alienation, it is natural: man objectifies himself by nature and "alienation is simply an essential secondary process," introduced by history and to which history will put an end. One grasps here the dangerous primacy accorded by Marx to nature. Here begins the ill-considered realism of his epigones. (See *Logique et Existence* (Paris, PUF, 1953), where Jean Hyppolite clarifies this point.)

3. Heidegger also noted the importance of alienation and of the Marxist conception, which clarified, confirmed, but also covered up the more original forgetting of being. "Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world. Hence it is necessary to think that destiny in terms of the history of Being. What Marx recognized in an essential and significant sense, though derived from Hegel, as the alienation of man has its roots in the homelessness of modern man . . . Because Marx by experiencing alienation attains an essential dimension of history, the Marxist view of history is superior to that of other historical accounts." See *Letter on Humanism* (*Basic Writings,* ed. David Farrell Krell (New York, Harper and Row, 1977); translation by Krell, slightly modified). Heidegger adds, perhaps a bit hastily, that as far as he can tell, Sartre hasn't been able to recognize what is essentially historical in being; this is why existentialism can't possibly reach the only dimension where there can be fertile dialogue with Marxism. He

addresses the same criticism to Husserl and phenomenology (*Letter on Humanism,* written in autumn, 1946).

4. There is no thoughtful Marxist who does not recognize the positive meaning of "ideologies," Tran-Duc-Thao, who is, granted, an exceptional Marxist, writes: "The autonomy of superstructures is as essential to the understanding of history as is the evolution of productive forces."

5. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1957). For a (selective) English translation see *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (London, Jonathan Cape, 1972).

6. The relation between the order of values and the proliferation of "signs" is a close one. Values are not stated but signalled.

The Mythologies of Roland Barthes and Psychopathology

André Green

Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* is one among numerous signs of a major return of the everyday in current literary preoccupations. This is certainly connected to the continual development of powerful means of communication. But above all, the essay indicates a more and more noticeable point of contact between those sectors of reality where collective and individual experience come together. As a result, the reflection which it arouses owes its inspiration both to a direct and combative grappling with the world of objects—an approach which can make of a sarcasm the condition of truth, says the author—and to a methodical study of demystification. That is what explains that, depending on the reviewer, sometimes it is its contestatory aspect which is highly rated, at other times, it is reviewed under the heading of philosophy.

From the outset, Barthes plunges into everyday reality, as an observer-participant whose aim is to rediscover the world by returning to the sources of experience, that is, to all the implicit postulates contained in the spectacle, as a tacit contract between the various protagonists. One has only to try to read oneself through the multiplicity of impersonal contacts which fill three-quarters of our existence. In any case there is no need for this experience to be genuinely peopled with life. The world of objects, of figures and forms, for all that the latter are silent, solicits me, speaks to me even when I want to believe in its muteness, or when I think that it is always to others that the discourse is addressed. What is the meaning of this language, and over and above its import, what intention can be discovered?

The most banal facts of our daily existence are infiltrated by an anonymous ideology, whose vectors are "our press, our cinema, our theatre, our most widely read literature, our ceremonies, our legal system, our diplomacy, our conversations, the weather, the crimes that we condemn, the weddings at which we feel moved, the cuisine that we dream about, the clothes that we wear . . ." But in truth it would only be partly accurate to claim that Barthes reveals an infra-reality or an ultra-reality. As Sartre had to argue that the

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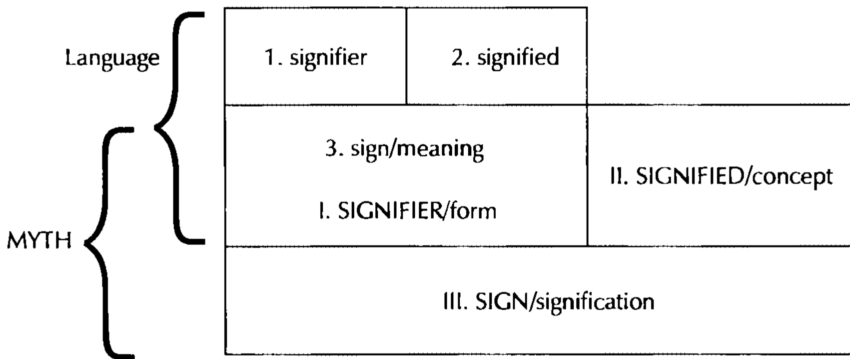
imaginary could not constitute a world, Barthes in turn is concerned to show that myth hides nothing. There is no "beyond" of myth. The latter does not refer us to a revealed reality, but on the contrary to a distorted real. Barthes's exegesis takes the reader through semiological and linguistic analysis—to the extent that myth is speech, a message, a discourse—and ideological analysis, to the extent that myth is the bearer of contents, and thus of history. This crossroads at which form and meaning meet to constitute myth reveals the two aspects of the mystifying function. Mythology is a study of ideas-in-form. To examine the first, Barthes utilizes semantic analysis according to Saussure's system. He shows the articulations of this meta-language, indicating the growth of myth on the language which constitutes itself as a second semiological system, a kind of reflection on that first reflection which is the linguistic system itself. The system of communication always remains open, and all speech, itself communication, is transmutable into a communicable object. In myth, there is a real game of hide-and-seek between form and meaning. The form does not suppress the meaning, it impoverishes it or puts it at a distance. The meaning loses its value but keeps its life, from which the form of myth will draw its nourishment, as the author puts it. It is as though meaning, in order to be perceived, needed to fix itself, therefore to arrest its progression in a form which, in turn, cannot exist unless it bears a meaning. The meaning fixed in the form acquires a status and this status is inhabited in turn. "The meaning is always there to present the form, the form is always there to outdistance the meaning."



(Barthes's diagram, amended)

But if myth hides nothing, what does it distort? A conception of man founded, as the author rightly points out, on an implicit theory of *essences* and *scales* by analogy with the signs of the Zodiac. On the one hand temporality is denied through appeal to the existence of an immutable nature—this is what the author calls the naturalization of myth; on the other hand human relations are evaluated according to a conception which is tautological (order is

order, the theater is the theater), neither-norist (neither this nor that), quantifying and egalitarian (tit for tat). This leads us to the construction of a human phenomenology in a mineral manner: a justification of immobility, of eternity, of fixity, and in consequence, of death. As a correlate of this position, we find the negation of the possibility of overcoming conflicts, for on the one hand, any possible conflict is ruled out, since everyone's rights are clearly established, and on the other hand, nothing is ever overcome, because one remains faithful to a past with which the actual present and the projected future are figures in complete continuity. It is easy to see that this intemporality of nature and of tradition is closely linked to a conception founded on the irresponsibility of consciousnesses. So common sense, good sense, a sense of what is natural relying on a naïve and prereflexive knowledge, is the best recourse for everyman to steer his way without ambiguity through the conflictual currents of existence. Such a type of thought projects the plane of human causality back on to that of natural causality, leading to that naturalization of the real of which Barthes speaks, where meaning is not abolished, but distorted. One word describes this contradiction: *it is alienated,* the author says.

That said, one will not be surprised by the links that might be made between Barthes's analysis and psychopathology. It was necessary to run through the author's thesis at length before broaching the crux of our review.

Dynamic Aspects of the Everyday

It is not the present writer but Barthes himself who refers to Freud in support of certain of his theses. He even describes the effort of lucidity with which he undertakes his essays as psychoanalysis. Although there is little in common between analytic work and the method used by Barthes, it might be interesting to make certain comparisons.

In Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life,* we are invited to register a discovery of great importance, whose roots can be found in his earlier work, from 1898 onwards, as he says himself. If the meaning of Barthes's work is ultimately the denunciation of the myth of the natural, of common sense, of naïve knowledge, Freud's work has similar preoccupations. In Freud too, there is the desire to show that the banal, the everyday, the insignificant, the irrational, the mechanical, all the dross of psychic life in which man seems to have invested so little of himself, is full of meaning, penetrated with intention, animated by signification looking for its way, even if that should be through the most apparently impersonal means of communication: forgetting names or places, slips of the tongue or the pen, misreadings, misperceptions and clumsiness, accidents, mistakes, and even that private domain of chance and superstition, a sort of interior garden for strictly personal use. All of this psychology to do with what is taken for granted, what is not analyzed, what cannot be an object for reflection, is laid bare by Freud. Thus, just as the apparent insignificance of our personal everyday life reveals the individual

imaginary, in the same way, all the material which we carry around as a result of our reading and other input, everything to do with the banality of our everyday and public existence, all that too is invested with a meaning which others induce in us, and which for us is simply the appearance of the real. Freud's work is a plea for the emergence of the meaning of the fortuitous, the accidental, the contingent and the negligible, all in fact structured like a language. But it is clear that this comprehension is not to be understood following a linear modality. Just as the meaning signified signifies precisely the inverse of that by which it is expressed, so Barthes shows us that behind the myth of an apparently optimistic, kindly and benign naturality, we find the alienation of the subject in an intemporal irresponsibility which ties it to a situation of stagnation in which every perspective is closed on itself. But whereas Freud works laboriously back through the individual history of a subject, checking one piece of evidence against another, to uncover the diverse meanings harbored by the irrational, Barthes lays out those meanings and allows them to spread bit by bit, like a pool of oil, starting from a detail elevated to the rank of sign, and carrying to the extreme the distortions of the real. This amplified vision denounces the intentionality which covers over the sign and which allows it to acquire its efficacity. Across numerous individual histories, certain indices attain a community of resonance.

In that light, how should we conceive the contiguity between psychoanalysis, insofar as it is a method of individual disalienation, and mythology? This was Freud's concern when, anticipating many others, he stated the solidarity between individual and group psychology at a time when general opinion inclined to separate them: "The contrast between individual psychology and social or group psychology, which at first glance may seem to be full of significance, loses a great deal of its sharpness when it is examined more closely." Freud's genius was to grasp that in all types of human relations, whether in the isolation of a human being alone with himself, or in the personal relations with others within a small-scale social group, or finally within much vaster collectivities, "in the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology, in this extended but entirely justifiable sense of the word, is at the same time social psychology as well" (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*).

For his part, Barthes makes very clear what underpins the whole ideology: the impossibility of conceiving the Other. There is no interpersonal communication of consciousnesses, but the encounter with a being either perfectly transparent or definitively opaque. Such a conception obliges us to return to an absolute narcissism whose connections with death have been established by Freud. Nevertheless, the obligatory commerce in which I engage with the Other forces me to invest in the Other. If I cannot bring about his destruction, I can both manipulate his image and protect myself from the anxiety which his gaze arouses in me. It is in these terms that we should understand the different mechanisms which assist in the promotion of

that pseudo-physis: "inoculation," the privation of History, identification, tautology, neither-norism, quantification of quality, the statement of fact. These are genuine mechanisms of group defense. Their role is to limit conflict, to reduce tensions, to maintain order.

Although individual psychoanalysis has progressively highlighted the importance of mechanisms of defense against anxiety, that is to say, has shifted the center of attention toward the repressive instance rather than the repressed contents, studies in social psychology have not followed the same evolution. The study of group mechanisms of defense has not yet been done. The application of psychoanalysis to sociology has been carried out mainly under the auspices of cultural anthropology. The path inaugurated by Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* has not found successors of equal acuity. In fact this new sociology seems suspect, not only because of its total lack of reference to embodiment, but because it has substituted for the earlier theory a psychopathology disconnected from the origins of the being which Freud promoted to the rank of signifying life, a psychopathology in which psychoanalysis degenerates, since it depends here on a psychology of common sense. Barthes however does not treat the building blocks of social facts as an already finished product, but as a raw material which has to be divested of its appearances in order to reveal its true form, allowing one to measure the distance between the real and the myth. The distortion is signalled by the reconstitution of the context which situates everything in its place, which gives each movement its trajectory and its aim, and which renders to each character his role. Everyone, in the system of exchange, plays his part. The difficulty of conceiving the Other, a difficulty underlying even interpersonal relations, is exploited here in its most obscure and its most effective possibilities.

Psychopathology and Everyday Life

We have attempted to insist on that aspect of everyday mythology which offers a conception of human relations from which ambiguity is excluded. Transparency or absolute opacity are the two poles of the alternative. It is in neurosis that we find the most acute form of that incapacity to let situations evolve, to break free from dependence, to find a way out of dilemmas, to conceive and accept coexistence with the Other, to assume his needs and his demands. But above all, it is in neurosis that we find, at its most acute, misrecognition as a fundamental form of life. The explanation of the drama most often has recourse to a "nature" against which there can be no argument, and denies all possibility of recovery or attempt at solution. In this way, neurosis can be seen as a kind of mirror of the culture in which it develops, while that culture expresses in what it produces the lines of force of neurosis. Psychopathology illustrates in an unexpected way certain of the processes

described by Barthes. For a long time, classical psychiatry was dominated by thematics. The classification of mental illnesses into as many varieties as there were themes expressed led to the fragmentation of the psychiatric field which was affected by the same sterility as psychology during the reign of atomism. Psychoanalysis was to a large extent responsible for the great shift which provided a way out of the impasse, by showing the meaning of symptoms and the quite relative value of thematics, whether in delusion, obsession or phobia, etc. From a perspective which was different, yet which reached the same conclusions, phenomenology also showed the structural aspect of neuroses and psychoses. A century of efforts has led to the renewal of psychopathology.

Yet what direct relations can mythologies have with psychopathology? The universe of the mentally ill frequently exposes us to contact with that double movement of personification of objects, or animism (described by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*), and of the naturalization of the real. While in the first case objects are promoted to the rank of existents and impose their insistent and tenacious presence, in the second case, the objectification of persons immobilizes and freezes any relation. This immobilization can be expressed in the guise of absolute frivolity as well as in that of pure feeling. After the turn from thematics, considered—as we said—as a mirage by which classical psychiatry was led astray, perhaps a reconciliation might now become possible?

It is not a question of contesting the symbolic value of the theme or disputing that it only represents the signification for which it stands without corresponding to it completely. The problem is knowing whether there can be a place, between the relation to the object and the phenomenological reduction, for an attempt to grasp the large themes of a collective imaginary through a social mythology of the everyday. We have to look beyond the meaning in the contents of what the mentally ill express, beyond their specifically individual resonance, to seek the elements which would allow us to articulate the constellation that the theme evokes, and which is there in its entirety even when it is no more than evoked. It would be a kind of introduction to the study of group fantasies. We might perhaps acquire a deeper knowledge of the choice of motifs out of which the most banal and the most common mental illness is woven. That would not dispel the mystery—far from it—but would contribute to bridging a gap: that of the distance which separates the psychiatrist from the patient.

Barthes's work allows us to grasp the double polarity of the themes expressed, that is, their necessity and their contingence. We have to accept perspectives which seem to be contradictory. On the one hand, we have to consider that the form of existence implied by mental illness is not confined to its theme, but that the choice of theme, albeit symbolic, still has value through reference to a common experience. This only makes more apparent both the need to be recognized by the Other, even in the depths of despair, and also the illusion inherent in the conception that madness is obscure and incomprehensible.

THE MYTHOLOGIST AND THE COUNTER-TRANSFERENCE

In this way, the difficult connection between individual and group is effected. We can no longer raise the question of the constitution of the reality-system as though this question could be strictly confined to the level of the individual. Fantasies and reality must coexist according to the double parameter of the individual and of the group, whose lines of force seem to pass through myth. It goes without saying that the study of myth's intra-structural determinants continues to retain all its value.

But this is to leap ahead of the work under review which is promisingly suggestive. At the conclusion of his analysis, Barthes gives a sketch of the mythologist himself. One cannot here do more than mention in passing the analogy between the problems raised by the author and those of the counter-transference in the relation between psychoanalyst and patient. In the first as in the second case, one reflects on the reaction from the world consequent upon one's action; in the case of the psychoanalyst, on the reaction from one's patient. It is tempting to connect the perpetual self-questioning in the analytic process, not only that of the analysand but also that of the analyst, with the anxiety that grips Barthes when he examines the role of the mythologist who, like the analyst, has constantly to regulate his distance from the object. "We constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness. For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it, but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it but we restore it to a state which is still mystified." In this way we are always brought back to the dialectic of self and other, and the reciprocal nihilation of each by the other's gaze. We have also to tackle the mythology of the mythologist. One day in a group of psychoanalysts, Merleau-Ponty, perhaps a little slyly, recounted the following anecdote. He found himself one day in a salon where there was a psychoanalyst among the company. After watching him smiling, having fun and enjoying himself like everyone else, he went up to him and said: "How can you, as a psychoanalyst, enjoy yourself and join in these frivolities, and even get a kick out of them?"

This anecdote warns us against the danger of mystifying demystification. Barthes understood the point: "What we must seek is the reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge." In fact, the whole effort of the psychoanalyst, like that of the mythologist, lies in the recognition of the other in the assumption of his alterity through reflection, which is the very medium of human connection.

FRENCH RECEPTION: THE HEYDAY (1965–1980)

The Obverse of Signs

GÉRARD GENETTE

The work of Roland Barthes is apparently highly varied, both in its object (literature, clothes, cinema, painting, advertising, music, news items, etc.) and in its method and ideology. *Le Degré zéro de l' écriture* (1953) seemed to extend into the domain of "form" the reflection begun by Sartre some years earlier on the social situation of literature and the responsibility of the writer before history—a reflection on the frontiers of existentialism and Marxism. His *Michelet* (1954), though offered as a simple, "precritical" reading, borrowed from Gaston Bachelard the idea of a substantial psychoanalysis and showed what a thematic study of the material imagination could bring to the understanding of a work regarded hitherto as essentially ideological. His work for the review *Théâtre populaire* and in the struggle waged around that review to introduce the work and theories of Bertolt Brecht into France brought him a reputation, in the next few years, of being an intransigent Marxist, although official Marxists never shared his interpretation of Brecht's theory; but, at the same time, and contradictorily, two articles on *Les Gommes* and *Le Voyeur* made him the official interpreter of Robbe-Grillet and the theoretician of the *nouveau roman,* which was widely regarded as a Formalist offensive and as an attempt to "disengage" literature. In 1956, *Mythologies* revealed a sarcastic observer of the petty-bourgeois ideology concealed in the most seemingly innocuous manifestations of contemporary social life; a new "critique of everyday life," clearly Marxist in inspiration, which marked an unequivocal political attitude. In 1960, there was a new metamorphosis, a commentary on Racine for the Club français du Livre (revised in 1963 as *Sur Racine*), which seemed to effect a return to psychoanalysis, but this time closer to Freud than to Bachelard, though to the Freud of *Totem and Taboo,* an anthropologist in his own way: Racine's tragedies are interpreted in terms of the prohibition of incest and Oedipal conflict, "at the level of this ancient fable (that of the 'primal horde'), situated far beyond history or the human psyche."[1] Lastly, the latest texts collected in *Essais critiques* (1964) seem to

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express a decisive conversion to structuralism, understood in its strictest form, and the abandonment of any responsibility towards meaning; literature and social life are now merely languages, which should be studied as pure formal systems, not for their content, but for their structure.

This many-sided image is obviously a superficial and even, as we will see, a highly unfaithful one. Not that the scope of Barthes' reflection is actually circumscribed, open as it is in principle to the most varied tendencies of modern thought. He himself admits that he has often dreamed "of a peaceful coexistence of critical languages or, perhaps, of a 'parametric' criticism which would modify its language to suit the work proposed to it,"[2] and, speaking of the fundamental "ideological principles" of contemporary criticism (existentialism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, structuralism), he declares: "For my part, in a certain sense I subscribe to each of them *at the same time.*"[3] But this apparent eclecticism conceals a constant in his thought that was already at work in *Le Degré zéro,* and which has become ever more marked, more conscious, and more systematic. If criticism can claim allegiance to several ideologies at once, it is, Barthes hastens to add, because "ideological choice does not constitute the being of criticism and because 'truth' is not its sanction": its task is not to *uncover* the secret truth of the works of which it speaks, but to *cover* their language "as completely as possible," with its own language, to *adjust* as closely as possible the language of our period to that of the works of the past, "that is to say, to the formal system of logical constraints worked out by the author in accordance with his own period."[4] This *friction* between literary language and critical language has the effect not of bringing out the "meaning" of a work, but of "reconstituting the rules and constraints governing the elaboration of this meaning," in other words, its technique of signification. If the work is a language and criticism a metalanguage, their relation is essentially formal, and criticism no longer has to concern itself with a message, but with a code, that is to say, a system the structure of which it is its task to uncover, "just as the linguist is not responsible for deciphering the sentence's meaning but for establishing the formal structure which permits this meaning to be transmitted."[5] In consideration of which, out of the varied languages that criticism can *try* on the literary works of the past (or of the present) "would appear a general form, which would be the very intelligibility our age gives to things and which critical activity helps, dialectically, both to decipher and to constitute."[6] The exemplary value of critical activity, then, derives clearly from this double semiological character: as a metalanguage (a discourse on literary language), it studies a system from the viewpoint of that metacriticism, or "criticism of criticisms," which is simply semiology in its most general form. Thus criticism helps both "to decipher and to constitute" the intelligible, since it is at the same time semantics and semanteme, subject and object, of the semiological activity.

These remarks lead us then to the central point of Barthes' thought: the problem of signification. *Homo significans:* man the sign-maker, "man's free-

dom to make things signify,"[7] "the strictly human process by which men give meaning to things,"[8] such is the essential object of his research. It is a traditional, even fundamental, orientation, since already *Le Degré zéro* studied the various ways in which the writer, beyond all the explicit contents of his discourse must in addition—perhaps essentially—*signify Literature,* and this book was offered as a contribution to "a history of literary expression which is neither that of a particular language, nor that of the various styles, but simply that of the Signs of Literature,"[9] that is to say, of the signs by which literature draws attention to itself as literature, and *points out its mask.* It is an old question, then, but one that has continued to reflect upon itself and to define its terms.

As we know, it was the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who first conceived of the idea of a general science of significations, of which linguistics would be no more than a particular case, "a science that studies the life of signs within society," which would show "what constitutes signs, what laws govern them," and which he proposed to call *semiology.*[10] The natural languages (*langues*) being by far the most elaborate and best-known systems of signs, linguistics necessarily remains the irreplaceable model for all semiological research, but the domain of signs goes beyond that of articulated language. Indeed, there exist on the one hand signs outside language, which function so to speak beside it, such as those emblems or signals of all kinds that men have always used, from "primitive totemism" to the various sign-posts and symbols that modern civilization constantly proliferates before our eyes. Some of these signs have already constituted highly complex systems: one has only to think of the degree of elaboration once attained by the art of the coat-of-arms and its corresponding science of heraldry; the ability to constitute a system is precisely the characteristic of any set of signs, and it is this constitution that marks the passage from pure symbolism to the strictly semiological state, since a symbol becomes a sign only at the moment when it ceases to suggest of itself, and by virtue of an analogical or historical relationship (the Crescent, the emblem of Islam, the Cross, the symbol of Christianity) which it maintains with its "referent," in order to signify in an indirect way, mediatized by the relation of kinship and opposition that it maintains with other concurrent symbols; the Cross and the Crescent, taken in isolation, are two autonomous symbols, but the use of an Arab Red Crescent with a European Red Cross sets up a paradigmatic system in which red holds the place of a common root, and the opposition Cross/Crescent that of a distinctive inflection.[11]

What we have, then, or at least it would seem so, is a series of *extralinguistic* semiological systems; but their social importance, and still more their autonomy in relation to articulated language appear to be highly questionable: "Until now semiology has had to concern itself only with codes of little interest, such as the highway code; as soon as one passes to systems possessing real social depth, one meets language once again."[12] This is because nonlinguistic objects actually become signifiers only insofar as they are *duplicated* or

relayed by language, as is clear enough in advertising or newspaper photography, which invariably accompany the visual image with a verbal commentary intended to confirm or to localize its virtual or floating significations, or again, in fashion writing, which gives objects (clothes, food, furniture, cars, etc.) their symbolic value by "speaking" of them, that is to say, by analyzing the signifying parts and naming the signifieds: the image might represent a man wearing a tweed jacket, standing in front of a country house, but the commentary will state more precisely "tweed jacket for the weekend," designating by name tweed as a sign and weekend as the meaning. "There is only meaning when it is named, and the world of signifieds is simply that of language." The extralinguistic domain rapidly gives way therefore (or is *absorbed* into) that other domain of semiology, which is the translinguistic, or metalinguistic order, and which embraces techniques of signification situated not beside, but above, or within, language. Semiology is thus brought back into the linguistic fold, which leads Barthes to reverse the Saussurian formula: semiology is no longer seen as an extension, but on the contrary as a specification of linguistics. However, it is not a question of assimilating the semiological fact to the linguistic fact, for language used in this way concerns semiology only as a *secondary* language, either because the verbal text is supposed to impose a signification on a nonverbal object, as in the case of the blurbs attached to press photographs or advertising images, or because it duplicates itself as it were in order to add to its own explicit, literal signification, or *denotation,* an additional power of *connotation,* which enriches it with one or several secondary meanings. Many pages of literature, as Valéry more or less remarks,[13] mean nothing more than "I am a page of literature," a sentence which, however, is nowhere to be found in them; and Sartre rightly stresses that the meaning or intrinsic quality of a text is never after all directly designated by the words of this text, and that "the literary object, though realized *through* language, is never given *in* language."[14]

This oblique language that suggests some unstated meaning is the language of *connotation,* of which literature is the domain *par excellence,* the study of which may avail itself of an illustrious, if sometimes decried precedent, that of Rhetoric. When a rhetorician of the classical period taught, for example, that the use of the word "sail" to designate a ship is a figure called synecdoche, and that this figure achieves its finest effect in an epic poem, he simply brought out, in his own way, the epic connotation implied in the use of this figure, and a treatise of rhetoric was a code of literary connotation, a collection of the means by which a poet could signify, over and above the explicit "content" of his poem, its quality of being epic, lyrical, bucolic, etc. Such is the case of those obscenities with which the prose of *Père Duchêne* is dotted, not to signify anything in the discourse, but to signal, obliquely, a whole historical situation: the precious figures of revolutionary rhetoric.[15]

In fact it is the phenomena and techniques of connotation that, since *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture,* have particularly commanded Barthes' attention. Writ-

ing, we should remember, is that *responsibility for Form* which, between the Nature represented by the horizon of the language (imposed by time and place) and that other Nature determined by the vertical thrust of style (dictated by the depths of the body and psyche), manifests the writer's choice of a particular literary attitude, and therefore indicates a particular modality of literature; the writer chooses neither his language nor his style, but he is responsible for the methods of writing that indicate whether he is a novelist or a poet, a classicist or a naturalist, bourgeois or populist, etc. All these facts of writing are means of connotation, since over and above their literal meaning, which is sometimes weak or negligible, they manifest an attitude, a choice, an intention.

Table 1

<table>
<tr><td>Signifier 1
(sail)</td><td>Signified 1
(ship)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Signification 1
(figure)
Signifier 2</td><td>Signified 2
(poetry)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Signification 2
(rhetoric)</td></tr>
</table>

This effect of super-signification may be represented by a simple schema (table 1), for which we will borrow from rhetoric once again its classic example: in the synecdoche *sail* = *ship,* there is a signifying word, "sail," and an object (or concept) signified, the ship: that is the denotation; but since the word "sail" has been substituted for the literal word "ship," the relation (signification) that links the signifier to the signified constitutes a figure; this figure in turn clearly designates, in the rhetorical code, a poetic state of discourse: it functions then as the signifier of a new signified, poetry, on a second semantic plane, which is that of rhetorical connotation; the essence of connotation is in effect to establish itself above (or below) the primary signification, but in a dislocated way, using the primary meaning as a form to designate a secondary concept; hence the schema (which might be expressed more or less in some such formula as: *the semiological system in which the word "sail" may be used to designate a ship is a figure; the secondary semiological figure in which a figure, such as the use of the word "sail" to designate a ship, may be used to signify poetry, is rhetoric*[16]).

Readers of *Mythologies* will recognize a similarity between this schema (table 1) and the one used by Barthes to represent the dislocation of myths in relation to the semiological system onto which it is grafted.[17] This is because

we are dealing with an effect of the same order, and Barthes says quite rightly that *Le Degré zéro* "was, all told, nothing but a mythology of literary language" in which he defined writing "as the signifier of the literary myth, that is, as a form which is already filled with meaning and which receives from the concept of Literature a new signification."[18] From the point of view that concerns us here, what distinguishes *Mythologies* from *Le Degré zéro* is, on the one hand, an explicit recourse to the notion of semiological system and a clear view of the superimposition and dislocation of the two systems and, on the other hand, the application of this analysis to non-literary objects and even, in some cases, non-linguistic objects, such as the photograph of a black soldier saluting a French flag,[19] which adds to this uncoded and purely denoted visual message a second connoted, ideological message, which is the justification of the French empire.

Thus a whole world is opened up to semiological analysis, a much vaster world than that of literature and one that still awaits its rhetoric: the world of *communication,* of which the press, the cinema, and advertising are the most obvious and best-known forms. But the field of signification does not stop there, for the language of connotation shows that man can endow with an additional meaning any object that has previously been provided either with a primary meaning (verbal statement, graphic or photographic image, film shot or sequence, etc.) or with a non-signifying primary function, which may, for example, be some kind of use: "Food is to be eaten; but it also serves to *signify* (conditions, circumstances, tastes); food is therefore a signifying system and must one day be described as such."[20] Similarly clothes are intended to be worn, a house to provide shelter, a car to move around, but clothes, houses, and cars are also signs, indications of a condition or personality, instruments of a "showing." Semiology thus becomes coextensive with a whole civilization and the world of objects becomes a universe of signs: "In a single day, how many really non-signifying fields do we cross? Very few, sometimes none."[21] What we call history, or culture, is also that "shudder of an enormous machine which is humanity tirelessly undertaking to create meaning, without which it would no longer be human."[22]

But it has to be realized that this signifying activity is always carried out, for Barthes, an an *addition of use* imposed on things, and therefore on occasion as a distortion or an abuse. For Barthes, signs are almost never, like ships' flags, roadsigns, or any other of the clarion calls with which semiology has traditionally concerned itself, signifiers deliberately invented for explicit, limited signifieds, in short the elements of a recognized and overt code. The systems that interest him are always, as he says of literary criticism, "semiologies that dare not speak their name,"[23] ashamed or unconscious codes, always marked by a certain bad faith. To decide that a red or a green lamp will signify "stop" or "go" is not in the least equivocal: I have created a sign that could not be clearer, I have abused nothing and nobody. To decide that a leather jacket "suggests sportiness" and therefore to turn leather into a sign of

"sportiness," is something quite different: for leather exists outside this imposition of meaning, as a substance that one might like for profound reasons having to do with its feel, its consistency, its color, its texture; by turning it into a signifier, I obliterate these substantial qualities and substitute for them a social concept of doubtful authenticity; but, on the other hand, I confiscate to the benefit of this signifying link the perceptible properties of leather, which are always available as a reserve of natural justification: leather *is* sporty *because* it is supple, convenient, and so forth; I wear leather *because* I am sporty: what could be more natural? The semiological link is concealed beneath an apparently causal relation, and the naturalness of the sign *exculpates* the signified.

It is clear that semiological reflection has shifted here from the level of facts to that of values. There is for Barthes an axiology of the sign, and it is doubtless not excessive to see in this system of preferences and rejections the deeper motive for his activity as a semiologist. Barthesian semiology is, both in its origin and in its active principle, that of a man fascinated by the sign, a fascination that no doubt involves, as it does for Flaubert or Baudelaire, an element of repulsion, and which has the essentially ambiguous character of a passion. Man makes rather too many signs, and these signs are not always very *healthy*. One of the texts collected in *Essais critiques* is entitled "The Diseases of Costume." It begins with this characteristic sentence: "I should like to sketch here not a history of an esthetic, but rather *a pathology or, if you prefer, an ethic* of costume. I shall propose a few very simple rules which may permit us to judge whether costume is *good or bad, healthy or sick*."[24] The diseases of theatrical costume, which is obviously a sign, are three in number and all three turn out to be hypertrophies: hypertrophy of the historical function, archeological accuracy; hypertrophy of formal beauty, estheticism; hypertrophy of sumptuosity, money. In another text on the theater, Barthes reproaches traditional Racinian diction for its "hypertrophy of detailed significance" (signification parcellaire),[25] a plethora of details that spread over the text like a film of greasy dirt and impair the clarity of the whole; the same criticism is leveled, with more violence, at the performance of a modern actress in the *Oresteia:* "a dramatic art of the intention, of the gesture and the glance heavy with meaning, of the *signified secret,* an art suitable for any scene of conjugal discord and bourgeois adultery, but which introduces into tragedy a cunning and, in a word, a vulgarity utterly anachronistic to it."[26] It is an indiscretion comparable to that of the *rubato* dear to the romantic pianists, and which Barthes finds again in a particular interpretation of a Fauré song: "this pleonasm of intentions muffles both words and music, and chiefly their junction, which is the very object of the vocal art."[27] All these redundant, *overfed* significations, like Michelet's "lacteous and sanguine"[28] Englishwomen or the apoplectic burgomasters of Dutch painting,[29] arouse a disapproval that is indissolubly of a logical, moral, and esthetic, but perhaps above all physical, order: it is nausea, that "immediate judgment of the body" which Barthes

finds so easily in his Michelet, who judges history "at the tribunal of the flesh."[30] The bad sign is bloated because it is redundant, and it is redundant because it wants to be *true,* that is, both a sign and a thing, like the costume for Chanticleer of 1910, made up of several pounds of real feathers "sewn one over the other."[31] The good sign is arbitrary: it is the common word, the name "tree" or the verb "to run," which has value only through an express convention, and does not try to deceive by adding to this conventional value the oblique power of natural evocation. It is the flag in the Chinese theater, which on its own signifies a whole regiment,[32] the masks and costumes of the *Commedia dell'arte,* or better still, the red gown of the Caliph in the *Thousand and One Nights,* which signifies "I am angry."[33] The bad sign *par excellence* is the meaning-form which serves as signifier to the mythical concept, because it uses the natural character of the meaning surreptitiously in order to justify the secondary signification. The *naturalization* of culture, and therefore of history, is in Barthes' eyes, as we know, the major sin of petty-bourgeois ideology, and its denunciation the central theme of *Mythologies.* Now the semiological instrument of this naturalization is the fraudulent motivation of the sign. When a Racinian actress utters the words "Je brûle" (I burn) in an obviously burning tone, when a singer interprets "tristesse affreuse" (terrible sadness) by terribly saddening the sounds of these two words, they commit a pleonasm and an imposture: they have to choose between the sentence and the cry, "between the intellectual sign and the visceral sign,"[34] which latter is really no longer a sign, but a direct manifestation of the signified, an *expression,* in the full sense of the term; but such effects are practically outside the reach of art, which must be accepted fully as a language. Now "if there is a 'health' of language, it is the arbitrariness of the sign which is its grounding. What is sickening in myth is its resort to a false nature, its superabundance of significant forms, as in those objects which decorate their usefulness with a natural appearance. The will to weigh the signification with the full guarantee of nature causes a kind of nausea: myth is too rich, and what is in excess is precisely its motivation."[35] The health of an art, its virtue, its elegance, lies in its strict fidelity to the system of conventions on which it rests: "The exercise of a signifying system . . . has only one requirement, which will therefore be the esthetic requirement itself: rigor":[36] this is the case of Brechtian dramaturgy, *cleansed* by the effect of distancing, which knows that "the responsibility of a dramatic art is not so much to express reality as to signify it";[37] it is the case with the sober acting of Helene Weigel, the literal performances of a Panzera or a Lipatti, the photographs of Agnès Varda, shot with "exemplary humility,"[38] the cathartic writing of Robbe-Grillet, determined *to kill the adjective* and to restore to the object its "essential thinness."[39]

Barthes does not see the semiological activity, then, as exclusively, or even essentially, belonging to the order of knowledge. For him, signs are never the neutral objects of disinterested knowledge, as Saussure conceived them when he contemplated the founding of a semiological science. The nor-

mative choice is never far behind analytical discourse, and this *ethical origin* that he recognizes in the work of the mythologist is to be found throughout his work. "Brechtian criticism will therefore be written by the spectator, the reader, the consumer, and not the exegete: it is a criticism of a *concerned* man."[40] This attitude marks all Barthes' critical activity, which is constantly underpinned by the question: in what sense does this work concern us? This criticism is and is always intended to be profoundly and aggressively subjective, because every reading, "however impersonal it forces itself to be, is a projective test"[41] into which the critic "puts all his 'profundity,' i.e., his choices, his pleasures, his resistances, his obsessions."[42] It has nothing to do, we realize, with the intersubjective participation which animates criticism like that of Georges Poulet, and which always operates to the benefit of the "thought criticized," before which critical thought stands back and falls silent, its sole *raison d'être* being to recreate a space and a language for it. Barthesian criticism is not the resumption of one subject by another, of one speech by another: it is a dialogue, and a dialogue that is "egoistically shifted toward the present." Thus, paradoxically, this notorious representative of the "newest" new criticism is alone in honoring in his work the ancient meaning of the word "criticism," which designates a militant act of assessment and challenge. His literary criticism is certainly a semiology of literature; but his semiology, in turn, is not only a study of significations, but also, in the most vivid sense of the term, a critique of signs.

Noting in the final section of *Mythologies* the imposture involved in the ambiguity of the mythical sign, "this turnstile of form and meaning,"[43] Barthes adds that one can escape this imposture, stop this turnstile, only if one focuses on form and meaning separately, that is, by applying to the mythical object a semiological *analysis*. Semiology, then, is not only a tool of knowledge and criticism: it is also, for the man besieged by signs, the only possible recourse, the only defense. To analyse the sign, to distinguish between its constitutive elements, to place on one side the signifier, on the other the signified: this activity, which, for Saussure, was a simple technique, a methodological routine, becomes for Barthes something like the instrument of an ascesis and the beginnings of a salvation. The semiological discipline stops the vertigo of meaning and authorizes a liberating choice: for it is the privilege of the semiologist to turn away from the signified in order to devote himself to the study of the signifier, and therefore to an exclusive commerce with it. He has given himself as his "moral goal," as Barthes says of the critic, "not the decipherment of the work's meaning but the reconstruction of the rules and constraints of that meaning's elaboration": thus he avoids "good conscience" and "bad faith."[44] His gaze stops at the frontier of meaning and does not cross it: like the linguist, he is concerned only with forms. But this prejudice in favor of forms is no mere methodological rule, it is an existential choice.

We have to remember that the forms in question are not sentences, words, phonemes—they are objects; and when the semiologist has operated

the semiological reduction, the *epoché* of meaning on the object-form, he is presented with a matte object, cleansed of the varnish of dubious, abusive significations, with which social speech had covered it, restored to its essential freshness and solitude. Thus the formalist enterprise opens up, in an unexpected way, an adhesion to, a very profound conformity with, the reality of things. The paradox and difficulty of such a deviation have not escaped the author of *Mythologies,* who devotes the last page of that book to them: the mythologist wishes "to protect reality" against the "evaporation" with which it is threatened by the alienating speech of myth, but he fears he has himself contributed to its disappearance. The "goodness of wine" is a French myth, but at the same time wine is good and the mythologist is condemned to speak only of its mythical goodness. This abstention is regrettable, and Barthes recognizes that he has been unable to avoid it altogether: "Finding it painful constantly to work on the evaporation of reality, I have started to make it excessively dense, and to discover in it a surprising compactness which I savored with delight, and I have given a few examples of 'substantial psychoanalysis' about some mythical objects."[45] All critical irony laid aside, he gives himself up for example to praising old wooden toys, the nostalgic associations of which are characteristic: "A sign which fills one with consternation is the gradual disappearance of wood, in spite of its being an ideal material because of its firmness and its softness, and the natural warmth of its touch. . . . It is a familiar and poetic substance, which does not sever the child from close contact with the tree, the table, the floor. . . . Wood makes essential objects, objects for all time."[46] Material intimacy, access to the "essence of things" is here, as in Proust, a lost paradise, which he must try to recover, but by some indirect way. For Barthes, semiology plays the role of a *carthарsis,*[47] but this ascesis, which rejects the meaning added by history, is in its own way a return, or an attempted return, to reality. His method is almost the opposite of that of (modern) poetry, that language *without writing* by which man "confronts the world of objects without going through any of the forms of history or of social life":[48] the semiological procedure seems to consist on the contrary in accepting the deviation as inevitable, in the belief that ideology and its rhetoric overlie the entire surface of reality,[49] that the only way of obviating this is to confront them in order to traverse them, and therefore that the poetic project of an immediate speech is a sort of utopia. But the opposition of means must not conceal the kinship of ends: the semiologist as Barthes understands him is also in search of "the inalienable meaning of things,"[50] which he uncovers beneath their alienated meaning. The movement from the (ideological) signified to the (real) signifier is only apparently therefore an abandonment of meaning. It would be better to say that it leads from the ideological meaning, which is an (abusive) speech, to the poetic meaning, which is a silent presence. "Things must taste of what they are," Curnonsky demands. The rediscovery of this profound taste is perhaps the unacknowledged aim of the semiologist.

This explains the privilege accorded, and preserved throughout his work, to Literature. For Barthes, literature uses signs, following Kafka's lesson, not to name a meaning but to "deceive," that is to say, both to offer it and to suspend it. In the literary work, the transitive movement of the verbal message stops and is absorbed into a "pure spectacle."[51] To the proliferation of meaning, literature opposes a resistance that is all the more effective in that its instruments are exclusively of a semantic order, and that all its works are composed of language. Far from turning away from that rather sickening technique which Barthes calls the "cooking up of meaning," literature is wholly and entirely committed to it, but in act, in order to free itself from it, preserving the significations, but diverting them from their signifying function. The literary work tends to turn itself into a monument of reticence and ambiguity, but it constructs this silent object, so to speak, with words, and this work of abolishing meaning is a typically semiological process, liable as such to an analysis of the same order: literature is a rhetoric of silence.[52] Its *art* consists entirely in making language, a vehicle of knowledge and rather hasty opinion, a locus of uncertainty and interrogation. It suggests that the world signifies, but "without saying *what*":[53] it describes objects and people, relates events, and instead of imposing on them definite, fixed significations, as does social speech (and also, of course, "bad" literature), it leaves them, or rather restores to them, by a very subtle technique (which is still to be studied) of semantic evasion, that "shaky," ambiguous, uncertain meaning, which is their truth. Thus it *breathes new life into the world,* freeing it from the pressure of social meaning, which is a named meaning, and therefore a dead meaning,[54] maintaining as long as possible that opening, that *uncertainty of signs,* which allows one to breathe. Thus literature is for the semiologist (the critic) a permanent temptation, an endless vocation postponed until later, experienced only in this dilatory mode: like the Proustian Narrator, the semiologist is a "writer postponed";[55] he constantly intends to *write,* that is to say, to turn over the meaning of signs and to send language back to the silence that forms part of it; but the postponement is only apparent, for this intention to write, this "Moses-like gaze" on the work to come is already Literature.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), p. 21; *On Racine,* Richard Howard, tr. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 9.
2. Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), p. 272; *Critical Essays,* Richard Howard, tr. (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 275.
3. *Essais critiques,* p. 254; *C.E.,* p. 257.
4. *Essais critiques,* p. 256; *C.E.,* p. 259.
5. *Essais critiques,* p. 257; *C.E.,* p. 260.
6. *Essais critiques,* p. 272; *C.E.,* p. 275.
7. *Essais critiques,* p. 260; *C.E.,* p. 263.

8. *Essais critiques*, p. 218; *C.E.*, p. 218.

9. Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1953), p. 8; *Writing Degree Zero*, Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, trs. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 8.

10. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1916), p. 33; *Course in General Linguistics*, Wade Baskin, tr. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 16.

11. *Essais critiques*, p. 209; *C.E.*, p. 208.

12. *Communications* (1964), 4:2. It is evident here that for Barthes the interest of a code is to be measured not by its social utility, but by its "depth," that is to to say, its anthropological resonance.

13. Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 2:696; "Rhumbs" in Valéry, *Analects*, Stuart Gilbert, tr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 259.

14. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 94; *What is Literature?*, Bernard Frechtman, tr. (New York: Harper, 1949), p. 38.

15. *Le Degré zéro*, p. 7; *Writing Degree Zero*, p. 7.

16. Or, more crudely, [(sail = ship) = poetry] = rhetoric.

17. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), p. 222; part of this volume translated as *Mythologies*, Annette Lavers, tr. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), the remainder in Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, Richard Howard, tr. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979). *Myth.*, p. 115.

18. *Mythologies*, p. 242; *Myth.*, p. 134.

19. *Mythologies*, p. 223; *Myth.*, pp. 116–17.

20. *Essais critiques*, p. 155; *C.E.*, p. 152.

21. *Mythologies*, p. 219; *Myth.*, p. 112.

22. *Essais critiques*, p. 219; *C.E.*, p. 219.

23. *Sur Racine*, p. 160; *On Racine*, p. 165.

24. *Essais critiques*, p. 53; *C.E.*, p. 41. My italics.

25. *Sur Racine*, p. 138; *On Racine*, p. 144.

26. *Essais critiques*, p. 74; *C.E.*, pp. 62–63.

27. *Mythologies*, p. 189; *Eiffel Tower*, p. 119.

28. *Michelet par lui-même* (Paris: Seuil, 1954), p. 80.

29. *Essais critiques*, p. 25; *C.E.*, p. 9.

30. *Michelet*, p. 181.

31. *Mythologies*, p. 190; *Eiffel Tower*, p. 120.

32. *Mythologies*, p. 28; *Myth.*, p. 28.

33. *Essais critiques*, p. 58; *C.E.*, p. 46.

34. *Mythologies*, p. 28; *Myth.*, p. 28.

35. *Mythologies*, p. 234; *Myth.*, p. 126.

36. *Essais critiques*, p. 142; *C.E.*, p. 137.

37. *Essais critiques*, p. 87; *C.E.*, p. 74.

38. *Mythologies*, p. 25; *Eiffel Tower*, p. 22.

39. *Essais critiques*, p. 34; *C.E.*, p. 18.

40. *Essais critiques*, p. 84; *C.E.*, p. 71.

41. *Sur Racine*, p. 161; *On Racine*, p. 166.

42. *Essais critiques*, p. 257; *C.E.*, p. 260.

43. *Mythologies*, p. 231; *Myth.*, p. 124.

44. *Essais critiques*, p. 256; *C.E.*, p. 259.

45. *Mythologies*, p. 267; *Myth.*, p. 158.

46. *Mythologies*, p. 64; *Myth.*, pp. 54–55.

47. "The novelist's labor [Barthes is writing about Robbe-Grillet] is in a sense cathartic; it purges things of the *undue* meaning men ceaselessly deposit upon them." *Essais critiques*, p. 199; *C.E.*, p. 198. My italics.

48. *Le Degré zéro*, p. 76; *Writing Degree Zero*, p. 58.

49. "To the general ideology . . . correspond signifiers of connotation which are specified according to the chosen substance. These signifiers will be called *connotators* and the set of connotators a *rhetoric,* rhetoric thus appearing as the signifying aspect of ideology" ("Rhétorique de l'image," *Communications,* 4:49; "Rhetoric of the Image" in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text,* Stephen Heath, tr. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 49). This means that the raw object, as the denoted message, becomes a signifier only once it is invested, by social rhetoric, with a value of ideological connotation of which it becomes the *hostage,* that is to say, the prisoner and the guarantor, from which only semiological analysis, through criticism, can free it. While "poetic" speech, as we might call that speech which immediately names the deep meaning without having rendered the ideological meaning harmless, runs the risk in turn of being invested by social speech, and of alienating what it has taken charge of. How many poetic truths have thus become advertising myths? This is because, under the pressure of ideology, the most innocent speech is also the most exposed, and therefore the most dangerous.

50. *Mythologies,* p. 268; *Myth.,* p. 159.

51. *Essais critiques,* p. 151; *C.E.,* p. 146.

52. We know that on certain jukeboxes one can get, for the same price as the latest tune, a period of silence equal to that of a record: it may in fact be a blank record specially made for this purpose. But whatever the means, the lesson of this invention is clear, namely, that in a civilization of noise silence must also be a *product,* that it is the fruit of a technology and a commercial object. There is no question of stopping the racket, which ought to be muffled as quickly as possible, but on occasion one is able, by paying the price, to get it to run silently. Likewise, in a civilization of meaning, though there is no longer any place for "truly insignificant objects," it is still possible to produce objects loaded with significations, but conceived in such a way that these significations cancel each other out, disperse, or are reabsorbed, like mechanical functions in Ashby's homeostat. No one is really able (or permitted) to be entirely silent, but the writer has the special, indispensable, indeed sacred function, of speaking "in order to say nothing," or to say "*What?*"

53. *Essais critiques,* p. 264; *C.E.,* p. 267.

54. "Once [literature] turns around to look at what it loves, all that is left is a named meaning, which is a dead meaning" (*Essais critiques,* p. 265; *C.E.,* p. 268). But "there is only meaning that is named" (*Communications,* 4:2). A whole (physical) anguish stands between these two formulas. The weight of meaning is, literally, *a dead weight.* It is the body of Eurydice, killed not by a glance, but by an indiscreet word.

55. *Essais critiques,* p. 18; *C.E.,* p. xxi.

[Intervention in the Barthes-Picard Affair]

SERGE DOUBROVSKY

In the beginning, then, was Barthes. That primacy is of neither a logical nor a chronological but rather, as it were, of a teratological order. Roland Barthes's *Sur Racine* hurls us from the word go—a very Racinian procedure—into the heart of a paroxysm: "You are about to hear the utmost horrors . . ." And Raymond Picard devotes more than half of his pamphlet to enumerating those horrors. A masterpiece stood on its head, Barthes's book is seen as "one of the most significant efforts" to evolve a new criticism (*Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture,* Paris: Pauvert, 1965, p. 12) of which Picard has already (pp. 9 and 10) taken pains to stress the inconsistent and rhapsodic nature. One is inclined to ask, ingenuously, how this *one* work can actually represent a movement which has previously been denied any kind of unity, and just how any evidence that could incriminate Barthes could also be stretched to cover Goldmann or Richard. The second part of the pamphlet brings enlightenment on this point: this unity linking the new critics, undetectable but nevertheless postulated, is a privative unity, the unity formed by the "common errors that define them" (p. 87). The act of confounding the heretic par excellence thus serves at the same blow to unmask every other heresy, since beneath their hypocritical differences of opinion they are all equally renegades from the truth. It is impossible to deny Raymond Picard a certain inquisitorial logic.

Let us look at the prosecution's case in detail. For a start, what form does it take? To which the answer is: exactly the form it would have taken in the seventeenth century. The Sorbonne (in Raymond Picard's theological sense of that institution) proceeds to extract a certain number of culpable propositions from the work of Jansenius—so sorry, I mean of course Roland Barthes. Here they are: "Nero is the man who embraces"; "tragic action is defined in terms of a relation between sun and shadow"; "Racinian tragedy revolves around the figure of the Father"; the use of an "obsessive, unbridled, cynical sexuality"; the heresy of the *homo racinianus;* the stylistic error of the "eunuchoid

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environment." These six propositions once extracted, it remains for the defense to wonder only (1) whether they actually occur in Jansenius, and (2) whether they are in fact impious. What we need here is a Pascal in fact. But since there isn't one handy we shall have to make do, alas, with our own modest talents of elucidation.

If subpoena'd by this ecclesiastical court, here is what I would say. I do not deny that Raymond Picard has an absolute right not to like Roland Barthes's style. I myself experience from time to time, while reading Barthes, a certain irritation, and just as Picard is less than fond of Bajazet's "eunuchoid environment" or Racine's "descensional imagination," so I am not particularly enthusiastic over certain eminently Barthian adjectives: "informational," "occurrential," "viriloid," etc. Picard thus has the right, when necessary, to be exasperated and, if he happens to feel like it, throw a conniption fit. One's reaction to a style, like one's reaction to people, is governed by sympathy and antipathy. Roland Barthes himself is the first to point out, in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture,* the extent to which "style" is a matter of personal, biological temperament. In reply to the prosecutor's indictment—which places great stress on stylistic idiosyncrasies—I can therefore only say that it is impossible for me to "feel myself at one with" those idiosyncrasies, since such a thing would be literally absurd. Barthes's style *is* Barthes, and concerns no one but himself. May I point out, however, that though all precious writing, from Racine to Giraudoux, has its inevitable sillinesses, it is very shortsighted to scrutinize only its excesses and turn a blind eye to its successes. Racine's "Brûlé de plus de feux que je n'en allumai" is admittedly a touch comic. But then there is "Dans l'orient désert quel devint mon ennui . . ." The poetry of the one ransoms the other. And as there are precious poets, so Barthes is a precious critic, one who enjoys projecting his thought in the form of conceits and expressing truths in ironic paradoxes. I find certain of his formulas both remarkable and absolutely clear. As for example: "It is as though the verb to love in Racine is by nature intransitive," or, in Racine's tragic universe, "Ingratitude is the inevitable form of freedom"; or again, "The possible in that universe is never anything but its converse"; and a dozen other observations of the same sort. Then there is the vocabulary. "*Eunuchoid?*" Picard queries. "*Ovoid* means something having the shape of an egg. A *deltoid* is the shape of a delta. So what we have here must be an environment in the shape of a eunuch." At which Picard collapses into well-earned mirth (p. 48). But let us continue this admirable argument a little further. Something "schizoid" is the shape of what? Making fun of Barthes is all well and good, and on this point he does deserve it a little. But attempting to understand *why* this critic, whom many excellent minds, in all respects Picard's peers, look upon as a great stylist, should sometimes fall into certain errors, that would be even better. It is clear enough that Barthes is fascinated by all branches of science, and particularly the human sciences, whose contribution he justifiably holds in high esteem. Hence the permanent temptation he feels to muddy the classical and dia-

mond clarity of his waters with the impurities of scientific terms. The asperities of the style simply reflect the difficulties inherent in a thought that is aspiring to achieve a hard-won synthesis between literature's beauties and science's truth. I do not claim that Barthes is not open to criticism—who is not? But I do claim that in order to criticize his style in any *valuable* way, by which I mean other than simply on the basis of purely personal reactions (because in that case why should Raymond Picard's reactions be any more interesting than those of X or Y?), it is necessary to begin with some attempt to grasp his fundamental intention, and then to put the censured phrases within the context of a general statement.

But in fact, Raymond Picard's essay seems to me to suffer from exactly the same inadequacy on the level of theoretical discussion as it does on that of clinical examination. For instance, we find Picard taking a great deal of trouble to justify Flaubert's invectives against his critics in these terms: "*Instead of entering into the author's intention,* of pointing out to him in what way he had fallen short of his aims, and how he should set about rectifying that failure, he was beset by quibbles about countless details wholly irrelevant to his subject, by people clamoring perpetually for him to do exactly the opposite of what he had intended to do." What strikes me most in this systematic attack of Picard's is precisely the absence of any systematic thought; the total lack of coherence in what is a denunciation of incoherence in another. For not once does the prosecution seem to have asked itself the most elementary question of all, and the most obligatory too—regardless of whether or not, after asking it, the court later decided to convict the prisoner without chance of appeal—namely, the question, What is the general *meaning* underlying Roland Barthes's undertaking? However infuriated he was, Raymond Picard might nevertheless have remembered that Roland Barthes—whom he himself recognizes occasionally as possessing a certain talent—is neither a total imbecile nor a pure exhibitionist, and that the author of *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture,* a man capable of grasping with such accuracy the trends and underlying currents of modern literature, must, in turning his attention toward the classics, have had some fixed design. In order to understand (not necessarily to justify) the details selected for such derision, the only way would be to begin by looking for that design and isolating it. But Picard has not for an instant attempted to make that effort. He picks on a formula here (the man who embraces), a concept there (solarity, paternity), or even, as we have seen, a single word (eunuchoid), and then he picks at them, devotes long commentaries to them, sears them with irony, or blasts them with his fury as the mood happens to take him. Such criticism, scrabbling haphazardly here and there in order to produce a few impious propositions, quibbling at details of style or thought without ever looking for a center, such criticism, garrulous and savagely dismissive at the same time, itself falls headfirst into the double sin of "impressionism" and "dogmatism" for which it seeks to flay Roland Barthes.

In fact, Barthes's study of Racine's plays has a very precise intention: the application to them of a "structuralist" method that will enable us to read them afresh. Any analysis presupposes a certain point of view, a certain language, and, it is unpardonable simplemindedness on the part of traditional criticism to believe that it can look objectively at the whole of literary history and take it in with a sort of absolute, eaglelike gaze. The "real Racine," the "Racine-en-soi," is the erroneous fantasy of realist metaphysics lurking beneath so much so-called positive research. Barthes therefore decided (and it was a choice to which he committed himself radically) to study Racine's dramaturgy structurally, in the sense that word assumes in Lévi-Strauss's anthropology, which is to say as "the interplay of purely relational forms," with the aim of grasping their mode of functioning. But since the structures involved here are not sociological but psychic, they had to be described in psychoanalytical terms (Father, Eros, etc.), with the proviso of course—in contradistinction to the aims of Charles Mauron's psychocriticism—that the descriptions are strictly confined to the objective relations of Racine's world as they occur in his plays, without any attempt to link them with the hypothetical processes of the author's own unconscious. And Roland Barthes was justified in attempting this piece of research by the extreme economy of the character types and situations in Racine's theater, as well as by the constant recurrence of those affective obsessions whose dynamics had already been so remarkably analyzed by Charles Mauron.[1] Or if Raymond Picard believes Barthes was not so justified, then he should have given sound theoretical reasons why not, something he does not begin to attempt to do. I am well aware that Raymond Picard disapproves very strongly of the illegitimate use of posthumous psychoanalyses based upon incomplete information, and in that I am wholly in agreement with him; but there is a radical difference between dubious mental autopsies performed on centuries-dead authors and the simple description, in psychoanalytical terms, of the clearly discernible relationships linking the characters they depict in their works. The arguments employed in the first case can have no bearing in the second. And if one wishes to deny all value to psychoanalysis as a language, which seems to me an absurdity, then the responsibility of arguing such a case rests with the prosecution, not with the defense. To judge Barthes justly—or even intelligently—therefore entailed in the first place establishing the meaning of his whole undertaking. Only after that would it have been legitimate to question—and then only with the use of sound arguments—whether or not that undertaking has any validity, and whether or not he has been faithful to it in the event. There is nothing of the sort to be found in Picard's pamphlet, which for that reason never rises above mere diatribe.

That said, are the "criminal" propositions actually to be found in this modern *Augustinus* or not? My answer is that they are and yet are not; for they clearly appear in Barthes's book, but with a meaning which, since no

attempt has been made to place them in context, becomes lost. Let us take three examples originally selected by Picard himself; "Eros," the "Sun," and the "Father." He could equally well have picked on the "Chamber," the "Herd," or "Anxiety." Picard's bitter complaint against Barthes here is that he drags in an "obsessive, unbridled, cynical" sexuality anywhere and everywhere (*Nouvelle critique,* p. 30). And it is true that we do often encounter adjectives such as "sexed," "desexed," "phallic," or the notorious "eunuchoid." But the fact is that Roland Barthes has gone to great lengths (excessive lengths in my opinion) to empty this sexuality, which Picard's virtuous indignation construes as unbridled and cynical, of all true sexual content: "It is their situation within the power relationship that directs some into virility and others into femininity, without regard to their biological sex" (*Sur Racine;* Paris; Seuil; p. 25). The error Barthes commits, if it is an error, is to continue to use psychoanalytic language after changing its semantic content in this way. It is not in being too Freudian, it is in not being Freudian enough. But in any case, Raymond Picard's indignation is totally misdirected and derives purely from his own misreading of the text.

The second point is more complex. According to Barthes, "Any Racinian hallucination presupposes—or produces—a mergence of shadow and light" (*Sur Racine,* p. 18). "Everywhere and always the same constellation reforms, that of disquieting sun and beneficent shade" (ibid.). This statement contains nothing revolutionary in itself. Barthes himself observes that the problem of Racine's "eye fetishism" had already been broached by G. May and J. Pommier. And in his study on "Racine and the poetics of the human look [regard]," J. Starobinski had already clearly established the central importance of the luminous hallucination, of the play of light and shade. What Barthes is attempting to do here is to progress from the level of purely psychological signification, where his predecessors had been content to remain, to that of mythic signification. And again we find Raymond Picard at his task, still using the same, now familiar, method—or lack of method. "Everywhere . . ." "Always . . ." He counts carefully on his fingers: ah, but there are two missing. "Alexandre, a solarian, in loving Cléofile loves the prisoner he has made; Pyrrhus, gifted with the power of dazzlement, finds in Andromaque the major shadow, etc." (*Sur Racine,* p. 30). But what about *Bérénice?* What about *Iphigénie?* Picard is triumphant. But a little too soon. After all, it would not be hard for Barthes to point out a similar shade-sun relation between the Roman emperor and the Palestinian queen who entreats: "Alas! more quietness, my lord, and less of dazzlement" (II, 4), or between a captive Eriphile and Achille, who set Lesbos aflame and to whom she is invincibly attracted. It is simply that the relation in these cases moves in the opposite direction, from the woman to the man, or, in Barthian terms, it is the shade that aspires to drink the sun, not the sun that yearns to drown itself in the shade. But even supposing that this particular relation exists in the most patent form in only nine tragedies out of the eleven, its validity is in no way

impaired by that; what we must then try to discover is the reason for its absence in those other two. For such an absence can equally be significant, once we have established such a constancy in the rest of the author's work. In order to destroy Barthes's thesis we would have to prove that no significant relation in fact exists between solar and nocturnal in the thematic content of Racine's work; in short, that it is impossible to establish any mythic sense at all in this case.

Twice Raymond Picard sidles up to the real problem without openly facing it. Since he is unable—for the best possible reasons—to deny a certain obsessive recurrence of the interplay between light and shade in our poet's work, he castigates Barthes's "solarity" for being a falsely explanatory category, since it varies in relation to what it is supposed to explain. This objection is almost on target; but formulated like that it sideslips into absurdity. It is true that Barthes's "solarity" is not genuinely explanatory as a category: because it has been insufficiently worked out, because it remains constantly allusive, because it does not articulate the structures of personal myth in Racine in any intelligible way with the constant structures of solar mythologies. Once cut off from its own dynamic forces, and also for lack of a link attaching it to the other motive forces of the Racinian imagination, "solarity" becomes a purely descriptive and static category, which provides, in fact, insufficient illumination. But Picard's objection is quite different; he complains that this solarity is a moral attribute in Alexandre, a question of fact in Néron, a particularity of Greek mythology in Phèdre, etc. A *concept* that varies in this way in relation to its applications is illogical. But we are not dealing with a concept here, or with logical relations measurable with the platinum meterstick in the safe at the Breteuil pavilion. One begins to wonder whether Raymond Picard suspects the existence of *poetic* thought, or even affective thought, which finds the raw materials on which the imagination and sensibility can feed in natural elements. It is painful to have to reiterate such truisms after all Bachelard's work. That the emotive category of "solarity" varies in its significance in accordance with the various levels of activity it denotes (amorous, social, political, even intellectual in Valéry's *Midi le juste* or Claudel's *Partage de midi*) is obviousness itself. Metaphoric perception, which lies at the heart of all poetry, is an authentic perception of the real, though situated on a different plane from practical or scientific perception. It is inadmissible to reproach an elucidation of poetry for modeling its categories on its object, or to refuse criticism of the metaphor the right to be partly metaphoric itself.

The criticism of Roland Barthes does consciously and frequently present itself as a linked series of metaphors, but then that is true of all criticism, beginning with that of Picard himself, as when he tells us, for example, that in *Andromaque* "the path of the event ineluctably fills in the tracer line laid down by fate." So when Barthes says that Néron is "the man who embraces," this does not mean that Néron has to spend his entire time on stage throwing

his arms around his fellow characters. It is sufficient that the phrase should convey, as it does, the way Néron is constantly reaching out to seize hold of people and things in order both to draw support from them and also to choke them. I don't like having to belabor the obvious like this, but it seems to be the level on which Raymond Picard has chosen to place the discussion. Barthes was therefore right to follow the development of the solar myth through Racine's plays, observing it at the different stages and under the different aspects of its expression; his only error was to have done so with insufficient precision and rigor. That reservation is a long way from filling Raymond Picard's book, however, and it is soon clear what his trouble really is. "And besides, even if M. Barthes did succeed in making us perceive the existence of a solar myth in Racinian tragedy, where would that get us? What we are being offered is less a philosophic inquiry than one of those old parlor games that used to go: *Question:* What burns? *Answer:* Fire, the sun, my heart, a roast . . ." (*Nouvelle critique,* p. 23). Reading such idiocies, one's jaw drops. It makes one think of the silliest elements in a certain kind of rationalism, fashionable in the eighteenth century, which believed it could shuck off the whole of "metaphysics" with a few jokes. Because what Barthes is really being accused of, it turns out, is not that he failed to push his research far enough—a quite reasonable accusation—but that he ever undertook it at all. It is, however, literally an aberration not to know, or to refuse to accept, in 1965, how much poetic expression, and tragic expression in particular, owes to mythic thought.[2] If Racine's tragic creations, despite their courtly gildings, still move us, it is because he was able to reach down to the level of the "archaic tufa," as Roland Barthes so aptly puts it, it is because he was able to touch the great archetypal fibers that control our emotions. There is no need here to invoke the name of Bachelard, or Jung, or Mircea Eliade, or Gilbert Durand. One only needs to have read Aristotle. How can any catharsis be looked for in a play if the drama is not a psychodrama, if it does not project, into the interplay of those legendary figures it evokes, all that is deepest and most primitive in our "terrors" and our "pities"? One is forced to conclude that it was not by pure chance that Racine was so fascinated by certain themes of Greek mythology, as Corneille was by Roman history; nor a simple coincidence that those same Greek myths have also been employed as illustrations in the language of psychoanalysis, and even as models for its researches. Since all poets since the beginning of time have always sensed that the human condition is, in a certain way, the battlefield of a great struggle between Day and Night, Darkness and Light (and, more than any of them, the superlative poet who could write; Et la mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté, / Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa pureté," [And death, stealing the light from my eyes, restores to the day, which they were sullying, all its purity . . .]), then to attempt an elucidation of the particular sense that this great cosmic confrontation takes in the Racinian universe is clearly an attempt to lead us into its living center, into the fire from which its inner

radiance proceeds. Whether or not Barthes's attempt has been successful remains, needless to say, open to discussion. But to reject the attempt itself as of no significance, when it constitutes a possible means of access to an essential signification, is unpardonable blindness on the part of a critic today.

It is when we come up against a precise detail of this sort, it seems to me, that we are best able to grasp—better than in any amount of theoretical manifestos—the real cause of opposition between the new and the old critical movements, and that we are able to put our finger on the essential reasons for the birth and development of the new movement. The value of the new criticism lies less in its answers, which are always open to contest, than in the questions, the essential and hitherto disregarded questions, that it poses; if there is any real newness, then, it lies entirely in the field of interrogation. All the commentators have noted the importance of heredity and "blood" in Racine's plays; our concern is to evaluate its exact meaning. Roland Barthes sees this blood, "which occupies an eminent position in the Racinian metaphysics," as "an extended substitute for the Father" (*Sur Racine,* pp. 48–49). But paternity, like sexuality, has a particular meaning for Barthes in this context (which makes it even harder to understand R. Picard's complaint: "One is therefore never sure exactly what meaning to lend to the terms *Father* [with a capital letter], *Eros, Error, Law,* and *Blood,* which constantly recur," *Nouvelle critique,* p. 25): "In both cases we are dealing not with a biological reality but essentially with a form: Blood is a more diffuse and consequently even more terrible anteriority than the Father. . . . Blood is therefore literally a Law, which means a bond and a legality. The only movement open to the son is to break that bond, not to detach himself from it" (*Sur Racine,* p. 49). So that far from having "determined to unmask an unbridled sexuality" as Picard accuses him of doing (*Nouvelle critique,* p. 34), one may say that Roland Barthes is doing exactly the opposite: purging carnal relationships until he has lent them a metaphysical transparency: "The inexpiable struggle of Father and son is that of God and the man he created" (*Sur Racine,* p. 49). If Barthes has sinned, then it is through a diametrically opposite excess from the one of which he has been accused, and I personally believe that Mauron, by dealing with these parental relationships more literally, achieved a more accurate and precise description. The weakness of "structuralist" analysis, to my way of thinking, is in supposing that it can render the concrete movement of real existence by means of a combination of figures and operational signs; it is in putting its faith in the illusion that human reality is in the last resort amenable to some kind of *scientific* comprehension, whereas in fact it is rightly the province of a *dialectical* comprehension. Be that as it may, Roland Barthes certainly reveals to us, at the heart of the parent-offspring bond, a relationship to authority that he considers a fundamental one, and it is thus at the level of struggles-for-power that he places the tragic contradiction in Racine's universe. One may or may not agree with this interpretation. Personally I believe it to be accurate, but with considerable reservations as to the details of

Barthes's analysis. Although I arrive at the same conclusion, it is by somewhat different paths, and I am perfectly prepared to accept that others may judge it to be erroneous.

Raymond Picard does not see things quite the same way however, and once again it is ultimately not the *validity* of Roland Barthes's interpretations he disputes but their *utility:* "Of what interest is it to observe that in tragedy, as in no matter what human social group, such and such an individual, whether for political, family, or spiritual reasons, possesses power or influence over another?" (*Nouvelle critique,* pp. 39–40). Of what interest? The question is comical indeed, and confirms, if confirmation were needed, the total incomprehension already amply demonstrated with regard to the importance of myth. There can be no tragic action, in the Greek classics as in Shakespeare, in Corneille as in Racine, other than in a world of *greatness.* Tragedy is a sport of kings and princes; and referring to human misfortunes in his preface to *Don Sanche,* Corneille observes, albeit with some regret, that "history disdains to record them unless they have descended upon one of those great heads." It is certainly not by chance that tragic dignity demands, as Corneille again tells us elsewhere, "some great interest of state, or some passion nobler and more virile than love." As George Steiner reminded us more recently, "There is nothing democratic in the tragic vision. The royal and heroic characters that the gods honor with their vengeance exist on a plane higher than ours in the hierarchy" (*The Death of Tragedy,* p. 175). In order for a *fall* to occur (and that according to Aristotle is the essence of tragedy), it is manifestly evident that there must be *height:* the comic character, servant or merchant, could never "fall," since he is by nature already "low." George Steiner has clearly shown that the tragic vision is always bound up with an aristocratic civilization, and that the decline of the latter always entails the death of the former: as soon as the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of bourgeois optimism, as soon as the romantics, faithfully following Rousseau, decided that crime no longer leads to punishment but to redemption, tragedy was finished. And there is certainly no doubt that in the seventeenth century, at any rate, the sense of greatness was inextricably bound up with the monarchic hierarchy. Metaphysics and history coincide in this case; for a man's fall will always be greater in proportion to the degree of his aspiration toward political and ethical "greatness." The "authority relation" and the "power relations" that Barthes speaks of do, therefore, lie at the heart of the tragic universe. A power crisis underlies the whole anguished progress of Oedipus, proud king of Thebes; and gives its meaning to the sacrifice of his daughter Antigone; it is a power crisis that sharpens the agony of Lear, who is dispossessed of his reason as a result of dispossessing himself of his kingdom. Nor could it be otherwise in Racine. And not by virtue of some sort of "law of Literary Kinds" with relevance solely to literary history: such a "law," far from being a principle of explanation, would have to be explained itself. It is in the rigor with which he has practiced this necessity that Racine's genius lies. Whether in

Pyrrhus or in Titus, in Agamemnon or in Mithridate, the emotional crisis has no meaning except within the context of a moral and political crisis of power, over self and over others. Racine's supreme art is to show us, in the character of Néron, the quest for love inextricably bound up with the will to power: it is to the degree that he is able to appropriate Junie for himself, with impunity, that Néron effectively liberates himself from the twofold tutelage of Burrhus and Agrippine, that he affirms himself as emperor; but just at the moment when he believes he has grasped true power, his empire escapes him in erotic alienation. There is no Racinian tragedy that is not fundamentally the spectacle of a "power relation" wrestling desperately with a subversive Eros threatening to undermine a universal Order.

Such is ultimately the meaning of the "equation" Barthes gives us:

> A has total power over B
> A loves B, who does not love A,

which Picard finds so infuriating. The presentation may lack charm, and I must confess that I agree with Picard in finding it pointlessly mathematical; criticism is never a form of "algebra," despite the secret hopes of the structuralists. But once again, though one may find objections to the letter of the interpretation, it is impossible to condemn the spirit behind it, the concern for truth that ought to guide all research desirous of reaching beyond mere surfaces. From the primitive "herd" to the court of Louis XIV, with admittedly important and even essential differences which Barthes does not stress sufficiently (this is what I shall term the *political level,* on which *Sur Racine* never moves), it is still true that the essence of tragedy remains centered upon a primal conflict. Whether familial or political, moral or theological, from Father to Prince and from Prince to God, there is a principle of Authority and Order that wishes to yoke Nature to its will, arousing in the latter a contrary desire for rebellion and liberation.[3] Tragedy is the radical frustration of these two impulses, their collision, and their mutual destruction. One may or may not agree with the use to which Roland Barthes puts this "authority relation," one may or may not agree with his definition of it, or with the one I have offered in my turn; on the other hand, to say as Picard does that relations of "power or influence" are of no interest in tragedy, is quite simply to utter a monstrous fatuity.

"Do they feel themselves engaged by *Sur Racine?*" asks Raymond Picard of the "adherents of the new criticism." "Do they recognize themselves in it? One would dearly like to know." In the light of what I have said so far I now feel able to reply. The new criticism is neither a school, nor a club, nor a kind of freemasonry. Those tempted by and those attempting unbeaten paths are not interested in patting one another on the back or holding one another's hands, but simply in confronting and, if needs be, in freely and openly contesting each other's discoveries. Charles Mauron is certainly not overfond of

the criticism that stems from Bachelard, and he says so; there is an abyss between the inward probing of Georges Poulet and the objectivism of Lucien Goldmann; Jean Starobinski is very emphatic about the differences between his particular brand of criticism, which is resolutely harnessed to the advances of philosophy, and other kinds of criticism—whether psychoanalytic or Marxist—with scientific pretensions. I myself have just expressed my disagreements and my reservations in the case of many aspects of *Sur Racine,* which, though they are certainly not those of Raymond Picard, are none the less considerable and real. This "intellectual solidarity so complacently claimed," Raymond Picard exclaims. Complacency? We have just seen the contrary. Solidarity? It is clear enough that I consider Roland Barthes alone responsible not only for his style and his thought but for his analyses and their form. He speaks neither for me nor for any other; like all writers he speaks for himself alone, and that is enough. And yet, in a certain sense, yes, I do feel a bond of solidarity with him. When someone starts using methods that put us back three centuries in order to extract "culpable propositions" from another's work, carefully dissociating them from their context; when someone begins quibbling about the letter without making an honest attempt to understand the spirit; when someone chooses to separate statements, sentences, or words from the general meaning that gives them their true signification, so that they become absurd and laughable, like any human expression separated from its intention, then yes, certainly, I do feel a solidarity with Roland Barthes. The very inadequacy of the methods used to attack him are a gauge to me of the solid basis of his own work, which is wholly directed toward the grasping of a global meaning, viewing each element in a vast dramatic universe as part of a whole, and each part as the necessary component in a totality. But that is not all. When someone attacks not the conclusions of this investigation—which are certainly disputable—but its object; when each time it penetrates beyond the more obvious meanings of Racine's work, pointing toward deeper existential and mythic meanings, someone cries: "Pointless! Without interest!" then yes, oh yes indeed, I feel my solidarity with Roland Barthes become absolute. Because in this squabble that the old guard seems determined to pick with the new critics, I can see, sprouting beneath the pomp of academic caps, the donkey ears of obscurantism.

Notes

1. The linguist Spitzer remarked years ago that "Racine peoples his stage with few characters, but he exhausts all the possible relationships between them." *Linguistics and Literary History,* 1948.

2. As George Steiner reminds us in his recent essay *The Death of Tragedy* (New York; Knopf, 1961), "the decline of tragedy is inseparably linked with the decline of an organic vision of the world and of its mythological, symbolic, and ritual context" (p. 212). What makes

it even more astounding that Raymond Picard should be capable of writing such ineptitudes is that elsewhere, in his introduction to *Phèdre,* he himself writes: "Like Plato, in *Er* or *The Cave,* [Racine] has put into action on the stage, with the aid of all music and all poetry, a metaphorical explanation of the human condition: truly the tragedy of *Phèdre* is a dramatic myth." But there are not two truths, one for Picard and another for Barthes. *Phèdre* is indeed a "dramatic myth," and Picard is right—thereby putting Picard in the wrong!

3. The patterns isolated by Charles Mauron in his *Inconscient dans l'oeuvre et la vie de Racine* clearly demonstrate the constancy of this double tension between domination and violent escape, both equally frustrated (notably pp. 25–26). Need I point out that this is a description in modern, psychoanalytical terms of a conflict perfectly familiar to seventeenth-century Jansenist thought, and one which is expressed in its own terms?

From "The Enchantress"

MICHEL BUTOR

VII. FORBIDDEN LANGUAGES

The young boy is forbidden to use three essential regions of language.

1) sexual language,
2) scientific language,
3) women's language.

Sexual language, it should be noted, is only officially forbidden; even amongst the middle classes, where this prohibition is most loudly proclaimed, parents recognize in fact that boys' use of certain "rude" words is a proof of their virility (the prohibition is much stronger and more enduring in the case of girls); the father, in particular, encourages this minor transgression, even provokes it if need be. This is why the appropriation of this domain does not present the same problems. Barthes rarely ventures into it. Yet in this respect how significant are the opening lines of *Writing Degree Zero,* his first published text:

> Hébert never began an issue of *Le Père Duchêne* without throwing in a handful of "fucks" and "buggers."

Though its display is forbidden, sexual language, like pornography which prints it, is "tolerated." For young boys, the prohibitions on the other two sorts of language are acute in a quite different way.

> Don't use words you don't understand,

this is the classic response of middle-class parents when a child comes out with one of these "rude" words at too young an age, along with:

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> you'll know that when you're older,

when he asks a question concerning the parts around which such vocabulary flourishes. It might seem that this could apply too to all scientific and technical languages, so that the child, once grown up, if he so wishes, and once he has studied for long enough, will be able to use mathematical and biological words as much as he likes. In reality, our education system and the increasing specialization of our society means that the opening up of one or more of these domains is all the more likely to close off the others. It is true that the child who grows up to be a mathematician earns the right to handle certain words whose precise meaning he at last knows, but medical or legal vocabulary, for example, generally remains forbidden territory. Besides, at this stage he forbids himself access to it. The basic condition of this new right is a scrupulous respect for this finally disclosed meaning, one which he may transform only slowly and laboriously by means of duly proven discoveries. This is why, in French, scientific, technical language is the only linguistic domain where neologism is tolerated. It's better to coin a new word than to interfere with the definition of an old one.

Once the tests have been taken the keepers of these lexicons will declare:

> you can use these words now, you can play with them.

Now one of the basic characteristics of Barthes's style, which has become increasingly marked over the years and which makes the translation of his works so difficult, is his liberal use of terms which have been borrowed, or rather lifted, from widely differing disciplines. The distortion imposed on their usual meaning is the mark of his appropriation, and this distortion obviously depends on a very subtle awareness of the orthodox definitions. It's as if he only familiarized himself with this or that branch of science—and with what attention to detail!—in order to endow a few of its terms with a new meaning, to put them in play.

His first move is to mark this conquest, this crossing of a frontier, with the invention of new words. This was already obvious in *Michelet* where the numerous composite terms were conspicuously placed as the titles of chapter sections:

> History-object, union-unity, water-fish, Goethe-dog, History-plant, History-equation, World-woman, Death-Sleep and Death-Sun, etc.,

a trend which markedly accelerates in *Mythologies* with the appearance of nouns ending in "-ness":

> Sininess, Basqueness, etc.,

to reach its apotheosis in *The Fashion System.*

Barthes is certainly one of the most prolific forgers of words in French literature today, one of the greatest in all of our literature. In his gradual discovery of linguistic research over the past few years one senses his enchantment in the face of a sort of lexical Garden of Eden, an island where all technical words are still young and malleable, where it seems to him easier than anywhere else to acquire the right of invention.

VIII. Women's Language

But of all languages the one most strictly forbidden to the young boy, and which in most cases remains so for the man, is women's language; and this, in our society, is not only the language of women's clothing but is this above all else. The husband may of course glance at *Elle, Vogue,* or *Marie-France,* but only for amusement. To be sure some men, should they work in this sphere, have the right to speak this language, but it is then lined with the very different jargon of the trade which acts as a counterweight. The couturier, who not only makes women's garments but is obliged to speak publicly of fashion, is popularly perceived as more or less feminized; this is not at all the case for the manufacturer of off-the-peg clothing.

For Barthes it was a case of breaking into this citadel, of openly using this vocabulary whose technical nature is so singular and elusive:

> blouse, jumper, camisole, bonnet, toque, capeline, collar, court shoes, skirt, etc.,

and doing so without submitting himself to the usual conventions, without becoming, like Mallarmé editing *The Latest Fashion,* Marguerite de Ponty or Miss Satin,

and to this end carefully reading *Elle* or *Marie-Claire* without being a husband looking over his wife's shoulder.

Mythologies had been a first solution to this problem. *The Fashion System* would allow him to go much further.

It's not fashion itself which interests him but its words. He makes no attempt to understand women's clothing in order to make it, influence it or even predict it. What he wants is to establish the absolute right to talk about it. It's this that explains, moreover, the fact that he doesn't study "real" clothes but only "written" clothes. For him fashion is always, as it were, "clothed" in its language.

Barthes replaces the husband's smile with a strange scientific smile. The method of *The Fashion System* is to apply the language of linguistics to the language of fashion, that is to say, to develop a fundamental metaphor: clothes are a language. The validity of this metaphor will lend itself to a turning inside out, so that some of the results obtained in this way from the study of fashion will be transferable to that of literature.

The constant juxtaposition of words and phrases from fashion magazines with those drawn from a science, of which the title is a first example, produces endless humor. Words from one sphere are contaminated by those from the other, and the play that is integral to fashion makes science playful. This is why *The Fashion System* is not only rich in insights relative to the science of clothing but, by presenting itself above all as a work of literature, manages to answer in advance all the detailed criticisms that could be made from a strictly scientific point of view.

Just as it is more interested in "written" than in "real" clothes, similarly the essence of this appropriation is the allure of scientific language and, to coin a Barthesian word, what I shall call its "scientificness."

Speaking of the transformation of Sade's vocabulary between *Justine* and *Juliette,* Barthes makes this excellent point in *The Tree of Crime:*

> We know that in *Justine* the amorous code is entirely metaphorical: it speaks of the myrtles of Cythera and the roses of Sodom. In *Juliette,* on the other hand, the erotic nomenclature is unembroidered. What is at stake in this shift is not, obviously, the crudeness or obscenity of language, but the elaboration of another rhetorical system. Sade makes extensive use of what might be called metonymic violence: he juxtaposes in the same syntagm heterogeneous fragments belonging to spheres of language normally kept apart through socio-moral taboo. Such as the Church, high literary language, and pornography. . . .

This is exactly what happens in *The Fashion System,* except that instead of starting out from "crude" language, half-heartedly forbidden but tolerated (though Sade strove to make it intolerable), Barthes starts out from women's language, and replaces a high ecclesiastical style by scientificness.

Replying to Jean Paulhan's question, in a note in the *NRF:* "Is Roland Barthes a Marxist?" the latter told me a few years ago that what mattered wasn't whether or not he was a Marxist, but whether his analyses were acceptable to a Marxist. Similarly, to the question: "Is Roland Barthes a scientist?" this reply could be made: what matters is whether the analyses in this book are acceptable to a scientist, and some of them, swept along by their imitative appropriation of scientific language, obviously are; as for Roland Barthes, he's another matter and something more than an academic scientist of the classical sort.

IX. Physical Appearance of the Work

Indeed, though the immense labor that led to *The Fashion System* may have been channelled for several years into the writing of a thesis, the outcome is something quite different; it's a pseudo-thesis which takes its distance from

the orthodox variety, not least when it most closely follows some of its conventions.

The main difference, which stops the work from being used like a normal academic thesis, is the absence of exact references for the vast majority of the quotations. We are told only that they come from fashion magazines for the year 1958 to 1959 (from June to June), in particular from *Elle* and *Le Jardin des modes,* but also from other publications, notably *Vogue* and *L'Echo de la mode,* and from the weekly pages that some daily papers devote to fashion. Which means that the original research and classification undertaken by Barthes would have to be done all over again by anyone wishing to discuss it in detail. Thus he puts paid to the habitual process whereby one thesis is nourished by another, the new doctoral candidate returning to the sources through the intermediary of the references provided by the doctor who wrote the most recent thesis on this or a similar subject. What Barthes does is to preserve the value of the text as an open-ended proposition. This *System* is in no way presented as a more or less final set of results, as something already scientific except for a few details. All of the material examined, despite the remarkable light thrown on it by Barthes's approach, would need to be studied all over again.

Barthes wanted to work with the obvious facts of fashion; he behaved like a novelist asking us to take him at his word, even in those cases where we could check whether a particular historical character really did say those particular words. In this case we could obviously check the quotations, but since we don't have the exact references, this would require such an effort that only those people reexamining the problem from a scientific point of view would be likely to make it.

This game makes the book idiosyncratic in nature and appearance:
the visual aspects of scientificness are strongly emphasized:

1) there are numerous notes; in the main body of the text only 36 pages out of more than 250 have no notes; only some of these have the function, as in a normal scientific work, of supporting the argument with references, examples, or the discussion of points of detail; a considerable number of them, by cross-referencing other pages, invite the reader to vary their chosen route; they have a structural role crucial to increasing the movement and circulation of quotations,
2) abbreviations; page 12 gives a list of twelve "graphic symbols employed," seven of them are typographically rare and thus give a particular flavor to the pages on which they appear,
3) formulas, these are countless, and often spread out over several lines, forming figures which are as striking as illustrations; the rare typographical signs give them a distinctive appearance,
4) diagrams; the work contains no less than 43 framed diagrams which are often marked, unsurprisingly, by a strong asymmetry; those which are not framed merge with the formulas;

note too that the dense paragraphs, occasionally spaced out with formulas or diagrams, have a dual system of numbers which are placed both inside and outside of the twenty chapters; the main body of the book thus contrasts sharply with the foreword and appendices made up of normal paragraphs;

but this is balanced by a thoroughly literary element: the nineteen epigraphs—nineteen fashion quotations, without references—which introduce all of the chapters except the last; they must appear to the reader as obviously drawn from fashion magazines; their importance to the overall construction of the work is such that it is appropriate to gather them together here; they act as the description of the citadel to be stormed:

1) A leather belt worn above the waist, with a single rose, over a soft shetland dress,
2) A soft canezou for a celebratory lunch at Deauville,
3) Slim piping adds a touch of elegance,
4) Town wear is dotted with white,
5) A sporty cardigan when the collar is open, a smart one when it's done up,
6) A cotton frock with red and white checks,
7) The twinset makes a conspicuous entrance,
8) Gauze, organza, voile, cotton muslin: summer is here,
9) A genuine Chinese tunic, straight with slits,
10) A sailor top open over a knitted modesty,
11) Linen is here, light or heavy,
12) California-style shirts, with big collars, standing collars, little collars, military collars,
13) A sweater for chilly autumn evenings on a weekend in the country,
14) Coquettish without coquetry,
15) The famous little suit which looks like a suit,
16) She enjoys her studies and parties, Pascal, Mozart, and cool jazz. She wears flat heels, collects little scarves, adores her big brother's plain sweaters and bouffant, rustling petticoats,
17) Warm ankleboots, lovely warm ankleboots,
18) As a secretary, I like to look impeccable,
19) Every woman should shorten her skirt to just above the knee, wear pastel checks and step out in two-tone court shoes.

Here is the summary, or essence as perfumers would say, of the forbidden language. If he can capture and lay claim to all that, fashion will be stripped of its language.

At first sight, that's to say before reading the book, nothing links the epigraphs to the chapter titles:

1) Written Clothing,
2) The Relation of Meaning,
3) Between Things and Words,

4) The Neverending Garment,
etc.

In some cases moreover, a particular epigraph could have been positioned elsewhere. In general it will be picked up and analyzed within the chapter itself, but not always. It is always discussed somewhere and often reappears many times over, examined from all sorts of angles and submitted to sundry reagents. The title itself contains a clash of two languages; at the beginning of each chapter the heterogeneity which is to be overcome in what follows is powerfully underlined by the vertical framing of the epigraph between the title and the first subheading; these generally display an exaggerated scientificness and act as tongs or tweezers. Thus for chapter 5:

5. The Signifying Unit
"A sporty cardigan when the collar is open, a smart one when it's done up."
I. Finding the Signifying Unit,

or chapter 9

9. Variants of Being
"A genuine Chinese tunic, straight with splits."
I. Inventory of Variants.

The epigraphs are in italics, as are all the fashion quotations that occur inside paragraphs. An exhaustive study of the use of italics within a work of this sort would require considerable space, but it should be noted that the numerous English words are also in italics, thereby increasing the impression that the language of fashion is a sort of foreign language; this is facilitated by the fact that many of the words of this language derive from English as is shown by the nineteen epigraphs: shetland, cardigan, twinset, sweater, weekend, etc. On some pages the opposition of the two languages, almost in the sense of two foreign languages, is clearly expressed by this variegation.

X. The Neverending Garment

This discontinuous nature accentuates the dogmatic side of the work, sharpens its cutting edge. The weapons that gleam around what is at first sight a fissureless enclosure are weapons prepared for battle. Here is the beginning of the fourth chapter, *The Neverending Garment:*

> Imagine (if this is possible) a woman covered in a neverending garment, itself woven from everything said by the magazine of Fashion, for this neverending garment is proffered through a neverending text. This total gar-

> ment must be laid out, which means that signifying units must be cut out from it so that they can be compared with one another and thus reconstitute the general signification of Fashion.

Two levels:

the first task is to cut up into signifying units the neverending language behind which the garment is concealed,

the next is to cut up into separate pieces the neverending garment behind which woman is concealed.

This idea of a primal, seamless garment, which would be cut up into pieces for analysis, reappears in chapter 8, *Inventory of genera:*

> Before listing the genera, we must decide upon their order of presentation. Can we submit the sixty carefully identified genera to a methodological classification? In other words, is it possible to derive all the genera from a progressive division of the total garment? Such a classification is certainly possible, but only on condition that we leave the sphere of written clothing and appeal to either anatomical, technical, or purely linguistic criteria. In the case of anatomy, the human body could be divided into increasingly specific areas, and the genera concerning each of them could be grouped in a dichotomous series.

And here is the note pegged to the end of this sentence:

> For example: Trunk = bust + pelvis.—Bust = neck + bosom.—Bosom = back + chest, etc.

This is an act of stripping.

For Barthes the female body isn't originally naked and then dressed, it is originally dressed in a seamless frock with hands and head barely allowed to emerge from their holes; nakedness can only result from an act of breaking and entering; to separate the different pieces is to tear them. A woman is undressed, not dressed.

A typical attitude of the young, middle-class boy; wasn't it specified in the old manuals of good manners that you should always dress for bed in the dark, so as to avoid seeing your own body?

For him woman is so fundamentally dressed that even in striptease, since there is no violence, the endpoint is not genuine nakedness:

> Thus in striptease a whole series of coverings is placed over the body of the woman as she pretends to strip it bare. Exoticism is the first of these barriers, for it is always exoticism of a petrified kind which transports the body into the world of legend or romance: a Chinese woman equipped with an opium pipe (the indispensible symbol of "Sininess"), an undulating vamp with a gigantic cigarette-holder, a Venetian decor complete with gondola, a dress with panniers and a singer of serenades: all aim at establishing the woman

> *right from the start* as an object in disguise. The end of the striptease is then no longer to drag into the light a hidden depth, but to signify, through the shedding of an incongruous and artificial clothing, nakedness as a *natural* vesture of woman, which amounts in the end to regaining a perfectly chaste state of the flesh.

(This text comes of course from *Mythologies.*)

> The classic props of the music-hall, which are invariably rounded up here, constantly make the unveiled body more remote, and force it back into the all-pervading comfort of a well-known rite: the furs, the fans, the gloves, the feathers, the fishnet stockings, in short the whole spectrum of adornment, constantly makes the living body return to the category of luxurious objects which surround man with a magical decor. Covered with feathers or gloved, the woman identifies herself here as a stereotypical element of music-hall, and to shed objects as ritualistic as these is no longer a part of a further, genuine undressing. Feathers, fur and gloves go on pervading the woman with their magical virtue even once removed, and give her something like the enveloping memory of a luxurious shell, for it is a self-evident law that the whole of striptease is given in the very nature of the initial garment.

For Barthes female nudity is so strongly forbidden that, in striptease, the very fact that the woman displays herself in public is proof that she isn't naked. What appears at the end of the spectacle is a sort of varnished object. This time a film covers the totality of the body which proclaims its status as a taboo:

> This is the underlying significance of the G-string covered with diamonds or sequins which is the very end of striptease: this ultimate triangle, by its pure and geometrical shape, by its hard and shiny material, bars the way to the sexual parts like a sword of purity, and definitively drives the woman back into a mineral world . . .

Of course the object which is the culmination of striptease is smooth, but like a pane of glass separating us from coveted treasures.

XI. Smooth

> We know that smoothness is always an attribute of perfection because its opposite betrays a technological and entirely human tailoring: Christ's tunic was seamless, just as the spaceships of science-fiction are formed of a single piece of metal.

An ambiguous theme in that, for Barthes, smoothness is at once the attribute of true perfection, especially that of nature, of that which consti-

tutes the world, and an attribute of false perfection, of that which bars us from it. Thus smoothness will be just as characteristic of Barthes's own deep-seated obsessions, those of which he has no intention of letting himself be deprived, as of those of the average contemporary Frenchman, the petty bourgeois he wants to denounce. Clearly, it's because the obsessions of the latter always threaten to entrap him that he attacks them with such vehemence.

Michelet plays a pivotal role here. Barthes finds in Michelet's work the most deep-seated themes of his own middle-class childhood, themes which are linked historically—via a medieval race—to the entire continuum of nature, and this at the very moment they are degenerating into a hideous parody of themselves in the France of today. When Barthes discovers in the world around him a trap into which he almost let himself fall, and which he therefore detests, he will find in Michelet a way of reversing its meaning, of returning to an earlier truth which had been falsified.

The ambiguity of Barthesian themes finds its first formulation in Michelet. The fundamental smoothness is invariably contaminated, in his work, by its own parody. Michelet spends his time struggling against all sorts of slippages. Barthes's book appeared in a series "Écrivains de toujours" in which the name of the object of study is followed by the expression "by Himself"; in most cases purely promotional and often ridiculous, here it in fact corresponds to a veritable affinity between the two authors.

Barthes uses the image of the Dutch canal boat to symbolize an auspicious smoothness in Michelet:

> For Michelet, the Dutch canal boat is the ideal site of the family. This concave, full object, this solid egg suspended in the smooth element of the waters, constantly intermingling the dampness of washing and the liquidity of the atmosphere, is the delicious image of the homogeneous. Here Michelet's central theme is posited: that of a seamless world.

The immense advantage of this absence of seams is that we can reappropriate Paradise, namely what we have lost, from any starting point:

> Nature is no longer a catalogue, as it was for the Encyclopedists, it's a tablecloth; take a pinch of the material and everything follows, the world is smooth like a piece of silk.

The great danger is false smoothness, the outer packaging of this piece of silk. When we take a pinch of this it is only the pinch that comes, without any of the cloth itself. Far from putting us in touch with all imagined universes, it separates us from them for good. In that case we must stop short. In the struggle against the traps of false smoothness discontinuity is the great ally.

In Barthes the fundamental figure of genuine smoothness is wood. The turn-of-the-century bourgeois child playing with his wooden toys from the

Vosges communicated with the essence of the universe through the sacrament of wood:

> It's a familiar and poetic substance, which does not sever the child from close contact with the tree, the table, the floor.

The figure of false smoothness, on the other hand, is plastic, already mystificatory with its names chosen to sound like some Greek shepherd (Polystyrene . . .):

> Whatever its final state, plastic keeps a flocculent appearance, something opaque, creamy and curdled, something powerless ever to achieve the triumphant smoothness of Nature.

False smoothness is fascinating because it passes itself off as the true sort; discontinuity, of which the basic figure is trenchant language, is equally fascinating because it frees us from this lie; but a false discontinuity is possible too, and is actually an accomplice of false continuity. Thus the dogmatic language which is sometimes used by fashion magazines participates in the fastening and wrapping of the neverending garment. Literary discontinuity is effective only if it opens the way to the smoothness of the world.

XII. Ultra-nudity

Woman is so unavoidably clothed that the mere fact of showing herself naked transforms her skin into a garment, a skin of untearable plastic. Only the last vestige of ornamentation, that triangle of interdiction, the diamond or sequin G-string, can show us the way to the lost continuity. Since nudity itself emerges from a spectacle of this sort as a vitrification, a lie, it is obliged to resort to ultra-nudity.

The expression is taken from *Michelet*. The latter's behavior towards his wife both scandalizes and fascinates Roland Barthes: Michelet-the-voyeur, the chambermaid-man; Barthes can hardly believe his eyes:

> This then is the redeeming principle of female blood, namely rhythm. The function of this sanguinary rhythm is to superimpose a fixed timescale onto a shifting one, to overcome two opposites without changing the nature of either. Which means that Woman's fixity does not detract from her weakness. Woman's periodic moult, though regularly surmounted, cannot but disarm her, and it is this very denudation which empties her out and incites man to feverish effusions. The periodic attack lays Woman bare in the same way as the necessary but terrifying sloughing of certain insects, and this ultra-nudity turns Woman into a being without shell or secret, as exposed as an ant without carapace or a chrysalis without cocoon.

Woman is so linked to her clothing that it is indeed the latter that constitutes her true skin; a true undressing must therefore go all the way to her blood, and to possess a woman is to occupy this most forbidden of places (in the essay on *The Witch* he declares:

> In short, what Michelet denounced in sacerdotal or Satanic subordination is also what he always described with such pleasure: insidious possession, gradual infiltration of Woman's secret. There are countless images in this very book: from the little sprite who *slips* into the serf's wife, to the spirits who take up residence inside her *like tapeworms,* to Satan *impaling* the Witch with an arrow of fire. Everywhere it's the image of passage or installation that predominates, rather than that of penetration, a banal metaphor of mundane eroticism),

when it comes down to it this can only mean clothing her, not, of course, by adding a few extra garments, but by becoming oneself her clothing, hence her own skin:

> For Michelet, the ideal movement of love isn't penetration but stretching out, for love is measured by seeing rather than sex. In the same way that Michelet, by regarding the fish as gelatinized water, imagined the universe as a deliciously smooth object, so to protect Woman, to cover and envelop her, to "follow" all the contours of her body, is to reject any discontinuity of matter. The ideal image of the man in love is ultimately the garment: just as there is no difference between algae and fish so there is none between the skin and the silk that covers it. When Michelet amorously describes the tunic wrapped around the woman, there can be no doubt that he sees himself as the enveloping garment he longs to be, a secret pursued, clung to, absorbed along its surface and not in depth.

Once this metamorphosis into a garment has been achieved, the outside and inside change places; once he has managed to envelop woman completely, he is then installed at the heart of the original bleeding heaven, he has returned to the womb:

> Woman is actually an element both contiguous and exterior to humanity, a complete envelope for man, his milieu as it were.

Then he leaves Michelet himself to speak:

> His relationship to her is that of heaven to earth: he is beneath, above, and all around her. We were born inside her. We live on her. We are enveloped by her. We breathe her in, she is the atmosphere of our hearts, its element.

Michelet represents for Barthes a literary interchange permitting a return from the hateful myths of contemporary society—degraded, per-

verted, debased, and always likely to entrap him—to the riches of his own myths, at last rediscovered. The obsessions of this "father," so well analyzed by Barthes, cannot but be viewed as mediators of his own more violent and painful obsessions. In Michelet they are speakable. For Barthes the prohibition on woman's nakedness is doubtless a good deal stronger, and cannot be resolved by the contemplation, during her periods, of another pale Athénaïs.

XIII. Infinite Discourse

An epic poem; in the opening pages he disposes his armies around the modern Troy; to see these confident troops with their sophisticated weaponry, who would not have anticipated a quick attack and an easy victory?

But how slowly they progress! It's as if a new wall loomed up immediately behind every breach. The fashion that "concealed" woman retreats indefinitely from sight.

Thus what seems at the beginning one of the most solid axioms—that the Fashion paradigm contains only one alterative: Fashionable/unfashionable, i.e. that the opposition between these two terms is absolute and cannot make way for a third—becomes increasingly problematic toward the end:

> The signified Fashion admits of a single pertinent variation, that of the unfashionable; but as the rule of euphemy bans from Fashion anything which contests its very being, the true opposition is less that of *fashionable* and *unfashionable* than of *marked* (by speech) and *unmarked* (silence);

and it's above all in that most intriguing and important article—an indispensable complement to *The Fashion System*—published in *Marie-Claire* in Summer 1967 as "The Chanel-Courrège Contest Refereed by a Philosopher"

(the title obviously derives from the magazine not the author, but one can imagine our combatant's moment of triumphant exhilaration when invited to speak in this female stronghold),

that we will see the opposition crowned by a third term, the "chic" which is a key value of Chanel's style,

> a singular and even paradoxical value uniting appeal and duration

(the word "chic" appearing not even once in *The Fashion System*).

But it's by retreating that the enchantress, enticing her pursuer ever further into the intimacy of her lair, allows Roland Barthes to accomplish his most enduring project.

Whereas originally it was clearly a case of demystifying all this, to use the word Barthes himself made fashionable in his *Mythologies*, in the last paragraph of *The Fashion System* we find this declaration:

> The relationship between semiological analysis and rhetorical utterance isn't at all that of a truth to a falsehood; it is never a case of "demystifying" the reader of Fashion; it's a relationship of complementarity, interior to the infinite system (however provisionally finite) to which Fashion and its analysis belong . . .

The word infinite is repeated several times in this last paragraph:

> an infinite science . . . this infinite construction . . .

(we recall the endless garment which proffers itself through an endless text).

And the last line:

> The semiologist is someone who expresses his future death in the very terms in which he has named and understood the world.

Just as Michelet

> clung to history as an initiation into his own death,

the man who has succeeded in transforming himself into words will find inside this infinitely expanding discourse a peaceful death as in the arms of a mother or at her breast.

Such is the reward bestowed by the enchantress upon her passionate antagonist. In the course of an epic which is both humorous and dramatic the perpetually frustrated project of revenge is distilled into an increasing sense of wonder which appeases the initial resentment now revealed as sorrowful love.

Clothing, and the skin itself turned into clothing, seemed first of all a pure prohibition, the impossibility of merging with the pulsed, rhythmic smoothness of woman and the world; it is revealed as its emanation. That's when the most trenchant language succeeds finally in weaving together literature, a luminous caress, an amorous garment become skin which hides only itself to infinity.

R. B.

PHILIPPE SOLLERS

The strongest of transgressions is the transgression of language.

What strikes you first, in R. B.'s work, is its strategy. A regular, cutting, continuous, unemphatic combat for a vigilant rationality; a combat against what has always seemed to provoke in him the same nausea: stickiness, the greasy, the more or less, the "neither-nor," the excluded middle, the stereotype, circumlocution, hyperbole, triviality, critical side-stepping. Side-stepping is denial: it founds a mechanistic understanding of texts, an unthinking detour into language which exposes a dependent subject viscerally riven to the reflex which constrains it. R. B., on the contrary, exposes himself: an engraved, punctual elegance. He arrives on time, is capable of transforming his weight quickly, gets rapidly bored, never seems to enjoy himself too much, has an active memory. He is the opposite of the showy academic or writer.who is always ready to talk about the "business" of the little world of learning and its narcissistic goings on: promotions, demotions, influence, careers. He is not especially interested in his contemporaries (so does not automatically hate them). He bears no resemblance to the familiar figure of the intellectual commercial traveler, who having to his name this or that scientific "accomplishment," is its incarnation to the point of neurosis, pulling articles on himself from his briefcase and spasmodically maintaining his authority on the spurious basis of an international reputation. We are used to these excessively rotative figures, these erudite cosines, with their short-lived dreams of power, their barely dissimulated desire for revenge on those friends of youth who "went in for it." Went in for what? For "literature," for "poetry." R. B. must automatically irritate—has irritated and will irritate—three types of ideological exploiters: the inspired writer or "artist"; the stunted prof; the intellectual-superego. In other words, R. B. irritates three discourses which are without reflexivity, without that discretion which makes things more subtle. R. B. calls this widespread, oral, intestinal mania the "will to seize."

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Translated for this volume by Patrick ffrench.

His writing is sweeping, blue, aerated. Syntactically musical. No overloading, nothing superfluous. It's not his style to draw out from a more or less laboriously patchworked theory a catch-all method, a kind of key to all texts. The trick is well known: a minimal grid, touched up here and there, with supposedly insightful "examples" derived from the disparate parts of a memory which hasn't needed to give an account of itself for a very long time. Poetic fragments, floating proverbs, sayings, nursery rhymes, reminiscences: the panoply of critical cosmopolitism. Cosmoapoliticism. R. B. is not cosmopolitan, but really, fundamentally *plural.* Are there truly mobile subjects? In whom one doesn't encounter the *least* trace of racism, xenophobia or nationalism—in short, of hysteria? The hysteric is the anti-R. B.: that which expels its other, the one for whom, hesheorit, there is no other. R. B., or anti-neurosis. Let's say that he is uncompromisingly and naturally democratic. Whatever, one way or another, is impregnated with fascism, more often than not without knowing it, without being able to know it (which is to say through projecting it when necessary onto someone else) can only find him *versus.* R. B. versus the "will to seize": it could be a comic strip. The French petty-bourgeois would see himself summarily dismissed through a certain freedom of language; tense, reactive, embittered, transferential, innumerable, alone, he would march—in profile as in a Daumier caricature—past an *empty* space into which he could not stop himself from exhaling his rancor. His name: Picard, Apel-Muller, Barberis, Mounin, and so on and so forth. Reactionaries, conservatives, idealists, ex-Jdanovists, revisionists, reformists: basically, one and the same recruitment of personnel in a country where the university, having become the dustbin of Capital, is steadily defecting to its political and economic adversary (in fact an ally of growing ideological influence): the State monopolist revisionism of the future.

R. B. personality test. R. B. trigger and anti-censor. Reserve, tenacity, retraction, a neutral voice, a quality of whiteness. White enlightenment, white-margin-irony, the color of that which is audible in color. R. B. or self-critical vigilance: what you get back from him is his own self-surveillance, his self-analytic position ready to pinpoint each knot of excess, each symptom, each obstruction. A protestantism, but tempered, emptied, turned Japanese. If France had ever had a proletarian revolutionary party open to ideological contestation—and thus ensuring the development of Marxist-Leninism, producing its own intellectuals and rallying progressivist intellectuals on a critical basis—there is no doubt that R. B. would have found a place in this party, that he would have affirmed there his most specific qualities. Indeed one cannot imagine him in the conformist trap of French post-Stalinism: populist-workerism on the one hand, on the other, "poetic" hyperbolism, empiricism and grandiloquence, sectarian evolutionism and the bombastic cult of the opera star. This is a logical alliance which it would be naive to view as antagonistic: a truly organic complementarity, a material kinship. Dogmatico-revisionism is the natural partner of an intendant all the more repressive in that it

carefully evades announcing itself as such: the liberal mask. Dogmatico-revisionism and bourgeois liberalism impose a selective eclecticism: everything is permitted, except the extreme left; everything is permitted, except the dialectical exposition of contradictions; everything is permitted, except China; everything is permitted, except a theoretical shake-up; everything is permitted, except investigation of sexuality and its discourse. The reciprocal infiltration of dogmatico-revisionism and repressive liberalism has produced the *ideological* hegemony achieved, after the great fear of May 1968, by the monopolistic bourgeoisie and the present French revisionist party—a paternalistic system split down the middle: psychotic foreclosure, automatic sublimation, instinctive censorship, scotomization, harping upon every weak point of current inventiveness. In brief, the con of the introverted French petty-bourgeoisie and its hyper-familial provincialism. France degree zero: there is nothing currently more regressive than this shortsighted nationalism which is confined, deaf, mythical, stuck in a rut and incurious about everything.

We are on the trajectory which leads from *Mythologies* to the *Empire of Signs;* from "French-ness" to the *haiku.* In other words, for R. B., the story of a lengthy period of irritation, of an angry long march through the pretentious, overloaded, decadent plenitude of our culture. Through the cultural notaries and their obsession with "inheritance." Through the visceral hatred of foreigners and foreignness, of alterity, of the *unheimlich.* Through that fetishism (let's write it more legibly, foetishism) to the explanation of which, the outflanking of which, R. B. has contributed more than anyone else, more than any formalist. The petty-bourgeois, on whom R. B. has inflicted a severe narcissistic wound, is above all the foetishist, the matriarchalized reverse side of patriarchy, the bigot, the conformist, the kind pervert who defends "the faith," as Lacan puts it. The one for whom the Other must be *stopped up* and maintained at all costs in its fictive existence, a guarantee of the non-being of the other. In a sense, woman in man, man in woman, the great mystification which allows the dissimulation of a fundamental homosexuality under various changing disguises: from "love" and the "couple" to "virile fraternity"; from the sublimated woman to woman as object; to the man in invisible petticoats to the phallic mother. What does the hysteric want? Lacan again: a master to rule over. Here too the following types are excluded: woman as equal to man (and not hyper-valorized or belittled, not partner to a castrated man, not fetish-guarantor of relations between men). Man as equal to anyone at all, the anti-master, the anti-father, the practicing analyst. Need one add the gambler? R. B. writes magnificently of Sade: "The couple he forms with his persecutors is aesthetic: it is the piquant spectacle of a vital, elegant animal, both obsessed and inventive, mobile and tenacious, endlessly escaping and endlessly returning to the same corner of his territory while stiff mannequins, fearful and pompous, attempt quite simply to *contain* him (not to punish him, that will come later)." Sade? Extreme rationality. What does Sade say of the obstacle in his path? "Prisoner even more in the name of reason and the phi-

losophy of enlightenment because of having wanted to translate into common sense terms what this sense must silence or abolish to remain common, under threat of being itself abolished . . ." (would you read that sentence again?).

R. B. is interested—was interested?—in linguistics, semiology, etc. . . . Ahead, by far, of fashion (whose system, don't forget, he has written). Understanding before anyone else the new bases of "literary" research, including the new small-talk. The remarkable point, however, is that instead of trying to impose a universitarism which would be illustrated retroactively, he has always evolved his critical practice in relation to the avant-garde *of his time* (whence: "nouveau roman," etc., first manifestation of a renewal of avant-garde activity in France, quickly defused, moreover, and rapidly transformed into an increasingly old gimmick, appropriated by the commercial interests of the publishing market in that semi-darkness [*mi-nuit*] of eclecticism where all changes are grey).[1] Before the Russian Formalists had wreaked their well-known havoc in the field of received wisdom—which led to a real rush to adopt new approaches (such was the void created), and to the intensive re-training of those teachers suddenly left behind—R. B. had already indicated, outlined and adopted the correct position. He quickly perceived the technocratic and neo-positivistic limitations of the movement as far as literature is concerned: the trivial and now traditional exercise of the phonologic-grammatic-metrical isn't his style. Not that it's useless, no, of course not. But to make a system out of it would be a return to scholasticism: no thank you. Literature is first and foremost a question of ideology, perhaps THE ideological question; it has its scientific side, of course, but to focus discussion of literature on its scientistic formality is an ideological move whose unspoken stakes are more and more apparent: anti-philosophical, anti-Freudian, and anti-Marxist. *Yes,* we must defend the materiality of language, a certain "formalism," etc., against the sermonizing of the undiscoverable and the ineffable, themselves carried along by a vulgar sociologism; *no,* we must reject the new intellectual agenda which a disturbingly monopolistic academic discourse seeks to promote: repression of the subject, of history, and of today's most urgent problem, the subject-of-language in history. Instinctively, R. B. defends Lacan's attack on the old neo-Kantian and neo-Cartesian ideas of an outmoded formalism, fixated on their minimal linguistic model, incapable of a serious analysis of discourse (just a few attempts to reinstall "the subliminal" in place of the split subject). Equally, without claiming that he was ever a "marxist," it's to R. B. that we owe a critical pugnacity which is the very spirit (if not the lethal letter) of marxism itself. Finally, and crucially, R. B. affirms literature as a practice, as a process, as a specific experience, and no longer as the *colony* of a meta-theory. This is the essential point: with R. B. this new object makes a lively entry on the scene, resists all attempts to crush it by force, discredits metaphysical surveillance, develops, erodes, burrows and deepens. This is why R. B. is so solidly behind the upheavals of the avant-

garde. Look at the others: when it comes down to it they have little to say about literature. A few general, loose remarks on the poetic function and the palpable aspect of signs (but who is palpating? that is the question), without using Freud, of course; a few timid nudges in the direction of the subject of writing (even Lacan is feeble on this; have another look at his essay on Delay's book on Gide, fancy taking Delay seriously; and as for Sade, Lacan is very good here, but what's happened to the body of Sade's discourse?). In general, then, it's basically neo-classicism or a sketchy overview of the avant-garde of forty years ago: the sum of these eclectic blindnesses could, on the ideologico-political stage, result in an ideal classical-modernist-regressive compromise formation—Aragon, let's say. R. B. does not share in this historical naïveté: literature, for him, is a total sphere, linked to other fields of social practice, not a decorative "surplus," not the spare-time sideline of the linguist, mathematician, sociologist, psychoanalyst or philosopher. A material world of differential development. A non-subordinate question, a new question, a *mise en abîme* of knowledge itself. What it has always been without being able to articulate it? What it is finally in its proper history. "What is new, is a mode of thought . . . which seeks . . . to know how meaning is possible, at what cost and by what means." "*To change signs themselves* (and not simply what they say), is to give nature a *new division* . . . and to found this division not on 'natural' laws, but, quite on the contrary, on the freedom which men have of making things signify" (1963).

The *Michelet* book (1954) should be reread for its analysis of this historical subject practicing language as both individual and historical subject. "Michelet's discourse—what is ordinarily called *style*—is precisely that sort of concerted navigation which propels History and its narrator nose to tail, like a fish chasing its prey." Michelet the "predator," staccato musician of narrative verticality, of "intermediary states of matter," transformist, synthetic, furtive. Michelet-organ: "Michelet's Kings and Queens form a veritable pharmacy of nausea. They aren't condemned, they are vomited up." "The surprised action is indeed essential to the representation of the human body in History." *The Woman, The Witch, The Sea, The Insect, The People* . . . Bataille and R. B. are almost alone in having brought out the retained, diverted force—the signifying force, for in terms of the signified, Michelet remains a petty-bourgeois ideologue—that is active here; by here, I mean for the teleanaesthetized French context of today. Michelet the voyeur, sensitive to the scar that oozes behind the machinery of history: "Menstruation lays woman bare like the terrible and necessary moult of certain insects, it is an ultra-nudity, it makes of woman a being without shell and without secret, as exposed as an ant without carapace or a chrysalis without cocoon" (R. B.). The passage in Michelet about Robespierre's shattered jaw should be looked at again. Has anyone realized that this is no straightforward "textual exegesis," and that R. B. has captured, between the lines, the shadow borne by Michelet, by Balzac, their phantasmatic last resort, their spring, their "casing"?

R. B. does not have a reified conception of language. Reified, that's to say with a mentalist or spiritualist underside. There is nothing more metaphysical, as we know, than a certain materialism. What matters isn't materialism to the exclusion of everything else, but to what extent and why it's dialectical. Just as Barthes has a politics of writing (whose anti-fascist and strictly democratic character we have noted, a complete contrast to liberal chicanery), so his practice is implicitly dialectical. Theatricalizing. Whence the constant attraction of Brecht. The closeness of the proper names is a clue. But note, too, the striking similarity of their "characters." Contained passion, feigned coldness, the Orient, the maxim, the play of reversals, mutation, immanence. As early as 1955: "For Brecht, the stage tells a story, the audience judges, the stage is epic, the audience is tragic. This is the very definition of popular theatre." / "It's not the success of any particular dramatic style that's at stake, it's the very consciousness of the spectator, and consequently his ability to make history." / "Henceforward we need an art of explanation and no longer merely an art of expression." / "Theatre must come resolutely to the assistance of history by unveiling its development." Can't everyone see that these positions are more relevant today than ever? It's just that over the past fifteen years, through the unfolding of history, class struggle and world revolution, Brecht's work has come out from *the inside* of the theatrical ghetto, and henceforward occupies a key position in the symbolic field, the external and internal scene of language which is no longer either literature or philosophy, but invents a new relation *between* literature and philosophy, *between* theory and practice: a new conception, too, of politics. More so even than in his theatrical practice, it's through Brecht's theoretical writing that we can reopen the question of an avant-garde literature (the kind of work upon language found in Joyce having been symptomatically repressed by the platitudes of "Surrealism"). (Take *Writings on Politics and Society,* a book which every revolutionary intellectual of today should study in depth, without forgetting the decisive fact—decisive in the face of revisionist censorship, the other side of the coin of the dogmatic censorship which preceded it—that Brecht almost immediately recognized the importance of Mao Tse-tung.) R. B., 1956: "To separate Brechtian theatre from its theoretical foundations would be as erroneous as to try to understand the influence of Marx without reading the *Communist Manifesto,* or Lenin's politics without reading *The State and Revolution.*" / "We must affirm the capital importance of Brecht's theoretical writings." / "At bottom, the greatness of Brecht, and his solitude, is that he constantly re-invents marxism." We could say that the attempt to make Brecht's work known had to struggle against a twofold censorship, bourgeois and Jdanovian, just as today it would struggle against the twofold censorship of monopolism and revisionism.[2]

Still the same anti-metaphysical battle, then, against the utilitarian crushing of language or its ornate separatism, to link the development of language to that of material production, to the double-entry dialectical register

of history and subject. "Revolutionary art must acknowledge a certain arbitrariness of signs, it must take account of a certain 'formalism' in the sense that it must analyze form with an appropriate method, which is that of semiology. . . . All of Brecht's art protests against the Jdanovian confusion between ideology and semiology, and we are only too familiar with the impasse to which this had led." To this we should now add that the impasse would be as much a result of conflating language and ideology as of separating them out. Language is and is not a superstructure: from this point of view the original error, and its subsequent correction by Stalin, are both symptoms of the lack of dialectical thinking of dogmatism which is now giving way to its revisionist counterpart. Until such time as the dialectical relation of language and ideology is elaborated and embodied in a political struggle that it influences in its turn, the bourgeoisie, the old world, will rest easy. An evolutionist, mechanistic and economistic Marxism won't change anything, is incapable of grasping how and why ideology is able, within a given conjuncture, to be determinant, a material force unleashing and redoubling the "last instance." Whence the indisputable importance—despite all the theoretical acrobatics, despite all the silences and all the potential deformations—of the Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the fundamentally innovative thought of Mao.

Tendentially, Brecht already applies the fundamental principle of dialectics—one divides into two—to the space of the production of language as a material entity. His rejection of nature (*anti-physis*) is an attack on the essentialist illusion: fideist homogeneity. R. B.: "Brecht's formalism is radically opposed to the sticky falsity of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois Nature." / "The strategic aim of Brecht's creative output is the rediscovery of revolutionary correctness." The dialectical practice of language stages the dialectics of social practice, the potential for change and the operative *relief* of ideology: not just propaganda but explication-unfolding of the symbolic *detour,* of the rotation-mutation of language, subject and ideology on the material stage of history, science and philosophical critique. The "getting rid of the rough edges," the "wising-up," the suspense-interrogation effected by Brecht—one (representation) divides into two (epic/tragic, stage/audience)—makes *possible* the correspondence of the line of battle and its detour, of practice and its multiplicative resonance. "Brecht's morality consists essentially in a *correct reading of History,* and the plasticity of this morality (to change, if need be, the Great Usage) is linked to the very plasticity of history." R. B. immediately recognizes Brecht's freedom in relation to the Law and the way he integrates it dialectically, thereby disorienting at one and the same time the classic Oedipal structure and the tragic function: "In the bourgeois order, transmission always passes from parent to child; this is the very definition of *inheritance,* a word whose fortune exceeds by far the limits of the civil code (you inherit ideas, values, etc.). In the Brechtian order, the only inheritance is an inverted one: the dead son is taken up, continued by the mother, as if she were the

young shoot, the new leaf called upon to develop. Thus, the old theme of succession, which has inspired so many heroic-bourgeois plays, no longer has anything anthropological about it, does not illustrate a fatal law of nature: in *The Mother,* freedom circulates at the very heart of the most 'natural' human relation: that of a mother and her son." (Here we note R. B.'s irony in the quote marks around the word "natural.")

R. B.'s critical strategy has always been to insist on the necessity of a true realism, an "intermediary state between words and things," which makes of literature the index of self-conscious and open ideological labor: "Realism . . . cannot therefore be the copy of things, but the knowledge of language" / "By *signification* I always mean the process which produces meaning, not the meaning itself." He is repelled, clearly, by subjective or "imaginary" dross, as well as by small-time positivism. What interests him, clearly, is neither the empiricist recurrence of poetic "characteristics" nor a phonologism with picturesque echoes, but the determinate play of historical discourse, the grand and multi-layered investment in writing; in short, the ample divided unity of the text of a stratified, contradictory subject. The writer is primarily someone who proffers to *every*one the language of *each* one, an excessive singularity, inscribed in history, writing himself into it as an anomaly, a knot of incompatibilities, anti-neurotic, anti-psychotic, the *impossible* (real) subject, experienced as such. The text is the creation and wide-ranging exploration of this impossibility and disunity. If R. B. is not convinced that "poetry" can refer to so-called linguistic universals (classic idealism), he does, on the other hand, show clearly how the "novel" is in the process of unveiling the shifting bases of the symbolic function (novel here "subsuming" the normal sense of "poetry"). "There is perhaps one great literary form which covers everything we know of man." R. B.'s strategy is analogous to that of the most lucid linguistician of our time—Benveniste, of course, whose culture, compared to that of other theoreticians of language, is still the most complex and profound. What is meant here by "culture" is the opposite of what R. B., as the mythologist of an age marked by frantic confusionism (accelerated by the disintegration of the university), calls *acculturation:* "it's *acculturation* that dominates our age, and we could imagine a parallel history of the *nouveau roman* and romance magazines." When literature is truly *culture,* and more specifically revolutionary culture, it takes on the responsibility of "breathing new life into the world." In other words: language is too serious a business to be subordinated to metalanguage.

R. B. struggling for the recognition of *jouissance,* a new continent. Lacan: "The right to *jouissance,* if recognized, would relegate to a bygone age the domination of the pleasure principle." No one has written about Sade in such a direct, simple, generous and *just* way as R. B.: "Sadeian delicacy . . . is at once a power of analysis and a power of *jouissance.*" No one has better understood that "sadism" was simply the "vulgar content of the Sadeian text." Today, more than ever, what threatens, what weighs us down, is a new

conformity, an immemorial senile droning; how can we not *therefore* be for all forms of resistance and subversion? Against all forms of censorship? R. B.: "Censorship is detestable at two levels: because it's repressive, because it's stupid, so that one always wants, paradoxically, to fight it and teach it a lesson." This is not to adopt an abstract position, but to prove concretely, for each concrete case, that what generally passes for "terrorism" is simply a form of violence responding to another which is far stronger and far more permanent, the only *curative* way of fighting against dogmatism and its spineless counterpart: exclusive eclecticism. If it wants to achieve its aim, this position must itself lead to a revolutionary line of action. There can be no concessions to petty-bourgeois parodies. There is everything to invent, analyze, criticize and rebuild. "To transgress is to *name beyond the bounds of lexical division* (the basis of society along with class division)." There is everything to be learned from a body and subject unknown to language—multiple, disarticulated, outside the mirror. No, Sade would not *for anything* have given way. The most *expansive* claims must be affirmed, we must know how to affirm them, for and within knowledge. Have I said that R. B., in the viscosity of bourgeois Franfrance, is one of the rare great writers of our time? That *Empire of Signs* and *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* are masterpieces? That he invented sequence-writing, flexible montage, the block of prose in a fluid state, musical classification, the vibrant utopia of detail, a solid basis for a finally bearable (discreet) transformation of human relations, the syntactic *satori,* the irruption of language into the truth of language? Have I not made myself clear? Must I repeat myself? Freud: "Novelty will always be the condition of jouissance." All is struggle, affirm the beginning.[3]

Notes

1. Sollers plays here on the name of the publishing house *Minuit,* stable of the majority of *nouveaux romanciers,* and possibly on the name of the journal *Change,* a rival to *Tel Quel. Trans.*

2. The proceedings of the Cluny conference (April 1970), published by *La Nouvelle Critique,* explain the reference to Brecht and its theoretical and political significance, as well as the symptomatic silence that has followed in *both* the bourgeois and the revisionist press (the latter being capable, admittedly, of recently presenting Monsieur Philippe de Rothschild as a thinker). Let's sum this up in a formula: revisionism in France today is dogmatism applied to China—that is, to a left-wing critique of dogmatism.

3. "Tout est combat, affirmons le début." Sollers plagiarizes and deforms here a phrase current in 1968 and post-1968 revolutionary discourse: "Ce n'est qu'un début, continuons le combat" (This is only a beginning, the struggle must continue). *Trans.*

Displacement

STEPHEN HEATH

Since reading is a crossing of codes, nothing can stop the journey.[1]

How can we read Barthes other than by allowing this multifaceted work its *force of displacement?* Everywhere we find sketched out a single gesture, encounter a single desire to change levels, to produce a new configuration, to displace. The stake is always *another history* ("Another history of painting is possible, no longer that of works and artists, but that of tools and materials . . .";[2] it's this movement of the imagination that constitutes the departure, as it were, of Barthes's texts): from *Writing Degree Zero,* which projects from its first page another history of literary language (that of the *signs* of Literature), to *The Pleasure of the Text,* which pushes the theory of text to its limit by opening it up to jouissance, the way Barthes works, his very writing, will be regulated by a prevailing set of choices relating to perception. No safe or certain place (Barthes is never "in his place," shut up in some system); only this transport *elsewhere.*

Images of displacement? Take the writing of the plates of the *Encyclopedia* (writing here, in the modern sense of the term, is defined not by its subject matter but by its work, that precisely of a displacement), these plates which alter habitual levels of perception; seen under a microscope, the flea becomes on one plate something other than a flea, a disconcerting, disruptive object. The shifts enacted by the plates reveal "the very secrets of form";[3] to displace is thus to theatricalize, to explode the intelligibility of the habitual—the habits of the intelligible—in order to display its forms; to dismantle while assembling, a surreptitious, oblique strategy permitting a furtive flight. Another image: that of the musical variation, above all as developed by Beethoven in the *Diabelli Variations.* To vary means to modify, to transpose, to change rhythm, which provides us with a neat summary of Barthes's own practice; consider, for example, that alteration in the rhythm of reading

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which intervenes so decisively in *S/Z* and which gives free rein to all possible variations—plurality exploited at every opportunity—on Balzac's text. The particular significance of the *Diabelli Variations* is that they have no origin, they disturb origins: the theme, Diabelli's waltz, does not exist; the starting point is nothing, sixteen bars emptied out twice over, which means there can never be an end point, variation becomes perpetual, vertiginous, performed to infinity: a delicate play of displacement. And then, finally, take the image of the mirror: a diabolical mirror which multiplies objects, a mirror which reflects something quite different ("mirrors have a supernatural beauty: what they reflect isn't known to them and they don't always reflect what they see");[4] empty mirror, mirror of emptiness, which undoes forms, which sets off once more the endless movement of forms, of signs, of language: "all that the mirror captures is other mirrors, and this infinite reflection is emptiness itself (which, as we know, is form)."[5] Displacement, mirroring, other stories.

This force of displacement seems to me represented by two important moments in Barthes (moments with a chronological specificity in his work, but which at the same time are relentlessly current, retraced in the most recent texts). The first is that of the passage from myth to semiology: here it's a case of fending off all instances of the mythical theft of language, taking the object as a signifying system, ridding it of its "naturalness," so that semiology itself could be considered a science of displacement; and although it has undergone changes, indeed quite radical mutations, at the hands of Barthes himself, there's a sort of engagement with semiology which remains important, this "capture" which initiates displacement. The second of these moments is that represented by the passage from work to text, target of a new object—*text*—which develops an acute analysis of all aspects of the work of language, of the signifier, of a whole area of productivity which is infinite and cannot be mastered; another scene on which meaning and subject see themselves questioned, rising in a cloud of dust. Thus text displaces the old notion of the work as a closed, finite totality, the straightforward expression of a meaning or a subject. Similarly, and here there is a sort of skid in the trajectory of the first of these two moments, text puts critical questions to semiology about its own limits, about its key concepts (what exactly is mastered by the idea of the *sign?*); it begins to displace semiology as well, in that, as a new object, it encourages the elaboration of a practice which would carry it beyond these same limits: the passage from semiology to semanalysis.

Barthes's position in all these analyses is not dissimilar to that of Azdak in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle,* a play by Brecht of which he seems to have been very fond. There is something out of place, out of order: Azdac, the rogue turned judge, doesn't put up a good show and, as a result, everything changes direction, things begin to revolve, to evade recognition, to evade truth itself. But

precisely, "truth" here is an imposture, the stopping of signs, passing itself off not as a process but as an essence (to be expressed). In which case what matters isn't at all to recognize or keep things in their rightful place (as expressions of an essence); the task is to overturn the natural, to ascertain the articulation of meaning, to expose signs: in short, recognition must be disturbed, along with everything that claims to "go-without-saying." The just judgement will involve *work*, the crafty and subtle work, for example, of the judge-thief Azdak, able to read in the eagerness of the woman to pull the baby out of the chalk circle the *myth* of "the Mother" (and not her reality), able to question signs. As reader, Azdak "loosens" the sticky hold of the natural; as thief, he deceives deception—which amounts to reestablishing a certain concrete truth (and no longer an essentialist one).

The gesture of displacement, this tireless gesture of Barthes's work, is nothing other, when it comes down to it, than the gesture of *theft;* except that it's a case of stealing *back*. What's to be done in a society which lives off the stickiness of languages, a thick covering of discourses, stereotypes, and repetitions which is nevertheless smooth and transparent in its very compactness, in its unity, always ready to spew out its decrees, its meanings, its reasons, all in the name of some "nature"? (This, transposed, is the question and problem of Brecht's play: how to be good in a bad society without at the same time serving the interests of the wicked? How to deliver an equitable justice in an unjust society?). Through destruction? But in this case, within the space of language, that would simply be to play the game of this implacable doxa: What linguistic place would be instantly outside of bourgeois ideology? To go against the doxa with the simple intention of contesting it is to remain complicit with it, to take up its oppositions, the very meanings of what one wants to combat, to come up against the same judgements. "To act as if an innocent discourse could be maintained in the face of ideology is tantamount to continuing to believe that language could be no more than the neutral instrument of a triumphant content."[6] Better then to settle for a subtle, deceptive intervention which destroys—which opens up language—from the inside, through analysis, reading, play, writing; which subverts not by opposition but by ceaseless displacement, which puts meanings into circulation, defers judgements, which shatters—snatches, scraps, fragments—desolidifies, which steals back: which *steals again*. "Ideological criticism is today effectively condemned to operations of *theft;* the signified, whose exemption is the materialist task par excellence, the signified is more easily removed in the illusion of meaning than in its destruction."[7] Here we see, in accordance with a Nietzschean reference, the latent nihilism of Barthes's work—"in some way *internal* to institutions, discourses of conformity, apparent finalities"[8]—wasn't it Nietzsche who ruined (stole/put to flight) philosophy?

This too is why Barthes, like Azdak, so often played for various people the role of a dubious character; notably in the Picard affair: Barthes's crime—

"should Roland Barthes be burnt at the stake?"—was to have deformed the Racinean work for the benefit of the Racinean text, of the potential pleasure of reading, of the plurality of meaning, to have taken possession of one of those objects that goes-without-saying and is shrouded in a protective cloud of tautology—"Racine is Racine," a mode of reasoning which had already given rise to one of the most incisive *Mythologies.*

Text is a displacement not only because it represents a major mutation (the passage from work to text) but also because its own activity is that of a displacement. The motto of text: *everything circulates.* Now if Barthes's writings displace it's because they are, in the fullest sense of the word, texts: at once displacing—through their analytical work, they bring about the displacement of an object whatever it may be (literature, fashion, image, city, narrative, etc.)—and out of place—inopportune, they escape the habitual frames (each seems to create its own genre), reflect upon themselves (a text like *The Fashion System,* which appears rigorously "scientific," is nonetheless powerfully self-aware), overflow into each other ("the writer should consider his earlier texts as other texts, which he reworks, quotes or deforms, as he would with a multitude of other signs";[9] in short, Barthes's writings are precisely caught up in a *practice of writing.*

To displace also means to *travel;* moreover, Barthes has written a very fine travel book, *Empire of Signs,* though "travel" must be taken to include the play inherent in this idea of displacement. Indeed, it's far from being some touristic jaunt (like the *Batory* cruise described in *Mythologies*), which hastily scrutinizes the other in order to confirm one's own perfection, but—literally—it's a self-displacement, a self-disturbance, a not-staying-in-place; an unfurling of self (and not a self-projection) onto an elsewhere which opens up faultlines, gaping holes, cracks: a state of loss of the self, what Barthes calls putting oneself "in a writing situation."

To travel, to displace: this is the journey of Barthes's works, as well as the activity of text (and of his texts). Text travels, displaces; it drifts off into the distance. So too do Barthes's texts, approach roads—unbalanced, gyratory, ceaselessly spiralling—to the entire empire of signs; meaning, subject in process, writing tours, *vertiginous displacement:* "vertiginousness is that which never ends: unhooks meaning, postpones it until later."[10]

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 77.
2. Barthes, "La marche dévorante de Bernard Réquichot," *Quinzaine littéraire,* 16–31 May 1973, 19.
3. Barthes, *Nouveaux Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 102.

4. Barthes, "En Grèce," *Existences* (1944), 48.
5. Barthes, *L'Empire des signes* (Geneva: Skira, 1970), 106.
6. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 15.
7. Barthes, "Écrivains, intellectuels, professeurs," *Tel Quel* 47 (1971), 14.
8. Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 71.
9. Barthes, "Drame, poème, roman," in *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 25.
10. Barthes, "La marche dévoranre de Bernard Réquichot," 18.

[Barthes and the Discourse of Photography]

RENAUD CAMUS

During dinner there were two main subjects of conversation, and I'm not sure which came first. Maybe we talked first about Roland Barthes. Before we left, Jeremy had leafed through the issue of *Creatis* that Tony had pointed out to him, but had said nothing about it at the time. At the table, he told us that he wasn't very taken with Boudinet's photographs.

"It's hard for me to judge. All I can say is that it's very far from my sensibility, from what I like in photography. Maybe it's just because it's so . . . European. It screams Europe at you. No American photographer would ever do something like that."

"And is that so bad?"

"Nooooo . . . No, of course not. I mean, I don't know. It's so . . . romantic, isn't it? In any case, he must be pleased to have a text by Barthes, isn't he?"

"Yes, probably."

"Does Barthes do a lot of things like that?"

"Yes, there are a lot of little pieces that turn up here and there. He's very fond of this work. So am I, by the way. There are also more recent pictures, very different ones, in color—night scenes, and I think they're splendid."

"All right, but how do you feel about Barthes's text?"

"I like it a lot."

"I actually think it's embarrassing, at first glance. In my opinion, it's really not possible to still talk about photography like that."

This was the moment I chose to emerge from my silence: "I can't agree with you there at all. I wonder if you're not mixing up doing something *still* with doing it *again*. Barthes is perfectly aware that the modern way of talking about photography is to talk about technique and framing and composition. To talk about the medium. He knows perfectly well that that's the established way of talking about photography."

"No, it's *not* the established way of talking, not enough. Listen to people talk, open any magazine. The established way of talking about photography is to talk about the subject: X is a good photographer because he's pho-

[First published in 1979.] From *Tricks: 25 Encounters* by Renaud Camus © 1981 reprinted by permission of Serpent's Tail, London (New York: St Martin's Press, 1981), 222 24. Translated by Richard Howard.

tographed something amazing, something unique, because he was in the right place at the right time, etc. That's all you ever hear, anywhere. A good photographer is a good reporter."

"Yes, yes, I know, you're right, but you have to be more specific; you have to distinguish different ways of talking, different layers of discourse. The dominant discourse among people who are interested in photography today, the established modern discourse, is the kind that talks a lot about the photographer's art—his way of working, his technique, whatever is specific to the medium. This discourse sets the subject completely aside. And that's fine, it's been fine as a reaction against the dominant discourse you're talking about. But it's this new discourse that's become the established one now. This is the established modern discourse. And Barthes isn't unaware of it, on the contrary, he knows it very well. He sees that it threatens to become dominant in turn, to forbid another possible way of talking about photography. And his position is that yes, it's all true, if you talk about photography you have to talk about the medium itself, of course, about what is specifically photographic, but we're beginning to discover that this is becoming in turn a cliché, a stereotype, in certain circles in any case. And the one shouldn't crush the other. We should also be able to talk again, today, about what the photograph represents, or about what it evokes, even subjectively. Representation, in photography as in literature, is never completely cancelled out. It was fine to contest it when it was dominant—hegemonic, so to speak—but if it is threatened now, then it has to be defended."

"Yes, but if you criticize the dominant discourse, you fall back into the clique of idiots who have always rejected it."

"No, you don't. That's exactly my point. Your objection is the kind people use when they say you can't mention the labor camps in the USSR because if you do you're saying what all the reactionaries in the world have been saying for fifty years."

Tony smiled: "Oh please, both of you. I don't see what poor Boudinet has to do with the Gulags."

Unfortunately, either from drunkenness or nervousness, I was off and running: "You can't lump together people who apparently say the same thing. You have to take account of degrees. It's the metaphor of the spiral—you can't avoid it if you're talking about Barthes. Besides, that's how Barthes works in everything. After the sixties, which were massively theoretical in France—and to a large degree thanks to him, don't forget—he wrote *The Pleasure of the Text.* He reminded us that in spite of theory, there was something else in writing which was precious, which had to be preserved at all costs, and which was pleasure. I can tell you that when he wrote his piece, there was a huge sigh of relief all over Paris. No one had dared say so. And that's why, because of this method of his, that's why it's from Barthes that we can learn what freedom is, thanks to his *despite* and his *nevertheless.* He always comes to the defense of the most threatened discourse. And the threatened

discourse with regard to photography today is the way we talk about the subject."

Now they were both smiling. Were they making fun of me and my flights? I was wondering what had come over me, what need to break lances for Barthes and for Boudinet, as if they needed my help. In any case, if, thanks to them, I was losing this trick, they would hear from me about it!

Roland Barthes and Photography: The Sincerity of the Subject

HERVÉ GUIBERT

At the request of the editors of *Les Cahiers du cinéma* Roland Barthes has ventured to write a book on photography. He had often expressed his interest in photography in the form of articles (on Richard Avedon for *Photo,* Bernard Fauchon for *Zoom,* Daniel Boudinet for *Créatis*), prefaces to books (on Von Gloeden for a German publication), or the family photos dotted through his little autobiography (*R. B. by Himself*). He hasn't reprinted these articles but has written, in one and a half months, a book which is "short" (his own description) but nevertheless a real book, with a coherent construction, and not a collection of essays of the sort recently put together by Michel Tournier in *Des clefs et des serrures,* or Susan Sontag in *On Photography.*

To begin with, on a first skim through *Camera Lucida,* it's not a loud voice that we hear. It's not an arrogant voice bent on affirming the truth of photography. It's a slight, gentle, cautious, apologetic voice, a touch nonchalant, which doesn't hang fire, not at all, but which advances in tiny bursts, in tiny scintillations, in tiny nibbles of writing. If there is any truth here, it is that of the sincerity of the subject. Barthes says "I" here: there is no better guide, no better mediator, than his pleasure, than his desire for this or that image consulted. In a first stage, Barthes draws out some of the principles and mechanisms of photography, such as its affirmative, evidential value, the presence within a single frame of antinomical elements (the soldiers and nuns in Nicaragua), or some fleeting acrobatic feat ("an emir in full dress on skis"). Then he dives in at the deep end: why is it that a particular image attracts me, catches my interest or, on the contrary, leaves me indifferent?

Barthes establishes a difference between the *studium* and the *punctum* (later he describes the "pedantry" of Latin as "necessary for illuminating subtle distinctions"). The *studium* is the field of cultural, historical interest, the rallying of the various elements of the image to my knowledge, to my consciousness. The *punctum* is "an unexpected whiplash cutting through this field": taste, surprise, desire, a fantasy, a projection. Why does Barthes like

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the photo of a house in Grenada taken in 1854 by Charles Clifford? It's because he would like to live there, because this image seems habitable to him . . .

Barthes sets in motion the somewhat capricious alternation of "I like, I don't like" (translated into English for the pleasure of the anglicism, and to put *like* in its exact place, one notch below *love*), already adopted in *R. B. by Himself:* there, to recall but the first two of his propositions, he confessed that he liked "salad and cannelloni" and that he didn't like "white spitzes and women in trousers." Here Barthes tells us what he likes, and what he doesn't like, in photography. He doesn't like loud-mouthed photos, photos which make a noise, or color photos, he couldn't care less about Edgerton's split-second shot of a drop of milk, or Atget's tree trunks (it would have been fairer, perhaps, to cite Ansel Adams). And if he likes a photo, as we shall see, it's for intimate, oblique, romantic, perverse reasons, it's for its faultlines: he sees only the bad teeth of the little boy in a photo by William Klein, "the slightly repulsive consistency of the blunt nails, at once soft and defined" of Andy Warhol photographed by Duane Michals, or the strapped shoes of a black woman photographed in 1926 by James Van der Zee, which remind him of those of a sister of his father. In fact, for each photo, what shocks him, what isn't quite right, the anomaly, the enigmatic detail, or what establishes a connection with his own biography or his body. These dead, unknown characters, wiped out by time and only living on in the photographic image, recur throughout the book with the familiarity of characters in a novel.

It's the second half of the book which is the most limpid, authentic, and necessary, and hence the most beautiful. At the time of his mother's death (Barthes prefers to speak of his bereavement, as if granting to words a soothing effect) he sorts through his family photos, searching for her, in the hope of rediscovering, not so much her features, but her essence, her "air," her soul, the emanation of her goodness. And he finds them in a photo, taken in a Winter Garden, of his mother as a little girl. He scrutinizes it, loses himself in it, and returns to it incessantly in the second part where he explores the inherent relationship between a photo and death, the evident truth of the "this has been," the disturbing moment of coincidence between the going-to-die and the already-dead, in a sort of vertiginous irreality, as evoked by the photo of someone condemned to death, taken in 1865 and looked at in 1979.

The book ends with an acknowledgement not of powerlessness, but of Barthes's awareness that he endlessly "balks" at this fascinating object, "this slack surface across which one's gaze can merely sweep" and which "cannot be deepened, because of its very obviousness": instantly full, obtuse, and ebbing in words. The book therefore shows photos which are not necessarily "favourite photos" but photos which lend themselves to writing, photos which are exemplary.

One of Barthes's strengths is to intersperse in a rich and rather learned discourse—which of the hundred thousand French purchasers of *A Lover's*

Discourse will already know the meaning of *satori, biographeme, noeme, interfuit, palinode?*—words thrown in feet first, images which are popular and somewhat trivial ("blah blah," "to ring a bell"), or displaced from another vocabulary (that of cooking, for example: "photos are signs which curdle like milk," "the image expressed, like juice from a lemon"), like sly, provocative witticisms which shake up your ideas, and to relaunch with each book a series of new, uncommon, disparaged, neological or outdated words, which bring new life to language before congealing in their turn. These "notes" on photography which follow the lover's "fragments" are streaked with their power to disturb: photography certainly won't sell as well as love, photographers probably won't get much from *Camera Lucida,* but it's a book that can be understood intuitively, consumed for its sumptuous, savorous musicality, and which will leave a trace more persistent than that of its predecessors, because that trace is more affective.

FRENCH RECEPTION: BARTHES REMEMBERED (1980–1984)

Roland Barthes
(12 November 1915–26 March 1980)

MICHEL FOUCAULT

This is the second occasion, within a very short space of time, on which it falls to me to speak to you about Roland Barthes.

A few years ago, when I invited you to welcome him amongst you, the originality and importance of a body of work which had been unfolding, with acknowledged brilliance, for more than 20 years, meant that, in support of my request, I had no need to call upon my friendship for him. It wasn't that I had to forget it. I could leave it aside. The work was there.

That work now stands alone. It will speak again; others will make it speak and will speak about it. Allow me then, this afternoon, to focus on friendship alone. Friendship which ought to have one thing at least in common with the death it abhors: not to be overtalkative.

When you elected him you already knew him. You knew you were choosing a rare balance between intelligence and creativity. You were choosing—and you knew it—someone who had the paradoxical ability to understand things as they are yet invent them with unprecedented originality. You were aware of choosing a great writer, I mean a writer pure and simple and an astounding teacher, whose lesson, for all those who followed his teaching, was less a lecture than an experience.

But I believe that more than one of you, in the course of these few years now terminated, discovered in this man, for whom the price of fame was an involuntary share of solitude, qualities of heart and soul that promised friendship.

I should like to say just one thing to you. Friendship is what he felt for you. At the start he was intimidated by you. Old grievances, a life which had not been easy, a university career made uncomfortable by circumstances, but also by some stubborn misunderstandings, had made him fear institutions. Nevertheless, he had been struck, and seduced—I can say this because he told me so—by the welcome you extended to him: sympathy, attentiveness,

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generosity, a certain style of mutual respect. He liked the serenity of this place.

He was grateful to you for introducing him to it and for the way you upheld it. He was grateful for this—most especially to Monsieur Horeau—but also to every one of you. To the entire administration as well, I should like to stress, and to all who worked here in any capacity whatsoever and with whom he had contact. It's true that what he felt for you, for us, was friendship.

Destiny dictated that the stupid violence of things—the only reality he was capable of hating—should put an end to all that, and on the threshold of this College to which I had asked you to admit him. The bitterness would be unbearable, were I not aware that he was happy to be here, and were it not the case that I feel entitled to convey, from him to you, across our sorrow, a slight smile and a wave of friendship.

Late Barthes

TZVETAN TODOROV

For me, Barthes's death will always remain linked to that other experience relating to him, reading *Camera Lucida*. For death is omnipresent in that book; as Death; as the death of his mother; as his own death. I cannot dissociate the event from those haunting words: "With her dead, I could do no more than wait for my own, undialectical, annihilation." "At the end of that first death, my own death is inscribed; between the two, nothing more, simply waiting." There is a troubling coincidence here between the accidental (as it were) and the essential.

I

It is trivial to write about someone that he is irreplacable (who is not?). I nonetheless think there is a further reason for applying that phrase to Barthes; a reason relating to the part he played in our intellectual life.

He belonged, in France, to that short list of names at the summit of the intellectual pyramid; he was one of those whose books one was always supposed to have read, whose books could become a subject of conversation between complete strangers, as if the fame attached to his name guaranteed a type of familiarity with the character: "And what's become of X? What's Barthes working on at the moment?" Certain schools of thought, certain artistic or philosophical movements, would announce themselves as having X, Y, Roland Barthes or Z as their leader. One might have thought, for that very reason, that he was not irreplaceable: a master thinker among others.

But that's just it, Barthes was not a master thinker, though he lived all the while on the top floor of the intellectual edifice, and that is what made him unique. Rather than be a master among others, he produced a distancing effect on all the ambient master discourses; he exerted a form of displacement on each one of them which was almost imperceptible yet after which it could no longer receive the same hearing as before. He had created a role for him-

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self which consisted in subverting the mastery inherent in discourse, and in assuming that role he had made himself irreplaceable; it is difficult to imagine who might take over from him.

It was very difficult to categorize Barthes's texts as belonging to one of the principal types of discourse with which we are familiar, and which our society takes as given; a fact in itself which was often the point of departure for a new attack on Barthes—from one of those individuals for whom culture is nature, and nature, penal law. He is not really a scientist they would say, nor a philosopher and, when all is said and done, not a novelist. Sometimes, giving into pressure, he produced a text which was clearly inscribed in the "scientific" or "philosophical" genre (these are his least successful); then, to see him occupy all the squares on the board and be able to assign him perhaps a definitive place, people would periodically spread the rumor that Barthes was about to write a novel. This just proved that they had not understood what was so innovative about his discourse. What he wrote was already fiction, but it concerned the very act of its own enunciation. Rather than being the authentic novelist of made-up stories, Barthes was the inauthentic speaker of true stories (or discourses).

So, in producing his own unprecedented form of intellectual discourse—with a scientific-philosophical content—Barthes had succeeded in endangering the master-discourse, yet his discourse was lacking in assertiveness and did not lend itself, as it should have, to the test of truth. Fiction was his mode, that of which one cannot ask the question true or false, the modality of quotation. He did not hide the fact and had inscribed one of his books with the heading: "All this must be considered as if spoken by a fictional character."

He obtained this result in several ways. In the text proper by working on language: paronyms, amphibologia, metaphors. Barthes's texts often begin in the manner of scholarly articles: terms are defined, distinctions made. The reader who is thirsty for knowledge is already rejoicing: saying to himself, here are some well-tested weapons I myself can use from now on, when the time comes. But little by little and as if as the result of a well-planned strategy, hope is disappointed; and if there exist Barthesians somewhere in the world they do not find their shared identity in a stock of common concepts. Those who, on the other hand, have "used" and "applied," have taken one of those fictional characters to be Barthes himself. Barthes's words never become weapons, they do not grasp anything (*begreiffen*); as one progresses through the text, instead of becoming clearer, they break up, disperse, disappear.

Even if each text appeared to be a coherent exposé of ideas, the various sequels would have been sufficient to destroy the illusion of system. Each new book by a philosopher or leading thinker makes clearer different elements of their system. One simply cannot talk about everything at once; one deals with aspects of the problem, one at a time. Barthes does nothing of the kind,

nor could one say that his successive texts form that ultimately reassuring duo known as contradiction (the right to change one's mind, a process of improvement). His books are out of synchrony with each other, displaced, blurring one into the other. One "method" slides into another, without explanation, without disavowal. Listened to in isolation each voice might seem authentic; taken together, each stamps the other as being on loan (not to say stolen).

Finally, for those who might have grasped neither intratextual dispersion, nor intertextual blurring, Barthes wrote several books in the last period of his life and in particular his *Roland Barthes,* in which he recounts in detail how "he is trying to speak in a language which is not enunciated in the name of the Law and/or of Violence," a discourse renouncing the military values of heroism, victory and domination. No one would ever again think of Barthes as a semiologist, a sociologist, a linguist, even though he might have lent his voice to each of those figures in succession; nor would they think of him as a philosopher or a "theorist." Of all the best-known photographs of Barthes the one I prefer is the one in which he is at the blackboard, explaining a structuralist equation while smiling: the smile punctuates like quotation marks.

Barthes's books are not exposés of ideas but verbal gestures, *action writing;* intransitive in the very act of their production. But once he relinquished the ownership of truth he could no longer be a master (not, at any rate, a master-thinker, though perhaps a master in the art of life); and not being a master, he lost interest in power. In the name of a facile capital letter (Power) one could, it is true, contest this last proposition: of course Barthes participated in intellectual Power; but as far as power is concerned (the real thing), not only did he not seek it, he fled it, preferring the honors and the signs of love.

One could say furthermore that Barthes never wanted to assume the discourse of the Father (another facile capital letter: for what if fathers no longer behaved in the name of the Father?). There was always something adolescent, and even infantile about him. He did not seek to impose truth on others, nor even on himself; that is perhaps why he was so vulnerable to the attacks to which he was periodically submitted, and did not really know how to defend himself (a decidedly bad warrior). He always seemed to be the same age as the students in his latest class (those from earlier years got older all the while), and he had no difficulty keeping up with all the latest innovations. *A Lover's Discourse* takes as its starting point the voice of an adolescent, Werther, and stages love, not desire. In the universe of sensations the negative pole is the sticky one, as it is for children, made up only of vertical relationships: desire did not enter into it. No, he could only be a paradoxical father, like Apollinaire's mothers, daughters of their daughters: father of his mother as he says in his last book, and father of himself. And was not his death the death of a child, crossing the road?

II

There was a change in Barthes's discourse which became perceptible, or so I think, in 1975 with the publication of *Roland Barthes.* Until then it was possible to divide Barthes's books into several genres or at least to distinguish the axes around which they turned. There was for example that opposition between works which were critical or affirmative, satirical or utopian, some books denouncing the doxa, others affirming paradox, some devoted to stupidity, others speaking the language of reason. Or, in a different perspective, concrete books, objective in the sense that they were about a particular object, and theoretical books. Barthes himself proposed a division into periods, following the tutelary system he had chosen to espouse: a Marxist phase, a Structuralist phase, a "Tel Quel" phase.

And it is true that from 1975 onward Barthes's books no longer reveal any tutelary system, nor any master discourse (unless in the form of a somewhat perverted quotation). For me Barthes's work can be divided into two distinct periods which count more than others: early Barthes plays the master, assumes his voice, and he may have disciples even if they have got the wrong address; late Barthes has given up all that. The late period produced a trilogy: *Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse, Camera Lucida.*

In one of his lecture courses Barthes said that one has to choose between terrorism and egoism; this choice explains the difference between before and after 1975. Barthes then became in his books what he had always been in his personal life and for his friends, a non-terrorist. The books preceding 1975 are not "terrorist" in the way the writings of a master thinker might be; but they are in their own way, since they embrace, be it only for the moment of writing or the length of a page, a position and a truth. In order no longer to impose his truth on others he had to restrict the import of his assertions to the minimum: to himself. Doing this is not a case of opting for the subjective to the detriment of the objective. I am tempted to say: on the contrary; since what we call the "objective" is often little more than a personal fantasy whereas speaking about oneself consists precisely in taking oneself for an object. Nor is it a case of opting for the particular to the detriment of the universal; there again, assuming authority in the name of a collective is usually no more than a fiction, and Barthes's final trilogy is certainly his most universal writing (whereas previously he was necessarily addressing a more restricted group: literary or scientific). In order to stop being terrorist he had to become egoistical, and to offer not only a discourse in his books (that is a given), but also a being: a subject without predicate.

To acquire that type of "egoism" is not easy, contrary to what one might think: it is achieved through a series of renunciations. In an interview given in 1971, Barthes said that what writing could not assume was the use of "I" followed by the past historic tense: the egocentric marker plus the stamp of reality which goes with the past tense. He was a long time learning to use these

two signs. His book *Roland Barthes* is of course about himself but that self is introduced (primarily) in the third person and the present tense. *A Lover's Discourse* uses the first person but keeps the present tense; there is a palpable difference: the present removes the subject from reality while generalizing it. What we read is not the experience of a singular subject but rather something proposed to us (even if it is not imposed) as a universal experience, or in any case an experience that can be shared; the form of the discourse decides our place (even if it is not a restrictive one). And only *Camera Lucida* begins each of the seven sections of the book evoking his mother's death with an "I" followed by the past historic, and they for me are not only the most powerful pages Barthes ever wrote but also, and absolutely, deeply moving pages: "Now, one November evening, not long after my mother's death, I sorted through some photographs." Thus purely individual experience attains universality, not by suggesting the nature of man but by leaving each man the freedom to choose his place in relation to the discourse being proposed.

Something, then, had changed, between the first two books of the trilogy and the last, something which had made that sentence possible; it was, as the sentence itself reveals, the death of his mother. The act of writing is indissociable from a psychical configuration of roles, writing being governed by a contemporaneous experience of alterity. Wondering, in *Roland Barthes,* which had been his most successful book, Barthes opted for *Empire of Signs,* immediately adding that it no doubt related to a happy experience of alterity. The most successful books of Barthes's first period (which is not to say that they are the richest or the most interesting) are his "objective" books such as *Michelet* or *Empire of Signs,* books in which there is least evidence of a tutelary discourse, as if this latter had been a supplement to the absence of a happy experience of alterity, a representation of alterity internal to the book. In these books Barthes no longer, not even provisionally, assumed a discourse; he produced a simulacrum, an entity intermediate between the perceived object and the perceiving subject, between the truth of another place and the sensibility of a here and now, the figure of Barthes himself.

It is obvious that writing and what it represents cannot automatically fill the gaps left in that network of alterity in which each individual is a point of departure. Today's professional intellectual needs to be happy in a relationship in order to be able to write in peace, poor man; he needs the other so that he may forget the other and turn to something else such as writing, for example. Not that writing is any compensation; it demands certain conditions; the breaking-up of a happy relationship puts a stop to writing (a double reproach to be addressed to the absent other!). Barthes is part of my own system of alterity; I undoubtedly owe him much, but I have the impression that now he is dead, each day I shall owe him more.

It was the death of Barthes's mother that enabled him to write "I sorted through." "To write about something is to make it obsolete," Barthes would say. By the same token, it is permissible to write about what is already dead.

Yet it was not only his mother who had died, but he too in one of his acceptations. His mother was his internal other, permitting the external other and the "I" to exist together. Once she had died, his life was over and could become the subject of writing. Barthes no doubt had other books to write, but he had no life left to live.

I find it emblematic that his last book should have been "on photography" (in a deceptive way, of course). Eloquent or discreet, the Photo only ever says one thing, and that is "I was there." It amounts to a gesture of showing, of silent deixis, and symbolizes a world before or after discourse; it makes of me an object, a dead person. What Barthes himself called "my last investigation" (chance? slip of the tongue? premonition?) was about death.

"I was trying to discover the nature of a verb with no infinitive, which would only be found with a tense and a mood," wrote Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. But that verb exists in French and it is the verb of death: *ci-gît* (here lies).

From "The Deaths of Roland Barthes"

Jacques Derrida

His *manner,* the way in which he displays, plays with, and interprets the pair *studium/punctum,* while at the same time explaining what he is doing by giving us his *notes*—and a little later on we will hear the music. This manner is unmistakably his. He makes the opposition *studium/punctum* and the evident *versus* of the bar appear slowly and cautiously in a new context, a context in which, it seems, they had no chance of appearing before. He gives to them or he welcomes this chance. The interpretation can at first appear rather artificial, ingenuous, elegant perhaps, but specious, for example in the passage from the *point* to the *pointing me* to the *poignant,* but little by little it imposes its necessity without concealing the artefact under some invented nature. It demonstrates its rigor throughout the book, and this rigor mixes its productivity with its performative fecundity. He makes it *yield* the greatest amount of meaning, of descriptive or analytic power (phenomenological, structural, and even beyond). The rigorousness is never rigid. In fact, the supple [*le souple*] is a category which I believe to be indispensable to any description of Barthes' manners. The virtue of suppleness is practiced without the least trace of either labor or labor's effacement. He never did without it, whether it was in theorization, writing strategies, or social intercourse; and it can even be read in the graphics of his writing, which I read as the extreme refinement of the civility he locates, in *Camera Lucida* and while speaking of his mother, at the limits of and even beyond the moral. It is a suppleness which is *liée* [linked] and at the same time *déliée* [unlinked, flowing, shrewd], as one says of writing or of the mind. In the liaison as well as in the undoing of the liaison, it never excludes accuracy [*justesse*] or justice; it must have secretly served him, I imagine, even in the impossible choice. The conceptual rigor of an artefact remains supple and playful here, and it lasts the time of a book; it will be useful to others but it only suits perfectly the one who signs it, like an instrument that can't be lent to anyone, like the [unique] history of an instru-

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ment. For above all, and in the first place, this apparent opposition (*studium/punctum*) does not forbid but, on the contrary, facilitates a certain *composition* between the two concepts. What is to be understood by composition? Two things which compose together. First, separated by an insuperable limit, the two concepts exchange compromises; they compose together, the one *with* the other, and we will later recognize in this a *metonymic* operation; the "subtle beyond" of the *punctum,* the uncoded beyond, composes with the "always coded" of the *studium.*[1] It belongs to it without belonging to it and is unlocatable in it; it never inscribes itself in the homogeneous objectivity of the framed space but instead inhabits, or rather haunts it: "it is an addition [*supplément*]: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is none the less already there*" (*CL,* p. 55). We are prey to the ghostly power of the supplement; it is this unlocatable site which gives rise to the specter.

> The *Spectator* is ourselves, all of us who glance through collections of photographs—in magazines and newspapers, in books, albums, archives. . . . And the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any *eidolon* emitted by the object, which I should like to call the *Spectrum* of the photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to "spectacle" and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead. (*CL,* p. 9)

As soon as it ceases to oppose the *studium,* while still retaining its heterogeneity, as soon as we can no longer distinguish between two places, contents or things, the *punctum* is not entirely subjugated to a concept, if by this one means a predicative, distinct, and opposable determination. This concept of a ghost is as scarcely perceptible in itself [*en personne*] as the ghost of a concept. Neither life nor death, it is the haunting of the one by the other. The *versus* of the conceptual opposition is as insubstantial as a camera's click. "*Life/Death:* the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print" (*CL,* p. 92). Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same, the *punctum* in the *studium,* the dead other alive in me. This concept of the photograph *photographs* all conceptual oppositions, it traces a relationship of haunting which perhaps is constitutive of all logics.

I was thinking of a second meaning of *composition.* Thus, in the ghostly opposition of the two concepts, in the pair S/P, *studium/punctum,* the composition is also the music. One could open here a long chapter: Barthes as musician. In a note, one would (to begin) locate such an analogy between the two heterogeneous elements S and P. One can discretely suggest, with the relation no longer a simple exclusion, with the punctual supplement parasiting the haunted space of the *studium,* that the *punctum* gives rhythm to the *studium,* that is, "scans" it.

> The second element will break (or punctuate [*scander:* to scan]) the *studium.* This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists . . . *punctum.* (*CL,* p. 26)

With the relationship to scansion already stressed, music returns, from some other place, at the bottom of the same page. Music, and more precisely, the composition: the analogy of the classical sonata. As he often does, Barthes is in the process of describing his train of thought, of giving us an account of what he is doing while he is doing it (what I earlier called his notes). He does so rhythmically, progressively, according to the tempo, in the classical sense of tempo; he marks the various stages (elsewhere he underlines in order to accentuate and, perhaps, to play point against point, or point against study: "*at this point in my investigation*") (*CL,* p. 55; italics omitted in translation). In short, he is going to make it understood, with an ambiguous gesture of modesty and defiance, that he will not treat the pair of concepts S and P as essences coming from outside a text in the process of being written, thereby lending themselves to some vague philosophical significance. They only carry the truth within an irreplaceable musical composition. They are motifs. If one wishes to transpose them elsewhere, and it is possible, useful, and even necessary, one must proceed analogically, though the operation will not be successful unless the other opus, the other system of composition, itself carries these motifs in a way just as original and irreplaceable. Hence: "Having thus distinguished two themes in Photography (for in general the photographs I liked were constructed in the manner of a classical sonata), I could occupy myself with one after the other" (*CL,* p. 27).

It would be necessary to return to the "scansion" of the *studium* by a *punctum* which is not opposed to it even though it remains completely other, a *punctum* which comes to stand in for it, link itself to it, and compose with it. I am thinking of a musical composition in counterpoint, of all the sophisticated forms of counterpoint and polyphony, of the fugue.

The Winter Garden Photograph: the invisible *punctum* of the book. It doesn't belong to the corpus of photographs he exhibits, to the series of examples he displays and analyzes. Yet it irradiates the entire book. A sort of radiant serenity comes from his mother's eyes, the clarity of which he describes but we never see. The radiance composes with the wound that signs the book, with an invisible *punctum. At this point,* he no longer speaks of light or photography, of anything to be seen, but of the voice of the other, the accompaniment, the song, the accord, the "last music."

> Or again (for I am trying to express this truth) the Winter Garden Photograph was for me like the last music Schumann wrote before collapsing, that first *Gesang der Frühe* which accords with both my mother's being and my grief at her death; I could not express this accord except by an infinite series of adjectives. (*CL*, p. 70)

And elsewhere:

> in a sense I never "spoke" to her, never "discoursed" in her presence, for her; we supposed, without saying anything of the kind to each other, that the frivolous insignificance of language, the suspension of images must be the very space of love, its music. Ultimately I experienced her, strong as she had been, my inner Law, as my feminine child. (*CL*, p. 72; "Law" is capitalized in original but not in Howard's translation)

For him, I would have wanted to avoid not evaluation (if it were possible or even desirable) but all that which insinuates itself into the most implicit evaluation in order to return to the coded (once again to the *studium*). For him I would have wanted, without succeeding at it, to write at the limit, as close to the limit as possible but also beyond the "neutral," "colorless," "innocent" writing of which *Writing Degree Zero* shows at once the historical novelty and the infidelity. "If the writing is really neutral . . . then Literature is vanquished. . . . Unfortunately, nothing is more fickle than a colourless writing; mechanical habits are developed in the very place where freedom existed, a network of set forms hem in more and more the pristine freshness of discourse."[2] It is not a question here of vanquishing literature but of preventing it from neatly and cleverly sealing up the singular and flawless wound (nothing is more unbearable or laughable than all the expressions of guilt in mourning, all its inevitable spectacles). . . .

The deaths of Roland Barthes: *his* deaths, these and those of his relatives, those deaths which must have inhabited him, situating places and solemn moments, orienting tombs in his interior space (his mother's death to end and probably even to begin with). *His* deaths, those he lived in the plural, those he must have linked together, trying in vain to "dialectize" them before the "total" and "undialectical" death; those deaths which always form in our lives a terrifying and endless series. But how did he "live" them? No answer is more impossible or forbidden than this one. But a certain movement had quickened in those last years; I could feel a sort of autobiographical acceleration, as if he were saying "I am aware that I have little time left." I must concern myself first with this thought of a death that begins, like thought and like death, in the memory of language. While still living, he wrote a death of Roland Barthes by himself. And finally *his* deaths, his texts about death, everything he wrote, with such insistence on displacement, on death, on the theme of Death if you will, if indeed there is such a theme. From the novel to

the photograph, from *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) to *Camera Lucida* (1980), a certain thought about death set everything into motion, into transit really, a sort of traversal toward the beyond of all closed systems, all forms of knowledge, all the new positive sciences whose novelty always tempted the *Aufklärer* and discoverer in him, though only for a time, the time of a passage, the time of a contribution which, after him, would become indispensable. And yet he was already elsewhere, and he said so; he would speak openly about it with a calculated modesty, with a politeness that revealed a rigorous demand and an uncompromising ethic, like an idiosyncratic destiny naively assumed. In the beginning of *Camera Lucida* he speaks, and speaks to himself, of his "discomfort" at always

> being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical; and at the heart of this critical language, between several discourses, those of sociology, of semiology, and of psychoanalysis—but that, by ultimate dissatisfaction with all of them, I was bearing witness to the only sure thing that was in me (however naive it might be): a desperate resistance to any reductive system. For each time, having resorted to any such language to whatever degree, each time I felt it hardening and thereby tending to reduction and reprimand, I would gently leave it and seek elsewhere: I began to speak differently. (*CL*, p. 8)

The beyond of this crossing is no doubt the last outpost and the great enigma of the Referent, as it has been called for the last twenty years, and death is clearly not in this for nothing (it will be necessary to return to this in another tone). In any case, as early as *Writing Degree Zero,* all this passes through the novel: the beyond of literature as literature, literary "modernity," literature producing itself and producing its essence as its own disappearance, showing and hiding itself at the same time (Mallarmé, Blanchot . . .); and "the Novel is a Death" (*WDZ,* p. 38).

> Modernism begins with the search for a Literature which is no longer possible. Thus we find, in the Novel too, this machinery directed towards both destruction and resurrection, and typical of the whole of modern art. . . . The Novel is a Death; it transforms life into destiny, a memory into a useful act, duration into an orientated and meaningful time. (*WDZ,* pp. 38–9)

And it is the modern possibility of the photograph (whether it be an art or a technique matters little here) which combines death and the referent in the same system. It wasn't for the first time, and this conjugation of death and the referent didn't have to wait for the Photograph to establish an essential relationship to reproductive technique, or to technique in general, but the immediate proof given by the photographic apparatus [*dispositif*] and by the structure of the *remains* it leaves behind are irreducible events, ineffaceably original. It is the failure, or at any rate the limit, of all that which, in lan-

guage, literature and the other arts, seemed to permit grandiose theories on the general suspension of the Referent, or of that which was classified, by a sometimes ridiculous simplification, under that vast and vague category. By the time the *punctum* rends space, the reference and death are hand in hand in the photograph. But should we say reference or referent? Analytical precision must here be equal to the stakes, and the photograph puts this precision to the test: in the photograph, the referent is noticeably absent, suspendable, vanished into the unique past time of its event, but the reference to this referent, let us say the intentional movement of reference (since Barthes does in fact appeal to phenomenology in this book), also implies irreducibly the having-been of a unique and invariable referent. It implies the "return of the dead" in the very structure of both its image and the phenomenon of its image. This doesn't happen in other types of images or discourses, or let's say in signs in general, at least not in the same way, the implication and form of the reference taking all sorts of different twists and turns. From the beginning of *Camera Lucida* the "disorder" introduced by the photograph is largely attributed to the "unique time" of its referent, a time which doesn't lend itself to reproduction or pluralization, and whose referential implication is inscribed as such in the very structure of the photogramme, regardless of either the number of its reproductions or the artifice of its composition. Hence "this stubbornness of the Referent in always being there" (*CL,* p. 6). "It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funeral immobility. . . . In short, the referent adheres. And this singular adherence" (*CL,* pp. 5–6). Although it is no longer *there* (present, living, real, etc.), its *having-been-there* now part of the referential or intentional structure of my relationship to the photogramme, the return of the referent indeed takes the form of a haunting. This is a "return of the dead," whose spectral arrival in the very space of the photogramme well resembles an emission or emanation. Already a sort of hallucinating metonymy: it is something else, a bit come from the other (from the referent) which is found in me, in front of me but also in me like a bit of me (since the referential implication is also intentional and noematic; it belongs neither to the sensible body nor to the medium of the photogramme). Moreover, the "target," the "referent," the "*eidolon* emitted by the object," the "*Spectrum*" (*CL,* p. 9), can be me, seen in a photograph of myself:

> I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. The Photographer knows this very well, and himself fears (if only for commercial reasons) this death in which his gesture will embalm me. . . . I have become Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person. . . . Ultimately, what I am seeking in the photograph taken of me (the "intention" according to which I look at it) is Death: Death is the *eidos* of that Photograph. (*CL,* pp. 14–15)

Carried by this relationship, drawn or lured by the pull and character of it (*Zug, Bezug,* etc.), by the reference to the spectral referent, Roland Barthes traversed periods, systems, modes, "phases," and "genres"; he marked and punctuated the *studium* of each, passing *through* phenomenology, linguistics, literary mathesis, semiosis, structural analysis, etc. His first move was to recognize in each of them their necessity or richness, their critical value and light, in order to turn them against dogmatism. . . .

I return to the "poignant," to this pair of concepts, this opposition which is not an opposition, the ghost of this pair, *punctum/studium.* I return to this because the *punctum* seems to speak, to let Barthes himself speak the point of singularity, the traversal of discourse toward the unique, the "referent" as the irreplaceable other, the one who was and will no longer be, who returns like that which will never come back, who marks the return of the dead to the reproductive image. I return to this because Roland Barthes is the name of that which points me, or points to that which I am awkwardly trying to say here. I return to this in order to show also how he himself treated and appropriately signed this simulacrum of an opposition. He first highlighted the absolute irreducibility of the *punctum,* the unicity of the referential as we say (I appeal to this word so as not to have to choose between reference and referent: what adheres in the photograph is perhaps less the referent itself, in the effectiveness of its reality, than the implication in the reference of its having-been-unique). The heterogeneity of the *punctum* is rigorous, its originality suffers neither contamination nor concession. And yet, in other places, at other times, Barthes accedes to another descriptive demand, let's call it phenomenological since the book is presented *also* as a phenomenology. He accedes to the requisite rhythm of the composition, a musical composition which, to be more precise, I would call contrapuntal. It is indeed necessary for him to recognize, and this is not a concession, that the *punctum* is not what it is. This absolute other composes with the same, with its absolute other which is thus not its opposite, with the locus of the same and of the *studium* (it is the limit of the binary opposition and, undoubtably, of any structural analysis the *studium* itself can exploit). If it is more or less than itself, dissymmetrical to everything including itself, the *punctum* can invade the field of the *studium,* although it technically doesn't belong to it. One will recall that it is located outside all fields and codes. As the place of the irreplaceable singularity and the unique referential, the *punctum* irradiates and, what is most surprising, lends itself to metonymy. As soon as it allows itself to be drawn into a system of substitutions, it can invade everything, objects as well as affects. This singularity which is nowhere *in* the field mobilizes everything everywhere; it pluralizes itself. If the photograph bespeaks the unique death, the death of the unique, this death repeats itself immediately, as such, and is itself elsewhere. I said that the *punctum* allows itself to be drawn into metonymy. Actu-

ally, it induces it, and this is its *force,* or rather than its force (since it exercises no actual constraint and exists completely in reserve), its *dynamis,* in other words, its power, potentiality, and even its dissimulation, its latency. Barthes marks this relationship between force (potential or reserved) and metonymy at certain intervals of the composition which I must here unjustly condense (p. 74). "However lightning-like it may be, the *punctum* has, more or less potentially, a power of expansion. This power is often metonymic" (*CL,* p. 45). Further: "I had just realized that however immediate and incisive it was, the *punctum* could accommodate a certain latency (but never any examination [*examen:* Howard translates *examen* as 'scrutiny'])" (*CL,* p. 53). This metonymic power is essentially related to the supplementary structure of the *punctum* ("it is a supplement") and of the *studium* which receives from it all its movement, even if it must content itself, like the "examination" with turning around the point.[3] From that moment on, the relationship between the two concepts is neither tautological nor oppositional, neither dialectical nor in any sense symmetrical; it is supplementary and musical (contrapuntal).

The metonymy of the *punctum:* scandalous as it may be, it allows us to speak, to speak of the unique, to speak of and to him. It yields the trait [*trait:* line, trace, feature, reference, draught, musical passage, etc.] that relates to the unique. The Winter Garden Photograph, which he neither shows nor hides, which he speaks, is the *punctum* of the entire book. The mark of this unique wound is nowhere visible as such, but its unlocatable clarity (that of *his* mother's eyes) irradiates the whole study. It makes of this book an irreplaceable event. And yet only a metonymic force can still assure a certain generality to the discourse and offer it to analysis by submitting its concepts to a quasi-instrumental employment. How else could we, without knowing her, be so deeply moved by what he said about *his* mother, who was not only the Mother, or a mother, but the only one she was and of whom such a photo was taken "that day . . ."? How would this be poignant to us if a metonymic force, which yet cannot be mistaken for something that facilitates the movement of identification, were not at work? The alterity remains almost intact; it is the condition. I don't put myself in his place, I don't tend to replace his mother with mine. If I were to do this, I could only be moved by the alterity of the without-relation, the absolute unicity which the metonymic power recalls in me without effacing it. He is right to protest against the confusion between that which was his mother and the Figure of the Mother, but the metonymic power (one part for the whole or one name for another, etc.) will always come to inscribe both in this relation without relation.

Translators' Notes

1 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, Hill & Wang, 1981), pp. 59, 51 (hereafter *CL*). We have referred to this translation throughout, though the context of Derrida's essay has sometimes necessitated a retranslation of particular words and a return to the original text, *La Chambre claire* (Paris, Seuil, 1980). All differences between our translation and Howard's are indicated in the text.

2 Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York, Hill & Wang, 1983) p. 78 (henceforth cited as *WDZ*).

3 The phrase here is *tourner autour du point* which is a play on *tourner autour du pot* (to beat around the bush).

Barthes's Voice

Julia Kristeva

All those who have loved someone now dead, survive the wound opened by that person's death by keeping them present, alive. Memory then occupies the place of a time which is ever present: the severed past and the impossible future merge in the intensity of a time of permanence in which the I who remembers is affirmed within, through and at the cost of the one now missing. The golden trap of narcissism. The ordinary course of mourning.

Yet the present remains the only dimension in which I can think about, read and listen to Barthes. Is that because my impression is that his first and most essential gift is that of *a voice?* In spite of the discretion and distance of the conversation, the firm fragility of that voice endows direct speech with the force of physical contact. The man speaking leaves you words beyond meaning. Just the tremor of that nonmeaning, that vocality beyond meaning reveals his body and his personal history.

The magic of those first classes in the days before Christmas 1965; of conversations inevitably tracing the development of new ideas which Barthes had anticipated or seized at the right moment (some foolishly thought he was at the helm); the timid phone-calls and their ironic sing-song sweep seeming to point to the inanity both of the banal subject matter and of his personal request; the weary but playful account of "problems" inflicted by the usual "bores" . . . All that still echoes through in the present and is inscribed in the texture and inflection of sound and melody reaching the ear before and beyond signification. Establishing a sonorous, timeless, unconscious complicity, so the durability of that voice becomes the inevitable support for a form of teaching which is fluid, fluctuating and radically a-didactic. The students are spellbound and (unlike in the analytic cure) there is no hint of loss, no gift, no separation, just Barthes transmitting impressions of truth and leaving us with a pleasure-bonus into the bargain.

This is to say (without saying much) that he is not a man with a message. Some must have been disappointed to see him delivering such a completely vocal, un-initiatory, un-Platonic and, on the whole, non-paternalistic form of teaching from the height of the most prestigious institutions. I can

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still hear him saying their acrimony *bored* him—his way of blocking out malice, defusing resentment, eliminating hatred. And in the "grain of the voice" there was the discreet jubilation of having outplayed the institution on its own ground, avoiding its ultimate snares as well as the pitfalls of meaning.

Voice as the sublime site of affect? As a passage through meaning, an antidote to hatred?

The feeling of *liberty* which abounded and which he leaves us, comes from that art he had of touching the chords of our own fragility, unconcerned by those powerful groups who resented his audacity, his ease. No noisy demands for liberty, nor assertion of the right to such and such an oppressed ideological or sexual identity fighting for recognition. The noble quality of his liberty, poles apart from the hysterical resentment which animates so many liberation movements, was to be found in his capacity to *decipher* (like a semiologist?) what was lacking within the defended exteriors of a piece of work or of a certain commitment, and to be able to formulate that lack, for us and for others, without pathos, without gravity, with the lightness and courage of perspicacious goodness . . . I remember, one rainy, melancholic May day, leaving to go nowhere in particular, ending up in a state of half-chosen solitude suddenly broken by his article "L'Étrangère" which came out in *La Quinzaine* and of which I had no inkling . . . No fighter's ethic this, nor the ethic of someone posing as a guarantor of society, but at obscure moments and without immediate implication, the ethic of a friend who gains your confidence since he interprets you against the background of a long cohabitation with illness . . . That ethic makes of him the most *modern* of great men, one whose morality was non-committal and timeless.

I recently worked on a survey of contemporary literature and I reached the conclusion that Barthes was the first, the only thinker to have forcefully teased out, and with acuity, the characteristic workings not only of modern literature but of modern man. *Writing Degree Zero* (a decidedly underestimated book like, in another way, Barthes's later theoretical writings) is the height from which the twists and turns of a new form of writing, already in existence, can be measured and become more and more affirmed in time. Barthes was the only one—and after him it must be said there is no one—to give us the words to think it, that is to perceive it as it is, a descent into the hell of the unnameable, that ultimate but jubilatory nothingness which borders the human adventure.

It is that art of *interpretation* which links Barthes to the tradition in which he was involved through the incidental course of cultural history: the tradition of the Stoics, founding fathers of Semiotics. I see him more at ease beneath the Athenian portico than in the Garden of Epicurus. To decipher, interpret and write out that movement in which he is entirely implicated, voice and mind, body and soul—that is what makes his discourse literature, in the full sense of the word—in which classical and modern are one and the same, the sense in which language can break out into effects of surprise, won-

der, a dazzling sphere we thought beyond language: always the *ellipsis,* a shortcut in logic, an unexpected bringing together of words, sentences, narratives, and even beyond, words suspended in favor of tone . . . That time of ellipsis, the time of literature, like the time of timely interpretation, is one in which eternity insists upon the instant and bypasses the procession of history, the aftermath of history . . .

It can then happen that the lucidity (of writing, of interpretation) coincides with the stopping point: that (the illusion of) the completed interpretation is the moment of suicide: that death becomes caught in timeless happiness . . . The Stoics knew it. Barthes's last days let it be known . . .

In 1974, in China, a coach took us through thousands of years of history visible to few Westerners at that time. Our avid eyes devoured each stele, statue, jewel, characteristic feature. Barthes would often stay in the coach or wait at the museum door. That form of commemoration, of linearity, that dream of filiation bored him.

A man of the present, an interpreter, he liked to shatter genealogies which he saw as illusions, and out of the event of the sign, the event in the present, weave other links, his own, beyond necessity, phantasmatic? synchronic? topical?—our own?

The reserved clarity of such a solitary, contented, hard, and therefore distinguished attitude, finds its reflection—I think—in the *choice of the mother,* which says it *all,* condensing beginning and end. It suspends real but also symbolic filiation: there are no Barthes "disciples," only epigones, as is often the case with writers. To return to China, where, apologizing perfidiously to my companions for my perpetual questions which diverted the comments of our hosts towards the enigmatic destiny of those mythical Chinese women, I heard Barthes state, without a trace of irony or complicitous confession, that he was a man who adored his mother. We were in Xian, at a cemetery dating back to the sixth millenium before our era, a cemetery in which the mother would be buried at the center and the other members of the clan in a circle around her . . .

Certain forms of adoration are taboo. Others are profane. He who writes, if only through that rape of language that he tips from the realm of meaning into the realm of voice, is a profaner. The pleasure of the text is then a "deep and painful voluptuousness" drawn no doubt at its very source, but transposed into signs by someone who insisted on severing within himself the links of the species.

A teacher? A writer? Between the second and fourth centuries he would have been called a "psychic" who was trying to become a "pneumatic" . . . The now harsh fate of sublimation. With all due deference to the Barbarians we are, everything else seems barbarous in a century "terrified for not having known that death was triumphant in that strange voice."

With all that and thanks to all that, Barthes's was the only literary-critical discourse of modernity. Do you know any other in France, or abroad? An

innovative book only has to appear—an exceptional thing in itself—for it to become clear that there is nobody in a position to talk about it. The newspapers oscillate between political eclecticism and partisan or sexual resentment; academic criticism, sometimes subtle, but often technical, remains confined in a language which is accessible to few. At which point, filtered by the media and awaiting a new generation of serious commentators, literature appears either as marginal and insignificant or as a battleground for the conflict of ideologies, unless, classically, it remains a sort of pretext for engulfing, inaudible fantasy.

Is this the ultimate destiny of the imaginary in a world "with neither god nor master"? So be it. But in this same universe, aware of its erasure of transcendence, Barthes was able to occupy, both implicitly and with musical precision, a distant, lucid and analytical position from which to speak about the *play,* the necessary and gratuitous polyphony, of verbal signs, foundation and acme of the identities we assume and the losses we suffer: to speak in short about *art,* an art which is both *formal* and *ethical.*

It is, I think, the place of a law which is immanent—active in the very fabric of language and which the interpreter who is attentive to signs and to the birth of signs, can try to attain. Such an attention to the immanence of meaning and to its dissolution is, perhaps, the fundamental guarantee of the discourse of literature or interpretation which is Barthes's unique and exemplary legacy.

The striking lack of that discourse, since his death, is the major symptom of a perverse society incapable of elaborating its own sublimatory code. Of producing it in the present.

[Impostor, Thinker, or Novelist?]

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET

In the last stage of his life Roland Barthes (him again), seemed obsessed with the idea that he was merely an impostor: that he had spoken of everything, from Marxism to linguistics, without really knowing anything. Already, many years before, I'd thought he was unduly affected by the criticisms of Picard who vigorously denounced his misreading of the "real" Racine and his times. And yet Barthes had made it clear that all he was doing in his *Racine* was offering a contemporary reading which was therefore subjective, risky and precisely contexted. But he was suddenly chilled by the angry frown emanating from the old Sorbonne and felt a complex mixture of hatred and dread. And so later, feeling his age, he became more and more troubled about the possible existence—which he suspected—of real seventeenth-century scholars, real teachers, real semiologists.

In vain I retorted that of course he was an impostor precisely because he was a real writer (and not an *écrivant* to use his own distinction) and that a writer's "truth" can only exist, if at all, in the accumulation, excess and transcendance of his necessary lies. He would give his inimitable smile: a blend of unpretentious intelligence and friendship, but there was a certain distance, an absence from the world which was growing more and more pronounced. He wasn't convinced: he told me that I certainly had the right to be an impostor, that it was even my duty, but not his, since he wasn't a creator. He was wrong. It's his work as a writer that will last. The semi-disrepute into which so many people would like to see him fall so soon after his death is merely the result of a misunderstanding: the role of "thinker" that was foist upon him.

Was Barthes a thinker? The question immediately raises another: what is a thinker today? Not so very long ago a thinker had to provide his fellow citizens with certainties, or at least with some rigid, consistent, inflexible axes to underpin his own discourse and so guide the minds of his readers and the consciousness of his time. A thinker was an intellectual guru. Certainty was his essential characteristic, his official brief.

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Roland Barthes was a slippery thinker. After his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, I was expressing enthusiasm for his accomplished performance when a strange young girl turned on me, passionate and angry: "What are you admiring? He hasn't said a thing from start to finish!" That wasn't quite accurate; he had indeed been saying something, yet avoided pinning this "something" down: using the method he'd been perfecting for many years, he withdrew from what he was saying as he went along. Deliberately undermining his provocative statement that all speech is fascist, which had caused such a furore that evening, he gave a disturbing demonstration of a discourse which was not a discourse: one that destroyed, step by step, any temptation to be dogmatic. What I admired in this voice that had just kept us in suspense for two whole hours was precisely that it left my freedom intact—better still: at each twist and turn of phrase, it gave it new strength.

Dogmatism is nothing but the serene discourse of truth (complacent, solid, unequivocal). The traditional thinker was a man of truth, yet a short time ago he could still believe in all good faith that the reign of truth was advancing hand in hand—same goal, same battles, same enemies—with the progress of human liberty. On the façade of a solid Neo-Greek monument at the University of Halifax, Nova Scotia you can read: "Truth guarantees your liberty" and headed notepaper from Edmonton that I was using this autumn has the following lofty motto: *Quaecumque vera.* Beautiful utopia, beautiful cheat that illuminated the euphoric dawn of our bourgeois society, and one century later the dawn of scientific socialism. Alas, today we know where that science leads. Truth, in the final analysis, has only ever served oppression. Anyway, too many hopes, wretched disappointments and blood-soaked paradises teach us to be wary of it.

The preceding lines and those that follow originally formed part of an article that I was asked to write for the *Nouvel Observateur* on the anniversary of Barthes's death, just before the presidential election in the spring of 1981. At this point in my text I made a joke—today unseasonable and somewhat bitter—which I nevertheless reproduce: "I shall vote for the Socialist party candidate, since he at least hasn't got a manifesto."

Unfortunately we then saw the candidate in question, who'd become our monarch, on the contrary take very seriously promises which many of his friends had until then only seen as vague speculations for the electoral campaign, the abstract ideas of the opposition which would need to be completely revised when they were eventually put into practice. Nothing of the sort has happened: from ill-timed nationalisations that have been needlessly ruinous, to the dictatorial, uniform reduction of weekly working hours, opposed by the unions themselves, the Left's victory resulted instantly in a flood of shortsighted measures carried out in defiance of circumstances (as well as in defiance of the most experienced advisers) and solely justified, we are told, by the fact that they were "in the manifesto."

Certainly in all the decisions of principle that weren't made in the national interest, nor in the interest of the people, the pledges that had to be given to the Communist allies must have weighed heavily—these allies, not the least of whose defects is obviously that they—they at least—believe in truth, that is, in the absolute and definitive value of what was judged to be right, once and for all, sixty or more years ago. In any case we have once more been able to gauge on this occasion how pernicious a manifesto can be as soon as it's taken as law.

And even if the problems of human liberty are not exactly the same for running a government and for the lawless pursuit of literature (which assuredly lacks sanctions), there could still perhaps be an art common to these two so disparate powers: the ability to contradict themselves in order to move on. As for me, I shall never side with those who reproach our president for having, a few months later, altered course, changed tack, as it were, right in the middle of the storm he had unleashed. On the contrary, I like to think that such a daring manoeuvre shows that there is still some flexibility at the heart of this nascent socialism, the overly respectful heir of outmoded traditions. It is said that on the day of his fatal accident Roland Barthes had lunched with François Mitterrand. Let's hope that on leaving he convinced him of the radical virtues of pulling back, of re-examination, of continuous change.

For, slippery as an eel (I'm talking about Barthes again), his shifts are not simply the result of chance, nor do they come from a weakness in judgement or character flaw. "Messages" that change, branch off, veer in other directions—this is what he teaches. So it follows that our last "real" thinker will be the one who preceded him: Jean-Paul Sartre. He still wanted to enclose the world in a total (totalitarian?) system worthy of Spinoza and Hegel. But, at the same time, Sartre was already possessed by the modern idea of liberty and that, thank goodness, is what undermined all his endeavours. So his grand constructions—novels, criticism or pure philosophy—remained one after the other unfinished, open on all sides.

From Sartre's point of view his work is a failure. However, it's this failure that interests and excites us today. Wanting to be the last philosopher, the last thinker to think in terms of totality, he ends up being a pioneer of the new structures of thought: uncertainty, mobility, skidding. And we can now see that the statement of "useless passion" at the end of *Being and Nothingness* wasn't so very different from Jean Paulhan's "Consider this unsaid," though they appeared to be poles apart.

In 1950 Barthes enters this intellectual arena, which already seems to be in ruins. Strangely, he is initially drawn to the reassuring work of Marx. In a quarrel with Albert Camus over *The Plague,* he silenced the liberal humanist with the supremacy of "historical materialism," as if it were some absolute value. But soon, gradually, he withdrew from Marxism, without a fuss, tiptoeing as always.

He was once more lured into great systems of thought: psychoanalysis, linguistics, semiology. Hardly had the new label of semiologist had time to stick before he detested it. Openly ridiculing "our three policemen: Marx, Freud, Saussure," he ended up denouncing the intolerable imperialism of all rigid systems in his famous apologue of the chip pan: a "valid" system of thought that is too coherent is like boiling oil: whatever you put into it, you'll always get chips.

And yet Barthes's work is not a disavowal because of the constantly renewed movement of the self outwards, this movement that constitutes freedom (that could never become an institution since it only exists at the moment of its own birth); this is precisely what he had been pursuing passionately from the outset, from Brecht to Bataille, from Racine to Proust to the *nouveau roman,* from dialectics to his analysis of fashion. And like Sartre before him, Barthes discovers very soon that the novel or the theatre—more so than the essay—are the natural setting in which concrete freedom can be most violently and effectively acted out. Fiction is like philosophy's "world of becoming." Was Roland Barthes in his turn a novelist? The question instantly gives rise to another: what is a novel today?

Paradoxically, in the 1950s, using my own novels as booby traps in his own terrorist activities, he would attempt to reduce their cunning dislocations, their implicit phantoms, their auto-erasures, their gaps, to a universe of things which would merely affirm its own objective, literal solidity. Of course that aspect was present in my books (and in my theoretical writings), but as one of two irreconcilable poles of a contradiction. Barthes chooses to ignore completely the monsters lurking in the shadows of the hyper-realist picture. And when the ghost and spectres of *Last Year at Marienbad* invade the screen all too visibly, he beats a retreat.

I think he himself was grappling with analogous contradictions. He refused to see the spectre of *Oedipus Rex* or the obsession with sexual crime in *Les Gommes* or *Le Voyeur* because, struggling with his own demons, he only needed my writing for its cleansing function. As a good terrorist he had only chosen one angle of the text, the most obviously acute so that he could use it in the cut and thrust. But in the evening, when he came down from the barricades, he would go home to wallow joyfully in Zola's rich prose thickened with adjectives . . . even if he were later to find fault with the "adjectivity" of the snow in my *Labyrinthe.* Finally, ten years on, when *Project pour une révolution à New York* was published, he recovered his enthusism and praised it as a perfect, yet "mobile" "Leibnizian model."

None of this answers the important question: what novels would he himself have written? He talked about this more and more in public and in private. I don't know whether there are any rough drafts or fragments among his papers. In any case, I'm sure they wouldn't be like *Les Gommes* or *Projet.* He would say that he could only write a "real novel" and he spoke of his problems with the past historic and the characters' proper names. In a shift

even more dramatic than its predecessors, it seemed that the literary landscape around him had slid back to the end of the nineteenth century . . . After all, why not? The meaning of any research must not be defined *a priori.* And Barthes was subtle and devious enough to transform this so-called "real" novel once more into something new, baffling, unrecognisable.

From "Roland Barthes without Tears"

PHILIPPE LEJEUNE

All this should be taken as spoken by a character in a novel—or rather by several.

P. L.

COULD I REALLY HAVE WRITTEN . . .

Could I really have written that to type was *to expel small portions of code?* These are the words maliciously attributed to me by the authors of a lampoon (*B/R,* 18). What I actually wrote was: "typing does not give rise to the birth of a letter, but rather to the expulsion of a small portion of code" (*RB,* 100). What's happened to the connotation? To the antithesis? A handwritten letter isn't simply a small portion of code, it's a gesture, an impulsion, hence a birth. A typewriter, however, does everything at once. It imprints, it expels; it spits out meaning in small parcels, it sputters. The word was crucial. A pastiche suppresses connotation so as to suggest that all signifiers are equivalent: *eccentricity* becomes outright *farce,* transgression is transgressed, everything is tainted by its ideology of clarity. In a word: it *goes too far*. . . .

INTIMACY

It's only people with the same attitude to *discretion* who become really close to each other. Everything else—character, taste, even culture—is trivial. True intimacy relies on a shared sense of the *pudenda* and the *tacenda.* It's this which permits such incredible freedom: you can talk about everything else.

But there are false intimacies, and few total friendships. People are very rarely friends from every point of view. So they tend to have several friends, and several who differ in kind.

(He has as many friends as the number of people who coexist within him.)

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Composition

I've got a "Preface" to write. Yet another. What's more, it's one I have no interest in writing. What a strange job: you have to do something you have no interest in, yet you end up doing it for pleasure. The natural discourse of a preface is secondary-school discourse. Instead of entirely foreclosing this means of expression, from time to time I choose to adopt it. The game banishes boredom: I set myself the subject of a *composition.* A dictionary, a friend's childhood memories, a new edition of a classical text, tales of *cruising,* a semiological treatise. I append my signature to increase their value. I dash off my composition, like Alain stringing together his "remarks." I dazzle, I amaze, I withdraw. All this should be read "in inverted commas," with due allowance for the playful element, for friendship, for context. But these "heterographic" prefaces (as G. I. puts it) end up by forming a system: these texts I've pulled strings for form an imaginary constellation, an annexed territory (or one granted as fiefs?), orbiting around my books like an intertextual network of suburbs. . . .

Fragments

Essays, sketches, studies, outlines, drafts, exercises, first attempts. If I use these filing cards as fragments, and publish them as a sequence with ***, it's bound to add up to something. The reader will see them as a coherent *whole* and so will I (one I hadn't thought of before). With the merest hint of a narrative linking them together, and with a proper name (or the *outline* of a name: his initials), you can construct a more or less feasible character. That's how I wrote *RB* in 74 or 75.

Fragility

RB claims to be everything, with the exception of an autobiography. The topos of origins is rejected (*RB,* 142), parodied (in the initial photo-novel), muffled (the "anamneses"): there is no true origin, only a discreet charm filtering through the denials. Above all, since any narrative is *Oedipal* (on the basis of the two principles: "All English women are redheads" and "I don't wish to know that"): no narrative. No confessions either: that derisory truth of things thought to be true because they had been hidden. His relation to psychoanalysis isn't scrupulous, or even operable (as we say of someone: he's no longer operable). Besides, to speak the truth about yourself is as impossible as it's inescapable . . . So he endlessly says that he's not saying what he says (what he doesn't say), by reflecting his denegatory meta-discourse in a triple mirror (I, you, he). He is fragile: pathetically. The more writing tries to

outplay the imaginary by replaying it, the more wafts from that writing, distilled, evanescent, pervasive, tenacious, the *scent of a person*. . . .

Blunder

Not having been loved for having written that *you write in order to be loved* (*RB*, 107–108), he proves, by the distress provoked in him by this reaction, the profound accuracy of this apparently silly remark: Q.E.D. But if his friend M. D. had found the remark accurate, maybe R. B. would have found M. D. stupid? How can you tell whether someone is saying "hello" to the first or the third degree?

Indeed, how can you tell whether M. D. wasn't speaking to the fourth degree when she voiced her disapproval? (R. B. was unable to go that far.)

Incoherent?

He started out by writing a satire of *Neither-Norism* (*M*, 144–146) only to end up producing a utopian reverie on the *Neutral* (which is a sort of *Neither-Nor* squared).

In his first books he separated language from reality, so as to remove its innocence. Now he uses the same strategy to reinstate the innocence of language and to shield it from all possible criticism. Under the name of the *imaginary* and the *novelistic* he lovingly protects what he made fun of under the name of *mythology* and *ideology*.

A contradiction? A palinode? This was the over-hasty conclusion of the Western Doxa. More accurately: a drift, with an ambiguous position as its starting point. But it led to a misunderstanding with his readers, whom he'd spent his time confusing (each book had its readers, and they were different each time: he tried out his readerships, like trying on new shirts). But he wasn't a turncoat: mythology is the imaginary of the other (an imaginary whose misfortune it is that one doesn't entirely share it), and the imaginary is a happy mythology. For some time now, under the pretext of "purging" himself, he has been slowly working through his own stupidity, exploring and savoring it, trying out his ability to "speak" it: he's been making books out of it.

Incubation

The *seminar:* they know how to love me there. Every week, I sow things and they *incubate*. I represent for them what Gide represented for me: their *Ur-Suppe,* their basic nourishment, their culture medium, their *stock cube*.

I LIKE, I DON'T LIKE

You put together two lists, actually identical in kind, but then muddle the headings to produce an idiosyncratic effect: anarchic froth, vague hachuring. You mark out your territory. I like: Brecht, men in trousers, picking my nose. I don't like: Albinoni's adagio, oranges, God. But you aren't fooled by this: you sum up with an "etc.," and you distance yourself by observing that when it comes down to it this simply means: *my body isn't the same as yours* (*RB,* 120–121). As your grandmother used to say: *there's no accounting for taste.* She was *liberal.* Unless, like you, she was tainted with ideology, mistaking some trivial, individual, and ultimately random variable for an absolute difference.

You open *Distinction,* P. B.'s laborious sociological tome, launched from the very site of *asymbolism.* You find your vague hachures framed in multidimensional diagrams. You recognize yourself: farewell to vagueness. You like the Concerto for the Left Hand, you don't like barbecues: you're classified. You have class, you're a successful member of the upper middle class, just as you claim V. G. E. is. The successful member of the middle class no longer believes in class struggle: he likes the Neutral. He thinks he's gone beyond the contradictions whose terms he reverses. Everything returns, but returns as *farce* (Marx). Human nature returns, and returns as "language." The soul returns, and returns as the "body." . . .

MY LIFE? IT'S A NOVEL!

The main thing is to thwart the ideology of biography: that no one should do to him what D. B. did to Beckett. The only way is to *occupy the territory.* And even to under-*mine* it: through denial, parody, dirty tricks. Such as publishing yourself the replies to a "precise, direct, and well-informed" questionnaire, put together by an obliging friend—while at the same time mounting a critique of the genre of the interview, only to arrive at the conclusion that a good interviewer would be someone who put to him . . . the questions his friend hadn't put (*TQ,* 105–106). Such as claiming that you come from a place (in the old days you were "at an establishment," now you *come from a place*) where biography is "held in low esteem": *any biography is a novel which dare not speak its name* (*TQ,* 89). Whence the conclusion that a biography that does dare say it's a novel no longer is one: it accedes to the category of the "novelistic" (along with the *biographeme,* the *anamnesis,* the *satori,* and the whole *caboodle*). And since it's no longer a novel, it's safe from the counter-inversion of the proposition, namely that any novel is a biography which dare not speak its name.

PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE

He had invented a crafty system of *stupidity insurance.* This was the trick of "floating inverted commas" which underwrite the sovereign freedom to say absolutely anything, including intelligent things. Under this system every statement carries invisible inverted commas, which can be called up whenever some awkward customer draws attention to a silly, absurd or ridiculous proposition, a truism uttered in a prophetic tone, etc. It's the critic who is made to look stupid: he'd failed to understand that it had been proffered to the third degree, *cum grano salis.* Another dodge: it's not me, it's my imaginary! A method brought into play to provide "cover" for *ES, RB,* and *FDA.* And if it's his imaginary it escapes criticism, for the imaginary, padded with elastic lucidity, mounted on ironic shock absorbers, protected against all possible knocks, has been the supreme value ever since the "semioclast" took to writing "happy mythologies"—his own, of course. This is a system close to mental reservation, but invented by a Jesuit who had anticipated Pascal. The pasticher always arrives too late: it's been done already. None of the devices denounced by B/R had escaped R. B.: galloping induction, amphibology, etc. He'd been *vaccinated* against everything. . . .

THE ASSAULT COURSE

Exercise: Bouvard and Pécuchet have come to interview Flaubert for France-Inter. Do the interview, then transcribe it. If this is beyond your powers, use as a model the J. C. "Radioscopie" interview of R. B. This is pure Monsieur Teste viewed with benevolent and unctious curiosity by the Doxa (for the single reason that he's famous). What a wonderful foil: we were beginning to forget that the Doxa isn't *only* a fantasy on R. B.'s part. A little tense at the beginning, R. B. laughs up his sleeve while displaying the most exquisite manners. A bathmology: he *disengages* J. C.'s questions, put to the first degree, received to the third: "what you say is very true." But in vain: his reply is received to the zero degree. Dispersed into fragments in the introduction to the transcription, R. B. declares: "thin people are more intelligent than chubby ones." The inverted commas vanish, the questions take on the role of the answers. And R. B., old warrior that he is, apparently even declared: "to say *I, you, he, me,* is to undergo an assault course." . . .

THE GAME, THE FUNNY FACE

To shrink the ship Argo so that it will fit into a bottle represents a remarkable achievement. Moreover, the pasticher doesn't need to invent or distort: any

real fragment, transported into the context of parodic expectations, will start *pulling a funny face.*

If mimicry sometimes engenders an illusion of (sardonic) superiority, this is because it strikes a chord with mere *memories* of reading, with another image, paler, more distant, a shadow against which it suddenly stands out. Once removed from its bottle, the pastiche barely stands comparison with the original. Whatever its mediocrity, a real text breathes, plays, works, has an unpredictable element: I feel myself coming back to life. The pastiche then *sloughs,* just like a dead skin. Neither readerly nor writerly, but something *far short* of both: simply laughable.

Person

Poverty of the French language. It has neither the flexible articulation of Greek, nor the sumptuous neutrality of those languages described by Benveniste which have no concept of person and which do not mark sex or gender. In Greek I could avoid having to choose between masculine and feminine (the Neuter), between active and passive (the middle voice), between subjunctive and imperative (the optative mood), and between singular and plural (the dual number). In French, if I want to speak about myself I'm obliged to use "I," "he," or "you": I cannot even use the plural (the paranoiac *we,* the schizophrenic *they*). They know very well that what we've just written is a piece of nonsense, or rather an *imaginary* science (like those Cratylic or generic classifications so well analyzed by Genette): a joke linguistics. But a piece of nonsense humorously assumed is already half *authorized,* and charm should see to the rest.

The recipe

In the twelfth century, a certain Lord de Coucy had the bright idea of serving up to his unfaithful wife her lover's heart prepared as a succulent dish. He then informed her, with a smile, of the nature of the delicacy she had just consumed with such relish. Shock and horror at this discovery killed her outright.

The pastichers B/R appeared on *Apostrophes* to reveal to the viewers that their concoction had contained some real *RB,* and that those who had laughed at what they thought was simply a *caricature* had actually laughed at R. B. himself (*FDA,* 111–112, reproduced in *B/R,* 105–106). But no one dropped dead as a result of this frank revelation: those who like *RB* hadn't laughed at this pitiable lampoon in the first place; those who had laughed were disappointed to discover that not all of it was from *RB.* The pasticher thinks he's holding the text to *ransom* and is stopped in his tracks. He's the one caught out, he's hoist on his own petard. For it's the opposite that's

true—though R. B., whose cruelty is more subtle, was careful not to boast of the fact—*RB* contained, in advance, some real *B/R,* and the crafty pasticher is simply an unknowing plagiarist.

WITHOUT TEARS?

A pastiche has an obvious limitation: it presupposes the existence (and the value) of a model upon which it is parasitical. It needs a pre-text. No pasticher has ever managed to imitate a work which didn't yet exist, to take its place literally. Gide, writing *The Counterfeiters,* said to himself: if I invent the character of a novelist, I must be *capable* of producing his novel. But most fictional works, like S/F itself, are simply a derisory projection of the present, the shadow of its imaginary. Even then, the pastiche *comes to a sudden end.* Only jokes save it from seeming labored: should it keep going, it tires itself out. Despite its best efforts, it's clear that it's *not so easy.*

S/Z

Typewriting: nothing is written: it doesn't exizt, then all of a sudden it finds itself written after all—I've produced a typo! Through some persistent linguistic slip, I've typed *z* instead of *s* yet again. When I write by hand I can stammer and create intermediary forms. With the typewriter it's all or nothing. The unconscious writes far more confidently through this mechanical error than through my hand: it's a *spirit-rapper* (*RB,* 100). But it's nothing that can't be put right. At the stationer's in U. I buy those little squares of white paper that P. L. told me about: one side is covered with a whitish substance, you slip one of them under the ribbon (having first typed a *back*-space to force the machine to confront its mistake). Then something rather strange happens: in order to erase the mistake my body is obliged, deliberately this time, to *repeat* it. The wrong letter is reinscribed on top of itself, it's obliterated and forgotten. It becomes *palimpsestuous.* The contentious place has become white again, or more or less, just imperceptibly thicker. But there's a return of the repressed. The ink of the correct letter which I then retype doesn't imprint itself as well on the chalky outline as it does on the white page itself. The bits of the two letters which overlap are paler, like a scar.

IN MATCHING TONES

Pitfall of the pastiche: to be funny, it must exaggerate; it must direct the Text toward a grotesque referent and spice it up with inanities that don't really fit. It lumps together different versions of the modern Text and scrambles them,

like eggs. In a pastiche, modernity stammers. B/R's pastiche isn't like me at all: it's a naive exposition of a stereotypical avant-garde, as imagined by the petty-bourgeoisie. The idea is that writing is a foreign language (a strange one), that it says, though in a different way, the same thing as Speech, that the writer has an *accent,* as it were: in *B/R,* the character who bears my name speaks a Nucingen-esque *sabir.* The pastiche doesn't need to be a good likeness since it's aimed at people incapable of reading me. In fact, it's supposed to confirm them in their belief that they were right not to read me: although they don't realize it, it's themselves that they recognize.

But if the pastiche were a good likeness who would be able to tell the difference, and who would laugh? It would be a mere copy, a boring calque, a *rehash.* Its ironic allusions would be missed by all but the initiates for whom *RB* is the Bible. A utopia: I dream of a pastiche *in matching tones* which would mimic less a few idiotisms than idiot-ism itself, the gesture of drift, the *safari* of meaning. One which would enhance, even as it unfolds, the critique of the author's project: it would mix, in a pretense of uncertain status, a pastiche of the pasticher with that of the object of his pastiche. A *teasing* pastiche, dictated neither by malice nor stupidity. One which would *caress* the Text—even if sometimes it rubbed it up the wrong way—while pretending to draw on that Occidental discourse that I've been at pains to extenuate. But who could write it, other than *me?*

ANGLO-AMERICAN RECEPTION: THEORETICAL READINGS

Roland Barthes and the Limits of Structuralism

PAUL DE MAN

Despite the refinements of modern means of international communication, the relationship between Anglo-American and continental—especially French—literary criticism remains a star-crossed story, plagued by a variety of time lags and cultural gaps. The French have only just gotten around to translating an essay by Empson,[1] and by the time American works of literary theory or literary criticism appear in Paris, they often have lost much of their youthful freshness. There is more good will and more curiosity in the other direction, yet here too a mixture of misguided enthusiasm and misplaced suspicion blurs the issues. Even some of the most enlightened among English and American critics keep considering their French counterparts with the same suspicion with which English-speaking tourists might approach the *café au lait* they are served for breakfast in a French provincial hotel: they know they don't like it but aren't entirely certain whether, for lack of some ritualistic initiation, they are not perhaps missing out on a good thing. Others are willing to swallow French culture whole, from breakfast coffee to Mont Saint Michel and Chartres, but since intellectual fashions change faster than culinary tastes, they may find themselves wearing a beret and drinking Pernod when the French avant-garde has long since switched to cashmere sweaters and a diet of cold milk. The essays[2] by Roland Barthes that have just become available in excellent English translations date from 1953 to 1963; *Mythologies,* which appears in a regrettably shortened version, goes back to 1957.[3] I cannot help worrying about all the things that could go wrong in the reception of texts that now combine a nostalgic with a genuine but out-of-phase revolutionary quality. Perhaps the most useful function for an American-based view of Roland Barthes may be to try to anticipate unwarranted dismissal for the wrong reasons as well as excessive enthusiasm for parts of the work with which Barthes himself might no longer be so pleased. *Writing Degree Zero,* the first of Barthes's essays to be translated into English,

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appeared with an introduction by Susan Sontag that raises very high expectations which, at first sight, may not seem to be fulfilled by these two later volumes.[4]

For despite the considerable emphasis on structure, code, sign, text, reading, intratextual relationships, etc., and despite the proliferation of a technical vocabulary primarily derived from structural linguistics, the actual innovations introduced by Roland Barthes in the analytical study of literary texts are relatively slight. Even in his more technical works such as *S/Z,* the study of a story by Balzac,[5] and the various articles on semiology and on narrative techniques published mostly in the review *Communications,*[6] the contribution to practical criticism is not as extensive as the methodological apparatus would lead one to expect. The work of "pure" structuralists such as the linguist Greimas and his group or of some among Barthes's most prominent associates, such as Gérard Genette or Tzvetan Todorov, is more rigorous and more exhaustive than Barthes's—though it is only fair to point out its avowed indebtedness to him. Hence the risk of disappointment or overhasty dismissal.

Barthes is primarily a critic of literary ideology, and as such, his work is more essayistic and reflective than it is technical, perhaps most of all when the claim to methodological precision is most emphatically stated. The close integration of methodology with ideology is an attractive characteristic of European intellectual life ever since structuralism became a public issue in the sixties—and, for better or worse, French writers on literature are still much closer to being public figures, committed to articulate positions, than their American equivalents. Barthes played a very prominent part in the recent "Battles of the Books," and his work bears the traces of his involvements. It has to be read and understood as an intellectual adventure rather than as the scientifically motivated development of a method. He is at least as interested in the reasons for advocating certain technical devices as in their actual application. Hence the polemical tone of many of the essays, the many interviews, pamphlets, position papers, etc. Barthes should be read within the context of the particular situation to which he reacts, which is that of the ideological tensions underlying the practice of literary criticism in France. This situation is idiosyncratically French and cannot be transposed *tel quel* to the American scene. It does not follow however that the story of Barthes's intellectual journey is without direct interest for American readers. American criticism is notoriously rich in technical instruments but frustrated in its attempts to relate particular findings to the larger historical, semantic, and epistemological issues that have made these findings possible. That such difficulties exist is by no means a sign of weakness; it only becomes one if the broader inferences of a method are misconstrued. Barthes's enterprise is of wide enough significance to have paradigmatic value for all students of literature willing to put the premises of their craft into question.

A somewhat euphoric, mildly manic tone runs through Barthes's writings, tempered by considerable irony and discretion, but unmistakably braced by the feeling of being on the threshold of major discoveries: "A new anthropology, with unsuspected watersheds of meaning is perhaps being born: the map of human *praxis* is being redrawn, and the form of this enormous modification (but not, of course, its content) cannot fail to remind us of the Renaissance."[7] This statement dates from 1966, but one still finds similar trumpet blasts, only slightly muted, in recent utterances. It is the tone of a man liberated from a constraining past, who has "the earth . . . all before (him)" and who looks about "with a heart / Joyous, not scared at its own liberty."[8] The exact nature of this liberation can best be stated in linguistic terms, in a formula partly borrowed from Barthes himself: it is the liberation of the signifier from the constraints of referential meaning.

In all the traditional polarities used throughout the ages to describe the inherent tension that shapes literary language—polarities such as content/form, *logos* (what is being said) and *lexis* (the way of saying it), meaning/sign, message/code, *langue/parole, signifié/signifiant,* voice/writing, etc.—the implicit valorization has always privileged the first term and considered the second as an auxiliary, an adjunct or supplement in the service of the other. Language itself, as the sign of a presumably nonlinguistic content or "reality," is therefore devalorized as the vehicle or carrier of a meaning to which it refers and that lies outside it; in the polarity man/language, it seems commonsensical enough to privilege the first term over the second and to rate experience above utterance. Literature is said to "represent" or "express" or, at most, to transform an extralinguistic entity which it is the interpreter's task to reach as a specific unit of meaning. Whatever shadings are used in describing the relationship (and they are infinite), it remains best expressed by the metaphor of a dependence of language on something in the service of which it operates. Language acquires dignity only to the extent that it can be said to resemble or to partake of the entity to which it refers. The Copernican revolution heralded by Barthes consists not in simply turning this model around (and thus in claiming that, instead of being the slave of meaning, language would now become its master) but in asserting the relative autonomy of what the linguist Saussure called the signifier, that is, the objective properties of the sign independently of their semantic function as code, such as, for example, the redness of a traffic light considered as an optical, or the sound of a word considered as an acoustic, event. The possibility for the signifier to enter into systems of relationship with other signifiers despite the constraint of the underlying[9] meaning proves that the relationship between sign and meaning is not simply one of dependence. It suggests that the metaphorical language of hierarchies and power structures fails to do justice to the delicate complexity of these relationships. The science that sets out to describe the functions and interrelations of signifiers (of which reference is one among others) is

called semiology or semiotics, the study of signs independently of their meanings, in contrast to semantics, which operates on the level of meaning. Barthes is one of the leading representatives of this science, not so much as its initiator—he is the first to acknowledge his debt to Saussure, Jakobson, Hjelmslev, and others—but as one of its most effective advocates.

One may well wonder why ideas about language leading up to the science of semiology acquired such polemical vigor in the hands of Roland Barthes. They had been around for quite a while, not only in the field of linguistics, but in various philosophies of language and in the formalist schools of literary criticism that dominated the scene in many countries, with the notable exception of France. It is true that the French have a way of taking hold, often belatedly, of other people's ideas and suddenly rediscovering them with so much original energy that they are positively reborn; this happened, in recent years, with Hegel, Heidegger, Freud, and Marx, and it is about to happen with Nietzsche. In Barthes's case, however, there is more to it than mere Gallic energy. His deliberate excursion into the realm of ideology is typical of the development that made the catchall phrase *structuralism* part of intellectual popular culture. And of all his books, the early *Mythologies* is perhaps best suited to illustrate the process I am trying to describe.

Barthes is a born semiologist, endowed with an innate sense of the formal play of linguistic connotation, the kind of eye and mind that notices at once how an advertisement for a brand of spaghetti seduces the onlooker by combining, in the picture of the *red* tomatoes, the *white* spaghetti, and the *green* peppers, the three colors of the house of Savoia and of the national Italian flag, thus allowing the consumer to taste all that makes Italy Italian in one single bite of canned pasta.[10] He has used this gifted eye to scrutinize not only literature, but social and cultural facts as well, treating them in the same manner as a formalistically oriented literary critic would treat a literary text. *Mythologies,* a book that remains remarkably fresh although the facts it evokes belong to the bygone era of pre-Gaullist France in the early fifties, undertakes precisely this kind of semiocritical sociology. Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno are among the undisputed masters of the genre, but I doubt that Barthes, although he was an early exponent of the work of Brecht in France, knew their work well at the time of writing the *Mythologies.* The common ancestry is nevertheless apparent from the reference, in the important concluding essay on history and myth, to Marx's *German Ideology,* the model text for all ideological demystifications.

Almost any of the *Mythologies* can be used to illustrate Barthes's main insight. Take, for instance, the opening essay on catch-as-catch-can wrestling as an example of the contrast between a referential, thematic reading and the free play of signifiers. The point is not that, in the world of catch as catch can, all the fights are rigged; this would not make the event less referential but merely displace the referent from the theme, "competition," to that of "deceit." What fascinates Barthes is that actors as well as spectators fully

acquiesce to the deceit and that all pretense at open contest has been abandoned, thus voiding the event of all content and all meaning. There only remains a series of gestures that can be highly skillful at mimicking competition (the triumph of winning, the abjection of defeat, or the drama of reversal or peripeteia) but that only exist formally, independently of an outcome that is no longer part of the game. Catch is not a game but a simulacrum, a fiction: Barthes calls it a "myth."

Myths of this kind abound in the fabric of any society. Their attraction is not due to their actual content but to the glitter of their surface, and this glitter, in turn, owes its brilliance to the gratuity, the lack of semantic responsibility, of the fictional sign. This play is far from innocent. It is in the nature of fictions to be more persuasive than facts and especially persuasive in seeming more real than nature itself. Their order, their symmetry is possible because they are accountable only to themselves, yet these are precisely the qualities wishfully associated with the world of nature and necessity. As a result, the most superfluous of gestures also become the hardest to do without. Their very artificiality endows them with a maximum of natural appeal. Fictions or myths are addictive because they substitute for natural needs by seeming to be more natural than the nature they displace. The particular shade of bad conscience associated with fiction stems from the complicity involved in the partial awareness of this ambivalence, coupled with an even stronger desire to avoid the revelation, public or private, of this knowledge. It follows that fictions are the most marketable commodity manufactured by man, an adman's dream of perfect coincidence between description and promotion. Disinterested in themselves, they are the defenseless prey of any interest that wishes to use them. When they are thus being enlisted in the service of collective patterns of interest, including interests of the highest moral or metaphysical order, fictions become ideologies. One can see why any ideology would always have a vested interest in theories of language advocating correspondence between sign and meaning, since they depend on the illusion of this correspondence for their effectiveness. On the other hand, theories of language that put into question the subservience, resemblance, or potential identity between sign and meaning are always subversive, even if they remain strictly confined to linguistic phenomena.

Barthes's *Mythologies* are fully aware of this; they bring the subversiveness into the open by exposing the structure of the social myths as well as their manipulation. The political implications are clearly visible as the *Mythologies* move from the relatively harmless mystifications of catch as catch can or the Tour de France to consumer goods such as the Citroën DS, *steak pommes frites,* or the singing style of the baritone Gérard Souzay, to reach finally the domain of the printed word and image as they appear in *Paris-Match* or in the movies. After having been the target of a heavy-handed and vicious attack by Raymond Picard, a Sorbonne professor of French literature whose main field of specialization is the life of Racine, Barthes wrote perhaps

his best "mythology" in the first part of the counterattacking pamphlet entitled *Critique et vérité* (1966), in which the ideological infrastructure of the French academic literary establishment is revealed with masterful economy and without an ounce of personal spite.

The demystifying power of semiology is both a source of strength and a danger. It is impossible to be so consistently right at the expense of others without some danger to oneself. Barthes's social criticism and the means used in accomplishing its highly laudable aim engender their own mystification, this time at the level of method rather than of substance. The very power of the instrument creates an assurance that generates its own set of counter-questions. In this case, the questions have to do with the claim of having grounded the study of literature on foundations epistemologically strong enough to be called scientific. The heady tone alluded to earlier appears whenever this claim is being made. Putting it, in its turn, into question nowise means a desire to turn the clock back, a foolish wish at best, for there can be no return from the demystifying power of semiological analysis. No literary study can avoid going through a severe semiocritical process, and there is much to be said for going through these fires with as urbane, sure-footed, and entertaining a guide as Roland Barthes. What happens on the far side of this crossing remains an open question. At stake here is the future of structuralism as an intellectual movement but also as a methodological blueprint for scientific research that, like Rousseau's state of nature, "no longer exists, has perhaps never existed and will probably never come into being"[11] but which we nevertheless cannot do without.

As in Barthes's social myths, the referential, representational effectiveness of literary language is greater than in actual communication because, like his wrestlers, it is so utterly devoid of message. As we say of bombs that they overkill, we can say of literature that it overmeans. This referential suggestiveness, which accounts for the fact that one responds with much stronger emotion to a fictional narrative than to an actual event, is of course illusionary and something for which a science of literature (whether we call it stylistics or semiology) should account without being taken in by it. The classical way of dealing with the question is to bypass it, as when Roman Jakobson rightfully asserts that, in literature, language is autotelic, i.e., "focused on the message for its own sake,"[12] rather than on its meaning. By getting rid of all the mess and muddle of signification, the formula opens up a heretofore undiscovered world of scientific discourse covering the entire field of literary syntax, grammar, phonology, prosody, and rhetoric. With the inevitable result, however, that the privileged adequation of sign and meaning that governs the world of literary fictions is taken as the ideal model toward which all semantic systems are assumed to tend. This model then begins to function as a regulatory norm by means of which all deviations and transformations of a given system are measured. Literature becomes, to borrow a phrase from the

title of Barthes's first book, a degree zero of semantic aberration. We know that it owes this privileged position to the bracketing of its referential function, which is dismissed as contingency or ideology and not taken seriously as a semantic interference within the semiological structure.

The seduction of the literary model has undoubtedly worked on Barthes, as it is bound to work on all writers endowed with a high degree of literary sensitivity. Up through *Mythologies,* it takes at times a rather naive form, as when, in the concluding essay of that book, literature, in opposition to ideology, is held up as a "transformation of the sign into meaning: its ideal would be . . . to reach, not the meaning of words, but the meaning of things in themselves" (*Mythologies,* 241). In the manifesto *Critique et vérité,* in which the vocabulary is more transformational than structural, closer to Chomsky than to Jakobson, the position is more complex but not essentially different. It now takes the form of a three-pronged, hierarchized scheme of approach to literature, in which a distinction is made among literary science, literary criticism, and literary readings. The controlling authority of the first discipline, the only one to be free from the error of semantization and to lay claim to truth, is beyond question:

> If one is willing to admit the textual nature of the literary work (and draw the proper conclusions from this knowledge), then a *certain type* of literary science becomes possible. . . . Its model will undoubtedly be linguistic. . . . The object of literary science will have for its aim not to explain why a certain meaning has to be accepted, not even why it has been accepted (this being the task of historians), but why it is acceptable not in terms of the philological rules of literary meaning but in terms of the linguistic rules of symbolic connotation. (*Critique et vérité,* 57–58; de Man's translation)

By emphatically drawing attention to its own methodological apparatus, *S/Z,* Barthes's most systematic piece of literary analysis to date, allows itself to be taken as a first exemplary move in the elaboration of such a science. The impact of this example on literary studies deserves to be extensive and long lasting, although it will be resisted in many ways, including the most insidious way of all: the use of praise in order to protect oneself against the consequences of insight. It will not do, for example, to dismiss the methodological claims as a device used by a writer of more traditional literary virtues. We cannot reassure ourselves by stressing the elegance, the sensitivity, the strongly personal, even confessional, element that is part of Barthes's tone and that makes him one of the "best" writers at work today in any genre, in the most traditional sense of this qualitative epithet. Nor can we merely classify and dismiss him as one more example of a "modern" alienated consciousness. The theoretical challenge is genuine, all the more so since the particular quality of Barthes's writing is due to his desire to believe in its theoretical foundations and to repress doubts about their solidity.

The unresolved question remains whether the semantic, reference-oriented function of literature can be considered as contingent or whether it is a constitutive element of all literary language. The autotelic, self-referential aspect of literature stressed by Jakobson cannot seriously be contested; why then is it always and systematically overlooked, as if it were a threat that had to be repressed? The just-quoted passage from *Critique et vérité* laying down the directives for the literary science of the future is a good example: Barthes can be seen fluttering around the question like a moth around a live flame, fascinated but backing away in self-defense. All theoretical findings about literature confirm that it can never be reduced to a specific meaning or set of meanings, yet it is always reductively interpreted as if it were a statement or message. Barthes grants the existence of this pattern of error but denies that literary science has to account for it; this is said to be the task of historians, thus implying that the reasons for the recurrent aberration are not linguistic but ideological. The further implication is that the negative labor of ideological demystification will eventually be able to prevent the distortion that superimposes upon literature a positive, assertive meaning foreign to its actual possibilities. Barthes has never renounced this hope; in a recent interview, despite many nuances and reservations, he still speaks of "the ultimate transparency of social relationships"[13] as the goal of the critical enterprise. Yet, in the meantime, his methodological postulates have begun to erode under the impact of the question which he hoped to delegate to other, more pragmatic disciplines.

That literature can be ideologically manipulated is obvious but does not suffice to prove that this distortion is not a particular aspect of a larger pattern of error. Sooner or later, any literary study must face the problem of the truth value of its own interpretations, no longer with the naive conviction of a priority of content over form, but as a consequence of the much more unsettling experience of being unable to cleanse its own discourse of aberrantly referential implications. The traditional concept of reading used by Barthes and based on the model of an encoding/decoding process is inoperative if the master code remains out of reach of the operator, who then becomes unable to understand his own discourse. A science unable to read itself can no longer be called a science. The possibility of a scientific semiology is challenged by a problem that can no longer be accounted for in purely semiological terms.

This challenge reached Barthes from the somewhat unexpected quarter of philosophy, a discipline that earlier structuralists had discarded in favor of the so-called sciences of man: psychology, anthropology, and linguistics. The dismissal proved to be premature, based as it was on an inadequate evaluation of the specifically philosophical ability to put the foundations of its own discipline into question in a self-destructive manner that no science could ever dare to emulate. The work of Michel Foucault and especially of Jacques Derrida (whose determining influence on literary theory is confirmed by the recently published book *La Dissémination*) treats the problem of linguistic

delusion in a manner which semiological critics of Barthes's persuasion cannot afford to ignore.[14]

Barthes's intellectual integrity is apparent in his reaction to this philosophical challenge. For the time being, it has taken the form of a retreat from the methodological optimism that still inspired *S/Z.* More recent theoretical papers—though not more recent books such as *L'Empire des signes,* inspired by a trip to Japan, or *Sade, Fourier, Loyola,* in which the semiological euphoria is allowed to reign undisturbed—sketch out a much less ambitious program that sounds like a return to a pragmatic collecting of literary data. One of these papers, available in English translation and sharply aware of the inability of semiology to account for the stylistic tension between written and spoken language, invites us to embark on

> the search for models or patterns: sentence structures, syntagmatic clichés, divisions and *clausulae* of sentences; and what would inspire such work is the conviction that style is essentially a citational process, a body of formulae, a memory (almost in the cybernetic sense of the word), a cultural and not an expressive inheritance. . . . These models are only the depositories of culture (even if they seem very old). They are repetitions, not essential elements; citations, not expressions; stereotypes, not archetypes.[15]

Traces of many readings, from Propp to Gilles Deleuze, are noticeable in these sentences, and American readers will rightly think of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy* as a related enterprise. But the attitude cannot represent a definitive position. The mind cannot remain at rest in a mere repertorization of its own recurrent aberrations; it is bound to systematize its own negative self-insights into categories that have at least the appearance of passion and difference.

There is every reason to suppose that Barthes's future work will participate in this development, as he participated decisively in the development that led up to it. The avant-garde review *Tel Quel,* whose attitude toward orthodox structuralism has always been healthily uncomplacent, recently devoted an entire issue to Roland Barthes,[16] thus creating, probably unintentionally, the impression that it was trying to make a monument out of a man who is about as monumental as a Cheshire cat. Whoever assumes this to be possible would seriously misjudge the resilience of one of the most agile minds in the field of literary and linguistic studies.

As far as American criticism is concerned, its reaction to Barthes is still unclear. The recent translations are a useful but still inadequate first step in introducing his work to English readers. The *Critical Essays* stem from the period that precedes the development of semiology—roughly 1963—and are mostly interesting in that they map out the domain of Barthes's discontent with the prevailing methods of literary criticism in France during the fifties and his delight at discovering the new perspectives opened by his readings in linguistics. They create the somewhat misleading impression that his main

interests are confined to the theater of Brecht and to the novels of Robbe-Grillet, and they should certainly not be taken as a comprehensive sample of his accomplishments.[17] There is more semiological finesse to be gathered from the *Mythologies*. How the availability of his more important theoretical writings (*Critique et vérité, S/Z,* various theoretical papers) might influence American criticism can begin to be inferred from the reaction of some specialists who are already familiar with this work. It is fair to assume that it will meet with considerable resistance. Even as informed a scholar as the American practitioner of stylistics, Seymour Chatman, who has done a great deal to bring continental and American literary theory closer together, takes Barthes to task for putting the referential function of literary language into question. In a recent essay entitled "On Defining Form," he writes: "It is difficult to understand why one should deny that there are, ultimately, contents or *signifiés* referred to. . . . The content of a literary work is not the language but what the language stands for, its reference. . . . The language is a mediating form between the *literary* form (structure-texture) and the ultimate content."[18] The main point to be learned from Barrhes is not that literature has no referential function but that no "ultimate" referent can ever be reached and that therefore the rationality of the critical metalanguage is constantly threatened and problematic. I have suggested that Barthes may have been all too hopeful in having believed, for a time, that the threat could be ignored or delegated to historians. The self-assurance he thus gained was productive and has a negative validity, as far as it goes; now that it seems to know its horizons, it remains a necessary part of any critical education. To return to an unproblematic notion of signification is to take a step backwards into a pseudoscience too remote from its object to be demystified by it. As long as the "libération du signifiant" is being resisted for the wrong reasons, the full impact of Barthes's work cannot become manifest.

Notes

This essay appears to date from 1972. It was commissioned by the *New York Review of Books* as a review of extant translations of Barthes's work into English but was never printed. Correspondence indicates that the editors found the essay too technical for a general readership. The essay differs from the previously published version appearing in *Yale French Studies*, 77 (1990). It is based on a typescript that came to light after the *YFS* publication and that incorporates de Man's revisions. The notes accompanying this essay are de Man's. The editors have supplied additional bibliographical information where necessary (i.e., to bring the apparatus into conformity with current practices or to provide missing references).

1. William Empson, "Assertions dans les mots," *Poétique* 6 (1971): 239–70. It must be added, however, that the same review has also published very recent American work of younger authors, in some cases before they appeared in this country.

2. Roland Barthes, *Essais Critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), trans. Richard Howard as *Critical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972).

3. The book consists of a series of brief texts on miscellaneous topics. The texts are complete in themselves, but several have been left out, probably on the wrong assumption that their local setting would make them unintelligible for English readers. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), trans. Annette Lavers as *Mythologies* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972). Further references appear in the text.

4. *Writing Degree Zero,* ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968).

5. The enigmatic title *S/Z* is deliberately and playfully ambiguous. It takes off from an anomaly in Balzac's spelling of his hero's name: the sculptor Sarrasine, who falls in love with the castrato singer Zambinella and whose name would normally be spelled Sarrazine. Beyond this fact, the title has many allusive connotations. The most obvious points to the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, author of an influential article on the revelatory power of letter substitutions. The formulaic figure *S/Z* mimics the notation *S/s,* also used by Jacques Lacan to represent the relationship between signifier and signified (*signifiant* and *signifié*) in which the slash, /, can be read as the symbolic sign of the repression or castration represented as a thematic event in Balzac's fiction. *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), trans. Richard Howard as *S/Z* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974).

6. Some of the essays first published in *Communications* have been reprinted in Roland Barthes, *L'Aventure sémiologique* (Paris: Seuil, 1985) and in English in Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1988).

7. Roland Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 48. Further references appear in the text.

8. See the opening of Wordsworth's *Prelude: 1805,* ed. E. de Selincourt, rev. Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), bk. 1, 11. 15–16.

9. One could just as well say, with equal metaphorical authority, overstanding (or transcendental) as underlying.

10. The example is taken from an article published in the journal *Communications* 8 (1964) and entitled "Rhétorique de l'image," trans. Stephen Heath as "Rhetoric of the Image," in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977).

11. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes,* in *Oeuvres complètes,* ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 123. De Man translates.

12. Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Selected Writings,* ed. Stephen Rudy (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 3:25.

13. See Roland Barthes, "Réponses," *Tel Quel* 47 (Autumn 1971), special issue on Roland Barthes, 107.

14. Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972). In English as *Dissemination,* trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

15. Roland Barthes, "Style and Its Image," in Seymour Chatman, ed., *Literary Style: A Symposium* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 9–10.

16. *Tel Quel* 47 (Autumn 1971).

17. The important group of essays *On Racine* was published in English translation in 1964 but, possibly because of the specialized French subject matter, has not received the attention it deserves. The book raises the question of Barthes's complex relationship to psychoanalytical methods of interpretation, a topic perhaps best approached from the perspective of the later *S/Z.* See Roland Barthes, *On Racine* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964).

18. In *New Literary History* 2 (1971): 219–28.

[The Development of a Method: The Language of Fashion]

JONATHAN CULLER

Roland Barthes's *Système de la mode* has been praised by other structuralists for its "methodological rigour:" "It would be difficult to imagine a better illustration of the semiological method."[1] More explicitly based on linguistics than Barthes's work on literature, it illustrates the difficulties that arise when one tries to use linguistics in a particular way and thus offers a warning that should be heeded in other attempts. . . .

Fashion is a social system based on convention. If clothing had no social significance people might wear whatever seemed most comfortable and buy new clothes only when the old wore out. By giving meaning to certain details—calling them stylish or appropriate for certain occasions and activities—the fashion system enforces distinctions among garments and speeds up the process of replacement: "c'est le sens qui fait vendre." The semiologist is interested in the mechanisms by which this meaning is produced.

In order to study the workings of this system, Barthes chooses to concentrate on the captions beneath photographs in fashion magazines ("la mode écrite"), because the language of captions isolates the features which make a particular garment fashionable, orients perception and divides continuous phenomena into discrete categories. The widths of lapels on suits form a continuum, but if the caption speaks of the wide lapels on a particular suit it introduces a distinctive feature to characterize those which are *à la mode.* The description is, as Barthes says, "un instrument de structuration": language permits one to pass from the material objects to the units of a system of signification by bringing out, through the process of naming, meaning that was merely latent in the object.[2]

Barthes's linguistic model requires him to collect a corpus of data from a single synchronic state of the system, and fashion, of course, is eminently suitable for such treatment since it changes abruptly once a year when designers bring out their new collections. By taking captions from a year's issues of *Elle*

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and *Jardin des Modes,* Barthes creates a manageable corpus which, he hopes, will contain the different possibilities of the system at that stage.

What is one to do with the corpus? What are the effects to be explained? They turn out to be rather complex. Consider the two captions, *Les imprimés triomphent aux courses* (Prints win at the races) and *Une petite ganse fait l'élégance* (Slim piping is striking). One can identify a variety of *signifiés* that they produce. In the first place, the presence of *imprimés* and *ganse* in the captions tells us that these features are fashionable. At a second level, the combination of *imprimés* and *courses* signifies that they are appropriate for this particular social situation. Finally, there is "a new sign whose signifier is the complete fashion utterance and whose signified is the image of the world and of fashion that the journal has or wants to convey" (p. 47). The rhetoric of these two captions implies, for example, that piping has not simply been labelled "elegant" but actually produces elegance, and that prints are the crucial and active agents of social triumphs (it is your clothes, not you, who triumph). These meanings are connotations, certainly; but they are not for that haphazard or personal phenomena. The term "connotation" is insidious if it suggests that they are unsystematic and peripheral. One could define connotations, rather, as meanings produced by conventions other than those of natural languages. As a sentence of French *Les imprimés triomphent aux courses* means that prints triumph at the races, but as a caption it has other meanings that are produced by the fashion system.

But what is one to do with these meanings? Barthes quite properly distinguishes between two levels of the system: the "vestimentary code," in which the pertinent features of fashionable garments are expressed, and the "rhetorical system," which includes the other elements of the sentence. In studying the latter one can investigate the vision of the world presented by the captions (the signifieds of the rhetorical system) or the procedures by which this vision is conveyed (the process of signification itself). The serious methodological problems arise at the more basic level of the vestimentary code. Here all sequences have the same meaning: the presence of an item in a caption signifies that it is fashionable. And there is little to be said about the process of signification: the fact that the picture is presented in a fashion magazine is what connects the signifier and the signified *Mode.*

The problem that offers scope for detailed investigation is which elements of the sequence are pertinent at the level of the vestimentary code and which are rhetorical. In *Une petite ganse fait l'élégance* does "petite" determine the fashionableness of piping or is it used for its rhetorical connotations (humble, unpretentious, pretty)? In *La vraie tunique chinoise plate et fendue* is "vraie" a rhetorical intensifier? To answer these questions one must investigate the rules of fashion operative in the given year. Taking sequences describing fashionable garments as "well-formed," one asks what are the rules which produce these sequences but would not produce sequences describing garments that happen

to be unfashionable at that time. To reduce sequences to their constituents and to write rules of combination that would account for well-formed captions is the course of investigation that the linguistic model suggests.

To proceed thus one needs information about unfashionable garments. Without it, like a linguist attempting to construct a grammar solely on the basis of a corpus of well-formed sentences, one does not know what changes in a sequence would make it deviant and therefore cannot determine its pertinent features. If the corpus speaks of a *Veste en cuir à col tailleur,* one cannot tell whether it is fashionable because of the leather, the collar or the combination of the two. The obvious solution would be to rely on the judgments of those who are fashion-conscious and have in some sense mastered the system, but Barthes seems to assume that a rigorous structural analysis of a corpus forbids this. At one point he tries to resolve the problem of pertinence with a highly specious argument:

> every description of a garment is subject to a certain end, which is to manifest or, better still, to transmit Fashion . . . to alter a fashion sequence (at least in its terminology), to imagine, for example, a bodice buttoning *in front* rather than *behind,* is thereby to pass from the fashionable to the unfashionable. (pp. 32–3)

But it does not follow that each descriptive term designates a feature without which the garment would be unfashionable. Because Barthes thinks that his task is to describe the corpus, he neglects the primary problem of determining which elements in the sequences carry functional distinctions. Assuming that linguistics provides a discovery procedure of sorts, he does not try to resolve an obvious empirical problem.

His strategy is indeed one of neglect. He is not concerned, he says, with what was fashionable in this particular year but only with the general mechanisms of the system and therefore does not provide rules which distinguish the fashionable from the unfashionable. The decision is regrettable, first, because it makes his whole project rather obscure. Why choose a single synchronic state if one is not interested in describing that state? If one is concerned only with fashion in general, then surely one requires evidence from other years when different combinations would be recorded, lest one mistake the particularities of one year's fashion for general properties of the system. The choice of a corpus, it seems, is determined only by the linguists' assertion of the priority of synchronic description and the desire to give an impression of fidelity and rigour.

Second, refusal to investigate what is fashionable and what is not makes his results indeterminate. He argues, for example, that "petite" in *petite ganse* is rhetorical because *grande ganse* does not figure in the corpus and hence "petite" figures in no opposition. But the opposition might be precisely that between *petites ganses* which were fashionable and *grandes ganses* which were

not and so did not appear in fashion magazines. Such questions cannot be decided on purely distributional grounds.

Finally, his results cannot be checked. If the function of the system is to transmit fashion then it should be described as doing just that, and one could evaluate the analysis by calling upon the evidence of other sequences from the same year or the judgments of the fashion-conscious and seeing whether Barthes's rules successfully distinguished the fashionable from the unfashionable. In the absence of such a project there is simply no way to test the adequacy of his descriptions.

What, then, does Barthes do in describing the corpus? The fullest description would be a list of the sequences which occur, but since this would be of no interest he sets out to reduce them to a series of syntactic schemes and to establish a number of paradigm classes corresponding to syntactic positions: "one must first determine what are the syntagmatic (or sequential) units of the written garment and then what are the systematic (or virtual) oppositions" (p. 69).

Study of the distribution of items leads Barthes to postulate a basic syntagmatic structure consisting of three slots: "object," "support" and "variant." In *Un chandail à col fermé,* "chandail" (sweater) is the object, "fermé" (closed) the variant, and "col" (collar) the support of the variant. This structure has an intuitive validity in that when speaking of a fashionable garment one may well tend to name it, identify the part in question, and specify the feature that makes it fashionable. The schema is subject to various modifications: in *ceinture à pan* the effective variant, "existant," is not expressed; in *Cette année les cols seront ouverts* object and support are fused. In fact, there is no conceivable sequence which could not be described by one of the modified schemas that he lists, and his claim that the model "is justified in so far as it permits us to account for *all* sequences according to certain *regular* modifications" (p. 74), is not a strong hypothesis about the form of fashion captions.

More interesting and pertinent is the attempt to establish paradigm classes of items which can fill these three syntagmatic slots. First of all, a whole series of items, such as skirt, blouse, collar, gloves, may serve either as object or as support. Items which can fill either slot Barthes calls "species," and he argues that a distributional analysis enables one to group them into sixty different *genera* or "kinds." Garments or parts of garments which are syntagmatically incompatible—which cannot be combined as elements of a single outfit—are placed in paradigmatic contrast within a single kind. Each paradigm is a repertoire of contrasting items from which only one may be chosen at a single time: "a dress and a ski-outfit, although formally very different, belong to the same kind since one must choose between them" (p. 103). Barthes's kinds seem adequate as a representation of syntagmatic incompatibilities: no two members of a single kind will appear as object and support in a single sequence. But a proper description should specify co-occurrence relations in considerably greater detail. For example, if a member

of the kind "collar" is the support, then the object must belong to one of a limited set of kinds: roughly, garments which have collars. Inversely, if "collar" is the object, then the support must be taken from "material," "edge," "cut," "motif," "colour," etc.

One might expect that if the division into kinds is correct, then these classes will be the units on which such rules of combination operate. But Barthes's categories seem unlikely to serve. Dress, ski-outfit and bikini are placed in a single paradigm class, but as objects they would take very different supports. If one would require a totally different set of classes in order to write rules of combination, then those which Barthes proposes have only the weakest justification.

Variants are classed according to the same principles: "wherever there is syntagmatic incompatibility there is established a system of signifying oppositions, that is to say, a paradigm" (p. 119). A collar cannot be both open and closed but it can be both wide and open. Compatibilities and incompatibilities of this kind lead him to postulate thirty groups of variants which cannot be realized simultaneously on the same support. He does not, however, use these classes to formulate explicit rules of combination.

Barthes seems to have been misled by linguistics into thinking that distributional analysis could produce a set of classes which need not be justified by any explanatory function. But even without explanatory efficacy, his inventories would be interesting as examples of what distributional analysis can achieve had he proceeded in a rigorous way. But instead of determining which items are never *in the corpus* simultaneously predicated of the same support, he refers to general compatibilities and incompatibilities determined by the nature of the garments themselves. Strictly speaking, if his corpus contains brown collars and open collars but no brown open collars, he ought to place "brown" and "open" within a paradigm class; he does not do so, because he knows that in fact collars can be both open and brown.

Barthes's failure to adhere to his theoretical programme illustrates the difficulties inherent in distributional analysis. If he were trying to determine what items were compatible and incompatible according to the fashions of a given year, then he would need to call on information from outside the corpus since the absence of a particular combination from the corpus would not necessarily mean that it was unfashionable. If he is not interested in the combinations permitted by fashion in a particular year, but only in general compatibilities and incompatibilities of garments, he should not in the first place have taken his corpus from a single year; but even with a wider corpus he would have to draw on supplementary information so as to note combinations which physically are quite possible (pyjama tops and ski-trousers) but do not appear in the corpus because they have never been fashionable. In either case, then, the analyst must go beyond the corpus to information provided by those who are knowledgeable either in fashion or in clothing. This knowledge of compatibilities and incompatibilities—like the competence of native speakers—is

the true object of analysis and one should focus on it directly rather than draw upon it occasionally and surreptitiously.

What we have, then, is a rather confused, incomplete, and unverifiable account of the vestimentary code which cannot serve even as a specimen of formal analysis. It does not offer a system of rules which would specify what is fashionable; nor does it attempt rigorous distributional analysis of a corpus. Misled by the linguistic model, Barthes went about his task in precisely the wrong way and then was unwilling to follow a formal method through to the end. He neglected to decide what he was trying to explain and stopped without having explained anything.

It is extremely important to note Barthes's failure because of the tendency among both critics and admirers to accept this work as a model of structuralist procedure. . . . Barthes's own comment is much more apposite: "I passed through a euphoric dream of scientificity."[3] It is scarcely surprising that a linguistic model perceived in a euphoric dream should yield confused and inadequate results.

Notes

1. Tzvetan Todorov, "De la sémiologie à la rhétorique," *Annales* 22 (1967), pp. 1322–7 (p. 1323). Cf. Julia Kristeva, *Semiotikè: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp. 60–89.
2. Roland Barthes, *Système de la mode* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), p. 26.
3. Roland Barthes, "Réponses," *Tel Quel* 47 (1971), pp. 89–107 (p. 97).

The Critical Difference

BARBARA JOHNSON

Literary criticism as such can perhaps be called "the art of rereading."[1] I would therefore like to begin by quoting the remarks about rereading made by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*:[2]

> Rereading, an operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society, which would have us "throw away" the story once it has been consumed ("devoured"), so that we can then move on to another story, buy another book, and which is tolerated only in certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors), rereading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the text from repetition (*those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere*). [pp. 15–16; emphasis mine]

What does this paradoxical statement imply? First, it implies that a single reading is composed of the already-read, that what we can see in a text the first time is already in *us,* not in *it;* in us insofar as we ourselves are a stereotype, an already-read text; and in the text only to the extent that the already-read is that aspect of a text which it must have in common with its reader in order for it to be readable at all. When we read a text once, in other words, we can see in it only what we have already learned to see before.

Secondly, the statement that those who do not reread must read the same story everywhere involves a reversal of the usual properties of the words "same" and "different." Here, it is the consuming of different stories which is equated with the repetition of the same, while it is the rereading of the same which engenders what Barthes calls the "text's difference." This critical concept of difference, which has been valorized both by Saussurian linguistics and by the Nietzschean tradition in philosophy—particularly the work of Jacques Derrida—is crucial to the practice of deconstructive criticism. I would therefore like to examine here some of its implications and functions.

In a sense, it could be said that to make a critical difference is the object of all criticism as such. The very word "criticism" comes from the Greek verb *krinein,* "to separate or choose," that is, to differentiate. The critic not only

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seeks to establish standards for evaluating the differences between texts, but also tries to perceive something uniquely different within each text he reads and in so doing to establish his own individual difference from other critics. But this is not quite what Barthes means when he speaks of the text's difference. On the first page of *S/Z,* he writes:

> This difference is not, obviously, some complete, irreducible quality (according to a mythic view of literary creation), it is not what designates the individuality of each text, what names, signs, finishes off each work with a flourish; on the contrary, it is a difference which does not stop and which is articulated upon the infinity of texts, of languages, of systems: a difference of which each text is the return. [p. 3]

In other words, a text's difference is not its uniqueness, its special identity. It is the text's way of differing *from itself.* And this difference is perceived only in the act of rereading. It is the way in which the text's signifying energy becomes *un*bound, to use Freud's term, through the process of repetition, which is the return not of the same but of difference. Difference, in other words, is not what distinguishes one *identity* from another. It is not a difference *between* (or at least not between independent units). It is a difference *within.* Far from constituting the text's unique identity, it is that which subverts the very *idea* of identity, infinitely deferring the possibility of adding up the sum of a text's parts or meanings and reaching a totalized, integrated whole.

Let me illustrate this idea further by turning for a moment to Rousseau's *Confessions.* Rousseau's opening statement about himself is precisely an affirmation of difference: "I am made unlike anyone I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different" [Penguin, 1954, p. 17]. Now, this can be read as an unequivocal assertion of uniqueness, of difference *between* Rousseau and the whole rest of the world. This is the boast on which the book is based. But in what does the uniqueness of this self consist? It is not long before we find out: "There are times when I am so unlike myself that I might be taken for someone else of an entirely opposite character" [p. 126]. "In me are united two almost irreconcilable characteristics, though in what way I cannot imagine" [p. 112]. In other words, this story of the self's difference from others inevitably becomes the story of its own unbridgeable difference from itself. Difference is not engendered in the space between identities; it is what makes all totalization of the identity of a self or the meaning of a text impossible.

It is this type of textual difference which informs the process of deconstructive criticism. Deconstruction is not synonymous with "destruction," however. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word "analysis" itself, which etymologically means "to undo"—a virtual synonym for "to de-construct." The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces

of signification within the text itself. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. A deconstructive reading is a reading which analyzes the *specificity* of a text's critical difference from itself.

I have chosen to approach this question of critical difference by way of Barthes' *S/Z* for three reasons:

(1) Barthes sets up a critical value system explicitly based on the paradigm of difference, and in the process works out one of the earliest, most influential, and most lucid and forceful syntheses of contemporary French theoretical thought;
(2) the Balzac story which Barthes chooses to analyze in *S/Z* is itself in a way a study of difference—a subversive and unsettling formulation of the question of *sexual* difference;
(3) the confrontation between Barthes and Balzac may have something to say about the critical differences between theory and practice, on the one hand, and between literature and criticism, on the other.

I shall begin by recalling the manner in which Barthes outlines his value system:

> Our evaluation can be linked only to a practice, and this practice is that of writing. On the one hand, there is what it is possible to write, and on the other, what it is no longer possible to write. [. . .] What evaluation finds is precisely this value: what can be written (rewritten) today: the *writerly* [*le scriptible*]. Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. [. . .] Opposite the writerly text is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the *readerly* [*le lisible*]. We call any readerly text a classic text. [p. 4]

Here, then, is the major polarity which Barthes sets up as a tool for evaluating texts: the readerly versus the writerly. The readerly is defined as a product consumed by the reader; the writerly is a process of production in which the reader becomes a producer: it is "ourselves writing." The readerly is constrained by considerations of representation: it is irreversible, "natural," decidable, continuous, totalizable, and unified into a coherent whole based on the signified. The writerly is infinitely plural and open to the free play of signifiers and of difference, unconstrained by representative considerations, and transgressive of any desire for decidable, unified, totalized meaning.

With this value system, one would naturally expect to find Barthes going on to extoll the play of infinite plurality in some Joycean or Mallarméan piece of writerly obscurity, but no: he turns to Balzac, one of the most readerly of readerly writers, as Barthes himself insists. Why then does Barthes

choose to talk about Balzac? Barthes himself skillfully avoids confronting this question. But perhaps it is precisely the way in which Barthes' choice of Balzac *doesn't* follow logically from his value system—that is, the way in which Barthes somehow differs from himself—which opens up the critical difference which we must analyze here.

Although Balzac's text apparently represents for Barthes the negative, readerly end of the hierarchy, Barthes' *treatment* of it does seem to illustrate all the characteristics of the positive, writerly end. In the first place, one cannot help but be struck by the plurality of Barthes' text itself with its numerous sizes of print, its "systematic use of digression," and its successive superposable versions of the same but different story, from the initial reproduction of Girodet's *Endymion* to the four appendices which repeat the book's contents in different forms. The reading technique proper also obeys the demand for fragmentation and pluralization, and consists in *manhandling* the text:

> What we seek is to sketch the stereographic space of writing (which will here be a classic, readerly writing). The commentary, based on the affirmation of the plural, cannot work with "respect" to the text; the tutor text will ceaselessly be broken, interrupted without any regard for its natural divisions [. . .]; the work of the commentary, once it is separated from any ideology of totality, consists precisely in *manhandling* the text, *interrupting* it [*lui couper la parole*]. What is thereby denied is not the *quality* of the text (here incomparable) but its "naturalness." [p. 15]

Barthes goes on to divide the story diachronically into 561 fragments called lexias and synchronically into five so-called voices or codes, thus transforming the text into a "complex network" with "multiple entrances and exits."

The purpose of these cuts and codes is to pluralize the reader's intake, to effect a resistance to the reader's desire to restructure the text into large, ordered masses of meaning: "If we want to remain attentive to the plural of a text [. . .], we must renounce structuring this text in large masses, as was done by classical rhetoric and by secondary-school explication: no *construction* of the text" [pp. 11–12]. In leaving the text as heterogeneous and discontinuous as possible, in attempting to avoid the repressiveness of the attempt to dominate the message and force the text into a single ultimate meaning, Barthes thus works a maximum of disintegrative violence and a minimum of integrative violence. The question to ask is whether this "anti-constructionist" (as opposed to "de-constructionist") fidelity to the fragmented signifier succeeds in laying bare the functional plurality of Balzac's text, or whether in the final analysis a certain systematic level of textual difference is not also lost and flattened by Barthes' refusal to reorder or reconstruct the text.

Let us now turn to Balzac's *Sarrasine* itself. The story is divided into two parts, the story of the telling and the telling of the story. In the first part, the narrator attempts to seduce a beautiful Marquise by telling her the second

part; that is, he wants to exchange narrative knowledge for carnal knowledge. The lady wants to know the secret of the mysterious old man at the party, and the narrator wants to know the lady. Story-telling, as Barthes points out, is thus not an innocent, neutral activity, but rather part of a bargain, an act of seduction. But here the bargain is not kept; the deal backfires. The knowledge the lady has acquired, far from bringing about her surrender, prevents it. The last thing she says is precisely: "No one will have *known* me."

It is obvious that the key to this failure of the bargain lies in the content of the story used to fulfill it. That story is about the passion of the sculptor Sarrasine for the opera singer La Zambinella, and is based not on knowledge but on ignorance: the sculptor's ignorance of the Italian custom of using castrated men instead of women to play the soprano parts on the operatic stage. The sculptor, who had seen in La Zambinella the perfect female body for the first time united in one person, a veritable Pygmalion's statue come to life, thus finds out that this image of feminine perfection literally *has* been carved by a knife, not in stone but in the flesh itself. He who had proclaimed his willingness to die for his love ends up doing just that, killed by La Zambinella's protector.

How is it that the telling of this sordid little tale ends up subverting the very bargain it was intended to fulfill? Barthes' answer to this is clear: "castration is contagious": "contaminated by the castration she has just been told about, [the Marquise] impels the narrator into it" [p. 36].

What is interesting about this story of seduction and castration is the way in which it unexpectedly reflects upon Barthes' own critical value system. For in announcing that "the tutor text will ceaselessly be broken, interrupted without any regard for its natural divisions," is Barthes not implicitly privileging something like castration over what he calls the "ideology of totality"? "If the text is subject to some form," he writes, "this form is not unitary [. . .], finite; it is the fragment, the slice, the cut up or erased network" [p. 20; translation modified]. Indeed, might it not be possible to read Balzac's opposition between the ideal woman and the castrato as metaphorically assimilable to Barthes' opposition between the readerly and the writerly? Like the readerly text, Sarrasine's deluded image of La Zambinella is a glorification of perfect unity and wholeness:

> At that instant he marveled at the ideal beauty he had hitherto sought in life, seeking in one often unworthy model the roundness of a perfect leg; in another, the curve of a breast; in another, white shoulders; finally taking some girl's neck, some woman's hands, and some child's smooth knees, without ever having encountered under the cold Parisian sky the rich, sweet creations of ancient Greece. La Zambinella displayed to him, *united,* living, and delicate, those exquisite female forms he so ardently desired [pp. 237–38; emphasis mine].

But like the writerly text, Zambinella is actually fragmented, unnatural, and sexually undecidable. Like the readerly, the soprano is a product to be "devoured" ("With his eyes, Sarrasine devoured Pygmalion's statue, come down from its pedestal" [p. 238]), while, like the writerly, castration is a process of production, an active and violent indetermination. The soprano's appearance seems to embody the very essence of "woman" as a *signified* ("This was woman herself . . ." [p. 248]), while the castrato's reality, like the writerly text, is a mere play of signifiers, emptied of any ultimate signified, robbed of what the text calls a "heart": "I have no heart," says Zambinella, "the stage where you saw me [. . .] is my life, I have no other" [p. 247].

Here, then, is a first answer to the question of why Barthes might have chosen this text: it explicitly *thematizes* the opposition between unity and fragmentation, between the idealized signified and the discontinuous empty play of signifiers, which underlies his opposition between the readerly and the writerly. The traditional value system which Barthes is attempting to reverse is thus already mapped out within the text he analyzes. Two questions, however, immediately present themselves: (1) Does Balzac's story really uphold the unambiguousness of the readerly values to which Barthes relegates it? Does Balzac simply regard ideal beauty as a lost paradise and castration as a horrible tragedy? (2) If Barthes is really attempting to demystify the ideology of totality, and if his critical strategy implicitly gives a positive value to castration, why does his analysis of Balzac's text still seem to take castration at face value as an unmitigated and catastrophic horror?

In order to answer these questions, let us take another look at Balzac's story. To regard castration as the ultimate narrative revelation and as the unequivocal cause of Sarrasine's tragedy, as Barthes repeatedly does, is to read the story more or less from Sarrasine's point of view. It is in fact Barthes' very attempt to pluralize the text which thus restricts his perspective: however "disrespectfully" he may cut up or manhandle the story, his reading remains to a large extent dependent on the linearity of the signifier, and thus on the successive unfoldings of the truth of castration to Sarrasine and to the reader. Sarrasine's ignorance, however, is not a simple lack of knowledge but also a *blindness* to the injustice which is not only being done to him, but which he is also potentially doing to the other. This does not mean that Balzac's story is a plea for the prevention of cruelty to castrati, but that the failure of the couple to unite can perhaps not simply be attributed to the literal fact of castration. Let us therefore examine the nature of Sarrasine's passion more closely.

Upon seeing La Zambinella for the first time, Sarrasine exclaims: "To be loved by her, or to die!" [p. 238]. This alternative places all of the energy of the passion not on the object, La Zambinella, but on the subject, Sarrasine himself. To be loved, or to die; to exist as the desired object, or not to exist at all. What is at stake is not the union between two people, but the narcissistic awakening of one. Seeing La Zambinella is Sarrasine's first experience of *himself*

as an object of love. By means of the image of sculpturesque perfection, Sarrasine thus falls in love with none other than himself. Balzac's fictional narrator makes explicit the narcissistic character of Sarrasine's passion and at the same time nostalgically identifies with it himself when he calls it "this golden age of love, during which we are happy almost by ourselves" [p. 240]. Sarrasine contents himself with La Zambinella as the product of his own sculptor's imagination ("This was more than a woman, this was a masterpiece!" [p. 238]), and does not seek to find out who she is in reality ("As he began to realize that he would soon have to act, [. . .] to ponder, in short, on ways to see her, speak to her, these great, ambitious thoughts made his heart swell so painfully that he put them off until later, deriving as much satisfaction from his physical suffering as he did from his intellectual pleasures" [p. 240]). When the sculptor is finally forced into the presence of his beloved, he reads in her only the proof of his own masculinity—she is the ideal woman, *therefore* he is the ideal man. When Sarrasine sees La Zambinella shudder at the pop of a cork, he is charmed by her weakness and says, "My strength [*puissance*] is your shield" [p. 244]. La Zambinella's weakness is thus the inverted mirror image of Sarrasine's potency. In this narcissistic system, the difference between the sexes is based on *symmetry,* and it is precisely the castrato that Sarrasine does indeed love—the image of the lack of what he thereby thinks he himself possesses. When Sarrasine says that he would not be able to love a strong woman, he is saying in effect that he would be unable to love anyone who was not his symmetrical opposite and the proof of his masculinity. This is to say that even if La Zambinella *had* been a real woman, Sarrasine's love would be a refusal to deal with her as a real other. This type of narcissism is in fact just as contagious in the story as castration: the Marquise sees the narcissistic delusion inherent in the narrator's own passion, and, banteringly foreshadowing one of the reasons for her ultimate refusal, protests: "Oh, you fashion me to your own taste. What tyranny! You don't want me for myself!" [p. 233]

Sarrasine cannot listen to the other *as* other. Even when Zambinella suggests the truth by means of a series of equivocal remarks culminating in the question (directed toward Sarrasine's offers to sacrifice everything for love)—"And if I were not a woman?"—Sarrasine cries: "What a joke! Do you think you can deceive an artist's eye?" [p. 247] Sarrasine's strength is thus a shield *against* La Zambinella, not *for* her. He creates her as his own symmetrical opposite and through her loves only himself. This is why the revelation of the truth is fatal. The castrato is both *outside* the difference between the sexes and at the same time the *literalization* of its illusory symmetry. He is that which subverts the desire for symmetrical, binary difference *by fulfilling it.* He is what destroys Sarrasine's reassuring masculinity by revealing that it is based on castration. But Sarrasine's realization that he himself is thereby castrated, that he is looking at his true mirror image, is still blind to the fact that he had never been capable of loving in the first place. His love was from the beginning the cancellation and castration of the other.

What Sarrasine dies of, then, is precisely a *failure to reread* in the exact sense with which we began this paper. What he devours so eagerly in La Zambinella is actually located within himself: a collection of sculpturesque clichés about feminine beauty and his own narcissism. In thinking that he knows where difference is located—*between* the sexes—what he is blind to is precisely a difference that cannot be situated *between,* but only *within.* In Balzac's story, the fact of castration thus stands as the literalization of the "difference within" which prevents *any* subject from coinciding with itself. In Derrida's terms, Sarrasine reads the opera singer as pure Voice ("his passion for La Zambinella's voice" [p. 241]), as an illusion of imaginary immediacy ("The distance between himself and La Zambinella had ceased to exist, he possessed her" [p. 239]), as a perfectly readable, motivated sign ("Do you think you can deceive an artist's eye?"), as full and transparent Logos, whereas she is the very image of the empty and arbitrary sign, of writing inhabited by its own irreducible difference from itself. And it can thus be seen that the failure to reread is hardly a trivial matter: for Sarrasine, it is fatal.

Balzac's text thus itself demystifies the logocentric blindness inherent in Sarrasine's reading of the Zambinellian text. But if Sarrasine's view of La Zambinella as an image of perfect wholeness and unequivocal femininity is analogous to the classic, readerly conception of literature according to Barthes' definition, then Balzac's text has already worked out the same type of deconstruction of the readerly ideal as that which Barthes is trying to accomplish as if it were in *opposition* to the classic text. In other words, Balzac's text already "knows" the limits and blindnesses of the readerly, which it personifies in Sarrasine. Balzac has already in a sense done Barthes' work for him. The readerly text is itself nothing other than a deconstruction of the readerly text.

But at the same time, Balzac's text does not operate a simple *reversal* of the readerly hierarchy: Balzac does not proclaim castration as the truth behind the readerly's blindness in as unequivocal a way as Barthes' own unequivocality would lead one to believe. For every time Balzac's text is about to use the word castration, it leaves a blank instead. "Ah, you are a woman," cries Sarrasine in despair; "for even a . . ." He breaks off. "No," he continues, "*he* would not be so cowardly" [p. 251]. Balzac repeatedly castrates his text of the word castration. Far from being the unequivocal answer to the text's enigma, castration is the way in which the enigma's answer is withheld. Castration is what the story must, and cannot, say. But what Barthes does in his reading is to label these textual blanks "taboo on the word castrato" [pp. 75, 177, 195, 210]. He fills in the textual gaps with a name. He erects castration into *the* meaning of the text, its ultimate signified. In so doing, however, he makes the idea of castration itself into a readerly fetish, the supposed answer to all the text's questions, the final revelation in the "hermeneutic" code. Balzac indeed shows that the answer cannot be this simple not only by eliminating the word "castration" from his text, but also by

suppressing the name of its opposite. When Sarrasine first feels sexual pleasure, Balzac says that this pleasure is located in "what we call the heart, for lack of any other word" [p. 238]. Later Zambinella says "I have no heart" [p. 247]. Barthes immediately calls "heart" a euphemism for the sexual organ, but Balzac's text, in stating that what the heart represents *cannot* be named, that the word is lacking, leaves the question of sexuality open, as a rhetorical problem which the simple naming of parts cannot solve. Balzac's text thus does not simply reverse the hierarchy between readerly and writerly by substituting the truth of castration for the delusion of wholeness; it deconstructs the very possibility of *naming the difference.*

On the basis of this confrontation between a literary and a critical text, we could perhaps conclude that while both involve a study of difference, the literary text conveys a difference from itself which it "knows" but cannot say, while the critical text, in attempting to say the difference, reduces it to identity. But in the final analysis, Barthes' text, too, displays a strange ambivalence. For although every metaphorical dimension in Barthes' text proclaims castration as the desirable essence of the writerly—the writerly about which "there may be nothing to say" [p. 4] just as the castrato is one "about whom there is nothing to say" [p. 214]—the literal concept of castration is loudly disavowed by Barthes as belonging to the injustices of the readerly: "To reduce the text to the unity of meaning, by a deceptively univocal reading, is [. . .] to sketch the castrating gesture" [p. 160]. By means of this split, Barthes own text reveals that it, like Balzac's, cannot with impunity set up any unequivocal value in opposition to the value of unequivocality. Just as Balzac's text, in its demystification of idealized beauty, reveals a difference not *between* the readerly and the writerly, but *within* the very ideals of the readerly, Barthes' text, in its ambivalence toward castration, reveals that the other of the readerly cannot but be subject to its own difference from itself. Difference as such cannot ever be affirmed as an ultimate value because it is that which subverts the very foundations of any affirmation of value. Castration can neither be assumed nor denied, but only enacted in the return of unsituable difference in every text. And the difference between literature and criticism consists perhaps only in the fact that criticism is more likely to be blind to the way in which its own critical difference from itself makes it, in the final analysis, literary.

Notes

1. This paper was prepared for a 1977 MLA Convention session, "Criticism as Deconstruction"; the unaltered text that is printed here is marked by that occasion.
2. Roland Barthes, *S/Z,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

[Transference in *A Lover's Discourse*: The Turn of the Reader/Writer]

ELIZABETH WRIGHT

The "turn" of the reader/writer is here used in a double sense: first, because it is their turn to be considered as a site where meaning is produced and where the distinction between them is no longer a hard and fast one; and second, because with the influence of Lacan's definition of the unconscious as structured like a language, the phenomena of transference in reading become all-pervasive, the structures of desire in language turning (in the sense of affecting) reader and writer alike.

The division I have made between "structural" and "post-structural" is not a neat historical one. Lacan, for example, is equally part of the post-structural enterprise. The division I am making is based on a practice of reading, in so far as it concerns psychoanalytic criticism. In one case (this section) the focus is on the reader in the text, both text of life and literary text, both determined by history and hence already written before the subject arrives on the scene. It is the reader who is transformed rather than the text. In the other case (next section) the capture of the reader is not taken as final. She can by a dialectical play move the text on to a new meaning, undermining its old power and deriving new power by exposing the text as self-contradictory. Lacan's procedure is to challenge the misreadings of past readers of Freud, by focusing on Freud the semiotician as distinct from Freud the humanist (Ernst Kris), or Freud the biologist (Sulloway 1979); Jacques Derrida's procedure is to subject Freud's texts to the same scrutiny as any other text, reading Freud's revolutionary discoveries against him, using the very transferential structures that Freud discovered in language to undermine *his* system. Freud's texts too are at odds with themselves and cannot be frozen into a metapsychology.

In either case the reader/writer distinction is no longer valid because making sense of the sign-system implicates both: each is caught in the net of signs, is up against language. Reading, writing and criticism are part of a con-

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tinuum whereby readers write in the act of reading and writers are shown to read in the act of writing. Barthes and Balzac are jointly implicated when the story *Sarrasine* is turned into *S/Z* (Barthes 1975; on this very point see Johnson 1978, p. 9: "The difference between literature and criticism consists perhaps only in the fact that criticism is more likely to be blind to the way in which its own critical difference from itself makes it, in the final analysis, literary"). Texts can be made to turn upon themselves, meaning both less and more than the writer may have intended. The psychoanalytic concept of transference in its extended form (which I will recapitulate as I proceed) has changed the way in which the production of meaning is to be conceived. The examples about to be discussed are Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* (1979) and Shoshana Felman's "Turning the screw of interpretation" (1977): both focus on the dilemma of the reader/lover in transference, albeit in different ways. Barthes is the reader of his own writing, self-consciously displaying the various effects of transference, and it is in this sense that he is performing a higher-level psychoanalytic criticism. Felman, while making a spectacular advance and attack on previous psychoanalytic criticism, is more orthodox in so far as she is working on the text of another writer.

A Lover's Discourse nicely illustrates the collapsing of the reader/writer/critic distinction. In his introduction Barthes explains both his detachment from and involvement with the persona of the book:

> In order to compose this amorous subject, pieces of various origin have been "put together." Some come from an ordinary reading, that of Goethe's *Werther.* Some come from insistent readings (Plato's *Symposium,* Zen, psychoanalysis, certain Mystics, Nietzsche, German lieder). Some come from conversations with friends. And there are some which come from my own life (Barthes 1979, p. 8).

The "I" of the text is both a person and a scene. "I" is a problematic word; in "To write: an intransitive verb?" (1972) Barthes examines its use. He wishes to show that a writer is not speaking from the position of a spontaneous bourgeois subject (the transitive "I write the book"), but is rather subject to the system that places him, inseparable from his act, defined by the system (the intransitive "I write"). To elaborate this he invents an image from grammar. Culture produces an illusory "passive" *I,* the nature of which is wholly externally defined. The experiencing self produces an illusory "active" *I,* the source of action appearing to be a pure ego without origin. The truth is half-way—a "middle voice," Barthes' pun, since the voice is the very thing that is in question. He thereby shows a Lacanian sensitivity to the power of language over the body, for the pronoun "I," "the *je* and what is deprived of the mark *je*" (1972, p. 144), is one of the most powerful tools for the subjugation of meaning. There is that in the body which is not represented by "je" in the ears of others, thus being deprived of expression.

In *A Lover's Discourse* the Imaginary is given a "je" which will not fit the body. The lover is gagged by the Symbolic, yet trying to utter through forcing the Imaginary to follow the bourgeois signifier. The particular constraints forced upon the lover are the "figures" that make him one (the "fragments" of the discourse), not to be understood in a rhetorical sense. The figures are episodes, characteristic of a romantic lover's experience, self-enclosed courses of thought and feeling, rituals, obsessive fancies, to which the lover is bound: "A figure is established if at least someone can say: "That's so true! I recognize that scene of language"" (1979, p. 4). Barthes wishes to offset the seductive influences of the figures of love, the chapters of cultural narrative imposed upon the subject, "the *love story,* subjugated to the great narrative Other, to that general opinion which disparages any excessive force and wants the subject himself to reduce the great imaginary current" (p. 7). To make it impossible for the figures to fall into a conventional narrative he deliberately eschews an order of development by putting them in alphabetical order, a gesture of unlearning the ABC. To put something in alphabetical order that has some other order is deliberately to disturb it: the body's alphabet becomes the clearer as the culture's alphabet becomes blurred. Culture's version of the alphabet would have made the narrative flow. Nevertheless, he wants to sensitize the reader to the structure of these influences, however random they appear. It is not so much an individual psychology he is interested in, but the cultural fabrications, the traps there are for beings of passion. He notes the irrational swervings and sudden reversals which fail to break out of the given figure, as if the body was still showing its powers of resistance while helpless within the order, "I am a Daruma Doll, a legless toy endlessly poked and pushed, but *finally* regaining its balance, assured by an inner balancing pin" (p. 141). This is part of a fragment under the title *This can't go on.* The titles and marginal notes have an effect he describes as à la Brecht," encouraging an alienation effect at the same time as an identification. The reader is to recognize the familiar schemes of emotion, the conventional sequences of thought, in order to distance himself from them. Hence the lover/writer and the critic/reader continually intersect.

The Barthesian lover does not have access to these alienation effects, safely tucked away as they are in titles, sub-titles and marginalia. He has to do the best he can, and this includes modelling himself on others. He needs a book to tell him how he feels. One might see him as having the same problem as E. T. A. Hoffmann's readerly/writerly cat:

> I decided that as a youth of erudition I should come to a clear understanding of my condition and began immediately, although with effort, to study Ovid's *De arte amandi,* as well as Manso's *Art of Loving;* but none of the characteristics of a lover given in these works seemed to fit me properly. It occurred to me suddenly that I had read in some play that an unquestionable spirit and a neglected beard are specific characteristics of a lover. I

> looked in the mirror. Heavens, my beard was neglected. Heavens, my spirit was unquestionable.
>
> Since I now knew that all was correct with the way I was in love, my soul was comforted (Hoffmann 1969).

In *A Lover's Discourse* a voice speaks about the Romantic novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in which a lover makes the description of his love all but a full-time occupation. Although Barthes' lover is struck only by Werther's passion for a woman he may not possess, it is worth noting that Goethe's epistolary novel revolves round a lover who also reads. He models himself on a Greek poet, Homer—in the spring and summer—and on a Celtic bard, Ossian (an impersonation of an impersonation, since the "bard" was Macpherson)—in autumn and winter.

Barthes reads psychoanalysis. He knows that love, even and especially romantic love, is transference love. In the artificial hot-house conditions of the psychoanalytic encounter the old, the primal love, is reactivated, without having to wait for the right "figure" (in Barthes' sense) to turn up.

In *A Lover's Discourse* the amorous subject addresses the (absent) mother. Here the archetypal lover/reader is the infant looking for links in the world/text which will bridge the gap left by the primal experience of separation. It is to be noted that Barthes sometimes adopts the benign perspective of Winnicott, at other times the dire perspective of Lacan, so that the concept "Imaginary" is not purely Lacanian. In the figure "Waiting," for instance, the lover knows that he is playing with reality (Winnicott's book is cited in a footnote). Waiting by the telephone for the "call" of the beloved is like waiting for the mother to reappear:

> The being I am waiting for is not real. Like the mother's breast for the infant, "I create and re-create it over and over, starting from my capacity to love, starting from my need for it." The other comes here where I am waiting, here where I have already created him/her. And if the other does not come, I hallucinate the other: waiting is a delirium (Barthes 1979, p. 39).

This is a non-pathological form of playing out one's lack (with the sound of a voice), taking place in a moment prior to the constricting definitions of language. Other moments are not so benign and can only be endured by making a fetish of the play-thing. The figure headed "The ribbon" designates a Lacanian moment, where the amorous subject becomes fixated upon every object the loved one has touched, as though it was a part of that body: "Werther multiplies the gestures of fetishism: he kisses the knot of ribbon Charlotte has given him for his birthday, the letter she sends him (even putting the sand to his lips), the pistols she has never touched" (p. 173). Werther's kissing the ribbon is not simply kissing something that metonymically stands for Charlotte, for the lover is kissing what metaphorically—through its being a sign of absence—can stand for what the Mother lacks. This is no benign transi-

tional object enabling the lover/infant to effect his separation, but a pursuit of something he is unwilling to surrender, his narcissism. In the case of the transitional object the play is a game for two in which narcissism is modified by encounter with that of another: in the case of the *objet a* (Lacan is here alluded to) the fantasy pursued erases the beloved, who is repeatedly "stifled" beneath the "massive utterance" of the lover's discourse (p. 165, "I am odious").

Another level of transference is that of the critic, who is both analysand and analyst. This joint function has already been discussed in the theory of André Green and in an example of Norman Holland's practice. In the present case a Lacanian model of transference is implied in that *A Lover's Discourse* is not just a matter of a pact between two subjects. Readers love texts, as Barthes shows in *The Pleasure of the Text,* and the *Lover's Discourse* demonstrates how that love can be a distorting infatuation, with the self caught in the existing, unsuspected signifying chain. Here is a writer giving the writer's game away in a game of his own, the writer's game being that of entrapping the narcissistic reader in a collusion of which even the writer is not fully aware. In showing how a text captures a reader Barthes enables *his* reader to escape capture both from transference and from the ideology that has contributed to it. He thus goes further than Lacan and further than Green. On the one hand he shows how "writerly" texts set out actively to disturb the "naive" reader's transference; on the other hand he shows how "readerly" texts may be thawed from their classic crystallization in a discourse in which writers, readers and critics endeavour to prevent the fixation of the text, its freezing back into ideology.

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Feminist Criticism and the Pleasure of the Text

JANE GALLOP

In 1973 Roland Barthes, the foremost practitioner of structuralist literary criticism, published a book entitled *The Pleasure of the Text.*[1] It is an attempt to elaborate a theory of the text based on the notion of pleasure rather than, say, structure or cognition or ideology. According to Barthes, pleasure has been radically excluded from criticism, from scientific, serious studies or theories of the text, his own work included, presumably.

The title of the book—*The Pleasure of the Text*—has in fact a subtly double meaning. Grammatically "of the text" (*du texte,* in French) is both objective and subjective genitive, whence the duplicity of meaning: the text is both object and subject of pleasure. The title means both the text's pleasure (the pleasure that is in the text) and our pleasure (the pleasure the text affords). The distinction is subtle because it is difficult to imagine how we might separate the pleasure that is in the text from that which the text gives us. The double meaning points to a difficulty in separating subject and object within the realm of textual pleasure. Barthes writes: "On the stage (in the scene) of the text . . . there is not a subject and an object. The text outdates grammatical attitudes" (29).

The Pleasure of the Text represented something like a break with Barthes's previous writings, inaugurating what would be the last phase of his work. Previously Barthes had been engaged in more or less scientific study of literature as well as leftist-leaning ideological analyses of culture. Whether engaged in disclosing the workings of ideology or trying to formulate a scientific theory of the text, Barthes had been above all a "serious" writer. And that seriousness devolved from his writing stance. Often ironic, highly logical and systematic, sometimes bitingly polemical, Barthes wrote with appropriate critical objectivity about whatever object he was studying.

The object of this book is pleasure, but a new object would not constitute an epistemological break in Barthes's *oeuvre* since throughout his career he had considered widely varying objects. What is new about this book is reflected in the duplicity of the title, in the fact that the object of this book (pleasure) is not simply an object. If in the realm of textual pleasure it is diffi-

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cult to separate subject from object, that dilemma might render it impossible to write objectively on the subject.

Pleasure is not simply an object in the text but is something that happens to the reader. Whereas structure, for example, would pretend to be immanent in the text where it could be studied and verified once and for all for any possible reading (hence affording structuralism a scientific status), pleasure depends on the individual reading and is thus uncertain. "Everyone can testify," Barthes writes, thus grounding his statement not in objective fact but in subjective experience, "that the pleasure of the text is not sure: nothing can say that this same text will please us a second time: it's a friable pleasure, crumbled by mood, habit, circumstance, it's a precarious pleasure" (83).

Pleasure is, we might say, a subjective effect. And certainly what is new in the book and will intensify in Barthes's later works is the explicit subjectivity of his writing position. Yet he would not call this stance subjectivity, since it is not based on a unified, enduring subject but is related to things like "mood, habit, circumstance," not to whom the reader is in any substantial, essential way but to the specific historical conjunction of reader and text, to the circumstances of the scene (the "stage," the performance) of reading.

Barthes's change of style has provoked passionate response, both negative and positive. The polarity of response could be represented by two recent books on Barthes, each by an author long familiar with and committed to his work. Their respective titles reflect the divergence in viewpoints on the break with structuralist science and embrace of pleasure. Annette Lavers calls her book *Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After.*[2] Although a study of Barthes's work, it is also equally a book on structuralism, an introduction to structuralism. The last phase of his career, from *The Pleasure of the Text* to his death in 1980, is treated as mere aftermath, an epilogue to the story of structuralism. The book allots only one of its fifteen chapters to all four books of Barthes's last phase. That chapter, the last of the book, vigorously condemns Barthes for betraying his contestatory position as critical intellectual and taking on the bourgeois image of the writer. Lavers even attempts psychoanalytic explanations of Barthes's fall into weakness, his sacrifice of intellectual and political rigor for the sake of bourgeois acceptance. Steven Ungar, on the other hand, entitles his book *Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire,*[3] a title which makes it clear that for Ungar the essential Barthes is that of the post-structuralist phase when pleasure and desire became central to his theorizing. Ungar's book treats the entirety of Barthes's pre-structuralist and structuralist work in the first of its four sections, as a prehistory to the hero of the title, the professor of desire. For Ungar the 1973 book marks the moment Barthes came into his own and began doing something really radical, calling into question his own authority, the authority of objective scientific criticism.

It is noteworthy that both positions—the attack and the celebration—make explicit connections between Barthes's work and left-wing politics. Lavers: "Barthes takes refuge in passivity and the pleasures identified with

the mother. But still, they are in his mind impossible to reconcile with socialism, and therefore guilty" (21). Guilty pleasure, guilty in relation to Barthes's "socialism." Ungar: "Never a Marxist in an orthodox sense [Barthes's] sensitivity to the use and misuse of authority has often suggested a sympathy to left-wing politics" (xv–xvi).

Lavers considers it the responsibility of the intellectual to challenge the dominant ideology, that is, bourgeois values and myths. Ungar believes we should challenge the power and authority that is masked as scientific objectivity, which itself functions as a very powerful ideology. Both critics judge Barthes from what is in one way or another a leftist, contestatory point of view and come to opposite conclusions about *The Pleasure of the Text.* Certainly this is where the passion comes from.

Passion and politics; politics and pleasure; leftist standards; a book on pleasure. "An entire little mythology," Barthes writes, "tends to make us think that pleasure is an idea of the right. The right, in one swoop, relegates to the left everything that is abstract, boring, political and keeps pleasure for itself. . . . And the left, out of moralism, suspects, disdains any 'residue of hedonism' " (38). "An entire little mythology," writes Barthes. *Mythologies* is the title of one of Barthes's first books, pre-structuralism, where he analyzed the workings of ideology in mass culture. That book was translated by Annette Lavers.[4] The quotation above from *The Pleasure of the Text* is a rare use of the word "mythology" in this sense in the last phase of Barthes's work. We thus momentarily return to the language of cultural criticism in order to question the ideological segregation of politics and pleasure, which locates politics as a leftist value and pleasure on the right. At the same time this passage foretells the negative reaction to his own move toward pleasure, correctly imagining the left, morally outraged rejection of his hedonism, and presuming to analyze the ideological underpinnings of that rejection before it even occurs.

Christopher Norris, who in his review of *The Pleasure of the Text* decries Barthes's hedonism from an explicitly Marxist perspective, writes that "the sensitive place in Barthes's exposition is plainly the suasive piece about 'right' and 'left' conceptions of literature."[5] Norris feels that "the little mythology" is "*plainly* the sensitive place." This is obviously the crux; the book clearly, certainly, self-evidently hinges on the question of left and right. By the expression "the sensitive place" Norris means the weak point, the vulnerable spot in the argument, but in the context of Barthes's theory of textual pleasure we could also hear "the sensitive place" as "the erogenous zone." This is the point where the critic can get Barthes, but the attack takes on erotic connotations.

Connotations reinforced by Norris' overheated prose. Norris calls Barthes's last mythology a "suasive piece." According to Barthes, "a word can be erotic . . . if it is unexpected, succulent in its novelty (in certain texts, words *glitter,* they are distractive, incongruous apparitions—it matters little

that they are pedantic)" (*Plaisir* 68). For me, Norris' "suasive" is such a word, a word that sends me scurrying to the dictionary where I learn that "suasive" is the adjectival form of "suasion" which means persuasion and is "used chiefly in the phrase moral suasion." In this "sensitive place" Barthes is using seductive rhetoric, working on the moral sense of his reader. In the "little mythology," we remember, the moral sense is implicated in the left's suspicion of pleasure.

Plainly, "suasive" marks a "sensitive place" in Norris' exposition. Echoes of morality, seduction, and eros, here at the juncture of pleasure and politics, the passionately moral question of left or right. And in *The Pleasure of the Text,* "the sensitive place," the place of passion where the text suddenly gives itself over to the reader's inquisitive touch, turns out to be, in keeping with Barthes's notion of the erotic as the unexpected, the sensitive place turns out to be not the explicitly sexual ideas and images but this discussion of the politics of pleasure.

The Pleasure of the Text does not seem to be a political text. In fact pleasure is there valued because it is beyond the conflictual positions of ideological struggle. Yet despite a certain impression of apolitical hedonism, politics and ideology are questions running throughout the book. If we try to read *The Pleasure of the Text* apolitically, banishing politics, embracing pleasure, then we have fallen into the reactionary side of the mythology. The right covers over political questions with aesthetic questions of pleasure; the left masks its pleasures with political positions. The book must be read, has been read, will be read within and against this "little mythology." We must think politics and pleasure together. What are the politics of pleasure? What the pleasures of politics?

Barthes writes of a form of ecstasy (intensest, most disruptive mode of pleasure, which he calls *jouissance*), a form of ecstasy that "consists in depoliticizing what is apparently political, and in politicizing what apparently is not" (*Plaisir* 71). One of the disturbing but also pleasurable effects of this book may be this radical shuffling of the place of the political so that it is not where we expect it and only appears when unexpected. Yes, indeed, the book is a depoliticization—reactionary gesture, Lavers' complaint—; it flees serious ideological struggle and escapes to the self-indulgent realm of pleasure. But it seems also, at least in its effects, to make pleasure a serious political question (leftist gesture).

Immediately after the sentence "another ecstasy . . . consists in depoliticizing what is apparently political and in politicizing what apparently is not," there is a dash like those marking another voice in dialogue, and we read, "But no, see here, one politicizes what *ought* to be and that's it." Immediately after positing another, more pleasurable relation to politics, one that is outside "the little mythology," another voice speaks, a critical, impatient voice from within the text that would call Barthes back into line, back to moral obligation. The word "ought" ("one politicizes what *ought* to be") is in italics.

This is the voice of the orthodox left for which there is a moral obligation to politicize everything. Any depoliticization shirks that responsibility. The voice could be Lavers', but it is coming from within Barthes's text. As Lavers says: "[Barthes's pleasures] are in his mind impossible to reconcile with socialism and therefore guilty" (212). The question of Barthes's complacency and cooptation by reactionary values is unavoidable, precisely because the book is literally in dialogue with that question.

Barthes's critics debate the politics of his hedonist gesture. So does his text. What is the politics of pleasure? That will be one of our questions here. A question I ask in the light of femininism.

Feminism has gone a long way to "politicize what apparently is not," or perhaps I should say, "to politicize what *ought* to be." "The personal is the political" is now an overly familiar feminist slogan. And we are indebted to feminism for the most cogent political analyses of sexuality, just as we must thank an early feminist literary critic, Kate Millett, for the phrase *sexual politics.* In Barthes's little book pleasure is always strongly tied to sexual pleasure. Is feminist sexual politics a politics of pleasure? Or does pleasure remain, for feminism, a suspicious depoliticization of the sexual?

Barthes and feminism, strange bedfellows? To my knowledge Barthes never discusses feminism, anywhere: *The Pleasure of the Text* never even mentions sexual difference, although both sexuality and difference are central themes. Lavers implies that feminists are, with good reason, hostile to Barthes, although her sentence about it is more than usually obscure, obscured, no doubt, by passion (208). Lavers cites Claudine Herrmann's book of feminist literary criticism, *Les Voleuses de langue,* as her example of the feminist critique of Barthes. Herrmann uses a passage from *The Pleasure of the Text* to show that for Barthes both bad writing and its reader are feminine, not of course explicitly but in the imagery. For Herrmann, Barthes is only one of an entire tradition of male writers who associate denigration and femininity.[6]

Even Ungar, Barthes's champion, can only say, "Barthes is certainly something less (or other) than a feminist" (90). Writing from a 1980s American progressive point of view, Ungar characterizes Barthes as "less than a feminist." Not to be a feminist in this age is to be lacking, inadequate. But in parentheses he adds "or other," hoping to free Barthes and himself from this moral responsibility, from an oppressive standard into some sort of alterity. The gesture is ironic since the history of phallocentric thought has considered woman "less than man," inferior, castrated, and feminists have argued that we are not less but other.

For Ungar's Barthes the tables are turned, and if this inversion seems suspect or glib, it might also point to some common ground between Barthes's project and feminism. Both, we might say, attempt to rethink what is traditionally "less than" as "other." Barthes writes: "The pleasure of the text

is always possible as the exercise of a different physiology" (*Plaisir* 49). In that valorization of "a different physiology," in the insistence on a positive reading of difference in the body, I hear something potentially friendly to feminism.

The politics of Barthes's book is a sexual politics as well as a politics of sexual difference, but sexual there refers not to the sexes but to eroticism, and sexual difference is individual difference, perversion, rather than the difference between the sexes. Textual pleasure and its wilder cousin textual ecstasy are presented not only as bodily and erotic but as specifically perverse. Perversion is here defined as "pleasure without function" (31), just as perverse sexuality, according to Barthes, "removes ecstasy (orgasm) from the finality of reproduction" (40). Pleasure is perverse when it is not subjugated to any function, like reproduction. Textual pleasure is not only perverse sexually (by not serving the reproduction of the species), but also without any higher function such as instruction, communication, or ideological stance. Or rather, I would say, it is not that the latter functions do not obtain, but that the pleasure of the text is not subordinate to them in any predictable way.

If the pleasure of literature is "an idea of the right," sexual perversion is not. Thus by insistently sexualizing pleasure, Barthes breaks up the mythological solidarity of aesthetics and conservative values. By laying bare the perversion of aesthetic pleasure, he renders textual pleasure unacceptable to the right although it remains condemnable to the left as decadent "hedonism."

What is the relation between sexualizing pleasure and politicizing pleasure? According to Barthes "there are few [writers] who fight against both ideological repression and libidinal repression" (58). The politicizers and the sexualizers are on the whole different. Yet, as I have suggested, feminism is at least nominally the place of sexual politics: explicitly sexual explicitly politics. Perversion, however, is a thorny problem for feminism.

If perversion is defined as the liberation of sexuality from reproductive ends, then many of the central issues of feminism would find common cause there. Abortion, contraception, lesbianism, clitoridectomy all involve questions of the right to non-reproductive sexual pleasure. Indeed the central gesture in modern feminist sexology, the displacement of the primary female sexual organ from vagina to clitoris, can be understood as a move from an organ of reproduction to an organ of pleasure which does not serve reproduction. This displacement might then itself be considered a perversion, in Barthes's sense of "removing orgasm from the finality of reproduction."

Feminism has expressed continual solidarity with the gay liberation movement and thus defended this "perversion." But it should be added, of course, that the usual feminist move is not to embrace perversion, as Barthes does, but rather to challenge the notion of homosexuality as perverse. If classically the clitoral woman, whether homo- or heterosexual, is considered perverted, the politics of feminism has been to challenge the classification and redefine the clitoris and lesbianism as normal.

Thus, in fact, feminism has not embraced perversion, but has defined it differently than Barthes does. And indeed, large sectors of the feminist movement stand in violent opposition to perversion which is understood to be male. The pervert—child molester, rapist, porno fan, fetishist, voyeur, exhibitionist, sadist, masochist, etc.—is seen as symptom of an aggressive, male sexuality that is inherently perverted and a primary enemy of feminism.

In its efforts to reclaim the clitoris and the lesbian from the realm of perversion, feminism has constituted a new standard for normal sexuality. The norm for feminist sexuality is an egalitarian relation of tenderness and caring where each partner is considered as a "whole person" rather than as an object of sexual fantasy. This norm clearly devolves from feminist critiques of patriarchal, phallocentric sexuality. Since relations between the sexes are, in a feminist analysis, considered the equivalent of relations between class-enemies, the egalitarian standard renders questionable whether any heterosexual relation (at least at this point in history) can be "normal."

Normal feminist sexuality is thus lesbian. If this seems in some way absurd, since the vast majority of feminists are still practicing heterosexuals, let us remember that likewise according to Barthes's biologico-psychoanalytico-Catholic definition of normal sexuality as subordinate to reproduction, only a small portion of sexual activity could be considered normal. Whatever the standard, few people seem to be sexually normal. When thinking about the functioning of sexual norms, we should bear in mind that, especially in the realm of the sexual, a norm is not a mean but an ideal.

In an excellent article on pleasure, sexuality, and feminism, Cora Kaplan, a feminist literary critic, notes that since both radical and revolutionary feminism "have located the universal truth of gender oppression in a sadistic and insatiable male sexuality, which is empowered to humiliate and punish [, a]ny pleasure that accrues to women who take part in heterosexual acts is . . . necessarily tainted." If male sexuality is sadistic, female heterosexual pleasure must necessarily be masochistic. Tainted pleasure, bad, sick, masochistic: perversion. Liberated from subjection to biologico-Christian standards, pleasure must now be politically correct. Kaplan continues: "at the extreme end of this position, women who 'go with men' are considered collaborators."[7]

My point, let me be clear, is not to complain that lesbians oppress their heterosexual sisters. Lesbians are an oppressed minority group who do not have the power to enforce their own hierarchies even if they wished to. My point rather is that there is a standard of normal sexuality in feminist thought, of politically correct sexuality which functions as morality and condemns pleasure that is not subordinate to it. (Witness the scandal created within feminism by the "coming out" of lesbian sadomasochists.)

Heterosexual feminists may experience their sexuality as a disturbing contradiction to their political stance. Within feminism heterosexual desire has only been theorized negatively. For example, penetration enacts the subjugation of women by men. Women's attraction to men reinforces phallocen-

trism and women's sense of their own inferiority. In such models there is little place for pleasure, which then becomes perverse, rebellious, insubordinate to political reason. Lesbian pleasure, to be sure, has been celebrated in feminist writing: theoretical, fictional, poetic, but the pleasure celebrated is respectably subordinate to correct politics. Pleasure is put in its place, reinforcing sisterhood.

A few years ago, Elaine Marks, an important feminist critic and at that time director of the substantial Women's Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, gave a talk in which she confessed that she loved to read Proust even though she did not know how Proust fit in with her position as a feminist. Marks is confessing a guilty pleasure, a pleasure insubordinate to feminism. What is the relation between Proust and feminism? Neither antagonism nor solidarity? Indifference? Barthes: "[Pleasure] is a drift, something . . . that cannot be taken care of by any collectivity. . . . Something *neutral?* It is evident that the pleasure of the text is scandalous: not because it is immoral, but because it is *atopic*" (39). "Atopic": strange word, formed on the model of utopic. Barthes italicizes it as he does "neutral" before it. *Neutral: neuter,* neither one nor the other; *atopic:* not of a place, neither here nor there. Indifference? Or simply difference? Proust "is certainly something less (*or other*) than a feminist." Proust and feminism, strange bedfellows? Perversion?

Proust has a special place in *The Pleasure of the Text.* Barthes writes: "I understand that Proust's work is, at least for me, the reference work . . . the *mandala* of the entire literary cosmogony . . . that does not at all mean that I am a Proust 'specialist': Proust, is what comes to me, it is not what I call; it is not an 'authority' (59). Barthes is not a Proust specialist; he is not supposed to write on Proust; he does not seek and research Proust; but Proust comes to him. Not an "authority," like Freud or Nietzsche, Proust is something personal, individual, perverse, "at least for me, the reference work." Proust accompanies Barthes, his companion in textual pleasure.

Marks confesses that she loves reading Proust but does not know how to align this with her feminism. Barthes is writing what is in certain ways a manifesto for postmodernist texts—Sollers, Robbe-Grillet, Severo Sarduy—but Proust is what comes to him unsolicited. I confess that I love reading Barthes but do not know how to align this with my feminism, although that indeed is the project of this paper. When I assigned myself the title "Feminist Criticism and the Pleasure of the Text" my wish was to take this book which is a source of great pleasure to me and reduce the scandal of its atopicality by subordinating my pleasure to some feminist idea.

In the first phase of feminist criticism, literary critics schooled in the tradition of male authors turned on that male canon to show how the great authors were sexist pigs, that is to say that the images of women in literature by men were distorting stereotypes that contributed to women's oppression and our alienation from self. Male literature had given us inhuman binary roles: madonna vs. whore, child-woman vs. bitch. Like the analysis of hetero-

sex, the analysis of male literature taught us to see subjugation and alienation in place of romance and beauty. Yet women readers had experienced pleasure in reading Rousseau or D. H. Lawrence, had enjoyed identifying with virgins and whores. The analysis showed us that our pleasure was "tainted."

In a second phase, feminists turned to women writers—the few already in the canon, the rediscovery of lost women writers from the past, and contemporary literary progeny of the women's movement. Feminist criticism moved from negation to affirmation, and suddenly there was a place for joy. Legitimate textual pleasure. A feminist can enjoy her identification with the heroine of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* or Virginia Woolf's *Orlando.* It is politically correct to find women's writing gratifying. Normal pleasure, pleasure properly subservient to political principle.

These two phases are obviously schematic and the neat bipolarities betray a sinister distortion. I should add, of course, that many feminist critics devote themselves to proving various male authors (from Shakespeare to Lacan) sympathetic proto- or crypto-feminists just as other feminist critics exert themselves in vehement critique of diverse women writers. The actuality and plurality of feminist criticism has a tapestried complexity that makes my tight binary scheme of attacking male pigs and celebrating female identity what Barthes might call a "little mythology." Yet my point might be that "an entire little mythology" makes us think that feminists should critique and demystify male writing and find pleasure in female writing. Feminist ideology produces a morality that could condemn as deviant any pleasure that does not serve the enhancement of female identity.

Elaine Marks, whose credentials as a feminist are good and strong, avows that she loves Proust. To be sure, Proust is not one of the enemies of feminism: no Henry Miller or Norman Mailer, he. But neither is he one of its heroines. Indifferent, atopic, neutral. For Barthes, the wonderful thing about textual pleasure is that, in a world of raging ideologies, in the war of discourses, textual pleasure can be neutral. And Proust is Barthes's point of reference in the pleasure of the text.

One might remark that both Proust and Barthes were male homosexuals. And that male homosexuality may figure as the exemplary thorn in feminism's thorny relation to perversion. We must affirm the normality of homosexuality in order to celebrate lesbianism, yet male homosexuality is also highly phallocentric male sexuality and partakes of all the perversions of male heterosexuality: rape, pornography, child molesting, etc. In practice the allegiance between lesbians and gay males is always problematic. Male homosexuality can neither be condemned nor celebrated. In the highly polarized world of feminism, male homosexuality might be *ne-uter,* neither one nor the other.

But I am not prepared here to explain Proust and Barthes as male homosexual authors. For I do not know how to articulate the relation between their lived homosexuality and their writing. Not that it is irrelevant.

Proust functions as a model for the late Barthes in that in Proust there is an unusually profound intrication of text and life. Homosexuality and biography are explicitly important questions in both Proust and (late) Barthes. But it is not clear to me what constitutes the homosexuality of their texts.

In contemplating a feminist reading of *The Pleasure of the Text* I felt discouraged by the lack of markers of sexual difference there, those markers that the feminist critic grabs onto in her intercourse with the text. Barthes never uses the words "masculine" or "feminine," for example. Athough there is much talk of sexual activity, the object of erotic desire is sexually indifferent. When Barthes writes "the most erotic place on a body is it not *there where clothing gapes?*", he lists as his examples of intermittence: "the skin that glistens between two pieces (pants and sweater), between two edges (the half-open shirt, the glove and the sleeve") (19). The examples seem applicable to either sex; all items of clothing are unisex with the possible exception of the shirt. A faint hint of homosexual desire but set against a general impression of neutrality. Sexual indifference, neutrality in the war between the sexes.

I recently gave a seminar on *The Pleasure of the Text,* a "straight" seminar on the book, no attempt to do a feminist analysis. But I did mention that elsewhere I was trying to work out a feminist reading of the text. Two women spoke out in anticipation of what might be my feminist reading. One asked if I *as a woman* did not find this book offensive. I never found out what she meant, but I can only presume that "as a woman" she found the explicit perversion offensive, since in some analyses perversion is by definition intricated with male sexuality's assaults on women's civil rights. The other woman asked what I made of the word "neuter" in the text. I was surprised since I hadn't known Barthes used the word. I was reading the French text and they were reading the English translation. The word "neutre," which I had always understood as "neutral," has been translated as "neuter."

The word "neutre" appears three times in this book. Each time I would translate it as "neutral" for it refers to pleasure's atopicality, its status outside the war of values. I am puzzled by the fact that the translator chose to use "neuter," and at first dismiss it as carelessness. Yet in my frustration with the lack of sexual difference in Barthes's erotics, I find myself returning again and again to the word "neuter" as if it shed new light on Barthes's neutrality. On all three appearances of "neutre" in *The Pleasure of the Text,* the word is in italics, as if one should remark something about it, as if the meaning were somehow changed without becoming another word, as if the word had become foreign. Five of the six meanings given for "neutre" in the dictionary could be translated by the English word "neutral." But the other meaning of the word, which is used in the field of linguistics, is "belonging to a grammatical category in which are grouped the nouns . . . that do not present the characteristics of masculine and feminine," in other words, what we in English call neuter nouns. In French, of course, there are no neuter nouns; the neuter is there exotic, atopic perhaps. And it is noteworthy that *neutre* as neuter refers

to linguistic gender, to sexual difference as it operates within language, within the text.

A few days after the seminar, I came across an example of Barthes using the word *neutre* in this linguistic meaning. In 1977, in his *Inaugural Lesson at the College de France,* Barthes stated: "I am forced always to choose between the masculine and the feminine, the neuter [*le neutre*] or the complex are forbidden me." I found this sentence in an analysis by Danielle Schwartz of the relation between language and power in Barthes's thought.[8] Schwartz notes that Barthes talks about language in terms of the dichotomy constraint/freedom. In this example, Barthes is constrained to choose either masculine or feminine; he is not free to choose the neuter (neither masculine nor feminine) or the complex (presumably some combination of the two).

Barthes is here talking about the linguistic notion of selection. According to Schwartz, "the notion of selection designates the work peculiar to the speaking subject consisting in choosing a signifier in an entire paradigmatic chain. This notion, which in Jakobson for example, is a scientific description, is here taken up and psychologized on the model of the alienating choice. The existential problematic of choice comes and grafts itself on the linguistic notion, thus giving the mechanisms of language a predestination that prepares his political version." Barthes is, according to Schwartz, in the process of recasting the laws of language, and our place under those laws, as a political dilemma. And with the example of the obligation of feminine *or* masculine, the prohibition of the neuter, one can imagine that the politics of language could become and might already be a sexual politics, or rather truly a politics of gender, not as we have come to use the word "gender," meaning biological sex, but in its dictionary meaning as sexual differentiation within language, textual sexuality.

Schwartz concludes her analysis of this sentence thus: "Implicitly in Barthes's text are manifested the regret and the wish for a counter-language, for an emancipation from constraints." And part of Barthes's liberated language, linguistic utopia would be access to the *neutre,* sexual neutrality. Feminism too has decried our compulsory, either-or masculine or feminine, created words like chairperson, spokesperson. Feminism too has longed for a freedom to be neuter or complex. Yet beyond the masculine/feminine dichotomy is the realm of perversion. Homosexuals used to be called the third sex. This utopic italicized *neutre* may be a sensitive zone of Barthes's homotextuality. It certainly is part of a wish to escape the constraints of bipolar gender differentiation. And so perhaps he shares in feminism's liberatory project.

And yet I am suspicious of neutrality, suspicious of the wish to deny sexual difference. Women have historically been associated with sexual difference, have been sexually differentiated from the generic so-called mankind. The wish to escape sexual difference might be but another mode of denying women. I distrust male homosexuals because they choose men over women just as do our social and political institutions, but they too share in the strug-

gle against bipolar gender constraints, against the compulsory choice of masculine or feminine.

Barthes edges toward an escape from that compulsory choice into something he calls *neutre:* neutral, neuter, sexually indifferent, outside the ideological war of the sexes. The *neutre* may be emancipatory but it is not free from eroticism. The *neutre* is reached through perversion and pleasure. Near the end of his book Barthes writes: "Pleasure is a *neutre* (the most perverse form of the demoniacal)" (102). The neutral here is far from innocent. Neuter sexuality, outside the dichotomy necessary for reproduction. Neuter, but not asexual, neither one sex nor the other, but not asexual.

Complex, perhaps. Near the beginning of the book Barthes imagines: "Fiction of an individual who would abolish in himself barriers, classes, exclusion . . . by simple riddance of that old spectre: logical contradiction. . . . Now this counter-hero exists: It's the text reader, in the moment when he takes his pleasure" (9–10). In textual pleasure one is rid of either-or, momentarily. Including, guiltily enough, feminine or masculine, and worse yet, feminist or sexist.

The pleasure of Proust. A guilty pleasure. On the question of feminism: neutre. The pleasure of Barthes, but what about feminism? What is Barthes's position on women? He never takes a position on women. (Out of homosexuality perhaps? Neutrality? Exclusion?) A possible exception: the word woman occurs once in *The Pleasure of the Text.*

In a section of the book called "War," Barthes opposes pleasure to "the warrior *value,*" lauds pleasure's atopicality in ideological conflict. At the end of the section, however, he specifies that the text is not, nor does he want it to be, devoid of ideology. He writes that "Some people want a text (art, painting) without a shadow, cut off from 'the dominant ideology'; but that is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text (see the myth of The Woman without a Shadow). The text needs its shadow: this shadow, it's *a bit* of ideology"(53). "The Woman without a Shadow" is a story by Hofmannsthal about a woman who coud not bear children because she had no shadow. By speaking of a text without a shadow he is equating text and woman. Susan Gubar, well-known feminist critic, in fact cites this passage from Barthes as yet another example of the longstanding masculinist tradition of woman as text, as art object, rather than artist.[9] Yes, but . . . that is not where I connect to this passage, which has, I believe, a certain homosexual specificity.

I am interested in the association between fertility and dominant ideology. Barthes specifies later that there is only dominant ideology, no such thing as dominated ideology, that ideology is the idea inasmuch as it dominates. Fecundity and ideology, both are shadows, outside the light of reason, the lightness of atopic pleasure. Normal sexuality for Barthes, as we have seen, is fertile, reproductive sexuality. That is also the dominant ideology of sex. Perversion is pleasure without reproduction, without ideology, without

shadow. Yet in this passage he is instead asserting the necessity for a bit of reproduction. The totally perverse text is sterile. And at the moment he would affirm "a bit" of reproductive sexuality, he writes the word "Woman."

The word is capitalized, refers to another text ("The Woman without a Shadow") and not to some extratextual being. The woman he mentions is in fact nonreproductive, that is, perverse. Yet in order to propose a negative image of nonreproductive sexuality, an image of sterility rather than perversion, the woman appears, for the first and only time in the book. Perversion, pleasure, the neuter are positive images throughout: nonreproductive sexuality is glorified. But suddenly when Barthes needs to counter this by showing nonreproductive pleasure in a negative light, woman appears. As if nonreproductive sexuality were glorious for men (male homotextuality) but a sterile woman were still a shame, a failure, less than rather than other.

Is woman for Barthes intricated with dominant ideology, normal reproductive sexuality, all that he is writing and struggling against? Pleasure has traditionally been associated with woman, particularly in its erotic sense. In the male heterosexual tradition, subversive pleasure that lures one away from productive duty is female. Women have thus been suspicious of pleasure because it relegates us to the nonserious, nonproductive, non-warrior side of things. In a male homosexual tradition woman may be on the other side, allied with duty, productivity, and ideology. This tradition is hardly restricted to overt practicing homosexuals; it includes, for example, a long tradition in American literature, as recognized by Leslie Fielder and his wake. Certainly this role is equally constraining for women. And oddly enough it may rejoin a certain tendency in feminism which calls women to their ideological duty (political seriousness, warrior values, feminine identity) and away from any nonproductive pleasures.

So Barthes's pleasure book also has "a bit of woman" and that bit is certainly "a bit of dominant ideology," the ideology that considers woman inadequate unless she is mother. Woman is overshadowed by the mother, femininity masked by maternity. Remains to be considered: Barthes and Proust, both had similiar close relations to their mothers, late into their adult lives. Male homosexuality and the mother, strange bedfellows, yet to be retheorized, in the wake of feminism.

And what of pleasure, perversion, and the mother? Lavers, who is always on the lookout for Barthes's collaboration with the dominant ideology, writes: "Barthes takes refuge in . . . the pleasures identified with the mother. But still, they are in his mind impossible to reconcile with socialism, and therefore guilty" (212). Barthes's pleasures are identified with the mother. And these pleasures are guilty. Lavers suggests that in Barthes there is an identification between the mother and the bourgeoisie, whence Barthes issues. Guilty, forbidden pleasures of a return to the maternal bourgeoisie. Of course in Freud's Oedipal schema the pleasures of the mother are the archetypal guilty plea-

sures. And for Barthes, the writer is that kind of pervert: "The writer is someone who plays with the body of his mother" (60).

Guilty from the point of view of socialism, from the political point of view. The chapter called "Politics" in *The Pleasure of the Text* consists of one lone sentence: "The text is (should be) that impertinent person who shows her/his behind to *Father Politics*" (86). The sentence is wonderfully provocative, but for our purposes let us note the phrase "Father Politics," capitalized and italicized. Politics is paternal, and so of course pleasure with the mother would be guilty in the eyes of politics, according to one's political (socialist) superego. "The pleasures identified with the mother are in his mind impossible to reconcile with socialism, and therefore guilty."

Feminism shares with Barthes the goal of an impertinent stance toward the father and a reconciliation and valorization of the mother, and yet we should question that little mythology: paternal politics vs. maternal pleasure. Another pleasure: to politicize what apparently is not, to depoliticize what apparently is. Another pleasure: to politicize motherhood, to find pleasure in the father—but no, see here, we politicize what *ought* to be and that's all.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973). All translations mine; page numbers will be given in the text. The book has been translated by Richard Miller as *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).
2. Annette Lavers, *Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
3. Steven Ungar, *Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
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The Goddess H.

D. A. Miller

What opposition more basic in Barthes's imagination, or central to his ethics, than between the Name and the Letter? The intense suffering Barthes alleges feeling "when he is named" overflows into his numerous complaints against the adjective, the image, the third person, the whodunit, all of which, for attempting to immobilize the signifying subject, are assimilated to the Name as an instrument of domination and death. In contrast, the Letter is always a good object for Barthes, cherished by him as the purity of a signifier that is "not yet compromised in any association and thus untouched by any Fall." Yet here too the Barthesian utopia is complicated by what it lets show of its own genealogy. If the letter-signifier appears empty, this is because it has been the site and is the result of an *evacuation;* its innocent airs never quite do away with the evidence of the semantic impressments that will already have left the smudge, precisely identifiable or not, of their prints. (Which is why, in Barthes's many encomia to the signifier, what he praises often looks less like purity than promiscuity—a proven ability to "fall" into an infinity of not always untraceable contacts.) On the M in Erté's alphabet, for instance, Barthes writes: "This inhuman letter (since it is no longer anthropomorphic) consists of fierce flames; it is a burning door devoured by wicks: the letter of love and death (at least in our Latin languages), flames alone amid so many letter-women (as we say Flower-Maidens), like the mortal absence of that body that Erté has made into the loveliest object imaginable: a script." On the one hand, in a patent allegory of Barthesian Writing, the letter advenes in a glorious (if also martyred) state of burning its bridges to a thus absented body—of literally, as French allows us to say, *burning its vessels.* Yet on the other, the passage's own writerly flagrancy (from the Latin *flagro,* to flare) fairly glows with the history, with the imaginary, of that body which—alone amid so many letter-women as Marcel within a budding grove, unique among them as Mother—has by no means therefore disappeared altogether in the flames. Indeed, so much flamboyance can hardly help kindling a suspicion that, not unlike the murderer in Agatha Christie who kills A and B to camouflage with the arbitrariness of the signifier his motives for the by no

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means arbitrary act of killing C, this incendiary text may be blazing the Letter's release from all verbal alignments by way of raising a smoke screen against one such alignment in particular: a certain name, perhaps, that the imprudence of divulging it consigns, like many another love letter, to the fire. On which conjecture, the writer fond of eliding himself into R. B., and his friends into A. C., E. B., D. F., will have been secretly banding, say with Shakespeare, as he is repeatedly supposed to have needed to conceal the identity of W. H.; say with Wilde, a character in whose *Dorian Gray,* when he likes people immensely, never tells their names to anyone; say with the entire long line of sodomites, inverts, homosexuals, and gay men to whom "safer sex" has ever had to mean, for themselves or their partners in crime, securing an incognito.

On at least one occasion, the euphoria arising from the Letter expressly acknowledges the extent of its determination by such distinctively gay experience of anonymity. In a handwritten preparatory note for *Roland Barthes,* photographically reproduced in the published text, its author describes a goddess he calls "Homosexuality" or "Homo," who permits him to say, do, understand, know so much that she becomes a catalyst, a mediator, a figure of intercession. The note is apparently an earlier version of the following passage in the finished text, now entitled simply "The goddess H.": "The pleasure potential of a perversion (in this case, that of the two H's: homosexuality and hashish) is always underestimated. Law, Science, the Doxa refuse to understand that perversion, quite simply, *makes happy;* or to be more specific, it produces a *more:* I am more sensitive, more perceptive, more loquacious, more amused, etc.—and it is this *more* where we find the difference (and consequently, the Text of life, life-as-text). Henceforth, it is a goddess, a figure that can be invoked, a means of intercession." Observe how "the goddess Homosexuality" or "Homo" gets enfolded into "the goddess H.," where H, as a relatively emancipated signifier, can then unfold into a plurality of perversions, among which homosexuality, even "in this case," has lost its priority (lost too, perhaps, the pain of that priority, as when once, not long ago, by way of cutting a man down to size, a size at any rate smaller than the unwieldy one he had grown to in my heart, I took to referring to him by his first initial, which was also that of two close friends). In the movement from the Name (as meaning *that name*) to the Letter (as meaning, only possibly, that name *among others*)—more accurately, in the oblique but observable *proffering* of the movement—consists the whole figured relation of Barthes's writing to his homosexuality. Or nearly: for Barthes will later inform us that for reasons of health he has never been able to enjoy smoking hashish.

As this pattern would predict, Barthes's relation to the act of gay self-nomination proves nothing short of phobic. "To proclaim yourself something is always to speak at the behest of a vengeful Other, to enter into his discourse, to argue with him, to seek from him a scrap of identity. 'You are . . .' 'Yes, I am . . .' Ultimately, the attribute is of no importance; what society will

not tolerate is that I should be . . . *nothing,* or that the something that I am should be openly expressed as provisional, revocable, insignificant, inessential, in a word, irrelevant. Just say, 'I am,' and you will be socially saved." The quasi-paranoid mistrust finds its warrant in the undeniable fact that, as a general social designation, the term *gay* serves a mainly administrative function, whether what is being administered is an insurance company, a marketing campaign, a love life, or a well-orchestrated liberal dinner party—as a result of which, even men on whom the overall effect of coming out has been empowering will sometimes also have to submit to being mortified by their membership in a denomination that general social usage treats, as though there were nothing else to say about them, or nothing else to hear them say, with all the finality of a verdict. (How well an arduously *sympathetic* investment in the category of gay men can facilitate a managerial anxiety to place them, or still less lovely, to show them their place, I eventually learned from Mona, whose last Christmas present to me was an organizer.) Yet gayness hardly operates in the manner of just any socially assigned attribute. What is still most familiarly solicited from the devotees of this proverbially innominate love, or solicited from others *for* them, is not a name, but the continual elision of one. (Consider:—Funny guy, that Al. He's fifty years old and never been married.—Maybe he's gay, Dad.—I didn't say *that.*) To the proclamation of gayness whose address, in any case, the Vengeful Other who sneers "You are" is obliged to share with the Kindly One who smiles "I am too," society continues to prefer the sotto voce stammering of a homosexuality from which nothing in fact is more tolerated, more desired, than that it be *provisional* ("it's just a stage"), *revocable* ("keep your options open"), *insignificant* ("it doesn't necessarily mean"), *inessential* ("are you sure?"), and, under the cumulative weight of all these attributes, expulsively *irrelevant.* Like the celebrity or politician whose refusal to discuss his sexuality (as being at once too marginal to bear on his business in the world and too central to forego full benefit of his right to privacy) declares that sexuality as legibly—I don't say with as much charm—as any sage nylon jacket ever did; or like those old-fashioned gay rendezvous, which are always more than sufficiently well identified by the mere emphatic vagueness of their names (such as, in Paris: L'Insolite, Le Curieux, Le Caméléon, and so on); so Barthes never with greater docility takes on a prescribed social identity than here in his ostensible argument against doing so. Even supposing a single individual refusal of a name could arrest the whole social process of nomination by which names are given out, it would remain the case that when the name in question is *that name,* whose most diffuse prejudicial effects depend on its *not* being pronounced—on its being restricted, quasi-catachrestically, to a system of connotation—then silence, far from guarding a subject against these effects, would leave him all the more destitute of resources for resisting them. If Barthes's reticence has successfully shielded anyone, it is his homophobic critics, who are

spared having to show how deeply their attacks are motivated by a name he never claims.

Yet how would homophobia know enough to strike, except by relying on information from a more reliable and less arid source in Barthes's writing than the proclamation that the author has merely *decided* not to make? Even when not spoken about in this writing, homosexuality does not fail to be spoken any the less. On the contrary, though seldom a topic, it comes to inflect every topic, no matter how remote, through the operation of a means comparable, even continuous, with that inexhaustible fountain of revelation popularly known (in fear, scorn, or love) as *a gay voice.* (In a former life, when I used to stand in dread of hearing myself on a tape recorder, I could not have imagined how often now I listen to messages on my answering machine solely in hopes of hearing an instance of this voice, for the pleasure of playing it back.) That such inflection only works by mobilizing highly variable and in any case never quite provable connotations makes a difficult task of specifying how, or as what, it is perceptible, except, grosso modo, by reference to the state of general opinion that is always ready to suspect, and often actually able to detect, male homosexual behavior in even the minutest deviation, by dilation or intensification, from male homosocial norms. The glance becomes one of "the signs" as soon as it seems to linger; the handshake, when it isn't punctual enough in relinquishing its hold; and similarly with the *négligé* that betrays no neglect, or the voice that instead of expediting the pleasure it takes in your company tends to draw it out in a kind of otiose sigh. Barthes takes less and less care to keep the same principle from casting on his prose, almost simply by virtue of a thing known as *manner,* the shadow of being "too pretty for a man's" (in alternative codes: too light, coy, sentimental, precious) to the point where among these codes, Barthes's own name has come to be included—or so I caught the drift of the reviewer who complained that my mentors were "people like Barthes." Moreover, though Barthes is plainly more conscious and conducive of his manner than most people are of their voices, yet to the degree that it manifests that nonpersonal individuality he likes calling *grain,* he may not be much more in command of it. Under usual conditions of reception, at any rate, such incorrigibility can't help approximating that of a certain voice in putting the ins and outs of the closet beyond power of election.[1]

With increasing visibility after *S/Z,* Barthes is engaged in the ambiguously twinned projects of at once sublimating gay content and undoing the sublimation in the practice of what he calls in the case of Proust "inversion—*as form.*" In Barthes's characteristic argument, be it mandarin or merely panic-stricken, the force of *that name* (already somewhat despecified as Pleasure, Perversion, Fashion, the Body) tends to surrender to the generality of an all-absorbing paradigm (of Language, Writing, the Text); in his characteristic performance, this paradigm becomes itself an erotic, perverse, dandiacal

embodiment, as though it liked nothing better than to relapse into the favorite themes whose particular bias is *persistent enough* not only to prevent the realization of a successful *Aufhebung* but even to make the whole wobbly dialectic apparatus start to look like a perverse erotic enhancer. If pleasure, for instance, is obliged for its expression to become—how unpromisingly!—a pleasure "of the text," the text is free to develop in the process a sexuality so accommodatingly perverse that only the boldest bad faith could think it had anything in common with the censorious notion of "the pleasure of reading." Similarly, an interest in fashion can only take the form of *The Fashion System,* which, however, precisely in that it hasn't worn well, makes a good index of how thoroughly modish its structuralist systematicity once was. At least until "Soirées de Paris," what one might call the (poignant, exasperating) hysteria of Barthes's most invidiously written texts lies in the activity of this contradiction—that while they phobically sacrifice homosexuality-as-signified, leaving the appeased deity of *general theory* as fixed as ever in its white-male-heterosexual orientation, they happily cultivate homosexuality-as-signifier, wreaking havoc on the discursive sobriety that works better than anything to give such coordinates an ecumenical air. No wonder Barthes ceased to be taken seriously as a theorist during the very period when his work most fully emitted that resonance of the body which *Writing Degree Zero* had earlier called *style:* who could recognize theory once it enjoined the necessity of looking at its ass in the mirror?

Notes

1. Guy Scarpetta, having visited Barthes's seminar, recorded this impression: "I was at once struck by the marked contrast between his words and his voice. Albeit the content of his discourse was abstract, semiological, 'scientific,' the voice itself never ceased being eroticized: warm, deep, slow-paced, cajoling, velvety, modulated (Casals playing Bach on the cello): it was with his voice that he would cruise. I immediately sensed that most of his auditors, male and female, so intensely submitted to the charm (the 'obtuse meaning') of this voice that they ended by savoring it for itself, almost independently of what it said. A kind of 'extra,' this voice grazed them, disturbed them, enveloped them, seduced them—to the point of excitation pure and simple."

BARTHES'S AESTHETICS

The Plural Void: Barthes and Asia

TRINH T. MINH-HA

Writing, says Barthes, is in its own way a *satori*. It corresponds to that Zen event which, in *L'Empire des signes* (Geneva: Skira, 1970) is defined as "a loss of meaning," a "seismism . . ." which perturbs the thinking subject: it produces a *speech-void*. At the same time, this void makes writing possible; it is what permits Zen, in the suspension of all meaning, to "write gardens, gestures, houses, bouquets, faces"[1] (p. 10). These statements present the two inseparable faces of a single entity. They open, as would a dice throw, a text in which the (named) Void moves beneath multiple forms, showing us at each pause in its displacement, a new face. This philosophy, this doctrine, which when referring to Barthes I will call the notion of the Void, is not confined to *L'Empire des signes*. It belongs to a network of closely connected signifiers and signifieds where Barthes chooses to be situated.

In *Essais critiques* Barthes had already remarked that literature is only form and indirect illumination: "if you treat an indirect structure directly, it escapes, it empties out, or on the contrary, it freezes, essentializes."[2] The observation clarifies (and is clarified by) Barthes' reading of Japan. It recurs in his texts, each time reformulated as if to make his concept of the writer-public experimenter more concrete:

> he knows only one art: that of theme and variations. On the side of the variations will be found . . . his *content;* but on the side of the theme will be found the persistence of *forms*. . . . Only, contrary to what happens in music, each of the writer's variations is taken for an authentic theme, whose meaning is immediate and definitive.[3]

Barthes sees Japan as an immense reservoir of empty signs. Packages, bows of respect, Tokyo's inner-city, *haïku, Bunraku,* all inspire a meditation on semantics. "The Japanese thing is not enclosed . . . nor formed by a sharp contour, a design, which would then be 'filled' by color, shadow or brushwork; around it there is a *void,* an empty space making it matte"[4] (*L'Empire,* p. 58). On the

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other hand, a Japanese box, for example, does not function as a temporary accessory to the object it contains; as envelope it is itself an object. Although its value is related to what it conceals, "that very thing which it encloses and signifies is postponed for a very long time" (p. 61). Like a rigorously arranged bouquet, which invites the perceiver to follow what the creative hand has traced, thus frustrating the simple decoding of a symbolic message, "the package is a thought":

> It is seemingly in the envelope that the work of *fabrication* is invested, but for this very reason the object tends to lose its existence, becomes a mirage: from one envelope to the next, the signified takes flight and when it is finally grasped . . . it seems insignificant, valueless, abject: . . . to find the object which is in the package, or the signified which is in the sign, is to throw it away. (p. 61)

Framed by void and framing nothing (or framing a nothing), the Japanese thing shows itself as essentially form *and* emptiness. If it is approached directly, i.e., as mere container, it either flees, empties itself of content, or else it congeals in its function as envelope. In either case, one is left holding an empty skin. The desire to grasp typically confuses illusion and reality or, to use a well-known Zen expression, the finger and the moon. Barthes' remarks here recall his earlier views on literature: "Whoever wishes to write with exactitude," he has said, "must proceed to the frontiers of language"; "the most 'realistic' work will not be one which 'paints' reality, but one which, using the world as content, will explore as profoundly as possible the *unreal reality* of language."[5] Writing like *satori* in no ways means God's illuminative descent; it is rather an " 'awakening to the fact,' a grasp of the thing as event, not as substance" (*L'Empire,* p. 101).

Postponement is a type of indirection. It has become almost commonplace today to say that the interest of a game, trip or quest lies not in the goal but in the route taken (or more precisely, *given*) to reach it. The goal is at most a pretext or provisional halt. The verbs "to play," "to travel," "to search," "to write," are often used in an absolute sense, not introducing a complement. Following Barthes, in "To Write: An Intransitive Verb,"[6] we should use (in French, at least) the *passé composé intégrant* (instead of the *passé composé dirimant*) to say "Je suis joué(e)," "je suis voyagé(e)," "je suis cherché(e)" (without complement), "je suis écrit(e)," just as one says (writes) "je suis né(e)." These expressions are not meant to convey an idea of the passive. They diminish "asymptotically" the distance between subject and act: the agent is here not posited as pre-existing but as immediately contemporary to the process of the act, being both "effected" and "affected" by it. Similarly, "there is always a little *something* in the [Japanese] package," although this something cannot be grasped, nor separated from what conceals and protects it without appearing at the same time as "insignificant." And the envelope, grasped directly, also

loses its *raison d'être.* The package's existence depends on the interdependence of the two elements and it is in order to *designate* this reality more effectively that the work-investment seems to be in the envelope, that Japanese boxes contain Japanese boxes *ad nihilum,* that the Japanese bouquet invites us to retrace its arrangement, thereby showing us how it may be unmade and restored to the void. A mirage, the envelope is realistic by virtue of consciousness of its unreality. To seize it as a substance is to take for the moon the finger which points to the moon. To fix it as mirage is to encounter the void. One annihilates what one names. Writing, as Barthes says, produces a "vide de parole." For this reason, "*the Name does not cross its lips,* it is fragmented into practices, into words which are not Names. Bringing itself to the limits of speech, in a *mathesis* of language which does not seek to be identified with science, the text undoes nomination."[7]

For the writer, to undo the work of death means to de-construct, to dislocate the entire system of Western rhetoric. Bathing everything with meaning, "like an authoritarian religion which imposes baptism on whole populations," this system has always aimed at "banishing from discourse the scandal of nonsense" and its imperative is still the "desperate filling-in of any blank space which would reveal the void of language" (*L'Empire,* pp. 90–92). Denouncing such an operation leads, in Barthes' case, to a definition of literature as "consciousness of the unreality of language."[8] *Haïku* provides a useful example:

> The number and dispersion of *haïkus* on the one hand, the brevity and closure of each of them on the other, seem to show an infinite division and classification of the world and to set forth a space of pure fragments, a swarm of events which, owing to a sort of disinheritance of signification, neither can nor should coagulate, construct, direct, terminate. (*L'Empire,* p. 101)

Haïku is thus a grasping of the thing in its "fragile essence of appearance." It brings forth that "strictly speaking ungraspable moment in which the thing, though nothing but language, will become speech" (p. 100). Like that of the package-mirage, the content of *haïku* is so insignificant, so ordinary that "the paths of interpretation, by which we [in the Western world] seek to perforate meaning, that is to say by forcing its entry . . . cannot but fail," "because the reading process called for requires one to *suspend,* not evoke language" (my italics, p. 94).

Because of its brevity, *haïku* is often referred to as "silence," a heavy, deep, mystical silence, and is attributed to a "sign of a full language" (pp. 92, 96). As a "vision lacking commentary," *haïku* will nevertheless not allow commentary. *Haïku* cannot be explicated, merely repeated; nor can it be deciphered, analyzed, or developed without subjection to the processes of metaphor or syllogism. In fact, "it is not a rich thought reduced to a brief form, but a brief event which assumes immediately its adequate form" (p.

98). Its rightness is owing to "a merging of signifier and signified, a suppression of border-lines, leaks of significance or interstices which ordinarily exceed or open up the semantic relationship" (p. 99). "What is set forth is matte. It can only be repeated" (p. 97). "What is sought is the very founding of the sign" (p. 96).

> The aim is not concision (that is to say an abbreviation of the signifier without reduction of the density of the signified), but on the contrary to act upon the very root of meaning, so that this meaning . . . is not interiorized, not made implicit. . . . [T]he aim is not to submerge language beneath the mystical silence of the ineffable but to arrest the spinning verbal top, whose gyrations whirl us in the obsessional game of symbolic substitution. (p. 98)

Haïku is written in perfectly readable discourse; it cannot therefore be called nonsense, nor can meaning be imposed on it. The exemption from meaning within meaning itself is to be understood not as abolition, but as "suspension" of meaning.

Haïku is one of those forms of courtesy in Japan which signify "nothing." If the bow of respect displays itself above all as graphic form free from all expression of vanity or humiliation ("two bodies which write themselves without abasement," p. 88), *haïku* is like "a polite host who permits you to make yourself at home, with all your obsessions, values, symbols" (p. 89). It is an empty mirror, a "symbol of the void of symbols," which receives but does not conserve, which "*captures only other mirrors* and whose infinite reflection is emptiness itself (which is to say form, as we know)" (my italics, p. 104). *Politesse* in no way expresses submission or lack of personality, as some Westerners may think; it is, says Barthes, "a practice of the void" (p. 86):

> there is a moment when language ceases (a moment obtained by much practice), and it is this echo-free cutting-off which produces both the truth of Zen and the form, brief and empty, of *haïku*. (p. 96)

> All of zen—*haïkai* is merely its literary branch—has thus the appearance of a vast operation aimed at *stopping language* . . . at drying up the irrepressible chatter of the soul; perhaps what is called, in Zen, *satori* . . . is nothing more than a panicking suspension of language, the blank which effaces within us the reign of codes, the shattering of that inner speech which makes us persons. (p. 97)

The Void: a tissue which is formed as its meshes (mirage, event, nothing, unreal reality, the matte, suspension) take shape. And it is in relation to the Void that these meshes are woven. Writing unravels (délie; dé-lit) and weaves (relie; relit); it repeats tirelessly the same gesture. "Rain, Sowing, Dissemination, Web, Tissue, Text, Writing," notes Barthes (p. 14), and further: "the Sign is a fracture which opens only upon the face of another sign" (p. 72). Barthes'

writing is a Japanese package which one must endlessly undo: from envelope to envelope it defers its closure, and what it encloses is "postponed for a very long time." The Name "is fragmented into practices, into words which are not Names," and the words, like chameleons, change color to suit their surroundings. Even when they are defined, they continue to say: and/not that, and/not that yet, while renewing themselves at each reappearance. Every definition, complete in itself, bears the traces of another definition; nothing is final: "the author [*écrivain* rather than *écrivant*] knows that his language, intransitive by choice and by labor, inaugurates an ambiguity, even if it appears to be peremptory, . . . that it can have no other motto but Jacques Rigaut's profound remark: 'and even when I affirm, I am still questioning.' "[9] Thus, having written a text on China, Barthes asks this question:

> We cannot speak, and surely not write, without being subject to one of these modes: either affirming, or denying, or doubting, or questioning. But cannot the human subject have another desire: to *suspend* his utterance without, however, abolishing it?

and goes on to describe his own work as follows:

> On China, an immense topic and, for many, one which inspires passion, I tried to produce—my truth was in this—a discourse which would be neither assertive, nor negative, nor neutral: a commentary whose tone would be one of "no comment": an acceptance . . . and not constrained to either approbation or rejection.[10]

Barthes seeks a certain suspension in his discourse, a suspension experienced as "a blank which effaces in us the reign of codes" and as a regenerative place of rest: "Pleasure's force of *suspension* can never be overstated: it is a veritable *époché,* a stoppage which congeals all recognized values (recognized by oneself)."[11] This is what is seen in the image of the "suspended garden" which he associates with his seminar in Paris:

> A peaceful gathering in a world at war, our seminar is a suspended place; it takes place each week . . . supported by the world which surrounds it but also resisting that world, quietly accepting the immorality of being a fissure in the totality pressing in from all sides (or one should say, rather, that the seminar has its own morality).[12]

Defying commentary, this suspended discourse can be situated, in *Alors la Chine?* as a response to ethnocentrism and its ally, phallocentrism:

> By producing a subdued mirage of China as something placed outside of the domain of brilliant colors, strong flavors and brutal meanings (all of these having some connection with the everlasting parade of the Phallus), I

> wanted to bind in a single gesture the feminine (maternal?) infiniteness of the object itself . . . and the right to a special discourse, a discourse which drifts slightly, or which speaks the desire for silence. . . . This is not a gratuitous hallucination: it seeks to respond to the way that many Westerners produce their own hallucinations of the People's Republic of China: in a dogmatic, violently affirmative/negative, or falsely liberal mode. (p. 14)

The association suspension/feminine conjures up a cloud of images and sentiments: pause, peace, acceptance (not espousal nor rejection), effortless slipping, desire for silence and mother. The mother: "role-free, as non-Name (non-nom) . . . who refuses to be fragmented but suffocates codes" (Hélène Cixous); she who in her maternal love wills herself whole and the other whole and is therefore neither assertive, nor negative, nor neutral. And Barthes is not reluctant to refer this "special discourse" to Taoist "wisdom" (p. 14), a reference which we have already discerned in the symbol of the empty mirror and which is even more clearly justified by these lines taken from the *Tao-Te-King:*

> A large kingdom is the low ground toward which all
> streams flow
> the point towards which all things converge
> the Feminine of the universe (61)
>
> Know in yourself the masculine
> Cling to the feminine
> Make of yourself the world's Ravine (28)[13]

To approach the Unknown, that feminine or maternal infinity which is China, Barthes affirms that his preoccupations have little to do with the description, deciphering or production of a meaning. He is concerned with the approach itself, with the discourse produced and with the confection of the envelope: China, writes Barthes, overflows meaning in an extraordinary way (*La Chine,* p. 14). It cannot therefore be grasped by the forced entry of meaning. It is, in fact, "pale," "colorless" and "peaceful" (does not the word "chinoiserie" convey the notions of *excessive* subtlety, useless and *extravagant* complication which Westerners associate with China?); it is, in short, rather like the Japanese thing. It is not, nor can it be, circumscribed by "a strong contour . . . which would then be 'filled in' by color." To approach Her as closely as possible, Barthes chooses a pluri-dimensional procedure aware of itself as an unreal container (the irreality of language) of another unreal container (the irreality of "China" and what She, as indirect envelope, includes): "The intellectual (or the writer) has no site—or this site is nothing other than indirection itself: it is to this utopia that I have tried to give a (musically) adequate discourse" (p. 14). We have here again the Japanese boxes, one inside the other *ad nihilum,* with the infinite play of mirrors.

Barthes' writing produces a "Displacement: it is not the truth which is true, it is the relationship with the lure which becomes true. To situate myself within truth, a stubborn persistence is sufficient. Affirmed endlessly, in the face of all opposition, a 'lure' becomes a truth . . . Truth would seem to be that which, in the fantasy, must be postponed, but not denied, extracted, betrayed . . . Truth: *that which is marginal.*"[14] This last statement derives from a Zen example. It illuminates Barthes' literary moves and casts another light on the notion of the Void. As we have affirmed, the Void or *sūnyatā* suggests Nothingness or Relativity, but does not signify them. Closely linked with the notion of Non-Identity, the Void is however a synonym for *tathatā,* the Non-Void or, more precisely, the This (le *Tel*). This apparently contradictory coupling is, naturally, intentional. It prevents the conceptualization of the Void, for the "true Void" is not a concept, it is the void of the *tathatā* (Thich Nhat Hanh).

An "adequate discourse" in Barthes' mind is a discourse aware that it is essentially language and which, like *haïku,* "is not at all an exact painting of the real, but a merging of signifier and signified." A commentary resisting comment, it wants to be *matte:* the reader cannot evaluate, classify or reduce it to an interpretive system—every criticism based on the *vraisemblable* is declared non-pertinent. On the other hand, she/he constantly recovers it (*resasse*) by *quoting;* redoubles it (*dédouble*) by repeating its gesture, meshing in this way knowledge with the "machinery of infinite reflexivity"; she/he *displaces* it to a realm where it is not foreseen; indefinitely *fractures* and *reconstitutes* it. Like photography, a just discourse is "the absolute Particular, sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the This."[15] It neither expresses nor describes, it *designates* and reproduces the gesture of a small child who points at something saying only "This!" in an unmediated movement free from any sense of finalism [c.f. the This and the example of the child recur obsessively in several texts by Barthes, including *L'Empire, Fragments d'un discours amoureux (A Lover's Discourse)* and *La Chambre claire (Camera Lucida)*]. Breaking with the notion of development, Barthes' writing proposes variation: instead of following an itinerary moving from beginning to end, the song alternates between moments of "Here" (*Voici*) and "There" (*Voilà*). Why is this or that discourse, object, moment chosen? Because: "The other whom I love shows me the particularity of my desire."[16] Reciprocal designation determines the This and its uniqueness. As with *haïku,* what occurs is an event which suddenly finds its appropriate form. Writing does not seek possession through affirmation or denial; it has, in fact, no purpose. It simply dramatizes language, and unfolds the "goings and comings of a desire."

"To know that writing is neither compensation nor sublimation, that it is situated precisely *in that place where you are not*—is the beginning of writing."[17] *Satori* cannot be *obtained* (through effort or discipline). No profound vision is required for the comprehension of the Void; it emerges where it is

forgotten, when one looks at the marginal and juggles other words. Likewise, it is inexact to conceive of the suspension of language as "a moment obtained by much practice" (quoted above): the realization of silence implies the intervention of the "I." Barthes seems more consistent with his writings on Asia and closer to oriental thinking when he speaks of "the shattering of that inner speech which makes us persons." For the new to be, all must reach an end. Writing is born when the writer is no longer. Which does not mean that he/she withdraws, but he/she dies in himself/herself in order to exist simultaneously with the text.

In *Fragments (A Lover's Discourse),* the "I" functions as does Tokyo's inner-city: it subsists not in order to propagate some power or other, but to nourish the whole textual movement with its central void, thus obliging the imaginary to deploy itself around it, in detours and returns on the circumference of an empty subject. The ego-mirror is the equivalent of a polite host who allows "thousands of subjects" to make themselves at home in his dwelling and to speak through him. His/her portrait, structural and non-psychological, dramatizes an *utterance (énonciation).* As in the seminar, what is produced is a work written *in front of* or *with* others, a propagation of a desire for a Text, a chain in which "the object is a matter of indifference, but subjects operate." The writer's role is comparable to the gesture of "circulating the ring" so that "each can take his turn as master of ceremonies."[18] The gesture of initiation is not, however, as simple as it may seem. How does one "pass the deal (word)" when one is a "master"? "Each time that I try to hand the direction of the seminar over to others, it returns to me: I can't get rid of my 'presidency.' " "We should write in the present tense," concludes Barthes, "we should display the *process of enunciation.*"[19]

"He whose discourse is non-instrumental," is the Father, the One who Speaks. But "He who points to the one who speaks, who designates enunciation, is no longer the Father."[20] The writer forms and is formed by a layering and separation of the "I." He is a plurality of subjects of speaking and of speech, and of the denunciation of these. The gesture of denunciation is infinitely repeated. We return here to that "mirage-displacement" which ceaselessly postpones and defers (the Father) and which thus provides a method for the abdication of power. In *Fragments* the writer speaks through a Someone (*On*) who is distinguished from the "I" of the discourse. These superpositions, detectable also in *L'Empire, La Chine, Camera Lucida,* do not obliterate the presence of the Father; they fragment it, thus lightening and retarding his power.

Intent on unveiling the process of the book, Barthes often gives us the how and the why of what is written. He wishes somehow to reproduce the double gesture of *Bunraku,* which is to be read on two levels, that of the marionnette and that of the manipulator. "It [*Bunraku*] displays both gesture and act, exposes at once art and its production" (*L'Empire,* p. 67). *Fragments* begins, similarly, with the two questions: what is the need for such a book?

How is it made? The situation of *L'Empire* and *La Chine* is more complex: what he seeks here is not to decipher Asia, but rather to assess his own position vis-à-vis exoticism, ethnocentrism and, above all, to assess his own hermeneutic posture, his role as decoder. Consequently, he takes great care in *L'Empire* to situate his work and to set aside any desire to conform to the "real." He neither claims nor desires to analyze an oriental culture; what he looks for is the "possibility of a difference": "to undo our 'real' by means of other *découpages,* other syntaxes, to unveil the extraordinary positions of the subject in his enunciation . . . to descend to the untranslatable, feel its shock without protection, to the point that all that is Western in us is convulsed, along with the rights of the Father Language" (*L'Empire,* p. 11). Suspended between the fictive and the real, Barthes' Japan parries or blocks any criticism based on the *vraisemblable.* We read the author reading Asia. He writes, not because he has "photographed" Japan, but because "Le Japan l'a étoilé d'éclairs multiples" and has placed him in the "situation of writing" (p. 10). The unknown he confronts is neither Japan nor China but his own language, and through it, that of all the West. Subject and object are inseparable: "the question asked indiscreetly about meaning is turned into the question of meaning" (*La Chine,* p. 8). In fact, what is given us to read in these books is neither the observed nor the observer but the observing: "The eye by which I see God is the same eye by which He sees me."[21]

"The *énoncé,*" writes Barthes, "is given as the product of the absence of a speaker. As for the *énonciation,* by exposing the site and the energy of the subject . . . it plays the role of giving voice to a subject who is at once insistent and invisible."[22] Hence, whatever the object chosen may be—Photography, the Lover, the Seminar, Asia—it is in what shows the writer's engagement with language that his subjectivity must be sought and defined. "I am indifferent to the Orient," Barthes has said (*L'Empire,* p. 7); the Orient can only illuminate his own truth, that of his desire to produce an adequate discourse (*La Chine*) or that of "being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical; and at the heart of this critical language, between several discourses, those of sociology, of semiology and of psychoanalysis."[23] Through persistent interrogation of the material which defines him, the writer dramatizes a "body in situation." Barthes sees in this gesture a sort of rape, "as if, in order to fall in love, I had to accept the ancestral formality of rape, that is to say surprise."[24] "The greatest transgression," he says elsewhere, "is to surprise the Father in the process of *énonciation.*"[25] While the taste for transgression shows a continued attachment to the Father, in *Bunraku* the simultaneous display of art and its production remains an empty gesture. In this perspective, we can better understand Barthes' procedure in *La Chambre claire (Camera Lucida):* the observations aimed at situating the writer's work are no longer affixed to the beginning or the end of the text as if to underline the separation of product and production, but are incorporated into the text itself. Through this more indirect approach to "the science of the

subject" Barthes seems to free himself from the clearly justifying and arrogating tone used earlier to clarify his position. "Language is always assertive," he says, "even and essentially when it is surrounded by a cloud of oratorical precaution."[26] Rejecting any reductive system, Barthes will quietly abandon a particular language to look elsewhere as soon as he feels that this language is "tending to reduction and reprimand."[27] Beyond the cleavage I/one, he moves toward an "absolute subjectivity [which] is achieved only in a state, an effort of silence . . . to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness."[28]

Notes

1. All quotations have been translated by Stanley Gray unless otherwise indicated.
2. *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil. 1964). tr. R. Howard. *Critical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press. 1972), p. 156.
3. Ibid., p. xii.
4. The term "matte" (*mat, mate* in French) is used by Barthes to describe texture, colors, sounds, the surface of a text. It may mean such things as lustreless, without resonance or echo, flat, "literal" (as in a text by Robbe-Grillet). Translator's note.
5. *Critical Essays,* pp. xv, 160.
6. In R. Macksey and E. Donato, *The Structuralist Controversy* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 134–145.
7. *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), tr. R. Miller, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975), p. 45.
8. *Critical Essays,* p. 160.
9. Ibid., p. 147.
10. *Alors la Chine?* (Paris: C. Bourgois, 1975), pp. 13–14.
11. *The Pleasure,* p. 65.
12. "Au Séminaire," *L'Arc,* No. 56, p. 55.
13. Translated from the French translation by F. Houang & P. Leyris, *La Voie et sa vertu. Tao-te-king* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), pp. 141, 75. English translations of the *Tao-te-king* are numerous. We prefer, however, to keep Houang and Leyris' poetic version.
14. *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), pp. 272–273.
15. *La Chambre claire* (Paris: Gallimard-Seuil, 1980), tr. R. Howard, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), p. 4.
16. *Fragments,* p. 26.
17. Ibid., p. 116.
18. "Au Séminaire," pp. 48, 52–53.
19. Ibid., p. 54.
20. Ibid.
21. Barthes quotes Angelus Silesius, *The Pleasure,* p. 16.
22. *Leçon* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 20.
23. *Camera,* p. 8.
24. *Fragments,* p. 228.
25. "Au Séminaire," p. 54.
26. *Critical Essays,* p. 278.
27. *Camera,* p. 9.
28. Ibid., p. 55.

Desublimation: Roland Barthes's Aesthetics

NAOMI SCHOR

> He attempts to compose a discourse which is not uttered in the name of the Law and/or of Violence: whose instance might be neither political nor religious nor scientific; which might be in a sense the remainder and the supplement of all such utterances. What shall we call such discourse? *erotic,* no doubt, for it has to do with pleasure; or even perhaps: *aesthetic,* if we foresee subjecting this old category to a gradual torsion which will alienate it from its regressive, idealist background and bring it closer to the body, to the *drift.*
>
> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*

> . . . it is of a detail that I asked for the revelatory ecstasy, the instantaneous access to Roland Barthes (himself, he alone), an easy access, foreign to all labor. I expected it of a detail both highly visible and dissimulated (too obvious), rather than from the great themes, the contents, the theorems or the writing strategies that I felt I knew and would easily recognize after a quarter of a century . . . *Like him* I searched . . . like him I searched for the freshness of a reading in one's relationship to the detail . . .
>
> Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes"

In his Fourth *Discourse on Art,* delivered to the students of the Royal Academy on the distribution of prizes in December, 1771, Reynolds cautioned against excessive attention to details in the following terms: "The general idea constitutes real excellence. All smaller things, however perfect in their way, are to be sacrificed without mercy to the greater."[1] Commenting on his own painting technique some two centuries later, Barthes writes in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes:* "I proceed by addition, not by sketch; I have the antecedent (initial) taste for the detail, the fragment, the *rush,* and the incapacity to lead it toward a 'composition': I cannot reproduce 'the masses'."[2]

Even as Barthes's tongue-in-cheek confession to the inadequacies of his painting technique is couched in terms that attest to the persistence of Academic norms ("composition," "masses"), the mere fact that he feels quite free to own up to a scandalous preference for the partial, a spontaneous privileg-

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ing of parataxis, dramatizes the major shift away from idealist aesthetics that defines the post-modern. The question arises: what aesthetic system, if any, takes on Barthes's aesthetic practice? Does Barthes have an aesthetics? I mean the subtitle of this chapter, "Roland Barthes's Aesthetics," to be somewhat provocative, to raise, for example, the question: what grounds are there for speaking of Barthes's aesthetics as one does of Hegel's?

At the outset, admittedly, the confrontation seems designed to produce nothing but a keen awareness of unbridgeable differences. Whereas Hegel's aesthetics are set forth in a monumental work called precisely the *Aesthetics,* Barthes's aesthetics take the form of a discourse whose disjointed members are scattered throughout a series of texts, none of which bears the title "Roland Barthes's *Aesthetics.*" On the one hand we have a systematic, totalizing aesthetics, on the other, one which is detotalized and fragmentary. And, of course, this initial difference inaugurates a series of differences one could all too easily enumerate. But to do so would simply be to confirm what seems evident. A far more promising though risky enterprise is the discovery of the secret affinities of these two aesthetics which I would ascribe in the broadest terms to Hegel's modernity and to Barthes's classicism. Or, to be more precise, to their common double aesthetic allegiance. For just as Hegel oscillates between Classical and Romantic art, Barthes is poised between the two artistic regimes which in his scheme of things figure the classical and the modern, in his idiolect, the regimes or economies of pleasure and bliss (*jouissance*). In short, in going from Hegel to Barthes, the double aesthetic allegiance has simply been displaced a notch. Now this double allegiance entails an essentially archaeological attempt to reconstruct the stages of great aesthetic mutations. And, further, in both instances, the detail is the critical aesthetic category ensuring the passage of one age, one regime to another.

Two examples drawn from Barthes's *Mythologies* should serve to lend some weight to my initial hypothesis. *Mythologies,* Barthes's acerbic articles on the semiotics of everyday life in a post-war France rushing headlong into consumerism, may seem a rather peculiar place to begin an inquiry into Barthes's aesthetics. It does not, for example, figure in the *Points* edition under the rubric "aesthetics." And yet I will argue that it is possible to make out in some of its pages degraded but perfectly recognizable topoi of classical idealist aesthetics. Consider the mythologies entitled the "Harcourt Actor" and "The Face of Garbo."

The Harcourt actor, that is the actor photographed by the Harcourt photography studios, is one of the gods in the Barthesian pantheon figured in *Mythologies.* Indeed it is important to note that *Mythologies* is among other things a witty and persuasive refutation of Hegel's conviction that the invasion of everyday life by what he called the "prose" of the world signifies the death of the Gods. What Barthes's *Mythologies,* with its operetta-like cast of unlikely divinities (wrestlers, gangsters, and bicycle racers, to name but a few), shows is that everyday life in the age of consumerism is shot through

with residues of the sacred. Thus, it is not difficult to recognize the Harcourt actor with his ageless appearance "fixed forever at the pinnacle of beauty"[3] as a modern avatar of the marble god of high antiquity: a hieratic figure whose idealization is bound up with the absence of any particularity betraying his membership in the human race. All of the elements of this portrait are borrowed from the classical code of representation. But—and it is at this point that I wish to set against the background of their similarities, the difference, or rather one of the differences between Hegel and Barthes—unlike Hegel, when Barthes enlists the topoi of neo-classical aesthetics it is not to exalt the paradigmatic perfection of Fifth-Century Greek statuary, but rather to denounce the mystification of contemporary idealization. If for Hegel the passage from classical to romantic art represents—at least in principle—decadence, for Barthes the passage from what we might call the neo-classical to the modern, or better the avant-garde, constitutes unquestionable progress. Thus, at the end of this mythology, the conventional photographs of the Harcourt studio are contrasted with the de-idealized work of such avant-garde artists as Agnès Varda and Thérèse Le Prat, who show the actor "with exemplary humility, in its social function" (*ET,* 22).

At first glance, the face of Garbo, known as the "divine," appears to be that of a goddess of the classical age, a "deified face."[4] Like the face of the Harcourt actor, Garbo's blinds one by the inhuman perfection of her features, preserved by artful make-up from any mark of specification. Garbo's face is that of a woman of stone. By the absence of any physical detail—always the bearer of contingency and death—the face of Garbo incarnates Essence, the Idea in all of its transcendent universality and immutability:

> The name given to her, *the Divine,* probably aimed to convey less a superlative state of beaury than the essence on her corporeal person, descended from a heaven where all things are formed and perfected in rhe clearest light. She herself knew this: how many actresses have consented to let the crowd see the ominous maturing of their beauty. Not she, however; the essence was not to be degraded, her face was not to have any reality except that of its petfection, which was intellectual even more than formal. The Essence became gradually obscured, progressively veiled with dark glasses, broad hats and exiles: but it never deteriotated. (*M,* 56–57)

And yet, if one takes a closer look, beneath the plaster mask of the eternally youthful goddess, faint signs of life are stirring. Far from being an icon of high classical art, the face of Garbo is in Barthes's view a transitional work that participates in two aesthetic regimes:

> Garbo's face represents this fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an existential form from an essential beauty, when the archetype leans toward the fascination of mortal faces, when the clarity of the flesh as essence yields its place to a lyricism of Woman.

> Viewed as a transition the face of Garbo reconciles two iconographic ages; it assures the passage from awe to charm. (*M*, 57)

Thus the face of Garbo, which epitomizes the waning classical aesthetic, is set against the eminently modern and mobile face of Audrey Hepburn. And—just as in Hegel—the passage from the older to the newer aesthetic takes the form of an increased specification, that is of a proliferation of details:

> the face of Audrey Hepburn, for instance, is individualized, not only because of its peculiar thematics (woman as child, woman as kitten) but also because of her person, an almost unique specification of the face, which has nothing of the essence left in it, but is constituted by an infinite complexity of morphological functions. (*M*, 57)

Having argued the case for Barthes's subtle intertextual relationship with Hegel and the tradition he represents, I want now to single out what is from the perspective of the archaeology of the detail the major difference between the two projects. Whereas the Romantics—and I here include Hegel—were forced, in response to pressure from a normative neo-classical aesthetics such as Reynolds's to devise theoretical and rhetorical strategies in order to bring the banned realist detail into the field of representation, the Modernists—and I here include Barthes—took it upon themselves to undo what the Romantics had wrought. Or, to phrase it otherwise, whereas the Romantics were engaged in sublimating—in the sense of elevating—the humble or prosaic detail, revealing as Wordsworth did so spectacularly in England or Balzac in France, "the charismatic power in the trivial and the mean,"[5] the Modernists were or are engaged in undoing the work of sublimation, in restoring realist details to their brute and unsublimated materiality. In short, Barthes's fundamental aesthetic imperative is *desublimation*. When in "The Harcourt Actor" Barthes notes: "The Harcourt iconography sublimates the actor's materiality" (26), he restores to the actor the very materiality of which the idealizing, essentializing Harcourt photograph had robbed him. Similarly, when in the mythology entitled "At the Music Hall" Barthes lays bare the mechanism whereby human sweat and toil is magically transmuted into an airy and delightful ballet, he undoes the work of sublimation—"the music hall is human work memorialized and *sublimated* [emphasis added]":

> Here reign the gleaming balls, the light wands, the tubular furniture, the chemical silks, the grating chalks, and the glittering clubs; here visual luxury parades *facility*, disposed in the brightness of substances and the continuity of gestures: sometimes man is a support planted in the center, a tree along which slides a woman-branch; sometimes the entire hall shares in the coenesthesia of energy, of weight not vanquished but *sublimated* [emphasis added] by rebounds. (*ET*, 125)

Sublimation, as it operates in the Music Hall, fuses essentialization and weightlessness. To desublimate is to refreight the sublime element with the gravity of facticity. And nowhere perhaps is Barthes's project of desublimation more in evidence than in his celebrated essay "The Reality Effect" ("L'effet de réel").

Critics are not done with Barthes's scandalous assertion that there exist in realist texts "useless," totally parasitical details that contribute neither to advancing the plot, nor to enhancing our knowledge of the characters and their physical surroundings. One need only recall that a long critical tradition condemns the superfluous detail as symptomatic of decadence in order to appreciate the importance of the question raised by Barthes: what is at stake is nothing less than the legitimacy of the organic model of literary interpretation, according to which all details—no matter how aberrant their initial appearance—can, indeed must be integrated into the whole, since the work of art is itself organically constituted. To accredit the existence of a truly inessential detail, to make of it a distinctive trait of ordinary Western narrative is tantamount to attacking the foundation of hermeneutics which is constantly engaged in shuttling between the part and the whole. Worse: to privilege the insignificant detail is to practice a sort of decadent criticism, to promote a poor management of linguistic capital, since these notations seem in Barthes's words to "be allied with a kind of narrative *luxury,* profligate to the extent of splurging on 'extravagant' details, and increasing the cost of narrative information."[6]

In order to avert the threat constituted by Barthes's audacious hypothesis, some critics have sought to demonstrate that there are no inessential details, just inadequate readers: viewed in the proper perspective, any prodigal detail can be brought back into the fold of meaning. To venture down this recuperative path is to risk missing the interest this essay presents, which is that in it Barthes once again attempts to reconstruct the stages of a major aesthetic shift, using the detail as his main category. The "reality effect," which is a sort of myth of origins of modernity, recounts the passage of the "concrete detail" from the domain of history, to which Aristotle assigned it, to that of fiction: in other terms, the emergence of a new verisimilitude—realism—from an older one: classicism. Barthes's essay is then an archaeological text where what is being re-staged is realism *in statu nascendi.* The birth of realism is made manifest in the famous description of Rouen in *Madame Bovary* where, in Barthes's words, "the realist imperatives" overtake the "tyrannical constraints of what must be called aesthetic plausibility" (*RE,* 13).

The passage from classicism to realism would then correspond to the invasion of fiction by those "concrete details" of which history has always been so inordinately fond. Now these details, whose function it is to denote reality, always refer to matters deemed of little interest ("casual movements, transitory attitudes, insignificant objects, redundant words" [14]), what we

might call the refuse of aesthetic verisimilitude, in keeping with the notion dear to the doxa that the concrete is one with the unintelligible:

> Unvarnished "representation" of "reality," a naked account of "what is" (or was), thus looks like a resistance to meaning, a resistance which confirms the great mythical opposition between the true-to-life (the living) and the intelligible. (*RE,* 14)

It follows that the more a detail is proof against meaning, the more it resists attempts at semantico-structural recuperation, the better it is able to lend to the referential text the full weight of reality.

Implicit in this account of the rise of realism is the problematization of two interrelated notions: one, the conventional equation of the real and the unintelligible; two, a pre-semiotic apprehension of the workings of denotation. For it appears that when submitted to semiotic analysis, the functioning of the concrete detail turns out to be a good deal more complicated than we had been led to believe. "Semiotically, " writes Barthes, "the 'concrete detail' is constituted by the *direct* collusion of a referent and a signifier; the signified is expelled from the sign." But—and this is the key point in Barthes's argument—that which is expulsed insists on returning; the so-called "reality effect" is then the return of the repressed signified, with one important difference: it returns in a new guise, as what Barthes calls a "signified of connotation":

> eliminated from the realist utterance as a signified of denotation, the "real" slips back in as a signified of connotation; for at the very moment when these details are supposed to denote reality directly, all that they do, tacitly, is signify it: Flaubert's barometer, Michelet's little door, say, in the last analysis, only this: *we are the real.* It is the category of the "real," and not its various contents, which is being signified. (*RE,* 16)

For Barthes, realism, which is to say realist description, is a lure, an optical illusion, indeed a *"referential illusion."* At the very moment when one thinks one is embracing the real in its concrete materiality—and let us note that throughout the text the word *real* is in quotes, under suspicion—one is in fact in the grip of a "reality effect," where what we are given is a category and not a thing.

Two questions then arise, having to do with the problematic notion of the real, for what is at stake in this essay and to a larger extent in all Barthes's writings on realism, is the nature of the real. What, after all, is the reality produced by the lark's mirror which is the concrete detail, since it is obvious that a "reality effect" and "real-reality" are not coextensive? To expel the signified from the sign is to reduce the referent to its initial facticity. If one evacuates the signified and applies the signifier directly to the referent, one may well produce a powerful reality effect, but the reality in question is a bizarre

reality, a desublimated reality, since the signified is the agency of sublimation in the sign. Thus it is that whereas for the aestheticians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the paradigmatic detail is Diderot's "little wart," for Barthes it becomes Mme Aubain's barometer: the ugly detail is replaced by the brute or stupid detail.

This observation brings us to our second question: what is the notion of the real that Barthes opposes to the discredited notion of the real as the unintelligible which grounds realism? This is not an easy question to answer, for Barthes's answer varied over the years. My answer will be a bit roundabout, but it seems important to me to at least touch upon the main stages in Barthes's trajectory.

The first time, to my knowledge, that Barthes raises the question, "what is the *real,*" is in 1961, well before the publication of "The Reality Effect" (1968). He begins by demystifying the notion of a universal, transparent real always identical to itself, a notion that grounds the mimetic enterprise of classical realism. Our knowledge of the real—whose problematic status is signaled here by the use of italics—is always partial, subjective; at best realism cannot copy *the* real, only *some* real:

> We never know it except in the form of effects (physical world), functions (social world) or fantasies (cultural world); in short, the *real* is never anything but an inference; when we declare we are copying reality, this means that we choose a certain inference and not certain others: realism is, at its very inception, subject to the responsibility of a choice . . .[7]

What falsifies realism from the very start is the fact that our vision of the *real* is refracted through the prism of language; there exists no relationship to the *real* which is not mediated through the opaque medium of language. "I am in my room, I *see* my room; but already, isn't *seeing* my room *speaking* it to myself?" (*CE,* 160). The gaze one brings to bear on the *real* is structured like and above all by language. Barthes concludes:

> Realism, here, cannot then be the copy of things, therefore, but the knowledge of language; the most "realistic" work will not be the one which "paints" reality, but which, using the world as content (this content itself, moreover, is alien to its structure, i.e., to its being), will explore as profoundly as possible the *unreal reality* of language. (*CE,* 160)

Two conceptions of realism clash head-on here: on the one hand, naive mimetic realism—realism in its most conventional sense—on the other, the new linguistic realism Barthes seeks to promote. In the first instance, the degree of a work's realism would be gauged against the standard of its greater or lesser fidelity to the representation of worldly reality; in the other, against the greater or lesser exploration of the irreality of language. The most realistic literature would then be the one which would designate its own irrealism.

The contorted and ultimately unsatisfying nature of Barthes's high structuralist conception of reality and realism should be apparent. However salutary and necessary the emphasis placed by Barthes and others on the primacy of language in literature, a conception of realism which reduces the world to secondary status and views it as "content" made of undifferentiated and interchangeable elements cannot long resist the pressure of the real, for the real, as we have seen above, is precisely that which always returns. If, throughout his career, Barthes never ceased to call "into question, in radical fashion, the age-old aesthetic of representation" (*RE,* 16), in the group of works which constitute what the critics have taken to calling "the last" (Todorov) or "the second" (Compagnon) Barthes, he goes beyond the formalist solution to elaborate an aesthetic that, without relapsing into naive mimeticism, gives its due to referential reality. If, however, in these texts (beginning with *The Pleasure of the Text* and culminating in *Camera Lucida*) the real makes a spectacular comeback, it is a *new real,* not that which *resists* meaning, rather that which *remains* after meaning has been evacuated or, in Barthes's idiolect, "exempted":

> Yet for him, it is not a question of recovering a pre-meaning, an origin of the world, of life, of facts, anterior to meaning, but rather to imagine a post-meaning: one must traverse, as though the length of an initiatic way, the whole meaning in order to be able to extenuate it, to *exempt* it. (*RB,* 27)

Now if in the West the exemption of meaning can only be achieved at the cost of a difficult ascesis, in the Orient, that is in Barthes's imaginary Japan, the situation is different. The new real is an Oriental import, for whereas in the West the concrete real has long been identified with the insignificant, in Japan there is, always according to Barthes, no insignificance. Thus he writes on the back cover of the French edition of *Empire of Signs:* "And above all, the superior quality of this sign, the nobility of its affirmation and the erotic grace of its design are affixed everywhere, on the most trivial objects and actions, those we generally dismiss as insignificant or vulgar."[8]

Consequently, in the empire of signs the detail reigns supreme. In "Japan"—the quotation marks are meant to indicate Japan's fictional status in Barthes's text for, paradoxically, the new real is not referentially anchored—everything is a detail: the hierarchy prevalent in the West which opposes the great and the small, the sublime and the trivial and implicitly valorizes the great and the sublime, does not obtain in "Japan." The very notion of futility is thus rendered impertinent, with this paradoxical result: in "Japan," where everything signifies, nothing is significant. What Barthes says about the haiku can be applied to Japanese life in general; borrowing a neologism from Gérard Genette, we might say that in Japan "haikuization" is generalized:

> What I am saying here about haiku I might also say about everything which *happens* when one travels in that country I am calling Japan. For there, in the street, in a bar, in a shop, in a train, something always *happens*. This something—which is etymologically an adventure—is of an infinitesimal order: it is an incongruity of clothing, an anachronism of culture, a freedom of behavior, an illogicality of itinerary etc. . . .[9]

What is then the haiku which figures what we might term the "good" relationship to the real? First, unlike Western art which is essentially mimetic, "the haiku never describes: its art is counterdescriptive" (*EoS*, 77). At the same time—and this is the tricky part—though non-mimetic, the haiku is not sui-referential, not cut off from reality.[10] Further, in this universe where the real is meaningless, the real has, so to speak, no sense of the real. Hence; no category of the real, no reality effect, no connotation. In short, in "Japan" the real is neither denoted nor connoted, rather it is *designated:*

> Neirher describing nor defining, the haiku (as I shall finally name any discontinuous feature, any event of Japanese life as it offets itself to my teading), the haiku diminishes to the point of pure and sole designation. *It's that, it's thus,* says the haiku, *it's so.* Or better still: *so* it says, with a touch so instantaneous and so brief (without vibration or recurrence) that even the copula would seem excessive, a kind of remorse for a forbidden, permanently alienated definition. (*EoS*, 83)

The difference between European realism and haiku can thus be reduced to the difference between two expressions: *we are the real* and *so.* On the one hand, a pseudo-definition enunciated by a small number of personified details, on the other, a simple exclamation, an accent guaranteed by no subject—for elision of the copula goes hand in hand with the abolition of the subject—and which can be renewed ad infinitum. Ultimately, however, the essential difference between Eastern and Western aesthetics is of a metaphysical order.

> Description, a Western genre, has its spiritual equivalent in contemplation, the methodical inventory of the attributive forms of the divinity or of the episodes of the evangelical narrative . . . the haiku, on the contrary, articulated around a metaphysics without subject and without god, corresponds to the Buddhist *Mu,* to the Zen *satori,* which is not at all the illuminative descent of God, but "awakening to the fact," apprehension of the thing as event and not as substance . . . (*EoS*, 78)

In the Utopia of the detail that is Barthes's Japan, the detail is at last freed from the close ties that bind it to the sacred of Christian metaphysics and is deployed in a beyond of the sublime. It is because oriental metaphysics does

not recognize any form of transcendence that haiku is a purely deictic form, designating an unencumbered real.

The question then becomes: is there any Western artistic practice on the model of haiku? One has only to read Barthes's last work, *Camera Lucida,* to discover that the answer is very definitely yes: photography enjoys the same deictic relationship to material reality as does haiku; it too is an art of pure designation:

> In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This* . . . what Lacan calls the *Tuché,* the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression. In order to designate reality, Buddhism says *sunya,* the void; but better still: *tatahta,* as Alan Watts has it, the fact of being this, of being thus, of being so; *tat* means *that* in Sanskrit and suggests the gesture of the child pointing his finger at something and saying: *That, there it is, lo!*[11]

Barthes's last detail, what he calls the *punctum,* is then bound up with a notion of the Real—and the Real is spelled here with a capital R—which stresses its pragmatic aspect, in the etymological sense of the word *pragma:* fact and event. Consequently, the *punctum* can only be the object of a double encounter. Like Proust's *madeleine*—and *Camera Lucida* is Barthes's *Recherche*—the *punctum* does not come under the sway of the will. It escapes the intentionality of both the photographer and the spectator:

> Hence the detail which interests me is not, or at least is not strictly, intentional, and probably must not be so; it occurs in the field of the photographed thing like a supplement that is at once inevitable and delightful; it does not necessarily attest to the photographer's art; it says only that the photographer was there, or else still more simply, that he could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object . . . (*CL,* 47)

> In order to perceive the *punctum,* no analysis would be of any use to me (but perhaps memory sometimes would) . . . it suffices that the image be large enough, that I do not have to study it (this would be of no help at all), that, given right there on the page, I should receive it right here in my eyes. (*CL,* 42–43)

Significantly, in keeping with the Proustian thematics of *Camera Lucida,* the devalorization of the will corresponds to the valorization of involuntary memory. The punctum is often a deferred detail, subject to "a certain latency" (*CL,* 53). There is a great deal to say about the punctum—and much has already been said—but I would like instead to proceed to a somewhat more systematic comparison of several theories of the detail in Barthes, for it should

be obvious by now that, for example, the concrete detail and the punctum do not function in the same manner or according to the same rules. I should like to sketch a comparison of Barthes's three main texts on the detail, "The Reality Effect," "The Third Meaning," and *Camera Lucida,* before going on to consider a detail *in* Barthes.

From the outset, a certain category of details, what I would call the "false little Barthesian detail" must be identified and eliminated. These are the details which participate in the economy of meaning, such as Eisenstein's decorative details, or the studious details in certain photographs:

> the Eisensteinian meaning devastates ambiguity. How? By the addition of an aesthetic value, emphasis. Eisenstein's "decorativism" has an economic function: it proffers the truth. Look at III: in extremely classical fashion, grief comes from the bowed heads, the expression of suffering, the hand over the mouth stifling a sob, but when once all this has been said, very adequately, a decorative trait says it again . . . Within the general detail . . . another detail is mirroringly inscribed; derived from a pictorial order as a quotation of the gestures to be found in icons and *pietà,* it does not distract but accentuates the meaning.[12]

Detail within the detail, detail of the detail, the decorative detail is entirely in the service of the message, indeed of the truth of the film. Similarly there exists in photography a category of details Barthes ranges under the rubric *studium,* details "which constitute the very raw material of ethnological science." "When William Klein photographs 'Mayday, 1959' in Moscow, he teaches me how Russians dress . . . I *note* a boy's big cloth cap, another's necktie, an old woman's scarf around her head, a youth's haircut . . . I can enter still further into such details . . ." (*CL,* 28–30). These details—to which one might add the celebrated "biographemes" of which Barthes speaks in *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*—are not in the restricted sense, Barthesian details. They belong to the voice of Science.

What then is a Barthesian detail, regardless of the artistic medium involved? It is marked, as we noted above in our reading of "The Reality Effect," by its participation in an economy of excess. It always enjoys the status of supplement, a luxurious extra. Thus, in "The Third Meaning," Barthes opposes obtuse meaning to obvious meaning in terms of a by now familiar economic metaphor and one which owes much to Bataille: "obtuse meaning appears necessarily as a luxury, an expenditure with no exchange" (*I-M-T,* 62). The Barthesian detail is always supplementary, marginal, decentered. Whether it is Mme Aubain's barometer, the disguise of a character in an Eisenstein film, or the gold chain worn by one of the black women in a photograph by James Van DerZee, the detail which draws and holds Barthes's attention is like the fetishist's fetish, a detail which, camouflaged by its perfect banality, goes unnoticed by others.

But almost immediately, a preliminary distinction must be introduced between Barthes's supplementary details: whereas the obtuse meaning and the *punctum* are details which "prick" the spectator with their fine points, the same cannot be said for the concrete detail. Unless the reader has a special passion for barometers, Mme Aubain's barometer does not touch her: on the contrary, the concrete detail produces its characteristic effect by its very lack of pathos, its affective neutrality. It does not appeal to the reader's emotions, as does for example, the obtuse meaning. Glossing a still from Eisenstein's *Potemkin,* Barthes writes:

> Look at another bun . . . it contradicts the tiny raised fist, atrophies it without the reduction having the slightest symbolic (intellectual) value; prolonged by small curls, pulling the face in towards an ovine model, it gives the woman something *touching* . . . I believe that the obtuse meaning carries a certain *emotion.* (*I-M-T,* 58–59)

The affective criterion allows us to distinguish the concrete from the punctual detail. And that distinction in turn leads to another. For, if we compare Barthes's remarks on obtuse meaning and the punctum, we find that all punctual details are not identical. In fact, for Barthes, as for Hegel, to each artistic medium there corresponds a particular use or status of the detail. Not only, for example, is the obtuse meaning a specifically filmic detail, it is the very locus of the emergence of the filmic. Similarly, the punctum is the photographic detail par excellence as well as the point of inscription of the photographic.

Finally the question arises: if every system of representation is endowed with a specific modality of the detail, if indeed the detail is the royal way to an artistic medium's specificity, is there in Barthes a literary detail on the order of the punctum, a textual detail which pierces the reader and which, unlike the concrete detail which refers only to the *category* of the real, refers to a duly authentified reality, one of which it can unequivocally be stated: *it has been,* "ça a été."

Two passages drawn from *The Pleasure of the Text* would suggest that such textual details do indeed exist. Whether it is a question of the food mentioned by Stendhal in one of his Chronicles of clerical life, or the weather noted by Amiel in his *Journal,* these details make manifest reality at its most unsurpassable: "the *final state* of reality, its intractability."[13] The observation that such a category of what we might call hyperrealist details exists in certain texts leads Barthes to distinguish between two sorts of realism: "there are two realisms: the first deciphers the 'real' (what is demonstrated but not seen); the second speaks 'reality' (what is seen but not demonstrated); the novel, which can mix these two realisms, adds to the unintelligible of the 'real' the hallucinatory tail of 'reality' " (*PoT,* 45–46).

It would seem, then, that contrary to what we had been earlier led to believe, there do exist in Western textuality details on the order of the ideal details evoked in both *The Empire of Signs* and *Camera Lucida:* non-mimetic realist details. In a sense, for Barthes, who never throughout his work ceased to pursue the phantom of reality, the classical realist text is an aggregate of details enjoying different orders of relationships with reality: a relationship of denotation (the real is the insignificant); a relationship of connotation ("we are the real"), and a relationship of designation ("so"). Only the deictic details have the ring of truth; if they do not necessarily move us, they do procure a distinct form of text pleasure, a pleasure of/in identity patterned on the pleasure of the metaphor in Proust: "astonishment that in 1791 one could eat 'a salad of oranges and rum,' as one does in restaurants today: the onset of historical intelligibility and the persistence of the thing (orange, rum) in *being there*" (*PoT,* 46).

If I return now to my question—are there textual equivalents of the obtuse meaning and the punctum?—I would have to qualify my answer. If by textual one means literary or fictional, then the answer would have to be no. For though Barthes claims to find these minute details of everyday life "in certain novels, biographies, and historical works" (*PoT,* 53), I think it is no accident that the two examples he provides are both drawn from non-fictional prose works: an episode of clerical life recounted by Stendhal and a weather report noted by Amiel in his *Journal.* The discursive *punctum* draws its force from its indexation on a referent guaranteed by a subject, apprehended in his or her most intimate specificity. Therefore it is not in the least surprising that it should be in one of Barthes's most generically heterogeneous texts—where scenes drawn from Barthes's life are explicitly intermingled with literary allusions—that I came upon or was pricked by a textual detail. I am referring to *A Lover's Discourse.*

In one of the rare critical studies devoted, at least in part, to this text, *Fowles/Irving/Barthes* by Randolph Runyon, I learned that *A Lover's Discourse* is one of the modern variations on a theme from the Apocrypha, the story of Tobias, the eighth and final husband of Sarah.[14] As evidence Runyon cites the fact that the enigmatic detail featured in color on the cover of the book is a fragment of *Tobias and the Angel,* attributed to Verrocchio's studio and on display in the National Gallery in London. Surely this choice of iconographic accompaniment is not "innocent." I will not rehearse here Runyon's ingenious analysis of a *A Lover's Discourse,* in the double light of the story of Tobias and the detail of the painting representing it. If I allude here to this study it is not merely out of professional scruple—one must always cite one's sources—but rather to insist upon the fact than once alerted by Runyon, my eye was constantly drawn back to this iconographic detail, but to no avail: I could not pierce the source of its mystery . . .

That was the state of affairs until upon rereading the text I was suddenly and forcibly struck by the insistence of a bizarre detail. Here are the passages in question:

> Why is it I desire so-and-so? . . . Is it the whole of so-and-so I desire (. . .)? And, in that case, what is it in this loved body which has the vocation of a fetish for me? What perhaps incredibly tenuous portion—what accident? The way a nail is cut, a tooth broken slightly aslant, a lock of hair, a way of spreading the fingers while smoking?
>
> (I was looking at everything in the other's face, the other's body, coldly: lashes, toenail, thin eyebrows, thin lips, the luster of the eyes, a mole, a way of holding a cigarette [une façon d'étendre les doigts en fumant] . . .)
>
> there are subtle, evanescent trivialities which swiftly pass over the other's body: a brief (but excessive) way of parting the fingers . . .[15]

Suddenly I saw it: in juxtaposing the cover and the text—and everything hinges, of course, on the very particular relationship of image and text in Barthes, "the text does not 'gloss' the images, which do not 'illustrate' the text" (*EoS,* xi)—the detail which has the vocation of a fetish for Barthes is not the hand—as Runyon implies—or not merely the hand, but rather a particular position of the hand, a certain spread. The corporeal detail on which the speaker of a lover's discourse fastens is in the alphabet of the unconscious—and I refer the reader to Barthes's text on Erté's alphabet for evidence of his fascination with the letters of the alphabet, of which *S/Z* are the most celebrated—a V.[16] In other words—and here I am purposely going very fast to prevent the quickening of interpretation—the detail Barthes's lover fetishizes in the lover's body—the parting of the fingers—is an erotic gap, a sort of icon of castration.

"To give examples of *punctum* is, in a certain fashion, to *give myself up,*" writes Barthes (*CL,* 43). To see in the spread of the fingers a punctum and further a literal inscription of castration is a highly idiosyncratic gesture. I run the risk of provoking resistance, denial: the detail of the gaping V may or may not pierce other readers. No matter. What does matter is that in Barthes the detail becomes the privileged point of contact between reader and text: the discursive punctum is the hook onto which the reader may hitch her own fantasies, fasten his own individual myths. Located at the intersection of the private (Barthes's lover) and the public (the painting of Tobias), Barthes's V figures emblematically his aesthetic project.

What we have in Barthes is an eroticization of aesthetics, or, better, an aesthetics of Eros. And Eros resides in the detail, because the detail is always at least partially sited in a real body. Hence the difference between the theater, home of Eros, and the cinema, the realm of pure representation and phantasm:

> The theatre (the particularized scene) is the very site of what used to be called *venusty,* charm, comeliness of form, i.e. of Eros observed, illuminated (by Psyche and her lamp). Enough that a secondary, episodic character offers some reason to be desired (this reason can be perverse, not attached to beauty but to a detail of the body, to the texture of the voice, to a way of breathing, even to some clumsiness), for a whole performance to be saved. (*RB,* 83)

Whereas at the cinema, "the image is the *irremediable* absence of the represented body" (*RB,* 84), at the theatre the sexy detail that arouses the spectator's perverse desire surfaces on a body which even if it remains by convention inaccessible ("essential") is in reality available to touch, present ("contingent"). If Eros resides in a detail of the body, what of the fragment, does it too participate in the general eroticization of aesthetics we find in Barthes? Yes, in the sense that writing by fragments is for Barthes an intensely pleasurable textual activity and that pleasure is born of the abrupt discontinuity introduced by the fragment: "it is a fantasy of discourse, a gaping of desire" (*RB,* 94). The blank interstices between fragments are to the text what the "intermittences of the skin flashing between two articles of clothing" (*PoT,* 10) are to the body: the portals of desire. Asexual in Hegel, sexually differentiated in Freud, the detail/fragment paradigm comes in Barthes—as do so many others—under the regime of perversion, which subjects sexual difference to a radical and endless oscillation. Though highly sexualized in Barthes, the detail/fragment paradigm is degendered, as the marks of sexual specification are erased from the textual, as well as the referential, contingent body of desire.[17] By bringing his aesthetics, in his own words, "closer to the body" and its "drift," Barthes has struck a decisive blow against idealist aesthetics and its devalorizing gendering of the detail. But it would appear that in transvaluating the detail, the feminine has vanished. Because the masculine/feminine opposition is itself tainted as a metaphysical or ideological construct, Barthes's seeming neutralization of sexual difference might appear to many as a sign of progress. Isn't that what you want, my reader asks? Yes, but. Can one be so certain that degendering is not merely defeminizing, leaving the masculine and its prerogatives intact? Does Barthes's fetishization of all part objects, of all that gapes subvert the orthodox psychoanalytic association of castration with femininity or does it, however subtly, reinscribe the primacy of the phallus? Within the gaping V of the lover's hand there is a cigarette and this may be one time where, pace Freud, a cigarette is not just a cigarette. . . .

Notes

1. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art,* ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 58.

2. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 94. Cited hereafter as *RB.*

3. Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 19. Cited hereafter as *ET.*

4. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 57. Cited hereafter as *M.*

5. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 391.

6. Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in Tzvetan Todorov, ed., *French Literary Theory Today,* trans. R. Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 11 (translation modified). Cited hereafter as *RE.* The notion that realist fiction is replete with superfluous details does not, of course, originate with Barthes; it is, as we have seen, a recurrent complaint among realism's detractors. Closer to Barthes is George Orwell who, in his essay on Dickens, makes much of what he calls, "the outstanding, unmistakeable mark of Dickens's writing . . . the *unnecessary detail*" (George Orwell, "Charles Dickens," in *Collected Essays* [London: Secker and Warburg, 1961], 75); the example Orwell cites of such a detail could serve equally well to illustrate the reality effect. But, having identified this characteristic stylistic effect of Dickens', Orwell is less concerned with taking apart its mechanism than with defending Dickens's piling on of such "florid squiggles on the edge of the page" (76): "Everything is piled up and up, detail on detail, embroidery on embroidery. It is futile to object that this kind of thing is rococo—one might as well make the same objection to a wedding cake" (78; cf. the wedding cake in *Madame Bovary*).

7. Barthes, *Critical Essays,* trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 159. Cited hereafter as *CE.*

8. Barthes, *L'Empire des signes* (Paris: Champs-Flammarlon, 1970), translation mine.

9. Barthes, *Empire of Signs,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 79. Cited hereafter as *EoS.*

10. In his article "Review of the Arts and Crafts" (*Die Wage,* 1898), Adolf Loos writes: "The Rococo had to go as far as China; for us, only Japan still remains." He goes on to say in terms that distantly presage Barthes's: " 'Japanese' . . . means the dematerialization of the objects being represented. The Japanese represent flowers, but they are pressed flowers . . . It is a kind of stylizing that is expressly meant to decorate the surface. But at the same time naturalism is maintained," *Spoken in the Void,* trans. Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 105.

11. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 4–5. Hereafter cited as *CL.* Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 58–66. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* opens with a consideration of the *this* and its two principal modalities, the *here* and the *now.* For Hegel the *this*'s apparent designation of the sensual world in its absolute particularity is nothing but an illusion grounding man's "sense-certainty." In fact, the *this* is a *universality,* a plurality of thises, in the lexicon of structuralist linguistics, a *shifter.* From Hegel's perspective, as I understand it, Barthes's error here would lie not so much in his belief in the "sovereign Contingency" of what is pointed to, as in—surprisingly—Barthes's forgetting of the linguistic properties inherent in the deictic sign itself: They speak of the existence of *external* objects, which can be more precisely defined as *actual,* absolutely *singular, wholly personal, individual* things, each of them absolutely unlike anything else; this existence, they say, has absolute certainty and truth. They *mean* 'this' bit of paper on which I am writing—or rather have written—'this'; but what they mean is not what they say. If they actually wanted to *say* 'this' bit of paper which they mean, if they wanted to *say* it, then this is impossible, because the sensuous This that is meant *cannot be reached* by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to that which is inherently universal" (Hegel, *Phenomenology,* 66).

12. Barthes, "The Third Meaning" in *Image-Music-Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 56. Cited hereafter as *I-M-T.*

13. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 45. Cited hereafter as *PoT.*

14. Randolph Runyon, *Fowles/Irving/Barthes: Canonical Variations on an Apocrypha Theme* (Oxford, Ohio: Ohio State University Press for Miami University, 1981).

15. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 20, 72, and 191.

16. Cf. in *Camera,* Barthes's comments on the self-portrait of the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe: "The photographer has caught the boy's hand (the boy is Mapplethorpe himself, I believe) at just the right degree of openness, the right density of abandonment" (59). See also Barthes's remarks regarding Mapplethorpe's photograph of Robert Wilson and Philip Glass: "Wilson *holds* me, though I cannot say why; i.e. say *where:* is it the eyes, the skin, the position of the hands . . ." (51). On the V, see Sigmund Freud, *S. E.,* 17:89–95. See also Serge Leclaire, *Psychanalyser* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 90–93.

17. For more on Barthes's erasure of sexual difference and more specifically femininity, see my "Dreaming Dissymmetry: Barthes, Foucault, and Sexual Difference," forthcoming in *Men in Feminism,* eds. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1987).

Persistence of the Image: Barthes, Photography, and the Resistance to Film

STEVEN UNGAR

It is one thing . . . to apprehend directly an image as image, and another thing to shape ideas regarding the nature of images in general.

—Sartre, *The Imagination* (1936)

The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were.

—Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939)

THE IMAGE AS IMAGE

The death of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in 1961 marked a turning point for postwar philosophy in France, ending the intellectual rule of the revised phenomenology that he and his longtime friend, Jean-Paul Sartre, had promoted since translations of Edmund Husserl's and Martin Heidegger's writings first appeared some thirty years earlier. Over the following decade, critiques by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida hastened the demise of models of consciousness and of perception going back to Descartes. These critiques—strongly argued and decidedly polemical—entailed their own problems. In particular, their relation to language-based systems growing out of structural linguistics, psychoanalysis, and semiology directed debate away from issues that Merleau-Ponty's death had left unresolved. Roland Barthes's writings illustrate the extent to which such unresolved issues relating to the image resurface in structural analysis and its offshoots. I have chosen to emphasize the image because Barthes's practice of semiology displays an ongoing attention to visual media. Moreover, film and photography continue to serve as

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test cases for ongoing debates in literary theory as well as in semiology, psychoanalysis, and gender studies.

Barthes's involvement with film is complex to a point where approaches to his writings on the subject are inevitably indirect and synthetic. This is the case, in large part, for two reasons. First, the sum of his writings on film is relatively small and disjointed within his corpus. Moreover, the writings in question range from the theoretical to the anecdotal. One could not seriously entertain a primary identity for Barthes as a film critic or theoretician since no consistent program or doctrine relating to film is discernible. Secondly, Barthes's writings on film derive from a more general involvement with images which should not be misconstrued as abstracted or otherwise removed from parallel inquiries. The point is made succinctly in a fragment of *Roland Barthes:* "On the one hand, what he says about large objects of knowledge (cinema, language, society) is never memorable: the treatise (the article *on* something) is a kind of enormous falling off. Whatever pertinence there happens to be comes only in the margins, the interpolations, the parentheses, *aslant;* it is the subject's voice *off,* as we say, off-camera, off-microphone, offstage."[1]

At first glance, Barthes's writings are unlikely to be seen as pertinent or innovative to film studies *on their own;* that is, without cross-references to the work of specialists. Closer scrutiny belies this impression in regard to texts which directly invoke films or film theory and others which relate to it by extension. In this sense, *Image-Music-Text* is not merely the title of a collection of Barthes's writings selected and translated by Stephen Heath, but evidence of the inevitable insertion of the image into signifying practices ranging from rhetoric to painting and musical performance. In order to understand Barthes's writings on film, we need to make a lengthy detour via the image. So as not to make what follows appear an empty exercise, I should state from the start that this detour is not only desirable, but necessary. What begins as a detour comes close to being permanent displacement, so that one might more accurately refer to a resistance to film.

Rigorous definition of the word "image" as graphic or pictorial representation excludes what are commonly referred to as mental, verbal, and perceptual images. We may think we know what we mean when we refer to verbal images, but there are those for whom the expression is meaningful only in a rhetorical or figurative sense.[2] For Barthes, the interplay of word and image is problematized first as the analysis of writings in *Writing Degree Zero* evolves in *Mythologies* into an inventory of rhetorical practices such as advertising ("Soap-powders and Detergents," "Operation Margarine"), photography ("The Face of Garbo"), film ("The Romans in Films"), and spectacle ("The World of Wrestling," "Strip-tease"). As a supplement to the notion of sign in Saussure's 1916 *Course in General Linguistics, Mythologies* provides a double-tiered model of signification which seeks to account for both connotation and denotation. But even when Barthes explores the mythic or ideological dis-

course underlying an explicit sign of denotation, (as in "Poujade and the Intellectuals" and "African Grammar"), nonverbal meaning—as found in the visual arts and in spectacle—is consistently subsumed within a linguistic model. Barthes's earliest foray into semiology addresses systems of nonverbal meaning without confronting their specificity—that is, without fully accounting for their difference from purely verbal systems.

Barthes's first substantial attempt to deal with the specificity of the image occurs in a 1961 text, "The Photographic Message." For historians of literature and critical theory, the appearance of this text in the inaugural issue of *Communications* marks an initial moment in what Barthes later calls the heroic period of Parisian structuralism. Some five years later, Barthes contributes "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" to the eighth issue of the same journal. Along with "Rhetoric of the Image"—which appears in 1964 alongside "The Elements of Semiology and Metz's "Le Cinéma: Langue ou langage?"—this *Communications* phase of Barthes's involvement with the image carries over an unstable synthesis of phenomenological (or, as Barthes writes, "naïve") descriptions and structural analysis.[3] "The Photographic Message" and "Rhetoric of the Image" extend the major concerns of *Mythologies* in that Barthes approaches the press and advertising photographs as signifying systems grounded in social and historical institutions. At the same time, his reading of the photographic image derives from questions akin to both structural analysis and phenomenology when he considers the image, so to speak, "in itself":

> The emission and the reception of the message both lie within the field of sociology: it is a matter of studying human groups, of defining motives and attitudes, and of trying to link the behavior of these groups to the social totality of which they are part. For the message itself, however, the method is inevitably different: whatever the origin and destination of the message, the photograph is not simply a product or a channel but also an object endowed with a structural autonomy. Without in any way intending to divorce this object from its use, it is necessary to provide for a specific method prior to sociological analysis and which can only be the immanent analysis of the unique structure that a photograph constitutes.[4]

Reflection on the nature of the image points to a concern for object and method of inquiry which Barthes had displaced in *Mythologies* in order to study the historical and social codes essential to all mythic activity. "The Photographic Message" is an attempt to address the image "in itself" without canceling the dynamic model into which—presumably—he wants to reinscribe it. The task is so ambitious that it seems from the start ill-suited to the two-tiered linguistic model of denotation and connotation in whose terms Barthes is able to account for the photographic image only as "*a message without a code*" (*IMT,* p. 17). The formulation is notorious, infelicitous to a point where Barthes modifies it in a number of texts until he more or less retracts it

some twenty years later when, in *Camera Lucida,* he writes that the question of whether or not photography is analogical makes for the wrong approach: "The realists, of whom I am one and of whom I was already one when I asserted that the Photograph was an image without code—even if, obviously, certain codes do inflect our reading of it—the realists do not take the photograph for a 'copy' of reality, but for an emanation of *past reality:* a *magic,* not an art."[5] After the fact, Barthes recognizes the problem even though, at the time, he persisted in approaching the image as a discrete entity—that is, as though it could be detached from function and context.

"Rhetoric of the Image" addresses the implications of approaching the image as an analogical language. Thus, Barthes argues, linguists often refer to the poverty of the image, as though it were a weak (or alternately strong) signifying system: either rudimentary in comparison with language or somehow rich and inexhaustible in its ineffability. Elsewhere in the same text, Barthes counters allegations of the image's intrinsic poverty. He argues that its polysemous nature has been perceived historically as an excess which must be reduced to determinate and stable form: "Polysemy poses a question of meaning and this question always comes through as a dysfunction. . . . Hence in every society various techniques are developed, intended to *fix* the floating chain of signifiers in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs; the linguistic sign is one of these techniques" (*IMT,* p. 39). Not only does Barthes here assert the irreducible difference of the image, but he also accounts for that difference when he relates it to the anchorage and relay functions in the text of the press photograph.

Barthes's inscription of word and image within a relay-text invokes for the first time the element of movement (the kinematics) that announces a progression beyond the static image: "While rare in the fixed image, this relay-text becomes very important in the film, where dialogue functions not simply as elucidation but really does advance the action by setting out, in the sequence of the messages, meanings that are not found in the image itself" (*IMT,* p. 41). "Rhetoric of the Image" marks the breakup of Barthes's early engagement with phenomenology—that is, of his attempts to approach the image as a thing-in-itself. The displacement has both long-term and immediate consequences. First, it recasts what Barthes had formerly referred to as the uncoded analogue within an inquiry into reference which, while unresolved, receives full expression in the sections of *Camera Lucida* dealing with the photographic referent. More immediately, Barthes seems ready to adapt the linguistic model to the very kinds of figurative "languages" disparaged by traditional linguists and philosophers.

The notion of relay-text has direct bearing on film studies and on the theory of film. An immediate difference in vocabulary replaces the former terms of message and communication with text and signification. In fact, Barthes's model remains two-tiered: the relay-text is a construct of relations between word and image corresponding in large part to movement along the

vertical axis of signification and the Saussurean emphasis on *langue* as entity or system. But a fuller dynamic model of signification would also entail a supplement of this model by the horizontal axis to account for the temporal sequence of individual utterances with a resulting emphasis on movement and duration. For students of film, the coordination of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes has strong associations with the notion of montage in the writings of S. M. Eisenstein and, in particular, with the problems inherent in moving *beyond* the image and *toward* film. It is this very problematic which Barthes confronts in his 1970 text, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills."

A decade after "The Photographic Message," the picture has—so to speak—changed. The visual arts figure directly in the expanded notion of semiology visible in *S/Z, The Empire of Signs,* and *Erté,* all of which appear in 1970. In "The Third Meaning," Barthes recasts denotation and connotation as informational and symbolic levels of meaning. To these, he adds an element which at first he describes only in its immediacy: "I read, I receive (and probably even first and foremost) a third meaning—evident, erratic, obstinate. . . . I am not sure if the reading of this third meaning is justified—if it can be generalized—but already it seems to me that its signifier (the traits to which I have tried to give words) possesses a theoretical individuality" (*IMT,* p. 53). For Barthes, the third meaning is initially perceived as a disruptive excess: "the 'one too many,' the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing" (*IMT,* p. 54). Not merely removed from communication and signification but also a difference internal to them, the third meaning has a number of functions.

First, it is a provisional limit or border on the basis of which Barthes differentiates obvious from obtuse processes: "In other words, the obtuse meaning is not situated structurally, a semantologist would not agree as to its objective existence (but then what is an objective reading?)" (*IMT,* p. 60). Moreover, the Eisenstein stills illustrate what Barthes terms the filmic as that in film which is both within and beyond language:

> The filmic, then, lies precisely here, in the region where articulated language is no longer more than approximative and where another language begins (whose science, therefore, cannot be a linguistics, soon discarded like a booster rocket). . . . Forced to develop in a civilization of the signified, it is not surprising that (despite the incalculable number of films in the world) the filmic should still be rare (a few flashes in SME, perhaps elsewhere?), so much so that it could be said that as yet the film does not exist (any more than does the text); there is only "cinema," language, narrative, poetry, sometimes extremely "modern," "translated" into "images" said to be "animated." Nor is it surprising that the filmic can only be located after having—analytically—gone across the "essential," the "depth," and the "complexity" of the cinematic work; all those riches which are merely those of articulated language, with which we constitute the work and believe we

> exhaust it. The filmic is not the same as the film, is as far removed from the film as the novelistic is from the novel. (*IMT,* p. 65)

The filmic is not simply other than the film. In the functions and ambitions that Barthes confers on it, the filmic relates to film as a process of meaning much in the way that *S/Z* asserts structural analysis via an excessive demonstration that is ultimately subversive. More to the point, the filmic seems to stop short of the cinematic by invoking the practice of montage, which commonly exemplifies meaning in the cinema as a coordination of paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. The gesture on Barthes's part is openly ambivalent and thus of particular interest as an act of resistance. Where Eisenstein argues for a synthesis in which individual shots are inscribed within a sequence to form a meaningful combination, Barthes willfully stops at the still and thereby removes the concept of montage from its original context. The result demonstrates the very kind of subversion which the obtuse third meaning operates on the obvious discourses of information and signification.[6]

Barthes's revised version of Eisenstein's montage is in line with the self-conscious elaboration of his critical practice from *S/Z* through *Camera Lucida.* In "The Third Meaning," the gesture already takes the form of a primal scene of recognition such as those staged later in *The Pleasure of the Text* and *A Lover's Discourse.* From the critical object of the Eisenstein stills, Barthes moves toward the critical subject in order to consider what motivates its particular stake or position: "I at first ascribed this taste for stills to my lack of cinematic culture, to my resistance to film" (*IMT,* p. 66). Such resistance should not be confused with simple negation. Instead, it asserts the specific value or essence of the filmic in a signifying process which neither photography nor painting fulfills since they lack the possibility of configuration which Barthes associates with diegesis. The relevant point is that Barthes sees this configuration as distinct from the illusion of animated representation in traditional film theory such as that of montage. What Barthes explores in the Eisenstein stills is not their potential function within sequence and montage, but something on the order of a second text (palimpsest or hieroglyph) whose existence never exceeds the fragment: "The still offers us the *inside* of the fragment. In this connection we would need to take up—displacing them—Eisenstein's own formulations when envisaging the new possibilities of audio-visual montage: the basic center of gravity . . . is transferred to *inside* the fragment, into the elements included in the image itself. *And the center of gravity is no longer the element 'between shots'—the shock—but the element 'inside the shot'—the accentuation within the fragment*" (*IMT,* p. 67).

To summarize at this point, Barthes's writings on the image during the 1960s are seemingly blocked at a notion of the filmic which he openly distinguishes from film. Barthes never really follows through on the program outlined in "Elements of Semiology" because his own concerns shift to a point where that model no longer corresponds to his revised notions of figuration

and text. After "The Third Meaning," a final set of writings elaborates an ambivalence which, I believe, should be understood as nothing less than a resistance to the cinema. It is that resistance—and its meaning—which Barthes addresses in three of his last writings: *The Pleasure of the Text, Roland Barthes,* and *Camera Lucida.*

The Image as Point of Death and Sexuality

Eisenstein's writings emphasize the dynamics of sequential exposition corresponding to the syntagmatic axis of signification. Montage occurs on the basis of what Eisenstein refers to as an integral image whose emergence concretizes a maximum of emotion and power. The key term of emergence marks an aesthetic experience in which creator and consumer participate actively:

> Every spectator, in correspondence with his individuality, and in his own way and out of his own experience—out of the womb of his fantasy, out of the warp and weft of his associations, all conditioned by the premises of his character, habits and social appurtenances, creates an image in accordance with the representational guidance suggested by the author, leading him to understanding and experience of the author's theme. This is the same image that was planned and created by the author, but this image is at the same time created also by the spectator himself.[7]

This passage is close to prophetic; one might easily mistake it for Barthes's account of the dynamics of reading and the binary of readerly and writerly texts in *S/Z.* It also recalls *The Pleasure of the Text* and a theory of the text as perpetual working and reworking of a generative idea, with a loss or unmaking of the subject in Barthes's notion which has no apparent equivalence in Eisenstein's theory of montage.

The primacy of the aesthetic experience for both Eisenstein and Barthes points to a common concern for representation. In "Word and Image," Eisenstein describes representation as a documentary function producing affidavit-expositions "shot from a single set-up." Against these, he asserts the singular virtue of montage construction fashioned by artists: "that great power of inner creative excitement in the *spectator* which distinguishes an emotionally exciting work from one that stops without going further than giving information or recording events" (*The Film Sense,* p. 35). In *The Pleasure of the Text,* Barthes sets representation against figuration, casting the former negatively as encumbered with meanings other than that of desire. To illustrate this difference, he refers at length to a text by Barbey d'Aurevilly and concludes as follows: "That is what representation is: when nothing emerges, when nothing leaps [*quand rien ne sort, rien ne saute*] out of the frame: of the picture, the book, the screen" (*Pleasure,* p. 57). Against representation, figuration becomes

an appearance of the erotic body, leading to a text split into fetish objects. Ultimately, the felicitous or privileged form of figuration mixes word and image: "Similarly, and even more than the text, the film will *always* be figurative (which is why films are still worth making)—even if it represents nothing" (*Pleasure,* p. 56).

Midway through *The Pleasure of the Text,* Barthes describes the asocial character of bliss (*jouissance*) in terms which suggest that solitude, separation, and loss are the inevitable price of surrender to overwhelming sensation: "*Everything* is lost, integrally. Extremity of the clandestine, darkness of the motion-picture theater" (*Pleasure,* p. 39). The statement expresses a radical hedonism, almost as though Barthes were taking Susan Sontag at her word when—a decade earlier, in *Against Interpretation*—she called for an erotics of art. Nevertheless, Barthes remains enough of a structuralist by habit to set any willful attempt to lose the self within an overriding project of observation. As a result, resistance always keeps *jouissance* partial; the critical subject returns, if only in fragments. If Barthes confesses to deriving intense pleasure from (and *within*) the darkness of the motion-picture theater, he still comes back out—so to speak—into the broad daylight of the "real world."[8]

In *Roland Barthes,* the interplay of pleasure and resistance is reasserted even more openly: "Resistance to the cinema: the signifier itself is always, by nature, continuous here, whatever the rhetoric of frames and shots; without remission, a continuum of images; the film (our French word for it, *pellicule,* is highly appropriate: a skin without puncture or perforation) *follows,* like a garrulous ribbon: statutory impossibility of the fragment, of the haiku" (*Roland Barthes,* pp. 54–55). But no sooner does Barthes acknowledge the force of the cinematic signifier than he identifies certain compromising constraints of representation that make it somehow insufficient. Elsewhere in the same text, Barthes asserts the pleasure of the theater against cinema and painting. Of all the figurative arts, theater alone presents bodies and not their representation: "The cinema would be like those bodies which pass by, in summer, with shirts unbuttoned to the waist: *Look but don't touch,* say these bodies and the cinema, both of them, literally, factitious" (*Roland Barthes,* p. 84). The reference to theater sets Barthes's resistance to film within traditional aesthetics and the problematics of correspondence and/or specificity among the arts. It also points to revised notions of figuration and textuality as a staging which both establishes and disperses the subject. As Barthes puts it in *The Pleasure of the Text,* the primary emphasis is on process rather than product: "The generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue—this texture—the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web" (*Pleasure,* p. 64).

By the time *Camera Lucida* appears in 1980, the film image is definitively mediated by Barthes's involvement with photography. At first glance, this last book regresses to a methodology of some twenty years earlier as Barthes invokes a phenomenological idiom revised via structural analysis.

Thus, he states that he wants to find out what photography is "in itself" and that he prefers photography *in opposition to* the cinema (*la Photo contre le cinéma*). The convergence of value and analysis leads Barthes to recognize the inadequacy of his earlier approaches: "*Affect;* affect was what I didn't want to reduce; being irreducible, it was thereby what I wanted, what I ought to reduce the Photograph *to;* but could I retain an affective intentionality, a view of the object which was immediately steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria?"(*Camera Lucida,* p. 21).

Once he considers the element of affect, Barthes must also contend with the inherent tautology of the photo that seemingly coincides with its referent: "The Photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both" (*Camera Lucida,* p. 6). This adherence of the referent should not, however, be confused with representation in a conventional sense. For what Barthes comes to see as the affective intentionality drawing him toward the photo is the detail (or *punctum*) whose emergence invariably supplements the informational or symbolic meaning. Thus, where the term "reference" commonly designates a relation to something outside language (something "out there" or "in the real world"), Barthes makes text and image the means of staging a personal drama:

> I call "photographic referent" not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph. Painting can feign reality without having seen it. Discourse combines signs which have referents, of course, but these referents can be and are most often "chimeras." Contrary to these imitations, in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there.* There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. And since this constraint exists only for Photography, we must consider it, by reduction, at the very essence, the *noeme* of Photography. What I intentionalize in a photograph (we are not yet speaking of film) is neither Art nor Communication, it is Reference, which is the founding order of Photography. (*Camera Lucida,* pp. 76–77)

This personalized meaning of the term "reference" allows us to understand the affective essence which Barthes seeks throughout *Camera Lucida* through comparisons of painting and theater to film. At one point, Barthes compares certain photographs to the paintings by Jean-Baptiste Greuze which stage moralistic scenes within a single tableau. Elsewhere, he asserts that photography touches art not by painting, but by the theater: "The *camera obscura,* in short, has generated at one and the same time perspective painting, photography, and the diorama, which are all three arts of the stage" (*Camera Lucida,* p. 31). For Barthes, the text mediates between a referent in the common sense of something "outside" or "beyond" language and a more personal drama whose movement generates the staging referred to above as figuration. For Barthes, this staging can occur in various media and genres,

especially when the specificity of material and form is sacrificed in favor of affective power.

The resistance to film asserted in *Camera Lucida* is already present in a 1973 text, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," in which theater, painting, cinema, and literature are classified as *dioptric arts:* "The tableau (pictorial, theatrical, literary) is a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view" (*IMT,* p. 70). Using Diderot as his major point of reference, Barthes characterizes a fetishism of the image based on a dramatic unity such as that which desire and mourning impose on his reading of the Winter Garden photo in *Camera Lucida.* In the 1973 text, Barthes describes how such dramatic unity is conveyed in film. Once again, the example invoked is that of Eisenstein:

> The film is a contiguity of episodes, each one absolutely meaningful, aesthetically perfect, and the result is a cinema whose vocation is anthological, holding out to the fetishist, on dotted lines, the ftagment to be cut out and taken away to enjoy. (Isn't it said that in some *cinémathèque* or other a piece of film is missing from the copy of *Potemkin*—the baby carriage scene, of course—snipped and stolen by some film lover as if it were a lock of a woman's hair, her glove or her underwear?) This is Eisenstein's primacy power: no *single image is boring,* we are not forced to wait for the next one in order to understand and be delighted: no dialectic (that interval of patience necessary for certain pleasures), but a continuous jubilation, consisting of a summation of perfect moments.[9]

Eisenstein's notion of montage evolves over the better part of twenty years, but the basic problematic of relating frame and sequence remains a constant. Like Barthes, Eisenstein wants to determine the specificity or essence of film and winds up instead with a limited correspondence among the arts. In *Camera Lucida,* the fetish of the photo image is symptomatic of an affective intensity whose referent is the personal drama of death foretold (foreseen?) in the Winter Garden portrait of Barthes's mother as a girl. *Camera Lucida* suggests that Barthes's assertion of the photographic image in opposition to film grows out of a deeper sense of interaction based less on film than on theater. To put this another way, spectator positioning in film is passive to a degree which seemingly precludes intervention. Motion pictures stage an inevitable passage toward completion which theater slows: one could conceivably jump onto the stage and "stop the show." Photography freezes that passage via compression within a single frame: "Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau vivant,* a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead" (*Camera Lucida,* p. 32).

The opposition between photography and film marks a limit of Barthes's semiology. It also asserts what André Bazin describes in 1945 as the

mummy complex, in terms of which Barthes's primal theater of photography expresses a desire to maintain the appearance of life in the face of death: "To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life."[10] The priority of the photograph's psychological function—the "instrumentality of a non-living agent"—corresponds to the impact of the *punctum* that Barthes describes some thirty-five years later. In fact, the following passage by Bazin might easily be mistaken as coming from *Camera Lucida:* "Hence the charm of family albums. Those gray or sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost undecipherable, are no longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny; not, however, by the prestige of art but by the power of an impressive mechanical process: for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms it, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption" (Bazin, p. 14).

Camera Lucida's complexity complicates any attempt to see it as a definitive statement of Barthes's involvement with film. Where Eisenstein constructs montage on the basis of the minimal unit of the shot, Barthes's analysis is ill-suited for rigorous application because the movement that draws him to the image is affective rather than cinematic. Even the phenomenon of framing holds less promise for the study of film than as a means of approaching what he calls the filmic or "third" meaning. Ultimately, Barthes's relation to film is tied to his attempts to articulate the interplay between deep and surface phenomena. This is why the phenomenology invoked in *Camera Lucida* is less of a simple regression than a critical return to problems of perception via psychoanalysis and semiotics. This is also to say that the direct application of Barthes's writings on film to practical analysis is ill-advised without adjustment, because the dynamic of representation drawing him to the image derives from the theater as well as from modes such as the *tableau vivant* and *diorama.*[11] In *Camera Lucida,* the photograph objectifies affect and a momentary stoppage of time responding to a personal imperative. For Barthes, this singular capacity sets the photograph apart from the motion picture, allowing for a persistence of the image which film never achieves.

SUBJECTED TO THE IMAGE

What, then, is the image *for Barthes* and what might his resistance to film add to our understanding of his writings on the sign? Some closing remarks in the guise of a conclusion. First, an overview of Barthes's evolving views on the image corrects the misconception that the phenomenological idiom in *Camera Lucida* marks a direct and uncritical regression from the semiology that had seemingly displaced it some twenty years earlier. In fact, the relation of phenomenology to semiology within Barthes's writings does not lend itself to a

simple and neat progression. The semiotics of the image developed over the *Communications* phase of the 1960s is neither negated nor otherwise phased out in *Camera Lucida.* Instead, Barthes's book-length note on photography is the last in a series of illustrations that meaning is inevitably grounded or located in a specific time and place and that unlimited semiosis is possible only in theoretical terms. The point is first made in *Mythologies,* where the denotation that Barthes referred to as "the mythic activity" is studied in the ways that advertising and popular press photographs illustrate capitalism and a colonialist mentality, respectively. Where the study of the image in *Mythologies* is carried out in social and economic terms, *Camera Lucida* is also a narrative of mourning whose ties to death and sexuality lend themselves to the more primal insight afforded by psychoanalysis.

"The Third Meaning" significantly revises Barthes's semiotics of the image from the social categories of *Mythologies* toward the intimate family drama of *Camera Lucida.* First and foremost, it invents the still image by excising it from the film strip. As a result, the photo derived from film inverts the customary progression from still to moving image, as though the former somehow contained—in a compressed and frozen state—the energy and movement of the latter. The figurative violence that produces the Eisenstein still acquires a different function in *Camera Lucida,* where the Winter Garden photograph operates a stoppage of time that is openly artificial. The photo of the mother as child serves as a fiction of convenience that momentarily eases the emotion of mourning. The progression from "The Third Meaning" to *Camera Lucida* ends with a conception of the image that borders on the fetishistic. (Barthes uses the very term in the passage from "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" quoted above.)

Even more suggestive is a second question raised by "The Third Meaning": the status to be granted to this progression. To restate this another way, we might echo Naomi Schor's concern for determining what aesthetic system, if any at all, is implied by Barthes's aesthetic practice.[12] Victor Burgin goes even further by projecting through what he sees as Barthes's untheorized observations on the image the necessity for a "psychopathology of everyday representation" based on a type of relation between movie and still images.[13]

The comments by Schor and Burgin help us to inscribe the last phase of Barthes's writings on photography and film within his evolving practice of semiology. Clearly, the notion of a systematic aesthetics (or aesthetic system) is made dubious by the fact that Barthes's death weakens any attempt to impose closure on a progression that remains interrupted and incomplete. Moreover, what Schor describes as Barthes's detotalized and fragmentary aesthetics is already so evident within the individual texts starting with "The Photographic Message" that rigorous systematicity is simply ill-conceived. More promising and more suited to the discontinuity noted above is the sense that Barthes's writings on the image resist or are otherwise incommensurate with systematicity. (An alternative formulation would be that they illustrate

or dramatize this incommensurability before—if ever at all—they theorize.) Schor contrasts the detotalized and fragmentary elements of Barthes's writings to the systematized totalizing elements in Hegel's aesthetics. Moreover, she sets Barthes against Hegel in terms of what she refers to as the modernist project of restoring realist details to their "brute and unsublimated materiality" (Schor, p. 84).

What Schor refers to as the work of *desublimation* also valorizes the priority of illustration over abstraction. In textual terms, Barthes's writings on the image internalize what others might designate as theory. His semiotics of the image evolves toward a dynamic of figuration that is increasingly personal. The progression that ends with the Winter Garden photo in *Camera Lucida* begins with the Eisenstein still as fetish in "The Third Meaning" and continues with the representative fragment in "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein."

Notably, the latter text adds the concept of the *tableau* (both painting and fragment) as intermediary form of representation between film and photo. Barthes invokes Lessing's "pregnant moment" to extend a classical notion of turning point (*peripateia*) that the late Henri Cartier-Bresson revises in the title of his 1952 collection of photographs, *The Decisive Moment* (Burgin, pp. 89–90) and that is also resonant with Eisenstein's notion of the integral image. The conflation of terms and modes of representation from "The Third Meaning" to *Camera Lucida* extends Barthes's valorization of the photograph's singular capacity to objectify emotion and meaning within time. The photographic *mise-en-scène* may well imply a theoretical position and a hierarchy among various modes of representation. But any such theorization is secondary to the illustration of photography's specificity and irreducible difference from painting and film. From message to *punctum,* Barthes's involvement with the image also illustrates with disarming simplicity the strong affective motivation within what might otherwise be taken for an abstract and/or disinterested inquiry.[14]

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 73.

2. This definition, set forth by P. N. Furback in *Reflections on the Word "Image,"* is discussed by W. J. T. Mitchell in *Iconology: Text, Image, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 11–13.

3. This specific series of articles is completed when Barthes contributes "En sortant du cinéma" (Leaving the Movie Theater) to *Communications* no. 23, a special issue on "Psychoanalysis and Cinema" edited by Raymond Bellour, Thierry Kuntzel, and Christian Metz. A translation of Barthes's text appears in *The Rustle of Language,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986).

4. Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image-Music-Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 15. Future references cite this collection as *IMT.*

5. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. R. Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 88–89. Three years after "The Photographic Message" and in the name of structuralist film theory, Christian Metz appropriates the notion of the photograph as a message without a code when he refers to film as a language (*langue*) without a code. See Paul Sandro's cogent overview of and commentary on Metz's early film theory, in "Signification in the Cinema," reprinted in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 2:391–407.

6. Metz distinguishes between film and cinema in order to account for the former's specificity. Where the word "film" refers to the material object in the real world, "cinematic" designates an abstraction made up of multiple systems. See Sandro, "Signification in the Cinema," pp. 393–394, and Stephen Heath, "Metz's Semiology: A Glossary," *Screen* 14/1–2 (Spring-Summer 1973): 214–226.

7. Sergei M. Eisenstein, "Word and Image," in *The Film Sense,* trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 33.

8. This entering and leaving is the very gesture of ambivalence that Barthes evokes in "Leaving the Movie Theater."

9. "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," in *IMT,* pp. 72–73. I have mixed Heath's translation with some of Richard Howard's felicitous phrasing from his translation of the same text, in *The Responsibility of Forms* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985).

10. André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?,* trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 9. Elsewhere in *Camera Lucida,* Barthes invokes Bazin's notion of the blind field of the cinematic screen. Yet once Barthes perceives the *punctum* of the photographic referent, even the still photo creates its own blind field, allowing for the *emergence* which he and Eisenstein both deem essential to the aesthetic experience. Behind (or within) the visible image, then, what Barthes terms the *punctum* "brings out" the essential image, the other stage of personal drama. (I am grateful to Brian Duren for directing me to the Bazin article.)

11. Walter Benjamin's discussion of experience, shock, and sensation in "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), is characteristically prophetic, reiterating Baudelaire's doubts in "Le public moderne et la photographie" (1859) as well as his own views developed at length in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* pp. 217–252.

12. Naomi Schor, "Desublimation: Roland Barthes's Aesthetics," in *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 80.

13. Victor Burgin, "Diderot, Barthes, *Vertigo,*" in Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Caplan, eds., *Formations of Fantasy* (New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 86.

14. A short version of this essay was first given in April 1986 for a session of the proseminar on theory in the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University. I thank David Grossvogel and Philip Lewis for their interest, criticisms, and encouragement in this instance and in the past.

Writing the Imaginary: Remarks on Music According to Roland Barthes

MARTIN GRISEL

Roland Barthes was one of the first writers to use the language of psychoanalysis as if it were quite normal to do so. Freudian and Lacanian notions—such as the Oedipus complex, castration, perversion, hysteria, imaginary, symbolic, *objet (a)*—pervade his texts. However, in his view, the "gesture" is more significant than the "idea." Barthes himself writes that he "begins with a sensuous object, and then in the course of his work hopes to come across the possibility of finding an abstraction for it, one drawn from the intellectual culture of the time."[1] Theory, therefore, often functions as an aftereffect.

The significance of Lacanian psychoanalysis in Roland Barthes's *oeuvre* is well-known. Jean-Michel Rabaté has suggested that: "An account needs to given of Barthes's manoeuvres in the face of the major Lacanian agencies—the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary—which he willingly invokes, and around which he develops a sort of complex dance." While I shall later attempt that account in full, here I restrict myself to Barthes's essays on music. Instead of playing the "psychoanalytical policeman," I shall attempt to investigate how the Lacanian agencies operate in the Barthesian text. Taking this approach does not mean criticizing Barthes in accordance with the master's discourse, but showing that the flavor of Barthesian writing derives most notably from the preference he gives to paradox over orthodoxy.

I will begin by considering the excellent text Barthes devoted to Charles Panzéra, the prewar singer. "The Grain of the Voice" originally appeared in the journal *Musique en jeu,* in a special edition on music and psychoanalysis. In this important essay, to which Barthes refers on more than one occasion, it is evident from the first page that Lacanian language has been "stolen," for here he deploys the notion of the "imaginary" three times.

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Barthes's question is the problem language has in interpreting music. Unfortunately, language handles it rather badly: music commentary deals with music in a predicative discourse, that is, in an imaginary discourse, since "this imaginary immediately enters language via the adjective."[2] Barthes denounces the "imaginary of music" which functions "to reassure, to constitute the subject who hears it": from its opening lines, the essay thus seems to be written against the use of adjectives in music criticism and hence, against the imaginary.

The adjective, here taken to be "the most impoverished linguistic category," is "inescapable," "fatal" even, when faced with music: the adjective reduces music's *signifiance.* It forces music into a (stereotypical) image and declares: "that music is this, this performance is that" (*OO,* 236). Barthes depicts the adjective as a demon that seizes hold of language the moment we begin to discuss music. Thus, music commentary must be "exorcized and liberated from the inevitability of predication."

Not an easy task, and Barthes leaves us to ponder its near impossibility by suggesting a parlor game: "discuss a piece of music without using a single adjective" (*OO,* 236).

Barthes rejects adjectival criticism, yet he nonetheless wishes to write "on" music in a way that does not suppress it. As he has no wish (or is unable?) to choose between that which can be predicated (the surge of adjectives, the gust of the imaginary) and the ineffable, Barthes finds himself confronted by aporia. Unable to "directly change language on music," his only option is to displace the problematic. And to reduce it. That is why he restricts himself to song, a "decidedly distinct space (genre) in which a language encounters a voice." It is within the space of the sung voice in which language and music "conjoin" that Barthes finds the antidote to the adjective and to the imaginary which he calls for in music criticism: the antidote is the "grain, the grain of the voice." In contrast to the adjective, the grain is a signifier "at the level of which the temptation of ethos can be liquidated—and thus the adjective dismissed" (*OO,* 237).

Barthes's essay revolves around the adversarial couple grain/adjective. This couple opens up another discourse which destabilizes what, on a first reading, seems to be the binary and interdependent opposition of imaginary/symbolic. But in fact the imaginary, as Barthes presents it, appears to enclose the symbolic elements to which it is opposed, with the unintended effect that the "symbolic" solution he proposes turns out to be more imaginary than one would have initially thought.

In order to read the symbolic in Roland Barthes's imaginary, we have to recommence by displacing ourselves in turn. Let me therefore begin again with Barthes's affirmation that text "can only be a braid, woven in an extremely devious manner, between the symbolic and the imaginary."[3]

In the perspective which Barthes has opened up, text could be understood as the real manifestation of an imaginary use of symbolic language; the prime cause of this manifestation would be the unconscious.

An entire aspect of his work is directed against the imaginary, or rather, the reifying element of the imaginary: it is the struggle against the image that sticks, that takes hold of the subject in an imago (the figure of this imaginary is the Medusa, who paralyzes those who look at her). Barthes denounces what he calls "imaginaries of language"—hidden meanings, ideological or literary connotations—which he takes to be signifieds that "adhere" an image to neutral symbolic signifiers. He opposes the notions of "Text" and "signifying" to these "imaginaries of language": "Text is language without its imaginary . . . All that which is barely tolerated or totally denied by linguistics . . . signifying, *jouissance, that* is what removes text from the imaginaries of language."[4]

Although Barthes appears to be against the imaginary, this "against" needs to be understood in both senses of the word: not only as opposition and struggle, but also as proximity and contact. It is true that in other places Barthes tries to revalorize the imaginary, such as when he refers to the phantasms, to the satisfying images of the narcissistic self of the mirror stage, or to the corporeal origin of knowing. This imaginary is no obstacle to writing: it is the condition and support of writing. And Barthes can even manage to deplore the depreciation of the imaginary, considered as the "poor relation of psychoanalysis," when it is "wedged between the real and the symbolic" (*GV,* 258).

Evidently, then, for Barthes the imaginary is both the source of and the obstacle to writing: he is ambivalent, struck by love and hate, fascination and fear. Thus, his ongoing relation to the imaginary is characterized by contradictory tendencies, or by what may be referred to as the double bind: on the one hand, a tendency to tear himself away from it by attacking it; on the other, a tendency to stage it in a veritable performance of gradations and degrees—in other words, in "bathmologies" (*RB,* 71).

While Barthes's relation to the imaginary may be characterized by the double bind, his relation to the symbolic is no less ambiguous. The symbolic often poses a problem as the problematic of meaning demonstrates. Meaning, just like Text, is a braid in which the symbolic and the imaginary intertwine. It is possible to go along with Barthes when he is "against" meaning in its imaginary sense, that is to say, when he is against the retrospective overdetermination of neutral symbolic signifiers by signifieds anchored in the subject's imaginary. One can assume that Barthes is seeking a pure symbolic in which signifiers would be independent of signifieds. Barthes's position is less assured, however, when he turns against the symbolic aspect of meaning: meaning considered as a linguistic expression of the imaginary.

It is in this sense that it is impossible to escape the signified. Expressing signifiers—enunciating and articulating them—necessarily creates signifieds as well, that is, as effects of meaning which come about in the practice of articulation and pronunciation. These two aspects of meaning are indissociable, but Barthes automatically conflates the symbolic aspect of meaning with the imaginary. For this reason, he almost always associates the expression of meaning with that theater he hates: the theater of hysterical emotion in

which the signified triumphs. The only theater he likes is the one which displays nothing on stage but the naked signifier: the theater of Brechtian alienation or that of Japanese *bunraku*.

In the critical essays devoted to music, we again find an obsessional and repetitive structure, which is a (hysterical?) fear of meaning, of the "tyranny of signification," the signified, articulation, and expression. Is Barthes opposed to the imaginary or to the symbolic, then, when he condemns expressiveness so severely? The death of Boris Godounov in Mussorgsky's opera is "expressive, or even perhaps hysterical; it is overladen with affective content" (*OO,* 242); Fischer-Dieskau's singing is "excessively expressive," "emotionally clear" (239, 241). In expressive art, "the melodic line is broken into fragments of meaning, into semantic rests, and into effects of hysteria" (250).

Barthes's critique of expressiveness is not unrelated to his fear of being unable to express himself. Thus he wrote of himself: "Not believing in the separation of affect and sign, of emotion and its theatre, he could not express any admiration, any indignation, any love, for fear of signifying it badly. The more he was moved, the duller he became" (*RB,* 180). Is this then yet another opposition between the ineffable and that which can be predicated? Between, on the one hand, the neutral (but "dull") signifier, and on the other, the hysterical theater of emotions and signifieds? Between the mute symbolic and the rowdy imaginary, or indeed inversely, between the inarticulation of the body and the expression of language? Does Barthes seek a symbolic of pure signifiers or an imaginary in which there is yet to be a split between signifier and signified?

On first reading the text, one has the impression that the adjective is opposed to the grain as is the imaginary to the symbolic. However, the imaginary/symbolic opposition, as Barthes presents it, becomes blurred, for each of these two interdependent and oppositional terms has a double status: the adjective belongs both to the symbolic (inasmuch as it is language), and to the imaginary (inasmuch as it incorporates the Medusa effect); the grain is both a remedy for the imaginary that takes hold, but also the poison that rekindles its fire. In evicting the imaginary, Barthes brings it in again through the back door. Thus another scene opens: the imaginary one in which the body is opposed to symbolic language.

The other side of the imaginary is evident when we turn to the structure underlying Barthes's texts. In his article on listening, Barthes observes that listening is "like a little theatre where those two modern deities—power and desire—confront one another, one bad and the other good." (*OO,* 230). These two deities may take different forms in Barthes's various writings, yet the conflictual structure seems always to remain the same. In his essays on music, Barthes opposes not only grain to adjective, but also geno-song to pheno-song, Charles Panzéra to Dietrich Fisher-Dieskau, amateur to professional, lied to opera, pronunciation to articulation, voice to soul, diction to pneuma, the humors to conflict, signifying to signification, signifier to signified, and desire to the social.

These dualistic (and sometimes absolute) oppositions lead us to the Barthesian Myth (a veritable textual structure), in which he stages the fight between Good and Evil, desire and power. In this confict "all the values of the delicate imaginary" are opposed to the oppressive symbolic, even though the latter, through its notorious "tourniquet" effect, sometimes presents itself as imaginary.

Thus the adjectival problematic forms part of a more general and somewhat Nietzschean problematic: how can we enunciate in terms derived from the order of the gregarious (the language of the adjective, of communication), that which is incommunicable in the experience of a singular condition (the grain of the voice or the rhythmic beat)? In other words: how can we express, through the transindividual symbolic, the imaginary and narcissistic experience of a body in *jouissance?* This problematic typifies writing in that, for Barthes, "the writer's task is to discover an ultimate particularity despite the general and moral instrument at his disposal."[5]

The Barthesian struggle against meaning, therefore, is not simply a struggle against the imaginary when it attaches to the symbolic; it also takes on the symbolic (from the perspective of castration), and the gregarious within language. The oppositions on which Barthesian text is based show how writing "against" the imaginary can turn into a writing "against" the symbolic. It may be possible to see in Barthes's condemnation of the imaginary's Medusa effect his relation to the Law, to the symbolic and phallic Law that distances the subject from his or her imaginary experience—experience which is narcissistic and singular.

The gregarious/singular opposition determines the choice of subjects on which Barthes lovingly consented to write. He likes to write on that which pertains (for him) to the category of the singular and marginal. Charles Panzéra has disappeared from the musical scene and is "unknown" to most of us. Thus, Barthes remarks that: "it is possible, therefore, that I am alone in liking him" (*OO,* 248). The Romantic lied is "always anachronistic" and untimely (in the Nietzschean sense of the word): Romantic amorous sentiment only appears "among marginal subjects or groups, those dispossessed of History who are alien to the forceful and gregarious society that surrounds, besets and excludes them, distanced as they are from any power" (258). For Barthes, the composer of singularity *par excellence* is Robert Schumann, who contrasts with the composers favored by the public at large (Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and all those "stirring musicians of heavy Romanticism": Mahler, Bruckner and Wagner).

"There are many Wagnerians and Mahlerians," writes Barthes, "but as for Schumannians, I know only of Gilles Deleuze, Marcel Beaufils and myself" (*OO,* 263). In Barthes's case, his love of singularity and his refusal to join in with the gregarious often come across as a form of egotism that relates everything back to the self.

Barthes's essays "on" music are not commentaries, the kind of hollow discourse (risking the adjective) which he hates since it destroys the singularity (or the difference) of music. Commentaries reduce music to the category of the gregarious (science and ideology). Instead of a commentary, Barthes proposes "to actively and openly affirm a value and produce an evaluation" (*OO,* 247).

The evaluation of the grain is undertaken "outside of any law: it will thwart the law of culture but equally that of anti-culture" (*OO,* 244); being but a different form of culture, anti-culture can only be derived from the same law. Initially, it seems as if "to thwart" is opposed to the adherence of the imaginary, except that, by another turn of the tourniquet, "to thwart" is also opposed to the Law, to meaning, to the Name-of-the-Father. "To thwart" would thus appear to be the Barthesian verb *par excellence,* indicative of his relation to the Law, and to castration: "My main problem in any case," states Barthes, "is to thwart the signified, to thwart the law, to thwart the father, to thwart the repressed—I don't mean to explode it, but to thwart it" (*GV,* 137).

In a perspective that can hardly be called Lacanian, Barthes opposes (singular) desire to the (gregarious) Law, the "wicked law of filiation—our Law, which is paternal, civil, mental and scientific: a segregative law" (*OO,* 98). He attempts to find an available space, one beyond Law, in which he may play and take pleasure. Musical listening, the theater where power is confronted by desire, proves to be that space in which symbolic imperatives can be thwarted, for "no law is in a position to constrain our listening" (230).

How is the relation to the Law articulated in Barthes's essays on musical listening? The opposition of the two singers in "The Grain of the Voice" might help to answer this question. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, taking over from the "bourgeois" singer Gérard Souzay,[6] is here opposed to Charles Panzéra. Aside from the imaginary aspects that Barthes finds in "Fischer-Dieskau," or "F. D.," he presents him as a man of the law, a man of the code. It would seem that the imaginary turns into the symbolic, for with F. D.'s singing—we are dealing with the pheno-song—it is the symbolic which dominates the imaginary: "[it] covers all the phenomena, all the features which derive from the structure of the sung language, the laws of genre, the coded form of the melisma, the composer's idiolect, the style of interpretation: in short, everything which, in the performance, serves to maintain communication, representation, expression . . . the tissue of cultural values" (*OO,* 239). By making the Law predominate at the expense of the body, is F. D. another name of the Father?

Unlike F. D., with Charles Panzéra it is not the Law which prevails, but the body. His geno-song covers a space (which is more maternal than paternal) of pure signifiers that are yet to produce signifieds, or, more precisely, the space prior to the law that founds meaning: "The geno-song is the volume of the saying and singing voice, the space in which significations germinate 'from within language and in its very materiality': it is a signifying function

alien to communication, to any representation (of feelings), to expression; it is that peak (or depth) of production where melody truly works on language—not on what it says, but on the voluptuousness of its sound-signifiers, of its letters" (*OO,* 239). Panzéra is a perfect amateur, in the etymological sense of the word, and thus positions himself "free of charge (for nothing) in the signifier: in the immediately definitive matter of music" (*RB,* 56–7).

In contrast, F. D. is a cold professional who flattens out performance through perfectionism. Fischer-Dieskau and Panzéra confront each other like the two "modern deities": power and desire. F. D. is celebrated and powerful: he is the king of the long-playing record ("he's the only one you hear: he has recorded everything"), the master of breathing whose current power contrasts with Panzéra's "marginal" status.

In the Fischer-Dieskau/Panzéra opposition, soul is opposed to body, just as the signified is opposed to the signifier: body and signifier—this is the site of *jouissance,* and we are divided from it by the soul and the signified. Barthes writes that for the German baritone, "singing is accompanied by the soul, not the body" (*OO,* 239). The sung death of Boris Godounov also constitutes a pheno-song: it amounts to "the smothering of *significance* under the soul as signified" (242). The soul, the signified, meaning—agencies associated with the symbolic and the Name-of-the-Father—are here opposed to the imaginary *jouissance* of the body and signifier: when signifying "bursts forth," it "surges with *jouissance,* not the soul" (240).

The body/soul couple would appear to designate the imaginary/symbolic opposition, in the same way as the couple grain/adjective. Hence, the imaginary body becomes a subversive principle of the symbolic soul, the pnuema.

Barthes therefore feels compelled to deride their "phallic stature" (and how!): "Breath is the pneuma, the soul swelling or breaking, and any exclusive art of breathing is likely to be a secretly mystical art (a mysticism leveled down to the measure of the popular long-playing record). The lung, a stupid organ (lights for cats!), swells but gets no erection" (*OO,* 239–40). In good Freudian tradition, however, let's take this etymological play on words seriously. Apart from the implicit reference to Barthes's illness which, because it affected his breathing, forced him to give up his singing lessons with Panzéra (248), what we have here is the binary balance in the form of an association between breath and meaning: meaning given through the abstract soul in its opposition to the concrete body, and through the leveling down imposed by technology (of the record, above all), which abolishes the amateur's *musica pratica* and opens the floodgates to the gregarious. Through the intermediary of the mysticism of pneumatology, etymology evokes the Holy Spirit (*pneuma aghion*), and this is a surprising evocation in this context: the Holy Spirit, which for psychoanalysis is a phallic term, is less "leveled down" than it seems. Barthes's comment on lungs—one that appears to sum up the entire passage—is thus perversely opposed to the phallic interpretation of the pneuma: of course all that has a phallic stature, but I refuse to take it seriously!

There may well be grounds for asking whether this mockery of the phallic is not in fact the manifestation of a perverse desire. Does Barthes wish to show his behind to Father "Diskau"? Is the imaginary Father evoked by the voice of the German baritone—a voice very close to the "dark voice" that Barthes finds, though only exceptionally, in Romantic song, the dark voice of Evil and Death in which the body is no more—that all-powerful Father who persistently threatens castration and who is undermined by the pervert? The dark voice does indeed incite "the anguish of something that threatens to divide, to separate, to dissociate and to dismember the body" (*OO,* 254).

It is through perversion, as we know from Freud, that the threat of castration manifests itself, which in turn brings into consideration the difference between the sexes. And in their own way, Fischer-Dieskau and opera both raise the problem of castration, of the acceptance of the excessive arbitrariness of the Name-of-the-Father, that is, of that which founds phallic Law and enables the advent of meaning, which is both semantic and sexual. Opera constitutes that song, that domain, of Oedipal difference: in separate voices it stages "familial, social, historic and external conflicts" (*OO,* 256). Barthes seems haunted by the central position accorded to castration in opera: "The Oedipus complex triumphs: father, mother, daughter and son, the whole family is there, symbolically projected, whatever the detours of the plot and the substitutions of roles, into bass, mezzo, soprano and tenor" (254).

Barthes prefers the Romantic lied to the semantic and sexual expressiveness of opera for the very reason that the lied "forgets" these four familial voices. Isn't this "forgetting" a mark of the denial (*Verleugnung*) of the pervert, that double approach which recognizes what it refuses, its ambiguity captured by the formula: "I know very well, but all the same"? And precisely because of that denial, the pervert can take pleasure in the imaginary, even though he has entered the symbolic. In the same fashion, the lied denies the difference of the sexes: "it does not take into account the sexual marks of the voice, for it does not matter whether a lied is sung by a man or a woman; there is no vocal 'family,' nothing but a unisex human subject" (*OO,* 254). Unlike opera, which is more a symbolic than imaginary space, the lied is a site of imaginary plenitude where the other is still the same.

In perversion, the fetish is a substitute (at the level of the real) for the woman's lack of a penis. A pervert makes up for that lack through the invention of a fetish, and thus attains *jouissance.* Is Panzéra's voice—a voice seemingly more maternal than paternal—that fetish a pervert finds pleasurable? For Barthes, it is opposed to the "lights" of F. D.'s singing, and is "a taut voice—*aufgeregt* (a Schumannian word)—or better still: an erect voice—a voice having an erection" (*OO,* 251). Listening to the third *Kreisleriana* arouses just such a *jouissance* in Barthes: "it tightens, it extends: *aufgeregt*" (265), which means, according to Barthes's glossary: "something wakens, rises, is raised (like a mast, an arm, a head), something provokes, irritates (and of course: something has an erection)" (275).

The "grain" of Panzéra's singing or the Schumannian "beat" thus do not escape (as does Beethoven's music) "the fetishism of a single element (voice or rhythm)" (*OO,* 233): whence "the voluptuousness of its signifier-sounds, of its letters" (239), whence the *jouissance* of the *ü,* of the *é* and of the *a* in Panzéra's phonetics (not forgetting his *r*—Roland's, perhaps?) which leads "beyond the singer's norms—without denying those norms" (240) and which has the role of "virilizing gentleness" (250).

Panzéra's singing exposes Barthes's fetishistic relation to language, and to the materiality of language specifically. Hence he defines the grain as "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue: perhaps the letter; almost certainly *significance*" (*OO,* 238). Yet note the Mother's presence in this *mater*-iality of the body speaking its mother tongue: for Barthes, language become erotic body refers back, in the final instance, to the maternal body. The signifiers he finds pleasurable then no longer designate a pure symbolic, but rather an imaginary in which the child discovers his "letters" on his Mother's body, in the way that erogenous zones are inscribed.

Barthes's fetishization of the mother tongue, "which for him is quite simply the umbilical language" (*RB,* 119), no doubt explains his insistence on speaking of it as: "the space of pleasure, of *jouissance,* a place where language works on itself for nothing—perversely, that is." (*OO,* 243).

For Barthes, Panzéra's singing is inscribed in one order, of reality or fantasy. So Barthes associates Panzéra, who "initiated" him (Barthes's term) to the materiality of umbilical language (*GV,* 176), with the figure of the Mother teaching her child the first sounds independently of the "tyranny of signification" (*OO,* 241), that is, as the pure production of a "music-language."

Panzéra's singing thus leads to a valorization of a language produced within the shadow of the Mother: it is the "language of sound," the language of affect, which Lacan named *lalangue* ("lah-language"). Lacan distinguishes "the so-called mother tongue (*la langue maternelle*), and it's not called that for nothing" from the paternal language (*le langage*) of social communication, the object of formal linguistics. Hence, Panzéra's singing or, more generally, the geno-song, is "a signifying play having nothing to do with communication" (*OO,* 239).

When discussing Schumann's music in "Rasch," Barthes opposes the mother tongue, the language of the body, to paternal language, the language of the Law, a "purely technical Italian code": "the invasion of musical writing by the *Muttersprache* is truly an announcement of the restitution of the body" (*OO,* 275).

Here, as in "The Grain of the Voice," the mother tongue enables "the mark of the code" to be diminished (*OO,* 237). The maternal thus becomes the subversive principle thanks to which the child can transgress the Father's laws. Here we encounter again the Barthesian Myth which stages the conflict between Good and Evil, desire and power. Might there be some association between this Myth and the fantasy of the primal scene in which the child

imagines he witnesses a sexual encounter between his parents? Parental intercourse is thus imagined in a way which takes us from perversion to psychosis, in the course of a permanent conflict between "motherland" and "fatherland." Which leads us, therefore, to a further psychic structure of Barthesian writing on music: psychosis and madness.

In the case of perversion, although thwarting the law can be understood as "transgressing the law," it nevertheless assumes a law, even if it is a new law, a transgressive law, one that enables the pervert to transgress the pure Law he wishes to place himself beyond. To state that the evaluation of music is undertaken "outside of any law," as Barthes puts it, is in itself a transgression of the Law. The new law Barthes obeys might be found in the value "which is hidden behind the 'I like' or 'I don't like'." It is the perverse law of corporeal intimidation: "I shall not judge a performance according to the rules of interpretation, the constraints of style . . . but according to the image of the body (the figure) offered to me" (*OO,* 244).

However, the verb "to thwart" suggests another interpretation. Barthes remarks that his evaluation of music is undertaken "outside of any law." Shouldn't his expression be taken literally? In that case "to thwart" would not be "to transgress" but, from the perspective of psychosis, "to reject" the Law. If the symbolic is rejected, foreclosed, *verworfen,* there is no longer any opposition to the Law. "To thwart" thus becomes an attempt to dissolve the symbolic as the third term, as the mediator between the real and the imaginary. Hence the suggestion of the possibility of a regression toward the imaginary. For Barthes, music also opens up a space "outside of any law," in which the Name-of-the-Father would be absent and in which the symbolic would cease to function as the translation (that is, as an alienating transposition into another register) of the imaginary experience the subject makes of the real.

In addition to perversion, Barthes's texts on music also contain a psychotic structure. As with perversion, it is castration that must be avoided: its association with the Law and the entry into the Symbolic. For the psychotic, however, the ambiguity of denial, which keeps the pervert in the symbolic; tends to disappear. The psychotic rejects castration: he no longer says "I know very well, but all the same," but "I want nothing to do with it."

In Barthes's case, listening to music produces not only the effects of fetishistic *jouissance,* but hallucinatory effects as well.

That is how listening to music opens up the domain of psychosis. In his writings on listening to the "grain" of the voice, as well as on listening to pianistic "beats," Barthes plays on the relation between psychosis and acoustic-verbal hallucinations.

With regard to Panzéra's phonetics, Barthes asks: "am I alone in perceiving it? Am I hearing voices within the voice?—But isn't it the truth of the voice to be hallucinated? Isn't the entire space of the voice an infinite space? Doubtless this was the meaning of Saussure's work on anagrams" (*OO,* 240). This may be related to a further passage concerning "beats": "the tur-

moil of the beats apparently keeps within the limits of a restrained language," usually it goes "unnoticed" such that "there's no way of knowing whether these beats are censored by most people, who do not want to hear them, or hallucinated by one man alone, who hears nothing but them" (268). Here again we find Saussure, with whom Barthes likes to identify: "In this we recognize the very structure of the paragram: a second text is heard, but ultimately—like Saussure listening for anagrammatic verses—I'm the only one to hear it" (ibid.). This second text, which for others is "inaudible," is similarly heard by Barthes in "the second Beethoven" (234).

In sum, Barthes's experience of hallucination is presented as an undecidable between madness and reason, between that which manifests itself through the body ("that's all one hears," "I hear with the certitude of the body") and that which remains unnoticed, inaudible. As for the truth of the hallucination, no doubt it does not reveal itself to everyone. Only the madman believes in the "certainty of hallucination." But is he, in his belief, any madder than the majority who refuse to believe in it, and who recoil from the *jouissance* and loss music causes—an "ancient Platonic idea" as Barthes observes (*OO,* 236)? Barthes has his reasons for invoking the second Saussure: the Saussure of anagrams who was afraid of being taken for a madman with his own experience of a strange second listening.

Certainly, for Barthes, the loss music leads to is experienced as a liberation: the body, released from the mark of the code, becomes the first principle once again: "the body passes into music through the signifier alone" (*OO,* 273). This passage, which Barthes again calls "transgression," makes music a madness: it opens up a space in which the imaginary is directly articulated with the real.

The certitude of a second listening is anchored in the imaginary in which the body is deployed to designate things: it takes place beyond the intermediary of the symbolic. Hence, Barthes writes paradoxically that the grain of the voice of the Russian bass "*directly* conveys the symbolic, over and above the intelligible and the expressive" (*OO,* 238). Yet this symbolic, which is "hurled immediately before us (without mediation)" (243), is totally unrelated to Lacan's symbolic: the symbolic, in this case, is the body. The unforgettable referent of music is the body which directly passes through music, without the means of language. For that reason Barthes remarks of piano music: "straightaway, I know which part of the body is playing" (244).

How can the body in *jouissance* be named? Barthes writes that it is "impossible" to give an account of the individual *jouissance* he continually experiences in listening to singing. Nor does Barthes succeed in "naming" the figures of the body, the "somatemes," that he finds in Schumann's piano music. Regarding the grain or the beat, he can only exclaim: "that's it! that's it for me!" When listening to music, then, he "resembles the *infans* making do with a meaningless word to draw attention to something" and through which he "(momentarily) achieves a language without adjectives."[7] His only

aim, as "Rasch" demonstrates, is to unleash a "stream" of verbs, not of adjectives. The body cannot adjust to the generality that lies within language.

Let us return to what is, for Barthes, his main concern: "to thwart the signified, to thwart the law, to thwart the father, to thwart the repressed." Moving on from perversion to psychosis considered as the unconscious structure of the text, it is appropriate to focus on the "thwarting" of the signified.

Music, which is the domain of the signifier, comes close to psychosis insofar as it raises the curtain of the signified. When the signified—which is only possible on the basis of the phallic signifier—dissociates itself from its relation to the signifier, the result is delirium. To quote Lacan, psychosis is evidence of "an invasion of the signifier to the extent of an emptying out of the signified." The moment the signifier is emancipated from its signified and, as a result, reduces the power of the symbolic, a regression toward the successive stages of the imaginary becomes possible.

Listening to music in the mode of psychosis manifests on the one hand, a collapse of rational speech, and on the other, a resurgence of the primordial importance of the body. Such listening thus offers the phantasmatic possibility of a return to the world of the *infans*—of the child who cannot yet speak. *Quasi-parlando,* which governs a large part of Schumann's *oeuvre,* refers to the "movement of the body which is going to speak," that "speaks without saying anything, like a mute whose face shows all the inarticulate power of speech" (*OO,* 272).

Quasi-parlando would indeed appear to be the utopian model of a language that comes close to music. Its "unvoiced declaration" enables it "to state the implicit without articulating it, to disregard articulation" (*OO,* 252). But what is meant by "speaking without saying anything"? How can one use speech at the same time as disregarding articulation? As soon as speech is no longer (or is yet to be) articulated, its signified is erased; all that remain are the signifiers of a "rustle of language", "a vast sonorous fabric whose semantic dimension would be derealized" (*BL,* 94). Through this rustle of language, this "music of meaning," language is made music. Speech, then, is "no longer linguistic, but corporeal" (*OO,* 272).

Panzéra's singing also transforms linguistic speech into corporeal speech: "it is music that comes into language and rediscovers what is musical and amorous in it" (*OO,* 250). Panzéra makes language sing: he does not articulate consonants "in order to satisfy the clarity of meaning" (240), he "patinates" them to make them "the springboard for the admirable vowels." At that point the functionality of language (clarity, expressiveness, communication) is dispersed in order to make way for "the voluptuousness of the play of vowels," for babbling, for rustling. In this, Barthes (re)discovers "jouissance, tenderness, delicacy, fulfillment, every value of the most delicate Imaginary" (251–2).

Music makes Barthes dream of an imaginary world prior to the entry into the symbolic, prior to the "imposition" of the bar splitting the complete sign into signifier and signified (S/s). Perhaps that is what Barthes means by

"to thwart the signified, to thwart the law, to thwart the father, to thwart the repressed." The bar which is said to resist signification also symbolizes the entry into the symbolic and castration. Hence, the painful process is effected which splits not only the sign, but the subject as well—between the "me" of imaginary identifications and the "I" of symbolic speech. What's more, the entry into the symbolic coincides with a renunciation of the immediate: the use of language suppresses the corporeal and specular "me" by introducing the "I" into an abstract network of differential relations.

Through music we briefly escape this alienation of language. It enables us to once again experience a world of imaginary states of fusion in which we don't yet need to distinguish between within and without, before and after, words and things, signifier and signified, your body and mine.

At the end of his preface to Marcel Beaufils's *Musique pour piano de Schumann,* Barthes concludes that to like Schumann is, in a way, to assume a "philosophy of Nostalgia, or to use a Nietzschean word, of Untimeliness" (*OO,* 264). Regretting what is now considered "outmoded," "untimely," Barthesian nostalgia is expressed as the desire for a return, a *nostos,* to the limitless perfections of childhood. Even more than Panzéra's singing, in which the "perishable" shimmers "in heartrending fashion," Schumann's music almost painfully evokes that nostalgia for an imaginary world in which the child "has no other tie than its tie to the Mother" (259). As for the father—who at each stage, as Guy Rosolato wrote, is the one "in whom and through whom difference comes to be"—he is absent from that world.

It is the absence of conflict that Barthes finds fascinating in Schumann's music. Schumann, "the man with two women—with two mothers?" as Barthes wonders (*OO,* 275), "misses out on conflict (which is necessary, it is said, for the proper economy of a 'normal' subject)" (263). Barthes rejects this necessity of conflict, this necessity of castration, and of the father's forbidding name, as his "it is said" suggests. Nevertheless, its absence can bring about madness—that of Schumann (who went mad instead of Barthes)? Since he too prefers the "motherland" to the "fatherland," Barthes identifies with Schumann, whose music is "continually taking refuge in the luminous shadow of the Mother" (263).

While piano music creates an imaginary union with the Mother, Romantic song is an expression of the child grappling with an irreparable fear of abandonment: "what Romantic song sings is always the affect of the lost, abandoned subject" (*OO,* 263). This song, with its interlocution which is "imaginary, enclosed within my most profound intimacy," functions like the bobbin of the *fort/da.* Hence, the first great lied written by Schubert, two years after his mother's death, "expresses the tumult of absence, the hallucination of return" (255).

Finally, apart from its power of perversion and hallucination, the voice also has a particular power of fusion: it is "the diffusion, insinuation, passing and abolition of limits and classes."[8] It is by this faculty that the sung voice

phantasmatically leads back to the time when the body was still undivided: hence, in the resonant space of the lied, everyone "can phantasize the reassuring unity of their body," express "the well-being of the unified body", for "to sing, in the Romantic sense, is precisely that: to take pleasure, phantasmatically, in my unified body" (*OO*, 255). The lied—and Schumann and Schubert wrote many of them—creates a world in which the listener-child rediscovers the imaginary union with the Mother: it is "the expression of that maternal unity" (263).

Music invites a return to the narcissism of the imaginary, for "the interlocutor of the lied is the Double: my Double—Narcissus" (*OO*, 257). However, narcissism does not only suggest the reassuring jubilation of a unified world: it is also the drama in which the alienating confrontation with the other is experienced as a death threat. When the narcissistic double is confused with the image of the self, the *jouissance* of the unified body is accompanied by feelings of annihilation. Listening to singing can revive this primitive anguish: "I address myself within myself to an Image: the image of that beloved being in whom I lose myself, and from which my own image comes back to me, an image of abandonment" (256). The dual relation to the specular other, which is both an image of the self and of the other, must therefore be destroyed: "I struggle with an image, which is both the image of the lost, desired other and my own image, which is desiring and abandoned" (ibid.). We know how powerful the aggressiveness sustained by narcississtic division can be, an aggressiveness which persists until the entry into the symbolic objectifies this hostile relation to the other.

In musical listening everything is unified and becomes one. Hence, at the level of the rhythmic beats "any distinction between the composer, the interpreter and the listener" is abolished (*OO*, 269). It is as if the very idea of two separate bodies had vanished: at that point, the bodies of the interpreter and the listener, or the bodies of the listener-child and the mother, are joined in a state of fusion. Musical listening can even provoke phantasms of the inner body. The grain thus appears to come from the depths of the body, "from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the mucous membranes, the cartilages and from deep down in the language, as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings," as well as from the "innerness" of the mother tongue (238–9); similarly, "Wanda Landowska's harpsichord comes from her inner body." Schumann's piano music also "goes into the body and into the muscles by the beats of its rhythm, as well as into the viscera, it seems" (260). Yet it is in the "welter of beats" of Schumann's piano music that Barthes rediscovers the body in its "primitive" state, the body of drives: "what is needed is a beating inside the body, against the temple, in the genitals, in the belly, against the skin from the inside" (267).

Although rhythm is the very condition of language and meaning—since all signs are based upon the alternation of marked/unmarked (*OO*, 220)—Schumannian rhythm is totally unrelated to any symbolic function. Barthes

constantly emphasizes that rhythm does not produce meaning: "it is not in the service of a dual, oppositional organization of the world" (263). He lets only "the body that beats" be heard. In the *Kreisleriana,* Barthes in actual fact hears "no note, no theme, no design, no grammar, no meaning, nothing that would enable some intelligible structure of the work to be reconstituted" (220). Barthes rejects everything that is the object of a "first semiology," the study of what might be called the symbolic aspect of music, its codes and conventions (the system of notes, scales, chords, etc). Barthes thwarts this symbolic approach. Once again, he inverts the hierarchy: what interests him is that "second semiology" which is to be found outside of any law, the semiology of the body "in a state of music." Consequently, symbolic semiology will be thwarted: "no more grammar, an end to musical semiology" (272).

Music constitutes a space of imaginary *jouissance* in which Barthes can dream of writing that thwarts the symbolic. If music is dangerous, as Plato thought, how can we break out of the madness it may lead to? Barthes himself gives the answer: through writing.

Schumann went mad, but "as for the writer, he can never be mad, for he is condemned to meaning" (*OO,* 273). Music can allow us to inhabit the imaginary, in the shadow of the Mother, but the writer cannot *not* occupy the symbolic position; he is indeed forced, however momentarily, to put himself in the position of the Father. He cannot refuse the signified. Thus Barthes is, paradoxically, a writer who, in a very rational manner, writes "against" meaning. Barthes writes in *Fragments:* "I could only produce, at best, a writing of the imaginary" (*FDA,* 115).

But is this entirely true? We can only end with a paradox, for as soon as the imaginary is written, it turns into the symbolic. And that symbolic may well become imaginary. It goes round in circles.

Who is "thwarted" by the Barthesian text? Is it Lacan, whose "scientific" notion of the imaginary is for Barthes above all a "metaphor-concept" (*GV,* 260)? For him, then, the imaginary is a more literary than philosophical notion. And so Barthes is able to separate that which, for Lacan, forms a knot that cannot be untied. If the imaginary and symbolic are no longer tied in their relation to the real, they can oppose one another, and, consequently, invert themselves and revolve. But isn't Barthes also thwarting his reader in that it's difficult, ultimately, to decide whether it is Barthes who is going round in circles, or me, the reader finding pleasure in his vertiginous texts?

Barthes has shown us that, even when opposing it, "one cannot write without the imaginary." No doubt he is right to add: "the same goes, of course, for reading" (*GV,* 231). So where is the imaginary of my reading-writing? Is this text, which has come out of it, tending to degenerate into "Babble"? Where do I go from here? That's where I'm at.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 103, hereafter cited in text as *RB*.
2. Barthes, *L'Obvie et l'obtus: Essais critiques III* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 236–7, hereafter cited in text as *OO*.
3. Barthes, *Le Grain de la voix: Entretiens 1962–1980* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 231, hereafter cited in text as *GV*.
4. Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 55.
5. Barthes, *Le Bruissement de la langue: Essais critiques IV* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 261, hereafter cited in text as *BL*.
6. Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), 168–70.
7. Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 262–3, hereafter cited in text as *FDA*.
8. Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris, Seuil, 1970), 16.

The Subject of Enunciation in Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*

JOHNNIE GRATTON

The tendency to view *Camera Lucida* as a work dominated by Barthes's grief at the death of his mother has a number of consequences, not least the idea that we are thereby morally and aesthetically bound to read the text straight. Under this imperative, there will be none of the ironies, detours, and layerings associated with Barthes's previous writing, and the first-person subject who addresses us will be Barthes himself, a fully qualified autobiographical subject, not some paper-thin persona or fictional stand-in. In short, we are led to conceive the text in terms of expression rather than enunciation. While Barthes's later writings undoubtedly explore the possibilities opened up by releasing an expressive subject into a realm of discourse normally presided over by a depersonalized critical subject, I would support Philippe Roger in arguing that this does not mark an abandonment of Barthes's longstanding belief in the essentially performative status of identity. As Roger maintains:

> Right to the end he kept faith with a certain idea of the absence of the subject. . . . Barthes insists on the non-identity of the subject (its heterogeneity, its non-cohesion). . . . In what might be called the "private phenomenology" of *Camera Lucida,* the restoration of the classical subject is at no point envisaged.[1]

In order to question the recuperative reading that sees in *Camera Lucida* a return to outright or unqualified expressivism, a return to an innocent state of language, I wish to focus on the enunciative dimension of the text. As Barthes explains in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes:*

> A good part of our intellectual work consists in casting suspicion on any statement (*énoncé*) by revealing the disposition of its degrees; this disposition is infinite and in scientific terms we call this abyss opened by each word, this madness of language: *speech-act (énonciation).*[2]

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Here, to envision language as *énonciation* is to unfasten language as *énoncé,* that is, to unsettle the apparent stability of a message, to disturb the apparent finality of an utterance as statement, meant state, state of meaning, static meaning. I shall want to pick up on this rather unorthodox understanding of the term *énonciation,* though, like Barthes, without losing sight of its more standard meaning in French linguistic theory. Thus the "subject of enunciation" mentioned in my title covers both the general matter of first-person discourse and the more specific matter of the actual first person, the "I": the matter of, or with, the subject.[3]

In a photograph, writes Barthes, using one of his favorite metaphors, "the referent adheres."[4] This is why he experiences the photograph as a "certificate of presence" (87). Language, however, can provide no such guarantees:

> No writing can give me this certainty. It is the misfortune (but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure) of language not to be able to authenticate itself. The *noeme* of language is perhaps this impotence, or, to put it positively: language is, by nature, fictional. (86–87)

To describe language as intrinsically fictional is a way of conceding (or, *to put it positively,* of asserting) that, unlike the photograph, it comes unstuck from the object of reference. An ironic moralism comes into play as Barthes sets the honest and complete nature of the photographic image—"*integral (intègre),* we might say, playing on the word" (89)—against the dubious nature of text, "which itself is never credible down to the root" (97). So much for the innocence of language.

Later still in *Camera Lucida,* Barthes reiterates his point about the difference between text and image in the following way:

> In the image, as Sartre says, the object yields itself wholly, and our vision of it is *certain*—contrary to the text or to other perceptions which give me the object in a vague, questionable manner *(d'une façon floue, discutable),* and therefore incite me to suspicions as to what I think I am seeing. (106)

Again text is associated with uncertainty, doubt, and the arousal of a feeling of suspicion. I now wish to suggest that this uncertainty applies not only to the "object" in the text but also to the subject; in other words, that the text does indeed give me a subject, but that it does so "vaguely," "questionably." A brief detour through the semiotic theory of A.J. Greimas will prove useful in this respect.

According to Greimas, the crystallization of language as *énoncé* ("utterance") comes about through an operation of *débrayage,* or "disengagement," resulting in the representation of a subject, a time, and a place outside the I-here-now of the enunciation. The operation of *débrayage* logically precedes

that of *embrayage,* "engagement," defined formally—but, from the perspective of autobiographical studies, very suggestively—as "an effect of return to enunciation produced by . . . the denial of the instance of utterance."[5] This counterprocess of *embrayage,* insofar as it marks a "return" to enunciation, is something I translate unofficially, informally, as a process of shifting in, or shifting back in, toward the subject. (By insisting on such terminology as opposed to the official translation, "engagement," I am actually exemplifying *embrayage:* each time I use the term, I exercise what Barthes would call a subjective pressure.[6]) Greimas insists, however, that this movement of return, the very condition of the discourse we call autobiographical, can never be completely successful: "total engagement is impossible to conceive, for it would be the erasure of all trace of discourse, a return to the 'ineffable.' "[7] He then goes on to set the impossibility of total "engagement" within the broader context of reference, employing in the process a metaphor of failed *accrochage* (fastening on) not at all dissimilar to Barthes's chosen metaphor of language's failure to "adhere":

> Engagement presents itself at one and the same time as aiming to reach the instance of enunciation and as failing to do so, as the impossibility of so doing. The two "references" with whose help we seek to get out of the closed world of language and to fasten onto another exteriority—reference to the subject (the instance of enunciation) and reference to the object (the world around us, *qua* referent)—fail to produce anything, in the final analysis, but illusions: the referential illusion and the enunciative illusion.[8]

There have been few modern critics more aware than Barthes of what Greimas here calls the "enunciative illusion," that is, the illusion that the subject of enunciation might be anything more than a simulacrum. To entertain that illusion is to fail to recognize the point so sharply summarized by Émile Benveniste in his famous pronouncement: "Being 'ego' is saying 'ego.' "[9] How absolute is such a statement? Are we to take it as a methodological prescription, relevant mainly to the concerns of the linguist, or as a more general existential law identifying an intractable truth about our relation to language? The late Barthes had clearly begun to feel ambivalent about this question but never wavered so far as to give up altogether his intellectual and indeed writerly commitment to the latter view.

Under the direct influence of Benveniste, Barthes in the 1960s began building on the idea of the "enunciative illusion" by arguing that first-person discourse is a process of "filling" (*remplissage*) in which an initially empty subject of enunciation gradually accumulates a variety of predicates that endow it with psychological substance.[10] This view continued to prevail in his work throughout the 1970s, but now integrated into a more evidently Lacanian context. Both the continuity and the change can be registered, for example, in one of his most memorable definitions of the imaginary as "the misrecogni-

tion (*méconnaissance*) the subject has of itself at the moment it sets about saying and filling its '*I*.' "[11]

Barthes invites us to ask how a given subject of enunciation gets filled up or firmed up at the level of discourse. I propose now to read Barthes as Barthes has encouraged us to read, by examining *Camera Lucida* in terms of a kind of rhetoric of subjectivity based on strategies of "filling." Due to pressure of space, I shall limit my analysis to just one aspect of this rhetoric, namely the process whereby the *I* acquires added substance through its alternative or supplementary representation as *me* (and sometimes *myself*). *Me* is weightier, more emphatic, a better creator of referential effect than *I*, and in French, of course, the pronoun *moi* also provides a *substantif*, a noun of some substance, *le moi*, the ego, the name of that full, solidified subject that is in Lacanian terms always a function of misrecognition.

The weight of the *me* can be gauged from the following passage, which appears quite early in the book (I have italicized all the terms which explicitly bear the mark of the subject):

> *For me,* the Photographer's organ is not his eye (which terrifies *me*) but his finger: what is linked to the trigger of the lens, to the metallic shifting of the plates (when the camera still has such things). *I love* these mechanical sounds in an almost voluptuous way, as if, in the Photograph, they were the same thing—and the only thing—to which *my desire* clings, their abrupt click breaking through the deadly glaze of the Pose. *For me* the noise of Time is not sad: *I love* bells, clocks, watches—and *I recall* that at first photographic implements were related to techniques of cabinet making and the machinery of precision: cameras, *in short,* were clocks for seeing, and *perhaps in me* someone very old still hears in the photographic mechanism the living sound of the wood. (15)

The terms in italics mark the text out formally as enunciation and dramatically as a particular kind of enunciative performance. By this I mean that they create a strong, insistent effect of a "return" to enunciation, a historical and not just infradiscursive reclamation by the first person of linguistic territory previously lost or conceded to the third person, the impersonality of *énoncé*.

With regard to this reclamation process, I am interested above all in the adverbial phrases *for me* and *in me.* The latter, which recurs throughout the book, confers on the subject the attribute of interiority, and with it the dimension of depth, which together are essential to the constitution of a replete subject. In *Camera Lucida,* for instance, the occurrence of the operator *in me* tends to posit interiority as the site of memory or else as the source of affect, a place where emotional responses hail from. In the specific example under discussion, interiority is a place inhabited by a sort of atavistic or historical memory, not just personal memory, but the effect is all the more markedly one of depth or rootedness: something within me goes back a very long way.

It would seem that the *for-me* must work in exactly the same manner. It serves the same syntactic function as the *in-me,* being an adjunct, often in the form of a prefix fronting the sentence. It serves the same semantic function, that of a subjective operator, though the *for-me* is, if anything, more powerful than the *in-me* in that it does not just presuppose a psychological subject, but seems to actively assert one as a source of perspective, opinion, attitude, judgement, and so on. And not just more powerful but more extensive too, in the sense that it stands for a whole range of subjective operators and prefixes: for me, in my case, to my mind, as far as I'm concerned, it seems to me that . . ., etc. Finally, the *for-me* shares the same stylistic status as the *in-me,* both being bits of "ordinary" language. The presence of so many bits of ordinary language in the text of *Camera Lucida* is explained by an important remark made in the course of an interview Barthes gave in April 1979, a matter of months before the publication of *Camera Lucida:*

> I think that the moment has perhaps arrived to struggle less, to militate less on behalf of texts, to fall back a bit to regroup our forces. Tactically, I envision a slight withdrawal: less deconstructing of texts and more playing at readability (even through traps, feints, tricks or ruses); in short, less struggling with the semantic givens of language.[12]

As far as his own writing is concerned, Barthes has given up fighting the Good Fight (*Tel Quel* fashion) and made a tactical withdrawal into readability. He will now be more accepting of ordinary language, or, as he puts it here, of the semantic givens of language. And among those semantic givens, quite possibly chief among them, we find the commonsense understanding of selfhood as a fact prior to language. In this, the semantically given view, adverbials like *en moi* and *pour moi* are not rhetorical operators, not ways of "filling" a subjectivity, but means of "expressing" an already constituted subjectivity.

There is little doubt that Barthes's return to ordinary language does take the form of a return to expressivism, but the crucial parenthesis in the text of his interview should suffice to alert us that this is unlikely to be a simple, complete, or innocent move. In *Roland Barthes* and *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments,* Barthes installed all kinds of safeguards to prevent us from engaging in a simple or solely expressivist reading of the first-person subject. The former is a work in which Barthes stages an *imaginaire,* the latter a work in which he "composes," puts together out of various bits and pieces, a first-person "amorous subject."[13] By contrast, *Camera Lucida* appears to invite an expressivist reading. Yet again, I have no wish to deny this point, but nor do I wish to overlook that key parenthesis in the text of the 1979 interview, with its dazzling array of through "traps," "feints," "tricks," and "ruses." In other words, I want to highlight what safeguards there are in or around *Camera Lucida,* which might lead us to see in the principle of the *for-me* something less than clear-cut, something just a bit *flou, discutable,* slightly questionable. I

shall now propose in turn two kinds of safeguards, the first external and the second internal.

By external safeguards I mean various antiexpressivist perspectives opened up by Barthes in his writings prior to *Camera Lucida* and that contribute strongly to the image of Barthes that an informed reader, a follower of his work, will bring to that text. In other words, as Barthes wagers more and more on readability, so he relies increasingly on the reader familiar with his work to furnish the necessary safeguards, perhaps to be the necessary safeguard.

In the present context, the main external safeguard I have in mind is the history of the *for-me* in Barthes's writings prior to *Camera Lucida*. In other words, the *for-me* is recognizable not just as a bit of ordinary language but also as a kind of Barthesian buzzword. As a principle, the *for-me* appears for the first time in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), where it is characterized as being "neither subjective nor existential, but Nietzschean"; the reference to Nietzsche is then followed up by a brief quote from Nietzsche: "at the bottom of it there always lies: what is that for me?"[14] In *The Will to Power*, the unacknowledged source of this quote, the question "what is that *for me?*" represents a recognition that there is no such thing as a fact-in-itself, no such thing as "essence" or "essential nature." The designation of something as a fact already involves an interpretation, which for Nietzsche means an "evaluation from a particular perspective."[15]

Thus the principle of the *for-me* as originally adopted by Barthes represents just that: an evaluation from a particular perspective. However, the particular perspective in question here is, as Barthes quite correctly insists, "neither subjective nor existential." It is Nietzsche, we should remember, who in *The Will to Power* deconstructs the Cartesian subject, arguing that it is "simply a formulation of our grammatical custom that adds a doer to every deed."[16] Elsewhere in *The Pleasure of the Text,* Barthes quotes Nietzsche in French translation making much the same point: "One may not ask: 'Who then interprets?' for the interpretation itself is a form of the will to power, exists (but not as a 'being' but as a process, a becoming) as an affect."[17]

The crucial point in all this is that the *for-me,* originally at least, does not imply or invoke a *me* as such, in the sense of substantive ego or founding subject. In an essay written at the same time he was working on *The Pleasure of the Text,* Barthes relates the *for-me* to an attenuated form of subjectivity, "the subjectivity of the non-subject," destined to manifest itself as "the intrusion of value in[to] the discourse of knowledge."[18] By the time of *Roland Barthes* (1975), this attenuated form of subjectivity has been recast as one's "partiality,"[19] one's values in the specific sense of one's likes and dislikes, one's tastes and aversions. Here, as the recurrence of the terms *goûts* and *dégoûts* suggests, the subjectivity implied by the *for-me* is strongly figured in terms of the body.

The body is the material subject, not just the disembodied psychological subject. It is, according to Barthes's most incisive definition of the term, "the

subject with its ballast of desire and the unconscious."[20] The body, then, is the subject rendered porous and uncertain by all that which exceeds consciousness or reason or judgement. To apply a pertinent distinction that Barthes borrows from Lacan, the body helps identify an insistent as opposed to a consistent subject, the former term marking the agency of the symptomatic, the unwilled and unwillable.[21]

Throughout the 1970s, then, Barthes is clearly trying out various ways of theorizing and actualizing a subjectivity that is not the attribute of a traditional subject, most notably by tracing subjectivity back, via the Nietzschean notion of value, to the body—whereas the more traditional paradigm would involve moving back via acts of value judgement to the mind. Barthesian value may well have moral implications, but it remains first and foremost a matter of bodily response, partiality, idiosyncrasy. And it is these specific inflections of the terms "subjectivity" and "value" that need to be kept in mind when we continue to envisage the *for-me* as the operator of subjective evaluation.

I want now to return to the passage from *Camera Lucida* that led me into this detour and take a closer look at the instance within it of the *for-me*. The *for-me* is initially recognizable in the way it continues, as in the text of *Roland Barthes,* to herald a display of idiosyncrasy. Thus each occurrence of the adverbial phrase "for me" is followed up, built on, by the subject-verb combination "I love": "For me, the Photographer's organ is not his eye . . . but his finger. . . . I love these mechanical sounds in an almost voluptuous way. . . . For me the noise of Time is not sad: I love bells, clocks, watches" (15). Let me admit at once that, because the passage is set in ordinary language, nothing I have said can prevent a first-time reader of Barthes from concluding that this is a straightforward act of self-expression. But to have read Barthes, and to know that these subjective markers have a past history in his work, is to be aware that this is in the first instance a self-conscious act of writing. To put it another way, this is not so much an innocent or immediate act of self-expression as the *representation* of an act of self-expression.[22] In Greimasian terms, one might well speak of an implicit *débrayage,* or shifting out, of an act of self-expression.

Such is the conclusion prompted by the external safeguard informing my reading of *Camera Lucida.* I now want to pursue a line of analysis opened up by this gap between immediate and represented self-expression, in the course of which I hope to identify an internal safeguard against outright expressivism.

What Barthes has created in this passage, deliberately, I think, is an almost aggressively "personal" tone. This is explained by the fact that, following each "for me," the assertion of an idiosyncrasy occurs, at least initially, as the negation of a presumed generality. In other words, most people would elect the eye as the vital organ of the photographer; and most people would probably describe the sound of time as unlikely to bring them much comfort

or pleasure (*tempus fugit* . . .). Whereas in *my* case, as far as *I'm* concerned, for *me,* things are different. Barthes is here enacting what he had already begun to explain in *Roland Barthes,* namely that self-expression can take the form of intimidation, even violence: "I borrow the violence of current discourse for the sake of my own violence, of *meaning-for-myself.*"[23] What Barthes here calls "meaning-for-myself" is a way of parading, and not just condoning, the notion of privileged access, that is, the idea that first-person claims about one's own thoughts and sensations have a special authority in that they stand immune to external doubt and aloof from external corroboration. The "violence" of such claims presumably lies in their tendency to preempt further discussion: we can take it or leave it. From the perspective of the reader or listener, therefore, this is a special authority that can easily jeopardize confidence in the subject who chooses to make a show of it.[24]

Mixed in with this aggression, can one not also detect a strong hint of *re*gressiveness? A regression from science, for example, as the *for-me* steers the subject away from any technical, professional appreciation of either the photographer or the camera. Regression also in the form of a pulling away from terror, a self-protective withdrawal into a realm of pleasurable (including fetishistic) associations. And regression finally as the subject engages in a nostalgic return to origins, to nature, to maternal substance, which completes the movement of withdrawal. We began with the metallic instrument, the calculating eye, "the deadly glaze of the Pose," in short the camera as tomb; and we end, on a note of modestly triumphant sentimentalism, with "the living sound of the wood," the bright chamber music of the womb. Underlying these images of regression, of course, we find the less visible yet all the more pervasive figure of *embrayage,* or shifting-back-in, identified by Greimas. In *Camera Lucida,* it would seem, the return to the subject of enunciation is destined to coincide with a return to what in Oedipal terms remains the object of *re*nunciation.

This twin note of aggressiveness and regressiveness recurs throughout *Camera Lucida.* Whereas *Roland Barthes* topicalized its subject through a thematics of being-excluded, the later book has moved over to a more willful attitude of *self*-exclusion, thematically marshaled around the principle of the *for-me.*[25] The subject's idiosyncrasy is now voiced in terms of sharp polarizations: me *v.* others, subject *v.* object, subjectivity *v.* science, singularity *v.* generality, private *v.* public, "my mother" *v.* "the Mother" (written with an objectifying capital letter). Within this repeated pattern, the *for-me* emerges frequently as an aggressive factor, marking an inversion, negation, or rejection of generality; and as a regressive factor, marking a withdrawal from generality.[26]

The notion of an internal safeguard begins to emerge, then, with the idea that, whether we are dealing with a consistent or an insistent subject, in either case we are faced with a *suspect* subject. By the term "suspect," I indicate once more a certain remove or shifting out, a slight distancing of that

subject from both myself as reader and Barthes as writer. And Barthes as writer is not just a construct of my reading, an object of my desire as a reader, but a counterpoint that I feel I can locate in the text. Thus the excessive flaunting of subjectivity is put into perspective, set off at a certain remove, as soon as I set it against Barthes's stated interest in *Camera Lucida* in "a science of the subject":

> I have always wanted to remonstrate with my moods; not to justify them; still less to fill the scene of the text with my individuality; but on the contrary, to offer, to extend this individuality to a science of the subject, a science whose name is of little importance to me, provided it attains (as has not yet occurred) to a generality which neither reduces nor crushes me (18).

The notion of a science of the subject immediately calls into question the polarizations listed earlier, and consequently the idiosyncratic subject who underwrites them. The discrepancy that emerges here reinforces my view that the more extreme manifestations of the *for-me* are part of an individuality that is being staged and not just expressed. In Barthes's own terms, it is being held out at arm's length, offered up in a conative gesture to that nonreductive science of the subject whose establishment Barthes seems to have entrusted to his reader.

In order to clarify my point about this internal discrepancy, I shall briefly discuss two passages that, compared to the one analyzed earlier, are far more evidently situated at the extreme end of the *for-me.*

The first passage forms part of Barthes's elaboration of the notion of the "punctum," the photographic detail that attracts and disturbs him outside the area of general interest designated by the term "studium." The punctum, not at all a bit of ordinary language, is nonetheless a conceptual extension of the *for-me,* being that in the photo that affects me individually. Though studium and punctum are conceived as complementary properties of the photograph, events can take a dramatic and oppositional turn, as we see in the following development:

> In Ombredane's experiment, the blacks see on his screen only the chicken crossing one corner of the village square . . .; what I see, like Ombredane's blacks, is the off-center detail . . .; I am a primitive, a child—or a maniac; I dismiss all knowledge, all culture, I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own (49–51).

Here the regressive/aggressive tendencies of the *for-me* are laid bare. In anticipation of the themes of primitivism and madness that will receive explicit development later in the book, the idiosyncrasy of the subject is articulated now as an anarchic, even manic condition. And this exposure of the *for-me* is doubtless enhanced by the quietly ironic fact that a refusal of intersubjectivity

("I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own") has been imaged with the help of intersubjectivity, that is by reference to *l'expérience d'Ombredane* (Ombredane's experiment, but also his experience), which is in turn a function of intertextuality.

Unruliness again characterizes the instance of the *for-me* in the following passage:

> Photography is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills sight by force,* and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed (that we can sometimes call it pleasant (*doux*) does not contradict its violence: many say that sugar is pleasant, but to me sugar is violent (*mais moi, je le trouve violent, le sucre*)). (91)

This remarkable parenthesis functions initially as a further reminder of the book's subjectivism; it marks another irruption, or insertion, of "evaluation from a particular perspective." Yet it underlines that subjectivism in such a way as also to jeopardize it. For the voice we hear is childishly peremptory, not just in its sharp swing from others in general to "moi, je" (unfortunately lost in the translation), which involves once more a negation, an inversion of a consensus attitude, but also in its quite uncalled-for heterology, its almost outrageous semantic leap from photography to sugar. Once again, then, the regressive/aggressive tendencies of the *for-me* are exposed, offered up, rendered apparent, here in the form of a little outburst of subjectivity. This is an example that perfectly illustrates what Philippe Roger calls "the constant dramaturgy that is Barthes's rhetoric."[27] Indeed Roger's use of the word "dramaturgy" ties in closely with my own inclination to describe such an outburst as the "representation" of an act of self-expression.

It is important to understand that in neither of the above cases is the *for-me* actually being repudiated. Rather, we should envisage Barthes as exercising what at one point in *Camera Lucida* he calls his "*political* right to be a subject" (15). From this perspective, which confirms the "spirit of anarchism" said by Louis A. Renza to be prevalent in so much autobiographical writing,[28] any excesses in the form of aggression or regression, paranoia or narcissism, are more than justified by the cause they serve. These excesses, then, are not so much simple expressions of a subject as tactical expressions of the right to be a subject.

The *for-me* in its specifically childish guise is virtually necessitated, moreover, by the strong Oedipal resonances of *Camera Lucida.* The subject's refusal of science and culture is figured as a refusal to be adult, a refusal to pay heed to what Barthes elsewhere calls "a superego of impartiality and objectivity."[29] In other words, the subject's tangle with intellectual authority is implicitly presented as a conflict with the father. The subject refuses the father's invitation to pass beyond the Oedipus complex, to grow up, to cop on, for this

would entail relinquishing his attachment to the original love object, the mother. This basic situation of the child not wanting to let go of the mother recurs of course in and as the experience of bereavement, where the adult subject is now coming to terms with the death of his mother. The conflict ultimately, then, is one between not-wanting-to-let-go and having-to-let-go (which tends to be felt subjectively, by the child in me, as a case of being-made-to-let-go). And all these levels or aspects of conflict surely converge in Barthes's assertion, against the generality of science, that "in the Mother, there was a radiant, irreducible core: my mother" (75).[30]

I have been arguing that *Camera Lucida* is more continuous with Barthes's previous writings than many readers have been willing to concede. Barthes's theory of text in *Camera Lucida* remains committed to a nonreferential position, a position that logically precludes expressivism. That position, I have gone on to claim, is not subverted by the subjectivizing rhetoric of the text because that rhetoric, deployed around the *for-me,* is at a constant remove from innocent self-expression, being rather the representation, the staging, the offering up of an act of self-expression. This remove can be picked up quite clearly in two comments made by Barthes, the first a general comment made at Cerisy in 1977, and the second a remark made in the course of an interview in December 1979, specifically about *Camera Lucida:*

> It is quite clear that for a few texts now there has been a deliberate, open inscription of an affective space in my writing, but ultimately in the form of a resolution, a postulate.[31]

> I place myself in the situation of a naïve man, outside culture, someone untutored who would be constantly astonished at photography.[32]

The first comment helps clarify the tactical, self-conscious dimension of Barthes's writing. In the second comment, he goes on to explain his tactics as the writer of *Camera Lucida* by telling us that here he has "placed himself in the situation" of a certain man. He has taken up a position, adopted a posture, dramatized a *poste d'énonciation,* such that the "naïve man" whose situation he assumes has the status of a virtual character in a virtual novel. A very autobiographical novel, of course. A novel of the sort Barthes himself had advocated, in fact, in his then still recent lecture on Proust (who of course crops up recurrently in *Camera Lucida*):

> The Novel, as I read or desire it, is precisely that Form which, by delegating the discourse of affect to characters, allows affect to be openly articulated: here pathos is utterable [*énonçable*], for the Novel, since it is representation and not expression, can never be for the subject who writes it a discourse of bad faith.[33]

Notes

1. Philippe Roger, *Roland Barthes, roman* (Paris: Grasset, 1986), 204 (my translation).

2. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 66; originally published as *Roland Barthes pan Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

3. The narrative framing of the subject of enunciation in *Camera Lucida* provides a key area for further analysis of many of the issues broached here, but constitutes so large a topic as to merit separate discussion in its own right.

4. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (London: Flamingo, 1984), 6; originally published as *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1980). Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text.

5. A. J. Greimas and J. Courtès, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris: Hachette, 1979), 1:119 (my translation).

6. See Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language,* trans. Richard Howard (Blackwell: Oxford, 1986), 248; originally published as *Le Bruissement de la langue: Essais Critiques IV* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).

7. Greimas and Courtès, *Sémiotique,* 119.

8. Greimas and Courtès, *Sémiotique,* 120.

9. "Est 'ego' qui *dit* 'ego.' " See Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 1:260 (my translation).

10. See Barthes, *The Rustle of Language,* 131.

11. See Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 49–50 (translation amended); originally published as *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971).

12. See Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962–1980,* trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), 310; originally published as *Le Grain de la voix: Entretiens 1962–1980* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

13. See Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 8; originally published as *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).

14. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* trans. Richard Miller (New York, Hill and Wang, 1975), 13; originally published as *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

15. See Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1990), 151.

16. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 268.

17. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* 62. English translation taken from Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* 302.

18. "Outcomes of the text" (1972), in Barthes, *The Rustle of Language,* 247.

19. See Barthes, *Roland Barthes,* 131.

20. See Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice,* 193.

21. For more extensive discussion, see Jane Gallop, "The Bodily Enigma," in *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 11–20.

22. The distinction drawn here was first suggested to me by an essay on the visual arts. See Richard Schiff, "Representation, Copying, and the Technique of Originality," *New Literary History* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 333–63.

23. Barthes, *Roland Barthes,* 139 (Barthes's italics).

24. An illuminating application to autobiography of what Wittgenstein called the "incorrigible" nature of first-person utterances is offered by Berel Lang in his essay, "Autobiog-

raphy as Literary Fact," in *The Anatomy of Literary Style* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 175–76. For a view that continues to argue the case for the special authority of first-person utterances, but without recourse to the notion of incorrigibility, see Donald Davidson, "Knowing One's Own Mind," in Quassim Cassam, ed., *Self-Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 43–64 (first published in *The Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 60 (1987): 441–58).

25. The move from being excluded to self-exclusion is already underway in *A Lover's Discourse,* where the lover's disdain for others-in-general stands opposed to his/her obsession with the *one* other. The lover is already one who draws *comfort* from a sense of being excluded, misunderstood, or ignored.

26. By contrast, the *for-me* may also operate on behalf of a nonantithetical, liberally disposed subject, as when Barthes claims: "for me, there is no *punctum* in the pornographic image" (59). The implication here is that others might well find their own punctum in such images and are quite welcome to do so.

27. Roger, *Roland Barthes,* 204.

28. See Louis A. Renza, "The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 290–91.

29. Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice,* 331.

30. Extending the analysis proposed here, one might go on to associate this deeply possessive inflection of the *for-me* with Heidegger's concept of *Jemeinigkeit,* "my-own-ness," the radical individualization that comes, according to Heidegger, from our confrontation with death, and that he opposes to the anonymity and impersonality of *das Man,* the *on.*

31. *Prétexte: Roland Barthes* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1978), 368 (my translation).

32. Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice,* 357.

33. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language,* 289.

INCIDENTAL BARTHES

"And my freedom is boundless . . .": Barthes, Loti, *Critique*

PHILIPPE ROGER

It's a good bet that the intellectual historian (assuming he's interested in Barthes in the first place) won't consider "The Name Aziyadé" an important article. Pierre Loti, of all people, in the aftermath of May '68? The marginal notation of this "old-fashioned" novel (Barthes's own description) with some reflections on hippies will only increase the suspicion of intellectual dandyism. As for the literary historian, he's more likely to single out two significant moments in Barthes's long association with *Critique:* his support for the Nouveau Roman in the middle of the 1950s and his entry, some fifteen years later, into the lists of theory at the side of *Tel Quel.*

And probably both would be right. "The Name Aziyadé" isn't an *important article.* It's a magnificent text. Subtle. Assured. At once refined and exposed. A word to the wise. A first call, in the face of "tiresome people of all descriptions," to sign up to the Society of the Friends of the Text whose statutes would be outlined, in 1973, in *The Pleasure of the Text.*[1]

What a triumph for *commissioning* (in this case, an Italian edition of Loti published by Franco Maria Ricci). Never perhaps, in so few lines, had Barthes said so much about Literature and that much rarer subject, himself. About his love of Literature and, no less risky a topic, his love of Desire. Fifteen fragments, a world: the World according to Barthes. Or rather, to be more exact, the jubilant version of this world, its propitious, radiant, euphoric aspect. As if the vowels of Aziyadé, "the brightest three vowels of our alphabet," and the stony whiteness of the name Loti, had dispersed any mist and dissolved (for the space of a text) the shadow of tragedy which cleaved, for Barthes, to the literary experience.

So these lumininous pages which Barthes, thinking of Marrakesh, conjured from Stamboul for a publisher in Parma, were "passed" to the journal *Critique.* There is no need to dwell on the word and its semantic ambiguities:

© 1996 Philippe Roger. Reprinted by permission of the author and Les Éditions du Minuit from *Critique* (special issue *Cinquante ans 1946–1996*), nos. 591–92 (1996): 754–62, where this essay accompanied a reprint of Barthes's "The Name Aziyadé," originally published in *Critique* in 1972. Translated for this volume by Diana Knight.

Barthes, precisely, had already passed that way himself. But passing no longer had to do with psychoanalysis, or even prostitution, but with circulation, sharing, passing on. "*Pass it over to me . . .* " as the song used to go, and to stay with the mood of this 1960s Loti portrayed by Barthes as a "hippy dandy," *Don't bogart.* Keep the texts turning. And keep desire whirling, within the texts themselves, like the floating bed of the lovers, borne hither and thither by the waters of Salonica.

Thus "The Name Aziyadé" floated all the way to *Critique,* propelled by a drift which owed nothing to chance. For Barthes saw in *Critique* the attributes of water and the city: those havens of happy suspension. "You are at once motionless (shielded from all rivalry) and carried away (shielded from law and order)."[2]

Saint Thomas Aquinus feared the man of a single book—*unius libri.* Never fear of Barthes that he was the man of a single journal. From the first moments of his literary and journalistic career, under the benevolent protection of Maurice Nadeau, Barthes moved around, changed places, and steered his way between those sites of "intervention" that periodical publications represented for him. In the 1950s his "little mythologies," inaugurated in *Esprit,* proliferated in *Les Lettres nouvelles* and sometimes made merry in *France-Observateur.* Other journals, *Théâtre populaire* first and foremost, took in dozens of articles (which deserve to be better known), magnetized by Barthes's then predominant passion for the hedonico-civic space of the theater. Engaged, engaging, ever between conviction and seduction, Barthes managed to stay, even in those years of stubborn rifts and exclusive allegiances, a free electron in the force field of strongly partisan journals. Baudelaire used to speak of the "freedom to take your departure" as something overlooked by the legislators of the Rights of Man. Barthes, long before theorizing it, practiced heterotopia as a fundamental duty of the intellectual.

Places count for a good deal and freedom of movement is crucial for anyone wishing to shake off the yoke of labeling. Barthes's ubiquitous publishing strategy wasn't the clever maneuver of a protean mind, but a safeguard against the adhesion which threatens all forms of joining. (According to Littré, the ubiquarian was a Doctor of Theology at the University of Paris who wasn't attached to a specific college.) Barthes played with places in order to outplay social Imago and ideological assignation. If he had to break with Camus he wouldn't do so in a "committed" journal, but in *Club: Bulletin du Club du meilleur livre* (Bulletin of the Best Book Club), as if he felt obliged to compensate for the heaviness of the gesture by the neutrality of the pages in which it was made. A strategy (or disposition) which was too personal to be simply tactical. And so irreducible to a cold-war stratagem that the Barthes of the 1970s was still using it when, for example, he balanced the heavy institutional connotation of *Communications* (Journal of the Centre for the Study of Mass Communications, École Pratique des Hautes Études) against the heavy

avant-gardist connotation of *Tel Quel*—a bit like the confectioner I once heard reassuring a customer about the insubstantiality of his praline éclairs by lauding their cream "lightened with butter."

In the old song, Cadet Rousselle had three houses. Similarly, Roland Barthes always had several homes for his sentences, his ideas, his dreams. And he had *Critique* as well.

A quarter of a century is a long time. A dozen articles isn't very much. But most of them made an impact—beginning with the very first article on Robbe-Grillet in 1954. Besides, Barthes's significance in the history of *Critique* cannot be quantified in figures. His was a discreet and constant presence, better thought of as a fidelity. It manifested itself in admiration for Maurice Blanchot. In friendship with Jean Piel who, as early as 1954, had reviewed *Writing Degree Zero.*[3] And also in Barthes's longstanding participation in the Editorial Committee, until his elevation to the "Upper Chamber" of the Advisory Board.

It would be better perhaps to turn the question on its head and to ask what place *Critique* occupied in the intellectual life of Roland Barthes. To which I would personally reply the place Barthes desired above all others: *Critique* was an atopia, a no-place place. In the well-mapped terrain of postwar publications *Critique* stands out as an atypical journal. It offered Barthes the priceless gift of a space in which he could feel *atopical,* could feel in that same position of "non-imposture" that he would attribute to Montaigne, and promote as an ideal, at the Cerisy colloquium devoted to his own work in 1977. So what *ties* Barthes to *Critique* is a factor here, and an important one. But another is the way *Critique* liberates Barthes, unties him, allows him a *boundless freedom* as far as writing is concerned.

In Barthes's reading of *Aziyadé,* the hero Loti is qualified by his "boundless freedom" and by that alone. Others would see it as the nature of this character, his vice or his destiny. But Barthes, an unshakeable anti-essentialist, describes it as a relation to place, as a condition inferred from Loti's state of *sojourn* and its voluptuously ambiguous status—escaping the bustle of travel and the transitory aspect of holidaying, but eluding too the constraints of belonging and the heavy obligations of true integration. Neither tourist, nor citizen, but *resident!* Doesn't this very conception of residence amount to atopia, but with voluptuousness thrown in?

In Loti's novel, this propitious place of *sojourn* is Turkey. It is echoed, in Barthes's essay, by his allusion to Marrakesh. Let's add *Critique* as a further echo. *Critique,* for Barthes, was an ideal literary residence, a Morocco of the mind.

"You could savour there a penetrating feeling: that of *déshérence* [escheat, the lack of inheritors by default]. Everything subsists and yet nothing belongs to anyone any more; each thing, present in its complete form, is drained of that

combative tension attaching to property; there is a loss, not of possessions but of inheritance and inheritors." With these words, Barthes united Marrakesh and "Loti's Stamboul" into a single passion, both analogous and structural. And outlined at the same time, beyond these agreeable, easy-going cities, a relationship with Literature itself.

Critique's place, for Barthes, was the very place of Literature, that big word of old endlessly rehabilitated and extolled, right through to the public apologia in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France: "I can thus say interchangeably: writing, literature or text."[4] Let's get this straight: it's clearly all of Barthes's work that bears witness to this desire and that formed this long pursuit. No moment or place had a monopoly on it. But it assumed a particular character in the articles offered to *Critique,* one marked by the energy, verve and alacrity of an incongruous vitality.

Incongruous and paradoxical. For right from *Writing Degree Zero* and for many years, Literature was described (and lived) by Barthes as a lost object and impossible passion. It was cherished, but deplored. Desired, but as if regretfully: a *desiderium.* Defended, yet under suspicion—and more often than not convicted—of all the historical and political wrongs imputed to it. In the face of this theme or threnody of the *condemnation* of literature (sometimes *de facto,* sometimes *de jure*), Barthes's strangely assorted contributions to *Critique* were a stubborn affirmation of the perennity of literature, of its value and vitality.

Elsewhere and contemporaneously, Barthes may well have deplored the loss of Eurydice, may have noted the "modern" impasse of writing or described, like some disabused sociologist, the reification of novels henceforth predestined for a particular readership. In *Critique,* on the other hand, Barthes avenged this prophecy of death, cocking a snook at his own Cassandra complex: Literature was alive and well, walking, moving, stretching and breathing. In the humor of a Queneau ("Zazie and Literature," 1959). In the rectitude of a Robbe-Grillet and the abrasive ambitions of the Nouveau Roman ("Objective Literature," 1954, "Literal Literature," 1955). In the tonicity of a Sollers and the correctitude of his "oscillations" ("Play, Poem, Novel," 1965, "Over Your Shoulder," 1973). And just as obviously in Loti, as long as the "old-fashioned novel" was reread as a "fragment of infinite language," by rehabilitating, that's to say, the claims of Desire. Barthes's version of *Critique?* It's tempting to reply, in the inevitably pompous tone of old advertisements: THE JOURNAL WHICH HAS REDISCOVERED THE LOST CONTINENT! That of "literary language": "Vast and magnificent debris, fragmentary residue of an Atlantis where words, overnourished with colour, taste and form, with *qualities* rather than ideas, would shine like the splinters of a *direct* world . . ."[5]

And if "*déshérence*" installed itself in the very place where the specter of deriliction had been prowling, it was as its antagonist: for this was a propitious *déshérence;* resembling "that fullness whose anticipation seems an empti-

ness; but also all that exterior (exteriorized) emptiness which constitutes happiness." It was the image (restored to grace) of Literature.

"In the old Orient, everything is possible!" That is to say, every Desire is present. It's not surprising that Loti's simple proposition should have structured Barthes's reading and lent it its charm. It cast in a delicate Nervalian mold (that of the *Journey to the Orient*) a Baudelairean theme that was dear to him: "In the sinuous folds of ancient capitals, / Where everything, even horror, turns to enchantment . . ." Indeed all of Barthes's commentary was to do with the imbrication of the modern and the old-fashioned. It ended (in Fragment XV) by turning back on itself with this rhetorical question, formulated with a feigned clumsiness and numerous dashes: "Have I managed to say—but without exaggerating—that this quaintly outmoded novel—which is barely a novel—has something modern about it?"

Yes, he had managed to say it, from the outset, on the very first page and without excessive precautions, when he invoked Proust and indicated clearly enough the direction his reading would follow: "and, having slipped from the precious name to the sad image of an old-fashioned novel, we might make our way back towards the idea of a *text:* a fragment of infinite language which doesn't recount anything, but is traversed by 'something unprecedented and murky.' "

In the charade of his reading, this "something" (referred to on two occasions: Desire, it seems, is worth repeating) is the same as its whole: the "everything is possible." Bits and pieces of writing which Barthes detached from one paragraph of *Aziyadé:* that in which Samuel, the feline servant, misinterprets his master's intentions. Thanks to this misunderstanding the plot hesitates for a moment, the love story is disoriented. And it's this tremor of the narrative, as much as the trembling of Samuel, which made one particular reader *flush with pleasure*—Roland Barthes, who from the very first line had not hidden his "I": "In the name Aziyadé this is what I hear and read . . ." But if Barthes confided, it was in Loti's text and its beneficent litotes—and not in the indiscreet reader. In confident mood perhaps, but not in a confiding mode. There was nothing tyrannical about this whiff of intimacy. No imposed desire. Uncovering "a minor sodomite epic" beneath the apparent monochromy of this "insipid novel" *(livre tout rose),* Barthes didn't confiscate its meaning, he signalled a glimpse of *something else.* And it was up to the book itself to make off through the embrasure thus offered to the reader's gaze, to make us see readings of all possible colors. Roland Barthes, Libertador of the Old Books . . .

Barthes was having fun here, and making fun in a good-humored way. Of himself, for a start, when he evoked Loti as a peaceable neighbor in the South-West: "Monsieur Viaud is in his house in Hendaye, surrounded by his Moroccan and Japanese memorabilia." Did Barthes really think he was estab-

lishing the "modern" credentials of an outmoded Loti? Or was he in fact mocking the chronological logic of Overviews of Literature?

What was Barthes writing at the same time as this article? It followed in the wake of *S/Z* (1970) where the S of Science (and of its Superego) was still a good defense against an overly caressant Z. It was even closer in time to *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971) and to *Erté,* where the alphabet was concluded by the rearing, "bent-over-backwards body of the Z."[6]

Yet it marked itself out by something more daring, more mischievous, more thoughtful. It has not been sufficiently recognized that the *New Critical Essays* (assembled in 1972) constitute one of the summits of Barthes's art, at the same time as an extraordinarily coherent and compelling summation. "The Name Aziyadé" should be reread, for example, alongside the marvelous introduction to *The Life of Rancé.* The same signs would be seen to pass by, the same cats to prowl. In Chateaubriand, the Abbé Séguin's "Yellow Cat" is "perhaps . . . all of literature." And in Loti the "arrival of a cat" is perhaps all of the *novelistic.*

And what if what really mattered was to be found in those occasional pieces? What if the religion of the Book, hinted at then openly professed by Barthes, had blinded his readers, too willing to believe him when, in 1975, he described his articles as the "connective tissue" of his works? (I personally regret my claim, on the basis of this statement, that he saw them as "excess fat.") In a deliberately confusing way, Barthes pretended that their only function had been to link together his Books, as if the latter were the noble and vital parts to which the whole activity of writing had been subordinated, like some new fable of the Limbs and the Stomach. But reading "The Name Aziyadé" something else is quite obvious: that here at least an article can carry along, assemble, fit end to end and finally *articulate,* and all this with unprecedented freedom and absolute ease, a range of themes (theoretical, literary, political, biographical) that the Barthesian book had to date been reluctant to unite.

"The Name Aziyadé" as a microcosmic commentary? What other text by Barthes gathers up so much of his past, embraces so many of his futures? All, or almost all, of Barthes's central themes can be found in it. The uncertain status of the Subject, illustrated by Loti's triple incarnation (Monsieur Viaud, Pierre Loti, and "Loti" the character), not to mention transvestism. The reversibility of literary "disappointment" and the necessity for the reader to work his way back to the signifier which, like Desire, "is never old-fashioned." The commendation via Loti of a "zero degree of notation": the way to a plotless *novelistic* in pursuit of exemption from meaning. The rhetorical enthusiasm for anacoluthia, as in the preface to *The Life of Rancé.* The keen structural impulse to establish paradigms, which in this case leads Barthes to organize the novel around the axis debauchery/constraint. Even Eurydice is

present. But whereas Eurydice habitually figured for Barthes an anguished allegory of Literature—lost all over again thanks to the writer's too insistent gaze—here she passes through as if to say a polite hello, and without her brief appearance in any way undermining the decidedly euphoric mood of the exotic, erotic excursion.

So everything reappears or, equally, prefigures itself. The Moroccan wash drawing at the beginning of Fragment 14 appears to fall straight out of *Incidents,* Barthes's posthumously published notebook. The very notion of the *incident,* so often invoked in the late writing, is already displayed here in its essential slightness: "taken in a sense as slight and discreet as possible"; defined as "what can just about be noted," illustrated by this fine phrase of a pictorial and oriental delicacy: "what *falls,* gently, like a leaf, onto the carpet of life." As for those pages where Barthes, sheltering behind Loti, describes the civic apathy of the lover and the political regressiveness on which desire feeds ("Desire is always feudal"), it's easy to recognize the seed of the "reactionary" phenomenology of passion which will be developed in *A Lover's Discourse* (1977).

And let's not forget, in passing, to offer a clue to the imaginary intellectual historian to whom we attributed, at the start of this essay, so little appetence for "The Name Aziyadé." Between the version published in *Critique* and the book version, published the same year in *New Critical Essays,* something fell by the way: the capital D by which Barthes had marked out the word Desire. (A fall I would personally resist interpreting as a decline.)

Have I too managed to say—"but without exaggerating"—that "The Name Aziyadé" doesn't belong in the gaps of Barthes's work? That this drift with the tide of a falsely nonchalant reading, this buffeting of thought both up and down river, make of it a *thesaurus* as well as a little jewel? Need I add that these serene republications and calm pre-writings (in the sense that Barthes spoke of "pre-novels") contrast strikingly with the effect of *rupture* systematically pursued in the books—each required, by an inexorable law of perpetual "displacement," to invalidate its predecessor to a greater or lesser extent?

It would not be excessive to suggest a final paradox. This would make of Barthes's books (more *ad hoc,* more targeted) the provisional way marks of an anxious quest, whereas an article like "The Name Aziyadé," far from obeying the dictates of some "scientific superego," would become that amorously floating bed, that patch of freedom, that Fortunate Island of writing where criticism might revert to the myth of the castaway—rediscovery of the world, drift which starts from the self.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Barthes's work is this precious pulverulence of writings in which hopes, emotions, impulses and desires are suspended, like dust in a ray of July sunlight—all that stuff from which "theory," in Barthes, was always woven. And it was the role of the journal

Critique, its privilege and good fortune, to welcome alongside those *important* articles in which the very destiny of literary activity seemed to be at stake, such pages as "The Name Aziyadé" in which Literature itself lives on.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 26.
2. All unattributed quotations are taken from Roland Barthes, "The Name Aziyadé," *Critique* 28, no. 297 (1972): 103–17.
3. Jean Piel, "Fonction sociale du critique," *Critique* 10, no. 80 (1954): 3–13.
4. Roland Barthes, *Leçon* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 17.
5. Roland Barthes, "Chateaubriand: *Vie de Rancé*" (1965), in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* suivi de *Nouveaux Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 113.
6. Roland Barthes, "Erté *ou* À la lettre," in *L'Obvie et l'obtus: Essais critiques III* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 116.

All That Falls: Barthes and the Everyday

MICHAEL SHERINGHAM

Mythologies alone would give Roland Barthes an important place in the evolution of thinking about the everyday that, particularly since his death in 1980, has progressively promoted the notion of "le quotidien" to the forefront of attention in France. Yet in many ways his pioneering and ever-popular account of "some myths of everyday French life" (1.565)[1]—including advertisements for detergents, new cars, steak and chips, striptease, wrestling, and astrology—gives a narrow view of the place of the everyday in Barthes's overall oeuvre and of his contribution to the evolution I have mentioned. As Diana Knight has highlighted in *Barthes and Utopia,* everyday life was one of those "lifelong concerns" (the others being history, language, literature, and sexuality) for which the concept of utopia was not only a meeting point but a mediating agency.[2] Ultimately, the everyday was the most utopian of these interwoven strands in Barthes's thought. Commenting in a 1967 essay on the organization of space and time in Sade, and allying him with Fourier, Barthes wrote: "the mark of utopia is the everyday . . . everything that belongs to the everyday is utopian: schedules, dietary programmes, decisions about dress, furnishings, and decor, precepts regarding conversation or communication" (2.1052). Such relish for the minute details of everyday life and the impulses that lead human beings to articulate daily existence in this way is a far cry from the largely ironic and negative posture of the demystifying mythologist of 1950s consumer society. But it is precisely the necessity not to limit the sphere of the everyday to the false consciousness of consumerism that animates the compelling and influential investigations of everydayness to be found in Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and in Barthes himself.

As it happens, Henri Lefebvre, the prolific Marxist philosopher and social theorist, was a lifelong friend of Barthes, and Barthes must have been familiar with Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* of 1947, republished in expanded form in 1958, and with the second volume, subtitled "Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday" published in 1961.[3] Here Lefebvre's account

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of the ambiguity of the everyday—a level of reality that is banal, superficial, inauthentic, but at the same time profound, open, creative—took on a richness that was not only to prove immensely stimulating for thinkers like Certeau but to find echoes in much of Barthes's later thinking on the everyday that would also be an important influence on Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* of 1980. But the Barthes who is as important as Lefebvre for Certeau's project is not the jaundiced mythologist. Indeed Certeau may have seen *Mythologies* as one of the sources of a "myth" he denounces all the way through *The Practice of Everyday Life*—that of everyday man as passive, brainwashed consumer. In seeking support for his far more positive view of "everyday man" as a creative *bricoleur* who subverts social systems by his ways of using them, Certeau turns rather to the 1967 lecture "Semiology and Urbanism" (2.439–46), where Barthes clearly articulates the parallel between walking and speech that Certeau will develop in a famous chapter "Walking in the City,"[4] or to a passage in *Empire of Signs* (1970) where Barthes cites the scrawled sketch-maps that serve as addresses in Tokyo. Certeau also celebrates Barthes's account of the creative tactics of reading in *S/Z* (1970), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), and the 1976 essay "On Reading" where reading is seen to harbor an energy that abolishes all structures in a limitless process of opening (3.384). For Certeau, as for Barthes, the "practice" of reading will become a crucial paradigm of freedom and creativity.

To trace the evolution of Barthes's thinking about the everyday is to some extent, then, to locate Barthes's ideas in an evolving complex deeply influenced by his own writings. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is when we look back at Barthes from the perspectives of later writers who have homed in on the everyday—Michel de Certeau, Georges Perec, Michel Vinaver, Marc Augé, Annie Ernaux—that we can see how he engages with a notion that, however frequently expressions like "everyday life" recur, is rarely if ever the direct focus of Barthes's attention. Yet this will seem less paradoxical the more we observe how the everyday generally tends to be construed as a notion that can only be apprehended obliquely, in the interstices between different fields of experience or modes of understanding. If, as Maurice Blanchot put it in a 1961 essay on Lefebvre, "The everyday is the most difficult thing there is to discover,"[5] it is because it is what Lefebvre calls a "residue": what is left when you strip away things that seem more important—events, decisions, ideologies—and reveal, in Georges Perec's words, "What's really going on, what we're experiencing, the rest, all the rest . . . what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual."[6] The contrast Perec draws between events deemed newsworthy—banner headlines—and the "infra-ordinary" that goes unperceived will be exactly matched in an important 1979 text where Barthes announced that he was interrupting his weekly "chronique" in the *Nouvel Observateur:*

> Why present the tenuous, the futile, the insignificant, why risk the accusation of saying "next to nothing"? The rationale for this attempt is as follows: the event that interests the Press appears quite simple . . . it's always evidently an "event;" and this event is strong. But what if there were also "weak" events. . . . What if, bit by bit, patiently, one were to re-order the hierarchy of intensities? (3.991).

And Barthes's sense of dissatisfaction with his "chroniques," on the grounds that he feels drawn despite himself to confer meaning and significance on the incidents and voices he transcribes—"The flaw is that for each reported incident I feel drawn (by what force—or weakness) to give a meaning (social, moral, aesthetic, etc.), to provide the last word"—is echoed by similar frustrations expressed by Annie Ernaux in her *Journal du dehors* (Diary of the Outside):

> I am aware that there are two possible moves you can make with regard to real facts. Either relate them precisely, in their brute, instantaneous state, outside narrative, or put them aside for subsequent "use," in a novel for example. Fragments, like those I'm writing here, leave me dissatisfied. . . . Nonetheless, I also feel a need to describe people's words and gestures for themselves, without serving any purpose whatsoever.[7]

Another point of reference with regard to the difficulty of registering everyday experience is the work of Michel Vinaver. As Vinaver has frequently indicated, all his writing from the 1950s onwards constitutes "an attempt to break into this territory, the everyday, which has never been *given* to me, and to which entry is always to be found or forced,"[8] and in 1956 Barthes had written an enthusiastic review of Vinaver's *Aujourd'hui ou les Coréens* (Today, or the Koreans). It is interesting then to note that by the late 1970s, with respect to plays such as *Les Travaux et les jours* (The Works and the Days), Vinaver's reflections on his search for a "theatre anchored in the everyday" drew inspiration from Barthes's recent ideas, including his 1978 lectures at the Collège de France. In a 1978 piece "Writing the Everyday" arranged, Barthes-style, around key words listed alphabetically, Vinaver describes his attempts to root his dramaturgy in "shifts of meaning" generated by "jumps in level of signification . . . short-circuits, skids and slides." The entry for the word "Contemporary" acknowledges Vinaver's "Notes from Barthes's lecture at the Collège de France, 16 December 1978" with respect to writing the present: "Can one make narrative, a story, out of the present? How? By noting it just as it befalls you," while an entry for the very Barthesian word *Évidence* is similarly steeped in "late Barthes": "Theatre renders what is evident or rather flashes of the obvious linked in time. It's the flash of 'That's it' . . . 'That's it. Yes, that's it. It's exactly that. Just like that.' "[9]

In his last decade Barthes evolved a number of notions and forms—the *incident*, the *romanesque*, *haiku*, the *chronique*—reflecting an engagement with

the everyday which, more than *Mythologies,* resonated strongly with writers who were to explore everydayness in the years after his death. But to appreciate fully the nature of Barthes's contribution, and to argue that the everyday is a crucial preoccupation within a body of works that can be read from different angles, it is important to try to show how the everyday remained a Barthesian preoccupation between *Mythologies* and *Empire of Signs,* the book that fully crystallized Barthes's later response to the everyday.

What is at stake in the first place is the status of reference, and of any specific referents, in Barthes's semiological phase, running approximately from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties. And in the second place what we might call the existential or lived (*vécu*) dimension of the modes of signification Barthes progressively taps into as he develops his analyses in various fields. Of course to ask to what extent the Barthes of the "semiological adventure" is interested in the everyday can seem paradoxical. What, apart from literary texts, is Barthes talking about if not everyday things, when his attention turns to fashion, objects, monuments, newspaper columns, and so forth? The rejoinder is of course that Barthes is not interested in these things in themselves but in how humans confer meaning on their surroundings. At times Barthes is inclined to suggest that he is exclusively interested in the methodological dimension of his work, its "scientificity," and in studying processes of signification in and for themselves. But more often than not he suggests that in studying systems of signs the semiologist encounters not only routine mechanisms of sense construction but a level of signification with a profounder, more unsettling character. And there will be a progressive convergence between this kind of signification and a positive if elusive mode of everydayness. To explain this further I want to look at three areas: first, the fashion detail, second, levels of perception, and third, functionalism and its limits.

The prestige of the detail, as "the very place of signification" (1.833), a theme running throughout Barthes's work, connects with a range of notions including the banal, the insignificant, the object, the fetish.[10] Owing partly to its specific meaning in this context, the detail is a consistent feature of Barthes's extensive writing on fashion that as it develops in the decade from 1957 onwards encompasses a gamut of methodologies whose variety and interconnectedness are very relevant to the question of the everyday. Barthes's first major essay in this field, the 1957 "History and Sociology of Clothing" (1.741–52), published in *Annales,* aligns his enquiry with the new historical school that sought to substitute microhistory for a historiography of major events. Dedicated to incorporating and fusing sociological and ethnological methods, *Annales* would play a major role in fostering the study of the everyday, and although after further articles on fashion and food Barthes's contributions lapsed, *Annales* methods and paradigms remained a feature of his work. Already, however, Barthes's specific contribution to what he envisaged at this stage as a historical approach to dress was to devise a method of analy-

sis that would draw on his recent discovery of Saussure. Mechanical though it is, Barthes's application of the langue/parole distinction to dress, whereby the *langue* of costume is actualized by the *parole* of individual ways of dressing (1.746), already anticipates the structuralism that with other tactics (this diversity or plurality being essential) will be a feature of Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life.* But in a second major essay, "Language and Dress" (1962), Barthes also links the study of what he calls "at first sight a banal object" to "the *scrutiny of what is evident* which is today the *salutary torment* of our most advanced kinds of research" (1.793). Taken together the phrases I have italicized tellingly emphasize the extraordinary difficulty of homing in on what is paradoxically quite evident. The power of *évidence,* associated with pure denotation, is that in reversing the hierarchy of the customarily significant and insignificant, it also subverts narrative. Barthes makes this point in an interesting 1959 mythology on Chabrol's film *Le Beau Serge,* where he borrows from Claudel the striking (and punning) phrase "the detonation of the evident" to convey the force of the film's microrealism, epitomizing "a whole modern way of seeing the surface of the world as it is" (1.787), sadly let down by the way Chabrol undermines it with a pathos-laden plot. This has nothing to do with eradicating man in favor of a dehumanized world, but with capturing a mode of relation to the world that does not pass through the ideological relays of narrative.

As Barthes's analyses of fashion evolve in the early 1960s, keeping pace with his theoretical development, we witness at one level the progressive eradication of content in favor of the play of structures. As is well known, a turning point occurred when Claude Lévi-Strauss advised Barthes to abandon the historical and concrete dimension of his approach in favor of a study of discourse. *The Fashion System* (1967) is accordingly based on textual material accompanying fashion items in women's magazines. But it is important to remember that with regard to *évidence* the appeal of dress for Barthes was always its superficiality, insignificance, and minimalism. He does not so much progressively drain fashion of its residual "content" as, bit by bit, apprehend the significance of what he will come to perceive as its near nothingness. The example of the dandy shows that a "rien" (next to nothing) can be everything: "The 'detail' of dress is no longer something concrete, however tiny; it's an often subtly indirect way of cancelling out what is worn, of subverting it, withdrawing it from all scales of value" (1.964). At one level, costume detail illustrates perfectly a cardinal property of all systems of signification, namely the way a minimal difference can have maximal consequences. As such the appeal of fashion is formal: "Fashion gives great semantic power to the detail" (2.331). But by another token the appeal of formal systems, and especially what Barthes will come to call their "systematicity," is that they enable us to observe a wider context—that of everyday experience—where tiny details and infinitesimal differences conspire to produce multiple networks and processes of meaning in the thick of the seemingly insignificant. In a 1964

interview Barthes clearly identified the highly overdetermined nature of his interest in dress, placing it in the wider context of a class of good objects belonging to the realm of the everyday:

> Dress is one of those objects of communication, like food, gestures, behaviour or conversation which I have always had great joy in investigating because, on the one hand, they are everyday things and provide opportunities for knowing myself at the most immediate level because they involve my own life, and, on the other hand, because they exist at an intellectual level and can be analysed systematically by formal methods (2.453).

In view of its frequent portrayal as a desiccated dead end, a desert of pragmatic structuralism, it is perhaps surprising that at the end of *The Fashion System,* and in a number of interviews at the time of publication, Barthes identified his labors with the poet Mallarmé. At the culmination of his analysis Barthes chooses to emphasize the way the fashion system ultimately constitutes a purely reflexive semiotic process where there is no final meaning because what is on show is "the spectacle of signification itself" (2.364). Fashion is a "*semantic system whose sole end is to fail to deliver the meaning it luxuriantly elaborates*" (2.365, italics Barthes's). Mallarmé had understood this when he chose to edit his own fashion magazine, *La Dernière Mode* (The Latest Fashion), writing all the articles himself under such pseudonyms as Miss Satin, and creating, according to Barthes, "a purely reflexive semantic system: the world signifies, but it signifies 'nothing'; empty but not absurd" (2.365). In subsequent interviews Barthes repeats the Mallarmé reference in connection with a "third" image of Fashion (Barthes once observed that the "third" term is always utopian). If to consider Fashion as a pure system is to unmask the functionalist alibi that disguises its gratuitousness, there is a third level where Fashion is "truly abstract and poetic" (2.464). And in this regard, *The Fashion System* can be seen as a poetic project, a creation *ex nihilo* akin to *La Dernière Mode* "which consists in creating an object of thought with nothing, or scarcely anything." As such Barthes's book would display "the interest we can find in working on the world's emptiness . . . how men create meaning out of nothing," a fact of wider anthropological significance (2.473) since in laying bare "a historical passion for signification" it overturns customary hierarchies.

The evolution of Barthes's interest in fashion might seem progressively to part company with the everyday by virtue of its increasingly systematic character. Yet paradoxically it is precisely this "systematicity" that reveals the true interest of fashion as a facet of or way into the everyday. For it is not because it is descriptively an "everyday thing" that fashion reveals everydayness but because the modes of signification it manifests, as they are revealed in an analysis seeking to track down the meanings we confer on clothes, are—specifically as modes of signification—rooted in everyday experience. With *The Fashion System* Barthes at the same time exhausts the semiotic pro-

ject and foreshadows ideas which will be crucial in the next phase of his engagement with the everyday. But before reaching that I want to explore a recurrent motif in Barthes's writings that clearly links his semiological with his later works.

To my knowledge this motif makes its first appearance in a 1964 essay on the illustrative plates of the eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie* (2.1348–58). Observing that these didactic images remain comprehensible even when they make the familiar seem monstrous—through such techniques as magnification, miniaturization, and the revelation of a usually invisible "inside"—Barthes, with the support of Baudelaire, identifies the essence of this device as "a shift in level of perception." To vary ("*variation* in the musical sense") the level at which an object is perceived is to liberate form itself: "Does poetry not consist in a certain power of *disproportion,* as Baudelaire so clearly indicated in his description of how hashish creates effects of reduction and precision?"[11] Subsequent occurrences of the motif and the Baudelairean reference will concern more transgressive effects.[12] The same Baudelaire passage is cited in a section of the 1969 essay on Loyola concerning the way in certain spiritual exercises the subject fantasizes a miniaturized self-image. Here reduction in scale enacts the "floating presence of the subject in the image," a drift akin to the play of the signifier: the "Ignatian subject" escapes fixed identity, "is not a person . . . is fluid, scattered" (2.1086). And the Baudelaire passage is cited again in *Empire of Signs,* with reference to the way in Japan everyday things (parcels in the immediate context) appear small even when they are not: "The miniature effect derives not from dimensions but from a kind of precision the thing acquires in delimiting itself, stopping, finishing . . . a hallucinatory [precision] analogous to the vision resulting from hashish, according to Baudelaire" (2.778). Crucial here is the link between disruption of scale and new order of experience. One precedent for the disruption engendered by shifts in level of perception would be the famous mythology on the 1955 Paris floods when a "a break in everyday vision" (1.599) had the effect of refreshing Parisians' perception of their world.[13] More radical versions of this phenomenon occur in various texts from the 1970s where another point of reference becomes habitual for Barthes. In a 1970 interview on *S/Z* he noted that by his process of slowed-down reading: "I brought about a shift. I changed the level at which the object is perceived, and by doing so I changed the object itself. Changing the level of perception . . . multiplies objects like a diabolical mirror" (2.1293). Barthes develops this idea in two essays on the visual arts. In a fragment entitled "The Magnifying-glass" from the 1973 essay on Réquichot, Barthes observes that if you home in on a detail, or select a portion of a painting for particular attention, or present things from unfamiliar angles, you discover a different work, so that there are, he claims, as many works as there are levels of perception. By "turning" the object, you change it: "Changing the level of perception: what is involved here is a jolt which shakes up the classified world, the named world (the recognized world)

and consequently liberates a truly hallucinatory energy" (2.1634). Later in the essay Barthes cites in support of his hypothesis the view once expressed by an art historian that the slabs of color in Nicolas de Staël's paintings were in effect "blow-ups" of three square centimetres of Cézanne. And the same example is picked up in a 1976 essay on the drawings of Saul Steinberg that celebrates the power of the artist to challenge the meanings we think of as natural by changing scale or proportions: "the instrument of this decisive operation is nothing other than a change of proportions (just as it is said that all Nicolas de Staël stems from a few centimetres of Cézanne, as long as you enlarge them: meaning depends on *level of perception*)" (3.410).

With these examples we have moved squarely into the last period of Barthes's career where the rehabilitation of the aesthetic and indeed of the power of art and the artist was an important strand. But it is central to the argument I am developing that the issue of "reading" and "writing" the everyday was often implicit in such concerns. This view finds support in the fact that levels of perception, and the de Staël/Cézanne example, recur in a 1979 text I have already quoted: "Pause," the last fragment of Barthes's *chronique* column in the *Nouvel Observateur.* Here the context of the subversive change of scale and level of perception, which overturns established hierarchies and reveals uncharted areas that are nevertheless already present within the existing frame, is unequivocally the everyday. The orthodox media treat events in the manner of the official painters of the Napoleonic era, ever eager for the "big picture." But just as painting only evolved because it invented different measures—the whole of Nicolas de Staël emerging from *one* square centimeter of Cézanne (Barthes's own hyperbolic scaling-down is symptomatic here)—so the media should make room for "weak" events as well as "strong" ones: "weak events whose tenuous quality does not impede them from stirring up meanings, from identifying what's wrong with the world" (3.991). Here smallness connotes neither the homely nor the purely subjective. "Re-ordering the hierarchy of intensities" is not tantamount to a rejection of politics but to a re-siting of the political within the framework of an individual subject's everyday existence. In suggesting that apprehending the everyday involves a radical shift of scale and level of perception Barthes's ideas directly chime with those of Perec, Certeau, Vinaver, Ernaux, and others.

Before coming finally to Barthes's later ways of framing and engaging with the everyday I want, once again with the aim of stressing the continuity of his evolving concerns, to go back to the semiological work of the 1960s and consider briefly the issue of what might be called the limits of functionalism. A regular topic for theoreticians including Lefebvre and Certeau is the need to show that the territory of the everyday cannot narrowly be confined to a level where everyday life is wholly dominated by constraints, routines, functions, or responses determined by wider social and political forces. What Lefebvre calls the "profound ambiguity" of the everyday resides in the fact that the everyday subject is creative as well as reactive and that the dimension

of the everyday harbors dissident, unprogrammed energies. For Lefebvre it is a "a kind of thing that is not a thing nor a precise activity with clear outlines . . . a space of transition and meeting, interference and conflict, in short a level of reality."[14] The tension between a functionalist view where each element is ultimately bound by its place within an overall totality, and a view that identifies a residual area where certain "unbound" elements constitute a "third" position, beyond the binary oppositions that regulate the system, can be identified in many areas studied by Barthes. I want to consider two examples where this tension has a bearing on the everyday.

In essays from the late sixties—"Semantics of the Object" (1966, 2.65–73) and "Semiology and Urbanism" (1967, 2.439–46)—Barthes identifies a functionalist level and then something that seems to exceed or outplay it.[15] Initially reluctant to allow the functionalist projection to be definitively thwarted by what exceeds it, he at first tends to find *in extremis* that it is precisely the *function* of the apparently "unbound" elements to signify, by connotation, a programmed and therefore functional "freedom." But increasingly Barthes concedes that there is indeed free play in the system. This pattern will be familiar as one of the symptoms of a switch from a structuralist to a poststructuralist paradigm. But I wish to read it in the context of these essays and the areas they cover as a sign that Barthes's intellectual development had the everyday as one of its crucial parameters. "Semantics of the Object" picks up Barthes's long-standing interest in the meaning-bearing properties of objects, both those saturated with ideology, as in the case of the toys discussed in *Mythologies,* and those seemingly drained of meaning.[16] Having chosen to dedicate the first two years of his seminar at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (1962–1964) to an "Inventory of contemporary systems of signification: systems of objects" (attended by Jean Baudrillard, who went on to write an influential book on *The System of Objects*) Barthes, in "Semantics of the Object," identifies a paradox in the fact that, beyond its function, an object such as a telephone also has a meaning, "a meaning which overspills (its use) . . . a meaning independent of its function" (2.67). But despite the polysemic character of the object, its capacity to host multiple levels and vectors of meaning, the split between function and meaning is never definitive. On the one hand, despite the initial "obstacle of the evident" (2.68)—the simple "thereness" of the object that confronts the semiologist—objects for Barthes are ineluctably constrained to have meaning. On the other hand the meanings objects accumulate always end up being recuperated as part of their inherent nature so that meaning remains domesticated.[17]

A similar opposition is developed in "Semiology and Urbanism" between the realm of what Barthes now calls "signification"—a concept with more active connotations than "meaning"—and the functional level. In the case of the city the relationship between "function" and "signification" is the despair of planners precisely because from the point of view of the city dweller "signification is experienced in total opposition to objective conditions" (1.441). In

other words the way the city dweller exploits what Barthes calls the "semantic power" of the city is not by responding to the use value of such urban amenities as parks, trees, squares, and transport systems but by creating an individualized, privately planned city, constituted by the individual user's whims: "The city is a discourse, and this discourse is indubitably a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, and we speak our city, any city, simply by inhabiting it, by moving around it, by looking at it" (2.441). This brilliant insight leads straight to one of the central tenets of Certeau's work on the everyday—the active transformation rather than passive activation of systems by their users—and also to one of its most salient cruxes: the identification between speech and walking epitomized in Certeau's phrase "the speech of idle footsteps." Certeau pays due homage to Barthes's essay, but, for our purposes, the connection with *The Practice of Everyday Life* not only underlines Barthes's concern with the everyday, it shows how this concern was at stake in his struggle to develop a satisfactory account of the workings of signification. Here Barthes is prepared to grant signification its "irreducible specificity," its independence from functionalism, however hesitant he is about whether such a postulate could be reconciled with a semiological viewpoint. The city and in particular Barthes's then recent first visit to Tokyo, the source of several references, seem to inspire him to think the semiologically unthinkable and postulate a process of meaning that outruns the system within which it is generated. Crucial here is the way this potentially abstruse debate is conducted in the context of everyday experience. Tokyo provides a salient instance for each of Barthes's three observations, designed to show how an "open" process of signification might work. First, the fact that the Japanese capital has a blank space at its center, constituted by the closed-off Imperial Palace, is seen as an illustration of how signification does not need fixed terms or centers but only their simulacra. While it might seem exceptional, Tokyo in fact reveals that a "city-centre" is really only a quasi-fictional point of reference, a void that keeps the whole urban system on the move: no one "lives" there. Second, the symbolic dimension of urban reality is not based on fixed equivalences but on circulating signifiers and links that never come to any final resting point. Far from being a neatly distributed set of functional spaces, a big city is an amalgam of micro- and macrostructures. Tokyo is a "polycentric city" possessing several "centres" identified with large railway stations. The different parts of a city are not like simple nouns but akin to the parts of a sentence, and the city "user" is a reader who engenders the city's meanings by private itineraries: "a sort of reader who, according to his commitments and itineraries, singles out fragments of the message to actualize them in secret" (2.444). Third, the fact that there is no ultimate signified means that the process of signification involves infinite metaphorical chains where each signified becomes in its turn a signifier in another chain. And this process of signification, far from being purely neutral, possesses its own "existential" character (initially psychoanalytical since these ideas stem, as Barthes indicates, from Jacques Lacan in the

first instance). At this point in his essay Barthes's paradoxical strategy becomes clearer. Having started with the resistance of the city to semiological analysis, he first uses the city to illustrate certain developments in semiotics. But at the same time it is clear that the pressure to remodel semiotics is generated from the outside, notably from the city, and Tokyo in particular. In this regard there is something frankly humorous in Barthes's po-faced statement that "the eroticism of the city is the lesson we can draw from the infinitely metaphorical nature of urban discourse" (2.445). Barthes's point that the erotic dimension of the city is not a functional element (associated with red light districts or glamorous quarters that could be "planned in") but to do with the spectacle of others in a "play" situation is plausible enough. And this is indeed substantiated by being theorized in terms of displaced or implicit eroticism. But if Barthes's determination to keep the two registers of semiotic theory and urban reportage strictly in synch with each other is not always intellectually convincing, it is highly symptomatic of a desire to open a two-way channel between experiential values and processes of signification, and it demonstrates clearly the extent to which the evolution of Barthes's semiology went hand in hand with the evolution of his engagement with the everyday.

Without entering into biographical causalities it is clear that Barthes's 1966 to 1968 encounter with Japan crystallized a new, and more importantly, newly formulated orientation toward the everyday. Visiting Tokyo, and then at a distance thinking and writing about what he had experienced there, hatched a number of notions and forms that would remain alive for the rest of his career. But there is no radical break; rather, a further evolution and re-evaluation in which the ethical, existential, and hedonistic dimensions of Barthes's passion for the processes of signification fully emerge. From this point the word "life" (*vie*) will play a discreet but significant role in Barthes's discourse.

In *Empire of Signs* the everyday is called Japan. In many ways it is unfortunate that a crucial set of Barthesian ideas made their first appearance in oriental garb: the consequent drama of repatriation would occupy him for the rest of his life. Barthes trod a well-worn path: back home via an exotic land; apprehending his own predilections in the daily sphere by finding them writ large (if in a glass darkly) elsewhere. This is perfectly consistent with other prospectors of the everyday for whom the exotic and the utopian are snares that can never be wholly eradicated. As Barthes himself observed, it may be that to posit the everyday as something other than (but including—as part of its ambiguous texture) the banal and alienated, is to take the risk of utopia, but as a detour that still homes in on something experientially real. It is poignant to recognize that in some respects Barthes never surpassed *Empire of Signs:* it remained a favorite among his own books as he sought to find other ways of exploring its insights. Yet this work harbors a tension or hesitation between poststructuralist avant-gardism and a more direct engagement with the everyday, and consequently some of the text's profounder emphases only become fully evident in its aftermath. In one strand we are presented with the

spectacle of a salutary otherness capable of violently disrupting occidental limits, notably in the overlapping areas of writing, the body, and identity. The idiom here, often reminiscent of *Tel Quel* in its inflections, is that of a radical decentering and the overthrow of an exhausted hegemony. Intertwined with this is another strand where the emphasis is on a mellower order of immediate experience, a gentler dislocation or displacement rooted in imaginative projection into alternative ways of living. In the text's core of four consecutive chapters (2.794–804) focused on the poetic form of haiku, the opposition between "The Breach of meaning" and "Exemption from meaning" opposes one kind of violence to another: the Western desire forcibly to inject haiku with meaning versus the Japanese way of seeing haiku as "a practice designed to bring language to a halt . . . to break up . . . that internal recitation which constitutes our person . . . to act on the very root of meaning" (2.798). But haiku takes on another complexion when Barthes moves from the sphere of signification to that of experience and sees the semantics of haiku as the touchstone of a particular quality of event, the "incident," where it is not what happens but the fact of happening itself that counts. Transposed onto "the page of life" haiku, as incident, has the quality of a "delicate pleat," a "dust of events," as it is rapidly read "in the live writing of the street," rather than a violence. This difference of emphasis can be characterized with reference to the two senses of the phrase "l'exemption du sens." On the one hand, and more conventionally, exemption *from* meaning; on the other hand a process in which meaning is obliterated. The two senses generally mingle in Barthes's usage, but by the fourth chapter, "So," which emphasises the "flash" that reveals nothing but just happens, haiku has become synonymous with "any discontinuous feature, any event of Japanese life as it offers itself to my reading" (2.803) and points in the direction of an equivalent way of living, "a graphic mode of existence."

In a number of interviews on *Empire of Signs* Barthes stressed more explicitly than in the text itself that Japan had inspired him to think about "some problems in the art of living" (2.528). The phrase *art de vivre* with its ancient source in treatises on the good life (which were to be studied closely by Michel Foucault at this time), and its fusion of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the hedonistic, will occur quite frequently in Barthes's writings from the late 1960s onward, with reference not only to Japan but to the lifestyle of the hippies (2.544–48), the utopian worlds of Sade and Fourier, the philosophy of Brillat-Savarin (3.280–94), and the monastic communities Barthes studied in his Collège de France lectures on communal living (3.744). In 1975 Barthes stated, "When I travel what interest me are the fragments of arts of living I can gather in passing" (3.750). Closely linked to what he termed his deep-rooted "ethnological temptation" (3.158), the theme of *art de vivre* was also linked to possible forms of writing closely bound up with the everyday, as *Mythologies* had been, but now reflecting Barthes's own pleasures and values:

"The art of living is a very important theme for me, to which I would like to return some day, I don't yet know in what form" (3.332).

In Barthes's later treatment of processes of signification *la vie* is seen not only as a space of textual effects but as the privileged sphere of textuality. The experience of being in the everyday, of apprehending everydayness, is equated with a certain experience of meaning. A good example is the 1970 essay on "The Third Meaning" where one of the sites of what Barthes calls "the obtuse meaning" is "a certain way of reading 'life' " (2.878), and where he goes on to characterize this mode of signification in terms of haiku, the depletion of meaning and the "romanesque" (2.880). Elsewhere Barthes claims to have identified an ideal "regime of meaning" in the *art de vivre* of Japan at what he calls the "vital level of everyday life . . . on life's most delicate surface" (2.1014). It is important to note that this equation between apprehending everydayness and "living" meaning in a particular way is wholly consistent with the ways Blanchot, Lefebvre, Certeau, Perec, Ernaux, or Vinaver—to stay with examples already mentioned—identify the difficulty of articulating the everyday with a resistance to meaning that is engendered by modes of subjectivity or subject position corresponding to the experience of flux and anonymity that Barthes identifies with "immersion in the signifier."[18]

The constant crossovers between "life" and "text" in late Barthes reflect a desire to shift the arena of textual play from the book to life itself, to locate "the rustle of language . . . in life, in life's adventures, in what life brings us in an utterly impromptu manner" (3.276). The notion of "life as text" occurs in connection with the avant-garde writing of Sollers (3.963) and in the context of walking in the city: in a very positive essay on advertising Barthes observes that "walking down the street, it is we who write these bodies, these comestibles, these objects which become the rhythm of our steps" (2.509). The surrealists are praised for recognizing that "writing does not confine itself to the written . . . there are life-writings, and we can turn certain moments of our life into real texts" (2.565). In the last decade of Barthes's career the search for ways of living and forms of writing are totally bound together. If the "gestures of everyday life" are "signs written on the silk of life" (2.1024), one possibility is to write haiku, another to look for alternatives. For Barthes the *romanesque* ("novelistic") was intended to be a form of writing, a "regime of meaning," and a way of living. A "life-writing" working "within the signifier" (2.1292), the *romanesque* is also "a type of notation, an investment of interest in everyday reality, in people, in life as it happens" (3.327). Like the other forms and projects Barthes thought up in these years the *romanesque* constituted a form of life-writing and indeed Barthes described his self-portrait *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* as an example of "intellectual *romanesque*" (3.178). The same applies to such forms as the *incident,* a type of anecdotal writing Barthes had experimented with in Morocco in the late sixties (3.1255–72), the *anamnesis,* a version of haiku addressed to "the tenuous-

ness of memory" (3.178), and the *biographeme* based on the perception of "significant traces" in the lives of others (Fourier for example). And the list can be extended to include most of the projects briefly outlined in a fragment of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* entitled "Projected books," including *Diary of Desire* (which anticipates the enactment in *A Lover's Discourse* of "amorous life" as discourse and experience), *Lives of the Illustrious, Our France,* and *The Book/The Life* (3.209).

Although amply compensated for by the brilliance of his last three major works, all strongly autobiographical, Barthes's search for new forms was in his own terms relatively unsuccessful. This is hardly surprising given the exceptional difficulty of the task he set himself as his commitment to writing the everyday modulated increasingly towards the pole of the *incident* as wonderfully characterized in the 1971 essay on Loti: "The incident is simply what *falls,* gently, like a leaf, onto the carpet of life. It's the slight, fleeting fold in the day's texture which can scarcely be noted" (2.1403).[19] Remarkably this formula was anticipated as early as 1964 in an essay on the writings of "F. B" whose texts are described as "not fragments but *incidents,* things that *fall,* without a jolt yet with a movement that is not infinite: the discontinuous continuity of the snowflake" (1.1440). Indeed, so evanescent is the "incident" that it can only be rendered by indirect modes of utterance of which the paradigm is allusions to *le temps qu'il fait* (the weather). Barthes's brilliant account of such discourse in the Loti essay, extended in a fragment of *The Pleasure of the Text* entitled "Everyday," and bemoaning the bowdlerization of references to the weather in an edition of Amiel's diary (2.1521), is further illuminated by his melancholy meditation on diaries (3.1004–14) and his experiment with a weekly chronicle in the *Nouvel Observateur* (3.969–92).

"So, *nothing* happens. But this *nothing* needs to find expression. How can we articulate: *nothing*" (2.1403). With these words Barthes summed up not only the challenge that haunted him in the last decade of his life but also the challenge confronted by all investigators of the everyday. If in tracing a thread running through Barthes's writing I have tried to emphasize parallels with other writers (much more work clearly needs to be done on this front), I want to stress in conclusion that Barthes ultimately had his own "take" on the everyday. Indeed one of the reasons for studying "Barthes and the everyday" is to give his own vital contribution its due. Two of Barthes's last courses at the Collège de France—"Living Together" with its intriguing investigation of the notion of communal life rhythms (*idiorrythmies*), and "Preparing the Novel: from Life to Work" with its emphasis on "problems of the daily practice of notaton"—focus on topics that resonate with many ideas in Lefebvre, Certeau, and Perec. And so does the fine late meditation on the idea of changing one's life, of achieving a "mutation" or conversion by the adoption of a new *art de vivre,* which shows how clearly Barthes understood what is almost invariably at stake in writing the everyday: the possibility of a new beginning, a new way of understanding one's participation in the "discontinuous

continuity" of daily experience, in short, as Barthes called it, a *vita nova* (3.1299–1307).

Notes

1. All Barthes references (incorporated in the text) are to the three volumes of the *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994–95).

2. Diana Knight, *Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1.

3. See Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life,* vol. 1, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1991). See too Rémi Hess, *Henri Lefebvre et l'aventure du siècle* (Paris: A. M. Métailié, 1988), 237, 243, 421, and Michael Kelly, "Everyday Marxism: The Convergent Analyses of Roland Barthes and Henri Lefebvre," in *Making Connections: Essays in French Culture and Society in Honour of Philip Thody,* ed. James Dolamore (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 135–46.

4. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91–110.

5. Maurice Blanchot, "La Parole quotidienne," in *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 355.

6. Georges Perec, "Approaches to What?", in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* trans. John Sturrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 206.

7. Annie Ernaux, *Journal du dehors* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 85.

8. Michel Vinaver, *Ecrits sur le théâtre* (Paris: Éditions de l'Aire, 1986), 124.

9. Vinaver, *Ecrits sur le théâtre,* 132.

10. See the chapter on Barthes in Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 79–97, and Knight, *Barthes and Utopia,* 86–89 and passim.

11. The reference is to a passage in *Artificial Paradises,* Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes,* I, (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 393.

12. On this see Stephen Heath, *Vertige du déplacement: lecture de Barthes* (Paris: Fayard, 1974), 19–24.

13. On this see Knight, *Barthes and Utopia,* 37–39.

14. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (Paris: Éditions de l'Arche, 1961), 2: 64.

15. To which could be added "The Reality Effect" (1968), 2.479–84.

16. Examples of the latter would include objects in Dutch painting with its "art of the catalogue" (1.1180) and in Robbe-Grillet's novels, where objects possess "neither function nor substance" (1.1186).

17. In the case of "The Reality Effect," Barthes sees "concrete reality" as one of the "irreducible residues of functional analysis." Pure denotation of the real "appears to be a resistance to meaning" (2.483). However, he ends up arguing that the role of seemingly insignificant details in realist novels is to *connote* the real—functionalism triumphs in the end. On this and other passages regarding denotation as "the passage of objects in discourse" see Andrew Brown, *Roland Barthes: The Figures of Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 236–84.

18. On this see Bernard Comment, *Roland Barthes: vers le neutre* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1991).

19. On this see Johnnie Gratton, "The Poetics of the Barthesian Incident: Fragments of an Experiencing Subject," in *Roland Barthes,* ed. Diana Knight, special issue of *Nottingham French Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 63–75.

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