

# Roland Barthes

*at the Collège de France*

LUCY O'MEARA



# Roland Barthes at the Collège de France

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LUCY O'MEARA

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Je devrais sans doute m'interroger d'abord sur les raisons qui ont pu incliner le Collège de France à recevoir un sujet incertain, dans lequel chaque attribut est en quelque sorte combattu par son contraire. [...] Il me faut bien reconnaître que je n'ai produit que des essais, genre ambigu où l'écriture le dispute à l'analyse.

Roland Barthes,  
inaugural lecture at the Collège de France,  
7 January 1977



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## Note on Abbreviations and References

Throughout the text, references to works by Barthes are given by abbreviated title and page number. Titles of works have been abbreviated as indicated below. All articles by and interviews with Barthes are referred to as they appear in the 2002 five-volume edition of the *Œuvres complètes*. References to the Collège de France lecture notes include the date of the relevant lecture as well as a page reference. All references to book-length texts by Barthes are to the individual Seuil editions of these works, with the exceptions of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* and *La Chambre claire*, which are referred to as they appear in the *Œuvres complètes*. Full publication details of all works cited are to be found in the bibliography. In the cases of articles by and interviews with Barthes, full details of the original publication (dates, journals, interviewers) are given in a note following each first reference.

C	<i>Prétexte Roland Barthes: colloque de Cerisy</i>
CC	<i>La Chambre claire</i>
CVC	<i>Carnets du voyage en Chine</i>
CVE	<i>Comment vivre ensemble</i>
DZE	<i>Le Degré zéro de l'écriture</i>
EC	<i>Essais critiques</i>
ES	<i>L'Empire des signes</i>
FDA	<i>Fragments d'un discours amoureux</i>
L	<i>Leçon</i>
LA	<i>Séminaire: le Lexique de l'auteur</i>
'Longtemps'	'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...'
JD	<i>Journal de deuil</i>
M	<i>Michelet</i>
My	<i>Mythologies</i>
N	<i>Le Neutre</i>
OC, I	<i>Œuvres complètes tome I. 1942–1961</i>
OC, II	<i>Œuvres complètes tome II. 1962–1967</i>



OC, III	<i>Œuvres complètes tome III. 1968–1971</i>
OC, IV	<i>Œuvres complètes tome IV. 1972–1976</i>
OC, V	<i>Œuvres complètes tome V. 1977–1980</i>
PR	<i>La Préparation du roman I et II</i>
PT	<i>Le Plaisir du texte</i>
RB	<i>Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes</i>
SFL	<i>Sade, Fourier, Loyola</i>
S/Z	<i>S/Z</i>

*Note on the use of the recordings of the lectures*

Where I have expanded quotations from the lecture notes with transcriptions from the recordings, this is indicated by the use of pointed brackets < >. Transcriptions are my own and are made from the recordings of *Leçon*, *Comment vivre ensemble*, *Le Neutre*, and *La Préparation du roman*.

## Introduction

Il essaye (ou il ne peut s'empêcher) de tenir un discours qui ne s'énonce pas au nom de la Loi et/ou de la Violence; c'est-à-dire qui ne soit ni politique, ni religieux, ni scientifique. Il ne lui reste donc plus que le discours *esthétique*.

Comment pourrions-nous encore appeler ce type de discours? Tout simplement le discours individualiste.

*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes (inédits)*

The shield of the Collège de France shows a book resting on a leafy background, with the legend 'Docet Omnia' – 'Everything is taught' – framed by stars. It is inlaid in the floor of the Collège's main entrance on Rue des écoles in Paris. Elsewhere in the building, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phrase describing the institution's promotion of experimental, unregulated teaching is carved in large gilded letters into the wall: 'Ce que le Collège de France, depuis sa fondation, est chargé de donner à ses auditeurs, ce ne sont pas des vérités acquises, c'est l'idée d'une recherche libre'. Roland Barthes taught at the Collège de France from 1977 to 1980 as holder of the Chair of Literary Semiology. He imagined having his own motto for his lectures. Not carven, but effaceable, it would be a sign hung beside the bust of Henri Bergson in the lecture theatre where Barthes lectured on Saturday mornings. The sign would feature a quotation from Montaigne's *Essais*: 'Je n'enseigne point. Je raconte'.<sup>1</sup> Montaigne was an enthusiastic adopter of mottoes, having Greek and Latin maxims, many of them drawn from Sceptic texts, cut into the rafters of his study: 'Iudicio alternare', he reminded himself, and 'Que sçay-je?'<sup>2</sup> The carvings at the Château de Montaigne prioritise inquiry, reflection, and abstention from quick decisions. Barthes is drawn to this intellectual spirit: he reminds his audience in 1978 of the medal that Montaigne had had struck in 1576, which depicted a set of balanced scales, and the Pyrrhonian legend '*Epokhe*': I hold back.<sup>3</sup> Barthes imagines erecting a notice which would demonstrate that he too will abstain from judgment: 'Comment mettre sur ma demeure ou mon entreprise intellectuelle un écriteau: "Fermeture de jugement pour congé annuel"?' (N, 254).

The imagined mottoes that Barthes wishes to display upon his

## 2 Roland Barthes at the Collège de France

teaching at the Collège de France are the 'signs' of an intellectual project that is radically self-effacing, at the same time as it makes subjectivity central to the investigation. It is the argument of this book that the Collège de France lectures represent an important addition to Barthes's corpus which allows us to arrive at a new reading of his thought. This new reading involves opposing those perceptions of Barthes according to which the potency of Barthes's work diminishes towards the end of his life as it becomes more subjective and aesthetic in focus. I shall argue that the value of this late work inheres in its questioning of the grounds of subjectivity, and its coverage of important critical, ethical and social problems *via* a deliberately contingent discourse. All of Barthes's work as cultural and literary theorist, including his increasingly creative late work, involves, ultimately, the complex relationship between the individual and ideology, and an imagining of how this relationship might change for the better. Utopian thought, always rooted in subjective response to social conditions, is central to Barthes's conception of the importance of his work as writer.<sup>4</sup> The Collège de France represents the apogee of Barthes's career as a public intellectual. This book examines his conception of the role of the intellectual as shown in his teaching there; his elaboration of particular social values; his emphasis on everyday life; and his desire to valorise aesthetic experience, often seen as less valuable than discourses of religion, philosophy or science. I shall place these issues in the context of post-'68 French thought and certain insistent themes therein, notably the idea of community; the doctrine of intellectual engagement (which Barthes believes needs to be refined); and the instrumentalisation of Asian thought in French theory. A preoccupation throughout the book, and notably in the final chapter, is Barthes's extensive use of fragmentation in his writing and teaching: I shall consider the ways in which techniques of fragmentation are linked to his anti-systematic thought generally. The book will also examine the institutional context of post-war French thought in the humanities by focusing on the particular status of the Ecole pratique des hautes études and the Collège de France, both of which played important roles in the careers of several of the most influential thinkers in post-war French theory: Barthes, Bourdieu, Foucault, Derrida and Lévi-Strauss.

Barthes's chair at the Collège de France is in *literary* semiology, the emphasis lying with the qualifier. Barthes is interested in the ability of literary language to express the complexity of the world, and to evade, in a kind of perpetuum mobile, the crushing force of ideological language. The positive charge of literature is celebrated in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in January 1977. Barthes subsequently gives four

lecture courses: *Comment vivre ensemble*, focusing on the problems of communal life; *Le Neutre*, which explores the ideal of a 'neutral', non-conflictual mode of being; and *La Préparation du roman I et II*, in which he examines the fantasy of writing a novel. In all four of these series, Barthes treats his material indirectly, relying on metaphors and shunning definition, concept, and pre-organised goals. His thought is aesthetic insofar as it is perspectival in its approach to epistemology: Barthes's continual question, formulated in Nietzschean terms, is 'what does this mean *for me*?'<sup>5</sup> This aesthetic contingency and individualism are linked to an ethics of the intellectual. Barthes is radically distrustful of the idea of the intellectual as mouthpiece for truth. For Barthes, rather, the intellectual is important as somebody who will assume his/her own contingency and interests, and demonstrate that 'il n'y a pas de vérité qui ne soit liée à l'instant' (N, 18 February 1978, 39). This uncovering of the occultation of the arbitrary that usually takes place in discourses of power – including intellectual discourse – is central to Barthes's work. Significantly, Barthes opens his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France by describing himself as an essayist. The unstable, destabilising nature of that genre, shuttling as it does between art and theory, is ideally suited to the work that Barthes wishes to do. Additionally, the intellectually independent nature of the Collège de France favours the staging of Barthes's aesthetic, counter-ideological theories. This is what this book shows.

Barthes's Montaignian mottoes indicate both his rejection of dogmatism and his investment in the importance of individualistic discourse. He describes his teaching as a tentative process in which he is only barely ahead of his audience: 'Ceci est une recherche en train de se faire. Je crois en effet que, pour qu'il y ait une relation d'enseignement qui marche, il faut que celui qui parle sache à peine un peu plus que celui qui écoute (parfois même, sur certains points, moins [...]). Recherche, et non Leçon'.<sup>6</sup> Thus he rejects intellectual showmanship. As the Montaigne 'sign' says, 'Je n'enseigne point'. But the second half of that motto is 'Je raconte'. Personal experience is central to the work. In the *Essais*, Montaigne's avowals that he is not providing any authoritative knowledge always have as their correlate the fact that he will talk about *himself*: 'Qui sera en recherche de science, si la pêche où elle se loge: il n'est rien de quoi je fasse moins de profession. Ce sont ici mes fantaisies, par lesquelles je ne tâche point à donner à connaître les choses, mais moi'.<sup>7</sup> Thus Montaigne refuses confinement to any disciplinary subject, and shapes the 'essai' as a questing, oppositional genre, in which the vagaries of his own interests dictate every digression.<sup>8</sup> In a strikingly similar fashion,

Barthes, in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1977, declares that his teaching will be based on personal fantasy: 'C'est à un fantasme, dit ou non dit, que le professeur doit annuellement revenir, au moment de décider du sens de son voyage'.<sup>9</sup> In this way, he adds, the teacher can debunk expectation, 'dévie[r] de la place où l'on l'attend'. An 'enseignement fantasmatique' is conceived of by Barthes as a discourse that refuses ideological systems, sidelining them in favour of a focus on the constantly shifting, contingent complex that is the relationship between the self and its environment. Barthes, like Montaigne, discusses the importance of objects 'for him'. Though this initially leads to a loss of general significance, his hope is that this is found at another level, by virtue of the presentation of his own tastes as a 'universal particular'. His subjective tastes are explicitly used to generate subjects in which he hopes his listeners will also invest their interest, such that a more universal importance is established. This book examines how this oscillation between the particular and the universal is brought about.

This discourse, which aimed above all at eliciting the listeners' own critical engagement with experience, was delivered to a large and diverse audience. All lectures at the Collège de France are open to the public. Barthes was nominated to the Collège by Michel Foucault, and elected by a majority of only one vote in May 1976. Required to provide 26 hours of teaching per year on a topic of his choice, to be divided between lectures and 'seminars' at will, he gave four individual lecture courses and two 'seminar' series with invited speakers between January 1977 and his death in March 1980.<sup>10</sup> His weekly lectures, like those of Foucault, drew a considerable crowd who queued for hours in advance before filling the Collège's largest lecture theatre as well as an adjacent room furnished with a video link-up. Enthusiastic listeners recorded Barthes's every word onto cassette. Barthes wrote very full lecture notes, and tended to read them out with minimal improvisation. However, his lecture notes were not included in any of the posthumous publications edited by Seuil's François Wahl during the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> Wahl asserted that Barthes would not have wished the lecture notes to be published due to his strict distinction between spoken and written texts, and also claimed that neither lecture notes nor recordings existed in sufficiently complete form to permit any kind of publication. In summer 1991, an unauthorised transcription of part of one of Barthes's lectures from the 1978 *Neutre* series appeared in Bernard-Henri Lévy's journal, *La Règle du jeu*.<sup>12</sup> This led to a court case in September 1991, in which the journal's publishers were convicted of breach of copyright and ordered to pay damages to Barthes's half-brother and heir, Michel Salzedo.<sup>13</sup> When

Salzedo subsequently deposited the archive of Barthes's manuscripts with the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition contemporaine (IMEC) in 1996, it became apparent that full handwritten notes for all of Barthes's Collège de France lectures existed, and could be supplemented by the amateur recordings of the lectures.<sup>14</sup> The texts of Barthes's notes for *Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens* (delivered from January to May 1977), and *Le Neutre* (delivered from February to May 1978), were published in November 2002. The final two lecture courses, *La Préparation du roman I et II* (December 1978 to March 1979, and December 1979 to February 1980) appeared one year later. Also made available were MP3 recordings on CDs of the entirety of the lectures.<sup>15</sup> Éric Marty oversaw the publications, which were released alongside his 2002 re-edition of Barthes's *Cœuvres complètes*. Since the Collège de France material has appeared, Marty has embarked upon a series of publications of the notes of Barthes's seminars at his previous place of employment, the École pratique des hautes études, also in Paris.<sup>16</sup> In 2009, to the ire of François Wahl, two diaristic texts of Barthes's were published: *Carnets de voyage en Chine*, which catalogues Barthes's experiences of visiting China as part of a *Tel Quel* delegation in 1974, and *Journal de deuil*, a collection of 'fiches' expressing Barthes's grief after the death of his mother in 1977.<sup>17</sup>

When preparing the Collège de France material for publication, Marty and his editorial team chose not to issue a transcription of the lectures or an edited text combining the oral and written versions of the originals. The published texts are in most respects identical to Barthes's manuscript notes. Unobtrusive editorial notes are present in footnotes; these pinpoint or elaborate Barthes's references, gloss any abstruse terms, provide links to other texts by Barthes, and occasionally add an elucidatory phrase from the relevant oral recording. Marty was determined not to turn these notes into an entirely book-like text. His preface to the series stresses that 'ces notes sont davantage ce qu'on pourrait appeler un *infra-texte*' (Marty in *CVE*, 12). Their nature is not textual so much as epitextual, in Genette's sense: provisional, oral, self-reflexive.<sup>18</sup> The texts are published as part of Seuil's *Traces écrites* collection, which is devoted to the publication of lectures and seminars. The covers are designed to resemble a spiral-bound *cahier*, and the text is printed in a typeface reminiscent of typewritten script. Littered with Barthes's ellipses, arrows, brackets and abbreviations, the text appears within wide margins, in which the reader can make notes, as Barthes did in his scripts. The visual appearance of the books thus seeks to remind the reader of the contingent nature of the material.



These are strange texts in a quasi-archival mode. They share this curious status with many other texts: there has been a general trend in French publishing over the last fifteen years whereby the pedagogical work of post-war French thinkers in the human sciences has become available on a large scale.<sup>19</sup> Following the publication of notes from a selection of Merleau-Ponty's Collège de France lecture notes during the mid-1990s, the publication of transcriptions of Michel Foucault's lectures began in 1997 and is ongoing. Émile Benveniste's final lectures at the Collège de France have just been published, and more publications are projected.<sup>20</sup> The notes of Jacques Derrida's seminars at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales are being published almost simultaneously in French and in English translation.<sup>21</sup> For all of these thinkers, their 'archive enseignante' is becoming part of their œuvre; the pedagogical material arrives late, supplementing the corpus, and enabling scholars other than those who attended the lectures to undertake a study of these thinkers' pedagogy. In the case of Barthes, the Collège de France lecture notes permit a *retroactive* assessment of his thought, as Jürgen Pieters and Kris Pint point out in their introduction to a collection of articles about Barthes's *Cours*.<sup>22</sup> Pieters and Pint portray the Barthes of the Collège de France period as being 'in the uneasy situation whereby the theoretical *doxa* he opposed was to a great extent influenced by his own thinking'. The lecture courses show us 'a man shadowboxing with an earlier self: Barthes's literary semiology seeks the inclusion of aspects of language and literature overlooked by his previous, more systematic semiology. This mission is inherently risky, as Pieters and Pint remind us: 'this revision often turned into a mere regression'.<sup>23</sup> The lectures are thus a 'riddle' of sorts, not least because the fantasies that they employ are never realised. Thus the lectures, far from being 'a final post-scriptum' to Barthes's œuvre, constitute instead 'an invitation to return to [the] œuvre' and to recalibrate Barthes's legacy.<sup>24</sup>

In thus returning to the œuvre, however, we need to be aware of the formal specificity of these texts. These are situated, semelfactive texts, whose moment has passed. The two seminar series, 'Qu'est-ce tenir un discours? Recherche sur la parole investie' (1977) and 'La métaphore du labyrinthe: Recherches interdisciplinaires' (1978–79), are incomplete, consisting only of Barthes's notes, without the interventions of the invited speakers whose presentations constituted the bulk of the series: it is for this reason that I shall not analyse these seminars in detail. Similarly, I shall not analyse the seminar on 'Proust et la photographie: examen d'un fonds d'archives photographiques mal connu' (1980), which was not given due to Barthes's untimely death.<sup>25</sup> The lecture series, on the other

hand, despite their partly interlocutory character, are monologic, and thus self-contained. I have found it logical to accept the lecture notes *a priori* as a textual addition to Barthes's corpus, though with the caveat that these are indeed *not books*.<sup>26</sup>

Barthes's forced monologism is both uncomfortable and enabling. At the Collège, he feels ill at ease being the sole speaker, not privy to the circulation of ideas amongst his listeners, and distressed by seeing people standing, or sitting uncomfortably on floors or windowsills in order to hear him speak. But he plays on this too: from the declaration of the 'enseignement fantasmatique' onwards, all of the lectures play upon the forced centrality of *himself*. His resistance to the magisterial form of the lecture leads to a style that constitutes its own dialogism, with Barthes constantly breaking up his own discourse, organising the material in an aleatory fashion, and undercutting his own mastery by a deliberately heavy reliance on others' material. This very idiosyncratic lecturing style serves to underline the counter-ideological message of Barthes's work. The lecture courses beneficently refocus our attention on Barthes's philosophy of form, and the manner in which much of the substance of his work inheres in its formal experimentation. This experimentation is elaborated within his pedagogy: Barthes's last three published books, *Roland Barthes* (originating in a seminar), *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (based on two years of seminars) and *La Chambre claire* (partially elaborated during the *Préparation du roman I* lectures) are each, in terms of their construction, richly inventive.<sup>27</sup> A similar formal innovation is found in the lecture courses, where Barthes exerts himself to practise an unmagisterial teaching in a magisterial setting.

The first lecture course, *Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens* (January–May 1977), begins with a lengthy setting-out of what this method will involve. Drawing heavily on Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Barthes opens the first lecture by discussing the Nietzschean opposition between 'method' and 'culture'.<sup>28</sup> Whereas a method implies that the thinker has a predetermined goal towards which he wishes to advance directly, 'culture' involves allowing thought to be formed by various unpredictable forces including one's unconscious. 'Culture' is a routing towards heterogeneity: 'des bribes, des bornes de savoirs, de saveurs'. It is this idea of heterogeneity, which will not be hierarchised in accordance with any preconceived goal, which will inform Barthes's methodology, as will the idea of the fantasy – for fantasy could be seen as 'origine de la culture (comme engendrement de forces, de différences)' (CVE, 12 January, 34). The 'fantasme' of the first lecture course is the 'vivre-ensem-

ble', an ideal of both personal and collective living which Barthes designates using the word '*idiorrythmie*', a term borrowed from the vocabulary of Greek orthodox monasticism. Barthes discovered the word in *L'Été grec*, a recent book by Jacques Lacarrière.<sup>29</sup> In this study of Greek monasticism, Lacarrière discusses the monks of Mount Athos who inaugurated a community which was only lightly regulated, and which thus constituted an alternative to the highly regulated monastic community from which they had broken.<sup>30</sup> '*Idiorrythmie*' refers to the individual rhythm or pace at which each of these monks lived. For Barthes, *idiorrythmie* is a form of living which manages to reconcile the problems of social living and those of a life too solitary, producing a quotidian ideal which balances the right mixture of elements of companionship and space. This *idiorrythmic* fantasy is distinguished from the most common exemplars of living together: Barthes makes it clear at the outset that he is not going to discuss the family or the couple: 'le lieu du couple n'est pas balayé par le fantasme qui précisément ne veut pas voir l'immuable chambre à coucher, la clôture et la légalité, la légitimité du désir'. Similarly, the recognised marginalism of groups which have an overt cause – communes, convents, phalansteries – is not of interest, for these groups are structured 'selon une architecture de pouvoir' and are thus 'déclarativement hostiles à l'idiorrythmie' (CVE, 12 January, 39–40).

Throughout the lecture series, Barthes examines the conditions that are required for the attainment of such an imagined '*idiorrythmie*', and those that are antipathetic to it. The important questions regard whether *idiorrythmie* is possible in our culture, and whether a small group could exist in which the benefits and comforts of communal living would be experienced without that sense of community impinging too much upon one's sense of individuality, and without an ideological 'telos' ultimately determining the group. Barthes examines these issues using a heterogeneous corpus. On the one hand, texts treating monasticism and cenobitism are examined. Barthes refers often to the problems of ancient Western monastic life, which he associates with the repressive aspects of Christianity. He promotes the much more desirable conjunction of the group and the individual that he sees in the 'bouddhisme doux' of the monks of Ceylon. This is the first occurrence in the *Cours* of the positive 'eastern' exemplars which we will see Barthes employ throughout his time at the Collège: this is discussed in Chapter 4. The other important group of texts in *Comment vivre ensemble* is a set of five 'textes-tuteurs' (CVE, 4 May, 182) each of which allows Barthes to examine the implications of certain types of space and community. Thus Palladius' *Histoire lausique*, a fifth-century account of Egyptian, Palestinian and Syrian monks,

is linked to the space of the desert.<sup>31</sup> Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* is used to discuss the 'autarkic' space of the sanatorium.<sup>32</sup> *Robinson Crusoe* provides material for consideration of solitude and the idea of the hide-out or lair.<sup>33</sup> Gide's *La Séquestrée de Poitiers* is also examined for what it reveals regarding obsessive solitude,<sup>34</sup> and Zola's *Pot-Bouille* stages the space of the archetypal 'immeuble bourgeois'.<sup>35</sup> By using these texts as well as the monastic intertexts and various other sources including reference works such as the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Barthes elaborates his fantasy of the ideal 'vivre-ensemble'. Both positive and negative aspects of communal life are examined, and the question of the imbrication of power in language is constantly present. Running in tandem with the *Comment vivre ensemble* lectures, the seminar on 'Tenir un discours' is concerned with the force and 'intimidation' inherent in certain uses of language; after sessions by seven invited speakers, Barthes's contribution to the seminar is an analysis of Charlus's speech to the narrator in Proust's *Le Côté de Guermantes*.<sup>36</sup>

The fantasy of retreat is examined in *Comment vivre ensemble* as a 'solution individualiste à la crise du pouvoir' (59). Its central problematic is the search for the 'distance critique' between oneself and others. Barthes characterises this research as a 'problème d'éthique de la vie sociale' (222). The search for *idiorrythmie* is a search for 'le Souverain Bien' (178), which in fact, Barthes concludes, can only ever be found in writing, thanks to its shifting and fragile nature. Thus, in the final lecture of the series, Barthes gently refuses to put together any set of prescriptions which would define the nature of the 'vivre-ensemble', and says simply that what is desired is 'délicatesse': 'une distance qui ne casse pas l'affect' (179). This is a theme to which he will return in the following year's lectures.

At the end of this first lecture series, Barthes describes at some length the manner in which the lectures have been structured. There has not really been a *method* – for, as he had explained in the first lecture of the series, method must be rejected given that it is a 'chemin droit [qui] fétichise le but comme but', serving only 'généralité, 'moralité' (12 January, 33). Rather, there has been 'un protocole d'exposition' (4 May, 180). Before the series began, Barthes wrote material sufficient for the entire series of lectures. Dipping into his corpus of texts, he identifies 'traits' or 'figures' that are relevant for the discussion of the 'vivre-ensemble'. These figures are then named, and shuffled into alphabetical order. The lecture series is thereby composed of fragments, whose sequence aspires to no ultimate outcome beyond that of gesturing, in each case, towards the fantasy which is at the origin of the lecture series. The mate-

rial is then delivered in the arbitrary alphabetical order, with no further constraint except the time-slot of each lecture. The system of 'traits/figures/cases', Barthes says in the final lecture, is just like that employed in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*. This methodological overlap reveals a concern with the role of the intellectual and with that assigned to the reader or listener that is both writerly and pedagogical. Using the 'traits', whether in the writing of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and the *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, or in these lectures, is deliberately non-exhaustive. Each 'figure' of the lover's discourse is 'offert au lecteur pour qu'il s'en saisisse, y ajoute, en retranche et le passe à d'autres: autour de la figure, les joueurs font courir le furet' (FDA, 30). Similarly, Barthes sees his lecturing role as being merely indicative of areas of interest that may be worth pursuing. He expects that the Collège de France audience run with the suggestions he provides them with, suggesting that the course is like a jigsaw puzzle: 'Je suis le fabricant (l'artisan) qui découpe le bois. Vous êtes les joueurs' (CVE, 4 May, 181).

The attempt at a collaborative activity cannot truly be accomplished within the monologic lecture format, but it is important to Barthes to insist that his lecturing is discreet, incomplete, and non-didactic. What he provides are 'touches successives: une goutte de ceci, une lueur de cela'. He often uses the idea of flashes, 'scintillations' or 'nuances', when discussing his assemblage of lecture material. Here the 'touches of colour' are likened to those in tachistic or divisionistic painting: while the work is in process, it is not obvious from the juxtaposition of colours what the final image will look like:

On juxtapose les couleurs sur la toile, au lieu de les mélanger sur la palette. [...] [Moi,] je juxtapose les figures dans la salle de cours, au lieu de les mélanger chez moi, à ma table. La différence, c'est qu'ici il n'y a pas de tableau final: ce serait, au mieux, à vous de le faire' (181, my emphasis).

On the recording, we hear him add, <Je n'ai pas une philosophie du Vivre-Ensemble>. No result is provided by the *cours*; if there is to be one, the listener has to furnish it for herself, using the materials Barthes has made available. The incompleteness and fragmentation are constitutive. Barthes's motivations for this type of structuring are aesthetic, epistemological and also ethical: he believes that the method of fragmentation and digression will, in keeping with the subjects under discussion, keep the dogmatism of discursive authority at bay. It is made clear that the mode of *experience* of the lectures ('on ne comprend pas où ça va'), as brought about by the aleatory and digressive method, is the central point of his enterprise:

Ce que je viens de dire de la non-méthode laisse entendre qu'au fond le 'sujet' (*quaestio*) n'est pas pertinent. Quoi que je choisisse comme 'sujet' [l'année prochaine] [...], la pratique digressive, le droit à la digression. Je dirai tant et toujours la même chose. L'indirect sera là, qui est d'ordre éthique. Il s'agira d'une *Éthique*. (CVE, 184)

The following year's lecture course, *Le Neutre* (February–June 1978), is also taken up by the examination of what Barthes characterises as a social and ethical problem. The aleatory structuring is reinforced: this time the 'figures' are alphabetised and then placed in a new order, according to numbers Barthes found in a 1959 statistical table. The *Neutre* is a slippery series of sketchings of what 'the neutral' might be, and why Barthes desires it. Lexically, the term has Blanchotian resonances, though these are not explored by Barthes in any detail.<sup>37</sup> He defines 'le neutre' as 'toute inflexion qui esquive ou déjoue la structure paradigmatique, oppositionnelle, du sens, et vise par conséquent à la suspension des données conflictuelles du discours' (N, 261). The fantasy of this series arises from a distaste for the surrounding logomachy.

*Le Neutre* bears witness to Barthes's weariness of what he calls 'la demande de position' (18 February, 45). There is, he contends, a social requirement that one should always be prepared to make judgments and defend them, because, due to the agonistic nature of language, not to have an opinion at all (to be neutral) is considered reprehensibly weak. Faced with this, Barthes desires the possibility of abstaining from judgment, of retreating – 'le droit à se taire' (49). Barthes had hinted at this in his inaugural lecture, when speaking of the way in which language forces us into affirmation; it was in this context that he made his notorious statement that '[La langue] est, tout simplement: fasciste, car le fascisme, ce n'est pas d'empêcher de dire, c'est d'obliger à dire' (L, 14). The fantasy of 'le neutre' is the fantasy of a mode of discourse – and, concomitantly, a mode of being – which would suspend the conflict which Barthes sees as being inherent to much social discourse and behaviour. Barthes elucidates the ideal by examining both positive and negative examples. The figures that 'renvoient aux modes conflictuels du discours' (N, 261) include 'Colère', 'Arrogance', and 'Affirmation'. But Barthes has also found examples of attitudes which suspend conflict or offer strategic means by which one can temporarily evade the conflictual logic by which language and thus social interaction are structured. Examples of such 'figures' are 'Bienveillance', 'Silence', 'Délicatesse', 'Wou-Wei', and 'L'Androgyne.'

The neutral is related to *idiorrythmie*. It can be seen as the positive distance between human subjects, a respectful space in which expecta-



tions and judgments are minimised. An active version of the neutral can be found in linguistic acts, such as the oblique evasion of persistent questioning practised by figures such as Pyrrho's disciple, Eurylochus, and the character of Mélisande in Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The neutral is also attained in certain physical and mental states, such as the drug-induced tranquil hyper-consciousness described by Baudelaire in *Les Paradis artificiels*, or Rousseau's description in *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* of his sense of being part of a great cosmic whole. Barthes is particularly interested in these states of existence in which hierarchy and social identity are nullified. In order to discuss these states of 'minimal existence', Zen and Tao writings are particularly important to Barthes. The corpus of material for *Le Neutre* includes an esoteric selection of material ranging from ancient Greek texts – notably texts on the Sceptics – to medieval theology to De Quincey, Michelangelo, and Pasolini. Barthes explains that his sources are almost exclusively drawn from 'la bibliothèque de ma maison de vacances [à Urt]' (34). Within the schematic of *Le Neutre*, and its yearning for retreats, feints, deviations from expectation, the use of the library at Urt can be seen as an *a priori* retreat. The course is built upon a 'réponse à côté' to the question of 'quelle bibliothèque?'

In *Le Neutre* Barthes imagines what it would be like to leave behind the conflictual interaction that is brought about by our adherence to binary oppositions. To do this, he has perforce to begin from these binary oppositions (between conflict and tranquillity, East and West, active and passive). Barthes insists that attaining a conduct which would be beyond such oppositional paradigms would involve not the passivity that we tend to associate with the idea of neutrality, but rather an endlessly renewed effort. It is so difficult, in fact, to achieve neutrality in our society that it can only be attained temporarily, as when Rousseau retreats to Lake Biel and writes his *Rêveries*. Only in certain spaces can the neutral be imagined. Thus *Comment vivre ensemble*'s ideal of retreat and *idiorrythmie* is implicitly present in *Le Neutre*. The similar structuring of *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*, which constitutes its own insistent topos, also confers a thematic unity on both of these courses. I shall be tracing the related ideals of community and retreat in Chapter 3.

In October 1978, Barthes announces that he wishes profoundly to change the form of his writing. This declaration is made in the lecture 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' This lecture, anthologised after Barthes's death, is broadly similar to the first lecture of *La Préparation du roman I* (December 1978–March 1979), and outlines the concerns of that lecture series.<sup>38</sup> Barthes's desire to write a creative work

which would articulate ‘la vérité des affects, non celle des idées’ (‘Longtemps’, 469) brings about a change in the structuring of his lectures. Both of the *Préparation* series are structured sequentially while retaining the originary protocol of the fantasy. In the first *Préparation* lecture, Barthes speaks of his desire to break with his previous intellectual work and with the oppressive public expectation it involves: ‘[L]e sujet écrivant subit une pression sociale pour l’amener (le réduire) à se *gérer lui-même*, à gérer son œuvre en la répétant: c’est ce *ronron* qui doit être interrompu’. The alternative to this is to embark upon what Barthes calls a ‘vita nuova’, calling to mind the ‘new life’ fantasies of Dante and of Jules Michelet. This ‘new life’ can only be envisaged through writing:

Or, pour celui qui écrit [...] il ne peut y avoir de *Vita Nova* [...] que la découverte d’une nouvelle pratique d’écriture. [...] Car face au ‘ronron’ de la gestion, deux voies s’ouvrent: 1) ou bien le silence, le repos, le retrait [...]; 2) ou bien reprendre la marche dans une autre direction, c’est-à-dire batailler, investir, *planter*, avec le paradoxe bien connu: ‘Passe encore de bâtir, mais planter à cet âge!’ (PR, 2 December 1978, 29–30).

This citation sums up the two main directions of all the Collège de France teaching – ‘retrait’ and ‘marche.’ He has already explored ‘la dilection du Neutre, de la Retraite’ (PR, 30) in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*. Now, the ‘marche’ is towards the idea of a novel, which shimmers at the horizon ‘à titre de mirage’; the fantasy-based method, as Barthes says at the end of *Comment vivre ensemble*, ‘est de l’ordre du *Plus tard*. Tout travail est ainsi assumé en tant qu’il est animé par le *Plus tard*. L’Homme = entre le *Jamais plus* et le *Plus tard*. Il n’y a pas de présent: c’est un temps impossible’ (CVE, 183).

The first *Préparation du roman* course, subtitled *De la vie à l’œuvre*, is concerned with how to transmute the matter of one’s own life into the desired new form. Barthes states that his imagined novel would document his present experience, and its ‘dimensions affectives, relationnelles’ (PR, 16 December 1978, 45). The exploration of how one might write a novel thus begins by examining the initial practice of all writing: note-making. In order to find out how he might make the transition from the ‘notation’ of the present to the long form of the novel, Barthes examines the ‘forme brève’ of the Japanese haiku. The haiku is chosen because it exemplifies for Barthes literature’s ability to render the absolute individuality of the ephemeral moment. The haiku, the study of which forms the bulk of *De la vie à l’œuvre*, is to be a propaedeutic for the novel, which, though a long form, would ideally conserve the intensity of the haiku. The series concludes with Barthes’s admission that his own love for the fragment as a genre means that, much as he wants to translate the

haiku's qualities into a longer form, this 'fantasme' is, after all, untenable: Barthes figures his technical inability to write a continuous, fictional form as a strongly felt resistance to fabulation. The question of his oscillation between the fragment and the desire for the novel will be treated in Chapter 5.

The second *Préparation* series, subtitled *L'Œuvre comme volonté* (December 1979–February 1980), moves to an examination of the material, real-world conditions that are necessary in order to write the proposed work. This series has a tripartite structure, corresponding to what Barthes describes as the three 'épreuves' which the writer must undergo in order to produce his work. This classically linear structure is determinedly – even, perhaps, parodically – conventional, with a clear introductory section and three chapters or acts. At the outset, however, Barthes tells us that there will be no conclusion, but rather 'une *Suspension*, un *Suspense final dont je ne connais pas moi-même la résolution*' (184). The first trial is that of the difficult choice of a form for the postulated work. For Barthes, the most profound formal choice is between fragmentation and the continuous. When discussing this opposition, he employs Mallarmé's distinction between the 'Album' and the 'Livre'. This is a significant paradigm which I discuss in detail in Chapter 5. The second 'épreuve' that the writer must undergo is entitled 'Patience', and involves the practical challenges faced by the writer who must organise his life in order to provide the time, space, and inspiration required to plan and write the work. This section deals exhaustively with timetables and domestic arrangements, citing many examples from the diaries and correspondence of writers such as Proust, Kafka and Flaubert.

The final trial discussed in *L'Œuvre comme volonté* is that of 'separation' and the sense of being 'inactuel' or out of time. Barthes considers the question of how the would-be writer can reconcile his desire for literature and for writing with the strident demands of sociality. Barthes had outlined this theme in his inaugural lecture, when he claimed that May '68 had inaugurated a crisis in pedagogical values, one of whose results is that literature is now 'désacralisée' (*L*, 40). Given that literature is not central to the concerns of the majority of people, the writer is 'exilé' (*PR*, 16 February 1980, 359). The end of this series is taken up with Barthes's preoccupations regarding the place of literature in society and the survival of literary language. He concludes that the writer needs explicitly to 'assume' his status as an exile, in order to transform any pessimism regarding the marginality of literature into a 'Forme intense d'Optimisme'. Finally, he adds that he is incapable of producing the novel or the 'Degré zéro de l'Œuvre' which has formed the fantasy of the last

two lecture series. The last lecture admits this, but remains determinedly open and unresolved in the end, gesturing towards a future time in which the work that Barthes imagines, characterised as ‘*simple, filiale, [et] désirable*’ (PR, 23 February 1980, 377–78), could be written. Citing Arnold Schönberg’s statement that, in the wake of the post-serial music he shaped, it is still possible to write music in C major, Barthes concludes his final lecture thus: ‘C’est là, pour finir, l’objet de mon désir: *écrire une œuvre en Ut majeur*’ (PR, 23 February 1980, 384). ‘Ut majeur’ are the final words of *La Préparation* in the way that ‘l’Utopie du langage’ is the final phrase of Barthes’s first book *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture*.<sup>39</sup> The work in C major, despite its untimely nature, remains new in being, to the last, a *project*. Barthes hands it on, pointing out that this desired work could be written by somebody else (‘l’Œuvre que je voudrais ou écrire, ou qu’on écrive aujourd’hui pour moi’) (378).

Throughout the four series of lectures, Barthes focuses on imbuing his pedagogical writing with unmagisterial, ‘provisional’ qualities. Reading these texts is frequently disorientating: we stagger, as Barthes does, ‘entre des bribes, des bornes de savoirs, de saveurs’ (CVE, 34). The ‘Cours-Livre’ or ‘Cours-Théâtre’ (PR, 229) is generically unstable, as Andy Stafford has pointed out: the interplay of elements of criticism, fiction and experiment leads to ‘what Barthes calls in *La Préparation du roman*, following the German Romantics, “bariolage”, an inter-generic (or extra-generic) form’.<sup>40</sup> As Chapter 5 shows, Barthes cannot produce the fantasised ‘roman bariolé’, but perhaps it is achieved within the *Cours* themselves, and within their essayism. For it is in fact, after all, the essay that is pre-eminent: an essayism in filiation with Montaigne and with the German Romantics is the very form which accommodates the collapse of rhetorical codings that Barthes explicitly desires, while providing an all-encompassing, permissive form in which one can explore diverse forms and fields of knowledge – always admitting one’s own contingency.

Since Montaigne, the essay has been concerned with the problematisation of genre, and with a rejection of concept-driven logic which tends to exclude specificity. Montaigne indicates this in ‘Des Livres’ in a diatribe against hidebound rhetoric. He vigorously condemns the style of Cicero, with its definitions, dissections (‘partitions’), and wordiness. Such ‘longueries’ are frustrating and inessential: ‘pour moi, qui ne demande qu’à devenir plus sage, non plus savant et éloquent, ces ordonnances logiciennes et Aristotéliques ne sont pas à propos’. He seeks instead a frank discourse which declares the author’s personal interests

and which does away with obfuscatory generic conventions: ‘il ne me faut point d’allèchement, ni de sauce: je mange bien la viande toute crue’.<sup>41</sup> Seneca and Plutarch satisfy his desire for immediacy, for they treat ‘science’ in ‘pièces décousues’, leading to a style that is gratifyingly ‘plein de points et saillies, [et] de choses’.<sup>42</sup> Against the pre-eminence of discursive systems, with their conflicts and hierarchies, Montaigne sets the details of taste which render truth, as Jean Starobinski comments, ‘more individual, different, and, by this very fact, more apt to become universalised’.<sup>43</sup>

Montaigne is on the side of fragmentation, of *thinginess*. He finds his echo in Barthes, who proceeds by rupturing the ‘longueries’ of doctrinal discourse – not only because, like Montaigne, he gets bored, but for the more serious reason that the compacity of discourse must be disrupted in order that its ideological sway be attenuated. Commenting upon the system of ‘traits’ in *Comment vivre ensemble*, he writes: ‘il convient de casser la fixité du langage et de nous rapprocher de notre discontinu fondamental’. While the fragmentation of discourse may be only a small step in this direction – ‘un faux discontinu, ou un discontinu impur, atténué’ – it is worthwhile nonetheless: ‘il est la plus petite concession que nous soyons contraints à faire à la fixité du langage’ (*CVE*, 52). Throughout his career, Barthes writes in short bursts for this very reason. Much of Barthes’s œuvre is a collection of *notes* in various directions, which refuse to assemble themselves under one totality. It is for this reason that he is regarded by some thinkers – notably those hostile to the essay as genre, such as Pierre Bourdieu – as insubstantial and flighty. I shall examine in Chapter 2 the manner in which Barthes plays upon such imputations of impurity. Though both Montaigne and Barthes employ the rhetorical tactic of self-deprecation (‘[Je suis] un sujet incertain’), making it clear that they can offer no overarching theory, both share a deep conviction of the value of their contingent discourses. The essayistic is the individualistic, and as a forum for knowledge is thus more helpful *to* individuals than the generalisations of system are. Indeed, abjuring system becomes vital, because, as Knight points out, ‘one of the problematic aspects of the structuralist orthodoxy which Barthes himself helped to fashion was precisely the gap it inserted between language and the world’.<sup>44</sup> And at the Collège de France, as I discuss in Chapter 1, Barthes wants to produce a discourse which is ‘moins technique et plus “humain”’.<sup>45</sup>

The ‘humanisation’ of discourse comes about through the insertion of sensuous detail: in this too Barthes is the heir to the Montaigne who discusses his liking for salted beef, for unsalted bread.<sup>46</sup> In *Roland*

Barthes, he discusses his desire to insert ‘sensual’ detail into ‘le discours de l’essai’. In this way a double benefit is gained: ‘apparition somptueuse d’une matérialité et distorsion, écart brusque imprimé au murmure intellectuel’. Thus he commends *The Sorrows of Young Werther* for its sudden introduction of a description of a dish of buttered peas. More immediately still, in certain haikus, ‘la ligne des mots écrits s’ouvre brusquement et c’est le dessin même du mont Fuji ou d’une sardine qui vient gentiment occuper le lieu du mot congédié’ (RB, 709–10). The importation of sensual detail here is attributable to a desire to use literature to overcome human alienation from reality. Additionally, it is a strategy by means of which the arrogance of conflictual discourse can be set aside: in *Le Neutre*, Barthes discusses the attraction of this *thingification* for Rousseau, who spends his time at Lake Biel describing the plants of the island: ‘jouissance de substituer un savoir irénique (peut-être obsessionnel: chosification, inventaire), à un combat d’idées’ (N, 13 May, 181). This same temptation is what leads Barthes to include in the Collège de France lectures references to so many tactile objects and experiences: reaching for one’s bedside table in the dark; drinking tea on a wet afternoon; knocking over a bottle of ink; walking in the countryside above the Adour; reading a menu written in chalk. Not for nothing does the word ‘experience’ – the title of Montaigne’s final, culminating *Essai* – appear as a ‘mot d’ordre’ at the end of Barthes’s inaugural lecture: ‘Vient peut-être maintenant l’âge d’une autre expérience. [...] Cette expérience a [...] un nom illustre et démodé [...]: *Sapientia*: nul pouvoir, un peu de savoir, un peu de sagesse, et le plus de saveur possible’ (L, 46). The special status of the Collège de France as an institution which allows a teaching unfettered by considerations of syllabi or qualifications means that this essayistic teaching, incongruous though it may (deliberately) be, is possible.

Barthes links his liking for the sensuous object which disrupts intellectual discourse to a way of writing which rejects conceptualisation in favour of using intellectual ‘objects’ to advance thought:

Différent du ‘concept’ et de la ‘notion’, qui sont, eux, purement idéals, l’*objet intellectuel* se crée par une sorte de pesée sur le signifiant: il me suffit de *prendre au sérieux* une forme (étymologie, dérivation, métaphore) pour me créer [...] une sorte de *pensée-mot* qui va courir, tel l’anneau du furet, dans mon langage. (RB, 709)

At the Collège de France, these ‘*pensées-mots*’ are the *fantasmes* informing each lecture series. Each series unfurls out of one ‘object’: *idiorhythmie*; the neutral; the novel. But these are not concepts, and their truth is never established. Rather, they are approached obliquely, in simula-



tion, imagination, and above all through metaphor. As a good post-Nietzschean, Barthes is profoundly distrustful of the ‘tyrannie du concept’ (*N*, 20 May, 200), both in theory and in life, because of its elision of nuances. The concept as generalising instrument makes no place for the non-systematisable, the contingent, or what Adorno calls the ‘non-identical’.<sup>47</sup> ‘A word becomes a concept’, writes Nietzsche,

insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless [...] cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept ‘leaf’ is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. [...] We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual.<sup>48</sup>

It is insofar as the concept is a *reductive* force that Barthes feels it imperative that we turn away from it; he quotes Nietzsche in *Le Neutre*, adding that the concept is a ‘force réductrice du divers, du devenir qu’est le sensible, l’*aisthèsis*’. The Greek word for sensation quoted here is also at the root of the word ‘aesthetic’. No coincidence this, for to defend *aisthèsis* (feeling), as Barthes wishes, involves an aesthetic method – the use of metaphor: ‘si l’on veut refuser la réduction, il faut dire non au concept, ne pas s’en servir. Mais, alors, comment parler, nous autres, intellectuels? Par métaphores. Substituer la métaphore au concept: écrire’ (*N*, 20 May, 201). An aesthetic approach to discourse is closely linked to Nietzsche’s perspectivism and to his rejection of ‘truth’ in favour of the idea of multitudes of truths, each invested with personal interest.

In the table of the ‘phases’ of his career included in *Roland Barthes* Barthes declares his most recent phase, from 1973 onwards, as being under the sign of Nietzsche (*RB*, 718–19).<sup>49</sup> It is an argument of this book that the late Barthes is not only Nietzschean but also Kantian, Schlegelian, and Adornian.<sup>50</sup> He shares the priorities of many of the most important thinkers of the German aesthetic tradition, with the exception of Hegel. Barthes’s late work is an assent to Adorno’s statement in *Minima Moralia* that ‘the whole is the false’: this reverses Hegel’s prioritisation of totality.<sup>51</sup> Barthes’s mistrust of the concept means he is anti-idealist, concerned with everything that Hegel’s dialectics leaves out: the singular, the specific, and the individual relation with the world. In this respect Barthes shares the basic principles of Nietzsche and Adorno, who reject Hegel’s systematism and promote the cognitive power of the aesthetic.<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche, and Adorno in his wake, have their roots in Kant and in the Jena Romantics of the 1790s, though they both tend to gloss over their debts to the Romantics.<sup>53</sup> Andrew Bowie has demonstrated the

importance of Romantic thought to Nietzsche's conception of language. It is largely thanks to the influence of Romantic thought that Nietzsche can formulate his questioning of the value of truth, and characterise the truth instituted by language as 'a repressive reduction to identity of something which inherently resists our identifications'.<sup>54</sup> For Nietzsche as for Schelling and the Romantics, modernity is negatively associated with the rule of the concept, which excludes "intuition", in the sense of the particular, immediate relation to the world which concepts cannot capture'.<sup>55</sup> Nature plays an important place in these thinkers' theories, as it did in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Similarly, Adorno insists on the importance of nature (absent in Hegel's aesthetic theory), and advances his own more austere conception of modernity as a repressive force. Art, in Adorno's renewal of Romantic aesthetics, becomes the only locus of the articulation of the non-identical. For all of these thinkers, the most vital work to be undertaken within theory is the defence of individual quiddity in the face of pervasive, systematising concepts. Also, the Schlegel brothers, Nietzsche and Adorno all share a conviction of the importance of practising paratactical, fragmented style.

It is no surprise then that Barthes's late theory is increasingly close in preoccupation to this tradition, or that his final lectures, as I show in Chapter 5, involve a celebration of the German Romantic conception of the fantasised work. His avowed debt to Nietzsche mobilises, often implicitly, echoes of Kantian and Romantic theory. These German influences constitute a thread running throughout this book. Barthes's final work is, as Knight has pointed out, increasingly marked by 'Romantic affects [...]: love, pity, and a preoccupation with death'.<sup>56</sup> It is the dying Nietzsche, mad with pity, who appears in the final pages of *La Chambre claire*; in this post-Romantic thinker Barthes sees his own desperate desire for the dead or about-to-die referent of the photographic image.<sup>57</sup> Beginning with the invocation of Nietzsche's idea of 'culture' in the first *Comment vivre ensemble* lecture, Nietzsche is a tutelary figure throughout this teaching; I examine in Chapter 2 the manner in which Barthes licenses his idiosyncratic lecturing methodology, with its tactics of simulation and fantasy, by recourse to the Nietzschean archetype of the artist.

The Collège de France teaching takes place during a period in Barthes's writing which is entirely consumed by aesthetic matters; indeed, Barthes's late work has been castigated for a retrenching into the aesthetic.<sup>58</sup> His published work during this period consists almost exclusively of essays on aesthetic objects: music, painting, literature, film. These late texts are examined in this book alongside the Collège de France

teaching. Through an exploration of the lectures' most insistent forms and themes, in tandem with a wide-ranging analysis of Barthes's output in the 1970s generally, I arrive at a reassessment of the critical and ethical priorities of the 'late Barthes'. His final book, *La Chambre claire*, is often dubbed a 'novel' by critics. In fact this text is the essay *par excellence* and the acme of Barthes's aesthetic, essayistic method, at the crux of which is the problem of how to reconcile the individual and society, the particular response and universal norms. Aesthetic judgment, as Kant showed in the *Critique of Judgment*, is the arena within which this oscillation between subjective response and more universal importance takes place. All aesthetic judgment is based on pleasure or on pain; Barthes extends this Kantian precept when he states that 'on étudie ce que l'on désire ou ce que l'on craint' (N, 261). The ability of the aesthetic experience to help us to organise our sense of our place in the world is thus central to Barthes's late work, and this is made clear in the Collège de France lectures, with their insistent questions: how can a refusal of conflict be recognised? How can grief be expressed? How can we overcome the gap that language institutes between ourselves and the world? How can we criticise the workings of power without becoming part of them ourselves? For Barthes, as he suggests in his inaugural lecture, the answer to these as to so many other questions lies in literature itself, and its ever-renewed attempts to represent the grain of existence.

As a professor of literary semiology, Barthes teaches us the importance of the aesthetic to our sense of our place in the world, the many ways in which kaleidescopic everyday reality can be articulated in language, and the value of the non-instrumentalisable, whatever that might be: reticence; elusive social accord; a kind of teaching that is not goal-oriented. These ideals are all present in the 'fantasmes' informing the four lecture series. Barthes's reflections in these lectures are 'pour [lui], une façon de chercher – d'une façon libre – [s]on propre style de présence aux luttes de [s]on temps' (N, 33). Barthes is of ongoing relevance because he is a thinker emblematic of modernity: he is tormented by the endless proliferation of meaning, by 'la marque intolérable du sens affiché, du sens oppressif' (RB, 699), and by its suffocation of particularity. He faces the problem of wanting individual expression, but wanting that expression to also have some general validity *without* being oppressive. He seeks a still place, a 'minimal existence' in which expression would be as exact and piercing as grief and love themselves, social relations would be transparent and peaceable, and meaning would be non-combative. This is why Barthes's teaching at the Collège de France is vitally, affirmatively 'fantasmatique'.

## Notes

- 1 Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du roman I et II. Notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France 1978–1979 et 1979–1980*, ed. Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2003), p. 234, and oral recording, *La Préparation du roman I et II. Cours au Collège de France 1978–1980* [CD MP3] (Paris: Seuil/Sonopress, 2003), session of 15 December 1979. The phrase is from Montaigne’s ‘Du repentir’, in *Essais*, ed. Emmanuel Naya et al. (Paris: Gallimard/Folio, 2009), vol. III, p. 37.
- 2 Alain Legros, *Essais sur poutres: Peintures et inscriptions chez Montaigne* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2003).
- 3 ‘L’abstinence pyr rhonienne’ in Barthes, *Le Neutre. Notes de cours au Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. Thomas Clerc (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002), p. 227.
- 4 See Diana Knight, *Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).
- 5 “‘Essence”, “the essential nature”, is something perspectival and always presupposes a multiplicity. At the bottom of it there always lies “what is it for me?””; Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 556.
- 6 Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens. Notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France, 1976–77*, ed. Claude Coste (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002), p. 52.
- 7 Montaigne, ‘Des Livres’, *Essais*, vol. II, p. 118.
- 8 Réda Bensmaïa has demonstrated that Barthes’s work is part of an ‘essayistic’ filiation of writers, from Montaigne through the German Romantics to Blanchot. *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text*, trans. Pat Fedkiew (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Antoine Compagnon discussed the influence of Montaigne on Barthes at the Cerisy colloquium on Barthes’s work in 1977: ‘L’Imposture’, in *Prétexte: Roland Barthes. Colloque de Cerisy* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1978), pp. 40–56.
- 9 Barthes, *Leçon* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 44. Kris Pint has examined at length the psychoanalytic underpinnings of the Barthesian ‘fantasme’ in *The Perverse Art of Reading: On the Phantasmatic Semiology in Roland Barthes’s Cours au Collège de France*, trans. Christopher M. Gemerchak (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010). The focus of Pint’s study is on the nature of the reader’s fantasmatic involvement with the text she is reading.
- 10 ‘The term ‘séminaire’, while it can be used in the same sense as the English word ‘seminar’ (i.e. a small group), tends to be used in France to refer to what in English would be called a ‘course (of lectures)’. Barthes’s ‘séminaires’ at the Collège de France were delivered to a very large audience, but differed from the lecture courses in consisting largely of presentations from invited speakers.
- 11 As well as posthumous collections of essays, Wahl published the autobiographical text *Incidents*, which includes the diary *Soirées de Paris*, in 1987 (Paris: Seuil).
- 12 ‘Le Désir de neutre’, transcribed by Laurent Dispot. *La Règle du jeu*, 5 (1991): 36–60.
- 13 See Lucy O’Meara, “‘L’Affaire Barthes” and Ownership of the Voice’, in *Transmissions: Essays in French Thought, Literature and Culture*, ed. Bradley Stephens and Isabelle McNeill (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 141–60.
- 14 The Barthes archives were moved from IMEC to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Richelieu site) in 2011.
- 15 There are recordings of every lecture, with the exception of the final *Comment*

- vivre ensemble session, of which only the first half exists.
- 16 Roland Barthes, *Le discours amoureux: séminaire à l'École pratique des hautes études 1974–1976 suivi de Fragments d'un discours amoureux: inédits*, ed. Claude Coste (Paris: Seuil, 2007); *Le Lexique de l'auteur: séminaire à l'École pratique des hautes études 1973–1974, Suivi de fragments inédits du Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, ed. Anne Herschberg Pierrot (Paris: Seuil, 2010); *Sarrasine de Balzac: séminaires à l'École pratique des hautes études 1967–1968 et 1968–1969*, ed. Claude Coste and Andy Stafford (Paris: Seuil, 2011)
  - 17 Barthes, *Journal de deuil: 26 octobre 1977–15 septembre 1979*, ed. Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2009), and *Carnets du voyage en chine*, ed. Anne Herschberg Pierrot (Paris: Christian Bourgois/IMEC, 2009). François Wahl opposed these publications vehemently: see 'Roland Barthes aurait été révolté', interview with Grégoire Leménager, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 21 January 2009. <<http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/essais/20090121.BIB0811/roland-barthes-auroit-ete-revolte.html>> [accessed 22 January 2009].
  - 18 Genette defines the 'épitexte' as a text which is provisional or contingent: drafts, autobiographies, self-reflexive commentaries, and all oral and public performances. Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. 11.
  - 19 For a comparative study of Barthes's and Foucault's teaching which focuses strongly on the materiality of the manuscripts and the particular status of the teaching archive, see Guillaume Bellon, *L'Inquiétude du discours: Barthes et Foucault au Collège de France* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 2012).
  - 20 Benveniste, *Dernières leçons au Collège de France (1968–1969)*, ed. Jean-Claude Coquet and Irène Fenoglio (Paris: EHESS/Gallimard/Seuil, 2012).
  - 21 For a representative selection of published pedagogical material, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours au Collège de France: 1958–1959 et 1960–1961*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1996); Michel Foucault, 'Il faut défendre la société'. *Cours au Collège de France (1975–1976)*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1997); Jacques Derrida, *Séminaire: La bête et le souverain (Tome I: 2001–2002)*, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud (Paris: Galilée, 2008).
  - 22 'Introduction', in *Roland Barthes Retroactively: Reading the Collège de France Lectures*, ed. Jürgen Pieters and Kris Pint, *Paragraph* 31.1 (2008), pp. 1–8. Several of the articles in this collection also appear in French in Sémir Badir and Dominique Ducard, eds., *Roland Barthes en Cours (1977–1980): Un style de vie* (Dijon: Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2009).
  - 23 Jonathan Culler, in his contribution to the Pieters and Pint volume, demonstrates his belief that Barthes's very late work on literature is 'vitiat[e]d' by the biographical 'retour de l'auteur' and the consideration of 'œuvre' at the expense of 'texte' in *La Préparation du roman II*. 'Preparing the Novel: Spiralling Back', in Pieters and Pint, eds., *Roland Barthes Retroactively*, pp. 109–120 (p. 119).
  - 24 Pieters and Pint, 'Introduction', p. 7.
  - 25 Barthes's notes for 'Tenir un discours' appear in *CVE*, pp. 185–220; the notes for 'La métaphore du labyrinthe' appear in *PR*, pp. 165–79. The notes and accompanying photographs for 'Proust et la photographie' appear in *PR*, pp. 385–457. For a reading of the Proust seminar, see Kathrin Yacavone, 'Reading Through Photography: Roland Barthes's Last Seminar "Proust et la photographie"', *French Forum*, 34.1 (2009): 97–112.
  - 26 My study of the lectures is based on both reading and listening to the material. In most cases my citations are from the printed text, supplemented where pertinent by transcriptions from the recordings.
  - 27 Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977); *La Chambre claire: note sur la*

- photographie* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1980).
- 28 Barthes had concluded his final seminar of 1976 at the École pratique des hautes études with a discussion of this Nietzschean opposition. See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1962), pp. 123–26.
- 29 Jacques Lacarrière, *L'Été grec. Une Grèce quotidienne de 4000 ans* (Paris: Plon, 1976).
- 30 There are still idiorrhythmic 'skites' or communites of hermits living on Mount Athos alongside more regulated cenobitic monasteries. See Graham Speake, *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Cenobitic monks live communally, praying, eating and working together, under the authority of a head monk. Idiorrhythmic monks live and work alone and dispose of their own goods. According to Lacarrière, the only gathering they all attend is the evening prayers (*L'Été grec*, p. 40).
- 31 Pierre Griolet, ed., *Palladius: les Moines du désert. Histoire lausiaque* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1986).
- 32 Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* [1924], trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
- 33 Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* [1719], ed. and intro. John Richetti (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001).
- 34 André Gide, *La Séquestrée de Poitiers* [1930] (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).
- 35 Émile Zola, *Pot-Bouille* [1882] (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).
- 36 Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* [1913–27], 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard/Pléiade, 1954), vol. II, pp. 553–61.
- 37 'Le neutre-le fragmentaire' is a key term in Blanchot's *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). Despite a certain amount of thematic overlap, Barthes and Blanchot are difficult to align due to the vastly different frameworks of their respective œuvres: Barthes's work prioritises socio-historical situatedness, notably regarding the use of language, whereas Blanchot's arguments tend generally towards the ontological or mythical. It is clear throughout his career that Barthes admires Blanchot, but he states in *La Préparation du roman* that this admiration is in spite of the fact that 'mon projet récuse le sien' (380). Christophe Bident has characterised their divergence by saying that 'Blanchot was a man of the absolute, Barthes a man of plurality'; 'R/M, 1953', *Paragraph*, 30.3 (2007): 67–83 (p. 68). Éric Marty argues convincingly that despite the thinkers' shared investment in the term, their conceptions of the 'neutre' are differently motivated. Blanchot is haunted by lack, whereas Barthes is tormented by an over-abundance of meaning. What links these thinkers, Marty argues, is not so much shared theoretical preoccupations as a shared *drive* towards a force which would escape mastery, and which they both name 'neutre'. Marty, 'Maurice Blanchot, Roland Barthes, une "ancienne conversation"', *Les Temps modernes*, 654 (2009): 74–89. Leslie Hill believes that Barthes misreads Blanchot, but also states that the two thinkers' conceptions of the neutral are radically different: 'While for Blanchot the Neuter was what preceded all manifestation, challenging the privilege of the visual, for Barthes it was the opposite, as the infinite detail of the figures described in *Le Neutre* testifies; it was what manifested itself without end within the interstices and discontinuities of the paradigm'. *Radical Indecision: Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida, and the Future of Criticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 136.
- 38 The 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' lecture was first published in *Inédits du Collège de France* 3 in 1982, and subsequently in *Le Bruissement de la langue: essais critiques IV*, ed. François Wahl (Paris: Seuil, 1984), pp. 313–25. I refer to it as it appears in OC, V, 459–70.
- 39 *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, suivi de *Nouveaux essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil,

- 1962), p. 67.
- 40 Andy Stafford, “‘Préparation du romanesque’ in Barthes’s Reading of *Sarrasine*”, in Pieters and Pint, eds., *Roland Barthes Retroactively*, pp. 95–108 (pp. 104–105).
- 41 Montaigne, ‘Des Livres’, *Essais*, vol. II, pp. 127–28.
- 42 ‘Des Livres’, *Essais*, vol. II, p. 126.
- 43 Starobinski, ‘The Body’s Moment’, trans. John A. Gallucci, *Yale French Studies* 64 (1983): 273–305 (p. 303).
- 44 *Barthes and Utopia*, p. 8.
- 45 ‘Rencontre avec Roland Barthes’, interview with Nadine Dormoy Savage for *The French Review*, February 1979. OC, V, 735–43 (p. 741).
- 46 Montaigne, ‘De l’expérience’, *Essais*, vol. III, p. 456. Cf. Barthes’s list of likes and dislikes, ‘J’aime, je n’aime pas’, in *Roland Barthes*, OC, IV, 575–774 (p. 692).
- 47 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990).
- 48 ‘On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense’, in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 114–23 (p. 117).
- 49 Douglas Smith has demonstrated that Nietzsche’s thought was revived in France in the early 1970s, not only in Deleuze’s work, but also in Sarah Kofman’s and Pierre Klossowski’s. *Transvaluations: Nietzsche in France, 1872–1972* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). On the influence of Nietzsche on French theory, see also Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche’s French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 50 Kant’s aesthetic theory was outlined in the *Critique of Judgment* in 1790. *Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986). Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel began publishing what subsequently came to be seen as the founding texts of German Romanticism in the late 1790s. As Kai Hammermeister has shown in *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Adorno’s post-war work is a refinement of paradigmatic late-eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. Barthes seems to have been unaware of Adorno’s thought. There are nonetheless striking similarities between the two theorists’ work, which I discuss in “‘Not a Question but a Wound’: Adorno, Barthes and Aesthetic Reflection”, *Comparative Literature*, Spring 2013 [article currently in press].
- 51 *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), p. 50. This statement is the inversion of Hegel’s ‘The true is the whole’ in *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie (London: Harper, 1967), preface, §20. Barthes is certainly counter-Hegelian at the end of his career, though dialectical materialism had a role to play in his earlier, Marxist work. Nikolaj Lübecker has written about the indebtedness of *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture* to a Hegelian tradition of social philosophy in *Community, Myth and Recognition in Twentieth-Century French Literature and Thought* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 6, pp. 113–39. Andy Stafford has pointed out that Barthes’s use of the figure of the spiral in his late work to discuss repetition in modernity allows him partly to ‘accommodat[e] both Nietzsche and Hegel’, because this figure is ‘progressive without being teleological, dialectical without totalising’. *Roland Barthes, Phenomenon and Myth: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 184.
- 52 See Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition*, for an excellent account of these thinkers’ aesthetic theories. Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* demonstrates at length his opposition to Hegelian dialectics and his argument that philosophy must concern itself with the non-identical aspects which do not fit in Hegel’s

- schematisations.
- 53 Hammermeister, *German Aesthetic Tradition*, p. 143, p. 194.
- 54 Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 290–91. For more on Romantic theory, see Bowie's *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 65–89.
- 55 Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, p. 291.
- 56 *Barthes and Utopia*, p. 10.
- 57 'J'entraîs follement dans le spectacle, dans l'image, entourant de mes bras ce qui est mort, ce qui va mourir, comme le fit Nietzsche, lorsque le 3 janvier 1889, il se jeta en pleurant au cou d'un cheval martyrisé: devenu fou pour cause de Pitié' (CC, 883).
- 58 Annette Lavers states that Barthes's use, in later work, of terms such as 'pleasure', 'charm' and even 'aesthetic' itself meant that he was 'on the way to being fully integrated into the bourgeoisie'. *Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 207.





# 1

## Barthes's Heretical Teaching

J'ai peu de popularité. Pourquoi? Parce que j'ai subordonné la question des intérêts à la question de l'âme. [...] Point d'école. Pourquoi? Parce que je n'ai pas exagéré l'importance des formules, parce que je n'ai voulu asservir aucun esprit, mais au contraire les affranchir tous, leur donner la force vivante qui fait juger et trouver, développer les facultés d'invention. [...] Une foule d'hommes ébranlés m'ont dit ou écrit en sortant du Collège de France: 'Nous recommençons de croire à la vie. Nous n'avons rien appris chez vous. Seulement notre âme, absente, est rentrée en nous'.

Jules Michelet, *Cours au Collège de France*, 1851

À l'issue de [l]a leçon inaugurale [de Barthes] au Collège de France, [...] une jeune fille inconnue a bondi sur moi avec véhémence, avec colère: 'Qu'admirez-vous là-dedans? D'un bout à l'autre il n'a rien dit!' Ce n'était pas tout à fait exact, il avait dit sans cesse mais en évitant que cela se fige en un *quelque chose*: selon cette méthode qu'il mettait au point depuis de longues années, il s'était retiré de ce qu'il disait, au fur et à mesure.

Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'Le parti de Roland Barthes', 1981

On 14 March 1976, Roland Barthes was elected to the 'chaire de sémiologie littéraire' at the Collège de France. Acceptance into the Collège comes via the approval of one's peers and (nominally) of the Institut de France.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Barthes was elected by the professorial body of the Collège de France by a majority of only one vote illustrates perfectly a tension in the Collège itself between conservative and slightly more radical values: Barthes was, for many, a more controversial choice than his competitor for the chair, the semiologist Claude Bremond. His 'présentateur', Michel Foucault, represented the more nonconformist pole of the establishment, having acceded to the Collège de France in 1970. Claude Lévi-Strauss was elected in 1959. Thus when Barthes arrived, as François Dosse points out, three of the four 'mousquetaires' of the high period of French structuralism were now enshrined in this most prestigious of institutions.<sup>2</sup> We shall see in this chapter that it is the particular status and institutional ethos of the Collège that make it, from Barthes's point of view, the ideal institution in which to teach. However, as he pointed out in a 1979 interview, 'au Collège de France, [...] il y a des contradictions entre des attitudes très novatrices et un aristocratism

incontestable'.<sup>3</sup> These contradictions are brought about by the Collège's paradoxical status: it is arguably the most eminent academic institution in France, but it is not part of the mainstream university system.<sup>4</sup>

I have found it helpful to use the work of Pierre Bourdieu as a means to contextualise Barthes's career in what we could call the marginal academy in France. Given the paucity of material treating these institutions, Bourdieu's 'sociology of intellectuals' becomes very useful. Interestingly, Bourdieu is extremely hostile to Barthes's intellectual endeavour. I shall use Bourdieu's own theoretical framework to argue against the criticisms Bourdieu levels at Barthes. Bourdieu's *Homo academicus*, published in 1984, is a study of the French academy during the 1960s and '70s.<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu devotes a section of the text to the 'hérétiques consacrés' of the French academic field. These are figures such as Lévi-Strauss, Foucault – and, though he does not say so, Bourdieu himself – who are employed in research-led institutions such as the École pratique des hautes études and the Collège de France. These thinkers operate at a remove from the mainstream university system, partly because, in Bourdieu's analysis, they lack 'les titres sociaux ouvrant l'accès aux positions socialement dominantes'.<sup>6</sup> They have little clout in the university field, but widespread notoriety beyond it. Their employment in the 'marginal' institutions means they are free to pursue pedagogical and research goals which are far removed from the criteria of reproduction and performance which govern more mainstream institutions. They are concerned with '[la production d']un savoir nouveau, voire hérétique, [et] l'aptitude et l'inclination à produire un tel savoir'.<sup>7</sup>

Bourdieu's characterisation of Barthes as a 'hérétique consacré' provides a useful rubric under which to examine the tensions brought about, in Barthes's late pedagogy, by his dual status as an intellectual marginal to the university system, and as a professor at the most elite institution in France. There is a link between the ethos of the 'heretical' institutions in which Barthes was employed and the evolution of his pedagogical philosophy, itself heretical in the manner in which it challenges the norms of magisterial teaching.

### The École pratique des hautes études and the Collège de France: Heretical Institutions

In the recording of Barthes's inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, we hear him thanking the friends and colleagues who have helped him during the course of his career. Omitted from the published version, this

brief section occurs at the start of the lecture, when Barthes explains that his institutional status is 'incertain'. Even though his career has been 'universitaire', he says, he does not have 'les titres qui donnent ordinairement accès à cette carrière' (*L*, 7). Thus, he implies, his career was facilitated by those who had the goodwill to overlook this lack: <Il y a fallu, couronnée par celle que le Collège veut bien me témoigner, la confiance d'un certain nombre d'amis dont je ne puis oublier l'appui> (*Leçon* oral). The friends instrumental to his early career and development of his thought are <Philippe Rebeyrol, qui m'appela comme lecteur à l'Institut français de Bucarest, au sortir d'une longue maladie; [et] Julien Greimas qui m'initia à la linguistique lorsque nous étions collègues à l'université d'Alexandrie>. <sup>8</sup> His subsequent employment was thanks to <Lucien Febvre et Georges Friedmann [qui] m'ont permis de me former à la recherche au sein du CNRS, [et] Fernand Braudel et mes collègues de l'École des hautes études [qui] m'ont fait, voici quinze ans, le plus beau cadeau que l'on puisse faire à un homme: la conjonction d'un métier et d'une passion> (*Leçon* oral). <sup>9</sup>

The expressing of debts of gratitude at the start of the lecture is, of course, an institutional convention. Barthes uses this convention, however, to explain his own *unconventional* academic trajectory; his description of his career as a series of 'cadeau[x]' offered by 'amis' substitutes individuals' recognition of his worth for institutionally sanctioned credentials. The manner in which he describes his feelings upon accession to the Collège is in line with this tactic, for here Barthes insists that his election to the Collège provokes in him an emotion of pleasure, rather than a conviction that this institutional recognition is deserved: '[J]e me détournerai des raisons qui ont amené le Collège de France à m'accueillir – car elles sont incertaines à mes yeux – pour dire celles qui font pour moi, de mon entrée dans ce lieu, une joie plus qu'un honneur; car l'honneur peut être immérité, la joie ne l'est jamais' (*L*, 8). This routing of institutional prestige away from formality and towards a personal appreciation anticipates the method of Barthes's future teaching at the Collège de France. Moreover, to express his sense of his appointment as a gift rather than a prize allows Barthes figuratively to retain his intellectual autonomy by proposing himself as an independent who has chosen to accept this gift. Barthes's accession to the 'plus glorieux des temples de savoir' <sup>10</sup> is the logical endpoint of a career which was both marginal and prestigious. Barthes, though lacking the normal academic credentials, occupies posts in the best-regarded research institutions in his country. These posts at the École pratique des hautes études (henceforth EPHE) and the Collège de France allow him to be involved in higher

education without being trammelled by the curricula and bureaucracy of the mainstream university system.

Both the EPHE (founded 1868) and the Collège de France (founded 1530) were originally set up in order to provide alternatives to the teaching provided by the Parisian *facultés*. The Collège de France was founded by François I in order to facilitate the teaching of subjects such as Hebrew which were not provided by the university at the time. Since its opening, all lectures have been completely open to the public without constraint.<sup>11</sup> In his history of the Collège as a ‘lieu de mémoire’, Christophe Charle has described the Collège as ‘la première pierre de l’édification d’un contre-pouvoir intellectuel, le premier endroit où s’est jouée cette longue partie d’échecs entre le savant et le politique qui forme l’argument de l’histoire culturelle française’.<sup>12</sup> It is an institution entirely apart from the more controlled university system, and thus has always fostered idiosyncratic thought, ‘la spécialisation qui brise les cadres scolaires habituels, [et] l’appel à des individualités qui échappent en partie aux moules traditionnels ou les contestent’.<sup>13</sup> Charle is also careful to note, however, that the state does have some involvement in the Collège’s staffing: this is apparent from the election process, and at some points in its history the Collège has counted amongst its teaching body ‘autant d’exemples de la dépendance du Collège de France à l’égard de son protecteur, l’État republicain, qui l’utilise pour institutionnaliser des enseignements qui vont dans le sens de sa politique anticléricale ou antisocialiste’.<sup>14</sup> This was particularly notable during certain tumultuous periods of the nineteenth century: after Napoleon III’s coup d’état of 1851, for example, Edgar Quinet, Adam Mickiewicz and Barthes’s hero Jules Michelet were all dismissed from their Collège professorships in 1852. In the late twentieth century, however, the Collège’s autonomy has been firmer, in Charle’s account. He adds that the Collège’s always considerable prestige has been enhanced in the post-war era by the appointment of several professors with a considerable standing outside the academic arena: his examples are Pierre Boulez, Paul Valéry, and Raymond Aron – Barthes, Foucault and Lévi-Strauss would also count in this classification. In an era of major university expansion in France, Charle concludes, the Collège de France has returned fully to its original brief of fulfilling ‘un rôle que l’Université ne peut plus assurer, même dans les disciplines traditionnelles[:] la consécration de l’innovation’.<sup>15</sup> Thus it has managed to ‘faire coïncider son mythe fondateur et son histoire réelle’.<sup>16</sup>

The politician and historian Victor Duruy described the EPHE shortly after he had founded it as ‘un germe que je dépose dans les murs

lézardés de la vieille Sorbonne; en se développant, il les fera crouler'.<sup>17</sup> In his role as 'Ministre de l'Instruction publique', Duruy's aim was to rejuvenate the French university system. This was not to be undertaken by internal reform, but rather by the addition of a new institution that would remain peripheral to the main system. In this manner the model for the EPHE was the Collège de France, along with institutions such as the École normale supérieure and the École polytechnique. Duruy was interested in using teaching methods not yet in use in the French university, taking his inspiration from the German model of the seminar. Classes at the EPHE are still conceived of as research seminars rather than lecture series. Similarly, the title of 'professeur' was deliberately avoided by Duruy: lecturers at the EPHE are called 'Directeurs d'Études'. The new establishment was to be research-led but with a vocational bent, as evinced by the word 'pratique' in its title. Like the Collège de France, the EPHE would not concern itself with awarding degrees. The Collège de France, in fact, awards no qualification of any kind to its listeners. At the EPHE there is no preparation for any university exam, though the institution does award masters and post-doctoral qualifications, as well as its own in-house diplomas. Staff at both institutions provide research supervision: Barthes continued to act as *directeur d'études* for several students after his accession to the Collège de France.

In 1947, a sixth section of the EPHE, entitled 'Sciences économiques et sociales', was formed by Fernand Braudel, Lucien Febvre and Charles Morazé. They had received funding from the Rockefeller foundation to do so.<sup>18</sup> Braudel et al. lent their relatively high standing as historians to the establishment of the less prestigious discipline of sociology within the École. As the section initially had a small budget, most of the academics employed had, perforce, posts in other establishments as well. According to Revel and Wachtel, historians of the EPHE, the new section appealed particularly to specialists 'dont le cursus et la forme des travaux ne correspondent pas toujours aux règles académiques communes'.<sup>19</sup> Certainly the Sixth Section rapidly gained a reputation for studying non-standard subjects: Barthes's 1963–64 course, for example, studied 'des systèmes contemporains de signification: systèmes d'objets (vêtements, nourriture, logement)'. As Niilo Kauppi has pointed out, this interest in everyday life was consistent with the interests of the *Annales* school – of which Braudel was the foremost representative – and with the orientation of the Section and the École towards subjects considered as 'vulgar from the point of view of traditional research'. This was research that redefined the limit separating 'the academic from the avant-garde, and the anachronism of the Sorbonne from the topicality of essayism'.<sup>20</sup> The section generally was

untrammelled by disciplinary constraints. Greimas's and Barthes's semiological seminars were particularly fashionable during the 1960s and early '70s. Barthes's class was nominally a seminar in 'sociology', but was attended by a heterogeneous group of students with specialisms in psychoanalysis, literature, the visual arts and philosophy as well as sociology. The success of these seminars contributed to the setting up, in 1965, of a new subsection within the section entitled 'Sémantique, sémiologie et linguistique'. In this year Barthes also became Secretary of the school.<sup>21</sup>

During his time at the EPHE, Barthes was surrounded by many of the most innovative researchers working in Paris at the time. As well as Braudel and Febvre, his colleagues included Raymond Aron, Pierre Bourdieu, Edgar Morin, Gaëtan Picon and Lucien Goldmann, as well as his assistants Gérard Genette and Christian Metz (both appointed in 1968). Such was the success and dynamism of the Sixth Section that in 1975, it devolved to become the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS). The EHESS, a major research centre, currently employs hundreds of staff in its main centre and associated research centres, and has 3000 registered students.<sup>22</sup>

At the EPHE/EHESS, the 'Directeurs d'Études' are not required to have any particular academic qualifications, and they can lecture on any subject of their choosing. Likewise, the Collège does not require any particular qualification from its staff. Given the Collège's position at the top of the French intellectual hierarchy, it is naturally the case that a certain proportion of its teaching staff, elected to the Collège at the apogee of their careers, have been successful within the mainstream academy (whether in the 'facultés' or in the 'grands établissements' such as the ENS), and are in possession of the qualifications – such as the *agrégation* – that are required in those spheres.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, many of the Collège's professors are in no way 'heretical'. As Barthes himself pointed out, there is a strong current of conservatism at this institution. This is not what commentators on the Collège tend to stress, though: a pride in the Collège as republican institution informs (French) assessments of its free-spiritedness. The salient point, in any case, is that 'traditional' qualifications are not required by either the EPHE or the Collège. It is for this reason that these marginal institutions tend to be the logical place of employment for those experts in a given field who do not have the 'normal' qualifications. This, combined with the emphasis on innovative, research-based teaching, means that the EPHE and the Collège tend to be staffed by the most independent thinkers of any given field. At the time of Barthes's election to the Collège de France the human sciences

were represented by, amongst others, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Raymond Aron, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Georges Duby, and Fernand Braudel and Georges Dumézil (both at this point emeritus).

The Collège de France's only stipulation with regard to its professors is that they must teach a lecture course each year in which the material, related to their own research, is new. As Barthes points out in *Leçon*, 'le professeur n'y a d'autre activité que de chercher et de parler, [...] de rêver tout haut sa recherche'. At the Collège, one is exempt from the procedures of 'juger, choisir, promouvoir, s'asservir à un savoir dirigé' (*L*, 9–10) and thus abstracted from mechanisms of professionalism and standardisation. Barthes sees the institution as being a 'ruse' of history because it is 'un lieu que l'on peut dire rigoureusement: *hors-pouvoir*' (9). In *Le Lexique de l'auteur*, Barthes describes the EPHE in identical terms as 'la ruse de l'Histoire, la maille du filet, un produit aberrant de la liberté' (*LA*, 276). 'Comment peut-on être heureux dans une institution (qui est un petit morceau d'État)?' Barthes asks. The answer is that the EPHE feels less like an institution than like 'une société d'esprits libres (étudiants et enseignants mêlés), à ce qu'on eût appelé au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle une *académie* (de savoir et de langage)'. Though he is concerned that history will catch up with the École ('y reprendra fatalement ses droits'), for now it is 'le champ libre d'un *savoir-vivre* intellectuel' (*LA*, 277). What Barthes values in this institution is the liberty afforded to him in his choice of subjects to teach, the diversity of his colleagues, and the lightness of the bureaucratic structure (*LA*, 276n). Above all, it is the pleasure of the seminars themselves that he enjoys. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, a photograph of a smiling Barthes surrounded by thirteen of his *séminaristes* appears above a handwritten text in which he praises 'l'espace du séminaire' for its affective, 'romanesque' nature.

### Bourdieu: Essayism and the Heretics

The heretical scholars who are employed in the marginal institutions tend, Bourdieu shows, to have accumulated a degree of intellectual notoriety which generally tends to outstrip that of their university-based counterparts. Their names are linked to 'isms' such as structuralism, and they are widely discussed in the press, influential on the boards of scholarly journals, and well-known abroad. Their books are usually published in pocket editions. Indeed the identification of the 'consecrated heretics' as a category is partly due to the specificities of publishing in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, as distinct from the interwar period,



essays in literary and cultural theory were published in affordable paperback form. Thus a widespread forum existed for the articulation of intellectual arguments that combined literary and 'scientific' elements. The diffusion of theory in essay form meant that, as Niilo Kauppi puts it, the intellectuals who produced them could 'accumulate capital of intellectual fame regardless of the internal criteria of either the literature or university fields'.<sup>24</sup> To this in part was due the ascendancy of the structuralist 'mousquetaires' (Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Foucault, Lacan) into the 'nouveaux maîtres' of French thought.<sup>25</sup> It is in fact success as an essayist, and within the profane sphere of journalism, that is at the heart of Bourdieu's conception of Barthes's 'heresy'.

For Bourdieu, Barthes cannot be a serious thinker, because he is an essayist. It is implicit in his argument that Barthes's accession to the Collège de France is facilitated by a notoriety achieved by intellectually disreputable means. In the preface to the English translation of *Homo academicus* (1988), Bourdieu makes this clear:

Roland Barthes represents the peak of the class of essayists, who, having nothing to oppose to the forces of the field, are condemned, in order to exist, or subsist, to float with the tides of the external or internal forces which wrack the milieu, notably through journalism...<sup>26</sup>

In Bourdieu's lexis, essayism is a bad word. He made this clear in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, in which he makes an opposition between 'la science rigoureuse', and the bourgeois thinking of catch-all essay-writing – 'l'essayisme planétaire'.<sup>27</sup> In the *Homo academicus* preface, he makes this much clearer in his evaluation of Barthes. As a representative of the 'class of essayists', Barthes

gives instantaneous expression to all the changes in the forces of the field while appearing to anticipate them, and in this respect it is sufficient to follow his itinerary, and his successive enthusiasms, to discover all the tensions which were applied to the point of least resistance of the field, where what is called fashion continually flowers.<sup>28</sup>

In Bourdieu's view, it is in the nature of essayism to be mundane and merely fashionable. He testifies frequently to his absolute disdain for the essay as genre. Marielle Macé, in her recent study of the fortunes of the essay in France during the twentieth century, discusses Bourdieu as just one example of a strong tradition of denigration of this essay.<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu is firmly committed to a defence of what he calls 'rigorous science'. The posthumously published *Esquisse d'une auto-analyse* makes it clear that it is of vital importance for Bourdieu that he distinguish his work from that of literary and philosophical intellectuals, whom he sees as egotistical lone-ranger figures who do not practise the discipline, and

disciplinary purity, that he himself espouses.<sup>30</sup> This is why he distanced himself from philosophy in order to devote himself to the more collective and rigorous work of sociology. Bourdieu's endeavour is entirely premised on claims to authority: sociology is the supreme arbiter, and objectivity is *always* possible when sociological principles are applied to an object. Within this system of values essayism must be seen as feuil-letonistic and insufficiently strict. Barthes's work, of course, involves taking this prejudice regarding the essay on board in order to debunk it, in the belief that essayism, with its aesthetic method, its disregard for arbitrary divisions between objects of knowledge, and its scepticism of the possibility of objectivity, is extremely valuable. The hostile nature of Bourdieu's evaluation of Barthes highlights the resistance towards Barthes's work which is typical of a French tradition, practised before Bourdieu by Julien Benda and after him by his disciple Jacques Bouveresse, of castigating 'mere' literarity, especially when it is combined with theoretical endeavour.<sup>31</sup> Bourdieu's disdain for Barthes is a disdain for disciplinary impurity and the practice of an essayism based on aesthetic, as opposed to rational or moral, thought. His critique of Barthes is useful not only because it informs us about the institutional context and the stakes at play in the marginal institutions in which Barthes taught, but also because his trenchant distrust of Barthes's whole intellectual project refocuses our attention on the specificity of that project and on how it is deployed in his teaching.

Bourdieu's account of the 'heretics' is neatly illustrated by an account of the 'querelle de la nouvelle critique' in the early 1960s, in which Barthes's *Sur Racine* was attacked by the Sorbonne professor Raymond Picard for involving, precisely, a *heretical* critical account of Racine's work which involved non-traditional interpretive methods.<sup>32</sup> The Barthes–Picard quarrel is a boon to Bourdieu, involving as it does two diametrically opposed protagonists who embody a whole series of oppositions – conservatism versus iconoclasm, the Sorbonne versus the École pratique, literary history versus the new 'sciences humaines', agrégé versus non-agrégé. Bourdieu is clearly fascinated – though also infuriated – by how Barthes profited from this affair. He refers to Barthes's quarrel with Picard in his own inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1981, in *Homo academicus*, and again at more length in the English preface to *Homo academicus* (1998). Bourdieu here insists that the quarrel is, on Barthes's part, motivated by 'the obscure sentiment of revenge felt by the outsider'.<sup>33</sup> He uses the affair as a means to explain to anglophone readers the complexities of the French academic system. Barthes is his tutelary example of the 'heretic with a vocation to become a heresiarch'.<sup>34</sup>

Bourdieu deliberately conflates Barthes with the institutions which employ him: [he] condens[es] in his social being the tensions or contradictions inherent in the awkward position of the marginal academic institutions like the Ecole des Hautes Etudes “après Braudel”, he writes.<sup>35</sup> Like others employed in similar institutions – Bourdieu’s examples are Foucault, Althusser and Derrida (he omits himself) – the critical tenor of Barthes’s work is, in Bourdieu’s analysis, due to a petulance regarding his professional situation: all these thinkers ‘share an anti-institutional mood homologous in its form to that of a considerable fraction of students’. Bourdieu ascribes this to their frustration with ‘the discrepancy between their already considerable fame in the outside world, that is, outside the university and also outside France, and the subaltern status which is accorded them inside the French university world’.<sup>36</sup> Whether having a position as directeur d’études in the EPHE really constitutes a ‘subaltern’ position is very debatable: although it is not part of the mainstream university, it is by Bourdieu’s own admission (he worked there himself) both ‘prestigieuse et dynamique’. To attribute the anti-institutional tenor of the work of Barthes, Foucault and others to a career-long sulk at their ‘rejection’<sup>37</sup> by the mainstream university system is reductive. In Barthes’s case, the ethos of the marginal institutions certainly had an effect on his thinking and his teaching methodology. Bourdieu figures this negatively. Clearly, however, the liberation from the responsibilities of the standard academic trajectory had many positive effects.

### ‘Les naufragés de l’université’

In interviews given after his election to the Collège, Barthes points out that his employment in marginal institutions has allowed him a far greater intellectual freedom than he could have had had he been part of the university proper. Discussing this with Pierre Boncenne in April 1979, he points out that, through being prevented by his tuberculosis from following a standard academic career (ENS and/or *agrégation*, university), this has actually been lucky (‘ce[la] a été ma chance’), because he has ended up having the ideal career: ‘Du point de vue professionnel, j’ai eu la meilleure vie que je pouvais avoir puisque j’ai été accueilli – quitte à être contesté – dans cette Université que j’aimais bien depuis le début, mais accueilli dans des lieux assez marginaux et hors pouvoir’. He explains to Boncenne that this marginality is important in terms of its liberatory effects on pedagogy. The teaching that takes place in these institutions is not obliged to conform to any curricula, and its success is

not measured in terms of students' performance. Thus this teaching has more scope for ideological critique than a faculté-based teaching which is partly dictated by the demands of the academic and commercial marketplace:

Ces institutions sont marginales pour des raisons de style mais aussi pour une raison objective qui n'a pas été bien comprise lorsque j'en ai parlé dans ma leçon inaugurale: le Collège de France et, en grande partie, l'École pratique des hautes études ne délivrent pas de diplômes. On n'est donc pas entraîné dans un système de pouvoir, ce qui crée une marginalité objective.<sup>38</sup>

Because he is employed by institutions whose only stipulation is that their staff teach research-based material, Barthes can teach on any subject he chooses. More importantly, given Barthes's increasingly a-teleological thought during the 1970s, the results of this teaching do not need to be measurable, and there is no 'savoir dirigé' (*L*, 10) or pre-defined goals that have to be met. He need only present the unfurling of his own thought on the subject he has chosen to explore.<sup>39</sup> The emphasis on research as process (rather than completion) is particularly explicit at the Collège de France and championed as the core of its ethos: often quoted in discussions of the Collège is Ernest Renan's remark that this institution aims especially at producing 'la science en voie de se faire'.

The university is concerned with the consolidation of canonical knowledge. In instrumentalist terms, then, as Bourdieu points out, the university's teaching is 'destiné à produire des enseignants', whereas the teaching in the marginal institutions is 'destiné à préparer à la recherche proprement dite'. Bourdieu also discusses value judgments based on perceptions of the usefulness of the types of knowledge promulgated by the respective establishments. The university, he writes, 'doit inculquer [ce qui est] académiquement ratifié et homologué, donc digne d'être enseigné et appris (par opposition aux "modes" et à toutes les hérésies modernistes)'. The marginal institutions, on the other hand, 'consecrate' a knowledge that is heretical in its refusal of the norms of academic reproduction: the EPHE was known for its often casual approach to disciplinary divisions. Claude Lévi-Strauss has remarked that the Collège de France, similarly, offers 'une concession à un esprit indiscipliné'.<sup>40</sup> The marginal institutions will be attractive to a certain type of student for two reasons: firstly, their *raison d'être* is to provide a kind of teaching (in terms of both material and method) that is not available elsewhere. Secondly, this teaching is provided in many cases by intellectuals whose work has some standing outside the sphere of the academy. The personal reputations of such intellectuals as well as the oppositional nature of their work are attractive to students, especially in the wake of May '68.

At the time of Bourdieu's research, Barthes was still at the EPHE. Bourdieu remarks that the EPHE, though 'universitairement mineure', deploys a 'poids déterminant [...] dans le champ universitaire'. He attributes this to an '*effet d'institution* qu'elle est sans doute la seule, entre tous les établissements universitaires français, à exercer'. This 'effect' is brought about by efficient and ambitious management which guarantees the École's unique prestige, dynamism, and sense of liberty from 'des servitudes scolaires des facultés ordinaires'.<sup>41</sup> Thus an 'effet d'institution' as well as a personal reputation for 'heretical' thought combine to make Barthes's teaching at both the EPHE and the Collège de France popular. Barthes's seminar was very fashionable amongst those who sought an alternative to mainstream teaching.<sup>42</sup> Calvet, who was one of Barthes's former *séminaristes* as well as his biographer, describes the motivations of the 'séminaristes' who attended Barthes's classes at the EPHE as follows:

Dans la salle, outre le cercle des proches, des fidèles, qui d'année en année se retrouvent là pour la même communion, il y a des âmes en errance, préfiguration sans doute d'un mai 68 à venir, qui ne reconnaissent pas leurs désirs dans l'enseignement universitaire traditionnel. 'C'était un peu le radeau de la méduse', commente l'un d'eux, 'les naufragés de l'université, ceux qui se sentaient mal ailleurs'.<sup>43</sup>

Calvet implies that the attraction of Barthes's teaching inheres largely in its non-magisterial qualities, which were appealing even before 1968, and even more in tune with the zeitgeist thereafter. There are many testaments by Barthes's former students to his gifts as a teacher.<sup>44</sup> All agree that his teaching was always radically opposed to the traditional authoritative model of master and pupil. In a 1971 article entitled 'Écrivains, intellectuels, professeurs', Barthes discusses at length the 'discours du professeur' and the authoritative assumptions that it embodies. This essay is notable for its marked hostility towards the spoken word and the positions it forces upon the speaker: in this way it anticipates *Leçon*'s railing against the 'fascism' of language and praise for the polysemous force of literature. Here, Barthes discusses how the situatedness of spoken language reifies its message: 'le contexte est par statut réducteur du sens, le mot parlé est "clair"; le bannissement de la polysémie sert la Loi. [...] Parler, c'est exercer une volonté de pouvoir'.<sup>45</sup> His teaching therefore must try to pluralise the monology of the spoken word, by using the model of writing – for, after all, 'c'est parce que j'ai écrit que je parle' (897). Barthes suggests in this article the necessity of bringing about an alteration of the circulation of authority within the teaching space, such that the 'violence' of didacticism is somewhat attenuated. These changes

are conceived in spatial terms: 'il faudrait substituer à l'espace magistral d'autrefois [...] un espace moins droit, moins euclidien, où personne, ni le professeur ni les étudiants, ne serait jamais à sa dernière place. [...] Dans l'espace enseignant, chacun ne devrait être à sa place nulle part'. Barthes states that he finds this lack of permanent situatedness reassuring ('rassur[ant]'): 's'il m'arrivait de *trouver ma place*, je ne feindrais même plus d'enseigner, j'y renoncerais' (899). The ideals of floating and dispersion that this article advocates are of course relatively easy to achieve within the privileged space of Barthes's EPHE seminar: Barthes teaches very gifted students and it is the norm for students to make lengthy presentations on their areas of specialism.<sup>46</sup> Thus speech 'circulates'.

This article indicates that Barthes's pedagogical philosophy was in line with post-'68 calls for changes in the academic teaching relationship. As the 'séminariste' Patrick Mauriès sees it, Barthes's tactics were successful: 'l'incroyable impact' of Barthes's teaching was, Mauriès writes, due to its diametric distance from '[le] terrorisme du savoir, l'intimidation universitaire, l'affirmation dépitée des petits maîtres'.<sup>47</sup> This was due both to the nature of the institution and to Barthes's own strongly felt imperatives. In their foreword to a 1970 collection of articles reviewing the role of the university teacher, Madeleine Chapsal and Michèle Manceaux ask a question which Barthes seems already to have answered in his seminars: 'N'est-il pas temps de casser l'un des plus vieux rapports du monde, celui qui unit le maître à l'élève, pour y substituer le rapport des élèves entre eux?' The teacher's role, they point out, is to facilitate relationships between the students themselves (this seems a truism in, for example, the context of current UK pedagogy, but would certainly have been rather more daring a proposal in the paternalistic academy of post-Gaullist France). 'À la limite', they conclude, 'le bon professeur ne serait-il pas avant tout celui qui ne "gêne" pas la vie du groupe et sa capacité de création spontanée?'<sup>48</sup> Barthes loved the seminars at the EPHE because he could observe the intellectual currents running between the students: the caption beneath the photograph of the *séminaristes* in *Roland Barthes* mentions the circulation of thoughts and desires between all members of the 'phalansterc' space of the seminar. This reminds Barthes of '[le] mot de Nietzsche: "l'enchevêtrement des rapports amoureux"' (RB, 743).

In the article 'Au Séminaire' (1974), Barthes discusses three 'practices' of education. The first is 'l'enseignement', which is a fundamentally reproductive practice, indexed upon manuals and discourse.<sup>49</sup> The seminar space forecloses all 'enseignement' of this kind, as 'aucun savoir n'est transmis (mais un savoir peut être créé), aucun discours n'est tenu

(mais un texte se cherche)'. Instead, the models of 'apprentissage' and 'maternage' are favoured. Barthes conceives of *apprenticeship* along 'oriental' lines: the teacher works quietly in front of the apprentice, speaking little, but accomplishing that which the apprentice will in due course perform herself: 'une compétence se transmet silencieusement'. This idea of apprenticeship subsequently guides Barthes's teaching at the Collège de France, though there the term 'fantasme' is substituted for 'apprentissage'. The *fantasme* is demonstrated, rather than discoursed upon – this is 'apprentissage' rather than 'enseignement'. As Barthes says in *Le Neutre*, 'je ne fabrique pas le concept de Neutre, j'étales des Neutres' (36, 18 February). The final practice identified in 'Au Séminaire', 'mothering', is explained by using the metaphor of the mother who silently, lovingly supports the child who is learning to walk: 'elle incite et entoure: l'enfant demande la mère et la mère désire la marche de l'enfant'.<sup>50</sup> Neither discourse nor demonstration is required. Barthes reprises this model of the child and its mother in *Leçon*, as we shall see in Chapter 2.

In sum, in the seminar, 'l'enseignement' – understood negatively as mere copying – is thwarted ('*déçu*'), as all those in the room work together to produce the object of knowledge. Barthes's writing about the seminar is romantic in tone and can seem improbably idealistic. The testaments of Barthes's former students imply, however, that many of these goals were achieved in his seminars. The main pedagogical aim of Barthes's teaching at the EPHE and later at the Collège de France was to encourage his listeners to respond creatively to the material offered to them: the material itself is subsidiary to the thoughts to which it may give rise. As Kristeva puts it, 'il n'est pas un homme à message'.<sup>51</sup> His teaching style implicitly critiques of the norms of academic teaching, in which, he says in his seminar in 1973, all teachers are in the position of 'examineur', the subject-who-knows and who must be imitated: 'savoir comme modèle (chose à copier)'.<sup>52</sup> Barthes instead views himself as being, just like his students, a researcher: 'il cherche, comme les autres: chercher, c'est ne pas savoir' (*LA*, 54–55). A dispersive teaching method is thus paramount, and Barthes attempted to carry over the methods of his teaching at the EPHE to his *cours magistraux* at the Collège de France, which themselves constitute 'une critique de la discursivité scientifique' (*LA*, 49).

**The Form of Barthes's Teaching:  
'Pas de discontinuité entre l'École et le Collège'**

Commencer, c'est toujours, à un étage du sujet: enchaîner [...] J'enchaîne sur ce que je disais. Où? À l'École pratique des hautes études. Quand? L'année dernière. [...] 'Donc, je disais': en assumant ce mot ici, je voudrais indiquer que pour moi il n'y a pas de discontinuité entre l'École et le Collège. (CVE, 187)

Three days after his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Barthes was interviewed by Bernard-Henri Lévy. When asked to characterise 'la parole pédagogique', Barthes replies that 'le rapport enseignant-enseigné' is a 'rapport de désir réciproque qui implique la possibilité de la déception et donc de la réalisation'.<sup>53</sup> Lévy believes that this very interactive conception of teaching will have to be altered now, given Barthes's new position. He asks Barthes whether his status as a professor at the Collège de France will change the 'nature de ce lien pédagogique'. Lévy is suggesting that the increased fame attendant upon Barthes's new job will make it more difficult for him to teach in a non-magisterial way: the forum of the teaching – what Barthes called in 'Au Séminaire' 'la géométrie grossière des grands cours publics'<sup>54</sup> – will surely enforce a change of method. Barthes insists that his 'lien' with his listeners will not change, given that the fundamental situation is the same – his listeners attend his classes purely out of choice: 'j'ai toujours eu, dans le cadre de mes séminaires, un rapport "idyllique" à l'enseignement. Je ne me suis jamais adressé qu'à des sujets qui me choisissent, qui viennent là pour m'écouter, et à qui je ne suis pas imposé. Conditions privilégiées qui sont aussi, par définition, celles d'un cours au Collège' (381). Lévy counters that there must be a difference, given that Barthes's EPHE teaching was seminar-based, whereas the Collège teaching will consist mainly of *cours magistraux*. 'Le séminaire suppose le dialogue,' he says, 'et le cours le soliloque'. Barthes's arguably specious reply implies that this distinction is not necessarily clear-cut, and that for a student to listen may be as active an experience as for her to speak: 'Il y a un fâcheux préjugé qui veut que dans un rapport pédagogique, tout soit dans celui qui parle, et rien dans celui qui écoute. Alors qu'il passe, qu'il se passe à mon avis autant de choses ici que là. Il ne faut pas censurer l'écoute, au nom de la parole. Écouter peut être une jouissance active'. Furthermore, he points out that according to the same 'fâcheux préjugé', the lecturer's discourse is always a 'soliloque [...] magistral': this need not be the case. Rather, he says, 'on peut fort bien penser le soliloque comme une sorte de théâtre, à la limite frauduleux, flou et incertain, où se mène un jeu subtil entre la parole et l'écoute' (381–82).



In this interview, Barthes is trying to make it understood that, despite his accession to a prestigious institution with a uniquely magisterial style of teaching, the goals and the practice of his own pedagogy will not change. The most important factors moulding Barthes's teaching are common to both the EPHE and the Collège. Firstly, the listeners attend out of choice. Secondly, there is no obligation to conform to a curriculum or to measure the results of the teaching. Thirdly, and most crucially, Barthes's own pedagogical philosophy – facilitated, of course, by the statutes of both institutions – remains the same. He is committed to a pedagogical discourse which tries not to be repressively authoritative. He wants above all to provoke a plurality of response in the listeners. The belief that the listeners' responses are more important than the discourse which gives rise to them is constant throughout Barthes's EPHE teaching, and becomes arguably even more important after his arrival at the Collège de France, given that his later writing and pedagogy are concerned more explicitly than hitherto with Barthes's 'envie d'accéder [...] à une pratique de discours qui ne fasse pas pression sur autrui' (*PR*, 41). This is a teaching that has been, and continues to be, anti-thetic and anti-paternalistic, defined against scholarly monologism and the reproduction of extant knowledge. In *Leçon*, as we shall see in Chapter 2, Barthes presents his teaching persona as being that of a child, forming fantasies in a realm free of authoritarianism. His teaching is defined against what he refers to in 'Ecrivains, intellectuels, professeurs' as 'Loi'.<sup>55</sup> In such claims to radicalism we find again the heady rhetoric of 'La Mort de l'auteur', in which the reader's response was posited as a revolutionary force overcoming 'Dieu et ses hypostases, la raison, la science, la loi'.<sup>56</sup>

Such a stance is well-suited to the EPHE with its oppositional ethos, but may sit ill with the conservatism and prestige of the Collège de France – and with Barthes's increased fame and mainstream success. When Barthes moves from the EPHE to the Collège the number of people attending his lectures increases enormously. This is not explained simply by saying that Barthes's EPHE teaching consisted of restricted seminars and the Collège teaching of lectures open to the public. For in fact the 'séminaires' had become extremely popular by the end of Barthes's tenure at the EPHE. Between 1962 and 1976, attendance increased cumulatively. Barthes perforce evolved a discursive teaching style over this time. Initially, the attendance seems to have been relatively small, and it was this that allowed Barthes to elaborate his thoughts concerning the egalitarian pedagogy facilitated by the 'phalanstéric' space of the seminar. Barthes wanted his teaching to involve a circulation, between teacher and students, of ideas and 'désirs' in an atmosphere of 'intimité' and 'commu-

nauté'.<sup>57</sup> Insofar as it was possible, Barthes tried to import the diffusive qualities of a more seminar-like teaching into his larger lectures. However, by 1971–72, the seminar had become 'circus-like', in Barthes's jaundiced assessment (*LA*, 51). According to Calvet, the students themselves complained about this 'notoriété conjugée à un phénomène de mode [qui] a transformé le séminaire en "show"'.<sup>58</sup> The number of students far exceeding that suitable for a round-table seminar, in 1972 Barthes took to a dual system, whereby each year's teaching comprised two halves. One was 'un séminaire élargi, ouvert aux auditeurs libres et consacré à la recherche du directeur d'études' (i.e., a series of lectures) and the other a 'séminaire restreint, réservé aux stagiaires, titulaires et étudiants du 3<sup>e</sup> cycle'.<sup>59</sup> Barthes mentions the benefits of the restricted numbers for the smaller seminar, compared to 'l'asphyxie croissante des séminaires précédents', as it allowed for group-based forms of work.<sup>60</sup> Still, in some years, he chose to give 'une exposition suivie' of his own, even to the smaller group: this was the case in 1968 and 1969, in the 'Sarrasine' seminars: 'ce n'est ni une discussion d'idées ni un monologue didactique, mais l'élaboration d'une écriture intellectuelle[.] [C]ette année, nous avons délibérément choisi une exposition suivie, présentée d'un bout à l'autre par le directeur d'études, sans appel à des exposés extérieurs'.<sup>61</sup>

Even in the seminar space, then, Barthes believed that the students' listening – when he himself is lecturing discursively – is as creatively important as their vocal contributions (we have seen his explanation of this in the Lévy interview). This is why he dedicated *S/Z*, the product of the 'Sarrasine' seminars, to '[s]es étudiants, [s]es auditeurs, [s]es amis qui ont participé à ce séminaire': the text was written, Barthes states, 'selon leur écoute' (*S/Z* flyleaf). Though the benefit of this 'écoute' accrues much more to Barthes than it does to the 'auditeurs', the point is that the creative power of the listeners is affirmed, given that Barthes claims that his own writing has been facilitated by this silent force. Speaking of the dedication of *S/Z* to his 'séminaristes' in a 1971 interview for *Tel Quel*, Barthes stresses the importance of a productive listening in any teaching relationship: 'Je suis persuadé qu'étudiants et professeurs réalisent déjà bien souvent entre eux des communautés de travail; en tout cas, c'est le régime normal à l'École des Hautes Études'. He points out that this is not a question simply of letting the students speak:

Le paradoxe, eu égard au discours académique et au discours contestataire, c'est de suggérer ceci: [...L]a libération ne consiste pas à donner à l'étudiant le droit de parler (mesure minimale), mais à tenter de modifier le circuit de la parole – non pas son circuit physique ('prendre' la parole), mais son circuit topologique [...]; autrement dit, de se rendre conscient de la véritable

dialectique [...] de la relation enseignante; selon cette dialectique, l'écoute n'est pas seulement active [...] – *l'écoute est productrice*.<sup>62</sup>

A subtle provocation is what is important. In this instance, the students' listening 'produces' Barthes's own writing. Six years later, the productive force of listening is expected to work the other way around: what Barthes says is designed to produce creative reflection in the minds of his listeners. In *Comment vivre ensemble*, Barthes remarks that the ideal lecture course would be one where 'ce qu'il [le professeur] dit serait en retrait par rapport à ce qu'il suscite' (CVE, 181).

So, by the time of his arrival at the Collège, Barthes was not unused to the practice of lecturing to large crowds.<sup>63</sup> His time at the EPHE had allowed him to elaborate a discourse which, though magisterial in form, was by no means magisterial in intention. But the 'rapport idyllique' with students who only came to hear him out of choice was altered, or perhaps abolished, by the enormous popularity of Barthes's lectures at the Collège de France. Barthes's media profile was at this time higher than it had been at any previous point in his career: the bestselling success and stage adaptation of his 1977 book *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, his appearance on Bernard Pivot's television programme *Apostrophes*, and his regular column in the *Nouvel Observateur* (1978–79) gave him the status of a literary celebrity.<sup>64</sup> Public lectures by such a figure were bound to be popular. The Collège's largest lecture hall was overcrowded and queueing began hours in advance. 'C'est presque devenu une histoire drôle', as a commentator in *Le Monde* wrote, in 2002; 'un conférencier, intrigué par le succès aussi subit qu'inespéré de ses séances au Collège de France, s'en inquiète auprès d'une vieille dame, qui l'éclaircit aimablement: "Pour assister au cours de Barthes qui suit le vôtre, il vaut mieux s'asseoir à l'avance..."'.<sup>65</sup> In the presence of these huge crowds, Barthes seemed to be quite uncomfortable. Marty explains the rather cumbersome beginnings of the *Comment vivre ensemble* cours – Barthes's first at the Collège – by saying that Barthes was still getting used to the new milieu of the Collège and the crowds (he does not mention that there had been some crowding problems at the EPHE too):

Barthes met un certain temps avant d'acquiescer son tempo; d'abord parce qu'il est, je crois, assez malheureux de se trouver au Collège de France. Il vient de quitter l'espace du séminaire où il avait un rapport phalanstérien à quelques disciples et il passe à un public nombreux, dans des conditions matérielles très inconfortables. Par ailleurs, en rédigeant ses premiers cours, il est confronté à une sorte de gêne; la demande de l'auditoire auquel il est exposé d'une manière nouvelle pour lui, semble lui enjoindre de faire de son cours une performance. Assez vite, les choses se stabilisent et prennent un cours plus serein.<sup>66</sup>

The presence of many tape-recorders and microphones added to the sense that this was a 'performance' – though Barthes reminded his listeners, on one occasion, that his lectures should not, in spite of appearances, be regarded as a display of knowledge, but rather as the execution of a personal research: 'Un cours n'est pas une performance, et il ne faut pas, autant que possible, y venir comme à un spectacle qui enchante ou déçoit – ou même [...] qui enchante parce qu'il déçoit. Il y a ici un "dessein" que j'essaie de tenir [...] semaine après semaine, et peut-être année après année' (*PR*, 35).<sup>67</sup> For a listener to treat the *cours* as a 'spectacle' would mean that s/he would not invest sufficiently in the 'dessein'; understandably enough, Barthes wants listeners who are fully engaged with the aims of his project.

The huge attendance and its concomitant weight of adulation also imposed on Barthes the myth-like weight of being a 'grand prêtre de l'université française'.<sup>68</sup> Barthes's reluctance to be 'on show' is thematised in the lectures themselves, notably in *Le Neutre*.<sup>69</sup> The new forum of Barthes's teaching brought about other more practical concerns: the fact that the Collège de France lectures are open to the public, in the broadest possible sense, meant not only an overcrowding of the lecture theatre but a compositional problem: what audience should the lecturer have in mind?<sup>70</sup> The audience was now far more diverse than that at the EPHE, which had consisted largely of students steeped in the intellectual trends of the day. This led to a problem regarding the orientation and register of Barthes's teaching – but also had liberating effects: Éric Marty has pointed out that the EPHE seminar was notable for a certain theoretical orthodoxy. For example, the presence of several influential psychoanalysts including Jacques-Alain Miller imposed a certain tenor upon discussions in the seminar.<sup>71</sup> Such theoretical moulds could be either abjured or retained at Barthes's discretion at the Collège de France. Alain Finkielkraut, who attended Barthes's EPHE seminars in the early 1970s, has commented that despite the governing theoretical norms of the period, at the Collège de France, 'Barthes semble s'émanciper de tout système'.<sup>72</sup>

At the Collège, Barthes was addressing people of widely differing ages, professions, and nationalities. In a 1979 interview, Barthes discussed this issue:

Quant au public du Collège, je ne le connais pas. Il n'y a que deux ans que j'ai un public, et c'est quelque chose de nouveau pour moi. C'est un vrai public, puisque tout le monde vient là, il n'y a pas d'inscriptions. Moi-même je ne saurais pas le définir. Je vois bien que les âges sont très mêlés, je sens bien que les niveaux culturels sont différents, et par là même je suis entraîné vers un discours, je dirais moins méthodologique, moins technique et plus 'humain'.<sup>73</sup>

How can the discourse required for the teaching of semiology become more ‘humain’? To a certain extent, the public perception of Barthes at this time is that his work is arcane and irritatingly neologistic: Burnier and Rambaud’s lampoon, *Le Roland-Barthes sans peine*, based on the ‘joke’ that Barthes’s French is as incomprehensible as a foreign language, was published in 1978.<sup>74</sup> How can Barthes make his discourse – and his discipline – appealing and vital for his diverse public? The answer lies in the title of his chair, ‘sémiologie littéraire’. With this new discipline, Barthes wants to work on a (re)insertion of the human, the banal, and the interactional aspects into a discipline which will no longer even be ‘semiology’ as it has been previously conceived. He writes in his presentation of his work to the Collège de France in 1975 that a ‘pur classement dont le sujet humain serait illusoirement absent’ is not for him. Rather, ‘[c]’est le statut difficile de la sémiologie [...] qui a constamment inspiré ma recherche – et non l’intention de constituer une science canonique des signes’.<sup>75</sup> Semiology as science is to be sidelined in favour of contingent, ‘impur’ human aspects. The new semiology ‘serait dès lors ce travail qui recueille *l’impur* de la langue, le rebut de la linguistique [...]: rien moins que les désirs, les craintes, les mines, les intimidations, les avances, les tendresses, les protestations, les excuses, les agressions, les musiques, dont est faite la langue active’ (*L*, 31–32, my emphasis). The emphasis on the human subject, then, will bring about the expansion of the discipline, thereby making it more appealing to a diverse audience. This emphasis will also come to embody, in paradoxical fashion, what Barthes sees as the true scientificity of his work. This scientificity inheres in his use of his own subjectivity to arrive at truths which are relevant for all of us. ‘Sémiologie littéraire’, is to be, very literally, a human science. Claude Coste has noted the manner in which the Collège de France *cours* pave the way for the culmination of Barthes’s individualistic generalisation in *La Chambre claire*. Writing about *Comment vivre ensemble* in 2000, Coste points out that Barthes ‘travaille à partir de lui-même sans renoncer à une forme de généralité. Cette démarche impossible, profondément idiorrythmique, conduit tout droit à la science du particulier que *La Chambre claire* mettra en œuvre deux ans plus tard’.<sup>76</sup> The foundations for the book on photography are laid in the methodology of the Collège de France courses. For it is there that Barthes accomplishes the move to an aesthetic discourse inspired by what he calls in *La Chambre claire* a ‘mathesis singularis’: a science of individuality. This method is announced in *Leçon* and essayed in the first lecture course, *Comment vivre ensemble*, with its explanation of the organising principle of the ‘fantasme’. We see in *La Chambre claire* the endpoint of the

'new science' towards which Barthes is working during the entire duration of his teaching at the Collège de France; indeed we can say that *La Chambre claire* is born from the teaching itself: its main ideas concerning the 'noème' of photography are outlined in the 17 February 1979 lecture of *La Préparation du roman I* (PR, 113–18), and the text of *La Chambre claire* is written shortly after that lecture course concludes.<sup>77</sup> An examination of the inaugural lecture and the 1978 lecture entitled 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' reveals the manner in which Barthes prepares the ground for the aesthetic discourse which he wants to attain. This is a discourse which has as its guiding *fantasme* the expression of an absolute singularity which yet manages to attain general relevance. It requires that his own status – that of essayist, of critic – be problematised. *Leçon* and 'Longtemps' perform such a beneficial problematisation.

### Notes

- 1 The election procedure at the Collège de France is as follows: on the vacation of a chair because of death or retirement, all the professors of the Collège vote to create a chair (the existing chair may also be retained, if there is a suitable new candidate for it). A likely candidate for this chair is then named, with a second and sometimes third candidate also chosen as a possibility. The candidate must visit incumbent professors and also present his/her 'travaux antérieurs' as well as a 'projet d'enseignement' in a report distributed to all the professors (see Barthes's 'Travaux et Projets' in Nathalie Léger, ed., *Roland Barthes au Collège de France 1977–1980* (Paris: IMEC, 2002), pp. 95–101). Each candidate is then verbally recommended in a 'hearing' before the Collège by an incumbent professor. Foucault was Barthes's 'présentateur'. After the presentation of each candidate, the professors vote to fill the chair and formally designate the majority-chosen candidate. The Collège's administrator then asks the relevant academy of the Institut de France to approve the professors' decision (the Institut, as a rule, confirms what the Collège has decided), and the Minister of Education is asked to give his/her assent to the decision. The 'Décret portant nomination d'un professeur au Collège de France' is signed by the President, the Prime Minister, and the Minister for Universities (respectively Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Jacques Chirac and Alice Saunier Seïté, in Barthes's case).
- 2 Dosse, *Histoire du structuralisme*, 2 vols. (Paris: La Découverte, 1992), vol. II, p. 166. The fourth 'musketeer' is Lacan.
- 3 'Roland Barthes s'explique', interview with Pierre Boncenne for *Lire*, April 1979. OC, V, 744–57 (p. 748).
- 4 There are few extant studies of the French educational system, and fewer still of the intricacies of the relationships between the different types of establishment (*facultés, grands établissements, institutions marginales*). Antoine Compagnon has noted that, by comparison with other countries, France has 'pas, ou peu, d'histoires de l'Université, encore moins du "haut enseignement"' (*La Troisième république des lettres: de Flaubert à Proust* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), p. 21). For a useful study of the evolution of the French academy through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see Terry Clark, *Prophets and Patrons: The French*

*University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), though his primary focus is on the study of sociology. The only critical history of the Collège de France is Christophe Charle's chapter 'Le Collège de France' in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. by Pierre Nora, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), vol. II, pp. 389–42. François Dosse's *Histoire du structuralisme* makes many illuminating references to the various spheres of the French academy in its narration of the careers of the intellectual avant-garde of the human sciences.

- 5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).
- 6 *Homo academicus*, p. 137.
- 7 *Homo academicus*, p. 136.
- 8 See Calvet's biography of Barthes for a full account of Barthes's career and how his tuberculosis affected his academic trajectory. Barthes's only academic qualification was a classics degree from the Sorbonne; his illness and subsequent stays in sanatoria prevented him from studying for the *agrégation*. Barthes's close friend, Philippe Rebeyrol, pursued the course that Barthes himself wanted to follow, entering the École normale supérieure in 1936. According to Calvet, Barthes told a friend in 1976 that his illness preventing him from entering the ENS with Rebeyrol was 'la plus grande douleur de sa vie'. Louis-Jean Calvet, *Roland Barthes 1915–1980* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), p. 59.
- 9 Barthes held posts as 'stagiaire de recherches' and as 'attaché de recherches' at the CNRS from 1952 to 1954 and from 1954 to 1955 respectively. At the invitation of Fernand Braudel, he took up the junior position of Chef de travaux at the École pratique des hautes études in 1960. In 1962 he was awarded a directorship of studies in 'Sociologie des signes, symboles et représentations', and remained in this position until his election to the Collège de France in 1976.
- 10 Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault (1926–1984)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), p. 232.
- 11 The Collège is currently visited by approximately 100,000 listeners per year. Attendance has increased since the renovations of 1998.
- 12 Charle, 'Le Collège de France', p. 390.
- 13 Charle, 'Le Collège de France', p. 394.
- 14 Charle, 'Le Collège de France', p. 398.
- 15 Charle, 'Le Collège de France', p. 404.
- 16 Charle, 'Le Collège de France', p. 422. The teaching body at the Collège de France consists currently (2012) of 47 professors. These are classed under 'Sciences mathématiques, physiques et naturelles'; 'Sciences philosophiques et sociologiques'; and 'Sciences historiques, philologiques et archéologiques'. A list of all professors from 1530 onward is available to download from the Collège de France website: <[http://www.college-de-france.fr/default/EN/all/ins\\_cha/liste\\_des\\_professeurs.htm](http://www.college-de-france.fr/default/EN/all/ins_cha/liste_des_professeurs.htm)> [accessed 14 December 2011].
- 17 Cited in Gabriel Monod, *Portraits et souvenirs* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1897), p. 129.
- 18 Jacques Revel and Nathan Wachtel, *Une École pour les sciences sociales: de la VI<sup>e</sup> section à l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (Paris: Cerf/L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1996), pp. 14–16. The Rockefeller Foundation initially funded a quarter of the Sixth Section's budget.
- 19 Revel and Wachtel, *Une École pour les sciences sociales*, p. 23.
- 20 Niilo Kauppi, *The Making of an Avant-Garde*: Tel Quel, trans. Anne R. Epstein (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), p. 120.
- 21 Jacques le Goff wrote an appreciation of Barthes's administrative work at the EPHE in his 'Barthes administrateur', *Communications*, 36 [special issue on Barthes] (1982): 43–48. Barthes resigned from his position as secretary in 1974, and was appointed to the École's scientific committee.

- 22 Source: website of the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, <www.ehess.fr> [accessed 18 December 2011].
- 23 In *Homo academicus*, Pierre Bourdieu points out that the ‘disciplines les plus classiques’ at the Collège de France tend to be represented by “‘universitaires éminents”, qui ont suivi la filière classique’ (p. 141).
- 24 Kauppi, *The Making of an Avant-Garde*, p. xvii.
- 25 In his interview with Sartre in *Sartre aujourd’hui*, a special issue of *L’Arc*, Bernard Pingaud referred to Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Foucault and Lacan as the ‘nouveaux maîtres’. ‘Jean-Paul Sartre répond’, *L’Arc*, 30 (1966): 90–101.
- 26 Bourdieu, ‘Preface’, in *Homo academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Oxford: Polity, 1998), pp. xi–xxvi (p. xxii).
- 27 Bourdieu, *Leçon sur la leçon* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), p. 30.
- 28 Bourdieu, ‘Preface’, in *Homo academicus* (1998), p. xxii.
- 29 Marielle Macé, *Le Temps de de l’essai: histoire d’un genre en France au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Belin, 2006), passim.
- 30 Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris: Raisons d’agir, 2004), passim.
- 31 See Jacques Bouveresse, *Prodiges et vertiges de l’analogie: De l’abus des belles-lettres dans la pensée* (Paris: Raisons d’agir, 1999), in which he states that ‘A côté de l’abus de pouvoir “scientiste”, il en existe un (le “littérarisme”) qui consiste à croire que ce que dit la science ne devient intéressant et profond qu’une fois retranscrit dans un langage littéraire et utilise de façon “métaphorique”, un terme qui semble autoriser et excuser presque tout’ (jacket blurb).
- 32 Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Seuil, 1963). Raymond Picard, *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture?* (Paris: Pauvert, 1965).
- 33 Bourdieu, ‘Preface’, in *Homo academicus* (1998), p. xxii.
- 34 Bourdieu, ‘Preface’, in *Homo academicus* (1998) p. xix.
- 35 Bourdieu, ‘Preface’, in *Homo academicus* (1998), p. xxii.
- 36 Bourdieu, ‘Preface’, in *Homo academicus* (1998), p. xix.
- 37 Bourdieu, ‘Preface’, in *Homo academicus* (1998), p. xix.
- 38 ‘Roland Barthes s’explique’ (*Lire*, April 1979). OC, V, 748.
- 39 For a full list of the subjects Barthes chose for his EPHE seminars, see the Appendix.
- 40 Claude Lévi-Strauss with Didier Eribon, *De près et de loin* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2001), p. 109.
- 41 Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*, p. 145.
- 42 Kristeva’s *Les Samourais* features the character of Bréhal, a barely fictionalised version of Barthes. Those in Bréhal’s seminars think the Sorbonne is ‘ringard’. Bréhal’s classes are very popular as he lectures on literature so skilfully that he resembles an ‘artiste’ who can speak to everyone. *Les Samourais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 14.
- 43 Calvet, *Roland Barthes*, p. 193.
- 44 See Renaud Zuppinge, ‘Notes étourdies écrites pendant un séminaire de Roland Barthes’, in *Barthes*, special issue of *L’Arc* 54 (1974): 87–90; Patrick Mauriès, *Roland Barthes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992); and Julia Kristeva, ‘La voix de Barthes’, in *Roland Barthes*, special issue of *Communications* 36 (1982): 119–23, for a representative sample of *séminaristes*’ praise of Barthes’s teaching.
- 45 ‘Écrivains, intellectuels, professeurs’, originally published in special issue on Barthes of *Tel Quel* 47, Autumn 1971. OC, III, 887–907 (pp. 888–89).
- 46 Barthes’s seminar was the site of many important intellectual interventions during the late ’60s and early ’70s – for example, Philippe Sollers elaborated his work on Mallarmé in the seminar, and Marthe Robert presented her study of Kafka. Niilo Kauppi has also noted the close links between the seminar and *Tel*



- Quel*: articles from many séminaristes, including Marthe Robert, Hubert Damisch, Gérard Genette, Jean-Michel Rey, Severo Sarduy, Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva, were published by the journal during the late 1960s and the '70s. Kauppi, *The Making of an Avant-Garde*, pp. 78–79 and p. 122.
- 47 Maurières, *Roland Barthes*, p. 48.
- 48 Madeleine Chapsal and Michèle Manceaux, eds., *Les Professeurs pour quoi faire?* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 14.
- 49 'Au Séminaire', OC, IV, 502–11 (p. 506).
- 50 'Au Séminaire', p. 506. As many critics have noted, Barthes's models of knowledge often invoke the mother and maternal love. See for example Knight's chapter 'Maternal Space' in *Barthes and Utopia*, pp. 244–69.
- 51 Kristeva, 'La voix de Barthes', p. 119.
- 52 'Au Séminaire', p. 506.
- 53 'À quoi sert un intellectuel?', interview with Bernard-Henri Lévy for *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 10 Jan. 1977. OC, V, 364–82 (p. 381).
- 54 'Au Séminaire', *L'Arc*, 1974. OC, IV, 502–11 (p. 502).
- 55 'Ecrivains, intellectuels, professeurs', p. 907.
- 56 'La Mort de l'auteur', *Manteia*, 1968. OC, III, 40–45 (p. 44).
- 57 1972 EPHE course summary, OC, IV, 191.
- 58 Calvet, *Roland Barthes*, p. 221.
- 59 1972 EPHE course summary, OC, IV, 191.
- 60 1973 EPHE course summary, OC, IV, 463.
- 61 1968 EPHE course summary, OC, III, 76.
- 62 'Réponses', interview with Jean Thibaut for *Tel Quel*, Autumn 1971. OC, III, 1023–44 (p. 1036).
- 63 Before any professional academic involvement, Barthes had lectured in his youth: Calvet describes the lectures on music that Barthes gave to a 'salle bourrée' while at the Sainte-Hilaire du Touvet sanatorium in 1943 (*Roland Barthes*, p. 76).
- 64 The episode of *Apostrophes* entitled 'Parlez moi d'amour' (29 April 1977), also featuring Françoise Sagan and Anne Golon, is available to download from the website of the Institut National de l'audiovisuel: <<http://www.boutique.ina.fr>>.
- 65 Fabienne Dumontet, 'Roland Barthes: Fragments d'un discours', *Le Monde*, 30 November 2002.
- 66 Jacques Henric, 'Roland Barthes: cours et nouvelles œuvres complètes: entretien avec Éric Marty', *Art Press*, 285 (2002): 48–54 (p. 49).
- 67 Bernard Comment has pointed out that the tape recording of the lectures was overtly tolerated by Barthes: he was in the habit of having a break forty-five minutes into each lecture so that the owners of the tape recorders might rush down and turn over their cassettes. *Roland Barthes, vers le neutre* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1991), p. 146.
- 68 The term is drawn from Gérard Petitjean's (1975) article, 'Les grands prêtres de l'université française' (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 7 April 1975) which consciously employs a vocabulary of worship in its treatment of 'prêtres' such as Foucault, Barthes and Lacan.
- 69 See Ch. 3 below.
- 70 Valéry had attested to the same problem: 'Moi je me perds en moi du haut de ma chaire! Ah! Si je n'avais que cinq auditeurs comme Renan. Ça irait tout seul! Mais une salle pleine d'on ne sait qui, c'est très fatigant. On se demande qui viser, quel degré de culture, de tension, il faut songer à satisfaire'. Cited in Charle, 'Le Collège de France', p. 419.
- 71 Author's conversation with Éric Marty, April 2010.
- 72 Alain Finkielkraut, 'Barthes et le roman', interview with Éric Marty and Antoine Compagnon, in *Ce que peut la littérature*, ed. Alain Finkielkraut (Paris:

- Stock/Panama, 2006), pp. 217–40 (p. 219).
- 73 'Rencontre avec Roland Barthes', interview with Nadine Dormoy Savage for *The French Review*, February 1979. OC, V, 735–43 (p. 741).
- 74 Michel Antoine Burnier and Patrick Rambaud, *Le Roland-Barthes sans peine* (Paris: Balland, 1978).
- 75 Barthes, 'Travaux et projets', in Léger, ed., *Roland Barthes au Collège de France*, pp. 95–96.
- 76 Claude Coste, 'Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens', in Léger, ed., *Roland Barthes au Collège de France*, pp. 35–59 (p. 54).
- 77 The first *Préparation* series concludes on 10 March 1979. *La Chambre claire* is written between 15 April and 3 June 1979.

## 2

### *Leçon* and ‘Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...’

The objective wealth of meanings encapsulated in every intellectual phenomenon demands of the recipient the same spontaneity of subjective fantasy that is castigated in the name of objective discipline.

Adorno, ‘The Essay as Form’, 1958

Mieux valent les leurres de la subjectivité que les impostures de l’objectivité.  
Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, 2 December 1978

Early in *La Chambre claire*, Barthes explains that in his writing he has always hovered between two sorts of discourse; he feels the ‘inconfort’ of a subject ‘ballotté entre deux langages, l’un expressif, l’autre critique’. His only sense of certainty, within the network of discourses in which he finds himself, is that he feels an ineradicable ‘résistance [...] à tout système réducteur’ (CC, 794).<sup>1</sup> His own subjectivity, “l’antique souveraineté du moi” (Nietzsche), must be used as a methodological starting-point. Selecting the photographs he would use for the book, Barthes had the ‘bizarre’ thought that perhaps, after all, it is by examining contingent individuality that a general validity can be reached – a ‘*mathesis*’ or knowledge which would respect particularity, and yet ultimately lead to the attainment of general truths:<sup>2</sup>

Pourquoi n’y aurait-il pas, en quelque sorte, une science nouvelle par objet? Une *Mathesis singularis* (et non plus *universalis*)? J’acceptai donc de me prendre pour médiateur de toute la Photographie: je tenterais de formuler, à partir de quelques mouvements personnels, le trait fondamental, l’universel sans lequel il n’y aurait pas de Photographie. (CC, 795)

Here we see the culmination of a method which Barthes had been setting out with increasing confidence over the course of the Collège de France teaching: the ‘idée bizarre’ of a *mathesis singularis* was in gestation during this time.

This chapter will trace the paradoxical combination of the personal and the general – or ‘scientifique’, connoting both science and knowledge – in Barthes’s inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, and the lecture given in Paris and New York the following year, ‘Longtemps, je

me suis couché de bonne heure...' These are the only two texts from Barthes's Collège de France teaching which were published before 2002, and in them we discover not only the manifestos for the form and preoccupations of Barthes's lecture courses, but also an important articulation of the contradictions inherent in the status and mindset of this 'consecrated heretic'. These texts articulate the profound tensions of Barthes's time at the Collège de France: tensions between the literary and the scientific (or semiological); the teacher and the writer; the critic and the artist. These texts set up a lecturing style which seeks ultimately to outline what in *La Chambre claire* is called '*la science impossible de l'être unique*' (847) or '*une science du sujet, dont peu m'importe le nom, pourvu qu'elle parvienne (ce qui n'est pas encore joué) à une généralité qui ne me réduise ni ne m'écrase*' (801). This search for a realm of knowledge and of love that is immune to any 'système réducteur' is, of course, problematic for many critics of Barthes. The 'impossible science' proposes that through an examination of the self's most profound emotional responses we discover an 'intraitable réalité' (CC, 885) that refuses further analysis. This, says Jonathan Culler, is 'Nature slip[ping] back into [Barthes's] writing'. However, as Culler also implies, this new endeavour is also linked to the 'systematic endeavours he [has] renounce[d]'.<sup>3</sup> Though apparently a radical departure, Barthes's new science is connected to his previous writing, and though the presence of a 'Nature' unmediated by culture is at the heart of *La Chambre claire*, I contend that this endeavour is an extension of his career-long uncovering of what lies beneath codes. The difference is the change of interest regarding what lies beneath: no longer concerned with political uses of the sign, Barthes now wishes to demonstrate the individual impulses that underlie any attempt at objectivity, thus inaugurating a new – though apparently regressive – demystification.

This individual science or knowledge is, of course, much more difficult to discuss and to classify than, for example, the 'science canonique des signes' that Barthes rejects in 'Travaux et projets'. This is the point. The fact that the 'sémiologie' Barthes is interested in has a 'statut difficile' allows Barthes great freedom of play, and the rejection of disciplinary 'purity' as an ideal makes way for the inclusion of the heterogeneity of objects, and the dilettantism of method, that Barthes personally favours and which he will deploy in his first lecture course under the rubric of 'paideia'. Julia Kristeva describes, in 1971, this taste of Barthes's for heteronomy and subjectivity in critical discourse. She could almost be writing about *Leçon* itself: "Le critique", lui, se charge d'indiquer l'hétéronomie [...] par l'introduction de l'instance du sujet, en assumant

une parole représentative, localisée, contingente, déterminée par son “Je” et donc par celui de son destinataire’.<sup>4</sup> Kristeva, anticipating Barthes’s ‘science du particulier’, describes his desire for what she calls ‘*eteros*’ as ‘l’annonce de la *réserve* barthésienne qui rapproche le savoir du procès de la vérité’. In this ‘réserve’, she continues, ‘la connotation morale s’efface si l’on admet que l’irruption, dans la vérité neutre de la science, d’un sujet de l’énonciation n’invalide pas cette vérité, mais rappelle son *opération*, sa genèse objective’.<sup>5</sup>

Kristeva’s rather oblique reference to a ‘connotation morale’ here in her description of Barthes’s methodology is interesting. For a moral connotation is heavily present in *Leçon*, brought about by the use of a typical inversion of terms. Just as Barthes had, in *Le Plaisir du texte*, claimed ‘perversion’ as a positive term in literary appreciation, he now claims ‘l’impur’ as a value. In terms of the thematics Barthes sets up in *Leçon* to herald his teaching, the most important idea is that of hybridity or impurity, which Barthes uses to explain his theoretical approach. Given that, for Barthes, literature is *mathesis*, or the multifarious repository of all knowledge (‘toutes les sciences’), thus a ‘sémiologie littéraire’, if it is to take in charge this multiplicity, must be hybrid by its very nature.

Barthes’s literary semiology, in its hybridity and prioritisation of personal response, will thus deploy a version of Kantian aesthetic judgment. Barthes’s ‘impurity’ is consonant with a continental reception of the *Critique of Judgment*, according to which the *Critique* constitutes a ‘radical undoing of the categorial divisions between knowledge, morality and aesthetics’.<sup>6</sup> Barthes wants the ‘divisions between knowledge’ to be friable, and believes that aesthetic judgment has a liberatory critical power that complements the more deterministic type of thought to be found in cognition and morality.

Judgment is defined by Kant as ‘the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal’.<sup>7</sup> The domain of the aesthetic involves a type of judgment profoundly different from the ‘determining’ (‘bestimmen’) judgment involved in the domains of rationality and morality. Knowledge and judgment proceed in these areas by subsuming particular facts and problems under pre-existing universal laws. But such judgments cannot account for the entirety of human experience – they leave out emotion and contingency, and instances where the particular does *not* slot easily into the universal. Hence the *Critique of Judgment*, with its account of another form of cognition, which occurs when, as Kant puts it, ‘only the particular is given, and the universal has to be found for it’.<sup>8</sup>

The important Kantian point is that judgments of taste, although they

arise from entirely subjective, contingent experiences, have a genuine claim to universal validity, via the '*sensus communis aestheticus*'. It is this passage from the particular to the universal, without the reduction and generalisation of universal laws, that is important for Barthes, as it is this possibility of having a non-reductive account of the subject's particularity, *without* falling into self-indulgent personal accounts that have no broader applicability, that he feels is the imperative for intellectual writing. In fact, what is most valuable about the theory of aesthetic judgment is the way it permits a movement between, or a problematisation of, categories which in other discourses are considered to be entirely separable – subjectivity and objectivity; feeling and cognition; art and sociality. Kant describes aesthetic judgment as a 'middle articulation' (*Mittelglied*), which permits an articulation of the 'gulf' ('Kluft') that otherwise separates the faculties of cognition and morality. Occupying a middle position, aesthetic discourse is not concerned uniquely with taste. Its concerns are also linked to questions of ethics and morality. For Barthes, the incorporation of aesthetic discourse into theory is, essentially, a moral question: it is *imperative* that the writer avow her own personal investment in the topic under study, while also striving to render this investment instructive for the reader. The '*sensus communis*' is pre-supposed, but this is not the same as a pre-existing concept which can be fallen back on. It is pre-supposed *and also* still to be made, by requesting that others acknowledge the validity of one's own taste, and is therefore not grounded in what Barthes would call 'myths' of culture. A theory that proceeds using aesthetic judgment has to respond to contingency, and incorporate an avowal of pleasure or pain into all attempts at presentation of knowledge. Using aesthetic judgment foregrounds the difficult, processual nature of judgment, which ideological discourse tends to suppress.

In Barthes's view, prioritising a wilfully individualistic disciplinary impurity will lead to a discipline which will end up being morally superior to a 'pure' science, precisely because of its explicit retention of the subject's emotional response. 'Impurity', in other words, is the hallmark of an approach which, necessarily heterodox because of the subject-matter, also has the aim of seeking to uncover that which other disciplines wish to keep hidden. Adorno, the pre-eminent post-Kantian thinker of the aesthetic, articulates this in his essay on the essay form – a text remarkably similar to *Leçon* in many ways. As Adorno puts it, the 'innermost formal law' of the essay must be 'heresy', whereby '[t]hrough violations of the orthodoxy of thought, something in the object becomes visible which it is orthodoxy's secret and objective aim to keep invis-

ble'.<sup>9</sup> We find at the 'innermost' level of Barthes's pedagogy – in his attitude to the epistemological status of his own thought – a heresy that mirrors the heretical licence provided by the institution of the Collège de France.

Barthes wishes to set himself up as deviating from what he chooses to see as the besetting norms of false objectivity and repressively authoritative metalanguage. In attempting to propose an alternative, he needs to demonstrate firstly that he has left his own 'rêve de scientificité' and its positivism behind. Secondly, he needs to show that his own new, looser values represent a new and improved way of 'doing' semiology, whose new methodology, because based on an up-front subjectivity, will be more thoroughly representative of truth than the positivist science against which he defines it. His manner of doing this is typically paradoxical. Throughout *Leçon* we see repeated rhetorical moves wherein Barthes re-valorises terms generally understood to be negative. In addition to the paramount term of 'impur[eté]', he arrogates to himself other terms that are deliberately distanced from ideas of rigour and precision, such as 'indirect', 'fragmentation', 'fantasme' and 'oubli'. Linked to this methodological lexis is the term 'artiste', which Barthes uses to describe and valorise his own tactics, methodology and status. We shall look at these sets of terms in turn as we examine *Leçon*.

### *Leçon* and the Impurity of 'la sémiologie littéraire'

The opening of *Leçon* employs precisely the same rhetorical tactic as the early sections of *La Chambre claire* quoted above. Barthes presents himself as a hybrid subject who has always been choosing between various approaches to writing, and who is therefore of uncertain status. This presentation of himself has the benefit – as it does in *La Chambre claire* – of then making it seem a logical correlate that, in this morass of uncertainty, subjectivity must be used as the unifying principle for writing. *Leçon* opens with Barthes's description of himself as a 'sujet incertain' who is inherently paradoxical: 'chaque attribut [en moi] est en quelque sorte combattu par son contraire'. He states that his favoured form of writing in the past has thwarted his desire that his writing have scientific status: 's'il est vrai que j'ai voulu longtemps inscrire mon travail dans le champ de la science, littéraire, lexicologique et sociologique, il me faut bien reconnaître que je n'ai produit que des essais, genre *ambigu* où l'écriture le dispute à l'analyse' (*L*, 7, my emphasis). In the recording of the lecture, Barthes uses the same adjective to describe both himself

and his genre of choice: 'incertain'. Carlo Ossola in his article on the drafts of *Leçon* shows that the other adjective Barthes considered to describe the essay as genre was 'tourmenté'.<sup>10</sup> All three adjectives – 'incertain', 'ambigu', 'tourmenté' – emphasise what Barthes chooses to see as the problematic status of his preferred form. He is in agreement with Adorno, who in the mid-1950s declares that 'the essay is condemned as a hybrid, [...] the form has no compelling tradition, [and] its emphatic demands are met only intermittently'.<sup>11</sup> Adorno makes this declaration in order the better to frame his defence of the essay's heterodox virtues. Barthes wishes to claim the essay's tentativeness and hybridity as qualities that inhere in his own person, and that he will promulgate in his teaching. Capitalising upon the idea of the essay as genre, Barthes defines himself as an essayist (an experimentalist) in order to lay the ground for the rest of the lecture.<sup>12</sup> Barthes is, as it were, the essay itself, with the term 'essai' having an important polysemy here. In Adorno's formulation, '[t]he word *Versuch*, attempt or essay, in which thought's utopian vision of hitting the bullseye is united with the consciousness of its own fallibility and provisional character, indicates [...] something about the form'. Anticipating what the *Leçon* wants us to think, Adorno writes that this 'something' is

to be taken all the more seriously in that it takes place not systematically but rather as a characteristic of an intention groping its way. The essay has to cause the totality to be illuminated in a partial feature, whether the feature be chosen or merely happened upon, without asserting the presence of the totality.<sup>13</sup>

Barthes emphasises his affinity with the essay genre at the start of *Leçon*, not only to describe his previous writing practice, but because, of the formal alternatives available, the essay is the one that best corresponds to the tentative, pluralistic nature of his thought and his pedagogy.

The opening of *Leçon* continues with Barthes saying that though his research has been linked to the 'développement de la sémiologie', he has little right to 'représenter' this discipline, 'tant j'ai été enclin à en déplacer la définition'. To this image of his own inconstancy he adds a statement which implies that he has deliberately distanced himself from semiology as it has gathered momentum and become increasingly popular: '[J]'ai été plus proche de la revue *Tel Quel* que des nombreuses revues qui, dans le monde, attestent la vigueur de la recherche sémiologique' (*L*, 7–8). Not merely a formulaic declaration of humility given the illustrious surroundings, this opening paragraph of the (published) lecture is a gambit aiming to prove Barthes's credentials as a thinker who always challenged or 'displaced' the axioms of the fields he has worked within. Thereby, the



impurity of his thought is demonstrated, as well as his refusal of univocal meaning whether at the level of signs themselves, or at the level of the self-definition of disciplines. Listeners are prepared firstly for a new departure in Barthes's thought, and secondly for an idiosyncratic programme of research whose status will be 'incertain'. He declares that the disciplinary space that he is in the process, during the *Leçon*, of shaping for himself at the Collège de France, will be subjective, multi-faceted, prone to displacement, and fundamentally opposed to the thetic and the univocal.

The lecture continues by showing that Barthes feels he has now sufficiently demonstrated his distance from positivist knowledge: 'C'est donc, manifestement, un sujet impur qui est accueilli dans une maison où règnent la science, le savoir, la rigueur et l'invention disciplinée' (*L*, 8). Barthes's own distance from rigorous science is later mirrored in the new semiology's distance from a more axiomatic semiology. Barthes explains this by declaring that 'la sémiologie dont je parle [...] est négative [...] non en ce qu'elle nie le signe, mais en ce qu'elle nie qu'il soit possible de lui attribuer des caractères positifs, fixes, anhistoriques, acorporels, bref: scientifiques' (*L*, 35–36). This 'apophatic' semiology has no constancy. But its lack of integrity is, we are encouraged to believe, its most honourable quality, for it is in its refusal of any *a priori* articles of faith that it manages to track closely the mutations of the sign over the time; thus it is an 'active' semiology, as Barthes points out. It is fluid, and has an implied corporeality. Although what this corporeality might mean in real terms is unclear, the implication is that this semiology is at work, temporally, *with* the human subject. It evolves as meanings evolve through usage. Furthermore, this semiology is with the subject in that it refuses any false objectivity:

La sémiologie [maintenant] [...] ne peut être elle-même un méta-langage. C'est précisément en réfléchissant sur le signe qu'elle découvre que toute relation d'extériorité d'un langage à un autre est, à la longue, insoutenable: [...] je ne puis être à vie *hors* du langage, le traitant comme une cible, et *dans* le langage, le traitant comme une arme. (*L*, 36)

Barthes here mentions the belief that 'le sujet de la science est ce sujet-là qui ne se donne pas à voir' (*L*, 36). For the writing (or teaching) subject to make himself an overt part of the study at hand, then, would be counter-scientific – because, in Adorno's words, 'to the instinct of scientific purism, every expressive impulse in the presentation jeopardises an objectivity that supposedly leaps forth when the subject has been removed'.<sup>14</sup> Like Adorno, Barthes shows that the equation of an impersonal discourse with authenticity of scholarly discourse may well be a

fallacy. He then goes further, by declaring that his recognition that the use of metalanguage in semiology is no longer relevant for his practice makes him in fact more advanced than those who would deny his semiology 'tout rapport avec la science'. He is always already ahead:

Il faut leur suggérer que c'est par un abus épistémologique, *qui commence précisément à s'effriter*, que nous identifions le métalangage et la science, comme si l'un était la condition obligée de l'autre, alors qu'il n'en est que le signe historique, donc récusable; il est peut-être temps de distinguer le métalinguistique [...] du scientifique, dont les critères sont ailleurs (peut-être que [...] ce qui est proprement scientifique, c'est de détruire la science qui précède). (*L*, 37)

Having apparently played down the capacities of his semiology by describing it as negative and as being unqualified to stand as a pure metalanguage outside of any other language it chooses to critique, Barthes then uses precisely these qualities to exalt his discipline. For if he has defined this semiology as a negative space, then it follows that it can be filled momentarily and successively by all the possible fields of knowledge that it may find in the heterogeneous space of literature. His semiology proposes to marry a semiological analysis of the emotions, effects, and subjective energy of discourse with that infinite field of types of discourse which is literature. There is an explicit aestheticisation of the discipline. Here again we see the theme of impurity. Barthes describes the new semiology as working on 'l'impur de la langue, [...] les désirs, les craintes, les mines', everything that constitutes 'la langue active'. This semiology gets its hands dirty, unlike linguistics, which Barthes describes as 'travail[ant] sur un immense leurre, sur un objet qu'elle rendait abusivement propre et pur, en s'essayant les doigts à l'écheveau du discours, comme Trimalcion aux cheveux de ses esclaves' (*L*, 31).<sup>15</sup>

The conjunction of literature and semiology will involve the best of both worlds, with 'le retour incessant au texte [...], la plongée régulière dans la plus complexe des pratiques signifiantes, à savoir l'écriture' preventing semiology from becoming dogmatic, while at the same time 'le regard sémiotique' will mean that the use he makes of literature will not fall back into indulgent stereotypes such as 'le mythe de la créativité pure' (*L*, 35). Thus each element of the partnership will correct the other's faults, as well as leading to a productive symbiosis, as a note from *Le Neutre* shows: 'chaire de sémiologie littéraire = 1) Littérature: codex de nuances + 2) Sémiologie: écoute ou vision des nuances' (*N*, 18 February, 37). The impure new semiology is uniquely qualified, then, to deploy its activity in a multitude of spheres. Flitting here and there, it has a far greater mobility than other disciplines, and can draw meanings from

these other schools of thought in order to enrich itself. This semiology will use methods drawn from all of these fields to provide an illuminating temporary distortion (anamorphosis) of the materials it chooses to alight upon in its readings. Thus literary semiology can, in fact, constitute a global but unoppressive theory, because it recognises the heteronomy of meaning, having departed from linguistics to meet all the other discourses which generate meaning.

So this semiology, like the signs it studies, has no fixed characteristics, and therefore is not sufficiently pure or definable to be a discipline: 'ce n'est pas une discipline' (*L*, 37). This, of course, is only an apparent abasement: Barthes states this in order to exalt his semiology to a position of ubiquity: 'J'aurais souhaité que la sémiologie ne prît ici la place d'aucune autre recherche, mais au contraire les aidât toutes, qu'elle eût pour siège une sorte de chaire mobile, joker du savoir d'aujourd'hui, comme le signe lui-même l'est de tout discours' (*L*, 38). One early commentator on *Leçon*, Ian McLeod, feels that with this statement, Barthes has 'thrown semiology entirely away'.<sup>16</sup> But, though Barthes carefully expresses his hopes for literary semiology in non-hierarchical terms, he has actually elevated semiology to the ur-discipline.

Of course, precisely because of Barthes's inversion of terms, there is no sense in *Leçon* of anything other than a retrenching into the personal: 'Je sais ce qu'une telle définition a de personnel' (*L*, 32), Barthes declares. McLeod quotes this declaration, saying that the weakness of Barthes's conception of semiology 'force[s]' him 'to resort to a claim for subjective privilege'.<sup>17</sup> McLeod seems to have been hoodwinked by Barthes's rhetoric. For in fact the lines of 'force' are held by Barthes himself and strengthened by the institution he is now part of, which encourages individualistic research. Thus, as Barthes points out, a 'personal' definition of his semiology is exactly what is required by the Collège: 'Il me semble [...] que l'institution d'une chaire au Collège de France entend moins consacrer une discipline que permettre à un certain travail individuel, à l'aventure d'un certain sujet, de se poursuivre' (*L*, 32). Furthermore, though the overall tenor of *Leçon*, as we have seen, highlights the importance of subjectivity, the message of the lecture is by no means exhausted by the presence of that theme. For beneath the careful declarations of personal predilection, all the subjacent claims are on behalf, not of Barthes himself, but rather, of literature. 'L'enseignement des lettres,' says Barthes, 'est déchiré jusqu'à la fatigue entre les pressions de la demande technocratique et le désir révolutionnaire de ses étudiants' (*L*, 10). At this 'moment historique', therefore, it is literature, and how his new semiology can be attentive towards literature, that Barthes is

concerned with. Aesthetic response is pre-eminent. As Leyla Perrone-Moïses has pointed out, the necessity of attending to literature is the lecture's main point, even though this tends to be obscured by attention to the lecture's argument about language. 'The lecture aroused strong objections,' writes Perrone-Moïses, 'mainly due to the assertion that "language is fascist":

What was less observed was that this provocative assertion [was] intended to prepare, in the discourse, the ascendancy and definition of a word that he had himself depreciated in his previous phases. This word, placed at the most jubilant moment of the Lesson, is literature.<sup>18</sup>

It is an idea of literature (which is not quite the same as literature itself) that impels the methodology set out in *Leçon* and carried out in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*. For if *Leçon* has demonstrated that Barthes's new semiology, though not scientific in the strict sense, is more 'scientifique' than science itself in being protean and shifting, what the lecture also needs to do is to demonstrate in what way literature will guide the deployment of this semiology. It is the 'mathetic' nature of literature which will provide such guidance. 'Mathésis' is the first of three 'forces' that Barthes ascribes to literature, the other two being 'Mimésis' and 'Sémiosis' (*L*, 17). His only explanation of the term is to declare that 'la littérature prend en charge beaucoup de savoirs' (*L*, 17). *Mathesis*, the desire for knowledge, will always be fulfilled by literature.

### *Leçon and the Encyclopedic Teaching of Comment vivre ensemble and Le Neutre*

The philosopher Frederick Van de Pitte, discussing Descartes's use of the term, explains that *mathesis*, used in conjunction with the complement *universalis*, is often understood to refer to a universal method for mathematics. This is erroneous, argues Van de Pitte. Rather, 'Descartes use[s] the term *mathesis* in its Greek [...] sense' as referring to the possibility of knowledge in or of *any* field (not just mathematics).<sup>19</sup> Thus, if *mathesis* is 'a science of necessary relations', *mathesis universalis* is 'the transformation of such systems of necessary relations into genuine *scientia* by providing the underlying conditions for the very possibility of knowledge: that general science which is the ground and source of all the particular sciences'.<sup>20</sup> Van de Pitte's understanding of the term accords with Barthes's. Furthermore, it chimes to a large extent with Barthes's conception of literature, and of literary semiology – the latter term being, as Michael Sheringham points out, 'virtually a tautology':<sup>21</sup> both litera-

ture and literary semiology are the ‘joker du savoir’ (L, 38), providing a universal ground for knowledge. Barthes characterises literature in *Leçon* as that which makes all of knowledge possible in one discipline – for he states that ‘[s]i [...] toutes nos disciplines devaient être expulsées de l’enseignement sauf une, c’est la discipline littéraire qui devrait être sauvée, car toutes les sciences sont présentes dans le monument littéraire’ (L 18). Barthes has not yet begun to hint at the elaboration of what in *La Chambre claire* is called a ‘*Mathesis singularis*’; the first intimations of this will be found in ‘Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...’ For the purposes of *Leçon* and the two lecture courses which precede the ‘Longtemps’ lecture (*Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*), it is the more generalised idea of ‘mathésis’ which is important. The description of literature under the rubric of the ‘force’ of mathesis is, along with the theme of the ‘fantasme’, what forms the methodology of those lecture series.

Continuing his characterisation of literature as ‘mathetic’, Barthes employs the etymology of the first half of the word ‘encyclopedia’ to explain his veneration for literature and to hint at the method he will employ in his lectures. He points out that literature is ‘véritablement encyclopédique’ because it ‘fait tourner les savoirs[.] Elle n’en fixe, elle n’en fétichise aucun; elle leur donne une place indirecte, et cet indirect est précieux’ (L, 18). The reference to the ‘turning’ of knowledge within literature calls to mind the first half of the Greek term ‘enkyklios paideia’, which gives us the word ‘encyclopédie’. ‘Enkyklios’ means circular or cyclical – i.e. recurring, but also everyday.<sup>22</sup> Barthes’s image, then, of literature ‘turning’, in an egalitarian fashion, the wheel of ‘les savoirs’, corresponds – as Barthes the classicist was undoubtedly aware – to the classical understanding of ‘enkyklios paideia’ as an unspecialised, general, everyday education. As Maarten de Pourcq tells us, the term ‘is used [in classical Greek] to signify a kind of general education, before one goes to the [more specialised] schools of rhetorics or philosophy’.<sup>23</sup> The fact that literature was ‘put forward as an encyclopedic source of knowledge’, says De Pourcq, led to its being denigrated by some classical philosophers as having ‘polymathia’ without the necessary ‘control or mastery’ over this ‘multi-knowledge’.<sup>24</sup> Barthes makes a similar point about literature holding all knowledge only very loosely in its palm, when he describes it as giving ‘les savoirs’ ‘une place indirecte’. Far from agreeing with those who would reproach literature’s lack of systematic knowledge, though, this is of course what Barthes sees as the most ‘précieux’ and important aspect of literature. As De Pourcq says:

It is exactly this encyclopedic and non-controlling aspect which brings Barthes to literature[;] [...] it is precisely as a remedy for th[e] fragmentation of the sciences and their distancing from life that Barthes wants to posit his [...] literary semiology.<sup>25</sup>

For it is literature's indirect presentation of 'les savoirs' that allows it to work 'dans les interstices de la science' (*L*, 18) and to resist 'la pureté' of '[les] discours typés qui l'entourent: les philosophies, les sciences, les psychologies' (*L*, 25–26). A teaching method that is guided by the literary, then, would be one that would overcome the limitations of the 'typé' or scientific approach to knowledge, and allow the indirect presentation of 'les savoirs', in a manner which will be general, non-specialised. Literature is thus the model for Barthes's practice. For Barthes's understanding of literature is that it traverses many forms of knowledge. If Barthes can mirror this active power of literature in his own pedagogy, then, he can 'reveal and thus neutralis[e] the Cyclopean arrogance of singular disciplines, and, more widely, the power of language itself'.<sup>26</sup> A place for singular expression would thereby be created. Thus perhaps the question of how Barthes's 'discours' is to become more 'humain' is answered.

The encyclopedic nature of literature cannot be fully replicated in Barthes's *cours*. This is firstly because Barthes cannot – and does not wish to – present himself as having sufficient authority to expound all the multi-faceted aspects of knowledge he finds within literature. Secondly, according to Barthes, our current society, saturated by information overload and fragmented into hermetically sealed idiolects, can no longer produce a holistic work: an encyclopedia of our world is no longer possible. He points this out at the end of *Comment vivre ensemble*, saying that we cannot, as Diderot and his team did, 'maîtrise[r]' all knowledge, because 'aujourd'hui: plus d'exhaustivité possible du savoir, entièrement pluralisé, diffracté en langages incommunicants. L'acte encyclopédique n'est plus possible' (*CVE*, 4 May, 182). However, through 'indirect' methods, the encyclopedic nature of knowledge (which Barthes favours over 'typé' or specialised knowledge) can be hinted at. Literature inaugurates this method. As Barthes wrote in 1967, 'il n'est certainement pas une seule matière scientifique qui n'ait été à un certain moment traitée par la littérature universelle: le monde de l'œuvre est un monde total, où tout le savoir [...] prend place'. Literature thereby gives us 'cette grande unité cosmogonique dont jouissaient les anciens Grecs, mais que l'état parcellaire de nos sciences nous refuse aujourd'hui'.<sup>27</sup> So, accepting the 'parcellaire' nature of knowledge in our time, but desiring nonetheless somehow to reflect the 'cosmogonique' potency of literature in his

teaching, the imperative for Barthes is that ‘soit en écrivant, soit en enseignant’, he employs the ‘opération[s] fondamentale[s]’ of ‘la fragmentation’ et ‘la digression’ (*L*, 42). Literature inspires a productive dialectic between totality and fragmentation. In this manner, Barthes explains in his retrospective account of his method in *Comment vivre ensemble*, one can perform the ‘acte encyclopédique par excellence’ of opening a folder of knowledge: ‘À tout instant j’ai dit (presque à chaque figure): “Nous ouvrons seulement un dossier”’. In this manner, ‘[un] geste encyclopédique’ is made, which for Barthes has ‘sa valeur de fiction, sa jouissance: son scandale’ (*CVE*, 4 May, 182). Mathesis can still be sketched out, but not filled in – permanent filling in being neither possible nor desirable any more. In *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*, with their plethora of ‘figures’ drawing on ethnological, theological, literary, anthropological and other discourses, one does indeed have the impression of a series of ‘gestes encyclopédiques’.

The second half of the term ‘encyclopédique’ is, of course, ‘paideia’, from the word for ‘child’. Barthes does not overtly mention the idea of ‘paideia’ in *Leçon* – we have to wait until the first lecture of *Comment vivre ensemble*, five days later, for the use of this term. There is, however, an important set of references to the child and to fantasy towards the end of *Leçon*, which provides an extra gloss to the ‘paideia’ set out in the opening *Vivre ensemble* lecture. In that lecture of 12 January 1977 – which sets out the methodology of *Comment vivre ensemble* that will also be carried out in *Le Neutre* – ‘paideia’ is explained as belonging to the Nietzschean distinction between ‘méthode’ and ‘culture’, as set out in Deleuze’s *Nietzsche et la philosophie*.<sup>28</sup> Deleuze describes Nietzsche’s conception of ‘method’ as an aprioristic philosophy: ‘La méthode suppose toujours une bonne volonté du penseur, “une décision préméditée”’. Culture, on the other hand, is ‘essentiellement dressage et sélection’:

Un dressage qui met en jeu tout l’inconscient du penseur. Les Grecs ne parlaient pas de méthode, mais de *paideia*; ils savaient que la pensée ne pense pas à partir d’une bonne volonté, mais en vertu de forces qui s’exercent sur elle pour la contraindre à penser.<sup>29</sup>

Barthes points out that the difference between ‘méthode’ and ‘culture’ is essentially a difference concerning the idea of one’s journey through knowledge: if one uses ‘méthode’, there is a ‘chemin droit’, a ‘démarche vers un but, protocole d’opérations pour obtenir un résultat’. ‘Méthode’, therefore, is concerned with ‘généralité’, ‘moralité’ (*CVE*, 33) – or in Nietzsche’s words, ‘cette contrainte à former des concepts, des espèces, des formes, des fins, des lois...ce monde des cas identiques’ (*L*, 34). This,

for Barthes, is problematic, because it engenders a false objectivity, and because it skips over everything which does not lead to a pre-defined goal. 'Méthode' leaves out vital areas of the subject ('subject' in both senses here of the *topos* and the individual): 'Le sujet, <quand il suit la méthode>, abdique ce qu'il ne connaît pas de lui-même, son irréductible, sa force' (CVE, 33). Implicit here is the Nietzschean idea of 'truth' as a repressive levelling of something which, in reality, is a-systematic, recalcitrant, contingent. The 'truth' in language, in Nietzsche's view, compels us to identity-thinking. This suspicion is also a powerful idea in *Leçon*. 'Méthode' assumes a knowledge in advance of where the investigation is to lead, and a (false) mastery over oneself and one's topic. Little wonder, then, that Barthes uses the Nietzschean paradigm here in order to reject this term. Barthes wishes to disqualify all claims to mastery. This disqualification can be accomplished, as *Leçon* has already told us, by means of fragmentation. In order to ally himself to the term 'culture' (as set out in the Nietzschean opposition), Barthes must allow his thought – and his exposition of his subject – to fragment into multiple directions and roles. Towards the end of *Leçon*, Barthes mentions the gift-giving games of a child. He wishes to model his teaching upon the erratic, repetitive journeys of a child that offers a series of mundane gifts to its mother. Note the references to circular (*kyklios*) movements in this description of the child (*paidos*):

J'aimerais donc que la parole et l'écoute qui se tresseront ici soient semblables aux allées et venues d'un enfant qui joue autour de sa mère, qui s'en éloigne, puis retourne vers elle pour lui rapporter un caillou, un brin de laine, dessinant de la sorte autour d'un centre paisible toute une aire de jeu, à l'intérieur de laquelle le caillou, la laine important finalement moins que le don plein de zèle qui en est fait. (L, 42–43)

Just as the mother receives the heterogeneous and often banal gifts proffered by the child, the 'auditeurs' at the Collège will be presented with a set of encyclopedic 'gestes' in which bits and pieces of knowledge will be touched upon. This is what it means to 'se placer dans la *paideia*'. Barthes's explanation in his first 'proper' lecture of what this means, in terms of methodology, recalls the terms used at the end of the inaugural lecture: 'Culture, comme "dressage" (≠ méthode), renvoie pour moi à l'image d'une sorte de *dispatching* au trace excentrique: tituber entre des bribes, des bornes de savoirs, de saveurs. [...] Culture, ainsi comprise comme reconnaissance de forces, est antipathique à l'idée de pouvoir' (CVE, 12 January, 34). Barthes's taking of a Nietzschean *paideia* as his methodological model means that the lectures are to be 'imprévisible', without a teleology. The thinker's mastery is deliberately undone by his



willingness to proceed *unmethodically*, flitting – as the ‘chaire mobile’ (L, 38) of literary semiology does – from one area of interest to another, staggering between snippets of information in the manner of a small child. The deliberately aleatory construction of the first two lecture courses is of course a cognate tactic. The lectures, therefore, are as erratic as a child might be – and as ‘incertain’ as the essay as genre is. ‘The essay,’ Adorno tells us, ‘does not develop its ideas in accordance with discursive logic. It neither makes deductions from a principle nor draws conclusions from coherent individual observations. It coordinates elements instead of subordinating them’.<sup>30</sup> The many directions of thought are retained as an ideal, rather than being organised into one single direction by a *terminus a quo*. Thus the polymathic nature of the endeavour is made present as a selection of ‘moments’ which are ‘interwoven as in a carpet’ – or ‘tissés’ as in a text. ‘The thinker,’ says Adorno, ‘does not actually think[,] but rather makes himself into an arena for intellectual experience, without unravelling it’.<sup>31</sup>

To undo ‘maîtrise’ is to undo authority. With the renunciation of authority comes the willingness to cede authority to others. Given that Barthes states at the end of *Leçon* that his Collège de France teaching will be placed under the aegis of ‘*désapprendre*’ and ‘*oubli*’ (L, 46), it is no coincidence that, as Claude Coste points out in his preface to *Comment vivre ensemble*, ‘Barthes accumule les savoirs, multiplie les références souvent érudites, les emprunts au grec ancien, mais ses connaissances, le plus souvent de seconde main, ne valent jamais pour elles-mêmes’ (CVE, 25). A large proportion of the material he uses for *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre* is secondary, and reference works such as the *Encyclopaedia Universalis* and the *Dictionnaire des sciences sociales* crop up frequently in the margins. The ‘encyclopedic gesture’ is thus made in a very literal sense. This is a tactic not so much of innovation but of recycling. Barthes is aware of the banality that this may lead to, and states this as his aim: at the end of *Comment vivre ensemble*, he declares that within the lectures’ ‘symphonie de propositions’, ‘le rôle’ would be ‘une sorte de banalité non oppressante’ (CVE, 181). There is no oppression – though of course there may be frustration on the part of those expecting a more sequentially erudite discourse – because there is no demonstration of authority. The responsibility (or authority) is delegated away from Barthes himself and given to the material; this is precisely the point of *paideia* as force. As De Pourcq puts it, *paideia* ‘selects, disturbs, distorts and forgets’.<sup>32</sup> All of those processes are to be viewed as positive. In *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*, the encyclopedic, aleatory staggering (‘tituber’) between discourses, opinions,

and facts constitutes an 'aire de jeu' in which, just like the pebble and the stone which the child offers its mother, the 'propositions' are ultimately less important than 'le don plein de zèle qui en est fait' (L, 43).

Another important aspect of the renunciation of authority foregrounded at the end of *Leçon* is the idea of the fantasy. This is thematically linked to the childish-ness of *paideia* through the mention of the child, or rather the son: when he outlines the importance of the 'fantasme', Barthes says that to use the fantasy as the basis for teaching is to elude capture, as a child does:

C'est à un fantasme, dit ou non dit, que le professeur doit annuellement revenir [...]; de la sorte il dévie de la place où on l'attend, qui est la place du Père, toujours mort, comme on le sait; car seul le fils a des fantasmes, seul le fils est vivant. (L, 44)

Interestingly, with the 'fantasme' we are returned to Barthes's tricky tactics of asserting the 'scientifique' nature of a methodological procedure that appears to be anything but scientific. Barthes sets up his defence of the fantasy as being 'scientifique' by asking the rhetorical question 'comment oser parler, dans le cadre d'une institution, si libre soit-elle, d'un enseignement fantasmatique?' (L, 43). Barthes is clearly pleased to be able neatly to answer this question by referring to one of his illustrious predecessors at the Collège de France, Jules Michelet:

Si l'on considère un instant la plus sûre des sciences humaines, à savoir l'Histoire, comment ne pas reconnaître qu'elle a un rapport continu avec le fantasme? C'est ce que Michelet avait compris: l'Histoire, c'est en fin de compte l'histoire du lieu fantasmatique par excellence, à savoir le corps humain; c'est en partant de ce fantasme [...] que Michelet a pu faire de l'Histoire une immense anthropologie. (L, 43–44)

This proves it, Barthes concludes: 'La science peut donc naître du fantasme'. If science springs from fantasy, then, *quod erat demonstrandum*, 'c'est à un fantasme, dit ou non dit, que le professeur doit annuellement revenir' (L, 44) in order to guarantee his discourse.

The justification of the use of fantasy here is interesting in that it runs counter to the values that one might expect such a justification to mobilise – values such as the 'mythe de la créativité pure' mentioned earlier in *Leçon*, for example. Rather, fantasy is unexpectedly defended on the basis of its scientificity. This is in line with *Leçon's* concerted effort to establish Barthes's new semiology as being 'scientifique' at another turn of the screw, because of its recognition of the subjective investment that occurs in the investigation of any apparently objective phenomenon. In his use of fantasy, then, Barthes makes the same point as Adorno when the latter points out that

in order to be disclosed, [...] the objective wealth of meanings encapsulated in every intellectual phenomenon demands of the recipient the same spontaneity of subjective fantasy that is castigated in the name of objective discipline. Nothing can be interpreted out of something that is not interpreted into it at the same time.<sup>33</sup>

Barthes, though, is even more trenchant than Adorno in arguing that the subjective *is* objective, and in invoking illustrious names in order to make this point – which is not fully argued, but merely presented as given. In the first *Vivre ensemble* lecture, explaining the use of the ‘fantasme’ as principle, Barthes once again points out that the fantasy is scientific, this time using Bachelard:

Science et fantasme: Bachelard: intrication de la science et de l’imaginaire. [...] La science se constituerait par décantation des fantasmes. Sans discuter ceci (on pourrait dire qu’il n’y a pas de décantation, mais surimpression du fantasme et de la science), admettons que nous nous plaçons avant cette décantation.

Barthes concludes this point by saying that we can – or should – view ‘le fantasme comme origine de la culture (comme engendrement de forces, de différences)’ (CVE, 34).

Though he is never mentioned, it must be the historical philosophy of Giambattista Vico that Barthes has in mind here – more so in *Leçon* than in this first lecture of the *Vivre ensemble*, because *Leçon* refers to Michelet. Michelet was heavily influenced by Vico and almost single-handedly introduced Vico to French readers with his translations from the *Scienza Nuova* and selections of Vico’s other work.<sup>34</sup> Familiar with Michelet, Barthes would also have been familiar with Vico’s principle of the *fantasia*. For Vico, human thinking begins initially with the power of imagination (‘*fantasia*’ in Italian). It is the use of this *fantasia* that leads to the founding of society itself. Early in the *Scienza Nuova*, Vico explains this as follows:

We find that the principle of [the] origins both of languages and of letters lies in the fact that the first gentile peoples, by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets who spoke in poetic characters. This discovery [...] is the master key of this Science. [...] The poetic characters of which we speak were certain imaginative genera (images for the most part of animate substances, of gods or heroes, formed by their imagination) to which they reduced all the species or all the particulars appertaining to each genus; exactly as the fables of human times [...] are intelligible genera reasoned out by moral philosophy. [...] Since these genera [...] were formed by most vigorous imaginations [*fantasia*] [...], we discover in them true poetic sentences...<sup>35</sup>

For Vico, *fantasia* is the force by which man originally moulded the world itself to his understanding, and is therefore the primal form of knowl-

edge. Donald Verene shows how *fantasia* is key at every stage of Vico's account of the development of civilisation. He writes that for Vico, 'all nations begin in the same way by the power of the imagination (*fantasia*) to *make* the world intelligible in terms of gods'. This age then 'gives way to a second age, in which *fantasia* is used to form social institutions and types of character or virtues in terms of heroes'. Verene shows that, in the last stage, Vico believes that false objectivity triumphs – wrongly – over the more subjective and productive force of *fantasia*:

Finally, these two ages, in which the world is ordered through the power of *fantasia*, decline into an age of rationality, in which the world is ordered in purely conceptual and logical terms and in which mental acting is finally dominated by what Vico calls a barbarism of reflection (*barbarie della riflessione*).<sup>36</sup>

This dovetails neatly with what Barthes implies both in *Leçon* and in 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' when he valorises the use of subjectivity and of fantasy in his teaching as being more 'scientifique' than the positivist 'science des signes' from which he distances himself. At the heart of all four lecture courses is a fantasy: in *Comment vivre ensemble*, it is the fantasy of idiorrhythmie; in *Le Neutre*, the fantasy of a neutral or non-arrogant mode of being; and in *La Préparation du roman I* and *II*, the fantasy of 'le Roman pas comme les autres' (PR, 38). The use of *fantasia*, coming back on on a Vichean spiral, is – in accordance with Barthes's defence of the 'fantasme' in *Leçon* and the first lecture of the *Vivre ensemble* – only apparently anachronistic and only apparently self-indulgent: in fact, this tactic returns to the first principle of the *scienza nuova*.

A 'poetic' fantasy, which in Vico's sense is rather more *poietic* than generically poetic, thus intermingles art and science. It is as such impure, and may even be childlike ('seul le fils a des fantasmes'). We have seen that Barthes characterises himself and his thought in *Leçon* as impure and childlike. He uses the figure of the artist in the same way. The theme of the artist forms the strongest link between *Leçon* and the lecture 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', which sets out the preoccupations of Barthes's final two years of teaching at the Collège de France.

### The Literary Semiologist as 'artiste'

The term 'artiste' is drawn from Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. After the death of God, Nietzsche needs to come up with emblems of a new,

anti-paternalistic way of thinking. The alternatives to religious authoritarianism are precisely those figures invoked by Barthes in *Leçon* – the artist and the child. These figures are valuable because they have the capability of imagining a non-hierarchised mode of being. The artist and the child, in their curiosity, do not respect the order of things. They are happy to ‘émietter l’univers, perdre le respect du Tout’<sup>37</sup> – that is, to affirm the death of God in their independent thinking. If Barthes takes the child and the artist as models for his thought, he thereby inaugurates a deliberately wayward methodology of fragmentation, chance, curiosity. We have already seen how the idea of the child feeds into Barthes’s use of *paideia* as a strategy in his teaching. In ‘Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...’, we will see how Barthes explains his fantasy of a ‘Roman’ which would manage to express ‘pathos’: the Nietzsche quotation concerning ‘émiettement’ is of vital importance for Barthes in this context.<sup>38</sup>

‘Longtemps’ is the manifesto for the final two years of Barthes’s Collège de France teaching, which are radically different in methodology and in content to the first two years of lectures. In *Leçon*, Barthes defines his new non-discipline, literary semiology. By the time he delivers the ‘Longtemps’ lecture in October 1978, it seems that semiology has fallen by the wayside, as Barthes is now describing only his fantasy of a novel. However, there is a continuity of theme between *Leçon* and ‘Longtemps’; this continuity is provided by the figure of the Nietzschean artist and the thematic importance of hybridity, invoked initially by reference to the essay genre. In ‘Longtemps’, Barthes decides that the form he is searching for is a ‘tierce’ (or hybrid) form that combines the best attributes of the essay and the novel; this work would be, ‘selon la typologie nietzschéenne, [...] du côté de l’Art, non de la Prêtrise’ (‘Longtemps’, 470). This ‘typologie’ has already been mentioned in *Leçon*, when Barthes uses it to describe the new semiologist. The semiologist’s role changes because of the nature of the new semiology, which, as we have seen, is constantly mutating as the signs it studies shift their connotations. If the semiologist thus treats the sign as ‘un spectacle imaginaire’ – and if he has renounced the practice of metalanguage – his task is of a new and different order: ‘Le sémiologue serait en somme un artiste’. Barthes quickly points out that this is not a value-judgment: ‘(ce mot n’est ici ni glorieux ni dédaigneux: il se réfère seulement à une typologie)’ (*L*, 39).<sup>39</sup> This is disingenuous, as elsewhere he turns the Nietzschean ‘typologie’ to which he is referring (which he does not explain here) into a paradigm in which the ‘artiste’ represents the positive pole, and the ‘prêtre’ the negative.<sup>40</sup>

Barthes understands Nietzsche's 'artiste' as representing a creative and active force, in opposition to the 'prêtre', who is a reactive representative of oppressive morality. In the final lecture of *La Préparation du roman I*, Barthes says that for Nietzsche, the 'Artiste' is 'un type absolu que l'on ne peut réduire', whereas the 'Prêtre' is associated with 'Politique, Ressentiment' (PR, 23 February 1980, 383). The 'prêtre' is linked to asceticism, purity, and, of course, Christianity. Barthes makes it clear that he associates the 'prêtre' not only with religious authoritarianism, but with any orthodoxy which promulgates a reductive or repressive understanding of the world. So a priestly world is the world Nietzsche diagnosed – a world of unquestioned norms: 'nous sommes,' Barthes declares at the end of the *Préparation* lecture of 8 December 1979, 'dans l'Ère générale du Ressentiment: des Prêtres, Papes, Ayatollahs, Moralistes du Politique' (PR, 218). By contrast, the 'artiste', free of 'ressentiment', has the ability (like the child) to interpret the world in accordance only with his own imagination and desire, without any hidebound set of moral prescriptions. The 'artiste', thus conceived, is therefore the ideal emblem of Barthes's new semiologist in *Leçon*. For this semiologist will deploy no set of rules but that dictated to him by his own *fantasme*. There is no deduction and no extrapolation; the semiology wanders where it will:

La sémiologie de celui qui parle ici n'est pas une herméneutique: elle peint, plutôt qu'elle ne fouille. [...] Ses objets de prédilection, ce sont les textes de l'Imaginaire. [...] J'appellerais volontiers 'sémiologie' le cours des opérations le long duquel il est possible – voire escompté – de jouer du signe comme d'un voile peint, ou encore: d'une fiction. (L, 39–40)

There are several terms here that appear at first glance to imply a light-hearted or casual approach to the study of signs: 'pein[dre]', 'prédilection', 'jouer', 'fiction'. Like the term 'fantasme', however, these terms are only apparently self-indulgent. Beneath this veneer lies an imperative ('escompté'): viewing the sign as a fiction is necessary in order for this semiology to evade and erode the discourse of power. This is in accordance with Barthes's career-long demystificatory effort. It is only if one can recognise that the meanings with which signs are invested are to a certain extent arbitrary – or rather, historical as opposed to natural – that one will be able to reserve independence of judgment and exist free of *ressentiment*. For to elude the 'discours de pouvoir' (by treating the sign as a fiction) is to elude 'tout discours qui engendre la faute, et partant la culpabilité, de celui qui le reçoit' (L, 11).<sup>41</sup>

Barthes has demonstrated, ever since *Mythologies*, that the ability to read the layers of ideological connotation that lie on top of the sign is the

critic's most important role. He reiterates this in *Comment vivre ensemble*, saying that for a 'pensée critique', 'toute coutume est une forme déguisée de loi'. He quotes some lines from Brecht which he had considered using as the epigraph for *Mythologies*: 'Sous la règle découvrez l'abus' (CVE, 20 April, 165).<sup>42</sup> Twenty years after *Mythologies*, the same 'pensée critique' remains – but in different terms: the 'critique' is now an 'artiste', who deploys a critical creativity in viewing the sign as a 'fiction'.

This is made clear in Barthes's tribute to the film director Michelangelo Antonioni, written in January 1980. The text begins as follows: 'Dans sa typologie, Nietzsche distingue deux figures: le prêtre et l'artiste'. Barthes will examine Antonioni under the rubric of the 'artiste'. He lists the 'forces' or 'vertus' of the artist: 'la vigilance, la sagesse et [...] la fragilité'.<sup>43</sup> 'Sagesse' is also used at the end of *Leçon* when Barthes describes how he will use '*sapientia*' as a principle in his teaching (*L*, 46). Barthes describes in 'Cher Antonioni' what this 'sagesse' means. We discover here the imperative that, in the quotation from *Leçon* above, is cloaked in the words 'jouer' and 'fiction':

J'appelle sagesse de l'artiste, non une vertu antique, encore moins un discours médiocre, mais au contraire ce savoir moral, cette acuité de discernement qui lui permet de ne jamais confondre le sens et la vérité. Que de crimes l'humanité n'a-t-elle pas commis au nom de la Vérité! [...] L'artiste, lui, sait que le sens d'une chose n'est pas sa vérité; ce savoir est une sagesse, une folle sagesse, pourrait-on dire, puisqu'elle le retire de la communauté, du troupeau des fanatiques et des arrogants.<sup>44</sup>

The 'artist' practises the 'moral' task of differentiating between meaning and would-be truth. There is a slippage of terminology – from mythologist to critic to semiologist to writer to artist – but no fundamental change in Barthes's conception of the task at hand. Only the status of the discourse changes. For whereas the mythologist is 'condamné au métalangage' (*My*, 232), the discourse of the 'artist' is primary. As we have seen, *Leçon* announces Barthes's renunciation of metalanguage, in accordance with his growing conviction that it is necessary to use subjectivity as the founding principle of criticism. This criticism, changing the 'degree' of its language, would thus become an 'art', as we have seen that the semiologist becomes 'en somme un artiste'.

The term 'artiste' mainly serves to underline Barthes's distancing of himself from 'scientific' studies of the sign. But the term is also employed to denote a rarity: there are few artists, and their combat against the 'troupeau des fanatiques et des arrogants' is heroic, because the numbers are so unmatched. Barthes writes at the opening of 'Cher Antonioni' that 'we' are surrounded by 'prêtres': 'Des prêtres, nous en avons aujourd'hui

à revendre: de toutes religions, et même hors religion; mais des artistes?'<sup>45</sup> The essay ends on the same note: having explained the implications of the artist's third 'force' – that of 'fragilité' – Barthes concludes that one's situation, 'dès lors qu'on n'est plus prêtre', is ultimately a situation of solitude: 'être artiste aujourd'hui, c'est là une situation qui n'est plus soutenue par la belle conscience d'une grande fonction sacrée ou sociale; ce n'est plus prendre place sereinement dans le Panthéon bourgeois des Phares de l'Humanité'.<sup>46</sup> This passage is strikingly similar to the passage in *Leçon* in which Barthes elegiacally – but artfully – describes literature after 'mai 68' as a deserted landscape: 'la littérature est désacralisée, les institutions sont impuissantes à la protéger et à l'imposer comme le modèle implicite de l'humain. Ce n'est pas [...] que la littérature soit détruite: c'est qu'elle n'est plus gardée' (*L*, 40–41). This is not merely a regretful postmodern assessment. It is a stratagem which allows Barthes to set out a neat position for the new semiology which he has, up to this point in the lecture, been defining. The next sentence of the lecture makes this strategy clear: 'La sémiologie littéraire serait ce voyage *qui permet* de débarquer dans un paysage libre par déshérence: ni anges ni dragons ne sont plus là pour le défendre' (*L*, 41, my emphasis). The post-'68 climate, in which 'la maîtrise littéraire' (*L*, 40) has 'dispar[u]', provides a conveniently untenanted location in which Barthes can practise his unmasterly pedagogical discourse and his predilection for literature: '[mon] regard peut alors se porter, non sans perversité, sur des choses anciennes et belles, dont le signifié est abstrait, périmé'. This smacks of defiance. By this stage of his career Barthes is willing to scandalise his former admirers by abjuring his previous, transgressive theoretical positions, and allying himself to what could be perceived as a reactionary emphasis on literature. The institutional ethos of the Collège de France licenses this, by allowing Barthes to pursue an 'enseignement que [...] rien n'est appelé à sanctionner, sinon la fidélité de ses auditeurs' (*L*, 41).

By sleight-of-hand, then, Barthes has by the end of *Leçon* constructed a rhetorical stage upon which his 'artistic' claims to subjective privilege are demonstrated to be, in fact, moral imperatives in a society dominated by (plural) 'discours de pouvoir'. 'Cher Antonioni' shows how Barthes views the situation of the 'artist' he claims in *Leçon*, however subtly, to be. Whereas the first two years of Barthes's teaching at the Collège de France employ an aleatory and encyclopedic approach to material from many disciplines (works of fiction, religious treatises, ethnological works, dictionaries, letters, etc.) in order to illuminate the 'fantasmes' of the 'vivre ensemble' and the 'neutre', it is in the final two years of teaching that the idea of a primary discourse (a writing that is 'du côté de l'Art'



(‘Longtemps’, 470)) moves to the forefront of Barthes’s preoccupations. The programme for *La Préparation du roman I* and *II* is set out in the ‘Longtemps’ lecture. Here Barthes describes his desire for a ‘tierce forme’ (461) founded on his own subjectivity, which will, beyond generic distinctions, become a sort of ‘Scienza Nuova’ (470) – a further step towards the ‘mathesis singularis’ he outlines in *La Chambre claire*.

**‘Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...’:  
From the ‘incertain’ to a *scienza nuova* of the ‘intime’**

The lecture entitled ‘Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...’ was delivered at the Collège de France on 19 October 1978, and given again in November at New York University, this time under the title ‘Proust et moi’. The lecture is quite obviously placed under the sign of Barthes’s affinity with Proust. I shall discuss the lecture further in Chapter 5 in the context of my examination of Barthes’s fantasy of the ‘Roman’. Barthes identifies with Proust, because, like him, after his mother’s death he feels an urgent desire to practise a new form of writing: ‘*je m’identifie à lui*’, he writes: ‘confusion de pratique, non de valeur’ (459). The choice to be made is the choice between ‘l’Essai (la Critique)’ and ‘[le] Roman’ (460). Barthes is intrigued by the manner in which Proust managed, in 1909, finally to start the *Recherche*, having resolved the hesitations that had dogged his work since the death of his mother four years previously.<sup>47</sup> It is the prolongation (from *Leçon*) of the theme of the ‘incertain’ that is of interest in ‘Longtemps’, along with the manner in which Barthes uses Proust as a keystone in his argument that subjectivity, fantasy and simulation must form the basis of a new science (a new *mathesis*).

At the start of the lecture, Barthes carefully points out that his ‘identification’ with Proust does not represent his own self-elevation to the same level as ‘l’auteur prestigieux d’une œuvre monumentale’. Rather, his identification is with ‘l’ouvrier [...] modeste, qui a voulu entreprendre une tâche à laquelle [...] il a conféré un caractère absolu’ (459). Barthes openly identifies aspects of his personal life with aspects of Proust’s: a major intermediary here is George Painter’s biography of Proust, a clear source of fascination for Barthes.<sup>48</sup> There is a willed provocativeness about Barthes’s identification with Proust, despite the disclaimer that this is not a preening comparison of himself to the great novelist. The provocativeness inheres in identifying, as Barthes claims, with ‘Marcel’ rather than with ‘Proust’: ‘marcellisme’ is a wilful abandonment to a *personal* investment in literature and a quasi-biographical interest in the

compositional dilemmas of the writer. This is part of the exercise in detheorisation that Barthes undertakes throughout much of the Collège de France teaching. Indeed, though Proust is, throughout Barthes's career, a writer of talismanic importance,<sup>49</sup> it is only once Barthes begins sloughing off the theoretical moulds he had done so much to form in the 1960s that Proust assumes more of an explicit presence in Barthes's writing.<sup>50</sup> As Kathrin Yacavone has pointed out, 'it was only after Barthes turned to a specific "writerly" practice of reading, namely one rooted in the pleasure-seeking subject as discussed in, and exemplified by, *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973), that Barthes's identification with Proust finds a theoretical justification in his work'.<sup>51</sup>

Barthes has always been interested in the mystery of the composition of the *Recherche*: how did Proust finally manage to make it work? In this way, Proust is the gateway to the coverage, in *La Préparation du roman II*, of the obstacles which writers must overcome in order to write the desired works: 'le choix', 'le doute'; 'la patience'; 'horaires, régimes'; 'démarrages, crises, freinages'. Jonathan Culler is critical of the way this approach mobilises what he considers to be regressive biographism, observing that it 'involves a turn away from reflection on language'.<sup>52</sup> However, Culler also points out that Barthes's focus, in *La Préparation du roman II*, on how the *Recherche* finally took shape is in some respects innovative: 'This discussion involves an interesting shift in ways of thinking about the novel in general and Proust in particular: vision from the beginning rather than the end, where the finished work is a given and one analyses the significance of different elements in that context'.<sup>53</sup>

In the 'Longtemps' lecture, Barthes explains that Proust, like himself, is torn between the essay (defined as being characterised by metaphor) and the novel (characterised by metonymy): 'Proust est un sujet divisé [...]; il sait que chaque incident de la vie peut donner lieu ou à un commentaire (une interprétation), ou à une affabulation qui en donne ou en imagine l'*avant* et l'*après* narratif' (460). From 1905 until the summer of 1909, Proust is uncertain. Barthes's description here of Proust's hesitation is remarkably similar to his description of himself at the start of *Leçon*, where, as we have seen, the adjective 'incertain' is used strategically: 'L'indécision de Proust est profonde [...]; il a déjà écrit, et ce qu'il a écrit (notamment au niveau de certains fragments) relève souvent d'une forme mixte, incertaine, hésitante, à la fois romanesque et intellectuelle' (461). Compare this to the successive versions of the opening of *Leçon*, in which Barthes defines both himself and the essay in the same terms, as 'incertain', 'ambigu'. For Barthes as for Proust, '[l']indécision est profonde', but also 'elle est peut-être chérie'

(‘Longtemps’, 461). Barthes explains that Proust clearly is attached to generic indecision given that ‘[il] a aimé et admiré des écrivains dont il constate qu’ils ont pratiqué, eux aussi, une certaine indécision des genres: Nerval et Baudelaire’ (461). For Barthes, the attachment to the ‘incertain’ is due more to his sense of its poietic and pedagogical value. A teaching which is ‘incertain’ in its method is true to the mathetic qualities of literature, and also manages by virtue of its impurity to evade the ‘discours du pouvoir’. This teaching ‘dévie de la place où on l’attend’ (L, 44).

In *Leçon*, then, the ‘indécision’ that Barthes later realises that he shares with Proust is positive and enabling. However, by the time of the ‘Longtemps’ lecture, the change in Barthes’s personal circumstances caused by the death of his mother means that he is no longer contented by the analytical nature of his writing. He wants his writing now to become primary: ‘quoi, toujours jusqu’à ma mort, je vais écrire des articles, faire des cours, des conférences, sur des “sujets”, qui seuls varieront, si peu! (C’est le “sur” qui me gêne)’ (‘Longtemps’, 466). His ‘indécision’ must somehow be transmuted in order to lead to a ‘forme nouvelle’ (467). It is precisely because Proust managed to alchemise his ‘indécision’ that he is an important figure for Barthes. Proust’s ‘indécision’ is the basis for a profound generic innovation. Barthes explains that it is the manner in which the narrator describes sleep – at the opening of *Du Côté de chez Swann* – that permits the synthesis of writing styles from which the whole work issues forth: ‘Le sommeil fonde une autre logique, une logique de la Vacillation, du Décloisonnement’ (462). For the ‘immense édifice du souvenir’ can only be articulated if chronology is interrupted. Thus the thematic importance of sleep provides Proust with the means to construct his work. Sleep will ‘ouvrir les vannes du *Temps*: la chronologie ébranlée, des fragments, intellectuels ou narratifs, vont former une suite soustraite à la loi ancestrale du Récit ou du Raisonnement, et cette suite produira sans forcer la *tierce forme*, ni Essai ni Roman’ (463).

Barthes therefore locates Proust’s transmutation of his writerly dilemma in his discovery of the myriad possibilities inherent to a state (sleep) normally considered as unproductive. The narrator’s confinement to the ‘self-cancelling impossibility’<sup>54</sup> of the phrase ‘*je dors*’ at the opening of the *Recherche* is the key that unlocks the subsequent enormous flow of recollection, just as in ‘Combray’, the work is seen to emerge from the narrator’s cup of tea. Apparent reduction leads, in fact, to creative expansion, because a ‘nouvelle logique’ is at work. Barthes needs to discover a similarly enabling ‘logique’. Thus he concludes the first part of the

'Longtemps' lecture by demonstrating how Proust is in this way a tutelary figure for him: 'Si j'ai dégagé dans l'œuvre-vie de Proust le thème d'une nouvelle logique qui permet – en tout cas a permis à Proust d'abolir la contradiction du Roman et de l'Essai, c'est parce que ce thème me concerne personnellement' (465). Drawing upon Proust, Barthes's own 'nouvelle logique' is to consist in a reduction – which is to be considered as an expansion – to his own self:

Je vais [...] parler de 'moi'. 'Moi' doit s'entendre ici lourdement: ce n'est pas le substitut aseptisé d'un lecteur général [...]; ce n'est personne d'autre que celui à qui nul ne peut se substituer, pour le meilleur et pour le pire. (465)

The desire to speak *personally* is, paradoxically, not egotistical. Proust is a vital catalyst for Barthes because he is the paradigmatic writer of 'la vérité de l'affect' (*PR*, 10 March 1979, 155). Novelistic language, for Barthes, is a way to bear witness to the lives of those one loves. Proust's writing about Marcel's grandmother is Barthes's model for his writing about his own mother in *La Chambre claire*. Thus what appears to be a dual egotism – the desire to speak personally, and the identification of himself with Proust – is in fact the expression of a generous, even a desperate, longing to do justice to other, beloved people. Proust is the emblem, for Barthes, of the consecration of one's own life to the project of writing an *affective* work, and thereby perhaps attaining a 'vita nova'.

Speaking personally would rebuff any *mathesis universalis*: 'C'est l'intime qui veut parler en moi, faire entendre son cri, face à la généralité, à la science' (465). The second part of the lecture will indicate that a particular 'science particulière' of 'simulation' will constitute, as Proust's *terce forme* does, an innovative method. With this method, Barthes can synthesise his 'indécision' on a new plane, beyond the territory of the 'sur' ('c'est le "sur" qui me gêne'). Simultaneously, he can construct a pedagogical landscape in which he can obey his own most personal conviction – that he must somehow express his love for his mother in writing.

Part two of the 'Longtemps' lecture begins with Barthes using Dante to explain that he feels he has reached the 'mezzo del camin', a sense of mortality and urgency which inaugurates a profound change in one's life. For Proust, this mid-point was 'certainement la mort de sa mère'. For Barthes it is the same event, though he does not name his mother, for whom he is experiencing 'un deuil cruel, [...] unique et comme irréductible'. This grief, he says, 'peut constituer pour moi cette "cime du particulier", dont parlait Proust; quoique tardif, ce deuil sera pour moi le milieu de ma vie' (467). It is from this most intense point of grief – the

'cime' – that his future work must depart.

Proust knew that it is 'à la cime du particulier qu'éclot le général'.<sup>55</sup> This phrase, partly quoted by Barthes in 'Longtemps', is glossed at greater length in the sixth *Préparation du roman I* lecture (20 January 1979), when Barthes is discussing the haiku's 'individuation' (PR, 77). The haiku outlines an utterly ephemeral event, viewed by an individual at a given brief moment. The conditions that give rise to the haiku are fleeting and always past. It is a form which, for Barthes, is the ne plus ultra of 'individuation – de la Saison, du Temps qu'il fait, de l'Heure comme individuation'. One important aspect of 'individuation', Barthes points out, is that of '[l]'individu contre le système'. The haiku draws him into thinking about individualistic philosophies, which in a post-Sartrean liberal climate of intellectual engagement are frowned upon: 'Il faut partir de ce vieux cheval de bataille: l'individualisme discrédité (cf. critique sartrienne de la démocratie bourgeoise [...] + critique marxiste + critique gauchiste: vraie conjuration contre l'individualisme!)' (77). From this point, Barthes states, he can imagine operating his usual 'tactique du déplacement' when thinking about the 'rapport entre le monde de "systèmes", c'est-à-dire des discours réducteurs (politiques, idéologiques, scientifiques, etc.) et l'étouffement de "l'individu"'. A general or 'scientific' discourse, then, is one which, unlike the haiku, accords no importance to the quiddity of the individual. The Proust quotation – 'cette très belle expression: "C'est à la cime du particulier qu'éclôt le général"' (PR, 78) – is one of several 'références' he provides here as examples of ways to re-examine the problem of how the subject can fit without distortion or reduction into the 'système'.

It is when we read the full Proust quotation in the context of a defence of 'individuation' that the use of the words 'cime du particulier' in the 'Longtemps' lecture becomes clearer. Proust's declaration to Halévy suggests precisely the conjunction that Barthes has been working towards since he posited, in *Leçon*, that 'la science peut naître du fantasme' (L, 44). The conjunction of the utterly individual with the universal brings about a new understanding of the term 'scientifique': the 'cime du particulier' is 'scientifique' in the sense that – according to Barthes – it leads to the mobilisation of a generally worthwhile knowledge. But it is not 'scientifique' insofar as it is not a 'discours réducteur'. Rather, writing from the 'cime du particulier' means rendering, as the haiku and the *Recherche* do, the emotion of the individual in a way that, while (ideally) as universally recognisable as love and death, is also extraordinarily private and ephemeral: the haiku tells of moments that are long vanished; Proust's narrator describes his childhood; and following these models,

Barthes wants to 'dire ceux que j'aime, [...] [afin de] témoigner qu'ils n'ont pas vécu [...] "pour rien"' ('Longtemps', 469). This is writing that, in refusing the old 'science', refuses the discourse of analysis (the 'sur'), or the discourse of intelligence. At the start of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust writes:

Chaque jour j'attache moins de prix à l'intelligence. Chaque jour je me rends mieux compte que ce n'est qu'en dehors d'elle que l'écrivain peut ressaisir quelque chose de nos impressions, c'est-à-dire atteindre quelque chose de lui-même et la seule matière de l'art. Ce que l'intelligence nous rend sous le nom de passé n'est pas lui.<sup>56</sup>

Barthes, by 1978, concurs. The death of his mother has altered his intellectual investment in the world of 'idées', and now he wishes to examine instead a 'Roman (fantasmé, et probablement impossible)' whose 'vérité' is 'la vérité des affects, non celle des idées' ('Longtemps', 469) – which, to bring us back to Nietzsche again, makes of the 'Roman' an instance of 'l'Art, non de la Prêtrise' (470). The new science is an art of the individual.

As the quotation from the *Préparation* has already made clear, Barthes is aware that such an apparently indulgent 'art' sits badly with the tenets of the theoretical and political climate. It also does not chime with perceptions of the role of the intellectual, if the intellectual is s/he who speaks truth to power in order to uncover injustices. We have already seen, though, that while Barthes believes his teaching – by virtue of both its methods and the location in which it now takes place – is 'hors pouvoir', he conceives his intellectual effort, characterised as 'indirect', as being more a flight away from (ahead of) power, than a direct combat with the orthodoxy. This has been his explicit conviction at least since 1971, when, in the preface to *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, he points out that in the absence of any language that is truly external to ideology, the 'seule riposte' available cannot be 'affrontement' or direct opposition, but rather, theft: 'fragmenter le texte ancien de la culture, de la science, de la littérature, et en disséminer les traits selon des formules méconnaissables, de la même façon que l'on maquille une marchandise volée'. Referring to the texts of Sade, Fourier and Loyola, he declares that their 'intervention sociale' consists in the manner in which they 'excède[nt] les lois qu'une société, une idéologie, une philosophie se donnent pour s'accorder à elles-mêmes' (*SFL*, 15).

Barthes's 'intervention sociale' in 1978 consists precisely in the belief that a focus on the particular is what is required in a climate that figures such retrenchment into the self as shameful or irresponsible. In an interview given a few weeks before the 'Longtemps' lecture, Barthes makes

this position clear. 'Depuis deux cent ans,' he says, 'nous sommes habitués par la culture philosophique et politique à valoriser énormément, disons, le collectivisme en général. Toutes les philosophies sont des philosophies de la collectivité, de la société, et l'individualisme est très mal vu'. There is no longer 'ou très rarement' a philosophy 'de la personne'. Thus, he says,

Peut-être faut-il justement assumer cette singularité, ne pas la vivre comme une sorte de dévalorisation, de honte, mais repenser effectivement une philosophie du sujet. Ne pas se laisser intimider par cette morale, diffuse dans notre société, qui est celle du surmoi collectif, avec ses valeurs de responsabilité et d'engagement politique. Il faut peut-être accepter le scandale de positions individualistes.<sup>57</sup>

Asked by the interviewer whether individualism is really such a 'scandale' as he implies, Barthes rather defensively replies, 'Oh, si, c'est un scandale pour tout ce qui pense et théorise, disons, depuis Hegel! Toute Philosophie qui essaye de se soustraire à ces impératifs de collectivité est extrêmement singulière, et [...] a une mauvaise image' (553). He needs to assert (if not demonstrate) this 'scandale' in order to construct a valorisation for his own individualistic practice.

At the end of the 'Longtemps' lecture, such a valorisation is provided by reference to Vico. It is here that Barthes sets out his idea of 'simulation'. For, though it is unlikely that he will actually write a novel, 'ce Roman utopique, il m'importe de faire comme *si je devais l'écrire*' (470).<sup>58</sup> This simulation will lead, he implies, to a new order of knowledge: 'Je me mets en effet dans la position de celui qui fait quelque chose, et non plus de celui qui parle sur quelque chose.' Vico is latently present here, just as he is when the principle of 'fantasme' is discussed in *Leçon*. The close of the lecture is indebted to Vico's philosophy of knowledge. For it was Vico who argued that we can only have true knowledge of something that is humanly made or practised; this is the meaning of his 'verum factum' principle.<sup>59</sup> He positions himself against Descartes's mathematical method. A Cartesian philosophy inspired by mathematical method is prone to lead to what Stephen Toulmin calls '[an] idea of timeless, eternal standards, applicable to arguments-in-general in abstraction from their practical contexts'; this is in Vico's view a 'Cartesian delusion, [...] [a] dead end'.<sup>60</sup> Vico believes that, when one is speaking of what he calls the 'civil world', it is only the knowledge of *making* something that can count if one is to arrive at an understanding of that thing. Thus, as Peter Burke tells us in his study of Vico, with the 'verum factum' principle, 'Vico turn[s] Descartes on his head. Descartes had argued, in his *Discourse on Method*, that the study of history was a waste of time

because we cannot acquire any certain knowledge of the human past, as we can (he claimed) of mathematics and the world of nature'.<sup>61</sup> The equivalent Cartesian argument to be levelled at Barthes – which Barthes seems to have in mind at the end of 'Longtemps', given his evident desire to prove the status of his own discourse – would be that his postulation of an impossible novel, to be discussed without recourse to metalanguage ('j'abolis le discours sur le discours'), can have no epistemological or 'scientifique' value. Vico's and Barthes's riposte would be that knowledge based on human creation is 'actually more certain than the [scientific] principles governing the natural world'.<sup>62</sup>

The simulation of practice leads to a new way of looking: 'le monde ne vient plus à moi sous la forme d'un objet, mais sous celle d'une écriture, c'est-à-dire d'une pratique: je passe à un autre type de savoir [...] et c'est en cela que je suis méthodique'. Furthermore, Barthes defines this methodology as being – in the manner of the 'fantasme' in *Leçon* – more 'scientifique' even than science itself:

'Comme si': cette formule n'est-elle pas l'expression même d'une démarche scientifique, comme on le voit en mathématiques? Je fais une hypothèse et j'explore, je découvre la richesse de ce qui en découle; je postule un roman à faire, et de la sorte je peux espérer en apprendre plus sur le roman qu'en le considérant seulement comme un objet déjà fait par les autres. ('Longtemps', 470)

So Barthes has constructed a reasoning whereby the element of 'analyse', which partly made up his 'incertain' writing, can be excluded from his pedagogy and discourse, in order to allow him to focus fully on the 'romanesque' aspect that he desires for his writing. However – and here is where the reasoning really licenses itself – this does not mean that the new writing and pedagogy are robbed of analytical teeth. Rather, the analysis is folded into another level of the discourse, such that, like the 'fantasme', beneath the appearance of extreme individuality it has the capacity to make valuable comment about generality, or, as Barthes describes it, '[le] monde' itself. The lecture ends as follows:

Peut-être est-ce finalement au cœur de cette subjectivité, de cette intimité même dont je vous ai entretenus, peut-être est-ce à la 'cime de mon particulier' que je suis scientifique sans le savoir, tourné confusément vers cette Scienza Nuova dont parlait Vico: ne devra-t-elle pas exprimer à la fois la brillance et la souffrance du monde, ce qui, en lui, me séduit et m'indigne? ('Longtemps', 470)

Barthes has used Vico to cunning effect to back up his claim that his writing and teaching henceforth, though appearing to have nothing to say beyond referring to himself and his desire for a novel, will thereby,



precisely, be saying something new and different in an intellectual context in which such individualism is (in Barthes's view) a 'scandale'. The 'scienza nuova' will involve the principle of 'identification': as we have seen, the 'Longtemps' lecture begins by explaining Barthes's 'identification' with Proust's 'pratique'. It is then the listeners' decision as to whether or not they wish to identify with Barthes. Barthes points this out again in the second *Préparation* series: 'Ce cours [...] n'aura rien, hélas, d'un *thrilling*, puisque ce sera l'histoire intérieure d'un homme qui veut écrire [...] et délibère des moyens d'accomplir ce désir' (PR, 15 December 1979, 234). This man is not only Barthes himself, but also all of those writers to whom he will refer during the lectures. The principle of the general in the particular is clear here: 'Cet homme, dont le récit commence, sera tous ces noms: eux, moi. Mais sera-t-il *vous*, ou même l'un d'entre vous?' Barthes is well aware that the identification may not take place: 'peut-être peu à peu [le Cours] se dépeuplera, de quoi lasser la curiosité des uns et la fidélité des autres' (PR, 235). This is not his concern, however. The important point is that the *cours* has been established on a ground which employs a methodology of 'simulation' defined as 'scientifique' (at another turn of the spiral). Thereby, Barthes has given himself a rhetorical warrant for the work that he wants to do in the wake of his mother's death. This work (*travail*) involves the gesturing, through personal divagations and poietic preoccupation, towards a work (*œuvre*) which would manage to articulate 'la vérité des affects' ('Longtemps', 469). The idea of the making is nourished by the desire for this truth; a much-reduced *verum factum*.

There is little doubt that, in his teaching at the Collège de France, Barthes uses his sense of the uncertainty of his status to his advantage. Setting out the methodological programme for the four lecture courses, both *Leçon* and the 'Longtemps' lecture employ uncertainty as an enabling principle. Also common to both is a deft treatment of 'l'opposition des sciences et des lettres' (L, 21) which enables Barthes to defend a literary teaching on the basis of an idiosyncratic conception of 'science'. Barthes wishes to use aesthetic judgment to shuttle between both sides of the paradigms he sets up, and at the same time to end up beyond them, in a position that he conceives to be methodologically and epistemologically superior. He wishes to synthesise and depart from any binarism which reduces him to being one or the other. This is the essayist's prerogative. According to Pierre Bourdieu, Barthes had been employing this synthetic method in his work ever since *Sur Racine* (1963). Even then he wanted to have it all,

Bourdieu comments. This passage from Bourdieu is remarkably prescient of the preoccupations of the 'Longtemps' lecture:

En s'affirmant capable de réunir l'imagination scientifique du chercheur [...] et la liberté iconoclaste de l'écrivain [...], d'annuler l'opposition sociologiquement si puissante entre les traditions et des fonctions jusque-là incompatibles, Sainte-Beuve et Marcel Proust, l'École normale et les salons, la rigueur désenchantée de la science et le dilettantisme inspiré des littérateurs, il joue évidemment sur les deux tableaux, essayant ainsi [...] de cumuler les profits de la science et les prestiges de la philosophie ou de la littérature. Comme si, à l'âge de la science, l'aggiornamento passait inévitablement par cette sorte d'hommage que le vice essayiste rend à la vertu scientifique.<sup>63</sup>

Bourdieu disapproves of Barthes's deliberate disciplinary impurity. Barthes is aware that both the 'impureté' and the 'individualisme' that he wants to mobilise are 'un scandale pour tout ce qui pense et théorise'. This is at least partly why he believes his procedure is worthwhile. The deliberately 'scandalous' procedure brings about an apparently harmonious methodology which enables him to explore the objects of his own 'fantasmes'. But it also obeys his deeply felt imperative of producing a discourse which is untouched by – though not actually standing up to – the 'discours de pouvoir' (*L*, 11). That he can set about such an idiosyncratic 'new science' is of course thanks to his privileged position at the Collège de France, which allows him to pursue this intellectual 'aventure' (*L*, 32). The effects of the institution on Barthes's writing are to be found in the way that the 'essayism' of the Collège de France lecture notes involves digression, self-effacement, and an emphasis on the provisional. In response to the magisterial position which he occupies, Barthes focuses on imbuing his pedagogical writing with unmagisterial qualities. Andy Stafford has written about this, pointing out that for Barthes, 'the more "institutional" or more constrained the context, the more corrosive and provisional the writing that emerges'.<sup>64</sup> These tactics are also, perhaps, the privilege of the older thinker: the savour of the term 'scientifique', employed in a new and looser way, derives from the tension between its new meaning and the older one that was employed in Barthes's structuralist work. Barthes's endeavour is then, in Culler's words, 'provocative precisely because familiar terms are being used in new ways – to loosen the theories they once helped to build'.<sup>65</sup> What we see, in the Collège de France teaching, is Barthes employing the privilege of age; as he says at the end of *Leçon*, 'vient peut-être maintenant l'âge d'une autre expérience: celle de *désapprendre*, de laisser travailler le remaniement imprévisible que l'oubli impose à la sédimentation des savoirs, des cultures, des croyances que l'on a traversés' (*L*, 46). After this point, it

is up to his listeners to decide whether such a tactic is one of self-indulgence or of intransigence.

### Notes

- 1 References to *La Chambre claire* are to the text as it appears in *OC*, V, 784–892.
- 2 *Mathesis*: mental discipline, learning or science, especially mathematics (*OED*). *Mathesis* is defined in Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* as the act of knowing, but also the desire for knowledge and education. It also has a Foucauldian inflection: Foucault used the term in *Les Mots et les choses* to mean 'science universelle de la mesure et de l'ordre'. *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 70. Barthes views literature as 'mathesis', a means to understand the world. See 'La littérature comme *mathésis*' in *RB*, *OC*, IV, 694. In *Le Lexique de l'auteur*, he defines mathesis as 'un savoir sans scientificité' (*LA*, 333).
- 3 Jonathan Culler, *Barthes* (London: Fontana, 1983), p. 120.
- 4 Julia Kristeva, 'Comment parler à la littérature?', in *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), pp. 23–54 (p. 48).
- 5 Kristeva, 'Comment parler', p. 49.
- 6 J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Oxford: Polity, 1992), p. 7.
- 7 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 15.
- 8 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 15.
- 9 Theodor Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', in *Notes to Literature: Volume One*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 3–23 (p. 23).
- 10 Carlo Ossola, 'Leçons de la Leçon', in Léger, ed., *Roland Barthes au Collège de France*, pp. 17–33 (p. 22).
- 11 Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 3.
- 12 Claire de Obaldia's chapter on Barthes 'the encyclopedic and the novelistic' in *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism, and the Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) (pp. 146–80) provides an inspiring account of Barthes's use of the generic uncertainty of the essay. The first chapter of her study is also extremely useful in this regard (pp. 1–64). Marielle Macé provides an assessment of Barthes as essayist in her *Le Temps de l'essai* (pp. 207–62).
- 13 Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 16.
- 14 Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 5.
- 15 In *The Satyricon*, Trimalchio, greedy and ostentatious, throws lavish feasts and is served by many slaves. Petronius Arbiter, *The Satyricon*, trans. and intro. P.G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- 16 Ian McLeod [writing as 'I.S.M.'], 'Powers Plural: Barthes's "Lecture"', *Oxford Literary Review*, 4.1 (1979): 29–30 (p. 29).
- 17 McLeod, 'Powers Plural', p. 29.
- 18 Leyla Perrone-Moises, 'Leçon: Testament and Prophecy', in *Back to Barthes: Twenty Years After*, special issue of *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14.2 (2001): 463–68 (pp. 463–64).
- 19 Frederick Van de Pitte, 'The Dating of Rule IV–B in Descartes' *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 29 (1991): 375–95 (p. 387).
- 20 Van de Pitte, 'Dating of Rule IV–B', p. 394.
- 21 Sheringham, 'Seminal Digressions', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 March 2006,

- pp. 7–8 (p. 7).
- 22 See the Chambers dictionary entry for encyclopedia: 'enkyklios paideia general education (opposed to professional or special education), from *enkyklios* circular, recurring, everyday, from *en* in, and *kyklos* circle, and *paideia* education, from *pais*, *paidos* a child'.
  - 23 Maarten de Pourcq, 'The *Paideia* of the Greeks: On the Methodology of Roland Barthes's *Comment vivre ensemble*', in Pieters and Pint, eds., *Roland Barthes Retroactively*, pp. 23–37 (p. 28). I am indebted for my understanding of the term *paideia* to this inspiring article. De Pourcq demonstrates that Barthes's use of the term '*paideia* des Grecs' is deliberately – and perhaps misleadingly – 'anti-historical' (p. 24), in its conflation of several ancient Greek cultures and epochs.
  - 24 De Pourcq, 'The *Paideia* of the Greeks', p. 28.
  - 25 De Pourcq, 'The *Paideia* of the Greeks', pp. 28–29.
  - 26 Sheringham, 'Seminal Digressions', p. 7.
  - 27 'De la science à la littérature', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 Sept. 1967. OC, II, 1263–70 (p. 1263).
  - 28 The section occurs in Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, pp. 123–26.
  - 29 Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, pp. 123–24.
  - 30 Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 22.
  - 31 Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 13.
  - 32 De Pourcq, 'The *Paideia* of the Greeks', p. 32.
  - 33 Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 4.
  - 34 The bibliography of Barthes's *Michelet* gives the dates of Michelet's translations of Vico in the 1820s and '30s. For an account of the influence of Vico's theory of history on Michelet, see Patrick H. Hutton, 'Vico's Theory of History and the French Revolutionary Tradition', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 37.2 (June 1976): 241–56. Somewhat in line with my discussion of *mathesis singularis*, Edmund Wilson discusses the manner in which Michelet managed in his work to combine general historical overview with a focus on individual historical objects. See *To the Finland Station* (London: Collins/Fontana, 1974).
  - 35 Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico: Unabridged Translation of the Third Edition (1744) with the addition of 'Practic of the New Science'*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 21–22. Cf. *Le Neutre*: 'Vico: construit la théorie générale de l'imagination, faculté née avant les autres: la connaissance imaginative ou sagesse poétique = forme première de toute connaissance → le langage poétique a précédé celui de la prose: les fables, "universaux de l'imagination"' (1 April, 139).
  - 36 Donald Phillip Verene, 'Vico', *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth. <<http://www.litguide.press.jhu.edu>>. 2005 [accessed 18 April 2008].
  - 37 Nietzsche, quoted in Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, p. 26, and by Barthes in 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' (OC, V, 463).
  - 38 See Ch. 5 below.
  - 39 Cf. *Le Neutre*: 'Ma visée = n'être ni maître ni disciple, mais, au sens nietzschéen (donc, aucun satisfecit), "artiste"' (18 March, 98).
  - 40 The third essay of the *Genealogy of Morals* looks at the 'ascetic ideal' and how it is viewed by different groups, of whom 'artists' and 'priests' are only two; the other four are philosophers, women, physiological casualties and saints. See *On The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. and intro. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 77–136.
  - 41 For an interesting discussion of *Leçon*'s conception of the power inherent in language, see Michael Holland, 'Barthes, Orpheus', in *Roland Barthes I*, special issue of *Paraglyph*, 11.2 (1988): 143–71. Holland critiques the problems

- inherent in Barthes's desire 'to free discourse from power' – which, as Holland points out, 'is not to eliminate power from discourse' (p. 164). See also Mary Bittner Wiseman's discussion of *Leçon* in *The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 38–64.
- 42 Coste's note gives the full Brecht quotation from *L'Exception et la règle*: 'Sous le familial, découvrez l'insolite, / Sous le quotidien, décelez l'inexplicable. / Puisse toute chose dite habituelle vous inquiéter. / Dans la règle découvrez l'abus / Et partout où l'abus s'est montré, / Trouvez le remède' (CVE, 165 n.32).
- 43 'Cher Antonioni', written for the ceremony in which Antonioni was presented with the 'Archiginnedio d'Oro' prize, 28 January 1980, in Bologna. Published in *Cahiers du cinéma*, May 1980. OC, V, 900–905 (p. 900).
- 44 'Cher Antonioni', p. 901.
- 45 'Cher Antonioni', p. 900.
- 46 'Cher Antonioni', p. 904.
- 47 The article 'Ça prend', published in *Magazine littéraire* in January 1979 (OC, V, 654–56), treats the same mutation.
- 48 George D. Painter's two-volume biography of Proust (1959 and 1965) was first published in French in 1966. *Marcel Proust: A Biography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).
- 49 'Proust, c'est un système complet de lecture du monde'. 'Roland Barthes contre les idées reçues', interview with Claude Jannoud for *Le Figaro*, 27 July 1974. OC, IV, 564–69 (p. 569).
- 50 Éric Marty has pointed out that although – or perhaps because – Proust is *the* major intertext for Barthes, Proust is very rarely analysed directly in Barthes's work. Apart from the 'Longtemps' lecture, the only texts devoted to Proust are 'Une idée de recherche' (1971; OC, III, 917–21); 'Proust et les noms' (1967, anthologised in *Nouveaux essais critiques* in 1972; OC, IV, 66–77); the session on the 'discours Charlus' in the seminar *Tenir un discours* (CVE, pp. 203–18); and the short article 'Ça prend' (1979; OC, V, 654–56), the ideas in which are discussed in *PR*, 2 and 9 February 1980, pp. 328–33. Marty characterises all the published interventions on Proust as 'très timides'. Marty, 'Marcel Proust dans "la chambre claire"', *L'Esprit Créateur* 46.4 (2006): 125–33 (p. 125).
- 51 Yacavone, 'Reading Through Photography', p. 99.
- 52 Culler, 'Preparing the Novel', p. 109.
- 53 Culler, 'Preparing the Novel', p. 117.
- 54 Hill, *Radical Indecision*, p. 145.
- 55 The phrase appears in a letter to Daniel Halévy of 19 July 1919. Marcel Proust, *Choix de lettres*, ed. Philip Kolb (Paris: Plon, 1965), p. 216.
- 56 Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 43.
- 57 'Propos sur la violence', interview with Jacqueline Sers for *Réforme*, 2 September 1978. OC, V, 549–53 (p. 553).
- 58 All subsequent citations from 'Longtemps' in this chapter are from OC, V, 470.
- 59 This principle is set out in a work from 1710, *De Antequissima Italarum sapientia*. The 'verum factum' criterion is important in Vico's later work, including the *Scienza nuova*.
- 60 Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 23, p. 33.
- 61 Peter Burke, *Vico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 78.
- 62 Burke, *Vico*, p. 78.
- 63 Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*, pp. 154–55.
- 64 Stafford, "'Préparation du romanesque'", p. 105.
- 65 Culler, *Barthes*, p. 121.

*Comment vivre ensemble,*  
*Le Neutre* and their Context

Ne pas oublier que nous sommes très précisément dans une phase active de déconstruction ‘saine’ de la ‘mission’ de l’intellectuel: cette déconstruction peut prendre la forme d’un retrait, mais aussi d’un brouillage, d’une série d’affirmations décentrées.

Barthes, *Le Neutre*, 6 May 1978

At the end of his inaugural lecture, Barthes states that the time has come for him to teach in a particular way: ‘Vient peut-être maintenant l’âge d’une autre expérience: celle de *désapprendre*’. The first two lecture series at the Collège de France quite obviously stage this ‘désapprentissage’, forming a sprawling, deliberately unauthoritative constellation of areas of knowledge. Barthes’s fantasies of the ideals of the ‘vivre-ensemble’ and the ‘neutre’ are sketched by recourse to a heterogeneous corpus of texts, and the exposition of his own views is intercut throughout by the aleatory method employed, and by exhortations to the listeners to consider everything Barthes is saying as merely a ‘dossier’ that is opened; it is up to them to take each idea further.

The methodology and ideals of *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre* are very closely linked. In this chapter I shall examine Barthes’s treatment and organisation of his material, and discuss how his ‘fantasmes’ can function as a teaching device. The lectures’ insistent theme of spatiality will also be examined as it relates to the listeners’ experience of and investment in the topics of the lectures. The ideals of the idiorhythmic community – which in fact is a solitude with benevolent interruptions – and of neutral discourse and behaviour, are examined for what they reveal of Barthes’s distaste for intellectual and political discourse in the specific context of the late 1970s in France. As I shall show, Barthes’s rejection of the narratives of Marxism and psychoanalysis overlaps to a certain extent with the preoccupations of other contemporary theorists, as does his thinking about community. Generally, however, these lectures show Barthes recoiling from the intellectual norms of his time: ‘On étudie ce que l’on craint’, as Barthes says

in the course summary of *Le Neutre* (261). However, he also studies ‘ce que l’on désire’: in the final part of the chapter, I shall examine how the negativity evident throughout these two lecture series is at the root of Barthes’s active, creative fantasy, whereby he imagines a type of writing and a way of being which would accomplish what he called in *Roland Barthes* ‘l’exemption du sens’ (RB 664).<sup>1</sup> This mode of being would be utopically untouched by the ‘arrogance’ of ideology and of prevailing intellectual discourses, and would, in an ‘unschooled’ but vital manner, approach the materiality of the world itself. In this way, the idiorrhythmic and neutral fantasies ‘peu[vent] renvoyer à des états intenses, forts, inouïs’ (N, 32).

### ‘Désapprentissage’ in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*

In his preface to the Collège de France lectures and seminars, Éric Marty notes that this material is marked by an ‘étrange négativité’: Barthes’s methodology reveals a desire to escape from the ‘mystifications spécifiques de l’intellectuel: mystification de la maîtrise, mystification de la persuasion, mystification de la “théorie”, aliénation du prestige, aliénation de la domination et du conflit’. What this means, he writes, is that we find a ‘quasi-absence de Barthes à son propos’ (CVE, 11) as he tries to problematise the prolix, authoritative nature of academic presentation. It is certainly clear from even a cursory glance at the pages of *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre* that Barthes attempts to minimise his authority. His approach to his material stages a certain ‘désapprentissage’ in being deliberately far removed from standard academic norms of presentation: digressive, vague, and often inconclusive, the material includes many lists, excerpts copied from literary texts, and second-hand material gleaned from encyclopedias. The flow of information is continually interrupted by the ‘système des traits’ which groups the material into alphabetically ordered titled fragments. ‘Devise du joueur de cartes’, declares Barthes in the second lecture of *Comment vivre ensemble*; “‘Je coupe”, j’agis contre la fixité du langage’ (19 January, 52). The use of heterogeneous material is, he writes in his course summary, in accordance with the nature of semiology: thus he has assembled the ‘traits’ of the lecture series from ‘[une] masse de modes, habitudes, thèmes et valeurs du “vivre ensemble”, and then allied to these ‘traits’ various digressions, ‘alimentées au savoir historique, ethnologique ou sociologique’. He insists throughout that this series is prospective and suggestive: ‘le soin [est] laissé aux auditeurs de remplir ces dossiers à leur

guise et le rôle du professeur [est] principalement de suggérer certaines articulations du thème' (CVE, course summary, 221–22). The commendation of the material to the listeners' care bespeaks a concern that this education should indeed constitute a *leading out*, and that the teacher's findings be considered secondary to the additional avenues of inquiry to which they may lead in other minds. The counterpart of this commendation is Barthes's own presentation of himself as unauthoritative, hesitant: he characterises the fantasy of the 'vivre-ensemble' as a 'projecteur incertain qui balaye d'une façon saccadée des fragments de monde, de science, d'histoire – d'expériences' (51).

Barthes's research for *Comment vivre ensemble* involved reading a large amount of material which might provide details to flesh out the fantasy of 'idiorrythmie' that he had read about in Lacarrière's description in *L'Été grec* of the *skites* on Mount Athos. Though the fantasy is named throughout as the 'vivre-ensemble', the term 'idiorrythmie' pinpoints more precisely the nature of Barthes's fantasy, the emphasis of which is not on the togetherness of 'ensemble', but rather on the peaceable solitude of the 'idios', happily interrupted by a light 'rhythm'. This is a vision of a solitude anchored by affective links with a community. Working outwards from Lacarrière's description of the Athonite *skites*, Barthes read many texts treating pre-cenobitic monasticism. He is fascinated by anchorites and idiorrythmic monks; the descriptions of their lives have, he writes, '[le] même valeur de dérangement et de projection (pour moi) que l'Extrême-Orient' (4 May, 183). However, he also notes that much of this reading was 'décevant' (12 January, 38), due to the inevitable dominance of religious models in which, increasingly, power is imposed. The histories of Western monasticism that he reads crystallise around the founding of cenobitism by Pachomius in the fourth century and the installation of the rule of St Benedict in the sixth century.<sup>2</sup> Thenceforth, cenobitic monasteries, organised according to written rules and a hierarchical structure, comprehensively eclipsed the independent semi-anchoritic and idiorrythmic communities:

Le cénobitisme, comme liquidation de l'anachorétisme (érémitisme [...] et idiorrythmie, considérés comme des marginalités dangereuses, résistantes à l'intégration dans une structure de pouvoir), est strictement contemporain (avec Pacôme) du renversement qui a fait passer le christianisme de religion persécutée (des martyrs) au statut de religion d'État, c'est-à-dire du Non-Pouvoir [...] au Pouvoir.

Barthes ascribes major importance to this shift, even implying that it is in this 'collusion de la religion et du pouvoir' that we can locate the 'séparation de l'Orient et de l'Occident' (12 January, 41). His preference



here, as throughout all the teaching at the Collège de France, is for the Eastern model: Buddhist monks of Ceylon, Egyptian pre-cenobitic monks, and the idiorhythmic monks of Mount Athos.<sup>3</sup> All of these communities allow their members to reap the benefits of belonging without being subject to strong regulation. Thus they represent for Barthes the non-repressive ideal of idiorrythmie. On the whole, however, Barthes's reading of the monastic histories bears witness to the depressing inevitability with which restrictive power structures take hold in any given societal grouping. *Idiorrythmie* becomes marginalised, ridiculed, and increasingly impossible.

In his desire to find both idiorrythmic and counter-idiorrythmic elements Barthes turns, naturally, to literature. He is particularly interested in the way in which space is treated in each of the five 'textes-tuteurs' (Gide's *La Sequestrée de Poitiers*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Zola's *Pot-Bouille*, Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, and the *Lausiac History* of Palladius). In accordance with the lecture series' subtitle – 'simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens' – each text exemplifies a certain 'lieu' or 'maquette': the bedroom; the den; the apartment block; the sanatorium; and the desert. The texts by Gide and Defoe treating dens take increasing precedence as the lecture series continues, demonstrating Barthes's pre-eminent interest in the organisation of solitary life. He is intrigued by the horrifying insalubrity in Gide's account of the real-life 'séquestrée' who lived imprisoned for twenty-five years in a filthy room in her mother's house. On a related note, he includes some excerpts from *A la Recherche du temps perdu* which refer to tante Léonie, '[qui] "n'a pas voulu quitter Combray" (= territoire), puis sa maison (= repaire), puis son lit (niche, nid)' (20 April, 157). This fascination with the private space recurs in *Le Neutre* and *La Préparation du roman II*, and is linked to the desire for a 'vita nuova' and to the possibility of creation.

*Comment vivre ensemble* is about the desire for a relationship to the community that is chosen, never imposed. Barthes seeks 'quelque chose comme une solitude interrompue d'une façon réglée: le paradoxe, la contradiction, l'utopie d'un socialisme des distances' (12 January, 37). His focus is on individualisation rather than on any homogenising communitarian ideal or telos. This thematic desire for space and individuation is mirrored in the aerated form of the lectures. As mentioned above, Barthes constantly reminds the listeners that these initial investigations should be superseded by what the listeners themselves find interesting about the 'vivre-ensemble'. In this way, the lectures present a discourse which, insofar as it can within the constraints of the magisterial lecture, tries to prioritise difference and the individual choice that is

at the heart of the idiorrythmic fantasy.

*Le Neutre* shares the formal protocol of *Comment vivre ensemble* and marshals a similarly eclectic corpus. The ideal of ‘le neutre’ is articulated initially in terms arising from structural linguistics, as ‘tout ce qui déjoue le paradigme’ (N, 31, 18 February). The neutral can be sought or aspired towards in one’s everyday life: Barthes explains that every ‘inflexion’ of discourse or behaviour which tries to suspend or nullify conflict provides a glimpse of the neutral ideal: ‘Tout le Neutre est esquivé de l’assertion. [...] On comprend maintenant où tend le Neutre (je ne dis pas: “ce qu’il est” car dogmatisme définitionnel; plutôt: découvrir une région, un horizon, une direction)’ (75–76, 4 March). The dispersive approach of *Comment vivre ensemble* continues. Gobbets of information from texts and from observation of daily life are presented, but Barthes claims, perhaps disingenuously, that he never ‘interprets’ them: ‘je prends des bribes référentielles (en fait des bribes de lecture) et je leur fais subir une anamorphose: procédé connu de tout l’art maniériste’ (98, 18 March). The neutral is found in an endlessly unfurling series of ‘nuances’: Buddha being offered a flower by his disciple; the complex aesthetic of the Japanese tea ceremony; the hyper-awareness that Baudelaire describes as the result of taking hash; the variegated appearance of watered silk; Pyrrho’s student Eurylochus swimming across a river to escape from persistent questioning; Zen koans. All of these exemplify a singularity which loosens the compacity of a *doxa* based on conflict and the reduction of difference.

Throughout his career, Barthes worked towards ‘the neutral’, and always made clear that it would be a language (momentarily) free from ideology.<sup>4</sup> In order to clarify this further, Barthes also devotes lectures to traits which go against the neutral, such as arrogant language, aggressive questioning, reductive conceptualisation. The canvas is large: Barthes devotes one trait to ‘les idéosphères’ and the powerful consistency of ‘systèmes langagiers forts’ such as psychoanalytic language and the discourse of Christianity (124, 25 March). However, his most revealing examples are those taken from everyday life. In a discussion of the arrogance of language, he quotes a journalistic reference to the pianist Alfred Cortot: ‘j’ai lu cette semaine dans la presse une phrase typiquement arrogante. [...] [I]l pourrait s’agir de politique, mais non: de musique [...]: “quand le plus grand pianiste français de ce siècle meurt, le 15 juin 1962, il y a [...] de la gêne dans l’air”’. Barthes objects to this loftiness, which he considers both a solecism and an aggression: ‘ce genre de palmarès expéditif est inacceptable: en art, pas de “le plus grand”. [...] Arrogance insupportable’ (80, 11 March). His point is not that the expression of

personal opinion leads to arrogance; indeed, Barthes believes the overt assumption of subjectivity in one's discourse is vital. The problem is the *masking* of personal interest under a mendaciously 'objective' discourse. As such, this snippet from *Télérama* represents an example of ideology itself, whose primary characteristic, as Barthes has demonstrated ever since *Mythologies*, is the presentation of vested interests as 'natural' and inevitable.<sup>5</sup> Countering this, the 'tentative idiorrythmique' as well as the 'désir de neutre' would work towards the suspension of the 'discours du *Il va de soi*' (CVE, 81, 9 February) and its false, reductive 'naturalness'.

*Le Neutre* strides across its various terrains of knowledge more confidently than its predecessor. Where *Comment vivre ensemble* tended often to conceal Barthes's desire for retreat and silence under material which treated these subjects dispassionately, *Le Neutre* articulates clearly Barthes's intense desire for an alternative to the conflictual logosphere he inhabits. More personal anecdotes are included. Barthes also demonstrates more spontaneity, reading out 'supplements' in the form of letters, remarks and reading suggestions from listeners at the start of many of the lectures. One of the supplements leads to an exemplary performance of the neutral on Barthes's part: on 13 May 1978, he reads out an ill-spelled anonymous letter he has just received, which implies that if he, Barthes, is so troubled by the demands of public life, then 'vous n'avez qu'à vous retirer et nous "foutre la paix" aussi!' (177). Commenting wryly on the patronising and aggressive nature of anonymous communications, Barthes decides to insert, at this point in the series, the figure on 'La Retraite', which was originally scheduled to be delivered later on: 'Donc, pour répondre à l'anonyme: je me retirerai (y compris du Collège) à mon rythme, et non sur injonction!' (190).

Where the metaphors used to describe the methodology of *Comment vivre ensemble* connoted tentativeness (the flickering lamp), those in *Le Neutre* imply skill. Barthes is a diviner: 'J'ai promené le Neutre [...] le long [...] d'un réseau de lectures, c'est-à-dire d'une bibliothèque [...]. [C]ertains passages peuvent cristalliser autour de la notion de Neutre comme une *sourcellerie* fantaisiste: je lis, la baguette se lève' (33–34, 18 February). He identifies his pedagogical practice with that of the Sophists, quoting Bacon's account of Aristotle, who derided the Sophists' non-dogmatic approach by saying that they were like cobblers who, rather than teaching people how to make shoes, instead set out a large variety of shoes to be examined (36, 18 February). Barthes is on the side of Epictetus, who writes 'A carpenter does not come up to you and say "Listen to me discourse about the art of carpentry", but he makes a contract for a house and builds it. Do the same thing yourself'.<sup>6</sup> He sets

out a variety of neutral traits rather than defining the concept of the neutral. He conceives of teaching as ‘apprentissage’ rather than instruction.<sup>7</sup> Again, this ideal is associated by Barthes with Eastern spaces, always the locus, for Barthes, of discretion. He wants his teaching to be like that of the calligrapher: ‘le maître [oriental] ne corrige pas, il accomplit devant l’élève ce que l’élève doit peu à peu accomplir seul’ (117, 25 March).

Barthes’s admiration of a (fantasised) Eastern model of teaching means that Asian texts have a privileged place in *Le Neutre*’s corpus. One of the four epigraphs to the lecture series is an excerpt from Lao-Tzu, in which he describes himself as lacking all the certainty, intelligence and aptitudes of other people.<sup>8</sup> Barthes is fascinated by the Tao model of the ‘sage’ who is not concerned with valorising his self-image and exists peacefully without engaging in argument. Skeptic texts are prioritised for similar reasons: the Skeptical ideal of ‘époque’ aims to suspend the ‘données conflictuelles du discours’ (N, course summary, 261), and thus is associated by Barthes with the means to dissolve the compacity of the ‘discours du *Il va de soi*’. The Sceptics do not hold categorical opinions, particularly where non-evident issues are concerned, in the belief that such opinions will lead almost automatically to conflict. The typical Skeptic utterance, as Benson Mates tells us, is ‘*dokei moi*’: ‘it seems to me now’. Confining oneself to an openly perspectival point of view means, ultimately, that ‘there will be less strife’.<sup>9</sup> Barthes frequently mentions the Pyrrhonic suspension of dogmatism, and seeks for a prolongation of such neutral conduct in more recent texts, such as Rousseau’s *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, and, intermittently, Blanchot’s *L’Entretien infini*.

Prefiguring the concerns of *La Préparation du roman II* and its meticulous accounts of the would-be writer’s practical organisation of the day and of the writing room, the *Neutre* lectures are threaded through by many quotations from accounts of the lives of writers, such as a biography of Spinoza and Thomas de Quincey’s *Confessions*. Maria van Rysselberghe’s *Cahiers de la petite dame* are referred to particularly often, as Barthes savours her descriptions of Gide’s crotchety reactions to the intellectual squabbles of his day.<sup>10</sup> All of these texts are valued for their consideration of a life apart from sociality. Having already examined religious retreat in *Comment vivre ensemble*, he examines the writer’s retreat in the longest figure in the *Neutre* series, ‘Retraite’. Rousseau’s, Swedenborg’s and Proust’s withdrawals from social life and the consecration of their days to writing provide potent material for Barthes’s fantasy: ‘retraite évidemment liée à l’idée d’une mutation

radicale, complète de vie: fantasme très actif, surtout quand on vieillit (le problème étant non pas de vieillir, mais entrer vivant dans la vieillesse)' (N, 191, 13 May). The fantasies of all four of Barthes's lecture series can be seen at this juncture in *Le Neutre*: idiorrhythmie, the neutral and the novel are all present in the fantasy of a room of one's own, far removed from one's normal tasks, in which everything is, spatially, *just right* for writing: 'le Neutre serait une pratique subtile de la bonne distance entre les repères (y compris les repères humains de l'espace affectif. Neutre = espacement (production d'espace) et non distanciation, mise à distance' (189–90, 13 May). This rejoins *Comment vivre ensemble*'s fantasy of 'l'aporie d'une mise en commun des distances' (CVE, 37, 12 January), and the desire to 'change[r] de place, [...] [de] naître de nouveau' (PR, 284, 19 January 1980) through the postulated writing of a novel which would be 'un discours sans arrogance, [qui] ne m'intimide pas; [...] une pratique de discours qui ne fasse pas pression sur autrui: [...] → Roman: écriture du Neutre?' (PR, 41, 9 December 1978). Beneficial intersubjective distance, and the desire for non-oppressive speech, as explored in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre* respectively, are the prerequisites for the ultimate fantasy of an affective writing which is in no way intimidatory. The novel is, for Barthes, the emblem of such a writing.

### Spatialisation and the *fantasme*

Spatialisation is the pre-eminent metaphor linking all the lecture courses, but especially *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*. Space is dispersive and freeing.<sup>11</sup> In line with the 'impure' ideals of *Leçon*, these lecture series are set up as broad, open areas of investigation, constituting an idiorrhythmic space: 'l'idiorrhythmique ne protège pas une "pureté", c'est-à-dire une identité. Son mode d'implantation dans l'espace: non la concentration, mais la dispersion' (CVE, 94, 2 March). *Rhythm* itself is spatial for Barthes, who has learned from Émile Benveniste's article on rhythm that *rhuthmos* originally referred to a distinctive, individualised form.<sup>12</sup> According to Benveniste, it was after Plato that rhythm came to be conceived of as an established order imposed upon the individual from the outside. Barthes seeks a return to rhythm as a 'forme improvisée, modifiable [...]; configuration sans fixité ni nécessité naturelle' (CVE, 38, 12 January).<sup>13</sup> Power works by imposing a rhythm on the individual which is not in keeping with that individual's own rhythm: Barthes illustrates this by describing a mother dragging along, too fast, a child who cannot keep up. This 'dysrhythmie' is something Barthes wishes to avoid

in his lectures, staying insofar as he can in the same place and at the same pace as the listeners. And all of them, listeners and speaker, should maintain between each other a ‘distance inter-individuelle’ and also a ‘distance critique’ with relation to the workings of ideology (CVE, 178, 4 May). Geographical space and social space merge into the same ideal, which Barthes wishes to provide in the articulation of his *fantasmes*.

But, given the quiddity of the fantasy, can it really be used productively in the teaching of individuals each with their own history and fantasies? Barthes’s implicit conviction is that the fantasmatic method as well as the invocation of literature will allow his listeners the space to recognise their own desires in what he is discussing. Taking his cue from Barthes’s discussion of the fantasy as a ‘Dialectique du Désir et de l’Amour, d’Érôs et d’Agapè’ (PR, 39), Kris Pint has dealt sensitively with this question. Pint suggests that ‘Barthes’ method of teaching tried to reconcile the loneliness of *Eros* – an incommunicable phantasmatic involvement of the subject in that one object of desire – with *Agapè*, a sympathetic, universal care of the other’. Pint also suggests that it is the *agapè*-esque model of sympathy for the other which Barthes values above all in the reading process. In reading literature we encounter ‘a sympathetic Other which offers [us] a discourse that helps to put [our] affects into words’.<sup>14</sup> Barthes sought to provide this experience in a teaching consisting of an eclectic, shifting set of vignettes and ideas in which each member of the audience might find, at least momentarily, the ‘sympathetic Other’ or the expression of their own desire. This model incorporates the ideal of the *vivre-ensemble* itself. The fantasy is shared, socially, but a beneficial distance is maintained by the non-dogmatic method which permits the listener her own space of response. Additionally, Barthes guards against his *fantasme* being hermetically sealed by staging his subjectivity in a certain way. As Claude Coste has noted, the importance of a fully assumed subjectivity does not equate to biographism.<sup>15</sup> Rather, the ‘je’ that Barthes articulates frequently opens out into generality. Barthes points out how his particular *fantasme* relates to very generic fantasies, such as the fantasies of retreating to the country (CVE, 59) or of decluttering (CVE, 171). When he discusses the ‘proxemics’ of his own bedroom at night, he is really describing a universal particular: ‘Soir: je me couche, j’êteins, je m’enfonce sous les couvertures pour dormir. Mais j’ai envie de me moucher. Dans l’obscurité, j’allonge le bras, j’atteins sans me tromper le premier tiroir de la table de nuit...’ (CVE, 155, 20 April). There are many such vignettes in which the audience can easily see themselves. The descriptions of negative *traits* also allow Barthes to articulate widely felt feelings. In *Comment vivre*

*ensemble*, he examines the somewhat abstruse concept of ‘xéniteia’, which referred originally to the pre-Pachomian ascetic monk’s actual physical solitude, as well as to his mental sensation of exile. Barthes gives the rich connotations of *xéniteia* contemporary resonance by explaining it as the feeling of being *foreign* within one’s own country, social class, and institutions: ‘Par exemple, si l’on permet cet exemple très personnel, chaque fois que je lis *Le Monde*: je suis pris d’un accès de *Xéniteia*’ (175, 27 April). We are all susceptible to this feeling that the world is going about its business in a way that is not quite in tune with ourselves. Discussing the relation between *xéniteia* and the mercenary soldier’s ‘peregrinations’ in another country, Barthes articulates this strangeness – a sensation of being lost or ignored, which is related to the feeling of ‘accidie’ which he discussed in the opening trait of the lecture series (‘Acédie’, pp. 53–56): ‘Et si chacun de nous [...] se sentait comme mercenaire dans le monde où il est placé: service payant et détaché de diverses causes qui ne sont pas les nôtres, envoyés sans cesse par ces causes dans des régions où nous sommes étrangers?’ (171, 27 April). From ancient monasticism to his own recoiling from the style of *Le Monde*, by way of the image of the exiled soldier, this particular ‘scintillation’ of Barthes’s *fantasme* allows the listeners implicitly to think about their own frustrations – perhaps the irritations of work or of family relationships – and thus to engage further with the desire for space which Barthes is sketching.

Occasionally, however, Barthes’s ‘je’ in the lectures is exclusive rather than inclusive. This occurs particularly when Barthes talks about the demands placed upon him as a public intellectual. At the end of the first *Neutre* lecture, within the figure on ‘La Fatigue’, Barthes describes this weariness: ‘forme de fatigue: celle de la “position”, du “rapport à”: “Comment vous situez-vous par rapport au marxisme, au freudisme, à x, à y?” [...] Fatigue: la demande de position. Le monde actuel en est plein [...], et c’est pour cela qu’il est si fatigant: difficulté à flotter, à changer de place” (N, 45, 18 February). Both *Le Neutre* and *Comment vivre ensemble* bear witness to Barthes’s despair at the way in which a *parti pris* is always required of him. The intellectual must have a firm view on everything, and it is difficult to shift allegiances, or to have none. Every position solidifies. Similarly, every community ultimately becomes sclerotised by hierarchical power, as its cause, customs and regulations become increasingly rigid. Groups too cannot ‘float’ or ‘change place’. *Comment vivre ensemble* poses, throughout, the question of whether one can have ‘un (petit) groupe sans *Télos*’. ‘Un tel groupe est-il viable? [...] N’y a-t-il pas affinité entre l’idiorythmie et l’absence de *Télos* et inviabilité d’un groupe sans *Télos*? Autrement dit: le groupe

idiorrhythmique est-il possible?’ (CVE, 83, 9 February). The sad answer, for Barthes, is that such a group cannot exist: this lecture series frequently documents the way in which every community ultimately becomes a ground for the exercise of power. Barthes’s point here, as Patrick Ffrench has stated, is a political one: ‘[Every community] ends up mirroring the society from which it separates, and Barthes suggests this particularly of the communities established in the wake of 1968 in France’.<sup>16</sup> The idiorhythmic ideal can only ever be attained briefly, in the ‘flashes’ or ‘scintillations’ by which Barthes structures his lectures. The ideal itself is fragile, hedged about on all sides by the calcifying forces of collective regulation. To suspend the urge towards the *telos*, as to suspend the ‘demande de position’ discussed in *Le Neutre*, requires strength and vigilance. This is why Barthes’s ‘neutral’ is a strong value, ‘intense, fort, inouï’ (N, 32, 18 February). Neutral values are viewed negatively in our logosphere as being weak and passive; trying to suspend conflict by espousing neutral values requires, he says, an extreme concentration of energy – that of *assuming* ‘l’image (fausse, mais inévitable) du flasque, <du feutré>!’ (N, 104, 18 March). This energy is particularly required given the very politicised nature of intellectual life in the 1970s in France.

In *Le Neutre*, Barthes imagines abandoning the situations which require of him to articulate, in his capacity as public intellectual, a factional point of view. He quotes at length an anecdote from the *Cahiers de la petite dame* which seems to him to be ‘parodiquement prémonitoire à l’égard de ce qui arrive quotidiennement à l’intellectuel d’aujourd’hui’. Being badgered to sign a certain manifesto, and not fully caring about the issue involved, Gide ultimately says in exasperation, ‘Je ne réponds rien, je laisse tomber, je suis en voyage’ (N, 148–49, 29 April). Barthes savours this inactivity for its refusal of the conflictual machinery of the manifesto and counter-manifesto: ‘Leçon de neutre (non aplati, impertinent, et même drôle face à tous ces casse-pieds sérieux de l’engagement)’ (150). Most of this lecture is given over to the creativity of ‘réponses à côté’ (148) and the ways in which such responses, by refusing to answer unsought questions directly, allow other forms of dialogue to resonate. Thinking about the manner in which Zen koans tend to puncture pomposity, Barthes imagines having the audacity to practise a similar feint:

Imaginez un instant qu’aux grandes questions pompeuses, arrogantes, dissertatives, dont est abusivement tissée notre vie sociale, politique, matière à interviews, à tables rondes, etc. ([...] “Pensez-vous que l’écrivain cherche la vérité? ‘Pensez-vous que l’écriture est vie?’, etc.), imaginez que quelqu’un réponde: ‘Je me suis acheté une chemise chez Lanvin’, ‘Le ciel est bleu comme une orange’, ou que, si cette question vous est posée en public, vous vous



leviez, enleviez un soulier, le mettiez sur votre tête et quittiez la salle → actes absolus car déjouant toute complicité de réponse, toute interprétation. (N, 156)

Not able to perform such feats, Barthes merely imagines them instead in his lectures. His notes for *Le Neutre* reveal his belief that the only way he could truly avoid the demands for opinion and judgment that are constantly ‘targeted’ at him, even while he is in a period of deep mourning, would be to suspend his presence to the world by means of a drastic physical retreat: ‘le monastère, le désert – l’érémétisme’ (N, 255). We see here, more clearly than in *Comment vivre ensemble* itself, the subjacent reasons for the choice of depopulated scenes in that series.

Sewn through all the irenic themes of *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre* is the question of how to protect oneself from the regimes of meaning and sociality prevalent in one’s society. As can readily be seen, the fantasy of a space pure of the will to power that tends to be inscribed within language is one that has been constant in Barthes’s work since his first book, *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture* (1953). He has always seen himself as marginal. Discussing this in an interview in 1978, Barthes says that his writing is always concerned with ‘un sujet délibérément marginal par rapport à toutes les formes de société’. This is a subject wilfully setting himself aside from ‘[les] grands espoirs, de type massif, sociaux’. Implicit in this is Barthes’s view of himself as intellectually marginal, ‘individualis[t]e’.<sup>17</sup> This ‘individualism’, which smacks somewhat of a romantic pose, is a strategy that Barthes has pursued throughout his career as part of what Stephen Heath called a ‘vertige du déplacement’.<sup>18</sup> By the late 1970s this strategy has acquired a more stubborn and self-protective edge. This is partly attributable to Barthes’s personal circumstances, not least his increased fame – including the weekly spectacle of the Collège lectures themselves – and his grief after his mother’s death in late 1977. However, the lectures’ articulation of an explicit desire for marginality, and their imagining of spaces and behaviours at a remove from collective *topoi*, is also a response to the normative aspects of Barthes’s intellectual context. The lectures clearly represent a concerted step aside from the political demands of the post-’68 Parisian milieu, and from narratives of intellectual legitimization, including standard utopianism.

Patrick French has drawn attention to the manner in which much of Barthes’s late work ‘can be read as a counter-strategy to the intense politicization of the [1970s], deflecting the demand for politics toward a subtle and delicate ethics of affective and corporeal relations’.<sup>19</sup> Such a ‘delicacy’ is unsystematic. This is demonstrated by Barthes’s refusal, at the end of *Comment vivre ensemble*, to construct a utopia of the *vivre-*

*ensemble*. For Barthes believes that all utopias, from Plato to Fourier, search for ‘une façon idéale d’organiser le pouvoir’ (177, 4 May). Fundamentally, Barthes finds most utopian thought dissatisfying not only because of its regulatory urge, but also because its canvas tends to be too large, and thus reductive of individual difference. This is a long-standing view of Barthes’s: in 1963, he explained to interviewers that ‘les grands mouvements d’émancipation idéologique – disons, pour parler clairement, le marxisme’, as well as ‘[les] grande[s] utopie[s]’, consistently fail to discuss ‘l’homme privé’ and ‘la possibilité du bonheur’. While many ‘interspatial’ utopias have been described, he says, ‘l’espèce de micro-utopie qui consisterait à imaginer des utopies psychologiques ou relationnelles, cela n’existe absolument pas’.<sup>20</sup> At the Collège de France, he explicitly seeks to sketch such a ‘micro-utopie’, which would be, he says in *Comment vivre ensemble*, ‘la recherche figurative du Souverain Bien quant à l’habiter’ (177). This ‘Souverain Bien’ involves a profound principle of ‘individuation’ (178). The positive charge of the lectures is their focus on such individuation. In this respect Barthes’s utopian thought bears similarities to that of Adorno, who expresses in *Minima Moralia* a similar desire for heterogeneity and the non-identical:

Abstract utopia is all too compatible with the most insidious tendencies of society. That all men are alike is exactly what society would like to hear. [...] An emancipated society, on the other hand, would not be a unitary state, but the realization of universality in the reconciliation of differences.<sup>21</sup>

This non-systematic, Romantic prioritisation of differences is at the heart of Barthes’s ‘contingent, anonym[ous]’ utopia (*CVE*, 177). In his superb discussion of the ethics of deferral and distance in *Comment vivre ensemble*, French links Barthes’s deferral of utopia to his attitude towards the political: “Putting it off until later” not only suggests utopia (a never-to-be-realized social state); it is also congruent with Barthes’s mistrust of the hysteria of speech, of the demand inherent in face-to-face discourse’.<sup>22</sup> Barthes’s temporal deferral – a tactic employed again in *La Préparation du roman* – is mirrored by the spatial distance that is so important in the organisation of the *cours* – separation, distinction, mistrust of the whole.

### Barthes and his Contemporaries: Factionalism, Politics

The lectures show Barthes in open reaction against collective explanatory discourses. Marxism and psychoanalysis in particular are at this point associated by Barthes with a pernicious ‘arrogance’: ‘l’arrogance

du discours agresse partout où il y a foi, certitude, volonté de saisir, de dominer' (N, 195, 20 May). Additionally, Barthes associates Marxist and Freudian discourses with the prioritising of conflict in Western discourse generally. These 'philosophies du conflit' involve an 'amplification' and 'approfondissement' of conflict, naturalising it by making it 'un moteur, un fonctionnement' (N, 166, 6 May).<sup>23</sup> This is a naturalisation which Barthes seeks to reveal and suspend, as *Le Neutre* makes clear. Barthes's rejection of such globalising theoretical discourses is the sign of his profound distaste for the intellectual norms of his day. However, as we shall see, this refusal to perpetuate what Lyotard was at this time dubbing the 'grand narratives' of theory also has some points in common with the anti-totalising turn in French thought that was occurring at this time.

Barthes's urge for individualism can be condemned as a tactic of self-protective enclosure. However, it is necessary to recognise, in his rejection of conflictual collective narratives such as those provided by Marxism and psychoanalysis, a concerned reading of the contemporary crisis in socialism and left-liberalism.<sup>24</sup> The intellectual left is somewhat rudderless during this period. After the post-war phase of Marxist hegemony headed by figures such as Sartre and Althusser, the 1970s see the crumbling away of the previously solid Marxist system of reference, as there is unease regarding Soviet expansionism and growing realisation of the genocides and atrocities on which Stalin's and Mao's regimes were based. As has been well documented elsewhere, the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* in France in 1974 was extremely important in this regard, transforming French intellectual politics in the latter half of the 1970s.<sup>25</sup> Immediately following the publication of Solzhenitsyn's text, philosophers such as André Glucksmann, Claude Lefort and Bernard-Henri Lévy began publishing works condemning Marxism and totalitarianism.<sup>26</sup> By 1977–78 such writers' works had crystallised into an anti-totalitarian movement incorporating a critique of the Parti communiste français (PCF). The journal *Tel Quel*, largely as a result of editor Philippe Sollers's devoted (and contra-PCF) Maoism in the wake of '68, had had a period of lefter-than-left Maoist fervour, which ended decisively in 1976 as the horrifying reports of life in revolutionary China became impossible to ignore.<sup>27</sup> Sollers abandoned Maoism in order to ally himself with those who advocated the repudiation of Marxism – notably Lévy, and also other members of the group of anti-Marxist 'nouveaux philosophes', including Maurice Clavel.

This political and inter-intellectual allegiance-forming is precisely the type of factionalism that Barthes claims he has no time for, as his delight in Gide's dismissal of politico-intellectual squabbles makes clear. The

lectures, especially the *Neutre* series, evince a profound desire to distance himself from the essentially conflictual nature of political debate. In *Le Neutre* he rather airily states that he is not interested in making statements either for or against the ‘nouveaux philosophes’, the controversial intellectual story *du jour*: ‘Nouveaux philosophes → moi: trop pyrrhonien pour connaître mon propos d’adhésion ou de refus’ (N, 118, 25 March). This is disingenuous, given some ongoing politico-intellectual allegiances, especially those formed through his great friend Sollers. In May 1977, Barthes writes a distinctly partisan open letter praising Lévy for his *Barbarie à visage humain*, then just published.<sup>28</sup> This letter may perhaps have been written at Sollers’s request: Christofferson tells us that Sollers was heavily involved in promoting Lévy’s book.<sup>29</sup> Barthes’s public allegiance to Sollers’s intellectual project, as evidenced by his preparation for publication, during 1978, of a collection of his articles on Sollers is significant, and sits at odds with Barthes’s avowed abjuring of politico-intellectual gamesmanship.<sup>30</sup> In the *Neutre* lecture of 13 May, Barthes discusses Sollers under the rubric of ‘Oscillation’, arguing that Sollers is resented for his unwillingness to adhere to one intellectual position only and for his unsettling of the ‘unité du discours intellectuel’. Barthes praises Sollers’s struggle against ‘la tendance de l’image à se stabiliser, à se retenir’ (N, 13 May, 173). His assessment of Sollers thus sits with his more general dissatisfaction with a *doxa* premised upon consistency and stereotype. Nonetheless, this ardent defence of one of the most provocatively polemical intellectual figures then active in France is very jarring in the context of Barthes’s advocacy of the suspension of conflictual values. Indeed, Barthes’s valuable support of *Tel Quel* throughout this decade, though it is likely to have been premised upon personal friendships rather than support for the journal’s at times almost hysterical *prises de position*, presupposes a set of intellectual allegiances that are far from neutral.<sup>31</sup>

Affiliations such as this govern to a certain extent Barthes’s professional choices during this period. The decision to publish his article ‘Délibération’ in *Tel Quel* in 1979, for example, may have been taken as an overt act of allegiance to Sollers. These choices do not equate, however, to any alignment with a particular intellectual position. The lectures make it very clear that Barthes is urgently concerned with the postulation of a discourse that is exempt from the collective. As Yue Zhuo states, Barthes persistently demonstrates his ‘resistance to the mandated discursive continuities of the group, to the historical flow and to the myths of fusional collectivity’.<sup>32</sup> The crisis in liberalism brought about by the end of faith in Marxism is, as communality of crisis, something from which Barthes distinguishes himself. It is significant, though, that

Barthes's focuses at this time bear striking resemblances to some of the broader intellectual preoccupations of the day, themselves in reaction to the crisis and informed by a sceptical spirit similar to Barthes's. Notable in this context is Jean-François Lyotard's *Instructions païennes* (1977), an important precursor to *La Condition postmoderne* (1979).<sup>33</sup> The text is written in a quasi-Socratic dialogue form, and is partly taken up by mocking references to the cliquishness of the *nouveaux philosophes*. More seriously, it calls for a localisation of knowledge which would reject the grand narratives that have previously organised intellectual response, notably Marxist and Freudian narratives. Lyotard advocates an end to the 'piety' which these discourses have previously inspired, arguing that in the case of Marxism, this has had pernicious results: 'l'injustice que [le récit marxiste] engendre procède de la piété même qu'il appelle et qu'il exige'.<sup>34</sup> Countering such faith, an 'instruction païenne' would consist in a beneficial scepticism, notably with regard to the grand narratives. A 'pagan' political or ethical programme would be one that disdains the universal and the 'prétention à l'omnitemporalité', and eschews the ills of doctrinal allegiances.<sup>35</sup> This loss of piety would lead to a beneficial particularisation of knowledge.

Lyotard was to build upon these anti-universalist ideas in subsequent texts: as his rallying cry in *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* puts it, 'guerre au tout, témoignons de l'imprésentable, activons les différends, sauvons l'honneur du nom'.<sup>36</sup> His metaphor of *impiety* – and indeed the sceptical aspects of Lyotard's theory of the postmodern generally – furnishes an interesting parallel with the methodology and critical spirit present in Barthes's lectures.<sup>37</sup> The patchworked, 'unschooled' method of *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre* represents an approach to knowledge that is wilfully 'pagan'. Barthes comments on this explicitly when discussing his use of the monastic material in *Comment vivre ensemble*: 'je dois préciser ceci: une théorie de la lecture est possible. [...] Lire en s'abstrayant du signifié: lire les Mystiques sans Dieu. [...] Il faut imaginer ce qui se passerait si l'on généralisait la méthode de lecture par exemption du signifié, de tout signifié'. Barthes provides as an example the idea of reading Sartre without allowing the signified of 'engagement' to dominate one's reading. The reading thereby arrived at would be 'souverainement libre':

la loi vient toujours du signifié, en tant qu'il est donné et reçu comme dernier. Les effets d'une exemption de la foi, où qu'elle se trouve (y compris aujourd'hui de la foi politique qui a remplacé la foi religieuse pour toute la caste intellectuelle), sont [...] incalculables, presque insupportables. <C'est pour ça que c'est une théorie à venir.> Car ce qu'il s'agit de périmer, de rendre insignifiant, ce sont les générateurs de culpabilité. (CVE, 19 January, 43)

The literal reading-without-God of the monastic material is a microcosm of the more general reading-without-faith, or reading without the *Il va de soi*, that occurs in Barthes's material more generally. This refusal of *telos* is central to the *fantasmes* of the first two lecture series, and also is an instance of Barthes's refusal of the 'signifieds' of politics. In a 1975 interview, Barthes states when prompted that his relationship to the political is 'discret, mais obsédé'. There is an important distinction to be made between "'le" politique' (the political), which is 'un ordre fondamental de l'histoire, de la pensée, de tout ce qui se fait, de tout ce qui se parle' (and which, since it is related to reality itself, is central to his work), and "'la" politique', which is politics *qua* 'discours ressassant, discours de la répétition', and is therefore intolerable. Barthes remarks in this interview that his position as an intellectual who does not wish to produce political discourse is 'souvent culpabilisée'. He concludes that one of the urgent tasks of the contemporary 'avant-garde' is to attack this problem of the intellectual's sense of 'culpabilité' with regard to politics: 'ce qu'on cherche, c'est un mode de présence dans le discours du politique qui ne soit pas ressassant'.<sup>38</sup> The method of *Comment vivre ensemble* and of *Le Neutre*, as the quotation regarding 'exemption de foi' above makes clear, evolves out of a desire to de-pietise, in the face of a leftist orthodoxy that has become stifling, both the role of the intellectual and the standard topoi of intellectual enquiry: as he puts it in *Le Neutre*, 'ne pas oublier que nous sommes très précisément dans une phase active de déconstruction "saine" de la "mission" de l'intellectuel: cette déconstruction peut prendre la forme d'un retrait, mais aussi d'un brouillage, d'une série d'affirmations décentrées' (N, 173, 6 May).

The 'discreet but obsessed' relation to the political appears thematically throughout *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*. It shapes *Le Neutre*'s valorisation of indirect response. The ideal of 'discretion' is constant. In *Comment vivre ensemble*, Barthes discusses his weariness of the dogmatic loquacity of political discourse using the term 'parrèsia' (frankness). Barthes interprets this as any 'excès social de langage, arrogance de langage, volonté d'appropriation par le langage, vouloir-saisir par le langage'. The ideal instead would be a quasi-Taoist 'maîtrise' or reserve in language (CVE, 172, 27 April). *Le Neutre* expands on this discreet ideal at great length in figures such as 'Silence', 'Délicatesse', 'Fatigue', 'Retraite' and 'Wou-Wei'. Tact and the implicit are themes throughout and their valorisation is a political point itself, as Barthes points out. Totalitarian societies forbid the implicit, 'car l'implicite, c'est la pensée qui échappe au pouvoir'. But in democratic societies too, the implicit is frowned upon. Barthes speaks with repugnance of the

moralism of *frankness* – an imperative which, when deployed in institutional and political language, forecloses nuance: ‘Laïcisation du rejet de l’implicite, morale de la franchise. [...] Nous en avons maintenant un surgeon politique. Politique = non dit → Donc on dit sans cesse qu’on dit tout’. He associates frankness with aggression and stupidity: ‘Combien de fois, dans notre vie, nous avons affaire à des gens “francs”: [...] on se dédouane d’être indélicat (sans délicatesse); mais ce qu’il y a de pire avec la franchise, c’est qu’elle est en général une porte [...] grande ouverte sur la bêtise’ (N, 25 February, 52–53). The anti-axiomatic urge of the *Neutre* series – ‘le Neutre ne peut se dire franchement’<sup>39</sup> – is as much an attack on the deceptive catchphrases of politicians (and fellow intellectuals) as it is a furious defence of the value of the implicit. From this defence follows Barthes’s willed abstention from the discourses by which he is surrounded. This is why Montaigne is the exemplary intellectual figure for Barthes: he placed a high value on reserve and judiciousness, but the vitality of his engagement with the issues of his own time was in no way lessened by this. Barthes contrasts this ‘abstinence pyrrhonienne’ sadly with the more broad-brush intellectual imperatives of his own time:

Montaigne, en 1576, fait frapper un jeton avec [...] une balance en équilibre et une devise pyrrhonienne: ‘Je m’abstiens’. [...] [I]l faudrait [...] interroger soigneusement Montaigne: vie et œuvre, pour dégager en quoi ou là où il ne s’est pas abstenu (car homme très mêlé à son temps et mêlé publiquement): c’est-à-dire, non pas réviser, mais affiner la doctrine sartrienne de l’engagement, maniée par les intellectuels depuis vingt ans <en France>, un peu brutalement. [<avec rudesse>] (N, 227, 27 May)<sup>40</sup>

This resistance to the simply political is seen also in *Comment vivre ensemble*, in Barthes’s refusal to examine ‘macro-groupements’ – groups structured by power – or the groupuscules of May ’68. He deliberately focuses instead on the *idios* and the ‘redoutable problème’ of distance (CVE, 110), via an arcane Greek classificatory vocabulary. This ‘discreet’ but still ‘obsessed’ relation to the *vivre-ensemble* is also seen in the anti-teleological finale of the series, with its absence of a ‘utopia’ of the *vivre-ensemble*.

### Community: Barthes, Blanchot, Nancy

The most striking overlap between Barthes’s thought at this time and that of his contemporaries crystallises around the theme of community. The disenchantment with ‘grand narratives’ and concerns about de-localised political appropriation of meaning is partly at the root of a movement in

French thought in the early 1980s which considered the question of community. Barthes's reflections in 1977 on the sclerotic movement by which all communities become suffused by power can be seen as prefiguring the studies of community written six years later by Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy, both of whom are influenced by Bataille's pre-war thinking regarding community.<sup>41</sup> A more recent account of community which partly resonates with Barthes's ideas is Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*.<sup>42</sup> At first glance the impossibility of Barthes's *vivre-ensemble* would appear to have much in common with Blanchot's 'unavowable' community. This is misleading. Blanchot's *Communauté inavouable* is concerned with May '68 and with the relationship of the ill-matched couple in Duras's *La Maladie de la mort*.<sup>43</sup> These discussions cover the models of community Barthes explicitly leaves out of his fantasy of 'living-together' (the couple, and the group-with-a-cause; both, in Blanchot's analysis, shortlived). Blanchot believes that May '68 was a form of community 'sans projet', and celebrates its 'liberté de parole' in a heady Romantic idiom: 'Le Dire primait le dit. La poésie était quotidienne. [...] [C'était] une manière encore jamais vécue de *communisme* que nulle idéologie n'était à même de récupérer ou de revendiquer. Pas de tentatives sérieuses de réformes, mais une présence innocente...' <sup>44</sup> While Barthes also celebrated the use of language in May '68 – notably the wall posters, which represented for him '[une] explosion de la subjectivité sauvage, [...] du plaisir du langage'<sup>45</sup> – his attitude towards any group's 'prise de parole' is fundamentally mistrustful.

Where Blanchot discusses interactional ethics, Barthes is more concerned with the keeping of distance. But in its refusal of *telos*, Barthes's *vivre-ensemble* bears some resemblance to the version of community proposed in Jean-Luc Nancy's *La Communauté désœuvrée* (1983). Nancy has shown that the 1980s and 1990s saw a growth of interest in descriptions of community that were not subtended by either a communist, or, more broadly, a communitarian project.<sup>46</sup> Nancy shares with Blanchot the idea that there is no graspable common substance to the community. Focusing on the relation between individuals, Nancy discusses in Heideggerian terms the inappropriable, resistant 'ground' formed by the community. He critiques the idea that a community must always have a *telos* under which all goals are subsumed: this does not have to be the case, he argues, and indeed may be pernicious. Despite this partial overlap with Barthes's ideas, however, Nancy's and Blanchot's discussions of unknowable, inoperative communities tend, not least due to their quasi-messianic rhetoric, to be far removed from Barthes's, whose focus on the individual's ways of coping ethically and affectively with the



demands of existing amongst other people is much more particularised – and thereby more universalisable. As Michael Sheringham notes, ‘for Barthes, the subject – as distinct from the defined and regimented individual, spoken for by organized knowledge – is fundamentally an everyday subject, rooted in everydayness: in transient moods, embodied desires, in likes and dislikes’.<sup>47</sup> His considerations of the *vivre-ensemble* do not have the ontological resonance of Blanchot’s and Nancy’s work on community, because of their origin in the *fantasme* and their unschooled, cut-up concreteness. Barthes is aware of the marked stylistic differences between his own work and that of his most famous contemporaries in the fields of literary and cultural theory. He ascribes the distinctiveness of his thought to the fact that, unlike many of his contemporaries, who had backgrounds in philosophy rather than literature, he thinks ‘avec les mots et pas avec les idées; pas avec les raisonnements’.<sup>48</sup> Barthes’s distrust of the concept leads him to organise his thought according to metaphor instead: ‘Mes concepts n’ont pas toute la rigueur que leur donnent d’habitude les philosophes’.<sup>49</sup> This absence of rigour is clearly to be figured positively, as it leads to a different emphasis and a more experiential philosophy.

### The Subject: Barthes, Foucault, Hadot

The subject, in Barthes, is never unhooked from its surroundings. The subtitle of *Comment vivre ensemble*, ‘simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens’, reminds us of this. What are the spaces (literal, affective, linguistic) that give the subject access to a sense of the ‘Souverain Bien’ (CVE, 177)? Barthes’s preoccupation with the subject and with how best to protect and care for it allies his late work with the near-contemporaneous work of Michel Foucault. From 1980 onward, Foucault reorients his work toward a consideration of the care of the self. This shift is articulated by recourse to the canon of ancient philosophical texts, notably Plato, Seneca and Epictetus.<sup>50</sup> Foucault’s Collège de France lecture course *Subjectivité et vérité* (1980–81) marks the first lengthy consideration of these issues. The following year’s lecture series, *L’Herméneutique du sujet* (1981–82), sees Foucault beginning to elaborate his ideas regarding ‘le souci de soi’, subsequently developed in the third volume of his history of sexuality, *Le Souci de soi* (1984).<sup>51</sup> He is interested in the ancient authors that Barthes also mentions in his lectures, and fascinated by Greek ideas of *askêsis* and *parrêsia*, and the question of how to control one’s own negative impulses.<sup>52</sup> Foucault was working

towards the idea that an ethical life could be conceived of in aesthetic terms. In this sphere of enquiry, the canonical texts of classical philosophy, consisting in dialogue and instruction, are examined not for what they reveal about philosophical system, but for their advice about coping with everyday life.

The work of Pierre Hadot, which urges a detheorisation of philosophy as discipline, is at the root of Foucault's interest in philosophy's relationship to lived experience. Hadot, a historian of philosophy, was proposed at Foucault's suggestion for a chair at the Collège de France, and acceded to the 'Chaire de pensée hellénistique et romaine' in 1982.<sup>53</sup> Hadot resists the abstraction of philosophy and insists on thought as a spiritual exercise which aims to transform your daily life.<sup>54</sup> His work involves a repudiation of modern philosophy's assumption that ancient philosophers were attempting to construct systems of thought. Modern philosophy is not very well able to account for the incoherencies or contradictions in the ancient texts. Hadot's position is that these contradictions only appear as such if one's starting point is that the systematic construction of a body of thought was these thinkers' goal. In fact, says Hadot, the primary reference must be to lived experience, from which these ancient texts emanated. Hadot lays useful emphasis on the *dialogic* nature of Greco-Roman philosophy and its rootedness in the reality of daily interaction. The ancient philosophers' pedagogical works were not conceived in order to communicate propositional, conceptual knowledge. Rather, they sought to train disciples and help them to 'orient themselves in thought, in the life of the city, or in the world'.<sup>55</sup> As he puts it in *Exercices spirituels* (1977),

la philosophie ne consiste pas dans l'enseignement d'une théorie abstraite, encore moins dans une exégèse de textes, mais dans un art de vivre, dans une attitude concrète, dans un style de vie déterminé, qui engage toute l'existence. L'acte philosophique ne se situe pas seulement dans l'ordre de la connaissance, mais dans l'ordre du 'soi' et de l'être: c'est un progrès qui nous fait plus être, qui nous rend meilleurs.<sup>56</sup>

This is a body of work based on praxis rather than doctrine – praxis that we have lost sight of, in Hadot's view. Hadot describes the Greco-Roman pedagogical dialogues (such as those found in the writings of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius) as 'spiritual exercises', making it clear that the term 'spiritual' is chosen *faute de mieux*: he has 'resigned' himself to the use of this term because other qualitative adjectives, such as 'psychic', 'moral' or 'intellectual', do not cover all the aspects of the exercises.<sup>57</sup> The exercises, all of which are elaborated in the goal of guiding the interlocutor, aimed to teach us how to cope with the difficulty of

everyday life by loosening our limited, ego-based conception of the world, and allowing it to cede instead to an awareness of our belonging to a more cosmic whole. Thus would true wellbeing be attained. According to Hadot's compelling argument, this existential ethics was the real goal of ancient philosophy: with the installation of Christianity as a state religion in many countries, however, philosophy gradually lost its 'spiritual' remit and became restricted to theory, subsequently becoming increasingly doctrinal and systematic.<sup>58</sup> This abstraction of philosophy from the matter of existence itself is the tragedy of philosophy now for Hadot, who advocates a return to the exercises in order to learn how to live more peaceably in our present: '[Une] attention au moment présent est en quelque sorte le secret des exercices spirituels'.<sup>59</sup> This philosophy is interactive, concerned with the self's imbrication with other selves, and with the surrounding environment: 'Le sentiment d'appartenance à un Tout me semble être l'élément essentiel [des exercices spirituels]: appartenance au Tout de la communauté humaine, appartenance au Tout cosmique. Sénèque résume cela en quatre mots: "*Toti se inserens mundo*": "se plongeant dans la totalité du monde"'.<sup>60</sup> The ancient philosophical texts teach us to care for ourselves, but never in isolation.

Hadot's historicisation of ancient philosophy had, as Arnold I. Davidson has shown, a profound impact on Foucault's thought from 1977, when he read the essay 'Exercices spirituels', until his death.<sup>61</sup> Foucault found Hadot's focus on the ethical, 'life-based' aspects of ancient philosophy extremely useful for the articulation of his own interest in an ethics of the care of the self. After Foucault's death, Hadot commented on Foucault's understanding of his ideas and on his use of ancient philosophy.<sup>62</sup> Foucault is not wrong to insist on an 'esthétique de l'existence', he writes: 'Il est vrai que la sagesse antique consiste partiellement dans un "souci de soi"'. However, Foucault's exegesis of these ideas is too limited: 'dans cet exercice, le sage antique ne trouve pas de plaisir dans son moi individuel, comme le pense Foucault, mais il cherche à dépasser son moi, pour se situer à un niveau universel, pour se replacer dans le Tout du monde dont il est une partie'.<sup>63</sup> Foucault places rather too much emphasis on the 'self' and on self-serving pleasure, bracketing out the aspects of the Stoic texts he studies which make reference to a more universal reality.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, there is a value of localisation in Foucault's 'experimentation' on the self, as Patrick ffrench has pointed out. Indeed, Foucault's subjective turn could perhaps be allied, as ffrench remarks, to Lyotard's suggestion in *Instructions païennes* that we follow individualised, 'pagan' ethical programmes.<sup>65</sup>

Hadot's detheorisation of philosophy and his focus on 'le sentiment d'existence' means that it is he, of all of Barthes's contemporaries, who provides the most illuminating gloss for Barthes's thought. Hadot's work provides the scholarly elaboration, via a study of texts from the Greek and Roman philosophers through Montaigne, Rousseau and Bergson, of the ideas which Barthes seems to intuit with regard to the relation between the subject and its environment. From within philosophy, Hadot calls for the same reorientation of philosophy towards lived experience that Barthes, from a different angle, calls for in his lectures. Barthes too resists conceptualisation and abstraction, in keeping with the imperatives of ancient thought.<sup>66</sup> Notably in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*, Barthes constantly ties his preoccupations with sociality to the real difficulties of 'life in the city': how to keep the right distance, how to respond to demands, how to be well in one's work. Central to the problematics of both these series is the ideal of 'délicatesse'. As tact, this is a beneficially spatialising force. It is also, for Barthes, a vigilant awareness of existence similar to the 'sentiment d'existence' that Hadot finds central to the 'exercices spirituels'. In a supplement to *Le Neutre*, Barthes describes this feeling:

En sortant, le soir, au crépuscule, en recevant avec intensité des détails infimes, parfaitement futiles, de la rue: un menu écrit à la craie sur la vitre d'un café, [...] un tout petit prêtre en soutane remontant la rue Médicis, etc., j'ai eu cette intuition vive [...] que descendre dans l'infiniment futile, cela permettait d'avouer la sensation de la vie. [...] La délicatesse est donc du côté du vivant, de ce qui fait sentir la vie, de ce qui en active la perception: la saveur de la vie toute pure, la jouissance d'être vivant. (N, 11 March, 79)

*Le Neutre* could be characterised as a quest for this blissful awareness of life: in this way it extends *Comment vivre ensemble*'s search for 'le Souverain Bien quant à l'habiter' (CVE, 178). But while in the *Vivre ensemble* Barthes's attention to his present is sometimes obfuscated by the layering of his own desires with historical and literary accounts of similar impulses, *Le Neutre* makes the present, existence-centred nature of its project very clear: 'Ce que je cherche, dans la préparation du cours, c'est une introduction au vivre, un guide de vie (projet éthique): je veux vivre selon la nuance', he states in the first lecture of the series (N, 18 February, 37). The investigation of the neutral is an investigation of 'un rapport juste au présent, attentif et non arrogant' (25 March, 118).

In Hadot's account of ancient philosophy as 'spiritual exercises', elaborated within a dialogic situation (teaching), and aiming to show how to live better, we find what seems to be a parallel to Barthes's sense of the import of his own teaching. In the spiritual exercises, the exhibi-

tion of the ‘authentic presence’ of the philosopher, as he tries to elaborate his lesson, is vital. As the philosopher struggles to articulate his sense of what the good life might be, it is the presence of his listeners, the concessions that must be made to them, that make the discourse *practical*, rather than merely dogmatic. In his lectures, Barthes seeks to elaborate a ‘discours humain’ by exhibiting his own *fantasmes*. Literary semiology is not a system: were it to be, it could only speak to other specialists. Barthes’s conception of his role, in conjunction with the non-reproductive educational remit of the Collège de France, means that Barthes can teach in a manner akin to Hadot’s conception of antique philosophy, which is a search for the *sagesse* that would allow us to exist in a peaceful state, experiencing an exact vision of the world.

*Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre* are frequently deeply negative in tone, as Barthes discusses the sclerotising effects of dogma. *Comment vivre ensemble* is a historicisation of how an idiosyncratic collectivity without *telos* is impossible in the context of a Western world-view which prioritises active regulation. This series is haunted by Pachomius, the rule of St Benedict, and many other avatars of power, whether they be bureaucratic or conventional. *Le Neutre* is suffused by an alarmed distaste for the conflictual bases of interaction and of intellectual discourse. Thus both series are informed by a fantasy that is in reaction against the prevailing norms of Barthes’s society, and specifically, his political and intellectual context. They articulate a negative: ‘Le Neutre, c’est ce *Non* irréductible: un *Non* comme suspendu devant les endurcissements de la foi et de la certitude et incorruptible par l’une et par l’autre’ (*N*, 18 February, 40). But these reactive fantasies can be turned into positives. As Barthes tells us in *Le Neutre*, weariness is creative: ‘Le droit à la fatigue [...] fait partie du *nouveau*: les choses nouvelles naissent de la lassitude – du ras-le-bol’ (25 February, 49). The yearning for a retreat from normative demands figures in both these series, and is a ‘fantasme très actif’, linked to ‘l’idée d’une mutation radicale, complète de vie’ (*N*, 13 May, 190). The desire for displacement figured so frequently in these lectures is consonant with the restive nature of all of Barthes’s work.

Both series demonstrate Barthes’s inventiveness in imagining alternatives to the status quo. The repressive aspects of our regimes of meaning and our ways of being together can be departed from in the imagining of a new, positive *askèsis*: this is the goal of the idiorhythmic fantasy of the *vivre-ensemble*, located in the space of the ‘skite’ (‘askiticia’, ‘lieux d’ascèses’). In *Comment vivre ensemble*, Barthes imagines a

new 'régime, genre de vie, *diaita*, diète' (12 January, 36). This work would be undertaken in a delicate language, of which we are given 'scintillations' in *Le Neutre*. The fears alluded to in these first two series could then, perhaps, be finally articulated in the novel of the *Préparation*'s fantasy: 'Peut-être le fantasme persistant du roman-à-écrire implique-t-il ceci: puisque sans carapace, invisible à quiconque, envie d'un espace d'écriture où ce pathos cesserait d'être clandestin' (N, 259).

The postulation of these fantasies does not involve an abstention from the present: Barthes makes it clear in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre* that these projects are Barthes's way of approaching his immediate context: 'une réflexion sur le neutre, pour moi: [...] mon propre style de présence aux luttes de mon temps' (N, 18 February, 33). The underlying focus of these lectures is on the grain of existence itself. Barthes's doleful assessment of the compulsive aspects of his logosphere ('le fascisme, c'est d'obliger à dire'<sup>67</sup>) is in some ways nihilistic, but there is a core of affirmativeness allied with a fascination with the everyday stuff of life. Tellingly, what Barthes likes most in *Robinson Crusoe* is its 'quotidienneté, [...] l'organisation ménagère de la vie, la hutte, le jardin aux raisins, la bucolique' (CVE, 16 March, 123). When events interrupt this focus on things, enforcing a narrative, the 'charme puissant' of the book is lost for him. Throughout *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*, Barthes's fantasies are situated, spatialised, involving a dream of perfect relationality which would be unmediated by the reifying effects of language: 'distance et égard, absence de poids dans la relation et, cependant, chaleur vive de cette relation. Le principe en serait: ne pas manier l'autre, les autres, ne pas manipuler, renoncer activement aux images (des uns, des autres). [...] = Utopie proprement dite' (CVE, 4 May, 179–80). Indeed the most striking motifs of all Barthes's late work involve a relationship with others articulated mutely through *things*: the lover wearing dark glasses in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*; the image of the child playing with pebbles near its mother in *Leçon*; the grieving Barthes going through old photographs in *La Chambre claire*. As Edward Said puts it, there is a longing for 'the silent quiddity of objects, undisturbed by the intervening yammerings of language'.<sup>68</sup> The most distressing example of this longing comes in the *Journal de deuil*, with its desperation for 'la lettre' of absolute grief in all its weight: 'Le chagrin, comme une pierre.../ (à mon cou, / au fond de moi)' (JD, 117). Language falls frustratingly short: '*Désespoir*: le mot est trop théâtral, il fait partie du langage. / Une pierre' (JD, 122). In this yearning for an articulation of the materiality of his grief, Barthes takes on what, in *Leçon*, he says literature too incessantly tries to tackle: 'ce qui est *toujours*

un délire[:] [...] l'inadéquation fondamentale du langage et du réel' (L, 22).

In his reachings for everyday objects, Barthes shares some qualities with modernist authors. In *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, Simon Critchley writes about how, in a post-Nietzschean era – an Adornian era, perhaps – of distrust of narratives of progress and meaning, the focus on the ordinary and tangible becomes vital.<sup>69</sup> Abjuring overarching narratives, these writers give us things instead. Hence Beckett's paraphernalia of bicycles, tape recorders and dustbins; Wallace Stevens's ponds, trees and mud. 'What each of these authors is concerned with,' writes Critchley, 'is what we might call the sheer mereness of things. In other words, when we learn to shake off the delusions of meaning and achieve meaninglessness, then we might see that things merely are and we are things too'.<sup>70</sup> Barthes is working towards such an understanding. What Critchley describes is another version of what Hadot believes the central message of the 'exercices spirituels' to be:

[Une attention au moment présent] délivre de la passion [...]; elle facilite la vigilance en la concentrant sur le minuscule moment présent, toujours maîtrisable, toujours supportable, dans son exigüité; elle ouvre enfin notre conscience à la conscience cosmique [...] en nous faisant accepter chaque moment de l'existence dans la perspective de la loi universelle du cosmos.<sup>71</sup>

In the next chapter I shall examine Barthes's desire for a state in which an awareness of 'le minuscule moment présent' would contain everything necessary for a sense of wellbeing. This fantasy involves the assumption of existential and aesthetic ideas which Barthes conceives to be impossible in the Western logosphere. He must go East.

## Notes

- 1 Knight has discussed Barthes's desire for a realm beyond ideological interests: 'Barthes often insisted on the beyondness of this utopian realm, somewhere on the far side rather than the near side of meaning, and therefore to be distinguished from any pre-semiological golden age'. *Barthes and Utopia*, p. 7.
- 2 On Pachomius, see Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Benedict, founder of several monasteries and Abbot of Monte Cassino in Italy, wrote his 'rule' as a guide to the regulation of Christian monasteries. The rule continues to be extremely influential in ecclesiastical life. *The Rule of St Benedict*, ed. and trans. Carolinne White (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2008).
- 3 Barthes considers Mount Athos to be an 'oriental' space.
- 4 The fragment on 'le neutre' in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975) gives an indication of the persistence of this theme and how it appears in Barthes's writings: 'Figures du Neutre: l'écriture blanche, exemptée de tout théâtre

littéraire – le langage adamique – l’insignifiance délectable – le lisse – le vide [...] – la discrétion [...] – l’absence d’*imago* – la suspension de jugement, de procès – le déplacement – [...] le principe de délicatesse – la dérive – la jouissance: tout ce qui esquivé ou déjoué ou rend dérisoires la parade, la maîtrise, l’intimidation (RB, 707).

- 5 See Barthes’s comments on the theme of ‘ce qui passe pour naturel aux yeux de la plupart’ in a 1975 interview, in which again he quotes his favourite lines from Brecht: ‘C’est un thème bien ancien chez moi, puisque c’est lui qui alimente déjà les *Mythologies*, qui se donnent pour une dénonciation du “ce qui va de soi”. C’est aussi un thème brechtien: “Sous la règle, découvrez l’abus”. Sous le naturel, découvrez l’histoire, découvrez ce qui n’est pas naturel, découvrez les abus’. ‘Vingt mots-clés pour Roland Barthes’, interview with Jean-Jacques Brochier for *Le Magazine littéraire*, Feb. 1975. OC, IV, 851–75 (p. 853).
- 6 Epictetus, *Discourses* 3, 21, 4–6, in *Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. Robert Dobbin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2008). This statement is quoted by Pierre Hadot in illustration of his statement that ‘[le] discours sur la philosophie n’est pas la philosophie’. Hadot, ‘La Philosophie comme manière de vivre’, in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, 2nd edition (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), pp. 289–304 (p. 293).
- 7 See Ch. 1 above.
- 8 The other epigraphs are from texts by Tolstoy, Rousseau, and, as a counter-example to the neutral, Joseph de Maistre. The Tolstoy and Rousseau epigraphs are discussed in Ch. 4.
- 9 Benson Mates, ‘On Refuting the Skeptic’, *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 58.1 (1984): 21–35 (p. 24).
- 10 Maria van Rysselberghe, *Cahiers de la Petite Dame*, Cahiers André Gide IV, 1945–1951 (Paris: Gallimard, 1977). On Barthes’s affinities with Gide, see Stafford, *Roland Barthes*, pp. 193–96 and *passim*.
- 11 Knight’s essential study of Barthes, *Barthes and Utopia*, is a fascinating account of the ways in which Barthes’s utopian thought is spatial.
- 12 Émile Benveniste, ‘La notion de “rythme” dans son expression linguistique’, in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1969–74), vol. I, pp. 327–35 (p. 330).
- 13 Yue Zhuo has discussed the spatial aspect of *rhythmos* in ‘The “Political” Barthes: From Theatre to Idiorhythmy’, *French Forum*, 36.1 (2011): 55–74.
- 14 Pint, *Perverse Art*, pp. 261–62.
- 15 ‘Paradoxalement, la portée fantasmagorique, subjective du cours, n’implique aucune dimension d’ordre biographique’. Coste, ‘Comment vivre ensemble’, p. 46.
- 16 Patrick ffrench, ‘How to Live with Roland Barthes’, *SubStance* 38.3 (2009): 113–24 (p. 122).
- 17 ‘Entre le plaisir du texte et l’utopie de la pensée’, interview with Abdallah Bensmaïn, *L’Opinion* (Morocco), 6 February 1978. OC, V, 533–40 (p. 535).
- 18 Stephen Heath, *Vertige du déplacement: lecture de Barthes* (Paris: Fayard, 1974).
- 19 ffrench, ‘How to Live with Roland Barthes’, p. 117.
- 20 ‘Sur le cinéma’, interview with Michel Delahaye and Jacques Rivette for *Cahiers du cinéma*, September 1963. OC, II, 255–66 (p. 265)
- 21 ‘Mélange’, in *Mimima Moralia*, pp. 102–103.
- 22 ffrench, ‘How to Live with Roland Barthes’, p. 114.
- 23 Cf. *Le Neutre*, 165: ‘Tout dans l’univers, le monde, la société, le sujet, le réel, [est] soumis à la forme du conflit: pas de proposition plus reçue: les philosophies occidentales, les doctrines, les métaphysiques, les matérialismes, les “sensibilités”, les langages courants, tout énonce le conflit (le conflictuel) comme



- la nature même’.
- 24 See Nikolaj Lübecker: ‘With his insistence on the *neutral* and the general attempt to escape “Hegelian” socialism, Barthes is challenging the widespread belief in the progressive potential of the struggle for recognition’. *Community, Myth and Recognition*, p. 132.
  - 25 Alexandre Soljénitsyne, *L’Archipel du Goulag, 1918–1956*, 3 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 1974). See Michael Christofferson’s chapter on ‘The Gulag as a Metaphor’ in *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn, 2004), pp. 89–110, for a discussion of reactions to the Solzhenitsyn text. See also Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) and Pierre Rigoulot, *Les Pauvrières lourdes: les Français face au goulag, aveuglements et indications* (Paris: Presses universitaires, 1991).
  - 26 See for example Lefort, *Un Homme en trop: essai sur l’archipel du goulag de Soljénitsyne* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); Glucksmann, ‘Le Marxisme rend sourd’, *Le Nouvel Observateur* 484 (4 March 1974), 80; *La Cuisinière et le mangeur d’hommes: essai sur les rapports entre l’État, le marxisme et les camps de concentration* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); Lévy, *La Barbarie à visage humain* (Paris: Grasset, 1977).
  - 27 Barthes had visited China as part of an enthusiastically Maoist *Tel Quel* delegation in 1974; see discussion in Ch. 4 below. On *Tel Quel*’s abandonment of Maoism, see Patrick French, *The Time of Theory: A History of Tel Quel 1960–1983* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 225–27. Sollers makes the journal’s abjuring of Maoism clear in an interview with Maurice Clavel, ‘A propos du “Maoïsme”’, *Tel Quel* 68 (Winter 1976).
  - 28 ‘Lettre à Bernard-Henri Lévy’, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 26 May 1977. OC, V, 314–15. This eulogistic letter discusses, in a deliberately oblique way, Lévy’s style and articulation of an ‘éthique de l’écriture’ (p. 315).
  - 29 Christofferson, *French Intellectuals*, p. 206.
  - 30 Sollers *écrivain* was published by Seuil in 1979. According to Philippe Forest, Sollers had asked Barthes to put together the collection in order to combat the hostile criticism that Sollers was then experiencing. Forest, *Histoire de Tel Quel 1960–1982* (Paris: Seuil, 1995), p. 558.
  - 31 Philippe Forest states that throughout the ’60s and ’70s, ‘le plus sûr des soutiens de *Tel Quel*, sinon le plus actif politiquement, est certainement Roland Barthes’. Regarding the journal’s Maoism, Forest’s view is that Barthes was ‘la recrue consentante d’un combat pour lequel il n’est pas question qu’il monte en première ligne mais auquel il ne monnaye guère la caution de son nom ou celle de sa prestige’. *Histoire de Tel Quel*, pp. 360–61.
  - 32 Zhuo, ‘The “Political” Barthes’, p. 58.
  - 33 Jean-François Lyotard, *Instructions païennes* (Paris: Galilée, 1977); *La Condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).
  - 34 Lyotard, *Instructions*, p. 11.
  - 35 Lyotard, *Instructions*, p. 28.
  - 36 Lyotard, *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p. 34.
  - 37 A further overlap between Lyotard’s and Barthes’s interests is shown in the essay Derrida wrote about Lyotard after his death: Derrida tells us that Lyotard’s Masters’ dissertation, written in the late ’40s, examined philosophies of indifference including the Epicureans’ *ataraxia*, Stoic *apatheia* and *adiaphora*, Taoist *wu-wei* and Zen ‘not-thinking’. These are all touchstones in Barthes’s lectures. Derrida, ‘Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998): Amitié à tout rompre – Lyotard et nous’, in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 255–89 (p. 255).

- 38 'Vingt mots-clés pour Roland Barthes', interview with Jean-Jacques Brochier for *Le Magazine littéraire*, February 1975. OC, IV, 851–75 (p. 862).
- 39 'La Chronique', *Le Nouvel Observateur* 18 December 1978–26 March 1979 (weekly), OC, V, 625–53 (p. 638).
- 40 In their preface to the recent Gallimard edition of the *Essais*, Naya, Reguig-Naya and Tarrête emphasise the indirect but vital engagement with social problems that is demonstrated in Montaigne's writing: 'S'il ne joua pas vraiment de rôle politique direct, Montaigne fut pourtant la conscience de son temps' ('Préface', *Essais*, vol. I, pp. 7–83 (pp. 14–15)).
- 41 Maurice Blanchot, *La Communauté inavouable* (Paris: Minuit, 1983); Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1986). Some of the material in Nancy's text was originally published in 1983 in the journal *Aléa*. A valuable collection of essays on community from this period is Miami Theory Collective's *Community at Loose Ends* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). Nancy has continued his reflection on community in *La Communauté affrontée* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), written as a new preface to Blanchot's *La Communauté inavouable*. For more on Bataille, Blanchot and Nancy's thought regarding community, see Ian James, 'The Narrow Margin', in *Blanchot romantique: A Collection of Essays*, ed. John McKeane and Hannes Opelz (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 263–74.
- 42 Giorgio Agamben, *La comunità che viene* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990); *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Agamben's concern with the 'Whatever', or a singularity beyond predicates, chimes with Barthes's hostility, as evinced in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*, towards reductive naming, and his longing for a sense of wellbeing within a community that would not revolve around 'images' of others. Agamben's thesis is that if we can imagine a singularity without predicates, then our own singularity would be 'freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal' (p. 1).
- 43 Marguerite Duras, *La Maladie de la mort* (Paris: Minuit, 1982).
- 44 Blanchot, *La Communauté inavouable*, p. 53.
- 45 'Structuralisme et sémiologie', interview with Pierre Daix for *Lettres françaises*, July 1968. OC, III, 77–83 (p. 79).
- 46 Nancy, *La Communauté affrontée*, passim.
- 47 Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 204.
- 48 'Entre le plaisir du texte et l'utopie de la pensée', interview with Abdallah Bensmain, *L'Opinion* (Morocco), 6 February 1978. OC, V, 533–40 (p. 537). See also Barthes's comments on philosophy in the *Lexique de l'auteur* seminar: 'L'écriture, ce n'est pas une question de style, c'est un congé donné au signifié, à l'idée; c'est la pensée-mot, c'est donc se retirer de la pensée. Philosophes? Même avec brio et style, tous restent dans l'idée, la pensée-pensée: sauf Nietzsche' (*LA*, p. 62).
- 49 'A quoi sert un intellectuel?', interview with Bernard-Henri Lévy for *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 10 January 1977. OC, V, 364–82 (p. 379).
- 50 On this shift in Foucault's work, see Patrick French, 'Foucault and Life as a Work of Art', in Michael Sheringham and Johnnie Gratton, eds., *The Art of the Project: Projects and Experiments in Modern French Culture* (New York: Berghahn, 2005), pp. 204–18.
- 51 Foucault, *L'Herméneutique du sujet: cours au Collège de France (1981–1982)*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2001); *Histoire de la sexualité III: le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). *Subjectivité et vérité* is yet to be published.

- 52 See for example his lecture of 10 March 1982 on ‘La *parrhêsia* comme attitude éthique et procédure technique’. *L’Herméneutique du sujet*, pp. 355–77. On Foucault’s conception of ethics, see Arnold I. Davidson, ‘Ethics as Ascetics’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 115–140.
- 53 Hadot had been a *directeur d’études* in the Fifth Section (Sciences religieuses) of the EPHE since 1964, specialising in Latin patristics and theology and mystics of the Greco-Roman era. See the first two chapters of the collection of interviews with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold Davidson, *La Philosophie comme manière de vivre* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 2003), for further details on Hadot’s career and interests, including the part he played in the introduction of Wittgenstein’s thought to France: his *Wittgenstein et les limites du langage* (Paris: Vrin, 2004) collects articles originally published from 1959 to 1962.
- 54 See especially *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001).
- 55 Arnold Davidson, ‘Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon of Ancient Philosophy’, in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 1–45 (p. 21). This introduction by Davidson to Hadot’s most important essays in translation is a superb introduction to Hadot’s work.
- 56 ‘Exercices spirituels’, in *Exercices spirituels*, pp. 19–74 (pp. 22–23).
- 57 *Exercices spirituels*, p. 20.
- 58 Hadot also locates the institutionalisation of philosophy in universities as a factor which has distanced philosophy from its original concern with spiritual exercises.
- 59 *Exercices spirituels*, p. 27.
- 60 *Exercices spirituels*, p. 326.
- 61 ‘Exercices spirituels’, subsequently published in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, was first published in the *Annuaire de la Ve Section de l’École pratique des hautes études*, tome LXXXIV, 1977, pp. 25–70. On Hadot’s influence on Foucault, see Davidson, ‘Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot’, *Critical Inquiry* 16.3 (1990): 475–82, and also ‘Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon’.
- 62 See the essays ‘Réflexions sur la notion de “culture de soi”’ and ‘Le Sage et le monde’ in *Exercices spirituels*, pp. 323–32 and 343–60 respectively. Both essays were originally published in 1989.
- 63 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, p. 345. See also *La Philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 217: ‘Foucault ne met pas suffisamment en valeur la prise de conscience de l’appartenance au Tout cosmique, et la prise de conscience de l’appartenance à la communauté humaine’.
- 64 Hadot refutes Foucault’s selective reading of the Stoics as follows: ‘Il semble, d’un point de vue historique, difficile à admettre que la pratique philosophique des stoïciens et des platoniciens n’ait été qu’un rapport à soi, une culture de soi, un plaisir pris en soi-même. Le contenu psychique de ces exercices me semble tout autre’ (*Exercices spirituels*, p. 326).
- 65 French, ‘Michel Foucault: Life as a Work of Art’, p. 213.
- 66 Diana Knight, analysing the references made by Barthes in his mid-’70s work to Socratic texts, has pointed out there are certain links between Barthes and Socrates as teachers, as Barthes himself implied: ‘When one of the audience at [the Cerisy colloquium on Barthes in 1977] asks Barthes: “what might Socrates produce, if we imagine a Socrates who lived after Freud [...]”, Barthes replies in his own name and about his own work. Pointers to the Socratic intertext are therefore launched [...] by Barthes, [...] in the context of a Barthes surrounded

by his much younger disciples-cum-friends. [...] There are obvious links between Barthes and Socrates as famous teachers and supposed corrupters of the young (and ironic parallels such as the trauma of their deaths for an academic generation both intellectually and emotionally dependent)'. Knight, 'Roland Barthes: An Intertextual Figure', in Michael Worton and Judith Still, eds., *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1990), pp. 92–107 (p. 94).

- 67 Barthes elaborated on this statement in the final session of *Le Neutre*: 'C'est dans ce sens que j'ai pu parler d'un fascisme de la langue: la langue fait de ses manques notre Loi, elle nous soumet abusivement à ses manques' (N, 3 June, 237–38).
- 68 Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (London: Granta, 1985), p. 328.
- 69 Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2004).
- 70 Critchley, *Very Little*, p. xxiv.
- 71 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, pp. 27–28.

## Japonisme and Minimal Existence in the *Cours*

At the instant when our mental activity almost merges into an unconscious state – that is, the relationship between subject and object is forgotten – we can experience the most aesthetic moment. This is what is implied when it is said that one goes into the heart of created things and becomes one with nature.

Otsuji (Seki Osuga), *Collected Essays on Haiku Theory*

### ‘The Other Scene’: Barthes, his Contemporaries, and the Orient

Throughout Barthes’s *Cours* at the Collège de France we see several profound themes that reveal the influence of Oriental thought as imported into the West largely by Alan Watts and D.T. Suzuki.<sup>1</sup> Barthes’s sketching of the haiku as leading to an aesthetic experience which overcomes the sense of division between one’s self and one’s environment; his suggestions that we conceptualise space and time differently; his digressive, incomplete methods of exposition; and his espousal of ‘suspension’ because of his reluctance to be pinned to a specific subject-position, all stem in part from his fascination with Taoist thought and Japanese aesthetics. He frequently refers in the *Cours* to the peaceable, liberatory ideals he sees in the ‘Orient’, defined in opposition to an ‘Occident’ whose logomachy is characterised by conflict. There is a problem of conflation here, of course: Diana Knight has shown that ‘Barthes’s key utopias are projected into the “Orient”’, and pointed out that the subsumption of such ‘totally distinct parts of the world’ as China and Japan under the label of ‘the Orient’ is problematic – or rather, ‘part of the problem to be discussed’.<sup>2</sup> In the *Cours*, the ‘Orient’ includes Mount Athos in Greece, the Buddhist monks of Sri Lanka, and memories of Barthes’s time spent in Morocco. However, the ‘Orient’ is mainly associated with Taoism, Zen, and the Japanese haiku. The largely Japanese slant of Barthes’s Orient stems from Barthes’s fascination with the country after visiting it in the late 1960s.

Barthes’s writing about Japan in *L’Empire des signes* (1970) and about China in ‘Alors, la Chine?’ (1974) has been covered in depth by

critics.<sup>3</sup> Such criticism covers the important question of whether Barthes produces an exoticising Orientalist discourse. My view is that he does not: his writing about China and Japan is shaped, above all, by a sardonic awareness of what Westerners *expect* to find in these countries, and by a concomitant rejection of these expectations. The article ‘Alors, la Chine?’, notably, received hostile criticism at the time of its publication precisely because of its refusal to conform to the paradigm of Western responses to contemporary China: either dogmatism or facile liberalism. It strove instead to articulate a subjective, indirect response.<sup>4</sup> In the book on Japan, Barthes openly states that his account of the ‘traits’ he finds interesting in that country is informed by the self-interrogation Japan has fostered in him, rather than by any desire to portray the country: ‘L’auteur n’a jamais, en aucun sens, photographié le Japon. Ce serait plutôt le contraire: le Japon l’a étoilé d’éclairs multiples’ (*ES*, 14). While such statements cannot simply absolve Barthes from the dangers of Orientalism, it is clear that his project centres upon the critique of the conventions of Western thought rather than upon any more nefarious instrumentalisation of the Eastern other. Indeed, Barthes’s explicitly *imagined* Japan is, as Eric Hayot points out, an effort to ‘create a third space that attempts to shed the orientalism of a knowledge-based reading’.<sup>5</sup>

Barthes’s use of a hypostatized ‘Japan’ to discuss ways of thinking unfamiliar to the West is typical of his context. During this period, many Parisian theorists were using the Orient in their work as a means of critique. This was arguably inaugurated by Foucault. Foucault opens *Les Mots et les choses* (1966) by discussing a story by Borges which outlines the strange system of classification used in a Chinese encyclopedia. China, writes Foucault, is for us the symbolic locus of utopian ways of thinking:

cette distorsion du classement qui nous empêche de le penser, [...] Borges l[à] donne pour patrie mythique une région précise dont le nom seul constitue pour l’Occident une grande réserve d’utopies. La Chine, dans notre rêve, n’est-elle pas justement le *lieu* privilégié de l’*espace*? [...] Il y aurait ainsi, à l’autre extrémité de la terre que nous habitons, une culture vouée tout entière à l’ordonnance de l’étendue, mais qui ne distribuerait la prolifération des êtres dans aucun des espaces où il nous est possible de nommer, de parler, de penser.<sup>6</sup>

Foucault makes the hypothetical nature of the invocation of ‘China’ clear. China as alterity becomes the sign of utopia – but it is a *dream* of China that allows us Westerners to conceive of our own reality differently. In the Paris of the early 1970s, this use of what Patrick ffrench calls the ‘other scene’ of thought in French theory came to a feverish head, notably in the offices of *Tel Quel*.<sup>7</sup> This journal was concerned with analysing

the workings of ideology, and one way of doing this was by referring to non-Western signifying systems. From 1968 onwards, Philippe Sollers became increasingly interested in Chinese thought, and thence became a Maoist.<sup>8</sup> It was at this point that the ‘Chinese dreams’ of Parisian intellectuals began their downward curve into hard reality. Members of *Tel Quel*, along with Barthes, made a trip to China in Spring 1974. It was after this trip that Barthes wrote ‘Alors, la Chine?’<sup>9</sup> The real encounter with China was frustrating as the trip was so controlled. The official version of China offered to the French intellectuals in the form of factory visits and speeches about China’s productivity was repetitive and flatly political. In response to the *Tel Quel*-ian questions about revolution, working conditions, Lin Piao, and so on, the same responses were always given – what Barthes calls ‘briques’ of stereotyped opinion. Barthes’s impressions of the trip to China, as registered in ‘Alors’ and in the recently published *Carnets du voyage en Chine* (2009), are of ‘fadeur’, a lack of interpretable signifiers, and an abundance of Maoist clichés. The visit marked the start of Parisian Maoists’ disillusionment with China.

For Barthes, the trip to China involves a shutting down of interpretation. The political text of China is enforced such that no creative or utopian thought is possible: ‘Aucun farfelu, aucune surprise, aucun romanesque. Écriture difficile’ (CVC, 186). Japan, however, retains all the beneficial force of alterity that Barthes requires from the ‘other scene’. For this reason, I have chosen to refer to Barthes’s invocations of the ‘Orient’ in the *Cours* as *japonisme* – though I am aware of the cultural conflation involved. Jan Walsh Hokenson uses the term ‘japonisme’ in *Japan, France and East-West Aesthetics*, her study of French writers’ fascination with Japan and utilisation of Japanese motifs and aesthetics in their work.<sup>10</sup> Hokenson reminds us that the term ‘japonisme’ is generally used to refer to the use of Japanese-inspired graphic techniques in painting and drawing, but shows that though initially confined to the visual arts, japonisme rapidly became an important current in literature as French writers began, from the late nineteenth century onwards, to incorporate Japanese aesthetics into their work. The goal in each case was to rejuvenate French aesthetics. This tradition seeks to be revolutionary: japoniste authors always render a Japanese-inspired aesthetic in order to ‘critique [...] the very grounds of occidental arts and letters’. It is a project centred upon France itself, and concerned with the ‘expressive problems’ attendant upon the calcification of the conventions of French literature. Japonisme is therefore ‘only secondarily about Japan, imagined source of proposed solutions’.<sup>11</sup>

The term ‘japonisme’ eludes the value-laden connotations of Said’s

term 'orientalism'. Hokenson has powerfully argued the case for viewing *japonisme* positively, since it is a triadic model whereas Orientalism is dual. Orientalist criticism cannot account for the elusive position which Barthes is trying to attain – an interstitial position outside of both French and Japanese symbolic systems, in which new possibilities of meaning are imagined. Orientalism is a binary paradigm (self/other, East/West, coloniser/colonised). Although there is a certain Manichaeism which has to exist in *L'Empire des signes* and subsequently in the *Cours* in order for Barthes to make his points about combating Western logomachy, his project here is in a profound sense *not* binary, as he struggles against dualistic conceptions of the world and of our place in the world.<sup>12</sup> This struggle seeks the complex; the operation of the neutral requires at least a third position.

### Japonisme from *L'Empire des signes* to the Collège de France

Barthes is fascinated by Japan because it is the country where 'il a rencontré le travail du signe le plus proche de ses convictions et de ses fantasmes'. Another way of putting this is that it is 'le [pays le] plus éloigné des dégoûts, des irritations et des refus que suscite en lui la sémiocratie occidentale' (*ES*, blurb). A critique of the 'West' frames the glowing representation of Japan. The text is thus typically *japoniste* in manifesting its perception of marked differences between French and Japanese systems of meanings, which are, as Hokenson puts it, 'discovered just in time to rescue if not supplant the always dying Cartesian, Christian, and bourgeois modes of French thought'.<sup>13</sup>

The opening paragraph of *L'Empire des signes* makes it clear that Barthes is less interested in the 'représent[ation]' or 'analyse' of 'la moindre réalité' than he is in evading the 'gestes majeurs du discours occidental' with their mimetic and hermeneutic imperatives. In fact, he writes, 'l'Orient m'est indifférent'. What he is interested in is a 'jeu inventé', a selection of 'traits' drawn from his conception of the Orient which would give rise to 'l'idée d'un système symbolique inouï, entièrement dépris du nôtre' (*ES*, 11). Barthes examines the Japanese relationship to the symbol (insofar as he can) in order to bring about a 'secousse' and 'un certain ébranlement de la personne'. In this way 'la compacité de notre narcissisme [occidentale]' can be exposed (*ES*, 12–14).

Japonisme is by this time the form of Barthes's utopianism, for its tenets correspond to Barthes's deeply felt belief – expounded upon in several interviews given after the publication of *L'Empire des signes* –



that the French relationship to the sign, as well as its tradition of criticism, requires a problematisation and rejuvenation. Japan is used as a gauge for the arbitrary but naturalised problems of the Western relationship to meaning. He tells Raymond Bellour in 1970 that ‘il faut maintenant porter le combat plus loin, tenter de fissurer [...] l’idée même de signe [...] [ainsi que] le discours occidental en tant que tel, dans ses fondements, ses formes élémentaires’.<sup>14</sup> Barthes’s talk of ‘fissuring’ the symbolic in this interview is rather over-stated: it bespeaks a pugnacity – perhaps inspired by *Tel Quel* – which has been left behind by the time Barthes accedes to the Collège de France. The idea of broadening the scope of criticism, though, remains, and this is due to the effects of Barthes’s encounter, while visiting Japan in the late 1960s, with a symbolic system he sees as being radically different to our own. Intercultural comparison furthers his awareness that the forms of our language limit our comprehension of the world. By 1970 Barthes no longer wishes (exclusively) to undertake demystificatory criticism limited to individual uses of signs within French culture.

*L’Empire des signes* is an important precursor to the *Cours*. For it is the encounter with Japan that crystallises Barthes’s desire to shake up the foundations of our relationship to language and its dictation of how we view our sense of being in the world. We must recognise the arbitrariness (or even paradoxicality) of our own semantics and social expectations. We see a critique of these in the *Cours*. Japanese poetics and aesthetics are vital to Barthes in his elaboration of a reconciliation between the subject and the world. The use of Oriental philosophy and Japanese aesthetics enables Barthes to move beyond merely ideological criticism and actually *into* a new mode of criticism, which involves the rethinking of the most fundamental aspects of Western thought – space, time, the position of the subject and its intersection with the environment.

In the 1970 interview with Bellour, Barthes explains his sense of the relevance and urgency of what I am calling his japonisme. After his encounter with Japan, he wants to grapple with ‘notre Occident, notre culture, notre langue et nos langages’ in order to arrive at “une nouvelle façon de sentir”, une “nouvelle façon de penser” (*OC*, III, 669.) Bellour argues that this conception of criticism is no longer political, implying that it is an insular utopianism, and accusing Barthes of shutting himself up in a Mallarmean ‘cabinet [de] signes’.<sup>15</sup> Barthes replies censoriously, saying ‘je ne pense pas qu’attendre soit s’enfermer’. We are habituated to viewing enclosure as something negative, in accordance with a romantic mythology which values openness. Yet ‘contre-clôture’ is not

openness, he states, but rather ‘l’exemption du centre’. It is this which we should work towards in our thought, and a logic of decentring is precisely the instructive complex that we can find in Japanese culture. Barthes’s conviction of this is extensively apparent in *L’Empire des signes*. We can use this decentring to figure the utopianism which will help us to tolerate our own society. He uses the Japanese house as a metaphor: ‘C’est précisément ce que j’ai cru apprendre du Japon: l’habitat, telle la maison japonaise, est supportable, délicieux même, si l’on parvient à le vider, à le démeubler, à le décentrer, à le désorienter, à le désoriginer’ (OC, III, 670). The space we live in now can be made bearable by the idea of its being emptied out.

The importance of the metaphor of the house is clear when we look at Barthes’s references to Japanese interior architecture in *L’Empire des signes*. This space is not merely the exemplar of ideals of delicacy and mobility – though these are, of course, important, as we will see in our discussion of the *Cours*. Japanese spaces such as the ‘corridor de Shikidai’ also constitute for Barthes the locus of aesthetic values which run counter to the most fundamental aspects of Westerners’ way of interacting with our environment. These spaces have much to teach us about the limitations of our hermeneutic and dualistic ways of seeing, according to which the human subject understands and masters the object which is the world.

An image of the ‘corridor de Shikidai’ appears on pages 68–69 of the Seuil edition of the text.<sup>16</sup> The caption beneath it, though entirely in keeping with the thematics of the void that operates throughout the text, is rather too cryptic to seem to be making any point concerning aesthetics or epistemology. ‘Renversez l’image,’ the caption simply tells us: ‘rien de plus, rien d’autre, rien’ (ES, 69). When he discusses the ‘corridor de Shikidai’ in the final section of *L’Empire des signes*, entitled ‘le cabinet des signes’, the critical import of the nothingness of the corridor becomes clear. This corridor is ‘encadré de vide et n’encadrant rien’. ‘Il n’y a en lui de place pour aucun meuble. [...] Dans le corridor, comme dans l’idéale maison japonaise, privé de meubles (ou aux meubles rarifiés), il n’y a aucun lieu qui désigne la moindre propriété’ (ES, 149–50). This space, therefore, frustrates the most deep-seated interpretive impulses and orientation mechanisms of the Westerner: ‘Ni siège, ni lit, ni table d’où le corps puisse se constituer en sujet (ou maître) d’un espace: le centre est refusé (brûlante frustration pour l’homme occidental, nanti partout de son fauteuil, de son lit, propriétaire d’un *emplacement* domestique)’ (ES, 150). This has implications that go beyond the issue of domestic comfort. Barthes is problematising here the Westerner’s interaction with his environment, and his sense of himself as a subject in opposition to (in

mastery of) his surroundings. The Japanese house, in giving this subject nothing which allows him to 'se constituer en sujet', acts as a reminder that that mode of being is not the only possible one. In fact, given that that mode of being is based on a dualism between subject and surroundings, it is potentially combative. Barthes's use of the word 'maître' implies our sense that our environment is subjugated to the will we impose on it. The 'corridor de Shikidai', Barthes suggests, is instructive in figuring to us a non-dualistic mode of experience based on an acceptance of and sense of integral union with one's environment. In this room, as he writes in the final line of *L'Empire des signes*, there is 'rien à saisir' (ES, 150).

Implicit in this is Barthes's sense of an ideal ethics of interaction. In the Skira edition of the text, this becomes clear. For here, within the 'cabinet des signes' section that closes the text, there is a photograph of a 'tokonama' alcove in the corner of a Japanese room. Normally used to display art, such alcoves traditionally have transom windows to maximise light. Beneath the photograph of this empty space, whose internal lines create yet more empty spaces, appears the caption 'Aucun vouloir-saisir et cependant aucune oblation' (ES Skira, 149). This space is the model of how our presence in the world, and our interaction with others, should be; the ideal is one of acceptance, without any connotation of ownership ('[sans] la moindre propriété').

The fact that Barthes sketches this ideal by referring to a space whose 'centre est refusé' (ES, 150) is no accident: to refuse the centre is to offend a deep-seated Western sense of propriety and priority. Concomitantly, to call for a 'decentring' is in line with an anti-Occidental deconstructive tendency very much in vogue in poststructuralism.<sup>17</sup> The apparently cryptic words with which Barthes concludes *L'Empire des signes* – 'Rien à saisir' – can be read as the motto for Barthes's japonisme. His employment of the terms 'vouloir-saisir' and 'non-vouloir-saisir' in later work immediately preceding the *Cours* indicate that it is in these terms that he conceptualises the subtle combat against dualism. An examination of the japoniste ideal of 'non-vouloir-saisir' is necessary before we turn to japoniste figures in the *Cours*.

### 'Non-vouloir-saisir' in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* and *Leçon*

Two statements in *Leçon* can be seen as revealing in advance the centrality that the combat against dualism will have in the subsequent *Cours*. The first comes at the end of the first section of the lecture. Having explained that the Collège de France is an institution which allows great

freedom in teaching, Barthes says that this freedom means we must interrogate the assumptions in play in our own intellectual discourse: '[il faut] se demander sous quelles conditions et selon quelles opérations le discours peut se dégager de tout vouloir-saisir'. This 'interrogation' of his own discourse will constitute 'le projet profond de l'enseignement qui est aujourd'hui inaugurée' (*L*, 10).

The 'vouloir-saisir' had been discussed in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, prepared for publication during the months preceding the delivery of the inaugural lecture. That text concludes with the figure 'Sobria ebrietas' which meditates on the importance of 'non-vouloir-saisir' for the lover.<sup>18</sup> The idea of 'non-vouloir-saisir' is an expression 'imitée de l'Orient', writes Barthes. To achieve this state is to manage not to seek to assimilate the beloved's fundamental alterity: 'Je décide: dorénavant, de l'autre, ne plus rien vouloir saisir'. If this is successful, the resolution not to 'seize' the other will exist without being apparent: 'Il faut que le *vouloir-saisir* cesse – mais il faut aussi que le *non-vouloir-saisir* ne se voie pas: pas d'oblation' (*FDA*, 285). This is almost an exact repetition of the caption beneath the image of the tokonama alcove in *L'Empire des signes*: 'Aucun vouloir-saisir, et cependant aucune oblation' (*ES* Skira, 149).

Worth noting here is how the *Fragments* figure the 'NVS' as being achievable only if the subject manages to fall outside language – that is, to overcome dualism. The resultant non-dualistic state is exemplified, for Barthes, by a Zenrin poem he has taken from Watts: to achieve NVS, he writes:

Il faut que je parvienne (par la détermination de quelle fatigue obscure?) à me laisser tomber quelque part hors du langage, dans l'inerte, et, d'une certaine manière, tout simplement: *m'asseoir* ('Assis paisiblement sans rien faire, le printemps vient et l'herbe croît d'elle-même'). (*FDA*, 286–87)<sup>19</sup>

Outside language, a silent and harmonious space is imagined – one that encompasses a peaceful relationship with both nature and the beloved. We will see the same harmony in the epigraphs to *Le Neutre* and in the haiku in *La Préparation du roman*. This, writes Barthes in the *Fragments*, is a Taoist idea: 'De nouveau l'Orient: ne pas vouloir saisir le non-vouloir-saisir; laisser venir (de l'autre) ce qui vient, laisser passer (de l'autre) ce qui s'en va; ne rien saisir, ne repousser rien: [...] produire sans s'approprier, etc. Ou encore: "Le Tao parfait n'offre pas de difficulté, sauf qu'il évite de choisir"' (*FDA*, 287). Watts explains the harmony that Barthes is describing in terms that make its critical import more apparent:

Taoism, Confucianism, and Zen are expressions of a mentality which [...] sees man as an integral part of his environment. Human intelligence is not

an imprisoned spirit from afar but an aspect of the whole intricately balanced organism of the natural world.<sup>20</sup>

A figuring of such non-dualistic harmony, writes Watts, is based on the important insight that binary conceptions of meaning do not actually reflect the reality of being in the world: 'The insight which lies at the root of Far Eastern culture is that opposites are relational and so fundamentally harmonious'.<sup>21</sup> Stark, value-based binarisms therefore become irrelevant.

If we understand the non-vouloir-saisir at the end of the *Fragments* as implying the utopian attainment of a non-dualistic harmony, we can conjecture what it means to make, as *Leçon* states, the same ideal the 'projet profond' of the Collège de France teaching. A teaching based on the non-vouloir-saisir will concertedly work against the intimidations inherent to the arrogant or ideological use of discourse: as we are told elsewhere in *Leçon*, 'la méthode ne peut porter ici que sur le langage lui-même, en tant qu'il lutte pour déjouer tout discours qui prend' (41). The method of the *Cours* will employ digression and suspension as a means of encouraging interpretive response: this is non-vouloir-saisir in action as an ethics of noncommittal which seeks not to influence the train of the listener's subsequent engagement with the material. Non-vouloir-saisir also implies a thematics of tact, lightness, and suspension. The non-vouloir-saisir is reflected in the *Cours* in figures such as 'délicatesse' and the idea of the 'aération' of the haiku. It informs the 'moralité' (a term used in Barthes's articles on Cy Twombly) that Barthes seeks to elaborate during the *Cours*.

A second statement from *Leçon* heralds those ideas in the *Cours* which can be productively placed within a matrix of Japanese ideas. This occurs during the build-up to the infamous statement 'la langue [...] est tout simplement: fasciste' (*L*, 14). In Nietzschean fashion, Barthes discusses the grammatical and, by extension, existential and interpersonal choices forced upon him by the structures of the French language: 'Dans notre langue française [...], je suis astreint à me poser d'abord en sujet, avant d'énoncer l'action qui ne sera plus dès lors que mon attribut: ce que je fais n'est que la conséquence et la consécution de ce que je suis' (*L*, 12–13). An absolute schism, in other words, is posed between the subject and his surroundings (in which both he and his actions in fact exist in synthesis). This is pure Cartesianism: the ego is isolated. What Barthes is intimating here is the absurdity of this conception of ourselves. Our languages have made this style of individuality so fundamental, however, that the absurdity is hard to spot, and harder still to combat.

Barthes's recognition of the 'paradox' of the ego-feeling in *Leçon* marks the starting-point of his subsequent articulation of different modes of consciousness in which the interrelation of the self and the environment will be emphasised. The other points he makes about the choices enforced by language emphasise the sense of paradox:

Je suis obligé de toujours choisir entre le masculin et le féminin, le neutre ou le complexe me sont interdits; de même encore, je suis obligé de marquer mon rapport à l'autre en recourant soit au *tu*, soit au *vous*: le suspens affectif ou social m'est refusé. (*L*, 13)

The impossibility of 'le complexe' in our language results in a sense of extreme frustration, for it is clear that the harmonious complex (i.e. the non-dual, the unisolated ego) *does* exist, but is veiled. As Watts puts it, 'the separation, the difference [i.e. dualism] is [...] what we notice; it fits the notation of language, and because it is noted and explicit it is conscious and unrepressed'.<sup>22</sup> Our language as social institution represents the world as 'an assemblage of distinct bits and particles', thereby holding us at arm's length from our environment, and imprisoning us within our ego-feeling. 'The defect of [such a worldview] is that [it] screens out or ignores (represses) interrelations'.<sup>23</sup> Barthes says the same thing: 'Ainsi, par sa structure même, la langue implique une relation fatale d'aliénation' (*L*, 13).

Overcoming the power inherent to language, then, involves not only employing a tactic and ethic of the non-vouloir-saisir (an idea drawn from Tao), but also the combating of the ego-feeling which imposes fixed subject positions and requires, in terms of linguistic interaction, opinions which are clear-cut (based on the binarism of meaning) and not neutral. We must change our consciousness so that the ego-feeling is exposed and what it represses revealed. This, according to Watts, is the central goal of Eastern 'ways of liberation'.<sup>24</sup> Altering the ego-consciousness (or decentring the subject, as a poststructuralist idiom might have it) requires an effort to overcome the dualism between self and surroundings. This effort, if successful, would achieve what Bernard Comment calls 'un rapport transparent du sujet au monde (sur le mode, peut-être, d'une fusion qui rendrait caduques ces dernières catégories)'.<sup>25</sup>

According to Watts and Suzuki – Barthes's main sources on these subjects – if we manage to see the workings of linguistic and social convention for what they are, i.e. as configurations that *do* occur, rather than configurations that *must* occur (culture, not nature), we will achieve a radically new consciousness. For Suzuki, this is satori itself: 'Intellectually, [satori] is the acquiring of a new viewpoint. The world now appears as if dressed in a new garment, which seems to cover up all

the unsightliness of dualism, which is called delusion in Buddhist phraseology'.<sup>26</sup> Zen, in Suzuki's account, consists in the eradication of the alienation caused by the ego-feeling and the divisive dualities it constructs between self and environment. Overcoming dualism is also at the forefront of Japanese aesthetic consciousness. Barthes displays his understanding of this inextricability of aesthetics from philosophy in *L'Empire des signes*, as we have seen in his appraisal of the 'corridor de Shikidai'. Indeed, when considering Japanese thought, it is impossible to separate aesthetics from philosophy: while aesthetic theories tend to be regarded in the West as peripheral to the more 'central' philosophical matters (epistemology, metaphysics, ethics), no such marginalisation of the aesthetic viewpoint has occurred in East Asia, where aesthetics are considered to be integral to philosophy.<sup>27</sup> It is the awareness of the problems of dualism that makes the Japanese aesthetico-philosophical complex so interesting to Barthes. It may be that the Japanese language itself predisposes the subjects who speak it to a consideration of these problems: Japanese is intrinsically more ambiguous than most Indo-European languages. Barthes remarks in *L'Empire des signes* on the way complex Japanese syntax makes the speaking subject seem like 'une grande enveloppe vide de la parole', as opposed to the 'noyau plein qui est censé diriger nos phrases' (*ES*, 16). The ego-feeling itself is demonstrably imbricated in Japanese syntax to a far lesser degree than is the case in the Indo-European languages. Maurice Coyaud, in a collection of translated haiku used by Barthes for *La Préparation du roman I*, points up this fundamental difference: 'Le sujet (nom, pronom), facultatif en japonais, ne peut pas être purement [...] éliminé en français'.<sup>28</sup>

Kenneth Yasuda, in his writings on the haiku, provides a concise digest of the radical differences between the conceptions of dualism in Japan and in the West. His questioning of the categories of subject and object resonates with the excerpt from *Leçon* quoted above. These categories, he writes, 'have never become as rigidly dualistic in Japan as in Occidental thinking and their oneness in experience is generally understood and accepted [in Japan]'. Conversely, 'due to the historical associations around words such as *subject* and *object*, or *form* and *content*, the English [or French] words themselves seem immediately to suggest separate entities rather than distinguishable aspects of a whole'.<sup>29</sup> We must overcome these categories at a certain point, writes Yasuda, for otherwise we will be disbarred from a true experience of reality. He discusses the unity of subject and object in the haiku's poetics:

What then are the uses of such words as *subject* and *object* – a dualism that has long plagued Western philosophy – in dealing with aesthetic experience?

[...] They are useful terms, as long as it is remembered that, in the aesthetic experience, the subject cannot exist without the object, nor the object without the subject, since they are one. Only as they are one, in a concrete and living unity, is there an aesthetic experience.<sup>30</sup>

‘A true aesthetic moment’, as understood by Yasuda and the classical haiku theorists whose work he channels in his essay, depends upon a transcending of ‘what we call the subjective or objective attitude’.<sup>31</sup> Barthes is aware of the intersection of Eastern aesthetics with existential and ethical questions: by examining these issues we can assess the import of Barthes’s articulations of new modes of consciousness and of criticism in the *Cours* and in other late texts.

### Japoniste/Japanese Aesthetics

Suzuki gives us a brief digest of the most vital aspects of Japanese aesthetics. He writes that ‘imbalance, asymmetry, the “one-corner”, poverty, *sabi* or *wabi* (incompletion, imperfection) simplification, aloneness, and cognate ideas make up the most conspicuous and characteristic features of Japanese art and culture’.<sup>32</sup> What we notice here is that Japanese aesthetics often valorise concepts that in Western thought would be regarded as the weaker aspect of any paradigm: perishability as opposed to permanence; economy of means (e.g. light, sparse brushwork) as opposed to impressively demonstrated technique (e.g. oil-painting that covers the canvas); monochrome as opposed to colour; brevity as opposed to length; silence as opposed to sound, and so on. Japanese aesthetics, as Hokenson points out, are thus in sharp contradistinction to ‘traditional Western arts’ which value ‘symmetry, complication, integral completion or unity, monumentality or perdurance in time, and, not least, symbol’.<sup>33</sup> To assent to the interest of these tenets is easily done, but as Barthes continually points out during *Le Neutre*, to actually espouse similar values in one’s conduct – for example by being silent or without opinion in a discursive situation that requires the lengthy exposition of a certain point of view – is generally inadmissible in the Western logomachy. Donald Keene emphasises a similar point when he outlines the principles of Japanese aesthetics using the foundation text *Tsurezuregusa* (*Essays in Idleness*) written by the priest Kenkō in 1330–33.<sup>34</sup> Kenkō advocates transitoriness as an aesthetic principle. ‘In all things, it is the beginnings and ends that are interesting,’ he writes. ‘Are we to look at cherry blossoms only in full bloom, the moon only when it is cloudless? [...] Branches about to blossom or gardens strewn



with faded flowers are worthier of our admiration'.<sup>35</sup> Barthes is aware of this principle; as he remarks in one of the haiku sessions in *La Préparation du roman*, 'pour les Japonais, dit-on, ce n'est pas, à proprement parler, la fleur de cerisier qui est belle; c'est le moment où, parfaitement épanouie, elle va faner' (PR, 93). But, as Keene observes, such a principle 'contradict[s] commonly held Western views on the same subjects. The Western ideal of the climactic moment – [...] when the soprano hits high C, or when the rose is in full bloom – grants little importance to the beginnings and ends'.<sup>36</sup> In this respect Japanese aesthetics subvert Western conceptions of value, prestige and even of time (the 'time' of the artwork ascends to an apex or climax). It is for this reason that they constitute the logical base upon which to consider Barthes's attempts to counter these Western assumptions.

We have seen with Yasuda that the Japanese idea of the oneness of artist with her material works against the ego-feeling, as there is no sense, as there is in Western language and aesthetics, of the subject (artist) having control over the material (object): there is 'rien à saisir'. Rather, artist and material, or organism and environment, become one – a *field*, as Watts would call it.<sup>37</sup> We have the same field-perception in Barthes when he discusses, in *La Préparation du roman I*, hyper-consciousness and diffusion of the self into one's surroundings. As we shall see, *identification* is sought between our subjective consciousness and the dynamic of our environment; the goal is to express such identification in a work which seeks to provoke a comparable perception.

Also, the haiku brings about a different conception of time: the interplay between its ephemeral brevity and a sense of the infinite is one of its central characteristics. Even the smallest thing, of course, can contain the infinite. This is why the haiku is the most cultivated poetic form in Japan: brevity is seen as the privileged access to liberation from limiting ideas of duration. Much Japanese art seeks to express infinity – or marvellous reality – by escaping from the constraints of space and time. The twentieth-century Japanese theorist Shūzō Kuki (1888–1941) writes that 'the most eminent characteristic of Japanese art in general [is] the expression of the infinite'.<sup>38</sup> In his lecture 'The Expression of the Infinite in Japanese Art', Kuki employs the classical haiku (of Bashō's school) as the exemplification of Japanese aesthetics in their pure form. The haiku's principle of suggestion – a principle it shares with most other Japanese art forms – is essential also in allowing the dynamism of imaginative force to overcome dualistic constraints: 'the élan [...] of the infinite can be expressed in poetry not only by an asymmetric and fluid form, but also by the employment of suggestive expression which outstrips time in a kind of

anticipation’, Kuki points out. ‘It is not necessary to express and disclose everything; it is only necessary to indicate with several essential lines and leave the rest to the active play of the imagination’.<sup>39</sup> Suggestiveness creates vital silences. We see here a foundational similarity between these principles and Barthes’s own pedagogical imperatives.

Barthes is fascinated by the haiku’s inherent ability to outstrip conventional modes of signification and perception. In *L’Empire des signes*, he describes the haiku as a liberation from occidental ideas regarding subjectivity, space and time, and the connotative layers of language. The haiku is the means to escape from dualism. In arresting our incessantly descriptive, interpretative language, it problematises our very systems of meaning. Thus with the haiku (and the Zen ideal of satori) we arrive at ‘une suspension panique du langage, le blanc qui efface en nous le règne des Codes, la cassure de cette récitation intérieure qui constitue notre personne’ (*ES*, 101). Our ego-feeling is destabilised by the haiku’s preclusion of metalanguage. At a deeper level, the preconditions of the haiku’s existence force us out of rigid subject positions and make us approach a more holistic conception of the world as an all-encompassing *thisness*: ‘Le haïku, [...] articulé sur une métaphysique sans sujet et sans dieu, correspond au *Mu* bouddhiste, au *satori zen*, qui n’est nullement descente illuminative de Dieu, mais “réveil devant le fait”, saisie de la chose comme événement et non comme substance’ (*ES*, 105). The ‘réveil devant le fait’, which comes about through a rupture of the symbolic codes constitutive of our sense of self, is a vitally important ideal for Barthes in *Le Neutre* and *La Préparation du roman I*. At the root of this necessary rupture is the twin imperative to problematise the most fundamental frames for the ego feeling: our sense of time and our sense of space. For a true apprehension of the world itself (the overcoming of dualism) must be, as Kuki shows, dependent on ‘the expression of the liberation from time and space’.<sup>40</sup>

### Japoniste Figures in the Cours

Neutre = espacement (production d’espace) et non distanciation, mise mise à distance. Notion très importante en japonais, le *ma*: espacement de temps, d’espace: règle la temporalité et la spatialité: ni entassement, ni ‘désertification’. (*N*, 13 May, 190)

#### 1. *Ma: the interval*

Barthes’s critical relationship to the codes of Western meaning (and subjectivity) brings about a sense of *distance* vis-à-vis these codes. This

is a distance which Barthes employs thematically in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* under the rubric of marginality. Distance becomes a vitally important value in the *Cours*. A light-handed regulation of (inter-social) distance is at the heart of *Comment vivre ensemble*'s ideal of idiorrhythmie. The vivre-ensemble is characterised by 'aération, distances, différences' (72), and he concludes the course by emphasising the importance of 'la distance inter-individuelle' (178). 'La distance critique,' he tells us, 'serait sans doute le problème le plus important du Vivre-Ensemble: trouver et régler la distance critique, au-delà ou en deçà de laquelle il se produit une crise' (178). In today's society, he continues, it is space itself 'qui coûte cher', which constitutes 'le bien absolu' (179). To be surrounded by a certain amount of space and to be comfortable with the limits thereof constitutes idiorrhythmie itself, or a certain utopia: 'Don de place: serait constituant de la règle (utopique)' (179). *Comment vivre ensemble* concludes by figuring 'la distance comme valeur' and imagines the perfect idiorrhythmie as 'une distance qui ne casse pas l'affect [...]; une distance pénétrée, irriguée de tendresse' (179).

Distance is conceived as the locus of both practical and affective concerns. The figuring of idiorrhythmie itself as distance also imbues the idea of distance with the subversive attributes of the idiorrhythmic impulse. Critical distance is a complex ideal, given its imbrication with emotional interaction: it is both an objective and a subjective category, involving 'la bonne distance entre les repères (y compris les repères humains de l'espace affectif)' (N, 13 May, 189). We should use the Japanese attitude as an ideal, Barthes says: 'Prolongeons l'attitude japonaise [...] qui ne conceptualise ni le temps ni l'espace, mais seulement l'intervalle, le rapport de deux moments, de deux lieux ou objets → essayons de concevoir [...] l'espacement entre les sujets' (N, 190). This idea of distance as encompassing both the external and the internal (emotional) life is one that can be usefully glossed by the uniquely Japanese consciential concept of *Ma*, to which Barthes refers frequently in the *Cours*. By problematising our demarcation of temporal and spatial categories, the idea of *Ma* or 'the interval' allows us to figure 'la bonne distance' as the shorthand for a non-dualistic ethical ideal involving relationships with others as well as one's relationship to power. In giving us a more complex sense of the interaction and succession of moments and of states, and by figuring a positive emptiness, *Ma* provides an interesting ground upon which to examine the *Cours*' exploration of alterations of our consciousness (our ego-feeling) and of modes of conduct which promote the overcoming of dualism.

*Ma* is the Japanese understanding of space/time. This concept is

without parallel in Indo-European languages, which strictly separate the categories of space and time. The architect Arata Isozaki explains this difference as follows:

We d[o] not traditionally have a concept of space or a concept of time like in Western philosophy or thought. We only [have] 'ma', no space, no time. When the philosophical concepts of space and time arrived in Japan [...] somebody had to translate the words time and space. [...] [To] 'ma' was added chronos: chronos plus 'ma' means time; and emptiness plus 'ma' means space.

In Japan, then, to think about space means to think about time, and vice versa. 'The direct meaning of "ma",,' Isozaki tells us, 'is the in-between, the space between object and object, and at the same time, the silence between sound and sound'.<sup>41</sup>

Isozaki created an exhibition entitled '*Ma. Espace/temps au Japon*' which was shown at the Musée des arts décoratifs in Paris in Autumn 1978. Isozaki claims that the ideas in the exhibition subsequently influenced Foucault and Derrida.<sup>42</sup> They certainly interested Barthes, who was already aware of the concept of *Ma*, having mentioned it in *Le Neutre* in May 1978.<sup>43</sup> Barthes's short report on the exhibition written for the *Nouvel Observateur* in October of that year explains the concept of *Ma* to readers. *Ma* is any interval in either space or time – any linking distance, in other words: 'toute relation, toute séparation entre deux instants, deux lieux, deux états: *Ma*'.<sup>44</sup> The exhibition on *Ma* constitutes, he says, a 'méditation' on 'cette idée d'intervalle'. We discover herein the principle of "discrétion" (mot approximatif) (OC, V, 476). The exhibition is 'discreet' in that its displays are sparse, characterised by 'rareté' and by a very subtle symbolism. Barthes's implicit point here is that the sensitive display of objects illustrating such aesthetic principles as *sabi* (the beauty of imperfection) or *utsuroi* (transitory beauty) reveals an approach to meaning that is different to ours in being more subtle. This, of course, has always been Barthes's point about Japan; he believes that in this respect the Japanese relationship to signs is 'superior' to our own: 'là-bas, le symbole ne se réduit pas à un emblème: c'est un passage, fluide, délié, instantané, qui ne relève d'aucun lexique' (OC, V, 477). In this exhibition, the discretion of the displays involves for Westerners '[une] difficulté d'appréhension' but also an 'apaisement', which occurs in the viewer because 'le symbolisme des arrangements est extrêmement elliptique' (OC, V, 477).

The exhibition on *Ma* has underlined for Barthes a subtle Japanese aesthetic of fluidity and lightness. Barthes's use of the word 'discrétion' to describe this implies the tipping over of the aesthetic into an ethical

(or interactional) value: as we already know, aesthetics in Japan tends to be inseparable from ethico-philosophical questions, and thus the consideration of *Ma* – a relational concept – naturally involves a reflection upon relations between human subjects. For this reason, Barthes's description of *Ma* as discretion is an extension of the issues at the end of *Comment vivre ensemble* in May 1977 when he refers to the utopian ideal of 'la bonne distance' as 'délicatesse'. 'Délicatesse' as a relational value involves the same light, balanced interaction as does *Ma* or discretion. It also suggests a comparably fluid use of the symbolic, whereby what Barthes calls 'images' (a negative term for Barthes, implying reductive pigeon-holing) are renounced: 'renoncer activement aux images (des uns, des autres). [...] = Utopie proprement dite, car forme du Souverain Bien' (CVE, 4 May, 179–80).<sup>45</sup> This imagined goodness, then, is premised upon a respect for the interval between oneself and the other – a respect which does not preclude emotion – and upon a renunciation of the intrusion of the symbolic into the relationship. Barthes says the same thing when he announces that utopia itself is 'le bon rapport du sujet à l'affect, au symbole' (CVE, 177).

*Ma* can be viewed as aiding our understanding of relationality as the latter is figured in *Comment vivre ensemble* and, more implicitly, in *Le Neutre*. It is another avatar of the non-vouloir-saisir, which valorises a certain willed distance (the interval) from the other. This runs counter to our Western impulse to possess (*saisir*) through interpretation. Instead of seeking to embody the other with our interpretive assumptions of knowledge about him/her (our *image* of the person), we must instead be willing to accept the person as uncategorisable, or neutral.

## 2. *Ma*: receptive emptiness

Robert Pilgrim, in an article that discusses *Ma* as a 'religio-aesthetic paradigm', convincingly demonstrates that *Ma* is a liberatory – or non-dualistic – concept: '*Ma* ultimately deconstructs all boundaries (as mind-created constructs and orders imposed on the chaos of experience)'.<sup>46</sup> *Ma* involves both observable phenomena as well as experiential or emotional states, and in both cases is at the edge of thought. The founding breakdown of temporal and spatial distinctions, according to Pilgrim, entails a breakdown of other categories, such as subject/object divisions. Commenting on Isozaki's definition of *Ma*, Pilgrim writes that

The collapse of space and time as two distinct and abstract objects can only take place in a particular mode of experience that 'empties' the objective/subjective world(s); only in aesthetic, immediate, relational experience

can space be ‘perceived as identical with the events or phenomena occurring in it’.<sup>47</sup>

*Ma*, then, encompasses more than the idea of the intervallic. Ultimately, it brings us to ‘the edge of all processes of locating things by naming and distinguishing’,<sup>48</sup> via the figuring of emptiness as receptivity. Barthes figures the emptying of the self into the world: he approaches ideas concerning this state in his use of the Rousseau and Tolstoy epigraphs to *Le Neutre* as well as in his discussions of the haiku and of Baudelaire’s *Les Paradis artificiels*. Throughout the *Cours*, also, he demonstrates an awareness of the philosophical base of Taoism, which understands nothingness as the ultimate context of our being. He had hinted at this idea of a nourishing void several times in *L’Empire des signes*; one striking example of this is the description of Tokyo as being held together by the empty space at its centre: this void ‘donn[e] à tout le mouvement urbain l’appui de son vide central’ (*ES*, 50).<sup>49</sup>

In his first lecture on the haiku (the fourth lecture of the first *Préparation* series), Barthes emphasises the importance of ‘aération’ in the haiku. This is in the first instance to do with the typographical ‘*disposition de la parole sur la page*’ (*PR*, 6 January 1979, 59), but also runs deeper than this. Barthes sees ‘aeration’ as being axiomatic in the haiku given that it is a form of ‘oriental’ art. All oriental art, he says, demonstrates a ‘respect’ for space. Barthes frequently invokes Japan to figure a beneficial void, particularly with regard to the symbolic. His understanding of *satori*, for example, emphasises the manner in which Zen teaching points constantly to ‘the void’. Hokenson deftly underscores the link between Barthes’s (correct) understanding of Zen and the use of its tenets in his own writing: ‘A discourse [is] written by Zen in figures pointing to the nothingness of all things in order to enable illumination, sudden shocking perception that void – as non-meaning – is a site of cognition’. Barthes’s ‘sleight of hand’, Hokenson states, is shown by his construction of a ‘correspondence’ between Zen and his own writing. This is ‘less an ethnological than an aesthetic figure for writing outside the occidental mode, free [...] from constructed meanings. As Zen writes, from a metaphysics of void, so Barthes will write, from a poetics of deficit’.<sup>50</sup>

In the first *Préparation* lecture on the haiku, we find that Barthes’s understanding of the ‘oriental void’ has been inflected by his awareness of *Ma*. It is now the relational aspect of space which he finds interesting:

Tout l’art oriental [...]: respect de l’espace, c’est-à-dire [...] de l’espacement. On sait: le japonais ne connaît guère les catégories kantienne de l’Espace et du Temps, mais celle – qui les traverse – de l’Espacement, de l’Intervalle: *Ma*. (*PR*, 59)

The haiku, then, embodies this relationality. In line with this, its ‘aeration’ hints at a happy state of the recognition of difference and respect for an implied ‘distance critique’. For, he says, ‘quand on parle du “Vide” (oriental), ce ne doit pas être dans un sens bouddhiste mais plus sensuellement comme une respiration, une aération et [...] une “matière”’ (PR, 59). To conceive space itself as matter is to respect the interval and its subversion of stereotype and generalisation: ‘Mot d’un physicien: “S’il n’y avait pas d’espace entre la matière, tout le genre humain tiendrait dans un dé à coudre” → Le haïku: c’est “l’anti-dé à coudre”, l’anti-condensation totalisante, et c’est cela que dit le tercet haïkiste’ (PR, 59). This is the essential point, Barthes implies, though it rests on other ‘interprétations thématiques’ of the ‘*protestation de Vide*’ – the void understood as ‘pulsion respiratoire, désangoisse de l’étouffement, fantasme de l’Oxygène, de la Respiration Euphorique, Jubilatoire’ (PR, 59).<sup>51</sup>

Barthes’s references to the ‘oriental’ void as a notional space which allows him to ‘breathe’ are less fanciful than they may at first appear. The theme of aeration is used critically, in a manner similar to the employment of the terms ‘rien à saisir’ and ‘vouloir-saisir’. The sense of aeration is brought about for Barthes when he witnesses values or conducts which operate within a non-dualistic conception of the world. Hence the importance of Japan. The most minute aspects of Japanese culture can bring about destabilisation and aeration of our own assumptions, as Barthes shows in *L’Empire des signes* when he discusses, in a section entitled ‘L’interstice’, the cooking of *tempura*. The batter coating of tempura, he writes, is so light as to become abstract: ‘l’aliment n’a plus pour enveloppe que le temps [...] qui l’a solidifié’ (ES, 40). Thus even here *Ma* is at work, bringing about an alteration of Barthes’s attitude to this food. The best way we can describe this, writes Barthes, ‘en raison de nos ornières thématiques’, is that it is ‘du côté du léger, de l’aérien, de l’instantané, du fragile, du transparent, [...] du rien, mais dont le vrai nom serait l’interstice sans bords pleins, ou encore: le signe vide’ (ES, 40). The desire sketched here for a permeability of boundaries between spaces, and for a concomitant sense of aeration, will be seen again when Barthes discusses the transparency of the border between self and world, with reference to Rousseau, Tolstoy, and the photographs of Daniel Boudinet.

### 3. *Ma: the interstice*

Recognising the interval means recognising negative space but construing it as positive. The most profound endeavour of the first three of Barthes’s

*Cours* is arguably the positive rendering of conducts generally viewed (in Barthes's socio-linguistic sphere) as negative and weak: solitude, neutrality, ephemerality.<sup>52</sup> Barthes proceeds by highlighting the apparently empty spaces skirted by the linear, goal-obsessed Western logomachy. These spaces are not valorised or obvious, but subtly present – hence Barthes's method. Such spaces, as Pilgrim puts it, are 'referred to as creative/substantial negative spaces, imaginative spaces, or emotional spaces that the positive spaces, narrative sequences, or forms of [a discourse] help create but into which they dissolve'.<sup>53</sup>

The *Ma*-inspired figuring of empty space as liberatory is an excellent emblem for the aesthetic and ethic Barthes is working towards. We see this in the last essay Barthes completed before his death.<sup>54</sup> 'Cher Antonioni' addresses the director Michelangelo Antonioni directly and praises his brave artistic principles. Barthes commends the filmmaker for the 'subtilité' of his work: 'votre art consiste à toujours laisser la route du sens ouverte, et comme indécise, par scrupule'.<sup>55</sup> This principle – akin to the Japanese aesthetic principle of suggestion – is vital for 'l'artiste dont notre temps a besoin', as it staves off dogmatism. Antonioni's art meets Barthes's criteria for the efficacy of the modern artist's methods. When Barthes insists further on Antonioni's use of subtlety he illustrates it by using the idea of the productive empty space. Meaning always goes further than what is directly said, writes Barthes; artists ensure this by imbuing their work with a sort of 'vibration': 'L'objet représenté vibre, au détriment du dogme' (OC, V, 902). Barthes thinks of Matisse drawing an olive tree and discovering that observing the empty spaces between the branches led to '[une] nouvelle vision' and allowed him to escape from 'l'image habituelle de l'objet dessiné, [le] cliché "olivier"'.<sup>56</sup> This was a discovery running counter to the tenets of Western art: 'Matisse découvrait ainsi le principe de l'art oriental, qui veut toujours peindre le vide, ou plutôt qui saisit l'objet figurable au moment rare où le plein de son identité choisit brusquement dans un nouvel espace, celui de l'Interstice' (902). Barthes is perhaps alluding here to the 'one-corner' style of Oriental painting, in which the sparsely painted object is prized for its evocation of infinity. Barthes states that Antonioni's art too has interstitial qualities, and it is this that gives it a relationship with 'l'Orient' that runs deeper than mere content (he mentions here Antonioni's film *China* (1972)).<sup>57</sup> Note the conjunction here between the interstice and non-Western thought: 'Votre art est lui aussi un art de l'Interstice [...] *et donc*, d'une certaine manière aussi, votre art a quelque rapport avec l'Orient' (902, my emphasis).

Barthes's association of the interstice with the Orient is linked to his



understanding of *Ma* (not directly mentioned here). *Ma*, in what Barthes refers to as its 'non-Kantian' elision of time and space, indicates not just the interval between identifiable objects, but the interval in thought that permits the figuring of more nuanced modes of being than we have hitherto imagined – in short, utopianism. For Barthes to think his way out of the logomachy of his own linguistic sphere, he needs such an interval. His understanding of *Ma* is, then, a more specific or nuanced version of his setting-up of the inverted-commas 'Japan' in *L'Empire des signes*. *Ma* is the gap between 'Orient' and 'Occident', a space for thinking that seeks to be unprescribed. Barthes is of course perfectly aware of the constructed nature of the gap between his imagined Orient and his Occident, and aware too that the artifice does not diminish its use-value. 'La langue inconnue', he tells us near the beginning of *L'Empire des signes*, gives him a sense of 'respiration, aération émotive'. The haiku and the idea of *Ma* give him this sense too. He feels the slight 'vertige' of being surrounded by a 'vide artificiel, qui ne s'accomplit que pour moi'. In a certain sense, he floats: 'je vis dans l'interstice, débarrassé de tout sens plein' (*ES*, 21).

It is clear from the essay on Antonioni that the interstice is for Barthes an important figure for sketching both the ethical and the aesthetic value of the artwork. In *Leçon*, it is literature as 'tricherie' that allows language continually (if infinitesimally) to elude the empire of ideology as it extends itself through stereotype and dogmatism. In the *Cours*, the same goal is sought through a practice of openness which we could describe as the valorisation of the interstice. The interstice is both the recognition and outlining of the 'creative/substantial negative spaces' ignored by the French logomachy – idiorrhythmie, the neutral suspension of judgment, silence, weariness, tact, the unwillingness to interpret – and the manner in which these 'spaces' are presented to the audience. 'Je ne suis pas là quand on m'attend,' as Barthes says in *Le Neutre*; 'je réalise une atopie de langage (mais ne soyons pas triomphant: cette atopie sera récupérée sous la nomination du "farfelu")' (*N*, 29 April, 160). To be regarded as precious or silly is both a result and an expedient of the interstitial technique. We can infer this from a statement at the end of *Comment vivre ensemble*, when Barthes says that the ideal lecture-course ('le rêve') would be characterised by 'une sorte de banalité non oppressante, aérée (cf. 'Délicatesse')' (181). Banality is itself an interstice, an un-value, something not supposed to be recognised. To assume it is to enter into the interstice fully, a space unrecognised by one's socio-linguistic sphere and therefore freely creative. In line with this, the imagined space that the writer must figure to himself is the interstice. Barthes posits this at the

end of *La Préparation du roman II*. The rejection of overt marginality here chimes with the refusal in *Comment vivre ensemble* to examine politically defined communes or, in post-'68 parlance, groupuscules: 'Place de l'écrivain,' he asks: 'la Marge? Il y en a tant: il finit par y avoir une arrogance de la Marginalité → Je préfère lui substituer l'Image de l'Interstice: Écrivain = homme de l'Interstice' (PR, 377).

We see in this quotation the caution that one's position should not be 'arrogant'. The point is to distance oneself from the ego-feeling, from the hermeneutics of the image, from position-taking itself ('la proposition doit être incomplète – sinon c'est une position' (CVE, 181)). *Leçon* heralds this tendency to deny the construction of a positive image. We find out there that Barthes's semiology from now on will focus on emptiness rather than plenitude: 'La sémiologie dont je parle est à la fois *négative* et *active*,' Barthes announces. 'Quelqu'un en qui s'est débattue, toute sa vie [...], cette diablerie, le langage, ne peut qu'être fasciné par les formes de son vide – qui est tout le contraire de son creux' (L, 35). The idea is that the sign should *vibrate*, in the sense in which Barthes employs that word in the Antonioni essay. It follows from this that the 'image' of the practitioner of such a semiology must itself vibrate, as it were: there is a logic here which dictates Barthes's digressive practice and its (attempted) refusal of the prestigious role of the leader who has an obvious and socially sanctioned goal. This methodology is also reflected thematically in the *Cours*, appearing frequently under the rubric of the Taoist idea of *wu-wei*.

#### 4. Wu-wei, xéniteia, Twombly

Tao and Chan (Zen) had different roots in China, but were exported to Japan, where both philosophies gained specifically Japanese inflexions.<sup>58</sup> The Tao principle of *wu-wei* literally means 'not-making' or non-action.<sup>59</sup> This does not mean simple idleness, though idleness, as we will see, is a concept Barthes derives from it and valorises in the way he valorises banality. *Wu-wei* is part of Barthes's japoniste complex of ideas, given that his understanding of it is closely linked to his understanding of (Japanese) Zen as gleaned from Suzuki and especially Watts – the latter mingles Tao with his discussion of Zen in *The Way of Zen*.

Taoism involves the assimilation of the ways (the *tao*) of nature into one's own conduct. *Wu-wei*, in eschewing ego-based choosing, works towards the harmonisation of self with environment. Barthes's understanding of *wu-wei* is drawn from Grenier's *L'Esprit du Tao* (1957), though he would also have read about it in the contemporary text by Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (1957).<sup>60</sup> Watts encapsulates the radical

otherness of *wu-wei* to Western systems of thought when he mentions the religious and ontological principles underpinning it: ‘whereas God produces the world by making (*wei*), the Tao produces it by “not-making” (*wu-wei*) – which is approximately what we mean by “growing”’.<sup>61</sup> This leads to a complex (non-dualistic) conception of our place in the world, based on an organic sense of being which precedes linguistic divisions: ‘A universe which grows utterly excludes the possibility of knowing how it grows in the clumsy terms of thought and language’.<sup>62</sup> Categorisation has no place in the Taoist worldview.

This bypassing of the divisions of language is what appeals to Barthes; he also takes an evident delight in the ‘scandale’ of the idea of *wu-wei* in a culture which makes value judgments about people’s status based on their levels of action and decisiveness. ‘Wou-wei’ is mentioned frequently during the *Cours*, and, as one of the figures of the *neutre*, takes up one and a half of the lectures in that series. During his first mention of it in *Comment vivre ensemble*, Barthes comments that ‘[le] Wou-wei [aurait] des incidences politiques parfaitement scandaleuses’. As a mode of conduct, it is ‘inconcevable’ for us, he explains, because ‘toute notre civilisation est dans le Vouloir-Agir’ (CVE, 124). It requires a discipline that is extraordinarily difficult to achieve. Non-action as harmonisation is an interstitial space that is constantly threatened by the active margins surrounding it. The challenge, as Barthes sees it, is ‘non seulement [d]’éviter l’événement, mais encore ne pas le susciter. [...] S’abstenir d’exercer une autorité, de remplir une fonction. [...] Ne pas juger, parler peu, ne plus connaître les oppositions logiques et morales, et d’une manière générale toute distinction’ (CVE, 16 March, 124). One’s abstinence from dualistic choosing has somehow to be accompanied by a genuinely non-dualistic thought. Barthes returns to this ‘acte-limite’, as he calls it, in *Le Neutre*, using Grenier’s text: ‘Initiation au Tao: “commencer par ne plus juger ni parler; puis on ne juge plus ni ne parle mentalement”’ (58). This would be a sort of ‘silence intégral’, says Barthes, which would become one with the profound silence of nature: ‘silence de toute la nature, éparpillement du fait-homme dans la nature: l’homme serait comme un bruit de la nature’ (N, 58). This intermingling of organism and environment is the goal at the heart of Tao.

Barthes’s desire to foil the construction of an ‘Image’ (understood as a recognisable, stereotypical social role) means that *wu-wei* – and Taoism generally – is a useful model for him. Tao’s practices reveal that it does not confuse our social role with our fundamental identity, in the manner to which we in the West (or indeed in the societies within which Tao developed its spirit of critique) are so prone. Taoism refuses any prestige

accruing through or from one's social role – hence its abstinence from judging. The *Tao Te Ching* demonstrates this causality: sociality is based on reductive, dualistic naming, and so in order to remain in sync with the complexity of nature one must not choose between these dualisms: 'The whole world recognises the beautiful as the beautiful, yet this is only the ugly; the whole world recognises the good as the good, yet this is only the bad. [...] Therefore the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action'.<sup>63</sup> Barthes understands the thought underlying this as a profound refusal of social prestige, which facilitates a wisdom the more nourishing for being unknown. It is in these terms that he discusses Tao in *Comment vivre ensemble* under the figure of 'xéniteia' or exile.

The desire for 'xéniteia' is the very Barthesian desire to shift position as soon as 'un langage, une doctrine, un mouvement d'idées [...] commence à prendre, à se solidifier, [...] à devenir une masse compacte d'habitudes [...] (un sociolecte)'. He wants to be 'exiled' from stereotype: 'aller ailleurs, vivre ainsi en état d'errance intellectuelle' (*CVE*, 27 April, 175). In order for this exile not to turn into another (solidifiable) position, however, Barthes needs an assistant concept: that which – utopically – would allow him intellectual freedom without being noticed. He names this concept 'sténochôria' ('espace étroit'). Through the idea of *sténochôria*, *xéniteia* becomes internalised, along the lines laid out by Taoism's 'conduite profonde qui vise à ne pas se faire remarquer'. The exile is then 'un exil si intérieur que le monde ne le voit guère. Sagesse qui reste inconnue, intelligence non divulguée, vie cachée, ignorance qu'ont les autres du but que je poursuis, refus de la gloire, abîme de silence' (*CVE*, 172). For Barthes, this self-effacing conduct is desirable because it represents the opposite of arrogance, whether in discourse or in conduct. Implicit here again are ideas of tact and discretion – which Barthes frequently associates with Japan:<sup>64</sup> 'Xéniteia n'est pas sans rapport avec la politesse. Non la "politesse" superficielle et mondaine (de classe) de l'Occident, mais la politesse de l'Orient' (*CVE*, 173). This 'politesse' is part of a positive, japoniste complex of values that for Barthes includes the terms 'discretion', 'délicatesse', 'l'interstice', and 'non-vouloir-saisir'.

These values, disseminated throughout the first three *Cours*, can seem elusive. Such ideas, because paradoxical to our socio-linguistic habits, are difficult to speak of. Barthes is aware of the aporetic problem, and links it again to Tao. He quotes Lao-Tzu: 'Celui qui connaît le Tao n'en parle pas; celui qui en parle ne le connaît pas', and adds in parenthesis 'C'est bien mon cas! Noter toujours la même aporie du Neutre. [...] Neutre = impossible: le parler, c'est le défaire, mais ne pas le parler, c'est

manquer sa “constitution” (N, 25 February, 57–58). Given that no definition of the sought-for values can be given, it is helpful to see them in action in Barthes’s criticism. Barthes sees the work of the American abstract painter Cy Twombly (1928–2011) as illustrating the principle of ‘délicatesse’.

Twombly’s work is layered with scribbles, graffiti, illegibilities. His canvases are large, often airy, lending themselves to being read but then frustrating that impulse. Some of Barthes’s own watercolours, probably not coincidentally, bear a certain resemblance to Twombly’s graphomaniacal work. Both of Barthes’s 1979 essays on Twombly were produced for catalogues of Twombly’s paintings, with some of the material common to both essays.<sup>65</sup> Barthes’s thinking about Twombly is partially inflected by his understanding of *Ma*. In the *Préparation du roman* lecture of 10 March 1979, he mentions Twombly as an exemplar of sparseness. Twombly’s work, like Anton Webern’s short musical pieces, is characterised by what Barthes calls ‘*Rarus*’. This, he says, is similar to ‘le *Ma*: notion qui, elle, permettrait de parler de la peinture: Twombly, les Orientaux’ (PR, 147). The end of the near-contemporary essay on Twombly, ‘Sagesse de l’art’, demonstrates a deft rhetorical causality whereby it is posited that Twombly shares qualities with ‘the Orient’ by virtue of his non-dogmatic style of painting. The logic here is clearer if one bears in mind Barthes’s association between the interstice and the Orient, in which (notional) realm alone are the values of discretion and suggestion truly valorised. Twombly’s canvas or page, though ‘silent’, is lent its significance by the sparse ‘trait[s], hachure[s], forme[s]’ that are dispersed upon it. We are reminded not just of the one-corner style of Japanese painting, but of the general Tao principle of nothingness as the most profound context of being. Barthes quotes the *Tao Te Ching* here: ‘L’être, dit le Tao, donne des possibilités, c’est par le non-être qu’on les utilise’. This phenomenon, which renders inapplicable the ideas of ‘le nombre et l’unité, la dispersion et le centre’ is, we may infer, anti-interpretive. The aesthetic of Twombly’s work is quite other to those ‘peintures excitées, possessives, dogmatiques [qui] imposent le produit’. Twombly’s sparse work is remarkable for Barthes in displaying an ethic that, though common in Eastern philosophies, is unique in our logosphere: ‘L’art de Twombly – c’est là sa moralité, et aussi sa grande singularité historique – *ne veut rien saisir*; il se tient, il flotte, il dérive entre le désir [...] et la politesse; qui est le congé discret donné à toute envie de capture’ (OC, V, 701–702). Twombly’s work, then, exhibits the relational values that Barthes is working towards in the *Fragments* and in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*. He sees Twombly’s success

in demonstrating the ‘délicat’ (701) as being without parallel in Twombly’s own culture (‘l’Occident’). ‘Si l’on voulait situer cette moralité,’ writes Barthes in conclusion,

on ne pourrait aller la chercher que très loin, hors de la peinture, hors de l’Occident, hors des siècles historiques, à la limite même du sens, et dire, avec le *Tao Tö King*: ‘Il produit sans s’approprier, /Il agit sans rien attendre, /Son œuvre accomplie, il ne s’y attache pas, /Et puisqu’il ne s’y attache pas, /Son œuvre restera’ (OC, V, 702).

Twombly’s work is, for Barthes, the most thoroughgoing embodiment of an ethic-aesthetic that is generally inadmissible in the West. There are other figures who gesture more fleetingly towards a conduct reminiscent of *wu-wei*: Barthes discusses these in ‘Wou-wei’, towards the end of the *Neutre* course. *Wu-wei* problematises the ‘morale de la volonté, du vouloir (saisir, dominer, vivre, imposer sa vérité)’, and is, therefore, ‘structurellement un Neutre: ce qui déjoue le paradigme’ (N, 27 May, 223). The attainment of this neutral in the West can only ever be brief, ‘rare et surtout partielle’ says Barthes; we see it only in ‘des moments, des tendances, des aspects de quelques individus’. The examples he provides here are Leonardo da Vinci as seen by Freud, John Cage, and Prince Andrei from Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.<sup>66</sup> He quotes *War and Peace*. The Prince is going on a journey in the springtime, and sees an oak tree: ‘La vue de cet arbre provoqua en lui une éclosion de pensées nouvelles, désespérées mais pleines d’un charme mélancolique’. The conjunction between the contemplation of nature and the imagining of a new mode of living is important here. The excerpt continues:

Au cours de ce voyage, il soumit sa façon de vivre à un nouvel examen approfondi et aboutit [...] à cette conclusion désenchantée mais apaisante, qu’il ne devait rien entreprendre, mais achever tout bonnement sa vie sans faire le mal, sans se tracasser, sans rien désirer. (N, 224)

Barthes presents this excerpt almost without comment, his only remark being that Christian morality lends a slightly ‘masochiste’ tone, as the prince sees his new, simple life with a certain ‘désenchantement’. For Barthes, the imagining of this unified life, the accomplishment of a profound *wu-wei*, and the manner of its apprehension, are deeply enviable.

At the start of *La Préparation du roman I*, Barthes describes an epiphanic moment of *wu-wei* or of satori that occurred to him in April 1978. This description appears to be rhetorically modelled on the *War and Peace* excerpt that he had quoted on 27 May 1978. The first *Préparation* lecture opens with Barthes explaining that he desperately wants a new writerly goal, as he is becoming overwhelmed by the ‘pres-

sion sociale' (PR, 2 December 1978, 29) and repetition he now associates with his work, which seems to involve largely 'la *gestion*' of former ideas. The decision to radically change his goals and to work towards a 'vita nova' happened suddenly, he says, on 15 April 1978. We see here precisely the same markers as in the Prince Andrei excerpt – here is the peaceable natural setting: 'Lourdeur de l'après-midi. Le ciel se couvre, un peu frais. Nous allons [à un] joli vallon de la route de Rabat'. And here, the sense, on his return from the outing, that his life must change: this is the liberatory realisation that 'il ne devait rien entreprendre', just like the prince:

Seul, triste → Marinade. [...] Éclosion d'une idée: [...] entrer en littérature, en écriture; [...] ne plus faire que cela. [...] Faire cesser la division du sujet, au profit d'un seul Projet, le Grand Projet: image de joie, si je me donnais une tâche unique. [...] Tout instant de la vie fût désormais travail intégré au Grand Projet. (PR, 32)

This idea of the unification of his goals is a moment of pure insight, and as such it is a liberation from the more atomised generic and social codes which have been governing his work and his attitude to it. 'Ce 15 avril en somme', Barthes concludes, '[c'est une] sorte de *Satori*, d'éblouissement' (PR, 32).

The mention of *satori*, as well as the natural setting of Barthes's 'realisation', also implies that the unification at stake here is not only that of Barthes's work; there is a hint here at the idea of a non-dualistic unification of the subject with his environment. Though Barthes does not pursue this further at this juncture of the *Préparation* lecture, he returns to it later in his discussions of the haiku. However, for a more thorough sketching of the idea of the diffusion of the self into its surroundings, we must return first of all to the opening of *Le Neutre*.

### 5. 'Je n'avais nulle notion distincte de mon individu'

In the first *Neutre* lecture, Barthes reads four short texts 'en guise d'épigraphes' (N, 18 February, 27). The first of these, by Joseph de Maistre, is an indication of the arrogance from which the neutral seeks to distance itself. The other three epigraphs, from texts by Tolstoy, Rousseau, and Lao-Tzu, bear witness to the neutral. All four excerpts are read by Barthes without comment. The 'portrait de Lao-Tzeu par lui-même' relates specifically to the theme of *wu-wei*. It invokes the Taoist valorisation of negativity, which Taoists believe to be far less limiting than the use of positive terms.<sup>67</sup> Hence the negativity of Lao-Tzu's description of himself; what is valued is the idea of an unknown wealth of meaning lying behind a bland exterior. Our knowledge of Barthes's

desire for *xéniteia* and *stenochôria* allows us to understand his affinity with these lines:

Moi seul, suis calme, mes désirs ne se manifestent pas; je suis comme l'enfant qui n'a pas encore souri. [...] Les autres ont tous du superflu; moi seul semble avoir tout perdu; mon esprit est celui d'un sot. [...] Les autres ont l'air intelligent; moi seul semble un niais. (*N*, 30)

The Tolstoy and Rousseau epigraphs announce a related idea, hitherto unseen in the *Cours* but which gains significance in *Le Neutre* and *La Préparation du roman I*. Both these excerpts involve an experience wherein Prince Andrei and Rousseau respectively experience a sudden and astonishing peace of mind, which is linked in both cases to a sense of oneness with the surrounding environment. Pierre Hadot speaks of such moments as being central to the ancient 'exercices spirituels': what is at stake here is a 'conscience cosmique' which allows one to escape all worry.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, just like Barthes, Hadot finds evidence of this 'conscience cosmique' in Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*.<sup>69</sup> In Tolstoy's text, Prince Andrei falls on the battlefield at Austerlitz and, instead of being aware of the hue of battle around him, experiences a great calm:

Il ne vit plus rien. Il n'y avait plus au-dessus de lui que le ciel, un ciel voilé, mais très haut, immensément haut, où flottaient doucement des nuages gris. 'Quel calme, quelle paix, quelle majesté! songeait-il. Quelle différence entre notre course folle, parmi les cris et la bataille, [...] et la marche lente de ces nuages dans ce ciel profond, infini!' (cited in *N*, 18 February, 29)

Andrei realises that the immense sky represents the real significance of existence, as the futility of battle and the 'rage stupide' of men cannot: 'Comment ne l'ai-je pas remarqué jusqu'alors? [...] Oui, tout est vanité, tout est mensonge en dehors de ce ciel sans limites. Il n'y a rien, absolument rien d'autre que cela'. It may even be that the sky itself is a mask for the ultimate nothingness that surrounds us: 'Peut-être même est-ce un leurre, peut-être même n'y a-t-il rien, à part le silence, le repos' (*N*, 29). The prince is diffused into his surroundings: the abolition of division between his self and his environment entails the realisation that all dualistic division – anything that is not nothingness, space or silence – is pointless. He experiences, in a very precise sense, *satori*: the revelation of the this-ness of the world.

Barthes has found a description of a remarkably similar revelation in Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* – a text in which Hadot tells us we see 'à la fois l'écho de la tradition antique et le pressentiment de certaines attitudes modernes'.<sup>70</sup> Rousseau experiences this as he gazes at the sky after an accident on the road. There is the added element here of the sense of loss of individuality:



J'aperçus le ciel, quelques étoiles et un peu de verdure. [...] Je naissais dans cet instant à la vie, et il me semblait que je remplissais de ma légère existence tous les objets que j'apercevais. [...] Je n'avais nulle notion distincte de mon individu; [...] je ne savais ni qui j'étais ni où j'étais. [...] Je sentais dans tout mon être un calme ravissant. (cited in N, 30)

Rousseau's *satori*, then, goes a step further than Prince Andrei's, in explicitly attaining the loss of subjectivity.<sup>71</sup>

Barthes's use of Tolstoy and Rousseau here to figure the *neutre* can be called a japoniste idea, though its implications go beyond the aesthetic considerations that define japonisme for Jan Walsh Hokenson. The figuration of a non-dualistic, intersubjective conception of the world is, as we have seen, central to Japanese aesthetics. The Tolstoy and Rousseau excerpts testify to an experience which is entirely consistent with *satori* as it is written about by Zen masters and commentators on Zen such as Watts and Suzuki. For *satori* involves not the apprehension of a mysterious doctrinal truth, but rather the realisation that self and world are one. As Prince Andrei puts it, 'Il n'y a rien, absolument rien d'autre que cela' – or, as the Zen master Hakuin exclaims at the moment of his *satori*: 'How wondrous! There is no birth-and-death from which one has to escape, nor is there any supreme knowledge after which one has to strive!'<sup>72</sup> Barthes fully grasps the import of *satori* as the revelation, once the filters of language which had coloured our view have been done away with, of the world itself. Discussing *satori* in *Le Neutre*, he points out that using the word 'illumination' to describe *satori* is not quite appropriate, for the illumination is of nothing – or of everything: 'on ne voit rien sinon peut-être qu'il n'y a rien à voir'. Rather, by virtue of the 'ébranlement de la logique du moi-social' (N, 29 April, 156), one attains a realisation of the interconnectedness of phenomena, a relationality that our divisive language-forms and social codings had hitherto screened from our consciousness. There is no intervening symbolic code between self and world; there is nothing to interpret. *Satori* and its literary form, the haiku, allow immediacy of relation and experience. There is a certain overlap here with some of the concerns of phenomenology. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, for example, envision a return to such a heightened perception of the world. For Merleau-Ponty – as for Hadot, incidentally – philosophy is the means by which one can 'rapprendre à voir le monde'.<sup>73</sup> Barthes's understanding of *satori* involves not only perception of the world, however, but a concomitant loosening of subjectivity. As Bernard Comment puts it, 'une pareille expérience *immédiate* du réel implique une destitution du sujet, l'effacement de son enveloppe constitutive, la sortie du rapport duel sujet-objet pour tenter une

expérience indistincte de l'événement'. He concludes that 'C'est le monde phénoménal en son *ainsité*, et sans projection du moi (désormais obsolète), qui doit être atteint'.<sup>74</sup> So the self is diffused. The mid-twentieth-century Zen master Sokei-an Sasaki describes this phenomenon: 'One day I wiped out all the notions from my mind,' he writes. 'I gave up all desire. I discarded all the words with which I thought'. He describes *satori* as a movement inwards:

Ztt! I entered. I lost the boundary of my physical body. I had my skin, of course, but I felt I was standing in the center of the cosmos. [...] I had never known this world. I had believed that I was created, but now I must change my opinion: I was never created; I was the cosmos; no individual Mr Sasaki existed.<sup>75</sup>

Barthes is aware of the complexity of the notion of individuation and its intersection with the environment in the Zen worldview: he devotes the whole of his third lecture on the haiku to these issues. Individuation, he suggests, consists precisely in the conjunction of 'l'irréductibilité, la nuance fondatrice, le Tel [...] de *l'individu* (sujet civique et psychologique)' and 'tel moment de cet individu: [...] [le] Temps qu'il fait, [la] couleur, [le] phénomène' (PR, 20 January 1979, 78). The apparently banal question of the weather becomes fundamental to our non-dualistic sense of self.<sup>76</sup> Barthes uses a quotation from Baudelaire's *Les Paradis artificiels* to illustrate this: 'Ceux qui savent s'observer eux-mêmes [...] ont eu parfois à noter, dans l'observatoire de leur pensée, de belles saisons, d'heureuses journées, de délicieuses minutes'. If we take this a step further, says Barthes, we leave metaphor behind, and we become our surroundings: 'vous *serez* la saison, la journée, la minute; votre sujet: comblé et épuisé par elle → vous devenez *baromètre*' (PR, 78). He goes on to conclude the lecture by suggesting that individuation, understood as the relationship between our self and our environment, seems both to strengthen our sense of our own quiddity, and to weaken our ego-feeling altogether:

L'individuation [...] est à la fois ce qui fortifie le sujet dans son individualité, son 'quant à moi' [...] et aussi, à l'extrême contraire, ce qui défait le sujet, le multiplie, le pulvérise et en un sens l'absente → oscillation entre l'extrême impressionnisme et une sorte de tentation mystique de la dilution, de l'anéantissement de la conscience comme unitaire: très classique et ultra-moderne. (PR, 79)

## 6. L'intraitable

The *Préparation* lectures on the haiku represent a continuation of *L'Empire des signes*'s conception of the haiku as entailing a 'réveil devant

le fait'. As we already know from *L'Empire des signes*, the haiku is the object of Barthes's writerly desire because of the manner in which its *tel*, its distilled and indivisible representation of a moment, repels interpretation and seems to forbid any symbolic substitution. The haiku 'stops' language and confronts us with the world. In the *Préparation* lectures, Barthes still insists on this. The haiku, he says in his lecture on the haiku and the photograph, gives us, as the photo does, the 'effet de réel', the certainty that the evoked moment did exist.<sup>77</sup> Language is jolted: 'J'entends par effet de réel l'évanouissement du langage au profit d'une certitude de réalité: le langage se retourne, s'enfouit et disparaît, laissant à nu ce qu'il dit' (PR, 17 February 1979, 113). It is this stripped quality which makes the haiku a model for the 'moments de vérité' which Barthes wants his imagined novel to consist of. As we will see in Chapter 5, Barthes focuses on two excerpts from Proust and Tolstoy to figure the pathetic force of 'moments de vérité'. Their 'truth' is analogised by recourse to Japanese aesthetics: why are these moments so 'vrai (et non seulement réel ou réaliste)', he asks? Because they render fragility: 'Parce que cette radicalité du concret désigne *ce qui va mourir*: plus c'est concret, plus c'est vivant, et plus c'est vivant, plus cela va mourir; c'est le *utsuroi* japonais → sorte de *plus-value* énigmatique donnée par l'écriture' (PR, 10 March 1979, 158). We hear him add in the lecture that this value <justifie intégralement, en dehors de toute théorie, l'écriture>. The haiku and the aesthetic principles it mobilises are an essential propaedeutic to the focus on the 'Intrahable' of life and emotion which Barthes imagines representing in his fantasised novel – and which he does represent in *La Chambre claire*: the final words of *La Chambre claire* designate its anguished core: 'l'intrahable réalité' (CC, 885). The real itself is found, laceratingly, in the Winter Garden photograph of Barthes's mother. This discovery is akin to the 'moments de vérité' which Barthes discusses in the *Préparation*. These are 'moment[s] de l'*Intrahable*'. No dialectic is possible, as with grief: 'on ne peut ni interpréter, ni transcender, ni régresser; Amour et Mort *sont là*, c'est tout ce qu'on peut dire. Et c'est le mot même du haïku' (PR, 159).

The haiku – and Zen thought generally – encourage a serene acceptance of what Barthes calls 'l'intrahable' and what Watts calls *now*: 'There is only this *now*'.<sup>78</sup> *Satori* represents a secular revolution in our understanding, whereby we finally realise that there is no possible transcendence of any kind, and no interpretation necessary. 'When Fach'ang was dying,' writes Watts in the concluding lines of *The Way of Zen*, 'a squirrel screeched on the roof. "It's just this", he said, "and nothing else"'.<sup>79</sup> We are familiar, from *La Chambre claire*, with Barthes's

version of this: ‘c’est cela!’ ‘Le *satori*,’ he states in *Le Neutre*, ‘rompt avec la vision courante qui acclimate, apprivoise l’événement en le faisant rentrer dans une causalité, une généralité, qui réduit l’incomparable au comparable’ (N, 221). If we experience the *satori* that reveals to us the ‘intraitable’ of the world, then we are in the realm of the ‘incomparable’, which is also the banal: experiences (love, death) that happen to everybody, about which nothing can be said to transform them: they just happen. Barthes describes the neutral as a ‘mouvement’ which would allow one to accept ‘une certaine pensée de la mort comme banale, car dans la mort, ce qui est exorbitant, c’est son caractère banal’ (N, 25 March, 119).

Barthes employs Suzuki’s ‘Zen dialectic’ in both *Le Neutre* and *La Préparation* to insist on this matteness of understanding. Suzuki tells us that as we follow Zen teaching, we go through two stages of looking at the world, in order to reach a third.<sup>80</sup> At first, the mountains are merely mountains. This stage, says Barthes, is the stage of ‘bêtise, tautologie’. This stage is followed by a period of interpretation and questioning: ‘à la suite d’un bon enseignement Zen les montagnes ne sont plus des montagnes’; this is the stage of ‘intelligence, paranoïa’. Finally, however, we attain the ‘asile du repos’ wherein ‘de nouveau les montagnes sont des montagnes’; this, Barthes tells us, is the desirable state of ‘innocence (mystique), sapience, “méthode” (= Tao)’ (N, 6 May, 164–65). If we have reached the Tao itself (the ‘way’), we have reached an acceptance of nature’s workings, and of ‘l’Intraitable’. This acceptance, Barthes reminds us in the *Préparation*, is only possible ‘si l’on a traversé l’interprétation – souffrir d’une mort = il faut traverser toute une “culture” du *deuil*; et la *culture* = ce qui vient d’abord, l’absolument spontané’ (PR, 127). The final stage is a ‘sagesse’: this word is resonant in Barthes’s late work, from *Leçon* to the essay on Twombly. Here, ‘sagesse’ consists in acceptance, which is also ‘la saisie de la *naturalité* de la chose. [...] Et ici, on retrouve Bashô, le haïkiste [...]: “Vous aurez beau regarder toutes choses, rien n’est semblable au croissant de la lune”’ (PR, 127). We are simply here – this is the banal, incomparable teaching of Zen: ‘L’être manifesté existe. [...] Ici, pas de doctrine de l’illusion, ni de l’ignorance, de Maya, ni d’Avidya. Les phénomènes existent’ (N, 217).

By means of the Zen dialectic, Barthes emphasises a literal, naturalistic reading of the world in which singular response is respected. Crucially, there is a refusal of the Hegelian dialectic. A reading of *La Chambre claire* makes it clear that Barthes feels the synthesising dialectic is a force which traduces the intensity of personal response. His study of photography angrily resists such a synthesis: ‘Je ne puis *transformer* mon

chagrin [...]; aucune culture ne vient m'aider à parler cette souffrance que je vis à même la finitude de l'image [...]: ma Photographie est sans culture: lorsqu'elle est douloureuse, rien, en elle, ne peut transformer le chagrin en deuil. [...] La Photographie est indialectique' (CC, 862). Barthes's grief leads him to an Adornian position of the rejection of the totalising force of the dialectic. Hegelian dialectics, in Adorno's reading, reduces particularity by subsuming it under a general movement. Adorno advocates a focus on that which resists such levelling:

The matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel [...] expressed his disinterest. They are nonconceptuality, individuality, and particularity – things which ever since Plato used to be dismissed as transitory and insignificant, and which Hegel labeled 'lazy Existenz'. Philosophy's theme would consist of the qualities it downgrades as contingent.<sup>81</sup>

'Lazy Existenz' is the vital core of Barthes's late thought.

### 7. L'existence minimale

Having arrived at an understanding of the *Intraversable* that results from a rejection of dualism, Barthes seeks to elaborate an ethic-aesthetic which will accommodate this understanding. It is the idea of the non-dualistic field and of individuation as attendant upon weather which informs Barthes's sketchings of an 'existence minimale' (and an attendant imagined 'discours minimal') from 1978 onwards. The 'existence minimale', though utterly subjective, is a repudiation of Western egotism, and a defence of what Adorno would call the 'non-identical'.

The haiku aesthetic is again the ideal propaedeutic here. The classical haiku always has a reference to the season or weather within it – the *kigo*, or season-word. In rendering the 'charge *existentielle*' of the surrounding environment it puts in play, says Barthes, 'le *sentir-être* du sujet, la pure et mystérieuse sensation de vie' (PR, 20 January 1979, 72). In tandem with this, the haiku's mobilisation of the absolute individuality of a situated moment seems to involve the diffusion of the subject into the surroundings so arrestingly evoked. This is how Barthes sees a Zenrin poem which he quotes frequently in his late work, stating in le *Neutre* that he has often wanted to use it as an epigraph for his texts.<sup>82</sup> He almost certainly read it first in Watts. The French translation of the poem is 'Assis paisiblement sans rien faire, le printemps vient et l'herbe croît d'elle-même'. Watts sees this as reflecting the ideal of the unified mind: 'this "by itself" is the mind's and the world's natural way of action'.<sup>83</sup> The ego has been abolished. Discussing the poem under the rubric of *Wou-wei* in the final *Neutre* lecture, Barthes discusses the importance of

its syntax. The poem's serenity is the result not only of the still, natural setting, but also of the anacoluthon which removes the subject from the poem, just as Barthes wishes the Western ego to be neutralised in writing: 'anacoluthie: entre la désignation de la posture et l'évidence cosmique, le sujet disparaît: il n'y a pas d'ego: il y a une posture et la nature' (N, 3 June, 233). In *La Préparation II*, he sees the poem as being the embodiment of a fantasy of idleness: 'fantasmer une certaine expérience, sinon du néant [...], du moins du *Nul*' (PR, 8 December 1979, 216). Discussing the poem in the interview 'Osons être paresseux' in December 1979, Barthes says that the 'rupture de construction' whereby it seems that it is springtime that is sitting, rather than the human subject, indicates the dispersion of the subject's consistency: 'Il est décentré, il ne peut même pas dire "je". Cela serait la vraie paresse. Arriver, à certains moments, à ne plus avoir à dire "je"'.<sup>84</sup>

The 'Assis paisiblement' poem, then, represents a non-dualistic existence, wherein the constraints and illusions of the ego-feeling are overcome, and one attains a oneness with nature. Barthes discusses this in the *Neutre* lecture, where he tells us that the poem always reminds him of seeing a child sitting on a wall in a 'village marocain "oublié"' in the late 1960s:

<J'ai vu assis sur un mur un enfant qui était 'assis paisiblement sans rien faire', et j'ai eu une sorte de *satori*. C'est-à-dire que m'est venu brusquement l'évidence de la vie pure, sans vibration de langage. L'enfant m'a servi ici de guru, de médiateur.> (N, 3 June, 233)

This 'pure life' could be called 'existence minimale': this is the term Barthes employs elsewhere in *Le Neutre* to designate a fully neutral life which would be untouched by the arrogance of a conflictual logosphere. 'L'existence minimale' would be a state of 'unicité vague, indéfinie du corps' (N, 18 March, 110). This could be seen negatively – as lethargy, perhaps – or have a positive epistemological charge, as in the Rousseau and Tolstoy epigraphs. This state could be defined in terms of strength and autonomy, he implies: 'l'existence minimale la plus forte: l'existence non pas simple (il ne s'agit pas d'un sentiment primitif) mais dépouillée d'attributs' (111). In April 1978, Barthes writes a short text on Voltaire and Rousseau for *Le Monde* where he repeats the same points more clearly, and defines 'l'existence minimale'. In such a state, as in the 'Assis paisiblement' poem, the subject is problematised. Time itself becomes individuated, while the subject is diffused – much as in Sasaki's *satori*. Hadot has noted that in Rousseau's *Rêveries*, there is a close link between Rousseau's 'extase cosmique' and 'la transformation de son attitude intérieure à l'égard du temps'.<sup>85</sup>

Rousseau, after his accident reported in the second ‘Promenade’ of the *Rêveries*, is the cosmos: ‘je remplissais de ma légère existence tous les objets que j’apercevais’.<sup>86</sup> Barthes discusses this: ‘Le sujet “déconstruit”: [...] l’ego est bien là, mais c’est pour mieux dire qu’il se quitte, [...] se porte au bout de lui-même, là où il se dissout dans le *moment*: c’est le moment qui est subjectif, individuel, ce n’est pas le sujet, l’individu’. Rousseau reaches a state with which we in the West are still unfamiliar, Barthes continues; a state of ‘l’abandon de tout paroxysme, l’éloignement de cette violence de langage, que nous croyons “moderne”’. We are mistaken in placing our faith in the ‘violence’ of language, and we repress the reality of existence in so doing. This violence is

rien d’autre que le refoulement d’une valeur pourtant bien connue d’autres civilisations (je pense à l’Orient): l’*existence minimale*: car ‘exister’ ne se sent pas forcément dans la violence, mais aussi dans *ce peu* de ciel, d’étoiles, de verdure, qui permit à Rousseau de ‘partir’, c’est-à-dire de raconter.<sup>87</sup>

‘Existence minimale’, is, of course, *wu-wei* itself – or, as Barthes shorthands it in the *Vita Nova* plans, ‘le rien faire philosophique’ (OC, V, 1008).<sup>88</sup> It is a state which, as it reveals no apparent desire, tends to be negatively characterised. It is laziness, in fact. Barthes, in the 1979 *Le Monde* interview, suggests that we revalorise such laziness. He tells Enthoven that real laziness ‘serait au fond une paresse de “ne pas décider”, de l’“être là”’. Comme les cancre. [...] Ils ne participent pas, il ne sont pas exclus, ils sont là [...] comme des tas.’ Sometimes this is an enviable state: ‘être là, ne rien décider, [...] ne rien déterminer’ (OC, V, 764). This peaceable indolence is in line with Tao teaching, but is a conduct frowned upon in our society, which, as we have seen, is defined for Barthes by the ‘vouloir-agir’. He has used the image of the ‘tas’ two days previously in the second *L’Œuvre comme volonté* lecture, when he muses on *wu-wei* as running counter to the desire to write. *Wu-wei*, he says here, is the desire for a life ‘qui extérieurement ne bouge pas, où l’on ne lutte pas’. This desire is represented in our society by ‘des images discréditées. [...] Celle du *Tas*: être comme un *Tas*’. He rather comically adds ‘pourquoi pas comme une *bouse*? [...] Ou encore comme une *larve* [?]’ The emphasis, he adds, must be on sensibility. We return here to the idea of individuation as the intersection between a subject emptied of its ego feeling, and its surrounding environment: ‘une *larve* – mais – tout est là [...] – une *larve sensible*, c’est-à-dire en un sens – [...]: l’intériorité rendue à son absolu, à son affirmation nue’. This is *wu-wei* itself, he continues, quoting the *Tao Te Ching*: “sorte de passivité humble”, éloignée de tout désir de violence ou de rivalité [...], mais au fond une espèce d’“activité spontanée et inépuisable”. Larve sensible, Tas pensant:

seul contact du Tas avec l'extérieur: *pression* de l'atmosphère, sensibilité barométrique' (*PR*, 8 December 1979, 217). We have seen the idea of the self as barometer before: it is the key to Barthes's appreciation of the haiku in *De la vie à l'œuvre* – and, as we begin to realise, it is crucial too to Barthes's imagining of a neutral, non-dualistic existence, which repudiates the codes and values of a social and linguistic sphere determined by action and the conflict of paradigms.

The haiku renders the 'nuance' of a given moment, and in doing so reminds us of the 'intraitable' of life itself beneath the vibrations of language. Barthes figures this state in his fourth lecture on the haiku. Here we see that the state of minimal existence is concomitant with the form that renders it (the haiku), for both require no commentary. There is a 'défaillance de discours':

Ce chemin de la *Nuance* (qui est parti du Temps qu'il fait et qui le suit): quoi donc, au bout? Eh bien la *vie*, la sensation de la vie, le sentiment d'existence; et nous savons que ce sentiment, pour être pur, intense, glorieux, parfait, il faut qu'un certain *vide* s'accomplisse dans le sujet; même lorsque la jubilation (d'amour) par exemple est la plus intense, c'est parce qu'il y a dans le sujet un vide de langage; lorsque le langage se tait, qu'il n'y a plus de commentaire, d'interprétation, de sens, c'est alors que l'existence est pure. (*PR*, 27 January 1979, 84)

What he has realised, Barthes explains, is the vitality of the banal. Its minimalism is liberatory: 'En somme, *découvert à fond*, le Temps qu'il fait suscite en nous ce seul discours (minimal): qu'il vaut la peine de vivre'. He cites here an excerpt from the diary he kept at Urt during the summer of 1977, which was later to be partially published in 'Délibération', Barthes's essay on the diary form:<sup>89</sup> 'De nouveau, après des jours bouchés, une matinée de beau temps, éclat et subtilité de l'atmosphère: une soie fraîche et lumineuse; ce moment vide (aucun signifié) produit une évidence: qu'il vaut la peine de vivre' (cited in *PR*, 84). This, he implies, is writing that hints at the haiku aesthetic as well as indicating 'existence minimale'. Were he a haiku poet, he adds, he would have said the same thing 'd'une façon *plus essentielle et plus indirecte* (moins bavarde)' (*PR*, 84). Interestingly, another entry from the Urt diary, published in 'Délibération', refers to another such moment of calm. Here Barthes explicitly links his sense of integration with the environment to a Japanese aesthetic principle:

La fenêtre est grande ouverte sur la fin plus claire d'une journée grise. J'éprouve alors une euphorie de flottement; tout est liquide, aéré, buvable (je bois l'air, le temps, le jardin). Et, comme je suis en train de lire Suzuki, il me semble que c'est assez proche de l'état que le Zen appelle *sabi*. (*OC*, V, 674)



It becomes clear that Barthes is working towards a minimalist ethic which is inspired by Japanese aesthetic principles and Taoist philosophy, and which implicitly critiques the Western, Cartesian logomachy for its repudiation of such an ethic. This existence can be attained if one reduces as much as possible one's complicity with 'l'arrogance du monde'. This desire is mandarinal, perhaps; impractical, probably; utopian, certainly – yet admirable nonetheless for its figuring of a mode of existence which has no adverse effect upon others. In a figure on 'Intensités', destined for but not given in the *Neutre* series, Barthes describes this minimalism: it is a 'style de conduite qui tend à diminuer la surface de contact du sujet avec l'arrogance du monde [...] et non pas avec le monde, l'affect, l'amour, etc'. It is an ethical minimalism, then – 'mais nullement [minimalisme] esthétique ou affectif' (N, 249). Though it is the haiku – an extremely pared-down form – that mobilises Barthes's conception of the 'existence minimale', the aesthetic to be worked towards is not minimal. It contains, rather, the incomparable complexity of the 'intraitable' – which, paradoxically, is rendered through writing the banal discourse of the weather and the subject's environment at a given instant. Such pastoral contemplation – *wu-wei* itself – engenders a serenity that may be at odds with writing: for how can one write if one is within *wu-wei*? Barthes approaches this question in *L'Œuvre comme volonté*, when he discusses how *wu-wei* inhibits the desire to write. Here we see the question answered: *wu-wei* elicits a contemplation of nature which is itself as powerful as the desire to write:

Ce sentiment [le *wou-wei*] a pris un soir une forme 'romantique' [...]: le soir du 14 juillet, [...] tour en auto dans la campagne; sur un chemin de hauteur [...] nous arrêtons l'auto et nous descendons; nous sommes entourés d'un paysage vallonné, vers l'Adour d'un côté, et de l'autre vers les Pyrénées; l'air était absolument paisible, inerte même: pas un bruit, quelques fermes blanches et brunes piquées au loin [...], une odeur de foin coupé. [...] Je vivais [...] une sorte de point zéro du Désir; tout en moi était aussi étale que le paysage: force, splendeur, vérité aussi souveraine que le Vouloir-Écrire. (PR, 15 December 1979, 220)

It is possible, then, that the cultivation of a non-dualistic conception of one's being in the world will lead to a blank state (the 'point zéro du Désir' mentioned here, or the 'non-vouloir-saisir' taught by the Tao) which will be the productive beginning of a new aesthetic. This, then, would be the answer to the question posed in the 1978 text on Voltaire and Rousseau, 'D'eux à nous'. Barthes has shown us Rousseau, in the *Rêveries*, falling out of the violence of language and into a state of serenity. Existence, he writes, need not be felt only in the 'vouloir-agir'; it inheres also 'dans *ce peu* de ciel, d'étoiles, de verdure'. It is these

surroundings which permit Rousseau to “partir”, c’est-à-dire [...] raconter’. And so we reach, Barthes concludes, the question of narrative: ‘voici de nouveau le Récit, et voici de nouveau la question moderne qui nous est posée – ou la contrainte qui nous est rappelée: comment écrire sans ego?’ (OC, V, 455). Perhaps, within the confines of our own linguistic forms, we can only ‘write without ego’ in snatches, as Rousseau and Tolstoy struggle to.

It seems, however, that the aesthetic of the ‘existence minimale’ remains utopian, at least for writing. It may exist in visual form – perhaps in Twombly’s paintings, whose ‘rareté’ reminds Barthes of the aerating spaces between the branches in Japanese flower-arranging. It is not only in non-representational art, though, that Barthes finds this aesthetic. In an untitled article from 1977, he indicates that Daniel Boudinet’s pastoral photographs also embody the aesthetic of the ‘existence minimale’.<sup>90</sup> Boudinet’s ‘géorgiques’, as Barthes calls them (OC, V, 322), are without ideological vibration: they tread the ‘ligne de crête’ between the two ‘abîmes’ of naturalism and aestheticism (317). They are, then, an art of the interstice. They are as serene as the haiku, and similarly indirect: ‘L’auteur dit indirectement le paisible, pour que nous nous reposions. [...] D’ordinaire, la photographie *affirme*; ici, elle *produit* la paix’ (320). There are many correspondences between the qualities Barthes sees in these photographs and the tenets of Japanese aesthetics and philosophy that he values. The serenity he finds in the photographs is replicated in his text. There is, as Barthes says, ‘nul combat’ here; rather, ‘quelque chose d’austère et de neutre’ (322). In these photos he finds repose and space. We see here again the idea of aeration: ‘Les photographies de D.B. sont très musicales. Elles ont un effet d’apaisement, opère une sorte de *catharsis* subtile, jamais violente: le corps respire mieux, il *boit* ce que Baudelaire appelait *l’ambrosie végétale*’ (327). These photos, it is implied, are as free of ideology as the haiku is. It is for this reason that even the darkest photograph, of foliage and undergrowth, still engenders a sense of freedom: ‘Ces frondaisons verticales sans air, sans ciel, inexplicablement, me donnent à respirer; elles m’élèvent l’“âme” [...], et pourtant, je veux aussi m’enfoncer dans l’obscur de la terre: bref, une moire d’intensités’ (318). The ethic may be minimalist, but there is maximal experiential intensity. This can happen in an aesthetic space which is devoid of dualism and of any endoxal use of the sign.

Barthes uses a Polaroid photograph by Boudinet as the frontispiece of *La Chambre claire*. It is the only colour photograph in the book, and one of

only two photographs in the book not to feature a human subject.<sup>91</sup> Taken inside a darkened room, it is a photograph of blue curtains, through which the light from outside the window is diffused. There is a gap of purer white light. This photograph seems an apt emblem of the ethic and aesthetic that Barthes is working towards from 1977. We see in this photograph suggestion, the interstice, the banal. We glimpse brightness. Barthes uses Japanese aesthetic principles – sometimes very loosely – to imbue his late work with values he sees as running counter to the tenets of the Western logomachy. He hopes these values will lead to an enriched and peaceable sense of existence within the world. The critical force of this work, though diffuse, is potent nonetheless: Barthes makes us question the very grounds of our subjectivity. It is the use of Japanese aesthetics that gives this critique its positive and affirmative charge. It is the arresting nature of the haiku and the Japanese conception of space-time that aids Barthes in resisting category thinking. That is why japonisme is important for him as for other French writers. As Hokenson puts it, Barthes uses the Japanese aesthetic ‘as a means of rethinking the Occident via Japan. This art can [...] teach Westerners how to resist [...] the sectarian ideology of “Je” and thereby “l’Homme”’. Postmodern negatives and unnamables become, in a japoniste aesthetics of plenitude, unique means to affect and presence, subtended with post-modern aesthetic pleasure’.<sup>92</sup>

The aim of Barthes’s japonisme is to encourage, if not effect, a transformation of our relationship to the world. In this, it can be seen as sharing the aims of Tao and Zen. In a more immediate sense, Barthes’s teaching itself, with or without the japoniste themes it contains, can be seen as exemplifying certain Japanese aesthetic principles in its suggestive, ‘one-corner’ style. He meets Shūzō Kuki’s criteria of the ‘true artist’ who is an ‘educator of humanity’ in revealing the beauty and complexity which is attainable once we overcome our restrictive understanding of time and subjectivity. ‘He teaches man to liberate himself from time’, says Kuki, describing this artist:

But he does not model himself on the unpracticed educator who takes pleasure in showing off his ideas. [...] He believes in the value of suggestion, in the power of the imagination. He knows how to bring about an active spontaneity on the part of spectators. Thus it is that he gives indication only of those points of view in which the latter may place themselves; he only traces lines and only points out directions in order that the spectators themselves may themselves follow these. [...] The task of the spectators remains intact: it is incumbent upon them to make the great leap.<sup>93</sup>

Barthes’s *Cours* concertedly mobilise both an aesthetic and a pedagogical ethic of suggestion. We have seen in this chapter the manner in which

Barthes seeks a minimal existence in which subjectivity would be fused with the ‘intraitable’ of the world. In the next chapter, I shall examine Barthes’s attempts to figure the writing of the ‘intraitable’ of his emotions.

### Notes

- 1 Alan W. Watts (1915–73) played a major role in raising awareness of Eastern philosophies amongst Western readers. D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966) wrote many books on Zen and lectured on Eastern philosophies in the US. On the reception of Zen in the US, see Gereon Kopf, ‘Zen in the Contemporary United States’, in *The Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, ed. William M. Johnston, 2 vols. (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), vol. I, pp. 1424–25.
- 2 Knight, *Barthes and Utopia*, pp. 14–15.
- 3 For negative critiques of *L’Empire des signes* as an Orientalist text, see for example Scott L. Malcomson, ‘The Pure Land Beyond the Seas: Barthes, Burch and the Uses of Japan’, *Screen*, 26.3–4 (1985): 23–33; Darko Suvin, ‘The Soul and the Sense: Meditations on Roland Barthes in Japan (À propos of *L’Empire des signes*)’, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 18.4 (1991): 499–531; David Scott, *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Marie-Paule Ha, *Figuring the East: Segalen, Malraux, Duras and Barthes* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000). Dalia Kandiyoti offers a critique of both *L’Empire des signes* and ‘Alors, la Chine?’ in her ‘Roland Barthes Abroad’, in Jean-Michel Rabaté, ed., *Writing the Image after Roland Barthes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 228–42. Lisa Lowe’s account of what she perceives as the ideological problems inherent to both those texts is compelling; see *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Even-handed accounts of *L’Empire des signes* are to be found in Lynn Higgins, ‘Barthes’s Imaginary Voyages’, in Mike and Nicholas Gane, eds., *Roland Barthes*, 3 vols. (London: Sage, 2004), vol. III, pp. 147–61; Trinh T. Minh-Ha, ‘The Plural Void: Barthes and Asia’, in Diana Knight, ed., *Critical Essays on Roland Barthes* (New York: Hall, 2000), pp. 209–18; Rick Rylance, *Roland Barthes* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1994); and Charles Forsdick, ‘(In)connaissance de l’Asie: Barthes and Bouvier, China and Japan’, *Modern and Contemporary France*, 14.1 (2006): 63–77.
- 4 Barthes noted the negative reaction to ‘Alors, la Chine?’ in a postface added to the article when it was published in booklet form by Christian Bourgois in 1975. It was originally published in *Le Monde* on 7 June 1974. OC, III, 516–26.
- 5 Eric Hayot, *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel Quel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 126.
- 6 Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, pp. 10–11.
- 7 ffrench, *The Time of Theory*, p. 171.
- 8 See ffrench, *The Time of Theory*, pp. 115–16. In a note, ffrench notes the preponderance of articles on Chinese and Japanese subjects appearing in *Tel Quel* from late 1968 through 1971 and beyond. Sollers’s Maoism was partly premised on opposition to the Parti communiste français. A major influence on Sollers was Maria Antonietta Macciocchi’s book *De la Chine* (Paris: Seuil, 1971). Macciocchi was banned from both the French and the Italian communist parties because of her Maoist allegiances. It was she who organised the *Tel Quel* trip to

- China.
- 9 The other travellers were Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, François Wahl and Marcelin Pleyne. Kristeva fictionalised parts of the trip in *Les Samouraïs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), and Pleyne's diary of the trip was published in 1980: *Le Voyage en Chine: Chroniques du journal ordinaire 11 avril–3 mai 1974–extraits* (Paris: P.O.L., 1980). Alex Hughes has discussed these two texts in 'Bodily Encounters with China: On Tour with *Tel Quel*', *Modern and Contemporary France* 14.1 (2006): 49–62.
  - 10 Jan Walsh Hokenson, *Japan, France, and East-West Aesthetics: French Literature, 1867–2000* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004).
  - 11 Hokenson, *Japan*, blurb.
  - 12 I understand dualism as encompassing more than Manichaeism. 'Dualism', as Watts, Suzuki and other theorists of Zen understand and employ the term, implies much more than the binarism of meaning: it has a profound existential dimension. For these theorists, it is the division between our selves and our environment that is dualistic, and it is this sense that must be overcome in order for enlightenment to be achieved.
  - 13 Hokenson, *Japan*, p. 18.
  - 14 'Sur S/Z et L'Empire des signes', interview with Bellour in *Les Lettres françaises*, 20 May 1970. OC, III, 655–70 (p. 669).
  - 15 Barthes refers to the 'cabinet des Signes' as 'l'habitat mallarméen' on the penultimate page of *L'Empire des signes* (149). The reference is to another japoniste, Paul Claudel, who calls Mallarmé the 'reclut du cabinet des signes' in his 'Mallarmé, le catastrophe d'Igitur' in *Accompagnements*. See Claudel, *Œuvres en prose*, ed. Jacques Petit and Charles Galpérine (Paris: Gallimard/Pléiade, 1965), pp. 510–11.
  - 16 There is a distinction to be made between the currently available Seuil edition of *L'Empire des signes* and the original Skira edition, which is laid out more lavishly, and contains nine extra images as well as supplementary information in the 'Table des illustrations'.
  - 17 Steve Odin points out that the decentring, disoriginating principles of post-structuralism are frequently used, post-Barthes, to account for the radical differences between Eastern and Western systems. 'Over the past decade,' he writes in 1990, 'we have seen [...] poststructuralism, along with its critical strategy of deconstruction, emerge as an important new transcultural method for East-West comparative philosophy [...]. Against the background of the differential logic of acentric Zen Buddhism, the art, literature, cinema, and other sign systems in the Japanese text have been analyzed as a fractured semiotic field with no fixed centers'. Odin, review of *Postmodernism in Japan* by H.D. Harootunian and Miyoshi Masao, *Philosophy East and West*, 40.3 (1990): 381–87 (pp. 381–82).
  - 18 See Éric Marty's section 'Le Non-Vouloir-Saisir' in his 'Sur les *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*' for an illuminating analysis of this idea. The 'NVS', says Marty, is another name for the Neutre. Marty, *Roland Barthes, le métier d'écrire* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), pp. 323–36 (p. 326).
  - 19 Watts's *The Way of Zen* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957), translated into French as *Le Bouddhisme Zen*, is cited in the bibliographies of *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* and *La Chambre claire*. It was first published in France by Payot in 1969.
  - 20 Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 175.
  - 21 Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 175.
  - 22 Watts, *Psychotherapy East and West* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 38.

- 23 Watts, *Psychotherapy*, p. 37.
- 24 In *Psychotherapy*, Watts refers to Taoism, Zen Buddhism and Confucianism as 'ways of liberation'. The liberation is from the damaging conventions imposed by our social institutions, including the convention of the ego-feeling.
- 25 Comment, *Roland Barthes, vers le neutre*, p. 27.
- 26 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, ed. Christmas Humphreys, foreword by C.G. Jung (London: Rider, 1969), p. 95.
- 27 See Graham Parkes, 'Ways of Japanese Thinking', in Nancy Hume, ed., *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 77–108.
- 28 Maurice Coyaud, *Fourmis sans ombre: Le Livre du haïku* (Paris: Phébus, 1978), pp. 54–55.
- 29 Kenneth Yasuda, 'Approach to Haiku' and 'Basic Principles', in Hume, ed., *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture*, pp. 125–50 (p. 135).
- 30 Yasuda, 'Approach to Haiku' and 'Basic Principles', p. 135.
- 31 Yasuda, 'Approach to Haiku' and 'Basic Principles', p. 135.
- 32 Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 27–28. A Japanese art-form of central traditional importance is the 'one-corner' style which originated with Bayen (Ma Yüan, 1175–1225). Suzuki tells us that this form 'is psychologically associated with the Japanese painters' "thrifty brush" tradition of retaining the least possible number of lines or strokes which go to represent forms' (*Zen and Japanese Culture*, p. 22). *Wabi-sabi* refers to the Japanese philosophy of the beauty of imperfection. See Haga Koshiro, 'The Wabi Aesthetic Through the Ages', in Hume, ed., *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture*, pp. 245–78, for more on this. Suzuki, defining *wabi/sabi* as the spirit of tea, writes that '*wabi*, which literally means "solitariness", "aleness", and more concretely, "poverty", is, we might say, what characterizes the entirety of Japanese culture reflecting the spirit of Zen' (*Zen and Japanese Culture*, p. 253).
- 33 Hokenson, *Japan*, p. 32.
- 34 Donald Keene, 'Japanese Aesthetics', in Hume, ed., *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture*, pp. 27–41.
- 35 Kenkō, *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō*, trans. Donald Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 115.
- 36 Keene, 'Japanese Aesthetics', p. 31. François Jullien has written at length about how the European literary tradition of the depiction of heroism would have been unthinkable in ancient China, due to an entirely different conception of process and achievement. *Traité de l'efficacité* (Paris: Grasset, 1996).
- 37 Throughout *Psychotherapy East and West*, Watts refers to the necessity of coming to a new and healing worldview of our organism as being an integral part of its environment. He is partially indebted to Dewey and others in his conclusion that 'organism/environment is a unified pattern of behaviour [...] – not an interaction but a transaction' (p. 33).
- 38 Shūzō Kuki, 'Considerations on Time: Two Essays Delivered at Pontigny During the Décade of 8–18 August 1928', in Stephen Light, *Shūzō Kuki and Jean-Paul Sartre: Influence and Counter-Influence in the Early History of Existential Phenomenology* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp. 43–67 (p. 62). As Light's fascinating study shows, it was Kuki who introduced Heidegger's thought to Sartre. His lectures at Pontigny succinctly presented to a French audience the radically other conceptions of time and aesthetics in Japan. Hokenson has pointed out that '[Kuki's] Pontigny lectures [...] now read, in retrospect, like something of a primer for Barthes's japonisme' (*Japan*, p. 363).
- 39 Kuki, 'Considerations on Time', pp. 55–56.
- 40 Kuki, 'Considerations on Time', p. 51.

- 41 Isozaki Arata, 'Interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist for *UnDo.net: Guide to the Contemporary Art in Italy*', 29 November 2000, <<http://www.undo.net/cgi-bin/openframe.pl?x=/cgi-bin/undo/features/features.pl%3Fa%3Di%26cod%3D22>> [accessed 11 February 2012].
- 42 '[The] exhibition was very well received in Paris,' Isozaki told Hans Obrist: 'Michel Foucault [became] interested in Japanese culture and came to Japan afterwards and went to the Zen temple, tried to practice meditation [...]. And Jacques Derrida also found his key concept *espa[c]ement* is similar to "ma"'. The exhibition subsequently travelled to the US and northern Europe.
- 43 See N, 190: 'l'attitude japonaise (≠ kantisme) [...] ne conceptualise ni le temps ni l'espace, mais seulement l'intervalle, le rapport de deux moments, de deux lieux ou objets'.
- 44 'L'intervalle', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23 October 1978. OC, V, 475–77 (p. 475). The text is followed in the *Œuvres Complètes* by Barthes's 'jeu de l'oe' (a diagram of the exhibition space with accompanying rather cryptic captions) written for the exhibition catalogue.
- 45 See Barthes's paper 'L'Image' given at the conference on his work at Cerisy in June 1977 for more on his ideas concerning the negative image of the person as constructed by others (OC, V, 512–19).
- 46 Richard B. Pilgrim, 'Intervals ("Ma") in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan', *History of Religions*, 25.3 (1986): 255–77 (p. 257).
- 47 Pilgrim, 'Intervals', p. 265.
- 48 Pilgrim, 'Intervals', p. 265.
- 49 Much of the critical literature on Barthes's 'orientalism' focuses on his fascination with the 'vide' he sees as characterising oriental thought. This fascination can be easily fitted into an Orientalist critique when aligned with traditionally Orientalist figures of the passive, inscrutable Orient. Thus Dalia Kandiyoti writes censoriously about the 'aesthetics of the void' that Barthes sees in Loti's *Aziyadé*. She is concerned that 'in constructing a utopia of absolute difference, based on liquidation and absence', Barthes permits the 'return' of a repressed 'exoticism'. 'Roland Barthes Abroad', p. 236.
- 50 Hokenson, *Japan*, p. 353.
- 51 In Barthes's interview with *The French Review* in February 1979 (a month after this lecture), he again describes 'les cultures orientales' in terms of breathing. The Orient, he says, is useful because it represents an absolute alterity to Western cultures. This alterity is vital to his intellectual life: 'Ce que je peux percevoir, par reflets très lointains, de la pensée orientale me permet de respirer'. OC, V, 741–42.
- 52 See Jean-Pierre Richard on Barthes's praise in *Le Neutre* for 'cette vertu apparemment paradoxale qu'est le *flasque*. [...] [C'est] un choix de ne pas choisir, de ne rien sacrifier dans l'ouverture de toute une multiplicité du désirable. [...] le refus d'un éréthisme de l'option (ne pas vouloir opter, c'est aussi, et encore, *ne pas vouloir saisir*'). *Roland Barthes, dernier paysage: essai* (Paris: Verdier, 2006), p. 32.
- 53 Pilgrim, 'Intervals', p. 251.
- 54 The essay on Stendhal, 'On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu'on aime', is Barthes's final piece of work, but had not been fully corrected before the accident in February 1980 which led to his death a month later.
- 55 'Cher Antonioni...', *Cahiers du cinéma*, May 1980. OC, V, 900–905 (p. 901). See the discussion of this text in Ch. 2 above.
- 56 Compare *L'Empire des signes*, where Barthes discusses Japanese flower-arranging as an art of the interstice: '[C]e qui est produit, c'est la circulation de

- l'air, dont les fleurs, les feuilles, les branches [...] ne sont en somme que les parois...' (ES, 63).
- 57 *China* [*Chung Kuo / Cina*], dir. Michelangelo Antonioni (Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1972). Antonioni was invited to China by Mao. The filmmaker's visit was controlled in much the same way as the *Tel Quel* delegation's visit. The documentary's settings are thus restricted to the locations which Antonioni was allowed to visit, such as factories, a collective farm, and Shanghai port. However, the film was denounced as anti-Chinese, and was not shown in China until 2004.
- 58 Tao was exported to Japan from the seventh century onwards, Zen from the twelfth century. For more on the assimilation of Chinese philosophies into Japanese culture, see David Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan's Synthesis of China from the Eighth through the Eighteenth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
- 59 Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 16.
- 60 Watts is in the bibliography of *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, whereas Jean Grenier's *L'Esprit du tao* (Paris: Flammarion, 1957) makes a first appearance in *Comment vivre ensemble*. Barthes presumably (re)read both texts during the winter of 1976 as he was preparing his lectures and readying the *Fragments* for publication.
- 61 Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 16.
- 62 Watts, *Way of Zen*, pp. 16–17.
- 63 Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. and intro. D.C. Lau (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 58.
- 64 See for example the figure of 'Délicatesse' in *Le Neutre*: Barthes discusses the Japanese art of tea (*chanoyu*) as an example of 'délicatesse' (p. 59); he also uses Suzuki's explanation of *sabi* to define the principle (p. 65).
- 65 'Sagesse de l'Art' was written for the catalogue of the Twombly exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, April–June 1979 (OC, V, 688–702). 'Cy Twombly ou "Non multa sed multum"' (OC, V, 703–20) appears in volume 6 of Yvon Lambert's *Cy Twombly: catalogue raisonné des œuvres sur papier*, 6 vols. (Milan: Multhipla, 1979).
- 66 The Freud text to which Barthes refers is *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci* (1910) [*Un Souvenir d'enfance de Léonard de Vinci*, trans. Marie Bonaparte (Paris: Gallimard, 1927)]. In *Pour les Oiseaux* (Paris: Belfond, 1976), the French translation of his interviews with Daniel Charles, John Cage demonstrates an attitude of simplicity and acceptance which Barthes admires, as his mentions of this text in *Le Neutre* (p. 224) make clear. Barthes quotes Henri Mongault's translation of *La Guerre et la Paix* (Paris: Gallimard/Pléiade, 1947).
- 67 This is a belief which Taoism shares with Christian negative theology, as Barthes is aware.
- 68 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, p. 27.
- 69 Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, ed. Jacques Voisine (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964). See Hadot's 'Le Sage et le monde' in *Exercices spirituels*, pp. 343–60, especially p. 356.
- 70 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, p. 356.
- 71 A passage from Rousseau's fifth promenade makes this beneficial loss even clearer: 'Le temps n'est plus rien pour [moi] [...] le présent dure toujours sans néanmoins marquer sa durée et sans aucune trace de succession, sans aucun autre sentiment de privation ne de jouissance, de plaisir ni de peine, de désir ni de crainte, que celui seul de notre existence' (*Rêveries*, p. 102). Hadot comments on this: 'Le sentiment de l'existence, dont parl[e] Rousseau, c'est ce sentiment de l'identité entre l'existence universelle et notre existence' (*Exercices spirituels*, p. 358).



- 72 Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 145. Barthes mentions Hakuin's *satori* in *Le Neutre* (27 May, 220).
- 73 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. xvi.
- 74 Comment, *Roland Barthes*, p. 188.
- 75 Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 121.
- 76 Michael Sheringham notes the importance of the weather as an 'indirect mode of utterance' which Barthes uses in the rendering of his *incidents*, and reminds us that there are discussions of 'le temps qu'il fait' in Barthes's 1972 essay on Pierre Loti's *Aziyadé* and in the 'Quotidien' figure in *Le Plaisir du texte*. Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 200.
- 77 This is a very different 'effet de réel' to that analysed in Barthes's 1968 essay, 'L'Effet de réel', which discusses the connotative effects of the 'détail concret' in realist fiction. OC, III, 25–32 (p. 31).
- 78 Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 41.
- 79 Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 201.
- 80 Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism (series 1)*, ed. Christmas Humphreys (London: Rider, 1970), p. 12.
- 81 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 8.
- 82 N, 3 June, 232. The 'Assis paisiblement' poem appears in the following texts: *Incidents* (written 1968–69) (OC, V, 974); *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (p. 287); *Le Neutre*, 3 June 1978 (p. 232); *La Préparation du roman II*, 8 Dec. 1979 (pp. 216–17); and the 'Osons être paresseux' interview, 10 December 1979 (OC, V, 763). It is also referred to obliquely in sketches three and four of *Vita Nova*, August 1979 (OC, V, 1011, 1013). In the third *Vita Nova* sketch, the conflation of the child with the poem itself is made explicit: 'L'Enfant marocain du Poème Zenrin'.
- 83 Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 134.
- 84 'Osons être paresseux', interview with Jean-Paul Enthoven for *Le Monde*, 10 December 1979. OC, V, 760–70 (p. 763).
- 85 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, p. 356.
- 86 Rousseau, *Rêveries*, p. 49.
- 87 'D'eux à nous', written for a dossier on Voltaire and Rousseau, *Le Monde*, 7 April 1978. OC, V, 454–55 (p. 455).
- 88 See Knight, *Barthes and Utopia*, pp. 93–96 for an exploration of the idea of idleness and the 'tas' in the *Vita Nova* sketches.
- 89 The Urt diary is also quoted in *Le Neutre*, 1 April (135). 'Délibération' was published in *Tel Quel*, Winter 1979. OC, V, 668–81.
- 90 'Sur les photographies de Daniel Boudinet', *Créatis*, 1977. OC, V, 316–29.
- 91 The other is 'la première photo' by Niepce (1822), depicting a laid dinner-table.
- 92 Hokenson, *Japan*, p. 375.
- 93 Kuki, 'Considerations on Time', p. 62.

## 5

*La Préparation du roman:*  
The Novel and the Fragment

...et si Novalis n'a pas composé le texte de la 'dissolution du poète', ce n'est pas seulement parce qu'il est mort, mais parce que cette œuvre, comme tous ses plus grands projets, ne cessait de se perdre dans la multiplication de ses propres semences. Ce qui pourrait peut-être vouloir dire que – dans le fragment tout au moins – le geste le plus spécifique du romantisme [...] serait celui par lequel au sein même de la quête ou de la théorie de l'Œuvre il abandonne ou retranche [...] l'Œuvre même – et se mue de façon à peine perceptible en 'œuvre de l'absence de l'œuvre'...

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire*, 1978

Mid-way through his four-year tenure at the Collège de France, Barthes seeks a new form for his writing. As we have seen, his sense that a transformation of his writing is required is crystallised in a moment occurring on 15 April 1978, which he characterises as a 'sorte de *Satori*' (PR, 32). The new form of writing fantasised by Barthes involves a productive tension between the aesthetic minimalism of the haiku and the maximalism of the 'grande œuvre' as exemplified by *À la Recherche du temps perdu*: 'Proust et le haïku se croisent' (PR, 99). As Kuki points out, though the haiku is extremely condensed, 'a very small thing contains the infinite just as much as does a thing of great dimensions'.<sup>1</sup> Thus the focus in *La Préparation du roman I* on the haiku as the propaedeutic to the writing of a 'roman' is in Barthes's view entirely logical. He hopes that the fantasised 'roman' would achieve the notational intensity of the haiku, at greater length.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will examine the search for a new form which Barthes identifies at the opening of *La Préparation du roman* and in 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' as being central to the attainment of a new lease of life as a writer. Instead of the encyclopedia, the idea of the 'roman' is now central to Barthes's pedagogy and his conception of his writing. The starting-point of Barthes's lectures on 'la préparation du roman' is the atomisation ('défection', 'émiettement') of the novel, in terms both of reading and of writing. However, this fragmentation coexists with a totalising conception of the 'roman' as being immense, heterogeneous, and multi-generic. This tension between fragmentation

and totalisation – between the haiku and the ‘grande œuvre’ – in *La Préparation du roman* is similar to the oscillation between systematisation and anti-systematism that is embodied by Barthes’s use of the ‘geste encyclopédique’ (CVE, 182) in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*. More specifically, Barthes’s view of literature at this point is firmly Romantic: he portrays himself in *La Préparation du roman* as ‘un homme qui raconte sa décision d’écrire à la manière “romantique”’ (8 December 1979, 206). His idealistic conception of the ‘roman’ closely resembles that of the German Romantics of the Jena group. In the literary theory of the Schlegel brothers and Novalis, writing in the late 1790s in the wake of Kant, we find a fantasy of the novel strikingly similar to Barthes’s, as well as a similar practice of fragmentation. As Claire de Obaldia puts it, there is for these sceptical thinkers an important link between the encyclopedia and the novel as emblems of the future book: ‘In [Barthes’s] work, the substitution of the encyclopedia for the novel anticipated by Schlegel follows the Romantic usage of the encyclopedia as a “system in fragments”’.<sup>3</sup> The metaphysical and ontological implications of systematisation are rejected in these thinkers’ work, but the idea of totality is also retained: no Hegelian dialectic here, but, perhaps, a Kantian universal particular instead.

The ‘roman’ that Barthes imagines embodies these tensions. The references to form generally, as well as specific generic forms referred to and used in *La Préparation du roman*, ‘Longtemps...’, and contemporaneous texts, will be examined in an attempt to show that the fragment as ‘idol’ of writing (Barthes’s term) is never overturned, despite Barthes’s professed temptation to try to write more continuously. The short form is retained as the ideal even during his period of desire for a ‘Grande Œuvre’. Much of Barthes’s thinking on form and on the possibility of creation is deeply indebted, especially in *La Préparation du roman*, to Mallarmé’s letter on the forms of the ‘Album’ and the ‘Livre’, and to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s text on German Romanticism. It will be seen that, partially due to the influence of these texts, much of Barthes’s work from late 1978 is concerned with the planning and projection of a work which is not intended to be written.

**From Cerisy to ‘Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...’:  
‘le romanesque’**

By 1977, the status of Barthes’s writing was no longer considered to be purely critical. His two last books, *Roland Barthes* and *Fragments d’un*

*discours amoureux*, were both imbued with what Barthes called ‘romanesque’ elements. As he had explained in the 1963 preface to *Essais critiques*, Barthes believes that the critic must use ‘un langage indirect’ (EC, 17) in his combat against ideology. Techniques of the indirect must, however, be practised in a covert manner, given that the critic must at the same time fulfil his social and overtly critical role: ‘Ce qui marque le critique, c’est donc une pratique *secrète* de l’indirect’ (EC, 21). Indirectness is given freer licence in literature than it is within the field of criticism. Therefore, were the critic to want to express himself ‘avec *exactitude*’, he would need to partially transform himself into a novelist, ‘c’est-à-dire substitue[r] au faux direct dont il s’abrite, un indirect déclaré, comme l’est celui de toutes les fictions’. Barthes declares here that the novel is the ‘horizon’ for the critic, and that the critic thus resembles the ‘Narrateur proustien’ who exists in a state of anticipation: ‘le critique est celui qui va écrire, et qui [...] emplit cette attente d’une œuvre *de surcroît*’ (EC, 21).

Barthes retains during the 1970s this sense of criticism as a state of tension and as a proleptic activity. ‘Le romanesque’ is conceived of as a destabilising tactic which assumes anti-systematic potency when employed within criticism. The critical essay is no longer generically pure; both critical and novelistic elements are in play with each other, and the ‘horizon’ of the novel is present, but never reached. The fragmentary romanesque cannot topple over into conventional narrative, for if it does, its anti-systematic power is lost. In a 1977 text on Romantic song, he likens the musical genre of the fantasia to the discontinuous ‘romanesque’:

*Fantasieren*: à la fois imaginer et improviser: [...] produire du romanesque sans construire un roman. Même les cycles de lieder ne racontent pas une histoire d’amour, mais seulement un voyage: chaque moment de ce voyage est [...] aveugle, fermé à tout sens général, à toute idée de destin, à toute transcendance spirituelle: en somme, une errance pure, un devenir sans finalité.<sup>4</sup>

This quotation makes clear that Barthes associates the ‘romanesque’ with the sceptical and subjective emphasis on fantasy, which we have already discussed in the context of *Leçon*. The ‘romanesque’ is explicitly opposed to the teleological conception of the ‘roman’, retaining always a sense of incompleteness.

Barthes’s critics during the 1970s seemed to believe that the ‘romanesque’ in Barthes’s writing equated to preparatory exercises for the ‘roman’ proper. This potential ‘novel’ became almost mythical, as Claude Coste says: ‘Au Livre mallarméen, au chapitre perdu de la

*Poétique* d'Aristote, [...] la France littéraire des années 70 ajoute un nouveau monstre: le "roman" de Roland Barthes. "Barthes écrit-il un roman? Va-t-il écrire un roman? A-t-il écrit un roman?"<sup>5</sup> Barthes's own allusions to the 'romanesque' appear to invalidate these questions. However, at the Cerisy colloquium on his work in June 1977, he appears to collude with the view that a 'roman' may after all be the desirable form for his future writing. Here, Barthes mentions that he is often asked when he is going to write a novel. He continues to provide matter for speculation: 'J'ai très envie de faire un roman, et chaque fois que je lis un roman qui me plaît, j'ai envie d'en faire autant' (C, 251). He points out, though, that his own methods of writing actively prevent him from even planning a novel, for he is not used to writing continuously, and has moreover often borne witness to his distrust of the limitation of meaning brought about by systematic and cumulative exposition of a theme: hence the massive use of fragmented and aleatory structures in his work. Would it be possible, he asks, to write a novel 'par aphorismes, par fragments? Sous quelles conditions?' (C, 251–22). Would such a narrative be recognisable as a work of fiction?

He returns to this problem towards the end of the colloquium, during the discussion of Frédéric Berthet's paper, 'Idées sur le roman'.<sup>6</sup> Barthes responds to Berthet, saying that '[le] roman, effectivement, c'est ce qui est devant moi' (C, 366), and adding that this vision of himself as someone who could write a novel (note the conditional) is deeply restorative. He describes an evening at Cerisy, a few days previously, when, during a state of utter fatigue, he became rejuvenated by the epiphanic idea that he could enter, in a spirit of devotion, into the sphere of the novel:

j'ai été soutenu d'une façon en quelque sorte miraculeuse, euphorique, par l'idée que j'allais enfin écrire un roman, que j'allais enfin, toutes affaires cessantes, déblayant tout le reste, entrer dans une sorte de grande ascèse comme a pu le faire Proust [...] – j'allais moi aussi entrer en roman, comme on entre en religion. (C, 366–37)

This state, brought on by his rereading of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, resembles in many respects the non-dualistic, neutral states of existence examined in Chapter 4 above. The idea of writing a novel allows Barthes to imagine a revivifying unification of his various professional activities. Having made this clear, Barthes comments on Berthet's quotation from Sade's preface to *Crimes de l'Amour*. According to Sade, man writes novels in order to 'peindre les êtres qu'il implorait, [...et] pour célébrer ceux qu'il aimait' (C, 349). Barthes says that this line of Sade's has made him realise that his interest in the novel form is based on the desire to

represent those he loves. He has not accomplished this thus far in his writing, and thus, 'Si je veux peindre ces êtres que je dis aimer, eh bien, je n'ai pas d'autre solution que de changer de genre [...] et d'entrer dans le roman' (C, 367–68). Barthes reasserts his belief that the writing of the affective narrative would demand an absolute break from his long-standing use of parataxis:

Alors se pose d'une façon déchirante peut-être, mais en même temps très excitante, le problème du fragment parce qu'il est très possible que je sois alors obligé de rejeter *l'idole présente de mon écriture*, qui est le fragment. Et ça aurait évidemment beaucoup de conséquences; [...] j'entrerais délibérément en décadence, ce qui [...] est assez tentant. (C, 368, my emphasis)

During these moments at Cerisy, Barthes articulates most of the key features with which his major work thereafter will be preoccupied: 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...', *La Préparation du roman*, 'Délibération', 'On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu'on aime', *La Chambre claire* and *Vita Nova* all deal to varying extents with the idea of the novel as the unificatory horizon of his writing; literature as a devotional activity; the desire to 'peindre [ce] qu'on aime'; and Tolstoy and Proust as touchstones. Barthes's account in Cerisy of his sudden apprehending of the novel as the promise of a new life is reinforced by the *satori*-like experience in Morocco on 15 April 1978. This moment is described in the first lecture of *La Préparation du roman I: L'Œuvre comme volonté*:

Quelque chose comme la conversion 'littéraire' – [...] entrer en littérature, en écriture; *écrire*, comme si je ne l'avais jamais fait. [...] Puis, idée d'investir le Cours et le Travail dans la même entreprise (littéraire), de faire cesser la division du sujet, au profit d'un seul Projet, le Grand Projet: image de joie, si je me donnais une tâche unique. (PR, 32)

The 'tempting' image of the great work or project which is always ahead is poetically nourishing. This image, to which Barthes cleaves for the rest of his life, binds together all the strands of his activity. The idea of a literary work which would successfully express love constitutes the motivation of all the late work, both written and pedagogical. However, Barthes's statement that 'le roman est ce qui est devant moi' should be understood in the most absolute sense – it is something which, by design, will *always* be ahead for Barthes, no matter how far he advances. As Andrew Brown puts it, 'Barthes's projected novel is [...] a pointer, from theory to a real that would paradoxically be written as fiction. But, for Barthes, the novel is yet to come and this emergence is interminable: the novel becomes the Utopia of theory'.<sup>7</sup> The image of the novel shimmers

at the horizon of *La Préparation du roman* and the *Vita Nova* sketches. It is, and remains, a fantasy.

Even at the level of fantasy, moreover, Barthes never abandons the 'idol' of the fragment. A novel, understood as a conventional, continuous, fictional narrative, while it is explored heuristically by Barthes, is not empirically possible for him, given his poietic adherence to the fragment, his admitted inability to fabulate or to invent names, and the strongly felt affective imperative of rendering the 'vérité' of his emotions. There is an endemic strain within the French reception of Barthes which advocates categorising him as a novelist.<sup>8</sup> While it is clear that certain elements of *La Chambre claire* – often referred to as a 'roman'<sup>9</sup> – are indeed novelistic, its innovation inheres precisely in its utilisation of 'romanesque' elements within theoretical and non-fictional discourse. As McHoul and Wills put it in an exasperated article combating the canonisation of Barthes as novelist, 'Barthes *risks* writing literature – [...] there is a deliberate [...] demand made by the texts that they be permitted to be recuperated by literary ideology. That risk is continually run and, to display it *as* risk, the possibility of the non-literary [...] must be continually run up against'.<sup>10</sup> Their insistence that *La Chambre claire's* central achievement inheres in the formal tension between two discourses – theoretical and novelistic – is salutary. To recuperate *La Chambre claire* as a novel, and to state that *La Préparation du roman* and *Vita Nova* could have been novels had Barthes not died, misleadingly elides the specificity of Barthes's reflections on the difficulties of composition by wishfully implying that these reflections are ultimately far less important than the categorisation (as potential 'romans') of this writing. What deserves attention is the reflections themselves, in their projective and deliberately abortive status.

'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...',  
'critique pathétique' and 'émiettement'

The *Préparation du roman* lectures began on 2 December, 1978. However, the material of the first lecture had already been aired in October, during the 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' lecture at the Collège. Barthes's own hesitation over the form of his writing has come to a head, due to his sudden consciousness of his own mortality. The work ahead of him is the last work he will do: 'Il me faut, impérieusement, loger mon travail dans une case aux contours incertains, mais dont je sais (conscience nouvelle) qu'ils sont *finis*: la dernière case'

(‘Longtemps’, 466). Grief for his mother has engendered an ardent wish to break with the kind of work he has previously done, and with the frustrating maintenance and repetition it involves: ‘Je dois sortir de cet état ténébreux, où me conduisent l’usure des travaux répétés et le deuil → Cet ensablement, cet enfoncement immobile dans le sable mouvant [...] cette mort lente du sur-place’ (PR, 28). As we saw in Chapter 2, Barthes aligns his own dilemma with that of Proust, and shows that Proust’s great breakthrough was his interweaving of both essay and novel. The device facilitating this interweaving is ‘un principe provocant: la *désorganisation* du Temps (de la chronologie)’ (463). Proust allows his work to unfurl in accordance with the dictates of involuntary memory, rendering it ‘hétérodoxe’.

Such a rupturing of linear organisation is, says Barthes, a quintessentially modern tactic. He supports this assertion with a citation from Nietzsche, drawn from Deleuze’s study *Nietzsche et la philosophie*: ‘Il faut émettre l’univers, perdre le respect du tout’ (‘Longtemps’, 463).<sup>11</sup> He also refers to John Cage, who shared Nietzsche’s belief in the principle of atomising the creative act so that no unitary whole is formed. Now the idea of fragmentation is applied to a reading of the novel. Barthes explains that during his grief, two specific episodes from novels struck him with an extraordinary affective impact: the death of the grandmother in *À la Recherche du temps perdu*, and the death of Prince Bolkonsky in *War and Peace*. These passages have shown him that literature can conjure an astounding feeling of identification in the reader. Barthes calls this a ‘moment de vérité’. Such a moment involves the confluence of love and death: ‘Donc, *Moment de vérité*: Au plan du sujet: arrachement émotif, cri viscéral. [...] Dans le moment de vérité, le sujet (lisant) touche à nu le “scandale” humain: que la mort et l’amour existent en même temps’ (PR, 159).<sup>12</sup> The power of these moments inheres in their *pathetic* force – ‘not finite knowledge’, as Leslie Hill puts it, ‘but boundless feeling’.<sup>13</sup>

It is for the isolation of these moments that the mentions of Proust’s temporal ‘disorganisation’ and Nietzsche’s ‘crumbling’ have prepared us. For if we are properly to recognise the ‘*pathos*’ of such episodes, says Barthes, we must be willing to pay them disproportionate attention, thereby essentially disregarding the structure and logic of the surrounding narrative. In a ‘pathetic’ reading, perceptions of the book’s significance would shift away from its overall cohesiveness, towards the brief and perhaps even disruptive passages of the most emotional impact. This suggestion that the structure of the novel be broken down, is, as Barthes realises, problematic: ‘Nous sommes encore loin d’une théorie ou d’une



histoire pathétique du Roman; car il faudrait, pour l'esquisser, accepter d'émettre le "tout" de l'univers romanesque, ne plus placer l'essence du livre dans sa structure'. Rather, he says, we would need to recognise that reading involves a process of atomisation in which a dialectic of destruction and construction is at play:

Il faudrait [...] reconnaître que l'œuvre émeut, vit, germe, à travers une espèce de 'délabrement' qui ne laisse debout que certains moments, lesquels en sont à proprement parler les sommets, la lecture vivante, concernée, ne suivant en quelque sorte qu'une ligne de crête: les moments de vérité sont comme les points de *plus-value* de l'anecdote. ('Longtemps', 468)

Barthes reprises this idea of crumbling or fragmentation as a vital process in the final lecture of *De la vie à l'œuvre*.<sup>14</sup> Here, he once again suggests that it might be possible to outline a theory of reading 'qui s'occuperait ou partirait des *moments* de l'œuvre: moments *forts*, moments de vérité ou, si l'on ne craint pas le mot, moments *pathétiques*'. If one could practise such a 'critique *pathétique*', one could perhaps arrive at 'une discrimination des valeurs (de la valeur) de l'œuvre selon la *force* des moments—ou d'un moment' (PR, 160). These moments, he says, are the 'justification absolue' of the novel, and to give them their due recognition, we would have to accept that we must 'déprécier l'œuvre, ne pas en respecter le Tout, abolir des parts de cette œuvre, la *ruiner* – pour la faire vivre' (PR, 161).<sup>15</sup>

On looking closely at the end of the 'Longtemps' lecture, we find that the conception of the novel here is in no way limited to the 'real novel, the "great" novel';<sup>16</sup> the references to Proust and Tolstoy do not dictate the form of the postulated work. The last two pages of this lecture involve a curious mixture of deferring to, and dismissal of, a vaguely defined version of the genre. Barthes misquotes the Sade line used by Berthet in order to explain his a-generic understanding of the novel: 'Sade, oui, Sade disait que le roman consiste à peindre ceux qu'on aime' ('Longtemps', 469). There is a sense of supplication in his hope that the novel will allow him 'la représentation d'un ordre affectif' (469), sanctioning ('me permettre') the expression of affect to a greater extent than critical discourse does. It is the perceived status of the discourse itself which is of interest; Barthes is not concerned with the actual mechanics of the production of novelistic discourse (the interrelation of the roles of author, narrator and characters).

The final, and also most oft-quoted, point of the 'Longtemps' lecture is the outlining of the method of simulation, introduced in the final paragraph: 'Ce Roman utopique, il m'importe de faire comme *si* je devais l'écrire. [...] Je postule un roman à faire, et de la sorte je peux espérer en

apprendre plus sur le roman qu'en le considérant seulement comme un objet déjà fait par les autres' (470).<sup>17</sup> It is here, with the explanation that a hypothetical novel will be used as a heuristic tool, that the respect for the convenient enunciative ventriloquism of the novel cedes to what is essentially a valedictory dismissal, though ostensibly an enlarging, of that genre. Stating that he must act *as if* he was going to write a novel – and provoking a ripple of amusement from the audience at the *Préparation du roman* version of this lecture, as the recording attests – Barthes says that the simulation to be worked towards may not even be a novel: 'Je ne sais s'il sera possible d'appeler encore "roman" l'œuvre que je désire et dont j'attends qu'elle rompe avec la nature uniformément intellectuelle de mes écrits passés' (470). This is the first of several indications, given at intervals throughout the *Préparation du roman* lectures, that the novel *per se* is not, in fact, the desired goal. Its invocation is instrumental: it serves as a vehicle for reflection on the possibility of affective, non-egotistical expression in *any* other genre than that of the essay. Therefore, no generic constraints apply. The novel is the guiding fantasy, then, but the classic, realist version of it, which we might assume to be the objective of Barthes's endeavours, is swiftly abandoned as volume and mass, and is retained only in the ideal of 'moments de vérité'. The novel itself, as we will see, vanishes under statements about the desired work as embodying truth, the world; the desired work as 'toute œuvre' (*PR*, 203). The novel is a convenient term for what might be any form at all. Simulation as method involves an immediate loss – albeit a loss postulated as beneficial – of the novel *per se*.

This loss is similar to that articulated in the final lines of Barthes's near-contemporaneous article on the diary form, 'Délibération', wherein it becomes apparent that his reconsideration of the diary form has led to its remodelling into something entirely different, or unfeasible.<sup>18</sup> Barthes writes here that he may be able to 'save' the diary form 'à seule condition de la travailler à mort, jusqu'au bout de l'extrême fatigue, comme un Texte à peu près impossible: travail au terme duquel il est bien possible que le Journal ainsi tenu ne ressemble plus du tout à un Journal' ('Délibération', 681). We see here the same adieu to the diary form, understood restrictively, as we see in 'Longtemps' with the novel. The form is enlarged into a pan-generic ideal, which, though it may seem vast in conception, is founded upon an intensely subjective desire for the expression of affect. Barthes's literary idealism thus closely resembles that of the German Romantics. For, as David Simpson has pointed out, the universalism of Friedrich Schlegel, for example, is particular: 'Readers of Schlegel [...] soon discover that what may look like a grand totality of everything is

actually an ironic reduction to the parameters of temporality and subjectivity'.<sup>19</sup> Schlegel's idealistic, fragmentary, anti-systematic approach to the novel thus anticipates Barthes's similar approach.

### *De la vie à l'œuvre*: The 'roman poikilos' and the Failure of the Fantasy

The loss of a purely generic understanding of the novel, however, cedes to another understanding at the end of *De la vie à l'œuvre*. During the 1978–79 lectures, we witness an increasingly evident – and perhaps increasingly impracticable – desire that the postulated work express the truth of the world and represent 'le Souverain Bien' (PR, 40). At the same time, there is a loosening of the concept of the form of this work. Ultimately, Barthes arrives at a definition of the novel as constitutively heterogeneous. This definition determines, before the event, his failure to write one.

The opening of *De la vie à l'œuvre* reprises the material from 'Longtemps' concerning the fantasy of the new form and the urgent sense of the need for a fundamental change in his writing which would positively change, also, his life. The change must be one of form, as a change of 'contenu, doctrine' only is merely 'banal': 'Pour qui a écrit, le champ de la *Vita Nuova*, ce ne peut être que [...] la découverte d'une nouvelle pratique de l'écriture' (PR, 29). Barthes tells us coyly in the second lecture that the fantasised form is indeed that of the novel, but that, contrary to rumour, he is not writing one. The fantasy is merely 'un moteur qui met en marche'. It is necessarily quite sketchy. In order to function as an enabling tool, the fantasy 'doit rester à même une image grossière, codée: le Poème, le Roman → ce n'est qu'en luttant avec le Réel [...] que le fantasme se perd comme fantasme et atteint le Subtil, l'Inouï' (PR, 9 December 178, 36). For now, in the 'preparation' stage, the fantasy of the 'roman' must remain at the level of being imagined only as a typical example of its genre. However, shortly after asserting that the fantasy is, perforce, generically coded, Barthes says that his fantasy has essentially nothing to do with such a broad conception, but is concerned with something more unique: 'Le fantasme saisit le "Roman pas comme les autres"', he says, 'comme si l'essence non-scientifique du roman [...] était cherchée dans un *déni* du genre "Roman". C'est bien le cas pour *La Recherche du temps perdu*, et même pour *Guerre et paix*' (PR, 38–39).

While this statement is in line with what 'Longtemps' had already established, the abandonment of the idea of the form *telle quelle* is puzzling, when we have been told that the choice or change of a form is

the most vital part of the enterprise – it is the ‘Grand Projet’ of Barthes’s life now, he has said. Why is the formal conceit (if such it ever was) being left behind? Because it is ultimately less important than the ideas which Barthes seeks to have represented. The idea of the novel is an extremely amorphous one, we now realise, conceived in line with the non-dualistic desire for the *intraitable* we have seen in the last chapter:

Les blessures du Désir peuvent être recueillies, transcendées par l’idée de ‘faire un Roman’, de dépasser les contingences de l’échec par une grande tâche, un Désir Général dont l’objet est le monde entier. [...] Roman: apparaît comme *Souverain Bien*. [...] Donc, en un sens, le Roman est fantasmé comme ‘acte d’amour’. (PR, 39–40)

This expansive list of suggestions of the role and virtue of the fantasised work makes it clear that a poetic ‘échec’ is subsidiary to the emotional intention that informs the fantasy. The reader or listener may be frustrated as she realises that the form, presented initially as an imperative, almost, in fact, as a matter of life or a Sisyphean death-in-life,<sup>20</sup> is no more than a provisional, all-embracing and therefore unfeasible outline for emotions and their vast inspiration: love, the ‘whole world’, and ‘la vie “contemporaine”, concomitante’ (PR, 45). We are returned to the idea of the banal and the incomparable as discussed in Chapter 4: the desired form would treat ‘l’intraitable réalité’ – a daunting task, and one accomplished (in Barthes’s view) only in certain haikus, and in the Tolstoy and Proust ‘moments de vérité’.

In the final moments of the last lecture of *De la vie à l’œuvre*, we realise that the previous lectures have prepared us for a new conception of the novel as a form-content mass, which is so voluminous as to be deliberately impracticable. Immediately after a lengthy discussion of the ‘moment de vérité’ and a reiteration of the idea of a ‘critique pathétique’, Barthes suddenly announces that the novel is not feasible for him, because its diversity means that it cannot sustain the intensity of the ideal moment of truth: ‘Le Roman [...] dans sa grande et longue coulée, ne peut soutenir la “vérité” (du moment): ce n’est pas sa fonction’ (PR, 10 March 1979, 161). He is unable to invent a narrative that might link these moments. This inability to fabulate is presented as an inability to lie in the productive manner that the novel does. Not a technical problem, then, but a deep-seated resistance to fabrication which is presented as an *ethical* resistance. The final lines of the first *Préparation* series conclude with this declaration:

Peut-être donc: parvenir à faire un roman [...] c’est au fond accepter de mentir, parvenir à mentir [...] – mentir de ce mensonge second et pervers qui consiste à mêler le vrai et le faux → En définitive, alors, la résistance au

roman, l'impuissance au roman (à sa pratique) serait une résistance *morale*. (PR, 161).

It is the infinite artifice of the novel which 'causes' Barthes's inability to write one: this view of the novel as necessarily heterogeneous and therefore unassailable is, perhaps, syllogistic. In any case, the novel at this point is (again) thrown out of court as a realistic option. As Barthes outlines his 'moral' impasse, he also gives us an image of the novel as infinitely many-faceted – an image which builds on the previous comments about the novel representing the whole world:

Je me le représente comme un tissu, [...] une vaste et longue toile peinte d'illusions, de leurres, de choses inventées, de 'faux', si l'on veut: toile brillante, colorée, voile de la Maya, ponctuée, clairsemée de Moments de vérité qui en sont la justification absolue [...] Quand je produis des *Notations*, <en vue du Roman> elles sont toutes 'vraies': je ne mens jamais (je n'invente jamais), mais précisément, je n'accède pas au Roman; le roman commencerait non au *faux*, mais quand on mêle sans prévenir le vrai et le faux: [...] → le roman serait *poikilos*, bigarré, varié, tacheté, moucheté, couvert de peintures, de tableaux, vêtement brodé, compliqué, complexe. (PR, 161)<sup>21</sup>

This moment at the end of the first series of *Préparation* lectures paves the way for the second, where the notion of the desired work as form or as content is comprehensively overshadowed by the description of the desire to write, and the material and mental arrangements which must be made in order for the writing to begin. This is an example of a now familiar prospective procedure, which prioritises exploration and hypothesis over any outcome or end result. In the second lecture of the second series, there is a section entitled 'Indistinction/*Poikilos*'. Here Barthes discusses the writing tendency and how, when the desire to write is strong, 'l'objet s'efface ou s'estompe au profit de [cette] Tendance'. From that point on, the division of genres becomes entirely irrelevant: 'Il y a évidemment indifférence croissante à distinguer les objets de l'Écrire, c'est-à-dire les "genres" de la littérature; la division des genres' (PR, 8 December 1979, 201). Here, the idea of the importance of the 'tendance, dont l'objet importait moins que la richesse même du *Tendre-vers*' (203) is at the expense of the desired work as object, for now, he tells us, the idea of the form of that work has been entirely extended. More than that: it never existed. There was no cohesive form as such actually behind the conception of the lectures, but rather, again, the idea of 'l'écriture fragmentée et bariolée' that prevented Barthes's accession to the novel at the end of the 1978–79 lectures. Barthes describes the kind of multifarious writing he means, where many genres are mixed, as in the writings of Nietzsche and in Plato's dialogues. He concludes the section by saying:

C'est un peu à cette extension – ou défection – du Roman que je pensais, en intitulant ce Cours: 'La Préparation du Roman': *Roman* doit peu à peu s'entendre comme Roman Absolu, Roman Romantique, Roman *poikilos*, Roman de l'Écrire-Tendance; autrement dit, toute œuvre, <tout texte>. (PR, 203)

But 'every work' is no work at all. Not only is the novel negated as genre, but the postulated work itself disappears. The ideal of the 'défection' of the novel into fragments ('l'écriture fragmentée et bariolée') shows that the dream of the continuous work is truly a chimera, and that the fragment is still at the forefront of Barthes's thought. The first series of lectures had concentrated unswervingly on the shortest possible form (the haiku), with the ostensible aim of ultimately reaching the longer form of which these fragments are the kernel. And yet its conclusion was that any stringing-together of the 'moments' was simply untenable for Barthes. Obliquely, the second series of lectures provides several indications that the fragment is, after all, not abandoned. Even the question of the actual writing itself seems to have become marginal. But there remains the niggling question of the form of that chimerical work: the word 'novel' still exercises the tyrannical fascination that has led so many commentators to assert that Barthes can be seen as a novelist. The question should not be whether Barthes *would* have written a novel ('Quand allez-vous sauter le pas?'): the *Préparation* makes it clear that that is neither the most pertinent nor the most interesting question. Rather, the question should be whether the 'idol' of the fragment is ever overcome, in the fantasy, by the 'decadence' of a continuous, 'roman'-like narrative. The influence of German Romanticism seems to prove that the fragment remains pre-eminent.

### *L'Œuvre comme volonté* and Jena Romanticism

Barthes's mention of the *poikilos*-writing he had in mind when thinking of the title of his current lecture course is strikingly similar to the Jena Romantics' ideal of literature. They imagined a work which would contain in a glorious synthesis all genres and the theory of all those genres. The Jena Romantics were of great interest to Maurice Blanchot: like Barthes, Blanchot is entranced by fragmentation and by the idea of literature as being infinitely *ahead* of one.<sup>22</sup> In *L'Entretien infini* (1969), Blanchot writes enthusiastically about the goals of the Jena group – but his criticism of them centres on the fact that wanting every form essentially means guaranteeing that you end up with none:

L'une des tâches du romantisme [...a été] d'être tout, mais sans contenu ou avec des contenus presque indifférents et ainsi d'affirmer ensemble l'absolu et le fragmentaire, la totalité, mais dans une forme qui, étant toutes formes, c'est-à-dire à la limite n'étant aucune, ne réalise pas le tout, mais le signifie en le suspendant, voire en le brisant.<sup>23</sup>

Precisely the same remark could be made regarding Barthes's suggestion that we see the novel as 'Roman Absolu, Roman Romantique, Roman *poikilos*; [...] autrement dit, toute œuvre' (PR, 203). In fact, most of Blanchot's ten-page discussion of the Jena Romantics in *L'Entretien infini* is startlingly pertinent to the Barthes of *L'Œuvre comme volonté*. The influence on these lectures of Jena Romanticism, as gleaned directly from the pages of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's just-published *L'Absolu littéraire*, is considerable.<sup>24</sup> Published in September 1978, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's text made available for the first time in French several key texts by the Jena group, such as the *Critical Fragments* and *Athenaeum Fragments*.<sup>25</sup> These were accompanied by philosophical exegesis of the texts. Barthes had probably already written his lecture notes for *De la vie à l'œuvre* when this text was published. However, he had clearly internalised the main propositions of *L'Absolu littéraire* by the time he came to write the notes for *L'Œuvre comme volonté* as well as *Vita Nova* in summer 1979. Barthes tells us in the first lecture that *L'Œuvre comme volonté* is partially premised on Jena Romanticism, given its relevance to the discussion of the desire to write as pure and intransitive ('Désir d'écrire comme *seul désir*'). He points out that 'il faudrait ici relever, depuis le Romantisme, qui a posé l'*Absolu littéraire*, les traits excessifs du désir d'écrire – ou qui font que ce désir n'existe qu'excessivement' (PR, 1 December 1979, 195–96). The Romanticism described by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy is taken as the starting point for the course's study of the fantasies, difficulties and practical problems undergone by those – including himself – who feel this desire to write intensely. The lectures will quote liberally from the diaries and correspondence of Kafka, Flaubert, Proust and Mallarmé, wherein the writers bear witness to their writerly hopes and frustrations. Such is the overall *parcours* of the lectures. Within this schema, there is another timeline, also premised on the significance of the Jena moment: in intense and telescoped fashion, Barthes provides a rapid historical explanation and justification of his extension of the idea of the novel into 'toute œuvre', and of the necessary priority of the fragment. This occurs in the section entitled 'Indistinction/*Poikilos*', just before the statements concerning the 'défection' of the novel – a 'défection' that is at the origin of the course itself.

Having established that during the period of German Romanticism the increasing strength of the writing *tendency* led to a growing indifference to the separation of genres, Barthes goes on to say that ‘le champ privilégié de cette [indifférenciation], c’est celui qui est tracé par l’éclatement du Roman, ou du moins sa déformation’. He swiftly lists Proust’s hesitation between forms; writers such as Nerval and Baudelaire who wished to blend a few genres at a time; and finally the transcending of the novel in Valéry, Breton, Bataille et al., where the canonical form of the novel is abandoned, but appears ‘comme une figure en palimpseste’. All this leads us inexorably to where we are now: ‘Tout cela se travaille au profit d’un nouveau mot non point générique, mais désignant une œuvre dont le genre est irrepérable: le Texte’ (PR, 201). He states that the closest historical equivalent that we have to this era of ‘l’éclatement du roman’<sup>26</sup> is German Romantic theory of the novel, which prefigures our theoretical age in demanding ‘le mélange, le “bariolage” des genres’. Barthes quotes Novalis:

Roman (Novalis, Schlegel) = mélange des genres, en l’absence de toute hiérarchie ou de tout découpage = Roman romantique ou Roman absolu. Novalis (*Encyclopédie*, 6<sup>e</sup> section, 2<sup>e</sup> livre, fragments 1441 et 1447): ‘*Art du roman*: le Roman ne devrait-il embrasser toutes les espèces de styles dans une succession diversement liée à l’esprit commun?’ ‘L’art du roman exclue toute continuité. Le roman doit être un édifice articulé dans chacune de ses périodes. Chaque petit morceau doit être quelque chose de coupé – de limité – un tout valant pour lui-même’. (PR, 202)

As Barthes points out, what Novalis provides is a ‘belle définition du Fragment comme Roman’, such that ‘l’objet est fractionné, au profit d’une moire d’énergies d’écriture’. In such a view of the literary object, intention (or the ‘volonté’ in the title of Barthes’s lecture course) becomes primary, with the actual writing itself featuring only ephemerally: ‘l’Écrire, comme tendance, veut dire que des objets d’écriture paraissent, brillent, disparaissent; ce qu’il reste, au fond, c’est un champ de forces’ (PR, 202). It is for this reason, Barthes asserts, that the rupturing and expansion of the novel genre prescribed in Romantic theory was the inspiration for this course.

Jena is thereby placed at the heart of the matter. Not only did it engender this course (and other work by Barthes; see below for a discussion of the Romantic idea of the *poikilos* in the sixth and seventh *Vita Nova* plans), but it is the birthplace of ‘our’ modern literature and the precursor of contemporary literary theory and the integration of theory into ‘primary’ texts. This view of the importance of Jena is drawn entirely from Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s text; they state in their book that ‘*L’Athenaeum* est notre lieu de naissance’.<sup>27</sup> In fact, a reading of the



blurb of their book alone reveals enough of their main thesis to reproduce it as Barthes does. The blurb posits that the Jena group's ideas inaugurate the main tenets of contemporary (poststructuralist) literary theory, or what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy call 'notre demi-sommeil théorique et nos rêveries d'écriture':

Le romantisme est d'abord une *théorie*. Et l'*invention* de la littérature. Il constitue même, très exactement, le moment inaugural de la littérature comme *production de sa propre théorie* – et de la théorie se pensant comme littérature. Par là, il ouvre l'âge critique auquel nous appartenons encore.

Within their text, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy produce a filiation very similar to Barthes's tracing of the 'éclatement du roman' and the writing 'tendency', where they end up with Barthes himself as one of the logical endpoints of Jena's influence:

Si, dorénavant, l'auteur ne peut sans doute plus être auteur sans être aussi critique, théoricien ou poéticien (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry), si le critique doit être lui-même et comme tel auteur (Benjamin, Barthes, Genette), [...] c'est toujours au nom de cette identité même de la 'poésie romantique' du fragment 116 de l'*Athenaeum*, qui 'veut et doit tantôt mêler et tantôt fondre ensemble poésie et prose, génialité et critique, etc.'<sup>28</sup>

Barthes reproduces Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's argument for the current relevance of German Romantic writing, adding to it his own understanding of Novalis's theory of the novel in order to define the heterogeneous work that is at the horizon of his own lectures. The Romantic theory of the hybrid novel or what Friedrich Schlegel calls the 'motley heap of ideas'<sup>29</sup> is, along with the idea of Romantic irony, the aspect of Jena Romanticism which is most often discussed in Anglo-American reception of these writings. Most commentators agree that the Romantics' postulation of the perfect multi-generic Romantic novel is so ambitious as to seem wilfully to exclude the possibility of its ever being actually accomplished: the writing does not thus belong to any material present. The same is true of Barthes. Ernst Behler describes what he sees as the quintessentially modern 'future-oriented thrust' of Jena theory, and points out that their overriding desire for a privileged relation to the infinite means that 'completion and totality in any realizable fashion are questioned', and 'any type of closure' is 'reject[ed] and postpone[d] [...] to an unrealizable future'.<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Schlegel's *Athenaeum* fragment 116, which defines the essence of the many-faceted Romantic writing, makes this desire for the infinite perfectly clear. Schlegel believes that Romantic poetry represents the perfect admixture of all genres:

Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philos-

ophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical.

As a good aesthetic thinker, he also believes that, in its rejection of systematisation, Romantic poetry manages to encompass all of the aspects of language and of life which are left out by that systematisation: '[Romantic poetry] alone can become [...] a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age'.<sup>31</sup> Writing only eight years after Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which plays down the cognitive elements of art and aesthetic judgment, Schlegel dramatically accords considerable cognitive and epistemological power to the aesthetic. His idealisation of Romantic poetry here resembles Barthes's characterisation of literature and literary semiology in *Leçon*: we saw in Chapter 2 how Barthes defends literature as containing, in encyclopaedic fashion, '[tous] les savoirs' (*L*, 18). Barthes proposes that the use of 'fantasme' in semiology leads to a universal particular. This affirmation of a subjectivity which transmogrifies into a superior version of objectivity seems to be anticipated in Schlegel's definition of Romantic poetry, which can 'hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, [...] endless[ly]'. The final section of fragment 116 is the most often quoted. Here Schlegel focuses on the dynamic, system-eluding quality of Romantic poetry:

*The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare to try to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free.*<sup>32</sup>

Within this logic, incompleteness is imperative, for the completion of a work would lead to a narrowing of the path to the infinite. Therefore even Friedrich Schlegel's novel *Lucinde*, the closest thing to a continuous work written by any of the Jena group, remains unfinished, because, one supposes, it has to. Peter Firchow writes that *Lucinde*'s incompleteness makes of it the embodiment of Romantic theory, 'for since it is incomplete, *Lucinde* can never *be* a novel, but must forever be attempting to *become* one'.<sup>33</sup> Schlegel's fragment 116 seeks to confer on itself, in Blanchot's words, 'une joyeuse et temporelle éternité'.<sup>34</sup> While Barthes cannot be accused of having so overtly grandiose an aim, it is undeniable that the *inachèvement* of *La Préparation du roman* and its concluding 'suspension' certainly confer upon it a version of the 'infinity' referred to by Schlegel: at the end we are still waiting, as Barthes is, for the work: 'Tout ce que je puis ajouter, c'est une certaine idée que j'ai de l'"attente"'

(PR, 23 February 1980, 383). Both Barthes and the Romantics, then, aim for the universal, but they know that such totality neither can nor should be reached. The suspension of teleology must engender a focus on individual fragments.

Another significant link between the Romantics and Barthes is that the postulation of an impossible new work is bound up with the possibility of a new subjecthood – in Barthes’s phrase, a ‘vita nova’. In *L’Absolu littéraire*, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy emphasise that the Jena project is concerned not only with the auto-production of literature, but simultaneously with that of the subject: they speak of the ‘Sujet-Œuvre’ at the heart of the Romantic endeavour, ‘le centre poïétique de l’opération, voire de l’opérativité de l’Œuvre’.<sup>35</sup> The writing subject is conceived dynamically as drawing the most important function of her life from the writing she is in the process of conceiving. This is a ‘poïétique où le sujet se confond avec sa propre production’.<sup>36</sup> While this remains rather oblique, the idea of the work and the writing subject being explored at once is certainly relevant to *La Préparation du roman*.

As we saw above, Barthes is convinced that for a writer, a ‘vita nova’ can only be approached – if not attained – through the essaying of a different form of writing. The new work would come about as the writer’s desire for it altered his own subjectivity. The work and the writing subject are thus in a symbiotic relationship. Interestingly, the American translators of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s text link the idea of the Subject-Work to the fragment and the Blanchotian ‘exigence fragmentaire’. The writer can only ever exist at the moment of ‘the task of auto-production’ – i.e., the writer is limited by being in the present rather than the postulated future. Therefore, his ‘disposition as the subject-work [must be] *fragmentary* in nature; that is, it assumes and continually points towards a perfection and completion that lie beyond it, yet also underlie its self-productive activity’.<sup>37</sup> Barnard and Lester go on to say that the fragmentary work embodies all the possibilities inherent in *poiesis*, and ‘manifests the synthetic totality that lies behind or before each of its particular manifestations’.<sup>38</sup> This is essentially the same point as that arrived at by Blanchot, Firchow and others, i.e. that the Romantic ideal posits the infinite. The fragment has a privileged relationship to the infinite, conjuring the absent whole. A *poikilos* work composed entirely of fragments is thus related to the idea of the encyclopedia. Schlegel’s fragments are designed to make us intuit what *might* be possible. Peter Firchow states that Schlegel’s notebooks make it clear that he had attempted to ‘build a system of literature which would put order into the criticism and understanding of the classics’. Explaining that Schlegel was

unable to complete his system, and therefore simply put his jottings together to make up the famous *Fragments*, Firchow concludes that

[the] fragments are not against systems. They are a substitute for one, a brilliant substitute, for unlike a fully formulated system they need exclude nothing because it is contradictory, or even self-contradictory; they can and do bring the entire noisy federation of literary and philosophical quarrels under one roof.<sup>39</sup>

According to this astute assessment, Schlegel tries both to elude and to improve upon systematisation. We have seen in Chapter 2 how Barthes's literary semiology proposes a similar correction to the systematisation of previous versions of semiology. In addition, at the level of methodology and poesis, Barthes shares Schlegel's hope that the fragments exceed their immediate materiality by pointing towards the varied wholes which they adumbrate. Accompanying this is a desire that literary genres become undifferentiated, in the name of an overarching, 'poikilitic' conception of literature. Hence Barthes's focus on the 'Tendance', or intransitive desire to write. If genres are ultimately to be conflated in a fragmentary and encyclopaedic method, the object to be written then becomes secondary to the mental exploration of the possibility of creation, and the possibility of writing any or every work, 'Roman de l'Écrire-Tendance; autrement dit, toute œuvre' (PR, 203).

*L'Œuvre comme volonté* constitutes the shift from the idea of writing a work (this idea was still present in *De la vie à l'œuvre*, though it was abandoned in the end) to the idea of simply writing: how and when is it possible, how does it change you? In the first lecture of *L'Œuvre comme volonté*, Barthes goes through the reasons why he writes. Many of the reasons are related to a sense of duty. One writes 'au service d'une Cause, d'une finalité sociale, morale, instruire, édifier, militer ou distraire'. These reasons, while they are significant, essentially constitute a sort of socially acceptable mask for his 'perverse' desire to write – 'perverse' in the Barthesian sense of the taste for activities such as literature which are considered to have little social utility. So, instrumentalist justifications for one's desire to write 'ne sont pas négligeables; mais je les vis un peu comme des justifications, des alibis, dans la mesure où elles font dépendre l'Écrire d'une demande sociale, ou morale (extérieure)'. In truth, he says, 'autant que je puisse être lucide, je sais que j'écris pour contenter un *désir*' (PR, 1 December 1979, 187). In the third lecture of the series, Barthes characterises the whole course as 'l'histoire intérieure d'un homme qui veut écrire [...] et délibère des moyens d'accomplir ce désir, ou cette volonté' (PR, 15 December 1979, 234). This shift towards the internal corresponds exactly to the contribution of the Jena group, as Barthes and

others see it. Ernst Behler writes that

Adam Müller, a contemporary of the Schlegels, characterizes the essence of the ‘literary revolution’ brought about by these brothers as having made [...] ‘the tendency of a work of art’ the most important aspect in our dealing with aesthetic phenomena.<sup>40</sup>

When the ‘tendency’ becomes central, then the ‘art object’ can no longer be regarded as a closed space. Nor can it be slavishly imitated, for it has become unpredictable. In this way, the Romantic ‘art object’ is an open work. Representation and mimesis become secondary to ideas of creation.

In *L'Œuvre comme volonté*, Barthes continually lays emphasis on the fact that his methodology is one of *simulation*: ‘En cherchant à simuler la préparation de l'œuvre, je me mets *dans la situation* de la produire [...] (je ne vais produire aucune œuvre – sinon le Cours lui-même)’ (*PR*, 15 December 1979, 233). Yet we know that he had in the months preceding the delivery of these lectures planned a work provisionally entitled *Vita Nova*. In fact, he had added a final plan to the *Vita Nova* sketches in December 1979, after having delivered the first three lectures of the course. How do we reconcile what seems to be a renunciation of the possibility of writing a work with the planning of a work? And would that work be the continuous work of the fantasy of Cerisy and *De la vie à l'œuvre*, or would it be the fragmentary, *poikilos*, Romantic work described as the origin of *L'Œuvre comme volonté*?

### *Vita Nova*: The ‘Album’ versus the ‘Livre’

<un livre de fragments peut être *le livre*>  
(*L'Œuvre comme volonté*, 5 January 1980)

*Vita Nova*, a red folder containing eight sketches for a work never begun, was discovered after Barthes’s death and published for the first time in the first edition of Barthes’s *Œuvres Complètes* in 1993.<sup>41</sup> There is very little discussion of *Vita Nova* in criticism of Barthes. Michel Contat, in a review of the 1993 publication of the *Œuvres Complètes* for *Le Monde*, discusses the *Vita Nova* plans in the belief that they would ultimately have become a work had Barthes not died. According to Contat, these plans for a text ‘que la mort [...] a empêché au seuil de l'écriture’, would, had circumstances been otherwise, have become a work of any size – who knows: fifty, three hundred, a thousand pages or more.<sup>42</sup> Claude Coste shares this view that it was only Barthes’s death that prevented the writing

of a novel.<sup>43</sup> Bernard Comment believes that Barthes was definitely planning a real work during the period of the *Préparation du roman* lectures, but proposes that the only reason the project was not executed is that Barthes felt he was not capable as a writer of achieving it.<sup>44</sup>

Antoine Compagnon suggests that for Barthes, 'homme du fragment', the *Vita Nova* plans had no destiny beyond their planning, or in other words were the plans of an 'imaginary' work.<sup>45</sup> However, Compagnon remains attached to the idea of Barthes as a novelist of sorts: he consoles his readers by pointing out that, though there is no novel to come, 'le Roman avait en somme déjà eu lieu':<sup>46</sup> this statement is based on Compagnon's assessment of *Roland Barthes, Fragments d'un discours amoureux* and *La Chambre claire* as versions of 'le Roman du Roman' or 'le Roman de l'échec du Roman'.<sup>47</sup>

Of the scant body of criticism of *Vita Nova*, Diana Knight is the only commentator to break with the topos of 'Barthes romancier' by focusing on the 'failure' of the *Vita Nova* plans.<sup>48</sup> She sets out her belief that 'despite playing with the idea of a grand literary project, an experiment which involved planning it in earnest, Barthes seems to [...] imply, both in the *cours* and elsewhere, that the possibility of failure was built into the basic conception'.<sup>49</sup> Knight includes a quotation from the radio programmes about Proust made by Barthes and Jean Montalbetti in November 1978: here, Barthes mentions his dream of rewriting Proust's novel ('c'est un rêve'), and explains that it is not something he will actually do. Given that it is a fantasy, Barthes remarks, 'peu importe l'échec au fond'.<sup>50</sup> If the *Vita Nova* plans can also be seen as a dream or fantasy, then, Knight pointedly asks, 'in what sense can a fantasy fail unless failure is in some sense part of the fantasy?'<sup>51</sup> Her conclusion is that the plans may well be a fantasy 'premisses on the idea that, once confronted with the labour of writing, it would collapse into failure and impossibility'.<sup>52</sup>

Knight has linked the composition of *Vita Nova* to the contemporaneous *Soirées de Paris*, a set of diary entries which seem sufficiently 'worked' to engender the belief that they may have been destined for publication. Both *Vita Nova* and the *Soirées*, begun in late August 1979, were written (with the exception of the eighth and final *Vita Nova* plan) around the same time as 'Délibération', Barthes's weighing-up of the value of the diary form.<sup>53</sup> 'Délibération' may have been partly spurred by the notes he had been making since his mother's death: these notes, made from October 1977 to September 1979, were found after Barthes's death in a folder labelled 'Journal de deuil', and were published under this title in March 2009.

'Délibération' introduces us to Mallarmé's formal distinction

between the 'Album' and the 'Livre', which will be used by Barthes in *L'Œuvre comme volonté* and his 1980 article on Stendhal, and will be implicitly important in *Vita Nova*. The 'deliberation', as a genre in classical rhetoric, discusses the topic of 'what is good', socially and pragmatically, with relation to the general public.<sup>54</sup> Barthes reflects that he cannot see whether the diary form really has any literary value. The diary's inferiority is signalled by the fact that it is 'only' an Album:

Le journal ne répond à aucune mission. [...] Les œuvres de littérature [...] ont toujours eu [...] une sorte de fin, sociale, théologique, mythique, esthétique, morale, etc. Le livre, 'architectural et prémédité', est censé reproduire un ordre du monde. [...] Le Journal ne peut atteindre au Livre (à l'Œuvre); il n'est qu'Album, pour reprendre la distinction mallarméenne. ('Délibération', 678)

Barthes's view of the provisional quality of the diary is doubtless imbued by his own writing practice: he wrote the *Journal de deuil* on the small 'fiches' he favoured: sparse, brief notes which could be shuffled. In 'Délibération', he writes that the Album's value is precarious because '[l]'Album est collection de feuillets non seulement permutable[s] [...] mais surtout *suppressibles à l'infini*' (679). Thus its outlook seems bleak. However, towards the end of the essay, Barthes suggests that it may just be possible to save the disappointing and mission-less diary form – though only postulatively, as we might expect – by working it 'à mort, jusqu'au bout de l'extrême fatigue, comme un Texte à peu près impossible' (681). Thereby it would perhaps be transformed into something unrecognisable, un-diarylike. Thus when *Vita Nova* includes the rubric 'Journal de deuil' (OC, V, 1018), we must assume that this part of the postulated work would include a 'reworking' of those *fiches*. Knight suggests that *Soirées de Paris* may be the attempt at 'working' the diary form suggested at the close of 'Délibération', and that *Vita Nova* would then be related to the attempt in being its far more ambitious masterplan, corresponding to Mallarmé's 'Livre', which can never be written. She concludes with a quotation from the letter by Mallarmé to Verlaine where the Livre/Album paradigm is suggested:

Ultimately, we might suspect Barthes of the wildest of literary ambitions, one buried in the relationship he establishes between the parallel strands of his project: on the one hand, the *Vita Nova*, 'premeditated', 'architectural' and impossible like Mallarmé's *Livre*; on the other, its self-conscious fragment, the *Vaines Soirées* (a Diary not at all like a Diary) [...]: 'Je réussirai peut-être; non pas à faire cet ouvrage dans son ensemble (il faudrait être je ne sais qui pour cela!) mais à en montrer un fragment d'exécuté, à en faire scintiller par une place l'authenticité glorieuse, en indiquant le reste tout entier auquel ne suffit pas une vie. Prouver par les portions faites que ce livre existe, et que j'ai connu ce que je n'aurai pu accomplir'.<sup>55</sup>

For Barthes, the ‘portions faites’ underlining the impossibility of the total work would be the *Soirées de Paris* – and perhaps also in due course the *Journal de deuil*.

Knight’s contention that *Vita Nova* is premeditatedly impossible seems incontrovertibly just, especially when one considers the morass of postulation underpinning *La Préparation du roman*, with which much of the content of *Vita Nova* is bound up. The projection of the idea of a work, without the accompanying intention of writing the work, is the same in *La Préparation du roman* and *Vita Nova*. This approach could be shorthanded as the ‘comme si’ method introduced in ‘Longtemps’, where the postulation is proposed as a heuristic method used to gain knowledge about the conditions of writing a work. Barthes had returned to this description of his method in the third lecture of *De la vie à l’œuvre*: in an echo of the statement to Montalbetti that the failure of the dream essentially does not matter, he points out that, in line with Tao thinking, it is the walking of the path that is the important part of the process, rather than any goal at the end of that path: ‘À peine sur le chemin, on l’a parcouru. [...] “Pas nécessaire d’espérer pour entreprendre, ni de réussir pour persévérer”. [...] Il se peut [donc] qu’un autre titre de ce cours [...] soit “Le Roman impossible”’ (PR, 16 December 1978, 49). There is no need to hope for a material result in order to begin – and even continue – an undertaking. The subtitle of the first two *Vita Nova* plans appears to repeat this assurance: ‘Morale sans espoir d’application’ (OC, V, 1008–1009). Whether the model is that of the *Livre* or of the *Album*, though, is unclear.

In ‘Délibération’, it is made clear that the *Album* is inferior to the *Livre*: as embodied by the diary, it is a throwaway, disappointing, ‘dépressif’ form. It is concerned only with the ‘inessentiel’. But the *Livre*, conflated with ‘l’Œuvre’, is something in which the writer can deeply involve himself, producing ultimately a worthwhile, ‘unique’ and ‘monumentale’ piece of writing. Similarly, in ‘On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu’on aime’ (written after both ‘Délibération’ and *L’Œuvre comme volonté*), the *Album* is conceived as the form of Stendhal’s Italian journals, where Stendhal fails to express his love for Italy: the successful expression of emotion and delight only comes about for Stendhal when he makes the shift to the *Livre*, which involves myth, meaning, ‘le mensonge romanesque’, and the ‘miracle’ of the suitable formulation of his ‘passion italienne’. Barthes writes that meaning (‘un sens’), as produced by the opposing action of two forces, is what the *Livre* has and the *Album* lacks; the *Livre* is therefore bound to succeed where the *Album* fails: ‘En s’abandonnant au Mythe, en se confiant au livre, Stendhal



retrouve avec gloire ce qu'il avait en quelque sorte raté dans ses albums: l'expression d'un effet'.<sup>56</sup>

This denigration of the *Album* is entirely in line with Mallarmé's own views on the opposition of *Album* and *Livre*.<sup>57</sup> For Mallarmé, the *Album* is a 'mot condamnatoire', and its form is one he longs to leave behind by realising the *Livre*: 'J'ai toujours rêvé et tenté autre chose, avec une patience d'alchimiste, prêt à y sacrifier toute vanité et toute satisfaction, comme on brûlait jadis son mobilier et les poutres de son toit, pour alimenter le fourneau du Grand Œuvre'. By the same token, however, the *Livre* is figured as being so monolithic and mythical that it is unattainable; it seems to be an archetype only:

Quoi? c'est difficile à dire: un livre, tout bonnement, en maints tomes, un livre qui soit un livre, architectural et prémédité. J'irai plus loin, je dirai: le Livre, persuadé qu'au fond il n'y en a qu'un, tenté à son insu par quiconque a écrit, même les Génies.<sup>58</sup>

In *L'Œuvre comme volonté*, however, Barthes breaks from his own and Mallarmé's situating of the *Album* as the inferior pole of the paradigm. In the fourth and fifth lectures (5 and 12 January 1980), he sets up the opposition as an explanation of one of the would-be writer's dilemmas. In a section entitled 'L'enjeu', he explains that the writer must choose, in advance of writing, whether his form will be that of the fragment or of narrative – *Album* or *Livre*. This is a profound choice, because the choosing of one term within this particular opposition, as conceived by Barthes, entails the election of one's entire worldview:

Par-dessus le 'contenu' dont il n'est pas tenu compte, autre chose que la Forme est engagé, ou, si vous voulez, quelque chose qui est de l'ordre de l'idéologie revient en spirale, à la place du contenu mais à un autre niveau: la responsabilité de la forme; chaque forme, *Livre* ou *Album*, a son enjeu, et c'est l'enjeu qu'il faut en définitive choisir.

The *Livre* is a representation of a monistic universe, 'un univers Un, structuré, hiérarchisé'.<sup>59</sup> The *Album*, by contrast, represents 'un univers non-un, non hiérarchisé, éparpillé, pur tissu de contingences'. The decision involves either refusing the 'émiettement' of the *Album* and Diary, or choosing them: 'vous ranger à la gloire de cet éparpillement, de ce miroitement, refuser le mythe du profond opposé à l'apparent. [...] Vous pouvez sentir l'appel du *rhapsodique* comme l'appel d'une vérité du monde' (*PR*, 12 January 1980, 255–56). Thus the choice of the *Livre* is figured negatively as the refusal of the real, contingent world, while to ally oneself to the philosophy implied by the *Album* is 'glorious' and involves a canny farsightedness which undoes the myth of shallowness that the *Livre* seeks to confer on the *Album*. If we are still in doubt about

where Barthes's preferences lie, we are given again the same quotations from Nietzsche and Cage as those used in the 'Longtemps' lecture, where they denoted the productive force of disorganisation in Proust's work, and, by extension, the necessity of the 'émiettement' of our reading of the novel in order to recognise the 'moment de vérité'. So the *Album* is on the side of the atomisation of both reading and writing that we have inferred from 'Longtemps'. Finally, Barthes stresses again the link between the choice of the form and one's philosophy: whereas the *Livre* implies a preference for 'structure, hiérarchie [et] ratio', the *Album* implies all the systems of thought that we know Barthes prefers: 'une philosophie pluraliste, relativiste, sceptique, taoïste, etc.' (PR, 256).

Immediately following this explanation of the stakes of the two forms is a section entitled 'Dialectique du Livre et de l'Album'. Anticipating his listeners' feeling that this opposition might be 'un peu raide, un peu forcée', Barthes proposes that we view it differently, 'non au niveau de celui qui écrit, mais au niveau de l'histoire, du devenir des œuvres'. It is here that the *Album* comes into its own: 'On va voir que, s'il y a lutte entre le Livre et l'Album, c'est finalement l'Album qui est le plus fort, c'est lui *qui reste*'. The opposition is blurred by the symbiotic relationship between its two terms along the chronological line, for each becomes the future of the other. The *Album* can be prepared in view of the *Livre* it will hopefully turn into '[l]'amas de notes, de pensées détachées, forme un Album; mais cet amas peut être constitué en vue du Livre; l'avenir de l'Album, c'est alors le Livre', Barthes writes. And yet – in a prefiguration, as one could see it, of his own *Vita Nova* folder of notes – he continues, 'l'auteur peut mourir entre-temps: il reste l'Album, et cet Album, par son dessein virtuel, est déjà le Livre' (PR, 256). This was the case for Pascal, he points out; Pascal planned 'un Livre: l'Apologie (de la religion chrétienne), représentation dirigée de l'Homme, transcendance, hiérarchie, "architecture"', but upon his death only a mass of 'pensées' was found: '→ L'Album a vaincu le Livre: la Mort l'a vaincu' (PR, 257).

Having 'proved' here that the *Album* can easily take the place of the intended *Livre*, Barthes builds on this assertion of the *Album*'s superior strength in a second part of the argument which shows that, even if the *Livre* is composed and finished, it is destined to return to the *Album*-state anyway:

À l'autre bout du temps, le Livre fait redevient Album: l'avenir du Livre, c'est l'Album, comme la ruine est l'avenir du monument → Valéry: 'C'est étrange comme la suite des temps transforme toute œuvre – donc tout homme – en fragments [...]'. Le *Livre* en effet est voué au débris, aux ruines erratiques; il est comme un morceau de sucre délité par l'eau: certaines parties s'affaissent, d'autres restent debout, dressées, cristallines, pures et

brillantes. C'est ce qu'on appelle un relief *karstique* (en géographie). (PR, 257)

This image of the work as a disintegrating mass of sugar, with only certain parts left untouched and gleaming, is strikingly similar to the image in 'Longtemps' of the 'univers romanesque' as a skyline where only the 'sommets' embodied by the 'moments de vérité' are left standing. The difference is that, in the earlier lecture, the illustration is in the conditional, and is proposed as a suggestion for how a 'critique pathétique' might proceed. Here the breakdown of the work is described, not only as a *fait accompli*, but as an imperative, or at least as the inexorable fate of all written production. One could perhaps extrapolate from both parts of the exposition of the *Album's* superiority that to produce an *Album* is simply to anticipate the unavoidable crumbling effects of time and death.

And yet the crumbling is not to be understood as facilitating the triumph of death over human endeavour, as he explains:

Ce qui reste du Livre, c'est la *citation* [...]: le fragment, le relief qui est transporté ailleurs. *La Divine Comédie*, c'est: 'Vous qui entrez ici, laissez toute espérance', etc. – La ruine, en effet, n'est pas du côté de la Mort: elle est vivante comme Ruine, consommée comme telle, esthétiquement constituée, germinative. (PR, 257)

The disintegration or unpiecing of the given work is seen as a life-giving force. This is a vitalistic and picturesque interpretation of intertextuality: 'Nous passons notre temps [...] à créer des ruines, et à nous en alimenter; à alimenter notre imagination, notre pensée' (PR, 257). Indeed, all of Barthes's teaching at the Collège de France has been such an endeavour, consisting as it has done of networks of quotations.

Barthes concludes his discussion of the *Livre* and *Album* forms using an organic metaphor: 'Ce qui vit en nous du Livre, c'est l'Album: l'Album est le *germen*; le Livre, si grandiose soit-il, n'est que le *soma*' (PR, 257). The germ is that portion of an organism capable of developing into a new one or part of one. The soma is the rest of the organism: it cannot reproduce. Barthes's dismissal of the *Livre* as 'only' the soma is telling. It unequivocally gives the fragmentary *Album* form technical, artistic and historic precedence over the 'hierarchised' and architectural *Livre*. We might say that Barthes here definitively joins the ranks of the Jena group; certainly, his metaphor here, with its connotation, not just of growth, but of infinite (re)generation, is redolent of the Romantic thinking set out by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy:

Le fragment est un germe, une semence; selon le dernier des *Grains de pollen* de Novalis: 'Des fragments de ce genre-ci sont des semences littéraires: il se

peut, certes, qu'il y ait dans leur nombre beaucoup de grains stériles, mais qu'importe, s'il y en a seulement quelques-unes qui poussent! – La fragmentation n'est donc pas une dissémination, mais la dispersion qui convient à l'ensemencement et aux futures moissons. Le genre du fragment est le genre de la génération.<sup>60</sup>

In Barthes's fantasy, then, the *Album* is saved from its vacillation and 'suppressibility', becoming instead the form *par excellence* with which to render the multifarious aspects of its author's affective engagement with the world. The Album becomes Barthes's 'forme tierce', the horizon of all his writing.

### *Vita Nova* and the Fertile Fragment

Of the eight *Vita Nova* sketches, it is the sixth and seventh which are closest to these issues regarding form as connected to the potential for either ruin or generation, or both. It is these two that are influenced by Barthes's rereading of Pascal's *Pensées* at the time of their composition. Under the rubric '{lisant Pascal}Envie', their proposals are directly linked to the form of Pascal's book, both as it was desired and as it actually is; the grand *Apologie* which ended up only as 'Fragments' or '*reliefs*' (OC, V, 1015).<sup>61</sup>

Barthes began writing the *Vita Nova* sketches on 21 August 1979. The first five plans are written between then and 26 August; the sixth and seventh 'Pascalian' plans on 2 and 3 September; and a final and eighth plan, thematically linked to the first five, on 12 December, after the *Œuvre comme volonté* lectures have begun. As Knight has shown in her article, the first five plans are related to, and partially written on the same days as, the *Soirées de Paris* diary entries, whose sixteen entries were written between 24 August and 17 September.<sup>62</sup> Within the *Soirées*, Barthes gives an account of his trip to Urt at the end of August. On his return to Paris he reads the *Pensées*. The tone of the diary entries is from here on more depressed than those preceding. He writes of reading Pascal in the plane back from Biarritz: 'J'ai lu un peu des *Pensées* de Pascal, retrouvant sous "la misère de l'homme" toute ma tristesse, mon "cœur gros" d'U[rt] sans mam. (Tout ceci vraiment impossible à écrire: quand je pense à la sécheresse et à la tension de Pascal)' (*Soirées*, 2 September 1979, OC, V, 984). In the penultimate *L'Œuvre comme volonté* lecture he also refers to reading Pascal on the plane, this time on the outward trip to Urt in August. He describes how, reading this book, he is 'transporté par ce texte, sa *vérité* (la vérité d'un texte n'est pas la vérité

de ce qu'il dit; c'est – notion paradoxale <mais, je crois, important> – *la vérité de sa forme*' (PR, 16 February 1980, 353). This vivid impression of the force of Pascal's form is carried through into the sixth and seventh *Vita Nova* plans.

These two plans do not share the ideas of the other six (1–5 and 8), which are linked by their allusions to grief, literary 'guides', the combat between writing and idleness, and the epiphanic moment of literary conversion on 15 April 1978.<sup>63</sup> They seem, therefore, to constitute a diversion or perhaps even a separate project within the overall project of *Vita Nova*. Their content is less overtly linked to Barthes's personal life, and formal issues are much more to the fore. The sixth plan is titled 'Apologie', and its rubric is as follows: 'Idée du Ποικίλος [*poikilos*], du Roman Romantique, du Roman absolu. V[oir] Fiches à Cours 79–80'. This main heading hints at the overarching ideal of the projection. Everything that we inferred from the discussion of *poikilos* in the *Préparation* is here: there is the idea of composition by fragments (after Novalis, who gave us such a 'belle définition du fragment comme roman' (PR, 202)). Also present is the 'magnifi[cation de] la Tendence', and the 'éclatement' of the novel into an unrecognisable and probably unwritable genre. The seventh plan takes up again the idea of the *poikilos*, and here seems almost to suggest the writing of the ideal novel of fragments suggested by Novalis: 'Les Frgmts: réaliseraient la théorie du Ποικίλος, du Roman romantique, du Roman absolu: la rédaction dense, voire elliptique, toujours très "intelligente" (surveillance rigoureuse) → Travail lent, acharné – pas seulement de la Forme, mais aussi (nouveau pour moi) de la Pensée'. There seems a closer engagement with the putative reality of writing here than anywhere else in the eight plans. However, the conditional tense, 'réaliseraient', is revealing, implying, again, a postulated future in which the work *would* be written: simulation is again the method here: 'Faire comme si je devais écrire ma grande œuvre' in the seventh plan is the reprise, almost word for word, of the phrase from 'Longtemps': 'Ce Roman utopique, il m'importe de faire comme *si* je devais l'écrire' ('Longtemps', 470).

In the sixth plan, under the main heading announcing the 'idée' of the *poikilos* is the word 'Formes', followed by a list of (all or some of) the possible formal conceits the *poikilos* work could use. First there is 'Le Récit, la relation de quête (intellectuelle) cf *Photo*'. The allusion here is probably to *La Chambre claire*, written earlier in the summer of 1979 (from April to June), and figured implicitly as a quest for the 'noème' of photography and for the essence of Barthes's mother in photographs of her. Interestingly, Barthes figures *L'Œuvre comme volonté* as a 'récit

intellectuel, aux articulations narratives lâches’, early on in the course. He puts this formulation forward rather wryly in the belief that it may be of very little interest to anyone: ‘[Ce récit] n’aura rien, hélas, d’un *thrilling*, puisque ce sera l’histoire intérieure d’un homme qui veut écrire. [...] S’agit donc d’une *Délibération*’ (PR, 234). Insofar as the second *Préparation* course can be understood as the narrative of a man who wants to write, it can be slotted into the sixth *Vita Nova* plan as the accomplishment of one of the proposed forms.

The second form is ‘La Relation de soirée (vanité de la diachronie qui s’étire)’. Here, as Knight points out, ‘if the *Vaines Soirées* might have formed a distinct project in their own right, the *Vita Nova* plans appear to subsume them into something more broadly conceived, both as “content” in a particular narrative structure [...], and as generic form’. She concludes that ‘it might seem that an apparent failure of form (the *vanité* of the diary) has been redeemed *as failure* by a specific literary context’.<sup>64</sup> It is not clear from the plan whether the *Soirées* are being recuperated after their inception as a form that could be used in the absolute Romantic work, were it to be written, or whether they retain their status as separate work. Barthes continued to write them after the sixth and seventh *Vita Nova* plans, until 17 September, before announcing, in a note of 22 September, that he is abandoning them.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the collection of ‘fiches’ entitled the *Journal de deuil*, mentioned by name in the eighth plan, and having been compiled since 26 October 1977, is abandoned on 15 September 1979. Its final entries mention the trip to Urt, Barthes’s despairing grief, and his reading of Pascal. Tellingly, in the diary entry for 22 July, he implies that there is no possibility of any future work: ‘Tous les “sauvetages” du Projet échouent. Je me retrouve sans rien à faire, sans aucune œuvre devant moi. [...] Toute forme du Projet: molle, non résistante. [...] “À quoi bon?” – C’est comme si advenait maintenant avec clarté [...] le retentissement solonnel du deuil sur la possibilité de faire une œuvre’ (JD, 248). The *Journal*, subsumed into the *Vita Nova* plans as one element of it, is what permits the realisation that the whole project is an impossibility.

The third postulated form in the sixth *Vita Nova* plan, which, in its repeating of the title ‘*Apologie*’, seems to be the pre-eminent one, concerns, implicitly, the forms of the *Album* and *Livre* and their suggestion of ruins and leftovers: ‘Les Frgmts d’une “grande œuvre” (cf. *Pensées* de Pascal) # observations, aphorismes[.] Frgmts: comme *reliefs* d’une *Apologie* de qqe chose’. This form, used in the *poikilos* work, would assume the presence, elsewhere, of a whole. However, the whole has, for Barthes, no content (it is just ‘qqe chose’). Marty, writing about the

sixth and seventh plans in his preface to *Œuvres complètes V*, says that ‘la référence à Pascal, c’est d’abord et essentiellement le modèle d’une œuvre saisie par le désordre, par l’indéchiffrable, par l’apparent échec. C’est, en réalité, *Les Pensées* comme œuvre romantique qui attire Barthes, comme “roman absolu”’.<sup>66</sup> Marty here conflates the *Pensées* with the motley ‘roman absolu’; this conflation elides the would-be status of the *Pensées (Livre)* with the *Album* form which it became and which Barthes outlines in these plans. The distinction between *Livre* and *Album* is of great importance here, as the fragment or leftover is posited *against* the ‘grande œuvre’ or cohesive whole, which is situated, both temporally and spatially, in an unknowable elsewhere. The hybrid collection of fragments (or ‘roman absolu’) is all that remains of the *œuvre* of Pascal’s conception.

In the 1979 interview for *Lire* (published several months before the composition of *Vita Nova*), Barthes was asked by Pierre Boncenne about the ‘ambiguity’ of writing by fragments, and whether the term ‘fragment’ gives the impression that these are only ‘petits morceaux d’un tout ou de petits morceaux d’un édifice?’ Barthes responds:

l’écriture n’est jamais que le reste souvent assez pauvre et assez mince de choses merveilleuses que tout le monde a en soi. Ce qui vient à l’écriture, ce sont de petits blocs erratiques ou des ruines par rapport à un ensemble compliqué et touffu. Et le problème de l’écriture, il est là: comment supporter que ce flot qu’il y a en moi aboutisse dans le meilleur des cas à un filet d’écriture? Personnellement, alors, je me débrouille mieux en n’ayant pas l’air de construire une totalité et en laissant à découvert des résidus pluriels. C’est ainsi que je justifie mes fragments.<sup>67</sup>

This reply is in line with the invocation of fragments and ruins in the sixth and seventh plans, as well as with Barthes’s own admission in the *Préparation* that the ‘totalité’ or continuous work is something he is unable to produce. At the time when this interview was given, Barthes’s most recent and most celebrated book was *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*. The preface of that book of fragments elaborated at length on Barthes’s sense of the necessity of constructing the text from fragments, so as not to produce a reductive linear ‘whole’. The title of the book, however, indicates the eliciting of the kind of whole he refers to in this interview, which can only be sampled in pieces when transformed into writing.

The seventh *Vita nova* plan furthers this complex of references to an unknown whole. It also reinforces the reference to Pascal:

{Lisant Pascal} Envie de: Faire comme si je devais écrire ma grande œuvre (Somme) – mais Apologie de quoi? Là est la question! En tout cas pas de ‘moi!’ – et qu’il n’en restât que des ruines ou linéaments, ou parties erratiques

(comme le pied peint par Porbus): des Fragments d'inégale longueur, (ni aphorismes, ni dissertations).

Michel Contat, discussing the plans, guessed that the 'Apologie' might be for literature: 'Il se serait agi, en somme, pour Barthes de produire un livre (une série de livres?) qui unisse et dépasse les ambitions de Pascal et de Mallarmé, une apologie pour la littérature, faite de fragments'.<sup>68</sup> This is a tempting idea, and could be supported by the very frequent excuses given for the use, in *La Préparation du roman*, of words that Barthes says are regarded as 'exécrables', 'démodés', 'mauvais' etc.; 'littérature' is one of them (2 December 1978; oral).<sup>69</sup> However, it seems clear from a reading of the plans that Barthes has no ideas regarding the content of the 'Apologie' – 'Apologie de quoi?' In *L'Œuvre comme volonté*, Barthes often reminds us that the fantasy of the work is the fantasy of a *form*. 'Ce n'est [...] aucun contenu, aucun thème qu'au départ je fantasme et "visionne:" [...] c'est une surface' (*PR*, 5 January 1980, 241). He points out that the *cours* is concerned with the material practice of writing, and that within this remit, the question of content is peripheral: 'Or le "contenu" (le sujet, la *quaestio*) n'est sans doute pas, ou n'est pas d'abord une catégorie *poétique* (*poiëtique*: du "Faire"), c'est une catégorie "Meta": catégorie de critiques, de professeurs, de théoriciens' (239). It can be deduced from this that the question of what the *Apologie* (corresponding to the *Livre* or whole) would be *for* is incidental. The focus is on the fragments of it that are visible, 'des ruines ou linéaments, ou parties erratiques'.

The reference to Balzac's short story, 'Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu', implies that the whole is dim and formless. Marty's footnote to the seventh *Vita Nova* plan corrects Barthes's error in attributing the painted foot to Porbus rather than to Frenhofer. Marty then reminds us that the confused, meaningless 'masterpiece' produced by the deluded Frenhofer was a 'chaos', an 'espèce de brouillard sans forme'. It was only the foot itself, 'ce fragment échappé à une incroyable, à une lente et progressive destruction', which was recognisable – perfect, in fact: 'un pied délicieux, un pied vivant!'<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Barthes the amateur painter seems to encounter some of the same problems as Frenhofer: a fragment entitled 'Le cercle des fragments' in *Roland Barthes* echoes the Balzac story in referring to Barthes's inability, in painting as well as in writing, to produce anything other than fragments. Barthes describes his own attempts to train himself into being a proper draughtsman in his painting: 'N'ayant pratiqué en peinture que des barbouillages tachistes, je décide de commencer un apprentissage régulier et patient du dessin; j'essaye de copier une composition persane du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle ("Seigneur à la chasse")'



(RB, 670). But as he continues, he finds that ‘irrésistiblement, au lieu de chercher à représenter les proportions, l’organisation, la structure, je copie et j’enchaîne naïvement détail par détail’, such that a bizarre picture is constructed:

Des ‘arrivées’ inattendues: la jambe du cavalier se retrouve perchée tout en haut du poitrail du cheval, etc. [...] J’ai le goût préalable (premier) du détail, du fragment, du *rush*, et l’inhabilité à le conduire vers une ‘composition’: je ne sais pas reproduire ‘les masses’. (RB, 671)

Speaking in *L’Œuvre comme volonté* of how sometimes the fantasy of the work can block the actual achievement of that work, Barthes refers again to the Balzac story. The fantasy, he says, allows us to glimpse ‘des aspects, des inflexions’ of the fantasised work – but these unreal visions prevent us, perhaps due to the burden of disappointment they will entail when reality does not match up to the fantasy, from attaining ‘une œuvre réelle’. This was the case for Frenhofer:

<Dans la nouvelle de Balzac, *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*, où du chef-d’œuvre l’artiste qui le fait n’a pu produire que – alors parfaitement rendu, dessiné, peint – le pied du personnage. *Ça il n’a pu le produire. Mais [le pied] est parfait. Mais il ne peut pas produire l’œuvre dans son entier, n’est-ce pas. Et quand il essaie d’en rajouter, d’arriver toujours à une perfection tout grande, qu’est-ce qu’il produit? – un entrelacs de, de lignes et de – indéchiffrables – enfin, il produit, disons, un tableau abstrait.* (12 January 1980, oral; my emphasis)

The Barthes of *La Préparation du roman* and *Vita Nova* resembles Frenhofer in certain respects. The theory of the *poikilos* or romantic work adumbrated in the sixth and seventh *Vita Nova* sketches and cited as the origin of the *Préparation*’s fantasy is manifestly unwritable. It relies for its articulation on the positing of a suppositional whole towards which it can gesture, just as the *Album* is defined against the *Livre*. It resembles the Romantic and Nietzschean writing that Barthes admires, in that it is always in the state of ‘becoming’. This is merely another way of saying that it cannot be achieved, and was not intended to be. Within the *Vita Nova* plans themselves exists the declaration of their abandonment. The seventh plan concludes with the declaration that ‘[t]out ceci voudrait dire qu’on abandonne l’enfantillage du Récit Vita Nova: ces efforts de grenouille qui veut se faire aussi grosse...’ *L’Œuvre comme volonté* ends with a ‘suspension’ (rather than a conclusion), and Barthes declaring that ‘[h]élas, en ce qui me concerne, [...] je ne puis sortir aucune Œuvre de mon chapeau, et de toute évidence sûrement pas ce *Roman* dont j’ai voulu analyser la *Préparation*’ (PR, 23 February 1980, 377). As Knight puts it,

these declarations of abandonment ‘may well reflect the reality of Barthes laying aside [the] projects, but [...] may also, in some sense, belong *inside* th[ose] project[s]’.<sup>71</sup> There was never a ‘roman’ at stake in either *La Préparation du roman* or *Vita Nova*. But this does not diminish the importance, for Barthes or for his readers, of the *postulation* of that work and of the heuristic reaching towards an elsewhere of writing that that postulation involves. The question of whether Barthes would have ‘made the leap’ into the work has become irrelevant. Instead, what is certain is that the temptation of the continuous, felt by Barthes, is ultimately not as strong as the fragment. Similarly, he feels that the *Album* is inevitably more fertile and durable than the *Livre*: ‘C’est lui *qui reste*’ (*PR*, 12 January 1980, 256). The fragment is at the vanishing point, as it was for the Jena group: ‘Écriture de vie = plus l’écriture et la vie se fragmentent (ne cherchent pas à s’unifier abusivement), plus chaque fragment est homogène; ainsi se retrouve à l’horizon le *poikilos* du Roman Romantique’ (*PR*, 19 January 1980, 279). All the reasons that Barthes cites in order to show that the ‘roman’ is unfeasible for him are essentially ‘autant de manœuvres dilatoires’<sup>72</sup> employed in order to illuminate and justify his anti-systematic method. This method is inherently Romantic in its revelation of Barthes’s conception of literature as the site of a privileged relationship to the infinite. In making this conception central to the final two years of his lecturing, Barthes seeks on one level to make his listeners privy to the difficulties he is undergoing in his search after his mother’s death to attain a new form which could express the ‘vérité’ of his emotions. But more profoundly than this, Barthes wants his listeners to understand, as Schlegel did, that interpretation can never ‘establish a final meaning that would close the book and relegate it to the past’. Rather, interpretation and writing constitute an ‘infinite task of deciphering that relates the text to the future of the world and keeps it alive’.<sup>73</sup>

All of the issues discussed here concerning the postulation of a work, the opposition of a totality to its realisable, atomised parts, the necessity for ‘émiettement’ of both the world and of writing, and the final and calculated non-completion of the project, are succinctly covered in Blanchot’s summary of the Jena group’s thinking on the possibility of a ‘livre total’. For, as Blanchot shows, the Romantics, like Barthes, practise an art ‘qui concentre la vérité créatrice dans la liberté du sujet’. Within this apparent reduction, they form ‘l’ambition d’un livre total, sorte de Bible en perpétuelle croissance’. This fantasised book is, of course, the ‘roman’, and it exists in no final form: ‘ce roman total, que la plupart des romantiques se contenteront de rêver à la manière d’une fable [...],

Novalis seul l'entreprendra'. Barthes, like Novalis, realises that 'la seule manière de l'accomplir eût été d'inventer un art nouveau, celui du fragment':

C'est là [...] l'un des pressentiments les plus hardis du romantisme: la recherche d'une forme nouvelle d'accomplissement qui mobilise – rende mobile – le tout en l'interrompant et par les divers modes d'interruption. Cette exigence d'une parole fragmentaire [ne veut pas] gêner la communication, mais [...] la rendre absolue.<sup>74</sup>

Thus Novalis, and Barthes, hit upon a tension which has the capacity to be perpetually productive, and which embodies the protean and processual nature of communication itself.

### Notes

- 1 Kuki, 'Considerations on Time', p. 55.
- 2 Éric Marty has remarked that the haiku is 'une sorte d'horizon phénoménologique du roman' for Barthes. Finkielkraut, 'Barthes et le roman', p. 223.
- 3 De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 145.
- 4 'Le Chant romantique' in *Le Monde*, 24 March 1977, OC, V, 303–10 (p. 307).
- 5 Claude Coste, 'Vita Nova: notes pour un roman de Roland Barthes', in Christine Andreucci et al., eds., *L'Œuvre inachevée: actes du Colloque de l'Université de Pau, 12–14 novembre 1998* (Pau: Presses universitaires de Pau, 1999), pp. 113–23 (p. 113).
- 6 C, 347–69.
- 7 Andrew Brown, *Roland Barthes: The Figures of Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 284.
- 8 In their preface to the edited collection *Barthes, au lieu du roman* (Paris: Desjonquères/Nota Bene, 2002), Marielle Macé and Alexandre Gefen describe the collection as a possible extra chapter added to Barthes's 'roman théorique' (p. 10), and refer to 'Barthes romancier' (p. 11).
- 9 Both French and Anglo-American critics refer to *La Chambre claire* as Barthes's 'roman': see for example Lavers, *Roland Barthes*, p. 314, and Michel Contat, 'Roland Barthes au seuil d'une vie nouvelle', *Le Monde*, 24 November 1999, p. iii.
- 10 Alec McHoul and David Wills, 'Bar S B R H S Barthes the Late(r) Barthes Constituting Fragmenting Subjects', *Boundary 2*, 14.1/2 (1985–86): 261–78 (p. 275).
- 11 Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, p. 26.
- 12 Kris Pint discusses at length Barthes's ideas regarding the reader's identification with the text in *The Perverse Art of Reading*.
- 13 *Radical Indecision*, p. 147.
- 14 There is certainly a sense in which the entirety of *De la vie à l'œuvre* can be viewed as an exhaustive extension of the 'Longtemps' lecture. In *L'Œuvre comme volonté*, Barthes describes the first course as being based on the desire, articulated in 'Longtemps', to 'rend[re] justice aux autres, [...] créer l'Autre' (PR, 226).
- 15 Cf. the section on names in *Comment vivre ensemble*: 'L'appellation caritative apparaît comme une contre-nomination: je retire les noms de la généralité de la

- langué. [...] Je nie dans la langué tout ce qui n'est pas objet d'amour: je détruis la langué, j'en fais une vaste ruine, où il ne reste debout que quelques noms d'amour' (23 March, 143).
- 16 Philippe Roger, 'Caritas Incarnate: A Tale of Love and Loss', in *Back to Barthes: Twenty Years After*, special issue of *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14.2 (2001): 527–33 (p. 530).
  - 17 See the discussion in Ch. 2 above.
  - 18 'Délibération' was published in Winter 1979. OC, V, 668–81.
  - 19 David Simpson, *The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature: A Report on Half-Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 136–37.
  - 20 See PR, 27: the change of form is vital if he is not to stay permanently trapped in the repetition of his former, successful work: 'Quoi? Quand j'aurai fini ce texte, ce cours, il n'y aura qu'à en recommencer un autre? – Non, Sisyphe n'est pas heureux: il est aliéné...'
  - 21 Barthes explains the etymology of the Greek word *poikilos*: 'racine *pingo* [peindre], broder avec des fils différents, tatouer; cf. *pigmentum* > indo-européen *peik*, orner, soit en écrivant, soit en étendant de la couleur → le *poikilos* du roman = un hétérogène, un hétérologique de Vrai et de Faux' (PR, 161).
  - 22 See Blanchot's *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959) and especially *L'Entretien infini* (1969), in which he discusses, among other writers of the fragment, René Char, Heraclitus and Nietzsche.
  - 23 *L'Entretien infini*, p. 518. See also p. 523: 'La poésie, en devenant tout, a donc aussi tout perdu'.
  - 24 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire: Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Seuil, 1978).
  - 25 *The Athanaeum* journal, run by Novalis and the Schlegel brothers, was published from 1798 to 1800. Contributors included Friedrich Schleiermacher, Dorothea Schlegel and Caroline Schelling (then Caroline Schlegel).
  - 26 Cf. Barthes's statement in a text for *Libération* on romantic small ads in 1979: 'Les PA de *Libé* sont bien, dans la mesure où si on les lit justement comme ça d'affilée [...], on a l'impression de lire vraiment une sorte de roman éclaté et ça c'est très moderne puisque, aujourd'hui, il y a un besoin de faire éclater le roman, de faire éclater le genre, en touches, en départ d'incidents, en départ d'aventures' ('Mes petites annonces', OC, V, 771).
  - 27 *L'Absolu littéraire*, p. 17.
  - 28 *L'Absolu littéraire*, p. 384.
  - 29 Friedrich Schlegel's '*Lucinde*' and the Fragments, trans. and intro. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 154, §103.
  - 30 Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 153.
  - 31 Schlegel, '*Lucinde*' and the Fragments, p. 175.
  - 32 '*Lucinde*' and the Fragments, p. 175, my emphasis.
  - 33 Firchow, Introduction to '*Lucinde*' and the Fragments, p. 39.
  - 34 *L'Entretien infini*, p. 522.
  - 35 *L'Absolu littéraire*, p. 419.
  - 36 *L'Absolu littéraire*, sleeve notes.
  - 37 Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, 'Translators' Introduction: The Presentation of Romantic Literature', in *L'Absolu littéraire*, pp. vii–xx (p. xii).
  - 38 Barnard and Lester, 'Translators' Introduction', p. xvi.
  - 39 Introduction to '*Lucinde*' and the Fragments, p. 18.
  - 40 Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, p. 300.
  - 41 Since then, *Vita Nova* has been republished in the fifth volume of the new *Œuvres Complètes* (2002), accompanied by additional editorial footnotes and discussed

- in a new preface by Éric Marty. It has been reproduced in facsimile and translated in the English translation of *La Préparation du roman, The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France 1978–1979 and 1979–1980*, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 389–406.
- 42 Contat, 'Roland Barthes au seuil d'une vie nouvelle'.
- 43 Coste, 'Vita Nova: notes pour un roman de Roland Barthes'.
- 44 Comment, *Roland Barthes*, pp. 206–18. Comment uses Barthes's own arguments from the *Cours* regarding his incapacity to invent a narrative.
- 45 Antoine Compagnon, 'Le Roman de Roland Barthes', *La Revue des sciences humaines*, 266–267 (2002): 203–31 (p. 220).
- 46 Compagnon, 'Le Roman de Roland Barthes', p. 231.
- 47 Compagnon, 'Le Roman de Roland Barthes', p. 206.
- 48 Diana Knight, 'Idle Thoughts: Barthes's *Vita Nova*', in *Roland Barthes*, ed. Diana Knight, special issue of *Nottingham French Studies*, 36.1 (1997): 88–98.
- 49 Knight, 'Idle Thoughts', p. 91.
- 50 Barthes and Jean Montalbetti, 'Un Homme, une ville', *Cassettes Radio France*, 3 episodes (Paris: 1978). Cited in Knight, 'Idle Thoughts', p. 91.
- 51 Knight, 'Idle Thoughts', p. 91.
- 52 Knight, 'Idle Thoughts', p. 97.
- 53 'Délibération' (1979) uses diary entries made by Barthes at Urt and Paris in summer 1977, plus one from April 1979, and bookends them with reflections on the form. *Soirées de Paris* was published posthumously in *Incidents* (1987) (OC, V, 977–93).
- 54 In section 3 of the first part of *The Art of Rhetoric* (ed. and trans. H.C. Lawson-Tancred (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 83–103) Aristotle defines three types of rhetoric: deliberative, forensic and epideictic. The goal of deliberative rhetoric is to either persuade or dissuade the hearer, with relation to political and/or ethical action. Deliberative rhetoric is geared towards future actions and their outcomes, whether positive or negative.
- 55 Knight, 'Idle Thoughts', pp. 97–98. Mallarmé's letter to Verlaine is entitled 'Autobiographie' and dates from 16 November 1885. In Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), pp. 661–65.
- 56 'On échoue toujours à parler de ce qu'on aime', *Tel Quel*, Autumn 1980. OC, V, 906–14 (p. 914).
- 57 Barthes's understanding of Mallarmé and this issue is drawn from his reading of Jacques Scherer's *Le 'Livre' de Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).
- 58 Mallarmé, 'Autobiographie', pp. 662–63.
- 59 Cf. 'Délibération': 'Le livre, "architectural et prémédité", est censé reproduire un ordre du monde, il implique toujours, me semble-t-il, une philosophie moniste' (678).
- 60 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire*, p. 70.
- 61 All references to *Vita Nova*'s sixth and seventh plans will be to the facsimiles of them as they appear on pages 1015 and 1016–17 respectively of OC, V. From here on, no page references to these plans will be given. Indications will be given as to which of the plans is under discussion.
- 62 Knight, 'Idle Thoughts', passim, especially p. 92.
- 63 See Knight, 'Idle Thoughts', pp. 92–97 for a sustained discussion of these themes.
- 64 'Idle Thoughts', p. 92.
- 65 François Wahl included this note in a footnote to his preface to *Incidents* (Paris: Seuil, 1987, p. 9): 'Arrêté ici (22 sept. 79) les Vaines Soirées. 1) Pour ne pas perdre de temps et liquider au plus vite la préparation des Cours. 2) Pour vérifier

- mes notes – et désormais tout écrire sur des fiches’.
- 66 Marty, ‘Présentation’, in Barthes, *OC*, V, 9–22 (p. 21).
- 67 ‘Roland Barthes s’explique’, interview with Pierre Boncenne for *Lire*, April 1979. *OC*, V, 744–57 (p. 750).
- 68 Contat, ‘Roland Barthes au seuil d’une vie nouvelle’.
- 69 See for example 10 March 1979, oral: <Une notion pour laquelle, malheureusement, il n’y a qu’un mot absolument déjeté, mais c’est comme ça dans nos civilisations – les choses importantes ne peuvent se dire que par des mots démodés – finalement, je le crois de plus en plus – et ce mot, ça serait la pitié. C’est un très mauvais mot – qui oserait aujourd’hui, notamment dans un journal, parler de ‘pitié’?>
- 70 Honoré de Balzac, ‘Le Chef-d’Œuvre inconnu’, in Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée, suivi de Le Chef-d’Œuvre inconnu par Honoré de Balzac* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), pp. 133–56 (p. 154).
- 71 ‘Idle Thoughts’, p. 93.
- 72 Philippe Roger, *Roland Barthes, roman* (Paris: Grasset, 1986), p. 338.
- 73 Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, p. 282.
- 74 Blanchot, *L’Entretien infini*, p. 525.

## Afterword

At the opening of *L'Entretien infini*, Maurice Blanchot points out that Nietzsche's fragmentary approach to writing is inconsistent with the requirements of the academy, which demands that research be presented in a continuous and developmental form. 'Nietzsche [...] fut professeur', writes Blanchot,

[mais] il dut renoncer à l'être et pour diverses raisons, dont l'une est révélatrice: comment sa pensée voyageuse qui s'accomplit par fragments, c'est-à-dire par affirmations séparées et exigeant la séparation, comment *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra* auraient-ils pu prendre place dans l'enseignement et s'accorder avec les nécessités de la parole universitaire?<sup>1</sup>

The questions asked here of Nietzsche could equally be asked of Barthes. Nietzsche is an archetypal figure for Barthes in terms of both philosophy and poetics, because of his perspectivist approach to knowledge and his anti-systematic employment of the fragment. But unlike Nietzsche, Barthes ultimately enters into a successful negotiation with the academy. Barthes's 'pensée voyageuse' managed to furnish a fruitful pedagogy without abandoning the 'exigence fragmentaire'<sup>2</sup> which for Barthes is not only a formal but also an ethical issue.

Barthes's lecturing style is inflected by the ethos of the Collège de France, an institution which favours the teaching of 'la science en voie de se faire'. The process-based approach to knowledge implied by such an ethos is used by Barthes as the basis for his own non-teleological teaching. Added to this is Barthes's self-definition, in his inaugural lecture, as an essayist. Many of the essay's attributes are embodied in Barthes's lectures: scepticism, an opposition to systems whether rhetorical or ideological, and a conviction that the act of criticism cannot take place without self-criticism. Barthes exploits his perception of the 'uncertainty' of the essay form in order to propose a digressive and pan-generic organisation of his material. The only sense of *certainty* comes from his refusal of dogmatic, 'certain' ideological discourses. Thus Barthes's teaching unfurls, as he said that the text of *La Chambre claire* did, from 'la seule chose sûre qui fût en moi (si naïve fût-elle): la résistance éperdue à tout système réducteur' (CC, 794).

The fundamental preoccupation that links each of Barthes's four lecture courses at the Collège de France to each other and to Barthes's concurrent published work is the concern with fragmentation and divagatory exposition. *La Préparation du roman* reveals, within a discourse upon continuous, lengthy narrative forms, Barthes's adherence to the relativised 'vérité' of short and fragmentary forms. These lectures, in their 'preparation' for a novel that is not to be written, proceed through a prospective method of endless deferral. *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre* also suspend any possible resolution to their exploration of social and ethical ideals. Barthes views the method that he employs in those lecture courses as constituting perhaps the most vital aspect of his teaching: 'Quoi que je choisisse comme "sujet" [...], la pratique digressive, le droit à la digression. [...] L'indirect sera là, qui est d'ordre éthique' (CVE, 184). Barthes's lecturing methodology and the aesthetic fantasy of the *Préparation* are extensions of the anti-dogmatic, anti-systematic goals of his entire oeuvre. The clearest rationale for Barthes's ethics and aesthetics of the fragment, both before and after his accession to the Collège de France, is found in *Leçon*, where Barthes explains that he is impelled to try to attenuate ('alléger') the power inherent in language: 'je me persuade de plus en plus, soit en écrivant, soit en enseignant, que l'opération fondamentale de cette méthode de déprise, c'est, si l'on écrit, la fragmentation, et, si l'on expose, la digression' (L, 42).

As Montaigne did, Barthes opposes a discourse of personal experience and taste to authoritative and objective knowledge. His particularity is set out tactically, in order to demonstrate that a 'universal particular' is attainable. Barthes accomplishes this to extraordinary effect in *La Chambre claire*. The study of photography turns around the incomparable, banal twin fulcrum of love and death – what everyone experiences, and yet also what only *I* feel in relation to this (this death, this beloved person, this sadness, this photograph; my own future death). Barthes can only do justice to the grief evoked by photographs by combining 'deux voix: celle de la banalité (dire ce que tout le monde voit et sait) et celle de la singularité (renflouer cette banalité de tout l'élan d'une émotion qui n'appartenait qu'à moi)' (CC, 851).

Thus the false generality of traditional, authoritarian criticism and pedagogy is lost, but only to be refound again at another level – that of the universal particular. Parataxis and fragmentation are pre-eminent for Barthes, but he remains determined nonetheless to gesture towards the possibility of a full, transcendent knowledge – even if that knowledge can no longer be fully attained. This determination can be inferred from his use of what he calls 'le geste encyclopédique' (CVE, 182) to inform the



methodology of *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*. In *La Préparation du roman*, the relationship between the ‘Album’ and the ‘Livre’ embodies the same tension. The minimalism of the haiku is part of the same problematic as the maximalist ‘grande œuvre’. The fantasised ‘roman’ of *La Préparation du roman* is a fragmented, *poikilos*, pan-generic work. This aesthetic ideal is an ideal of formal fusion, in which the ‘œuvre’ oscillates (in conceptual terms) between simplicity and complexity, between the ‘Album’ and the ‘Livre’, between aesthetic discourse and critical discourse, between the fragment and totality. As was the case for the German Romantics, this fantasy is unrealisable, but potent in its revelation of the view of literature as a system of total representation.

This is the crux of aesthetic discourse itself: the tension between atomised individual significance, and the possibility of general meaning or the *sensus communis aestheticus*. For Barthes as for Kant, the natural world has an important role to play. How does one organise one’s sense of being in the world, and how could the negative aspects of that world be imagined otherwise? This is a central question in the *Cours*, especially in *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*. As Pierre Hadot would put it, this is a philosophical act which is situated ‘pas seulement dans l’ordre de la connaissance, mais dans l’ordre du “soi” et de l’être’.<sup>3</sup> Barthes’s interrogation of subjectivity using the device of the *fantasme* is a reflection on our capacities to think the world differently. This relates to our own nature, and to our surroundings. Barthes’s interest in the infinite, ‘delicate’ detail of life grounds his fantasy of an existence anchored by affective links but free of the coercion of discourse, and of language which institutes barriers between us and our environment. Guided by Japanese aesthetics, Barthes realises that *satori* is not the revelation of any mystical truth. Rather it is a full acceptance of the unity of the subject with his or her environment, and of the ‘intraitable’ of the world: ‘la brilliance et la souffrance du monde, ce qui, en lui, me séduit et m’indigne’ (*Longtemps*, 470). Barthes provides an account of his own ‘sorte de *Satori*’ (*PR*, 32) at the opening of *La Préparation du roman I*: the fantasy of fusion with one’s environment is for Barthes linked to the creative fantasy of the unification of his pedagogical and writerly goals.

Barthes’s *fantasmes* are expansive, dispersive, non-oppressive. In their contingency we find our own. But they are regulated too, by deliberation, self-criticism, scepticism. In this double articulation is the instructiveness of Barthes’s teaching – magisterial, in skill as in form, but laced with interstices. There is space for reflection, for Barthes’s subjectivity, for our own, and for uncertainty.

The assessment of Barthes's pedagogy presented in this study represents an early stage of what will undoubtedly become an ongoing recalibration of Barthes's legacy, given that material from a selection of Barthes's seminars at the École pratique des hautes études is also being published. There is much work to be done in this area, and, though there are statutory similarities between the EPHE and the Collège de France, there are clearly some institutional and formal issues unique to the EPHE which will deserve analysis. There is a crucial difference, however, between the Collège de France publications and the existent and forthcoming EPHE material. The 'Sarrasine' seminars, the 'Roland Barthes' seminars and the 'discours amoureux' seminars each fed into the construction of a book by Barthes (*S/Z, Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* respectively). For this reason, the material presented in the EPHE publications will primarily be of interest to genetic critics. However, the Collège de France lectures led ultimately to no book – and this is not merely because Barthes died before such a textual transformation could be undertaken. The lectures constitute an end in themselves, as the *compagnon de route* of his concurrent work and concerns. 'Le Cours et le Travail', as Barthes says at the opening of *La Préparation du roman I*, are invested in 'la même entreprise' in order to 'faire cesser la division du sujet, au profit d'un seul Projet, le Grand Projet: image de joie' (*PR*, 32). We must recognise the importance here of the term 'projet'. At the Collège de France, Barthes teaches a way of reading and a way of living, and imagines a way of writing. Throughout, the most important focus is on activity rather than on product. Critical, interpretive, poietic and affective activity – on Barthes's part and on his listeners' – is ongoing, and by definition cannot be completed. Barthes sees this endeavour as furnishing an instructive '*mathesis singularis*' (*CC*, 795). On the uncertainty of this *singularity* is founded the recognisability of this *mathesis*: 'C'est ça!' (*CC*, 876) we cry, as we see the universal particular. This is Barthes's achievement at the Collège de France, where he unifies the goals of his teaching and his writing, and the formal and ethical imperatives dictated to him by the circumstances of his own life, into a hopeful project.

### Notes

- 1 Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 3.
- 2 Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 525.
- 3 Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, p. 23.



## Appendix

### List of Roland Barthes's Seminars and Lecture Courses at the École pratique des hautes études and the Collège de France

École pratique des hautes études, VI<sup>e</sup> Section (Sciences économiques et sociales). Roland Barthes, Directeur d'Études (Sociologie des signes, symboles et représentations)

- 1963 Inventaire des systèmes contemporains de signification: systèmes d'objets (vêtements, nourriture, logement)
- 1964 Inventaire des systèmes de signification contemporains
- 1965 Recherches sur la rhétorique
- 1966 Recherches sur la rhétorique (suite)
- 1967 Recherches sur le discours de l'Histoire
- 1968 Analyse structurale d'un texte narratif: 'Sarrasine' de Balzac
- 1969 Analyse structurale d'un texte narratif: 'Sarrasine' de Balzac
- 1971 La notion d'idiolecte: premières questions, premières recherches
- 1972 Dix ans de sémiologie (1961–1971). La théorie du texte
- 1973 Les problèmes de la thèse et de la recherche – La notion de modernité – Analyse de 'Rapport sur un cas de paranoïa allant à l'encontre de la théorie psychanalytique'
- 1974 Etude des problèmes relatifs à la constitution d'un lexique d'auteur (idiolecte) – Travail collectif sur la biographie – La voix
- 1975 Le discours amoureux
- 1976 Le discours amoureux (suite): les intimidations de langage
- 1977 Les problèmes d'interprétation dans l'opéra – Le problème des ratures du texte écrit

Collège de France. Roland Barthes, Chaire de sémiologie littéraire

- 1977 Cours: Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens.  
Séminaire: Qu'est-ce que tenir un discours? Recherche sur la parole investie.
- 1978 Cours: Le Neutre.
- 1978-79 Cours: La Préparation du roman I: de la vie à l'œuvre.  
Séminaire: La métaphore du labyrinthe: recherches interdisciplinaires
- 1979-80 Cours: La Préparation du roman II: l'œuvre comme volonté.  
Séminaire: Proust et la photographie: examen d'un fonds d'archives photographiques mal connu

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*Michelet* (Paris: Seuil, 1954)  
*Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957)  
*Sur Racine* (Paris: Seuil, 1963)  
*Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964)  
*L'Empire des signes* (Geneva: Skira, 1970)  
*S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970)  
*Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971)  
*Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973)  
*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975)  
*Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977)  
*Leçon* (Paris: Seuil, 1978)  
*La Chambre claire: note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1980)  
*Le Bruissement de la langue: essais critiques IV*, ed. François Wahl (Paris: Seuil, 1984)  
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*Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens. Notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France, 1976–77*, ed. Claude Coste (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002)  
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