SEVERED TEXTS: ASPECTS OF AESTHETICIZATION
IN ROLAND BARTHES' POST-STRUCTURAL WRITINGS

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Comparative Literature Program)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
April 1993
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Date **April 21, 1993**
This thesis contributes to a discussion of the specificity of Roland Barthes' post-structural theorizing by examining some of the themes and techniques of aestheticization running through his writing--reverie, pleasure, "perversion," and the hyper-textualization of the human subject and culture. Following this thread/hypothesis of aestheticization, the thesis focuses upon changing notions of the human subject and textuality presented in Barthes' writings from "The Death of the Author" (1968) until Camera Lucida (1980).

The opening chapter discusses aestheticizing and decadent discourses in nineteenth century French and English literary traditions, identifies relevant intertexts, and proposes a set of key themes in aestheticizing discourses--the rejection of the natural, the quest for separation and mediation expressed in a valorization of artifice, aesthetic pleasure, private experience, and anti-utilitarian, anti-bourgeois values. The second chapter lays out the myth of an alienated literary modernity underwriting Barthes' later theorizing. Subsequent chapters follow shifts in notions of subjectivity, textuality, and aestheticizing strategies in most of the major texts produced by Barthes during this period: S/Z, The Empire of Signs, Pleasure of the Text, Roland Barthes, Fragments of a Lover's Discourse, Camera Lucida, and essays collected in The Rustle of Language and The Responsibility of Forms. The last two chapters follow Barthes' half-ludic struggle with his earlier construction of the subject as public intertext. He
dramatically moves away from conventional forms of theorizing into the cultivation of subjectivity, affectivity, and personal culture to escape being captured in the public texts of the cultural Imaginary. Finally, the thesis will consider some of the contributions and consequences of his theories, including whether the cultural skepticism and pose of fatal belatedness underwriting his positions can be maintained.
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To begin with the *sine qua non*: thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for faithfully funding my graduate years of study

thanks to Maureen Scobie, for aural asylum and the gift of an exquisite Victoria garden full of sage and hummingbirds one summer

and to Jimmy Sung Chan, N.D., for the compassion and excellence of his care

and, finally, I bow down to the generations of women and men who have kept alive knowledge of the earth's healing plants--though they are no longer alive, they still heal
ABBREVIATIONS AND A NOTE ON PRONOUNS

This text will occasionally veer between the use of masculine and feminine pronouns such as the inclusive generic (i.e. from he and his to she and her). Where the pronouns are masculine, they conform to the usage of pronouns found in Barthes and most of the other texts cited. Where the pronouns are feminine or inclusive (i.e. "he or she," "she or he") they generally signal my own voice.

The following abbreviations refer to books by Barthes and collections of his essays. The first page number(s) given in the thesis refer to the English translation; the second to the French original.

ABR: A Barthes Reader
CE: Critical Essays/ Essais Critiques
CL: Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography/ La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie
ES: The Empire of Signs/ L'Empire des signes
FLD: A Lover's Discourse: Fragments/ Fragments d'un discours amoureux
L: Leçon inaugrale au Collège de France (English translation found in ABR)
M: Mythologies
MI: Michelet
NCE: New Critical Essays/Nouveaux essais critiques
PT: The Pleasure of the Text/ Le Plaisir du texte
R: On Racine/ Sur Racine
RB: Roland Barthes By Roland Barthes/ Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes
RL: The Rustle of Language/ Le Bruissement de la langue
   Essais critiques IV
SFL: Sade, Fourier, Loyola/ Sade, Fourier, Loyola
S/Z: S/Z/S/Z
WDZ: Writing Degree Zero/ Le Degré zéro de l'écriture
for Kuan Yin
Suzan
Ted
Heather
d.d., mouse & the rain
Heard the one about the post-structural mafia? They make you an offer you can't understand.

Susan Musgrave, "Scabbing for Clarity"
CROSSING THE LINE (AN INTRODUCTION)

Aesthetic Discourse

He attempts to compose a discourse which is not uttered in the name of the Law and/or of violence: whose instance might be neither political nor scientific; which might be in a sense the remainder and the supplement of all such utterances. What shall we call such discourse? erotic, no doubt, for it has to do with pleasure; or perhaps even aesthetic, if we foresee subjecting this old category to a gradual torsion which will alienate it and bring it closer to the body, to the drift.

Roland Barthes, (RB 84/87)

The old values are no longer transmitted, no longer circulate, no longer impress; literature is desacralized, institutions are impotent to defend and impose it as the implicit model of the human. ....Our gaze can fall, not without perversity, upon certain old and lovely things, whose signified is abstract, out of date. It is a moment at once decadent and prophetic, a moment of gentle apocalypse, a historical moment of the greatest possible pleasure.

Roland Barthes, (ABR 475/L 40-41)

In an essay on Giacometti, John Berger writes:

Every artist's work changes when he dies. And finally no one remembers what his work was like when he was alive. Sometimes one
can read what his contemporaries had to say about it. The difference of emphasis and interpretation is largely a question of historical development. But the death of the artist is also a dividing line.¹

Twenty years after Giacometti's death, Berger continues, few will understand this change, the hermeneutic borderline that has been crossed.

His work will seem to have reverted to normal --although in fact it will have become something different: it will have become evidence from the past, instead of being, as it has been...a possible preparation for something to come. (AL 171-173)

The work of Roland Barthes lies somewhere in this bardo realm (that strange place in between death and canonical resurrection as an intertext). The sheer accident of his death in 1980 is fading: the edges of that lacerating caesura are being smoothed by time and scholarship. Barthes, the light, myriad creature that he consciously sought to be, is entering the Lacanian Imaginary of culture; as he knew he would. Speaking through the persona of the structural Lover in FLD, he writes of his life:

I myself cannot...construct my love story to the end: I am its poet (its bard) only for the beginning; the end, like my own death, belongs to others; it is up to them to write the fiction, the external, mythic narrative. (FLD 101/117)

This is why Barthes sought beginnings, middles, and interstitial states, avoiding conclusions of any sort. An apparently protean writer, he nevertheless worked on a corpus
of issues and (though he would resist the terms) identity-themes or existential codes which lend his work—which he once described as a long, unending sentence—a certain thematic coherence.

The energetic displacements of his work—the change of intellectual idioms, the constant redefining of terms, critical hypotheses, and forms, do, however, trace a kind of spiraling progress. The interrogation of language and power sustained throughout those shifts leads him away from the practice of literary theory in the usual sense. His final texts are permeated with an ambivalent appreciation of the formal beauty and dangers of unreflective theorizing, and an even stronger move, however problematic and dissimulated, toward particularity and the personal and affective dimensions of writing.

I began working on Barthesian post-structuralism because I wanted to understand the visceral ambivalence that I've often felt reading his texts. An attraction to the gentle anarchy and sensuality of his discourse was always complicated by an unease which resisted analysis. One day, reading L while looking back on certain passages underlined in PT and brooding over Barthes' treatment of the photograph of the dead Salvadorean boy in CL, I recognized that what I was returning to, finally, were the pragmatic political and ethical implications of his position (however often he would disparage
the notion of ethical discourse, once apocryphally equating the phrase "we sincerely desire peace in Vietnam" with "please pass the cheese." I wanted to map the world that he, like other theoreticians, invites his reader to inhabit alongside him; I needed to establish some of its historical antecedents, its social and aesthetic values, and, finally, draw out the potential cost of unreflectively entering that world of hypertextuality and isolated, fissured human subjects. I found myself weighing the direct and implicit claims he makes about the ethical force of his theoretical positions, his search for the suspension of signs and a disengaged hedonism that does not seek power but flees it, against the potential consequences of that stance for women and other marginals in first world cultures who might consider—at least intellectually—emulating his position.

Despite his injunctions against interpretation, in order to understand Barthes' position and my own sense of déjà lu, I needed a more diachronic reading of Barthes, one that would reach behind the exposed, obvious intertexts and at least begin to acknowledge the prior literary and philosophical texts still actively working in his writing. Post-structuralism is, as I was reminded during a conference in Montréal, a post-Existentialism. French Existentialism—principally Sartre—is a strong but little explored intertext pervading Barthes' early and post-structural texts. Both in its pre- and post-structural phases, Barthesian discourse, as I will suggest in the chapter on WDZ, is not only an evolving
rejection of Sartrean humanism and its call to artistic engagement, but an ongoing response to violence and the multiple absurdities of language and human existence. Drawing upon the prior discourses of writers committed to the aestheticization of the real, that response passes from an ambiguous commitment to form into a period of structural and semiotic analyses, finally moving into a paradoxal moral commitment to the sign and to a mythopoeic celebration of the pleasures of the text and the literary amateur (Barthes presenting Sisyphus the absurd creator in a new guise: the post-structural scriptor).

Susan Sontag, in "Writing Itself: on Roland Barthes," identifies Barthes as a latter-day aesthete who oscillates between an apparently extreme egoism and an elegant depersonalization of the subject. She notes his affinities with Oscar Wilde, yet does not pursue the implications of her observation. Within Barthesian post-structuralism there can be discerned a complex thematic return and theoretical echoing of the postures of Flaubert, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Proust—not to mention fin de siècle writers such as Huysmans. Throughout the 1970s Barthes repeatedly aligns himself with the values and historical situation of decadence, most notably in PT, L, and RB. In those text he ingeniously renovates earlier hedonistic and transgressive postures in his reflections on pleasure, perversion, erotic textuality and the reading body. Barthes' attraction to what Wolfgang Iser, in his study of the aesthete Walter Pater, identifies as the
"intensified moment" and the liminal state of "in-between," taken in conjunction with Barthes' cultivation of pleasure, his fear of closure, his tendency toward boredom, and the sense of absurdity which circulates just beneath a compulsive quest for pleasure and distraction in his later works, support Barthes' view of at least an elective affinity existing between himself and the writers of Decadence and their precursors (grouped, for the sake of convenience and historical orientation, under the rubric of Aestheticism). Barthes' comments, the overwhelming presence of the above-mentioned themes, and the particularly strong echoes of Baudelaire in PT led me to formulate the hypothesis of Barthesian "aestheticism." This aestheticism—more precisely, Barthes' characteristic aestheticization of phenomena, his desire to rewrite things so as to suspend meaning or cause the implosion of matter into the sign—does not develop directly, in a historical sense, out of nineteenth-century aesthetic and decadent discourses. It is, rather, a defiant political posture that models itself upon the earlier refusals funding those discourses.

I have chosen to read Barthesian post-structuralism (which is generally acknowledged as beginning with the 1968 manifesto of "The Death of the Author," and continuing until his last major book, CL) as an evolving intellectual myth in the Nietzschean sense. Barthes' myth of post-structural écriture does not begin suddenly in the late 1960s: it spins outward from the thematic core of WDZ. By opting to read
Barthes from a more speculative position, following some of the turns that his thinking takes on textuality and the subject over this stretch of twelve years, the thesis is released from the need to defend the truth or error of Barthes' extravagant post-structural notions: for instance, his insistence that signs and referents are fatally separate, that the author is dead, that texts are empty fragments void of any prior meaning, and so on. What this thesis will begin to consider are the consequences of Barthes' intellectual mythologizing; a mythologizing which is, in my view, a function of his pessimistic cultural imagination. The intermittent myth that this thesis will weave around Barthes' work is itself partial and tentative, asserting only a kinship between Barthesian aestheticization and earlier nineteenth-century writers (decadence and Mallarmean Symbolism being later intertexts that directly fund his post-structural theorizing on signs and pleasure).

Originally, the thesis was to be a more direct feminist engagement with Barthes than it appears in this final version. The plan was to lay out the aestheticization of subjectivity, the body, the text and the real in Barthes' theories, then proceed into a consideration of how useful these theories of dissemination and suspension might be to feminist theorizing. But the first half of the project, fueled by my need to overcome the sense of disorientation which had come to attend my reading of Barthesian post-structuralism, took over. This thesis is, then, a kind of prelude to that analysis; a work still
informed, if too quietly, by feminist prejudice (in the Gadamerian sense of the inescapability of intellectual prejudice). In its intermittent consideration of the intertexts which enable Barthes' concepts and positions, it obliquely advances the argument that hermeneutic and historical readings of contemporary theorizing are essential critical activities for those who care about the cultural consequences of ideas. Seeking precedents, contexts and intertexts for apparently novel ideas not only assists one in discerning the specificity of each theorist's discourse, but aids in a reflection upon the ethical implications of those discourses. It is often difficult not to be seduced by the intelligence, the playfulness and rhetorical persuasiveness of Barthesian post-structuralism. R.G. Collingwood once wrote that in order to understand a work, one must understand the set of questions to which it is responding. Barthes' texts, which are obsessed by the issues of power, violence and the construction of human subjectivity, invite and yet resist the notion of any final ethical accountability to others. And it is toward a consideration of the ethical implications of Barthes' discourse and his chronic aestheticization of phenomena that this thesis moves.

In his introduction to *Untying the Text: a Post-Structural Reader* Robert Young writes that the premises of post-
structuralism forestalls any comprehensive definition of itself:

The word post-structuralism itself shifts the emphasis from any single meaning or theory towards an unbound movement through time and space, suggesting that there never will be, and never can be, any definitive 'theory of post-structuralism'. Instead it consists of a perpetual detour towards a 'truth' that has lost any status or finality.4

Yet post-structuralism is often treated as an almost monolithic entity in some theoretical circles, in spite of the difficulties using this term to encompass the disparate genealogies, turns, and projects found in the work of those claimed as post-structuralists; principally, Derrida, Barthes, Lacan, Kristeva, Foucault. These disparities are obscured by several factors. Thematically, their writings interrogate similar issues: authority, power, writing, violence, subjectivity, absence, the formation of reality and the human subject, eroticism, and so on. And there are the simple historical facts of proximity and synchronic interaction dear to a hermeneut's retrograde heart: these individuals read and responded to one another's work in their own writing, contributed to many of the the same organs of publication (particularly Tel Quel), lived--often as marginals in some sense--in the same nation-state, experienced May 1968, and knew one another to some degree. The specificity of each thinker's "detour," or swerve away from the tenets and intellectual style of Structuralism, recedes further in anglophone North America because of small subtleties, which, over time, accumulate: a
reliance on unstandardized English translations which come out erratically, in a random order, not at all, or in collections directed by market pressures which scramble chronological development, creating spectral Borgesian image-beings in translation whose différance is not at all helpful. More importantly, the obsessive, almost journalistic critical focus on the immediate theoretical past and present has made it appear that intellectual history is indeed "going very fast." As pivotal has been the tendency, in most of North America, to neglect any serious consideration of the less obvious political or philosophical intertexts informing these discourses. This can unfortunately lead to a shallow and blurred reading of these varied post-structuralisms as being largely a reaction to the constrictions of French Structuralism and persistent varieties of humanism.

Critical, too, has been the lack of attention to the diverse literary intertexts of post-structural theorizing: the impact, for example, of Jabès and Blanchot on Derrida, of Artaud and Romantic philology on Kristeva, and of Aesthetics and German Romanticism on Barthes. Even a partial reconsideration of these intertexts—which comprise part of the vast submerged prehistory of post-structural theorizing—would extend the historical frames within which theory is considered, and demonstrate how these post-structural theories continue the interrogation of language and writing begun in earlier centuries.
Barthes' career, with its dramatic enthusiasms and subsequent fadings or abdications, seems to invite and yet resists easy periodization. Many critics have opted for a schematic solution, dividing his work into the early Sartrean/ Marxist period of WDZ and M, followed by a structural phase, beginning in 1963 with the publication of "History or Literature?" and OR, followed by CE and a series of essays in which Barthes engages French literature and society as a structuralist (however idiosyncratic his brand of structural analysis). These phases, in tandem with Barthes' semiotic writings, constitute the era of the "hard" Barthes, the intellectual dedicated to political critiques and the scientific analysis of social discourse. By 1968, with "The Death of the Author," Barthes is undeniably moving beyond the pseudo-scientific discourse of Structuralism. In the estimation of some critics, such as Annette Lavers in Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After, he is regrettably turning away from progressive forms of criticism and beginning a slow decline into the questionable pleasures of his post- structuralism, into the later, "soft" (or, in Antoine Compagnon's terms, the "tender" Barthes). Yet Steven Ungar, in Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire, holds that this moment after Structuralism is when Barthes, questioning his own authorities and methodologies, begins his most radical work. Of the two, only Ungar explores the complexity of that post-structural phase, the subtle movements and turns within
that extraordinary last decade of Barthes alive.

The movements within that last decade begin to be sketched in *RB*. There, in the fragment "Phases," the protagonist/narrator of *RB* makes himself "intelligible," wryly presenting a schematic and roughly chronological table of R.B.'s intellectual "periods" and ongoing resistance to his own and others' ideas. The table has three columns: "Intertext," "Genre," and "Works." (*RB* 145/148) Gide heads the list of intertexts: he is the writer credited with igniting R.B.'s desire to write. Sartre, Marx and Brecht follow, grouped together under the rubric of "social mythology." Saussure stands alone, the master of R.B.'s brief period of relatively orthodox semiotic analysis. Then Sollers, Kristeva, Derrida and Lacan appear as the intertexts stimulating R.B.'s initial period of exuberant textuality that, according to the table, includes three major texts: *S/Z*, *SFL*, and *ES*. Nietzsche is the intertext who presides over the next internal movement or sub-phase within his post-structural period, the phase of "morality" (the two texts included in this period are *PT* and *RB*). Some guiding reflections on R.B.'s intellectual displacements, in point form, succeed this table. The narrator recaps that movement, underlining the complicated and fugal nature of his intellectual practice:

...first of all (mythological) interventions, then semiotic fictions, then splinters, fragments, sentences, phrases; (4) between the periods, obviously, there are overlappings, returns, affinities, leftovers...(5) each phase
is reactive: the author reacts either to the discourse which surrounds him, or to his own discourse, if one and the other begin to have too much consistency, too much stability; (6) as one nail drives out another...so a perversion drives out a neurosis: political and moral obsession is followed by a minor scientific delirium, which in its turn sets off a perverse pleasure (with its undercurrent of fetishism)... (RB 145/148)

This table and accompanying remarks, only briefly alluding to the least submerged influences operating in Barthes' texts, begins to suggest why it would be exhausting and nearly impossible to lay out the prehistories of each of Barthes' intellectual phases. He was, more than any other contemporary European theorist, an intellectual in flux. Barthes' work, as Fredric Jameson asserts (providing his reader with a more comprehensive inventory of Barthesian intertexts), constitutes

...a veritable fever-chart of all the significant intellectual and critical tendencies since World War II: Bachelardian phenomenology...Sartrean Marxism...Hjelmslevian linguistics...Brechtian Verfremdung...orthodox Freudianism...hard-core semiotics...Tel Quel textual productivity...Lacanian psychoanalysis...post-Structuralism...and...finally...origins...8

If one were to seek through lines in Barthes' writing, themes which organize his work from the time of his earliest published essay (on Gide) until CL, at least three could be offered: his rejection of the ideology of representation, his resistance to endoxic discourse and utilitarian models of culture, and, lastly, his preoccupation with the non-
referential aspects and potentialities of the sign (the graph). These themes are keys to the Barthesian project of aestheticization. Barthes' early fascination with the arbitrary and autonomous potential of the sign gradually modulates into an appreciation of the autotelic sign, and then, almost simultaneously, into the aesthetic reverie of the beautiful silenced graph informing ES and the meditations on visual art and music collected in RF. The graph, whether visual or aural, becomes for Barthes in the 1970s an emptied, drifting utopia, an ephemeral elsewhere (anailleurs), a quasi-Baudelairean flot of reverie and signifiance in which the withdrawal of prior meanings is, as in other aestheticizing writers, a condition of pleasure. 9

Barthes' aestheticizing bent is not the product of a sudden break with his earlier structural and semiotic practice. In texts such as "The Structuralist Activity" Barthes' delight in the purely formal and non-semantic aspects of structure is clearly in evidence. Retrospectively, his aesthetic posture of refusal, his cultivation of the non-rational and the marginal in the face of bourgeois demands to make money and sense, is already discernable in WDZ. There he forwards the outlines of his enduring myth of an alienated literary modernity and his search for a position of social innocence. And, pursuing the implications of Allan Megill's work on post-structural intellectuals in Prophets of Extremity, Barthes' turn toward aestheticization is encouraged by the textualization of reality underwriting
structural, semiotic and post-structural theories. This turn, read in more traditional terms against the background of nineteenth-century French literature, emerges quietly in the stylized exoticism of his reading of Japan in *ES*, then detonates in *PT*, where he exposes the anhedonia of high culture and an unrelenting theoretical modernity. Enacting a provisional theory of reading and writing erected partially upon the recasting of Baudelairean thematics of pleasure, ennui, desire, and mental escape from bourgeois culture, Barthes makes of the text a semi-private pleasure dome, a sanctioned Babel withdrawn from the turbulence of history, the violence of assertion, and from the pressure of others' needs or desires.

In his writing from this time forward (1973) Barthes reprises many of the characteristic postures, themes, and strategies of those earlier writers I have mentioned. There is his Baudelairean (or, from Sontag's vantage point, quasi-Wildean) indictment of referentiality and bourgeois doxa, his fascination with textual surfaces and style, as well as his celebration of criticism as a primary creative act. Barthes' critique of the bourgeois ideology of the natural moves into a heightened appreciation of artifice (his post-structural play with artifice centring upon an exploration of the intertext, the Lacanian *imago* and other varieties of simulacra). In *ES* he idealizes the (for him) unreadable calligraphies of Japanese. Nauseated by the repletion of Western societies and subjects, he takes refuge in "Japan," a utopic haiku country of emptied
signs, restful interstices, decentred texts, and attenuated human subjects—the site of a gentle aestheticization of matter and a voiding of personal identity. This rejection of humanism and the fiction of the "moral" and political unity of the subject for Kristeva's conflicted poetic subject leads Barthes to experiment with the ambiguities and absence of identity he finds in personal pronouns and *imagos.*

His last three major works—*RB, FLD, CL*—pursue the defensive and ironic possibilities of a disseminated and textualized subject-simulacrum. They revolve around divided and fictional subject-shards (*dividua*) that function as masks which are intended to protect Barthes from figuration and cultural recuperation.

This attraction to fragmentation, complexity and dissimulation further suggests Barthes' affinities with *fin de siècle* literary decadence. In *RB* the narrator/protagonist R.B. confesses to a decadent penchant for "le fragment, le détail, le rush." (RB 94/97) This will-to-fragmentation and fascination with the inessential detail (what Derrida refers to as the "supplementary") organizes Barthes' writing both structurally and thematically for the rest of his life. His preference for short, fragmented, hybrid forms is a contemporary restatement and elaboration of the general aesthetic inclination toward marginal, small-scale works and more intimate literary forms such as the aphorism, the lyric poem or prose text, the essay, the journal entry, the closet drama. The fragment is, particularly in Barthes' hands, a
fertile and extreme form of writing—a *texte-limite* which pushes against the margins and nomenclature of literature. It can archly mime the classical notion of a text as a highly unified, composed structure; then, in a *reductio ad absurdum*, turn and cause that tight text to implode and assume the undecidable configurations of the post-structural text. The prose fragment is, in Barthes' writing, as in its history, torn between the early Schlegelian vision of it as a glittering hermetic plenum (but full of absence), and the Novalian apprehension of it as *blütenstaub*, as an imperfect diaspora of language, as an intermittent field of disseminated traces in which the writer takes refuge from meaning in absence and imperfection.

Barthes' post-structural writings, following his own characterization of them as *essais*, have been regarded as being simply variations on that venerable anti-genre, the essay. In *Roland Barthes: the Essay as Reflective Text* Réda Bensmaïa reads his *essais* more astutely, situating them within the tradition of the European philosophical and speculative essay, finding within them bits of "intellectual autobiography, anecdotal *punctum*, and discursive transgressions...that brilliantly manipulates the essay form to idiosyncratic ends."\(^{12}\) The issue of genre in these later texts is even more involved than Bensmaïa suggests: every major work of Barthes' from the time of *S/Z* forward is not merely an "essay," but rather an active attack upon the categories of humanism and what Derrida refers to as the "law
of genre. "13 PT subverts the written and unwritten codes of the scholarly essay; RB plays ironically with the conventions of autobiography and cultural hagiography. FLD is not so much an essay but the hyper-fragment of a virtual discourse which moves restlessly, erotically cannibalizing the official canon and earlier genres to create a cybernetic subject—the structural lover—and provide moments of amorous intertextual resonance and screen "memories." CL, his final major text, is a subtle work of enormous complexity. It is at once a tentative note on photography, a prose elegy for his dead mother and the passing world, and an self-consuming essay indicting the machinations of the will-to-representation and the will to theory—theory being viewed as a return of representation on a metadiscursive plane. These works react against the inherited imperatives of relative coherence, erotically pulverizing conventional forms of rhetorical development, tantalizing the reader with shards of familiar forms and literary strategies. Epiphanic, drifting utterances, they seek refuge from master narratives and commodity culture in the utopian realms of non-signification and non-identity, and in what Barthes, during a 1971 interview with Stephen Heath, termed the "paragrammatic": that which is—or is made—"plural, multiple, ambiguous." (GV 137).

...the great problem, for me in any case, is to outplay the signifier, to outplay the law, to outplay the father, to outplay the repressed—I do not say to explode it, but to outplay it; everywhere there is a possibility of a paragrammatic work...
feel at ease. (GV 137/)

And this is the heart of the matter. Barthes' aestheticizing moves, like those of Baudelaire or Wilde, are not gratuitous: they are a conscious response to the felt stresses of bourgeois ideology. In Barthes' case, there are the additional stresses of history and power (the tools of the elided emperor of CL), as well as the congealing gaze of commodity culture which seeks to murder the individual into an imago, a distorting image-identity which circulates within cultural economies as one of its primary currencies. Barthes apprehends that the social and ideological violences he is fleeing are, fundamentally, forms of stabilized images and assertions which develop into doxa and social narratives (or, in Althusserian terms, into systems of representation). So his later texts are, among other things, devoted to disrupting the fascination of images and narrative in all their complementary forms: identity, history, generic forms, and theories. Fragmentation becomes a principal device in this guerilla warfare, as does anacoluthia, the use of dramatic and unmastered irony, reflexive and decentered texts, ambiguously distanced discursive subjects, and the transformation of the textual space and writing into a theatrical spectacle run by Brechtian Verfremdung, desire, and Barthesian perversity.

As the 1970s progress, Barthes wearies of the stockmarkets of culture and the arrogance of unreflective theorizing. Having the apparent option of a partial withdrawal from consumer culture, retreat and evasion were to become Barthes'
final tactics. PT announces Barthes' definitive conversion to the body and to the specificity of sensual and aesthetic pleasures. In CL he turns to the reverie of a post-theoretical discourse, one in which theoretical reflection would be put under erasure and turn toward a speculative, pleasure-driven phase, charged only with enjoying the eccentric sway of its own detours away from the threat of any meaning or authority, even its own. And it is in this almost Paterian state of quietism and retreat from the narratives of power that he allows photographs of oppression and tortured bodies to become graphs, floating signifiers, important only as sites from which some unpredictable aesthetic interest—a detail, a punctum—might suddenly arise and ravish him.

Is this withdrawn and compensatory ideology of pleasure and unattended bliss the logical terminus of Barthesian post-structuralism? Can feminists and others who make use of his theorizing on textuality, pleasure and the body escape the overt and covert agendas of his aestheticiting, his need to evade a parti pris by asserting a Nietzschean will-to-art (art becoming here the textual) and declaring the desirability of a position of "nonpower" (depouvoir)?(ABR 472/L 34) Is reality, as Barthes claims, only organized violence, only a "system of power"? (FLD 89/105) These are some of the issues to be examined in the final chapter of the thesis, where the enabling and disab]]>ing consequences of Barthes' aesthetic quest for separation will be considered.

My interest in Barthes' aestheticizing activity lies not
in a hermeneutic reconstruction of his sources in Aestheticism, Modernism, and Decadence, nor in a close comparative study of themes and motifs. My interest, like Megill's, lies in the consequences of the textualizing trend of contemporary European theorizing; and, with Megill, I concur that the roots of this trend lie partially in the soil of Aestheticism (both philosophical and literary), though where he emphasizes its philosophical antecedents (Nietzsche, Schopenhauer), I will point to a few of its literary intertexts.

In this thesis, the reading of Barthesian post-structuralism as a "neoaesthetics" is intended to help bring to light the kinds of distancing and skepticism that enable Barthes' theories to function. The following chapter is not intended to be anything more than the briefest indication of the links between Barthes and earlier writers, using Barthes' own comments about Flaubert, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and decadence as its parameters. A comprehensive comparative thematic reading of Barthes against the founding discourses of Aestheticism and decadence (both philosophical and literary) would be salutary. The successive shocks of novelty which his writing have engendered would be replaced by the shock of recognizing that many of his more provocative themes and postures originate in antecedent texts. Barthes' innovative post-structural move is to textualize and eroticize sensual aspects of the aesthetic experience, developing an unstable idiolect in which traces of older terms and categories such as
taste, the beautiful, and the sublime are revamped, circulating in extravagant Parisian guises. Some of these antecedent aesthetic terms and themes that are critical to Barthesian post-structuralism—hedonism, the aesthete's body, perversion, the creation of utopian spaces of solitary pleasure, the aestheticization of matter, the rejection of representation and conceptual systems—will be considered in the following chapters.

As for the thesis itself: after pointing out some similarities between Barthes' post-structural posture and those of literary decadents, and then, in the chapter on WDZ, outlining the myth of an alienated literary modernity pervading all of Barthes' writing, the argument will concentrate upon following the textualization of reality and the human subject in Barthes' post-structural period. The chapter on S/Z will lay out Barthes' conversion to an ethics of the sign, his use of structural and post-structural simulacra, his earliest version of the subject, and his theories of the text. The next chapter, on ES, will pursue Barthes' textualization of reality and use of the simulacra—there, the "dislocated" and purely textual hyper-reality known as Japan—to suspend context and forestall interpretation. It will also explore the two textual economies operating in Barthes' post-structural texts: one, which I refer to as a Parisian economy, which is predicated upon an unconcluding web of codes and intertexts, and the other, a complementary textual economy, referred to as a Japanese economy, where the gestural sign, as
empty as "Japan's" subjects, tends away from the web of culture toward silence and a utopian space of non-involvement. The chapter on PT will be a busy one in which Barthes' defense against bourgeois discourse will be sketched in an examination of the notions of pleasure, the nihilating force of jouissance, the reading body, the recalcitrant and hedonistic subject, Barthes' retreat from the hypnos of commodity culture, and his flight from ideological violence. The subsequent chapter on RB, FLD and CL will follow Barthes' flight from the violences of ideology and the image, his cultivation of personae and other forms of textual distancing, his growing mistrust of theory and doxic culture, his vacillation between the competing attractions of the gesture and the intertext, and, finally, his turn toward affectivity, the novelistic, and the specificity of the body. In the conclusion I will attempt to summarize my own ambivalent response to Barthes' construction of the real as textual, and his withdrawn, defensive ethos of pleasure.

There is, to return to the issue of Aestheticism, another reason for opting against a more traditional source study. Identifying all of the persistant traces and transformations of literary Aestheticism in Barthes would be quite difficult, given his casual, often indirect or approximate quotations and allusions (as in, for instance, FLD) and his sense that the works he pulls into his own text exist as widely disseminated public intertexts needing no footnotes. Paradoxially, these cultural icons and the hermeneutic systems tracking them
become the direct targets of Barthes' post-structuralism. In S/Z he counsels their sabotage, writing:

A multivalent text [the ideal post-structural text] can carry out its basic duplicity only if it subverts the opposition between true and false, if it fails to attribute quotations (even when seeking to discredit them), to explicit authorities, if it flouts all respect for origin, paternity, propriety, if it destroys the voice which could give the text its ('organic') unity, in short if it coldly and fraudently abolishes quotation marks which...enclose a quotation and juridically distribute the ownership of the sentences to their respective proprietors...

(S/Z 44-5/51)

This passage betrays the outlines of Barthes' strategy for the rest of the decade and indicates why it would be an arduous and at times futile task to naively attempt, using orthodox hermeneutic means, to read his writing and disentangle their sources. Up against such writing, which relies upon a cultural memory that is nurtured by decades of reading, then slyly put under erasure or "forgotten," the reader can only rely on her own memory of that memory (the "circular memory" of culture, as Barthes will describe it in PT), and on what she can remember outside of that memory-loop.

This also suggests the deep ambivalence toward culture which characterizes Barthes' later work. The consequences of this antagonism toward cultural structures which fix writers and texts will be explored throughout the thesis. Barthes' revulsion against authorial "ownership," which he sees as the
foundation of bourgeois culture and its current expression in a market-driven commodity culture, recalls the antipathy expressed by Baudelaire, Wilde and other aesthetes toward the commercialization of art. The passive-aggressive political critiques historically launched against power and mass culture by aesthetes—a tradition which Barthes continues—points to the curiously backhanded ethical concerns circulating in aesthetic discourse, which some commentators, Camus being a luminous instance, have picked up on.

There has been much discussion of the abstract politics of the Father in post-structural theories, but less around the pragmatic implications of post-structural ideas. Barthes, in many of his writings and some of his interviews, insists upon the ethical force of his post-structural posture. In "Remarks on Violence," a conversation with Jacqueline Sers in 1978, he speaks of seeing circles within circles of violence in European society and being forced, as a person living within that society, to choose between accepting certain instances of violence (the-end-justifying-the-bloody-means) or categorically denouncing all violence, as he would, as intolerable. (GV /287) In another interview given in 1972, "Pleasure/Writing/Reading," Barthes makes it clear that the pleasures of the text are, in his eyes, implicated in an "ethics of the sign" which inaugurated in ES. (GV 153/150) Against the pressures of "terrorist discourse," that is, of discourses of assertion which value language primarily as a means to some final signified, which is usually a political,
ethical or religious cause, Barthes raises the counter-ethic of the drifting, uncertain sign whose only end is itself. (GV 156/153) This counter-ethic inscribes, as Barthes will put it five years later in L, "the impossible horizon of linguistic anarchy...that point where language attempts to escape its own power, its own servility." (ABR 468/L 26-27)

Against the discourses of power (including the idiolects of literary theory) Barthes asserts the utopian will to an absolute renunciation of power in his idea of the Text: the Text becomes a site of non-power (dépouvoir) where the scriptor learns to outfox power by "cheating with speech" (la langue); that is, by creating undecidable (i.e. literary) texts. (ABR 472, 462/L 34, 16) This is one of the ideal aims of Barthes' aestheticizing posture. By assuming the role of the amateur in his later writings, by opting for the pole of an apparently disengaged, non-harming hedonism focused upon the sign, pleasure, and significance, Barthes hoped to escape the sinister nets of power. To be neither victim nor victimizer; to create a writing which, in staying close to the energies and experiences of his plural "bodies" as he/they cruise art and the world made infinite text, does not play into the discourses of Law or of Violence; this begins to articulate both the contents of Barthes' cultural Imaginary and the oddly moral dimensions of his aestheticizing projects.

This thesis will call for a more nuanced and critical evaluation of the agendas and implications of Barthesian post-structuralism. Barthes teaches us to read in speculative and
liberating ways, demonstrating how readers might deploy their particular bodies and responses as disruptive heuristic devices. But the eventual costs of Barthes' strategies, particularly his political disengagement and its underlying aesthetic pessimism have not, to my knowledge, been addressed. Rather than assenting to his early post-structural counter-proposals--the deaths of history, identity, the subject, and interpretation--and then passively accepting the compensations of private textual pleasures, feminists and others have more to gain by learning from and yet resisting Barthesian myths regarding writing and culture. By tempering the hyper-textual claims of Barthesian post-structuralism and retaining a sense of the historical specificity and positionality of the human subject (one who is read as positively embodying multiple identities rather than one or none), feminist theorists and others can continue to work with Barthesian post-structuralism without perpetuating the alienation from which it arises.

My reading of the last twelve years of Barthes' work may inadvertently have the force of academic closure, so that it would seem that I am imagining Barthes as nothing more than a contemporary decadent, but this is not my intention. Barthes' post-structuralism is a complex phenomenon that draws upon many prior discourses. It exceeds any attempt to categorically fix its polysemic intricacy. And it is not a pensée terminale. CL, like FLD and RB, are liminal texts, where Barthes begins to negotiate another turn, a turn away from criticism, perhaps
into what he would term the novelistic, or perhaps into something else.
CHAPTER ONE. BARTHESIAN AESTHETICIZATION: SOME INTERTEXTS

What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends upon nothing external for its support; a book which would have almost no subject, or at least one in which the subject would be almost invisible.... The finest works are those which contain the least matter... I believe that the future of Art lies in this direction.... This emancipation from matter can be observed everywhere.... from the standpoint of pure Art one might almost establish the axiom that there is not such thing as subject, style in itself being an absolute manner of seeing things.

Gustave Flaubert ¹

It seems as if the most opposite statements about him were alike true: he is so receptive, all the influences of nature and of society ceaselessly playing upon him, so that every hour in his life is unique, changed altogether by a stray word, a glance, or touch. It is the truth of these relations that experience gives us, not the truth of eternal outlines ascertained once and for all, but a world of fine gradations and subtly linked conditions, shifting constantly as we ourselves change...To the intellect, the critical spirit, just these subtleties of effect are more precious than anything else. What is lost in precision of form is gained in intricacy of expression.

Walter Pater ²

Aestheticism, aestheticization: for some, the words may
conjure up slightly faded after-images of green carnations, jewels, out-of-focus debauchery, stylized C curves materializing into images of unsettling androgeny, byzantine prose styles, accelerating decadence, and perhaps a fleeting glimpse of the young Rilke walking through the streets of Prague, defiantly dressed in black, carrying an iris. Which is to say that literary aestheticism, from Gautier's assertion of the uselessness of art, of l'art pour l'art, in his preface to Mademoiselle de Maupin, through to fin de siècle decadence and dandyism, can seem a last-century phenomenon, a curious historical blip having little to do with contemporary literary and theoretical discourses. However outdated aestheticism may seem as a personal style, it is generally accepted that it is a critical phase in the development of Anglo-American and Gallic literary modernity. There are critics who believe that aestheticism actively informs present cultural discourses. In The Five Faces of Modernity Matei Calinescu reads the present moment—what he refers to as (literary) "modernity"—as being a complex extended space in which the traces of five cultural modalities persist and interact within contemporary texts. Those five modalities, according to Calinescu, are: the avant-garde, kitsch, decadence, modernism, and the post-modern. Calinescu's historical model is supple, polyphonic, and polyvalent, coming closer to the kind of richly multi-vocal and confused present comparatists encounter working with modern texts than other, more monological readings of modernity. I would make one revision to Calinescu's scheme, replacing the
term "decadence" (which is generally acknowledged as the dehiscence of aestheticism) by the more general term of "aestheticism." Such a substitution would not only move back the parameters of the prehistory of literary and particularly theoretical modernity, but also flag the quest for separation and unique imaginative re- or dis-orderings that characterize much of high modernism and contemporary theorizing.

In *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche asserts that nothing that has a history can truly be defined. Aestheticism is a general term that suffers from the obvious dangers courted by using a single noun to refer to a complex, even heterogenous series of *attitudes, phases* and *events* within a culture which arise from a cultivation of, in Barthesian terms, *dégagement*. ("KA," CE 133/138) In English literary studies Aestheticism, as Brian Trehearne points out, connotes the entire movement of aesthetic thought and production throughout the span of almost a century: Pre-Raphaelitism, Aesthetic criticism, Decadence, and the literary Impressionism of early twentieth-century writers. In France, Aestheticism is an equally enveloping term which begins with Gautier and persists in the critical vocabulary until Mallarmé, Proust and Gide. The history of Western European literary Aestheticism is complicated by a strange intergenerational dance of intertexts and personal influences back and forth across the Channel, and rendered even further recondite by the complication of philosophical and philological intertexts. How, for instance, is one to categorize Nietzsche, the ironic philologist and patron
trickster of post-structuralism? He participates in the histories of both discourses, undermining traditional distinctions in his hybrid texts, making the train of philosophy jump its rails and veer into the territory of metaphor and the novelistic. He initiates not only the "violent reflection upon language" of which Foucault writes, but re-introduces the body and personal history into intellectual discourse, changing the course of continental philosophy and, eventually, of literary theorizing.7

The body: philosophical aesthetics, like literary aestheticism, is rooted in the sentient human body. Reflecting upon the origins of philosophical aesthetics in the late eighteenth century in The Ideology of the Aesthetic Terry Eagleton observes:

Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body. In its original formulation...the term refers not in the first place to art, but, as the Greek aisthesis would suggest, to the whole realm of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought. 8

The function of this new discourse, aesthetics, was to mediate between the categories of the particular (the particularities of sense perception) and the universal (the "generalities of reason"). (IA 15) However fleetingly, this new category was in Western intellectual history a sign of "the first stirrings of a primitive materialism--of the body's long inarticulate rebellion against the tyranny of the theoretical." (IA 13) The innovative--and potentially
disruptive—situation of having thought attend to the life of the senses is, in Eagleton's account, quickly domesticated. Reason, in Eagleton's estimation, had to find some way of ordering the realms of sensation and perception, but in a manner that would not put its own dominance at risk. (IA 15) Aesthetics therefore became a means of rhetorically rendering the dense particulars of physical experience "luminous" to thought. In both Baumgarten and Kant, founders of philosophical aesthetics, the aesthetic is conceived of as a "third way" which bridges the chasm between "the vagaries of subjective feeling and the bloodless rigor of understanding," a way consenting to speak the language of reason. (IA 17) All aesthetic unities or phenomena would, therefore, lie open to rational analysis, never resisting analytic frames or hypotheses.

The body, perception, taste, pleasure, the beautiful: these are the common origins of aesthetic writing and philosophical aesthetics. Yet, as Eagleton and Megill concur, aesthetics soon ossifies into an idealizing and normative discourse—an old idealizing category, as R.B./Barthes writes in RB, one which drifts far from the individual body, only to be audaciously yanked back to its originating ground by Nietzsche.

Although aesthetics emerges as a distinct discourse in the late eighteenth century, Western aestheticism (whether philosophical or artistic), is, in my view, best understood not as a bounded historical period or movement, but, as Eagleton describes it, an "intellectual current" whose motifs could be "pursued back to the Renaissance or even to classical [Latin]
antiquity." (IA 3) Believing neither in the model of "theoretical cataclysm," that is, of an absolute rupture which initiates the modern (post-Kantian) category of the aesthetic, nor in the equally dubious model of smooth continuity, Eagleton acknowledges a signal innovation in late eighteenth century philosophy which filters through into literary production: the emergence of art as a privileged category comprised of discrete, self-contained aesthetic artifacts. (IA 3-4) In his study of the development of the idea of the aesthetic from Baumgarten through to Benjamin and Adorno, Eagleton's hypothesis explaining the historical genesis of the category of the aesthetic is linked to the rise of the bourgeois culture. Leaving aside his political analysis of the middle class developing a shared set of aesthetic values to substitute for the social coherence generated by feudal values, the parallel he draws between the intellectual construction of the discrete art object and the construction of the discrete bourgeois subject usefully anticipates (and explains) Barthes' dislike of both. (IA 17-23) Although philosophical reflection on aesthetics in eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosophy might be viable intertexts in a philosophical study of post-structuralisms, as IA and Derrida's reflections on Kant in The Truth in Painting would hint, my thesis will not map the shifts and developments occurring within those discussions of the aesthetic because Barthesian aestheticization, however indebted to shifts in the intellectual category of the aesthetic, is stubbornly literary, even in its use of Nietzsche
The entry found in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics under "Aestheticism" supports reading it as a primary aesthetic posture or modality. The first sentence: "Aestheticism: a term applied to the point of view that art is self-sufficient, need serve no ulterior purpose, and should not be judged by moral, political, or other nonaesthetic standards." This definition—however naive and distorted by Nietzschean standards—is a useful retrospective critical summation of an attitude that gradually arose among nineteenth-century writers, cresting in the self-consciousness and decadent euphoria of the 1880s and 1890s. One cannot pretend that the aesthetic stance of Gautier and the equivocal utterances of Flaubert and Baudelaire can be blithely assimilated to the later postures of Huysmans, Mallarmé, Gide, and the 1890s generation of English and French decadents who transformed the more contained aesthetic position of earlier writers into a lifestyle and a metaphysics of marginality. Yet there is a gradual amplification and working out of certain common themes and motifs linking early aesthetic projects to the most outrageous manifestations of décadentisme. Aestheticism is such a complicated and, to borrow from Pater's reflections on Coleridge which opened this chapter, sometimes such a contrary phenomenon that it would seem as if the most opposite statements about it were true. Rather than attempting a classical definition of the aesthetic, which asserts the presence of a single element common to all members of a proposed
unity, I would opt for a reading of aestheticism relying upon Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances, in which an overlapping series of multiple elements perceived among members of a proposed unity establishes relatedness. Aestheticism is, then, in my myth (and I stress that this reading is not intended to be an orthodox historical one) not a single aesthetic posture, but a collection of aesthetic postures arrayed in a continuum, or perhaps an unstable discursive field shifting around a core thematics of privately rewriting or recreating the world (which manifests in Barthes' propensity to textualize phenomena).

Aestheticism is an astonishing phenomenon which is (and I struggle for words here) multi-polar. It vacillates between abstraction and particularity, between an arch formalism and the pleasures of the loss of form: it can celebrate or suppress the human body, privileging the perceiver, the processes of perception, and/or the object perceived. Within it one can see writers straining toward an intense submersion in both the Kristevian symbolic and what Kristeva conceptualizes as the pre-Symbolic realm of oceanic sensual pleasure. Often the austere formalism of the symbolic suddenly flips into the semiotic, providing the reader with great sensual enjoyment: something that often happens in Barthes' post-structural readings of the sign.

If pressed for a more classical definition of aestheticism, I would say that aesthetic writing is primarily characterized by a sustained play with the tensions generated
by mediation. That is, a mediation effected by means of various structures and strategies of artifice or semantic suspension such as the simulacrum or the *epoché* which create an aesthetic doubling or, particularly in Barthes, an aesthetic distance from an origin of some type—a human subject, a discrete self-contained object, an original context. Distance, as Simone Weil once wrote, is the very soul of beauty. Distance, or, more exactly, *the quest for separation* appears to lie at the core of what I am calling the aesthetic position, whether one examines the particular aestheticisms of Flaubert, Mallarmé, or Barthes. Aestheticizing discourse explores the ludic, sensual, anti-utilitarian spaces of separation and absence that artifice (the imaginative nihilation and recomposing—or fragmentation—of an object), negation, radical doubt, perversion, fantasy, boredom and solitary pleasure can produce. Within these spaces apart or between, the aesthete or decadent is free to re-invent or destroy whatever she chooses. Or, alternatively, she can play indefinitely with the effects and tensions created by mediation. In enhancing that space and distance apart from doxic discourse, the constraints of context and the heavy "screen of meaning" which stops the play of the sign are diminished, even theoretically overcome. The aesthete moves toward the intense and cerebral pleasures of ambiguity—in Barthes' discourse, the gratifications of *signification*, irony, textuality, *jouissance*, paradox, connotation, reflexivity, drift, perversion, erasure, abjuration, and the paragrammatic.
Barthes, like earlier aesthetes and decadents, seeks distance: distance from the pressures of bourgeois culture, from a gross and intransigent material world and its moral issues, from the history of others (including cultural traditions and prior interpretations), from utilitarian aesthetic values, from genetic models dealing in beginnings and in deaths, in choices, limitations and consequences; distance from the traps of personality, identity, social violence, power, the sleep of Doxa. This distance, as I will argue, is the very space of aesthetic creativity in Barthes. It is at once the source of its power and its hidden vulnerability; and a space, for women and other marginals reading him, of promise and deception.

Of the writers (Flaubert, Baudelaire, Mallarmé) venerated throughout Barthes' texts, Flaubert is the one most often mentioned. With Mallarmé, he figures in WDZ, S/Z, PT and several essays as a liminal writer and theoretician of modernity. In WDZ, as the next chapter will show, Flaubert is prized as the first writer to fully appreciate the tragic situation of the writer in bourgeois culture, and reject the bourgeois ideology of naive representation, turning instead toward the altar of style and the ethos of art as a conscious crafting of a language which does not coincide with any referent. Barthes is only one among several contemporary critics who champion the aesthetic and modernist aspects of Flaubert that harmonize with the
values of post-structural theorizing. Read as ironic, perverse, even aporetic avant la lettre, Flaubert has been repeatedly celebrated as the first modern writer to espouse the death of the author (in his cult of authorial impersonality), and to consciously subvert both representation and narrative, miming realism only to aim at undecidability. Flaubertian realism, as Eugenio Donato writes, deliberately works "in the space between subject and representation." Deploying a network of details suspended over absence, it generates the illusion of verisimilitude--what Barthes will refer to as the "reality-effect"--while subtly pointing to the artifice of its representation. In "Literature Today" Barthes glosses the import of Flaubert's practice of realism, emphasizing the disjunction between language and the world of objects already broached in WDZ.

Yet, what is the real? We never know it except in the form of effects (the physical world), functions (the social world), or fantasies (cultural world); in short, the real is never anything but an inference; when we declare we are copying reality, this means that we choose a certain inference and not certain others: realism is, at its very inception subject to a choice... ("LT," CE 159/163-164)

Barthes pursues the implications of the truism that reality exceeds any description of it, that it cannot be copied in its entirety. "Realism," Barthes asserts in "The Reality Effect," a later essay partially devoted to Flaubert, "is only fragmentary, erratic, confined to details." ("RE," RL 147/174) The modern real becomes, in Flaubert, a self-conscious
discontinuous simulacrum, a series of significant and insignificant details linked together on an empty page which, when read at the proper distance, generate a deceptive referential illusion. Flaubertian realism, however, is not a crammed verbal world which seeks to distract the reader from the inhering emptiness and absence of the literary sign. Rather, as Barthes notes, Flaubert calibrates aesthetic imperatives and referential constraints, establishing a delicate balance between mimesis and linguistic reflexivity, making a textual lace of ruptures and absences (anacoluthons and asyndetons) linked by "interstichal notations" and details which do not denote the real so much as signify it. ("RE," RL 147-148/174).

These ruptures and details draw the attention of the contemporary reader, disturbing the smooth flow of the real. In this way the referential illusion in the Flaubertian text is undermined as those balances shift and language slowly separates from the referent and the narrative Trieb, becoming visible and intermittent. Barthes comments:

...for the first time, with Flaubert, the rupture is no longer, exceptional, sporadic, brilliant, set in the base material of a common utterance: there is no longer any language on the other side of these figures (which means, in another sense: there is no longer anything but language....the narrative is deconstructed, and yet the story remains readable...

(PT 9/18)

The Flaubertian text is therefore radically ambiguous: it actively lends itself to multiple reading strategies. A reader can opt to focus upon the conforming edge of pleasure, devouring
language to fuel the illusory "realistic world" and story; she can attend, with Flaubert, to form; or, as Barthes chooses, she can move closer to follow the "mimesis of language" (language imitating itself). Spacing is, as Derrida argues, a necessary condition of intelligibility. In Flaubert that spacing is played with, pushed almost to the point where intermittence—the rupturing of language's flow and telos—causes what Barthes refers to in PT as the "two edges of language" to appear: the doxic, conformist, "plagarizing" edge of readerly language (the lisible), and the wilder, erotic edge of language (associated with jouissance and the scriptible). Intermittence—the distance between signs, the gap between word and thing, clothing and flesh, gesture and meaning, the chasm between scriptor and reader—is, Barthes will claim in his post-structural phase, what creates the textual and the erotic.

The subtle Flaubertian gap between word and thing estranges language from its ostensible origin and reason for being. To return to the interview "Literature Today": there Barthes suggests that the meanings of words derive less from their relation to the object they signify than from their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relation to other words. Language becomes a separate, almost parthenogenetic (un)reality (l'irréel).16

...in relation to objects themselves, literature is fundamentally, constitutively unrealistic; literature is unreality itself; ...literature is on the contrary the very consciousness of the unreality of language;
the 'truest' literature is the one which knows itself as the most unreal... ("LT," CE 160/164)

In a move that will become increasingly characteristic of his intellectual style, Barthes subverts the usual definition and telos of realism, proposing, as Naomi Schor remarks, not a naive unreflective realism, but a new "linguistic realism" inspired by Flaubert and Mallarmé (RD 87):

Realism...cannot be the copy of things, therefore, but the knowledge of language; the most 'realistic' work will not be the one which 'paints reality', but which, using the world as content (this content itself, moreover, is alien to its structure, i.e. to its being), will explore as profoundly as possible the unreal reality of language. ("LT," CE 160/164)

Flaubert remains a friendly tutor text during Barthes' post-structural phase, where the war on the ideology underlying naive realism intensifies. In the 1970 essay "Flaubert and the Sentence" Barthes praises Flaubert's work on the materiality of language, and his useless (i.e. intransitive) martyrdom of style. In this essay Flaubert is figured in unmistakably aesthetic terms, his creative agony being a species of aesthetic intensity and expenditure pour rien, albeit inverted and masochistic. The text opens with a consideration of Flaubert's sequestration and Sisyphean passion. Writing demands, in the Flaubertian aesthetic, "an irrevocable farewell to life," "the very sacrifice of a life," and a "pitiless sequestration" not, as in Proust, to recover a past lifeworld through the act of writing, but, in the Barthesian
interpretation, for another reason: "to experience the structure of the language as a passion." ("FS," NCE 69-71/135-138)

Writing is an odyssey engaging the writer's entire existence: "to write is to live....to write and to think are but one action, writing is a total being": an aesthetic which once led Flaubert to describe himself as a *homme-plume* (a "human pen"). ("FS," NCE 71/138) Writing--the quest for style--does not redeem the boredom from which Flaubert suffers when without the mediating protection of art: it is at best a strangely compensatory activity. "Style", Barthes writes, is, for Flaubert, "absolute suffering, infinite suffering, useless suffering." ("FS," NCE 69/135) The essence of the Flaubertian style is not, as in Proust, one of endless addition; rather, it is one of endless erasure, correction, and permutation in which Flaubert comes to experience the indeterminacy, and the "theoretical infinity" of language in his writing. The Flaubertian verbal world, built upon the impossible notions of absolute style and *le mot juste*, and hence upon revision and ellipsis, is open, upon each reading by the writer, to what Barthes, opting for an obviously existential phrase, baptizes as "the vertigo of an infinite correction." ("FS," NCE 74/140)

The Flaubertian text's perpetual vulnerability to erasure, even negation, can be interpreted as a paradoxal product of its nascent materiality. The Flaubertian text is built up sentence by sentence, block by block. With Flaubert the
sentence literally becomes, Barthes argues, a new literary object in which the writer's freedom is invested. ("FS," NCE 76-78/142-144) This new literary unit, the sentence, presents itself as a separate, finite thing, only to metamorphose under the writer's gaze. Barthes describes the Flaubertian drama of writing in terms which come to resemble the situation of the post-structural scriptor. Flaubert initially confronts the sentence in an almost sculptural fashion. He sees it as a discrete object whose finitude and beauty fascinates him, seducing him into its realm with the promise of perfection, of achieving pure art. Once within the sentence (that is, actually writing), Flaubert encounters the infinite and amorphous freedom of language, apprehending, as always, that every sentence is "unsaturable": that, as Barthes puts it, "there is no structural reason to stop it here (the present version) rather than there (some future version)." ("FS," NCE 77/143) In 1853 Flaubert, recognizing that the text is theoretically infinite, writes: "Ah! What discouragements sometimes, what a Sisyphean labor style is, and prose especially! It's never finished!" ("FS," NCE 77/143) The Flaubertian text is condemned to incompletion, and its aesthetic to perpetual failure. Yet this constant and agonizing failure, Barthes subtly notes, is what allows Flaubert to go on writing in the confined and yet vertiginous space of the sentence.

Flaubertian sequestration has for its center (and its symbol) a piece of furniture which is not the desk but the divan: when the depths of agony are plumbed, Flaubert throws himself on his
sofa: this is his 'marinade,' an ambiguous situation...for the sign of failure is also the site of fantasy [i.e. connotation and drift], where the work will gradually resume, giving Flaubert a new substance which he can erase anew.

("FS," NCE 70/136)

Ensconced in his study, engaged in the "Sisyphean circuit" of his writing, Flaubert uncovers the undecidable nature of language, its trickster aspect, and the nothingness lying beneath it that both delights him and yet causes him to take refuge in style and the defensive utopian formalism of "a book about nothing." ("FS," NCE 70/136) Something of Flaubert's attraction to absence and its corollary themes may be seeping through in the first version of L'Éducation sentimentale, where he writes:

Women do not like death. That profound love for nothingness that the poets of our age carry in the very depths of their being frightens them...Do not tell them that you like the empty sockets of yellowed skulls and the greenish walls of tombs; and do not tell them that you have an enormous aspiration to return to the infinite, like a drop of water that evaporates in order to fall back into the ocean...

(FLP 38)

Sartre once referred to Flaubert as "one of the original Knights of Nothingness," acknowledging both Flaubert's attraction to and yet wariness of absence and silence. Flaubert, as Barthes points out, is involved in a complex flirtation with nothingness: "Flaubert subtracts, erases, constantly returns to zero, begins over again." ("FS," NCE 70/136) Yet when Flaubert finds that he cannot write, that he cannot produce something, anxiety and ennui overwhelm him.
Barthes appends this footnote—a passage from Flaubert's legendary correspondence:

Sometimes when I feel empty (je me trouve vide), when expression is refractory, when after having scribbled many pages I discover that I haven't made a single sentence, I fall on my couch and lie there stupified in an inner marsh of ennui.

("FS," NCE 70/136)

In "Flaubert and the Sentence" Barthes acknowledges the anxiety that silence and the vertigo of the sentence can provoke in Flaubert, while in WDZ, S/Z, and PT those anxieties are substantially ignored. In these two latter texts Flaubert is figured as a writer who aggressively works with that corrosive ambiguity and what one might refer to as the vertigo-effect.

Vertigo is a complex and enduring category of experience in Barthesian aesthetics. Sartrean vertigo (or its harbinger, and sometimes synonym, nausea) is a purely negative mental and physiological reaction to threatening encounters with absurdity, provoked equally by glimpses of the void, human futility, the threatened negation of the self by the other, or some repulsive excess (usually of matter). Barthesian vertigo is complicated: it can be either attractive (as in jouissance) or repulsive. In Barthes it is not nothingness (le néant) but stupidity and/or repletion (the two are often conjoined) that brings on the nemesis of aesthetes, boredom, or nausea. With Barthes the plenitude and stasis of doxic realism is an enduring source of vertigo that must be countered by the practice of linguistic realism. And in Barthes' account this is precisely what Flaubert, with his ironic, distanced realism that blurs
the controlled borderlines of a stable ("classical") irony, begins to effect.

The referential codes have a kind of emetic virtue, they bring on nausea by the boredom, conformism, and disgust with repletion that establishes them. The classic remedy...is to make them ironical, i.e., to superimpose on the vomited code a second code which expresses it at a distance [emphasis mine]; in other words, to engage a meta-linguistic process (the modern problem is not to halt this process, not to span the distance taken with respect to a language). (S/Z 139/145)

The Ironic Code (if it is apprehended as such) ruptures any naive connection between reader and text, and, potentially, the text and a naive mimetic function. Irony, Barthes writes, forces disconnection and "constitutes writing in all its power as a game." (S/Z 139-40/146) But where Barthesian "classicism" quickly confines the destructive scope of irony, afraid that language might shred its mimetic lace and reveal the fraudulent nature of the author (i.e. of the voice and the original utterance), Flaubert, the liminal modernist, couples an uncertain irony with free indirect discourse and unleashes it in his sentences. He begins, as Barthes writes, to breach the "wall of voices" and pass through the other side, to a multivalent text, to a subject-less écriture (S/Z 45/52). The effects of this unstable irony on subjectivity and authorial responsibility--already equivocal in Flaubert--are traumatic. Literature is thrown into an uncertain world of circulating codes. The text "speaks" in its voiceless and yet polyphonic confusion: upon examination, discrete voices--those of the
author, the narrator, the characters, or society—cannot be assigned. The slow death of the classical author, and the birth of the post-structural text, begins here: as must, eventually, an ethical interrogation of Barthesian post-structuralism.

Flaubert...working with an irony impregnated with uncertainty, achieves a salutary discomfort of writing: he does not stop the play of codes (or stops it only partially), so that (and this is indubitably the proof of writing) one never knows if he is responsible for what he writes (if there is a subject behind his language); for the very being of writing (the meaning of the labor that constitutes it) is to keep the question Who is speaking? from ever being answered. (S/Z 140/146)

If Flaubert and Mallarmé are the more obvious and cerebral tutor texts of Barthesian discourse, the egocentric passion, perversion (in the appreciative Barthesian sense) and intelligence of Baudelaire is certainly less often recognized as an intertext funding Barthesian post-structuralism. Although echoes of Baudelaire on reverie, ennui, sexuality and perversion are frequent in PT and other works, Barthes infrequently mentions Baudelaire by name, except when alluding to Baudelaire's notorious investigations of the effects of hashish in Artificial Paradises. A brief reflection will bring to mind a pool of thematics and positions common to the two writers. There is, to begin with, a similar anti-utilitarian, anti-mimetic, anti-bourgeois, pro-dandy stance: Barthes' comment that at the end of the nineteenth century the word
"bourgeois" designated an "aesthetic disease" ("un mal esthétique") expresses a shared perception and a mutual nemesis. ("B," RL 192/222) A dislike of the natural and the endoxic (la banalité and le poncif, in the Baudelairean vocabulary), leads both writers to celebrate novelty, marginality, excess, reverie (connotation and drift in Barthes), various forms of "perversion," the fortuitous, unrepeatable sensation or event, and, of course, the specificity and ephemerality of individual desire. Critical of science and of unequivocal assertions, both writers come to adopt a stance of strategic ignorance, favouring the ambiguity and irresolution of the experiential over the arrogance of abstract systems. Both are urban writers, delighting in the artificiality, the accelerated rhythms and the overstimulation of the surrogate Nature of the metropolis. And both writers are sensual and innovative critics espousing solitary pleasure as one of their primary values. If the disembodied linguistic aestheticism of Flaubert and Mallarmé can be said to constellate the pole of the Symbolic Aesthetic, then Baudelaire's cultivation of the particular, of the sensual, and of an aimless pleasure pour rien begins to establish the pole of the pre-Symbolic Aesthetic that will increasingly draw Barthes' attention in the late 1970s.

In "To the Bourgeois," the prefatory chapter to the Salon of 1846, Baudelaire--the isolated poet/critic--ironically acknowledges the bourgeois hegemony, his note revealing a deep mistrust of that class's powers and values--a wariness so
utterly reiterated in Barthes that Baudelaire's note could preface most of Barthes' texts. You are, Baudelaire writes to the silent ascending bourgeois, the majority: either savants or owners, you govern the community: you are in power. You have also, his apostrophe goes on, changed the practice of art, drawing it into the web of commerce and the idea of progress, instituting collections, museums, galleries. You--and not some suffering minority--are, he continues, reaching a heavily ironic apotheosis, being rich and learned, the natural friends of art. And what function would art serve in Baudelaire's sardonic scenario? Art is a domesticated harlot that soothes the savage--but weary--bourgeois: "When you have given society your science, your industry, your work, your money, you can claim, as payment, pleasures of the body, the mind and the imagination" (i.e. art). ("AR," OC 415-417) And when the bourgeois moyen sensuel receives enough restorative pleasure, he, and by extension, society itself, being "happy" and satiated (repue) will attain a golden state of equilibrium.

Baudelaire and Barthes concur that bourgeois culture, seeking this state of equilibrium, of safety, attempts to domesticate and commodify art by reasserting two bankrupt principles. The first is the unity and continuity of past and present: that is, the economic and cultural viability of the Great Tradition; and, secondly, the idea of art as representation. Neither writer tolerates such doxa. The hypothesis of historical rupture--the assertion of a chasm between past and present culture forwarded in texts such as WDZ--alienates and frees
both writers into what Baudelaire identifies as the sources of originality, modernity, and modern beauty: the writer's own sensibility and his attention to the contingencies of the present moment. Here, from "Modernity," is his apprehension of artistic modernity:

Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable ....As for this transitory, fleeting element whose metamorphoses are so frequent, you have no right to either scorn it or to ignore it. By suppressing it, you are bound to fall into the emptiness of an abstract and undefinable beauty...

("M,"OC 695)

Rather than positing a simple model of cultural history in which modernity (the perceiver's present) arises smoothly from antiquity, Baudelaire proposes a more complicated model in which, as Matei Calinescu argues, the present is freed from the authority of tradition. (FFM 48) Denied its usual dominance, the past is figured as a series of heteroclite and non-communicating modernities which recede into a synchronic reservoir known as antiquity. Rejecting the classical model of cultural development, in Baudelaire the locus of creative potency is no longer in the past, but in the present moment of creation. The Great Tradition, no longer quite a living well, can become a kind of curio shop sans proprietaire filled with vases and beautiful bones--"lovely and outdated things", as Barthes puts it in L--that the estranged poet is free to break or shoplift in the service of her own art. As Baudelaire warns:
Woe unto him who seeks in antiquity anything other than pure art, logic, and general method. By plunging too deeply into the past, he loses sight of the present; he renounces the values and privileges provided by circumstances; for almost all our originality comes from the stamp that time imprints upon our feelings.  

(OCFFM 48)

In Baudelaire the classical cultural time-line begins to shift and rupture, edging toward a contemporary sense of post-history and the aestheticist's celebration of the intense, unrelated moment. Calinescu glosses:

...Baudelaire means by modernity the present in its 'presentness,' in its purely instantaneous quality. Modernity, then, can be defined as the paradoxical possibility of going beyond the flow of history through the consciousness of historicity in its most concrete immediacy. ...Separated from tradition (in the sense of a body of works and procedures to be imitated), artistic creation becomes an adventure and a drama in which the artist has no ally except his imagination.  

(OCFFM 49-50)

Baudelairean modernity and beauty are predicated not only upon a pervasive sense of contingency, of the fugitive nature of things, but also upon the strength of individual artistic imagination. ("RF," OC 620) Adumbrating the Nietzschean notion of perspectivism, by punning repeatedly on the idea of the real and the true to disengage his own notion of multiple subjective "realities", Baudelaire writes: "The artist...must only render
according to what he sees and feels. He must be truly (réellement) faithful to his own nature." (RF," OC 620) On the pain of death the artist must avoid borrowing the eyes and the feeling of another man, however great he may be; because then his art will be inauthentic: it will be lies rather than réalités.

Baudelaire assails the values of classical representation. "'Copy nature: copy only nature. There is no greater triumph than an excellent copy of nature'" he mocks.("RF," OC 619-620) This doctrine, which the bourgeois apparently aspires to apply to all the arts, is, in his frank estimation, the enemy of art. Baudelaire phrases the response of the creative artist to this doxic imperative, articulating the anti-naturalism and chronic dissatisfaction of the rebellious aesthete, underscoring the aesthete's perception of a chronic lack of some kind which motivates his creative response. "I find it futile and tedious to represent what is, because nothing that is satisfies me. Nature is ugly: I prefer the monsters of my fantasy to positive triviality." (RF," OC 620)

Representation is inimical to art in the Baudelairean aesthetic. Nature--or, broadly, the external object to be rendered--is rejected as an unsuitable subject. Ugly, alien, or merely flawed, the external object and the mimetic imperative conspire to suppress the artist's own supplementary "nature": the islands of pleasure and reverie generated by his own body and imagination (in Barthes, the pleasures arising from and within the elsewhere of the Text). Imagination, Baudelaire concurs with his romantic predecessors, is the primum mobile: it creates and
governs the world. ("RF," OC 621) Active individual imagination must be protected because only it is capable of creating "new worlds" and the precious event of the new which forestalls ennui and the closure of banal reality (an argument Barthes will advance in slightly different terms in PT). "Imagination is the queen of the true, and the possible is one of the provinces of the true. It is positively related with the infinite." ("RF," OC 621) As critically, Baudelaire apprehends the way in which realism, by devaluing the imagination, lures art into the clutches of industry.

In the Salon of 1859, oppressed by the tenacious doctrine of realism, and by the new threat the daguerreotype appeared to pose to both visual and verbal art forms, Baudelaire condemns photography. Photography, seen naively by the bourgeois as rendering reality more faithfully and completely than any traditional art medium, puts more pressure on traditional art forms. The bourgeois credo had long been, to cite Baudelaire's version, "I believe in nature, and only in nature...I believe that art is and can only be the exact reproduction of nature" (excluding, Baudelaire notes, "repugnant" objects such as chamberpots and skeletons which suggested some of the suppressed themes of bodily existence). ("PM," OC 617) Now progress and industry had produced a technique which could crank out an infinite number of instances of "absolute art." All arts, Baudelaire could hear the bourgeois saying, should aspire to the condition of photography. Although an instance of artifice, Baudelaire curiously denied photography the status of art. In
his estimation it was merely a form of transcription which excluded the human imagination. Photography was the revenge of the impotent and the industrialist. It threatened to degrade art and the human imagination, encouraging society to become an immense Narcissus bent over its trivial image on a metal plate. Baudelaire worried about the long term effects of this new technology, fearing that a people whose eyes were accustomed to considering the results of a material science as art would suffer a diminished imaginative and aesthetic sense. (OC 272) And, perhaps half-ironically, perhaps not, Baudelaire goes on to argue that imagination nurtures the moral sense. Without this cardinal faculty, he contends, morality itself suffers degradation: virtue without imagination turns hard, cruel, sterile, bigoted. ("RF," OC 621)

Art (in Barthes, the utter artifice that is writing) overcomes the closure, imperfection and determinism of the natural, offering humanity the opportunity to improve upon and even surpass the natural. Through the triumph of style, the human imagination asserts itself over matter, creating a certain space of freedom in which to operate. As the nineteenth century progressed, aesthetes increasingly seized every opportunity, no matter how small or far away from traditional definitions of art, to deform the natural and increase the realm of artifice, leading to the life-as-art ethos of the dandy and the decadent. As Baudelaire rails in his essay "In Praise of Makeup": "Who would dare assign art to the sterile function of imitating nature? Makeup does not have to hide itself, to try to evade detection; on
the contrary, it can display itself ... candidly." ("EM," OC 717)

From the same essay, this is Baudelaire on fashion (another humble quotidien practice of artifice):

Fashion must...be considered as symptomatic of the taste for the ideal which floats in the human mind above all the coarse, earthy, filthy things that natural life accumulates therein, as a sublime deformation of nature, or rather as a permanent and successive attempt to reform nature. ("EM," OC 716)

Since Baudelaire perceives the natural as inhuman and ugly, artifice--the manipulation, overcoming, or suspension of the natural--is regarded by him as a primary good. In both Barthes and Baudelaire, art and artifice are fused notions motivated by desire. Desire in the Baudelairean aesthetic--the need to escape the replete insensibility of the bourgeois world, the desire to express individual vision, emotional states, and, equally, to experience pleasure--demands the imaginative construction or reconstruction of objects such that they are liberated from the realm of the natural and cross over to the realm of the artificial. In both writers artifice often centres upon a provocative play with gender, sexuality, and a re-writing of the human body intended to liberate the erotic from the utilitarian grasp of the natural.Aligned with that other positive value, artifice and transgression (the Baudelairean crime and mal receiving a secular treatment in Barthes) are signal elements in their common ideological challenge to realism.

The revolt against the imperatives of representation and
normative aesthetics are key to the aesthetic and critical practices of both writers. Baudelaire's appraisal of the inadequacy and oppressive nature of systemic thought precedes Barthes' rejection of theoretical systems by more than a century. In his writing on the universal exposition of 1855, Baudelaire indicts normative aesthetics and theories. Whether in its Greek, Italian, or Parisian versions, the "senseless doctrine" of the Beautiful, shut up in the sclerotic but "blinding strength of its system," has lost touch with its sensual origins, surviving only to forbid the living to enjoy, to dream, or to think in any terms other than those of its system. System, unopposed, issuing its abstract rules from "a small scientific temple," would eradicate the perception of difference ("la variété, le bizarre") from life, blurring all sensations into its "vast, monotonous, and impersonal unities." ("MC," OC 577) Categories as "immense as boredom and the void" would reiterate a doxic notion of beauty ("un beau banal"). ("MC," OC 577)

Baudelairean beauty may sometimes be contained within the classical structure of a sonnet, but it is never a normative phenomenon. Eternal beauty co-exists for Baudelaire along with unanticipated modern forms of the beautiful--forms skimmed from a pool of diverse instances of beauty, each transitory and particular. ("PVM," OC 493/"M," OC 695) Adumbrating Barthesian difference, Baudelaire asserts the fascination of the strange: the beautiful is always "bizarre" he declares, coupling aesthetic pleasure with deviation, if not (in this
instance) perversion. Modern beauty is, for him, singular and strange, always signed by the necessary and involuntary mark of the passions of its creator and the circumstances of its creation. This beauty is infinitely varied, depending on the environments, moeurs, race, religion, and temperament of the artist. Baudelaire insists upon the function of passion within art: the specificity of each instance of beauty arises from the unique affective and aesthetic responses of an individual. Without those traces of individual response, those disruptions of the abstract Beautiful and conventional themes by private subjects and obsessions, there would be no modern beauty. Fortunately, Baudelaire writes, art escapes the normative rules and analyses of academics. The specificity and surprises ("l'étonnement") of artworks—that is, its modern beauty—cannot be governed or controlled by apriori aesthetic rules. ("PM," OC 616)

Style—one's vision or manner of seeing as it manifests in the artwork—is as critical a notion in Baudelaire as it is in Flaubert. But Baudelaire's take on style is not one which idealizes the invisibility of the author and the cool posthumous style Flaubert craved. Rather, like many aesthetic and decadent writers, he celebrates individual sensibility and its traces enriching the text. Difference, the sine qua non of Barthesian post-structuralism, turns out to play a similarly critical element in Baudelairean aesthetics.

Aestheticism is, as I have suggested, marked by a dislike for norms, systems and external authority. In one essay
"Method of Criticism," a text arising out of his attendance at the 1855 Universal Exposition, Baudelaire stages an ironic confession that recalls the rejection of authorities, concepts and theoretical systems Barthes announces—and enacts—in PT. To the confession: more than once, Baudelaire begins, like his friends, he tried to enclose himself within a systemic notion of art and the beautiful from within which he could preach at his ease. But system rapidly revealed itself to be a "kind of damnation which pushes one to a perpetual abjuration." ("MC," OC 577) Although his systems always appeared, at least in the beginning, as "beautiful, vast, spacious, useful, clean, and smooth," some spontaneous and unexpected bit of life ("la vitalité universelle") would give the lie to his "childish and antiquated science," the "miserable child" of his desire for an intelligible world in which life could be captured in theoretical jars. ("MC," OC 577-578) However he would attempt to modify or expand his system, it would always prove inadequate and belated, forced to run impotently after the multiform and changing aspects of the beautiful, which moves endlessly in the "infinite spirals" of life.

Condemned by his intellectual honesty to a humiliating series of conversions to new systems, Baudelaire faced down two choices: either he could continue the round of philosophical engagements and apostasies, or he could take refuge in his senses and an "impeccable naivete." Recognizing the vanity of systems, he makes his decision, writing: "I prefer to speak in the name of feeling, morality and pleasure. I hope that some
persons, wise without being pedantic, will find my ignorance in good taste." ("MC," OC 579) This position of amateurism and strategic ignorance or, to borrow an insight from Barthes on Baudelaire, this will to "nonfulfillment" ("l'inaccomplissement") (which is, as Barthes emphasizes, recognized by Sartre as a existential choice), is one Barthes will himself adopt. ("BT," CE 25/41)

Barthes' suppleness and idiosyncracy as a creative critic recalls Baudelaire's critical practice. In the Salon of 1846 Baudelaire lays out some of his views on criticism. The best criticism is not, under the pretext of impartial explication, "cold and algebraic." ("QB?," OC 418) Whether in an orthodox or more poetic style destined for the eyes of an elect of poetic readers, a critical response must be written from a passionate and partial perspective. But it cannot be dogmatic. It must issue from a critical point of view which is always actively seeking "new horizons." The best criticism is "amusing and poetic," achieving a sensitive and intelligent translation of an individual's experience of a specific artwork. While acknowledging the necessity of writing some criticism in a conventional manner, Baudelaire speculates that the best critical account of a painting, for instance, might be a sonnet or an elegy. ("QB?," OC 418) This subsequent or supplementary act of poetic-creation-as-criticism discourages the use of pedantic jargon (already denounced by Baudelaire) and not only undermines the primary and secondary textual categories fundamental to hermeneutic criticism, but creates what
Barthes, quoting Proust, refers to as a salutary hybridization and "indecision of genre" that Barthes himself practises. ("LC," RL 279/315) In Baudelaire, the critic's options theoretically multiply as the critical act begins to bifurcate into orthodox, readable public texts and hybrid poetic texts that approach the condition of a privileged creativity, foregrounding the active critical response which generates a subsequent text of potentially equal interest.

Baudelaire honoured both intelligence (seen as the analytic impulse) and the imagination (the synthesizing impulse) as equally important aspects of the creative psyche. Though not advancing the Nietzschean argument that intellectual activity is, even in its degraded and un-selfconscious moments, an aestheticizing and quasi-creative activity, one could argue that Baudelaire draws poetic and analytic modalities closer together. In the text on Wagner he recognizes that poetic and intellectual modalities ideally support one another. Since a poet (a generic term designating the creative artist) must harbour within himself a critic who uncovers the hidden laws of his art in order to continue creating, he must therefore have a more complete experience of art, and is, in Baudelaire's view, potentially the best critic. ("W," QC 495-496) Baudelaire's preference for the poet-critic, or to put it in other terms, the poeticization of criticism, stimulates later generations of English and French writers who figure as covert intertexts for Barthesian post-structuralism. The poet-critic, in Pater, becomes the aesthetic critic who
writes subtle answering essays that cannot be read as other than primary texts themselves. Pater's texts, like Barthes', are hypersubtle webs of texture, reflection and mood which exquisitely overwhelm and dissolve whatever is drawn into their "hyphos." And in Wilde, the recognition of the creative nature of criticism culminates in the notion of the critic as artist: a category in which Barthes might fit most comfortably.

Although this thesis will not focus upon the sometimes striking affinities observable between the post-structural aesthetic values of Barthes and Pater (Proust being, I suspect, a literal intertext), or Barthes and Wilde (Gide acting as a possible intermediary), I want to signal connections which should be explored in a prehistory of contemporary literary theory. Barthesian post-structuralism is, if anything, a body of hypotheses about, and experiments in, reading. Pater and Wilde not only adumbrate aspects of Anglo-American reader-response theories, but nurture, and in Wilde's case, argue for the parallel creativity and autonomy of both the critic and the critical text: notions of paramount importance in Barthes' post-structural theorizing. And Pater and Wilde are among the first European critics to unhook criticism from its servitude to high culture and to the past, granting critics the permission to read in unheard-of and perverse fashions, denying the sanctity and authority of the primary text, overcoming it with what we would recognize as very contemporary strategies of paradox, irony, citation, recontextualization, reflexivity, excess (in the Barthesian sense), disfigurement, digression,
and biographical intrusion.

Like Baudelaire, for Barthes reading is not a passive reception of artworks or the spectacle of the world, but rather an active creation which delights in its own brio and excessiveness, in its freedom and its uselessness within bourgeois society. By the time of PT, Barthes has begun to work through his strategy of reading as a counter-bourgeois discursive strategy. Following the lead of aesthetes and decadents such as Proust and Huysmans, Barthes makes reading a site of resistance to bourgeois notions of art and language. Reading becomes particularly precious when it does not follow the rules of culture and easily produce a viable cultural product (a text, an iterable interpretation, an imago), but rather subtrah the text and the act of reading from the economy of culture, drawing it into a realm of private pleasure and expenditure pour rien. The reader becomes another kind of amateur, a counter-bourgeois amateur whose activity, modeled after the earlier practice of decadents, is intense and ephemeral, decentred, self-consuming, without memory of itself.

Barthes and the intertexts of western decadence

...the world must be remade for my pleasure: my pleasure will be simultaneously the ends and the means: in organizing it, in distributing it, I shall overwhelm it [the world].

(SFL 79/85)
Under the heading "Decadence" the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics provides a partial inventory of the characteristics of decadent discourse. Decadence is, the entry begins, inadvertently touching upon the enduring ideology of classicism and the transgressive nature of decadent art, an adjective applied to diverse "periods or works whose qualities are held to mark a 'falling-away' (L: de-cadere) from previously recognized standards of excellence." (PEP 185) The two most notorious periods of decadence in Western literary history to date have been the Hellenistic period (ca.300-30 B.C.E.) and the last-century span of symbolist and decadent movements in fin-de-siècle France and England (ca.1880s-late 1890s). To summarize the analysis of decadence found in the middle third of this entry: the decadent poet lives in a state of Heraclitean flux, his values and attention confined within narrowly egocentric limits which, ironically, leads to an only momentary satisfaction. His existence is a cycle of desire feeding upon itself. The decadent individual is concerned, in the Paterian phrase, not with the fruit of experience but experience itself—whether experience is met by chance on the street, in some private library or gallery, or in a boudoir. The works—and, often, the life—of the decadent "poet" (a generic term used within the entry) manifest some of the following traits. Terrified by the spectre of boredom, the decadent launches himself on a perpetual quest for novelty, with an attendant cultivation of the artificial and the unnatural. The decadent is, the entry continues, prone to the following:
excessive self-analysis, neurosis, feverish hedonism, an obsession with corruption and morbidity, and an exaggerated erotic sensibility. His work tends to align itself with the values of aestheticism (*l'art pour l'art*). Like the aesthete, the decadent and his work can also demonstrate some of the following: a preoccupation with and cultivation of rare sensations and emotions coupled with a scorn of contemporary society and utilitarian mores; a restless curiosity, perversity and eccentricity; an "overemphasis" on formal elements, with a resultant "attrition" of content; an interest in ornamentation and detail; a cultivation of the exotic, the esoteric, and dream-states (reverie), leading to a predominantly connotative use of language; the substitution of coherence in mood for coherence and synthesis in thought; obscurity, arising from remote, private, or complicated imagery, diction, and syntax; a penchant for synesthesia, and *transpositions d'art* which heighten the musicality or visual aspects of a text; and radical experimentations with prosody. The aesthetic choices of the decadent artist precipitate the disintegration of the well-wrought art object in classical and neoclassical terms, giving onto the ambiguous art objects of contemporary modernities. (PEP 185)

The Princeton entry attends to conventional analyses of decadence, but neglects some of the more vital theoretical and philosophical aspects of decadence. The corrosive skepticism and relativity of most decadent writing is repeated in the negative theology of Barthesian *écriture*, while the decadent
cult of artifice and the life-as-art ethos engages in the very acts of mediation which underlie the post-structural textualization of the subject and reality. The resurgence of sensuality and the experiential body in decadent writing, its anti-utilitarian ethos and its insistence on the marginality and exclusion of the individual (often a marginal several times over as an addict, homosexual, "pervert", and so on) recur in Barthes. And, finally, the decadent's sense of cultural belatedness--of culture returning a second time, but as farce, as Barthes writes--supports a shift toward ironic forms of criticism, personal culture and a fascination with isolated detail which are, again, encountered in Barthesian post-structuralism. ("TS," RL 342/379)

One must examine the genesis of decadence in the turn aesthetic discourse begins to take in the middle of the nineteenth-century, as those attitudes broaden from a relatively contained position into the more radical and reflexive ethos of decadent life and art styles. Sensibility: whether productive or purely reflexive, it is, of course, a master term of both aesthetic and decadent discourse. The cult of sensibility supports the turn from the more philosophical sensualism of early aesthetes to the later reworking of aesthetic values into the hedonism and narcissism of the 1880s and the yellow nineties. That turn develops slowly, beginning with Gautier in the 1830s and attaining a critical point in the work of Baudelaire.

It is with Baudelaire that the responding consciousness--
whether of the critic, the amateur or the observant dandy—
begins to assume greater importance. In Baudelaire the poet is,
as I have indicated, not only brought into a positive relation
with the critic, but is also allied with the figure of the dandy
and the aimless flâneur. As sensitive marginals rebelling
against bourgeois values, the hyper-sensitivities of the
critic, the flâneur, and the dandy almost rival those of the
creative artist. Over the course of the work of Baudelaire, the
poetic critic and the flâneur devolve into supplementary
creative forces as they interact with prior cultural texts. The
dandy is, also, paradoxically, a creative entity, although his
creativity does not lie in the creation of texts in a strictly
literary sense, but rather in a generalized semiotic one.
Seeking, in the Nietzschean way, to turn life into art, the
dandy's very body and every gesture become, potentially, a
sign. His life becomes a grandly ephemeral text—a performative
counter-text inscribed on and against the semiosis of the
larger social text.

When Baudelaire published Les Fleurs du mal in 1857, the
concept of decadence had already been in circulation for some
time in England and France. Artists and other marginals,
morally and aesthetically alienated from the self-serving
humanism of the bourgeois class, espoused, as Calinescu writes,
an "aesthetic modernity" which, by the end of the century had
come to be known as decadence. (FFM 162) By the middle of the
nineteenth century French intellectuals had begun to explore
this modernity which dramatically opposed a crass "bourgeois
modernity" promising open-ended progress and industrialization, democracy, material comfort, and wanting only safe (and saleable) art. Théophile Gautier, in his 1868 preface to Les Fleurs du mal, was among the first critics to propose a sociocultural account of decadence, linking cultural and artistic decadences:

The style inadequately called decadence is nothing but art arrived at the point of extreme maturity yielded by the slanting suns of aged civilizations: an ingenious, complicated style, full of shades and of research, constantly pushing back the boundaries of speech, borrowing from all technical vocabularies, taking colour from all palettes and notes from all keyboards, struggling to render what is most inexpressible in thought, what is vague and most elusive in the outlines of form, listening to the subtle confidences of passion grown depraved, and the strange hallucinations of the obsession which is turning to madness.

(FFM 164)

Paul Bourget, whose analyses of decadence in the 1870s and 1880s were to influence Nietzsche's own sense of the decadent, endorses Gautier's sociocultural reading. Writing from within a period of decadence, Bourget forwards a partisan defense of decadent times. Decadent periods are, Bourget argues, vigorous and superior to "organic periods" because of the intensity and audacity of its artists, and their "uneven, violent creations." (FFM 169) By "organic periods", Calinescu glosses, Bourget means highly ordered societies in which the energies of the "components" (the individual) are subordinated to the goals and demands of the "total organism." (FFM 170) As soon as individual life is considered more important than the welfare of the social
organism, Bourget writes, the social organism becomes decadent (hence the enduring antagonism between totalitarians and decadent individualists). Decadent societies are thus marked by a growing anomie and anarchy precipitated by an abandonment of that collective's sustaining myths in favour of some privately-worked out myth, and what one might refer to as personal culture. Most accounts of decadence focus upon the compensatory myths and activities of pleasure, passivity and skepticism. Yet there is, as Megill argues in PE, a history of decadents opting for something else: a radical creativity that arises out of the very failure of meaning.

In Bourget's analysis of decadence, the decay of the social organism is mirrored in the slow-motion failure of the linguistic organism. His description of that decay foreshadows the course of what Barthes refers to as "our modernity," and suggests to contemporary readers the reiteration of decadent aesthetics within Barthesian post-structuralism, where Barthes' post-structural theory of textuality presents decadence--the failure of semantic and textual integrity--as the fundamental condition of the text.

One law governs both the development and decadence of that other organism which is language. A style of decadence is one in which the unity of the book breaks down to make place for the independence of the page, in which the page breaks down to make place for the independence of the sentence and in which the sentence breaks down to make place for the independence of the word.

(FFM 170)

In Bourget's view, in declining societies the withdrawn
decadent stands in polar ideological opposition to the military barbarian—and, not surprisingly, compares favourably. Like Barthes, Bourget finds a viable if passive resistance of societal violence within the decadent stance. Bourget intimates that sensitive persons would prefer, as it were, the defeat of decadent Athens to their violent triumph over invading Macedonians. But sensitive persons always seem to comprise a social minority, and Bourget goes on to sound the theme of the decadent's marginalization and reactive hostility to majority opinions.

Let us then indulge in the unusualness of our ideal and form, even though we imprison ourselves in an unvisited solitude....why sacrifice what is most intimate, special and personal to others? (FFM 171)

Summarizing Bourget's position as a decadent intellectual (one akin to Barthes' eventual stand), Calinescu observes that the borderline between the intellectual recognition of the fact of decadence blurs into a commitment to decadence as a positive cultural style. This "unbounded, anarchic individualism...for all its socially paralyzing effects, is artistically beneficial" since it has "done away with traditional authoritarian requirements such as unity, hierarchy, objectivity." (FFM 171) Calinescu highlights the link between decadence and the modernities of the contemporary era, noting that "decadence thus understood and modernity coincide in their rejection of the tyranny of tradition." (FFM 171)

Baudelaire stands as a transitional figure in whose
discourse the early phase of aestheticism gives onto the pan-
sensuality and outrageous postures of fin de siècle decadence. 
Although ambivalent about both the term and the developing 
practise of decadence, his poetry and criticism were to serve as 
tutor texts for later writers and theoreticians of decadence. 
Throughout his texts, Baudelaire intermittently refers to his 
poetry as decadent (decadence and modernity being near-
synonymous in his view). In a long apostrophic note appended to 
the poem "Fransicae meae laudes" Baudelaire reflects on his own 
modernity and that of late Latin decadence, finding 
similarities in the language and cadence of those two 
modernities. The language of that earlier decadence--its 
complex tenor shifting between mysticism and sensuality--
appears particularly appropriate to express the complicated 
passions of modern poets (Baudelaire's decision to write 
"Fransicae" in Latin being a kind of hommage to his dead 
decadent brothers). The passions of those late poets were at 
once sophisticated and anarchic; the beauty of Latin was 
forcibly twisted into new configurations by them, made as 
subtle and overdetermined as their psyches. The complicated 
desire of modern poets expresses itself, for Baudelaire, not 
only in a similarly extreme refinement of language and 
sensibility but also in a free interchange of means and 
procedures among the arts, leading to texts sui generis which 
seek to blur the boundaries between arts. The artistic text, 
however, remains unified: Baudelaire rejected the fascination 
of the detail, insisting upon a subordination of elements to the
artistic whole, and it is this position which separates him decisively from the later generation of decadents.

Needing an audience to appreciate his complex and innovative discourse in a hostile culture, Baudelaire conjured the sensitive marginalized critic, the dandy (an amateur of art whose greatest creation is himself), and the receptive flâneur. Traces of these figures—altered and subjected to the recombinative impetus of Barthes' own desire—will return in the roles of reader, scriptor and amateur in Barthesian post-structuralism. Baudelaire frequently adopts the pose of the flâneur in his poems. The flâneur (inevitably male, as Janet Wolff observes in "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity") embodies the antithesis of bourgeois values. The artist, the dandy, and the flâneur begin to blur in the late nineteenth century. All three are usually visually-oriented operators of the Sartrean gaze, resolutely urban and anti-utilitarian marginals who, as Benjamin once wrote of Baudelaire, go botanizing on the asphalt. But where the dandy, in existential terms, is preoccupied with managing the dual dynamics of the gaze, seeking at once to look and to be looked at, the flâneur simply directs his gaze outward. Like the dandy and the artist, he wanders aimlessly through the surrogate nature of the metropole's streets and arcades, gazing at the pageantry of urban life and the thousands of floating existences which drift about the underworld of large cities.
The flâneur, like the Barthesian subject, prefers not the grandly official subjects of tradition, but rather isolated details or moments of experience, the intimate or ephemeral private subjects which constitute the heroism of modern urban life. In Baudelaire's "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" Constantin Guys, as the paradigmatic painter of modern urban existence, moves into the stimulus of the crowd to record the "myriad impressions of day and night":

He goes and watches the river of life flow past him in all its splendour and majesty... He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city... He delights in fine carriages and proud horses... the sinuous gait of the women, the beauty of the children... If a fashion or the cut of a garment has been slightly modified... be very sure that his eagle eye will already have spotted it.

Both the flâneur and the modern artist seek novelty and surprise. But where some flâneurs consume spectacles while refusing to produce anything but an intransitive stream of private experiences, the artist creates something public, or quasi-public--the artwork, the text. This is the critical distinction between the artist, the dandy, and flâneur in Baudelaire. All three look upon and move through the same environments, the same modernity, but where the flâneur and the dandy take refuge in their languid sterility and non-involvement, the artist produces artworks, thereby keeping the cycle of culture spinning.

Both the dandy and the flâneur existed as cultural phenomena before being drawn into literary discourse.
Baudelaire's famous take on dandyism opens with a sketch of the history and temperament of that mode of being. Dandyism is, he claims, an ancient and global phenomenon, one properly included among the range of human tempers. Caesar, Catalina and Alcibiades serve as antique prototypes; Chateaubriand claimed to have found aboriginal dandies in the forests of the New World. The dandy, in contemporary Europe, is a man of financial ease disengaged from the pressures of earning a living. Blasé, an idler, his only occupation is the pursuit of his own happiness, his only profession that of elegance. ("PV," OC 709) Dandyism is, Baudelaire writes, a venerable institution which exists outside of the law; yet has it own rigorous laws and mores. To be a dandy, one must devote oneself to cultivating the ideal of the beautiful in one's person, seeking only to feel, to think, to love, to satisfy one's passions, and to cultivate reverie. ("PV,"OC 709-170)

Reverie--the old romantic topos of a consciousness drifting blissfully in the space in between--is a key term in decadent aesthetics--it is at once a stimulus to art-making, a dominant poetic theme, a rebellious act, and one of art's few proper ends. (Reverie is, as the chapter on PT will examine, an inherited strategy of emancipation Barthes reworks in the more theoretical terms of drift, connotation, and delay.) Baudelaire is pragmatic enough to note that ease (in the Barthesian sense) is a sine qua non of dandyism. Without having both money and free time, fantasy (reverie) is reduced to impotent daydreaming, and love, instead of being the subject of
some burning caprice or elaborate reverie, is reduced to "repugnant utility" (i.e. conjugal duty or crass orgies). ("PV," OC 710)

The dandy's aesthesis--his cultivation of reverie, the attention to the "material elegance" of his person and his environment, his "cult of the self," is seen as a kind of spiritual discipline and as evidence of the aristocratic superiority of his spirit: a spirit which seeks to escape the stifling repetitions of doxa and stereotype, achieving the state of absolute originality (the fundamental need of a dandy is, as Baudelaire puts it, "de se faire une originalité"). ("PV," OC 710)
The Baudelairean dandy is a complex spectrum of possibilities, but intensity and excess always attend his postures and actions. A bit like a heyokima, a contrary, who finds greatness in folly, or the serious in the trivial, a stoic who seeks to shock while never being shocked, the Baudelairean dandy is always performing against doxic expectations.

In the last third of his account Baudelaire returns to his sociohistorical account of dandyism, observing that the dandy appears most often during troubled epochs--interregna--when the local aristocracy is faltering and degraded, but democracy is not yet entrenched. In the uncertainty of those times, and against the rising tide of democracy, some men--socially dispossessed (déclassés), disgusted, idle, but endowed with great native strength, conceive the project of founding a new kind of aristocracy: an aristocracy founded not upon bloodlines or money, but upon inalienable "celestial gifts": taste, pose,
refinement.

The men of this counter-democracy—dandies—however solitary they tend to be, express a common *parti pris*: that of intransitive opposition and revolt against banality. ("PV," OC 711) Camus, in his study of the dandy in *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, expands on Baudelaire's perception of the seditious nature of the dandy and his negative theology:

The dandy creates his own unity by aesthetic means. But it is an aesthetic of singularity and negation....The dandy is, by occupation, always in opposition. He can only exist by defiance. 20

Refusing to endorse the structures of meaning and coherence emanating from some collective god-term, the dandy finds himself in a stimulating but precarious situation. Apparently disloyal to and rejecting of past and present authorities, his sense of cultural time alters dramatically. Relativity and an egocentrism of the type Todorov indicts in post-structural theories reigns. 21 R.B. sums up the isolation and the truncated sense of cultural time of the dandy in *RB*: "a dandy has no philosophy other than a transitory one: a life interest: time is the time of my life." (RB 106/110) Camus puts it stronger, moralizing terms, apprehending the compensatory yet futile nature of the dandy's ethos of synchronic pleasures. The dandy, Camus writes, "finds himself delivered over to the fleeting moment, to the passing days, and to wasted sensibility." (R 51) Realizing, after some time of drift, that he must create some kind of ethical structure, however minimal,
to contain this corrosive anomie, the dandy "rallies his forces and creates a unity for himself by the very violence of his refusal." (R 51) Pleasure, Art-for-art's-sake, and the refusal of social commitment become elements of that unity, that myth. But such unities are, to borrow a term from Barthes, largely reactive and oddly dependent ones. The dandy is, as Camus points out, always belated: he needs a prior term (or assertion) and a hostile majority if his world-view (or Imaginary) is to function. His ethos of reflexive pleasure and chronic play leads to a despair only partially dissimulated by irony. The dandy creates, in Camus' view, an untenable position: neither his creativity nor his marginality can save him.

Perpetually incomplete, always on the fringe of things, he compels others to create him, while denying their values. He plays at life because he is unable to live it. (R 52)

The skepticism and sterility of the dandy's pose, his allegiance to appearances, to the intensities of the moment, and to the reactive mode, forces him, Camus argues, to extreme positions. Dandyism, its alienation and negative theology carried through to its logical conclusion, ends in suicide, madness, silence, or abdication. When dandies fail to commit suicide or go insane, Camus observes wryly, they begin a career and pursue prosperity (or, following the progress of the dandy des Esseintes in Huysmans' *À Rebours*, threaten to get religion).
Barthes and the decomposition of bourgeois consciousness

Barthes is, rather like Bourget, an intellectual whose description of a late cultural phase slides into a celebration of decadence. In Barthes' case, his writing becomes an affirmation of and repeated call for the further decomposition of bourgeois consciousness:

(s)uppose that the intellectual's (or the writer's historical function today is to maintain and to emphasize the decomposition of bourgeois consciousness...we deliberately pretend to remain within this consciousness and that we will proceed to dismantle it, to weaken it, to break it down on the spot, as we would do with a lump of sugar by steeping it in water. Hence decomposition is here contrary to destruction: in order to destroy bourgeois consciousness we should have to absent ourselves from it, and such exteriority is possible only in a revolutionary situation.

(RB 63/67)

Western Europe is not, Barthes writes, (from the middle 1970s) in the midst of any kind of social turmoil that threatens to destroy the dominating bourgeoisie. In 1975 his estimation is that there is no viable hors-texte, no undogmatic site of utterance on the far side of bourgeois discourse. Other than "tripping the lever of a counter-term" and falling into into an unpalatable mode of a discourse of opposition, into the "aggression" of meaning, there is nowhere to go. Nowhere except into the pleasurable non-assertive spaces of dissolution and ambiguity: the territories of irony, paradox, and the novelistic, of personal culture, fragmented simulacra, multiple reading bodies and the manipulated imago, and a new version of cultural carpe diem dealing in shards and "post-
meanings" (après-sens). (RB 87/90)

...here and now...to destroy [bourgeois consciousness] would ultimately come to no more than reconstituting a site of speech whose one characteristic would be exteriority: exterior and motionless: in other words: dogmatic language. In order to destroy, in short, we must be able to  

overleap [sauteur]. But overleap where? into what language? Into which site of good conscience and bad faith? Whereas by decomposing, I agree to accompany such decomposition, to decompose myself as well, in the process: I scrape, catch, drag.  

(RB 63/67-68)

This process of cultural dissolution is, for Barthes, as he tells his reader, not agonizing but pleasurable and stimulating. Readings of ES, then PT, with its obsessive and solitary des Esseintian cultivation of the pleasures of textual perversion, followed by the sophisticated essays on art and the pleasures of the amateur collected in RF, suggest that Barthes is, if anything, a textual hedonist whose positive ethos of decadence and matte, suspended pleasures is an intertextual elaboration of nineteenth century discourses. Barthes himself, in L and that curiously distanced and unreliable systématique of intellectual autobiography, RB, begins to make this very case. Throughout RB, protected by the masks of the third-person singular and the screening fiction of an unnamed narrator, Barthes reflects upon the alienation and dandyism of his position.

Lavish use of paradox risks implying (or quite simply implies) an individualist position, and one may say: a kind of dandyism. However, though solitary, the dandy is not alone...in a given historical
situation--of pessimism and rejection--it is the intellectual class as a whole which, if it does not become militant, is virtually a dandy.

(RB 106/110)

And he considers the evasions or at least deferrals that the aesthetic modality can achieve against the assertive forces of political (i.e. overtly positional) discourses which demand that the intellectual choose. (RB 48/52, 84-86, 87-90) Finally, as a middle-class hedonist, he muses on the value of material comfort. Like Baudelaire, he is aware of the need to finance his hedonistic *modus vivendi*. Just two years after *PT*, the rhetoric of pleasure is already mellowing into the quieter values of ease, private life, and the specificity of his body that will mark his later writing.

Being a hedonist (since he regards himself as one), he seeks a state which is, really, comfort; but this comfort is more complicated than the household kind...it is a comfort he arranges for himself...This personal comfort might be called ease. Ease can be given a theoretical dignity ('We need not keep our distance with regard to formalism, merely our ease'), and also an ethical force: it is the deliberate loss of heroism, even in pleasure.

(RB 43-44/48)

The historical pessimism and rejection of assertion (of "heroism") in these last two passages raises the issue of Barthes' post-structural skepticism, a skepticism equally mistrustful of power and rebellion. As a negative theology skepticism, as Eugene Goodheart writes in *The Skeptic Disposition in Contemporary Criticism*, is a powerful and double-edged conceptual strategy. Whether in Nietzsche,
Wilde or Derrida, skepticism lends the critic or theoretician both a deconstructive capacity and a strong negative capability—not an empathic Keatsian faculty, but an ironic, even nihilistic intellectual capacity which, in this world of near zero-gravity, enables a scriptor to assume or desert any position at will. In either case, once the great doubt is set into motion, the solidity of endoxic constructs is suddenly vulnerable: the locus of power shifts from past institutions and traditions towards the solitary questioning individual working in the present—that is, ultimately modern—moment.

Barthes' skepticism expresses itself in an often ambivalent assessment of cultural production, particularly the vast collective enterprise of high culture. Whether in *PT, L* or *RB*, Barthes, the arch cultural initiate, cannot resist airing his cultural ambivalence, positioning himself somewhere in the space between the cultural devotee and the barbarian that his irony opens up. In *PT*, reprising a theme first encountered in *WDZ*, he asserts: "[a]rt seems compromised, historically, culturally. Whence the effort on the part of the artist himself to destroy it." (*PT* 54/86) Yet even in *WDZ* art already appears indestructible to Barthes. In his poststructural phase, despite his efforts to level the traditional distinction between registers of discourse into a generic textuality, it will remain beyond demolition. Building upon nineteenth-century attempts to, as Barthes puts it, murder literature, contemporary efforts—other than his own—to destroy art have taken, in his reading, three forms. The artist
can abjure his original medium and "shift to another signifier" (a writer can, for example, begin to make video documentaries); he can renounce all overt forms of creativity, becoming a scholar or an "intellectual theorist" who no longer speaks "except from a moral site cleansed of any linguistic sensuality"; he can, lastly, emulate Rimbaud and "stop writing, change trades, change desires." (PT 54/86) But, Barthes regrets, such attempts at cultural liquidation are always inadequate, since the epicentre of destruction arising from purist act of silencing oneself lies outside of the art realm itself. Or, should the would-be saboteur remain a practising artist, his discourse of subversion, judging from the past, is destined to a profitable recuperation.

Barthes' attitude toward the vast reservoir of texts known as culture is complicated. As an aestheticizing hedonist whose primary fetishes and moments of pleasure are obtained from art objects and a decaying high culture, he allows that the existence of that body of prior works is the very condition of his enjoyment. Barthes legitimates culture through a strategic inversion: he makes "the totality of the human past" subservient to the end of a private and ephemeral pleasure that can propose and dispose at will in the magic realm of the imagination. Substantiating Iser's observation, and Camus' point about the reactive and belated nature of the dandy, in a particularly paratactic fragment in PT Barthes reflects:

*Pleasure of the text*. Classics. Culture (the more culture, the more diverse, the pleasure will be). Intelligence. Irony. Delicacy.
Barthes, like most decadents, is a cultural parasite (the term is not perjorative) who is estranged from the institutions of high culture but does not wish--and cannot afford--the demise of his host. Lacking the protective naivete and aggressive will-to-nihilation of young avant-gardists, decadents are often caught in ambivalence, both desiring and resisting the products of culture: witness Barthes' equivocal positioning of himself in *PT* and his subsequent texts in an uncertain place in between culture and its destruction. In *PT* he insists: "[n]either culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so." (*RB* 7/15) This disaffection with the sedimentary processes of culture is reiterated in his vision of present culture as history returning--but as kitsch and farce. (*RB* 88/92-93) In "Outcomes of the Text" Barthes' reflections on Bataille and Nietzsche clarifies Barthes' own post-structural practice of "decadence." He offers a surprising interpretation of decadence as a *continuation* of the bourgeois banalization of values. In both Bataille and Nietzsche [d]ecadence is not read, contrary to the word's accepted connotation, as a sophisticated, hypercultural condition, but on the contrary as a *deflation of values*: return of tragedy as farce (Marx), clandestinity of festal expenditure in bourgeois society (Bataille)....In all, the same disgust provoked by bourgeois deflation: bourgeois man does not destroy value, he *deflates* [aplatit] it, diminishes it, establishes a
system of the paltry.

Both Barthesian post-structuralism and nineteenth century decadents radicalize that deflation--literally, the flattening--of values, forcing this process to its logical conclusion: a world constituted not of meanings, but surfaces and signs, ruled by a ludic if corrosive relativity minimally contained by pleasure and desire. Objective or scientific knowledge is, as readers of the later Barthes will know, a bourgeois value that he indicts as the stale repetition of stereotypes and doxic statements. Following Bataille, Barthes comes to recognize two categories of knowledge. There is the orthodox hermeneutic "endoxal knowledge" that Barthes rails against, a "citational, referential, reverential knowledge." ("O," RL 240/273) Against that monological knowing, Bataille (and then Barthes) assembles a paradoxal counter-savoir, a bricolage of textual fragments, interfering codes, and small "curiosities" that refer back not to some cohesive universal assertion or body of texts, but to an individual's own particularity--in Barthes' essay, Barthes' and Bataille's fascination with the "strange" (especially the strangeness of "elsewhere" (de l'ailleurs) and with details. ("O," RL 240-241/272-273) This "personal culture" "de-naturalizes" objective knowledge. As a kind of foregrounded self-conscious writing it produces a "remoter knowledge," a "burlesque, heteroclitic knowledge," an inverted image of savoir (Barthes' sapentia), which, in its intransigent particularity, produces (Barthes contends) an "incipient collapse" of the principles of
knowledge by its "futilization" and "miniaturization." This counter-savoir produces not mastery but astonishment. Its syncretism overcomes the orthodox separation of knowledges (of "genres," in Barthes' take). Knowledge is thus construed as a series of Nietzschian fictions; it becomes the territory of "polygraphs," that is of amateurs and writers, rather than of monological specialists. ("OT," RL 240-241/272-273)

With the intervention of skepticism--these various forms of aesthetic and philosophical doubt (the negative theology of writing, the flattening of values and the production of polysemic counter-knowledges)--the context that was culture is imaginatively suspended. The Barthesian sense of cultural time begins to shift toward an indulgent synchronicity and reversible syncreticism that is increasingly in evidence from PT onwards. As the 1970s progress, Barthes inclines toward an intricate and eccentric personal culture, ignoring the oppressive repertories of both high and avant-garde cultures to read and look at whatever he chooses, collecting theoretical and textual fragments, and moments of bliss, like a tourist wandering through an ageing ruin. Old and lovely texts such as Proust's novels and essays, Goethe's Werther, Chateaubriand's Vie de Rancé and Mémoires d'outre-tombe, Brillat-Savarin's gastronomic writing, Erté's drawings, and Schumann's music increasingly draw his attention. Overtly theoretical discussions of contemporary theories and writers fade, or move into familiar and even colloquial registers. Theories such as the Lacanian imago, as well as Barthes' own notion of a
systematics, drift into the subtle and even more fluid realms of metaphor and the disassembled stories of the novelistic (le romanesque) structuring RB, FLD, and CL.

Throughout this period of twelve years Barthes slowly develops an alternative personal culture is not unfamiliar to readers of mid to late nineteenth century French literature. Alternative personal cultures are liberating environments that are freely as well as individually chosen and controlled, rather than inherited or passively endured. In Barthes they constitute semi-private mental pleasure domes, protective semiotic environments cobbled together by need and desire. These habitations still retain some lines of communication into endoxal culture. Barthes' vision of an ideal alternative personal culture is partially expressed in RB in terms of a "plural culture" of "composite" arts that joyously "loop" together several tastes and languages ("...un art composé, qui prenait en écharpe plusieurs goûts, plusieurs langages"), creating artforms that could be both popular and intricate, as in, for instance, Chaplin's films. (RB 54/58-59) Such art and artists, Barthes' protagonist writes, "provoke a complete kind of joy," because they offer the "image of a culture that is at once differential and collective: plural." (RB 54/58-59) The pluralism of difference inactivates the conflict and antagonism inherent in cultural models which oppose "high" and "low" forms of culture. This alternative cultural practice, Barthes continues, "then functions as the third term, the subversive term of the opposition in which we are imprisoned:
mass culture or high culture." (RB 54/58-59)

In Barthes' plural culture the suspension of context and prior interpretations allows any object—whether a text by Balzac, a painting by Wilhelm von Gloeden, the single red fingernail of a student's lover, or a photographic self-portrait by Mapplethorpe—to be read without bowing to intentionality or any other interpretive constraints. This joyful skepticism is not merely a sophisticated intellectual position. It is also, and perhaps even more so, as Goodheart contends, a corrosive mood (in the Heideggerean sense) which causes a thing to shatter into a synchronic and textualized world of intermittence, of fine gradations and constantly shifting surfaces and conditions: substantially, the kind of beautiful and absurd world of Huysmans, Pater and their kin.

Whether one opts for a historical or intertextual perspective, there are important similarities between Barthes and his aesthetic and decadent predecessors. Beyond the evident thematic and aesthetic congruities—cultural ambivalence, the cultivation of intensity and disjunction, the adumbration of the useless reader and the useless text, the foregrounding of individual aesthetic response, the fascination with surfaces—there is even deeper agreement. Barthesian post-structuralism, like these earlier writings, is an anti-genetic discourse, a discourse of skepticism and perversion. For both, the concept of the natural is the "ultimate outrage," (RB 85/88) because
"[t]he natural is never an attribute of physical Nature," but an ideological representation and the "alibi paraded by a social majority: the natural is a legality." (RB 85/88, 130/134)

Looking back over his own career, R.B. comments:

His work is not anti-historical (at least, so he intends), but always, persistently, anti-genetic, for Origin is a pernicious figure of Nature (of Physis): by an abusive interest, the Doxa 'crushes' Origin and Truth together, in order to make them into a single proof, each reinflating the other...

(RB 139/142)

R.B. offers two somewhat conflicting accounts of his reaction to Nature, one more nuanced and predictably ambivalent, the other polemic. To begin with "The abandonment of origins," a fragment summarizing the polemic that encapsulates Barthes' early post-structural attitude and the strategy of semiotic pantextualization operative in S/Z and ES:

[i]n order to thwart Origin, he first acculturates Nature thoroughly: nothing natural anywhere, nothing but the historical; then this culture (convinced as he is, with Benveniste, that all culture is only language) is restored to the infinite movement of various discourses...

(RB 139/142)

But in another, earlier, fragment, "The natural," R.B. is more equivocal, contending that against the doxic category of the "natural," he can rebel in two ways: either by arguing, "like a jurist, against a law elaborated without me and against me"; or, in the grandiose tradition of the countercultural, aggressively "wrecking the majority's Law by a transgressive
avant-garde action." (RB 130/134-135) R.B. is, in this second fragment (which is closer to Barthes' reflections in his later essays) a more complicated creature. Writing of himself in the third person, R.B. reflects: "[h]e seems to remain strangely at the intersection of these two rejections: he has complicities of transgression and individualist moods." (RB 130/134-135) The effect:

[t]his produces a philosophy of the anti-
Nature which remains rational, and the Sign is an ideal object for such a philo-
sophy: for it is possible to denounce and/or celebrate its arbitrariness; it is possible to enjoy the codes even while nostalgically imagining that someday they will be abolished: like an intermittent outsider, I can enter into or emerge from the burdensome sociality, depending on my mood--of insertion or distance [emphasis mine].

(RB 131/135)

In Barthes' discourse, the poles of the Symbolic aesthetic impetus and pre-Symbolic aesthetic desire, which constitute the aesthetic continuum, meet. This continuum, ingeniously twisted back upon itself through an exploration of the abstraction and sensuality of the sign, becomes, to borrow an anticipatory image from Baudrillard, a moebius strip. In the logic of Barthes' moebius strip categories fail as contraries meet, as the distinction between inside and outside, between the model and the real, past and the present, origin and repetition, are abolished. Barthes' textual realms, the world he invites us into, is the seductive floating world apart of the sign, signifiance and the simulacrum--a world complicated in its very structure by, as the chapters on ES and PT will testify,
a paradoxal longing to put an end to the sign.
Evidently he dreams of a world which would be exempt from meaning (as one is from military service). This began with Writing Degree Zero in which is imagined the 'absence of every sign'; subsequently, a thousand affirmations subsequent to this dream (apropos of the avant-garde text, of Japan, of music, of the alexandrine, etc.)

(RB 87/90)

It was in the late 1940s, recovering from tuberculosis in a sanitorium, that Barthes first read Sartre and Brecht. From that experience, if one is to rely upon the charming if unreliable protagonist of RB, Barthes emerged a temporarily committed Sartrean and Marxist. Barthes' first major statement on literature, WDZ, is a polemical and mythopoeic document bearing a conflicted witness to the impact of Sartre upon him. Responding to the existential view of language and the call for an instrumental engaged writing in Sartre's What is Literature?, Barthes reads with and against the grain of Sartrean discourse, laying out a stylized history of literary modernity and a counter-ethos of écriture which adumbrates his post-structural devotion to the sign.¹ This counter-ethos of écriture and personal style is one in which the writer's primary engagement is not directly with history, power, or some community of people, but rather with form and the literary word. Barthes rejects the belief in representation underwriting the Sartrean artistic ethos. A
relative authenticity is to be found not within the use of inherited forms to impossibly mime what exists beyond the bar of language, but in a conscious and solitary exploration of artifice and the multiple beauties of signs divorced from referents. This counter-ethos, and the themes presented in his lapidary history of French modernity, will endure throughout his career.

In *WDZ* Barthes prefaces his speculations on the contemporary writer's situation with a spare history of the development of French literary modernity. He presents a claustrophobic scenario, using only a few genealogical points de repère (Gautier, Chateaubriand, Flaubert, Valéry, Gide, and Mallarmé) who weave in and out through the text like Wagnerian leitmotifs. Barthes reads French history through an existential thematics. Crisis, alienation, complicity, absence, choice, the hostile gaze, the unresponsive object, and familiar metaphors of plenitude, *le néant* (nothingess, the void), the viscous (the Sartrean "stickiness") are deployed to figure literature's lurching fall from neoclassicism and realism into modernity's self-consciousness and impotence.

In *WDZ* social changes precipitate a series of compensatory moves resulting in literary modernity. The historical caesura in Barthes' reading occurs sometime around 1850, when the convergence of three new sociohistorical realities--demographic expansion in Europe, the birth of capitalism, and the 1848 revolution--divided French society into mutually hostile classes, effecting an "obvious disjunction between the social vocation of the writer and the instrument which he has inherited
Confronted by the emergence of competing social discourses, by the multiple writings which were then emerging, neoclassical aesthetic and ideological unities could longer masquerade as universal. Dislodged from the artist's prior position in the ancien régime, from the old ritual of Literature, and feeling the normlessness of his situation, the writer was thrown into crisis. Ceasing to be a "witness to the universal," he becomes instead "the incarnation of a tragic awareness," "an unhappy consciousness" (une conscience malheureuse).(WDZ 3/8) The social compact between writer and society has, in this version of history, been sundered. Language can no longer be used innocently by a writer; its unity torn asunder by class conflict, language's power to define a shared social world is put into crisis. The transparent union of word and referent begins to fail. Over a period of several generations, language slowly becomes almost palpable and increasingly ambiguous as it disengages from both literary tradition and the world external to it. Barthes' post-revolutionary writer is condemned to be at once a perpetual witness to and participant in this disengagement: but a witness who is estranged from the assertions of the universal, a martyr whose attention is chained to particularities and to the ambiguities of choice, whose work with language ironically only increases his isolation.

The first gesture of this unhappy and alienated writer, Barthes maintains, is to decide whether to accept or refuse Tradition (a package deal which includes the humanistic subject, essentialist genres, and the ideology of representation). The
decision to reject the authority of what lies on the other side of 1850 is, in *WDZ*, a foregone conclusion, as is the recognition that one cannot entirely escape the remnants of the past, the writer being always belated and forced to use stale, inherited words. Having disavowed Tradition, the writer is then forced to find another guiding principle, opting for the commitment of unique literary form, that is, of style.

Language first becomes visible to French writers through the exploration of literary form. Form, Barthes writes, no longer integrated and utilitarian as in the economy of the "classical" text, begins to capture the attention of writers (notably Flaubert). As a fresh receptacle for creative energy, form comes to "fascinate," "disorient," and "enchant," eventually becoming an almost reified *Forme-Objet* capable of evoking "existential feelings": existential feelings being, for Barthes, surprise, familiarity, disgust, complacency, utility, and murder. (*WDZ* 4/8-9)

In *WDZ* the materiality and absurdity of language, coupled with the writer's need to justify or simply create a space for his activity within a mercantile society, constitute the crux of Barthes's mythopoeic reading of modernity. From Flaubert onward, writing, released from the old justification and constraints of representation and the literary tradition, sheds its humanism and becomes, in Barthes' view, a problematic of language. Or, put in other terms: released from history and mimesis, the writers in Barthes' story begin to re-imagine the fundamental conditions of writing, dreaming of what Barthes refers to as "solutions" to the
compromised situation of the writer. Flaubert's solution--countersigned by several generations after him--is an immersion in unique form; Rimbaud's revolt takes the form of an engagement with the sensual and Dionysian aspects of language, eventually moving into silence; Mallarmé's solution is the suicide of literature by the poetic Word; and Camus struggles toward a white writing (écriture blanche) that Barthes, in his fashion, countersigns: a white, pure discourse liberated from any servitude to an order, one that "being devoid of reflections, declares its solitude, and therefore its innocence" [emphasis mine]. (WDZ 75/55) Some of these writers share the elusive dream of a post-humanist writer without literature; and others, even more radically, envisage a writing without a subject, culminating in Mallarmé's dream of a double homicide (of literature and the writer) which informs the early years of Barthesian post-structuralism. (WDZ 61/45)

This, then, is the passion of writing according to Barthes. From an initial classical transparency and utility, writing passes through the phases of a progressive and alienating objectification, ending in a final disintegration in the late nineteenth century; a process which parallels and, Barthes will suggest in RB, perhaps accelerates the disintegration of bourgeois consciousness and the solitude of the writer. As he summarizes in WDZ:

...it [language] was first the object of a gaze, then of a creative action, finally of a murder, and has reached in our time a last metamorphosis, absence: in those neutral modes of writing, called here 'the zero degree of
writing,' we can easily discern a negative momentum...as if Literature, having tended for a hundred years now to transmute its surface into a form with no antecedents, could no longer find purity anywhere but in the absence of all signs...

(WDZ 5/9-10)

Language as object

This is the core of Barthes' argument: for the past hundred years, he claims, writing has been either an exercise in taming or a revulsion against the growing materiality of literary language. This trend, which he baptises as the "concretion" of literature, is first seen emerging in the work of Chateaubriand. In terms which anticipate the reflexive and sensual linguistic position adopted in PT, Barthes describes this process in Chateaubriand: there a "trace, a light pressure of linguistic euphoria, a kind of narcissism" appears as writing slowly begins to separate itself from the task of representation, turning instead to look into the pool of signs. (WDZ 4/9) Curiously, this suggestion of romantic textual jouissance is immediately submerged in a melancholic reflection upon the Flaubertian work-aesthetic, though it resurfaces periodically in the work.

In the chapter "Style as Craftmanship" Barthes reflects upon the reasons for this move toward an emphasis on writing as the painstaking production of form. After 1850, he writes, returning again to the moment of crisis, literature faced a problem of self-justification; it needed to seek (and this word returns in the text) "alibis" for itself. (WDZ 62/46) Generations of writers--most of those he names being canonical male writers--
attempt to legitimate their activity by opting to replace the use-value of art by its work-value. (WDZ 62/46) "Writing is now to be saved not by virtue of what it exists for (sa destination) but thanks to the work it has cost." (WDZ 63/46-47) An image (imagerie) of the writer as craftsman arises, who, "like a workman operating at home...roughs out, cuts, polishes and sets his form exactly as a jeweller extracts art from his material." (WDZ 63/46) This working of language into the fetish of highly wrought form, or into the inverted preciosity of Flaubertian concision, is not seen as a selfless meditation on or encounter with language. It is read as a quasi-public spectacle, a means for now-alienated writers to justify themselves within bourgeois culture. Barthes observes:

Writers like Gautier (past master in Belles-Lettres), Flaubert (grinding away at his sentences at Croisset), Valéry (in his room at the crack of dawn) or Gide (standing at his desk like a carpenter at his bench) form a kind of guild of French Literature...Labour replaces genius as a value.

(WDZ 63/46-47)

Flaubert, comedien et martyr

Flaubert is, in WDZ, the first tragic bourgeois writer, one who perceives that "the bourgeois state is an incurable ill" that, as in the Sartrean imaginary, repulsively "sticks" (poissee) to the writer, leaching his freedom. (WDZ 64/47) Flaubert's response, in Barthes' reading, is to realize that he can cope with this situation only by deliberately assuming it. Accordingly, he opts to justify his writing to the external and, perhaps, introjected bourgeois mind by founding an aesthetic of writing as
craftsmanship (l'écriture artisanale). (WDZ 64/47) This writing subtly draws attention not only to form, but to the voiceless signs of literature, to the unnatural tenses and cadences of prose, and to its rules of elocution which, unlike those of speech, appeal to a "sixth, purely literary sense" shared by the producers and consumers of Literature. (WDZ 65/48) Form becomes a sacred "ritual language" of writer-"priests" and a utopian value which, like all utopian hypotheses, is antagonistic towards history: form seeks neither to participate in, nor express a cultural moment, but to "transcend History." (WDZ 74/54) This aesthetic is one which, in Barthes' interpretation, emphasizes its separation from speech, society and tradition. Literature becomes largely a recondite problem of language and form engaged by a solitary writer whose activity is justified as a kind of a marginal productivity, but a productivity nevertheless. By appropriating the bourgeois work-ethic, figuring the writer as an industrious artisan, and writing as a sort of fetish of worked form, however impractical, even perverse, Flaubert's move succeeds in establishing a new contract between writer and society.

touched with sadness, and openness too...

the art of Flaubert points to its mask as it moves forward. What this Gregorian codification of literary language aimed at was ...the transmutation of the writing handed down to him by history into an art...The writer then gives to society a self-confessed art, whose rules are given to all, and in exchange society is able to accept the writer.

(WDZ 65/48)

The acceptance of the writer in bourgeois society comes at a
high price. Flaubert becomes an ironic Christ-figure, the first martyr of modernity crucified on the cross of style to appease middle-class philistines. The "Flaubertization of writing," as Barthes refers to this cult of art as a perverse and Sisyphean kind of work, is perceived as offering the general salvation of all writers (le rachet général des écrivains). This redemption does not, however, ease the distance and unhappiness which haunts his account of Flaubert and this first solution to the dilemma of the modern writer. Barthes lucidly analyses the fundamental passivity of this écriture artisanale. Lying within the belly of the bourgeois patrimony, renouncing both the ideological battles of Realists and the avant-garde struggle to "liberate" a new literary language, it does not disturb any order. The artisanal writer's only passions are the creation of form and perhaps the ornamentation of language with new conceits, préciosités, and archaisms, creating a "rich" and "mortal" writing (in this category of "great traditional writing" Barthes places Gide, Valéry, Montherlant, and even, surprisingly, Breton). (WDZ 74/54) Barthes moves onto his account of the second moment in literary modernity. Some writers, notably Rimbaud, struggling against the "sacred writing" of the Flaubertian aesthetic and the compromised situation of the writer, turn their attention toward language, experimenting with a "chaos of forms and a wilderness (désert) of words," hoping to achieve a pristine state of language and a verbal "object" wholly delivered from the nightmare of History and the myth of Literature. (WDZ 74/54) Form is now put into crisis. And with it language and the writing subject begin to
disintegrate. But, inevitably, Barthes writes, this poetic revolution fails (Barthes reveals here his enduring skepticism about grand gestures of social rebellion; a skepticism which returns with even greater force in his post-structural writing). All the possible outcomes are grim. Revolt, gutted by bad and opportunistic epigonic repetition, and the voracious sponginess of bourgeois culture, which appears capable of neutralizing, and even profiting from, any critique, is flattened into fashion, even convention. The search for innovation degenerates into the tedium of bad imitation, ending in the halls of art school and Belle-Lettres. The other foreseen end is even darker. Barthes summarizes: "[i]n a perpetual flight forward from a disorderly syntax, the disintegration of language can only lead to the silence of writing." A desire to escape Literature and imposture leads to the complete abandonment of writing. It ends in the terminal "agraphia" of Rimbaud and some Surrealists, in the "poignant self-destruction of Literature," as well as the literal suicide of the writer. (WDZ 75/54-55)

Flaubert's discovery of form disengaged writing from tradition, representation, expression and communication: in a word, from the traditional tasks of writing. In WDZ Flaubert's formalism is, following standard histories of modernity, a threshold, a phase which gives onto the current obsessional phase with language. As the nineteenth-century fades into the twentieth, language becomes increasingly visible and thematically central to writers and to critical reflection upon writing. With Mallarmé—whom Barthes will venerate throughout
his career as the threshold and texte-limite of modernity—modernity embraces the Word. The Word (le Verbe) is the primal unit of Mallarmean discourse; with its foregrounding history arrives at the Mallarmean fiction of Littérature-Objet, where language quietly supplants the external world, and where the final conceptual sundering of Nature and writing, of word and referent, is broached.

The Rimbaldian temptation of silence and linguistic destruction is central to Barthes’ reading of Mallarmé. Mallarmé is seen through Barthes’ Blancholdian lenses as the "Hamlet of writing" who meditates upon the murder of Literature. For Barthes, Mallarmé embodies a "precarious moment in which literary language persists only the better to sign the necessity of its death." (WDZ 75/55-56) Silence was, for Rimbaud, a complicated gesture; it appears to have been, among other things, an attempt to regain some kind of innocence. The allure of the idea of the death of Literature, for Barthes’ Mallarmé, appears to lie in a similar need to overcome the compromised situation of the writer in bourgeois society, gaining a position of almost suicidal social innocence through separation and protective contextual silences.

Mallarmé’s typographical agraphia seeks to create around rarefied words an empty zone in which speech, liberated from its guilty social overtones, may, by some happy contrivance, no longer reverberate. The word, dissociated from the husk of habitual clichés, and from the technical reflexes of the writer, is then freed from responsibility in relation to all possible context; it appears in one brief act, which, being devoid of reflections, declares its
solitude, and therefore its innocence. This art has the very structure of suicide: in it, silence is a homogenous poetic time which traps the word...and sets it off less as a fragment of a cryptogram than as a light, a void, a murder, a freedom. ...it is Literature brought to the gates of the Promised Land: a world without Literature...

(WDZ 75-76/55)

In WDZ Mallarmé ushers in the third moment of modernity, where the remnants of literary classicism give way to the ethics and economies of a literary modernity marked by reflexivity and alienation. The economy of classical language, Barthes observes, is *relational*. Within it words have no quasi-existenceal "density," and are hardly even signs. "Words," he reflects, "are abstracted as much as possible in the interest of relationships": that is, words are treated as utilitarian carriers of content, serving to establish relationships among referents that exist beyond the circuitry of language.(WDZ 45/35) Rather than "plunging into an inner reality consubstantial to its outer configuration, it extends...toward other words, so as to form a superficial chain of intentions." (WDZ 44/35) In this classical economy language flows in rigid channels, its words "neutralized," stale, "dessicated", the writer assiduously avoiding the "phonetic or semantic accident which would concentrate the flavour of language at one point and halt its intellectual momentum in the interest of an unequally distributed enjoyment." (This is perhaps an early suggestion of post-structural *jouissance.*) (WDZ 44-45/35)

The function of the writer within the classical economy, in Barthes' polemic, is not to "find new words, with more body or
brilliance, but to follow the order of an ancient ritual, to perfect the symmetry or the conciseness of a relation" which verges on becoming a verbal "algebra" or series of "chemical valences" in which words, as instrumental messengers, delineate a "verbal arena full of...connections, junctions, and networks" from which endlessly arise new waves of meaning, "the gestures of intellection" which need to be carried forward in an endless relay." (WDZ 46/36)

Aestheticization, solitude, reverie: poetic texts

One might call 'poetic' (without value judgement) any discourse in which the word leads the idea: if you like words to the point of succumbing to them, you exclude yourself from the law of the signified, from écritance. This is an oneiric discourse to the letter (our dreams seize the words which pass under their nose and make them into a story).

(RB 151/155)

In the chapter "Is There Any Poetic Writing?" Barthes prepares the ground for écriture by reworking a central distinction in Sartre's existential analysis of literature: the difference between "prose" (that endless wave of language which moves into the world, gesturing toward what lies beyond itself) and "poetry" (introverted moments of language which decline to refer to anything external to its world-of-signs). This Sartrean distinction rests upon the linguistic categories of literary classicism. Classicism, Barthes argues, borrowing a formula from one of Molière's characters, understands prose and poetry thusly: "Poetry= Prose+a+b+c" and "Prose=Poetry-a-b-c" ("a," "b," "c," representing the "useless but decorative" attributes of language
such as metre, rhyme, or images). (WDZ 41/33) This scheme does not, as Barthes puts it, "jeopardize the unity" of written and spoken languages:

...there remains everywhere a single language, which reflects the eternal categories of the mind. Classical poetry is felt to be merely an ornamental variation of prose, the fruit of an art (that is, a technique), never a different language...

(WDZ 42/33)

In WDZ Barthes insists upon the estrangement of truly literary discourse, dividing up language into a crudely affirmative political or "axiological writing" (the precursor of his post-structural bête noire "endoxic discourse") and the literary (i.e. "poetic") word. The modern poetic word, in WDZ and throughout Barthes' writing, succeeds in forcing the Flaubertian wedge of difference between speech and writing further into the body politic, converting literary discourse into a sovereign realm, a "dwelling place" (demeure), a "closed Nature" in which solipsism might preserve innocence, the poet's clean hands. (WDZ 47/37) The poetic word avoids existential issues of complicity and responsibility, and manages to neatly sidestep the spectre of inauthenticity by taking refuge in artifice (a tactic which Barthes will endorse again throughout the retrospective assessment of his career in RB). The poetic word is neither true nor untrue. In fact, it becomes the site of a curious solipsistic authenticity-by-default: the Word can never be untrue, Barthes argues in classical aesthetic style, because it is a solitary whole unto itself which dwells in possibility rather than (as Emily Dickinson once wrote) prose. The poetic word evades the
traps of definition, affirmation and relation: "it shines," Barthes rhapsodizes, "with an infinite freedom and prepares to radiate toward innumerable uncertain and possible connections"--connections which are always, as in Barthesian post-structuralism, deferred. (WDZ 47/37)

Freedom and chronic potentiality renders the poetic word an ideologically subversive genre-killer. The bourgeois myth of literature and its "old literary categories"--specifically genre--embody, Barthes argues, the essentialist and humanistic views of classicism. This deft slippage from an indictment of classicism to a denunciation of humanism sets up Barthes' real antagonist in WDZ: naive, mimetic varieties of representation, with all their aesthetic and ideological ramifications. (WDZ 85-86/62-63) These humanistic literary modes and forms, now emptied of convincing ideological content, remain only as tottering husks put into a final crisis by the Mallarmean displacement of attention from the level of form to the minimal unit of the individual word. Genre and its social ramifications neutralized, "now writing," (écriture) Barthes argues further, ignoring more conservative accounts of generic transformation which reject avant-garde theses of an apocalyptic death of genre, "absorbs the whole identity of a literary work." (WDZ 85-86/62-63).

In this dramatic reading of the alienation of late nineteenth and twentieth century writing Barthes first reveals his enduring desire for a position not implicated in the utterances and machinations of power. Although he is almost fifteen years away from it, the fundamental assumptions underlying his post-
structural *écriture* already appear in his affirmation of the separateness and difference of literary writing from ordinary language. This poignant quest for a position of non-engagement, of non-complicity—for an elusive zero degree of writing—will sustain his explorations of the reflexive sign for the rest of his life.

In the last chapter of *WDZ*, "The Utopia of Language," Barthes returns to the impossibility of classicism. "Classicism," throughout Barthes' polemic, is a huge and sometimes confusing straw term which flouts the schemes of orthodox literary history, lumping together disparate literary periods and movements. The term, as I understand it, primarily refers to a linguistic ideology common to all these discourses. Barthes deploys this stylized classicism/modernity opposition to help focus his account of modern writing and its move toward a surrogate world of signs. Sounding a great deal like Sartre, he maps out the assumptions of classicism's fading but persistent ideology (which, need it be said, lingers in various forms of Naturalistic writing and even in Sartrean discourse).

For what does the rational economy of classical language mean, if not that Nature is a plenum, that it can be possessed... Classical language is always reducible to a persuasive continuum, it postulates the possibility of dialogue, it establishes a universe in which men are not alone, where words never have the terrible weight of things, where speech is always a meeting with the others.

*(WDZ 49/38)*

Like the decadent writers before him, Barthes dislikes the "gregariousness" of classicism. Classical language, Barthes
observes, is "euphoric" because it is a coherent and "immediately social" phenomenon, its reassuring language spinning a communal cocoon sheltering readers and writers from nothingness and absurdity (the same bourgeois horror vacui Barthes identifies in classical Dutch painting). Classical literature is, he writes, caught up in an efficient economy which encourages a regulated and collective consumption of the literary text: "classical literary art is an object which circulates among several persons brought together on a class basis." (WDZ 49/38-39) In this economy, Nature, human subjects, and writing interact in a seamless and transparent harmony. After the disintegration of that economy, the series of tentative or failed or partial solutions offered by Flaubert and other modernists undermined—but did not entirely destroy—classicism's most fundamental constructs: Literature, the writer, and History. In the final chapters of WDZ Barthes sketches the contrary and troubled economy of modern writing, which struggles against those persistent humanistic constructs.

Modernity's endgame

The economy and ontology of modernity put forward in WDZ is antithetical to that of Barthes' bucolic classicism. Reactive, catastrophic, pyrrhic, it rewrites the human world according to an existential script emphasizing alienation, absence, and discontinuity. It is never quite clear in Barthes' earlier writing whether literary modernity creates or merely describes
this broken world and its own impotence. In RB an older Barthes will forward a complex explanation of contemporary writing's impotence, its aphasia, its turn against representation. Literature, R.B. suggests in that text, has been overwhelmed by the vicious and manic proliferation of events in recent world history.

...literature...cannot account for objects, spectacles, events which would surprise it to the point of stupefying it: this is what Brecht sees when he says: 'The events of Auschwitz, of the Warsaw ghetto, of Buchenwald certainly would not tolerate a description of literary character.' Literature was not prepared for such events, and has not given itself the means to account for them.

(RB 119/122-123)

R.B. continues his reflections on the series of unpleasant shocks which have overwhelmed some writers, generalizing that shock to rationalize his own position of retreat.2

Perhaps this explains our impotence to produce a realistic literature today....Realism is always timid, and there is too much surprise in a world which mass media and the generalization of politics has made so profuse that it is no longer possible to figure it projectively: the world, as a literary object, escapes; knowledge deserts literature, which can no longer be either Mimesis or Mathesis but merely Semiosis, the adventure of what is impossible to language, in a word: Text...

(RB 119/122-123)

But as a younger man Barthes vacillates between two positions. In WDZ his text moves ambiguously between passive and active constructions, alternately suggesting and then denying that literature still retains a power to order, to make myths, albeit at the cost of the writer's innocence. At this point his
strongest assertion--one that persists in his post-structural theorizing--is that literary modernity has rhetorically destroyed the world, as it were, in its dismantling of Nature, language and literary structures.

...modern poetry destroyed relationships in language and reduced discourse to words as static things....The interrupted flow of the new poetic language initiates a discontinuous Nature...At the very moment when the withdrawal of functions obscures the relations existing in the world [fait la nuit sur les liaisons du monde], the object in discourse assumes an exalted place...

(WDZ 49-50/39)

Barthes figures Nature in the usual existential terms: as contingent, "unfulfilled," "terrible," only precariously asserting itself intermittently in a void. (WDZ 50/39) No longer classicism's happy plenum, it becomes "a fragmented space, made of objects solitary and terrible, because the links between them are only potential" (virtuelles). (WDZ 50/39) In this unordered dark vacuum with almost zero gravity, the literary object--the poetic word--assumes an "exalted place" as an "absolute object." The connections between persons, words, and things being broken, Nature becomes a random, tenderless hall of novelties and potential fetishes--"a succession of verticalities, of objects, suddenly standing erect, and filled with all their possibilities." These poetic, dehumanized words "exclude men" and are "full of terror"; they relate human beings not to other individuals, as in classical discourse, but to "the most inhuman images in Nature: heaven, hell, holiness, childhood, madness, pure matter." This is a language of "anti-communication" in which
a "violent drive towards autonomy detroys any ethical scope." (WDZ 20, 50-51/18-19,39) This drive toward autonomy in modern poetry, he concludes, "destroys the spontaneously functional nature of language, and leaves standing only its lexical basis....The Word shines forth above a line of relationships emptied of their content, grammar is bereft of its purposes...and lasts only to present the word."(WDZ 46-47/37) Put under erasure, these relationships become "a parody of themselves." This fragmentation and emptying out of language is, Barthes asserts, needed: "this void is necessary for the density of the Word to rise out of a magic vacuum, like a sound and a sign devoid of background," creating not "works," but a literature "seen from a distance" [qui se voit de loin]. (WDZ 50,70/39,51)

**The horizons of modernity**

Torn in conflicting directions by social demands, the belated impotence of what survives as literary discourse, and the materiality of language, the writer is now confronted with an unprecedented, and, as Barthes repeatedly insists, tragic situation.

Before his [the writer's] eyes, the world of society now exists as a veritable Nature, and this Nature speaks, exuding living languages from which the writer is excluded: ...History puts in his hands a decorative and compromising instrument, a writing inherited from a previous and different history, for which he is not responsible and yet which is the only one he can use. Thus is born a tragic element in writing, since the conscious writer must henceforth fight against ancestral and all-
powerful signs which, from the depths of a past foreign to him, impose literature on him like some ritual... (WDZ 86/63-4)

Writing thus moves into a complicated historical situation: despite its alienated condition, it testifies to "something beyond language, which is both History and the stand the writer takes in it." (WDZ 1/7) Here Barthes puts a complex spin on the Sartrean notion of commitment. The first gesture of a modern writer, Barthes observes, is a choice: to either accept or refuse the literature of his past. Rejecting it is, as already indicated, a forgone conclusion. Rhetorically excising the representational powers of literary art, he argues that for the writer, this solitary figure situated in a strange liminal zone, equally repulsed by History and the conditions of his medium, writing is now an "ambiguous reality" which draws him back, by a "tragic reversal", toward his "instruments of creation": that is, toward language and Form. (WDZ 16/16) The historical post-classical multiplication of modes of writing forces a new set of ethical issues upon the writer. There is the possibility of opting for the derivative and inauthentic modality of social realism. (WDZ 70-73/50-53) But for the writer who cannot hide in that conventionality and act of bad faith, there can be no primary allegiance to a moral principle, to a group of people, or anything external to language. The proper site of the writer's commitment is not in the world, as in the Sartrean argument, but in the writer's choice of a mode of writing; that is, to the commitment to literary form. Form categorically reveals the writer's allegiances, and affiliations, Barthes argues:
...the writing to which I entrust myself already exists as an institution; it reveals my past and my choice, it gives me a history, it blazons forth my situation, it commits me without my having to declare the fact. Form functions as an economy signal whereby the scriptor constantly imposes his conversion without ever revealing how it came about.

(WDZ 27/23)

(A passing objection: Barthes' argument is highly suspect here. Curiously retaining the classical value of clarity at this point in his polemic, Barthes shifts the entire burden of signifying, and of clarity, onto artistic form, saturating it with a total, rather than a more moderate degree of significance, as though form could not be as damningly ambiguous as language itself. Form may suggest the political alignment of a writer, but certainly fails to confirm it; as the fascist inclinations of several innovative modernists would attest.)

But to return to Barthes' reading of form in WDZ. Extending the Flaubertian view of artistic form, the Barthesian version argues, somewhat opaquely, that form has three dimensions: language, writing (écriture) and style. In the Flaubertian aesthetic form is, as Barthes notes, antagonistic towards history: it strains toward a beyond of history, dreaming of a Baudelairean ailleurs...an alibi that would free the writer of a guilty complicity with History: and specifically, in France, with bourgeois society.³ Acknowledging the impossibility of ever being completely "innocent" of this alliance, Barthes manages to theorize form as being an only partially compromised--that is, socially implicated--gesture. Rejecting, as Susan Sontag notes in her introduction to the English translation of the work, the
doxic dualism of language as a "social property" and style as an "individual decision" that runs Sartrean criticism and unequivocally interns every act of writing within the gulag of History, Barthes proposes this uncertain conceptual triad which pulls away from the fatalism of History. (WDZ xii) Of the three terms, only language is seen as irredeemably sociohistoric in origin. The opening paragraph of the chapter "What is Writing?" is surcharged with similes and metaphors straining to apprehend the reality of language. Language is a "corpus of prescriptions and habits common to all the writers of a period". The English translation is weak and confusing at this point, obscuring the botanization of the semiotic realm first pointed out in Baudelaire: language, the translation runs, is a "kind of natural ambience wholly pervading the writer's expression." The original reads: "la langue est comme une Nature qui passe à travers la parole de l'écrivain." (WDZ 9/11) Language "enfolds the whole of literary creation much as the earth, the sky, and the line where they meet outline a familiar habitat for mankind." (WDZ 9/11) As environment and horizon, language is simultaneously a negative (that is, constraining) phenomenon and an enabling one: it is "à la fois une limite et une station," the reassuring expanse of an "économie" (an "ordered space" in the English version), a "field of action" which, paradoxically, being seen as something which is a societal given--"the undivided property of men"--and thus beyond personal choice, cannot be the site of a social commitment. (WDZ 9/11) Language is a "blind force": behind it "the whole of History stands unified and complete in the manner of a
Natural Order." (WDZ 9,14-15 / 11,14) As a naturalized plenum, language is "an abstract circle of truths, outside of which alone the solid residue of an individual logos ("la densité d'un verbe solitaire") begins to settle." (WDZ 9/11)

If History, as Barthes claims, is a blind collective force, then on the far side of that History and its ironically capitalized categories lies a counterforce: the wild and sheer carnality of individual style. (WDZ 14/14) Style, for Barthes at this point, is not a Flaubertian process of infinite correction, or post-structural play, but is instead seen as a perverse (i.e. irrational and nonutilitarian) process whose origins lie beyond language. (WDZ 10-11/12) It is rooted not in inherited models of discourse, but outside of language, in the magma of the writer's body and his past. In a series of strong claims, WDZ asserts that the body's primary frames of reference are not historical or collective, but biographical and biological. Style is specific to the person: it is, in Baudelairean terms, always bizarre, and, like the Freudian psyche, split between conscious and unconscious processes. It issues from desire and the body's private remembering: it resists conscious control and analysis.

...imagery, delivery, vocabulary spring from the body and the past of the writer...Thus under the name of style a self-sufficient language is evolved which has its roots only in the depths of the author's personal and secret mythology...where once and for all the great verbal themes of his existence come to be installed...

(WDZ 10/12)

In this initial take on style--subtracting its residual humanism and bracketing its insistence on the private origins of
writing—one can discern the outlines of Barthes' later version of a drifting and detached post-structural writing:

...style has always something crude about it: it is a form with no clear destination, the product of a thrust, not an intention....it is the writer's 'thing', his glory and his prison, it is his solitude. Indifferent to society...a closed personal process, it is in no way the product of a choice or a reflection on Literature. It is the private portion of the ritual...the decorative voice of a hidden, secret flesh...

(WDZ 10-11/12)

Style is, Barthes contends, an "infra-language" which develops during the encounter between flesh and world ("qui s'élabore à la limite de la chair et du monde").(WDZ 11-12/12) Its sources largely hidden from the social gaze, style is enigmatic, opaque, and secretive. Opposed to the "transparent" and "horizontal" social flow of speech, style has only a "vertical" (i.e. introverted) dimension which is surprisingly retrospective. Although, in WDZ, the writer is already drawn to the Mallarmean textualization of reality, to the purity and refuge of the literary sign, the things beyond language retain an existential resistance to language: there is, as it were, an outside to language. Style arises from a space beyond the reach of this material "outside." The unique writerly body--its specific "density," its solitary recollections of "fragments of a reality entirely alien to language"--impinge upon collective discourses while remaining, Barthes claims, beyond art and the social contract. Style is, as Barthes' remarks on Flaubert suggest, a mask that at once reveals and protects the writer.
...style is never anything but metaphor, that is, the equivalence of the author's literary intention and carnal structure... style is always a secret...its secret is recollection locked within the body of the writer....By reason of its biological origin, style resides outside art, that is, outside the pact which binds the writer to society.... It is the Authority of style, that is, the entirely free relationship between language and its fleshly double, which places the writer above History as the freshness of Innocence [sic: 'qui s'impose l'écrivain comme une Fraîcheur au-dessus de l'Histoire']. (WDZ 12-13/13)

Language and style--History and and the remembering body--are two ostensibly autonomous "objects" or "blind forces" which interact in the elaboration of an écriture, of a mode of writing which links the writer's singular utterance to the "vast History of the Others (d'autrui)." In this way, Barthes writes, the choice of a form and of a mode of writing are acts of historical solidarity; to opt for a mode of writing is to compromise the absolute freedom and novelty of personal style using inherited forms, since "it is under the pressure of History and Tradition that the possible modes of writing for a given writer are established." The primary ethical and political issue of writing after 1850 is, therefore, what Barthes refers to as the "morality of form." The writer's choice of an aesthetic or of a form among the plurality of post-classical modes of writing is, he argues, the clearest political gesture that he can make. (WDZ 10-15/11-15)

This argument is clearly directed against the cruder content-driven arguments about committed literature found in What is Literature? For all the reflection on ethics in WDZ, which R.B. acknowledges as being produced during a period of "political
and moral obsession," there is no desire to assent to a Sartrean ethos of definitive social commitment that would bring the writer and his work entirely into the realm of the social and the historical. (RB 145/148) Rather, one senses a constant effort to distance the writer from the juggernaut of the socio-historical. Barthes' ambivalence toward the pressures of history and the existential imperative of commitment permeates WDZ. Writing is seen by him as a fleeting moment of freedom—an instant in which the writer is at liberty to choose how he will compromise between her individual "freedom" and a constraining "remembrance" of past writing—even her own. (WDZ 16/16) This fear of claustrophobic repetition and of a sinister concretion or sedimentation of language over time, as Merleau-Ponty (and perhaps Beckett) would envisage it, motivates Barthes' post-structural discourse of displacement and indecision. Throughout WDZ, M and CE the reader comes across traces of the same complaints regarding endoxic discourse (referred to in WDZ as stereotypes) and the confining public imago appearing twenty-two years later in RB.

True, I can today select such and such a mode of writing, and in so doing assert my freedom, aspire to the freshness of novelty or to a tradition; but it is impossible to develop it within duration without gradually becoming a prisoner of someone else's words and even of my own. A stubborn after-image, which comes from all the previous modes of writing and even from the past of my own, drowns the sound of my present words. (WDZ 17/16)

Writing is, for Barthes at this moment in his intellectual career, and then again, in the latter part of the 1970s, a solitary
and "ambiguous reality" born from a complex confrontation between the writer's private being and sociohistorical conditions. The writer remains on the periphery, oddly disengaged from the social realm, theoretically shielded from the full force of history by his body as he struggles against the stale repetition of words and forms, searching for social innocence and a fresh writing. And already the Barthesian subject is seeking shelter from the social contract between writer and audience, distancing himself from the sense of an enduring if vague social obligation beyond the economic Flaubertian entente by insisting upon the opacity of language, and theorizing the existence of lateral space, of spaces apart, in the private body of the writer, and in the zone of silence Mallarmé discovered around words. This silence and the matte writerly body are counterforces to history; somehow, history does not mark or coerce this solitary hypothetical writing body in the ways that it has harassed other bodies. In Barthes' scenario, silence protects the writing body and its words as it has not protected other bodies, by creating an emptiness history cannot, in theory, flow across.

An assessment of the Barthesian myth of writing

While often brilliant, the arguments in WDZ as frequently have the opacity of someone else's obsession. The tactically syncopated and claustrophobic reading of a brief moment--a detail--of French history turns in circles around a tight thematic node: the mythemes of History, Literature, the Writer,
and Society. Themes of silence, bourgeois society, guilt, innocence, and absence recur in an almost fugal series, seeking an elusive resolution in Barthes' discourse. Barthes' arguments about classicism and the predicament of literary modernity are most often unsubstantiated: they appeal to a sympathetic reader who can silently accept his tight and obsessive reading of the past; they rely on the seductive beauty of symmetrical arguments and dyadic oppositions (Barthes' predilection for the productive tensions of structural oppositions evidently predating his involvement with Structuralism). The rhetorical strength and persuasiveness of *WDZ* lies in its relentless movement toward a tragic aporia which obscures other facts or absences which would undermine Barthes' monological interpretation of French cultural history.

In her preface to the English translation of *WDZ*, Susan Sontag catches the ersatz historicism of the text. This is, Sontag writes, a strangely "generalized, thin notion of history... Barthes is not so much referring to a real state of affairs as he is using a metaphor, which allows him to describe literature as a process rather than as a static entity." (*WDZ* xix) This pseudo-historicity she reads as being in the service of Barthes' version of the fall of Literature from the gilded age of classicism and its ideological congruence into the self-consciousness, alienation, and ambiguities of modernity.

The terseness and lack of concrete detail she remarks upon in the text is a function of its almost geometric rhetoric. In *WDZ* Barthes is a nascent theoretician using his rhetorical training
to its fullest effect. Here, as in the writing of other theoreticians (one could think, for instance, of Bakhtin's account of the development of the epic and of the novel), conventional literary history is subordinated to a strong theoretical, or, in Nietzschean terms, mythic imagination. For instance, the claim central to Barthes' argument about the development of modernity—that where writing is concerned classicism lasts until Flaubert—is historically outrageous in its treatment of Romanticism. This historically untenable assertion should not be dismissed out of hand, but rather interpreted as a theoretical move in which Barthes' native "structural reflex" and rhetorical skill combine to construct a Nietzschean fabula out of the too-simple opposition of "classicism" to "modernity." What emerges from this intellectual reprocessing is a stylized polemic in which periods, genres, and categories are to be understood as theoretical entities, as heuristic devices, as supporting hypotheses.

WDZ is a stylized and partial account of the development of French modernity (though that ethnic qualification sometimes tends to be suppressed). In "Reflections on a Literary Manual" Barthes makes a series of suggestions on how to overcome the "classico-centrism" of French literary history. The first is to do literary history, as it were, backwards:

...instead of envisioning the history of literature from a pseudo-genetic point of view, we should make ourselves the center of this history, and if we really want to 'do' literary history, organize this history starting from the great modern break...  
("RL," RL 28/55)
In *WDZ* Barthes is making himself the hidden centre of his history, reading backward to simultaneously create and justify his myth of literary modernism. 1850 is, as it were, the year of "the great modern break": the moment of irrevocable change, the beginning of the Baconian *chute* from innocence into ambiguity and process. Barthes' attitude toward modernity is complicated. There is, in this work, a strange fluxing of moods. The characteristic disdain and utopian hopes of an avant-garde polemicist are undercut by a resigned awareness that the greatest talents of the bourgeois--assimilation and neutralization--spell the inevitability of co-optation. No writing, he admits, can ever be perpetually revolutionary. Ambivalence, indirection and a certain conceptual fatigue further complicate his tone. The actual intent of this primer charting the disintegration of the classical mode of writing is at least two-fold: to underline the impossibility of twentieth-century Realism (i.e. representation in the sense of *mimesis*), and to defend the ethical choice of engaging writing as conscious artifice, as a form of "anti-communication" (*contre-communication*).(WDZ 20/18) In *WDZ* Barthes responds to Sartre indirectly, restaging the cultural scenario to support his claim that the alienation of the writer and of language make the Sartrean ethos of committed writing unworkable. Barthes actually inverts Sartrean values, insisting that the practice of writing as a form of anti-communication is ethically preferable to an axiological discourse, that is, to a discourse of engagement.

At the centre this counter-myth of modernity lies the tragic
situation of the writer. Alienated from any meaningful community (other than the spectre of the economic gang of vile bourgeois), faced with a compromising medium, she lives in an absurd world of convention and artifice. A world in which, as Eugene Goodheart points out, the only uninterrogated—and therefore "natural" element—is absence (and an attenuated version of Sartrean absudity); and where the only refuges from nothingness and vulgarity are personal style, narcissistic paper languages, and the fantasy of \textit{écriture blanche}.\textsuperscript{5} Barthes' writer inhabits a confined and tragic world: and the sense of tragedy which this text exudes arises from Barthes' monological and unidirectional reading of modernity. \textit{WDZ} should not, therefore, be evaluated on the basis of whether it is an accurate or misleading history of modernity. Following Barthes' lead, it is best understood as a critical fiction which simply helps him makes sense of the present situation. As Barthes might put it, \textit{WDZ} constructs the intelligibility of his time. Reading backward with the angel of history, one can find in this construction of the situation of the French writer of the 1950s many of the themes of Barthesian post-structuralism.

Barthesian discourse rests upon two principal mythemes of modernity which continue to operate in his (and others') thinking: separation and absence. Barthes, and quite possibly other post-structural theorists, may well have first encountered these concepts in Sartre. In \textit{WDZ} absence is designated using Sartrean terms such as \textit{le néant} and \textit{le vide}. As both Goodheart and Betty R. McGraw in "Public Parks and Private Gardens: Sartre's
Nausea and Barthes' Ennui" point out, in his texts Barthes rewrites the Sartrean take on the void, softening the existential terror haloing the Sartrean construct. In all of his writing, the voids and absences (particularly of meaning) found in WDZ are closest to the absurd and destructive vacuums found in Sartre. Yet even here one can observe how absence and absurdity are recovered by a nascent aesthetic which assigns them a positive value. Temperamentally disinclined toward painful forms of extremis, in Barthes nothingness and its sometimes slightly gentler variation, absence, are contained by being pluralized and disseminated, becoming desirable aesthetic values which support one of his cardinal post-structural values: artifice. This "aesthetic nihilism," to borrow a phrase from Alan Megill, is obvious in Barthes' reading of the Mallarmean sign, where the sign is surrounded by a zone of silence, a kind of protective negative space which does not negate the graph, but only any potential context, any threatening incursion of meaning. (PE 34)

In ES, filtered through an idiosyncratic reading of Japanese aesthetics, absences and miniature voids become critical elements in the protagonist's mental production and analysis of aesthetic objects. Emptiness and absences of various kinds (of the author, of authorial intention, of meaning, of history) facilitate Barthes' structuralist and eventually post-structuralist analyses. Absence, in "The Death of the Author," S/Z, PT and other early post-structural texts, becomes the very pre-condition of the scriptor's textual pleasure and his endless drift through language. During the last eight years of his life,
however, and specifically after the death of his mother, Barthes' apprehension of absence and separation shifts as traces of personal emotions and responses, however ironically mediated, enter his writing. In RB, FLD and particularly in CL, a ludic interpretation of absence gives way to a more complex and ironic reading of absence. Leaning upon Sartre and Lacan, these later works assert absence as being the precious condition of human freedom and, then, poignantly, explore absence as irrevocable loss.

Some final comments to anticipate arguments made in subsequent chapters. In PE Allan Megill reflects upon the term aestheticism, writing:

\[
\text{[a]s it is usually employed, the word aestheticism denotes an enclosure within a self-contained realm of aesthetic objects and sensations, and hence also denotes a separation from the 'real world' of nonaesthetic objects.}
\]  
\[\text{(PE 2)}\]

In Barthes' work reflexivity, as Goodheart notes, "has the effect of generating an enclosed subjective space (what Barthes calls his imaginaire de la solitude)." (SD 85) There are in WDZ, as in most of Barthes' other texts, enclosed spaces, self-contained (or nearly so) realms of aesthetic objects and rhetorical/textual spaces set apart from ordinary reality through imaginative epochés and re-writings. As I will show in subsequent chapters, this textualization of the given and of the real hypothetically suspends context, thus enabling the creation of these privileged spaces, these floating worlds. In WDZ three of the most enduring sanctuaries in Barthes' theories--the text, body and the silent
space beyond or around signs--first appear. Although most critics write as though the thematics of the privileged body and the sign in Barthes only develops in the late 1960s, in *WDZ* the writer's body and her graphs are already being thematized and treated as isolated lateral spaces which resist the pressures and encroachment of history. Most importantly, in *WDZ* Barthes is already theorizing and seeking out the safe spaces of a non-communicating writing. The desire for these spaces manifests in Barthes' attraction to the perceived zone of silence surrounding the Mallarmean sign, to the project--however unworkable--of a white writing, and the reverie of a writing without Literature.

These safe spaces, these protective gardens found at the heart of Barthes' texts, at once shelter him from (as Megill puts it) "the terrors of an interested reality," and allow him to flirt with nothingness and absence while never having to face the painful, wrenching aspect of these forces until the final years of his life. (PE 43) Consequently, Barthes and the uncertain scriptors and actants found in most of his post-structural texts can sidestep issues that agonise existential writers and protagonists, or treat them almost comically. In his texts boredom never accelerates beyond the safe vertigo experienced in the presence of stupidity and repetition into anything like Roquentin's nausea. The complex phenomenon of boredom will, rather, be conjoined with pleasure in *PT* and *RB*. The void, rather than being an engulfing anti-entity, as in earlier existential texts, is rhetorically ruptured and almost domesticated. The invasive and terrifying Sartrean void, pluralized, will become an
aphrodisiac, a ludic tease. Re-thematized as gaps, fragments, interstices, negative spaces, or silences, le néant becomes a vital element in the strategies of aestheticization which develop in Barthesian post-structuralism. Emptiness and absence become interstitial, epiphanic, and in PT, even sexy: eros, as Barthes will contend in that text, depends upon discontinuity; pleasure arises in the spaces between or beyond the sign.

The second mytheme of modernity operating in WDZ, that of separation or rupture, is obviously linked to the first. Three scissures synergistically combine to enable Barthesian modernity: a historical rupture between past and present; a linguistic rupture not only between past and present discourses, but also between word and world; and a series of social ruptures which provoke the separation of the writer from others. In Barthes' scenario, these last two ruptures are both diachronic and synchronic: they are ongoing schisms, literature and community like two continents drifting apart. The most momentous of all breaks, Barthes acknowledges in WDZ, is the rupture of a social—that is, a shared—language. In Barthes' history, the self-conscious writer's separation from the languages of his society feeds upon itself. Although the act of writing does, as Barthes recognizes, compromise the purity of the graphic gesture per se, since writing cannot help yielding some trace of the writer's sociohistorical situation, the overall alienation of literary writing deepens. As the distance between writing and referents grows, its prosaic (i.e. representational) aspects, in Sartrean terms, atrophy; the writer must choose
between turning back toward the materials and conditions of writing, or falling into the senility of formulaic repetition and the pose of inauthentic authenticity. Innovative writing, therefore, can only turn inward and become fundamentally "poetic" (that is, reflexive). Language empties itself out. All writers become solitary poetic specialists working in distant paper languages that, however compromised they may be, neither affirm or deny. Barthes summarizes his account of the situation of modern writing in the last chapter of WDZ, seeing it as a kind of weed (in Derridean terms), as a supplementary parasite ironically doubling or feeding off the remains of the classical "literary act", pulling it toward the Mallarmean zone:

>modern writing is a truly independent organism which grows up around the literary act, decorating it with a value foreign to its intention, engaging it continually in a double mode of existence, and superimposes on the content of words opaque signs that carry within themselves a history...so that thought is always involved with the supplementary, often diverging and always encumbering supplement of form.

(WDZ 84/62)

The supplementariness of the writer and of writing itself are core assumptions propelling the Barthesian myth of modernity. In his construct, the writer is not only separated from History (past and contemporary) and its representation by the "discovery" of the mediated and reflexive nature of language; he is also isolated from any vital sense of community. As a solitary being enclosed within the horizon of language, literary gestures of solidarity or acts of self-defense on behalf of oneself or a group of people become tortuous and improbable. This writer cannot, as a
writer, overcome his isolation. In Said's terms, he might have, at best, a constituency: but his primary audience in such a situation is either himself or a bourgeois clientèle. Not surprisingly, alienation and ambiguity are key terms in the belated no-exit culture through which Barthes' writer moves (a tragic modernity seemingly patched together from the ontologies of Sartre, Beckett and Kafka). The estrangement of the writer, the lack of any vital communal sense or ethos to counter the bourgeois ethos, sets up the hostile and utterly negative analysis of power which endures throughout Barthes' career. The comments found in WDZ—that "Order" always indicates repression (WDZ 26/22) and murders poetic intention (WDZ 38-39/31); that writing, faced with the choice of complicity or impotence, is literary only to the extent that it is powerless (WDZ 28/24)—are echoed twenty-odd years later in L. This revulsion against the "realities" of power, coupled with the need to flee power and create a position and a writing of non-complicity, of "innocence," underlies his post-structuralist theories of language and style: "the word [including, as Barthes will demonstrate in RB and FLD, the first and third-person singular] becomes an alibi, that is, an elsewhere and a justification." (WDZ 20/19)

The utopian strain in Barthes' thinking, his need to withdraw and create spaces apart from the stream of the endoxic social, marks WDZ, returning strongly later in his post-structuralist theories of subjectivity, the text, the reading body, drift and jouissance. But this utopian bent is, as I have indicated, tempered by an awareness of the limits of his own
beautiful theories. Characteristically, Barthes will offer a grand gesture, a seductive hypothesis (e.g. of writing beyond the "literary myth," or of "Literature becoming the Utopia of Language," then lay out the reasons those ideas or states cannot be realized. (WDZ 88/65) In effect, he generates fecund tensions, paradoxes, contradictions and aporias, putting his own rhetoric under erasure, but not his categories out of play (one of the most perplexing contradictions in the text, as I read it, is Barthes' vacillating presentation of the literary word as both "dense" and empty). The effect, depending on one's mood, can be either stimulating, poignant, or irritating. And, again, these strategies of contradiction and erasure persist in his post-structuralist thinking.

The most critical ambivalence in WDZ is Barthes' vacillating attitude toward Literature. In theory, he clearly sides with the avant-garde and its murderous inclinations regarding Literature. Yet he is reluctant to fully relinquish that cultural discursive space. After acknowledging the impossibility of "liquidating" Literature (Literature being one of the cultural Undead) he opts for the desacralization of writing, seeing modern écriture as a non-communicating literary language that is "hardened" and "closed" against ordinary speech (the latter designated as "la parole"). (WDZ 19/18) Opaque, languidly synchronic, this modern writing is only, in Barthes' words, "a duration of empty signs" whose movement is the only significant element." (WDZ 19/18) In the Barthesian conception of écriture the Flaubertian concept of form as a stable autonomous object has already fragmented, and
is, via Mallarmé, edging toward the amorphous and intermittent flow of the post-structuralist text. And there are indications that the unity of the poetic sign itself is already failing. Barthes repeatedly points to the fascination with ambiguity and the "beyond" (au-delà) of language in which writing is, in his thesis, rooted. This beyond is, in part, as I have signalled, the writer's own body. It is a conceptual point where the poetic universe curves back toward itself, where the two poles of the aesthetic phenomenon—in Kristevian terms, the rarefied symbolic and sensual, pre-logical semiotic (pre-Symbolic) realms—meet as language destroys itself. Barthes is, I think, pointing toward these very realms when he refers to the unity of the sign in literary writing as being attracted to the "alibi" of "the zones of infra- or ultra-language" first charted by Rimbaud and then the surrealists. (WDZ 20/19)

Throughout WDZ Barthes intimates that this nascent fascination with the literary sign—let alone the subsequent move toward infra- and ultra-linguistic zones—will fatally undermine the "old values" of the literary institution: authority, meaning (hence interpretation), and authorial identity. Writing will, as Barthes' history projects, necessarily drift toward the realms of the reflexive sign and of the semiotic; private gardens to which Barthes himself will, after passing through a minor "scientific delirium," turn his attention. (RB 145/148) Despite his tentative and ambivalent considerations regarding the ethics of writing, and his claims that the writer is bound to society through the sociohistoric
aspects of form, in WDZ Barthes' rhetorical energy is moving in the opposite direction, towards a defense of the solitudes of writing. He is already suggesting the fictional--that is, textual--status of Nature and of History. In this mythopoetic text the locus of the real is contracting, shifting away from History and the world toward the de-contextualized sign and the secret realm of the writer's body: two of the most privileged sites of Barthesian post-structuralism.

The later Barthesian notion of écriture is predicated upon the existence of privileged sites, places beyond or apart from the social. These sites--the body and unpredictable semiotic processes which are not, at least rhetorically, entirely contained within collective semiotic systems--are precisely the refuges of earlier aesthetes. In the following chapters I will explore how Barthes develops these safe utopic or atopic zones of creativity and distance--the body of the scriptor, the text as it is being read or heard or re/written in solitude, the non-productive appreciations of the amateur, the "dislocated copy" of Japan in ES, the safe places behind the language-masks and simulacra of RB and FLD, the "hanging garden" of the seminar, the Winter Garden photograph in CL, and, of course, the absolute seclusion of jouissance.

This reading of WDZ as a mythological intervention in which Barthes establishes the tenets of his modernity begins, I hope, to demonstrate how the aestheticizing quest for separation circulates in the Barthesian myth of literary modernity. A recognition of this quest is fundamental to any reading of Barthes
which attempts to grasp the reasons behind the ethical and political positions advanced in his post-structuralist texts. WDZ identifies most of the things Barthes will spend his life analysing, indicting and, whenever possible, evading: the endoxic fatigue and bad faith of ordinary language (la parole), the rejection of referentiality and the category of the Natural, the uselessness both of tradition and writing, the bête noire of the bourgeoisie, the alienation, marginality and belatedness of the writer, the co-optation and commercialization of art, what he will later refer to as "the war of languages," the dangers of power, institutional violence, writing as a contre-communication; and, more positively, the sanctuaries of absence and absurdity, the perception of the text as space rather than object, and the grails of pleasure and the reflexive sign.

Barthes' enduring sense of absence and of the absurd--primary mythemes supporting his post-structuralist notions of subjectivity and textuality--testify, in my view, to Sartre's impact upon Barthes. His post-structural theories, I have come to believe with Bittman, McGraw, Roger, and a few other critics, are far more indebted to Existentialism than is generally acknowledged. Behind Barthes' critique of conventionality, whether in WDZ, S/Z or PT, one hears the existential murmur of a senseless fluxing world. Absurdity, whether it is consciously attended to or suddenly invades our mental compounds, is a disorienting event. The vertigo it normally precipitates forces the recognition of the fluidity and indeterminacy of the subjects, objects, meanings and worlds (in the phenomenological
sense) that once caused experience to cohere into something once known as reality. But in the grip of that vertigo, with the death of context and the loss of the power to interpret, things are no longer solid: they become uncertain, intermittent, and, as Barthes writes in PT, they glitter momentarily and intensely, then die.

Endoxic solidity is more of a threat to Barthes than is emptiness. The modern writer and his text must, as Barthes asserts in an early essay on Robbe-Grillet, operate in a "very narrow zone, in that rare vertigo where literature unavailingly tries to destroy itself, and apprehends itself in that one and the same movement, destroying and destroyed." ("LL," CE 57/69) Literature must exist in a "state of permanent presuicide": it can only exist as "the figure of its own problem, self-pursuing, self-scourging." ("LL," CE 58/69-70) Subtracting the tone of existential anguish, this threshold between being and non-being is the very space of Barthes' post-structuralist writing; the place to which he will return after experimenting with other, more "prosaic" forms of criticism, the vertiginous yet claustrophobic site that will be imaginatively opened up by Barthes' play with signs. As R.B. puts it:

[w]riting is that play by which I turn around as well as I can in a narrow place:
I am wedged in, I struggle between the hysteria necessary to write and the image-repertoire, which oversees, controls, purifies, codifies, corrects, imposes the focus (and the vision) of a social communication.

(RB 140/137)
CHAPTER THREE. WHERE IS THE VOICE COMING FROM?:
EARLY POST-STRUCTURAL VERSIONS OF WRITING,
TEXTUALITY AND THE SUBJECT

In its primary aspect, a great picture has no more definite message for us than an accidental play of sunlight and shadow for a moment, on the wall or floor; is itself, in truth, a space of such fallen light, caught as the colours are caught in an Eastern carpet, but refined upon, and dealt with more subtly and exquisitely than by nature herself.

Walter Pater

...extravagant polysemy is the first (initiatory) episode of an ascesis: the one which leads outside the dictionary, outside meaning.

("R," RF 225/205)

Jump cut

After passing through a rich period of eclectic analyses ranging from applied phenomenology (MI) to social criticism (M), by 1960 Barthes was moving into the new mythopoeic territories of structural analysis; and, with him, French writers were distancing themselves from existential views of literature. In "Kafka's Answer," a kind of post-script to WDZ, he surveys the contemporary French literary scene, writing:

[t]he end of the Sartrean novel, the imperturbable indigence of socialist
fiction, the defects of political theater --all that, like a receding wave, leaves exposed a singular and singularly resistant object: literature.

("KA," CE 133/138)

He perceives another literary moment cresting, an "opposing wave" that washes over literature, the wave of "an asserted detachment" ("un dégagement déclaré"). ("KA," CE 133/138) This wave carries with it another set of aesthetic values:

...[a] revival of the love story, hostility to 'ideas,' cult of fine writing, refusal to be concerned with the world's significations: a whole new art is being proposed, consisting of a convenient swivel [d'un tourniquet commode] between romanticism and off-handedness [la désinvolture], the (minimal) risks of poetry and the (effective) protection of intelligence. ("KA," CE 133/138)

Structuralism, as part of the rising anti-Sartrean wave, proved to be a viable form of intellectual protection for Barthes, one which stimulated his bent for creative theorizing and paraliterary texts. In the mid 1970s, looking back on his own work, Barthes implicitly rejected the construct of the "two Barthes" sometimes forwarded by his interpreters, in which the early critical thinker suddenly cedes to the delicious essayeur of hedonism. He never, he said repeatedly in interviews and articles, actually believed (at least for very long) in the possibility of a science of literature of the kind pursued by some of his structural colleagues. His real fascination lay with the creative discursive possibilities offered by the structural use of binary oppositions, deep and surface structures, and the simulacrum.
In retrospect, Barthes appears as the most fanciful and désinvolte of the French structuralists. By 1963, with "The Structuralist Activity," he is already split between the practice of a "reflexive" (i.e. purely scholarly) Structuralism as opposed to a creative "poetic" Structuralism. ("SA," CE 214/214) In this essay the two practices are not clearly separate, although Barthes is already tending toward a poetic Structuralism. He opts to foreground Structuralism's critical operations on the text, and implicitly accords them the status of a further or parallel creation. He makes these assertions about structural analysis. Structuralism is not an intellectual movement so much as a generative cultural activity: "we might speak of structuralist activity as we once spoke of surrealist activity." ("SA," CE 214/214) The goal of all structural activity is to reconstruct an object so as to manifest the rules which govern its functioning. ("SA," CE 214-215/214/215) Those rules comprise the "structure" of that object, whether it is a poem, a social ritual, or a prosaic economic exchange. That recovered deep structure is therefore, in structural jargon, a simulacrum of that object. Barthes' structural simulacrum is not a disinterested scientific anatomy of an object, but a "direct, interested simulacrum," one that makes something that was previously invisible--the structure of that object--appear to the intellect. "Structural man," Barthes writes, "takes the real, decomposes it, then recomposes it." ("SA," CE 215/215) This analysis, which is only a series of abstracted movements
in a symbolic realm, might seem to be inconsequential, but it literally produces something else: something Barthes initially wavers between referring to as a new object or merely regarding as an "addition" to the first. Then, deciding that the simulacrum is neither an after-image nor an appendage to the observed object, that it is indeed a distinct object, he moves into a line of argument already advanced by nineteenth-century writers who argued for the creative nature of critical work. Structuralism, Barthes contends, is an activity of homologic imitation: there is no technical difference between structural criticism and the making of art. When Lévi-Strauss, for instance, mentally decomposes a myth in order to discover and recompose the homologic functioning of the totemic imagination, his acts are indistinguishable from those of Mondrian or Butor: all three are engaging in the act of composition. ("SA," CE 215/215) Barthes goes on to accord the same value to the structural theorist's work as to traditional art-making, throwing open the boundaries of critical activity, making everything a potential text for the critic's formalizing art:

It is of little consequence whether the initial object submitted to the simulacrum activity is given by the world in an already assembled fashion...or is still dispersed (in the case of the structural 'composition'); whether this initial object is drawn from a social reality [le réel social] or an imaginary reality [le réel imaginaire]. It is not the copied object which defines an art...it is the fact that man adds to it in reconstructing it: technique is the very being of all creation.

Barthes presses his case for structural readings being an aesthetic activity, presenting structural analysis and the simulacrum as a kind of intellectual collage which cannibalizes and reassembles the raw and sometimes far flung materials of the object(s). Significantly, he argues against both representation and originality, contending that it is not the copying of an object that defines art, but the addition of a new element—intellect—which creates new art by producing an abstracted reconfiguration of the object. The English translation inadvertently obscures the creative intent of that move, rendering the precise "découpage" and "agencement" by the vaguer, almost clinical English approximations of "dissection" and "articulation." "The structuralist activity," Barthes writes, "involves two typical operations: dissection [découpage] and articulation [agencement]." He glosses the first operation:

To dissect the first object, the one which is given to the simulacrum activity, is to find in it certain mobile fragments whose differential situation engenders a certain meaning; the fragment has no meaning in itself, but it is nonetheless such that the slightest variation wrought in its configuration produces a change in the whole...

("SA," CE 216/216)

Whether one of Mondrian's squares, or Lévi-Strauss' mythemes, these elements or "fragments" are then, on the basis of a perceived similarity, classed into paradigms. These paradigms constitute a "reservoir...of objects (of units)" from which the structuralist critic, by an act of citation, can summon forth elements at will. Once these "elements" are
isolated and paradigmatic classes are posited, "structural man must discover in them or establish for them certain rules of association." ("SA," CE 217/217) This is the second operation: the active recombination of those elements. The structuralist builds up his version of the internal structure of the object from its abstracted elements, in effect producing a distinct if virtual object: the structural simulacrum. This simulacrum "manifests a new category of the object, which is neither the real or the rational, but the functional." ("SA," CE 218/218) The structuralist does not deal in meanings, but in schematic processes and virtual intellectual forms:

[u]ltimately, one might say that the object of structuralism is not man endowed with meanings but man fabricating meanings... the act by which...meanings...are produced. Homo significans: such would be the new man of structural inquiry. ("SA," CE 218/218)

The structural simulacrum is not only a theoretical supplement, but often, in Barthes' essays, an open, ludic activity. It describes, in aestheticizing terms, the synchronic and diachronic patterns of meaning generated by human attempts to render the world intelligible. The structuralist, however, does not engage or evaluate these patterns. He, according to Barthes, stands apart from that human struggle, merely analysing or fabricating patterns that are always empty. "[L]ike the ancient soothsayer" the structuralist "speaks the locus of meaning but does not name it." ("SA," CE 219/219)

In the description of the simulacrum found in "The
Structuralist Activity" and other essays from his structuralist period one can observe Barthes' drift towards a fragmentary and unconcluded textuality. To create the structuralist simulacrum, the classical assumption of the integrity and originality of the first object (or objects) must be conceptually breached. Structural aesthetics, oriented toward the notion of culture as a complex of interdependent sign systems, asserts that the integrity of the object and the authorial imprint are illusory. Neither object nor voice are inhering plenums, but intricate and open discursive structures made up of independent fragments ("elements") circulating within the cultural system. These structures, harmoniously mirroring that vast system, become micro-systems; the object becomes construed as a text caught up in the flow of larger cultural texts. The relative originality of a text now lies not in the force of authorial expression or artistry, but in its specific combinations and permutations of prior elements and codes—that is, in its systemic différence. The object's apparent origin is, in structural and post-structural theory, pulverized into conceptual collage. It becomes a decentred system of citations, authored not by an individual, or individuals, but rather by a transpersonal system of signs. The notion of the simulacrum as a collage of recycling fragments, with its emphasis on surfaces, detachable elements, and abstract recomposition, functions as a transitional construction of the text, sliding toward the hypothesis of the intertext upon which Barthesian post-structuralism is
founded.

The authorial intertext

Often coupled with Foucault's "What is an Author?," "The Death of the Author" lays out Barthes' initial post-structural stand on the Author, reading, and the text. The essay circles around a sentence taken from Balzac's "Sarrasine," which reads: "She was Woman, with her sudden fears, her inexplicable whims, her instinctive fears, her meaningless bravado, her defiance, and her delicious delicacy of feeling." ("DA," RL 49/61) An individual known as Balzac may have written down these words, but who or what is truly speaking through that sentence? Is it, Barthes reflects, a single man, "universal wisdom," or Romantic psychology? The conventional response is, of course, to shake off this sophist's doubt and affirm the sovereignty of the author. But Barthes, like Foucault and others, asserts that every utterance is full of other utterances. They view the Author--broadly, the idea of a privileged and unified single voice--as a recent (i.e. post-medieval) ideological institution produced by a convergence of philosophies which, by supporting the idea of the "prestige of the individual," helped to nurture the rise of capitalism. ("DA," RL 49-50/61-62) In return, capitalism reinforces the idea of the centrality of the individual within cultural systems, so that the author has come to dominate the process of writing. As Barthes complains:

the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions...[the] explanation of the work is still sought in the person of
But before capitalist cosmology, the author was—in Foucault's celebrated phrase—an anonymous authorial function. In pre-industrial and pre-capital societies, Barthes writes, writing was not a personal affect-laden utterance, but a communal and impersonal utterance that was performed by a mediating shaman or reciter whose interpretation of the already-known text was the focus of an audience's admiration and attention. Falling back upon the genealogy of resistance outlined in *WDZ*, Barthes suggests that the current of contemporary literary resistance to the empire of the Author is, in fact, not at all novel, but a stance akin to the older model of authorial anonymity. For Barthes this wave of modern resistance begins with Mallarmé, who constantly cast the category of the Author into doubt, stressing the "verbal condition of literature" and the purely linguistic and contingent nature of his writing activity. These become tenets of the Barthesian Imaginary:

...for Mallarmé, as for us, it is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a preliminary impersonality...that point where not 'I' but only language functions, 'performs': Mallarmé's whole writing consists in suppressing the author in favour of writing (and thereby restoring, as we shall see, the reader's place).

("DA," RL 50/62)

In a curious but telling interruption of the logical sequence of his argument, Barthes presents the second figure in his potted history of resistance: Proust, who has "given modern
writing its epic" in the massive novel cycle À la recherche du temps perdu. By a "radical reversal," Barthes claims, Proust did not put his life into his novel. Instead, in aesthetic fashion, the author and history implode into a pre-existing imaginative text.

...he [Proust] made his life itself a work of which his own book was the model...so that it is quite clear to us that it is not Charlus who imitates Montesquiou, but Montesquiou, in his anecdotal, historical reality, who is only a secondary, derived fragment of Charlus.
("DA," RL 51/63)
After Proust, Surrealist experiments with irrational processual forms of discourse such as automatic writing, as well as innovative collaborative forms of writing such as the cadavre exquis, flouted traditional literary codes, disappointing the bourgeois expectation of univocality and meaning, thus helping to "desacralize the image of the Author."
("DA," RL 51/63) Lastly, Barthes writes, outside of literature itself (though such a distinction was, he noted, becoming dated) linguistics delivers the coup de grâce to the category of the Author by demonstrating the double vacuity of the utterance and of the personal pronoun.

...linguistics...show[s] that the speech-act in its entirety is an 'empty' process, which functions perfectly without its being necessary to 'fill' it with the person of the interlocutors: linguistically, the author is nothing but the one who writes, just as I is nothing but the one who says I: language knows a 'subject,' not a 'person,'...this subject, empty outside of the very speech-act which defines it...
("DA," RL 51/63-64)
The rest of the essay explores the consequences of this analytic "destruction" of the Author. Although the title of the essay dramatically proclaims the demise of the authorial subject, in the last half of the text Barthes undercuts his own initial claim, advancing instead the Brechtian notion of a distancing of that figure.5

The removal of the Author (with Brecht, we might speak here of a veritable distancing, the Author diminishing like a figure at the far end of the literary stage)...transforms the modern text. ("DA," RL 51-52/64)

To assign an Author to a text, Barthes asserts, is to limit the play of that work, "to impose a brake upon it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close writing." ("DA," RL 53/65) This closure of the work allows certain forms of criticism to busily discover within and beyond its texts of pleasure the Author and its corollary notions—"society, history, the psyche, freedom." ("DA," RL 53/65-66) But once the Author is distanced from the text, no longer a stabilizing source of meaning, the rabbinical Critic is likewise dispossessed. "[T]he claim to 'decipher' a text" Barthes concludes, logically enough, "becomes entirely futile." ("DA," RL 53/65) The source of writing becomes not an individual's engagement with the world, but language itself: and meaning is dismissed as a bourgeois desire, of less interest than the desire to play.

Having withdrawn his assent from an authorially-centred model of culture, it rhetorically collapses in Barthes' text, bringing down with it the inherited parameters and telos of
bourgeois culture. Writing is no longer the site of individual affirmation and expression, but the very locus of its loss. In this modernity, the older sense of cultural time and its steady flow shifts. Barthes begins to gloss the ontological implosions and inversions implicit in his reading of Proust. Time, within Barthes' construction of modernity, although freighted with codes and intertexts, bends back upon itself into a perpetual synchronicity created through a suppression or forgetting of what has gone before. "The Author," Barthes writes, "when we believe in him, is always conceived of as the past of his own book...he lives before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it..."

("DA," RL 52/64) No longer countersigning the idea of an Author, Barthesian modernity posits instead the post-structural scriptor who is perpetually "born at the same time as his text." This scriptor "is not furnished with a being which precedes or exceeds his writing, he is not the subject of which his book would be the predicate." ("DA," RL 53/66) In this modernity, the reader, as a supplementary scriptor, literally creates both the "author" and the "text" every moment that she reads--that is, performs--it. Barthes holds: "there is no time other than that of the speech-act, and every text is written eternally here and now." ("DA," RL 53/65)

Writing, in Barthes' ideology of perpetual performance, is an activity antithetical to personal expression and affirmation. The scriptor, unlike the Author, "no longer contains passions, moods, sentiments, impressions" but is an "immense dictionary." ("DA," RL 53/65) To write, or to read, is
to suicide oneself into an impersonal, drifting, intransitive realm of signs. Once an individual begins to work with language in such a reflexive manner, no longer demanding that it extend itself to referents or that it "act directly upon reality," a "gap" appears between word and world, between human beings and language; "the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins." ("DA," RL 49/61) "Writing," Barthes writes:

...is the destruction of every voice, every origin. Writing is that neuter, that composite, obliquity into which our subject flees, the black-and-white where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.

("DA," RL 53/65)

The scriptor is a disembodied actant, a hand "detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription." ("DA," RL 52/64) This gesture is itself derivative: it "traces a field without origin--or at least with no origin but language itself, i.e. the very thing which ceaselessly calls any origin into question." ("DA," RL 52/64-65) Like Bouvard and Pécuchet, Flaubert's "sublime and comical" copyists whose "profound absurdity precisely designates the truth of writing," the writer is fatally belated, unable to impress an originality upon prior discourse (as in the more optimistic Bakhtinian model), doomed to the imitation of anterior gestures, none of which are, ironically, themselves original or--and this word is, in Barthes' view, synonymous--integral. ("DA," RL 52-53/64-65)

The Barthesian Text, from this time forward, is the antithesis of the classical hermeneutic work.6 It is not framed
as an utterance releasing a "single 'theological' meaning" as encoded by an author, but is imagined as a massively overdetermined and decentred post-Jehovah field of Babel. The text is now a "fabric of quotations" drawn from an unthinkable number of cultural sources, a public and multi-dimensional space in which several discourses and codes jostle, marry or challenge one another without resolution. Writing becomes the polyglot art of arranging ruins in perpetual motion. Bricolage, or unrestrained dispositio, is one of the few creative avenues remaining to the writer. According to Barthes, the writer can now only "mingle" [mêler] writings," and provisionally contest some discourses by means of other prior utterances.

Having distanced the centripetal originary myth of the Author, the hyphos of culture becomes perceptible; and becomes, in fact, the primary force and focus of the macro-Text of post-structural culture. In this multiple writing that is both the individual text and its context, meaning (semiotic closure) is frustrated. Traces and signs can be "disentangled" from one another, but nothing ever definitively "deciphered." ("DA," RL 53/66) The structures of a text can be followed in "all [their] reprises, all [their] stages, but there is no end to it, no bottom." ("DA," RL 54/66) Writing is now not only perceived as a counter-communication, but also as a negative theology elevating process and evasion:

...writing constantly posits meaning, but always in order to evaporate it: writing seeks a systemic exemption of meaning. Thereby, literature (it would be better, from now on, to say writing), by refusing
to assign to the text (and to the world-as-text) a 'secret,' i.e. an ultimate meaning, liberates an activity we may call counter-theological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to halt meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law.

("DA," RL 50/63)

The centrifugal push of the text, its "multiplicity" and overwhelming intertextuality, is momentarily halted and gathered together: not in the figure of the Author, but in the act of reading, in the cultural function that is the reader. Barthes' isolated competent reader is, at this point, very like Riffaterre's virtual super-reader. 7

[T]he reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any of them being lost, all the citations out of which a writing is made; the unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination, but this destination can no longer be personal...

("DA," RL 53/63)

In Barthes, as in other theorists associated with reader-response theories, a suppressed category of classical culture—the reader—erupts into cultural consciousness. Through a polemical inversion, the scriptor/reader is now seen by Barthes as the only viable future of writing. Rather than opting for a more modest and gentle proposal—the birth of the text—Barthes ends "The Death of the Author" on a note of almost classical bloodlust: "we know that in order to restore writing to its future, we must reverse the myth: the birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the Author." ("DA," RL 55/67) That mythic inversion, which births the scriptor, the reader, the text, and the intertext, delivers Barthesian post-
 structuralism.

S/Z & ES: reading and the intertext

To interpret a text is not to give it a ...meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it. Let us first posit the image of a triumphant plural, unimpoverished by any constraint of representation (of imitation).

(S/Z 5/11-12)

In 1970 Barthes published two works. One, S/Z, was almost immediately celebrated as a major theoretical statement breaking with Structuralism; the other, ES, issued in Geneva by a smaller publishing house specializing in art books, was rather overshadowed (it was first translated into English in 1982). Both books forecast the course of Barthesian aesthetics, providing two complementary versions of post-structural aestheticization, two perspectival textual economies, two ways of reading. S/Z, in its exuberant and irreverent reading of Balzac's "Sarrasine," is the first major document from Barthes' phase of "extravagant" semiosis, which climaxes in the theoretical hedonism of PT, then moves into the quieter and complex intertextualities of FLD and RB. The private reverie, the cooler attention to gestures, emptied signs, and re-imagined materiality found in ES foreshadows the later essays on visual art and music, as well as the strategic absences of Barthes' late books.

Although Barthes is, as I will argue, disturbing Balzac's delicate mimetic lace to effect aestheticizing operations upon "Sarrasine" in S/Z, it is in ES that Barthes first appears as a Western aesthete of a kind recognizable from the prose of
Gautier, Baudelaire, and Huysmans. The strategy common to both texts is what critics like Megill and Fredric Jameson, following Barthes, identify as the textualization of reality. If *S/Z* is the theoretical baseline of Barthesian post-structural theorizing, a compendium of heuristic concepts and practices of reading texts and the phenomenal world so as to render them as synchronic, semelfactive systems, as "play-texts," *ES* is an imaginative—and surprisingly different—application of Barthes' practice of the reading the "world-as-text."  

Hyper-textualizing the world is, as Allan Megill suggests, the fundamental move of aestheticizing discourse in the twentieth century: and it is certainly the critical move in Barthes' post-structural writing. But there are other important supporting and correlative moves in Barthes' theorizing during this period, many of which are clearly derived from earlier aestheticizing discourses. The most crucial are those to which I have alluded in the preceding chapter: the privileging of writing as reflexive, socially indifferent process, the utopian hypothesis of the world as a realm of malleable signs, the voiding of the human subject and of the sign (what I refer to as the process of deauthorization), and the emancipation of the repressed reader. Having thus suspended the old imperatives of semantic and contextual stability, Barthesian post-structuralism lends the reader carte blanche. It allows him to overwhelm, interrupt, play with and/or dismember the text at his leisure,
disregarding the restrictions of any interpretative methodology or community, as well as the pressures of history or intentionality. These postulates reinforce the uncrowning of the author and create the preconditions for the critical thesis of intertextuality, the concept blurring reader, writer and text, a concept Barthes is attracted to and yet finally, when he is on the verge of becoming a cultural intertext himself, resists.

By the end of 1970 intertextuality had emerged as a major conceptual fiction (or epistemological shift) in the work of Barthes and other French intellectuals. With such persuasive statements as S/Z and "From Work to Text" Barthes popularized his own exuberant take on Julia Kristeva's notion of the intertextual. Yet within a few years of publishing these celebratory manifestos of post-structural textuality, unresolved tensions begin to appear in his work around that very concept. For the rest of the decade Barthes returns to the intertextual, making what I see as a series of re-appraisals of his initial understanding. In later years the analytic enthusiasm of S/Z modulates and at times recedes, giving way to tentative speculations on unusable (what Barthes will refer to as "perverted") forms of reading and writing, and to the ironic intertextualities of RB and FLD. The aestheticizing turn in his thinking, his inclination towards irony and mediation, intensifies. He develops the critical terms and strategies of
oscillation, abjuration, the palinode, *jouissance*, the body, the grain of the voice, the graph, graphic texture, the ductus, the gaze, the amateur, utopia, atopic texts, the obtuse meaning (refigured as the punctum in CL), and so on. Retreating from his initial fascination with public systems of culture, he comes to cherish the unrepeatable (the non-iterable, in Derridean terms), the non-functional, the supplemental, the sensual, the private, the neuter, and the indeterminate. All that, in short, actively or passively resists being caught up in the citational nets of institutional culture.

There is, in Barthes, a slowly developing tension between textualization and his particular body (the strife between social expectations and the aesthete's desires being a common theme in nineteenth-century aesthetic discourse) that leads me to propose, *grosso modo*, two periods of intertextual theorizing in his work. Intertextuality obviously turns upon the interdependent terms of system and difference. *S/Z* is the primary document from his initial, more systems-oriented phase; *PT* marks his entry into a still pleasurable but agonistic later period in which his critical reflections on textuality and difference continue, but in hybrid ironic and sensualized forms which exploit the uncertainties of the literary register and resist critical summation. Texts from both phases need to be read together in order to understand his movements around this issue, and how Barthes the post-structural critic develops into the aesthetic critic who resists the commercial and eventually sinister *hyphos* of culture. In this chapter I will begin with
Barthes' initial phase—the phase whose version of post-structural (inter)textuality is still most widely in circulation (a time that foregrounds the textual economy that I shall refer to as the "Parisian economy").

The Barthesian version of intertextuality put forward in *S/Z* derives from at least four prior "texts." The first three are fairly obvious: the decentred systems theory of French Structuralism, and then the wilder, pluralistic account of interacting systems found in the work of Kristeva, who is indebted to Bakhtinian dialogism. Bakhtin in turn, is, with the others, indebted to the early nineteenth-century hermeneutics of Schleiermacher, who conceived of culture as a self-perpetuating system of texts working in terms of source and influence. Post-structural textuality can be read as a radicalized version of hermeneutics in which the notion of cultural system survives, but one in which the controlling, stabilizing, and creative category of the individual author has been erased, barely surviving as an *assembleur*, as an authorial function (in Foucauldian terms), as a de-historicized trace. No longer does the writer "speak" to another through language: language writes (to) itself through the making of texts, perpetuating itself via the intermediary of the scriptor. Thus the locus of creativity shifts to the realm of the sign, and to a ludic reading consciousness.

To briefly reiterate the salient points of Kristeva's argument on intertextuality, which return in Barthes' discourse on textuality: the text—a generic semiotic term—is figured in
systemic, spatial and belated terms. It is seen as a "mosaic of quotations," a bricolage of previous texts created by the simultaneous absorption and transformation of prior texts in a complex movement of affirmation and negation. The Kristevian textual space is polyphonic and potentially infinite, bounded only by the reader's ability to identify shards of prior utterances. Intertextuality, as she defines it, is the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another sign system, "accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position."\(^{13}\) There are no strong discrete human agents directing this process in Kristeva's theory: intertextuality explicitly replaces the old hermeneutic notion of intersubjectivity, stimulating the new theories of reading, writing, and the text advanced in *S/Z.*

There are few clear conceptual edges to the post-structural Barthesian categories of the work and the text. In the fifth thesis of "From Work to Text" Barthes actually refers to them as *metaphors* which point to disparate organic and cybernetic models of writing:

> The metaphor of the Text is...detached from the metaphor of the work; the latter refers to the image of an *organism* which grows by vital expansion, by 'development'...the metaphor of the Text is that of the *network*; if the Text expands, it is by the effect of a combinative operation, of a systematics...
> 
> ("WT," RL 61/74)

Nevertheless, to recapitulate the outlines of the ideal Barthesian text advanced in *S/Z*: the *text* is not to be equated with the *work*. The work is, alternately, either the classical
conception of a literary text—a classicism whose demand for representation suppresses the polysemy of a writing and impoverishes its language, turning it into a *readerly* text, that is, into a cultural product intended to be passively consumed by a reader—or the physical object we literally hold in our hands and read. Barthes refers to contemporary innovative writings that reject inherited notions of the coherence of literary work, such as those by Sollers, as texts. These texts—and what Barthes sometimes refers to as the *writerly* or plural text—are distinguished by their openness and, even more, by their chronic potentiality. Texts and textuality are, Barthes suggests, ephemeral things that are held and enacted in the realm of language. ("WT," RL 57/70-71)

Like the structural simulacrum, the text (or textuality) is an unappropriated instance of linguistic potential which exceeds both the signs and every act of reading that reconstellates it. ("WT," RL 58/71) The text is a perspectival "galaxy of signifiers," a "methodological field" or quasi-musical "score" which is provisionally constellated (produced) only in the moment-by-moment act of reading which catches up the sign in a plurality of larger discursive systems. ("WT," RL 57-58/71) The ideal text is virtual, limitless, freed from authorial intention and critical categories: it does not, as Barthes observes, stop at the end of a library shelf or a back cover. ("WT," RL 58/71) The text is "radically symbolic," and, like language, is "structured but decentred, without closure": it gravitates around the sign and playfully resists meaning by
indefinitely deferring the signified through a "serial movement of dislocations, overlappings and variations." ("WT," RL 59/72) Meaning is further frustrated by the text's inclination to dissolve and incorporate the meta-languages which attempt to describe it. ("WT," RL 64/77) Where the work has an apparently consistent structure and telos, the text, as a decentred network or field, theoretically has no privileged point of entry, no beginning, and can be entered or abandoned at multiple points. (S/Z 5/11) The irreversibility of the classical work, which is seen as insisting upon an organic literary model having clear beginnings, middles, and ends, is challenged by the wandering cybernetic "reversibility" of texts. The text, being a stereographic "social space" in which a number of languages circulate, having neither consistent structure nor a clearly defined territory, cannot be interpreted so much as traversed, and, as it were, perpetually produced and disseminated by each reading.

The Barthesian text confronts the quasi-capitalist ideology of classical culture. The work is, Barthes writes, caught up in the nets and values of tradition, what he refers to, ironically, as the "process of filiation" which controls interpretation and helps cultural capital accrue to the great Fathers. Being authored, the work is controlled by a prior intention—metonymically, the Father's signature—that must be respected and countersigned by the reader. The text, in contrast, is unauthored, and theoretically exists outside of culture's Oedipal economy. Barthes' reader thus has no need
(and no desire) to respect the integrity of the text, the Father/Author's word or any intention prior to his own. Rather than heightening the distance between the grand act of writing and the dependent, largely passive act of reception, as in the classical ideology of the work, Barthes' construction of the text collapses writing into reading. The reader (the scriptor) does not kowtow to the work or generate a reading of it which can be deposited to the reputation of the author. He plays with the unreadable score, actively performing the text as he pleases. ("WT," RL 62-63/75-76) His role, cultural rights and inheritance usurped, the author can return to the text only as a "guest" of the reader, as one character among others:

if he [the author] is a novelist, he inscribes himself there [in the text] as one of his characters, drawn as a figure in the carpet; his inscription is no longer privileged, paternal, alethic, but ludic: he becomes, one can say, a paper author; his life is no longer the origin of his fables, but a fable concurrent with his life [sic (oeuvre)]...

("WT," RL 62-63/74-75)

Barthes glosses this notion of the text and of textuality repeatedly, admitting its intermittent and conjectural, almost ghostly status.

...the writerly text is not a thing, would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore....the writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language... can be superimposed; the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) ...is stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages.
However opposed the categories of the work and the
idealized hypothesis of the text may appear in Barthes, the text
is in some respects intimately related to the work. Although the
text may exist as an independent entity, it—or textuality--
often arises within the interstices of the work. "It would be
futile," he writes in "From Work to Text," "to attempt to
literally separate works from texts, and to contend that "the
work is classical, the text avant-garde," since "there can be
"Text" in a very old work, and many products of contemporary
literature are not texts at all." ("WT," RL 57/70) A reader
attuned to potential textuality can release the suppressed
wildness of the work's language.

The Text (if only by its frequent
'unreadability') decants the work...
from its consumption and recuperates
it as play, task, production, practice.
("WT," RL 62/75)

Ambiguity and disagreement as to the strongest locus of
production divides work from text. A "work" is the ambiguity of
language successfully forced into a confined room and the myth
of authorial originality; the "text" is the demolition of that
room, the work opening into the nebulous galaxy of cultural
systems. The text cultivates relative originality, what one
might refer to as systemic différence, rather than the hubris of
absolute originality. As Barthes remarks, the text can be Text
only in its systemic difference. (S/Z 3/6, "WT," RL 60/73)14 The
text is the explosion of structure in favour of systématiques,
the delight in the vagaries of polysemy connotation and
cybernetic noise (the "delicious and precious nourishment" that literature affords), the preoccupation with differance—"a difference which does not stop and which is articulated upon the infinity of texts, languages, of systems." (S/Z 3/5)

The work, then, moves toward signifieds, toward culture and meaning. The text, however, resists any unity of meaning: it is irreducibly plural and fragmentary; its reading cannot be cumulative (as with the work) but only semelfactive. ("WT," RL 59-60/73) The work may appear to present a coherent structure, but the text has, at best, only moments of structuration, so that the work may be easily consumed as a cultural commodity, while the text resists consumption. In theory, it offers only the opportunity for play. The work, then, is anchored in the world, and moves back toward it as it is read: the text, as it is performed, seeks to move into an immanent textual realm free of the pressures of history, a strong individual subjectivity, or human need.

S/Z is acclaimed for its exposition of post-structural textuality, but, like the theory of the Text, intertextuality remains a soft and even self-subverting hypothesis in Barthes. The last lexia of Barthes' spectacular reading of Balzac's short story is, not incidentally, declared to be "unclassifiable" according to the five-code schema that Barthes has just spent the last two hundred pages elaborating. The sabotaging of metalanguages and their categories, or at least their disruption, is, as indicated, part of the program of Barthesian post-structural textuality. ("WT," RL 64/77)
multivalent text (the ideal post-structural text, utterly
decentred and reversible) is, within the economy of hermeneutic
culture, fundamentally "duplicitous," since it attempts to
destroy the traces of cultural origin and authorial "ownership"
persisting in itself or in the other works upon which it draws.
(S/Z 44/51) The multivalent text can only effect that end by,
Barthes writes, subverting the opposition between true and
false, by failing to attribute quotations (even when
discrediting them), and by flouting all respect for "origin,
paternity, propriety," generating a textual noise--a
"cacography"--which disrupts the semblance of an authorial
voice that might lend a text the semblance of an organic unity.
(S/Z 44-45/51-52) This multivalent text must "coldly" and, if
necessary, "fraudulently" abolish the textual signs (the
"quotation marks") that enclose a discrete utterance and create
the illusion of an utterance being some author's private
property. Post-structural textual multivalence is intended as
an aggressive contestation of literary ownership and authority
as it has been understood within the academy.

In both Kristeva and Barthes intertextuality is an attempt
to describe the transformation and deliberate--or inadvertent-
persistence of prior discourses within new utterances. In S/Z
Barthes identifies five codes (the Hermeneutic, Proairetic,
Symbolic, Cultural, and Semic codes) which, woven together in
endless combinations, constitute every (literary) text. These
codes and intertexts are seen in terms which range from the
banal (the doxic) to the erotic and flirtatious: although
frequently experienced as coercive or authoritarian, they tend to be perceived by Barthes as half-familiar, half-exotic. Every text, being the intertext (that is, the antecedent) of another text, belongs to the endless chain of the intertextual. This intertextual relay or pool must not be equated with the now unworkable nineteenth century hermeneutic myth of stable textual sources. Intertexts are not in themselves origins, but only vast, derivative, distorted fields of signs. To search for sources and influences in these spaces would be to fall back into the myth of filiation. Critically, Barthes insists upon the familiarity of these echoes or traces for his hypothetical reader. The quotations from which a text is made are, he writes, "anonymous, irrecoverable and yet already read: they are quotations without quotation marks." ("WT," RL 60/73) These texts create a "circular memory," a shared cultural space of half-remembrance within which an individual and the society within which she moves thinks and creates. (PT 45/58).

Together, these anonymous and faded codes and quotations constitute a kind of uninterrogated environment. They have been naturalized: that is, they have become part of an allegedly general cultural macrotext that constitutes the background against which individual texts become legible.

Barthes' post-structural reader moves through these quasi-environmental semiotic zones known as texts in ways diametrically opposed to traditional hermeneutic styles of reading. Practicing the vagaries of an unpredictable connotative and "topographical" style of reading that, as
William Ray describes it, ironically inverts the usual movement of interpretation, this reader subverts the traditional critical goals of meaning and structural synthesis. If even the structural reader sought a hidden order within a text, the post-structural reader locates and heightens the discontinuities within a text, spinning and unravelling the "fabric of codes knotted around each textual element" into an uncertain and perpetual movement as he attends, in an unconcluding present, to his structurations of the text. (LM 176) "The more plural a text, the less it is written before I read it" Barthes asserts. (S/Z 10/16) Hence post-structural reading is not a "parasitical act," but a form of creative "work". (LM 176) This work may be ludic but it is also deliberately Sisyphean. To read now is now not so much to remember--that is, to identify intertexts and painstakingly track semiotic relations and build up meanings--as to forget.

...reading does not consist in stopping the chain of systems, in establishing a truth, in establishing a truth, a legality of the text, and consequently in leading its reader into 'errors'...I [the post-structural reader] pass, I intersect, I articulate, I release, I do not count. (S/Z 11/18)

Although this hypothetical reader may, as Barthes does in S/Z, draw in fragments of several kinds of critical discourses, she adopts a globally Nietzschean mode of interpretation that appreciates the passing strangeness and plurality of signs without seeking any putative referents. (S/Z 5/11)
Acknowledging referents would imply not only recognizing an extra-textual dimension to the hypothesis of world-as-text, but also press Barthes to furnish his ideal reader with a reasonably stable and consistent cultural memory if he were not to be labelled dysfunctional, narcissistic, or literally psychotic. There is a curious tension between memory and forgetting in the version of reading advanced in *S/Z* and other essays between the years 1968 and 1971. Barthes, echoing Mallarmé's cultural fatigue, asserts in effect that "everything" is always already read. He therefore claims for his way of reading a "freedom" characteristic of later phases of culture, one which implies a strong and active cultural memory: the freedom of reading a text as though it had already been read by the reader: a manner of reading which assumes that the reader's hermeneutic and narrative impulses have long been exhausted. (*S/Z* 15-16/22-23) This is the post-structural strategy of framing reading as re-reading (and is, incidentally, a tenet of the Parisian textual economy). Yet, curiously, lack of sustained memory is, in this counter-ideology of reading, a positive virtue, an act of semantic failure which enables the post-structural lector to continue reading moment to moment, indefinitely.

Forgetting meanings is not...an unfortunate defect in performance; it is an affirmative value, a way of asserting the irresponsibility of the text, the pluralism of systems (if I closed their list, I would inevitably consitute a singular, theological meaning): it is precisely because I forget that I read. (*S/Z* 11/18)
These early Barthesian notions of reading, the text, and intertextuality are predicated upon two prior theoretical constructions. The first is a theoretically gutted (i.e. textualized, decentred) subject. Barthes' reader, like his scriptor, are both, as he describes it, "fairly empty" subjects. ("WT," RL 60/73) The question is, emptied of what? The description found in "The Death of the Author" makes it clear. The reader is "a man without history, without biography, without psychology." ("DA," RL 54/67) He is a cybernetic actant, a discursive function that momentarily gathers into one site thousands of disparate traces, and then releases (forgets) them, so that ideally little or no trace survives of his reading—either physically, communally, or even personally.16 ("DA," RL 54/67) This reading subject, no longer "dense, emphatic centred, sacred," has been stripped not only of gender but of most of the attributes of humanistic subjects. (ES 85/63) This largely empty and "idle" (desoeuvré) post-structural reader is a textual operator: his task is not to interpret but to "shift systems," to identify and then "release" codes and texts, to practice a selective amnesia which allows him to frustrate any movement toward meaning. He is competent, functional, at ease with the system, its "accomplice," as Barthes writes. He manifests, at this juncture, no sense of cultural coercion or dissonance, no recognition of alternate or marginal subcultures. No painful absences disturb his play with the text. This subject is literally a walking bundle of citations and semes woven from the
surrounding discursive environment. He mirrors the text: reading becomes the complex identification and interfacing of common codes and texts, some remembered, others forgotten but still active.

...I is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text....This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or more exactly, already lost (whose origin is lost). Objectivity and subjectivity are of course forces which can take over the text, but they are forces which have no affinity with it. Subjectivity is a plenary image, with which I may be thought to encumber the text, but whose deceptive plenitude is merely the wake of all the codes which constitute me, so that my subjectivity has ultimately the generality of stereotypes.

(S/Z 10/16-17)

The human intertext and the texts he reads are made from the same quasi-genetic pool of codes. The flesh has been made sign: and emotion, like human consciousness, is rendered textual and citational. Recalling the cynical La Rochefoucauld, Barthes opines in S/Z:

[w]ithout the--always anterior--Book and Code, no desire, no jealousy...itself a lost origin, writing becomes the origin of emotion.

(S/Z 73-74/80)

The subject here is not the recalcitrant, introverted hedonist of Barthes' later works. Well-socialized, complicit, attuned to the symbolic order, she seems almost nothing but surfaces and impersonal forms of memory. Turned toward the social space that is the text, motivated only by the pleasures of textuality, this reading subject is primarily a synchronic
public entity, and a theoretical function. Made up of public intertexts, she moves in a universe of codes, of indiscrete and blurred phenomena held precariously together by the fiction of pantextuality. And this brings forward the second theoretical assumption upon which Barthesian intertextuality depends.

Alan Megill, in PE, argues that aestheticism informs the work of Foucault and Derrida and their predecessors (Heidegger and Nietzsche). By "aestheticism" Megill is referring, as I have suggested in a previous chapter, to the chronic textualization of extra-textual phenomena, that is, to a tendency to see discourse as constituting the primary realm of human experience. (PE 2-4) This idealizing position is, as the reading of WDZ showed, already present in Barthes' emulation of the Mallarmean position in the 1950s. Barthes' aestheticizing polemic, which argues that signs and texts utterly precede individual experience, only intensifies in his early post-structural years. In S/Z Barthes, echoing Derrida, affirms that nothing exists outside of the text, and that, despite realism's claims to the contrary, nothing exists behind the text. (S/Z 6/12) Recycling the trope of world as semiosphere, he compares the infinite Text to the sky, signs being figured as migrating birds: "[t]he text, in its mass, is comparable to a sky, at once flat and smooth, deep, without edges and without landmarks." (S/Z 14/20) The commentator is, again, likened to a soothsayer, one who again raises his staff toward the azur of the text-sky to carve out an empty locus, an arbitrary space (the "zone of reading") in which to consider, like the falling
of yarrowstalks, the flight of these signs. (S/Z 14/20) In PT pastoral and mantic tropes fade into the dominating trope of network. There Barthes writes of experience as being inevitably mediated by a web of external and introjected texts. These introjected texts become the circular public "memories" which structure human experience:

Proust is not an 'authority,' he is not what I actively recall, but is simply a circular memory. And that is what the intertext is: the impossibility of living outside of the infinite text—whether this text be Proust, or the newspaper, or the television screen: the book creates meaning [le sens], meaning creates existence. (PT 36/59)

This points to one of the aestheticizing aims of Barthes in S/Z: to rewrite the work as text, wrenching "Sarrasine" away from its putative origin (the author Balzac) and its naive representational ground by making visible the semiotic codes and intertexts which constitute the intertext. Barthes accomplishes this by literally re-writing the text, surrounding and overwhelming Balzac's text with a massive close reading that sunders the illusions of a seamless fictional world and a single authorial voice. Barthes' post-structural technique of analytic disruption conflates, at least for the reader of S/Z, the two phases involved in the making of a structural simulacrum. The "breaking" or "starring" of the text is akin to the first phase of structural analysis of a text: the stage of découpage. (S/Z 13-14/20-22) This "starring" of the work separates, "in the manner of a minor [ontological and epistemological] earthquake," the work's "blocks of
signification" that were imperceptibly soldered together by the flowing discourse of narration and the "'naturalness' of ordinary language." (S/Z 13/20) Barthes' post-structural analysis, based upon the affirmation of the artificality and hidden plurality of all texts, aggressively "manhandles" (malmener) the work, interrupting its flow and its "natural" syntactic, rhetorical and anecdotal divisions, disturbing the illusory transparency that the story may have once had. (S/Z 14-15/21-22)

The second phase of structural analysis—agencement—occurs simultaneously—if almost ironically—in S/Z. There the text's order is disordered, then tentatively and loosely reconstellated—reordered—within the larger network of cultural intertexts and codes. Barthes' violation of the apparent plenum of the work has several pragmatic and ideological functions. It is, of course, a flat rejection the classical ideology and its privileging of the discrete primary text. By dramatically rupturing the conventional connections between sign and referent, work and author, and exposing the citationality of texts, Barthes' reading displaces the origin of Balzac's short story, indeed of all texts, to the immanent realm of textuality. Lastly, however denied, one wonders whether Oedipal tensions—at least in the sense of a resistance to entrenched powers—fund Barthes' post-structural drive to valorize re-reading and re-writing. By literally overwhelming and dissolving the boundaries of Balzac's work in the universal solvent of language, Barthes levels the old hierarchies placing
the author above the reader in importance. He shifts attention to the ultimately modern moment—the eternal present of poststructural modes of reading and commentary—thereby making space for further writing; that is, for the *scriptible*.\(^\text{17}\)

As Nietzsche pointed out, all intellectual acts are, in a sense, aestheticizing operations in that they abstract and actively reconstruct the object(s) lying passively under the intellectual gaze in order to generate a theory of some kind.\(^\text{18}\) *S/Z* is a discourse which lays bare the latent aestheticism of intellectual work: Barthes' text is an aestheticizing act (in the Nietzschean sense) which overtly produces a new object designed to overcome its primary text. This new thing is not, strictly speaking, a structural simulacrum—since it does not posit deep or macro textual structures—but a different kind of simulacrum, a post-structural simulacrum. This unfinished and unstable simulacrum posits not a textual system but a systematic (*systématique*). The Barthesian systematic attends not to a text's order, but to its disorder. Refusing the position of authority assumed by structural analyses, Barthes' reconstruction of "Sarrasine" has a different agenda; one that is clearer when read against Baudrillard's study of simulacra and hyperreality in *Simulacres et simulation*.\(^\text{19}\)

Baudrillard's study opens with a discussion of one of Borges' fables. The mapmakers of an Emperor were ordered to make a perfect map of the Empire. These cartographers, frightened of their master, made a map so detailed and true to the scale and topography of the realm that it ended up covering
the whole empire itself—covering it exactly, mind you (the
fable ends with an evocative, Shelleyan image of the map
decaying slowly back into the desert sand).

Borgès' fable conducts, in Baudrillard's an ironic
reductio ad absurdum of the ideology of realism. This ideal
realism, dealing in the desire for an exact correspondence
between thing and copy, is, even in its less extreme
expressions, Baudrillard writes, a nostalgic impossibility.
Representation can no longer be framed in terms of the map, the
double, the mirror, the concept, territory, or referent.
Representation is now, in Baudrillard's account, a culturally
unworkable term which has been superseded by a new activity, one
that Baudrillard refers to as "simulation." (SS 10) Western
cultural forms of simulation now deal not in reflecting a
reality, but in creating autonomous hyperrealities: that is, in
the "generation, by models, of a reality (un réel) which has
neither origin nor reality (réalité)." (SS 10) In this new
reality-less réel he baptises as "hyperreality" referents (or
even simply prior objects) are no longer the strong term. In
Baudrillard's analysis of contemporary simulacra, "the
territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive the
map." (SS 10) Now the map, as it were, precedes the territory: it
conjures up a putative "reality." In Baudrillard's revisioning
of Borgès' fable, the ruins of the territory would rot slowly on
the expanse of the map.

But, in the next paragraph, Baudrillard rejects his own
revisions to the fable, since it implies an imaginary co-
extensivity he no longer perceives in the contemporary simulacrum. Reality is no longer enveloped by a friendly or complementary zone of the imaginary (i.e. of the non-real, the fictional; Baudrillard's use of the term imaginary is not to be equated with the Lacanian use of the word). (SS 11) As in the Barthesian notion of the text, in the Baudrillardian reading of the simulacrum, reality has been collapsed into--or has been "liquidated" by--signs. (SS 11) In its strongest expression, the era of the simulacrum has destroyed the once "sovereign difference" separating the thing from its representation. (SS 10) Consequently, without the necessary distance between the real and an imaginary zone, there is, Baudrillard contends, no longer an imaginary realm in the usual sense: even the category of the fictional collapses into the hyperreal. (SS 181) The real can now be parodically and "artificially resurrected" in the bright sterility and flatness of the simulacra, but there has been a fatal, irreversible substitution of signs of the real (i.e. a réalite) for the real (le réel). Ontological difference--the difference between thing and graph that once constituted the charm of maps, portraits, and concepts--is overcome (although difference persists in other forms).

Western faith in representation has historically rested upon the wager that in its semiotic economies the sign always referred to, or could be exchanged against, some referent or "deep meaning." (SS 16) Possibly following the Althusserian take on representation and cultural economies, throughout SS the sign is also equated with the image (the image construed as
sign or hypersign). According to Baudrillard (who provides no historical points of reference to substantiate his claims) the image evolves through four distinct phases in Western history. The image/sign begins as the reflection of a deep reality; then it masks and denatures a deep reality; subsequently, it masks the absence of any deep reality; and finally, being without any relation to any reality (réel), the image becomes its own simulacrum. (SS 17) During the first phase the image/sign is seen as being "sacramental" and harmoniously co-extensive with its referent; in the second phase, it is figured as a distorting mark at odds with the referent; then, in the third phase, it is seen as a diversion: the image/sign ironically plays at being the faithful reflection of a referent which is suspected to be absent. In the fourth phase, the image/sign is no longer perceived as having co-extensivity with any external referent; it is now engaged not in the processes of representation but in those of reflexivity. It becomes, as it were, its own simulacrum (hence Baudrillard's image of the moebius strip).

In these third and fourth phases the Western image/sign attains the status of what Baudrillard generally identifies as the simulacrum (though images/hypersigns from all of four stages can correctly be designated as simulacra). The Baudrillardian simulacrum, like the Barthesian text, negates the hermeneutic hypotheses of depth, origin, identity, and the sign as bearer of meaning. (SS 16) Within this fourth, post-hermeneutic stage of Western culture, odd things happen to inherited notions of reality. Having destroyed the belief in
relations between signs and referents, and therefore in transcendance (i.e. a hors-texte, an outside to semiotic systems), this cultural construction of the real is, or at least appears to be, in Baudrillard's reading, entirely captured within semiotic systems of exchange. (SS 182-185) Like Barthes, writing from inside the dense and egocentric culture of the intellectual West, Baudrillard laments the Coca-colonization of the planet: "[th]e space of the earth is closed, saturated with codes, turned into a universal market of goods, values, signs, and models which crowd out the imaginary." (SS 182)

Awash in images and replications, this culture of the citation is one that (as in Benjamin's reading of the culture of mechanical reproduction) destroys the putative aura of the discrete and unrepeatable objects of the real. Within this zone the "real" and its corollaries, exhausted by excessive repetition, fragmentation, and gratuitous recontextualizations, turn into superseded notions, overcome by the noise of mass images and the "uninterrupted circuit [of images and signs] whose reference and circumference is nowhere." (SS 182) This fourth phase, which initiates the final agony of the real (that is, of "rational" and "strong referents") ushers in the era of hyperreality and the cultural reign of the simulacrum. (SS 70, 183)

In the zone of the hyperreal (in this fourth stage time seems to collapse into space) mimesis is, as Baudrillard's analysis has been signalling, rendered impossible.
Hyperreality is defined by Baudrillard as existing when a réalite absolutely coincides—or maps onto— itself: as a student of American culture, one of his favoured instances of this is the Disneyland theme park in California. (SS 76) Inside this fourth world the creative process no longer consists, Baudrillard writes, in starting with a real (un réel) and making from it an unreal world (un irréel), a fiction. Rather, creativity now consists in retro bricolage, in taking citations from models and simulations already in circulation and making from them patently self-conscious and decentred illusions of a "real" that flagrantly exposes its artifice, like the dark roots of a dyed blonde. At this moment the simulacrum turns back upon itself, and from the earlier stages of reflecting or invoking a collective real assumed to be independent of any act of representation, it now, in the fourth stage, "reinvents" the real as as a consummate and malleable fiction, in a practice Baudrillard terms "neofiguration". (SS 72)

Baudrillard stresses the circularity and solipsism of this post-real zone. Neither metaphysics, history, phantasms, nor science-fiction—in fact, traditional fictions of any kind—can endure in this atmosphere. Recalling Barthes' formulation of textuality, in this fourth phase the prior meanings of things and events now survive only in an "artificial effervescence of signs which succeed one another without logic, in a total equivalence." (SS 65) Consequently, the differential poles creating boundaries and ontological distinctions tend to...
implode into one another, destroying the necessary condition for dialectics, creating a world of citation and farcical repetition in which there are no truths, no points of stability by which to orient oneself. Ideological oppositions become parodic or senseless; time becomes uncertain, malleable, reversible; reality turns into a film that "gives off the sinister impression of being kitsch, retro and pornographic all at once." (SS 65-66) Reality, which needs to be reinvented because, Baudrillard asserts darkly, "it has disappeared from our lives," is not restored by acts of neofiguration, which ironically only point to the emptiness of its forms and its citations. (SS 183-184) The real metamorphoses into something which no one can quite believe is real: mediated, endlessly refracted and manufactured, manipulated by others, it subsists only as a hallucinatory thing haunting our images, a kitsch grab-bag of citations generated via models, semiotic matrices, and memory banks, a reconstituted and arranged thing: precise, transparent, yet without substance, derealized.

This "new universe" is not a parallel universe, a possible world, or the double of reality. The hyperreal universe of Baudrillard's commodity culture, is one in which images ideally coincide and refer to themselves. A universe which no mirror can reflect, since it is a matte realm having no centre of gravity, and no outside. (SS 185) Trapped inside this world of reflexive images and signs (Baudrillard is no fan of the simulacrum), there is neither past nor future. Paralysed by its amusing and yet cruel techniques, human beings, should they resist this new
order, experience vertigo and ontological as well as epistemological crises. Previous means of human orientation--time, space, identity, memory, imagination, specificity--are destroyed, and their ruins left to float in an uncertain and shallow space. (SS 76-77,184) Meaning, values, and history "hemorrhage" from this space, which levels hierarchies of discourse and "cools out" events. (SS 77)

Baudrillard studies many cultural phenomena, but Disneyland occupies a special place in his analysis of simulacra: it is singled out as a phenomenon which embodies the themes and the kinds of simulacra operating in this strange world culture spinning outward from its American epicentre. For the French theorist, Disneyland is, to begin with, like the Barthesian intertext, a site where a culture recycles its ruins, its déchets, a space devoted to restaging the "game of illusions and phantasms," past and future, that haunt its host society: themes such as the Frontier, the manically optimistic Future World, and so on. (SS 24-27) Like its late creator, Walt Disney, whose body is held in cryogenic suspension, awaiting resurrection, Disneyland is, Baudrillard asserts, a gigantic congealed and kitsch miniature that resurrects things whose substance has disappeared. (SS 17,25) As a superficial and retro "digest of the American way of life, a panegyric of American values," this sunny cartoon simulacrum is also, as a third-stage image or hypersign, a "machine of dissuasion" which functions not only to hide the "real" America, but--and here Baudrillard's argument takes a surprising twist--to affirm the
failing "reality" of a hyperreal America. Los Angeles, simulacra capital of the U.S.A., is surrounded by a number of these centrales imaginaires (Enchanted Village, Magic Mountain, Marine World, Disneyland) which, while affirming a dissuasive version of the societal real, simultaneously flaunt their artifice in order to shore up the public réel, to persuade Americans that the rest of what they live in is "real," although the omnipresence of the hyperreal has weakened, and, Baudrillard goes so far as to say, murdered reality (i.e. has destroyed the auras of "originals"). (SS 25-26, 161-162)

Baudrillard argues that most public events, whether hijackings, strikes, demonstrations, no longer possessing any inhering content or proper ends, have become hyperreal gestures, public quotations of previous texts caught up in a strange network in which events indefinitely cite and refract one another Power, in Baudrillard's reading, manipulates simulacra as dissuasive tools of social control (these simulacra being what Barthes identifies as doxic utterances), but it publicly sets itself against the corrosive relativity and emptiness of simulacra dominating a now "irreferential world." (SS 37-29) Power must vigorously defend itself by "reinjecting" the signs of the real and of the referential in order to persuade its subjects to endorse its legitimacy, and fend off the vertigo of non-sense produced by the hyperreal.

If Baudrillard is to be believed, the present commercial first-world culture, with its media machines and centrales imaginaires, is a kind of fulfillment of the aesthete's dream
of Nature overcome: in it the nineteenth-century discourse of perversion accelerates into an imploding and triumphant reflexivity, into an unconcluded polysemy which precipitates the diaspora of meanings.

There are, certainly, important differences between Baudrillard's reading of the simulacrum and Barthes' construction of the text. Barthes is both a theorist and an active practitioner of literary simulacra (the text being, as subsequent chapters will show, elaborated into a number of surprising kinds of shattered simulacra). Baudrillard, however, is a pessimistic cultural theorist whose work attempts to describe the purely negative effects of the rise of reflexive image systems within first-world (and specifically American) society. His examples are not literary but sociological and ethnographical: Disneyland (a "sentimental simulacrum"), Watergate, a TV miniseries on the Jewish Holocaust, the degraded institution of the American presidency (an "ideological simulacrum"), and the curious flatness of Hollywood period films (which do not evoke the past but instead present the past as a series of cool visual surfaces).(SS 77) He emphasizes the harshness and insensitivity of the reign of hyperreal images, writing that its "realities" are unbearable, "more cruel than Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty" since their noise and replications separate the cultural subject from any primary source (what Baudrillard, daring to be unfashionable, calls life), condemning him instead to the mode of the retro, to the phantasmal and parodic rehabilitation of lost
Barthes, however, is still in his early phase of post-structural theorizing, when loss and a rediscovery of the individual have not yet impinged upon his theories of the subject and of the referent. For Barthes, writing in the early 1970s, the hypothesis of human subjects and reality as a series of surfaces is preferable to hermeneutic notions of depth and exteriority. Textual surfaces are ludic sites; the act of deformative copying is an opportunity for pleasure, and both are vehicles of critical and ideological liberation. Both theorists present post-representation models of cultural discourse in which the creative forces are not discrete human subjects, but models, systems and fragments ("ruins" or "remains" in Baudrillard's terminology). In Barthes' reading, simulation is a desirable and liberating avant-garde practice in competition with a still tenacious ideology of the representational, while Baudrillard finds his differing conclusion—the fait accompli of the death of representation and the attrition of the Bejaminian aura—a highly sinister cultural development (as Linda Hutcheon remarks in The Politics of Postmodernism, in Baudrillard's cultural scenario "the simulacra gloats over the body of the deceased referent.") Baudrillard's murderous simulacra are readable, crassly commercial, and highly visible public texts designed for passive consumption as substitute réels and surrogate cultural memories that destroy history, authenticity, originality and difference. Barthes recognizes the nihilating potential of repetitive utterances (it is the
case he makes against Doxa). But, contrary to Baudrillard, Barthes endorses a positive nihilation, a salutary Nietzschean forgetting of the past and of referents which opens up cultural space for new texts and semiotic drift, a strategic amnesia which pits itself against a pernicious doxic memory which congeals the real, repeating it until it is literally solid but senseless. Barthes pits that mode of nihilation against the practice of representation. Furthermore, Baudrillard's dislike of the semiotic noise of repetition, which shatters the integrity of prior utterances, runs against Barthes' appreciation of that interference, which is part of what, reusing a term from WDZ, he refers to as the greatest delicacy and effect of desirable writing: countercommunication. This effect (due to language's inhering poeticity and involuntary semantic noise), Barthes writes joyfully, "makes communication obscure, fallacious, uncertain." He goes further:

literatures are in fact arts of 'noise'; what the reader consumes is this defect in communication, this deficient message; what the whole structuration erects for him and offers him as the most precious nourishment is a countercommunication; the reader is an accomplice, not of this or that character, but of the discourse itself as it plays on...the impurity of communication...

(S/Z 145/151)

Baudrillard's obvious unease with the loss of metalanguages and language's communicative aspect, is, again, starkly contrasted by Barthes' cultivation of the counter-communicative, and his contention that the function of writing
is to ridicule and to annul the power of one language over another, to dissolve any metalanguage as soon as it is constituted. (S/Z 98/105)

Although Barthes' simulacra are generated using similar techniques of textual fragmentation and diverse forms of citation as explored by Baudrillard, Barthes' simulacra—specifically, here, his notion of the text as a copy without an original—while also circulating in the public arena, are intended as unrepeateable and writerly counter-commercial entities that can only be activated through the active participation of the solitary reader. These sophisticated simulacra, attuned to the differences within systemic repetitions, privilege, rather than abolish, textual difference. Barthes' reflexive and citational construction of textuality is congruent with Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum as the endless public repetition of empty models. Barthes' exploration of the text as an intertext—that is, the text as an ephemeral metasimulacrum several times over participating within larger semiotic systems—parallels Baudrillard's reading, but emphasizes the perception that citations occur within the smallest units of discourse, and that they are generally conjoined in hybrid constellations. The Barthesian text is, in my reading, made up of shattered simulacra that are recombined into open discourse pour rien—as an aerated and dynamic constellation of signs characterized not by closure, but by gaps, silences, noise, disorders, and fertile indeterminacies which provide the opportunity for the
kinds of oblique readings championed in S/Z.

Perhaps surprisingly, the impact of simulation is similar in both accounts. For both men, the simulacrum or copy eventually constitutes, in Baudrillard's metaphor, a kind of "moebius strip" that turns the world into a looping and centreless series of surfaces that destroy distinctions between inside and outside, between past and present discourses, the real and the fictional, the original (or even simply the antecedent) and subsequent replications. But Barthes' examination of the forms of textual fragmentation and copying, as well as the reader's and/or the scriptor's engagements with prior texts, are far more sophisticated than those laid out in SS. Barthes recognizes that culture deals less in models (still a modernist notion) than in gratuitous fragments of a plurality of codes comprising the naive real. (S/Z 6/13-14) Baudrillard fears the absolute and irretrievable loss of the real in a vertiginous sea of signs; while in S/Z Barthes tends to argue that the real is always a sea of signs, and that the semiotic produces the real. In subsequent texts Barthes plays with that tension between the ostensible real and textuality, recognizing that the utter obfuscation of the category of the real would be undesirable. There is, as he will write in PT, the need for a small bit of chiaroscuro, of the problematic flesh of the real, to cling to signs.

The recognition of semiotic reflexivity, textual surfaces, citational recycling and deformation, and the postmodern quest to overcome what one might refer to as the
outside constitute points of contact between the Baudrillardian simulacrum and the Barthesian intertext. (S/Z 6/13-14) In both, prior consensual models of the real--what Barthes sees as putative origins--are overwhelmed by the sheer perversity and iterability of artifice (what Baudrillard refers to as the procession of prior models). Furthermore, in both constructs distinctions between the real and the non-real, the system and the individual utterance, are abolished in the premise of a voracious and ultimately empty textuality: a textuality whose potential impact is thrown into relief by Baudrillard's exploration of the flatland of hyperreality. The claustrophobia lurking in both constructions of culture--a confinement felt by Baudrillard but not yet, at this juncture, by Barthes--is also notable. In S/Z the classical notion of the work is apparently opened up to the larger macrosystem of cultural systems, and to the vagaries of connotation and arbitrary structuration; but despite the proliferation of codes and the induction of luxurious spaces of indeterminacy and drift, "Sarrasine" is simply caught up in a larger but still restrictive and oddly metaphorical system--the hypothesis of textuality.

S/Z is, literally, an instance of simulation that disengages both the "tutor signifier" and itself from the intent "world's significations," taking shelter from meaning in the safer space of a hyperreal textuality. (S/Z 13/19) The aggressive if ludic acts of reading that comprise S/Z are dedicated to the textualization of "Sarrasine," and, by
extension, to the forcible dismantling and relocation of classical culture and its categories within the nebulous and flat realms of the textual and, metaphorically, of the cinematic (hence the realm of the gaze, of the visual, of the legible). The strength of Barthes' dramatic "slow-motion" reading, the digressions, the cut-ups, the cinematographic "decomposition[s]" and the extreme close-ups of isolated textual details that comprise S/Z, must be acknowledged. (S/Z 12/18) Balzac's short story, appended to the commentary that cannibalizes it and disrupts its mimetic flow, is not restored after the analysis, as Barthes ironically suggests, to its original purity and continuity. The story, which the reader stumbles across at the back of S/Z, lies as inert as a dead animal along a highway. And where a reader, prior to Barthes' tour de force, might once have contentedly read "Sarrasine" without hearing the noise of culture buzzing in the spaces between the words, she now cannot get that noise out of her head, and has come to mistrust the silence she was once taught to hear behind the voices of great men.

This verbal victory is won, obviously, not over a single text, but over the assumptions of the entire practice--critical and creative--of naive realisms. The losses reality sustains in this attack are substantial. The "real" and the categories of hermeneutic readings of cultural phenomena dissolve into the post-structural zone of the textual and the perspectival. With the consequent loss of a sense of a bracing textual outside, an intractable hors-texte, less remains of the once fertile
tensions drawn among the world, the human subject, and the text animating, for instance, the Bakhtinian model of intertextuality.

Barthes' extravagant and poetic reading of the play of signs produces new texts whose difference exposes the pretences of doxic culture, and yet gives cultural production a new impetus. The world is, in S/Z and for almost the duration of Barthesian post-structuralism, once again flat, but this time it is a palimpsest, a surface upon which human intertexts inscribe distorted repetitions of repetitions, seeking a relative disordering. This textual disordering or reprocessing is achieved through an exhaustive process of tracking codes and citations, through decentring, re-articulation, purging prior interpretations, putative meanings, authorial imprints, and discrete parameters. These operations, in tandem with Barthes' pursuit of the connotative, the aleatory, the gaps between word and referent, constitute the aestheticizing operations at work in S/Z--operations which become increasingly sophisticated and fecund in Barthes' subsequent books.
CHAPTER FOUR. AN ELSEWHERE OF SIGNS

Je dis: une fleur! et hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets.

Stephane Mallarmé

This is not Japan/ Forgetting the West

ES is perhaps Barthes' most beautiful book. None of the linguistic overload of so many other contemporary theoretical texts here: the text is beautifully balanced between image and text, filled with calligraphy, line drawings, black-and-white photographs, exquisite colour reproductions of Japanese art, and holographic mementos of Barthes' time in Japan.

But be advised: this book is about things other than Japan. Barthes himself refers to the text as a "fantasy," an imagined "faraway" place. (ES 3/7) During an interview after the book's release he speaks of ES as a "countermythology," "un bonheur des signes," the first writing in which he broaches the pleasure of the text. (GV 158/150) Reading ES against the background of nineteenth-century aestheticism and its escapist penchant for things oriental, I would push that analysis a bit further and categorize ES as an innovative twentieth-century exercise in utopic discourse using that old and now ideologically suspect
vehicle of fantasy and social critique, exoticism. Historically, exoticist texts and utopias (whether purely discursive entities or actual attempts at alternative societies) have been contestatory and highly ideological gestures.² Barthes' fantastic counter-Japan is no exception. The theoretical exoticism of *ES*, its praise of a half-imaginary culture that does not naturalize or close the strong signs it generates, but instead values the very fissure between the real and the symbolic, has as its primary ideological target the "classical" western ideologies and values already indicted in *WDZ* and *S/Z*. (ES 4/8)

In *ES* the travelling protagonist, despite his body being physically present in "Japan," is often preoccupied by thoughts of the West. Both the protagonist (whom I will designate as Barthes) and the text are spectacularly divided, circulating between two "real-world" (i.e. consensually recognized) entities (Japan and France) and at least two réels, two purely individual constructs ("Japan", and the "Occident").³ The gaps, tensions and non-coincidences circulating among these four terms constitute a major source of pleasure in the book; indeed the very success of Barthes' verbal fantasy depends upon exploiting the unresolved tensions between these alternate réels. This book/trip, as Gary Shapiro writes, is also emblematic of Barthes' polemic with orthodox scholarship.⁴ Revolting against the imperatives of traditional hermeneutic interpretation, this "imaginary voyage" is undertaken by a traveler who plays with the interpretative apparatus--a
contextualizing knowledge of the language, history, and culture of that country—usually employed by travel writers to create a persuasive image of a foreign country. Instead, Barthes suspends verisimilude and truth-claims, relying on his own touristic desire and a scattered, sometimes doxic knowledge of Japanese culture and aesthetics. ES is a site in which Barthes half-creates a half-imaginary country in order to criticize the bedrock principles of Western realism: presence, identity (iterability), meaning, naturalness and repletion. As Gary Shapiro writes, reading in the half-light of the Derridean deconstructive project: "Barthes' desire to slide over the surface of Japanese life is...tied to his attempt to suspend...the Western metaphysical commitment to the values of the center and Interiority." ("PD," SC 4)

Shapiro's observation that in ES Barthes is attempting to suspend Western metaphysics and contest the binary categories of center/periphery and interior/exterior goes to the heart of Barthes' project. In this book Barthes continues to work out his post-structural aesthetic, advancing an alternate economy of signs (what I will refer to as the Japanese textual economy) through the systématique, the fragmented simulacrum he ironically identifies as Japan. Barthes is at pains to emphasize that the systématique given the name "Japan" in his book is not to be confused with the reality one might encounter landing at Narita airport. ES opens with Barthes' reflections upon how he might variously position his fantasy with respect to that latter réel. A first, paratactic, thought:
If I want to imagine a fictive nation, give it an invented name, treat it declaratively as a novelistic object, create a new Garbagne, so as to compromise no real country by my fantasy (though it is then that fantasy itself I compromise by the signs of literature).

Barthes moves on to consider and adopt his second option.

I can also—though in no way claiming to represent or to analyze reality itself (these being the major gestures of Western discourse) isolate somewhere in the world (faraway) a certain number of features... and out of these features deliberately form a system. It is this system which I shall call: Japan.

Barthes defends himself from the potential charge of Orientalism, underlining the unreality of his "Japan."

Hence Orient and Occident cannot be taken as 'realities' to be compared and contrasted historically, philosophically, politically. I am not lovingly gazing toward an Oriental essence— to me the Orient is a matter of indifference, merely providing a reserve of features whose manipulation— whose interplay— allows me to 'entertain' the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own.

Barthes' Japan is not a simulacrum of the type described in "The Structuralist Activity." There the task of structural analysis is to decompose an object (such as Japanese culture) and subsequently reconstruct in such as way as to manifest its rules of functioning. This skeletal reconstruction— the
structural simulacrum--makes visible a deep structure which remains invisible in the "natural" object. The result of structural analysis is the creation of a new--and equally significant--object which is related to but distinct from the first object. In his post-structural phase Barthes retains the ludic and creative aspects of structural analysis while rejecting its analytic imperative. Continuing the tradition of earlier aestheticizing critics, ES Barthes concentrates on developing a supplementary form of critical creativity that explores a whole range of subjective responses and desires through the hybrid personal essay. Barthes' innovative post-structural systématiques and essayistic forms seek to be semelfactive and inconclusive. In ES, as in his other post-structural texts, he evidences no interest in depth structures or general rules of cultural functioning. On the contrary: the goal of Barthes' decenring, desiring analyses are to valorize and remain on the level of surfaces and "flashes," forestalling any movement toward depth, coherence, history, identity, or meaning (i.e. doxic forms of interpretation). (ES 4/8) Like his structural analyses, Barthes' post-structuralist analyses are synchronic. But his rejection of an interpretative method focused on global structures for a more responsive and epiphanic mode separates his structural phase decisively from this later period. Barthes' idiosyncratic construction of a fantastic Japan in ES is not aimed at structurally reconstituting that culture: it goes beyond structural operations of découpage and collage in an arbitrary
recombination of elements. At least in theory (since one can easily recognize the "real-world" Japan in this other "Japan"), this perverse manipulation of Japanesmes yields an "unheard-of symbolic system," a systèmeatique rhetorically separated from any referent, and, most critically, insulated from Occidental symbolic systems and values: an ideal hyper-text whose difference obliquely challenges Western notions of presence.

A thematics of difference and otherness in ES organizes the separation of the referential Japan from its fantastic version. In phenomenological terms, Barthes uses an epoché which, by bracketing (or suspending, in Coleridgean terms) the real, allows the imagination to nihilate that given and recreate, from its elements, an utopic emptied country of signs. Exploiting the Saussurean fissure between sign and thing, word and image, object and interpretation, the gulf between the imagined and the "real," ES derealizes (textualizes) Japan. In the headnote and first entries of the book, Barthes drops hints regarding how his reader is to interpret the disjunctions, separations and absences ruling ES. The headnote reads:

The text does not 'gloss' the images, which do not 'illustrate' the text. For me, each has been no more than the onset of a kind of visual uncertainty, analogous perhaps to that loss of meaning Zen calls a satori. Text and image, interlacing, seek to ensure the circulation and exchange of these signifiers: body, face, writing; and in them to read the retreat of signs.

(ES xi/5)

A bit later, he elaborates on the connection between writing
and the "retreat of signs":

...Japan has afforded him [the author] a situation of writing. This situation is the very one in which a certain disturbance of the person occurs, a subversion of earlier readings, a shock of meaning lacerated, extenuated to the point of its irreplaceable void, without the object's ever ceasing to be significant, desirable. Writing is, after all, in its way, a satori: satori (the Zen occurrence) is a more or less powerful...seism which causes knowledge, or the subject, to vacillate: it creates an emptiness of language.

(ES 4/10)

Sartre's Roquentin would understand some of what is going on here. Vertigo--the onset of uncertainty and the loss of meaning which Barthes suggests might be analogous to Zen satori--ruptures the tight conventional connection between sign and referent as it forces open the dense narcissism of that ideology, lacerating the seamless mask of the ordinary to reveal its emptiness. But where Roquentin, the emblematic Western protagonist, would respond with anxiety and nausea as his world-system, rocked and punctured, collapses, revealing absurdity, Barthes--who prefers absence--reacts to the fissuring of symbolic systems and the appearance of emptiness with delight and relief. This space of intermittent emptiness and semiotic crisis--of simultaneous danger and opportunity--is, for Barthes, both the very space and aim of writing. Such an understanding of the power of emptiness, of the decentred, and the beauty of the interstice is, I think, one of the gifts of Japanese culture to his post-structural aesthetic (Barthes' fascination with absence adumbrates the desire for the
cessation of signs found in CL and his later essays on music).

Themes of vacillation and emptying reappear in the following section of ES, "The Unknown Language," where Barthes expounds upon the salutary traumas of a Western encounter with Japanese difference. Difference, although signaling separation, nevertheless implies some degree of relatedness and similarity. In ES the ground of similarity is provided by Western terms of reference: throughout the book the Occident remains the primary referential term, while "Japan" is read so as to function as a supplement disrupting the Western categories Barthes wants to undermine.

The dream: to know a foreign (alien) language and yet not to understand it: to perceive the difference in it without that difference ever being recuperated...to know, positively refracted in a new language, the impossibility of our own...to undo our own 'reality' under the effect of other formulations, other syntaxes; to discover certain unsuspected positions of the subject in utterance, to displace the subject's topology; in a word, to descend into the untranslatable, to experience its shock...until everything Occidental in us totters and the rights of the 'father tongue' vacillate...

(Vacillations of other kinds unsettle the work. Throughout the text Barthes makes conflicting implicit and explicit assertions about his degree of knowledge and cultural competence with respect to Japan. At times he claims that he does not need and does not want to "know" Japan or Japanese in the usual sense, preferring a warm womb of signifiance:
The murmuring mass of an unknown language constitutes a delicious protection, envelops the foreigner (provided the country is not hostile to him) in an auditory film which halts at his ears all the alienations of the mother tongue...

(ES 9/17)

Yet, when it serves his purposes, Barthes will incorporate scholarly interpretations regarding the referential Japan into his fantastic version. The Japanese language--this "auditory film"--"it is said," through its proliferation of functional suffixes and complex enclitics, "turns the subject...into a great envelope empty of speech...diluting...hemorrhaging the subject in a fragmented, particulated language diffracted to emptiness." (ES 7/12) Pursuing the theme of the salutory emptiness of the Japanese subject, he analyzes the ontology of the Japanese ritual of bowing as two individuals pass a gift between them. The gift, Barthes writes, "remains suspended between two disappearances": the salutation (bowing) "literally salutes no one;" it is not a moment of communication "between two personal empires"; "it is only the feature of a network of forms in which nothing is halted, knotted, profound." (ES 68/87-88) Logically enough, the Japanese language has verbs which are "without subject, without attribute, and yet transitive": zen, for instance, refers to an act of knowledge without either a knowing subject or a known object. (ES 7/12) This language is tentative in its truth claims, articulating impressions rather than "affidavits." (ES 7/12) And where the West has struggled to create the illusion of life in its invented characters, Japanese assigns these
entities an inanimate verb form: "the very structure of Japanese restores or confines these being to their quality as products, signs cut off from the alibi referential par excellence: that of the living thing." (ES 7/13) Barthes reveals the contestatory agenda of his literary utopia, writing:

> These phenomena and many others convince us how absurd it is to try and contest our society without ever conceiving the very limits by which...we claim to contest it: this is trying to destroy the wolf by lodging comfortably in its gullet. (ES 8/13)

So much for his initial claim that this country has no relation to any other symbolic system. It is clearly a reactive textual fantasy. "Japan" is, in fact, created out of and partially lodged between two other symbolic systems: Japan and "the West." And, like a smaller body in space, its orbit describes its attraction to those two larger gravitational fields, while it exerts its weaker, contrary pull. Rather than accepting Barthes' claims about the autonomy and fictionality of this country, I think it is more to the point to look at the effect of his rhetorical manoeuvring. This "Japan" is less a Mallarmean absence than a "dislocated copy" of the consensual Japan. Barthes creates a version of Japan which oscillates between fictional and referential registers. Thus Tokyo, General Nogi and his wife, student demonstrators, and artwork from the seventeenth century appear in this closed textual realm--cited but looking, to the naive reader, amazingly like
the "real" thing. Japan (like the West from which Barthes writes) is no longer an *origin* but an *intertext*. Like the chasm between the text-system and image-system in *ES*, gaps open up between these symbolic systems, producing a field of uncertain tensions in which the author and the reader, if she is so inclined, can experience the vertigo of indeterminacy and the hemorrhaging of meaning. Barthes' imaginative act, which suspends and then causes the intermittent coincidence of Japan and the West with "Japan," puts the ontological status of the latter into a strange realm: "Japan" both is and is not real. This fantastic country is at once an interpretation (and an evasion of interpretation), a critique, and a re-imagining of the consensual real.

The functions of "Japan" in *ES* are at least three-fold. It exists as a site of indeterminate pleasure; it functions as a utopia, a place of gentle, plural voids which challenges the Western ideology of repletion; and, finally, as a foreign space it "protects" Barthes from "the alienations of the mother tongue" and more. Another passage from *ES*, in which Barthes plays upon the real and fictional status of his Japan:

...in foreign countries, what a respite! Here I am protected against stupidity, vulgarity, vanity, worldiness, nationality, normality. The unknown language, of which I nevertheless grasp the respiration, the emotive aeration, in a word the pure significance, forms around me, as I move, a faint vertigo, sweeping me into its artificial emptiness ([*vide artificiel*], which is consummated only for me: I live in the interstice, delivered from any fulfilled meaning ([*sens plein*]).

(*ES* 9/17)
Paris, Japan

*S/Z* and *ES* are, with *PT*, among the most seminal and idealizing discourses of Barthes' career. They manifest two diverse aspects of Barthes' evolving post-structural aesthetic, revealing distinct versions of culture and textuality operating in his work. Although Barthes' Japan reads like an ideal generic post-structural culture/text, being a world of surfaces, empty subjects, structurations, and deferred signs, it is very different from the busy French hypertext analysed in *S/Z*. It is not the syncretic and symbolically overloaded site of Balzac's Paris—synechologically, of Barthes' West.

Paris and Tokyo can stand as emblems of the diverging forms of textual economies Barthes most desires. The Parisian textual economy, as it were, is the one generally identified as being the definitive post-structural formulation of the text and textuality. It is the version of culture and of cultural production found in Barthes' most-quoted statements. This economy puts forward a belated and citational model of culture, one in which the writer is both bricoleur and copyist. In this economy, the writer is not an originating Author, controlling some univocal text, but a voiceless scriptron whose only powers are citational and combinational. His gestures are limited: to draw from the immense dictionary of culture, "to trace a field without origin," to "mingle writings, to counter some by others," making a textual system that no longer contains
"passions, moods, sentiments, impressions," but only old signs, which, repeated, rearranged, circulate in a new context. ("DA," RL 53/65) Writing can no longer in good conscience perform the classical operations of recording, observing, or representing anything outside of itself; yet it has, ironically, in Barthes' aesthetic, become a performative act which creates its own continuous present. ("DA," RL 52/64)

Having, as Barthes writes, theoretically "distanced" the sign from the referent, and the Author from the text, the play of signs cannot be arrested by any definite "meaning." The reader's task in this economy is to disentangle the "threads" (that is, the codes and semes) of this multiple writing, to follow its structures in all their stages and reprises, knowing there is no end to it, no origin. For the reader/scriptor (the distinction between the two is almost totally obscured in Barthes) "the space of writing is to be traversed, not pierced; writing constantly posits meaning, but always in order to evaporate it: writing seeks a systematic exemption of meaning." ("DA," RL 54/66)

The Parisian economy is, as Barthes writes, antimimetic and "countertheological". ("DA," RL 54/66) Within its anti-theology, everything is citational, yet nothing has origin, self-identity, or depth. In it the lives and bodies of the scriptor and of the receiver (who is always reading alone) are almost entirely suppressed, surviving only in the gestures of inscription, or in turning a page to momentarily collect into one's own emptiness disparate traces of previous writings. The
earlier carnality of the writer (in WDZ) has disappeared into a textual economy in which baroque playing surfaces and the pleasures of citation build up to and then yield to the frisson—and alibi—of absence.

There are are significant commonalities in both the Parisian and Japanese economies, which I see as complementary rather than antagonistic systems: an agreement on the lack of substantive origin, subjectivity, hermeneutic plenitude centre, depth, and the view of culture as play. Compare, for instance, the following two passages. In "The Death of the Author" Barthes writes:

...writing is the destruction of every voice, every origin. Writing is that neuter, that composite, that obliquity into which our subject flee, the black-and-white where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.

("DA," RL 49/61)

A congruent, slightly more poetic take on writing and emptiness in ES:

...satori creates an emptiness of language. And it is an emptiness of language which constitutes writing; it is from this emptiness Zen writes gardens, gestures, houses, flower arrangements, faces, violence.

(ES 4/10)

Both economies work interstichally; they need that emptiness of world and persons, those gaps, voids, and fissures between sign and referent in order to function. But the ratio of sign to emptiness is markedly different in each textual economy.
Signs (graphs) are more restrained and spare in the Japanese economy of ES, which begins to develop a graphic space that participates in what Barthes, in a late essay on Cy Twombley, will call the aesthetic of the rare. He offers this definition: "'Rarus' in Latin means: presenting intervals or interstiches, sparse, porous, scattered...." ("CT," RF 182/167) The rare is linked to the principles of lightness, emptiness, apparent spontaneity, surprise, chance, maculae, and the dissemination or erasure of subtle gestures lingering in a subtly "aerated space." ("CT," RF 178-183) This concept of the rare— in short, of spacing— is, he continues, crucial in Japanese aesthetics, "which does not acknowledge the Kantian categories of space and time, but the subtler one of the interval." ("CT," RF 182)9 The rare is "the 'void' of Oriental compositions, merely accentuated here and there by some calligraphy." ("CT," RF 182-183/168) But the rare is also part of the Mediterranean aesthetic; Barthes finds its expression in the old southern houses of the Midi:

'Those huge rooms of the Midi, very good for meditation—the big pieces of furniture lost in them. The great emptiness enclosed [my emphasis] where time doesn't count. The mind seeks to populate all this.' Basically, Twombley's canvases are big Mediterranean rooms, warm and luminous, with their elements lost in them (rari), rooms the mind seeks to populate.

("CT," RF 183/168)

"Emptiness enclosed": one of the generative principles, I think, of Barthesian post-structuralism and its versions of
textuality. This fascination with absence and enclosure first appears, as I have shown, in Barthes' reading of French modernity and his characterization of the Mallarmean project in WDZ as one which seeks to allow Language (rather than any human subject) to "speak" by creating around the Word an "empty zone" in which "guilty social overtones...no longer reverberate." (WDZ 75-76/55)

In ES Japan is fragmented and largely absent: put another way, it is present only synecdochically, in small details and gestures which are apprehended in a largely empty space. Japan is a kind of big empty room throughout which an indefinite number of smaller emptinesses--cities, gift packages, theatrical performances, faces, gestures, drawings, poetry, meals, photographs, persons--circulate. These things are scattered (in the sense of the rare) and yet contained either figuratively or literally by frames, envelopes, silences, or space itself, since form, as Barthes insists throughout ES, following Buddhism, is emptiness.

In the final entry of the book, appropriately titled "The Cabinet of Signs," Barthes reflects upon the subtle ordering and enclosure of his Japan. In every part of this country, there is an idyllic and "special organization" of space which renders the sense of an indefinitely spacious miniature: there is "the conjunction of a distance [un lointain] and a division [un morcellement, literally a fragmentation]." (ES 107/144) The fields (literal and visual) are discontinuous, open; there are no functional enclosures, but only, and infrequently, the
pleasing gesture of one. The traveler is neither "beseiged" by the specter of a horizon, never constrained to constitute himself as the "assimilating center of the infinite." (ES 107/144)

This is a country which has been utterly overwhelmed and tailored by human orders (however subtle their apparent absence). The wild--that alterity--is repressed. Spaces are entirely civil: voids are small, pleasing, and "artificial" (i.e. human). Chance strolls sweetly through the streets as a public entertainer. Barthes, the western tourist, moves through it like a flâneur in the streets of Paris, like the post-structural reader of "From Work to Text" who wanders through the exotic if contained word-landscape of a text.

From the slope of the mountains to the neighborhood intersection, everything here is [human] habitat, and I am always in the most luxurious room of this habitat [emphasis mine]: this luxury (which is elsewhere that of the kiosks, of corridors, of fanciful structures, collectors' cabinets, private libraries) is created by the fact that the place has no other limit than its carpet of living sensations, of brilliant signs (flowers, windows, foliage, pictures, books)...

(ES 107/144)

The safety and contraction of this beautiful, aestheticized world provides Barthes with several opportunities to directly and indirectly articulate some principles of post-structural textuality.
Tempura and textuality

The motifs of enclosure, space and detail dominate Barthes' meditations on textuality. Frames conventionally signal boundaries, distinguishing inside from outside, self (or object) and other. As deictic devices, they have pointed out the realm of heightened semiosis--historically, the zones of art and of authority. ES is filled with a disorienting array of visual and verbal framing devices which can almost jostle one another, heightening the already decentred, plural quality of the text. As with other devices of containment, the literal and verbal frames operating in ES (e.g. the suspensive headnote, the handwritten texts scribbled on the bottom of photographs) function as devices of art--devices of separation and reconstellation--which help to aestheticize Japan and its culture, turning it into a land of insistent textuality.

In Barthes' post-structural Japan, frames distance and withdraw phenomena from the stresses of representation and plenitude (depth). Positively alienated from confining and only putative referents, signs--especially framed signs--now create only surfaces and, as Eve Tavor Bennet refers to them, emptied "play-texts." (SD 54) In ES Barthes' theories of pantextuality and of the sign-in-itself allow him to rhetorically subsume the heaviness of matter into an ethereal textuality. Barthes' readings of Japanese cuisine are a case in point.
The dinner tray seems a picture of the most order: it is a frame containing against a dark background, various objects (bowls, boxes, saucers, chopsticks...it might be said that these trays fulfill the definition of painting which, according to Piero della Francesa, 'is merely a demonstration of surfaces and bodies becoming ever smaller or larger according to their term.'

(ES 11/19)

This "painting," (perhaps a miseen abyme with respect to ES), quite literally framed, contains the elements of an open work. It defines the play-field of a dynamic and unpredictable text, one "destined to be undone, recomposed according to the very rhythm of eating"; metaphorically, of (readerly) consumption. (ES 11/19) What was initially "a motionless tableau ...becomes a workbench or chessboard, the space not of seeing but of doing--of praxis or play." (ES 11/19) The person having a meal, randomly and "hesitantly" taking up bits of rice and vegetables, condiments and soup, is likened to a Japanese graphic artist hesitating over pots of ink. This diner is, as she eats, performing a series of aesthetic operations on this tray-cum-tableau: she is altering or decomposing the tableau, shifting and reassembling its elements in order to compose a second artwork in process: the meal, "the praxis of alimentation." (ES 12/20) 11

This new artwork is not achieved with mounds of food and the usual violent Western tools of analysis--metaphorically, in ES, knives and forks. Instead, there is an idyllic "harmony between Oriental food and chopsticks." (ES 15/24) The Japanese gastronomic artist works with miniscule amounts of food already
tending toward dispersal, and a utensil—a pair of chopsticks—expressing, Barthes avers (conveniently dismissing the Japanese cleaver working in the kitchen) a radically different aesthetic. A chopstick has, to begin with, a purely deictic function: "it points to the food, designates the fragment, brings [it] into existence by the very gesture of choice, which is the index." (ES 16/24-25) This introduces "not an order but a caprice [fantasie], a certain indolence [paresse]" and "intelligence" into the act of eating. (ES 16/25) The chopsticks express a refined, tender and tentative interaction with the food, rather than a primal drive to seize and dismember: "the instrument never pierces, cuts, or slits, never wounds, but only selects, turns, shifts." (ES 16/26) These sticks never violate the food: they gradually unravel or prod at the natural fissures of the food in order to separate morsels and then "translate" them to the mouth. Against the "predatory" operations of the fork, the chopsticks are figured as gentle and almost maternal in their work.

The food-texts the chopsticks work on are analysed as post-structural avant la lettre. In "Food Decentred" Barthes considers the ways in which Japanese cuisine "cooks," in the Lévi-Straussian sense, transforming the natural density and rawness of foodstuffs into aerated surfaces, graphs, and textures.

Entirely visual (conceived, concerted, manipulated for sight, and even for a painter's eye), food thereby says that it is not deep: the edible substance is without a precious heart...a vital secret: no
Japanese dish is endowed with a center... here everything is the ornament of another ornament...

(ES 22/32)

There is no order or within the Japanese text (here sukiyaki):

...food is never anything but a collection of fragments, none of which appears privileged by an order of ingestion; to eat is not to respect a menu (an itinerary of dishes), but to select, with a touch of the chopsticks... this food—this is its once originality—unites in a single time that of its fabrication and of its consumption... once 'started', it no longer has moments or distinctive sites: it becomes decentred, like an uninterrupted text. [my emphasis]

(ES 22/32-33)

In "The Interstice" Barthes meditates in an almost Bachelardian fashion on the preparation of tempura, following the chef's aesthetic "cancellation" or transmutation of heavy natural objects (a pepper and an eel) into artificed and "purely interstitial" objects. In ES, writing is, in all its metaphors and instantiations—calligraphy, Bunraku theatre, cuisine, gift wrapping, the layout of a city, social rituals, pinball games, gardens, wrestling—a process or spectacle which textualizes its raw elements, congruent with the aesthetic of artifice and absence Barthes sketches. In his analysis of tempura, the chef is first figured as an artist who "makes lace out of fish and peppers." (ES 26/38) Then the chef's cooking stall is likened to a calligrapher's table, and his cooking is seen as "literally graphic." (ES 26/48) (Throughout the book the distinction between writing and more quotidian activities
is attenuated.) The reason for cooking eel and peppers is as much to aestheticize human need while providing physical sustenance; tempura translates the raw world of matter and basic human need into the textual artifice and ornamentation of a desire: the desire for "empty signs." In Sartrean terms, tempura re-imagines the pepper, liberating it from the uncomposed sterility of the natural (that is, the untextualized, the undelineated). To quote from two of the epic sentences contained in ES:

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tempura...the fry outlines...a pepper, chambered inside; what matters here is that the foodstuff be constituted as a piece, a fragment (fundamental state of the Japanese cuisine...out of which emerges a fragment completed, separated, named and yet entirely perforated: but the contour is so light that it becomes abstract: [my emphasis] the foodstuff has for its envelope nothing but time, the time (itself extremely tenuous, moreover) which has solidified it....refined by the Japanese techniques of cancellation and exemption, it is the nutriment of another time...a kind of meditation, as much spectacular as alimentary...on the side of the light, the aerial, of the instaneous, the fragile, the crisp, the trifling, but whose real name would be the interstice without specific edges, or again: the empty sign.

(ES 25-26/35-36)
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Cities, envelopes and empty signs

In ES writing often occurs within the suggestion of frames of various kinds. Frames, as I have indicated, conventionally help organize the physical and conceptual space within their borders, assisting in the determination of compositional centres. Writing and frames can generate at least the illusion of meaning, but here they help produce neither. Elements and structure give way to fragments, discontinuous surfaces, and structuration. For instance: like the city of Tokyo, the Japanese gift (both further "texts" and objective correlatives in the book's wandering argument) are structurations of details circulating around contained and silent traces, half-absences. Both literally and figuratively, in post-structuralism the center (of the subject or the text) is no longer a special site of plenitude and truth, the place where the essential values of what is called Western civilization collect. Historically, the centre (the origin) is the place where the West has gone--or returned--to "invent" or recognize itself. It has been the storehouse of Western mythologies--and power. Power collects in origins and radiates outward; and it is in relation to that power centre that whatever surrounds it is interpreted and systematized (or textualized). Social reality crystallizes around those centres. It is no accident that the Western city-centre is where generations have consistently chosen to build landmark churches, libraries, courts, government offices, and corporate cathedrals.

Dead centre in Barthes' contemporary Tokyo, there is a
walled imperial palace with a ceremonial emperor. But in this Tokyo power has migrated elsewhere. Having become a corporate democracy, the imperial power once held at this centre has apparently become an "evaporated notion", a "sacred 'nothing' [le 'rien' sacré]", another non-interfering "mirage". (ES 32/46) Tokyo thus offers Barthes a "precious paradox: it [Tokyo] does possess a center, but this center is empty." (ES 30/43) Emptied, this centre persists not in order to radiate power, "but to give the entire urban movement the support of its central emptiness, forcing the traffic to make a perpetual detour." (ES 32/46) In this way, Barthes concludes, revealing yet another element of his theory of the function of relative absence within a text, "the system of the imaginary is spread circularly, by detours and returns the length of an empty subject." (ES 43/46) Emptied, the subject cannot impose itself or an interpretation on what envelopes it.

Emptiness and material framing devices organize the "semantic meditation" Barthes finds in Japanese packaging, whether the packages are utilitarian or literally gratuitious. The Japanese carry, "with a formicant energy" (he recounts in amazement, sounding like Gulliver among the Lilliputians), a profusion of tiny "instruments of transport." (ES 46/62) These instruments--pouches, packages, sacks, suitcases, fujos (peasant bundling scarves)--apparently contain almost nothing. These packages are, Barthes asserts, "actually empty signs." (ES 46/62) In this post-structural country every citizen ritually carries "some sort of bundle, an empty sign,
energetically protected...as if the finish, the framing, the hallucinatory outline [my emphasis] which established the Japanese object destined it to a generalized transport [translation généralisée]." (ES 46-47/62)

Ceremonial packages are just as intriguing in this unreal land. There is, for Western sensibilities, an unexpected reversal in the Japanese aesthetic of the gift. The package containing the gift, painstakingly composed of a pleasing interplay of cardboard, wood, paper, and ribbon, carefully signed somewhere with an asymmetrical fold or knot, "is no longer the temporary accessory of the object to be transported, but itself becomes an object; the envelope, in itself, is consecrated as a precious though gratuitous thing; the package is a thought." (ES 45/60) The art of the package, he insists, suddenly digressing momentarily to an image of a naked but bound boy in a Japanese pornographic magazine, lies in the extreme art of fastening and, he continues, (returning to the general analysis of packaging), of strategic delay. The envelope postpones the discovery of the object it contains. It is, in fact, a Japanese tradition that the triviality of the object itself (a sweet, a small souvenir) is inversely related to the extravagance of the envelope. It is as though the parergonal wrappings--a layered experience of surfaces, complications and beautiful delays screening the triviality at its core--constitute the true gift. What lies beneath the wrappings is not the real gift, but a mere pretext enabling the other process--the slow and appreciative undoing of the
package—to occur. Musing on this happy analogue to his post-structural text, Barthes reflects on the aesthetics of delay he construes in Japanese packaging, comparing their wrappings to the post-structural sign:

Thus the box acts the sign: as envelope, screen, mask, it is \textit{worth} what it conceals, protects, and yet designates...but the very thing it encloses and signifies is for a very long time put off...as if the package's function were not to protect in space but to postpone in time...

(ES 46/61)

The wrapped object, Barthes writes, somehow "loses its existence", becoming a "mirage." (ES 46/61) Slipping into a metaphorical register, he goes on to reiterate the view of textuality and interpretation found in \textit{S/Z}.

...from envelope to envelope, the signified flees \textit{[fuit]} and when you finally have it (there is always a little \textit{something} in the package), it appears insignificant, laughable, vile: the pleasure, field of the signifier, has been taken: the package is not empty, but emptied...

(ES 46/61)

The ultimate hermeneutic moment--finding the kernel, the essence of the text--is the moment of greatest disappointment; the moment in which the sign, according to Barthesian post-structuralism, is consumed, then discarded. Playtime is over. The "Japanese" solution to such a rapacious and wanton (read: bourgeois) pillaging of the text is involved. One: insist upon an experiential approach to "texts." Two: prolong the time of play, that is, the process of "unwrapping" the sign. Three:
discourage the acquisitive hermeneutic impulse by insisting that all objects and gestures, whether natural (such as flowers) or a human product (e.g. the gift boxes), are "precise, mobile, empty." (ES 47/62) Four: eliminate intertexts, prior judgements, and interpretive communities. Barthes' contrary world of Japanese aesthetics frustrates Western expectations of a dense, controlling semantic or ontological centre which might order one's experience of the world-text, providing not only a telos of some kind (and therefore a moment of catharsis, or resolution), but also a certain semantic capital. Instead of sign and referent, centre and ornament, tension and relief, the processual narrative of the Japanese gift provides not essence but instead a series of details (supplements), semelfactive tensions, and surprises. In effect, the Japanese gift--broadly, the Japanese object/text--is an enveloped trace which, as Barthes remarks frequently in ES, merely emphasizes the interstice or void in which it floats.

This principle of containment, producing an airy, contained emptiness that is both intimate and yet, finally, quite distant, dominates Barthes' Japanese aesthetic. And it contributes to the quality of the miniature in this imaginary world that so enchants Barthes. In the first two paragraphs of "Packages" Barthes explores some of the effects of containing devices. "If the things and manners of Japan seem diminutive to us" he observes, "this is not by reason of their size, it is because every object, every gesture, even the most free, the most mobile, seems framed." (ES 43/57) These frames may be
obvious (e.g. the dinner tray), or they may be discrete, even invisible. In Japan, space is the final frame:

...the Japanese thing is not outlined, illuminated; it is not formed of a strong contour...around it, there is: nothing, an empty space which renders it matte (and therefore to our eyes: reduced, diminished, small).

(ES 43/57)

The clean delineation of Japan's miniatures arises from "a kind of precision which the thing observes in delimiting itself, stopping, finishing." (ES 43/57) This precision is, however, not rational, not Apollonian. The distinctness of the Japanese object, Barthes argues, results from one of two possible gestures effected by the scriptor: excision or hallucinatory re-visioning: that is, "an excision which removes the flourish of meaning from the object and severs it from...its position in the world, any tergiversation"; or, more opaquely, a Baudelairean "hallucinatory...[of] fantasmal addition" quite analogous, he adds, to the visions induced by hashish. (ES 43/57) Through framing, excision, and fantasy, Japan becomes a country of miniature textualized objects; or, more simply, a place of intransitive and voided forms of writing. The material world undergoes an imaginative refiguration: it becomes, in Nietzschean terms, aesthetically justified, not as an artwork, but as a series of textualities. The heightened and detached character of Japanese semiosis--its radical but unthreatening alterity, its difference--captures Barthes' admiration. In ES
Barthes' project is to re-write—to privately re-imagine—Japan, heightening what Western eyes have interpreted as the inhering aestheticism of the Japanese culture in order to subtly clarify and support his own emerging aesthetic of beautiful, playful, absurd signs.

At the approximate midpoint of ES, three photographs disrupt a long entry on Bunraku theatre. The first image, spread across two pages, is a black-and-white photograph of an empty Japanese room (which is later identified as the Shikidai corridor). The other two black-and-white photographs face one another on following pages. One is of a "woman" in traditional Japanese dress (the face is a stiff white theatrical mask, through which the reader catches sight of a pair of androgynous eyes); the other image is of a mature Japanese paterfamilias who, one may risk inferring from an accompanying note, may be the man behind the mask in the first image. The handwritten note accompanying the photograph of the room in the original reads: "Turn the image upside down: nothing more, nothing else, nothing" [rien de plus, rien d'autre, rien]." (ES 50-51/64-65)

The second note, set off in italic type in the original, reads:

The Oriental transvestite does not copy Woman but signifies her: not bogged down [il ne s'empoisse pas] in the model, but detached from its signified; Femininity is presented to read, not to see... translation, not transgression...

(ES 53/69)

The photograph of the empty room and the visually
reinforced parable of the Oriental transvestite are, I suspect, keys of a sort to ES. And they are, of course, a strong statement about writing and the material world. The notes found beneath these images communicate Barthes' abiding hostility to naive theories of mimesis, and to the unformed heaviness of matter itself (as the Sartrean adjective "s'empoisse" found in the original suggests). The symbolically-resistant materiality human beings live in and are—a raw materiality synecdochally present in ES in as unprepared food, unarranged flowers, the unartificed human body—is put under erasure. The crudely material (predictably, metaphorically, "Woman") is overcome by a writing which, in detaching itself from any heavy truth-claims or responsibilities the referent might have pressed upon the scriptor or the reader, displaces human attention to the realm of the airy mental. The locus of the real, shifts from the physical to the conceptual level. "Femininity" (read the referent) is presented to read, not to see. In this aesthetic our eyes shift from the world to the sign and do not shift back. The sign thus, in Sartrean terms, abjures its prosaic functions. It becomes an utterly poetic sign as it irresponsibly "signifies" the real, and then, invoking the alibis of difference and textuality, disburdens both the object and itself of referential force.

Alan Megill argues that aestheticism has a radically creative aspect: it seizes upon andforegrounds what he refers to as the ontogenetic potential of language. (PE 3) That ontogenetic impulse, as exemplified in Holderlin and Rilke,
literally recreates the human world from a mass of particulars by imaginatively shaping human existence and the human environment into meaningful forms (what Heidegger referred to as the "worlding of the world"). Barthes opts for a different, reflexive reading of the generative potential of the sign. Labelled by the unimpressed as Mallarmean linguistic solipsism, this alternate hypothesis, or myth, has yielded two major conclusions (Barthesian post-structuralism oscillates between the two). The first conclusion is not complicated or even particularly original. Elaborating upon the Saussurean myth of the estrangement of sign and thing, language is treated almost as an alternate, or even parallel reality, an emptied Baudelairian fantasy island offering shelter from the cold war of languages. Ideally distanced ("detached") from reality, language is a series of empty graphs that does not point to anything beyond itself. Language does not mean. It simply, sensuously, is. (This is one possible reading of the photograph of the empty room and the juxtaposed note found beneath it.) The second conclusion offers a twisted skeptical paradox: language creates, sustains, and destroys "reality."

The destructive aspect of the sign is one which comes to preoccupy Barthes during his later, autographical phase, when he explores the tension between figuration and the live person (RB, CL), and the strife between the publicizing sign and the private, the beloved (CL). In his early post-structural work, the reflexive beauty and creativity of the poetic sign is stressed. The creativity of the sign lies partially in its
capacity to rewrite the given world, to heighten the formal and pre-Symbolic aspects of the real—or the imagined—for the reader's own pleasure. This, to my mind, is the common denominator of otherwise divergent aesthetic discourses. And this heightened re-imagining and appreciation of the sign is a signature move of Barthes' imaginative and cerebral sensuality.

According to the Sartrean theory of the imagination, in order to re-imagine the world, one must momentarily nihilate it. That is, one must imaginatively suspend the plenitude of the given world in order to create potentiality—a conceptual emptiness—that would allow one to not repeat what exists, but construct something other. Sartre understands the imaginative act as a form of necessary violence. In ES Barthes resists admitting the violence of the imagination and of the sign, arguing in the note on the transvestite that his fantasy writing does not "transgress" (violate) the object being signified, but only "translates" it; creating, he would probably argue, a non-violating and detached version of the model. Throughout the 1970s Barthes was to try to develop a non-harming and non-invasive form of writing. Reading the various interviews and addresses collected in GV, it is clear that this was one of the conscious aims of his post-structuralism (see, for instance, "The Fatality of Culture," "The Limits of Counterculture," "Digressions," "Of What Use is an Intellectual?", and Stephen Heath's interview). Despite these initial claims, from 1968 to 1973 Barthes' writing is full of
attacks on the doxic and the replete given. Throughout ES writing is defined as the technique of unsettling or destroying prior meaning (satori), or, alternatively, as a means of producing relatively empty signs. A "true writing" is held to frustrate the simple or utilitarian decoding of signs while producing a "volume" (that is, a textual space) in which the reader may follow—or, of course, ignore—"the course of the writing's labor": that is, the trace of the gestures which produced that sign or object. (ES 45/59)

...in a Japanese flower arrangement... what is produced is the circulation of air, of which flowers, leaves, branches (words that are far too botanical) are only the walls, the corridors, the baffles...you can move your body into the interstice of its branches...not in order to read it... but to follow the trajectory of the hand which has written it...

(ES 44-45/59)15

This view of writing as producing detours and volume will be more elaborately developed in PT. There the notion of writing as satori develops into the notion of jouissance, and Barthes pursues the desirable spaces of the marginal, the hors-texte.

Haiku

The functions of the frame—whether literal or conceptual—in this economy are complex. In Barthes' country the frame's primary task is, as I have argued, a defensive one:
to isolate the gesture or object from any context, so as to frustrate the semantic operations of those who would seek to "pierce" the thing with other signs, tapping the object's ostensible plenitude in order to surround it with commentary and meaning. Thus contextualized and interpreted, the object would be stabilized and drawn into the marketplace of culture as a commodity. Haloed with meaning, it would be prone (in Barthes' reading) to generate further anxieties of interpretation. Anxiety (a touchstone of existential discourse) interferes with pleasure and play: where there is no halo of meaning, Barthes declares in an interview, there is no anxiety. (GV 10/17)

Anxiety and meaning are antipathetic to the beat Zen aesthetics of ES. In a spiralling series of chapters on the haiku form (the supreme exemplum of Japanese "writing") Barthes reiterates his criticisms of Western values. The West, he complains, "moistens everything with meaning, like an authoritarian religion which imposes baptism on entire peoples: the objects of language...are obviously de jure converts." (ES 70/90-91) Desperate to fill the emptiness of language, the West has developed ways of "sparing discourse the infamy of non-meaning (non-sense):... symbol and reasoning, metaphor and syllogism." (ES 70/91-92) Western misreadings of the haiku have subjected it to such indignities, stopping its dynamic, absurd flow, and stuffing its emptiness with symbols and metaphors. "Correcting" those prior interpretations, in Barthes' fantasy the haiku is framed with silence (that zone of
agraphia around the Mallarmean sign) and with space. Restored to non-sense, it attains a paradoxical condition denied to Western writing: the "exemption from meaning within a perfectly readerly discourse." (ES 81/108) Haiku vacillates between two poles: opacity and a deceiving limpidity. It is a transparent and legible semantic absence: "while being quite intelligible, the haiku means nothing." (ES 69/89) This Japanese form has managed to escape the two basic functions of Western "classical writing" which continue to inform Western expectations of literary art: description and definition (description and definition being, as Barthes will argue in PT, "the doors of ideology in a text."). (ES 82/110) The haiku, according to Barthes, does not deal in metaphors or syllogisms. Like the pointing finger of a child, or the deictic gesture of a chopstick, the haiku neither describes nor defines, only tentatively designating the isolated event (and things are events) with a "so!" [Tel!]: "a touch so instantaneous and so brief (without vibration or recurrence) that even a copula would seem excessive." (ES 83/111) This "so!" is not an epiphanic illumination, a "rich thought reduced to a brief form," but a "brief event" (ES 75/98), a "faint crease" in the "page of life, the silk of language" (ES 78/101), "a kind of faint gash inscribed upon time." (ES 82/109) The haiku is a gratuitous gesture. As with many other "graphic gestures which mark modern and social Japanese life," the haiku is written for its own sake; it is a series of intransitive (matte) traces whichculminate, if the poetic gesture is sucessful, in a
meaningless flash of illumination (ES 82/110-111) Haiku's surprise, its sudden illumination and absurd beauty, is antipathetical to the Western literary tradition of revelation:

Here [in Japan] meaning is only a flash, a slash of light: *When the light of sense goes out, but with a flash that has revealed the invisible world*, Shakespeare wrote; but the haiku's flash illumines, reveals nothing; it is the flash of a photograph one takes very carefully ...but having neglected to load the camera with film.

(ES 83/111)

Barthes' haiku denies that there is an invisible deep world which might potentially inform and give sense to a world of interrupted surfaces. This genre recognizes only random surfaces, perceptions, and intensities that might fall fleetingly into some kind of intriguing and sensual--but senseless--order. Repeatedly moving between visual and aural metaphors, Barthes likens the haiku's absurd intensity to various forms of writing, then to the purest graph, one that will increasingly draw his attention: music. A "precise" utterance, without stable subject or object, this utopic haiku form suppresses the "margins", "smudges", and "interstices" which usually arise from semiosis, achieving the purity and very emptiness of a note of music.

In this emptiness difference and language cease to function. Having suspended meaning, the haiku form "makes impossible the most ordinary exercise of our language...commentary." (ES 81/108) "Deciphering",
"normalizing," or making "tautological": these are the traditional forms Western interpretation takes, according to Barthes. Western philologists, blissfully unaware of the haiku's aesthetics (if one is to accept the Barthesian reading), have violated that poetic genre by inferring and then interpreting an interiority and subjectivity which is not there. The Japanese soul does not, Barthes avers, contaminate Japanese writing. Western readings of haiku have suppressed its counter-descriptive treatment of the human subject and the thing as event or appearance rather than essence: commentators have unknowingly used haiku as a psychoanalytic ink blot, imposing symbols, narratives, insights and subjective states where they do not, according to Barthes, exist. The only respectful form of commentary on haiku, Barthes writes, would be repetition: but the real work of reading haiku is not to provoke language but to suspend it. (ES 72/94)

...merely saying that! with a movement so immediate (so stripped of any mediation: that of knowledge, of nomination, or even possession) that what is designated is the very inanity of any classification of the object...

(ES 83/111)

In ES, as throughout Barthes' post-structural writing, discrete verbal objects and concepts are unstable, contradictory, fluxing. They have a disconcerting tendency to transform and half dissolve within a larger movement of argumentation. Apparently substantial categories shimmer like mirages, then come apart, becoming synecdoches or metaphorical
entities working within a larger argument. To risk belabouring
the point of the hyper-textualization of the real: in ES haiku
finally refers not only to a particular literary genre but, as
Barthes parenthetically acknowledges, to any discontinuous
feature or event of Japanese life offering itself to his gaze.
(ES 83/111) For this tourist haiku, finally, is whatever
frustrates the Western impulse to meaning.

nothing special, says the haiku, in
accordance with the spirit of Zen:
the event is not nameable according to
any species, its speciality: like a
decorative loop, the haiku coils back
on itself, the wake of the sign which
seems to have been traced is erased:
nothing has been acquired, the word's
stone has been cast for nothing: neither
waves nor flows of meaning.
(ES 83-84/111-112)

In this fantasized world the graph, however rare or
quotidian, is its own beginning and end. A gestural flourish,
it arises and dies, leaving no semantic trace, not even the
reverberating series of fortuitous associations that Pater so
cherished, nothing that might be salvaged as a cultural
commodity. Haiku's absurd flash is part of the larger strategy
of Zen, which sabotages the mechanical operations of meaning.
The four possible semantic possibilities recognized in Western
logic--this is X, this is not X, this is both X and not-X, this
is neither X nor not-X [and therefore Y]--are confounded by the
conceptual noise of Zen. The Buddhist way, Barthes argues, is
that of the "obstructed meaning": as a consequence, "the very
arcanum of signification...the paradigm, is rendered
impossible." (ES 73/95) Zen thus mocks the mechanical nature of meaning, whose fundamental unit is the sign, seeing all as maya; that is, as delusion. All of Zen (and haiku is only its "literary branch") appears to Barthes as "an enormous praxis destined to halt language, to jam that kind of internal radiophony continually sending in us, even in our sleep." (ES 74/96) When the sudden croak of the frog awakened Basho to the truth of Zen ("vast emptiness, and nothing sacred about it", as one Zen master put it), what Basho discovered in that sound was not a mystical "illumination," but rather void, an "echoless breach," "an end of language" which silences the "soul's...babble" and notions of depth, subjectivity, and development. (ES 74/96) What Basho attained was the far side of language, a point beyond the Eliotic moment where words fails but meaning still exists. What Basho, a master of haiku, awoke to was the lack of any stable meaning in the world.

Haiku, in Barthes' reading, discovers three moments of language: the first, that of "vision without commentary," then, more radically, the reflexivity of language and the "matteness" (the opacity) of signs.(ES 82/109) Finally, haiku can move into its own nihilation: the abolition not only of meaning, but of the sign itself. This moment--another satori--provokes a shock in the reader. This satori is, Barthes conjectures, perhaps nothing more than a "panic suspension of language," a blank moment which releases one from the "reign of the Codes," an interruption of the "internal recitation which constitutes our person." (ES 75/97) However brief, this state
of "a-language" is a "liberation" because it jams the cycling of thought processes, the looping generation of secondary and tertiary thoughts, the circle of which language itself is the "depository and the model." (ES 75/97-98) Zen does not crush language beneath a mystical silence, but halts "that verbal top which sweeps into its gyration the obsessional play of symbolic substitutions": it overcomes the semantic operations of the sign. (ES 75/97-98) Barthesian haiku is one of the strongest successful literary instances of the sign as "anti-communication": the ineffable silence it creates as it abolishes language creates a resistant space separating graph from referent.

And in this writing the sign becomes something other: an empty form, or, better, a mirror, a jewel shining in an infinite net of faceted jewels reflecting light without beginning or end. In the West, Barthes writes, the sign is a narcissistic object which humanity creates only in order to look at itself in it. But in the "Orient," the mirror/sign is truly empty. It is the symbol of the "very emptiness of symbols...the mirror intercepts only other mirrors, and this infinite reflection is emptiness itself (which, as we know, is form)." (ES 78-79/104) Haiku pulverizes the world, reducing it to a random series of pure fragments, to "a dust of events" scattered throughout space which nothing can or should "coagulate, construct, direct, terminate." (ES 78/101) This beautiful absurdity does not provoke anxiety, but rather a desire for play. Recycling the vedic image of the universe as Indira's shimmering net, Barthes
offers the following image:

...one might say that the collective body of all haikus is a network of jewels in which each jewel reflects all the others and so on, to infinity, without there ever being a center to grasp, a primary core of irradiation (for us, the clearest image of this...play of reflections without origin, would be that of the dictionary, in which a word can only be defined by other words.)

(ES 78/103-104)

The haiku is a suspended jewel, a post-structural simulacrum in which, Barthes argues, we somehow recognize "a repetition without origin, an event without cause, a memory without person, a language without moorings." (ES 79/104) And, as Barthes reminds the reader, what he is writing about the haiku he could also write "about everything which happens when one travels in that country I am calling Japan." (ES 79/104-105) This Japan is a network of unconnected, semelfactive jewel-like flashes: there, in the street, in a shop, a train station a gesture, person or object flashes, "starring" Barthes, causing a series of perceptual and sensual "adventures" of an "infinitesmal" order. The subtlety of these experiences, Barthes' careful attention to them, as well as to his own complex response to them, is characteristically aesthetic in its hypersubtle exploration of detail and subjective response. "An incongruity of clothing, an anachronism of culture, a freedom of behaviour, an illogicality of itinerary": these are events that suddenly come forward in the "lively writing of the street" and suddenly glisten as they are "read." (ES 79/104-
These tiny adventures accumulate over the course of a day, causing a kind of "erotic intoxication" in the traveler. (ES 79/104-105)

These adventures are not "novelistic." (ES 79/104-105) They have no development, no duration, no cohesion: they do not lend themselves to the semiotic "chatter which would make them into narratives or descriptions" (that is, they do not create the illusion of a fictional world.) (ES 79/105) Instead, what they offer the individual to read is the reflexive movement of the graph, "without wake, without margin, without vibration." (ES 80/105)

In ES Japan becomes a refined and almost inhuman spectacle—the product, as Barthes writes, of an aesthetic from which all vulgarity and emotion has been decanted, or subsumed into a series of highly coded "graphic gestures." Barthes is enchanted by a people who have achieved, in this fantasy, a "graphic mode of existing" that does not depend, as in the West, on a "theatricality (hysteria) of bodies," but on a writing alla prima—a writing which excludes erasure or repetition. (ES 86/116) Japan becomes the ultimate utopian aesthetic state, the country of taste.

In this text/state everything is—or, more accurately, is perceived by Barthes as—writing, even blatant social violence. He analyses the Japanese Zengakuren riots of the late 1960s and early 1970s not as a manifestation of real social conflict, but as a fierce ballet of signs. Rather improbably (given the background of the dissent fuelling the riots) he
extirpates that clash of its expressive content, arguing that the riot is not in fact a riot but a "great scenario of signs," an organized and solitary "mass writing" which is neither spontaneous nor expressive. Westerners, Barthes writes, are prone to misinterpret these riots by reading them through the Occidental prejudice that violence is a "primary, savage, asystematic" language spontaneously expressing both a political position and "a content, an inwardness, a [human] nature." (ES 103/139) The Zengakuren riot is, he insists, expressing neither. The violence of the riot is a self-abolishing "sign" which expresses nothing: "neither hatred nor indignation nor any moral idea." (ES 103/139) It is a discontinuous but deliberately arranged writing of actions publicly "performed like a prosaic sentence." (ES 103/139) Barthes obscurely argues that this riot is really a form of action-writing.17 In choosing not to lapse into the naive myth of presence by destroying its targets in the Western manner, but rather putting those targets and the symbols of the rioters "between parentheses," the demonstration moves into the realm of the mimed and suspended gesture, of the theatrical. (ES 104/139)

This riot/"sentence"--masked and helmetted students putting themselves in the way of state violence in order to manifest their revulsion against the Vietnam War--lacks any sense of reality or emotional force for Barthes. The frightening situation is, under his outsider's gaze, doubled, aestheticized, becoming not so much a protest against a bloody
war as a "great scenario of signs." (ES 106/142)

In the following, final section of the book, "The Cabinet of Signs," Barthes reasserts the contained and graphic post-structural nature of his Japan. The sumptuous closed cabinet through which he has been moving is a half-voided artifact. In it the human body, sensual but emptied of expressivity, becomes a pure signifier. In this cabinet the human trace is fugal: it apparently persists, as in the Zen garden, only in traces—the trace of the rake ordering the sand, the ghostly hand placing the rocks which transforms earthy materials into "a mineral tapestry of tiny volumes;" that is, the human element persists only in the work of writing which transforms the elemental into an aesthetic object. (ES 108/146) This empire of signs is a fragmentary textual—and, finally, mental—space of successive "views." Within its borders the object-as-event produces itself under western eyes in a moment of "pure significance, abrupt, empty, like a fracture" and then fades before "any particular signified" has time to form. (ES 108/146) Returning to the Shikidai corridor, Barthes draws a series of parallels between it and this ideal Japanese space where meaning and the acquisitive impulse are delicately arrested.

...the better to see how it [the country] is made, take for example the Shikidai corridor: tapestried with openings, framed with emptiness and framing nothing, decorated no doubt, but so that the figuration (flowers, trees, birds, animals) is removed, sublimated...

(ES 108/145)

In this corridor, as in the ideal Japanese house, there is
no place for furniture, no site which might express the slightest nuance of ownership, no bed or table from which the human being might organize space and create a centre, however arbitrary. Disoriented in such a space, Barthes writes, the subject is unable to constitute himself as either subject or master of that space. (ES 108-109/146) This white space is also arguably akin to the zone of silence protecting the haiku (and the Mallarmean sign) from the contaminating forces of subjectivity, the passing of time, personal narratives, history, territory. This space remains unmarked, fantastically "reversible" (that is, freed from the exigencies of choice and consequence that mark real life), as pure and synchronic as a note of music. Underlining the unreality of this Japan, Barthes ends the book with a gesture reminiscent of Thackeray in Vanity Fair, synecdochically picking up his creation and turning it upside down like a child's toy to exhibit its unreality.

Uncentered, space is also reversible: you can turn the Shikdai gallery upside down and nothing would happen, except an inconsequential inversion of top and bottom, of right and left: the content is irretrievably dismissed: whether we pass by, cross it, or sit down on the floor (or the ceiling, if you reverse the image), there is nothing to grasp.

(ES 110/146)

A tentative semiosis: the suspension of language: reverie, beauty, the flash of something, of nothing, starring the reader: a delicate suicide of signs in an aerated space. Loss and absurdity: but no grief. This is the utopian writing of pure expenditure and reflexivity Barthes has learned to seek
from Japanese texts and their anonymous scriptors. In both S/Z and ES the grasping "humanist imagination" and humanist subject of which Kearney writes is declared to be dead, an illusion undone. The sovereign individual imagination of the West is unseated by the perception of cultural belatedness and notions of bricolage and the intertext, challenged by the ideal of an writing performed by an "empty wrist." (ES 57/75) For Barthes, the textual will remain a sanctuary, but in ES the first indications of an ambivalence toward the intertextual economy articulated in works such as S/Z is evident. In the Parisian economy, the world-habitat is a heavy and cerebral palimpsest of prior writings, a realm choked with decaying signs. The most intense pleasures in that habitat--difference and connotation--are the rewards of the insider, the initiate. In the Parisian economy, pleasure is largely a function of cultural competence, which depends upon a cultured memory and sophisticated mental operations. For this economy to function, the reader/ascriptor is obliged to identify codes and intertexts; then, having remembered (or ludically distorted) them, she must subsequently disentangle, reconstruct and release (forget) intertexts. It is at this moment, the point of forgetting, that the Parisian economy begins to approach the Japanese aesthetic of suchness.

The Japanese economy is, even more than the Parisian one, an aestheticizing economy. This economy is one in which either a cultural initiate or a cultural outsider may participate, and it is an economy of disengagement, of pure expenditure. Moving
away from the model of the busy text, and suspending metalanguages, in *ES* Barthes proposes a textual economy in which what dominates is not the intertext, but that which is non-iterable and therefore non-functional in a larger cultural sense. In *S/Z* a profusion of signs screens a larger absence. In *ES* that nothingness frankly dominates an economy in which graphs are sensual, experiential, semelfactive, and arrested before reaching a critical threshold of meaning. The critical mind is silenced as the body experiences writing both actively and passively, and then moves into silence, so that there is almost nothing to comment upon, nothing left to grasp in a beautiful bouquet of signs.

Nothing left to grasp: the fundamental gesture of violence in Barthesian post-structuralism. For the rest of the decade Barthes will reflect on forms of violence and coercion found in discourse. His analyses of the nuances of discursive violence will most often be acute: one can cite, for example, "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers" and his stunning *L.* ("WIT," *RL* 309/345) But his understanding of grosser and quotidian violences will remain problematic, and rather cerebral, as his reading of the Zengakuren riot, and eventually the comments on the images of violence scattered throughout *CL*, attest.
CHAPTER FIVE. PLEASURES OF THE TEXT

The one way of tolerating existence is to lose oneself in literature as in a perpetual orgy.
Gustave Flaubert

Claims of the repressed

Half theoretical reverie, half critical provocation, PT is a disjunctive essay of fragments and abandoned thoughts that confronts the cultural Imaginary with "the texture [le grain] of desire" and the unruly "claims [la revendication] of the (reading) body." (RB 71/75) As Barthes suggests, this work proceeds in a state of unresolved tension, exploring, in terms frequently reminiscent of decadent and aesthetic discourses, the themes of reading, textuality, violence, aesthetic pleasure, and cultural disengagement. After initiating a reflection on the question of reading and pleasure in ES and then pursuing it in the stimulating interpretations of Sade's and Fourier's imaginary utopias in SFL, Barthes' writing is now more openly rebellious. He continues to "unlearn" cultural values and inherited forms of reading, and attempts to emerge from the "aegis of great systems" and write without the intellectual protection of prior constructs.² Professing himself a hedonist, he indicts the anhedonia of doxic culture, challenging the values of a "frigid" and "violent" society, and contemporary literary theories which repress the profound
hedonism animating cultural production.

From 1970 through 1973, both in his theories and his writing practice, Barthes has been distancing himself from purely cerebral discourses on, and engagements with, texts. The modest defense of the pleasures of connotation and drift scattered throughout S/Z accelerates, in SFL, to the contention underwriting PT—that the text is not an intellectual object, but an object of pleasure. PT, building upon the valorization of individual aesthetic response forwarded in ES, treats the text as a site of complex personal enjoyments, as a collection of signs giving rise to unpredictable interstices in which the reader may experience a range of pleasures from the soothing if outdated enjoyments of culture to the brief voyage or satori of jouissance.

Barthes' retreat from orthodox theory is linked to the assertion of the specificity of the reading body and a search for new reading strategies that break the hold of doxic interpretations. His retreat from his earlier treatments of texts continues in this erotic manifesto of reading. With the entry of the body into his theoretical frames, materiality, the "extravagance of the signifier," the intertext and the cessation of semiosis (satori in ES, jouissance in PT) come into a more complex and nuanced relationship. This second, less critically researched phase centres upon a growing attraction to the unrepeatable surprise and specificity of individual aesthetic response to (as ES forecast) the material substratum of texts, as well as to the moments when the Symbolic order
fails. This fascination develops into an attraction toward the opaque (or matte) extra-symbolic aspects of the material, and, eventually, a desire for the shelter of the impure silence between signs.

Under the influence of Kristeva's work on the semiotic realm and the child's pre-Symbolic relation to language, the mother, and the sensual world, Barthes' constructions of textuality and human subjectivity—and, particularly, his own precious and renegade individuality—turn toward the tutor texts of Baudelaire and Nietzsche. Adopting the posture of a marginalized hedonist, he pursues a counter-cultural ethos of reading not as cultural obligation but unindentured pleasure. Some of the implications of this move are not lost on Steven Ungar and Betty R. McGraw, who reflect on the implicit critique contained within Barthes' turn toward a more self-conscious discourse:

[m]ore than any of his peers, Barthes made his critical practice self-reflexive. In doing so, he returned consistently to the underlying questions of value and interpretation that the scientific ambitions of structural analysis had displaced. Barthes' assertion of the personal stake in critical inquiry scandalized those of his readers for whom he had embodied the triumph of linguistic and textual analyses over conventional practices which used the life of the author to explain his or her writings. ("Intro.," SC xix)

This upsurge of sensualism and private values heralds another shift within Barthes' post-structural theorizing, where he begins, as I have indicated, to consider the costs of his own involvement with dominant forms of culture, and comes to
an even more ambivalent relationship with signs and the violent
dynamics of culture. PT is, as Richard Miller points out in the
forward to the English translation, an "erotics of reading." (PT
viii) And it is the first of Barthes' later post-structural
writings, all of which, as Ungar and McGraw observe,
"constitute a unique self-analysis which hovers consistently
between confession and dissimulation." ("Intro.," SC xxi-xxii,
my emphasis) Hence this text on textual eroticism is a curious,
ambivalent, and involuted discourse; one in which, as Miller
notes, Barthes appears to passionately "give himself away" and
"confess" the nature of his reading habits in what may appear to
be a "random succession" of fragments: facets, aphorisms,
touches and shoves, nudges, elbowings, bubbles, trial
balloons, phylacteries." (PT vii) Yet globally the text is
hardly spontaneous, or casually disheveled: its internal
disputations, its formal and semantic disorders, are contained
and even protected by the arbitrary device of an alphabetic
ordering of the titles of its prose fragments, creating, as in
ES, a systématique having neither centre, beginning, or
closure. 5

The protective nature of disorder (and the arbitrary order
of the Symbolic) are lessons reinforced by Kristeva's work on
language and human subjectivity. Her brilliant theorizing on
the progression of the human subject through the realm of the
semiotic (what, for the sake of clarity, I refer to as the pre-
Symbolic) into an unresolved entry into the power and the
poverty of the Symbolic order underlies the sea-change in
textuality and the subject evident in PT. Kristeva posits the existence of three categories of human subjects. Most familiarly, she identifies the functional unary social subject (what Barthes refers to in PT as the "cultural ego"). This social subject is a stable, continuous, self-identical being who is well-integrated in the dominant order of her society. This dominant order—the Symbolic order—values closure, continuity, stability. It attempts to repress or at least contain the pansensuality and memories of the unfocused experiential world of the child before her entry into the strictures of the Symbolic order. This entry is, however powerful, not totally irreversible. An enlivening tension between the two orders endures—a tension which is the very stuff of art. Even once socialized within the Symbolic realm, the subject retains a certain liminality and attraction to the pre-Symbolic realm. Through art, reverie and sensual pleasure, the subject can momentarily allow that modality to flood and soften the Symbolic modality. However, too great and protracted an immersion in the pre-Symbolic would render her dysfunctional, or, culturally speaking, psychotic. The Symbolic order, if it is to function, must restrict the anarchic polyvalence of language, so that social values, signs and referents may remain stable. The Symbolic order is, therefore, the site of political assertion. The official citizen of this order—Kristeva's unary subject (also referred to as the readerly or classical subject in Barthes' texts)—is the subject presupposed and validated by Barthes' readerly text:
(in PT, the readerly text returns as the texte de plaisir or the texte-babil). This unary subject has been well socialized in the interpretation of social codes that restrict polysemy and significance: successfully distanced from the rich but dangerous lure of the semiotic, she approaches it only fitfully. Kristeva's second category of subjecthood recognizes the "split subject"; that is, the "poetic subject-in-process" of PT who moves between the social Imaginary and its momentary abolition in the amniotic waters of the pre-Symbolic. Finally, unlike Barthes, Kristeva identifies a psychotic subject, that is, a person who is trapped in the semiotic realm and unable to communicate with other persons using a common language.

Reading and subjectivity

For Barthes, reading is the fundamental human activity: to be human is to read; and thus most of his speculations on human subjectivity proceed through a discussion of the nature of the reader. S/Z figures the human subject as a quasi-cybernetic social intertext who re-reads and manipulates the codes manipulating him, momentarily seduced by the draw of connotation and drifting; in ES he is, ideally, a graceful trace, a gesturing but silent body who participates in the promulgation and the cessation of codes. In PT Barthes' previous hypotheses regarding language and the human subject, predicated upon structural notions of bricolage and the post-structural trace, though still retained, are incorporated into
a construct of greater complexity and tension. This new construct rests upon the Kristevian model of the ambivalent poetic subject engaging a language which is itself plural, divided, perpetually oscillating between the poles of meaning and *significance*. Barthes' ideal reader is now a competent but "split," "perverse" subject having many "bodies" that encounter the half-dreamed "body" of the text. This virtual reader--like his pale reflection, the less subversive historical reader practising post-structural reading--is, Barthes declares, a "'living contradiction'" who plays the "two edges" of language, and "simultaneously enjoys [jouit], through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall." (PT 6-7/14-15, 21/35-36, my emphasis) This split subject is, like Barthes, full of productive tensions. Both cultured and perverse, historical and anachronic, sensual and rational, erotic and yet alienated, egocentric (but not subjective), capable of memory and emotion yet fictive, drawn toward sapentia rather than cold knowledge, he is an unresolved multiplicity of sensations, responses, and postures. Like a spider, Barthes writes, this reader/ascriptor makes and dissolves his (or its) selves within the secretions of the text. (PT 64/101)

*PT* opens with a small cameo in which Barthes conjures up an impossibly ideal reading actant. This readerly being is a mobile and fissured thought-form, a half-imaginary creature issuing from the repressed of culture. Hedonistic, "anti-heroic," unstable, solitary, this reading entity (who can also
write) cultivates his "neurosis" (which isolates him from the gregarious herd), and spends his reading time as a flaneur, "cruising" the text, taking refuge in sensation and the tumult of languages. (PT 3-6/9-13) Like the romantic poet, he lives on borderlines, flouting social interdictions, names, and the law of non-contradiction. Gesturally contesting power, he moves back and forth across the doxic and innovative edges of language, courting paradox, and, like certain avantgardists, a confusion that creates open space within cultural discourse:

[imagine someone (a kind of Monsieur Teste in reverse) who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old specter: logical contradiction; who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity...who remains passive in the face of Socratic irony...and legal terrorism.]

(PT 3/9)

In PT the figure of the reading subject is shattered into a series of individual and ideal attitudes, as well as anecdotal "confessions" that one assumes are Barthes', so that one can no longer speak of a coherent paradigm of the reader per se. Rather, Barthes has a number of kinds of readers and reading attitudes parade through the textual sook (square) of his work. This complexity is heightened by Barthes' doubled writing, his habit of not only speculating, in the abstract, on the nuances of writing and reading, but of also ambiguously inscribing himself as both reader and writer in PT, so that distinctions between the habits and traits of the ideal reading subject and
those of (presumably) Barthes himself deliberately blur. When Barthes writes of the reader, then, one must, when possible (and often it is not), sort out whether Barthes is referring to himself, to the virtual reader of his intermittent theorizing, to its counter-term (the complacent cultured reader), or, finally, to the reader moyen(ne) sensuel(le).

The complexity of the reading subject(s) in this text is underlined by the shifts in reading positions Barthes himself enacts within the text. PT is a mass of disjunctive fragments and fragmentary reflections that circle around a thematic node; a mass shrewedly oscillating between the registers of the personal and the theoretical essay. Barthes' unsystemic and personal reflections on himself as a reader are part of the strategy of protective incoherence operating in PT. Through the fictional screens of the first and third person shifters, and the amorphous, ironized M. Teste (Barthes' mask for the ideal post-structural reader), Barthes returns frequently to the issue of subjectivity, and the subject's unpredictable responses to what he reads. The Barthesian subject--half mann, half theory--is now, by turns, a rhapsodic Nietzschean entity, an empty space ("a vessel of expansion"), a shape-shifter. This subject shuttles back and forth between the stasis of his "cultural ego" (his unary identity within society) and his fluid, latent poeticity, his capacity for experiences of liminality in which the cultural self, momentarily fading, is ravished by the pre-Symbolic. This temporary overcoming of the cultural ego can, in Barthes' rewriting of the sublime,
culminate in a momentary and purely private loss of that cultural self in the sudden and unforeseen surge of the pre-Symbolic: an experience that, in its most extreme instance, culminates in the loss known as *jouissance*.\(^6\)

In his later texts Nietzsche, like Barthes, tends toward the semantic compression of the aphorism, and to the stubborn ambiguities and aporias of what Blanchot refers to as a *parole de fragment*.\(^7\) The compression and allusiveness of PT is such that one might write a full-length study elucidating the decadent traces and intertexts threaded through Barthes' account of *jouissance* and its attendant themes (*ennui*, the fragmentation and fetishization of the text, marginality, perversion, Heraclitean flux, the cult of the hypersubtle, and so on).\(^8\) Barthes' covert dialogue with Kristeva and Lacan on subjectivity, desire and pleasure could furnish material for yet another work, as could a study pursuing the Nietzschean intertexts operative in his thinking. In this thesis I will of necessity severely restrict my discussion of *jouissance* to its most immediate and strategic functions, focusing on the relations between pleasure, *jouissance* and the indictment of the violence pervading the Western cultural economy. Specifically, I hope to touch upon how pleasure wards off identity, self-consistency, meaning, and ideology. But before exploring those areas, it is worth pointing to a few of the changes that the concept of textuality—and concepts in general—undergo in this work. Barthes attempts to distance his writing from the structures of ideologies and prior
intellectual systems by embracing perpetual process (process as an irresolute shifting or displacement), opting for unresolved notions such as the systematic, the individual reading body, and the playful subversion of his own conceptual categories (e.g. the blurring of pleasure and jouissance). Accordingly, he offers a number of new metaphors of the text.

_The flowing tree, the island, the spider's web_

'We are not subtle enough to perceive that probably absolute flow of becoming; the permanent exists only thanks to our coarse organs which reduce and lead things to shared premises of vulgarity, whereas nothing exists in this form. A tree is a new thing at every instant; we affirm the form because we do not seize the subtlety of an absolute moment' (Nietzsche).

The Text too is this tree whose (provisional) nomination we owe to the coarseness of our organs. We are scientific because we lack subtlety [my emphasis].

(PT 60-61/96)

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading. Text of bliss [jouissance]: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.

(PT 14/25-26)

Barthes now concentrates upon reactivating the faded
metaphoricity--and hence the ambiguity and latent novelty--inhering in concepts.(PT 40-41/65-66) As part of an evolving strategy of poeticizing the hardening discourses of critical theory, Barthes retreats from the use of quasi-scientific terms such as "network" and "system" in his writing, reaching instead for a series of lovely if disjunctive new metaphors to describe his vision of textuality. These metaphors are at times drawn from literary tradition. Take Barthes' Baudelairean vision of the text as an "asocial islet": "the text is never a 'dialogue': no risk of feint, of aggression, of blackmail...[it] establishes a sort of islet within the human--the common--relation." (PT 16/28) But these metaphors can be also surprisingly quotidian and domestic (the text as a fluid, endlessly becoming tree, a spider's web, an irregularly veined and knotted piece of wood). (PT 38/62, 64/101, 36-37/60) Less visually-oriented, more tactile and kinesthetic, Barthes' new constellation of tropes expressing the myriad facets of the textual shifts abruptly throughout the work. PT features a sequence of beautiful and obliquely related figurations of the textual that sound most of the themes and attitudes of this latter phase (in addition to the above metaphors, Barthes writes of the text as a "fissured envelope," and a fetishized quasi-human, desiring body--"a language lined with flesh". (PT 66-67/104/105) As fugual and provisional as these heuristic images are, they signal Barthes' rejection of the role of a professional lector bent upon cold readings of mastery. The essay's tropes and speculations on the textual--whether
offered from the point of view of Barthes-as-writer or Barthes-as-reader—are like a series of details or snapshots of parts of the beloved thrown into the lap of the reader, faute de mieux. One may attempt to work with these images as though they were pieces of an intellectual puzzle: but these images, these pieces, do not add up into an iterable theory: they express, instead, momentary, perversely disjointed insights into the potentialities of texts. Barthes' texts move toward a rich sensualism and manifest, however dissimulated and ironically, a reading practice which, in its attention to the smallest nuances of individual aesthetic experience and response, recalls the essays of Pater and Proust's Recherche. Inclining toward the pre-Symbolic pole of the aesthetic continuum, Barthes' writings will integrate what I have tentatively identified as the Parisian textual economy--i.e. the cerebral treatment of signs and difference as elements caught up within a larger system--with the Japanese aesthetic of suspending context in order to focus upon the reader's desire as it flutters over the material and sensual specificity of an object-text.

Throughout PT Barthes explores the advantages of reading aimlessly. Ideally, his reader "grazes" upon random words and passages, safely shut away in his library like an "aristocratic reader," a textual flâneur, or, in Barthes' idiolect, an amateur who has the time and the cultural privilege to indulge his caprices and cultivate his boredom, pursuing the phoenix of desire, writing small notes to himself and an audience
erotically distanced by the screen of language. It is appropriate, then, that the metaphor of the text as an isolated, privately conjured islet leads the sequence of textual metaphors that I have referred to above. The text-as-island is, in the Barthesian Imaginary, an interstitchal respite from dialogical stress and competing Imaginaries:

[t]he text is never a 'dialogue': no risk of feint, of aggression, of blackmail, no rivalry of ideolects; the text establishes a sort of islet within the human--the common relation, manifests the asocial nature of pleasure...grants a glimpse of a scandalous truth about bliss; that it may well be, once the image-reservoir of speech is abolished, neuter.

(PT 16/28)

After casually dropping those controversial notions, Barthes heads into another image, putting a new metaphor to the view of writing as productivity found in S/Z: the text-as-stage from which the reader performs endless and intermittent monologues to and for himself. "On the stage of the text, no footlights; there is not, behind the text, someone active (the writer) and out front someone passive (the reader): there is not a subject and an object." (PT 16/29-30) Then, hedging the certainty of the sourcing, and embellishing the central trope with a suite of evocative visions, Barthes borrows what proves to be a major image in the rest of his writing: the body-as-text.

Apparently Arab scholars, when speaking of the text, use this admirable expression: the certain body. What body? We have several of them; the body of anatomists and physiologists, the one science sees or discusses: this is the text of grammarians,
critics, commentators, philologists... But we also have a body of bliss consisting solely of erotic relations, utterly distinct from the first body: it is another contour, another nomination...

(PT 16/29)

Disengaging himself from the more moderate position of S/Z, where the pleasure of signs co-habits with at least traces of representation, Barthes moves into an imploded aesthetic of pleasure. Anything external to the immediate moment of the reading goes out-of-focus. Form, which has, over the course of Barthes' career, devolved from structuralist simulacra to structural oppositions, then into structurations and fragments, hallucinatory figurations, and an amorphous collection of details, semiotic abrasions, gaps, rifts, ruptures, and maculae.

Barthes' tentative, perpetually experiential understanding of the text coincides perfectly with his carpe diem posture. For Barthes hedonists are true marginals--those who dedicate themselves to the unverifiable pooling of energy that can be generated in the experience of aware seeing, those who deeply engage the details of some thing, some sign, and spin a web of "erotic relations" Barthes names the "body of bliss." Poetically evoking this subtle body beyond the body, he writes of it as being like a series of "living fires, intermittent lights, wandering features strewn in the text like seeds." (PT 16-17/29-30)

Throughout PT Barthes exploits two potent alternatives to representation: the loss of form (jouissance) and the free, slightly dreamy constellation of desire within a text (what he
terms "figuration"). Presaging the notion of the punctum in CL, in PT Barthes defines figuration as something that happens involuntarily, during the moments when something "leaps out of the frame of the picture, the book, or the screen." (PT 57/90) It is when a phantasmal "erotic body appears in the text": "the text...can reveal itself in the form of a body, split into fetish objects, into erotic sites." (PT 55-56/88-89) This body is not a unified, historical body, but a passing, metaphorical phantasm of desire. Representation, Barthes asserts, is merely an "embarrassed figuration," "one encumbered with other meanings than that of desire..reality, morality, likelihood, readability, truth, etc." (PT 56/89) The distinction here is between the useless (figuration) and the functional (representation). Barthesian figuration is motivated not by a human need to use a text for some practical or informational purpose, but rather by a wandering, individual desire. The separation of pleasure and production is a tenet of PT: "the pleasure of the text is irreducible to its grammatical function...like the pleasure of the body is irreducible to physiological need." (PT 17/30 translation altered)

Like the ideal text, Barthes' ideal readers and writers are perverse: they resist functionality; they are irreducible to any ideology. The writer is seen as a useless monk, a beggar, an unproductive bonze; then as a "joker in the pack," always drifting in the blind spots of systems"; he is "outside exchange, plunged into non-profit...desiring nothing but the bliss of words." (PT 23/40, 35/57-58) Barthes' reader, like the
writer, enjoys the verbal luxury of the text, neither judging the text nor applying normative predicates, but posing instead the "Nietzschean question": what is this text for me? (PT 13/24). When faced with a tedious, doxic, "babbling" text, the reader will disrespect its apparent order, reading it as he likes, creating "abrasions" upon the "fine surface of the text." (PT 11-12/22-23) If faced with the semantic drone of critical texts (texts that are, at best, about radical pleasure) he turns this annoyance into an opportunity for radical pleasure. The solution is elementary. The "second-degree reader" makes himself into a first-degree reader not by becoming a confidant of the author, or a passionate hermeneut, but by assuming a posture of disengagement. He becomes a third party to the critic's engagement with a text, an uninvolved voyeur who spies on this relation, plays with it, and so enters a space of "infinite perversity." (PT 17/31)

This cult of the perverse in Barthesian post-structuralism must be carefully understood. Perverse acts are creative, sometimes involuntary acts that "split...the moral unity that society demands of every human product." (PT 31/52) In perverse acts--including perverse texts--the antagonism of opposition is overcome by plurality, by uncontrolled difference. (PT 31/52) Perversion opens up unconstrained, uncontrolled spaces for further writing, further reading, and more pleasure. Perversion is thus set against the congealed values and subjects of the ideological and the doxic; hence its link with the pre-Symbolic. This is why Barthes cherishes the
instants when his engagement with the text—an engagement with the tamer delights of the symbolic order—is involuntarily interrupted by his bodymind’s response to the reading material. With the eruption of the pre-Symbolic modality, the Symbolic order (identity, order, unity, meaning) looses control, momentarily submerged in the cresting of the body’s desire and its counter-intelligence: "[t]he pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do." (PT 17/30)

PT is, like Barthes' subsequent books, more belle-litteristic than theoretical in the ordinary sense. These later works participate in Barthes' one-man rebellion. They refuse to furnish the reader with a consistent concept of the text (including the text of the self), yielding only voyeuristic glimpses of another's pleasure of the text intended, I think, to stimulate the reader's own perverse readings of the world-as-text. Sensing the protection of intellectual movement, Barthes begins, in Nietzschean terms, to learn to dance. He becomes a poetic theoretician. The already somewhat tentative and equivocal theoretical hypotheses circulating in his texts (e.g. the readerly and writerly, pleasure and jouissance) become even more dynamic, impure, blurred, relative, overtly metaphorical and perspectival tropisms. The subversion of metalanguage intensifies in his writing. Reflecting upon his theories of textuality, in RB R.B. asserts the Nietzschean position of the fictionality of concepts, holding that the Text, like some secular mystery, can only be approached
indirectly:

[t]he text is never approached except metaphorically; it is the field of the haruspex, it is a banquette, a faceted cube, an excipient, a Japanese stew, a din of decors, a braid, some Valenciennes lace, a Moroccan wadi, a broken television screen, a layered pastry, an onion, etc. (RB 74/77)

Some general points, however, about the textual in this later phase can be culled from PT. The peculiar isolation and non-harming social disengagement Barthes perceives the text as offering is repeatedly reaffirmed. His theories of the human subject and of the text mirror one another, as they did in S/Z. A significant shift is found his apprehension of the "anti-heroic" poetic subject. This subject and his discourse creatively disrupt Symbolic codes, and negotiate not only consequent gaps in the Symbolic, but also flirt with the idea of the death of language. (PT 6-8/14-15) In PT the minimal order and depth persisting in notions of the text found in S/Z and ES are lost in extreme closeups of textual details. Barthes pursues his anti-represental theory of the text, presenting the eloquent hypothesis that the text does not name, but in fact undoes nomination.

"Then, potentially, all linguistics fell..."

Barthes' retreat from totalizing conceptual systems, as I have suggested, occurs under the tutelage of Baudelaire and Nietzsche, two Western masters of sensual skepticism. As a
speculative and often ironic, deliberately unreadable meditation on reading, PT should be read neither too earnestly, nor too literally. Speculation is a form of reverie, of awake dreaming, signalled by the use of the subjunctive mood. Throughout much of PT Barthes is, as it were, dreaming aloud, probing gaps in the skin of the endoxic.10 Barthes himself underscores his speculative mood, often salting his aphorisms and hypotheses with "perhaps," "if," "as if," or, frequently, "imagine." "We can imagine a typology of the pleasures of reading," he writes, and: "[i]mage an aesthetic...based entirely..on the pleasure of the consumer," or: "[w]hence, perhaps, a means of evaluating the works of our modernity: their value would proceed from their duplicity"; "[i]f it were possible to imagine an aesthetic of textual pleasure, it would have to include: writing aloud...Let us talk about it as though it existed:" and "if one were to manage it, the very utterance of drifting today would be a suicidal discourse." (PT 59/94, 63/99-100, 7/15, 66/104, 19/33) Reminding one of André Breton's call for a culture of sleeping intellectuals (i.e. intellectuals attuned to the non-logic of the pre-Symbolic), in the last third of the essay Barthes suggestively links some of the major themes of PT (the ideal text, the poetic subject, language, reading, reverie) in an oblique tableau. One evening, half-asleep in a bar (a doubly liminal state) he decides to perform an experiment. Surrounded by an ambient womb of aural graphs—"music, conversations, the sound of chairs, glasses, a whole stereophony" which he likens to a square in Tangiers as
described by Severo Sarduy—he tries to enumerate all the "languages" he hears. His efforts are blessed by failure: a failure which affords him a glimpse of what language and human being might be like before and beyond the incarcerating sentence. In this indolent threshold state, he achieves a happy parallel emptiness, a state of negativity. His being seems to him an empty site mirroring the formless space and flow of the plural text he is attempting to disentangle.

I myself was a public square, a sook; through me passed words, tiny syntagms, bits of formulae, and no sentence formed...this non-sentence...was...what is eternally, splendidly, outside the sentence. Then, potentially, all linguistics fell...

(PT 49/79-80)

This second phase of speculation and semantic irresolution, where Barthes' writing explores the registers of poetic, essayistic and novelistic discourses, can provoke enormous frustration in those readers wanting his texts to produce a marketable set of conceptual "cultural goods" that could circulate in scholarly economies. Though not as strongly as Baudelaire, Barthes is now almost persuaded that abstract theorizing (i.e. scientific or scholarly modalities) engenders powerful and seductive but belated discourses of poverty next to the richness of the thing (language, reverie, sensuality, the text). Therefore, throughout the rest of his life, Barthes plays ironically with concepts. Wanting to distance his writing from languages of power, Barthes will devise a number of formal and rhetorical strategies. In PT, against the prevailing
theoretical practice of opposition and conflict, Barthes idealistically proposes an ethos of private sensuality, based upon respecting and cultivating the opacities of difference. Opposition, the conceptual "knife of value" that orders the world, which has produced both unending conflict as well as much of Barthesian theory, is played with, dulled by hesitations and the counterproposals of the matte and the neuter, if never finally laid down. ([PT] 41/67)

Early on in PT Barthes alerts his readers to the contingency and self-subversion that will henceforth blur the edges of his theoremes. His signs, like Twombley's delicate and indolent drawings, will now seek to "tremble" with pleasure and "verge" on dysgraphia. And the most blurred, trembling construct in PT is certainly the distinction between pleasure and jouissance:

(Pleasure/Bliss: terminologically, there is always a vacillation--I stumble, I err. In any case, there will always be a margin of indecision; the distinction will not be the source of absolute classifications, the paradigm will falter, the meaning will be precarious, revocable, reversible, the discourse incomplete. ([PT] 4/10)

Reverie, revolt, readers
In *The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes* Mary Bittner Wiseman offers a less wary interpretation of this text and its subjunctive mood, reading PT as an "invitation" to the reader to imagine herself to be like the anarchic, post-cultural M. Teste. ([ERB] 9) And indeed PT, along with ES, could be read as a
post-structural *invitation au voyage*, where the body of the lover (more frequently than hashish, the site of and stimulus to Baudelairean reverie) has become the distanced bodies of language. (PT 66-67/104-105) Like ES, PT is a protected rhetorical garden, one of Barthes' utopias of language generated by verbal acts of suspension (*épochés*) which distance the constraints of external claims and relations, allowing Barthes and his sensual but bored actants to dream within the infinite and yet confined space of details. 11 ES and PT are, in terms of Barthes' ethical and aesthetic critiques, intimately related to one another. In both, Barthes challenges the values and telos of Western culture. Read together, they document the range of Barthes' indictment of Western culture with its sacred categories, its hermeneutic, Oedipal, and acquisitive obsessions, while modeling alternative relations to existing cultural texts. These two modern utopias propose a cultural counter-ethos founded upon pleasure, perverse reading, and a soft-focus poeticization of fundamental cultural categories--the text, the reader, the writer.

This counter-ethos is heavily indebted to Nietzsche. The figure of the ironic M. Teste gracing the prow of PT is at least as indebted to Nietzsche as to Valéry. Barthes' essay, from its claims of the fictionality of the real down to theft of the Nietzschean metaphors of the human being as a spider spinning the web of her text, and the text as a tree, evidence the impact of Nietzsche upon Barthes in the mid to late 1970s. Barthes' post-structural reading attitudes are partially modeled upon
the Nietzsches of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *Ecce Homo*, and "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense." The Nietzschean reader is a self-directed cultural insider who seeks the position of marginality, of the outsider. He is not a violent cultural Macedonian (or dadaist), but a renegade philologist who is, as Nietzsche writes, a cultural contrary, a friend of *lento*, whose reading slows down as the culture around him speeds up.12 This dissenting and learned figure—or figures, since Nietzsche, like Barthes, fictionalizes himself and produces textual masks and decoys—suffers from, to borrow another Nietzschean metaphor, cultural indigestion.13 Unable to stomach either mass or high culture, this friend of *lento* chooses to respond to their pressures by practicing occultation and delay, producing a marginal and deliberately difficult, impeded critical reading/writing dedicated to mass unreadability. These tactics of Nietzsche adumbrate, in many respects, the tactics of the theoretical and inscribed readers of Barthesian post-structuralism. Barthes' readers are, as in Nietzsche, all cultural insiders, extremely competent semiotic decoders and initiates who suffer from an excess of culture. That surfeit, paradoxically, is one of the factors that disturb their relation to culture. It precipitates the boredom and alienation underlying their revolt, the need to become poetic rather than unary subjects, the desire to establish a solitary counter-culture as refuge. The anhedonia of doxic high culture is arguably, along with its violence, what leads Barthes to evolve the fragments of a post-cultural philosophy of reading as
pleasure.

The strengths of Barthes' iconoclastic modes of reading--their range, innovation, and suppleness--derive directly from his intimacy with Western literary and theoretical culture. Often his readings can (as S/Z demonstrates) literally cannibalize and, through the distortions of ironic repetition, neutralize earlier modes of interpretation. Barthes acknowledges that his post-structural reader is not one who would be found in most cabinets de lecture. The majority of readers publicly appear to observe cultural law, content with the quieter ego-reinforcing enjoyments of textes de plaisir and conventional styles of reading which reinforce the predicates of cultural law. In PT the cosy mastery of cultural texts appears in a kitsch send-up of that ordered world, a world in which reading is not only an affirmation of the law of the Father, but a particular kind of recompense for allegiance to that Symbolic order:

the time and place of reading: house, countryside, near mealtime, the lamp, family where it should be...Extraordinary ego-reinforcement (by fantasy), the unconscious muffled.

(PT 51/82)

Orderly, well-socialized readings are, as Barthes intimates throughout his writing, acts which buttress civilization (one thinks of Mukarovsky, the Czech Structuralist, who once disdainfully expressed the opinion that for educated men pleasure was not a necessary element of reading). Barthes' theories of reading in S/Z, ES and PT are
attractive precisely because they speak the secret boredom and resistance most readers have felt during dutiful readings. Barthes, as attentive to the minute fluctuations of his reading consciousness as Pater or Proust, forces the issue of cultural ennui into the open. He utters our boredom, our resistance to some writings; he reveals our private impatience, our secret reading rhythms, our habits of skipping dull sections, of fantasizing, of disfiguring passages, of engaging in obsessive re-readings. (PT 11-13/20-23) Rather than censuring such disloyalty to civilization, Barthes grants the reader his precious "neurosis," as well as the right to choose to read in grossly conventional, endoxic ways (scientific readings now being counted as gross and unsubtle).

Perhaps more than any other contemporary Western theorist, he raises the standard of alternate ways of reading the world-text. Through the utopian figures of his composite readers, who refuse to endorse any interpretive system or stable theoretical proposition, Barthes, like Baudelaire before him, assumes the posture of the wise Fool, the stance of sensual ignorance. In PT, as for the rest of Barthes' career, difference and sensuous particularity complicate and undermine theoretical moments. The alluring transparency of theoretical reflection is beautifully clouded by the addition of the reader's attention to the myriad nuances and fluctuations of his own reading consciousness. If, in S/Z, it is primarily the reader's cerebral cortex engaging the text, now a long-suppressed force--the reader's plural bodies--are, as it were,
moving their lips and fingers along the same line of print the savant eye gazes upon. Following the iconoclastic line of essayists such as Nietzsche and Montaigne, Barthes wills that his own aesthetic and affective reactions, his desire, his "neurosis," and his body's unpredictable tastes shape his response to texts. (PT 13/24) As PT and his subsequent books indicate, Barthes' ideal reader, then, is a solitary who has freed himself from the norms of interpretative communities, who has granted himself the permission to read however he likes, drifting among the happy Babel of the text, the fragments of "confused languages" that screen or challenge the terrifying prattle of power. (PT 3-4/9-11) Yet, however differently Barthes chooses to read, he tends to adopt a cocooning pose discomfortingly like that of the bourgeois he sends up. In PT that similarity is knowingly underscored in a couple of passages wherein Barthes expresses his attraction to the slow, contemplative readings of the past, the "leisure of bygone readings," the "art de vivre shared by old books" that "contain...contemplative or delective duration." (PT 13-14/27, 18/30-31)

Active/reactive

'Every ideological activity is presented in the form of compositionally completed utterances.' Let us also take Julia Kristeva's proposition in reverse: every completed utterance runs the risk of being ideological.
He used to think of the world of language (the logosphere) as a vast and perpetual conflict of paranoias. The only survivors are the systems (fictions, jargons) inventive enough to produce a final figure, the one which brands the adversary with a half-scientific, half ethical name...that permits us simultaneously to describe, to explain, to condemn, to reject, to recuperate the enemy...

Forgoing violence, I forgo the code itself...

In R.B., R.B. writes of his work:

...[i]n what he writes, there are two texts. Text I is reactive, moved by indignation, fears, unspoken rejoinders, minor paranoias, defenses, scenes. Text II is active, moved by pleasure. But as it is written, accommodated to the fiction of Style, Text I becomes active too, whereupon it loses its reactive skin, which subsists only in patches (mere parentheses).

As R.B.'s comments might suggest, in PT and later books Barthes is writing against one of the most critical and submerged cultural forces that cause a human being to metamorphose into a stable cultural ego: fear. This understanding of the power of social fear underlies Barthes' attacks on narrative, nameing, the sentence: in short, the whole bolus of "jelled fictions" known in the consensual world as reality and ideology. Barthes links readerly texts and unreflective reading pleasure to the brittle Oedipality of first-world society.
Whether sympathetic to or critical of Barthes' call to solitary pleasure, most readings of PT have focused upon the "active" text that is so prominent in the essay, paying less attention to the "reactive" text which precipitates Barthes' flight into hedonism. The tattered skin of that wary reactive text shows through in the textual fragments on ideology, the name, repetition, fear, morality, the political Father, and the sentence. Barthes' public affirmation of pleasure, drift and counter-cultural styles of reading are a reaction against the now-familiar bourgeois trinity of Doxa--Representation--Power. PT is, as much as an "erotics of reading," a meditation upon a cardinal problematic of Barthesian post-structuralism: the relations between language and power. The fragments of the reactive text, where Barthes considers how the openness of human languages is foreclosed by ideology, constitute Barthes' most direct confrontation yet with that problematic: but that confrontation is fugal, oblique. Barthes attempts to aestheticize the conflict, to partially neutralize it, by subsuming it into the book's network of erotic tensions, figurations, and liberatory ruptures. (PT 54-56/86-87) Traces of that struggle, far less neutralized than Barthes might be willing to admit, persist in the essay's discourse of pleasure.

The dynamic tension between active and reactive discourses in PT is encapsulated in what seems to be a key to the essay: that curious epigraph from Hobbes, one of the most pessimistic philosophers of power. The odd yoking of pleasure and pain in that citation--where pain (fear) is not sublated into into a
Sadean pleasure but remains as a kind of open wound--returns throughout PT in the extreme images, adjectives and adverbs Barthes sometimes favours in his descriptions of reading pleasures (the "abrasions" the reader inflicts upon the skin of the text, the pleasure of the text being likened to the pleasures of auto-erotic strangulation, etc.) (PT 6-7/14-15) His contrary essay is at least double-voiced. It alternates between favouring an ethos of "subtle subversion" that "forgoes" the stereotypic and "worn out" code of violence, one in which difference and the neuter would "replace" conflict, and passive-aggressive attacks on cultural concepts and texts. (e.g. PT 15-16/27-28, 20-21/34-36, 26/44-45) For Barthes, the ideal text is a freed, atopic space where one can find respite from the paranoid engueulment of opposing discourses ("[t]here can be tranquil moments in the war of languages, and these moments are texts"). (PT 29-31/49-51) Throughout PT, metaphors of gentleness jostle with harsher visions of pleasure and bliss as "blackening," "lacerating," "discomforting," rupturing and dismembering the maternal body of language.

Hannah Arendt's reflections on ancient and modern forms of hedonism help to elucidate the conjunction of pleasure and pain in Barthes' textual hedonism, as well as the social estrangement and withdrawal which will become increasingly apparent in Barthes. She writes:

[a]ncient world alienation in all its varieties--from stoicism to epicureanism down to hedonism and cynicism--have been inspired by a deep mistrust of the world and moved by a vehement impulse to withdraw
from the trouble and pain it inflicts, into
the security of an inward realm in which
the self is exposed to nothing but itself.15

The guiding force of Epicureanism (a philosophy privileging
e bodily sensations) is not pleasure and enjoyment but, finally,
Arendt asserts, the avoidance of fear and pain. (HC 97) In PT
Barthes' fear is manifest in his obsessive figuration of the
external world as bloody, power-mad, rife with conflict and
paranoia. Barthes' analysis, albeit now more focused and
politically astute in a theoretical sense, (and, ironically,
better able to name its antagonists), still recalls the
analysis advanced in WDZ (where the active text is, unlike PT,
almost submerged in anxiety). Both books are haunted by the same
mistrust of linguistic transparency, coherence, repetition,
utility, and the social appropriation of discourse. Those
anxieties circulate without any pragmatic resolution in both
texts, since Barthes, in characteristic style, puts his own
tentative dreams of evasion--in WDZ the reverie of a useless
white writing, in PT that of an irre recuperable radical pleasure
and a useless white scriptor--under erasure.

Barthes' analyses of power have remained relatively
constant over a span of almost fifteen years. His opinions
regarding the ethics of writing and the ethos of disengagement
have endured. He persists in devising ways of frustrating
language's unfortunate tilt toward meaning. He continues to
emphasize the opacity and absurdity of the sign: yet bourgeois
society, as he admits, is not paralysed or even embarrassed by
his critique--a critique straining to create temporary
excursions from the social hell of language. (ABR 476/L 42) Two of the more important developments in Barthes' thinking, to my mind, are these: Barthes now incorporates his anxiety—the source of the reactive text—into the production of innovative texts and aesthetic pleasure; secondly, through his notions of textuality, *jouissance*, perversion, and the neuter, Barthes achieves a positive elaboration of the rather dark and amorphous negativity and absurdity found in *WDZ*.

**Perversion and jouissance**

How can we take pleasure in a reported pleasure (boredom of all narratives of dreams, of parties)? How can we read criticism?...I must shift my position: instead of agreeing to be the confidant of this critical pleasure...I can make myself its voyeur...I enter perversion; the commentary then becomes in my eyes a text, a fiction, a fissured envelope. The writer's perversity (his pleasure in writing is *without function*), the doubled, the trebled, the infinite perversity of the critic and his reader.

(PT 17/30-31)

The theme of the perverse has already been sounded in decadent writing. Barthes continues the tradition, celebrating perversion as the antithesis of the utilitarian and the doxic. Literally turning away acts and objects from boring norms and origins, perversion is an imaginative act that begins, as do all acts of imagination, with an *époque* followed by an act of nihilation. Two acts of separation— or suspension—are involved in Barthes' perverse readings: there is an immediate suspension of the sign from sender, context, and implied addressee, and a second degree of withdrawal indicated by the
figuration of the perverse reader as a voyeur.

These acts of alienation and deviance force a wedge into the bourgeois plenum, creating a cultural space of uselessness, evasion, and potentiality. Perverse reading open up the space of a disruptive pleasure and creativity.

Jouissance is, of course, the star-term of PT. As Barthes suggests, jouissance is a soft, shifting, chameleon-concept whose fluid and contradictory nature makes it difficult to capture in the cultural Imaginary. One can say, however, that jouissance is an idea that, like the Salzburg branch, crystallizes the longing for the pre-Symbolic and the private in Barthesian theory. It signals the advent of a desiring, rebellious body on the dry steppes of a prattling culture. To embrace aesthetic pleasure in the more extreme formulations found in PT is, for Barthes, almost a political act, since jouissance is a defection from naming, hence from a social order which Barthes can only imagine as Oedipal. Throughout PT Barthes and his actants disrupt the established cultural macroeconomy by preaching--and practicing--the creation of a private underground cultural economy. This largely subterranean economy participates in and yet periodically subtracts itself from the larger, shared discourses of culture. Ideally, it would produce private experiences and texts of bliss which would not circulate in the ordinary channels of critical discourse. It would produce an active and creative, critical writing distanced from the agendas of ideology; a writing working not to capture a text and produce a banal
critical image à la Coles notes, but to precipitate further bliss.

With the writer of bliss (and his reader) begins the untenable text, the impossible text. This text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, Unless it is reached through another text of bliss: you cannot speak 'on' such a text, you can only speak 'in' it, in its fashion, enter into a desperate plagiarism, hysterically affirm the void of bliss and no longer obsessively repeat the letter of pleasure. [my emphasis] (PT 22/37-38)

Jouissance caps Barthes' theory of writing as a counter-communication. Jouissance is, as Barthes writes, inexpressible in its totality. PT 's fragments theorize and write their way around the experience: they approach it tangentially; the text is full of field notes, while the experience itself is sheltered in silence. Jouissance is an ailleurs, another elsewhere, an unforseen moment when language and the outlines of the world, ruptured and perverted by desire, fade, giving way to another order of aesthetic experience. It is a discursive caesura, a momentary cessation of the external noise of culture, a tmesis—the splitting of language into the two edges of repletion and loss. It is a whiteout, the loss of any outside reality, any minimal structuration or meaning. A petit mal as much as a petit mort, Barthesian bliss is the cherished moment when the systems of the Symbolic order are disrupted. Like satori, jouissance empties out the real and makes the cultural subject shudder and lose her bearings. But this shudder is a tactical if involuntary fading—rather than loss—of the cultural self and its ground. Barthes' subject plays both ends against the middle: he is, to
repeat the citation, a "'living contradiction': a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall." (PT 21/35-36)

Viewed from the perspective of the Western literary tradition, jouissance draws upon the intertexts of the privileged moment, Bakhtinian carnival, and the sublime. It can be read as an inverted epiphany in which the consensual real is not ordered and given a heightened meaning, but instead suspended, and overcome by the space between signs. Barthesian jouissance theoretically overcomes social power structures and all forms of representation. A semelfactive, quasi-erotic event, it cannot be controlled, rehearsed, replayed, collected or even recollected in language. (PT 52/83-84) But even jouissance, like the notion of textuality (as R.B. allows in RB), will not be able to retain its marginality.

Thinking about pleasure

The post-existential emptiness and contingency of the world according to Barthes is partially screened in PT by the genuine and enormous pleasure that Barthes takes in the vast cacography and interstices of the world-text. The sensuality and enjoyment of what he calls his "materialism" fills his writing, seducing readers away from the cold war of interpretive languages raging outside of his texts. In place of warfare, his work holds out the possibility of engaging in
reading as a deflected erotic relation with the text. (PT 64/97-98) The rich confusion and pleasure that this "material" world of the text affords is Barthes' trump card in his cultural critique. The excesses foregrounded (or latent) within a text can be exploited by the knowing gaze and touch of a perverse reader who, in a classically privileged and initiated gesture, has the ease to expend herself, her time, her intelligence, and the text, pour rien. This activation and expenditure of the excess of the sign can, in Jakobsonian terms, poeticize the text to the threshold of non-sense and "uselessness" that defines Barthesian jouissance. Excess and uselessness, those old decadent values, prove useful as disruptive devices that afford a pleasurable if provisional resistance to the recuperation of the text (or the reading) by doxic culture.

This resistance via an extravagant spending and loss of the sign is, as Barthes emphasizes, an integral aspect of his personal sense of literary modernity. Even writing of resistance, Barthes is compelled to point to the double bind that haunts his modernity. The writer who does not abdicate writing is, however unwillingly, complicitous in the dirty game of culture. Yet, still trying to salvage a position of social innocence for the writer, Barthes partially blinds his argument to the pragmatic economic productivity of writing and the power of the published writer, advancing an improbable utopian vision of both writer and text as useless, non-producing, powerless, kept things. This image is then put under erasure, but not de-activated. As Barthes muses, circling
The Barthesian ethos of pleasure is both a proactive and reactive phenomenon. As a reactive value, it functions as an ideological deflection and counter-proposal stimulated by the coldness and rigidity of the culture in which he writes. From this time forward Barthes practices, in the ambiguous Bakhtinian sense, an affective and festive (i.e. semi-carnivalesque) relation to ideas. In his last major text, CL, that festivity turns to a sophisticated and poignant, darker laughter leveled against the terrorism of identity and other forms of symbolic entrapment and closure.

Yet even textuality and pleasure are values which Barthes holds lightly, provisionally, knowing, as R.B. sighs, that they are destined to social recuperation and to return as doxisms. In a series of three entries near the end of PT, Barthes unveils some surprisingly pragmatic motivations underlying his conversion to a latter-day hedonism. He reflects upon the subversive uses of pleasure in his theorizing, writing:
...the position of pleasure in a theory of the text is not certain. Simply, a day comes when we feel a certain need to loosen [dévisser] the theory a bit, to shift the discourse, the idiolect which repeats itself, becomes consistent, and to give it the shock of a question. Pleasure is this question.

(PT 64/102)

The abjection of pleasure in contemporary culture, the suspicion with which had been viewed by both conservative and progressive forces, is what has won the Barthesian stance of reading-for-pleasure such an uncritical reception in some academic circles. (PT 22-23/38-39) Barthes utters, as I have already said, the secret revolt of readers against cold pedagogies and the unreedemed boredom of Culture. He breaks the silence too often maintained about the shadow side of mass cultures (whether "high" or popular), identifying the deadening dysfunctionality of systems which crush the individual into the general. Mass cultures are, in Barthes' view, the production of a cultural Father, a kind of tyrannical and fractured B-Grade Hollywood volcano-god equally capable of dispensing his blessings on the people while demanding the perpetual sacrifice of the right to attend to one's own desire, one's own life. Barthes' rebellion is not his alone. He names and polishes his (and perhaps our) cultural ennui, defending the individual right to experience desires and pleasures which do not feed back into any cultural mammon. PT is a primer of the forms of evasion and disfigration possible in a pleasure-seeking cultural revolt: Barthes' quest for pleasure takes the form of intermittent readings of texts (ranging from an
agressive cruising or "blackening" of texts to a gentle fluttering among pages that R.B. refers to as *papillonage*). Precisely because pleasure is a "trivial," "almost unworthy" [*indigne*] but stubborn value that draws attention away from the asceticism of transcendance or closure, it can, in Barthes' mind, "embarrass" any text's puritan attempt to "return to morality, to truth." (PT 64-65/102-103) Pleasure and its attendant notions (difference, drift, the body, the "demonic" plural, the cessation of signs, the perverse) are subsumed with the more general (and underplayed) Blancholdian notion of the neuter (or the matte). Together, pleasure and the neuter interrupt the dialectical prose of the world. They constitute an "oblique" means of conceptual impediment, a chronically centrifugal force, a "drag anchor...without which the theory of the text would revert to a centered system, a philosophy of meaning." (PT 65/103) In the final of these three notes, Barthes stages a small internal debate with himself about the effects of pleasure on meaning. The note opens with a sweeping assertion set off from the rest of the entry--an assertion in which pleasure is figured, in an moment of uncertain irony, as an alienating counter-force:

[p]leasure's force of *suspension* can never be overstated: it is a veritable *époché*, a stoppage which congeals [*fige au loin*] all recognized values (recognized by oneself). Pleasure is a *neuter* (the most perverse form of the demoniac).

(PT 65/103)

After a textual silence (the spacing referred to above) Barthes
retreats from this initial position. "Or at least, what pleasure suspends is the signified value: the (good) Cause" he muses, concluding: "[t]hat is the pleasure of the text: value shifted to the sumptuous rank of the signifier." (PT 65/103)

Bread or croissants?

Several years ago I was at a discussion on ethics and art at the University of Alberta. The poet Gary Geddes was sitting on the panel; Rudy Wiebe was among those in the audience. Midway through the question-period, Wiebe rose. Dramatically extending both hands in a gesture of supplication and exasperation, he declared: "When will artists begin making the good black bread that people need?" Geddes smiled back, and playfully drew a croissant in the air: "Ah, but I make fine pastries." Wiebe threw up his hands and sat down. The black bread/croissant debate comes back to me as I read Barthes' post-structural writing--Geddes sitting in for Barthes. To my mind, polarizations of the type exemplified by the exchange between Wiebe and Geddes miss the point--and limit the range of literary work. Most human beings need both meaning and pleasure: bread and roses, as the song goes. Underneath the seductive veneer of Barthes' insistence on pleasure as the primary value and reason for reading, I sense something quite compulsive. Barthes' inability to allow or honour a truly wide range of reading pleasures (including the pleasures of representation and interpretation) betrays the defensive aspect of his ethos of
private pleasure. Despite his claims about the non-existence of the coherent subject, Barthes makes a typical aesthetic move: he withdraws from the social realm, making the privileged individual (an entity under erasure, but still operative) the hidden centre of his apparently decentred universe. Private pleasure screens and partially transforms the absurdity of existence in the Barthesian Imaginary. Pleasure is the cardinal positive force that stops the hemmorhage of meaning; it is the value that averts an entropic devolution toward the gallows laughter of the Beckettian world-text. Barthesian pleasure is protest, protection, discovery, diversion.

Barthes' turn toward the individual, toward unpredictable and affective responses, will continue in his subsequent books. There he focuses upon rewriting the "jelled fictions" of his own being--a rewriting that arises in equal measure out of the desire to enjoy the pleasures of disfiguration, and the need to escape the image-traps of the cultural Imaginary.
CHAPTER SIX. A CUTTLEFISH AND HIS INK: THE LATER WORKS

He is troubled by any image of himself, suffers when he is named. He finds the perfection of a human relationship in this vacancy of the image: to abolish --in oneself, between oneself and others --adjectives; a relationship which adjectivizes is on the side of the image, on the side of domination, of death.  
(RB 43/47)

I am writing this day after day; it takes, it sets: the cuttlefish produces its ink: I tie up my image-system (in order to protect myself and at the same time to offer myself).  
(RB 162/166)

The detour of subjectivities

In The Wake of Imagination Richard Kearney argues that Western culture has become obsessed with the making and consumption of images.¹ The work of Sartre, Althusser, Lacan and Barthes on representation and the gaze would suggest the relevance of extending Kearney's observation into the realm of the conceptual "image."² Notwithstanding the work of post-structural theorists, Western culture still appears to be fixated on the images generated by theory--the etymology of theory deriving from the Greek word to look at, or, more poetically, to contemplate. A theoretician: one who is a spectator; one who, in her turn, must receive the gaze of others. Theories are, in a sense, both images and eyes: and the
West, as Barthes argues in his last three longer works (RB, FLD, CL) has hungry eyes.

For the better part of his career, Barthes had been the privileged operator of the analytic and voyeuristic gaze. Supported by the transparent advantages of his social position, he had been the intellectual aesthete, a dreamy voyeur, one who could look with impunity upon other texts, other lives, cultures and bodies, never suffering, at least in print, the violent *petit mort* of another's eyes. After the success of *PT*, however, the tables were turned.⁴ Despite his own retreat from critical theory *per se* into the preoccupations with sensuality, the body and the self that mark his affinity with writers of aestheticism and decadence, Barthes rapidly—and, for him, rather uncomfortably—became one of the most well-known theoreticians of French post-structuralism. Surprisingly, within his later book-length texts Barthes pursues a growing fascination with the distorted reflection of his many subjectivities (his personal history and image-repertoire, his bodies and their unpredictable responses), publicly offering biographemes while warding off the cultural Imaginary. Identity, in Barthes' writing, devolves into a series of evasive self-stagings. Through the wild supplement and irrationality of the body, affectivity, and private remembrance, Barthes attempts to reinstitute--albeit under erasure and without lapsing into an essentialist philosophy--the realm of the private by displacing the site of individuality from the psyche onto the corporeal self.
In this chapter I will touch upon aspects of the turns that Barthes' enduring quest for separation and an elsewhere free of power takes after PT, focusing upon Barthes' predilection for staging mediated discourses of intimacy that frustrate powerful Imaginaries. After briefly discussing RB and FLD, and the less wary Barthes found in his essays, I will focus on CL, laying out the resistance to representation enacted in the sophisticated game of hide-and-seek that Barthes plays in this last text.

In WDZ Barthes had speculated in the abstract upon the effects of the accretion of past acts of language upon current ones. By 1975, with the publication of RB, Barthes was clearly experiencing the haunting of old words. Despite his earlier idyllic formulations of intertextuality as a means of promoting the loss of images and names, at moments intertextuality appears to be indistinguishable from the strong appropriating forces of commodity culture. The theoretical cultivation of difference proves not a potent enough force to stave off the human need--and desire--for social images.

Although he does not directly acknowledge the fact, in these later years Barthes is meeting the devouring aspect of intertextuality and the post-structural negation of the subject. Logically, since "the subject is merely an effect of language," there is literally no one to sustain any notion of individual boundaries: his earlier writings therefore grant the other carte blanche to read and appropriate whatever she chooses, refusing to acknowledge any protestation of personal
Ironically, Barthes and his writings have been caught up in the macrotext of commodity culture and turned into a novel star-intertext, a "sinister" doxic Image. Consequently, much of Barthes' writing during the 1970s (though not quite "everything," as Lavers contends) shows "a desire to defuse or deflect aggression from outside and to control his self-image."(RBA 210-211) And it is this desire for an "exemption from meaning" and Images that propels Barthes to the body and the ideal of a writing that "aspire[s] to the status of matter," one that can render the grain of an operatic voice or a painter's body. (RBA 211)

Barthes and his novelistic narrators and protagonists are ambivalently drawn to the fascination of literal and conceptual images. RF contains several essays on visual artists; RB begins with a series of images from Barthes' youth that are "the author's treat to himself for finishing his book"; CL is a book about photography, in which an unnamed narrator, obsessed by one particularly moving photographic trace of his dead mother, seeks to define the essence of Photography. (RB i/i)

Despite disclaimers enjoining the reader to consider his novelistic actants as fictions, or as hyperreal simulacra, RB, FLD, and CL are experiments in public self-figuration, where Barthes flirts with but impedes the closure of representation, coyly furnishing his protagonists with bits of his personal existence while rhetorically detaching himself from them, arguing, via R.B. and FLD's Lover, that life-writing is a form
of suicidal escape into the sign. (RB 56/60) Barthes thereby generates an elaborate series of verbal screens that allow him to "play," as he puts it in L, "with signs as with a conscious decoy." (ABR 475/L 39) Two metaphors from the second citation opening this chapter suggest the tenor of this strategy of offering and withdrawing, of leading the reader towards and then away from what Barthes will call his "interiority." (CL 98/153) The first metaphor: Barthes ties himself up in textual surfaces like a Japanese gift-box, tempting the reader to unwrap level after level in search of some nonexistant hidden essence. The second: like the cuttlefish, whose ink clouds the waters, hiding her from the eyes of her potential devourers, Barthes' texts use the production of signs and traces of the personal to distract the other. They generate an ironic and disfigured image-system of the historical Barthes, advancing traces of a privileged "real" subject not entirely deactivated by disclaimers or theorizing that expounds on the impossibility of subjects. Barthes' attraction to the liminal zones of the cultural, those places where the individual, the somatic, and the affective momentarily short-circuit or exceed cultural codification, ripens during these years. FLD explores the interpenetration and reciprocal shaping of public and private discourses of love; RB and CL probe both the blurring and separation of public and private selves, asserting the supplementarity of the body-self.4

Barthes rides the unresolved tension in his writing between the pull of the individual and its theoretical
impossibility. He vacillates between these colliding desires, forwarding the idea of the specificity of the body and memory while contending that no subject can be truly authentic. Yet despite this erasure of subjectivity, Barthes' work strongly reaffirms the privacy and solitude of aesthetic and sensual experience, heralding his further retreat from power into sapentia, into the refuges of signifiance, the sensual sign and the unfigured body. (ABR 478/L 46)

Lavers' observation regarding Barthes' need to control his public Image overlooks another aspect of Barthes' response to his induction into the cultural Imaginary. If one reads RB, FLD, and CL, it is evident that Barthes is concerned about the potential oppressiveness of his texts as he becomes a cultural institution. From one book to the next, Barthes works steadily to undermine his own authority, to remain perversely within the spaces of "drift and expectation," abjuring the power of his Image as the world closes in on him and his writing. (ABR 467, L 26/15)

Recognizing that he and his texts could not escape recuperation as completely as he had once dreamed, Barthes' response in this final stretch of works is supple and complicated. He eroticizes the tensions circulating among his present self, his Image, and the larger culture. Like Nietzsche, he follows the wisdom of his boredom and his desiring bodymind. Rather than seeking to destroy signs, he cultivates strategies that attempt to outplay (déjouer) and frustrate the power of gregarious, repetitive signs. 5 (ABR 474, L 28, 35)
these later texts, Barthes executes a half-turn away from theorizing toward a novelized meditation on fictional modes, personal origins and his "plural bodies." (RB 60-61/65) As his essays from this phase attest, he appears to no longer regard himself as being primarily a theorist. He wants to become a late twentieth-century amateur, amorously engaging in the experiences of life and art without a spirit of mastery or competition, expending himself for nothing (pour rien), taking pleasure in the signs of a bourgeois culture that has been subtly "deformed": i.e. perverted, turned away from assertion or conclusion. (RB 52-53/56-57)

However novel some of these moves and counter-tactics are, they still work a familiar thematic and textual field of traces, delights and deferrals through which Barthes continues to drift. This drifting, no longer quite so untouched by the darker contingencies of existence, still affords Barthes pleasure, and perhaps continues, in a delayed fashion, the wave of anti-existential belle-lettristic writing described in "Kafka's Answer."

The a/political subject

He is quite willing to be a political subject but not a political speaker (the speaker: someone who delivers his discourse, recounts it, and at the same time notifies it, signs it)...it is as if he were the historical witness of a contradiction: that of a sensitive, avid, and silent political subject (these adjectives must not be separated) [latter emphasis mine]. (RB 53/57)

This last phase is Barthes' most introverted, yet it
contains his most compelling criticisms of power. Barthes continues to distance himself from the powerful languages of doxa and critical theory by slipping into the protective indecision of literary registers and "mixed, uncertain, hesitant form[s], both fictive and intellectual" that "shield" his fragments (and his being) from the "ancestral law of Narrative or...Rationality." ("LC," RL 279,281/315,317)

Pursuing his desire for hybrid forms of semantic detour, the status of Barthes' intimate and theoretical discourses in these later works are thrown into uncertainty. These fragmentary, digressive texts create a strategic if temporary "excursion" from the fraught scenes of theory and culture. This is no Rimbalidian departure: Barthes likens his excursions to the sorties of a child playing a game with a pebble and a string, (perhaps a version of fort/da?) a child who takes care that, however intensely he plays, he is never far from his benevolent mother. (ABR 476-477/L 42-43)

These excursions are driven by the need to postpone the exercise of power through language. Announced in WDZ, the theme of the compromised nature of language returns strongly in Barthes' L. "If we call freedom not only the capacity to escape power but also and especially the capacity to subjugate no one, then freedom can exist only outside language." (ABR 461/L 15)

The scriptor or speaker who does not want to oppress others through his language can, by focusing upon gesture, signifiance and process, slow down the exercise of power; but in each sign there "sleeps a monster--a stereotype" that can be awakened
through repetition and assertion. (ABR 461/ L 15)

Barthes' ambivalent relationship to language reaches no resolution, although he does eventually re-embrace literature. (ABR 463-468/L 16-19) In CL and L he praises the register of the literary while indicting its ideological complicity. He repeats his now-familiar analysis, outlining how signs, through repetition and assertion, thicken, stabilize, and eventually enter the cultural Imaginary, becoming agents of ideology and create that ultimate horror, the imago. Power is now no longer viewed as a unary phenomenon, but apprehended as a demonic plural. Legion, inevitable, present in all intertexts and situations, it inhabits the

...most delicate mechanisms of social exchange...fashion, public opinion, entertainment...news, family and private relations, and even in the liberating impulses which attempt to counteract it. (ABR 459/L 10-11)

In L the Text--the very "index of nonpower" (depouvoir)--remains an active, if utopian and doomed, counter proposal to congealed, adhesive languages and the ideological "will-to-possess." (ABR 459,466-467/L 10-11,23-26) Barthes' late appreciation of the subtle sapentia and non-assertive nature of the literary functions within his project of finding ways to frustrate what he sees as the closure of the ideological. Explaining his conversion to the pursuit of the literary rather than persisting in the subtler maché of the theoretical, Barthes writes:

...for the subject who writes...there can
be no 'new life,' it seems to me, except in the discovery of a new practice of writing. To change doctrine, theory, philosophy, belief, spectacular though this seems, is in fact, quite banal: one does such things the way one breathes; one invests, one re-invests: intellectual conversions are the very pulsion of the intelligence...but the search, the discovery, the practice of a new form--this, I believe, is equivalent to that Vita Nova whose determinations I have described.

("LC," RL 286/322)

This search for a vita nova through a reclamation of the literary (the novelistic), the body, the pathos of human mortality, and a strange "forgetting" that also enacts an ironized remembrance of origins, precipitates further changes. His writing, never simple, tends toward a growing apparent readability and yet, in Sontag's words, remains "irrevocably complex, self-conscious, refined, irresolute." (ABR xxii) Wanting to evade the polemics of public discourses, Barthes withdraws into the material of his private live(s). Guided by Bataille's notion of a subversive personal culture that fractures monadic knowledges, Barthes' "bodies," including his aesthetic and emotional bodies, become primary intertexts and heuristic entities engaging other texts in "the great adventure of desire." (ABR xxii) His amateuristic essays and novelistic writings demonstrate the self-preoccupation, the delicate attention to hypersubtle nuances of personal response, the obsession with unusual details, gestures, and effects (the alternate "logics" of shock, surprise and "effect" already apparent in ES and PT) familiar to readers of French and English decadence. Until the end of his life, Barthes' egoism
vies with his impulse toward the disfigured and the perverse; and his turn toward the affective is complicated by a mistrust of both figuration and his audience. In his longer (book-length) works, that mistrust wins out. Exploiting the uncertainty and emptiness of pronouns noted in S/Z, this post-structural fox learns how to hide in language, how to stage versions of himself, miming the confessional mode while escaping figuration.

Refusing face/ the text as screen

Since S/Z, Barthes had been arguing that the most desirable text was one that returned no images to the reader (i.e. was matte). Although the Barthesian text privileged difference, those differences never accumulated—at least initially—into even a corporeal specificity. The text did not construct, reiterate or yield names or images. The text was, ideally, an intermittent structuration of signs that destroyed the illusion of subjectivity: variously, a field of signifiers, a piece of linguistic lace, a verbal crematorium that incinerated the subject (SFL 8-9/14), the site of an erotic dissolution of boundaries, a verbal web in which the spidery subject spun language and dissolved in her own secretions. Textual voices could not be recuperated into a coherent public image. One could not know with certainty "who" was speaking in a text, only "what" was speaking—and that "what" was the shattered, mutating codes of culture.
Throughout R.B./Barthes reflects upon his long quest for textual means of exemption from figuration and public identity. Paratactically, he draws a connection between his search for a counter-communicative white writing in the 1950s (the impossible desire for an "Adamic language" Barthes puts forward in WDZ), and his later post-structural aesthetic, which reposes upon the desire to escape the perceived violences of representation through a hyper-textualization of the world and the human subject.

Figures of the Neutral: white writing, exempt from any literary theater--Adamic language--delectable insignificance... discretion--the vacancy of the 'person,' if not annulled at least rendered irretrievable--absence of imago--the suspension of judgement, of due process--displacement--the refusal 'to keep oneself in countenance'--(the refusal of any countenance whatever)--the principle of delicacy--drifting--pleasure in its ecstatic aspect: whatever avoids or thwarts or ridicules ostentation, mastery, intimidation.

(RB 132/136)

R.B./Barthes' quest for a politically unimplicated language issues in the eroticized pleasures of the text and an absence of names. It is of signal importance to underscore the disorientation and loss of order necessary to Barthesian happiness. "[O]nce the paradigm is blurred" R.B. writes "utopia begins." (RB 133/137) Utopia: the moment when the cultural Imaginary is temporarily overcome, whether through contradiction, jouissance, irony, reflexivity, fragmentation, or other forms of semiotic disruption, thereby creating space
for an expansive discourse of possibility.

As a series of disrupted language surfaces, the Barthesian
text-as-screen at once displays and conceals, protecting the
problematic privacy of the writing "subject" while furnishing
him/it with a venue for playful, public spectacle-making. In RB
and FLD, Barthes turns to the protective possibilities of the
shattered, incoherent simulacrum gesturing repeatedly in the
direction of its artifice. However much Barthes appears to be
drifting toward the less guarded affectivity of some of his
later essays (for instance, "Longtemps je me suis couché...")
in these more guarded works subjectivity is self-consciously
simulated in a passel of ironic and evasive fragments.

In France, Seuil's Écrivains de toujours collection
publishes a venerable series of illustrated intellectual
primers, invariably titled X par lui-même, providing potted
histories--imagos--of selected writers and thinkers. These
primers busily pin the writer and the residues of his (or,
rarely, her) desire to the Eliotic wall, furnishing the reader
with conceptual and plot summaries, dates of publication,
samples and overviews of critical reception, photos of
holographs, mistresses, parents, ancestral homes, and
portraits of the writer throughout the various phases of his or
her life. In 1954 Barthes had produced a wonderfully
idiosyncratic volume on Michlet for the series. In the early
1970s Barthes once again took on the project of writing one of
these primers--but the subject was himself. One can read RB, the
resulting disorganized history of a French intellectual (R.B.)
who bears a striking resemblance to Barthes, as a preemptive cultural strike--an ironic "portrait of the artist as seen by bourgeois tradition." (RBA 209) Via R.B., Barthes contests the ideological suppositions of authenticity and coherent subjectivity this gesture of life-writing might be perceived as supporting. Against the apparent solidity of an external documentation of a life, his protagonist takes refuge in the supplementarity of the body, and in the post-structural assertion that language dissolves rather than consolidates subjectivity:

(once I produce, once I write, it is the Text itself which (fortunately) dispossesses me of my narrative continuity. The Text can recount nothing: it takes my body elsewhere [my emphasis], far from my imaginary person...

(RB iv)

Living in his post-structural world-view, where events and perceptions remain flowing, semelfactive moments of intensity that do not resolve into any interpretative constellation, R.B. periodically complains about the implicit demand to reconstruct his life: "(w)hat right does my present have to speak of my past? Has my present some advantage over my past?" (RB 121/124) Recalling Foucault's resistance to the confessional, he writes:

(this book is not a book of 'confessions' ...my texts are disjointed, no one of them caps any other; the latter is nothing but a further text, the last of the series, not the ultimate in meaning: text upon text, which never illuminates anything.

(RB 121/124)
Yet R.B./Barthes half-festively, half-resignedly performs the ultimate act of cultural violence upon himself. In an act of entertaining sabotage, he throws a problematic Image to the culture-machine. The referential illusion fundamental to the X par lui-même series is undermined by a reluctant narrator who points to the artificial nature of his commissioned project and questions its legitimacy, cunningly turning the situation to his advantage. He (R.B./Roland Barthes) puts his own image and history—borrowed from (for lack of a better term) the historical Roland Barthes—under a protective and ludic erasure. Throughout RB the narrator-protagonist dissembles his "interiority" and "intimacy" from the cultural gaze and the "grotesque" spectre of Totality (RB 180/182).

In RB, Barthes repeats the suspensive, novelizing strategy of ES. Through the epoché of the fictional register which amplifies Barthes' primary post-structural claim—that in the field of the subject there is no referent—a liberating distance is once again achieved. Using the double protection of a fictional protagonist who narrates his fictional life, Barthes dislocates and novelizes his own life, writing in the first and third person singular. The text's shifters—I, he—spin around those two initials (R.B.) that "frame a void." ("BD," RL 212/243) The textual disclaimer directing the reader not to read RB in a literally autobiographical way is the first thing a (readerly) reader sees upon opening the book. On the inside cover, in white ink on a black page, placed before the title page and publishing information, a holographic tease, the
probable trace of the body under the body, reads: "[i]t must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel." Half-way through the text, in a fragment titled "the book of the Self," the narrator returns to this disclaimer, musing upon the simulacra his book contain:

> [a]ll this must be spoken as if by a character in novel--or rather by several characters....the image-repertoire is taken over by several masks (personae), distributed according to the depth of the stage (and yet no one--personne... is behind them).

* (RB 120/123)

Yet R.B. is uneasy about the consequences of his own position. He ponders the loneliness and paradoxal silencing of himself in the world-view generated by his aestheticizing theories. "Writing," this contrary figure reflects,

> ...subjects me to a severe exclusion, not only because it separates me from current ('popular') language, but more essentially because it forbids me to 'express myself': *whom* could it express? Exposing the inconsistency of the subject, his atopia, dispersing the enticements of the imaginary, it makes all lyricism untenable....there functions a veritable schism between the (complimenting or amorous) subject's emotion and the nullity, the aphony of his expression.

* (RB 86-87/89)

This tension between the force of personal emotion and experience (however citational and impossible in Barthes' earlier, more jaded account), and the banality of the uttered emotion, is beautifully negotiated in *FLD* and *CL*. Within these texts, writing from behind the masks of the structural Lover and the anonymous "I" of the latter work, Barthes learns how to hide
himself behind language, continuing to play an oblique game of hide-and-seek with hermeneuts, biographers, and power. Barthes de-authorizes himself in order to escape becoming an oppressive figurehead, and pursues the theme of a split subjectivity further, dramatizing the inconsistency and passion of the Barthesian agent. These staged simulacra are neither Barthesian surrogates nor doppelganger, but fictional devices that are paradoxically related to and yet detached from the historical Barthes. They facilitate the strangely ambivalent oscillation between intimacy and dissimulation that structures these last works: they allow Barthes’ reader, from a distance, to watch Barthes moving away from public culture and the ideological frames of his modernity into a meditative state where he works with half-withheld memories, emotion, and the specificity of his aging body.

Not surprisingly, the Barthesian subjects’ relations to the dynamics of intertextuality are no longer as simple and emotionally neutral as in the earlier part of the decade. Intertextuality now depends not only upon the compartmentalized, competent recall of cultural texts and codes demonstrated in S/Z, but is increasingly overlaid, if not blurred and disfigured, by personal memories. In these last three major texts Barthes works with the literary possibilities and personal effects of the tensions circulating among public intertexts and personal memories (both corporeal and affective). In RB the subject mimes the gaze of the other: he ironically investigates and reviews himself largely from, as it
were, the outside, using photographs, documents, and sources external to his body to provide a scrambled oedipal version of R.B./Barthes. This image-repertoire that the narrator provides his audience is, as advertised, an unreliable and hollow history, a fiction shielding the feeling, live body beyond it. In FLD, however, Barthes orchestrates a complex series of pressures and counter-pressures, focusing upon how external texts shape and order affective experiences.

In FLD a brief headnote, followed by a prologue ("How this book is constructed"), again signals the historical Barthes' ostensible withdrawal from the text, while still directing the reader how to engage the work. Like the Bunraku artist, Barthes stands aside from the passionate memory-text he stages. FLD is a rich midden, a post-structural collage or "site." A structural Lover wanders through a "horizontal discourse," musing upon an unordered cloud of memories of conversations and events lifted from Barthes' life, including half-remembered passages from writings that have held his attention--some momentarily, some more insistently (among the latter, the Lover counts Werther, "Plato's Symposium, Zen, psychoanalysis, certain Mystics, Nietzsche, German lieder." (FLD 6-7,9/8-12)

Barthes outlines some of the screening and distancing effects he has set up in this non-personal lover's discourse, the moves that ward off naive confessional readings. Each entry in the work (referred to as a figure) is generated from a "matrix-sentence" (phrase mère) preceding the figure. (FLD 6/9) These matrix-sentences are not "completed message[s]" but
structurations, "syntactical arias[s] that "utter an affect" and then suddenly "break off," remaining "suspended." (FLD 6/9) Isolated, intense, sometimes epiphanic utterances or quasi-musical phrases, they are composed to maintain an uncertain distance from one another:

\[ \text{[e]ach figure explodes, vibrates in and out of itself like a sound severed from any tune...} \]
\[ \text{No logic links the figures, determines their contiguity: the figures are non-syntagmatic, non-narrative; they are Erinyes; they stir, collide, subside, vanish with no more order than the flight of mosquitoes.} \]

(FLD 6-7/10)

In the manner of Brechtian discourse, the heading announcing the argument of each "figure" is conceived of as an "instrument of distancing." (FLD 5/9) These arguments and figures do not refer, Barthes insists, "to the amorous subject and what he is (no one external to this subject, no discourse on love)." (FLD 5/9) Although Barthes inserts details of personal moments into many of the figures, he contends that these figures globally express nothing but the momentary pooling of prior texts and codes around the site of an empty first-person shifter. (FLD 5/9) He goes on to explain--shifting into the third person--the complex contract he negotiates with his creation, the protection from image-repertoires that it (the Lover) affords him:

\[ \text{[f]or if the author here lends his 'culture' to the amorous subject, in exchange the amorous subject affords him the innocence of his image-repertoire, indifferent to the proprieties of knowledge.} \]
In FLD, then, the protagonist reflects upon love through a patchwork of prior intertexts that paradoxically amplify and yet dissemble moments lifted from Barthes' own life. The book's "amorous subject," the structural Lover, is, like R.B., another decoy or simulacrum--another copy purportedly without a discrete origin. This Lover is a staged dramatic monologue, an empty "discursive site," as Wiseman writes, whose utterances occur, as she puts it, not so much in the first person singular, as in the "no person" singular of ES's "Japanese" language.9

FLD blends the economies of the intertext and the gesture, deftly exploring the discredited discourse of affectivity through an aesthetic of the fragmentary and counter-communicative. The text is neither telic nor isotonic: "the text's dispersion is rich here and poor there; there are nodes, blanks...some [figures] have the rarity...the poverty of essences." (FLD 4/8) The "I" of the text is at a void and an open palimpsest. Half-impersonal, archival, fictive, heavily citational, the book is nevertheless capable of great emotional range and generosity. Barthes' de-authorization of himself, his refusal to privilege any authorial emotion, in conjunction with the emptiness of the protagonist and Barthes' active invitation to the reader to enter the discourse, creates room in the text for the reader to devise her own answering text--one in which her affectivity would be of equal importance. Falling back on a structural model, and underplaying the poignancy of so many of his figures, Barthes likens FLD to a latter-day print
out of a *Carte du Tendre*—a punched-out computerized card of half-empty topoi that each person can fill-in according to her own history. (FLD 5/8) This de-authorizing of himself and his gracious invitation to the reader to have her way with the text is testimony to Barthes' efforts to escape being transformed into an Authority. He sees his open work as a "perpetual calendar," an "encyclopedia of affective culture," a "modest supplement offered to the reader to be made free with, to be added to, subtracted from, and passed on to others...Ideally, the book would be a cooperative:'To the United Readers and Lovers.'" (FLD 5/8-9)

A rhapsodic meditation and monologue, *FLD* explores the delicate, states, tensions and emotional fluctuations within love relationships—whether mutual or unrequited. Rather romantically polarizing love (most often, in *FLD*, the discourse of infatuation, of reverie, of desire) and power, Barthes continues to drift away from the languages and concerns of literary theory into subjects and treatments that are, according to one's perspective, either regressive and bourgeois, or brave, unconventional, salutory. In this oddly un/confessional trio of texts, the wildly fractured and intertextual subject of Barthes' earlier theorizing is supplanted by a less dramatically fissured subject that has more of the deceptive readability of haiku. In "Pleasure/Writing/Reading," the transcript of an interview with Jean Risat, Barthes remarks that he is fascinated by the rhetorical dispersion of the subject ("les opérations de
\textit{dispersion du sujet"}, particularly the moment where the classical subject is in the process of foundering, exploding. ("P/W/R", GV /157) This slowed, fragile process of "explosion" is one that he that chooses to explore repeatedly in his last books, where he seems to negotiate a return to more classical themes of subjectivity and origins.

Less concerned with being an orthodox (post)modern, Barthes' late texts pursue unfashionable themes and values. The marginality and abjection (the powerlessness) of the contemporary discourse of the lover is what draws Barthes. "[I]gnored, disparaged, or derided" by more dominant languages, "severed not only from authority [\textit{sic: pouvoir}] but also from the mechanisms of authority [\textit{sic: pouvoir}] (sciences, techniques, arts)," the socially unimplicated discourse of love is "exiled," driven into "the backwater of the "unreal," into the unattended gestures of the desiring body; driven, therefore, into the space of Barthesian reverie. (FLD 1/5)\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Body/sign}

...my body cannot accommodate itself to \textit{generality}, to the power of generality which is in language. ....The body is the irreducible difference, and at the same time it is the principle of all structuration...

(RB 175/178)

In other words, the body always exceeds the exchange in which it is caught up: no commerce in the world, no political virtue can exhaust the body...
What echoes in me is what I learned with my body: something sharp and tenuous suddenly wakens this [inward] body, which had...languished in the rational knowledge of a general situation: the word, the image, the thought, function like a whiplash. (FLD 200/237)

In *WDZ* Barthes speculates that style arises out of the dynamic interaction of language with the themes and private recesses of a writer's body. He argues convincingly, in effect, that the writing body is both within and beyond culture. After a diversion through the rational, generalizing grids of structural and semiotic analyses, the elaboration of this agonistic yet productive relationship between body and culture dominates the last seven years of Barthes' writing. Barthes' least ironically-distanced reflections on the relationship between the literal human body and signs are to be found in essays post-humously collected in *RF* and *RL*, where Barthes' readings present him as an aesthete in a more traditional sense. I am almost inclined to propose that another version of his body-centred aesthetic, even more passionate and less circumspect, moves through some of the essays found in these volumes. This is particularly true of some of the pieces written after *PT*: "Reading Brillat-Savarin," "The Image," Leaving the Movie Theater," "One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves," (found in *RL*); or "Cy Twombley, Works on Paper," "The Wisdom of Art," "Requichot and His Body," and the essays on music gathered under the heading "Music's Body" (collected in *RF*). In all of these essays Barthes explores
effects, significance and "the figures of the body" (somathemes), enacting an aesthetic marked by a symmetrical interest in the irrevocably distanced bodies of the scriptor (the graphist) and his reader.

Although the conceptualized Barthesian body is still, ideally, a decentred, discontinuous entity, the facticity and sheer tatatha--the Buddhist "suchness," that is, the moment-to-moment specificity of the literal human body--is no longer as semiotically unrealized and as nebulous as in the earlier writings. The cool disincarnate theorizing of the late 1960s and early 1970s modulates into an open preoccupation with Barthes' own body, and his desire for the literal and textual bodies of other scriptors--those fatally mediated bodies he fantasizes that he can almost see, touch, or hear as he reads "the nervous turns of the letters, the spurt of ink, the tensile quality of the strokes, all those accidents [my emphasis] which are not necessary to the functioning of the graphic code." ("CT," RF 169/156)

In 1979, writing on Cy Twombley's gestural drawings, in a passage titled simply "Body," Barthes lays out his apprehension of the erotic separation of body and sign, of body from body, and the complex tension between the skin of the scriptor and the skin of the text that he now seeks:

[t]he line--any line inscribed on the sheet of paper--denies the important body, the fleshy body, the humoral body; the line gives access neither to the skin nor to the mucous membranes; what it expresses is the body insofar as the line scratches, brushes over
by the line, art displaces itself; its center is no longer the object of desire (the splendid body frozen in marble), but the subject of this desire...  
("CT," RF 170/156)

The sign (the line or graph) is here, as in the Japanese textual economy, an *energon*, a rare trace, the "visible action" and residue of a body's "pulsion and its expenditure." ("CT," RF 170/156) In this last phase difference comes to rest, as Barthes first argued in *PT*, not upon a relative systemic difference, but upon the absolute individuality--and the uniqueness--of each body.

Throughout *RB* R.B. writes of the body as being a stubborn remainder, a site of supplementary resistance to discourse. Barthes reaffirms that position in the essay on Twombley:

[n]ow what is ultimately inimitable is the body; no discourse, whether verbal or plastic...can reduce one body to another. TW's [Twombley's] work reveals this fatality: my body will never be yours. From this fatality, in which a certain human affliction can be epitomized, there is only one means of escape: seduction: that my body (or its sensuous substitutes, art, writing) seduce, overwhelm, or disturb the other body.  
("CT,"RF 170/157)

In *ES* Barthes began attending to the gestural qualities of writing bodies; in *PT* he initiated a reflection upon reading bodies. These two sets of reflections now converge in a symetrical body-centred theory of writing and reception. For both writer and receiver, writing is no longer conceived primarily in terms of intertextual bricolage, but is now sensual seduction, perturbation, desire intensified by the
mediation of signs screening one body from another. What the sign now expresses is the scriptor's "inward body," the "internal magma" or "ectoplasm" of "the body before the mirror-stage." ("R," RF 207-208/189-190)

The last Barthes?

In both his essays and his last longer work, Barthes champions the body and sensuality (especially the unfocused pre-oedipal sensualism of the Kristevian semiotic) against the violence of the Symbolic order and a new violence—death. With the publication of "Longtemps je me suis couché..." in 1978 Barthes finds what seems to be an openly personal voice, writing on the themes of pathos and death. He reprises the theme of the writer as witness—but presents the writer as one who attends not to artistic alienation, but to the act of keeping alive the memory of the dead. This turn toward the personal and the affective jolts a reader who has been persuaded by the earlier Barthesian ideology of the text, and is not easily negotiated. How, for instance, is a good postmodern to interpret this passage from "Longtemps je me suis couché":

Hence I shall be speaking of 'myself.' 'Myself' is to be understood here in the full sense: not the asepticized substitute of a general reader...I shall be speaking of the one for whom no one else can be substituted, for better and for worse. It is the intimate which seeks utterance in me, seeks to make its cry heard, confronting generality, confronting science.

("LC," RL 284/319-320)
If one read only Barthes' essays, leaving aside CL, Barthes' new posture of vulnerability, his renunciation of his skeptical theorizing self, might seem complete. Yet in CL, that wariness and need for personae to defend his being against the Image—as well as the residues of a theorizing impulse—endure. Hence my reading of CL as a kind of prospective coda which reprises many of Barthes' earlier themes and theoremes on textuality and the human subject, yet also participates in Barthes' complicated turn toward affectivity and the novelistic.

*Camera Lucida: the fascinum and death*

the point is not to destroy Images
but to unstick [décoller] them, to
distance them. In Taoist "Meditation"
there is an initiatic operation, Wang-
Ming: to lose consciousness of the
Name (which I call: the Image).
("I," RL 356/395)

For me, the real violence is that of
'everything passes,' of ruin, of
 oblivion. The violence of effacement is
stronger than that of fracture; not so
much the death one inflicts, that one
wants to inflict, as the death that comes
all by itself (a violence which perhaps
cannot be understood before middle age).
("I," RL 354/393-394)

CL, Barthes' last major work, has been read as the most personal of his books. Ostensibly a note on photography, it negotiates the resonant tensions between literal and figurative meanings of the photographic image with great subtlety, so that it is, finally, a rich coda and unintended
envoi. CL is a book about many thing, but it circles around literal and figurative deaths, reflecting upon aspects of power that murder the fluidity and openness of human existence identity, categories, and cultural commodities. An uncertain tension circulates in this book as it moves through quasi-confessional, theoretical, and ironic modes. Given the writing subject's acute sense of audience, I believe that CL should not be grouped with the more intimate essays of RL and RF, but rather be considered as part of the ambivalent corpus of the longer, more public texts upon which this thesis has focused.

CL is structured by the protagonist's attempts to escape the image-making apparatus of power. As a closet theoretical drama, CL is a carefully arranged frustration of the naive will-to-theory. Structurally, the book's resistance to theory, and to representation in the largest sense, turns upon the crafted failure of the narrator's spurious quest to define the theoretical essence of photography in the first half of the work. The failure of this project (referred to by me as the "telic" discourse) disables systemic theorizing and moves the narrator to begin writing the second section of CL, what he refers to as a "palinode" (literally, an ode or a song recanting something previously put forward). This palinode is a temporal elaboration of the strategy of erasure. With it the reader enters into a twilight world where concepts, partially negated yet still functioning, shimmer undecidably. These negations are "impure" (that is, non-dialectical). They serve to protect the negativity of the unidentified narrator who may
or may not be equated with the historical Barthes.

In CL the reader follows what turns out to be a devastating but not complete indictment of the will-to-theory. This partial negation of theoretical inquiry functions within no larger scheme of antithesis or sublation. It offers only the opportunity to move beyond abstractions and rigid systems of representation into a post-theoretical modality which restores to the world and human subjects their incoherent and multiple being. Instead of the droning sound of theory and power, CL offers a utopian reverie, one rewriting the intellectual as an amateur of desired texts and persons; desired bodies that remain beyond the cultural Imaginary, beyond any order.

For Barthes representation is an unambiguous affirmation: this is. In CL he (or his protagonist, depending upon how one chooses to read) is a "poet of systems" turned refugee, in flight from the slave-raids of ideological systems—including literary theory—that capture lives and texts, turning them into banal social images which circulate ad nauseum as the currency of culture.12 CL is not simply a note on photography which moves into a prose elegy for the narrator-protagonist’s dead mother; it enacts the struggle between representation (affirmation) and the abolition of the image. The protagonist of CL plays the razor edge of negation, countering the blunt unself-conscious negation of the social image with rhetorical manoeuvres which disfigure that initial negation, returning the human subject to its inhering negativity.

This only begins to suggest the complex nature and agendas
of the protagonist narrating CL. This subject writes solely in the first person, but never identifies himself, even ironically, so that the reader cannot know "who" is writing. This pronoun qua protagonist is a curiously unfigured discursive construction which, oscillating between the semblance of intimacy and the stance of estrangement, protects the "private" being of the writing subject, allowing him, under the cover of language, to slip out of the nets of the implicit authorial obligations assumed by the very act of writing. The writing subject evades the reader's dominating gaze, since being "seen" would mean being turned into a stable set of salable adjectives and images. Here, as in the work of Nietzsche or Wilde, self-representations conceal as well as reveal. Barthes is the historical author of CL, ostensibly the "I" both writing and narrating the text--though this is never textually established--and, one supposes, the protagonist absenting himself from the book's implied contracts with the reader.

This rhetorical absenting of the subject is a rebellious gesture directed against the existing cultural compact: culture being, for the protagonist, "a contract arrived at between creators and consumers": a contract which, in this book, he is both evading and renegotiating. (CL 28/51) Focusing on the moments of that evasion, this reading follows that intrigue, where the writing subject enacts his resistance to unequivocal systems of representation (in short, to consumption) through a complex textual performance, staging and then sabotaging (negating) his initial pretense of
theoretical inquiry. Abandoning the pose of the theoretician, in the second half of the work the subject is an amateur, opting for what seems a more intimate form of writing. CL is comprised of these two primary discourses: the pseudo-theoretical or "telic" discourse seeking the essence of photography, and the other discourse, the intermittent and "paratelic" discourse of wary interiority. What emerges from the interaction of these two discourses is a third discourse, a perverse rhapsodic utterance which negates the ostensible projects of the first two discourses, making of the book an unreliable but provocative performance indicting what Barthes refers to as bourgeois culture. In CL, the theoretical project functions as a protective fiction, as a screen of language hiding an absent centre and a fugal protagonist who does not want either his language or his being to be turned into images.

A first (hypothetical) objection to this line of argument: that CL is about photography, not systems of representation. But is Barthes really only concerned with the photographic image per se? Commenting on his working methods in an interview during the time he was writing the book, he indicated that photographs he liked a great deal were not included in the work, because the images were chosen to correspond to certain moments in the development of the text's argument. (GV 358-359/332-333) The photographs therefore play a supplementary role to the textual notes. And what are the thematic concerns of those notes and fragments? CL is a book about memory, images, mortality and irretrievable loss. It is also a book about the ideology of
representation current in contemporary capitalist cultures, about the self as a political subject caught in a society that consumes ideologies and satisfies its desires through images. These public "photographs"—mental, conceptual, literal—traffic in a coercive, frozen plenitude of objects.

The photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed...

(CL 91/143)

Barthes refuses to grant the possibility that a photographer could perform a benign intentional aesthetic act toward the other being or object she photographs (the only exception to that rule in the book seems to be the self-portrait by the young Mapplethorpe). The photographer is seen as an erased operator who controls a technological process which results in the forced representation of the other. That representation dispossesses the other of her interiority. Barthes creates a semantic oscillation around the term "image", so that photography, while remaining, literally, photography, also functions synedochically as an instance of, and a channel for, the petrifying gaze of a social discourse that arrests and commodifies the potential of the human subject. As Lacan observes in "What is a Picture?":

...in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture....What determines me...is the gaze that is outside.... the gaze is the instrument through which...

...I am photo-graphed. 13
Through this "photograph," this "writing," an *imago* is produced. This effigy literally constitutes a "flat death," an externally imposed negation-via-closure of the contingent self that the writing subject flees. (There is a certain ironic serendipity in the fact that the "original" photographic image presented by the narrator is a conventionally-composed still life (*nature morte*): a fraudulent version of "nature" set on a table, and an image of imminent consumption.) While examining the ideological and philosophical implications of the photograph, and of photography as a social discourse, the narrator explicitly analyses the image as a means and unit of social appropriation and exchange--like Mallarmé's worn coins, passed in silence, the faces worn off.

The locus of privileged perception in *CL* resides in the writing subject, the anonymous "I" of the text who is at once its narrator, protagonist, and writing subject. This subject is a conflicted and ambivalent entity: not only is he torn between expressive and critical languages, between intimate and public modalitites, but he is also presented as a coerced subject caught between the reductive discourses of social power and the hardened theoretical discourses he has previously used and created. Not wanting to be a *Zeichen* (a mark or, literally, token) in those monologues, determined to never reduce himself, as a unique subject, to "the disincarnated, disaffected *socius* which science is concerned with," he defensively decides to remain open and incoherent. (*CL* 74/115) He reclaims his flesh and its opacity against the social demand for stable,
transparent subjects who do not contradict the imagos of them already in circulation.

'myself' never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it), and 'myself' which is light, divided, dispersed; 'myself' doesn't hold still, giggling in my jar: if only Photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body, a body that signifies nothing! (CL 12/26-7)

The textual glass-jar containing this subversively light, decentred being is made of fragments in an uncertain—and only apparently chronological—order that does not obscure the disjunctive nature of the work: a text of pleasure drifting toward a sorrowful moment of bliss.

In one of his last interviews, Barthes described CL as a kind of "intellectual thriller" (un suspense intellectif). (GV 358/333—English translation inaccurate) Annette Lavers, picking up on that remark, has called the book a "hermeneutic thriller":

Like Nausea and Remembrance of Things Past, it is the story of a quest, a hermeneutic thriller; but unlike Sartre's and Proust's masterpieces, it also shows the flight of the subject before the very advance of knowledge which it tries to promote. (RBA 214)

Both flight from unequivocal forms of knowledge and active resistance to representation (representation being the
precondition of knowledge, in Althusserian terms) operate within the writing subject's initial project: the quest to uncover the "essence" of photography. This project is deliberately and ironically marked by the need for unambiguous information. "I was overcome" the subject writes "by an 'ontological' desire: I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was 'in itself', by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images." (CL 3/13) So he constructs a specious and finally inoperable methodology which seems hardly more than a jumble of details jayed from Phenomenology and Structuralism: "a vague, casual, even cynical Phenomenology" the subject admits. (CL 20/40)

This pseudo-methodology, its premises and procedures under constant revision, and further undermined by the subject's irritation with discourses that suppress the particular and the affective, quickly collapses. Doing research, he finds that none of the standard references on photography discuss the photographs which interest him, which give him pleasure or some other significant emotion.

Each time I would read something about Photography, I would think of some photograph I loved, and this made me furious. Myself, I saw only the referent, the desired object, the loved body.... looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be primitive, without culture.... in short, I found myself at an impasse and, so to speak, 'scientifically' alone and disarmed. (CL 7/19-20)

This subject finds another entry into the realm of photography, marrying the double skepticisms of Nietzsche and
Montaigne as he abandons the discourses of semiology and psychoanalysis for his own unordered perceptions.

It was better, once and for all, to make my protestation of singularity into a virtue—-to try making what Nietzsche called the 'ego's ancient sovreignty' into a heuristic principle. So I resolved to start my inquiry with no more than a few photographs, the ones I was sure existed for me.

(CL 8/21)

The protagonist becomes a sensual subject, reading through the frames of his memories, his desire, his emotions, his unfigured body. Pastiching Montaigne (and, I suspect, half-sending up Descartes) he writes: "So I make myself the measure of photographic 'knowledge.' What does my body know of Photography?" (CL 9/22) And in fragments 7 and 8 we read, noting the constant negation or displacement of theoretical hypotheses which mark the unsettled hermeneutics of the writing subject:

I decided then to take as a guide for my new analysis the attraction I felt for certain photographs. For of this attraction, at least, I was certain. What to call it? Fascination? No....something more like a internal agitation, an excitement, a certain labour too, the pressure of the unspeakable which wants to be spoken.

(CL 18-19/37)

Commenting on his unorthodox, emotionally-driven phenomenology he writes:

Of course I could make out in Photography, in an orthodox manner, a whole network of essences...but at the moment of reaching the
essence of Photography in general, I branched off; instead of following the path of a formal ontology (of a Logic), I stopped, keeping with me, like a treasure, my desire or my grief.... As Spectator I was interested in Photography only for 'sentimental' reasons; I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think.

(CL 21/41-42)

Abandoning or displacing an initial position is a frequent move in Barthes' later texts. As Steven Ungar remarks in Roland Barthes: Professor of Desire, a critical project set forth at the beginning of one of Barthes' later texts is often replaced by a narrower inquiry pointing to the affective dimension of writing. Since 1973, Ungar notes, Barthes' writing no longer pursues the analysis of texts, but moves instead toward forms of self-analysis. (RBP 139) In CL the writing subject moves rapidly from the posture of an inquiring intellectual to that of an ambivalent amateur of photographs and disappeared bodies, nostalgically wanting to become a primitive individual, "without culture." This move to abandon theoretical work frustrates the unfolding and resolution of the hermeneutic code: the paratelic discourse, the discourse of the subject's private reflections, undermines the public inquiry into the nature of photography (this affective interference, is, in cybernetic terms, an instance of disruptive, counter-communicative "noise"). The writing subject in CL is no longer willing to be a disincarnate socius, a docile and coherent cultural subject. The good cultural subject, like the "good" photograph, "speaks," and allows himself to be identified with
that speech. (CL 43/73) The good subject produces a recuperable discourse that observes a critical mass of conventions necessary to be intelligible and iterable. This recuperated speech becomes both identity (the Image or *imago*, the imposed mask of the subject) and social product. It has exchange value in legal, economic and intellectual systems. It neutralizes. It appropriates. These Images are the product of the photo-ideological gaze: a murderous social gaze that emerges at the points of slippage between literal and figurative versions of the photograph scattered through the book. What society reads from his "photograph", his image, the subject does not know. All he understands is that he has become a specter, a "Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person." The other(s), he writes, turn him into an object: "they put me at their mercy, at their disposal, classified in a file, ready for the subtlest deceptions." (CL 14/31)

In "What is a Picture?" Lacan considers the human subject's possible defensive response to the *fascinum*—that is, to being figured, or, as he puts it, "captured" by the deadly gaze of another being. One can opt for ironic dissimulation and play:

Only the [human] subject..is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself [s'y repère] in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. ("WP," FFC 107)

The image (the "screen") can, in Lacan's reading, be both
literal and conceptual. Its function is to mediate between self and others. It is "something like a mask, a double, an envelope, a thrown-off skin" that can be either actively projected from the subject, or passively received by the subject from another (as in the case of photography or criticism). Projecting or imposing an image is an act of power. It is, to think of Sartre, the difference between being seen as a waiter, or choosing to play at being a waiter. The subject in CL chooses to preempt the other's act of figuration (of "naming") by defensively projecting an image of himself as theoretician, and then ironically playing with it and his theoretical project.

Conjoining non-figuration and the survival of subjectivity, the writing subject finds asylum for his precious negativity in private life. Private life, as he defines it, is the "zone of space, of time, where I am not an image, an object. It is my political right to be a subject which I must protect." (CL 15/32) He goes on to argue that the age of photography corresponds to the creation of a new social value, the compulsive "publicity of the private" (the tabloid syndrome) in which "the private is consumed as such, publicly." (CL 98/153) He--somewhat paradoxically--resists this age, claiming his political right to privacy. The realm of the private is, he writes:

...the absolutely precious, inalienable site where my image is free (free to abolish itself), as it is the condition of an interiority which I believe is identified with my truth, or, if you like, with the Intractable of which I consist, I must, by
a necessary resistance, reconstitute the division of public and private: I want to utter interiority without yielding intimacy. (CL 98/153)

In its refusal to produce a workable theory of photography, offering only the subjective, blurred categories of the studium and the punctum, CL enacts what the subject says is his "desperate resistance to any reductive system." (CL 8/21) The book is a complex series of gestures which criticize voracious theoretical language-empires while shielding the writing subject from recuperation. This hybrid discourse has not hardened into coherency, into the rhetoric of affirmation or theoretical mastery. CL offers the reader not a theory of photography but only the tentative and entirely subjective "theme" of the punctum. The punctum is a detail which suddenly "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow," "piercing" or "wounding" the viewer, calling forth some private emotional response. (CL 26-27/49) Because it is an utterly subjective category, the idea of the punctum cannot circulate in the theoretical economy in the usual way. It is, as Barthes intended, provocative and yet almost unusable in theoretical discourse because of its subjective--and therefore unverifiable--nature.

The staged closet drama of the failure of the theoretical project of the first section of CL releases it into the inwardness of the final section of the book, the palinode--the recantation of the theoretical mode which moves the writing subject deeper into the protective space of incoherency.
In his study of Barthes, Ungar asks: why does the subject of CL begin to use concepts and analytic methodologies from Phenomenology and Structuralism, only to immediately question their usefulness, and finally reject them? The first half of the book (entries 1-24), Ungar argues, functions literally as a pretext, as a necessary foil that allows the subject to enter into the "pertinent context" of the palinode. "The palinode", Ungar writes, "can only operate as such in conjunction with an ode: in response to it, after it, against it. Difference is asserted within repetition, even when (especially when) the initial assertion serves only as a point of departure." (RBP 141) Ungar offers a second line of reasoning: the entire sequence of fragmentary notes constituted by the first section of the book and the subsequent palinode serves to facilitate (and re-enact) the text's drift toward a more auto-analytic and affective writing.

Barthes is aware of the resistance he brings to his self-analysis as false moves or opening statements. The sequence of fragments functions on the order of what Freud describes as a screen memory whose transformation is necessary to the process of transformation. At the same time, Barthes ascribes to the articulation an expressive or surfacing function referred to by Husserl and other phenomenologists as de-sedimentation. (RBP 142)

Internal evidence suggests that this "screen memory" was
written, or at least revised, after the discovery of the withheld Winter Garden photograph in the palinode. This would mean that the writing subject is ironically playing with the reader, and that **CL** is an *explicitly staged* "memory," a self-conscious performance of contradiction and negation, a "shifting of ground" that slyly mimes the acts of hermeneutic investigation while preparing the very failure of that inquiry. There is, in the book's second entry, a parenthetical prolepsis which reveals that the writing subject is aware of the poignant discoveries about death, time and the frozen image which will occur much "later" (with respect to the unfolding of the hermeneutic code) in the palinode: "(I didn't yet know that this stubbornness of the Referent in always being there would produce the essence I was looking for)." (**CL** 6/17-18).

This betrays a critical—and arguably ironic—incongruity. If the writing subject is already aware of the discovery of the Winter Garden photograph and the epiphanies haloing it, then the "beginning" of the book is not the unretouched moment of original inquiry into the nature of photography that chronological readings of the book suggest that it is. If the reader searches for some indication of the possible "originary" moment of the the text, she finds traces scattered through fragments 25 to 30. In fragment 30 she reads:

> Something like an essence of the Photograph floated in this particular picture. I therefore decided to 'derive' all Photography... from the only photograph which assuredly existed for me, and to take it somehow as a
guide for my last investigation... The Winter Garden Photograph was my Ariadne... it would tell me what constituted that thread which drew me toward Photography.

(CL 73/114)

In this same fragment the subject asserts that henceforth he must "interrogate the evidence of Photography... in relation to what we romantically call love and death." (CL 73/115). But even before this revelation he has been interrogating the photographic image in terms of love and death. In fragment 4 he writes of "that terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead." (CL 9/23) In fragment 5 one finds him equating the act of photography with embalming, and reading his own photographed self as "Total-Image...Death in person". (CL 14/31) And in fragment 8 one observes him beginning to use emotional response as a heuristic device, leading up to the pathos of finding the image of his mother as a young woman in the glassed-in garden.

This is Steven Ungar's reading of the Winter Garden photograph. Barthes, he writes, "stages" the discovery of that image as the primal scene or encounter around which the book is organized. This photograph is, like the Emperor's Palace in Barthes' phantasmic Tokyo, the empty centre of the labyrinth-text. Of all the verbal gestures which establish the value and function of that image, the most telling is Barthes' refusal to reproduce the photograph in the work. The result, Ungar notes, is this: "what ought to have been the thematic center [of CL] becomes instead an absent and withheld origin." (RBP 145). The
subject does, however, provide the reader with a devastating explanation of why the image remains hidden from the reader's eyes:

(I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the 'ordinary'...but in it, for you, no wound.)

(CL 73/115)

Yet despite this mistrust of the other, the protagonist turns toward a new theme, one that he only begins to explore in the remaining entries--the poignant and tenuous relatedness possible even within the distance separating a viewer from an *indexical image* (a photograph) of another body.

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body...proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being...will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light...is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.

(CL 81/126-127)

The protagonist's emotional connection to the woman echoing in the Winter Garden photograph produces a decisive rebuttal of Barthes' earlier view figuring all texts as unconcluded perpetual presents in which to wander. Looking again at the Garden image, he writes:

I suffer, motionless. Cruel, sterile deficiency: I cannot *transform* my grief, I cannot let my gaze drift; no culture will help me utter this suffering which
I experience entirely on the level of the image's finitude... [my emphasis].
(CL 90/141)

Love and negativity

CL is an absent-centred text, an elegaic and empty room. In it the writing subject, out of love, protects the negativity of his mother by withholding her image from public circulation. This gesture paradoxically, from the reader's point of view, moves the photograph into the realm of negativity, the realm of the Barthesian ailleurs. There is yet another absence in the text which arises from that act of literally withholding the mother's image. By refusing to reproduce the photograph in the actual text, the writing subject exposes the book's illusion of an intimate discourse, revealing to the reader that she is considered a hostile other whose gaze would trivialize or deny the specificity and negativity of not only this unknown woman--the mother--but also of her child, the faceless and unnamed "I" of the work. Declining to represent himself via his refusal to publicly reproduce his mother's indexical trace, the subject circumvents the process of representation, protecting his own freedom to continue to invent himself. This double absenting of the mother and of the child make them "intractable" (i.e. ungraphed) beings existing anywhere outside of the uptake of Image-Repertoires. This absented, negative space in CL is, perhaps, la chambre claire, the silent analogue of the generically-titled Polaroid found serving as the book's frontispiece, a site of pathetic bliss.

However subtle the reproach, this absenting of the subject
from the implied contracts of the text precipitates a crisis in the attentive reader. Her slight contract with the subject seize up. It no longer functions. She is rejected as a conspiratorial agent who would petrify the flowing subjectivity of this ageing child. Even when the subject resumes the discourse, after rhetorically setting his boundaries and claiming his right to be a private subject, his exit from the scene of cultural exchange has undone the illusion of an amiable cultural transaction. The rest of the book unfolds as a slightly distanced spectacle, because in the absence of any certain grounds or terms of exchange, there can be no stable reading contract. There is only the reader and the fugal writing subject, separated by the proscenium arches of a reversed dramatic irony, by a staged pseudo-hermeneutic code, by the soft drapes of language hanging ambiguously between the space (the medusa space) of completed utterances, the place of the image, and the live, aerated, negative space beyond representation.

CL is an extended meditation upon the practice and the implications of representation. For Barthes, the image is consubstantial with the commodification and the consumption of the private and the individual. The oppressiveness of the photograph and the ideological gaze lies in the stasis and violent plenitude they force upon their subject-turned-object, in a reification of the processes of a contingent, changing being. Life, as Derrida reminds us in "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," is inherently negative,
unfigurable: it is not "nonrepresentable origin of representation."("TC," WD 234/243) The image, whether actual or conceptual, as the primary unit of a system of representation, of an ideology, imposes identity. In CL identity is violence. To deny the human subject the drifting space of indeterminacy, of non-figuration, is a form of incarceration. To mask an individual by imposing an image-identity upon her is to have power over her, to have that person, in a way, both as property and as a sacrifice to a commodity culture: recuperated and coldly immolated.

CL deploys two major tactics against this potential recuperation: the use of verbal screens (including personal pronouns) and what Barthes refers to as "shifting" (déplacement). Shifting, he says, can mean to go where one is not expected, or, more radically, to abjure what one has written (but not necessarily what one has thought) when power has appropriated it. (ABR 468-469/L 26-27) The book's structure of contradiction—a text followed by its palinode—is a structure of erasure which enacts the unstable processes of the writing subject's to figuration. The text refuses to yield itself up as a unified utterance: it will not surrender stable theorems or an image of the writing subject. Instead it yields only a heap of traces emanating from the subject's movements around several kinds of absence.

The book's disfigured subject, like its failed theoretical project and its structures of contradiction and oscillation, are strategies to negate the image-Name, means to
avoid being crushed by the transactions of cultural commerce. These strategies constitute a kind of textual performance, as Susan Sontag has observed. *(ABR xvii)* CL is a kind of verbal theatre piece in which the subject paradoxically exposes the systems of representation and exchange which found his culture, then escapes into the space of the unfigured. Outplaying doxa and the will to theory, to power, he offers, hesitantly, only the words of a singular being, an *amateur*, and the reminder that negativity is a fundamental condition of human freedom.

In *FLD* Barthes' ludic, textualizing aestheticism alters under the needs and desires of love. Then, in *CL*, Barthes' aestheticizing position is broken open—not destroyed—by those great existential themes, death, loss, finitude, and by the need to remember, to mourn, to struggle against the effacement of death. However equivocally, in these later works other kinds of distance are emerging. *CL* constitutes, in my myth, another threshold, where Barthes' playful intelligence and sensuality, his need for the space of potentiality and the beauties of eccentric difference, was taking a new turn; but this threshold was one that Barthes only began to cross.
CHAPTER SEVEN. WORKING THROUGH BARTHES (SOME PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS)

...since culture, in its entirety, is no longer sustained by a humanist ideology (or is increasingly reluctant to sustain it), it returns to our lives only as comedy, farce, masquerade: culture is acceptable, one might say, only in the second degree--no longer as a direct value but as an inverted one: kitsch, plagiarism, game, pleasure, shimmer of a parody-language in which we believe and do not believe (the characteristic of farce), a fragment of pastiche; we are condemned to the anthology, short of rehearsing a moral philosophy of totality.

("TS,"RL 341-342/379)

The Tolstoyans the Afro-American slaves knew this: you could be killed for teaching people to read and write I used to think the worst affliction was to be forbidden pencil and paper well, Ding Ling recited poems to prison walls for years of the Cultural Revolution and truly, the magic of written characters looms and dwindles shrinks small grows swollen depending upon where you stand and what is in your hand and who can read and why I think now the worst affliction is not to know who you are or have been I have learned this in part from writers Reading and writing aren't sacred yet people have been killed as if they were Adrienne Rich1

In his study of Walter Pater, Wolfgang Iser makes observations germane to aspects of the Barthes I have been pursuing in this thesis. Iser reflects that Pater, like many
other nineteenth century aesthetes and decadents, "lives in contradiction to [consensual versions of] reality." (WP 168) Embracing the relativism and skepticism of the time, Pater makes the "totality of the human past subservient to the moment of aesthetic enjoyment," "elevat[ing] the intensified moment into a life-line for aesthetic existence." (WP 168, ix) These two remarks capture much of the spirit of Barthesian aestheticization. Throughout this work, I have been trying to unpack some of what I intend by this rather awkward term. Most human activities--which are, at bottom, acts of ordering and interpretation--involve a degree of aestheticization, as Nietzsche contends. But strongly aestheticizing discourses--discourses of the kind explored in the first chapter of this thesis--are marked by a fascination with and elaboration of the act of selectively unmaking and then imaginatively reorganizing objects, sensations, events--texts, in the Barthesian sense.

Barthesian aestheticization, as I have argued, is not without precedent in Western literature. As a form of protest and reverie, it is a creative--and necessarily destructive--intellectual process that hinges upon distancing some discourse, object or situation from any stabilizing ground or context (such as a consensual reality, essentialist claims, prior interpretations, or interpretive communities) in order to privately rewrite and enjoy details of those "texts" free of any constraint. Barthes' creative aestheticizing process seeks states of negativity, of the potential, the unresolved, the
semelfactive. To aesthetize then, as I have been using the term, can variously mean: to de-realize (in the sense of withdrawing a subject, thing, or event from the realms and claims of the collective real: hence, to unname, to rupture relatedness, to circumvent or sabotage identities), to rewrite, to artifice, to textualize; to figure, not represent. Aestheticization involves breaking the stranglehold and coherence of the Symbolic order to explore the fissure between sign and signified, creating open yet bounded spaces—interstices between the Symbolic and pre-Symbolic modalities—within which to play, to dream, to write. Therefore, to aestheticize can also mean to make plural, paragrammatic, uncertain, malleable, différent, absurd. To aesthetize, in the later Barthes, also implies wrestling enjoyment from some thing or experience, a wrestling that asserts the desires of an unpredictable bodymind. Therefore, to aestheticize here can also mean to sensualize, privatize, marginalize, and disorient. And, finally, within Barthes' world, it means to empty, to begin again, endlessly, reaching not resolution but a protective indeterminacy, a further detour that creates the spaces of Barthesian reverie.

"Reality as a system of power..."

Language is legislation, speech is its code. ....I am obliged to posit myself first as the subject before stating the action which will henceforth be no more than my attribute
I must always choose between masculine and feminine, for the neuter and dual are forbidden me. Further, I must indicate my relation to the other person by resorting to either tu or vous; social or affective suspension is denied me. Thus, by its very structure my language implies an inevitable relation of alienation. To speak...is not to...communicate; it is to subjugate....Once uttered, even in the subject's deepest privacy, speech [la langue] enters the service of power.

(ABR 460-461/L 13-14)

The narrator of FLD writes:

I experience reality as a system of power...
The world is full, plenitude is its system, and as a final offense this system is presented as a 'nature' with which I must sustain good relations...'love' reality? What disgust for the lover...

(FLD 89/105)

Throughout his post-structural writings, Barthes views reality (that is, the sum of the names, prejudgements and semiotic structures of others) as a form of organized coercion. Language, power, and violence become collusive, almost synonymous forces of closure that press in upon the potentiality of human being through the agency of adjectives, substantives, and the proper name. These agents of definition constellate what Barthes refers to in PT as the "cultural ego," and then later, borrowing from Lacan, as the imago--that is, the largely unconscious public representation--whether literal or conceptual--of someone or something that circulates without much question in the cultural economy.

Barthes resists the perceived violence of images and identity through a series of polemics which indict stable or
social identities. He asserts, instead, the possibility of repeatedly uncreating the cultural ego. Barthes' positions on subjectivity shift around throughout the decade. Initially conceiving of the human subject and the consensual real as malleable and fragmented texts, in *S/Z* the pan-textualization of the world turns flesh into citation, into sign. Gender, race and class— that is, the political "real-world" specificities and affiliations of human beings—dissolve in the acidic bath of a macroculture of anonymous and semi-anonymous languages. Human specificity is exploded into an indifferent mass of differences. The subject is suicided into the processes of language. Figured as a synchronic intertext turned toward the Symbolic and Imaginary orders of culture, he possesses a hypertrophic cultural recall, but demonstrates almost no personal memory. Here the most desirable writing is held to be one which achieves a "salutary discomfort" and anonymity— that is, a masked, apparently subject-less writing which prevents the critical hermeneutic and political question "Who is speaking?" from being answered.

Motivated by his own growing ambivalence toward the press of ideology and culture, by the time of *PT Barthes* is moving toward a more complicated and sensual notion of human subjectivity. Drawing upon the Kristevian notion of a poetic subject, the already labile and decentred Barthesian subject fissures into a cultural ego and a pleasure-seeking "body" which is somehow both within and beyond culture. Through this fissuring the subject, although still largely figured as a mass
of intertexts (i.e. as a cultural ego) begins, at least theoretically, to thwart social demands for identity and representation through three utopian forces that resist cultural recuperation: the body, the Text (textuality, the writerly), and *jouissance*. If the world, as Barthes has argued, is a chain of names and violent images sustaining discourses of power, then the Text will become a site where that chain and those discourses can be broken, perverted, made ludically dysfunctional by the excesses of reflexivity, absurdity, and the pre-Symbolic.

Barthes' aestheticizing practice is marked by a change in the notion of subjectivity as textual function to one of cultural supplement. In texts treating the subject as cultural supplement (*PT*, *RB*, *FLD*, *CL*), Barthes shifts to the experiential body as his preferred locus of cultural production and resistance. Isadora Duncan's personal motto was "*Sans limites!*," and one might argue that it could have served as Barthes' byword during the heady late 1960s and early 1970s. Barthesian aestheticization (where the subject is merely one text among others) is a strong counterproposal to essentialist notions of coherent subjects and a shared, verifiable reality. Holding that the real cannot be represented by language (Barthes writes of "*l'inadéquation fondamentale du langage et du réel*"), Barthes pursues the reflexive and connotative aspects of signs. (ABR 564/L 22) In his work, the post-structural text is actively involved in a process of de- or ex-nomination. It destroys, or at least suspends, identities and
contexts. It refuses to function, however equivocally, as a simple mirror or memory device. On the contrary, it becomes a means of undoing history and leaving the scars of memory behind, a site in which to uninvent the cultural self, the past and the present.

This uninvention does not lapse into the extremities of psychosis. Barthes' ideal subject-text is, by the time of PT, a poetic subject who can, as it were, have it both ways. At once a cultural initiate and a professed marginal (a hedonist, an amateur, a pervert) he is split between the Symbolic and pre-Symbolic orders, between his bodymind and the culture of signs. This ambivalent subject exploits the frictions between the doxic and innovative edges of language. He can enjoy both his culturally assigned identity and the momentary, purely private fading of it in the heat of textual bliss, which, for an instant, overcomes metalanguages and fragments the coherence of the cultural ego and its names, drawing the human subject into a state of negativity (the neuter or the matte) where names and adjectives do not function.

By 1975, Barthes recognizes that his strategies can neither retain their subversive quality nor dissolve the bourgeois mindset which oppresses him. He therefore chooses to pursue sapentia, the retreat of the signifier, and hybrid, at times apparently semi-confessional discourses. The text then becomes a semi-private asylum, a site of depouvoir, of powerlessness, where the dominance of one sign system over another is annulled, where language is a counter-communication
rather than a communication, where words and things unravel into an arresting and futile semiography. (ABR 464, 472/L 22, 34) With RB, R.B./Barthes withdraws even further from the machinations of doxic culture into an introverted personal culture. In complicated essays and novelistic modes that oscillate between confession and dissimulation, subjectivity devolves into a series of ironic self-stagings that only widen the split between public and private aspects of the individual. The subject returns as a staged, half-fictitious entity exploring its origins as well as its affective and aesthetic responses. These explorations paradoxically take two directions—one culminating in the distanced confessions of FLD and CL, the other in the apparently less guarded intimacy of his late essays and fragments.

The Barthesian subject is often a dreamy entity, turning pages and textualizing the simulacra of an already hypertextual world in a kind of Proustian confinement. In Barthes' post-structural zones, the subject is an avant-garde and then anachronistic lector who delights in and yet is oppressed by the surfeit of his cultural inheritance. Despite the fact that Barthes lives, as R.B. puts its, in a society of transmitters—an urban subculture of writers and thinkers—the solitude of the Barthesian subject in the face of power is striking. In Barthes' cultural Imaginary, the world is overcome by malevolent clouds and structures of power: there are nations-states, visible and invisible social institutions, and Doxa. Society appears to be a multi-tiered economic clientèle
comprised of the bourgeoisie and a passive, manipulated mass engaged in low-brow consumer culture. On the periphery of that massive clientèle circulate a small number of isolated marginals. Although professional and private affiliations periodically flash in Barthes' later writing—emotional and intellectual friendships, lovers, the ephemeral garden of the seminar, and his deep bond with his mother—no vibrant human networks appear around most Barthesian subjects. No strong interpretive communities are to be found in Barthes' early work, only the ruins of prior texts, interpretive strategies, and conventions. One looks almost in vain for instances in which Barthes' theoretical subjects or actants read with another person, or even discuss their reading with others, except through the screened indirection of an answering text. Anti-authoritarian and pessimistic, the Barthesian subject often cherishes his isolation and anomie. A decentred fiction without substantive origin, he (or, one is tempted to say, it) declines to seek to create common fronts or communities of resistance opposing the negative exercise of power. Thus there is almost no buffer zone in Barthes' cultural Imaginary between the individual and social power. Consequently, in Barthes' view, few viable alternatives to institutional culture are possible. Should one choose not to associate oneself with the clientèles of the commodity-culture, one can either fall silent or practice an aesthetic of textual pleasure, detour and inconclusiveness, exercising a "philosophy of nongregariousness" and "singularity." ("V," GV 311/289)
Barthes' singular solution is first to become a polemic critic and theorist of simulacra, then an *amateur* and graceful, ironic dissimulator. He drifts into interstices, sensuality, the contemplation of details and signs, *jouissance*, abjuration, paradox. In the early 1970s, Barthes attempts to break the strangleholds of plenitude and the utilitarian, asserting instead the primacy of the symbolic over the biological and the material. Then, like Rancé, very late in life, touched by mortality and the pathos of life, he assumes yet another attitude to writing, one less remote than his early, brilliant aestheticizing self, but still ironic, still somewhat distanced.

_Taking refuge_

No significance (no bliss) can occur, I am convinced, in a mass culture...It is characteristic of our (historical) contradiction that significance (bliss) has taken refuge in an excessive alternative: either in a mandarin *praxis* (result of an _extenuation_ of bourgeois culture), or else in an utopian idea (the idea of a future culture...about which anyone writing today knows only one thing: that, like Moses, he will not cross over into it).

(PT 39/63)

This thesis began with a wry joke courtesy of Susan Musgrave. The operative word in her aside is, for my purposes, "offer." As much as more overtly imaginative writers, in order to write at all, theoreticians must figure a world, or, in
Lacanian terms, generate an Imaginary—a world-image half-consciously cobbled together from implicit and explicit assumptions, values, obsessions, omissions, and antagonists. These images, these interpretations of the real, are tacitly proffered along with overt theoremes and speculations, and a silent invitation is issued to the reader to pass through that particular version of the world, and, to some degree, assent to the force of the theoretician's interpretations.

If one steps back and examines the images of culture passing in Barthes' writing, the shared world as he interprets it, one finds a complex, decaying sign-hoard, a Disneyland rife with unpredictable flashes of difference and beauty. Yet despite that beauty, doxic Western culture is figured as being fundamentally violent, agonistic, rootless, and predatory—a culture dealing not so much in meanings as in tired banalities, where subjectivity is told and retold like a fraudulent bedtime story, reifying creative acts and people. The violence of this world would overwhelm a writer's efforts to represent it—if representation were possible.

Beyond the headless post-patriarchal nuclear family celebrated in RB, the genetrix-son dyad of Barthes and his mother, the primary unit in the Barthesian Imaginary is the reader-text dyad. In this unit there is a lack of dialogism in the energetic, interpersonal Bakhtinian sense, as well as an extreme accumulation of power in the person of the post-structural reader—a power which Barthes fails to directly admit.
Of the many aporias and tensions animating Barthesian theorizing, perhaps the most outstanding contradiction is that aestheticization functions as a form of control through the apparent abandonment of control. Rather than truly allowing the play of diverse interpretations to coexist alongside readings focused upon drift and jouissance, Barthes ironically cannibalizes or fragments those competing interpretive strategies, forestalling the jelling of interpretations which could create provisional overviews or points de repère.

Barthes' reluctance to admit the power and control wielded by those would read in the manners modeled by him points to a blindness in his thinking. His utterly disparaging analysis of power does not allow him to admit the positive and sustaining aspects of human and social power—even as he employs his own power to reinvent the world and create the suspended gardens in which he takes his pleasure. As a cardinal instance of human force, the act of interpreting is, as Nietzsche contends, a form of power, and the founding act of human culture. Human beings need semantic grids to make their world comprehensible. However Barthes opts to delay and erase his own interpretations, to fragment his operative semantic grids, those grids continue to function in his writing.

The Subject (2)

There are, as I have indicated, a series of figurations of
the human subject in Barthes' work. His most influential figurations of subjectivity have been those which present the subject as an isolated textual-effect wandering among other textual-effects. Even with the growing appreciation of individual response, and the shift toward a subject that is blurred and poetic rather than simply textual, PT and RB reassert the fundamental solitude of the subject. Like Giacometti, Barthes seems to believe that reality cannot be shared at all. (AL 173) Barthes' early writings present a human subject who cannot pragmatically extend himself to other people (either living or dead), the non-human world, or to the physical world existing beyond his network of codes. Running counter to his policy of non-involvement and strategic "excursions," such affiliations would be counted as ethically less than desirable. After PT, however, discovering the draw of a more emotional approach to writing, and then the violence and closure of death, Barthes and his actants seem to find an aestheticizing position dealing in beginnings and the present moment an inadequate response. The thesis of an amorphous, ongoing reading present cedes to a more complex and poignant time sense and an awareness of others. In that beautiful image from CL, the protagonist tenatively conjures up a connection between himself and those in the old photographs he contemplates, a link figured as an umbilical cord, a "common skin of light." But other kinds of umbilical cords—for instance, the great connecting streams of culture perceived by hermeneuts—do not prevail over Barthes' emphasis upon the
solitariness of cultural experience, an experience now accorded a tragic as well as ludic cast. In some of Barthes' later essays, he reflects upon how the memory of texts and delight dies with each body, and how a dead person survives in the memory of those who remember—until those witnesses themselves die. "History," Barthes writes in a published 1979 journal entry, sounding a bit like Lucretius, "consists of tiny explosions of life, of deaths without relays. Our human impotence with regard to transition [i.e. to death]" ("D," RL 362/402)

How to understand this rich and complicated body of texts, rife with stimulating contentions about the nature of the subject, culture, and reality? With Megill, I agree that Barthes is best understood as a polemicizing, therapeutic thinker who administers a series of shocks to naive constructions of human subjecthood and semiotic environments. Barthes makes a compelling case that human subjects are fissured, multiple, conflicted, supplementary, always exceeding any sum of their identities. His critique of a coherent subjectivity focuses upon one aspect of the process of identity formation—the liberating moment of negativity in which old imagos and definitions fail, opening onto mental spaces where there is room to at least rhetorically uninvent oneself and the world by moving into the spaces of pleasure, deviance, and hyper-textuality.

This critique offers ways of reading the self against the names imposed by power. It warns of the dangers of unexamined
identities--identities that are hardened, authoritative, too proprietal. Barthes' later writing decentres and problematizes rather than suppressing subjectivity, displacing it from the site of the liberal psyche to the living body and unpredictable affective responses. In an innovative manner, his work lodges an ethical protest against the status quo, recovering the alternate authority of personal experience and the live bodymind.

The gifts of Barthes' aestheticizing practice are considerable. The post-structural Barthes teaches his readers to be anarchistic and amphibious creatures who can move through the pre-Symbolic and Symbolic realms, seeking the openings of liminal spaces created through new ways of reading texts and misreading classics. He tutors his readers in the art of cultural deconditioning. He shows them how to cope with cultural ennui by resensualizing and renovating cultural documents, how to avoid being caught in old thoughts, past identities, powerful theories, and silenced by internal censors. Yet, perhaps still affected by his analyses of May 1968, his responses to a negative exercise of social power revolve around a rejection of social identity and context in favour of labile intertexts and provisional constellations ("subject-effects") which I find theoretically stimulating but practically fraught with pitfalls.

Barthes recognizes the plurality of the bodymind. R.B., for instance, observes that he has a historical body, an urban body, a desiring body, a writerly body, and so on. In his writing
Barthes tends to use the multiplicity of the human subject in largely defensive ways, to fend off coherence and simple identities. Even when Barthes dramatically re-identifies himself as a hedonist and pervert, aligning himself with marginal currents in Western culture, he fails to reflect upon this act of *renaming* and *realigning* himself. He does not fully articulate the proactive aspects of his strategy even as his work points to the *positive plurality* of the human subject.

For most of his career, Barthes writes from within a conception of identity that can be characterized as oedipal, essentialist, and economic, where the name is seen as an externally imposed mark distorting a human being into civil intelligibility, and identity is the act of the political senex pre-judging and appropriating what is other than his. This brings forward the skepticism and extreme, if shattered, individualism of Barthes' theorizing. He writes as though human groupings beyond individual friendships or familial relations were incarcerating structures. He offers a blurred and fragmentary series of countermoves which appear to snap the chains of identity, affiliation, and other forms of interpretation. Closely examined, however, Barthes balances on the two edges of language identified in PT, leaping back and forth between interpretation (identity being, of course, one instance of interpretation) and the suspension of interpretation in moments of *jouissance* or radical pleasure.

Stephen Heath's gloss on pleasure and *jouissance* in the translator's note to *Image-Music-Text* highlights an important
secondary meaning of that latter term in the original French.

English lacks a word able to carry the range of meaning in the term *jouissance* which includes enjoyment in the sense of a legal or social possession (enjoy certain rights, enjoy a privilege...).

As much as Barthesian *jouissance* overtly refuses notions of cultural ownership and privilege, it is founded upon a considerable social entitlement which needs to be probed. As Barthes and his actants admit on occasion (e.g. *PT* and *RB*), Barthes *et al* have taken refuge in a mandarin praxis of reading. Utopian, perverse, this is the praxis of an insider endowed with a considerable degree of both cultural competence and ease. Goodheart raises this point, likening Barthes' critical texts not to a textual *sook*, but to a private estate. Articulating the curiously enclosed quality that Barthes' work can exhale, Goodheart writes:

> For Roland Barthes, 'criticism' is the creation of a verbal space, comparable to an aristocratic estate, in which one is provided with pleasures impossible in contemporary reality. Among those pleasures, Barthes somewhat furtively imports the 'charms (not values) of the bourgeois art of living'...

*(SD 81)*

The Barthesian agent is not an anonymous, classless, post-gendered being, but a socially privileged subject who has the power to explore his desires and "texts" in safety, rhetorically divesting himself of his cultural ego when he chooses to do so, while not risking any real world benefits in
the process. Culturally competent and enfranchised, if alienated, until the late 1970s this subject/fiction wants to believe that the world is always a malleable collection of signs, that it cannot resist his interventions and mental rearrangements. For Barthes, public identity is a tragic phenomenon, a kind of crucifixion. He does not mark a theoretical distinction between identities that are imposed (such as the assigned identities of the cultural ego) from those that are actively assumed—what I think of as resistant identities. Most importantly, he fails to consider the effect of identities that are actively denied by power. He writes as though a chronic condition of negativity and absence of identity—in effect, the loss of a cultural Imaginary—was the most desirable condition. The rebellious aspects of naming are not theorized. Nowhere does he consider the sustaining and creative aspects of resistant identities which have historically been true for marginalized peoples, and which have been coming forward in North American intellectual work, particularly in the areas of feminist, aboriginal and post-colonial studies.5

Identity is an impure thing that can carry prior interpretations, but it is not inevitably a coercive, essentialist notion deriving from some political Father, or the wounding acts of other eyes. Names have a survival value. Put another way: names (or images) can struggle against the domination of prior names in that endless war of languages Barthes so hated. Names can also be processes. The false dilemma
pitting coherent subjectivity against an ideally disseminated subject needs to be laid aside in favour of a conceptual continuum encompassing both moments of identity-extremis. With Sally Robinson, I would agree that identity can be understood not as a confining and nostalgic Oedipal mark, but as an ongoing relational process in which there is a significant degree of conscious choice. Robinson writes:

[subjectivity...is an ongoing process of engagement in social and discursive practices, not some immanent kernel of identity that is expressed through that engagement. It is not constructed, once and for all, at some locatable point in the individual's history; rather, it is a continuous process of production and transformation. (GSR 11)]

The term that I have been using throughout this thesis--community--does not necessarily refer only to groupings of people related by genes or history. In the best sense, it refers to those persons and cultural documents--persons living or dead, physically present to one another or gathered together mentally by a single individual--that assemble at certain points in one's life process, often as the result of some choice or accident. These intermittent networks of people and texts can be employed to help interpret what is happening in one's life and cultures. They can refine or challenge values and perceptions, and assist us in understanding who we were or might have been.

Barthes implicitly recognizes the fundamental premise supporting this notion of community. This premise is that identity is a relational phenomenon--and this explains, in
large part, his cultivation of distance and dégagement. Robinson's apprehension of human identity as supplementary and provisional is consonant with Barthes' interpretation of the contingency of the subject. But Robinson emphasizes the politically potent and celebratory aspects of identities. Barthes' resistance to identity and to the act of interpretation (that is, to a tentative ordering of the world) would end in a human subject that is isolated, politically and culturally disoriented, and separated from many positive expressions of power—including the critical act of self-definition. I am not setting up a polar opposition between the radical individualism of Barthes and an equally utopian notion of communitas, only countering the thrust of Barthes' thinking. Choosing and acknowledging the plurality of one's identities and affiliations, defining one's communities and solidarities, can be acts of beauty and acts of power-with-others, rather than the scenario of power-over-others pessimistically figuring in Barthes' world. At the present time, I fear that a sustained absence of images and names, while presenting the space to reimagine the world, would not necessarily support freedom or intimacy so much as the opportunity for oppressions to exist without being named as such. Finally, Barthes' notion of no names, no boundaries, no authors—in short of unowned texts—raises the issue of deliberate or inadvertent cultural appropriation from the perspective of other cultures which do not participate in the Barthesian myth.
Alongside the expansive opening of human subjectivity and cultural contexts through fragmentation, incoherence, and a reclamation of the experiential body, there is a covert contraction in Barthes' Imaginary. This contraction is evidenced in his conflicted desire to withdraw from the scene of public culture (for lack of a better term) into an unfigured, apolitical body and a private collection of sensations and textual shards.

The handmaids of culture/the severed text

The information that a text provides is either uninteresting or suspect, since what counts is the deceptive play of language. In severing the text from the reality to which it might refer, the text does not offer any knowledge of our experience of the world—except the negative knowledge of unreliability and deceptiveness.

(SD 127)

What I need is perspective....Perspective is necessary. Otherwise there are only two dimensions. Otherwise you live with your face squashed against a wall, everything a huge foreground, of details, close-ups, hairs, the weave of the bedsheets, the molecules of the face. Your own skin like a map, a diagram of futility, crisscrossed with tiny roads that lead nowhere. Otherwise you live in the moment. 7

In the passage above, Goodheart signals another tension or dilemma resulting from Barthesian aestheticization: the dichotomy between text and "information" (or "knowledge" of the world). Holding fast to this dichotomy, Barthesian post-
structuralism advances the contention that culture cannot communicate information, in the ordinary sense of the word. In his published work Barthes appears unable to conceive of the less ironic cultures and Imaginaries that Rich and many other writers are engaged in creating. Alienation and pessimism fund Barthes' Imaginary as strongly as the desire for pleasure and novelty. In his view, culture persists only as a farcical play with old and lovely things, as a "parody-language in which we believe and do not believe." Consequently, as I have argued in previous chapters, in Barthes' later texts pleasure often is not simply pleasure, but distraction, even flight from a world that is too often full of coercion and ashes.

In this thesis I have struggled with the underpinnings and consequences of Barthes' post-structural Imaginary. My appreciation of Barthes' creative audacity may have, I fear, been submerged by a need to ferret out the sources of my unease with his thinking-- its pessimistic constructions of identity, power, culture, language and interpretation itself, its excessive and disorienting textualization which risks blurring the disparate categories and textures of the real. Working with the valuable insights threaded throughout his writing, I would want to move beyond Barthes' pessimism and learn to negotiate the tensions between creation and dissolution, sedimentation and negativity, interpreting and imagining the world otherwise.
NOTES

EPIGRAPH


CROSSING THE LINE (AN INTRODUCTION)

1 John Berger, About Looking (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 171. (AL)


7 Steven Ungar, Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire (Nebraska: U. of Nebraska Press, 1983). (RBP)


9 In "Right in the Eyes" Barthes describes signifiance as a "vagueness," a "halo" surrounding the certainty of the sign," a "field of infinite expansion," a "disturbance," an "overflow zone...whose being inheres in its excess." ("RE," RF 237-238/279

CHAPTER ONE. BARTHESIAN AESTHETICIZATION: SOME INTERTEXTS

1 Gustave Flaubert, letter to Louise Colet, dated September 28, 1857.


11 In his introduction to *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, a collection of Julia Kristeva's essays, Leon S. Roudiez offers these definitions of the Symbolic and semiotic modalities as they are defined by Kristeva. For Kristeva, the symbolic is "a domain of position and judgement" which comes into being at the time of the mirror stage: "it involves the thetic phase, the identification of subject and its distinction from objects, and the establishment of a sign system." Unless the subject is an infant, or psychotic, the symbolic is "always present, even in the semiotic disposition, which cannot exist without constantly challenging the symbolic one." The semiotic modality is that of the infant, who has not been initiated into the symbolic order. This latter, early phase is characterized by the dominance of sensation and "instinctual drives" which find expression in the adult attraction to rhythm, colour, pure sound, onomatopoeia, and other elements which are non-rational. These two modalities exist in a dynamic tension within language: too much of the semiotic, and meaning and order are threatened; too much of the symbolic threatens to kill the poetry and pleasure of an utterance. (18-19) For the sake of clarity, in the thesis I have chosen to substitute "pre-symbolic" for "semiotic."


14 See Naomi Schor's *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Metheun, 1987), 84-86. Schor includes a fine chapter on Barthes' aesthetics, focusing on Barthes' penchant for the detail.

Later, within a long paragraph found in L, Barthes provides a more nuanced and amphibolic account of the relationship between literature and the real, which is beautifully enacted in his CL. "From ancient times to the efforts of our avant-garde, literature has been concerned to represent something. What? I will put it crudely: the real. That the real is not representable, but only demonstrable, can be said in several ways: [emphasis mine]...we can define it, with Lacan, as the impossible, that which is unattainable and escapes discourse... We can imagine a history of literature... which would be the history of certain (often aberrant) verbal expedients men have used to reduce, tame, deny, or, on the contrary, to assume what is always a delirium, i.e., the fundamental inadequacy of language and the real. I said a moment ago, apropos of knowledge, that literature is categorically realist, in that it never has anything but the real as its object of desire; and I shall say now, without contradicting myself... literature is quite as stubbornly unrealistic; it considers sane its desire for the impossible." (ABR 465-467/L 22)


Chapter Two. Barthes Degree Zero: The Passion of Writing

2 In "Instead of a Forward," the headnote she appended in 1957 to her long poem "Requiem: texts 1935-1940" the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966) writes against the belief that language has been overcome by the magnitude of the horrors of this century. That headnote reads: "During the terrible years of the Yezhov Terror I spent seventeen months in the prison queues in Leningrad. One day someone 'identified' me. Then a woman with lips blue with cold who was standing behind me, and of course had never heard my name, came out of the numbness which affected us all and whispered in my ear--(we all spoke in whispers there):

'Could you describe this?'
I said, 'I can!'
Then something resembling a smile slipped over what had once been her face." Anna Akhmatova, Selected Poems Trans. Richard McKane (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1989), 281.

3 In WDZ Barthes offers a passing view of the word as "alibi"—that is, as an elsewhere (ailleurs) and a justification." (WDZ 20/19)


5 Goodheart, SD 60.


7 Edward W. Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" in Hal Foster (Ed.) The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983),135-159. Said writes: "a constituency is principally a clientèle: people who use (and perhaps buy) your services because you and others belonging to your guild are certified experts....Whether all this makes an interpretive community, in the secular and noncommercial, noncoercive sense of the word, is very seriously to be doubted." (152) Throughout this thesis, when I use the phrase "interpretive community" I am using it in Said's sense of a real-world, living network of individuals who share common though by no means identical interpretive conventions and concerns, rather than Fish's use of the phrase, which refers more to an abstract collection of interpretive conventions guiding the reading of texts.

8 Goodheart notes the paradoxal fullness and density of the "empty" Barthesian text. Barthes' often baroque post-structural textual analyses, he argues, compensate for the lack of a "substantial" extra-textual reality. (SD 79)
Chapter Three. Where is the Voice Coming From? Early Post-Structural Versions of Subjectivity and Textuality


2 Barthes' changing estimation of contemporary theory can be gauged by his comments in a 1971 interview with Stephen Heath: "'theoretical' doesn't mean 'abstract'; from my point of view it means reflexive, i.e. turning back upon itself...theory, which I personally think of as corresponding to a very definite historical phase, would also correspond to a paranoiac phase, in the nonpejorative sense of the term." (GV 144/136)

3 In RB R.B. offers these comments about theory, eroticism, and writing, voicing his/Barthes' trickster side: "[s]ince intellectual things resemble erotic ones, in binarism what delighted him was a figure. Later on he would find this...figure again, in the opposition of values. What (in him) would deflect semiology was from the first the pleasure principle: a semiology which has renounced binarism no longer concerns him at all." (RB 52/56) Later R.B. ponders theoretical concepts and coupled notions as "figures of production" and "artifacts" that he "steals" "without wishing to apply [them] to the end...the opposition is struck (like a coinage), but one does not seek to honor it. Then what good is it? Quite simply, it serves to say something: it is necessary to posit a paradigm in order to produce a meaning and then to be able to divert, to alter it." (RB 92/95-96) Hence, for instance, the uncertain status and distinctions between pleasure and jouissance in PT.


5 Brechtian distancing is intended to facilitate audience interpretation, while Barthes' distancing techniques are explicitly intended to forestall interpretation.

6 I capitalize Text to signal that I am referring to the ideal Barthesian post-structural Text, which is a heuristic and virtual concept more than a demonstrable thing.

7 Michel Riffaterre, "Describing Poetic Structures: Two
Approaches to Baudelaire's "Les Chats" in Yale French Studies nos. 36-37, (1966), 200-242.

8 Fredric Jameson, "Ideology of the Text," 405.


10 In "Cy Twombley: Works on Paper" Barthes writes of the ductus as being the unrepeatable trace of the artist's specific body apprehended in the graph. It is a paradox of Barthes' work that, despite mass replication, non-subjectivity and mechanical forms of writing, he can be drawn to the specificity of holographs and older forms of writing which retain some evidence of the human subject. ("CT," RF 64/151)


13 See Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language, 15.

14 In RB difference is understood as a way of overcoming dialogism and meaning. R.B.'s definition of Barthesian difference runs: "difference, that much-vaunted and insistent word, prevails because it dispenses with or triumphs over conflict. Conflict is sexual, semantic; difference is plural, sensual, and textual; meaning and sex are principles of construction, of constitution; difference is the very movement of dispersion, of friability, a shimmering...encroachments, overflows, leaks, skids, shifts, slips..." (RB 69/73-74)


16 Adumbrating the Barthesian notion of the subject as an uncertain text, in Beyond Good and Evil Trans. Marianne Cowan (New York: Gateway, 1955; rpt. 1966) Nietzsche writes of "the frightful basic text homo natura" and of the "many vain enthusiastic glosses which have been scribbled over th[at] everlasting text." (160)

17 A pocket definition of the lisible and the scriptible (the readerly and the writerly texts): "to end, to fill, to
join, to unify—one can say that this is the basic requirement of the readerly: as though it were prey to some obsessive fear: that of omitting a connection...the readerly abhors a vacuum" Barthes writes. (S/Z 105/112) In a telling series of metaphors, Barthes compares the readerly text—"Replete Literature," "the egg-text"—to a "cupboard where meanings are shelved, stacked;...like a pregnant female, replete with signifieds which criticism will not fail to deliver; like the sea, replete with depths and movements...." (S/Z 201/206) Respecting well-established conventions, the readerly text is what most competent readers already know how to read. Thus has a certain transparency, while the writerly text is a resistant, semi-opaque, self-conscious writing that creates—and possibly frustrates—its own rules of interpretation. The scriptible works against the grain of the conventional, creating the holes and exposing the omission in cultural discourse that have been historically the space of the avant-garde. These are the very sites that Barthes claims as the spaces of his further creativity.

18 Nietzsche, in "On Truth and Lies in an Extra Moral Sense"


Chapter Four. An Elsewhere of Signs


3 To pursue the thesis of aestheticization (as de-realization) and distance: for Barthes, difference is valued partly as a means of creating a wedge between signs and possible referents, "dislocating" signs so that they literally float in a space which is neither real nor fictive. "The enigmatic copy, the interesting one, is the dislocated copy: at the same time it reproduces and reverses: it can reproduce only by reversing, it
disturbs the infinite sequence of replicas..." (RB 49/53)

4 Gary Shapiro, "To Philosophize is to Learn How to Die," Ungar and McGraw Eds., Signs in Culture, 3.

5 The theme of compromising the private and the individual (here Barthes' fantasy of "Japan") through a public writing will return forcefully in CL. The desire to retreat from the public realm of signs into a private experience of pleasure (and ultimately remembrance) is the endpoint of the Japanese textual economy in Barthes' work.

6 Throughout Barthes' writing alterity is softened into a delicious difference which is rarely threatening or antagonistic, as in the Sartrean model. In his engagements with alterity, Barthes and his actants are generally in a privileged situation of looking rather than being looked at or rewritten—the only (real-world) exception to this observation is obviously the publication of the parodic Le Roland Barthes sans peine, where the authors offer an imago of Barthes. A discussion of this painful, emblematic critical gaze subsequently makes its way into RB.

7 In 1970 interview Barthes connects Japan (his interpretation of the country as it filters through in ES) and his "ethic of the empty sign." Note Barthes' surprisingly direct admission regarding the expressivity of ES: "Japan offers the example of a civilization where the articulation of signs is extremely delicate, sophisticated, where nothing is left to the non-sign; but this semantic level, expressed in the extraordinary finesse with which the signifier is treated, in a way means nothing, says nothing: it doesn't refer to any signified, especially not to any ultimate signified, and thus for me it expresses the utopia of a world both strictly semantic and strictly atheistic. As many of us do, I profoundly reject our civilization, ad naseum. This book expresses the absolute revendication of a complete alterity which has become necessary to me and which alone can provoke the fissuration of the symbolic order, our symbolic order." Japan is a lovely paradox: "a system that is almost entirely immersed in the signifier", yet one that "thrives on the perpetual retreat of the signified." (GV 83-84/82-83)

8 R.B.'s explanation of the perverse dislocation and distance which his fantasy generates is helpful here: "[t]he dream displeases me because one is entirely absorbed within it: the dream is monologic; and the fantasy pleases me because it remains concomitant to the consciousness of reality (that of the place where I am) hence is created a double space, disconnected, layered..." (RB 88/90)

9 The aesthetic of the rare— that is, of the interstitial—
Barthes' fascination with Bunraku in ES—a type of Japanese theatre which uses puppets visibly manipulated by a number of men who move the body and openly read the character's speeches—nurtures the theme of the text as a stage developed in RB.

The idea of the artwork as a disconnected *series* (which Barthes develops in his essays on Romantic music) is latent in this processual model of the text.

In "Reading Brillat-Savarin" Barthes remarks upon Brillat-Savarin's distinction between need and desire. For Brillat-Savarin, as well as for Barthes, the gourmet/aesthete cultivates not hunger but appetite, that is, desire. This desire seeks a pleasure which is not simple but "composite" and "overdetermined": pleasure "must have several simultaneous causes, among which there is no way of distinguishing which one causes delight...it figures a complex space in which the subject no longer knows where he comes from and what he wants—except to have his voluptuous pleasure—*jouir*." (*RB-S*, RL 267-268/303)

Barthes' musings on surprise and *satori* adumbrate his reading of *jouissance* as a disruptive post-semantic event in PT.


As Barthes reads the *Ikebana* arrangement, he imaginatively moves his body into the spaces of the text. This movement into the alternative space of the text intensifies in the extreme close-up readings found in PT, where perspective and context can utterly disappear as the world implodes into texts.

Within the Western cultural tradition, the epiphany has been the privileged, elevated moment of revelation—of enhanced meaning. Barthes inverts this tradition, valuing the moment when meaning does not coalesce, but rather collapses.


See Richard Kearney's introduction and conclusion in
Chapter Five. Pleasures of the Text

1 Flaubert's letter to Louise Colville, dated September 4, 1858.

2 In his preface to SFL Barthes writes: "today, there is no language site outside bourgeois ideology: our language comes from it, returns to it, remains closed up in it. The only possible rejoinder is neither confrontation nor destruction, but only theft: fragment the old text of culture, science, literature, and change its features according to formulae of disguise, as one disguises stolen goods." (SFL 10/15) In PT Barthes "steals"--or subtracts--texts and manages to emerge from systemic thinking through attending to the individual, the specific, the corporeal, the pleasurable, as well as cultivating a poetic notion of subjectivity and a Nietzschean "forgetting."

3 In SFL Barthes is inclining toward a hedonistic conception of texts, and reveals an aestheticizing preference for those moments when art rewrites private life. "Nothing is more depressing than to imagine the Text as an intellectual object (for reflection, analysis, comparison, mirroring, etc.). The text is an object of pleasure...at times the pleasure of the Text is achieved more deeply...whenever the 'literary' Text (the Book) transmigrates into our life, whenever another writing...succeeds in writing fragments of our own daily lives." (SFL 7/12)


5 Some passages from the "System/Systematic" section of SFL: "systematics is the play of the system; it is language that is open, infinite, free from any referential illusion...its mode of appearance, its constituency, is not 'development' but pulverization, dissemination (the gold dust of the signifier); it is a discourse without 'object' (it only speaks of a thing obliquely, by approaching it indirectly...and without 'subject' (in writing, the Author does not allow himself to be
involved in the imaginary subject, for he 'performs' his enunciatory role in such a manner that we cannot decide whether it is serious or parody. It is a vast madness which does not end, but which permutes." Systematics is "not concerned with application...but with transmission, (significant) circulation; further it is transmittable only on condition it is deformed." The systematic is "dilatory," a "dubious parody, shadow, game." System is not the opposite of systematic, but its very pre-condition: the liberty of the systematic is not disorder, but "order paragrammaticized." (SFL 109-111/114-115)

6 Baudelaire's emphasis on the function of surprise in art may well have also shaped Barthes' thinking on jouissance.


8 See Reinhard Kuhn, The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1976) for a comprehensive history of ennui in Western culture from Latin Antiquity to Gide. Kuhn isolates four characteristics of ennui: it is a state which affects both body and mind; it is endogenous rather than reactive; it is involuntary; and, finally, it estranges the person upon whom it has descended from substantive meaning. Barthes' conversation with Western notions of ennui is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it further attention.

9 Barthes' definition of encratic language: "encratic language (the language produced and spread under the protection of power) is statutorily a language of repetition; all official institutions of language are repeating machines..." (PT 40/66-67) Barthes recognizes that repetition, properly handled, can create bliss. Pointing to ethnographic examples of "obsessive rhythms, incantatory music, litanies," and so on, he argues that to repeat something excessively is to potentially "enter into loss, into the zero of the signified." But encratic language suppresses that potential loss, dealing instead with "humiliated repetition: content, ideological schema, the blurring of contradictions... always new books, new programs, new films, news items, but always the same meaning." (PT 42-43/67-68)

10 The theme of reverie returns in one of Barthes' late addresses. Reflecting upon his professorship at the Collège de France, Barthes said: "[a] professor's sole activity here is research: to speak--I shall even say to dream his research aloud--not to judge, to give preference, to promote, to submit to controlled scholarship." (L 9/ABR 458)

11 In his lecture at the Collège de France, Barthes clings
to the perverse, "utopian function" of literature within Western culture, conjoining his notion of modernity with the search for literary utopias of the kind figured in the Mallarmean Verbe. "Modernity--our modernity, which begins at this period [i.e. with Mallarmé]--can be defined by this new phenomenon: that utopias of language are conceived in it. 'To change language,' that Mallarméan expression, is a concomitant of 'To change the world,' that Marxian one. There is a political reception of Mallarmé, of those who have followed him and follow him still." Barthes then undercuts this assertion: "[u]topia, of course, does not save us from power. The utopia of language is salvaged as the language of utopia--a genre like the rest. Writers who initially struggle against the power of language end up being "coopted," "posthumously inscribed within official culture," or "caught in a mode which imposes it image and forces him to conform to expectation." The only way out for the writer is, as Barthes demonstrates, to "shift ground" and continuously find new sites--the text, the seminar--for utopian discourse and pleasure. (L 23-24/ABR 466-467)

12. Protesting against the acceleration of bourgeois culture and its hasty, avaricious consumption of texts, in matters of reading Nietzsche once described himself as a cow, a "friend of lento" who savoured and explored works. Barthes, like Nietzsche, often slows down the act of reading for precisely the same reason--though Nietzsche is, of the two, the more careful philologist.

13. A further attitudinal similarity between Barthes and Nietzsche: both suffer from, as Nietzsche puts it, "cultural indigestion" and nausea. (BGE 226)

14. R.B. returns to the theme of the active and reactive dynamics of his writing. The first paragraph of one entry--Sed Contra--reads: "[f]requently he starts from the stereotype, from the banal opinion which is in him. And it because he does not want that stereotype (by some aesthetic or individualist reflex) that he looks for something else; habitually, being soon wearied, he halts at the mere contrary opinion, at paradox, at what mechanically denies the prejudice (for example: 'there is no science except the particular'). He sustains, in short, counter-relations with the stereotype--familial relations." (RB 162/164)


16. Barthes' proposed "negative" and "active" semiology would be a discourse reading signs as an "imaginary spectacle" or a "painted veil," seeing them as a "conscious decoy." "[F]ascinated by the forms of its [language's] void," this semiology would not repudiate the sign, but it would deny that
signs are "positive," "ahistoric," "acorporeal"—in short, that they possess any "scientific attributes." Consequently, this "semiology" could not be a metalanguage or an orthodox discipline. (ABR 474-475/L 35-37)

17 The political edges of Barthesian jouissance signals its probable indebtedness to Bakhtinian notions of carnival.

18 See Blanchot's essay in L'Entretien on the neuter.

Chapter Six. Cuttlefish and His Ink: The Later Works

1 Kearney, Imagination, 283.


3 Possibly as a reaction to the increasing weight of the public gaze, in 1977 Barthes began working on the delicate nuances of the interpersonal and artistic gaze in a fragment collected as "Right in the Eyes." ("RE," RF 237-242/279-283)

4 In "Deliberations," a series of journal entries and reflections upon journal writing that Barthes published in 1979, he alludes—albeit under subsequent erasure—to the covert personal dimensions of RB and FLD that the books themselves formally disclaim. The July 22, 1977 entry runs: "[f]or some years, a unique project, apparently: to explore my own stupidity, or better still: to utter it, to make it the object of my books. In this way I have already uttered my 'egoist' stupidity and and my 'lover's' stupidity." ("D," RL 366/406-407)

5 This desire to outplay and baffle signs rather than explode them is part of the agenda of Barthes' negative semiology.

6 To experience the more "traditionally" aesthetic side of Barthes, see "The Wisdom of Art," where he discusses work by Twombley, Gautier, Valéry, as well as pursuing the subtle nuances of "effect" and artistic surprise. ("WA," RF 177-194)

7 There are some critical differences between the French original and first English translation of RB. On the inside of
the original text, the disclaimer—a white holographic script—appears on a black background before the title page, acknowledgements, and publishing information. After the usual trade information placed at the back of books, a second holographic post-script, written in white ink on a black page, teasingly ends the book, suggesting that its scriptor lives beyond the covers of the text. In the English version, that order is scrambled, so that the (perhaps) Mallarmean resonances ("l'homme poursuit noir sur blanc") and original teasing effect are lost. The first page reads simply, in capital letters "Roland Barthes." Then the blurred picture of Barthes' mother (which is put after the disclaimer and acknowledgements in the original) appears, followed by a standard title page, copyright information, and only then the holographic disclaimer—written in black ink on a white page. The second script appears written in black ink on a white page, followed by an English translation. One final note: the Seuil edition cover features a detail of a crayon drawing by Barthes—i.e. traces or graphs of the author rather than an image of him—while the English translation inexplicably opts for a traditional photographic portrait of Barthes in a buttoned sweater and doxic pensive pose.

8 In FLD Barthes' protagonist blurs his source texts in an odd manner, sometimes roughly summarizing, paraphrasing, or casually recalling snatches of those texts from memory. This protagonist engages in an active deformation of culture—a kind of cultural theft and private incorporation of public texts into a personal culture. By this time (1977) the metaphor of culture as an endless textual field has faded, supplanted by an apprehension of each individual body as the locus and mortal transmitting station of culture. The introjection of cultural texts and the privileging of a personal, quasi-physical relation to culture marks the second phase of Barthes' post-structuralism. Writing of the death of a beloved teacher, Paul Mazon, Barthes muses: "[k]nowledge, like delight, dies with each body. Whence the vital idea of a knowledge which circulates, which 'mounts up' through different bodies, outside of books; learn this for me, I'll learn that for you...." ("TS," RL 338-339/376)

9 As Mary Bittner Wiseman observes in her chapter on the issues of personal identity in Barthes' work, Barthes' lover is attempting to write not in the first person, but in a "no-person" perhaps partially inspired by the absence of personal pronouns in Japanese. See her The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes (London: Routledge, 1989), 126.

10 The Lover traces a fine distinction between the unreal (i.e. Barthes' aesthetic suspension and creative rewriting of the consensual real) and the disreal (an existential state in which the world is suddenly "frozen, petrified, immutable"). The Lover writes: "[s]ometimes the world is unreal (I utter it
differently), sometimes it is disreal (I utter it with only the greatest difficulty at all). This is not...the same withdrawal from reality. In the first case, my rejection of reality is pronounced through a fantasy...In the second case, I also lose reality, but no imaginary substitution will compensate me for this loss...Everything is frozen, petrified, immutable, i.e. unsubstitutable...In the first moment I am neurotic, I unrealize; in the second, I am psychotic, crazy, I disrealize."

(FLD 90-91/106-107)

11 I have borrowed the terms "telic" (discourse concerned with attaining a goal or substantiating some contention) and "paratelic" (discourse concerned with expressive behaviour rather than goals or intellectual proofs) from Annette Laver's discussion of Barthes' later work in RBA (263). She, in turn, has taken this pair of terms from K.C.P. Smith and Michael Apter, A Theory of Psychological Reversals (Chippenham: Picton Press, 1975) to describe the shift she perceives in Barthes' writing from theoretical concerns towards the affective dimensions of writing.

12 "Poet of systems" is Andrew Busza's apt phrase.


Chapter Seven. Working Through Barthes (Some Provisional Conclusions)


2 The only two exceptions that come to mind are the following: the incident reported in ES where Barthes puzzles over a map with a local, and the shared readings implied in "To The Seminar."


4 See, for instance, the essays collected in Homi Bhabha (Ed.), Nation and Narration (New York: Routledge, 1990), especially Bhabha's own essay, which problematizes but does not reject the idea of identity and a communal positioning of the subject.
5 This polarization of the classical and post-structural subject is undermined by Barthes in his later books and essays, where he presents a number of poetic subjects who play with traces of personal origin and affect.


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