

# Roland Barthes: Life as a Text

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*Translated by Sam Ferguson*

Barthes raised the possibility of reading a life ‘as a text’, and therefore of *writing* it.<sup>1</sup> For the practice of life-writing cannot be taken for granted, and is in principle an impossible enterprise: after all, how can these two heterogeneous materials, the factual and textual, be reconciled? Surely all writing involves a kind of death, the creation of a fixed form?

One genre, however, professes this ambition in its very name: bio-graphy. Indeed, biography is as free and open as a genre can be, if one considers that it has no established form. To my mind, Barthes offers the possibility, through his life and his writing, of a genuine biography – quite literally, an exercise in life-writing – for the very reason that his life can be read as a text.

Biography occupies a particular place among the factual genres: situated somewhere between philosophy, history and literature, practised by writers, philosophers and historians (Sartre, Zweig, Gide, and of course Barthes), discredited in turn by the doxa of theory, philosophy, literature and history, rehabilitated once again in recent years since the emergence of ‘le tout-texte’ and, in the literary domain, since critics called into question Genette’s proposition in *Fiction and Diction* that only fiction can be an object of study for narratology.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this apparent reversal, I do not subscribe to a certain polemical attempt to rehabilitate biography with a return to Sainte-Beuve and an overly simplistic reading of the link between life and text. I share the reservations of the doxa that make us place the term ‘biography’ within scare quotes, or make us speak instead of the ‘biographical essay’, in order to avoid the suspicion of anecdotal writing that haunts the genre: I believe that the anecdotal or ‘straightforward’ life narrative is a noble literary genre in itself, and I would not discredit it as a type of factual genre, but it does not hold a great interest for me. On the other hand, biography, in its more experimental and self-reflexive forms, as an object in itself, interests me deeply.

Biographical writing therefore poses serious questions, both

complex and fundamental: what does it mean to write *a* life, or life *in general*, to transform life into a text? Does the word ‘biography’ denote the process of writing life, or life in the process of writing? Biography forces us to address this fascinating mixture of two different substances, that of reality (of life or death), and that of the text. Does the biographical object consist only of a *subject*, or is this writing an encounter with an individual? How can we respect the openness and movement of a life, when narration forecloses meaning and signifies from the perspective of death? And with regard to the lives of writers, how can we avoid separating the life from their writing? How can we reach the man or woman if, as the latest theories about the genre suggest, biography must be understood in terms of a biographical relationship, between biographer and biographee? Writing a biography raises the fundamental problem of ‘writing the Other’, evoked by Levinas<sup>3</sup> and central to the discussions of those philosophers who have been drawn to the biographical question: Roger Laporte, Blanchot, Barthes, Derrida, Deleuze and even, reorientated towards the more political dimension of life narratives, Foucault. It is no surprise that Sartre muses in his biography of Flaubert, ‘what can we understand about a man?’, but it is more surprising that these structuralists, supposedly responsible for the anti-biographical doxa that followed after their work, were in fact the very philosophers and writers who truly and most deeply examined the genre. It is significant that Jean-Pierre Martin, in his recent essay criticising the anti-biographical doxa, draws on both Barthes and Lacan for his defence of biography.<sup>4</sup> Besides, the practice of biography is closely linked to certain anthropological questions, in particular in its gesture of renunciation – we do not reach the man or woman, we merely construct a narrative; even biographemes, fragments of biography, are themselves the construction of a narrative. This is the very basis of Lacan’s defence of the genre. Biography brings to the fore, as Blanchot writes, ‘a relation in which the unknown would be affirmed, made manifest, even exhibited: disclosed – and under what aspect? – precisely in that which it keeps unknown’.<sup>5</sup>

It might seem that I am being overly pessimistic: is there not a firm basis for knowledge and understanding based on the archives, manuscripts and personal testimonies? Is biography, or at least the present biography, to be considered a speculative genre rather than a factual one? The fact of the matter is that my own biographical project – undertaken without access to the manuscripts, and at a time when the acquaintances from Barthes’s early years have died or are at an advanced age – had to renounce the factual from the outset. There was, inevitably,

a certain amount of archival work relating to Barthes's grandparents and the early years of his life, but as a secondary task, in order to establish *exempla* that might substantiate my initial idea.

My idea... no, the idea is Barthes's own, and it is the starting point for my desire to write a biography of which he would be the object. It is very simple: it postulates that life is a text. In doing so, it inverts the biographical doxa: life does not become a text, life is constituted as a text, it is a text in the process of becoming – we should say more precisely that its very substance is *the textual*.

## I. Life as Text: Biography According to Barthes

As a writer, Barthes was obsessed by the biographical question, especially in the final 'period' of his life, traditionally viewed according to an artificial but effective division into four phases, which I shall not dwell on here: the prehistory (the time before the writing body, the photos included in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*), the 'sociological period', the 'structuralist period' and the 'novelistic period'; the 'biographical turn' therefore takes hold around the beginning of the 'novelistic period', with the reflection on the signifier in *Empire of Signs* and especially in the preface to *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* in 1971. Barthes produced a new understanding of the biography of writers, just as Derrida undertook the equivalent task for the biography of philosophers.<sup>6</sup>

Barthes's initial interest in biography is not concerned with this idea of a text, but rather he first considers biography – I shall return to the historical development of his thought on the subject – from the point of view of pleasure and the biographeme, or in other words, from the point of view of language. The idea of life as a text emerges from 1973 onwards, in the first drafts for *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*.

Barthes's passion for biography is centred on pleasure, it *produces 'the pleasure of the text'*, and is dependent on the notion of the biographeme: 'For me [...], the sudden about-face occurred at the time of *The Pleasure of the Text*: weakening of the theoretical superego, return of the much-loved texts [...]. I also thought I could detect, here and there, a fondness among some of my peers for what could be called [...] *biographical nebulae* [...]. That biographical "curiosity" then developed freely in me.'<sup>7</sup> Biography, in Barthesian language, resembles *erotography*, as he claims with regard to the life of Roger Laporte: 'And if it should happen that for a given subject, as is the case for Roger Laporte himself, life, his life, is absorbed entirely, fundamentally, and – I would say – structurally, in the desire to write, then we can see that whatever

happens to this desire, the adventures of this desire, gradually form the genuine *biography* of this subject, and the supposedly critical articles actually become variations on a biographical theme, and I would even say on an erotographic theme.’<sup>8</sup>

What, then, is the concept of erotography that Barthes discovers in the early 1970s?

In 1971 Barthes publishes *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, which reopens a field previously addressed in *Michelet*, that of the biographical question. This issue does not come to displace Barthes’s passion for language: what fascinates Barthes in the biographical question is still in fact concerned with language – it is, notably, the creation of the ‘biographeme’. Furthermore, as he makes clear in his preface, the objects of his biographical writing are all ‘logothetes’: founders of languages. I would like to develop two points here: the meaning of the emergence of the question of ‘life’, and the relation of this question to language (which remains omnipresent in Barthes’s seminars and articles).

When Barthes addresses the biographical question, both in theory and in practice, he radicalises the approach that he had started to adopt in *Michelet*: he dispenses with the traditional biographical *topoi*, instead creating a space in his writing in which life appears as a succession of moments that incessantly outplays any unity. Just as for Sartre, the subject is first and foremost unknowable:

For if, through a twisted dialectic, the Text, destroyer of all subject, contains a subject to love, that subject is dispersed, somewhat like the ashes we strew into the wind after death (the theme of the *urn* and the *stone*, strong closed objects, instructors of fate, will be contrasted with the *bursts* of memory, the erosion that leaves nothing but a few furrows of past life).<sup>9</sup>

Barthes refuses the prerogative, taken for granted in biographical writing, of imposing a retrospective unity on a life, effectively that of the novel, of a coherent narrative. When he defines ‘life as a text’ in the unpublished fragments for *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (cited above), he has no intention of assimilating life with the unity of the *Œuvre*, of assimilating the object with its transformation into writing. Rather, he considers that the object is already textual in nature and that biography is in reality a hermeneutic, a reading, a rewriting: ‘For example, this year (1972–73), he [Barthes] is producing a unique text by juxtaposing very different sorts of social engagements; here and there

subjects emerge unexpectedly from disparate, incompatible contexts (one leaves a meeting with a militant communist, only to dive into a nightclub); this breaks the monotonous law of biographical discourse, it produces a sort of textual cacophony.<sup>10</sup> The diary is proposed as the immediate form of writing that would allow the writer to ‘*mak[e] his life into an œuvre, his Œuvre*’, but this solution is ‘unsatisfactory’, and will be adopted only in passing.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Barthes’s novelistic theory is founded on the individual ‘detail’, and the ‘author’ who is (in three different guises) the object of *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* is not the object of a *biography*, but a ‘novelistic’ object: ‘the author who leaves his text and comes into our life has no unity, he is a mere plural of “charms”, the site of a few tenuous details, yet the source of vivid novelistic glimmerings’.<sup>12</sup> The paradoxically ‘simple’ plural here becomes a unity, and all the more strongly in this case since it involves three biographies in one. The realities of the ‘novelistic’ and of the individual detail permeate one another, the ‘novelistic’ and life are consubstantial, of one substance – and in this respect the novelistic is distinct from the ‘novel’: ‘The “novelistic” is [...] a mode of notation, of investment, interest in the reality of everyday life, in people, in everything that happens in life’,<sup>13</sup> a way of ‘writing life’. The novelistic is therefore ‘a way of dividing up reality’.<sup>14</sup> This was the moment of the well-known shift in Barthes’s work from science to ‘pleasure’ (as shown in the interview on biography in 1971), which would lead to *The Pleasure of the Text* in 1973.<sup>15</sup>

There is a fundamental connection between fiction and the biographeme, as he writes later with regard to anamnesis: ‘I call *anamnesis* the action – a mixture of pleasure and effort – performed by the subject in order to recover, *without magnifying or sentimentalising it*, a tenuity of memory: it is the haiku itself. The *biographeme* [...] is nothing but a factitious anamnesis: the one I lend to the author I love.’<sup>16</sup> Anamnesis, like the biographeme, is exempted from meaning. The fictional is therefore central to Barthes’s conception, even as it is rejected by Foucault (for example) in ‘The Lives of Infamous Men’: the symbolic is crushed by an imaginary that relegates the real, since childhood, to the domain of uncertainty.<sup>17</sup>

For Barthes, biographemes must therefore remain on the surface, and on no account should they be signs of *meaning*, as he explains in order to justify the absence of a life of Loyola:

I have not attempted a ‘Life’ of Loyola. The reason for this is that I could never have written that ‘Life’ in conformity with the *biographical* principles referred to in the preface; I lacked the significant

material. This lack is a historical one, and I therefore have no reason to conceal it. There are in fact two hagiographies: that in *The Golden Legend* (fifteenth century) amply allows the signifier to enter and fill out the scene (the signifier, that is, the martyred body); that of Ignatius, modern, suppresses this same body: we know nothing of this saint but his misty eyes and his claudication. In the first book, the story of the life is based on the *given* of the body; in the second, it is its *not-given* [...]. Beyond (or outside) the sign, toward the signifier, we know nothing of the life of Ignatius Loyola.<sup>18</sup>

Only the body is the object of the biographeme, whereas biography is a story diffracted from the body, without the consistency of the novel but nonetheless closer to Proust than to Lacan, for whom there are clusters of biographical signs that produce meaning. It is a story in movement, and specifically the movement of writing, of *life-writing*. Biographemes must be arbitrary signifiers, which then lead us to the metaphor of life as a text.

The 1973 seminar is entirely devoted to this biographical approach, and it contains the explicit statement of the principles that emerged gradually from the linguistic conception of life as writing, and from biographemes:

*Life as a text*

Life as a text: this will become banal (perhaps it already is), if we do not specify: it is a text to be *produced*, not *deciphered*. – Already stated at least twice before: in 1942: ‘It is not that the *Journal d’Édouard* resembles Gide’s *Journal*; on the contrary, many passages in the *Journal* already have the autonomy of the *Journal d’Édouard*’ (‘On Gide and his *Journal*’); and in 1966: ‘Proust’s œuvre does not reflect his life; it is his life that is the text of his œuvre’ (‘Parallel Lives’, 1966).<sup>19</sup>

The idea is stated again in *The Preparation of the Novel*:

*Life as Work*

[...] it involves the writer *making his life into an œuvre, his Œuvre*; obviously, the immediate form (without mediation) of this solution is the *diary* (I’ll

say at the end of this [development] why that solution is unsatisfactory).<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere he replaces the *text* with the *sentence*. However, what matters for me here is the proposition itself and the task of defining my own *life-text*. This is not the place for me to develop at length Barthes's own idea, perhaps now out-of-date, but which was the stimulus for my own writing.

## II. From 'Life-Writing' (the Text Written by his Life) to the Writing of the Text (My Biography)

I have therefore taken Barthes's proposition quite literally, and pushed it to its logical extreme. Why take this approach? Because it is revolutionary, and also consistent with all of Barthes's thought regarding the signifier: what interests him, as he states in *Empire Of Signs*, 'is the possibility of a difference, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems'.<sup>21</sup> Yet the confrontation with the Other, in the form of a text (but not reduced to his *œuvre!*), is for the biographer the essential experience of a difference in symbolic systems, which here represents perhaps one of the few critical methods of approaching Barthes's thought, one possible way of avoiding mere paraphrase.

As Benveniste and Saussure have shown, we can never grasp the framework of thought itself, only the categories of language that govern the format of 'reality' (what we refer to as reality): just as for thought, the person and the life that we seek to grasp are a language, which is not to be decrypted, but is rather the very condition of thinking that life. As Barthes says, life is a text in motion, 'a text to be *produced*, not *deciphered*'. And Sollers writes, in *Logiques* in 1968, 'one can dream of something that would be... a genuine *biography*, conforming to Baudelaire's wish: "Biography will serve to explain and to *verify*, so to speak, the mysterious adventures of the mind"; bio-graphy, *writing* that is *alive* and multiple, following a logic of fiction'.<sup>22</sup> Movement and fiction, these are the characteristics of life.

## Fiction and Movement

Just as Barthes created the 'fictive nation' of Japan in writing *Empire of Signs*, so I must pursue a fiction in order to create a formal system, this *text*.

Writing is not primarily narrating, or citing, or providing commentary, it is not a matter of being inscribed in a genre, but rather it is an active process of inscribing, of establishing a certain path. In Derrida's terms, one might speak of the '*itinerant* work of the trace, producing and not following a route, the trace that traces, the trace that forges its own path'.<sup>23</sup> We are concerned here with movement and with the body, it is a question of writing the bodily life of thought, as Derrida says with regard to the biographies of philosophers.<sup>24</sup> The writer engages his or her life in their writing, and the 'biography of the mind', contemporary with the writing itself, is itself in constant motion. We must also take account of the mind's 'residue of reading' and the imprint of this residue on the life in general, as Marielle Macé discussed in a recent essay.<sup>25</sup>

How can we reconcile this dynamic quality and the idea that life is a text? How can we contemplate this text in motion? I shall not proceed, as Barthes does in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, by reducing the movement of writing to a reading of the *œuvre* and by limiting the 'life' to the biographeme. I have organised the great text of Barthes's life chronologically, at every stage drawing indiscriminately on the textual (in the strict or material sense) and the non-textual. No distinction is made between the life and the writing, there is only the biographical. For the lives of writers, writing and life should be considered as being of the same nature – after all, a direct consequence of the idea that life is a text is the affirmation of the homogeneity of all the materials that make up this text: events, thoughts, writings, even that which is not expressed, silences: 'As Lautréamont, throughout the whole trace of his *œuvre*, was entirely subsumed in writing, [...] this writing becomes entirely biographical, biographical no longer only in the space of speaking (in what it says), but in the whole parabolic trajectory of its trace.'<sup>26</sup> In the same sense, language constitutes our reality.

It was relatively easy for me to identify the broad text of Barthes's life, to understand its composition and how it functions, but this was not true for all of its parts. I must admit that at times I cannot *see* certain unities of the text, presumably because of the wrong



perspective, or the wrong method of dividing it: on those occasions I see only facts, ideas, which relate to one another without any textual logic. I then have to approach these parts afresh, since I know what I am looking for: an invariant identified from the very beginning of the work. This is what defines the 'text': the identification of invariants and a 'closure' brought about by an eventual movement of return (in 1977). All the parts of the text conform to the same, repeated structure, which forms a 'closure' while remaining open (the very nature of a text), which forms textual unities in the midst of the book of the life, and the same structure is operational over the whole ensemble: by an essentially rhizomal mode of functioning, textual unities are generated by the text itself. I have described this structure as a 'generative void', on the principle that both events and writing are structured in such a way as to fill an initial void. The photographic metaphor – of a negative followed by the process of development – therefore functions as the major metaphor of the *life*, the major metaphor of the life-text. At least, this is true of the first part of this text, which comes to a close in 1977 with the death of the mother and the beginning of a *Vita Nova*, inaugurating a second structure characterised by the failure of any compensation and by the attainment of another way of writing, another way of reflecting on the sign, which Éric Marty has baptised (following Blanchot) as 'the right to death'.

From this structure emerges a form, the form of Barthes-as-Other, of his life, his Œuvre and his thought: a form of dualism, or the Neutral, a miraculously maintained and productive equilibrium between two poles, two contradictory postulations, two opposite postures.

### Barthes's Dualism

It seems to be a typical characteristic of childhood, of all childhood, to be structured around polar oppositions, both geographical and imaginary, to have 'two sides': the Guermantes way and the Méséglise way, the Parisian grandmother and the provincial one, the maternal side and the paternal side. Roland Barthes, born 12 November 1915 in Cherbourg, had (after this one, fleeting point of unity) his own 'two sides'. The Proustian depiction of childhood itself has strong resonances with Barthes's account of his own childhood, since he wrote that Bayonne is 'a city that played a Proustian role for me, and also resembled something from Balzac, as it was there that I used to hear a certain provincial, bourgeois dialect, which from early on was a source of pleasure rather than oppression'.<sup>27</sup> Balzac too appreciated dichotomies,

landscapes of two halves: the high city and the low city, the village and the heath, but especially the great opposition of the *Comédie humaine*: Paris and the provinces. This opposition, a fundamental one in France, is also one of the structural oppositions of Barthes's childhood, given his to-and-fro between Paris and Bayonne in the early years, which would continue to a lesser degree until his death. Yet this is only one of the structural oppositions, for what is surprising in Barthes's life is the great proliferation of such oppositions, even in his ancestry, over the course of his childhood, and in every detail of his existence. For Barthes, everything becomes dual, oppositional. Barthes is a dualist, and the presence of the Neutral in his *œuvre* and his life is the positive value to emerge from this state.

The Neutral, as he summarises in an unpublished fragment for *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, is the refusal to choose between the two poles, it is a synonym for dualism, but it is also the path of plurality, and therefore it provides the perfect harmony between the dualism and the eclecticism that constitute my own 'Barthes'.<sup>28</sup>

### The Neutral as a Third Term

The Neutral is a non-place, an evasion, a refusal to think in binary terms. [...] [In a choice between alternatives], on each side, *nothing new*; submitting to the paradigm, to meaning, is to accept repetition, immobility. What remains is the plural, infinite difference, the third term [...]. This third term is not a term of synthesis, nor a middle term.<sup>29</sup>

For this reason I shall speak, not of the Neutral, which can lead to confusion as a 'middle term', but of duality, which is also a refusal of dialectic. This duality, which becomes particularly pronounced in adulthood, has a firm grounding in the biography of Barthes's childhood. Even though it might seem contradictory, it will be necessary to reconcile this duality with another attitude present in Barthes's formative years: his eclecticism.

My own text is chronological, but interspersed with digressions belonging to a different genre from biographical narrative – textual analyses, referred to as 'readings' in the main body of the biography (to which I shall return). One of the main difficulties of writing this biography is that, for each 'period', each unity of life-text, it is necessary to identify the particular colouring and the new problematic that organises the invariants, whose form is always changing. At every stage of

the project I have had to begin the search again, based on the different pieces of evidence that I have at my disposal, which are not even complete, since a number of manuscripts remain inaccessible.

## A. Reading the Life-Text

### a. The Generative Void

This is the major invariant of Barthes's life structured as a text. In the beginning, there is a void: on 12 November 1915, at nine in the morning, at 107 rue de la Bucaille in Cherbourg, Roland Gérard Barthes was born:

I was born, as I am told, 12 November at nine in the morning, at Cherbourg, a simple garrison stopping point for my father, an officer in the merchant navy mobilised as a midshipman.<sup>30</sup>

This birth is a blind spot ('as I am told'), a void. The fact is, in itself, banal: the act of being born rarely has any significance, except in the realm of myth. However, in this case the in-significance is more significant than it might seem. Barthes's birth is a void of meaning *par excellence*: both symbolically and even geographically. For example, if the birth had occurred several weeks later it would have fitted neatly into the family mythology: if Barthes had been born in 1916, he would have taken his place in the series that was recounted by his grandfather on his mother's side: 'My grandfather was born in 1776 under Louis XVI, my father was born in 1816, and I was born in 1856.'<sup>31</sup> The place too held no particular significance; the two branches of Barthes's ancestry are diametrically opposed, in the North-East on the maternal side, and in the South-West on the paternal side. Cherbourg and the North are fundamentally excluded from any symbolic attachment, they have no significance in the life of the couple and even less for the child, who would later refer to this 'city which I do not know, since I, quite literally, never set foot there, being only two months old when I left it'.<sup>32</sup> However, this same un-symbolic North was to be the location of a crucial and essential event: the death of the father. Yet once again, this would take the form of a void, albeit a void transformed into a determining and foundational element.

The lack created by the death of the father becomes a 'generative absence', and throughout Barthes's life it serves systematically as the foundation for all construction: the absence of social status as a ward of the state, the total absence of money until 1953, the absence of the

opportunity to study due to the onset of tuberculosis, the absence of an official post, the absence of the necessary qualifications, all of these lead him to the writing of a masterful *œuvre*, constantly renewed and innovative, to unparalleled fame, and to the Collège de France in 1977.

In Barthes's long engagement with structuralism, I find a particular dualism associated with the generative void, or rather with its failure, to which I shall return: in the opposition between science and literature, Barthes chooses the Neutral. The significance of the 'choice' of structuralism, and of its practice, is that writing itself becomes the empty centre, a void. Barthes discovers, in the infinite search of writing, the same principle of a generative void that structures his life – but it is a search which never reaches its goal because it is, precisely, caught between two poles, it is an empty centre, a black hole.

At two points, the failure to compensate for a void or absence leads to serious ruptures in Barthes's life, both of which relate to writing. The first case concerns May 1968 when, suddenly deprived of his identity as an outsider, he turns towards a different form of writing, centred on the first person, on writing 'I'. The second rupture, this time a more fundamental reversal in his life, is the death of his mother in 1977. In this life text, May '68 therefore represents a turning point. By dismissing structuralism as a whole, but especially the avant-garde espoused by Barthes himself, May '68 deprives Barthes of his *œuvre*. In fact, May '68 deprives him of his very state of exclusion. Yet the structure of exclusion is essential to Barthes's being. For the first time, the complete filling of the generative void creates a new void, the process of compensation is defeated by its own success. The paradoxical situation of structuralism in the movement of May '68 plays out, in Barthes's case, in the life of an individual. This paradox, which undermines the imaginary construction of Barthes's relation to work and to creation, can be stated in literary terms: May '68 does not recognise his signature. May '68 is effectively a plagiarism of Barthes, which is confirmed by the false attribution of the famous phrase 'structures do not take to the streets', which Barthes could very well have spoken but, as it happens, did not, and which turns against him ('...nor does Barthes'). In this war, vicious in its own way, where the power of speech was dominant – speech rather than writing, 'the terrorism of speech', and also the opposite of the 'absence of speech' in Japan<sup>33</sup> – speech takes on the very form of plagiarism, the pastiche of his own writing. The phrase 'nor does Barthes' bitterly signs the rejection of one who is defined by exclusion, it excludes the rejected. The author's first response is simple: to recentre his writing on the self, the 'I'. But in reality, this

revelation – and it is a revelation since this is the moment when Barthes finds his own writing – is more complex. Barthes's search for the secret of writing over the previous ten years of structuralist work was not in vain. He finds the response to the 'biographical mystery' in a line of continuity from structuralism, a labour to discover the relation between the sign and life, and to break free of psychological reflexes. But he also makes a change in direction. He adopts a critical distance which allows him to hold up an ironic mirror to the modernity that excludes him – whether it is structuralism or the Sartrean discourse of a return to humanism, whose followers unanimously criticise Barthes at this time. His reorientation towards the self will lead him to writing *S/Z* and *Empire of Signs*, works in which the continuity from structuralism is manifest, but a version of structuralism caught in a deforming, ironic mirror.

Finally, with regard to the turning point of May '68, I have maintained throughout my biography, discreetly, a somewhat controversial idea: paradoxically, the very thing that Barthes sought in structuralism was the writing of life, biographical writing. After all, he was not the only one, as others in the structuralist fold showed the same tendency over the course of the 1970s to reconcile the sign and life, to write the letter of the life. Nonetheless, in 1968 he produced the well-known article 'The Death of the Author', the crowning work of the ideology of the structuralist period, which was read for a long time afterwards as a rejection of 'biography'.<sup>34</sup>

In his article, he establishes the role of writing as destruction of all origin: not a voice but the opening of voices, converging in the reader. The loss of identity of the writing subject is the very condition of the birth of writing: the death of the author for the birth of the text. However, around the same time Barthes discovers his own writing, which is born through the death of the author, with the '[loss] of the writing body'.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, to discuss this loss, he uses the very terms that constitute his own 'biography': the Neutral and the photographic metaphor of black-and-white:

[W]riting is the destruction of every voice, every origin. Writing is that neutral, that composite, that 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.<sup>36</sup>

Barthes finds writing in conjunction with the Neutral, the dualism that is *the abolition of the voice*, 'the death of the author': the

death of the author is not merely a polemical and theoretical notion concerning the critical manner of *reading* a text, it is above all a lesson in how to write: 'once a fact is *recounted* [...] exclusive of any function except that exercise of the symbol itself – this gap appears, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins'.<sup>37</sup> This death of the author therefore signs a birth certificate, that of writing in general, and Barthes's in particular.

There is a second turning point in the functioning of the generative void, but this time more fundamental, and leading to a complete reversal in Barthes's life. This second failure of the generative void takes place with the death of the mother.

### b. The Photographic Metaphor

The structure of Barthes's life-text shifts through a transformation of inversion, which can be viewed using a metaphor from photography (since Barthes frequently uses photography as both an analogy and a complement for writing):

Photography [...] allows me to accede to an infra-knowledge; it supplies me with a collection of partial objects and can flatter a certain fetishism of mine: for this 'me' which likes knowledge, which nourishes a kind of amorous preference for it. In the same way, I like certain biographical features which, in a writer's life, delight me as much as certain photographs; I have called these features 'biographemes'; Photography has the same relation to History that the biographeme has to biography.<sup>38</sup>

This break in the structure acts like the photographic process of development: we pass from a negative to a positive, a sort of process of clarification.

The photographic metaphor has interesting implications when applied to biography or a life, because it relates to the *development* of something that is *entirely present from the beginning*, and even once it is developed, or written, it does not allow for a 'development' of the imagination, it remains closed. It is a sort of dualism, an oxymoron of mobility and immobility:

For the notation of a haiku, too, is undevelopable: everything is given, without provoking the desire for

or even the possibility of a rhetorical expansion. In both cases we might (we must) speak of an *intense immobility*: linked to a detail (to a detonator), an explosion makes a little star on the pane of the text or of the photograph: neither the Haiku nor the Photograph makes us 'dream'.<sup>39</sup>

## B. The Textual Investigation

My materials therefore consist of: the published writings, both theoretical and autobiographical, and in particular six works and two of the courses which are taken as cryptograms for the life (*S/Z*, the two texts on Jules Verne, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 'Erté ou A la lettre', *Camera Lucida*, *How to Live Together*, *The Preparation of the Novel*), as much of the correspondence as I have been able to gain access to (the 'intimate writings'), such as the correspondence with Lévi-Strauss, Renaud Camus etc., and the notes that were provided to me from the consultation of Barthes's filing system. Many factual elements are based on interviews with Barthes's contemporaries or written testimonies by his friends, and also from Louis-Jean Calvet's biography.

My biography functions on the principle of *The Figure in the Carpet* by Henry James, and of the anamorphic skull in the painting *The Ambassadors* by Hans Holbein the Younger: these are the models for Barthes's life. The anamorphic skull in this painting, emblematic of every literary text,<sup>40</sup> here represents the void of the death of the father, but it is not a static figure, it functions as a gap in the structure, it alters the adjacent figures through a structure of complementarity: money, studies, etc. One could also say that my reading of Barthes's life-text is Saussurian and anagrammatic. It could be considered as a generalisation of the principle that Barthes suggests implicitly by writing a text such as *S/Z*, with its cryptogrammatic character, as defined in a related text (or 'mythographic', as Éric Marty writes).<sup>41</sup> Besides, as Marty mentions, Barthes was fascinated by anagrams (as I am), or rather by the very existence of the idea of anagrams as an object of fascination for Saussure: 'We know how much this search obsessed Saussure, who seems to have spent his life between the anguish of the lost signified and the terrifying return of the pure signifier.'<sup>42</sup> And again, in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 'He [Barthes] liked the scientists in whom he could discern a disturbance, a vacillation, a mania, a delirium, an inflection; he had learned a great deal from Saussure's *Cours*, but Saussure had come to mean infinitely more to him since he discovered the man's desperate pursuit of the Anagrams.'<sup>43</sup>

As stated earlier, my approach abolishes the heterogeneity between text – in the sense of written language – and the factual, between past and present. As for the construction of a narrative, chronology is respected only with regard to the facts, and not for the texts: the underlying notion is that the cryptogrammatic writing which creates a secondary narrative, of a psychological and structural nature, is present in every part of the life, both written and lived, and just as present in the paratexts and drafts as in the main body of the *œuvre*. Lacan, writing on Jean Delay's biography of Gide, proposes that the totality of elements making up a writer's life, and particularly the fragmentary traces known as 'intimate writings' (which in the present case have remained out of reach, to my great regret), form a parallel body constituted in relation to the *œuvre*: 'The [intimate papers] are, from the outset and still more when they are tied together in bundles with string, planned with an eye to the body they must constitute, if not in the work itself, at least in relation to it.'<sup>44</sup>

But my biography is Lacanian above all in its premise that the language of the texts conceals, as Barthes suggests, this secondary narrative which explains, in cryptogrammatic form, the functioning of the structure of the life-text: the generative void, compensation for the mother, etc. This is the principle that I develop in the passages of 'textual analysis', which are detached from the main 'narrative' both by their use of a secondary genre, and also in that the choice of text disrupts the overall biographical chronology. A first example of this, discussed below, is my reading of *S/Z*, placed in relation to the circumstances of Barthes's life in 1927.

### Example 1: *S/Z* – Sal/Zedo

My search begins in Chapter 27 of *S/Z*, on account of the birth of Michel Salzedo in 1927: this connection is made possible by the polyvalence of relations, the levelling of all relations in the life-text (once I have assumed a Freudian or Lacanian perspective). The reading of this chapter exposes the 'figure in the carpet' (of the text), the figure of the unwanted child.

The symmetry established between 'S' and 'Z', whether a dual figure or an irreconcilable antithesis, is that of the feminine and the masculine, and the central 'slash' patently represents castration. Sarrasine too is a name with feminine connotations, it asserts the feminine essence of the painter who insists all the while on his virility, faced with Zambinella's castrated state, and his/her laughter. This



masculine/feminine duality seems to have been embodied by Maggie Salcedo, the wife of Barthes's 'step-father', André Salzedo. She was a well-known illustrator, who notably changed the 'Z' in her married surname to an 's' (at least phonetically – 'Salcedo'). She also embodied the duality of 'S/Z' in her role as a recognised artist in the Roaring Twenties, the era of 'flappers' [*Translator's note*: in French, 'Garçonnes' – 'tom boys']. The crystallisation of this sexual duality around the opposition between the two letters is therefore likely to have its origins in the substitution of letters that she makes in her surname. Besides, the opposition at play in *Sarrasine* is not one of masculine/feminine but, within the symbolic field of castration, one of castrator/castrated, of active/passive. Maggie's act upon the name of her husband, in removing the 'Z', is also reflected in a gloss of the name and title word 'Sarrasine':

*SarraSine*: customary French onomastics would lead us to expect *SarraZine*: on its way to the subject's patronymic, the Z has encountered some pitfall. Z is the letter of mutilation: phonetically, Z stings like a chastising lash, an avenging insect; graphically, cast slantwise by the hand across the blank regularity of the page, amid the curves of the alphabet, like an oblique and illicit blade, it cuts, slashes, or, as we say in French, *zebras*; from a Balzacian viewpoint, this Z (which appears in Balzac's name) is the letter of deviation [...]; finally, here, Z is the first letter of La Zambinella, the initial of castration, so that by this orthographical error committed in the middle of his name, in the centre of his body, Sarrasine receives the Zambinellan Z in its true sense – the wound of deficiency.<sup>45</sup>

But this name also represents the other couple, the adulterous couple of Henriette and André Salzedo. Evoked in the background in connection with this exchange of letters, it represents, not the movement from one letter to the other, but rather an opposition: the image of the impossible couple. The name 'Salzedo' also contains both 'S' and 'Z'. Another passage, governed by the same antithesis between letters, addresses this opposition:

#### XXVII. ANTITHESIS II: THE MARRIAGE

The antithesis is a wall without a doorway. Leaping this wall is a transgression. Subject to the antithesis of inside and outside, heat and cold, life and death,

the old man and the young woman are in fact separated by the most inflexible of barriers: that of meaning. [...] The marriage of the woman and the castrato is doubly catastrophic [...]: symbolically, it affirms the non-viability of the dual body, the chimeric body, doomed to the dispersion of its parts: when a supplementary body is produced, added to the distribution of opposites already effected, this supplement [...] is damned: the *excess* explodes: gathering becomes scattering.<sup>46</sup>

The dualism of heat and cold to express the impossible amorous union is reflected in the choice of the poem by Heine (*the* poet associated with Schumann) at the end of the album of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*.<sup>47</sup> Here the number of the chapter, 27, corresponds to the year of Michel Salzedo's birth. The title, 'Antithesis II: The Marriage', which should be read in relation to 'Antithesis I: The Supplement', the added element, evokes both the impossible union of the two lovers (in the antithesis of heat and cold) and the birth of their child, which is addressed again in the production of a 'supplementary body [...], added to the distribution of opposites already effected', and which is 'damned'. This binary relation, which is also the intrusion of another binary relation in between Barthes and his mother, is intermediate, and in this respect it is good, neutral – the collection of Heine's poems from which the antithesis of heat and cold is drawn is entitled *Intermezzo*. This extract from *S/Z* is an anagram of the life-text and of the event of the birth of the brother. Barthes presents his text as a journey with the goal of resolving the different enigmas offered by *Sarrasine*.<sup>48</sup> *S/Z* is essentially the text of the resolution of enigmas, whether they are Balzac's or those of Barthes's own life. We can see here the structure of the paragram, as Barthes describes it in reference to the 'blows' of Schumann's music: 'a second text is heard, but at the limit – like Saussure listening for his anagrammatic verses – *I alone hear them*'.<sup>49</sup> The text traces the impossibility of reconciling an opposition, the explosion of the oppositional couple, or the passage from dualism to eclecticism ('explodes', 'gathering becomes scattering'), which takes on a great significance in relation to the biographical imaginary. Surely it is the binary relation of the young Roland to this mother that explodes? The movement of the life also traces a 'Z', since the oscillation between two sides in a dualism always yields to a certain sideways shift, resulting in the tracing of a zig-zag.

### Example 2: Reading of the Text on 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat'

The insertion of this reading in the biographical narrative creates an even greater temporal distortion than in the previous example, since this text from the 1950s reveals or makes apparent one of the meanings of an element from the life's 'prehistory', which is also connected to Barthes's childhood: the figure of his grandfather Binger. I have sought out the 'forms' or 'figures' which reveal the presence of the life-text in Verne, on the grounds that Barthes's grandfather Binger was a manifestly Vernian figure: first an explorer then governor of Ivory Coast, adventurer, author of an adventure novel, *Le Serment de l'explorateur*, which served as a hypotext for Jules Verne's last novel, completed by his son Michel. Barthes begins his text on the Nautilus with a paradox: for Verne, the voyage is a form of closure: 'the manchild re-invents the world, fills it, closes it, shuts himself up in it'.<sup>50</sup> The closure of open space, or open/closed space, is a dual figure and an obsessively recurrent motif in Barthes's work, originating in the original equivalence of the generative void and the maternal womb, which I shall discuss in relation to this particular text. These open/closed spaces proliferate in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* – the episode of being left in the hole in Marrac, the three gardens, but also in other texts, Valéry's room as the creator's cave looking out onto the endless sea, etc.<sup>51</sup> But this is the text in which this important oxymoron from Barthes's childhood finds its perfect expression: the text progresses clearly from enclosure in the submarine to enclosure in the mother. Verne's 'ceaseless action of secluding oneself', which is presented here as an action constitutive of writing, is polymorphous and subject to metamorphoses – my mind turned first of all to the figure of the grandfather, who had in reality passed from his African adventure to a spatial enclosure in his retirement in L'Isle-Adam and his temporal enclosure in boredom and the long wait for mealtimes. Verne evokes the elements of the archaic in Barthes's imaginary, as he is connected to the grandfather, who is himself mythically associated with enclosure in boredom.

But, like anything archaic, the image of the womb soon makes its presence felt, and the 'childlike' passion for enclosure becomes the 'bliss' of the foetus – we need merely cite the terms used, and their connotations: 'the most desirable of all caves', 'the bliss of their closure', the 'paroxysm [of bliss]', 'the bosom'.<sup>52</sup> To read this as a sexual metaphor becomes child's play. Let us also cite 'this unbroken inwardness' and 'the outside vagueness of the waters' for the image of the

womb with its amniotic fluid, the model of maternal perfection, which is a leitmotif of the whole *œuvre*. The phantasy is subsequently expanded to include a political dimension, which allows a double reading: 'a whole nautical morality makes [the occupier of the ship] at once the god, the master and the owner (*sole master on board*, etc.)'.<sup>53</sup> This reference to the 'captain' of the ship relates as much to the new-born Barthes as it does to 'Captain Binger' or to the father, who died at sea, the last aboard his ship, and then displaced in his role.

In this idealisation of the womb as a cave, Barthes also 'define[s], in a single act, the inside by means of its opposite' and gives a new meaning to the dualism.<sup>54</sup> The text foreshadows the episode of the hole in Marrac, but here we see its idealised aspect. The enclosure is, as in the three gardens, or the hole, or Valéry's room, open on one side: this is the window of the Nautilus onto the exterior, the opening of the womb into life; what remains from the *topos* of children's literature and from the account of the first traumatic social fear is the arrival of the mother, seen from below, filling all of the opening onto the exterior, all the void of the sky over the hole.

Towards the end of the text, continually repeating the motif of a 'cherished seclusion', 'the habitat of man, for man immediately to organize there the enjoyment of a round, smooth universe', he goes on to consider the 'means to exorcize the possessive nature of the man on a ship'. This gesture consists of removing the man from the cave, which is also an act of childbirth. Psychoanalysis is invoked explicitly, as a matter of necessity: 'The object that is the true opposite of Verne's *Nautilus* is Rimbaud's *Drunken Boat*, the boat which says 'I' and, freed from its concavity, can make man proceed from a psychoanalysis of the cave to a genuine poetics of exploration.'<sup>55</sup> The birth is that of the lyrical subject, who says 'I', the figure of the writer. The connection between the maternal womb and writing as compensation for the absence of the father is symbolised, and Barthes accomplishes this in a general, broad reference to the figure of the grandfather, who is defined as a link joining the absence of one and the omnipresence of the other. The grandfather, a sailor and Vernian figure, is placed firmly between the father and the mother, for whom he is the origin (and conversely, from the child's point of view, she is his origin, for our grandparents come from our parents, and not the reverse). To leave childhood behind is to say 'I', to leave the pleasure of organising our enclosed spaces and open oneself to the world, to leave the womb: this is a repetition of the Œdipal drama, but concluding in a euphoric movement towards writing. Barthes has only one reading of Verne, whatever the work in question, for this same

relation is always present in the background.

The second text on Verne, related to *The Mysterious Island* and which takes up again the motif of the womb, shifts from the cave to the Garden of Eden. It should be understood that it is always necessary to begin again this construction of the womb, and whether it is manifested in the Nautilus or, in this case, the island, compensating for the lack is an endless process. The assimilation of the island to the mother is clear: perfection, fertility, 'it always supplies the necessary substance *at the appointed site*', 'gratifying Nature'.<sup>56</sup> The phrase '*at the appointed site*' and the 'omnipotent discourse' recall once again the anecdote of falling in the hole in Marrat.<sup>57</sup> The passage from Adam (the origin) to the maternal 'Eden' ('Adam/Eden, a curious phonetic homology', writes Barthes) implicitly presents the completeness of the couple father/mother, or 'fatherland' and 'motherland' – which Barthes develops further in his final text, on Stendhal. Yet we can also read here the assimilation of the two parents in a single figure: the mother has two roles, that of Adam before becoming Eden and, as ever, there remains the same reading of compensation for the void by covering, or recuperation. We might well ask whether the absence of the discourse of the grandfathers, and particularly that of Binger, was not simply connected to this all-powerful discourse; I then came to realise that 'the island of Adam', recuperated as an Eden, is l'Isle-Adam, the site of the grandfather's *retirement* (a village in the Parisian suburbs), whose importance in Barthes's early life is unequivocally confirmed. Binger is undoubtedly present as a palimpsest in the texts on Verne, but he also functions as a palimpsest in that he is a figure who has been expunged from Barthes's life: expunged by the mother who has taken his place, just as she took the place of the father, he is a palimpsest both as an erased masculine entity and as a figure of closure.

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I have presented here Barthes's theory of life as a text because it is central to my interest in biography, and because it corresponds to a historic turning point in the genre when it was reborn in the 1970s (undoubtedly in the wake of the events of 1968), for Sartre and for the structuralists alike. This turning point created a certain mode of biography, which continues to define my own writing.

I have also defined the properties of the life-text that is sketched

out, but always in motion, by Barthes's life. It is not a text to be interpreted or read, but to be defined in its textual essence by its two constitutive elements: the invariant of the structure of void, whose functioning is dispersed throughout all parts of the text, and the final reversal, the *dénouement* of 1977, which is clearly manifested in the photographic metaphor. I next set out the method I followed in exploring the text: treating the textual and the factual as being essentially homogeneous elements of the life-text, and the Freudian (but undogmatic) reading of 'cryptogrammatic texts' such as *S/Z* or an article on Verne. I therefore sought to provide my own reading, one *possible* reading, not of the life of Barthes – which I have merely 'presented' as a text – but of what this 'life-*œuvre*' can be, when taken in a purely textual sense. And also to show what it means, or what it can mean, to take seriously the idea that the real and the textual consist of one and the same matter, that of language.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, from unpublished fragments for *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, included in *Le Lexique de l'auteur: séminaire à l'École pratique des hautes études 1973-1974: suivi de Fragments inédits du "Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes"*, ed. by Anne Herschberg Pierrot (Paris: Seuil, 2010), p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> Gérard Genette, *Fiction & Diction*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). Some texts which respond to Genette's theory are listed in the 'atelier' of *Fabula* on this subject:

<<http://www.fabula.org/atelier.php?Fiction%2Fdiction>> [accessed 23 June 2015].

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. by Nidra Poller (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Martin arrives at this defence after having attacked the 'structuralists', paradoxically, by assimilating them rapidly (and rather too polemically) with the doxa to which their work gave rise. But presumably it is the 'writers' who redeem the others, who are mere 'philosophers'. Jean-Pierre Martin, *Les Écrivains face à la doxa, ou, Du génie hérétique de la littérature* (Paris: Corti, 2011), pp. 152, 159.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Thinking Lives: The Philosophy of Biography and the Biography of Philosophers', University of New York, 10-11 September, 1996; *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985) (first published 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France (1978-1979 and 1979-1980)*, ed. by Nathalie Léger, trans. by Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Rapports entre fiction et critique selon Roger Laporte', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), vol. V, pp. 758-59 (p. 759).

<sup>9</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Barthes, *Le Lexique de l'auteur*, pp. 324-25.

<sup>11</sup> Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 207. Translation modified.

<sup>12</sup> Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Vingt mots-clés pour Roland Barthes', interview with Jean-Jacques Brochier (first published in 1975), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV, pp. 851-75 (p. 866).

<sup>14</sup> Marielle Macé and Alexandre Gefen, *Barthes, au lieu du roman* (Paris: Desjonquères, 2002), p. 123.

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- <sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Voyage autour de Roland Barthes', interview with Gilles Lapouge (first published December 1971), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, pp. 1045-50.
- <sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 109. Translation modified.
- <sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Lives of Infamous Men', in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. by Paul Rabinow and James Faubion, 3 vols (London: Allen Lane, 1997-2000), vol. III ('Power'), pp. 157-75.
- <sup>18</sup> Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, pp. 11-12, n. 5.
- <sup>19</sup> Barthes, *Le Lexique de l'auteur*, p. 324.
- <sup>20</sup> Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 207. Translation modified.
- <sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), pp. 3-4.
- <sup>22</sup> Philippe Sollers, *Logiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 31.
- <sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 269. Translation modified.
- <sup>24</sup> Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*.
- <sup>25</sup> Marielle Macé, *Façons de lire, manières d'écrire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).
- <sup>26</sup> Antonin Artaud (citing Marcelin Pleynet), *Le Théâtre et son double*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), vol. IV, p. 254.
- <sup>27</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Réponses', interview with Jean Thibadeau (first published in 1971), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, pp. 1023-44 (p. 1024).
- <sup>28</sup> Barthes, *Le Lexique de l'auteur*, p. 307.
- <sup>29</sup> Barthes, *Le Lexique de l'auteur*, p. 307.
- <sup>30</sup> Barthes, *Le Lexique de l'auteur*, p. 250.
- <sup>31</sup> Louis-Gustave Binger, *Une vie d'explorateur: souvenirs extraits des Carnets de route*, ed. by Jacques Binger, René Bouvier and Pierre Deloncle (Paris: Fernand Sorlot, 1938), p. 35.
- <sup>32</sup> Barthes, 'Réponses', p. 1023.
- <sup>33</sup> Barthes theorised the opposition between speech and writing. Personal testimonies support this idea: 'In fact, Roland did not like May '68 at all, and he disliked it precisely because it was a move to seize the power of speech [...]. Because it was speech and not writing that came to the fore, for example in the lecture theatres of the Sorbonne, and that seemed to him an impoverished form of language, inferior to the text, and in this sense a failure.' (France Culture, 14 May 1986).
- <sup>34</sup> Marie Gil, *Roland Barthes: au lieu de la vie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), pp. 11-13.
- <sup>35</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) pp. 49-55 (p. 49).
- <sup>36</sup> Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 49. Translation modified.



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- <sup>37</sup> Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 49.
- <sup>38</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 30.
- <sup>39</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 49.
- <sup>40</sup> Marie Gil, 'Le chiffre des lettres: pour une critique littéraliste', *Les Temps modernes*, 672 (2013), 145-54.
- <sup>41</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Masculin, féminin, neutre', in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. V, pp. 1027-43 (p. 1042). Éric Marty, 'Roland Barthes et le discours clinique: lecture de *S/Z*', *Essaim*, 15 (2005), 83-100 (p. 100).
- <sup>42</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Saussure, le signe, la démocratie', in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV, pp. 329-33 (p. 333).
- <sup>43</sup> Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, p. 160.
- <sup>44</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Youth of Gide, or the Letter and Desire', in *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 623-44 (p. 626).
- <sup>45</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (London: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 106-07.
- <sup>46</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, pp. 65-66. Translation modified.
- <sup>47</sup> Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, p. 41.
- <sup>48</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 17: 'Let us designate as *hermeneutic code* (HER) all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution. Thus, the title *Sarrasine* initiates the first step in a sequence which will not be completed until No. 153 (HER. Enigma 1 – the story will contain others [...]).'
- <sup>49</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Rasch', in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 299-312 (p. 302).
- <sup>50</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat', in *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Cape, 1972), pp. 65-67 (p. 65).
- <sup>51</sup> Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, pp. 121-22, 8; 'Sagesse de l'art', in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. V, pp. 688-702 (pp. 692-95). I have treated this at greater length in *Au lieu de la vie*, pp. 68-69.
- <sup>52</sup> Barthes, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat', pp. 66-67.
- <sup>53</sup> Barthes, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat', p. 67.
- <sup>54</sup> Barthes, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat', p. 67.
- <sup>55</sup> Barthes, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat', p. 67.
- <sup>56</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Where to Begin?', in *New Critical Essays*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), pp. 79-89 (pp. 83-84).
- <sup>57</sup> Barthes, 'Where to Begin?', p. 84.

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