

Roland Barthes and Literary Minimalism

Diana Leca

In an interview published in *Le Magazine littéraire* in February 1975, Roland Barthes is asked by Jean-Jacques Brochier to discuss twenty ‘key words’ that hold meaning for him. He ruminates with particular relish on short forms of writing (the fragment, the *dictée*, and the haiku):

I have long had a taste for discontinuous writing, a tendency reactivated in *Roland Barthes*. Rereading my books and articles, which I had never done before, I noticed that my mode of writing was never lengthy, always proceeding by fragments, miniatures, paragraphs with titles, or articles – there was an entire period of my life during which I wrote no books, only articles. It’s this taste for the short form that is now becoming systematic.¹

Since the end of the 1970s, however, when, as Kate Briggs puts it, “everyone knew” that Roland Barthes was writing a novel, critical interest in his anarchic short-form writing has lost something of its vitality.² Indeed, the recent English translation of *The Preparation of the Novel* – a two-part lecture series given by Barthes from 1978-1980 at the Collège de France – has reoriented scholarship towards the novelistic and effectively eclipsed evaluations of the Barthesian miniature. My objective in this paper is not so much to agitate for the restitution of Barthes’ status as a subtle theorist of the short form. This fact is generally uncontested in the scholarship. Instead, I intend to examine Barthes’ function as a self-professed *practitioner* of the short form, particularly in the later years of his life. This paper thus sets out to track the inner workings, moods, and matter-orientation of Barthes’ minimalist style. It will rummage through – or, as Barthes himself might put it, cruise – his *oeuvre* for textual leavings and scraps, attentive to their durations and densities, and to their fondness for the object world.

Furthermore, whilst this paper sets fragments from Barthes’ writing alongside one another for close analysis, it does not do so in order to congeal them into a demonstrable aesthetic program, for as Barthes reminds us, such an objective inevitably confronts the ‘problem of soldering’.³ Instead, taking Barthes as a guide to reading Barthes, I will engage the ‘the awkwardnesses, the naiveties, and the not-quites’ of

his minimalist writing, which ultimately resists a general will to seize and classify material existence.⁴ This paper argues that although Barthes' last lecture course, *The Preparation of the Novel*, was concerned with how to pass from a collection of dispersed, minimalist fragments to the undulating, sequenced, 'premeditated' style of the 'Book', Barthes never in fact leaves the orbit of the fragment.⁵ Moreover, it posits that the logic of the short form is constitutive of Barthes' actual poetic practice: namely, his late experiments with literary minimalism.

If the term 'minimalism' can only be used as an 'anxious shorthand', it is perhaps because its penchant for abstraction has unfailingly linked the practice to the immaterial, the undifferentiated, and the non-sensuous.⁶ (Think of Sol LeWitt's faint lines on white canvas or Samuel Beckett's late prose, in which human figures are abstracted to letters of the alphabet.) As a consequence, the minimalist project has tended to be censured by literary and art historical scholarship as apolitical formalism: ethereal, delicate, hygienic. I would argue, however, that Barthes offers us an idiosyncratic, 'worlded' version of minimalist literary production – one both matter-oriented and comprising a clear social dimension. If such a re-orientation of the term seems to overly stretch 'minimalism', then perhaps Susan Stewart's term 'micrographia' might offer up a better fit. In *On Longing: Narratives on the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir*, Stewart refers to this term as a miniaturized form of writing that 'continually refers to the physical world'.⁷ As such, 'micrographia' amalgamates a range of concerns in this paper: an emphasis on the microscopic or minute, the physical labour or process of writing itself, and the priority of matter.

As an entry-point into the ways in which the 'ascetic, elliptical workings'⁸ of a Barthesian miniature nevertheless foreground the sensuous, it is worth briefly considering the much-loved 'anamneses' section in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*:

On the long summer evenings, the mothers strolled along the lanes, the children fluttering around them: holidays.

Coming home from his grandparents' house on the streetcar, Sunday nights. Dinner was taken in the bedroom, beside the fire – soup and toast.⁹

Barthes notes in *Preparation of the Novel* that the 'enchantment' of such disjunctive sentences arises from the ways in which their 'lack of fat', or thinness, in fact rubs up against a referent (soup, for example, or toast) to produce a kind of 'sensual peace'.¹⁰ Ultimately, despite its relative

austerity, Barthes' later micrographic writing is linked to a withdrawal not from 'thingitude', or from public life, even, but rather from coercive models of being in, relating to, and reading the world. *Travels in China*, the text on which this paper is principally based, demonstrates the beginnings of Barthes' adoption of a minimalist form of writing that is neither arrogant, duplicitous, nor 'embalmed' – an experiment which he would continue to develop in *Barthes by Barthes*, *A Lover's Discourse*, and *Camera Lucida*. Indeed, Barthes claims that the focus of his last writing course, *The Preparation of the Novel*, is the 'alliance between the Aesthetic (the Technical) and the Ethical'.¹¹ For Barthes, it is specifically the minimalist fragment, due to its suspension 'of Pomposity, of Arrogance', that embodies this 'privileged field'.¹² My aim in this paper is therefore twofold: first, to reclaim Barthes' minimalist writing as a specifically materialist practice that stands *with* rather than above or extracted from matter, and second, to argue that such textual labour has a connective and *critical* component.

I

The first thing to note is that Barthes did not of course start out writing minimalistic prose. Think of the abundant, dense, almost luscious writing of *S/Z*. Or take this example from *Mythologies*, in which he discusses detergent as the desire for contact with something light and airy: 'either in the gustatory category (foie gras, entremets, wines), in that of clothing (muslin, tulle), or that of soaps (film-star in her bath)'.¹³ Despite the thematic emphasis on airiness, the passage – brimming with parenthetical notations – feels crowded. His early texts, in particular, proceed by stockpiling what Barthes calls 'tangibilia' (that is, things, concrete objects), giving the reader the impression of textual congestion. In this way, an early work like *Mythologies* becomes, in a strangely mimetic way, as decorative and ornate as the objects it is oriented towards: masks, toys, cars like the Citroen DS 19, Greta Garbo's make-up.¹⁴ Such a dense passage, moreover, offers the reader a sensual mouthful – with its sinewy s's and plosives like 'tulle' and 'gustatory'. As Barthes tells us, a sentence is not only a site for ideological, psychological, and perhaps even erotic investment; it is also itself an 'artefact' – a sumptuous, affectively charged, contingent sentence-object, something akin to a living phenomenon.¹⁵ More than merely possessing communicative or syntactic functions, then, words and grammatical signposts, such as punctuation marks, are both graphic and expressive in early Barthes. His relentless use of round brackets, for instance, not only

interrupt the ‘graphic image’ of the sentence, but also create what Adorno calls ‘enclaves’ of ‘superfluousness’.¹⁶ Proper textual practice enjoins that ‘nothing in good prose should be unnecessary to the overall structure’, and, yet, through his parenthetical notations Barthes pushes to the foreground what would otherwise be disposed of as excessive or embarrassingly concrete: gustatory delights, delicate textiles.¹⁷

Looked at from this angle, it is rather unsurprising that Barthes’ style generally brings to mind sensuality, effusiveness, and prolixity – a loose program of aesthetic hedonism – rather than the spartan restraint associated with minimalism. Indeed, Barthes himself notes in *Preparation of the Novel* that the ‘[v]alorization of *verbal abundance*’ is ‘ancient in the West’, giving Cicero as an exemplar of the norm of loquaciousness and the counter-examples of Thrasymachus, Gorgias, and Thucydides, whose writing was too disjunctive, ‘not smooth enough’. The resistance to the short form is not confined to the past, however. Modernity, too, according to Barthes, ‘tends to be more wordy’ since it is ‘haunted by the idea that it’s being prevented from speaking’.¹⁸ This ancient quarrel – between textual frugality and abundance – is central to Barthes’ theoretical concern with and actual production of minimalist forms.

II

Travels in China, perhaps even more than *Barthes by Barthes*, provides a valuable lesson in the ways in which short-form theory encounters micrographic craft in Barthes. The three-part notebook – originally published in 2009 as *Carnets du voyage en Chine* – collects miniature observations from Barthes’ trip to Maoist China from 11 April to 4 May 1974. Accompanying Barthes on this journey were his editor at Éditions du Seuil, François Wahl, and a small delegation representing the avant-garde Parisian literary journal *Tel Quel*, which included Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, and Marcelin Pleynet. Although Barthes did not publish the generically promiscuous text (travelogue? personal diary? reportage?) in his lifetime, its afterlives are manifold. The text was used to prepare a seminar Barthes gave at the École Pratique de Hautes Études in May 1974, and served as the blueprint for the article, ‘Alors, la Chine?’ (‘Well, and China?’), published in *Le Monde* in the same month. The publication of the notebooks in 2009, moreover, has attracted criticism from those intent on preserving an air of scholarly solemnity around Barthes’ *oeuvre* by excluding what they perceive as Barthes’ ‘intimate’ and private writing – a category under which *Travels* in part falls.¹⁹ I would argue, however, that resistance to incorporating *Travels*

in China into the Barthesian canon stems not only from its categorization as diary literature (and thus ‘trite’ and ‘effete’), but rather from its explicit and unrelenting use of the short form. In *Preparation of the Novel*, Barthes argues that ‘we’re incapable of tolerating *short* forms of language’ – such as diary jottings – most particularly because they do not lay bare their meanings and, generally, we are ‘overwhelmingly conditioned to furnish every reported fact with an alibi of an interpretation’.²⁰ *Travels in China* becomes the means by which Barthes renounces this alibi, not only critically but also in his actual poetic practice. In other words, as Barthes develops simultaneously as a critical theorist and as a creative author or poet (for Barthes, a poet is any maker of language), he employs increasingly eliminative procedures that subtract density, ornamentation, and fixed signification from his literary style.

Indeed, there is a noticeable shift from the more overtly metaphoric, adjectivally rich language of *S/Z* and *Mythologies* to the pared down, non-symbolic, miniaturized prose of the China notebook. Rather than utilizing conventional sequenced prose, the compact form of *Travels* features minute phrases, often compressed to a single word. Reducing street scenes to word-figures, as well as the use of lineation and frequent end-stopping, gives the *carnets* a poetic quality:

Wan sunshine.
Kiosks. Strollers.
We stop to take photos. Stupefied crowd.
People out boating.²¹

Constituted by what Barthes calls ‘little block of writing’, the layout of *Travels* is reminiscent of the sonnet or the haiku.²² There is even a hint of the *dazibao* about the typography. In the notebooks, Barthes expresses fondness for *dazibao*, large posters featuring blocks of calligraphic script, which dot the Chinese urban landscape. Though their content is often political in nature, Barthes is captivated by their ‘poetry’, especially when the calligraphy is in Mao’s hand: ‘utterly elegant (grassy calligraphy), cursive, impatient, and spacious’.²³ This raises a frequently voiced concern about Barthes’ orientation towards Chinese language and culture. Indeed, one way of reading the typographical structure of the fragment above is to posit that it attempts (inauthentically, of course) to approximate what Barthes refers to as an ‘ideogrammatical square’.²⁴ On this reading, Barthes betrays an occidental ideology that, according to Eric Hayot in *Chinese Dreams*, ‘associat[es] Chinese characters with the material expression of language

and alphabetic writing with debased and distracted signification'.²⁵ There are, however, other ways of approaching the minute structure above. For instance, it could equally be read, as Barthes suggests in *Preparation*, as a 'holophrase', which, in Lacanian and Kristevan thought, denotes 'a nonthetic expression of desire'. As a footnote to Barthes' suggestion tells us, the term 'holophrase' is used in psychoanalysis to mean a linguistic structure that is 'motivated by the drives and is organized on a concatenation of nouns'.²⁶ In that respect, there seems to be sympathy between the holophrase and the noun-oriented fragment above – 'sunshine. Kiosks. Strollers' – a minute 'verbal gesture' encapsulated in a little tome of text.

In *Preparation*, however, Barthes takes special interest in not only the diminutive verbal blocks of print themselves but also in the blank space around them – what he refers to as the 'aeration of the written form'. The lightness and respiration of the page itself becomes the focus and 'draws the eye'.²⁷ As such, the blank spaces take on a materiality and should be seen not as a void, but rather 'more sensually', as 'a matter', as a 'condensation that is antitotalizing'.²⁸ Thus, unlike the *Mythologies* example above, which thematizes lightness and airiness – 'in that of clothing (muslin, tulle), or that of soaps (film-star in her bath)' – *Travels* in fact *incorporates* aeration into its typographical experiments. Consideration of the tension between compression of text and its aeration adds, I would argue, nuance, texture, and, especially, scale to our reading of *Travels in China* as a micrographic artefact.²⁹

It is noteworthy that compression is not merely a typographical technique in *Travels*, but also a linguistic one. In these tiny tomes of text, excessive verbal detail is frequently curtailed in favour of terse descriptions ('Wan sunshine') and clipped nouns ('Kiosks', 'Strollers'). The staccato rhythm of the reading experience is due in part to the severe lineation of *Travels*, as noted above, but also to its asyndetic logic and associative drive. Indeed, more than just a mechanistically recorded 'notebook', *Travels* is an 'inventory of circumstances' with an arbitrary, almost cut-up impulse. Consider the following notation: 'Hydrochloric acid. Puddles on the floor. Five barefoot doctors'.³⁰ Such a fragment (and indeed much of the journal itself) reads something like a Dadaist prank. With its unconnected, flat observations verging on the ludic, *Travels in China's* minimalist procedures involve a kind of paratactic or episodic arrangement via linguistic scraps. Tangibilia (the acid, the puddles, the doctors) are no longer linked through metonymic or causal chains as they were in the sticky stylistics of *S/Z* and *Mythologies*. Indeed, correlative logic is abandoned in favour of disjunctive arrangements of

unadorned ‘co-presences’. *Travels in China* thus functions as a cut-up literary object that ‘can be dipped into and skimmed’ from any point and in any direction.³¹ When the logic of the novelistic sequence is subtracted, only tangibilia with no obvious connections or conjunctions remain. This is what Barthes calls the ‘illogic of the itinerary’: ‘Biscuits, jams. Photography. Musical instruments. Typewriter. 2,100 characters classified by their radicals. Sport. Ping pong.’³²

The stuttering style of *Travels* not only records, rather dryly, Barthes’ wariness of extended, continuous narrative, but, importantly, is also rooted in its circumstances of composition. Unlike the longer gestation time of his critical monographs, much of the China text was composed briskly during Barthes’ excursions, with his ‘[b]iro at the ready’.³³ In *Preparation of the Novel*, Barthes presents himself during these composition ventures as a scriptor ‘capturing a *sliver* of the present as it *jumps* out at observation’.³⁴ Such a method of composition, of course, seems to preclude the possibility of both novelistic linearity and a swelling *S/Z*-like style. Yet, I would argue that the minimal utterances of *Travels in China* constitute an intermediary region between narrative and haiku – what Barthes calls ‘the little scene’.³⁵ Such an act of notation (or *Notatio*) is expressly minimalist and world-oriented for Barthes; performed mainly out of doors (‘not at my desk, but in the street, in the café, with friends, etc.’), the activity of short-form writing involves ‘swiping’ or ‘scooping’ small, insignificant slivers of life.³⁶ Moreover, it requires its own ‘microtechniques’: a kind of ‘*free-floating attention*’, a small notebook (‘not very thick’), a pen at the ready.³⁷ There is thus a specific mode of short-form writing that Barthes performs in *Travels in China*. The haiku-like or imagistic brevity of the notebooks, in other words, is not demonstrative of an unreflective allegiance to the diaristic genre, but rather a deliberate poetic enactment of the theoretical dilemma of minimalism – that is, the task of modestly noting the partial, fleeting, and inexorably unconnected events of Barthes’ environs. Furthermore, it is also to say Barthes’ small style constitutes a minor genre in his *oeuvre* – one that also makes appearances in various other writing projects: from the lyrical segmentation of *Incidents* (recording his travels and erotic travails in Morocco) and the disjointed critical-poetic reflections of *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* to the poignant compactness of *Mourning Diary*. Such texts share with *Travels in China* an arguably conscious minimalist method of approaching and chronicling the world – one that is modest, incomplete, splintered.

Indeed, an affection for parataxis, structural segmentation, and syntactic disjunction runs like a spine throughout these texts and is most visible in *Travels in China*. Barthes' resistance to sequencing is connected not only to the circumstances of composition but also, as Adam Phillips astutely notes in the foreword to *Barthes by Barthes*, to the 'episodic nature of Brecht's epic theatre', about which Barthes was writing in the same year as his China tour.³⁸ For Brecht, of course, form is not merely the 'servant of content', but is audacious – subversive, even.³⁹ In an interview in 1975, Barthes himself posits that fragmentary short-form writing can be read as a 'counter-ideology of form', which 'breaks up the smooth finish' of doxic discourse.⁴⁰ This points to an important dimension of the fragment, namely its eccentric, rule-resistant, even law-skirting proclivities. In *Travels* Barthes uses this function of the fragment to reveal, in a parodic vein, the mechanized generalities of state-sanctioned discourse. During one of his many organized tours of 'ordinary' sites in China, Barthes quips:

Big heavily decorated lounge with vases, big tables,
lanterns, flowers, Mao.⁴¹

One of the many delightful effects of this passage is that its asyndetic structure eliminates basic antimonies without privileging one term (hegemonic) over another (marginal). In other words, to use Barthes' beloved equation sign: vases = big tables = flowers = Mao. In this way, the paratactic jotting is 'a spoilsport' that disrupts the function of classification and meaning-making, which, as Barthes notes, is 'always a law'.⁴²

With its willfulness towards leveling hierarchies, *Travels in China* is at times reminiscent of Gertrude Stein's experimental *Tender Buttons* (1914):

It is a sister and sister and a flower and a flower and a dog
and a colored sky.⁴³

Whilst there is insufficient space here to draw out the manifold affinities between the two texts, the refractory minimalist techniques used by both Barthes and Stein aggravate the conventions of realism, which, in bad faith, suppresses its literariness in favour of taxonomic exactitude. When placed next to Stein, Barthes' emphasis on mundane matter and strange co-presences subverts both the smooth, structured architecture of the realist novel and its arrogant claim to 'serious' subject matter. We might also note the anarchic effect of restricted diction in both texts:

Stein's 'a flower and a dog and a colored sky' finds verbal echoes in Barthes' 'big tables, lanterns, flowers, Mao'. Indeed, *Travels in China* has none of the linguistic pyrotechnics of Barthes' previous texts, in which he hybridizes words or simply conjures them up: *la bouvard-et-pécuché-ité*, for instance, or *diaphorologie* (the science of everything that twinkles). In *Travels*, the diction is simple, economical, almost child-like. A longer excerpt will give a taste of this lexical miniturization:

We leave the minibus on Tiananmen Square. A lot of people.
Enter the park showing our cards. Crowd. The weather's a little cloudy and warm. Compact crowd.
In the park, shows to be seen on every side. Young girls dancing, as big yellow flowers, pink workers.
TV sets.
Little stalls of children's games.
Basins, little drinking fountains.
Clothes: a forest of blue and khaki.
Impossible to avoid getting lost.
Sailors. Workers' hands.⁴⁴

Despite the carnivalesque atmosphere depicted (dancing, games, sailors, stalls) and the sea of colors (yellow, pink, blue, khaki), which lend the passage an almost surreal, kaleidoscopic quality, everything is held in check by the economy of diction and a terse, flat delivery. Sentences are often no more than one or two words in length: 'Sailors'; 'Crowds'; 'TV sets'; 'Workers' hands'. Again, the vocabulary is common and simple, eschewing a Blanchot-style opacity and betraying nothing of Barthes' learned internationalism. Somewhat counter-intuitively – and, I would argue, *essentially* – such linguistic restraint in Barthes' writing allows objects to scuttle to the fore. In *Preparation*, Barthes argues that short-form notation (and particularly haiku) is the 'art of *speaking plainly*' – an art he links to the '*return of literality*'.⁴⁵ When poetic restraint encounters a scrap of reality – the hands of workers, let's say – then, according to Barthes, the "real" is *raised aloft*'. Moreover, Barthes links the minuteness of the textual fragment – it 'can't be enlarged, its size is precise' – to its ability capture the 'suchness' or particularity of the real: 'it makes no leap into the symbolic, it's not a trampoline'.⁴⁶ I will come back to the question of realism shortly, but for now it is enough to note that the minibus, the crowd, the children's games are, to borrow from Barthes, 'translated in their naturality' – that is, without

commentary or analysis, and, consequently, without sclerotizing meaning.⁴⁷

Moreover, despite their repetitive rhythms, there is nothing mechanistic or reductive about Barthes' jottings. Each phrasal unit, no matter how seemingly banal, 'twinkles', to use a Barthesian term, though, importantly, without relation to an irradiating centre. Instead, there are only brief 'flashes of referent': 'Smells. Cabbages on the Square. Palace Museum. Wet dog, cheesy manure, sour milk'.⁴⁸ Such a minimalist series of objects is what Barthes calls 'epiphanic' – strange and surprising, never emanating from 'the mind of the majority' or the 'violence of prejudice'.⁴⁹ This in fact is his main grievance about speech-techniques in Maoist China: that they rely on what he calls 'bricks' – repeated, clichéd, and 'drab' phrasal units that continuously reinforce the doxa: 'rarely a reply to a concrete question', he complains in an aside, 'only facts and figures, and bricks'.⁵⁰ Unlike his compatriots Philippe Sollers and Kristeva, who, as Hayot notes, composed a flurry of texts upon their return from China praising the Cultural Revolution as the 'future of Marxism', Barthes was 'far more reserved'.⁵¹ 'The stereotypes need to be killed', he said, if we are to 'escape endoxical mortification'.⁵² Despite such inflammatory rhetoric, however, Barthes' method of doing away with such violent language is rather gentle, even playful. One way to eliminate stereotypes, discovers Barthes in China, is simply to deploy 'fresh', surprising referents in their stead. This is the effect of Barthes' cabbages-wet dog-sour milk fragment above. Brief, testimonial, and productive of small epiphanies, such fragments never lend 'themselves to the chatter which would make them into narratives or description' and thereby into the violence of prejudice. In this way, epiphanic fragments are less susceptible to being converted into either literary norms or state-pleasing clichés.

Another equally creative method Barthes utilizes to bypass stereotypical language in his notebooks is through the minimalist technique of *reduction*, which simply does not give room to the doxa. Driven to 'nausea' by the use of stereotypes in Maoist discourse, Barthes reduces and confines the repetitive and 'long winded' doxic enunciation to the 'etc.': 'This acts as a lesson for the children: how the imperialists stole, etc....'; 'Lacan as a henchmen of religion, idealist, etc.'; 'Power grows out of the barrel of a gun, etc. etc.'; 'Figures, etc.'; or simply reduces the doxic language to a boxed 'et cetera'⁵³:



On other occasions, he restricts the movement of doxic articulation to the bounds of parentheses: '[Endless references to Mao]'; '(Short speech)'; '(set theme, continued)'.⁵⁴ Unlike his use of round brackets in *Mythologies*, which functioned as spotlights on concrete matter, parenthetical notations in *Travels* operate through *subtracting* repressive narrative components by bracketing them off. Barthes' own minimalistic techniques are thus based less on processes of abstracting the concrete into pure forms, and more on skirting and squeezing out general opinion and totalizing systems. As such, Barthes brackets off clichés, reduces the diffusion of doxic language by quarantining it in 'etc.'s', as well as uses 'flat' language to disrupt the conventions of signification.

III

The adjective 'flat' does valuable work for Barthes. Importantly, it registers his allergy towards 'pretension[s] to a general, systematic, doctrinal meaning'.⁵⁵ Flat writing, in other words, does not encourage commentary or interpretative intrusion; in fact, it defies it and thereby preserves what Barthes calls the short's form's 'quiddity' or particularity. Yet, Barthes acknowledges the difficulty – or 'bravery' – of not providing a meaning to his verbal gestures and incidents. As a result, the China notebooks index a perpetual struggle between a desire to get close to things, to brush up against them, and, equally, a resistance to the will to possess or fix them. What emerges from this tussle is a textual tone that is equally minimal, cool, detached, weary, and languorous. The latter term has been helpfully explicated in Ellis Hanson's article on Barthes, 'The Languorous Critic'⁵⁶. However, rather than adopting Hanson's focus on 'mood', I find 'tone' a more assistive (because capacious) category with which to approach *Travels in China*. What I am calling the text's minimalist 'tone' is the enmeshment of several components: authorial mood, formal technique, and social relations. Sianne Ngai refers to such as synthesis as the 'affective "comportment" of a literary text'.⁵⁷ For Ngai, tone is thus a 'global and hyperrelational concept of feeling that encompasses attitude: a literary text's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' its audience and world'.⁵⁸ Such an articulation is remarkably friendly to Barthes' formulation of *écriture* as

the ‘tone’ or ‘ethos’ of a text: ‘both History and the stand we take in it’.⁵⁹

What is especially interesting about *Travels in China*’s tone or textual comportment is the ways in which it constellates ‘minor’ moods like bemusement, irritation, and erotic disappointment with minimalist formal techniques, such as a restricted vocabulary and the elimination of conjunctions, ornamentation, and even colour. Indeed, flouting the cheery conventions of pre-packaged travel writing (such as enthusiasm, confidence, a taste for adventure), *Travels in China* performs instead a long, ‘sad note of weariness’⁶⁰: ‘[t]oo tired to note the continuation of the lovely countryside, with its delicate trees’, writes Barthes. Repeatedly he notes the ‘monotonous’ and ‘drab’ nature of the countryside: ‘[t]he landscape is getting dryer and dryer’, ‘[a] landscape without a fold’ – a ‘[d]rab country’.⁶¹ In addition to the ostensive visual dullness of the countryside, the steely interiors of the factories, the sterility of hospital rooms, and the dreary lecture theatres leave Barthes uninspired, cold. In response, his writing, like much minimalist visual art, takes on a leaden pigmentation, frequently gravitating towards greys and other dusky monochromes: ‘[Outside, rain, mud, wind, cold]’.⁶² Moreover, the act of cramming words next to one another in such a way – which, as I have noted, is one of Barthes’ primary micrographic techniques – creates a kind of tonal cacophony. Indeed, we might call the effect of this asyndetic writing ‘white noise’. Take another example: ‘Greeting. Hall. Table. Thermos. Tea, cigarettes, napkins’.⁶³ Such ‘aphoristic precision’ Hanson observes, gives the impression that Barthes is ‘too fatigued, distracted, or overwhelmed to be bothered with the transition from one idea to the next’. Furthermore, Hanson argues that these ‘epiphanic fragments’ do not ‘develop so much as thicken in the air, even swarm’.⁶⁴

And, yet, given the fragment’s flat affective disposition – the ways in which it lists its environment with complete emotional detachment – the noise created by such verbal congestion is paradoxically muted. Take the line ‘Soft white bread. Soup. Napkins’, for instance.⁶⁵ In addition to featuring ‘insipid’ tastes, colours, and textures, the fragment has remarkably almost no stressed syllables. Its first segment (‘Soft white bread’) is an example of the tribach foot – a rare species in English prosody – which features three unstressed syllables in a row. In other words, even in scansion it is flat. Phrases throughout the notebook frequently preclude (or at least diminish) stress: ‘Warm hands’; ‘Grey, quite cold’; ‘Vast, calm’; ‘Drum that stops them. So sweet’, ‘The little boy falls over. The others come back’.⁶⁶ The minimization of accent not

only flattens rhythm, but also creates the impression of murmuring, sighing, muttering, grumbling – in other words, minimal modes of expression. Indeed, the ‘Soft white bread’ series ends in the quiet, almost exhausted phrase ‘Euphoria (at last)’ – an elation of minute affective proportions, to be sure.

Andrew Brown’s English translation picks up and registers this flatness from its source. This becomes plain by taking a cursory look at the above-mentioned examples in their original expression. In French, the ‘soft white bread’ sequence reads: ‘*Pain mou, blanc*’. This phrase is exemplary of the *Carnets*’ use of bilabials – p’s, b’s, m’s – linguistically lazy consonants requiring minimal effort to utter. *Carnets* is replete with them: ‘*le petit tombe*’ (‘the little boy falls over’); ‘*pluie, boue*’ (‘rain, mud’); ‘*Plus chaud. Palmiers. Mimosas*’ (‘Warmer. Palm trees. Mimosas’); ‘*Pays fade*’ (‘Drab country’). An overuse of bilabial consonants results in a devitalized prose. Meanwhile, sibilants and fricatives – in *soupe* and *serviettes*, for instance, and in *euphorie* – emphasize expiration and exhaustion through their *sssss*- and *fffff*-sounds. (By ‘expiration’ I intend both the association with the breath and with a languid gesture of perishing.) In other words, a similar effect of flatness, minimal effort, and enervation is conveyed in the French by the use of devitalized consonants in the *Carnets*. The abundance of feminine endings, in which the final ‘e’ is not pronounced, but rather left simply to dangle – ‘*soupe*’, ‘*petit tombe*’, ‘*pays fade*’, ‘*mais douces et tièdes*’ (‘warm hands’) – additionally contributes to the minimalist effect of the original. In fact, I would argue that the unrealized, yet lingering and suspended force of the feminine endings can be read, in this context, as the equivalent of unstressed syllables in the English. The gamut of minimalist linguistic effects just discussed – feminine endings, plosives, and fricatives – are present in the phrase *pays fade* (‘drab country’). With its Verlainian dullness, the phrase epitomizes the tonal mood of the text in its entirety. And whilst *fadeur* is sometimes defined as ‘insipidity’, ‘pointlessness’, and even ‘sickliness’,⁶⁷ suggesting a kind of perverse blandness, Barthes’ *Carnets* is in fact a more complex stylistic enactment of minimal feelings – of weariness, fatigue, and his own particular blend of political and erotic disillusionment – than such a crude translation would suggest. What I want to propose here is that Brown’s English translation is not introducing flatness unavailable in the original; instead it is *responding* to a minimal affective comportment alive in the French.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that such a suppression of grandiose affects, stylistic ornamentation, and lofty linguistic devices is not the exclusive domain of experiments in literary minimalism, but is

also a marker of reportage. And, indeed, it might be objected that the latter genre is a more apt descriptor for *Travels*, with its quasi-journalistic brevity, precision, and elimination of floridity. In other words, if we took *Travels* as a documentary-style transcription of Maoist China's reality – what Flaubert might call *le réel écrit* – it could be held that Barthes' minimalism is tied to a logic of impartiality and detachment in relation to his objects of observation. In other words, *Travels in China* could be perceived as achieving a level of neutrality coveted by journalism, a stripped-down, telegraphic *non*-style. On this reading, then, Barthes becomes the 'Zen master who teaches by example the art of withdrawal from the hysteric space of the avant-garde'.⁶⁸ In other words, it might be said that his lapidary and laconic *poésie vérité* works to eliminate the exaggerated affects and maximalist textuality associated in particular with French experimentalism.⁶⁹

Whilst this reading holds some plausibility, it would be something of a category error to mistake the short form's literality for a species of realism. The textual slivers that emerge from Barthes' street scenes are not complete, hermetic, unending. Indeed, Barthes himself writes that the short form is 'the opposite of realism, which disguised as exactitude, is the boundless provision of meaning'.⁷⁰ I would thus like to posit an alternative reading to Barthes' minimalist 'withdrawal'. If Barthes operates through procedures of compression and minimization in *Travels*, it is not because he is the prototypical 'anti-hysteric' – the phrase is Sollers' – but rather because such modest micro-writing is the appropriate form for what Barthes deems the 'social fact' of Maoist China's 'untheatrical, significative quiet'.⁷¹ Whilst there is an obvious degree of Orientalist sentimentalization in the notebooks, Hayot notes Barthes' admiration of the 'modest relation to social meaning' that he perceives in China.⁷² In his five-page essay in *Le Monde*, published two weeks after his return to Paris, Barthes argues that, 'like an abscess', heroism in China is confined to the performing arts, whilst in daily life people 'work, drink tea or do gymnastics without theatrics, without commotion, without striking poses, in a word without hysteria'.⁷³ The late Barthes – the Barthes of the 'Neutral' – instinctively gravitates towards such a modest relation to meaning (however imagined or constructed it may be) and toils to encode such a philosophy of minimal demands into his own stylistics.

Somewhat paradoxically, given his idealization of the lack of histrionics in China, Barthes frequently gripes that the shortage of spontaneity, surprises, or 'folds' is anathema to fruitful literary production. 'For a week', he complains, 'I haven't felt any opening up in

my writing, any *jouissance* in it. Dry, sterile'. Feelings of futility thus permeate the journal: 'All these notes will probably attest to the failure, in this country, of my writing (in comparison with Japan). In fact, I can't find anything to enumerate, to classify'. More forcefully, Barthes objects that there is 'nothing odd, nothing surprising, nothing novelistic' in Maoist China.⁷⁴ The anaphoric series 'nothing...nothing...nothing' performs the contradictory double-labour of expressing an emptiness or lack whilst in fact fattening itself through repetition. And this is perhaps the core of the paradox: though he finds 'nothing' to express in China, Barthes manages to fill three notebooks with scraps of reflections and observations. Read through a stylistic and philosophical minimalism, these notebooks chart a 'withdrawal' from attempts at 'weighty, muscular writing'.⁷⁵ In fact, I would argue that Barthes' confrontation with, and acceptance of, his failure to systematically comprehend his environment in China is perhaps the most valuable 'souvenir' he takes back with him. Indeed, it is in his 1974 notebooks that Barthes develops, to borrow from Ellis Hanson, 'the art of elliptical observation' – one 'stated with aphoristic precision unencumbered by the rigor of evidence or elaboration' – or, I would add, of completeness.⁷⁶ *Travels* is thus not a species of the 'Total Book' – that is, a book in which 'you'll put *Everything* in: the *Whole* of your life, your sufferings, your joys, and therefore, of course the *whole* of your world'.⁷⁷ It is not brim-stuffed with objects in all of their *ding-an-sichness*; rather it leaves things out, or brackets things off, or gives them to us only partially. Read in this way, Barthes' stylistic reduction is thus not – in the words of Hanson – a 'renunciation for the sake of virtue or winning by failing to lose; rather it actively seeks a position of passivity, of neutrality, as a noncombatant in the fray of desire'.⁷⁸ This conception of Barthes' position as a noncombatant stylist is aligned to Magali Nachtergaeel's account in *Roland Barthes contemporain* of the radical minimalist's unease with bourgeois ornamentalism and melodrama. For Nachtergaeel, minimalists like Barthes – for whom she constructs a lineage of figures as diverse as Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, and the *No Wave* movement in 1970s New York – resist promulgating a heroic ethos constituted by creative exploits and monuments. Instead, minimalist artworks emphasize the withdrawal of the art-makers, along with their unwillingness to valiantly (and often violently) transfigure their environment. Such a self-effacing spirit, maintains Nachtergaeel, is consistent with not only a critique of capitalism, but also with principles gleaned from long-established artistic and social practices in the far east.⁷⁹

Seeking this minimal, neutral position, both affectively and in relation to his writing, however, is not always an easy, languorous activity for Barthes. Instead, it is a kind of ‘*tense labor*’.⁸⁰ As Anne-Lise François so astutely notes in ‘Late Exercises in Minimal Affirmatives’, there is a tension in Barthes between his hesitancy towards coercing or intruding upon objects, scenes, and bodies in the world and an intellectual (and erotic) desire to brush up against them. François observes:

[W]hat is disconcerting and difficult to render accurately is the way this coolness that bears the world no ill will, this spirit of happy accommodation in which critical powers appear to have been put to sleep such that anything goes, complements and cannot be separated from an appetite for minimal variations and an active seeking out of the nuance, the precise and delicate difference.⁸¹

Indeed, both stylistically and in his critical ventures, Barthes proceeds as ‘a kind of unheroic Hero’, minimizing his ‘paper-I’ in order to illuminate concrete matter – whether gem or junk – in all of its sensuousness and strangeness. Almost paradoxically, subtracting the ornamental and consoling dimensions of language, as evidenced in the spartan prose of *Travels in China*, allows the material world to fluoresce in all its particularity and suchness. I would thus argue that his micrographic procedures – aphoristic, tending towards the minute – are evidence of Barthes’ refusal of the ‘will-to-possess’ combined with his matter-loving linguistic experiments.

In the middle of the second notebook in *Travels*, Barthes offers up a highly instructive metaphor for such a worlded minimalist practice. ‘One possibility for a text on China’, he writes, ‘would be to *sweep* across it, from the most serious, the most structured (the burning political issues) to the subtlest, most futile things (chilli, peonies)’.⁸² Such acts of sweeping elevate parataxis from a micrographic (or stylistic) practice to a heuristic (or critical) one. As Barthes intuitively grasps, sweeping *across* has the effect of leveling distinctions between the serious and the frivolous, the monolithic and the minute. Such a gesture would seem to be consistent with François’ supposition that Barthes models a ‘lateral’ mode of thinking and writing, which situates objects side-by-side and moves easily from one to the next. (Think here of his penchant for listing and what is frequently dubbed the ‘Latour litany’.) Sweeping across such a hefty, heterogeneous object of inquiry as the Chinese nation, Barthes keeps his aspirations for his scenes and forms small. In so doing, he

enacts what François calls a ‘double movement of attenuation (flattening) and making available’.⁸³ He sweeps *across* the quiddity of objects, flattening their hierarchies – ‘his jacket, his desk, his scarf, his bench’ – rather than sweeping them *up* into a pile to collect or analyze or dispose of.⁸⁴ Put differently, he renounces all claims to exhaustiveness and completion on his journey – rather begrudgingly as we have seen – yet continues to give his attention to individual objects along his route: chillies or flowers. As François – who discusses a Barthesian critical metaphor similar to sweeping: namely, promenading – argues that although Barthes’ episodic writing leaps quite happily from thing to thing, Barthes nevertheless ‘continues to imagine his interest in a particular object, however light and fleeting, as a *particular* interest’. She adds that ‘[h]is model continues to insist on the finite nonexportability of its engagements’.⁸⁵ Notice the way in which the train, the valley, the river, the wheat, even the colour pale green leap out in this passage:

On the left of the train, a broad valley with a dried river.
Pale green of wheat.⁸⁶

Each thing in the fragment is alive to itself. And yet, the *inessentiality* of the fragment itself is repeated again and again by Barthes: the short form is the ‘insignificant’, the ‘meaningless’, ‘the Nothing Special’.⁸⁷ Moreover, in *Preparation*, he cites the doxa’s ‘disdain for someone who writes “trifles” [*de petits riens*]’.⁸⁸ The phrase Barthes chooses here – ‘*petits riens*’ (literally: ‘little nothings’) – is particularly revealing as it refers to something that appears insignificant, but is in fact valuable, hence nicely capturing Barthes’ affection towards unloved minimal forms. The notation, and in particular the haiku, he says, is like the worthless little trinket buried underneath lavish and ornate wrapping paper.

IV

As I hope to have shown, then, Barthes’ minimalism – both his intellectual interest in the practice and his adoption of its techniques – is far from a purification fetish. It is not, in other words, that Barthes wishes to take the world – ‘sprawling before us’ – and turn it into a harmonious, condensed textual artefact: into what he calls ‘slim and pure logos’.⁸⁹ Instead, in the guise of a loving rag-picker, Barthes salvages discarded literary forms, ousted from the realm of ‘serious’ literature, and incorporates them into his writing. (*Barthes by Barthes*, he confessed,

could have been composed of quotations gleaned from Brecht.⁹⁰) A committed style of writing as it develops for Barthes is thus not a continuous, unalloyed narrative, but rather the disjunctive practice of the nuance: the ‘unexpected, sensual streak’, that which is ‘flawed’.⁹¹ The nuanced fragment embraces unintentional errors, smudges, and imperfections and gives a kind of absolute accent to each thing – trivial or otherwise. Indeed, in the paratactic logic of the *carnets* , ‘futile’ things become what Peter Howarth calls ‘luminous bodies’ which ‘cut across the border between art and junk, craft and concept, as if to say that unimportant, ugly, or discarded material could become marvelously irradiated again if we saw it differently’.⁹²

We could thus say that there is in fact an *ethics* to the short form – perhaps even an ecological drive. Barthes’s micrographic texts, with their penchant for reduction and minimization, do not withdraw into an extra-social sphere of aesthetic autonomy. Instead, Barthes continually finds new ways of expressing social realities and contradictions through non-totalizing literary practices that are thoroughly ensconced in the world. In so doing, his texts carefully sustain an ethical and political pulse, however faintly beating. His microadventures in literary form can hence be seen as a form of ‘salutary trickery’ – as he calls it – against the mothballed norms of conventional literature and criticism. That said, for Barthes the short form is not a magical special effect or a literary gimmick. Instead, it is a skillful critical practice, a disciplined craft – the ‘effect of the non-effect’⁹³ – or, what we might tentatively call the Neutral. It is true that in the annex to his penultimate lectures of the same name Barthes argues that aesthetic minimalism cannot be conflated with the strictly ethical category of the Neutral.⁹⁴ However, Barthes crucially revises this earlier claim to maintain in *Preparation* that his aim is to meditate – via the short form, and particularly the haiku – on the ways in which the Neutral might indeed be said to possess a literary technique. Indeed, he argues that with the short form ‘we’re in the *quasi*, the almost’ – that is, the undecidable and thus ethically valuable field – of the Neutral.⁹⁵ The humble, self-effacing literary short form, then, becomes the means by which to speak the ethical and the literary together – a vital alliance towards which Barthes labours in *Preparation of the Novel*.

Through his practice of the short form, Barthes thus teaches us how to read minimal literary expressions *otherwise* – how to engage the blank spaces of a page, the fissures between words, how to retrieve the buried referent. Sweeping across and brushing up against things in their oddness, their triviality, their inessentiality, their smallness, and their

difference, *Travels in China*, as I hope to have shown, lashes together short-form techniques, such as parataxis, the parenthetical notation, and restricted diction, with the ethical drive to renounce critical arrogance. If this method of reading has any ethical or political traction, it is evidently of a minimal variety – and, yet, as I have been at pains to show, this does not imply that it is a frivolous one.

This paper began by remarking upon Barthes' quest for a less haughty and duplicitous form of writing – an 'appropriate form' for his peculiar critical and affective stance in the world, which combines restraint with sensuousness, withdrawal with curiosity, a minuteness of forms with a largess of spirit. Finally, the task comes down not to thickening the slash within what Barthes calls the '*Haiku/Proust*' problem, but instead positing a utopic 'Novel through Fragments, a Novel-Fragment' and meditating upon how such an object would be made, how it would be *read*.⁹⁶ This 'third form' would forge new micrographic techniques to register emerging socio-affective predicaments of various scales. And because, as Cunningham puts it, minimalist practice is 'always in danger of becoming just another style option, a term for interior designers', Barthes continuously experimented with critical short forms so that they ultimately never thickened into a system.⁹⁷ Indeed, Barthes' final lecture courses show that he was still heavily invested, both theoretically and creatively, in the short form's future and that he had not yet reached a placid phase in which he had settled comfortably into his own personal style. The *Preparation* lectures are thus not a petrification of his aesthetic philosophy; instead, they are object lessons for the demanding, on-going process of formal renewal that is at the heart of Barthes' minimalist style.

Acknowledgements: *I would like to extend my thanks to the following for assistance with this paper: the Gates Cambridge Trust; St John's College, Cambridge; the French Attachée for Higher Education in the UK, Catherine Robert; and Thomas Godard.*

Notes

- ¹ Roland Barthes, 'Twenty Key Words for Roland Barthes', in *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews (1962-1980)*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), pp. 205-32 (p. 209).
- ² 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. xxv.
- ³ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 262.
- ⁴ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 262.
- ⁵ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 182.
- ⁶ David Cunningham, 'Asceticism Against Colour, or Modernism, Abstraction and the Lateness of Beckett', *New Formations*, 55 (2005), 104-19 (p. 107).
- ⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives on the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 45.
- ⁸ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 29.
- ⁹ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), p. 107.
- ¹⁰ Barthes, *Preparation*, pp. 29-30.
- ¹¹ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 21.
- ¹² Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 67.
- ¹³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 33.
- ¹⁴ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 56.
- ¹⁵ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 98.
- ¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Punctuation Marks', *Antioch Review*, 48.3 (1990), 300-05 (p. 304).
- ¹⁷ Adorno, 'Punctuation Marks', p. 304.
- ¹⁸ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 97.
- ¹⁹ For more on the debates sparked by the publication of the notebooks, see Jean Birnbaum, 'La publication d'inédits de Barthes embrase le cercle de ses disciples', *Le Monde*, 22 January 2009.
- ²⁰ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 102.
- ²¹ Roland Barthes, *Travels in China*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p. 61.
- ²² Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 26.
- ²³ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 42.
- ²⁴ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 26.
- ²⁵ Eric Hayot, *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel Quel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 113.
- ²⁶ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 414, footnote 18.
- ²⁷ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 26.
- ²⁸ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 27.

²⁹ It is certainly the case that such typographical experimentation is more apparent in printed form than in the handwritten notebooks. A small selection of pages from the latter was published in the eponymous volume accompanying the *R/B Roland Barthes* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (27 November 2002 to 10 March 2003). From these facsimiles it is evident that Barthes did not aerate his notebooks in their entirety, yet there nevertheless remain swathes of blankness around numerous cursive notations. It might thus be maintained that the printed form accentuates the palpable (if not explicit or uniform) impulse for aeration in the notebooks.

³⁰ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 13.

³¹ Barthes, *Travels*, p. xi.

³² Barthes, *Travels*, p. 43.

³³ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 91.

³⁴ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 91.

³⁵ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 88.

³⁶ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 90.

³⁷ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 91.

³⁸ Barthes, *Barthes*, p. x.

³⁹ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. xiii. The phrase is Susan Sontag's.

⁴⁰ Barthes, *Grain*, p. 209.

⁴¹ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 63.

⁴² Barthes, *Grain*, p. 210; Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 32.

⁴³ Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*, ed. by Seth Perlow (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2014), p. 30.

⁴⁴ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 166.

⁴⁵ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 79.

⁴⁷ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Barthes, *Barthes*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 19.

⁵¹ Hayot, *Chinese*, p. 110.

⁵² Barthes, *Travels*, p. 19.

⁵³ Barthes, *Travels*, pp. 103, 192, 37, 60, 107.

⁵⁴ Barthes, *Travels*, pp. 60, 29.

⁵⁵ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 102.

⁵⁶ Ellis Hanson, 'The Languorous Critic', *New Literary History*, 43 (2012), 547-64 (p. 549).

⁵⁷ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 43.

⁵⁸ Ngai, *Ugly*, p. 43.

⁵⁹ Barthes, *Zero*, p. 1.

-
- ⁶⁰ Hanson, 'Languorous', p. 552.
- ⁶¹ Barthes, *Travels*, pp. 94-95.
- ⁶² Barthes, *Travels*, p. 82.
- ⁶³ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 87.
- ⁶⁴ Hanson, 'Languorous', p. 553.
- ⁶⁵ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 86.
- ⁶⁶ Barthes, *Travels*, pp. 85, 87, 20, 82, 83.
- ⁶⁷ See Jay Lutz, review of Steve Murphy, *Marges du premier Verlaine* (2003), *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 30 (2005), 452-54.
- ⁶⁸ Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack, 'Dissemination', in *The Tel Quel Reader*, ed. by Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 243-47 (p. 247).
- ⁶⁹ Marjorie Perloff, "VOCABEL SCRIPTSIGNS": Differential Poetics in Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget*, in *Electronic Poetry Center* <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/goldsmith/perloff_goldsmith.html> [accessed 21 April 2015].
- ⁷⁰ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 80.
- ⁷¹ Hayot, *Chinese*, p. 134.
- ⁷² Hayot, *Chinese*, p. 135.
- ⁷³ Roland Barthes, 'Well, and China?', trans. by Lee Hildreth, *Discourse*, 8 (1986-87), 116-23 (p. 119).
- ⁷⁴ Barthes, *Travels*, pp. 75, 57, 167.
- ⁷⁵ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 91.
- ⁷⁶ Hanson, 'Languorous', p. 553.
- ⁷⁷ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 184.
- ⁷⁸ Hanson, 'Languorous', p. 551.
- ⁷⁹ Magali Nachtergaele, *Roland Barthes contemporain* (Paris: Max Milo, 2015), pp. 74-79.
- ⁸⁰ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 21.
- ⁸¹ Anne-Lise François, 'Late Exercises in Minimal Affirmatives', in *Theory Aside*, ed. by Jason Potts and Daniel Stout (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 34-54 (p. 39).
- ⁸² Barthes, *Travels*, p. 95.
- ⁸³ François, 'Late', p. 44.
- ⁸⁴ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 115.
- ⁸⁵ François, 'Late', p. 46 (emphasis mine).
- ⁸⁶ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 118.
- ⁸⁷ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 80; Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 83.
- ⁸⁸ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 97.
- ⁸⁹ Barthes, *Zero*, p. 30.
- ⁹⁰ Barthes, *Barthes*, p. x.
- ⁹¹ Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 46.
- ⁹² Peter Howarth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 152.

⁹³ Cited in Barthes, *Preparation*, p. 69.

⁹⁴ Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977-1978)*, ed. by Thomas Clerc, trans. by Rosalind Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 199.

⁹⁵ Barthes, *Neutral*, p. 69.

⁹⁶ Barthes, *Neutral*, p. 18.

⁹⁷ Cunningham, 'Asceticism', p. 119.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Leca is a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge. Her research interests include aesthetics, literary modernism, and critical theory.

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

This article is copyright © 2015 *Barthes Studies* and is the result of the independent labour of the scholar or scholars credited with authorship. The material contained in this document may be freely distributed, as long as the origin of information used is credited in the appropriate manner (through bibliographic citation, for example).