

Roland Barthes and The Literary Absolute: The Conditions of the Necessity to Write Intransitively

Jacob Bittner

... write, but only if you're absolutely convinced that, if you don't, you'll perish (what we call a *vocation* probably refers to this kind of survival).¹

— Roland Barthes

At least two significant events in literary studies took place at the end of the year 1978. On the one hand, the commencement of Roland Barthes's lecture course at the Collège de France, *La Préparation du roman* (*The Preparation of the Novel*) on December 2, 1978, which lasted until the beginning of 1980. On the other hand, the publication in September 1978 of Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *L'Absolu littéraire* (*The Literary Absolute*) in which the concern is the emergence of the 'question of literature' in Early German Romanticism.² In his late lecture course, Barthes is concerned with a *Vouloir-Écrire*, a will to write or a desire to write, which according to Barthes perhaps signifies an 'attitude, drive, desire [*l'attitude, la pulsion, le désir*]', but overall is 'insufficiently studied'.³ With this term, Barthes refers to Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *The Literary Absolute* in which they, with reference to Heidegger, understand the journal of Early German Romanticism, the *Athenaeum* (1798–1800), to be a manifestation of 'the will to system [*la volonté du système*]'.⁴ Barthes will in the session on December 1, 1979, link this will-to-write to *The Literary Absolute* and on December 8 designate his concern as 'Writing as absolute'.⁵ In the session of February 23, 1980, Barthes will explicitly say that 'the writer, such as I've tried to imagine him' is 'someone who devotes himself to the *Literary Absolute*'.⁶ My question is what the conditions are for this will-to-write to emerge as what Barthes's understands as *a necessity to write* and how this necessity is linked to the

question whether the act of writing is transitive or intransitive. How is it possible for Barthes to understand the will-to-write as a necessity to write? What are the historical conditions of this necessity to write? In order to trace these conditions, I will read Barthes's lectures in relation with Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's *The Literary Absolute* and Nancy's work on Kant in *The Discourse on the Syncope* (*Le Discours de la syncope*, 1976).

The Will-to-Write in The Literary Absolute

It is possible to understand *The Literary Absolute* as a commentary on a short digression in Heidegger's *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* (*Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809), 1936/1971): 'Friedrich Schlegel once said (*Athenaeum* fragment 82) that "a definition that is not *witzig* is worthless." This is only a romantic transposition of the idealist dialectic'.⁷ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe cite this comment by Heidegger in a note to *The Literary Absolute* in which they also add: 'This affirmation nevertheless raises the question, clearly, of what is in fact at stake in this *transposition*, or of the "play" that subsists between idealism and romanticism'.⁸ Insofar as the 'advent of writing', according to Derrida, is the advent of 'the play of signifying references that constitute language', the question for Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe is the play of writing that takes place in the post-Kantian space between German Idealism and the *Athenaeum*.⁹ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe thus follow in the wake of Derrida's deconstruction. Lacoue-Labarthe understands his own investigation of the relation of philosophy and literature to be in debt to Derrida's thought.¹⁰ In March 1973, Nancy presented his work on Hegel at Derrida's Seminar at the École Normale Supérieure, a reading of Hegel which Nancy himself understands to be linked to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (*De la grammatologie*, 1967) in which Derrida considers Hegel to be 'the last philosopher of the book and the first thinker of writing'.¹¹ For Derrida, Hegel is the thinker of the book, of absolute knowing, in which writing is effaced, but 'Hegel is *also* the thinker of irreducible difference'.¹² Hegel is 'also' a thinker of writing, which functions as a supplement of the absolute.

In *The Literary Absolute*, the term (German) Idealism refers to Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, but the main focus is nevertheless on Hegel's dialectical thought.¹³ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's concern

with Hegel is here in line with the traditional focus in recent French thought on German Idealism. As Vincent Descombes traces in *Modern French Philosophy* (originally published in French as *Le Même et l'autre*, 1979), the figure of Hegel emerges at the centre of modern French philosophy from the 1930s. Besides such readers of Hegel as Jean Hyppolite, Eric Weil and Jean Wahl, it is especially Alexandre Kojève's course on Hegel given at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes from 1933 to 1939 that impacted the turn to Hegel in French thought.¹⁴

According to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, romantic *Witz* is 'constituted in the greatest proximity to what Hegel will call "Absolute Knowledge"'.¹⁵ But *Witz* at the same time indicates itself as the gap that separates Romanticism and Idealism. In a 'Remark' in his *Logic*, Hegel opposes the key dialectical concept of *Aufhebung* (sublation) to a Ciceronian *Witz* in which the equivocal senses of the Latin *tollere* is deployed.¹⁶ In his entry on the concept of *Aufhebung* in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, Philippe Büttgen explains this relation between this *Witz* and the concept of *Aufhebung*. Since *tollere* can mean either to 'raise' (to the highest office) or to 'eliminate', Büttgen writes that 'the *Witz* proceeds from the fact that Cicero succeeds in making this "second meaning," which is threatening, heard in a passage that is apparently favorable to Octavian ("We must praise this young man, adorn him with all the virtues, *tollere* him").¹⁷ In opposition to the *Witz* in which the sense is either to 'raise' or to 'eliminate', *Aufhebung* means to 'raise', to 'preserve' and to 'eliminate', all at once.

In his early work on Hegel, *The Speculative Remark (La Remarque spéculative*, 1973), Nancy presents this difference of concepts in a similar manner: '*tollere* covers an antinomic duality (to suppress, to push aside or to lift up); *aufheben* combines a dialectical or speculative duplicity (to suppress and to preserve)'.¹⁸ The romantic *Witz* thus introduces equivocation into the system where the speculative *Aufhebung* manifests itself as the System presenting itself.¹⁹ But does romantic *Witz* then indicate the interruption of the system? Does the either-or of the antinomy of *Witz* interrupt the both-at-once of dialectical *Aufhebung*?

In *The Literary Absolute*, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe dismiss this possibility. They write: 'The writing of the fragment thus constitutes the dialectical *Aufhebung* of the internal antinomy of *Witz*. "Fragmentary geniality" preserves *Witz* as work and suppresses it as non-work, sub-work, or anti-work'.²⁰ For the Romantics, *Witz* remains within the horizon of the system, of the absolute Work, which means that the antinomy of *Witz*, the opposition of the *either-or*, always already

functions within the dialectic of the Subject (the Work), which becomes itself by being other than itself, thereby returning to itself.

The Literary Absolute is written within the horizon of Heidegger's history of Being. When Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe understand the journal of the Early German Romantics, the *Athenaeum*, to constitute *Witz* as Absolute, this means that they understand the literary absolute as a manifestation of 'the will to system [*la volonté du système*]'.²¹ This term is a reference to Heidegger's identification of the Being of modern metaphysics as self-willing, *exigent*, the 'will to be', which means that being has precedence over nothingness: 'Ever since the developed beginning of modern metaphysics, Being is will, that is, *exigentia essentiae*.'²² According to Heidegger, in German Idealism, Being as will becomes 'the unification of the unity of totality striving for itself'.²³ Both Hegel's absolute Subject and the literary absolute are specific understandings of Being in which Being is the self-grounding of the effective foundation. Being emerges as the *will to system*, which is the English translation of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's French 'volonté du Système',²⁴ which itself is a translation of Heidegger's '*Wille zum System*'.²⁵ In Heidegger's analysis, this *Wille zum System* is also rendered as '*Systemwille*'.²⁶ The German *zu-* (preposition in Dative) in *Wille zum System* corresponds to the English *to* indicating that the system is *to do*; however, the German *Systemwille* furthermore underlines that it is the system itself that wills. The French *volonté du Système* underline both senses: the system is to (*de-*) do, but it is the system *itself* that is to produce itself and, in this sense, the preposition *de-* simply brings the two nouns *volonté* and *Système* together as in the German *Systemwille*.²⁷ The literary absolute is thus the system of the will, the Subject's will, the system *as* Subject. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy therefore choose to give the name '*System-subject*' to the literary absolute, which must be the '*living System*'.²⁸ The literary absolute is thus a will that wills its own actuality.

The Will-to-Write in Barthes's Lectures

In his late lecture course, Barthes's concern is the will to write, which he understands as a desire to write literature. For Barthes, the focus of the lecture course is a writerly subject (Barthes himself) who is situated at a 'juncture' that divides the life which came before and the life that is to come.²⁹ The question for Barthes in this lecture series is the possibility of

a new future, of a new life, which can only be a *writerly* life insofar as Barthes is *someone who writes*: 'Now, for someone who writes, [...] there can be no other *Vita Nova* (or so it seems to me) than the discovery of a new writing practice.'³⁰ For Barthes, the will-to-write is 'explicit'³¹ in Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* insofar as these letters concern a necessity to write:

The 'essential' form of the Advice offered to a Writer ultimately concerns not the practice of writing but the very Will to Write: Writing as the *Telos* of a life = in answer to the question 'Should I write? Continue to Write?' they all say (Flaubert, Kafka, Rilke): it's not a matter of a gift, of talent, but of *survival*: write, but only if you're absolutely convinced that, if you don't, you'll perish (what we call a *vocation* probably refers to this kind of survival).³²

Rilke's letters written at the beginning of the twentieth century are addressed to the young poet (Franz Xaver Kappus) who would be situated in a position of suspension between a 'must' and a 'cannot'. The writer is *not able not to write* but nevertheless *not able to write*. The aim of Rilke's letters is precisely to address the question of how to manage this position between a necessity to write and an impossibility of writing. It is from this perspective that one should understand the notion of *patience* (*Geduld*) that is a recurrent theme in these letters. Rilke proposes to the young writer in a letter from Paris (February 17, 1903): 'Nobody can advise you and help you, nobody. There is only one way. Go into yourself. [...] This above all: ask yourself in your night's quietest hour: *must* I write?'³³ Barthes's course is an 'intellectual narrative [*récit intellectuel*]' about 'a man who's deliberating the best way to realize that desire [of writing], or that will [*volonté*], or indeed that *vocation*'.³⁴ For Barthes, 'writing *leads* [life]: poetically, transcendently'.³⁵ Writing is the transcendental condition of this life devoted to writing literature.

It is here possible to see the connection between Barthes's understanding of the Will-to-Write as a necessity to write and his assertion that the writer is someone who is devoted to the literary absolute. When literature emerges as absolute for a subject as the condition of this very subject's life, this subject is a writer who cannot not-write literature. Moreover, when literature is the condition that constitutes the subject's very desire, it is not possible for this subject to not-desire writing. Within the horizon of the literary absolute as a 'transcendental' condition, the desire of writing is the very condition of

this writerly life. The consequence is that it is not possible to distinguish between the writer and literature since the writer's very life depends on (the actualization of) the literary work. Barthes can therefore claim that the will-to-write delimits literary writing insofar as literature is 'an order of knowledge where the product is indistinguishable from the production, the practice from the drive'.³⁶ In Barthes's understanding of literary practice, the written work coincides with the act of writing as the will-to-write. Barthes says: 'To say that you want to write – there, in fact, you have the very material of writing'.³⁷ For Barthes, literature is thus situated at the indistinction between producer and production, between life and writing, between subject and work.

Barthes focus is thus 'existential, not aesthetic'³⁸ since it concerns the 'Desire to be'³⁹ which for the writer Barthes is a 'desire for language [*désir du langage*]'.⁴⁰ For Barthes, the question is not to suspend writing, but to interrupt the incessant will-to-write so as to make possible a new life. To think the verb *to write* anew concerns the possibility of inventing a new practice of writing in which there is no necessity to write, no desire of writing, which makes the interruption of writing impossible. Since literature is absolute for this writer, Barthes's lecture course concerns the interruption of the desire for literature that coincides with the interruption of literature as absolute. We should pay attention to the implicit transposition of the will-to-write that takes place here: Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's study concerns the *concept* of the literary absolute as the '*living System*'⁴¹ whereas Barthes's lectures concern *the system that is alive* as the writer who must write literature. For Barthes, the literary absolute is not simply a concept of the absolute, but embedded in the writer who must write. This *transposition* of the literary absolute as a concept into that which constitutes an actual living being is the condition of Barthes's investigation into the will-to-write.

Barthes understands himself as someone who is devoted to the literary absolute: literature has emerged as the absolute condition of the subject's life. At the beginning of the second session (December 9, 1978), Barthes presents the horizon for his practice of writing as the question whether to write is an intransitive or transitive verb: 'For a long time I thought that there was a *Will-to-Write* [*Vouloir-Écrire*] in itself: *To Write*, intransitive verb – now I'm less sure. Perhaps to will to write = to will to write something → To Will-to-Write + Object.'⁴² But the question is then what the conditions are for the necessity to write to emerge as the question of an intransitive act of writing. What is the link between the necessity to write and the verb *to write* understood as intransitive? How does literature emerge as intransitivity?

The Question of Intransitive Writing

In 1978, the writerly subject (Barthes) is 'less sure' now than he was before whether there is an act of writing in which *to write* is an intransitive verb. With an allusion to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's study, Barthes understands in his late lectures the question of intransitive writing to have emerged at the time of the Early German Romantics.⁴³ Here Barthes implicitly revises a claim from his early work, *Writing Degree Zero* (*Le Degré zero de l'écriture*, 1953), in which he conceptualized the 1850s as the modern moment when literature emerges as an object of knowledge.⁴⁴ The Year of Revolution (1848) is the date for an *a priori* event at which the classical age of *Belles Lettres* disappears and (modern) literature emerges. This disappearance signifies the fragmentation of 'the ideological unity of the bourgeoisie [which] gave rise to a single mode of writing' since 'literary form could not be divided because consciousness was not'.⁴⁵ The disappearance thus manifests the historicity of the (Hegelian) concept of a true classical consciousness in which form and content coincide and an atemporal universal (bourgeois) consciousness functions as the transparent condition of society. Barthes rejects this consciousness as ideology, but he confirms the (Hegelian) thesis that literature is 'tragic' because the writer's 'consciousness no longer accounts for the whole of his condition.'⁴⁶ Since there is no universal norm in (modern) literature, there is a multiplication in the modes of writing, which are however all attempts to find a solution to their (alienated) condition as 'writers without [universal] Literature.'⁴⁷ Barthes diagnosis is that the very condition of possibility of literature produces its inability to overcome itself:

literary writing carries at the same time the alienation of History and the dream of History; as a Necessity, it testifies to the division of languages which is inseparable from the division of classes; as Freedom, it is the consciousness of this division and the very effort which seeks to surmount it.⁴⁸

Literature embodies a division of a plurality of modes of writing which all aim to overcome their division; however, since literature is also the

consciousness of the historicity of the ideological character of the universal (bourgeoisie), literature occupies a position of alienation in which its only 'utopian' possibility is its own disappearance: 'For Literature is like phosphorous: it shines with its maximum brilliance at the moment when it attempts to die.'⁴⁹ The brilliance of literature is its appearance as the interruption of the dialectical production of meaning. For Barthes of 1953, the modern literary object indicates only the very disappearance of the literary object since 'it is the existence of Literature itself which is called into question'.⁵⁰ Barthes writes: 'Modernism begins with the search for a Literature which is no longer possible.'⁵¹

Thirteen years later, in the paper 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?' ('Écrire, verbe intransitif?'), delivered at the seminal conference at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, Barthes identifies the apparent transformation of the verb *to write* from its transitive to its intransitive sense as 'the sign of an important change in mentality'.⁵² In modernity, the verb *to write* would not be a transitive verb (to write *something*) but an intransitive verb (to write, *tout court*). But Barthes nevertheless here questions the idea that *to write* is in fact an intransitive verb: 'No writer, whatever age he belongs to, can fail to realize that he always writes *something*'.⁵³ The modern writer who writes intransitively still appears to be linked to an 'object' of writing.

The Emergence of Intransitive Writing

My concern here is not to resolve the question whether intransitive writing in fact exists. Rather, my aim is to trace the conditions of this thought of intransitive writing. What are the conditions for the emergence of what we can name *the subject who must write intransitivity*? In order to trace this emergence, I will argue that it is necessary to analyze what happens when the literary absolute is transposed from being a concept of the living system into a system that is alive. We have already seen how the literary absolute emerges as the condition of the subject who must write literature. But the question is then also how literature emerges as an intransitive act of writing. I will argue that the transposition of the literary absolute into an actual subject who must write literature also is the condition for the emergence of literature as an intransitive act of writing. With reference to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's work, I have aimed to show how the romantic *Witz* introduces equivocation into thinking of the absolute system, but

nevertheless remains within the thinking of the absolute Will. I will now return to Nancy's early work on Kant in order to trace what the conditions are for the literary absolute to emerge in Barthes's lectures as a subject who must write intransitively.

In *The Discourse on the Syncope*, Nancy claims that the 'moment of Kant'⁵⁴ is 'the moment in which philosophy explicitly designates its own exposition as *literature*'.⁵⁵ My initial concern is to show how this Kantian moment manifests 'literature' as form of *a priori* writing, which prepares the later understanding of literature as absolute in the journal of the Romantics, the *Athenaeum*. This Kantian moment will also be a condition for the emergence of literature as intransitive writing, since it will constitute literature as an *a priori* writing in which the possibility of the objectivity of the literary 'object' is always in question.

The notion that the Kantian moment exposes philosophical presentation as 'literature' does not mean that Kant *invents* literature; rather, it means that literature arises as a solution to a Kantian problem of how to present philosophy. Kant never recognises 'literature' as a solution as such; however, Nancy traces how the problem of the exposition of philosophy becomes a fundamental problem for Kant. This is the problem of how thinking can exhibit itself, of philosophical *Darstellung*, of philosophical presentation.⁵⁶ It is because of this problem that the Kantian moment is the time when it becomes 'possible and necessary to expressly distinguish between philosophy and literature'.⁵⁷

Nancy's analysis presupposes Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (*Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, 1929), which is a reworking of a lecture course first delivered at the University of Marburg in 1927–28.⁵⁸ Heidegger understands Kant's first *Critique* as an attempt to find a 'secure course of a science', which is to prevent metaphysics from both scepticism and from dogmatically overstepping the limits of the sensible in order to grasp the absolute (the supersensible).⁵⁹ On the one hand, for Kant the absolute is that which 'reason [*Vernunft*] necessarily and with every right demands [*verlangt*] in things in themselves for everything that is conditioned, thereby demanding the series of conditions as something completed [*vollendet*]'.⁶⁰ But, on the other hand, Kant excludes the absolute as a possible object of knowledge: 'the unconditioned [*das Unbedingte*] must not be present [*angetroffen*] in things [*Dingen*] insofar as we are acquainted with them (insofar as they are given to us), but rather in things insofar as we are not acquainted with them, as things in themselves'.⁶¹ For Kant, metaphysics has failed in its attempt to establish itself as a science since it lacks a 'procedure'.⁶² The *Critique* is therefore a 'treatise' on 'method', which is

not itself the system of metaphysics, but which is to make the system possible.⁶³ According to Heidegger, method is here not simply ‘the technique for proceeding’, but ‘the working out of a complete determination of the “whole contour” and the “whole internal, articular structure” of ontology’.⁶⁴ Heidegger thus understands Kant’s *Critique* as an attempt to lay the ground for metaphysics: ‘the fundamental knowledge of beings as such and as a whole’.⁶⁵

For Kant, human knowledge is thus not *intuitus originarius*, an infinite divine knowledge or an absolute intuition, which originally produces beings; rather, it is an *intuitus derivativus*, a derived intuition, which cannot make the being come-into-being, but must be receptive for the already given being.⁶⁶ For Heidegger, Kant’s aim is to secure an ontological (transcendental) knowledge. In Heidegger’s terms, the *Critique* aims to constitute ‘the Being of the being’,⁶⁷ which for Kant concerns a knowledge of objects *a priori*, a cognition, ‘which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us’.⁶⁸ Kant’s insight is to focus on things insofar as they appear to us since metaphysics might be secured if we distinguish between ‘objects as appearances’ that conform to the human way of representing and ‘things in themselves’ as the things insofar as they are not given to us.⁶⁹

For Heidegger, the question at the core of the Kantian *Critique* is the question of human finitude since human pure reason is the foundation for establishing metaphysics.⁷⁰ He presents the Kantian problematic of representing in terms of the question of transcendence. The finite being (the human), in its ecstatic turning ‘itself toward’ and ‘standing-out-from’, lets objects horizontally ‘stand-against’ itself and thereby ‘holds before itself – a horizon’⁷¹ that first makes possible any experience of objects (objectivity). In Heidegger’s admittedly ‘violent’ analysis, which focuses on the *unsaid* of Kant’s *Critique*, the main question in the first *Critique* is the question of how to understand the problem of schematism, which Kant describes as ‘a hidden art in the depths of the human soul’.⁷² For Kant, schematism concerns the synthesis or unification of sensible intuition and pure concepts (categories). The schema is ‘the sensible concept of an object’, the synthesis of intuition and pure concepts, which as a unity makes possible the experience of objects.⁷³ The ‘schema’ is ‘the pure synthesis’, which is a ‘transcendental product of the imagination’.⁷⁴ According to Heidegger, it is thus the transcendental imagination that for Kant ‘forms the look of the horizon of objectivity as such in advance, before the experience of the being [*Seienden*]’.⁷⁵

The transcendental imagination is the 'root' of the two stems of human knowledge, sensibility and understanding.⁷⁶ This is a source that Kant writes 'perhaps' exists, but in any case is 'unknown' to us.⁷⁷ In Heidegger's analysis, the transcendental imagination becomes the finite 'creative' faculty, which is not ontically creative since it is not an absolute intuition, but which forms the pure image (*Bild*) of time by which objectivity becomes possible.⁷⁸ Understanding (conceptual representing) is here itself relative to intuition (the pure forms of time and space) since, as Kant writes, the intuition relates 'immediately' to the object whereas the understanding 'is mediate'.⁷⁹ For Kant, knowing is thus 'intuiting thinking' insofar as the faculty for judging is the faculty for thinking: 'Judgment is therefore the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation [concept] of a representation of it [intuition].'⁸⁰ Moreover, according to Heidegger, there is a division in intuition itself insofar as 'time has a preeminence over space'.⁸¹ As 'the form of inner sense',⁸² time manifests itself as successive 'states of our mind' without spatial relations.⁸³ Kant understands time as 'the intuition of our self',⁸⁴ which is thus nothing but 'pure self-affection'.⁸⁵ In this understanding of time as 'pure self-affection', Heidegger finds the traces of a more original time that he understands (against Kant) to mean that the subjectivity of the subject itself consists in a time, which forms the possibility of transcendence. In the last instance, transcendental imagination, as the root of the two sources of knowledge (intuition and understanding), is thus itself 'rooted in original time' since the pure, finite subject is in itself temporalisation.⁸⁶ On the one hand, Heidegger can therefore say that, in the Kantian ground-laying of metaphysics, 'the grounding of the inner possibility of ontology is brought about as an unveiling of transcendence, i.e. [an unveiling] of the subjectivity of the human subject'.⁸⁷ The fundamental question of the *Critique* is thus the question of human finitude. But, on the other hand, Kant never firmly established the transcendental imagination at the core of the subject's transcendental synthesis. Rather, according to Heidegger, in the second version of the first *Critique*, 'Kant falls back from the ground which he himself had laid' because this ground (finitude) undermines the very concept of pure reason (subjectivity) that forms the point of departure for the *Critique*.⁸⁸ From Heidegger's perspective, in order to retain the Subject as a foundation, Kant neglects to pose the question of the relation between human finitude and Being. In Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's words from *The Literary Absolute*, this means that, 'an abyss opens up where a bridge should have been built'.⁸⁹

According to *The Literary Absolute*, it is this abyss, 'this problematic of the subject unrepresentable to itself, which Romanticism 'will receive, not as a bequest but as its "own" most difficult and perhaps insoluble question'.⁹⁰ With Heidegger's analysis in mind, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe will state, regarding the section of the *Critique* on the transcendental aesthetic ('a science of all principles of *a priori* sensibility'⁹¹): 'What does the transcendental Aesthetic represent? Not the traditional division of the sensible and the intelligible but rather the division between *two* forms (*a priori*) within the 'sensible' or intuitive itself. The first and most fundamental result is that there is no *intuitus originarius*'.⁹² There is no absolute intuition, no absolute Subject, but only a division between the two pure forms of intuition, time and space.

In *The Discourse on the Syncope*, Nancy addresses how this Kantian problem of how to situate the foundation of metaphysics in a common root (the transcendental imagination) corresponds to the problem of how to *present* philosophy. This problem of presentation (*Darstellung*) will give rise to the question of literature, which is also to say that this question (of literature) is first 'posed within philosophy itself'.⁹³ Nancy addresses the problem of *Darstellung* in relation to Kant's distinction from 'The Transcendental Doctrine of Method' in the first *Critique* between mathematical cognition and philosophical cognition.⁹⁴ According to Kant, mathematics travels 'the secure path of a science' since it is supposed to establish its objects purely *a priori*.⁹⁵ Nancy can therefore say that, for Kant, the 'only invulnerable presentation is mathematical presentation' since it is 'the only adequate grammar [*régime*] of a joint presentation of the concept and the intuition that responds to it'.⁹⁶ Mathematics is the only proper locus in which a presentation of the unity of understanding and sensibility in the transcendental imagination could be carried out. But, as Nancy points out, philosophy is restrained by a linguistic imperative, which means that philosophy 'must discourse'.⁹⁷ Philosophical exposition thus 'reveals a particular fragility',⁹⁸ the fragility of its *discursive* status, which for Kant involves the question of the *foundation* (transcendental imagination) of philosophy itself since language can never be a totally adequate form of presentation. Nancy writes that philosophy 'must' for this reason 'desire elegance' since the exposition of philosophy always already exposes this science to its own insufficiency.⁹⁹ The pure system should be presented *a priori*, but 'the grapheme is always inadequate, uncertain, buried, misshapen, or damaged'.¹⁰⁰

The problem of *Darstellung* is thus the problem of the lack of the foundation of the system since it means that the system is always already

displaced. The system needs the substitution of elegance since it is exposed to its discursive presentation: ‘Elegance is the term substituted for the presentation of the mathematical opus, and the desire for it is the desire to write a book. “Literature” will be the name of the object of desire of the lost opus.’¹⁰¹ At the very core of Kant’s *Critique*, the question of writing emerges as the problem of philosophical exposition. Philosophy will never be able to accomplish a ‘pure writing’, an intransitive writing, a writing without anything written, a pure presentation. Literature will be the name of the loss of the desired adequate philosophical presentation: ‘to write *in not writing*’.¹⁰² Literature will be the locus of the pure writing of a ‘poet-philosopher’, an impossible hybrid figure that Nancy proposes: ‘the mathematician who would write (in prose)’.¹⁰³ But literature will thus precisely be the impossible *fiction* of a pure writing: ‘*literature will only come to be determined as fiction from the point of view of the philosophy that determines the ideal beyond the limits of possible experience*’.¹⁰⁴ The modern category of literature arises within the horizon of the philosophy of finitude (Kant’s *Critique*), but literature will at the same time be that which always already transgresses possible experience. From the Kantian perspective, literature is not a philosophical possibility since it is the fiction of an infinite or absolute intuition. The Kantian moment manifests ‘literature’ as the fictional realisation of a pure philosophical writing, a form of *a priori* writing, which would be the writing of pure ‘reason’ itself, independent of all empirical limiting conditions.

Literature emerges as a solution to the problem of how to present philosophy: it is the fiction of a pure *a priori* writing, of an absolute intransitive writing. In his *Dialogue on Poetry* (*Das Gespräch über die Poesie*, 1800) published in the journal *Athenaeum* (1798–1800), Friedrich Schlegel lets the figure Ludovico pose the question of literature: ‘Do you perhaps consider it impossible to construct future poems *a priori*? [*Halten Sie es etwa für unmöglich, zukünftige Gedichte a priori zu konstruieren?*].’¹⁰⁵ The *critical* question of literature is: how is poetry *a priori* possible?¹⁰⁶ Literature arises as the question of how to produce an absolute, intransitive work. The *Athenaeum* represents the core of the Kantian moment, insofar as this journal inaugurates literature as absolute.

The Interruption of Writing

My aim has been to show how the literary absolute emerges as the question of an intransitive act of writing in order to expose the conditions of Barthes's lectures in which the figure of the writer arises as what I here call the *subject who must write intransitively*. On the one hand, it is visible how the literary absolute constitutes a writer who must write since his very being is conditioned by literature. On the other hand, we can see how the literary absolute produces itself as an intransitive act of pure *a priori* writing. The subject who is constituted by the literary absolute is the writer who must write intransitively. This link between the necessity to write and the intransitive work indicates the reason for Barthes's inability to confirm intransitive writing: the intransitive work, which is supposed to 'be' without work, is in fact intrinsically linked to the thinking of the absolute work as the writer's condition. Both the necessity to write and the thinking of the intransitive work emerge when Barthes transposes the concept of the literary absolute into being the condition of the writer.

However, in the lectures, Barthes is not only concerned with this current position of the writer as someone who must write literature. Rather, he proposes that the literary work of the future 'should cease to be, or be only discretely, a *discourse of the work about the work*'.¹⁰⁷ The work of the future should not be absolutely marked by intransitivity so as to produce the subject who says: 'I can't write a work, there's no longer any work to be written, the only thing left for me to write is that there's nothing to write.'¹⁰⁸ Barthes fantasised moment of temporalisation is 'a time when you'll stop writing, when you'll finally take a break, less from writing than from the perpetual reactivation of the desire'.¹⁰⁹ This is a fantasy in which there is an interruption of the desire of writing. Here the desire *as* desire is put into question, which opens up the possibility of interrupting the desire of the subject who *must* desire to write. But this interruption of desire should not necessarily be a break from writing; rather, the question is whether it is possible to enact a practice of writing in which the will-to-write, the desire of writing, is suspended. Since for Barthes the necessity to write is intrinsically linked to the impossibility of finishing an actual work, it is an illusion that there could ever be an absolute work: 'You labor on the work like a maniac, *in order to finish it* – but as soon as it's finished, you start another one, under the same illusory conditions'.¹¹⁰ For Barthes, the writer is situated in the position of the will-to-write between the

desire for a work and the impossibility of any intransitive work. In order to resist this suspended position, Barthes is thus constantly approaching the limit of this will-to-write. With reference to Heidegger, Barthes says:

You remember the citation from Heidegger: in Nature, each thing remains within the allotted sphere of the Possible; only 'will' takes us outside of the Possible. I said that Writing, as Will, was an Impossible (which I was opposing to *Idleness*, as Nature). – We can now say: even within the will to write, that is, within its Impossible, the task of Talent is to remain within its Possible: to precisely delineate the Nature within this Non-Nature that is Writing.¹¹¹

Since the will-to-write is a necessity to write the impossible intransitive work, the task of the writer must be to position himself at the site in which writing becomes possible as a form of non-writing and inoperativity ('idleness'). The fact that this subject *must* write does therefore not mean that he *can* write; rather, this subject is precisely situated in the suspension between a necessity to write (without object) and the impossibility of writing (an object). In 'The Obverse of Signs', with reference to the critic Barthes as a 'writer postponed', Gérard Genette proposed literature to be the incessant postponement of the work:

literature is for the semiologist (the critic) a permanent temptation, an endless vocation postponed until later, experienced only this dilatory mode [...] but the postponement is only apparent, for this intention to write, this 'Moses-like gaze' on the work to come is already Literature.¹¹²

From this perspective, Barthes emerges precisely in the position of the critic who coincides with the writer who cannot not-write intransitively. Insofar as the will-to-write is Rilke's necessity to write in which the verb to write appears to be intransitive, the question for Barthes becomes how to interrupt this necessity to write so as to delimit a new inoperative practice of writing. But this question of how to interrupt the desire of writing thus goes beyond Barthes's concern for his own position as a writer since it concerns the very question of literature. Unless literary thought aims to stay within a thinking of the absolute, the question on the level of the act of writing is how it is possible to

Jacob Bittner

interrupt the necessity to write. Here my aim has been to trace the conditions for this necessity to write in Barthes's lectures.

Notes

¹ 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. 280.

² Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 13.

³ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 8; Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du roman: cours au Collège de France 1978–1979 et 1979–1980*, ed. by Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil, 2015), p. 27. For studies on Barthes's lecture course on the preparation of the novel, see: Lucy O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 163–99; Sam Ferguson, 'Forgetting Gide: A Study of Barthes's "Ursuppe"', *Barthes Studies*, 1 (2015), 17–34; Antoine Compagnon and Rosalind Krauss, 'Roland Barthes's Novel', *October*, 112 (2005), 23–34; Kris Pint, 'How to Become What One Is: Roland Barthes's Final Fantasy', *Paragraph*, 31.1 (2008), 38–49; Jonathan Culler, 'Preparing the Novel: Spiralling Back', *Paragraph*, 31.1 (2008), 109–20; Andy Stafford, 'Préparation du romanesque' in Roland Barthes's Reading of *Sarrasine*', *Paragraph*, 31.1 (2008), 95–108.

⁴ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 32; Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'Absolu littéraire: théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 46

⁵ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 148; see also p. 138.

⁶ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 296.

⁷ Quoted in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 135, note 28; Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985), p. 82. For the relation between the literary absolute and Hölderlin as a subject who must write literature, see: Jacob Bittner, 'The Paradigm of Writerly Necessity in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Literary Absolute*', *MLN*, 131.3 (2016), 770–90. For another detailed reading of *The Literary Absolute*, see: Daniel J. Hoolsema, 'The Echo of an Impossible Future in "The Literary Absolute"', *MLN*, 119.4 (2004), 845–68. Hoolsema's investigation is a reading of *The Literary Absolute* from the perspective of Nancy's later works. Hoolsema touches on the problem of Kantian *Darstellung*, but without any reference to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's earlier works and Heidegger's early readings of Kant and German Idealism that are presupposed in *The Literary Absolute*. For further readings of *The Literary Absolute*, see: Simon Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); Marc Redfield, 'Romanticism, Bildung, and the Literary Absolute' in *Lessons of Romanticism: A Critical Companion*, ed. by Thomas Pfau and Robert F. Gleckner (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 41–54; Susan Bernstein, 'Re-Re-Re-Reading Jena', *MLN*, 110.4

(1995), 834–55; Kevin Newmark, ‘L’Absolu littéraire: Friedrich Schlegel and the Myth of Irony’, *MLN*, 107.5 (1992), 905–30 (907). For studies on the philosophy of the Romantics, see especially: Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Manfred Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik: Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989).

⁸ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, pp. 135–36, note 28.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 7.

¹⁰ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Subject of Philosophy*, ed. by Thomas Trezise (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 1. Lacoue-Labarthe asks whether literature exists ‘for anything but metaphysics’ (p. 2), or whether literature can mean ‘the letter (*gramma*, trace, mark, inscription ... writing)’ (p. 2). On the one hand, the pure absolute writing appears to be nothing but the metaphysical will which desires its own unity. On the other hand, the pure intransitive writing appears as the contingency of a supplement. Insofar as ‘literature’ is a metaphysical practice, a thinking of *parousia*, the question of literature is a philosophical question. It is a ‘solution’ to the metaphysical question of how to present philosophy: the question of a pure writing *a priori*. But ‘literature’ also puts in question the presence of metaphysics itself. This ambiguity is reflected in the question of the subject who cannot not-write literature.

¹¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 26; see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel’s Bons Mots)*, trans. by Céline Surprenant (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 164–65, note 17.

¹² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 26.

¹³ See Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 132, note 7.

¹⁴ Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. by L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 10. Regarding the reception of Hegel in modern France, see also: Michael S. Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁵ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 53.

¹⁶ See G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. by Arnold V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1976), pp. 106–08. Hegel writes: “‘*To sublata*’ [Aufheben] has a twofold meaning in the language: on the one hand it means to preserve, to maintain, and equally it also means to cause to cease, to put an end to. [...] The double meaning of the Latin *tollere* (which has become famous through the Ciceronian pun [Witz]: *tollendum est Octavium*) does not go so far; its affirmative determination signifies only a lifting up’ (Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of*

Logic, p. 107; G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, I–II, Werke 5–6, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969], Vol. 1, p. 114). See also Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, p. 24.

¹⁷ Barbara Cassin, ed., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 74.

¹⁸ Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, pp. 55–56.

¹⁹ See also Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, p. 56.

²⁰ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 54.

²¹ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 32; Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'Absolu littéraire*, p. 46.

²² Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 47. The later Heidegger's history of Being consists in the *destruktion*, or deconstruction (*ab-bau*), of the history of 'the metaphysics of the will'. Heidegger traces the beginning of this history to the initial distinction between whatness ('what a being is') and thatness ('that a being is'), which in later scholastic language will emerge as the division of Being between *essentia* and *existentia*. This division grounds metaphysics, but is also a division that metaphysics cannot think, since the origin of the division conceals itself in the very emergence of this division of Being. The division of Being is thus the oblivion of Being itself, 'the self-concealing of the origin of Being divided into whatness and thatness in favor of Being which opens out beings as beings and remains unquestioned *as Being*' (Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, pp. 3–4). The history of metaphysics is the history of (the concealment) of Being, which is our very possibility of history, but also a history that has become non-transparent. Regarding the development of the concept of 'will' in Heidegger's works, see Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

²³ Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, p. 48.

²⁴ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'Absolu littéraire*, p. 47.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)*, ed. by Hildegard Feick (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1995), p. 29.

²⁶ Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung*, p. 234.

²⁷ For Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's own analysis of the 'will to system', see Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 33.

²⁸ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 34.

²⁹ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 3.

³⁰ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 5.

³¹ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 9.

³² Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 280.

³³ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet & The Letter from the Young Worker*, trans. by Charlie Louth (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 7–8.

Regarding such a necessity or imperative of writing, see also Jeff Fort's *The Imperative to Write* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014) in which he traces how a Kantian categorical imperative, linked to a thought of the sublime, emerges in Kafka, Blanchot and Beckett.

³⁴ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 171; Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, p. 319.

³⁵ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 210.

³⁶ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, pp. 8–9.

³⁷ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 8.

³⁸ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 283.

³⁹ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 302.

⁴⁰ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 302; Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, pp. 551–52.

⁴¹ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, pp. 34.

⁴² Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 10; Barthes, *La Préparation du roman*, pp. 31–32; translation modified.

⁴³ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, pp. 143–44.

⁴⁴ See Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), p. 3. For readings of Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*, see: Mary Bittner Wiseman, *The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 15–37; George R. Wasserman, *Roland Barthes* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), pp. 23–46.

⁴⁵ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁶ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, p. 60.

⁴⁷ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, p. 61.

⁴⁸ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, pp. 87–88.

⁴⁹ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, p. 38.

⁵⁰ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, p. 61.

⁵¹ Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, p. 38.

⁵² Roland Barthes, 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?', in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. by Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 134–45 (p. 142).

⁵³ Barthes, 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?', p. 142.

⁵⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus*, trans. by Saul Anton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 19

⁵⁵ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 18. For a good analysis of Nancy's reading of Kant, see Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 26–48.

⁵⁶ See Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. xxii.

⁵⁷ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p., 19. Regarding the concept of *Darstellung*, see Martha B. Helfer, *The Retreat of Representation: The Concept of*

Darstellung in *German Critical Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

⁵⁸ Regarding this lecture course, see Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁵⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bxviii.

⁶⁰ Kant, *Critique*, Bxx.

⁶¹ Kant, *Critique*, Bxx.

⁶² Kant, *Critique*, Bxv; see Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. by Richard Taft, fifth edition, enlarged (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 6.

⁶³ Kant, *Critique*, Bxxii; see Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 11.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 5.

⁶⁶ See Kant, *Critique*, B72; Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 17.

⁶⁷ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Kant, *Critique*, Bxvi; see Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Kant, *Critique*, Bxx; see Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 8.

⁷⁰ See Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 15.

⁷¹ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 84.

⁷² Kant, *Critique*, A141/B180-81; see Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 141.

⁷³ Kant, *Critique*, A146/B186.

⁷⁴ Kant, *Critique*, A142/B181.

⁷⁵ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 92; Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Fünfte, vermehrte Ausgabe (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991), p. 131.

⁷⁶ Kant, *Critique*, A15/B29; see Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ Kant, *Critique*, A15/B29.

⁷⁸ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 93.

⁷⁹ Kant, *Critique*, A320/B377; see Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, pp. 16–17.

⁸⁰ Kant, *Critique*, A68; Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 20.

⁸¹ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 34.

⁸² Kant, *Critique*, A33/B49.

⁸³ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 34.

⁸⁴ Kant, *Critique*, A33/B49.

-
- ⁸⁵ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 132.
- ⁸⁶ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 141.
- ⁸⁷ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 144.
- ⁸⁸ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 150.
- ⁸⁹ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 30; see also Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 151.
- ⁹⁰ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 30.
- ⁹¹ Kant, *Critique*, A21.
- ⁹² Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 30.
- ⁹³ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 18.
- ⁹⁴ See Kant, *Critique*, A714–15.
- ⁹⁵ Kant, *Critique*, Bx.
- ⁹⁶ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 32.
- ⁹⁷ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 15.
- ⁹⁸ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 32.
- ⁹⁹ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 34.
- ¹⁰⁰ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 104.
- ¹⁰¹ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 44.
- ¹⁰² Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 126.
- ¹⁰³ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 85.
- ¹⁰⁴ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope*, p. 106.
- ¹⁰⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), p. 116; Friedrich Schlegel, ‘Gespräch über die Poesie’, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe. Bd. 2.*, pp. 284–362 (p. 350).
- ¹⁰⁶ Cf. the Kantian question in the first *Critique*: ‘How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?’ (Kant, *Critique*, B19).
- ¹⁰⁷ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 300.
- ¹⁰⁸ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 300.
- ¹⁰⁹ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 149.
- ¹¹⁰ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 148.
- ¹¹¹ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, p. 198.
- ¹¹² Gérard Genette, ‘The Obverse of Signs’, in *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 27–44 (p. 41). For studies concerned with Barthes as a ‘writer-critic’ and less with his place within the ‘movements’ of literary criticism, see: Andrew Brown, *Roland Barthes: The Figures of Writing* (Clarendon Press, 1992); Réda Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text*, trans. by Pat Fedkiew (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Brown notes (p. 3) that Barthes is neither simply a pure writer nor a pure literary theorist. Bensmaïa focuses on the fragmentary tendency of Barthes ‘reflective text’ in which the producer and the user, the author and the critic are brought together ‘in one writing movement’ (p. xxvi).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacob Bittner is a Part-time Lecturer in Rhetoric and the Humanities at the University of Copenhagen. He is also working as a translator and publisher at the Danish *Forlaget Senmund*. He received his PhD in philosophy and literature in 2017 from King's College London. His thesis concerned the emergence of the literary absolute, which he argues arises as a paradigm of literary theory at the end of the eighteenth century.

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

This article is copyright © 2017 *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).