

Roland Barthes Dialectician? In the Final Instance?

Andy Stafford

I Introduction

In a footnote to his 1960 essay in *Arguments*, ‘Authors and Writers’ – marginalised in his work, as with all of Roland Barthes’s good ideas – we find this suggestion on the *non*-dialectical nature of language:

Structure of reality and structure of language: no better indication of the difficulty of a coincidence between the two than the constant failure of the dialectic, once it becomes discourse: for language is not dialectic, it can only say: ‘we must be dialectical [*il faut être dialectique*]’, but it cannot be so itself: language is a representation without perspective, except precisely for the author’s; but the author dialecticizes himself, he does not dialecticize the world.¹

Not only a gentle allusion to the famous exhortation by Arthur Rimbaud, ‘Il faut être absolument moderne’, the injunction ‘*Il faut être dialectique* [we must be dialectical]’ – with the ‘we must’ written in italics in the original French – suggests that it is the position, the positioning, of the person analysing the outside world that counts for more than the objective nature of that outside world.² In so doing, Barthes was gesturing towards the ‘parametrisation’ that he would go on to praise in 1965 in his newspaper appreciation of Edgar Morin’s ‘dialectical writing’ and which we will consider in a moment. The strength of this idea about language furthermore is shown by its repetition across Barthes’s *œuvre*. In his 1971 piece ‘Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers’, for example, Barthes underlined once more how language is not dialectical: ‘language [...] allows only a movement in two stages [...] (does not allow the third term other than as pure oratorical flourish, rhetorical assertion, pious hope)’.³

Indeed, in his final essay in 1980, *Camera Lucida*, we find a similar suspicion towards the dialectic. Following his mother’s death,

Barthes's own death suddenly appears to him 'undialectical'; for, since he has no offspring, and in line with the Hegelian dialectic, his own death to come will produce nothing.⁴ Except that Barthes reverses chronology in the light of this non-dialectical (or anti-dialectical) situation, by considering his recently deceased mother as his daughter, as a product of his own life, and then proceeding to immortalise her by inscribing her into his essay on photography. As an attempt, which is finally in vain, by Barthes to turn things around, to reverse Time, and thereby overcoming death, the idea of a life that is undialectical is indebted also to Edgar Morin and to his thesis on the history of death, first published just as they first met in 1951 and the same year as an important article by Barthes, 'Michelet, l'Histoire et la Mort'.⁵ It is as if the idea of an undialectical being applied to himself in 1980 meant that – borrowing and lightly modifying the formulation above – they had in fact '*undialecticised*' themselves!

In this article nevertheless, we will see that Barthes can still be considered a dialectical thinker and writer, if not an analyst of the dialectic, writing on and with the dialectic. So how do we get at this dialectic in operation in his work? This is a major difficulty with Barthes's writing, with the following three options all to be avoided (at least in relation to Barthes). Firstly, despite Eric Marty's recent affirmation of a 'philosophical' Barthes, we must resist a simple discussion of the dialectic in philosophical terms, as this would ignore the 'suppleness' of the Barthesian dialectic.⁶ Secondly, and in contrast, any analysis of the dialectic that privileged the play(fulness) of writing would no doubt overlook the 'responsibility', political or intellectual, that guided Barthes; for, even in those writings not published in his lifetime such as his notebooks from his 1974 visit to China, Barthes feels the urgent need to write in a dialectical – rather than what Simon Leys calls an 'abyssal' – manner.⁷ Finally, though it might be tempting to consider the Barthesian dialectic as a dialectical unity of these first two options – indeed, we will be analysing the 'responsible' nature of the 'play' of language – it may well be too tidy a way to intertwine (our) analysis and (Barthes's) writing.

The non-systematic, even down-right contradictory, way in which Barthes deploys the dialectic notwithstanding, we can affirm that, as a philosophical category and method of analysis, the dialectic in his work is both classical and modern, as devised by Hegel and then Marx, but reinvented in the structuralist and poststructuralist age.⁸ According to Louis-Jean Calvet's biography, the young Barthes is inspired in 1932

by the dialectic used by the socialist and pacifist Jean Jaurès; but it is the ‘suppleness’ of the Marxist dialectic, from 1945 onwards – as explained to Barthes by his friend Trotskyist friend and fellow tuberculosis-sufferer Georges Fournié during discussions in the sanatorium in Leysin at the end of the War – that will influence his work during the 1950s.⁹ The ambiguity in his attitude towards the dialectic, at the same time, is contained in the ‘amputated’ dialectic, itself considered by Barthes in dialectical fashion, and this will become, in the 1970s, a fascination for the figure of the ‘spiral’. The spiral – ‘[t]hat dimension [*temps*] which is necessary for the dialectic’, as he put it in his seminar papers of 1973-1974 – goes a long way in explaining the complex and tortuous trajectory that he sees in his own work (as he looks back over it in 1973); and this is true even in the fragment ‘Dialectics’ in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, where he is reluctant to propose that the spiral might be, for him, the third term of the dialectic that is missing in his work, preferring to a synthesis, a ‘*translation* [déport]’.¹⁰

Might it therefore be an idea to trace the dialectic in Barthes by working through his career *in reverse*? This would have the advantage of avoiding a teleological approach, in which moving across the spiral in the opposite direction, and using a binary analysis such as that deployed in the recent biography by Marie Gil, would allow for the *movement* in Barthesian thought with respect to the dialectic. Gil very persuasively places ‘oscillation’ as the fundamental figure and movement of Barthes’s life; and, using a reverse trajectory, Gil highlights the paradox whereby the tragedy – the major event in Barthes’s life in her view – comes only at the very end of his life, when his mother dies only three years before he does.¹¹ Is there not however a danger of teleology in this schema of tragic oscillation proposed? Indeed, the ‘two-term dialectic’ that Gil seems to be using might be redolent of Jaurès and his famous comment in the introduction to his life-long work on the history of the French Revolution: ‘our interpretation of history will be both materialist with Marx and mystical with Michelet’.¹² So it is to Marx and then Michelet that our analysis must perforce turn.

II Dialectic of ‘Two Terms’

Writing to his friend Philippe Rebeyrol in July 1946, Barthes described, following his reading of Marx’s *The Holy Family*, how disappointed he was by Marxism.¹³ Such was the simplistic nature of materialist analysis that he would never be able to ‘overcome [his] repulsion for materialism as a philosophy’, which seemed to him to be one ‘of confusion, weakness and puerility, in the extreme’: ‘[n]ever’ would he be able to believe that ‘the *nec plus ultra* of psychology is behaviourism’. ‘What’s more’, continued Barthes, ‘all these Marxist commentators are ludicrous in their severity’. There was, he conceded however, ‘one sole exception’; indeed, Barthes found it ‘very telling to have been so persuaded by a mere commentator of Marx (Sidney Hook) and so disappointed (so far) by Marx himself’. Yet, Barthes underlined, ‘politically’ he could barely think in any way other than ‘Marxistly’ (using a slightly odd neologism: ‘*marxistement*'). The ‘description of the world’ by Marxists ‘alone’ was ‘correct’; and the ‘suppleness’ and the ‘intelligence’ he found in Marxist theory was sorely lacking in Marxian practice. This led Barthes to make two reservations as to his own political commitment; feeling ‘reticent for the moment’, he questioned, firstly, ‘the link between a materialist philosophy, notoriously insufficient, and the Marxist revolution’, which seemed to him to be ‘true’, secondly, ‘the place, the nature of the intellectual in this revolution’.

Hook was an American theoretician, and, in the 1930s, a Communist activist, whose 1933 book *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* exerted a major influence on American Marxism. Translated into French in 1936, *Pour comprendre Marx* was, for the Barthes of 1946, the only book by Hook available in French.¹⁴ It considered Philosophy and Marxist practice, using voluntarist conceptions of the actor in History drawn, on the one hand, from Karl Korsch for practice, and on the other, from Georg Lukács for the Marxian dialectic. As a non-orthodox Marxist, Hook was helping to reinvent Marxism, in the aftermath of its ‘castration’ by the Second and then the Third International, both of which, he suggested, had marginalised the ‘philosophy of action’ in Marxism. As a precursor to what Perry Anderson has called ‘Western Marxism’, Hook mixed the instrumentalist pragmatism of a John Dewey with the method of historical materialism; for Hook, it was the ‘suppleness’ of the dialectic in Marx that mattered in the marrying of the theoretical and the practical.¹⁵

If there is a clear trace of Barthes's interest in the 'suppleness' of the dialectic in the ideas of Sidney Hook, there is equal influence on his work of Lukácsian ideas, and most clearly in 'Myth Today' which we will consider in a moment. For example, in *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, Hook declares that 'the philosophy of Marx is a dialectical synthesis of those objective and subjective moments'.¹⁶ Despite Barthes's seeming desire in 1971 to deny any knowledge of Lukács after the Second World War, it is hard to miss the Lukácsian arguments in *Writing Degree Zero* as well as in the notion of the 'dialectique d'amour' (amorous dialectic) in the overlooked mythology that Barthes published in 1954.¹⁷ But the most important part of Barthes's work where we find the 'suppleness' of the dialectic is in his writings on the nineteenth-century (post-)romantic historian, Jules Michelet. For Barthes, the 'dance of the dialectic' (to borrow Bertell Ollman's expression¹⁸) is unmistakable in Michelet's voluminous writings, which Barthes 'devoured' during his war-time years in the sanatorium at Saint-Hilaire du Touvet.

Indeed, in his very first publication on Michelet, in a 1951 number of the prestigious journal *Esprit*, Barthes presented the historian as a god of the future, acting as a magistrate of History, all this by dint of his position of ulteriority; however – and this is crucial – in Barthes's eyes, Michelet is also an 'eater of History', that is, the person who walks *with* the actants of History – the 'people' – who are blind, so to speak, as to where their actions will end up.¹⁹ This gymnastic dialectic (at once, here *and* there) – what Edward Thompson calls 'the enormous condescension of posterity' – makes Michelet, to use Edmund Wilson's expression, the 'historian from below' *par excellence*. As Barthes maintained, the 'foundation of History' for Michelet was 'in the final instance' – he wrote in a manner similar to that of Friedrich Engels affirming Marx's materialism – 'the bodily death of millions of humans'; the 'body Historian' had found a way of '[r]emaking the life of the dead'.²⁰ Barthes was suggesting then that Michelet could, in a utopian manner, be simultaneously here and there, was able to put himself both outside and inside History.²¹ In his second publication on Michelet, in *Les Lettres nouvelles* in 1953, Barthes proposed that Michelet's 'History knew only a linear dialectic, two-stroke [*à deux temps*]'; whereas, here, in 1951, Michelet's was described as a 'dialectic of two terms'.²²

The resemblance between this dialectic of Michelet using two terms only, on the one hand, and the one deployed by Barthes in 1968 with respect to Honoré de Balzac's 1830 tale *Sarrasine* on the other is

striking. A crucial aspect of the levels of analysis in the resultant essay of 1970, *S/Z*, is precisely the mobility of the reader (aware, critical), on one side, and that of the 'blind' protagonist, Sarrasine, on the other; to be able to be both a critic of the strange story that Balzac delegates to a narrator to tell and, at the same time, to trace the castrating trap of the anecdote (which is itself narrated by an old man to a young woman at a party) could be described as a dialectical form of reading, as it is able to be both external and internal to the plot. What Barthes called 'paragrammatic' literary criticism deployed a particular type of analysis which, to use Barthes's words about Michelet in the 1950s, consists of 'overview [*survol*]' of the story (or history, in Michelet) of the tricked sculptor Sarrasine, *as well as* the 'tableau' of the same story, in what Barthes calls a 'stereographic' reading.²³ It is certainly not new for a novelist to put themselves inside the head of a fictional character; but a literary critic, using a dialectical, toing-and-froing between the outside and the inside of the story, certainly is! Sarrasine in Balzac – and the 'people' in Michelet – must be the object of a level of subjectivity in which the reader (and writer) must experience the blindness of the actants. The 'all possible readers' level of reading that Barthes assigns to the notion of general reader operates in tandem with the approach of the literary critic who must recognise what he called in 1960 the writer's 'failed commitment' [*engagement manqué*], the ability only to glance at 'the Promised land' resulting in an oblique form of criticism.²⁴ This resembles precisely the 'two-term' dialectic that Barthes found in the work of Jules Michelet, in which the historian – a populist scribe of the people – sees and, as people, does not see, what happens in the end.²⁵

It is not surprising then – though the wording might startle a little – that in his favourable review in *Critique* in 1954 of *Michelet par lui-même*, Bernard Dort congratulated Barthes (and the whole collection *par lui-même*) for the 'totalitarian' approach (totalitarian in the good sense of attempting to reach totality). Indeed, 'totalité' was one of the three key categories of the dialectic according to Engels and to Lukács, and we will now see how the dialectic fares in the hands of Barthes the mythologist.

III Mythologies, or the 'Amputated' Dialectic

'The study of myth leads us to contradictory findings.'
(Claude Lévi-Strauss²⁶)

'At bottom, it would only be the degree zero which could resist myth.'
(Barthes, 'Myth Today'²⁷)

'Myth [...] does away with all dialectics.'
(Barthes, 'Myth Today'²⁸)

In the discussion of semiology in 'Myth Today', written in Summer 1956, Barthes recognises with regret that there is in critical thought, including semiology, the risk of amputating the dialectic:

The important thing is to see that the unity of an explanation cannot be based on the amputation of one or the other of its approaches, but, as Engels said, on the dialectical coordination of the particular sciences it makes use of. This is the case with mythology: it is part both of semiology inasmuch as it is a formal science, and of ideology inasmuch as it is a historical science: it studies ideas-in-form. (p. 97)

Yet, Barthes seems to justify this same amputation when he defends ideologism against Stalinism at the end of the essay, and to have perhaps forgotten the categories of the dialectic in Engels. Indeed, though criticising Michelet in 1951 for his use of the 'amputated' dialectic, Barthes seems to become influenced by this same truncated dialectic in 'Myth Today'.

Having dismantled both bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology in the preceding 50 essays, he proceeds at the end of *Mythologies* to a theorisation of the semiological method that he has used, but this is done in the political and cultural context of 1956. Demoralised by the marked decline in the fortunes of a truly popular theatre in France, of which he had been an active member between 1953 and 1956, Barthes characterises the position of the mythologist as one in which the 'Promised Land' cannot be seen; this leads the mythologist to accept that that they are in some sense excluded from a truly people's culture, and

that consequently ideologism, as a form of metalanguage, must be operated from the outside of contemporary culture; but this, he insists, is better than Stalinist abdication:

It is true that ideologism resolves the contradiction of alienated reality by an amputation, not a synthesis (but as for Zhdanovism, it does not even resolve it): wine is objectively good, and *at the same time*, the goodness of wine is a myth: here is the aporia. (p. 187)

This notion of an aporia seems to be a more mature version of the ‘amorous dialectic’ that he had theorised in 1954 in the mythology ‘Phenomenon or Myth?’, and it is to become – in dialectical terms, the ‘amputated synthesis’ – the overall method of Barthesian analysis for the rest of his career:

But exposing [myth] is really nothing more than explaining it; and that’s me more than ever linked to my historical moment, engaged with it in a real dialectic of love. For, in so far as every mythology is the palpable surface of human alienation, it is humanity which I see in all myths: I hate this alienation, but I realise that for the time being this is the only way I can locate my contemporaries.²⁹

So the amputation of the dialectic – at least in ‘Myth Today’, drafted in 1956 – takes on a tactical importance:

Against a certain quixotism of synthesis, quite platonic incidentally [*hélas*], all criticism must consent to the *ascesis*, to the artifice of analysis; and in analysis, it must match method and language.³⁰

Is this holding-back akin to the refusal to conclude that Flaubert proposed?³¹ Or rather, is it part of a ‘responsible’, politically-committed formalism?³² Clearly, Barthes considers the truncated dialectic – amputated and then formalised – to be the most supple and mobile weapon in the battle against myth’s ‘motility’. Indeed, though following Marx’s idea in the post-face to the second edition *Capital* that the dialectic is like ‘an abomination for the bourgeoisie’, the Barthes of *Mythologies* uses the dialectic as a weapon against the ‘immobilism’ of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois myth; but his analysis begins to accept that myth too is mobile, agile, dialectical. Therefore, his critique of the

amputated dialectic itself has to be ... dialectical.³³ Thus, it is with a certain formalism in the conception and use of the dialectic that Barthes moves into the 1960s and it is this that dominates in his praise for another dialectician, his friend and colleague Edgar Morin.

IV Morin and 'Parametrism'

'And even when I am affirming, I am still asking'
(Jacques Rigaut, cited by Barthes in *Théâtre Populaire* in 1955³⁴)

Barthes's 1965 article praising Morin's 'dialectical writing' contains much that could be called Hegelian formalism, promoting an 'open', two-term dialectic, that is not synthesised as it would be in Hegel and Marx; and Barthes uses elements of Marx's early thought to do this. Also collected in Barthes's *Essais critiques*, but written seven years before the 'Authors and Writers' essay that we have briefly analysed above, 'The World-Object', in its original 1953 version, has as its epigraph a quotation by Marx: 'L'histoire ne peut répondre aux vieilles questions qu'en s'en posant de nouvelles'.³⁵ Barthes quotes this again in his 1965 article on Morin's dialectical writing.

Barthes had been using Marx's quote, in the 1953 essay on seventeenth-century Dutch painting, as part of his 'degree zero' thesis on the 'longue durée' manner (as much Trotskyan as it is Braudelien) in which bourgeois ideology came to ideological power not spontaneously with the Glorious Revolution of 1789-1794 that handed political power to the bourgeois class, but over centuries of ideologico-cultural implantation and socio-economic ascendancy. But here, in 1965, Barthes's dialectical understanding is applied, using Marx's quote, to the relationship between research on the one hand, and the writing-up of this research on the other as found in Morin's work. Barthes uses Marx's (somewhat enigmatic) quotation to illustrate the 'open' dialectic used by Morin, but without ignoring his own earlier views on the non-dialectics of language, to see whether, though research can be dialectical, writing itself tends to fail to be dialectical.

Barthes begins by describing Morin's work as triply dialectical: firstly in its inspiration (Hegel and Marx); secondly in its understanding of the contradictory forces operating on any one phenomenon in history

and which Morin is not afraid to totalise (in the way that Morin includes the future as a 'natural dimension of time'); finally, and most importantly, in its 'dialectical imagination', or rather, Barthes corrects himself, in its 'imagining', in its ability to 'see ideas, not in their separation, their cultural ranking, their attachments, but as a sort of nomadic substance, of which the book, from one end to the other, from Freud to Marx, from the revolution to science, is the vast territory of migration'.³⁶ Whilst this imagination in Morin's work, continues Barthes, is 'prospective, syncretic', it remains critical: 'it sees with equal force what is, what must not be and what must be'. Barthes then cites the key phrase by Morin, and which is crucial to the dialectic at work in his research: "The principle of synthesis in no way extinguishes the principle of antagonism".³⁷

It is by following this non-synthesised dialectic that Morin's writing can take up this 'wager [which] is not easy', whereby in the modern period (as opposed to the time of Bonald, Fourier and Michelet) the dialectic is a 'demand that is much more severe than utopia'. 'But', reiterates Barthes, 'language opposes to dialectical development, to the view of contrary phenomena, movements and simultaneities, a natural resistance'. This natural resistance to the dialectic is (as we mentioned earlier) the 'linear, monodic' structure of language, in which the multiple phenomena *all at once* that is reality, can indeed be represented in language but only in series, 'one after the other': analysis is language's domain, not synthesis or antagonism; and, in a premonition of the *post-structuralist* insistence on *différance* – as opposed to the more static *différence* of structuralism (*différer* in French, as Derrida famously pointed out, means 'to defer' as well as 'to differ') – Barthes insists on the *temporal* aspect to meaning in a sentence as indicative of language's *inability* to say more than one thing at once, of its failure to be dialectical.³⁸ Indeed Morin, says Barthes, has unceasingly to live with this 'squaring of the circle', in which his writing (Barthes does not give any direct examples from Morin's work) is 'both direct and baroque, vigorous and *précieuse*, situated outside of literature and within rhetoric', as it attempts to impose on language that which the latter rejects the most: 'a dialectical dimension'. Barthes now cites the quote from Marx above to illustrate the dialectic in Morin's writing, how it hoists the problems encountered onto a higher, unexpected level:

As soon as an antinomy threatens to become fixed, Morin transports it 'elsewhere', gives it some new terms that

surround it and modifies the system of which it was a part; [...] he thus operates a veritable enlarging of meaning.³⁹

Clearly thinking back to the Saussurean model of the sign that he had illustrated in 'Myth Today', Barthes suggests that this enlarging of meaning is not a metaphor, since a sign can have meaning only if it can be integrated into a higher order, a word being a word only because it is in a sentence. Thus, Morin's skill, says Barthes, is to take the fragmentary and heteroclit sign and to try and always imagine a 'sentence', or wider horizon, that can underpin meaning. This is for Morin 'the resilience of dialectical discourse'; but the movement that it entails is maintained at the level of writing:

The object of study is never given without its contradictory attributes, is only ever defined as a *meeting-point* [*croisement*], and which is falsely symmetrical, of a number of terms (this is the ancient notion of chiasma), whereby rhetoric becomes a veritable dialectical instrument; this is because only form is able, in the final instance, to correct the inability of language to make sense of the object's movement, of its alternating [*contrariété*] and generally of its *other* logic.⁴⁰

This is Morin's 'gongorism', suggests Barthes; and it is whilst describing this 'gongorism' that Barthes returns to his idea that writing cannot itself be dialectical.⁴¹ In so doing, he pursues the points on language and dialectics that he had made in 'Authors and Writers'.

Reality, he asserts, might be '*several things at once*' – that is, contradictory, even dialectical – but language is 'linear, monadic [*monodique*]'. It is this structure of language that prevents the writer from being dialectical in language; for the language of a writer is obliged to list these contradictory realities one after the other, that is, only in serial, not synthetic, fashion. Thus 'a writer', asserts Barthes, 'can declare the dialectic, but not represent it'. Morin's work however, and especially his writing in Barthes's view, seems to get around this problem. It is, 'in the end, the expression of a serious struggle', the stakes of which are normally hidden by the 'platitude' of classical language and its desire for 'taste' and by the 'unhealthy ablutions' typical of the language purists. The author [*écrivain*], says Barthes, gesturing back to his thesis in 'Authors and Writers', 'is condemned to achieve nothing'; but, 'by dint of *choosing* a way of speaking, the writer can approximate by fascination

that which reality achieves by construction'; and this is the case for Morin:

by dint of enunciating in a thousand different ways the opposing and future dimensions of phenomena, [Morin's writing] ends up imposing the requirement of dialectics.⁴²

This is done, suggests Barthes, in such a way that, having read Morin, it is impossible to see things 'from one side'; or at least, if one insists on doing so, it is one's loss.

There is clearly a gesture not just forwards to post-structuralism, but backwards, with the reference to rhetoric and dialectic, towards Aristotle.⁴³ But this is not Barthes's main point. As so often with Barthes's enigmatic descriptions of others' writing, it is perhaps more of an injunction to himself on how to write (or, in many other cases, how *not* to write). It will be instructive therefore to finish this consideration of language and dialectics by looking at Barthes's views on Marx and language. Following May 1968, in the years of turmoil 1969-1972, Barthes moves back, if only briefly, to Marx, having seemingly left behind his thought and writing, from 1957 onwards, for the euphoria of semiology that lasted, at least, until 1967.

V 'Undialectical' Marx

'[W]hat, *at the level of discourse*, distinguishes dialectics from compromise?'
(Barthes, 'Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers'⁴⁴)

From the work of Philippe Roger, who suggests that Barthes learns very quickly in the 1950s how to 'retordre le bâton' [bend the stick] in a dialectical way, to that of Jean-Claude Milner, who insists on the Marxist 'underpinning' in Barthes's approach to cultural and literary analysis, Barthes's interest in Marx and Marxism has been broadly covered.⁴⁵ But little mention has been made of its engagement with language. One critic has looked, as part of a study of Barthes's 'xyloglossia', at the cherry-tree example from Marx's *German Ideology* used in 'Myth Today'; for our purposes here, it will be instructive to concentrate on the parallels of Marx's work on Capital and Barthes's complex research on language; firstly, because Marx defines Capital as a relation, thereby corroborating

Maurice Godelier's view that Marx was one of the first Structuralists; secondly, and more importantly, Barthes's 'return' to Marx in 1971 (following over a decade of intensive semiological research across the 1960s) entailed the outline of a new, startling project.⁴⁶

In an interview in 1971, with Guy Scarpetta in *Promesse*, Barthes expressed his desire to work on a political theory of language. What is striking about this suggestion is not so much the political nature of the project – we are, after all, in the ultra-radical period that followed the first phase of May 68, with the Maoist turn, in particular of *Tel Quel*, now underway – but the parallel that Barthes gives to the project: 'something like the *Capital* of linguistic science'.⁴⁷ The discussion with Scarpetta then moves onto a much wider terrain. Reacting to Scarpetta's assertion that language is not a 'superstructure', Barthes suggests that, whether language is a superstructure or not, 'the rapport with language is political'. Barthes qualifies this by adding that one would not know it in a country like France which is historically and culturally "tassée" [squashed down] and where 'the French are simply *asleep*, made apathetic [*chloroformés*] by centuries of classical authority'; and he contrasts this with countries that are 'less well-off [*moins nantis*]', such as Arab countries emerging from colonialism (and no doubt specifically Morocco, from where he has recently returned); there the link between language and politics is a 'burning' question.⁴⁸ It is worth quoting the description of the project in full:

We are missing a political theory of language, a methodology which would allow us to see the ways in which language is appropriated and to study the 'ownership' of the means of enunciation, something like the *Capital* of linguistic science.⁴⁹

One might argue that Barthes had already done this, to some extent at least, during the 1950s, when he mobilised his demystifications. However, the use of Marx's cherry-tree in 'Myth Today' carries a certain pessimism with it.⁵⁰ It illustrates for Barthes, firstly, the fact that language, *pace* Sartre, is mediated, and secondly, and more importantly, that myth – the opposite, and suppressor, of dialectics – prevents all unmediated communication between humans. Here in 1971, by contrast, Barthes's disillusion with Marxian progress in the second half of the 1950s – he said that the mythologist can see no 'Promised Land' in 'Myth Today', let us remember – is, albeit temporarily, reversed following the explosion of 1968. Suddenly Marx returns to Barthes's

sights in the wake of the radical sixties, not in the tragedy-farce spiral so beloved of Marx, rather in a replay of the phosphorus metaphor that is deployed in *Writing Degree Zero*: Barthes's explicit interest in Marx here in 1971, not so long before his description in 1977 of Marxism's deployment as 'stupidity', seems to burn most brightly when it is close to extinguishing itself.⁵¹

In his contribution to the special number of *Tel Quel* on his own *œuvre* in 1971, 'Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers', Barthes returns, in a brief section called 'The Chain of Discourses', to the idea that we have seen in the 1965 article on Morin that language cannot itself be dialectical. In contrast to his view of Morin's 'dialectical writing', Barthes now argues that Marx, despite his intense and crucial use of the dialectic, is not at all a dialectical writer. Barthes's argument relies on what he has said already about the linear, monadic nature of language being not conducive to language having an ability to show the contradictory, multiple sides to reality. He uses the examples of Chomsky as a rebuttal of Bloomfield's behaviourism and then semiotics' supersession of Chomsky's 'mentalism (or anthropologism)' to suggest that 'a new discourse can only emerge as the *paradox* which goes against (and often goes for) the surrounding or preceding *doxa*, can only see the day as difference, distinction, working loose *against* that which sticks to it'. Having suggested that Marx's 'discourse is almost entirely *paradoxical*, the *doxa* being Proudhon, now someone else, and so on', he moves, with Marx, towards Vico and the two-term dialectic of the spiral:

This twofold movement of separation and renewal results not in a circle but [...] in a spiral, and it is in this *drift* of circularity (of paradoxical form) that historical determinations are articulated.⁵²

It is precisely this (somewhat surprising) view of Marx's own undialectical language that leads Barthes towards a two-term dialectic in his own writing, and which seems to be linked to the 'ideologism' that he had described as the only option for the mythologist in 1957 that we mentioned above and which, in the absence of any sight of the 'Promised Land', truncated the form and outcome of its critique.

In his brief but incisive commentary on 'The Chain of Discourses' fragment in 'Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers', Ed White argues that this discussion shows Barthes asserting that 'dialectical thinking simply does not exist'; only for White then to contradict himself somewhat, a few lines later, when he suggests that Barthes's

fragment tries ‘to give an alternative of [*sic*] dialectical thinking’.⁵³ White seems to agree with Barthes that Marx’s writing is ‘paradoxical’, not dialectical; but this is possibly a result of both Barthes’s and White’s arguments working with a limited set of examples, that is ‘Proudhon etc’. It would seem to me that Marx is, at different times, ‘paradoxical’ in Barthes’s sense and also (classically) dialectical, depending on the context.⁵⁴ Though Barthes is clearly influenced by Althusserian categories in 1971 – especially the ‘epistemological break’ that Althusser saw Marx operating, largely, in *The German Ideology* – the above formulation does not seem Althusserian in any way.⁵⁵ Furthermore, in the militant 1971 essay ‘Languages at War in a Culture at Peace’, Barthes sets out how language is deeply class-divided, carrying this argument into the ‘Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers’ essay in *Tel Quel*.⁵⁶

Here, he argues in the post-68 world – unlike in Marx’s time – the modern world of mass communication facing the proletariat requires ‘representatives ... in a word, *oblates* who devote themselves to the proletarian interpretation of cultural facts’.⁵⁷ But, as Barthes had already argued in ‘Myth Today’ with regard to the exclusion from the proletariat of the mythologist, these ‘oblates’ have a ‘class situation [which] is not that of the proletariat’; furthermore, he asks, if the proletariat is ‘separated’ from intellectuals by its petty-bourgeois culture and is ‘mute’ because it is cut off from intellectuals (and whose radical critique is the ‘unconscious’ of the intellectual), how do we join ‘the materialist and the Freudian dialectics’? In a replay (or spiral) of his ‘Promised Land’ of ‘Myth Today’ whereby the dialectic cannot act, Barthes in 1971 is only more convinced that the language of materialist cultural critique does not speak for the masses, that it can only be ‘a silk shot through with tactics [*une moire de tactiques*]’.⁵⁸ By suggesting that this ‘moire de tactiques’ has to be mobile because different arguments over the complexity of contemporary mass culture are ‘occasionally contradictory’ and above all ‘established on different temporalities [*temps*, in italics in French]’, Barthes seems to be moving his point about language not being dialectical – but monodic and linear – onto the level of cultural critique (which is for Barthes, after all, only language).

One answer to his conundrum cited as the epigraph above, about dialectic as compromise, is that offered by *Tel Quel* in its Maoist phase of 1971 (and to which Barthes alludes when he mentions those ‘who finally prefer to give up the problem, to dismiss all “culture” [...] entail[ing] the destruction of all discourse’); another is his own desire to write as Nietzsche does ‘from abyss to abyss’.⁵⁹ When Barthes suggests that the

dialectic of criticism is one of tactics, it is indeed the writer who is dialectised, and not the world. It is here that Barthes seems supremely dialectical, in the compromising sense (as illustrated by the quotation at the beginning of this section). The 'bastard' (third) term upon which Barthes alights in 'Authors and Writers' in 1960 – with which to suggest that there are those writers who combine elements of Author *and* Writer – seems to summarise well his own approach to writing throughout his career.⁶⁰ The formalist way in which Barthes understands and uses the dialectic resembles what Maurice Merleau-Ponty called the 'hyper-dialectic'.⁶¹ We might be tempted therefore to modify slightly Barthes's enigmatic allusion to Rimbaud quoted at the start of this essay, '*il faut être dialectique*': 'we must be *dialectical*'.

Notes

¹ Roland Barthes, 'Authors and Writers', in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. by Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 188. As I have pointed out in my article on Barthes's 'dialectical' way of writing in his diary of his 1974 visit to China – 'Roland Barthes's *Travels in China*: Writing A Diary of Dissidence within Dissidence?', in *Deliberations: The Journals of Roland Barthes*, ed. by Neil Badmington (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 96 note 3 – there is a sentence missing in the English translation: 'the *spoken* dialectic', continues Barthes, 'is wishful thinking' ['La dialectique *parlée* est un vœu pieux']; see Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), p. 150 note 5.

² The Rimbaud quotation comes from the final 'Adieu' section of his 1873 writings *A Season in Hell*, trans. by Enid Rhodes Peschel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 105.

³ Roland Barthes, 'Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers', in *A Barthes Reader*, p. 388.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida, Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Fontana, 1984), pp. 71-72.

⁵ See Roland Barthes, 'Michelet, l'Histoire et la mort' ('Michelet, History, Death'), *Esprit*, April 1951, 497-510, republished in Roland Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 2002), vol. I, pp. 109-23. (References to the *Œuvres complètes* will henceforth be in the form of OC, followed by volume and page number.) The reference to Edgar Morin's work on death in the original French version of *Camera Lucida* is not included in the English version; in the French version, Barthes refers to Morin's very first book, and its use of the Hegelian view of the dialectics of death (OC V, p. 848); in "To Philosophize Is to Learn to Die" – in *Signs in Culture: Roland Barthes Today*, ed. by Steven Ungar and Betty R. McGraw (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), pp. 3-31 – Gary Shapiro points out that Hegel 'formulated the principle that the child is the death of its parents' as part of human dialectics, and hence that Barthes's own death, given his childlessness, is 'undialectical'; see Edgar Morin, *L'homme et la mort*, new ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1970), pp. 281-293, especially p. 287. Morin's book was originally published in 1951.

⁶ Éric Marty, 'Barthes philosophe', *Le Monde des livres*, 23 January 2015, 2.

⁷ In the English translation of Leys' work, 'abyssale' is translated as 'unfathomable'; see 'Footnote to a Barthesian Opusculé', in Simon Leys, *Broken Images: Essays on Chinese Culture and Politics*, trans. by Steve Cox (London: Allison and Busby, 1979), p. 88); see also Stafford, 'Roland Barthes's *Travels in China*', p. 86.

⁸ On this 'new' dialectic, see Malgorzata Kowalska, *Dialectics Beyond Dialectics: Essay on Totality and Difference* (Oxford and Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2015).

⁹ Louis-Jean Calvet, *Roland Barthes: A Biography*, trans. by Sarah Wykes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 23; on the perceived

‘suppleness’ of Fournié’s version of the dialectic, see the 1971 interview with Barthes, ‘Responses: Interview with *Tel Quel*’, trans. by Véréne Grieshaber, in *The Tel Quel Reader*, ed. by Patrick French and Roland-François Lack (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 252, though the term ‘souplesse’ in the French is rendered as ‘flexibility’.

¹⁰ See Roland Barthes, *Le Lexique de l’auteur. Séminaire à l’École pratique des hautes études 1973-1974* (Paris: Seuil, 2010), p. 274 and *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 68-69.

¹¹ See Marie Gil, *Roland Barthes. Essai biographique* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), especially chapter 0.

¹² See Jaurès’s ‘Introduction’ to *The Socialist History of the French Revolution of 1900*, available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/jaures/1901/history/introduction.htm>. Accessed 2 June 2017. On Marx’s early theorisation of a non-synthesised dialectic, see Jean-François Gava, *Contrariété sans dialectique. Logique et politique hégéliennes face à la critique sociale marxienne* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2011).

¹³ A good number of the letters from Roland Barthes to Philippe Rebeyrol are not included in *Album* (Paris: Seuil, 2015, due to be translated for Columbia University Press in January 2018); and this correspondence, currently being catalogued at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (under the code ‘NAF 28630 – Fond Roland Barthes’), was very kindly shown to me by M. Rebeyrol before his death and before being transferred from the ‘Fonds Barthes’ at l’IMEC to the BNF. The translations of this unpublished correspondence are all my own.

¹⁴ I have used the French version: Sidney Hook, *Pour comprendre Marx*, trans. by Mario Rietti (Paris: Gallimard, 1936). Hook’s analysis contains important considerations on myth and ideology in an alienated society which may have influenced the mythologies Barthes wrote ten years later.

¹⁵ See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London, Verso, 1979) and Hook, *Pour comprendre Marx*, pp. 14-34, pp. 59ff. See also Hook’s study of historical praxis, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (New York: John Day, 1943) which tries to describe the Marxian notions of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ in terms of pragmatism. On this subject, Barthes wrote the following in the newspaper version of ‘Triumph and Rupture of Bourgeois Writing’ (*Combat*, 9 November 1950, 4), in a discussion about the ‘deep rapport’ between ‘Form’ and ‘History’ not included in *Writing Degree Zero*: ‘(It may be [...] that the problem of the determinism of superstructures will one day be resolved by looking more at forms and structures rather than at the traditional history of ideas where the intermediaries [relais] are more numerous and more complex)’.

¹⁶ Hook, *Pour comprendre Marx*, p. 14. Barthes’s investment in Marxism was highly ambivalent. In August 1946, he wrote to Rebeyrol to express his admiration for Marx’s 1851 essay on the *coup d’état* by Napoleon III: ‘I have

risen above Marxism; I think that I have got it out of my system [*exorcisé*]; I have just been reading, with greatest pleasure, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, a beautiful work, powerful in its cohesion, its air of truth'. 'But', he added, 'our Marxists today, so pretentious, so proud of their materialist philosophy, are miles away from the *active* intelligence of this book, from its suppleness even. Indeed, someone who believes, to whatever extent, in literature cannot be absolutely Marxist. It requires such partisanship'.

¹⁷ Barthes, 'Responses', p. 254; Barthes, 'Phénomène ou mythe?', a 'petite mythologie' which appeared in *Les Lettres nouvelles* in December 1954 but was not included in *Mythologies* (OC, V, pp. 1022-23).

¹⁸ For Ollman's work on the dialectic, see http://www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/docs/dd_ch01.php. Accessed 9 July 2017.

¹⁹ Barthes, 'Michelet, l'Histoire et la mort', OC I, pp. 110-12.

²⁰ Barthes, 'Michelet, l'Histoire et la mort', OC I, p. 122. 'In the final instance' is a 'materialist' expression that can be found regularly in Barthes's writing; it is redolent of Althusser for an older Barthes, but here, in 1951, it is to Engels that Barthes seems to be alluding; see the preface to Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/preface.htm>. Accessed 7 July 2017.

²¹ See the first part of Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station*, chapters 1-4, on Michelet, which, published in 1940, preceded Barthes's study of Michelet by a decade. As a colleague and comrade of Sidney Hook, Wilson also put forward a voluntarist view of history. Though there is no evidence to suggest that Barthes had read Wilson's work on Michelet, the similarities are striking. According to Wilson, Michelet's historiography was inspired by Vico, Bacon and Grotius, and underlined the 'organic' nature of human progress; similarly, Barthes pointed to the *Scienza Nuova* by Vico – a form of sociology conceived long before the birth of the discipline of the same name according to Wilson – as a major influence on Michelet. And just as Barthes will do, Wilson underlines the contradictory aims in Michelet's historiography. Firstly, Wilson suggested, Michelet had tried to find a fusion of distinct materials, in his keenness to establish the interrelations between diverse forms of human activities (similar to the notions of 'structure' and 'tableau' in Barthes's Michelet). Secondly, Michelet wanted to capture the colour and feel of a period, that is, by returning to the past whilst being (or, pretending to be) ignorant of the outcome (this is the 'récit' in Michelet for Barthes), maintaining the illusion of having no historian's distance. Finally, in terms that prefigured those of Barthes, Wilson put an emphasis on the capacity of Michelet's prose of supplying a general tableau whilst, at the same time, focusing attention on a single historical object, which used a technique of narrating and then at certain moments breaking off to draw the large historical tableau. Quoting, just as Barthes does (OC I, pp. 433-44), Proust's pastiche of Michelet, Wilson insisted on how much Michelet

had tried to live the history that he was narrating. For Wilson, the enormous contradiction in Michelet's life and in the writing strategy deployed in his historiography, was that Michelet loved the people, saw them as the agents of History, but that, Wilson noted, it was Michelet alone who spoke, acted and resurrected the past.

²² 'The alterity of historical objects [in Michelet's writing] is never total, History is always familiar, as Time is there only to support an identity between them; its movement is equational, its dialectic is of two terms' (OC I, p. 111); see also Roland Barthes, 'Féminaire de Michelet', *Les Lettres nouvelles*, November 1953, 1092-93. The latter text is not included in his *Ceuvres complètes*.

²³ Roland Barthes, *Michelet*, trans. by Richard Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 20-22 and *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 15.

²⁴ See the interview with Barthes in 1970 in *Les Nouvelles littéraires* (OC III, p. 645); Barthes, 'Authors and Writers', p. 188.

²⁵ There are some interesting similarities, parallels and dissonances in the Michelet presented by Barthes in relation to Walter Benjamin's unfinished final writings, the famous fragments partly inspired by Michelet and written in 1940, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1973), pp. 255-66.

²⁶ This is my translation of: 'L'étude du mythe nous amène à des constatations contradictoires', in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1958), p. 229, considerably different from that in Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 208.

²⁷ Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today', in *A Barthes Reader*, p. 119.

²⁸ Barthes, 'Myth Today', p. 132.

²⁹ Barthes, 'Phénomène ou mythe?', p. 953 (OC V, p. 1023).

³⁰ Barthes, 'Myth Today', p. 96.

³¹ 'The obsession with wanting to conclude is one of the most deadly and sterile manias belonging to humanity. Every religion and every philosophy claims to have God in it, to have looked the infinite up and down and to know the recipe of happiness. What arrogance and what emptiness! I consider, on the contrary, that the greatest minds and the greatest works have never concluded'. Gustave Flaubert, letter dated 23 October 1865 to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie, in Flaubert, *Correspondance V* (Paris: éditions Louis Conard, 1929), p. 111 (my translation); my gratitude to Diana Knight for having located this quotation.

³² Barthes wrote: 'Less terrorized by the specter of "formalism", historical criticism might have been less sterile; it would have understood that the specific study of forms does not in any way contradict the necessary principles of totality and History. On the contrary: the more a system is specifically defined in its forms, the more amenable it is to historical criticism. To parody a well-

known saying, I shall say that a little formalism turns one away from History, but that a lot brings one back to it'; 'Myth Today', p. 97.

³³ On Barthes's response to the 'motility' of myth, see Andy Stafford, 'Dialectics of Form(s) in Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*', *Nottingham French Studies*, 47.2 (Summer 2008), 6-18.

³⁴ Barthes, 'Editorial', OC I, p. 524.

³⁵ See 'Le monde objet', in *Les Lettres nouvelles*, June 1953, 394. Marx's unpublished idea that 'History can answer the old questions only by posing new ones' is from an unfinished 1842 article. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), vol. I, pp. 182-83.

³⁶ Roland Barthes, 'Une écriture dialectique', *Combat*, 5 July 1965, 6, republished in OC II, pp. 718-19, all translations of which are my own. The 'book' to which Barthes refers is Morin's 1965 study *Introduction à une politique de l'homme* (Paris: Seuil, 1965).

³⁷ Interestingly, in his 1957 piece 'Brecht, Marx et l'Histoire', Barthes had argued a parallel point about Brecht's use of history in relation to Marx and Engel's conception of the representation of history in theatre; unlike the views of Marx and Engels, Brecht's theatre, wrote Barthes, 'provokes History but does not divulge it, [...] poses the burning problem of History without resolving it' (OC I, p. 909).

³⁸ Barthes, 'Une écriture dialectique', OC II, p. 718. By an interesting parallel, Barthes and Derrida had, in their early careers, both been impressed by the work of the Franco-Vietnamese philosopher Tran Duc Thao's *Phénoménologie et matérialisme dialectique* of 1951 (Paris: Gordon & Breach, 1971), which Barthes favourably reviewed in *Combat* in 1951 (OC I, pp. 130-31) and from which Derrida took inspiration in his postgraduate studies; Fredric Jameson has recently regretted the manner in which the work on the dialectic by Derrida in his 1954 Master's thesis on Husserl (published in 1990) disappeared in his subsequent work; see Jameson, *The Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 103.

³⁹ Barthes, 'Une écriture dialectique', OC II, pp. 718-19.

⁴⁰ Barthes, 'Une écriture dialectique', OC II, p. 719.

⁴¹ Luis de Gongora (1561-1627) was a Spanish poet known for his florid, obscure, baroque rhetoric that deploys paradoxes and puns.

⁴² Barthes, 'Une écriture dialectique', OC II, p. 719.

⁴³ Writing about a parallel project that he was running on Rhetoric at the same time as his 1965 essay on Morin, Barthes wonders whether Aristotle is not the key philosopher of 'so-called mass' contemporary culture and of that which underpins any critique of this culture; see also his suggestion that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is actively beholden to the "psychology" of the public', a dialectical understanding of culture if ever there was one. Roland Barthes, 'Old Rhetoric', in *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 22-23.

⁴⁴ *A Barthes Reader*, p. 398.

⁴⁵ See Philippe Roger, *Roland Barthes, roman* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1986), pp. 323-43 and 'Barthes et les années Marx', in *Communications*, 63 (1996), 39-66; Jean-Claude Milner, *Le Pas philosophique de Roland Barthes* (Paris: Verdier, 2003), p. 58 note 7.

⁴⁶ Douglas Smith, 'Barthes's Xyloglossia: Structuralism and the Language of Wood', *Nottingham French Studies*, 53.3 (2014), 329-44; Maurice Godelier, 'System, Structure and Contradiction in *Das Kapital*', in *Structuralism. A Reader*, ed. by Michael Lane (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 340-58.

⁴⁷ Though an English translation of this interview exists – 'Digression', in Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985) – the translations here are my own. Scarpetta describes meeting Barthes in late 1970 and how the latter handed over the written answers that he had thought about beforehand by way of his responses to Scarpetta's questions; see 'Flashes' in *La Règle du jeu*, 1 (May 1990), 75-76.

⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Barthes points out, drawing on his recent experience of teaching in Moroccan universities, there is a reactionary idea in such countries embarrassed by the old colonial language that one can separate language from literature, that one can teach the former without the latter just because the latter is considered 'bourgeois'.

⁴⁹ Barthes, 'Digressions', OC III, p. 998.

⁵⁰ Barthes, 'Myth Today', p. 132.

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 44; 'The Image', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 351.

⁵² Barthes, 'Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers', p. 388.

⁵³ Ed White, *How to Read Barthes' Image-Music-Text* (London: Pluto, 2012), p. 171.

⁵⁴ I have recently had the experience of teaching Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* to first-year university students, and this 'text' strikes me as classically dialectical, if only because of its practical purpose and application. One might accept the theoretical analysis in Parts I and II of the *Manifesto*, but what happens to its historical-materialist critique *if* one discounts or discards Part III, the final, *practical* section on 'Communism'? In this 'truncated' reading, Parts I and II seem to remain 'paradoxical' in the way in which Barthes is using the word here; but this 'truncated' reading would entail – in practical, political terms – a very different application from the one that Marx is, in the final instance, advocating: a reading of Parts I and II on their own, without Part III, loses the *revolutionary* charge of the *Manifesto*, ending up with a reformist, even romantic, programme of human liberation.

⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Barthes's 'structuralist' conception of language fits with Althusser's stress on relationality, what one critic calls 'the ontological primacy of relations'. In this conception Althusser rejects the 'humanist historicism' of

certain Marxists who maintain that social (including ideological and political) relations under capitalism are ‘inter-human, inter-subjective’; whereas, for Althusser, humans are ‘agents of the production process and the *material conditions* of the production process, in specific “combinations”’. See Alex Callinicos, ‘Appendix. Althusser’s Detour via Relations’, in *Deciphering Capital: Marx’s Capital and its Destiny* (London: Bookmarks, 2014), pp. 317-18. Indeed, Barthes’s assertion of the crucial element of the *combinatoire* in all forms of language and communication dovetails with Althusser’s relationism.

⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, ‘Languages at War in a Culture at Peace’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 3632 (8 October 1971); republished as ‘*Pax Culturalis*’ in *The Rustle of Language*, pp. 100-05.

⁵⁷ Barthes, ‘Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers’, p. 398.

⁵⁸ Barthes, ‘Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers’, pp. 399-400. On this and its relation to his own Marxism, see the unpublished section of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* called ‘Argument’, numbered as 16, that is reproduced in Barthes, *Le Lexique de l’auteur*, p. 336.

⁵⁹ Barthes, ‘Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers’, pp. 398-99; and on Nietzsche’s ‘abyssal’ style, see Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, p. 72.

⁶⁰ Indeed, reviewing his own career in 1973 and 1974 with an idea that was unpublished, Barthes feels strongly that, despite being badly written (‘mauvais, confus, nul’), his 1960 piece ‘Authors and Writers’ nevertheless proposes a tenable distinction of the two types of writer; see Tiphaine Samoyault, *Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), p. 580.

⁶¹ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible*, trans by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 91.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Stafford is the author of *Roland Barthes, Phenomenon and Myth. An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh 1998); co-editor (with Claude Coste) of Roland Barthes's seminar notes, « *Sarrasine* » *de Balzac* (Les Editions du Seuil 2011); and translator of Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion* (Berg/Power Publications 2006). His most recent book is a 'Critical Life' of Barthes (Reaktion Press 2015). He is a member of the 'équipe Barthes' at ITEM/CNRS in Paris and a Senior Lecturer in French Studies at the University of Leeds.

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