

Memoirs of a Gaysha: Roland Barthes's Queer Japan

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Larvatus prodeo: I advance pointing
to my mask: I set a mask upon my passion, but with a
discreet (and wily) finger I designate this mask.
— (Roland Barthes)¹

Only a mask which has eaten into the flesh [...] can make a confession.
— (Yukio Mishima)²

Arthur Golden's literary geisha appearing in his acclaimed *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997) is no stranger to the countless literary and cinematic constructions of an exoticized, sexualized Japan. As evidenced by the works of Pierre Loti and Marcel Proust, as well as more contemporary *japoniste* novels by Amélie Nothomb, Japan has been the object of much of the same kinds of reductive orientalizations for over a century. Although Roland Barthes's Japan-themed work *L'empire des signes* (*Empire of Signs*) has been qualified as a 'critical fiction' and 'hyper-Orientalist text' by Dalia Kandiyoti and Joanne Sharp, respectively, Barthes's text manifests an overlooked quality that intricately weaves queer re-imaginings of Japan with his personal, privatized relationship with homosexuality.³ The exploration of sexuality in *Empire of Signs* has been at the center of scholarly debates in Barthes Studies for decades. Diana Knight's and D.A. Miller's works centering on aspects of sexual tourism in *Empire* serve as perhaps two of the most compelling engagements of Barthes's homoerotic *flâneries* in Japan. Knight offers the bold affirmation that *Empire* remains 'a parody of an Orientalist sexual tourism [...] some parodic *Gay Guide to Tokyo*' – an unconventional sex guide that D.A. Miller had used to prepare for his own trip to Japan.⁴ Reading the queerness *of* and *in* a text has been a foundational literary hermeneutic in the field of Queer Studies.⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of 'paranoid reading' by which critics like

Miller 'plac[e] [...] faith in expos[ing]' hidden meanings from within a text has allowed for critical re-presentations of Barthes's major works.⁶ Paranoid readings have furthermore given rise to 'reparative' re-readings, such as those done cogently by Carol Mavor and Nicholas de Villiers.⁷ These reparative readings have shed an important light on the affects and liminalities associated with themes of masculinity and closetedness characterizing many of Barthes's texts.

Contributing to Queer Barthes Studies by unavoidably embracing paranoid and reparative hermeneutics to varying degrees, this article proposes a different approach to *Empire* that explores Barthes's queer relation to Japan via the archive. The homoerotics of *Empire* can best be understood by analyzing what was redacted from the final edition of Barthes's text on Japan, along with considering the complex queer countercultural community in Tokyo during the late 1960s. When analyzed in conjunction with *Empire*, readers exploring the Barthes archive at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France pertaining to *Empire* – folders containing Barthes's personal correspondences and the pictorial materials appearing in his text – would remark a perplexing elision. Barthes does not include a certain parchment in the final edition of *Empire* entitled 'Le rendez-vous sans paroles' ['The meeting without words'], found in one of the *Empire* archive folders. This parchment shows the author's direct personal communication, presumably dated to December 1967, with a potential Japanese male named Hiroshi. By nature of the eroticizing Japanese words and images included in *Empire*, especially in the image-series of Barthes's handwritten sensual phrases entitled 'Le rendez-vous,' Barthes moves the potentially homoerotic encounter that may (or may not) have transpired in Japan with Hiroshi to the archives in Paris. This import placed on eroticizing spaces – and their trans-geographic queerness bridging Japan to France in context of *Empire* – is of particular concern in this essay.

Barthes's queer Japan, defined as a 'sexual system of signs [...] giv[ing] [and] elicit[ing] pleasure and desire' comprises his construction of Japan.⁸ However, Barthes's queer Japan can only elicit a limited amount of eroticism precisely because the actual queer encounter between Barthes and a Japanese man, as recorded on the unpublished 'rendez-vous sans paroles' parchment containing the name Hiroshi, takes form and has remained intimately secret in the *Empire* archives in Paris. Barthes's desire for a Japanese man can be read and seen via the text and images in *Empire*; however, as I argue, the queered text and images in *Empire* operate within an interstitial lacuna, defined by the

apparent *lack* of any textual or visual evidence of a direct, intimate contact between Barthes (who embodies the author-narrator of *Empire*) and a Japanese male. The culmination of the homoerotic experience in *Empire* – namely, the ‘rendez-vous sans paroles’ between Barthes and Hiroshi – operates both secretly and remotely within the silent filings of Barthes’s archive that contains the materials associated with Barthes’s sojourns in Japan. The *Empire* archive is thus a queer archive – a special kind of archive that Judith Halberstam defines thus: ‘[The queer archive is] a complex record of queer activity. For the archive to function it requires users, interpreters, and cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making’.⁹ The jigsaw puzzle for Barthes’s readers involves considering two separate geographical locations, France and Japan, while engaging the queerness operating interstitially within Barthes’s *japoniste* text. Not only is the Tokyoite urban space of non-signs queerly eroticized, the *Empire* archive’s private space in the Bibliothèque’s reading room plays to the overt theme of ‘displacing [...], of obstructing, as with bars, [...] [of] a tactics without strategy’ that Barthes himself advocates.¹⁰

Although there exists to date no actual proof of Barthes and Hiroshi’s physical encounter in Japan, Barthes and Hiroshi’s exchange on paper – carried out in English to avoid the inevitable language barriers – is highly eroticized when read in context with the four other ‘rendez-vous’ images depicting Barthes’s handwriting in *Empire* that include certain Japanese phrases typically used in sexual acts. Akane Kawakami has described these hand-written ‘rendez-vous’ phrases as giving off an ‘effect [...] of graffiti’ whereby its ‘playful scribbling on the monument of the printed page [...] distracts and amuses, inviting us not to take [...] [the] writing too seriously’.¹¹ Although Kawakami’s observation does underscore the coquettishness of Barthes’s Japan-related handwritings, I would like to suggest that the images of these handwritten phrases constitute revealing guideposts for Barthes’s readers: These graffiti-like images move the reader more closely and intimately to Barthes’s culminating ‘rendez-vous’ image where Barthes communicates in English with the unknown Hiroshi, writing to the Japanese man to wait for him. Yet, this final image of the handwritten ‘rendez-vous’ parchment that puts the spotlight on Barthes and Hiroshi was selectively redacted from the final publication of *Empire*. Such a curious elision further enshrouds Barthes’s queer Japan in a drape of mystery. My serendipitous discovery of their private correspondence in the *Empire* archive – a reparatively queer act of discovery

in terms of archival fieldwork – leads me to assess *Empire* as a tactically performative work problematizing a politics of transparency. Under a performative, serious semiological meditation on non-signs, *Empire* offers a window into Barthes's intellectual and social *flâneries* within Tokyo's gay nightlife, as well as Tokyo's queer community of respected literary figures who may have played an important role in the fruition of *Empire*.

Furthermore, in relation to the performativity of *Empire*, the author-narrator can be viewed as a 'gay-sha' whereby the paronomasia of 'gay-sha' phonetically plays on (1) the heterosexual but oftentimes androgynous Japanese *geisha* and (2) the Japanese term 「ゲイ者」 (pronounced 'gay-sha') signifying 'in the nature of a gay/queer person'. Arguably, the same author-narrator in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, *A Lover's Discourse*, and *Camera Lucida* who the historical Barthes calls a 'naïve man without culture' appears in *Empire* many years prior.¹² It is this author-narrator who later establishes a framework of racializing queer desire that punctuates *A Lover's Discourse* and *Camera Lucida*.¹³ The author-narrator of *Empire* can be thought of as a 'gay-sha' recording his Japanese memoir: he is a figure embodying a queerly performative role by formulating a semiological theory of empty signs while masking below a personalized, homoerotic subtext – a narrative subtext that many critics like Ross Chambers and John Treat have qualified as a form of textual cruising.¹⁴

The 'gay-sha' author-narrator fixates on a noteworthy item in *Empire*: his fixation on masks and faces is laced with homoeroticism, echoing the themes and concerns of one of the most recognized works of Queer Japanese literature. The fixation on faces, Kabuki and Bunraku theatre, and masks in *Empire* can be read as a link to Japan's most recognized homosexual and Nobel Prize-nominated writer Yukio Mishima, as well as Mishima's personal interests in masks and theatre. This interest in masking can perhaps be best articulated in Mishima's semi-autographical novel *Confessions of a Mask* (*Kamen No Kokuhaku* [1949]). It is in *Confessions* that Mishima famously associates homosexuality and its closetedness with masks and hetero-centric performance. Both Barthes's and Mishima's works engage closetedness, performativity, and homosexuality through the imagery of a mask; and much like Barthes, Mishima was an avid reader of Proust whose influence can be seen in *Confessions*.¹⁵ The thematic continuity between Barthes's and Mishima's works could be retraced to a possible encounter between the two men in Tokyo or, at the very least, Barthes's recognition and subsequent

engagement with Mishima's intellectual and creative productions. In addition, playing foundational roles in the proliferation of queer culture in Japan and present in Tokyo at the same month as Barthes and Mishima in December 1967 and January 1968 was Jean Genet, Barthes's acquaintance with whom he shared mutual friends. Mishima was also an admirer of Genet and his work after the translation of Genet's *Le Journal du voleur* (1949) (*The Thief's Journal*) in Japan in 1956.¹⁶ Barthes, Mishima, and Genet were in Tokyo at the same time according to biographical records and would have thus frequented Kabukichō in Shinjuku – Tokyo's known gay district of which Barthes offers a hand-drawn map in *Empire*.¹⁷ Although the three men's actual in-person encounters have never been officially recorded, it remains striking that *Empire* exhibits the traces of (1) Mishima's homoerotic literary works and theatrical interests and (2) Jean Genet's potential meeting with Barthes in Tokyo, which to date has never been considered in Barthes and Genet scholarship. In what follows, I will articulate the extent to which Mishima's and Genet's presences find their echoes in *Empire* by placing import on the visual cues that the text provides to validate these claims. Upon close examination of Barthes's hand-written map of Tokyo's gay district, one would notice that the names of the map markings were clubs frequented by members of the gay community, including Mishima himself, where musical performances by geishas and transvestites took place, alongside debates on literature, theater, and art.¹⁸ In fact, the *Empire* archive contains several of Barthes's unpublished hand-drawn maps of Tokyo's gay district that show the designation of the very club Mishima and Genet would have frequented – a jazz club that was the epicenter of Tokyo gay nightlife – that lends credence to the possibility that the 'gay-sha' roots of *Empire* may have been inspired by a queer, serendipitous Franco-Japanese encounter between three gay men from different walks of life.

Empire as Palimpsest

Scholarship treating the semiological import that *Empire* proposes is countless; yet there remains little consideration on the visual materials in his text, which include photographs of people, architecture, and statues; hand-drawn maps; and hand-written notes. In this section, I would like to consider the paratextuality framing *Empire* to shed light on how the visuality of Barthes's meditation on Japan is a key element to discovering the masked queer mediations operating in Barthes's text. To begin, however, it is worth noting that paratextuality refers to '[t]he relation, within the totality of a literary work, between the text proper and its "paratext" – titles, prefaces, postfaces, epigraphs, dedications, illustrations, and [...] in short, all the accessory message and commentaries which come to surround the text'.¹⁹ Although the visual material surrounding the text is placed in seemingly arbitrary junctures within the narration, many of the visuals' in-text locations can be thought of as carefully-placed checkpoints within a larger thematic continuity of homoeroticism. To understand these queerly curious placements, one must turn to the *Empire* archive that contains all the visual materials appearing in the text, as well as the unpublished materials that never made it into the pages of *Empire*. These unpublished materials include Barthes's numerous postcards from Japanese and French correspondences, Japanese subway maps from American guidebooks, Japanese business cards, among other varia.

The cover of *Empire* shows a mannequin of Murasaki Shikibu, one of Japan's most recognized novelists and court lady penning *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari* [1008]), at Ishiyamadera Temple in Japan.²⁰ Upon consulting the *Empire* archives, one would remark that the cover of the original French edition of *Empire* is in fact a postcard that Barthes had received from an address in Japan while he was in France; however, the hand-written text that would be on the back of the card has been torn out; the card's written message is nowhere to be found in the archive. Additionally, the remaining traces where writing would have appeared have been crossed out in ink to avoid any possibility of decryption.²¹ Barthes chooses this postcard whose text was effaced as *Empire*'s cover and places his textual narration 'behind' the postcard's image where the original hand-written message would have been. This paratextual intervention immediately situates the narration within a lack or emptiness. Barthes's formulates that Japan is in this regard a 'fictive nation'

through which his writings on Japan ‘create an emptiness of language’.²² This emptiness of meaning, on which Barthes paradoxically comments through his own writing, is underscored by the Japanese ideogram *mu*, meaning ‘emptiness’, found on the opening pages of the work. Barthes’s narration in *Empire* symbolically stands in place of the empty, ripped, and scratched-out space of the back of the postcard. Framed by the postcard’s image whereby the narration replaces what symbolically was written on the back of the card itself, *Empire* can be thought of as a palimpsest of sorts: In essence, the work offers a narration on semiology and Japanese culture symbolically written over an effaced and redacted text, seemingly censored as a result of having been ripped out – an act for which Barthes was more than likely responsible.

In this context, the secrecy and censorship associated with *Empire* allow for a hermeneutics of decryption that is in itself highly eroticized. The opening photograph of actor Funaki Kazuo presents him with a serious composure, whereas the final photograph appearing in *Empire* is Kazuo again; but this time, the actor appears ‘close to smiling’.²³ If the text itself acts a prompt to engender Kazuo’s reaction, it also acts as a pleasurable stimulus in order for such a reaction to take form. For Barthes, a text is heavily masturbatory as he famously asserts in *The Pleasure of the Text* where the textualized voice behind the words allows for intimate autoeroticism: ‘It granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss. [...] Language [is] lined with flesh’.²⁴ The textual onanism that prompts Kazuo’s reaction to smile is thus imbued with a queerness from its initial to final page: Nearly all other photographs of Japanese subjects in *Empire* are of males, several of which appear androgynous in nature.²⁵

The pleasure-factor of the Barthesian text fuses with its camouflage, particularly as they pertain to Barthes’s own closeted homosexuality. Barthes’s paranoid preoccupation about his homosexuality and his attempts to foreclose any possibility of its public outing are noteworthy. In fact, Barthes is known to have sent acquaintances to the Latin Quarter to tear out a page of Dominique de Roux’s *Immédiatement* (1972) in which de Roux shares a conversation between Genet and George Lapassade: ‘One day I was with Jean Genet, Lapassade told me, and we were talking about Roland Barthes; the way he had separated his life into two parts, the Barthes of male brothels and the Talmudic Barthes’.²⁶ Having read de Roux’s inclusion of this revealing homosexuality by the knowing Genet, Barthes elects to have the offending page destroyed in person to avoid any public outing. This revealing episode,

transpiring only two years after the publication of *Empire*, strains Barthes's friendship with Genet, despite the reality that both Barthes and Genet are simultaneously sojourning in Japan in December 1967. Although the photographs and images included in *Empire* are not in themselves homoerotic (and certainly do not evoke the same public outing as does de Roux's publication), the surrounding captions and narrative text in *Empire* frame what could be regarded as innocuous visual inclusions. For purposes of this study, I will limit my textual-visual appraisal to two considerations while assessing their relations to the archive of *Empire*: (1) 'the address book' photo of Shinjuku, Tokyo, and (2) Barthes's hand-written 'rendez-vous' notes. Although the written manuscript of *Empire* does not configure in the Barthes's archive on *Empire*, there exists a wealth of material that did not make the publication cut. Furthermore, depending on the translation of *Empire*, certain images appearing in the original French do not appear in foreign-language translations.²⁷

In *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*, D.A. Miller discloses that he had used *Empire* as an itinerary 'to memoriz[e] the landmarks of Shinjuku Ni-chome', which is synonymous with the gay district of Tokyo that Barthes had frequented, armed with his 'impoverished [...] lexicon [of Japanese]'.²⁸ The 'address book', or the images of hand-drawn maps appearing in *Empire*, are not strictly those depicting Tokyo but also include neighborhoods in Osaka and Kyoto. The *Empire* archives also contain other hand-written maps, many of which are hand-drawn road guides on the back of business cards of the night clubs that Barthes would frequent.²⁹ In the *Empire* archives, the hand-written map of Shinjuku that Miller rightfully designates as Tokyo's Ni-chome gay district is color-coded: all hotels were marked in red, while bars and supper clubs were marked in blue ink. What is noteworthy is that nearly all hotels in this Tokyoite area are known as 'love hotels' that cater to clientele engaging in short-stay romps; additionally, the indication of 'pachinko' on the top-right of the road guide also underscores the 'cruising' nature of this image in *Empire*.³⁰ Pachinko parlors were often regarded as cruising hot-spots; and Barthes's photograph of standing Japanese men at a pachinko parlor, framed by the caption 'Mangers and Latrines', leads one to make the visual association with an all-male bathroom where Barthes is photographing each men's private acts of urination.³¹ Barthes details this voyeuristic cruising thus:

All these districts produce different races, distinct bodies, a familiarity new each time. To cross the city (or to penetrate its depth, for underground there are whole networks of bars, shops to which you sometimes gain access by a simple entryway, so that, once through this narrow door, you discover, dense and sumptuous, the black India of commerce and pleasure) is to travel from the top of Japan to the bottom.³²

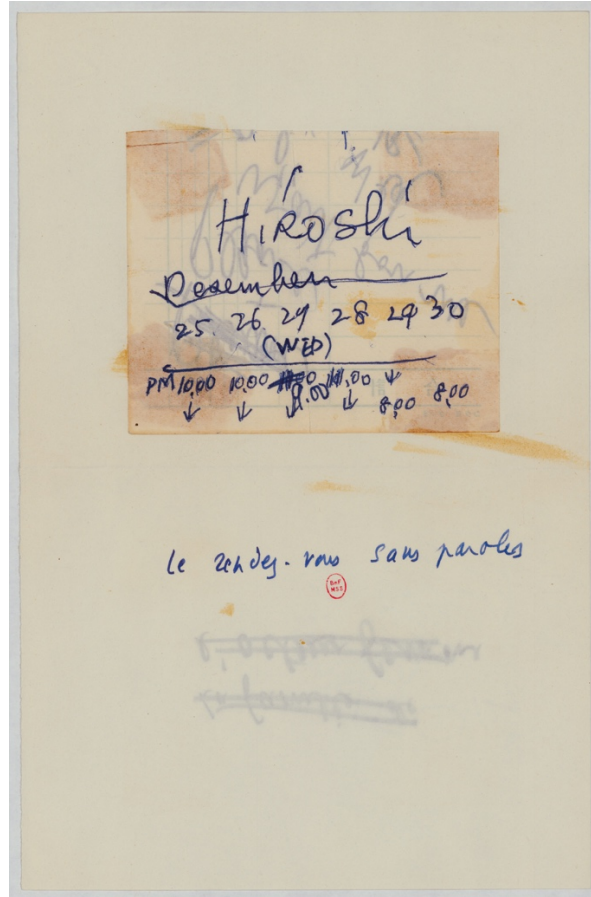
Barthes's cruising allows him to discover the queer pleasures of urban exploration, which he compares to discovering the 'Japan[ese] body [that] exists, acts, shows itself, gives itself, without hysteria, without narcissism, but according to a pure – though subtly discontinuous erotic project'.³³ In effect, the inability to understand Japanese and the ability to rely simply on 'gestures, drawings on paper [...] [which] may take an hour', allows Barthes to meditate on the male Japanese body as a vulnerable French tourist-cruiser whereby the 'other's entire body [must be] known, savored, received, and which has displayed (to no real purpose) its own narrative, its own text'.³⁴ The racialization of queer desire through which Barthes and Japanese men are both 'savored' and 'received' (which can be read as more innocuous versions of 'fellated' and 'sodomized') frames both homosexual acts and queer cruising as textual experiences. That is, Barthes's communication with Japanese men – largely mediated by the written exchanges in English and Romanized Japanese characters that he can have on paper – renders the text a necessary object to advancing his homosexual proclivities as a sexual tourist in Japan.

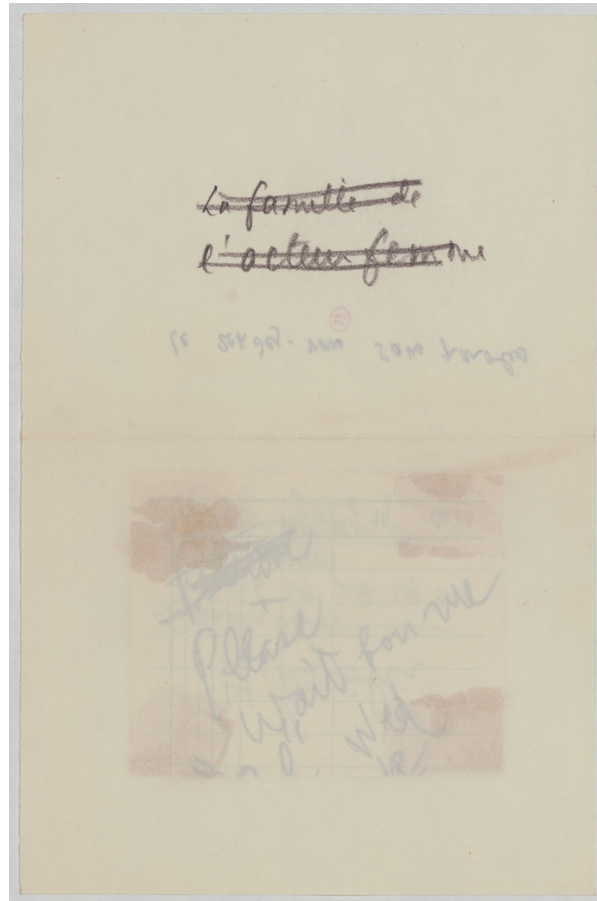
Queering the *Empire* with a Feverish Archive

The queer encounters first prompted by Barthes's exchanges on paper lead me to assess the series of hand-written notes, entitled 'Le rendez-vous', that appear in four different iterations throughout *Empire*.³⁵ These four notes have curiously not received much scrutiny in Barthes scholarship, yet these notes constitute a critical importance in decrypting the queerness of and in *Empire*. Joshua Paul Dale has argued that '[t]he exhaustion Barthes reveals in the final page of the lexicon is perhaps indicative of the pathology of continually maintaining this playful state of indecision in the cross-cultural encounter'.³⁶ This hypothetical indecisiveness that the 'rendez-vous' notes evoke is performative at best. Barthes clearly knows how to cruise the gay nightlife, whether in Japan or Morocco, as Genet had later suggested to Lapassade. Barthes's knowledge of Tokyo's gay district is furthermore evidenced by his color-coded map of Tokyo's Shinjuku district. Although Barthes suggests that his experience in Japan is 'to descend into the untranslatable [...] until everything Occidental in us totters', he is certainly able to translate and navigate enough to engage in the queer Tokyo counterculture that his Shinjuku maps accurately illustrate.³⁷

If one were to examine the *Empire* archives, one would notice a curious fifth addition to the 'rendez-vous' notes that was never included in the finalized publication of *Empire*:

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'Le rendez-vous sans paroles'. The unpublished fifth of the four 'rendez-vous' image sequence in *Empire*. Barthes's faded handwriting in English, 'Please wait for me Wed', appears behind the cut-out paper containing the name Hiroshi. The front of the cut-out paper (above image) does not depict Barthes's handwriting. © Bibliothèque nationale de France. Dossier A14-02. Reproduced with permission.

This redacted fifth handwritten ‘rendez-vous’ image, nestled between two postcards and has long remained unnoticed in the archive, is captioned ‘le rendez-vous sans paroles’ (‘the rendez-vous without words’). The front has the Japanese male name ‘Hiroshi’ written with dates of Barthes’s final stay in Japan in December 1967, written by the presumed Japanese male and not by Barthes. On the back of this redacted cut-out paper, one would find in Barthes’s handwriting in English: ‘Please wait for me Wed’. It is unclear whether Barthes and Hiroshi’s encounter did actually take place; but it is noteworthy that this fifth ‘rendez-vous’ image is the culminating puzzle piece to the previous four images of Barthes’s rendez-vous lexicon – a vocabulary list that has up to this point been regarded as being part of a ‘rendez-vous manqué’ or ‘travel guide’.³⁸ Barthes and Hiroshi’s ultimate encounter through text and queered language – keeping in mind Barthes’s reminder that ‘language is [a] skin’ to be rubbed against and from which he ‘trembles with desire’ – does transpire within the secret confines of the archive.³⁹ Whether the two men’s physical encounter transpires is less an important detail than their actual communication: This is the only instance in any of Barthes’s corpus that clearly shows a cross-cultural communication between Barthes himself and a male minority subject, let alone in a language other than French.⁴⁰ This fifth, unpublished sequence of the ‘rendez-vous’ images is the only item in the *Empire* archives containing the name Hiroshi. In addition, appearing on the reverse-side of this redacted document appears a crossed-out phrase: ‘La famille de l’acteur femme’ (‘The family of the cross-dresser’). Given that this fifth item appears within the same *Empire* archive folder as all of Barthes’s hand-written maps of Tokyo’s gay district – maps that show the names of clubs known to have had transvestite dancers – it is entirely plausible that Hiroshi was an ‘acteur femme’ or cross-dresser; after all Barthes includes a photograph of an *onnagata* transvestite performer later in *Empire*.⁴¹ Barthes’s fascination with cross-dressing, which he calls ‘the Oriental transvestite’, is confirmed by the inclusion of an *onnagata* actor flanked by two young boys.⁴² Barthes incorrectly captions these photos as ‘Kabuki actor surrounded by his two sons’.⁴³

Barthes and Hiroshi’s intimate encounter on paper, accentuated by Barthes’s trailing English handwriting ‘Please wait for me Wed’, orients the rendez-vous that may (or may have not) transpired in Japan to a certain locus. This specific location is the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris that has kept private Barthes and Hiroshi’s queer textual encounter. Jacques Derrida

has suggested in regard to the archive that ‘the archiving trace, the archive is not simply a recording, a reflection, an image of the event. It shapes the event. The archivization produces as much as it records the event’.⁴⁴ Accordingly, the archive constitutes the past and molds an inevitably interventionist vision of a future that seeks to establish a truth. The archivist’s choice (and Barthes-as-archivist’s idea) to include the fifth ‘rendez-vous’ sequence outside of *Empire* queers the Barthes archive because it suggests that Barthes’s homoerotic encounter, enshrouded in secrecy, symbolically occurs within the archive and as a result of its archivization. Furthermore, calling to mind Judith Halberstam who posits that ‘the notion of a [queer] archive has to extend beyond the image of a place to collect material or hold documents, and it has to become a floating signifier for the kinds of lives implied by the paper remnants’, the queer *Empire* archive’s floating signification of Barthes’s homosexuality, which becomes an extension of *Empire*, complicates Barthes’s own theory that Japan is an empty sign.⁴⁵

In this regard, Japan is an empty sign without attached meaning; but the *Empire* archive that houses the materiality of Barthes’s *Empire* is a floating signifier whose signified is Barthes’s queerness. Although Barthes ‘imagine[s] a fictive nation, [...] giv[ing] it an invented name, treat[ing] it declaratively as a novelistic object [...] call[ed] Japan’, Barthes offers an interpretation of Japan with a clearly-marked queer subculture as confirmed by his work’s visual content. This visuality refers to, among others, the hand-written sketches and notes of Tokyo’s gay district.⁴⁶ Using Japan, Barthes formulates a theory of ‘an aesthetics of an empty sign [...] that does not refer to anything’; yet his Japan cannot be an empire of empty signs if the archives of *Empire* contain material that disclose Barthes’s insider-knowledge of homosexual contacts and cruising while in Tokyo and other Japanese cities.⁴⁷ *Empire* is thus a performative text that consolidates an image of emptiness because Barthes’s narrative naïveté insists that Japan’s empty signification is a product of not being ‘hypostatized under the name of God, of science, of reason’ in relation to the Occident.⁴⁸ Barthes additionally feigns a performative naïveté by framing the images appearing in *Empire* as innocuous: ‘The text does not ‘gloss’ the images, which do not “illustrate” the text. For me, each [image] has been no more than the onset of a kind of visual uncertainty’.⁴⁹ Yet, Barthes’s logic on emptiness is not all too clear. He notes in an interview that ‘Everything for me [in Japan] appears like traits, accidents of a text. In Japan, I am in a constant activity of reading’.⁵⁰ However, in the same interview where he

regards Japan as a textual experience, he states that during the reading process there exists a 'symbolic reader' and 'naïve reader' who 'coexist in all persons' engaging 'in an activity of textual decoding [...] [whose] goal is always the same: striving to find a true sense of the text to discover its structure, its secret, its essence'.⁵¹ The narrative naïveté embodied by 'Barthes the naïve reader' who meditates on the emptiness of Japan's signs overshadows the 'Barthes the symbolic reader' who is in fact textualizing and queering the Japanese bodies that he encounters while exploring the structures, secrets, and essences of Tokyo's queer counterculture. Barthes's Japan is a floating signifier with a trans-cultural, queer signification extending to Paris where the textual contact between Barthes and a Japanese male takes place in the guarded silence of the archive. The queerness of *Empire*, uncloseted but nourished by its own archival shadows, extends to the present day where this textual encounter remains private and consultable only on location – which is perhaps symbolic of Barthes's keeping a Japanese male 'under wraps' with him in Paris.

The packaged materiality of the *Empire* archive is also of analytical import. The folders in which the visual contents of *Empire* are found are classified by the archivist, having been originally prepared and placed by Barthes himself. In his chapter entitled 'Packages', Barthes details the aesthetic classification of Japanese flower arrangements known as *ikebana* before commenting on 'Japanese package[s]' and their 'envelope[s]' tied together by knots that visually evoke a bound-up copy of 'pornographic magazine[s]' wherein Barthes finds

the image of a naked Japanese boy tied up very neatly like a sausage: the sadistic intent (paraded much more than achieved) is naively – or ironically – absorbed in the practice, not of a passivity, but of an extreme art: that of the package, of *fastening*...⁵²

Barthes's fixation on the bound nature of the envelope, superposing the packaging with the pornographic image of a bound boy, places into contiguity the materiality of the object with the nakedness of the racialized boy body. This queer continuity is underwritten by the French term *cordage*, translated as 'fastening', but is also derived from *corder* – a verb meaning to harbor an attraction toward someone. Barthes's emotional attraction toward the boy's body, which he imagines seeing 'tied up' as part of a BDSM scene, is

normalized as an aesthetic experience of binding paper. The archived folders of *Empire* – large, tightly bound envelopes containing the fifth sequence of the ‘rendez-vous’ notes – occupy the same associative queered visuality as Barthes’s fastened envelopes superposed onto the image of a bound nude Japanese boy.

The physicality of the *Empire* archive thus maintains queered visual contiguities with the textualized evocations of hyper-sexualized visual material appearing in Barthes’s book. The queer linkages between book and archive cannot be separated or read separately from the affective considerations that frame the presentation of *Empire*. The ‘archive of feeling’ that Ann Cvetkovich has articulated in context with queer archives harbors an ‘affective power [...] [that] produc[es] not just knowledge but feeling’.⁵³ The queer archive maintains the power to be an archive of feelings, thus producing new knowledges to new publics; but it also exhibits a critical aporia. The private nature of an archive and its propensity to conceal have the power to re-closet the material subject even in the queerest of archives: The act of uncloseting emotions from the queer archive is contingent on an external prompt – a prompt so often heterocentric within a heteronormativizing archive like Barthes’s – to validate the initial access to the archive itself.⁵⁴ I am qualifying the Barthes archive as a heteronormativizing space housing queer(ed) materials; as there has been a noticeable reticence in French scholarship in outing Barthes as a homosexual.⁵⁵ As José Esteban Muñoz notes: ‘When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past, there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight present, who will labor to invalidate the historical fact of queer lives – present, past, and future’.⁵⁶ The archive holds the archived materials in an invisible straightjacket, furthermore subjecting researchers to a panopticon-like space where each of their moves is scrutinized and recorded. Accordingly, the documentation and un-closeting of a queer past and preserved affects have the potential to be re-closeted by a heteronormativizing archive, which has the additional ability to prevent the closely-surveilled queer researcher from liberating the materials and their affects therein. The iterative and systematic re-closeting of the queer archived material by an archival institution only underscores its feverish quality to which Derrida famously alludes in *Archive Fever* – namely that the archive can be ‘radically effac[ed]’ by virtue of its own death-drive.⁵⁷ If queerness entails embracing the death-drive, meaning ‘a persistent negation that offers assurance of nothing at all: neither identity, nor survival, nor any promise of

future', then the materiality and affectivity of the queer archive will silently converge as an empty sign buried within the walls of the heterocentric Barthesian archive.⁵⁸

Barthes the Gaysha (ゲイ者): Tokyoite 'Encounters' with Genet and Mishima

In an interview with *Les lettres françaises*, Barthes comments that '[he] profoundly refuses his [Western] civilization to the point of nausea. [*Empire*] expresses the absolute claiming of a total alterity that became necessary for [him] and can only cause the fissuring of the symbolic, of our symbolic'.⁵⁹ Barthes's refusal of the West's incessant fixation on the non-empty sign compels him to regard Japan as an empty sign in relation to which he could plausibly situate his queerness – a queerness itself that corresponds to his social alterity as a closeted Frenchman. Barthes's three voyages to Japan, from 1966 to 1968, transpire during a time in Japanese queer history where the underground movement known as *gei bōi* (ゲイボーイ) was blossoming. *Gei bōi* was a blanket term used to designate transvestites working in entertainment districts, such as in gay-oriented supper bars or tea houses with Western influences. The *gei bōi* were also known as *geisha bōi* who would embody the roles that female geishas would play; the *geisha bōi* would work in restaurants, dressing as *onnagata* or in theatrical female drag, similarly to the one that Barthes reproduces in *Empire*.⁶⁰ As Mark McLelland notes:

The *gei bōi* rejected the aggressive masculine gender performance [...] [and] sought to embody the new androgynous ideal of beauty emerging in Europe that was to dominate the cultural scene of the late '60s. The hybridized gender performance of Japan's *gei bōi*, then, which drew upon earlier paradigms of the transgender entertainer coupled with new western ideals of androgyny.⁶¹

As male geishas, the *gei bōi* could be found entertaining in the Shinjuku Tokyo quarter that Barthes hand-draws in *Empire*. If one were to examine this map closely, one would notice in the top corner the location labeled 'Nadja', named

after André Breton's famous novel; additionally, the *Empire* archives contains additional maps of Tokyo's Shinjuku gay district that specifically label Nadja's location, but these additional documents do not appear in the final publication of Barthes's text.⁶² Among all the labelled clubs in Barthes's map, Nadja remains the *punctum* in *Empire*; as its reputation as a prominent club during the 1960s still rings loudly today.⁶³

In this regard, Tokyo's Bar Nadja, owned by the famed Mariko Furuta in the 1960s, was a well-established bar situated in the midst of 'the center of artistic ferment in theater, photography, jazz, and dance as well as the visual art' where some of the biggest names of Japanese artists and performers would stop in, including Yukio Mishima, Tatsumi Hijikata, and Kisho Kurokawa.⁶⁴ It was also a location where members of the queer community would come to discuss the arts, from music to literature. In the literary scene, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) was translated into Japanese in 1953, becoming a top-seller and launching Western-framed questions of femininity and sexuality into Japanese society at the time. Furthermore in the Japanese queer subculture, Jean Genet was regarded as a legendary figure, well-known to many prominent Japanese writers and theater performers. As Stephen Barber recounts:

At the time when Genet visited Japan [in 1967], his reputation and influence there was immense. Genet was among the most inspirational and significant European cultural figures for Japanese writers, film makers, choreographers and artists. From the end of the 1950s, with the translations of his novels into Japanese, Genet had become a seminal, revered presence in Japan, incessantly cited in the titles of art works and films.⁶⁵

Although there exists no documentation of the specific clubs, restaurants, or other areas in the queer subsector of Japan that Genet may have frequented, Genet voyaged to Tokyo, having experienced there 'a sort of rebirth'.⁶⁶ Genet arrives in Tokyo on 23 December 1967 from Hamburg, Germany via Copenhagen with the intention 'to assemble notes for a book that was never written'.⁶⁷ Genet remarks the radical change in identity that he experiences in Tokyo, particularly at this point in his life where he had previously attempted to commit suicide:

The air hostess spoke a few greetings [...] and then said 'Sayonara'. The clear voice, the long-expected strangeness of the language, [...] gave me the feeling of utter newness that we call presentiment. [...] [A] word of Japanese spoken in the fluent voice of a girl had been enough to trigger off the operation. [...] A little while later it seemed to me that 'Sayonara' [...] was the first touch of cottonwool that was going to cleanse my wretched body – wretched because of the long degrading siege it had had to withstand from Judaeo-Christian ethics. [...] I had no doubt that when I got to Tokyo I'd be naked and smiling.⁶⁸

The similarities in the ways Genet and Barthes regard Japan and their identity renewal are striking; as both writers reject the monotheistic value systems operating in the European society in which they live and with which Japan starkly contrasts. Barthes, for instance, explains that he

profoundly refuses his [Western] civilization; [...] [i]n Japan [...] there is no supreme signifier. [...] All the civilizations that possess a monotheistic religion are inevitably forced into monotheistic constraints. [...] And that is the structural constraint of [Western] civilization.⁶⁹

Sharing similar criticism on the West's monotheistic culturo-value system, Genet and Barthes both experience a liberating experience in Tokyo; but what is perhaps most striking about Genet's and Barthes's relation to Japan is that they both are in Japan in late December 1967. A striking overlap between Barthes and Genet lends credence to their encounter together in Japan: Genet attended a demonstration near Tokyo University against the Vietnam War during both his first and second voyage to Japan. As if standing in front of a line of demonstrators alongside Genet, Barthes includes in *Empire* a photograph taken near Tokyo University at the same Vietnam War demonstration on January 1968 where Genet would have been present.⁷⁰ It is a year later that Genet becomes more involved in the anti-Vietnam War protests in Japan.

In what follows, I would like to use Bar Nadja as a point of departure – a social and geographic conduit only miles from the anti-war demonstrations at Tokyo University – to illuminate the traces of Japan's most celebrated queer writer and cultural persona, Yukio Mishima, appearing in Barthes's *Empire*. This is not say that Barthes, Genet, and Mishima were in close contact near Bar

Nadja; but rather, I would like to propose using the visual *punctum* of Nadja and more loosely the queer urban space of Shinjuku, Tokyo where Nadja is situated to orient Barthes's intellectual connections with Mishima's works. This orientation allows one to make a comparatist analysis between the queer Japan-related works of Barthes and Mishima, while assessing how Genet configures in this Franco-Japanese sphere of contact given his physical proximity to Barthes in Tokyo.

Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* was translated into English in 1958 and was widely successful in the United States where Barthes was instructing before his 1967 voyage to Japan.⁷¹ Barthes is noticeably attracted to faces and masks in *Empire*: he publishes a photograph of himself from a Japanese newspaper, commenting on the ensuing page that 'To imagine, to fabricate a face, not impassive or callous [...] but as though emerged from water, rinsed of meaning, is a way of answering death'.⁷² In the French edition of *Empire*, Barthes includes a photograph of a mask visually evocative of the first edition cover of *Confessions* circulated in the United States where Barthes would have encountered Mishima's translated work.⁷³ In *Confessions*, the protagonist who stands in for the historical Mishima presents a coming-of-age text that represents Mishima's public mask of heterosexuality. Mishima's protagonist notes: '[I]t was precisely what people regarded as my true self which was a masquerade'.⁷⁴ As Mishima's former acquaintance had once noted, Mishima was always masquerading, rarely removing his mask in the public scene similarly to Barthes.⁷⁵ Barthes's homosexuality was placed under the mask of closetedness; and his meditations on masking and the face are articulated in *Empire* where the face becomes associated with, among many items, an 'artificial emptiness' and an interstice that Barthes confesses in the following way: 'I live in the interstice. [...] [A]n ideological assertion masked by the practical interrogation: there is no communication except in speech. [...] It is not the voice [...] which communicates [...] but the whole body'.⁷⁶ Much like Mishima's mask of closetedness, Barthes homosexuality exists in the interstices of Western society that finds its ultimate, albeit temporary, openness in Japan's gay district. Like Mishima's protagonist who 'seek[s] physical pleasure consciously, intentionally', Barthes's un-closeting takes the shape of physical manifestations of queer love in private confines.

Under Mishima's mask was an added preoccupation with suicide as his protagonist explains in *Confessions*: 'The second force – which was bent, even more profoundly, more intensely, upon the complete disintegration of my inner

balance – was a compulsion toward suicide, that subtle and secret impulse to which a person often unconsciously surrenders himself.⁷⁷ Barthes's *Empire* makes the clear association between masking and suicide through the two photographs of General Nogi Maresuke and his wife, taken the day before their double suicide, whose caption reads 'They are going to die, they know it, and this is not seen', as if their masks cover their suicidal intentions.⁷⁸ The traces of Mishima's presence in *Empire* is striking, particularly when one considers the curious incorporation of General Nogi in Barthes's text: Mishima had allegorized Nogi and his wife's ritual suicide in his work *Patriotism* (1961), which was screened in Paris in 1966 and was highly applauded. Furthermore, Nogi was the principal of the Peer School (Gakushuin University) where Mishima was enrolled.⁷⁹ Barthes's preoccupations with *Nô* Japanese theatre and Bunraku puppet theatre, the latter to which Barthes consecrates an entire chapter in *Empire*, were Mishima's past-times: Mishima was a celebrated writer of several modern *Nô* and *Bunraku* plays. The imprint of Mishima's interests find their traces in *Empire*; and although Barthes does not outwardly disclose having read any of Mishima's works – perhaps out of closeted paranoia – he does include subtle thematic continuities with Mishima's works and personal interests in *Empire*.

Conclusion

Calling Japan 'his' Japan allows Barthes – who is both Professor of Desire and a cruising 'gay-sha' – to get away with the performative naïveté that his textual and visual narration seemingly posits. This kind of narrative and theoretical presentation has led *Empire* to be critiqued as a textual 'eroticization of urban space' and an orientalizing dream by scholars like Charles Forsdick and Lisa Lowe.⁸⁰ Yet, a nuanced approach in reassessing the visuality of *Empire* leads one to conclude that Barthes was not only abreast of the nook-and-cranny gay clubs and major supper clubs frequented by prominent gays in Japan, but also was in contact with a Japanese person of interest – the secret Hiroshi of the archives – during his third and final stay in Japan. A consideration of the *Empire* archives illuminates a perhaps lesser-known area of Barthes's romantic interests in Japanese men, while offering a consideration on the effects and affects of queer archivization. Barthes and Hiroshi's Franco-Japanese contact constitutes the

final piece of the 'rendez-vous' image series, curiously omitted from the final publication of *Empire*, along with the omission of other hand-drawn maps of supper clubs, including Bar Nadja, which was at the center of Tokyo nightlife in the 1960s. It is noteworthy that Genet, Barthes's acquaintance and a Frenchman with celebrity status in Japan's queer community, was in Tokyo at the same time of Barthes's third sojourn. Their overlapping contact zones in Tokyo could have potentially influenced the visual incorporations in *Empire*, placing both authors in close physical proximity to Yukio Mishima and his intellectual pursuits. Tokyo's Bar Nadja, having welcomed major queer literary figures such as Mishima, along with Barthes himself, marks Shinjuku as a queer, eroticized urban space that enables Franco-Japanese contact zones to overlap. These queer, trans-geographic contact zones extend to the Paris archive housing *Empire*: Such zones give space to the queer encounter between Barthes and his potential Japanese person of interest, allowing both to unite in silent, tactic secrecy.

Notes

I would like to thank Éric Marty and Marie-Odile Germain for their assistance throughout the various stages of this article.

¹ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 2010), p. 43.

² Yukio Mishima quoted in Paul G. Schalow, 'Introduction', in *The Great Mirror of Male Love, Ihara Saikaku*, trans. by Paul G. Schalow (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 5.

³ Dalia Kandiyoti, 'Exoticism Then and Now: The Travels of Pierre Loti and Roland Barthes in Japan', *History of European Ideas*, 20.1-3 (1996), 396; Joanne Sharp, 'Writing Travel/Travelling Writing: Roland Barthes Detours the Orient', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20 (2002), 155.

⁴ Diana Knight, *Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 153-54. Consult also D.A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

⁵ David Halperin defines queer as 'not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices'. David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 62.

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 130.

⁷ See for example, Carol Mavor, *Reading Boyishly: Roland Barthes, J. M. Barrie, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Marcel Proust, and D. W. Winnicott* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). See also Nicholas de Villiers, *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2012).

⁸ Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 48. As a corrective to Hayes's analyses on *Empire* where he notes that *Empire* 'takes its title from the quasi-pornographic Japanese film *L'empire des sens*', Barthes's *Empire* was published in 1970 while the author was present in Morocco, whereas the film *L'empire des sens* was released in Japan six years later. See Hayes, *Queer Nations*, p. 48.

⁹ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 170.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), p. 172.

¹¹ Akane Kawakami, *Travellers' Visions: French Literary Encounters with Japan, 1881-2004* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p. 135.

¹² Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 357.

¹³ On this point, see Benjamin Hiramatsu Ireland, 'Queering Photography: Race, Death, and Sexuality in *La Chambre claire* and *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*', *Modern Language Review*, 110.2 (2015), 439.

¹⁴ See Lawrence D. Kritzman, 'Barthes's Way: *Un Amour de Proust*', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14.2 (2001), 540. Consult also John Treat, *Great Mirrors Shattered: Homosexuality, Orientalism, and Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). The versatile queerness of *Empire* has additionally been used by certain scholars like Treat to promote pornographic excursions into Tokyo.

¹⁵ Schalow, 'Introduction', p. 5.

¹⁶ Satoshi Ukai, 'Genet au Japon', *Magazine littéraire: Jean Genet*, 313 (1993), 22.

¹⁷ Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 34. All citations will be taken from this edition unless otherwise indicated. Citations taken from the updated French version of this text published in 2007, which contains photographs that the English translation does not, will be designated *L'empire*. This 2007 edition also contains captions that the *Œuvres complètes* (2002) do not include. On Genet, see Jeremy Reed, *Jean Genet: Born to Lose: An Illustrated Critical History* (London: Creation, 2005), p. 181; Stephen Barber, *Jean Genet* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), pp. 118-19. On Mishima, see Lesley Downer, *The Brothers: The Hidden World of Japan's Richest Family* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 221. Like Genet's popularity among members of the queer community in Japan, Mishima was at the pinnacle of his population in Japan, having published numerous well-received works. Barthes was relatively unknown in Japan during each of his three visits.

¹⁸ Curiously, Barthes and Genet leave Japan separately months apart, but both arrive in Morocco in September 1969. Genet returns to Japan for his second and final voyage to Japan in November 1969. See Edmund White, *Genet* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p. xxviii.

¹⁹ Robert Stam, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, ed. by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), p. 28.

²⁰ This point is a corrective to Jay Goulding's suggestion that the mannequin on *Empire's* cover depicts Sei Shonagon, author of eleventh-century diary *The Pillow Book*. See Jay Goulding, 'Hwa Yol Jung's Phenomenology of Asian Philosophy', in *Comparative Political Theory and Cross-Cultural Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Hwa Yol Jung*, ed. by Jin Y. Park (Lanham: Lexington, 2009), p. 128.

²¹ The Japanese translation of *Empire*, entitled *Hyocho no teikoku*, depicts as its front cover a photograph of the statue of Hoshi Washo dating from the Heian period in

Saiō-ji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. This photograph also appears within the text of the original French text of *Empire* but not in the English translation.

²² Barthes, *Empire*, pp. 3-4.

²³ Barthes, *Empire*, p. 108.

²⁴ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), pp. 66-67.

²⁵ On this point, see Roland Barthes, *L'empire des signes* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), p. 150.

²⁶ Tiphaine Samoyault, *Barthes: A Biography*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), pp. 394-95.

²⁷ As previously noted, the English edition of *Empire* does not contain certain images appearing in the original French – examples of which include missing photographs of sumo wrestlers, as well as the captioned photograph 'The eyes and not the gaze'. See Barthes, *L'empire*, pp. 58, 150. The Japanese edition of *Empire*, however, reproduces all images found in the original French version; however, several pictures are placed out of sequence in different chapters.

²⁸ D.A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*, p. 5.

²⁹ An example of a business card of a supper club includes one labelled 'Bar Pinocchio' in Japanese, which is found in Kyoto. See Barthes, *Empire*, p. 36. Barthes's biographer Tiphaine Samoyault incorrectly labels 'Bar Pinocchio' as 'a place for homosexual encounters', whereas 'Pinocchio' was a nightclub and not a brothel. See Samoyault, *Roland Barthes*, p. 38.

³⁰ Barthes, *Empire*, p. 34.

³¹ Barthes, *L'empire*, p. 44. This photograph and caption do not appear in the English translation. Diana Knight interprets this photograph as 'a sustained allusion to male masturbation' whereby the men's hands are 'clearly connoted as the instrument of masturbation, a connotation passed on in its turn to the gesture of the graphic artist'. See Knight, *Barthes and Utopia*, pp. 163-64.

³² Barthes, *Empire*, pp. 39-42.

³³ Barthes, *Empire*, p. 10. Barthes acknowledges his cruising interests near the Ueno station, which is also known to have been a frequented area for homosexual encounters: 'I decide to go to one neighborhood or another, without any goal but a kind of prolonged perception of its name. I know that at Ueno I will find a station filed on the ground level with young skiers, but whose underground floors [...] of these sordid corridors, finally fulfils the novelistic essence of *the lower depths*'. See Barthes, *Empire*, p. 39.

³⁴ Barthes, *Empire*, p. 10. The 'Other' could include both Barthes and the Japanese subject, depending on which point of view is taken.

³⁵ D.A. Miller remarks the insufficient nature of Barthes's 'rendez-vous' notes such that the notes omit the most practical words that homosexuals would need if ever the possibility of homosex were to arise. See Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*, p. 5.

³⁶ Joshua Paul Dale, 'Cross-Cultural Encounters through a Lateral Gaze', *Thamyris/Intersecting*, 10 (2003), 71.

³⁷ Barthes, *Empire*, p. 6.

³⁸ Hayes, *Queer Nations*, p. 48. See also, Dalia Kandiyoti, 'Roland Barthes Abroad', in *Writing the Image after Roland Barthes*, ed. by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 242. Diana Knight, however, has aptly suggested that these series of Franco-Japanese lexicon constitute an 'erotic quest'. See Diana Knight, 'Roland Barthes: An Intertextual Figure', in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 100.

³⁹ Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, p. 73.

⁴⁰ This omitted fifth image of the 'rendez-vous' lends credence to the possibility that Barthes's communication with Japanese homosexuals was in English.

⁴¹ Barthes, *Empire*, p. 52.

⁴² The Japanese word *onnagata* refers to male actors who played female roles in the traditional Japanese theatre of Kabuki.

⁴³ Barthes, *L'empire des signes*, p. 73. This caption does not appear in the Barthes's *Œuvres complètes* edition. As a corrective to Barthes's caption, the central actor is Onoe Baiko VII, whereas the two flanking boys are not his sons, given that their vestments contain different familial crests. The photograph on the previous page of the *onnagata* is Baiko playing the role of Masaoka in *Meiboku Sendaihagi*. Baiko performed this role at the Misonoza in Nagoya in October 1968. (Alan Cummings, personal communication.)

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁵ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 169.

⁴⁶ Barthes, *Empire*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, 'Sur « S/Z » et « L'Empire des signes »', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 2002), vol. III, p. 667. All translations from this edition are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁴⁸ Barthes, 'Sur « S/Z » et « L'Empire des signes »', p. 680.

⁴⁹ Barthes, *Empire*, p. xi.

⁵⁰ Barthes, 'Sur « S/Z » et « L'Empire des signes »', p. 679.

⁵¹ Barthes, 'Sur « S/Z » et « L'Empire des signes »', pp. 673-74.

⁵² Barthes, *Empire*, p. 45.

⁵³ Ann Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 241.

⁵⁴ The consultation of the *Empire* archives is first contingent upon the approval from Barthes's current beneficiary Éric Marty.

⁵⁵ Nicholas de Villiers, 'The Reception of Roland Barthes: The Question of the Closet', *French Studies Bulletin*, 1.92 (2004), 19. At the 'Roland Barthes at 100' conference held in 2015, there were only three papers out of the approximate sixty delivered that engaged Barthes's homosexual proclivities. Seemingly, Barthes's closeting is reinforced by critics who opt to avoid mentioning this facet of Barthes's life.

⁵⁶ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 65.

⁵⁷ The death-drive in Derrida's context, informed by Freud's theories on the death instinct, refers to the fetishistic recourse to repetition that prompts annihilation of memory, creating an accumulation of memories and data that defer the possibility of ever fully understanding what is housed in archives. See Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 48.

⁵⁹ Barthes, 'Sur « S/Z » et « L'Empire des signes »', p. 667.

⁶⁰ Barthes, *Empire*, p. 52.

⁶¹ Marc McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p. 111. Alongside the *gei bōi* in 1960s Japan were the *buru bōi*, who were transgender performers known as 'Le Carrousel de Paris'. These performers had undergone sex-change surgery in Casablanca, which led to numerous Japanese gay performers to undergo surgery in Morocco. Incidentally, Barthes finds himself in Morocco after his sojourn in Japan where he publishes *Empire* in April 1970.

⁶² Barthes, *Empire*, p. 34.

⁶³ Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Project Japan: Metabolism Talks...* (Cologne: Taschen, 2011), p. 453.

⁶⁴ Thomas R.H. Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avant-garde Rejection of Modernism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), p. 132.

⁶⁵ Barber, *Jean Genet*, pp. 118-19.

⁶⁶ Nathalie Fredette, *Figures baroques de Jean Genet* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2001), p. 164.

⁶⁷ Reed, *Jean Genet*, p. 181.

⁶⁸ Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, trans. by Barbara Brey (New York: New York Review, 2003), pp. 51-53.

⁶⁹ Barthes, 'Sur « S/Z » et « L'Empire des signes »', pp. 667, 680.

⁷⁰ Barthes, *Empire*, pp. 104-5.

⁷¹ When asked if he had read any Japanese literature, Barthes does not mention Mishima's works but instead those by Zeami and Akutagawa Ryunosuke. See Roland Barthes, 'Entretien', in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, p. 113.

⁷² Barthes, *Empire*, p. 91.

⁷³ Barthes, *L'empire*, p. 20. This mask appearing in the Japanese edition does not appear in the English.

⁷⁴ Yukio Mishima, *Confessions of a Mask*, trans. by Meredith Weatherby (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 27.

⁷⁵ Donald Keene, 'Mishima', *The New York Times*, 3 January 1973, BR4.

⁷⁶ Barthes, *Empire*, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁷ Mishima, *Confessions*, p. 208.

⁷⁸ Barthes, *Empire*, pp. 92-93. *Empire* opens with a photograph of Funaki Kazuo who attempted suicide in 1970, incidentally the year of *Empire's* publication.

⁷⁹ Kazukuni Aihara, *Mishima Yukio no shi* (Tokyo: Yuseido, 1971), p. 242. See also Mark Holbord, *Beyond Japan: A Photo Theatre* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), p. 68

⁸⁰ Charles Forsdick, '(In)connaissance de l'Asie: Barthes and Bouvier, China and Japan', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 14.1 (2006), 71; Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 159.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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